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The influence of Scottish sentimentalist ethical theory on Thomas Jefferson's philosophy of human nature

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THE INFLUENCE OF SCOTTISH SENTIMENTALIST ETHICAL THEORY
ON THOMAS JEFFERSON'S PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN NATURE

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

William Parks
1975
APPROVAL SHEET

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the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Jefferson's faith in man's capability for self-government, and in the ultimate success of the republican experiment that was undertaken by the founding fathers, are among the most familiar themes of his biographers. What is less clear, however, is the source of this faith.

It is the purpose of this study to show that Jefferson's faith did not derive from a simple, naive optimism about man, nor solely from a belief in the efficacy of a particular form of government. His faith rested, rather, upon a consciously developed and well defined philosophy of human nature, which was largely shaped by his knowledge of and agreement with the writings of a group of eighteenth century British moralists. The influence of their ethical theory, clearly shown in his correspondence spanning the half-century after 1776, is reflected in his views on race, religion, man's social dispositions, as well as political systems.

Jefferson's study and knowledge of the sentimentalist ethical theory, to the extent that it contributed to his own conclusions about human nature and human motivation, are essential to an understanding of the conceptual framework from which he acted, and thus to the political faith which he professed. Four principles of the sentimentalist theory made a deep impression on him: 1) that man is by nature moral, 2) that man is by nature benevolent, 3) that these natural characteristics are susceptible to development, and 4) that they prepare man for a harmonious social existence. These basic principles became strong intellectual supports for his optimistic hope for a harmonious democratic society in America. His faith, and the philosophical foundations on which it rested, are given a sharp clarity by a comparison with the more negative appraisals of his principal political rival, Alexander Hamilton. The comparison between Jefferson's and Hamilton's ideas on human nature and political institutions, and on the relationship of one to the other, also contributes to the understanding of the philosophical differences between the democratical and aristocratical factions among the founding fathers.
THE INFLUENCE OF SCOTTISH SENTIMENTALIST ETHICAL THEORY
ON THOMAS JEFFERSON'S PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN NATURE
A great deal has been written about Thomas Jefferson's faith in the ability of men to govern themselves in a harmonious society. It is indeed a consistent theme in his writings throughout his political career. It is a faith embodied in the Declaration of Independence where he wrote that it is the right of the people to design their government "on principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness" [Italics mine]. One year later he pointed with pride to his native state where the people had "deposited the monarchical and taken up the republican government with as much ease as would have attended their throwing off an old and putting on a new suit of clothes. Not a single throe," he wrote, "has attended this important transformation."¹ As wartime governor of Virginia during the last two years of the Revolution, he was confronted with substantial evidence that the citizens did not share his commitment to political liberty. In the face of this discouraging experience, he still believed that the people themselves were the "only safe depositories" of government.²


When it appeared, in the half decade immediately following the Revolution, that the republican experiment was on the verge of collapse, his faith remained firm. "The happiness of governments like ours, wherein the people are truly the mainspring, is that they are never to be despaired of. The apprehensions you express," he wrote to Richard Price, "led me to note to you this character in our governments, which . . . has kept my mind in perfect quiet as to the ultimate fate of our union; . . ." [Italics mine].

Jefferson was minister plenipotentiary in France at the time of the insurrections in eastern Massachusetts culminating in Shays's Rebellion in the fall and winter of 1786-1787. The violent confrontations between armies of discontented debt-ridden farmers and state militia, numbering more than a thousand on each side, convinced most of the leaders of the new nation that their experiment was moribund. Their reactions, couched in demands for the overhaul of the governmental system, frightened Jefferson. He feared that his compatriots might too swiftly push the pendulum of American political practice from republican liberty toward dictatorial suppression. He expressed his concern that those who would redesign the government might "conclude too hastily that nature has formed man insusceptible of any other government but that of force, a conclusion not founded in truth, nor experience." He had been in Europe now for more than two years, and that experience had reaffirmed his dislike for oppressive government. Democracy "has its evils too," he continued in his warning to James Madison, "the principal of which is the turbulence

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to which it is subject. But weigh this against the oppressions of monarchy, and it becomes nothing.⁴ In the face of the mounting fear of anarchy at home, he reaffirmed his faith "that the good sense of the people will always be found to be the best army. They may be led astray for a moment, but will soon correct themselves. The people are the only censors of their governors; and even their errors will tend to keep these to the true principles of their institution." Once again recognizing the danger of over-reaction to the events in Massachusetts, he added that "to punish these errors too severely would be to suppress the only safeguard of the public liberty."⁵ The short history of the democratic experiment in his native country revealed trends that were alarming, even to Jefferson. But as discouraging as that record was, his faith in the ability of men to exercise self-government, so confidently proclaimed in 1776, still burned brightly a decade later.

Jefferson was still in France during the opening events of the French Revolution in the summer of 1789. He attended the meeting of the Estates General regularly from its opening on May 5. Within a month he had become the willing, though unobtrusive, counsel to the Patriot Party. He was indeed invited by the committee from the National Assembly that was charged with the framing of a constitution to guide them in this responsibility. He declined this invitation, in the name of diplomatic propriety, but did offer advice in less public ways. His

⁴TJ to James Madison, Jan. 30, 1787, Ibid., XI, 92-97.
⁵TJ to Edward Carrington, Jan. 16, 1787, Ibid., 48-50.
quarters at the Hotel de Langeac was the scene of what Jefferson considered one of the most important compromise agreements between the republican and constitutional monarchical wings of the Patriot Party. In these fateful weeks, during which he held an optimistic view of the events that were occurring around him, he tried to convey to the French leaders his basic faith in people as self-governors. "We think in America," he wrote to Abbé Arnoux, "that it is necessary to introduce the people into every department of government as far as they are capable of exercising it; and that this is the only way to ensure a long-continued and honest administration of it's powers."7

Jefferson returned to America late in November 1789, eight months after the inauguration of the first administration under the new Constitution. The success or failure of the republican experiment had not yet been determined. Indeed an important part of the shaping of the essentials of American political theory and practice rested in the hands of those who assumed leadership at this juncture. Jefferson was forty-six years old, and for the next twenty years, he devoted his energies to the molding of the American political institution to reflect his faith in the ability of the people to exercise self-government.

The founding fathers were very conscious, as they began their tasks, that the eyes of the world were upon them. They conceived of themselves as being the vanguard of a great historical movement, and they were convinced that

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7 TJ to Abbé Arnoux, July 19, 1789, Boyd Collection, XV, 282-283.
their success or failure would hold mementous implications for the future happiness of mankind. The burden of such a responsibility was no doubt intensified by public speculation among Europeans as to the likely outcome of the American republican experiment. Although there were some who believed that the United States might emerge as the "new king of nations," most Europeans held a much more conservative estimate of its future. "In the first place," one observer wrote, "will not the success of the Americans be an endless source of divisions amongst themselves?" He believed that "ambition and love of power will soon begin to actuate the operations of the congress and provincial assemblies," and that as a result the Americans will never be able to "maintain one common interest and an unity of plans and operations; but will find a thousand objects for rivalship arising the moment their independency becomes acknowledged, and their commerce free and uninterrupted." His conclusion contained a specter that was no doubt very familiar to the founding fathers: "Without having had occasion for, or perhaps without producing a Brutus, they will soon meet with a Caesar, and will then feelingly regret under the weight of a national despotism, the yoke of a distant government which had strength sufficient to protect, though it was too weak to oppress them." 8 This kind of speculation served to impress more deeply upon the founding fathers the experimental character of their task. Jefferson expressed this awareness when he wrote that America, unique in time, place, and circumstance, furnished "hopeful imple-

ments for the interesting experiment of self-government." He said that they felt that they were "acting under obligations" not confined to America alone. "It is impossible not to be sensible that we are acting for all mankind; that circumstances denied to others, but indulged to us, have imposed on us the duty of proving what is the degree of freedom and self-government in which a society may venture to leave its individual members." The question of political competence implied in this quotation provided one of the major tensions in eighteenth century political theory. As far as Jefferson was concerned, fate had decreed that America would be the stage on which the question would be resolved.

During his tenures as Secretary of State, Vice President, and President, Jefferson frequently reaffirmed his basic faith in the democratic possibility; though one might suspect that in the early years of this period he must have frequently felt very much alone in his optimism. As he and his colleagues went about the business of fashioning a viable political machine, he soon found that his faith, both in the ability of the people to exercise self-government and indeed in the ultimate success of the American experiment, was not widely shared. Later, in reflecting on those early years of the Republic, he said that the only point on which he and President Washington had ever differed was over the competency of the people to govern themselves. "I had more confidence than he had in the natural integrity and discretion of the people," he wrote, "and

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in the safety and extent to which they might trust themselves with a control over their government. "10 Jefferson did not believe that either Washington or John Adams had any real faith that the experiment would succeed. 11 Alexander Hamilton left no doubt as to his pessimism. As late as 1802 Hamilton wrote that he was "still laboring to prop the frail and worthless fabric" even though this was contrary to all his "anticipations of its fate." 12

This disparate appraisal of the future was ultimately reflected in the philosophies of the Federalist and Republican Parties. In later years Jefferson came to believe that the people's competency for self-government was the essential difference between the parties. He wrote: "Men by their constitutions are naturally divided into two parties: 1. Those who fear and distrust the people, and wish to draw all powers from them into the hands of the higher classes. 2. Those who identify themselves with the people, have confidence in them, cherish and consider them as the most honest and safe, although not the most wise depository of the public interests. In every country these two parties exist, . . . call them . . . by whatever name you please, they are the same parties still, and pursue the same object. The . . . appellation of Aristocrats and Democrats is the true one expressing the essence of all." 13

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10 TJ to John Melish, Jan. 13, 1813, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIII, 206-213.

11 TJ to Dr. Walter Jones, Jan. 2, 1814, Ibid., XIV, 46-52.


13 TJ to Henry Lee, Aug. 10, 1824, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XVI, 73-74.
More specifically, he declared that those of the Republican persuasion believed "that man was a rational animal, endowed by nature with rights, and with an innate sense of justice; and that he could be restrained from wrong and protected in right, by moderate powers, confided to persons of his own choice, and held to their duties by dependence on his own will." The Federalist philosophy was shaped, Jefferson believed, by a lack of faith in the people.

This same distinction between the Federalist and Republican parties was described by Jefferson's closest collaborator. James Madison wrote that "there has been in fact a deep distinction between the two parties or rather, between the mass of the Nation, and the part of it which for a time got possession of the Govt. The distinction has its origin in the confidence of the former, in the capacity of mankind for self Govt. and in a distrust of it by the other or by its leaders; and is the key to many of the phenomena presented by our political History."  

The essence of the Republican philosophy was most clearly expressed by Jefferson in a letter to an old friend in France in 1816.

We of the United States [Republicanism was by this time triumphant]... are constitutionally and conscientiously democrats. We consider society as one of the natural wants with which man has been created; that he has been endowed with faculties and qualities to effect its satisfaction by concurrence of others having the same want; that when, by the exercise of these faculties, he has procured a state of society, it is one of his

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14 TJ to Judge William Johnson, June 12, 1823, Ibid., XV, 439-452.

acquisitions which he has a right to regulate and control, jointly indeed with all those who have concurred in the procurement, whom he cannot exclude from its use or direction more than they him. We think experience has proved it safer, for the mass of individuals composing the society, to reserve to themselves personally the exercise of all rightful powers to which they are competent, and to delegate those to which they are not competent to deputies named, and removable for unfaithful conduct, by themselves immediately. . . . I acknowledge myself strong in affection to our own form, yet both of us act and think from the same motive, we both consider the people as our children, and love them with parental affection. But you love them as infants whom you are afraid to trust without nurses; and I as adults whom I freely leave to self-government. 16

Only once did Jefferson's faith in the democratic experiment grow dim. As the debate over slavery in Missouri revealed intense sectional antagonisms, he began to despair for the future. "I have been among the most sanguine in believing that our Union would be of long duration. I now doubt it much, and see the event at no great distance, and the direct consequence of this question; . . . My only comfort and confidence is, that I shall not live to see this; and I envy not the present generation the glory of throwing away the fruits of their fathers' sacrifices of life and fortune, and of rendering desperate the experiment which was to decide ultimately whether man is capable of self-government?" Perhaps reflecting declining health, pressing financial worries, and the weariness of his seventy-seven years, he branded the failure of leadership as a "treason against human hope." 17 It is clear however, that until this time an optimistic faith in the ability of the people to exercise self-government and in the ultimate success of the American democratic experiment was a

16TJ to Monsieur Dupont de Nemours, Apr. 24, 1816, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 487-491.

17TJ to William Short, Apr. 13, 1820, Ibid., XV, 243-248.
constant theme in Jefferson's thought.

Jefferson's faith in republican democracy reveals much more than a faith in the efficacy of a particular form of government. It was a faith that rested upon an optimistic appraisal of human nature. Jefferson believed that man was basically good; that he was by nature reasonable, moral, compassionate, and generous; and that he could "be trusted with the formation of his own opinions." This appraisal contrasted sharply with the pessimistic view of human nature which was still encountered in the eighteenth century.

The distrust of human nature has a long tradition in Western thought. Its origins are to be found in the Christian emphasis on man's inferiority to God and, more specifically, in the Christian doctrine of original sin. But even those enlightened philosophers of the eighteenth century, who had rejected these theological doctrines as being contrary to reason, found on the more empirical and rationalistic grounds of observation and introspection, good reason to be cautious in their appraisal of human nature. That "the heart of man is deceitful altogether and desperately wicked" is a prevalent theme in eighteenth-century writing and can be found in the work of figures as diverse as Jonathan Edwards and Voltaire. Although attributing a degree of dignity to man, these writers usually portrayed him as being activated by non-rational passions such as vanity, ambition, or especially love of approval and praise. This abasement of human nature gradually gave way to the more optimistic

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view of the Religion of Humanity, but this did not occur until the turn of the century. Arthur O. Lovejoy has labeled the era beginning in the latter part of the eighteenth century and extending into the early twentieth century as "the Age of Man's Good Conceit of Himself." He notes that the optimistic view of human nature has had a long and gradual development, but that an intensification of the trend is evident beginning in the late eighteenth century which reaches its climax in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was, according to Lovejoy, a self-confident era for Western mankind in which "the belief that man is 'naturally good' became a widely accepted premise alike of politics and pedagogics; the taste for satire largely went out of fashion in literature, and the sense of sin rather largely in religion; and to express a 'low view' of human nature became a kind of odious blasphemy." 19 Jefferson matured during this period of transition, and, as far as his appraisal of human nature is concerned, he is as much a child of the Romantic Era as of the Enlightenment.

Both the theological and the secular strictures on human nature were emphasized in America during the eighteenth century. The concept of the total depravity of man, the notion that man is by nature corrupt as the result of

19 This appraisal of eighteenth century thought is developed in Arthur O. Lovejoy, Reflections on Human Nature (Baltimore, 1961), 1-51. Lovejoy describes approbative as one of the most powerful passions that motivated eighteenth century leaders. Douglass G. Adair finds this same passion dominant among the American Founding Fathers. "It is my argument that the lust for the psychic reward of fame, honor, glory, after 1776 becomes a key ingredient in the behavior of Washington and his greatest contemporaries." "Fame and the Founding Fathers," Fame and the Founding Fathers, ed. by Edmund P. Willis (Bethlehem, Pa., 1967), 27-52.
Adam's sin, was one of the basic themes of Calvinistic theology brought to America by the Puritans in the early seventeenth century. Though the Puritan errand into the wilderness had not been realized, its influence on the shaping of American thought was still very much in evidence. The Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century, which had intellectual ramifications lasting beyond the end of the century, was very specifically characterized by a resurgence of Calvinist doctrine. Not only was there a renewal of these doctrines in the traditional Calvinist congregations, but the revival revealed that at least some of the "points" of Calvinism, including the distrust of human nature, were taught in some of the non-Calvinistic institutions outside New England. George Whitefield, the English evangelist who is usually portrayed as the catalyst of the revival, was said to have hardly preached any sermon without having emphasized the doctrine of original sin. Benjamin Franklin expressed surprise at how much people admired and respected Whitefield "notwithstanding his common abuse of them, by assuring them they were naturally 'half beasts and half devils'."

From a pulpit in Hanover, Virginia, one could hear the traditional harangue that we are all "even by nature children

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20This doctrine descended from Augustine, but the immediate Puritan debt was to Calvin. See Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (New York, 1939), Book I.


of wrath, . . . corrupt from our very birth, transgressors from the womb, and liable to the wrath of God . . . . The innate depravity and corruption of the heart, and the habits of sin contracted and confirmed by repeated indulgences of inbred corruption, these are the poisonous, deadly things that have slain the soul; these have entirely indisposed and disabled it for living religion." 23 Or "take what dispensation of the law you please, the law of innocence, the law of Moses, or the moral part of the gospel, it is impossible for one of the fallen posterity of Adam to be saved by it; . . . and the reason is plain, there is not one of them but what has broken it; and therefore, there is not one of them but what is condemned by it, to suffer its dreadful penalty." 24 From the pulpit at the College of New Jersey the students heard that unseemly behavior "springs out of the corruption of the heart. It is the dictate of its sinful inclinations, of its guilty wishes, of its criminal passions, which more than reason, contribute to form the moral system and rule of conduct of an unbeliever." 25 From the pulpit of a Dutch Reformed Church in New York City in 1794, the congregation heard that "there is necessarily contained in believing, that Jesus is the Christ, . . . a belief of the sinful state of mankind, and their inability to recover themselves." 26 An evangelical in Norfolk,

23 [Samuel Davies], Sermons on Important Subjects, by the late Reverend and Pious Samuel Davies, A. M. to which is prefixed the Character of the Author by the Rev. David Bostick, M. A., in Five Volumes (Philadelphia, 1818), I, 97-101.

24 Ibid., III, 62.

25 Samuel Stanhope Smith, Sermons (Newark, N. J., 1799), 1-2.

26 William Linn, Discourses on the Signs of the Times (New York, 1794), 87-115.
Virginia heard a sermon on August 20, 1775 "on the dignity of human nature. Vain philosophy!", he exclaimed. "What is the dignity of depraved human nature?" Even John Wesley, the father of the Arminian Methodist sect, warned against those who were painting "fair pictures of human nature." Though it was "Quite unfashionable . . . to say anything to the disparagement of human nature," he warned that neither the scriptures nor experience supported an optimistic conclusion. From both "we learn, concerning man in his natural state, unassisted by the grace of God, that 'all the imagination of the thoughts of his heart' are still 'evil, only evil' and that continually." And "let it be remembered, that the heart even of a believer is not wholly purified when he is justified. Sin is then overcome, but it is not rooted out: it is conquered, but not destroyed." It was still necessary, even in the redeemed state, to be ever on guard against the root of sin, self-will, pride, which remained in his heart.

Jonathan Edwards, the most respected defender of the revival in America, offered the most articulate explanation in support of human depravity. In The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended; Evidences of its Truth Produced, and Arguments to the Contrary Answered, containing in Particular, A Reply to the Objections and Arguings of Dr. John Taylor, in his Book, entitled, "The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination." (1758), he undertook the defense of this Calvinist position which was


28 John Wesley, Sermons on Several Occasions (2 vols.; New York, 1815), I, 351-353, II, 503.
under attack from some of the more liberal clergy. He argued that God im-
planted within man two kinds of principles, the operation of which reflected the
duality of man's nature. The inferior principles were those which encompassed
the natural appetites and passions of "mere human nature." There were also
the superior principles "wherein consisted the spiritual image of God, and
man's righteousness and true holiness." This is Edwards' exposition of the
scriptural dualism that describes man's fleshly and divine natures. According

to God's plan, "these superior principles were given to possess the throne, and
maintain an absolute dominion in the heart: the other to be wholly subordinate
and subservient." So long as these principles reigned, man enjoyed dignity and
happiness. But "when man sinned, and broke God's covenant, and fell under
his curse, these superior principles left his heart: for indeed then God left him;
that communion with God, on which these principles depended, entirely ceased;
the Holy Spirit, that divine inhabitant, forsook the house." Without this com-
munion with God man was nothing but flesh without spirit. "The inferior prin-
ciples of self-love, and natural appetite, . . . being alone, and left to them-
selves, of course became reigning principles; . . . they became absolute
masters of the heart." Edwards' conclusion then was that the natural state of
the mind of man is governed by inferior principles only, and that consequently
man's nature "is corrupt and depraved with a moral depravity that amounts to
and implies their utter undoing." 29

29Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections, intro. and notes by
This emphasis on the depravity of man's nature was an enduring theme in the preaching of the evangelicals from the Great Awakening through the remainder of the century. During the Jeffersonian era, the great majority of church going Americans were members of evangelical congregations and concurred with the negative appraisals of their own natural inclinations heard regularly from the pulpit.

At the same time many of those to whom this theological reasoning was nonsensical were equally demeaning in their appraisal of human nature. Either through reflection on their own impulses, or, especially, in viewing the historical record of man's carnage, or the contemporary evidence of the influence of ambition and deceit, they were willing to accept the more secularly oriented, but equally pessimistic, Hobbesian portrait of natural man. This was a portrait which "put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restless desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death"—a portrait wherein man without an external control over his natural passions of greed and pride was at war against every other man.

Jefferson found that, for the most part, his colleagues held a rather low estimation of human nature. He found that President Washington "was naturally

\[30\text{Robert G. Pope finds that "on the eve of the American Revolution at least three-fourths of the congregations in the rebellious colonies still professed, if they did not strictly adhere to the tenets of Reformed theology." In Michael McGiffert and Robert A. Skotheim, American Social Thought: Sources and Interpretations (2 vols.; Reading, Mass., 1972), I, 75.}

distrustful of men, and inclined to gloomy apprehensions about them."  

The General had indeed written during the Revolution that "a small knowledge of human nature will convince us, that, with far the greatest part of mankind, interest is the governing principle; and that almost every man is more or less, under its influence." When applied to man in society this meant that "motives of public virtue may for a time, or in particular instances, actuate men to the observance of a conduct purely disinterested; but they are not of themselves sufficient to produce a persevering conformity to the refined dictates and obligations of social duty. Few men are capable of making a continued sacrifice of all views of private interest, or advantage, to the common good." It was, he concluded, "vain to exclaim against the depravity of human nature on this account," but when the time comes to build a government it should be remembered that "no institution, not built on the presumptive truth of these maxims can succeed."  

As we have noted, Jefferson believed that it was this kind of thinking, that shaped the Federalist political philosophy.  

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32 TJ to Dr. Walter Jones, Jan. 2, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 46-52.  


34 Marshall Smelser finds that the Federalist's rejection of egalitarian principles "was based on a theory of human nature which emphasized differences of individual abilities and the inherent depravity of passionate, self-interested human nature." "The Federalist Period as an Age of Passion," American Quarterly, X (1958), 391; also see Lovejoy, Reflections, 51.
dominant leaders of the Federalists, Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, did not attempt to conceal their distrust of human nature. Hamilton from his earli-est writing frequently made such charges as: "a vast majority of mankind is entirely biassed by motives of self-interest"; and "jealousy is a predominant passion of human nature." 35 His defense of the new constitution in 1787-1788 was in many ways a paraphrase of Hobbes's philosophy. "Why has government been instituted at all?" he asked. "Because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice, without constraint." 36 "Has it not . . . invariably been found, that momentary passions and immediate interests have a more active and imperious control over human conduct than general or remote considerations of policy, utility or justice?" 37 Most eighteenth century Americans found this declaration that the history of human conduct does not warrant an "exalted opinion of human virtue" 38 compatible with their religious confessions. "To judge from the history of mankind," Hamilton wrote, "we shall be compelled to conclude, that the fiery and de-structive passions of war, reign in the human breast, with much more powerful sway, than the mild and beneficient sentiments of peace: and, that to model our political systems upon speculations of lasting tranquility, is to calculate on


37 "The Federalist No. 6," Nov. 14, 1787, Ibid., 313.

the weaker springs of the human character."  

John Adams rejected the concept of the total and universal depravity of human nature, but he still confessed his conviction to Jefferson that human reason and human conscience were no match for "human passions, human imaginations and human enthusiasm." He had little respect for "those profound philosophers, whose sagacity perceives the perfectibility of human nature." He was convinced that man's "passions, ambition, avarice, love, resentment, etc., possess so much metaphysical subtlety, and so much overpowering eloquence, that they insinuate themselves into the understanding and the conscience, and convert both to their party."  

Neither Adams nor Hamilton subscribed to any theory of human depravity in the sense of some awesome affliction from above. They both frequently reaffirmed their belief that man enjoyed the faculty of reason. But both were students of human motivation. And in their conclusions they belonged to the school that believed, in Hume's words, that "reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."  

Because passion was superior to reason as the motive

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power of human action, republican virtue, though appealing to reason, would prove to be a clay foundation for the new republic. "We may preach till we are tired of the theme, the necessity of disinterestedness in republics, without making a single proselyte," proclaimed Hamilton. "Men are rather reasoning than reasonable animals, for the most part governed by the impulse of passion." This did not mean that man was depraved. Nor did it mean that passions were to be despised. It simply meant that if one was engaged in designing a government for men, he should take into consideration the motivating force within their lives. Quoting Hume, Hamilton wrote that "in contriving any system of government, . . . every man ought to be supposed a knave; and to have no other end in all his actions, but private interests." If the motivations of the governed were recognized, whether they were private interest, ambition, or the love of fame, the latter being in Hamilton's hierarchy "the ruling passion of the noblest minds," they could be used in binding the governed to the governor.


45 For an excellent analysis of the relationship of Hamilton's appraisal of human nature and his ideas on government see Gerald Stourzh, Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government (Stanford, 1970), 76-125. Most eighteenth century writers from Mandeville to Hume and Adam Smith claimed that the craving for admiration "was ingeniously implanted in man by his Creator as a substitute for the Reason-Virtue which he does not possess, and is the
Jefferson rejected the Federalist design for government, and the somber view of human nature proclaimed by its architects, with the same vehemence that he rejected the five points of Calvin as a religion of Daemonism.  

"I do not believe with the Rochefoucaults and Montaignes, that fourteen out of fifteen men are rogues," he wrote in 1795. But in obvious reference to his immediate political experience he added that this proportion was probably not too strong for those who "always contrive to nestle themselves into the places of power and profit." To say that Jefferson held an optimistic view of human nature does not imply that he was blind to history, or to the behavior of men in his own time, or to the role of ignoble passions in shaping human conduct. He knew that man was susceptible to the "seduction of self-love," and that one had to acknowledge "the bias of the human mind from motives of interest." He knew that there were occasions when even irrational motives might overcome the motive of self-interest. I know of no more eloquent, and revealing discourse


on the struggle between reason and passion that takes place within every human
breast than that found in the Head and the Heart dialogue in his much quoted
letter to Maria Cosway. He knew there was much vice and misery in the world,
but he believed there was more virtue and happiness. He believed that "morality,
compassion, generosity, are innate elements of the human constitution,"
and refused to relinquish his general confidence because of "occasional in-
fidelities."48

This optimistic appraisal of the human constitution placed Jefferson in a
philosophical minority, just as did his optimistic faith in the ultimate success
of the democratic experiment. It is my conviction that the latter faith rested
upon his confidence in human nature. I shall suggest in the succeeding chapters
that both these faiths were a subtle but clear expression of a deeply held belief
that man is by nature a social creature, and that he is innately prepared for a
harmonious social existence, and further, that these beliefs rested firmly on
a consciously developed and well defined ethical theory, a theory that was
largely shaped by his knowledge of and agreement with the philosophical writings
of a group of eighteenth century British moralists. Although Jefferson may
never have completely grasped the subtleties of their moral philosophy, most
familiarly known as Scottish sentimentalist moral philosophy, he was an
attentive student to the essential arguments on which it was based and the con-

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48TJ to David Ross, May 8, 1786, Boyd Collection, IX, 473-475; TJ to
Maria Cosway, Oct. 12, 1786, Ibid., X, 443-453; TJ to Abbe Salimankis, Mar.
14, 1810, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XII, 379-380; TJ to Monsieur Dupont
de Nemours, Apr. 24, 1816, Ibid., XV, 103-108; TJ to Thomas Leiper, Jan. 1,
1814, Ibid., XIV, 41-45.
clusions about human nature that it offered. His study and knowledge of the
Scottish philosophy, to the extent that it contributed to his own conclusions
about human nature, are essential to an understanding of the conceptual frame-

49 Almost all of Jefferson's biographers have made at least a passing re-
ference to the influence of the Scottish Common Sense Philosophers, but they
have not felt the necessity to elaborate much beyond that. For examples see
Henry S. Randall, The Life of Thomas Jefferson (Philadelphia, 1865), I, 26;
Dumas Malone, Jefferson and His Time, Vol. II: Jefferson and the Rights of
Man (Boston, 1951), 215; Nathan Schnacher, Thomas Jefferson: A Biography
(New York, 1951), I, 36-37; John Dos Passos, The Head and Heart of Thomas
Jefferson (New York, 1954) 91-110, 152; and Merrill D. Peterson, Thomas
Chinard sees the influence primarily in the field of legal theory. Thomas
Jefferson: The Apostle of Americanism, 24-31. Douglass G. Adair finds the
Scottish influence more important than the French in the fields of social and
political theory. "'That Politics May be Reduced to a Science:' David Hume,
James Madison, and the Tenth Federalist," Huntington Library Quarterly, XX
(1957), 343-360. The most extensive treatment is in Adrienne Koch, The
Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1943). She believes that Jefferson
leaned slightly to the "hopeful" side in his appraisal of human nature, but she
concludes that he was not unduly influenced by his "flirtation with Scottish
intuitionist philosophy." She believes that "the predominant influences in
Jefferson's views on human nature came from eighteenth-century France." (113-116) I believe that this is true in only the very small area of the relations
between man's physical organs and the thinking process. In this area the works
of the French materialists P. J. G. Cabanis and Destutt de Tracy were certainly
influential, but in the more general view of human nature, I believe that the
Scots were far more important.

It is the purpose of this study to measure the nature and extent of the in-
fluence of the Scottish philosophers on Jefferson's concept of human nature and
to comment upon the implications of this for his political theory. It is not an
attempt to explain the intellectual origins of his ideas on government, but is
intended to complement that kind of study such as is found in Douglass G. Adair,
Yale University, 1943), or H. Trevor Colbourn, Lamp of Experience: Whig
History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution (Chapel Hill,
1965), and "Thomas Jefferson's Use of the Past," William and Mary Quarterly,
3rd Ser., XV (1958), 56-70.
work from which Jefferson acted, and thus to the political faith which he
professed.

This dissertation is thus one chapter in the intellectual biography of Thomas
Jefferson, and at the same time one chapter in the intellectual history of late
eighteenth century America. It proposes an interaction between ideas and
events, and rests upon the assumption that, at least in some instances of human
endeavor, ideas precede and influence activity. More specifically, it proposes
that at the beginning of the American democratic experiment, Jefferson was
drawing upon certain assumptions about human nature that he felt were basic
to the theory of democratic government. It is a virtually universal assumption
among political scientists today that all political theories are or must be
premised on either explicit or implicit assumptions about human nature. It is
more and more being recognized that earlier "political scientists," from
Aristotle to Rousseau, were also seriously concerned with questions about
human nature. 50 This was no less true for the more important theorists at
work in late eighteenth century America. Although they were certainly com-
mitted to the experience of history as their most reliable guide, 51 they were
equally sensitive to their immediate experience with human nature. Their

50 For example see Glenn Tinder, Political Thinking: The Perennial Ques-
tions (2d ed.; Boston, 1974), 4; Lucian W. Pye, "Personal Identity and Political
Ideology," Psychoanalysis and History, ed. with intro. by Bruce Mazlish

51 Douglass G. Adair, "'Experience Must be Our Only Guide:' History,
Democratic Theory, and the United States Constitution," The Reinterpretation
of Early American History, ed. by Billington, 129-150.
beliefs about human nature were shaped by a knowledge of history, by theological dogma, and by a kind of primitive psychology based on evidence derived from both observation and personal introspection. Their goal was to develop a scientific theory of government based on both the lessons of history and the psychology of human nature as they understood it. I will propose that Jefferson's beliefs about the psychology of human nature, more than those of any of his colleagues, were influenced by the teachings of early motivational theory in addition to observation and introspection.
CHAPTER II
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MORAL PHILOSOPHY

The most generally held concept of human nature in eighteenth century America rested on the Calvinist doctrines of original sin and the depravity of man. According to these doctrines all human beings were heirs of Adam's sin, and as God had withdrawn his spiritual communion from the common head of the species, "so he withholds the same from all the members, as they come into existence; whereby they come into the world mere flesh, and entirely under the government of natural and inferior principles; and so become wholly corrupt, as Adam did."¹ In other words, man, governed by the evil passions of his natural state, would sin. He was powerless in his own volitions to make right moral decisions and follow them. But this belief, like so many others, came under serious scrutiny and attack by eighteenth century philosophes on both sides of the Atlantic. By the middle of the following century, such a belief about human nature would appear at least uninteresting, if not totally discredited, in most of the western world. The years of Jefferson's greatest intellectual development, roughly the last quarter of the eighteenth century, were the years that witnessed the most intense debate about this issue and its implications for the whole realm of human endeavor. It is hardly necessary to state that

Jefferson was quickly persuaded to the side of the more romantic image of human nature that would emerge triumphant in the nineteenth century. A knowledge of the general outlines of this important transition in thought will be necessary, however, in order to follow Jefferson to his conclusions.

The Calvinist doctrine of innate depravity precluded the necessity for or development of a philosophy of morals, and indeed moral philosophies were considered by most Calvinists as evil attempts to evade God's law. Their religious doctrine clearly defined the nature of man and of morality and thus any secular statement on either subject would be at best superfluous. But because their philosophy of morality was theologically founded, its acceptance and influence depended upon a fervor of religious affection, and religion in America by the early eighteenth century was, according to Samuel Wigglesworth in an election sermon in 1733, only "the shadow of past and vanish'd Glory! . . . If the Fear of the Lord be to Hate Evil, as Prov. 8. 13. Then it is to be feared that our Religion runs low." All across the Colonies frightened ministers agonized over the decline of piety and religious ardor. They told of a society that had been founded by men dedicated to realizing on earth a community founded on God's immutable principles, a goal that had become progressively lost in the business of fishing, trade and settlement.

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I shall only now add, that the Powerful Love of the World, and Exorbitant Reach after Riches, which is become the reigning Temper in Persons of all Ranks in our Land, is alone enough to awaken our concerns for abandon'd, slighted and forgotten Religion. 'Tis this that takes up our Time, seizes our Affections, and governs our Views: Straitens our Hands: respecting Works of Charity, and pusheth us into the most wicked Schemes and Methods. This Worldly Spirit has in a great measure thrust out Religion, and given it a Wound which will prove Deadly unless infinite Mercy prevent. . . .

The loss of religious ardor and the emergence of a worldly spirit probably reveals more than a turning to the pursuit of economic opportunities. The historical portrait of America as a crucible in which European ideas were remolded and fused into a unique new intellectual culture can easily be overemphasized. But the change in the American mind during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was not something peculiar to America. It was a change that was occurring in the mind of Western man on both sides of the Atlantic. It was simply the continuation of a trend that had begun long before -- a trend toward the secularization of Western thought. Over a period of two centuries after 1600 Western man came to hold new beliefs about himself and about the universe. Many of these beliefs were incompatible with the teachings of traditional Christianity. Questions arose about the validity of any absolute truth. The authority of tradition was severely diminished by a new faith in investigation. The progress of scientific theory and discovery pointed man from the world of the spiritual to the world of the natural or material. The physical world was man's abode, and it was here that he would work out his destiny.

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3Ibid., 6.

4This theme is developed at length in Max Savelle, Seeds of Liberty: The Genesis of the American Mind (Seattle, 1948), and David J. Boorstin, The Americans: The Colonial Experience (New York, 1958).
The writings of Newton on natural laws and Locke on the theory of knowledge had made their mark in America as well as in Europe. In the new picture God was subject to the laws of order and reason, and was thus more intelligible. Perhaps even more importantly, the new picture reflected a new faith in human activism in matters both secular and beyond. Natural theology, while not denying the validity of the Calvinistic thesis of scriptural revelation, also insisted that reason was of equal importance as a vehicle through which God revealed Himself, and His moral will, to man. True virtue was still defined by God, but it was by the use of natural reason that man apprehended and understood divine principles.

In sum the change was one that reflected Western man's passage from one intellectual world to another -- from a theocentric to an anthropocentric conception of man and the universe. The change that occurred in the American mind that so alarmed the Colonial ministers was as much an accident of time as a response to a unique environment.

The importance and implications of the secularization of Western thought were far-reaching. In America this trend was temporarily altered in the eighteenth century by the Great Awakening that revived for the commonalty the traditional "world picture" of God immediately participating in the universe and in the fortunes of their lives. But the revival held little appeal for many of the learned minority. These found the new secular "world picture" more intellectually acceptable. This new picture did not obliterate the traditional concept of the relationship between man and God. But it emphasized the transcendence rather than immediacy, the benevolence rather than wrath of God;
and de-emphasized the depravity of man and the concept of predestined moral actions. Most significantly, the focus of interest in the new picture was on man in the physical world working out his own destiny. And in this sense, the new picture emerged as a reaction against Calvinist determinism; or the providential view of history.

One of the greatest contrasts between the old and new pictures of the universe was the contrast between the pessimistic and optimistic appraisals of human nature. And because ethical theory is largely dependent on some understanding of human nature, the new optimism caused serious alterations in moral thought. It was these "ethical difficulties of secularism" that, according to Lester G. Crocker, reached a first critical focus in the eighteenth century and constituted an intellectual "age of crisis." Or as Sir Leslie Stephen has so succinctly stated it, "Wider speculations as to morality inevitably occur as soon as the vision of God becomes faint; when the almighty retires behind second causes, instead of being felt as an immediate presence." Just as they had rejected the theological concept of the depravity of human nature, the handful of American philosophes rejected the concept of revealed ethical law.

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5 An Age of Crisis: Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought (Baltimore, 1959), 180, 199.

6 History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century (2vols., New York, 1962, fp 1876), II, 1. But one should also note L. A. Selby-Bigge's suggestion that "it was perhaps rather the emptiness and insufficiency of theological ethics in which sanctions were the chief interest, which set serious people upon original moral inquiries, rather than contempt for theology altogether." British Moralists: Being Selections from Writers Principally of the Eighteenth Century. (2 Vols.; fp 1897, New York, 1965), I, xxi.
sequently the theological sanctions of divine reward and punishment as incentives to virtuous conduct became progressively less efficacious. The new natural theology substituted for the old Calvinist dogma the belief that "an enlightened Mind . . . ought to be the Guide of those who call themselves Men."

The aim of "the Influence of the Spirit of God" was "as much intended to open the Understanding, as to warm the Affections; and not only so, but to keep the Passions within their proper Bounds, restraining them from usurping Dominion over the reasonable Nature." 7

The development of an optimistic theory of human nature was accompanied by a search for a compatible philosophy of ethics. The books and pamphlets published and read during the eighteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic testify to the increased interest in the nature of man and morals. 8 The result was an expression of moral philosophy through the proliferation of secular moral theories that attempted to solve the human moral problem; the selection of and doing of right and the avoidance of wrong actions as a means for the achievement of present and eternal happiness. William Smith, first president of the College of Philadelphia (now University of Pennsylvania), defined moral

7Charles Chauncy, Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England . . . (Boston, 1743), in Heimert and Miller, Great Awakening, 298.

8Gerald Stourzh writes that "it would be more accurate . . . to regard the eighteenth century as the Age of Human Nature, or the Age of Psychology" than the Age of Reason. "Psychology, in fact, dominated the moral and political science of the eighteenth century as theology had dominated the seventeenth century." Alexander Hamilton, 76.
philosophy as "deducing the laws of our conduct from our situation in life and connexions with the Beings around us; settling the whole Oeconomy of the Will and Affections; establishing the predominancy of Reason and Conscience, and guiding us to Happiness thro' the practice of Virtue."  

And Samuel Johnson, first president of King's College (now Columbia University), wrote that "Moral Philosophy is the Knowledge of the moral World; . . . and the general Laws of the moral Nature, together with all that practical Conduct and Behavior thereon depending, that is necessary to promote our true Happiness both in our present and future State," and that "ETHICS is the Art of living happily, by the right Knowledge of ourselves, and the Practice of Virtue: Our Happiness being the End, and Knowledge and Virtue, the Means to that End."  

The development of moral theories obviously necessitated a confrontation with some very basic philosophical questions. What is the nature of man? What are the nature and criteria of virtue? On what foundation or authority do they rest? Why is man obligated to conform to the knowledge of true virtue?  

The nature of these questions plus the number of persons offering solutions resulted in a variety of theories that frequently conflicted. The most serious conflicts seemed to grow out of questions of epistemology, as applied to the knowledge of virtue; and motivation, as applied to moral behavior. As Thomas Clap, head of Yale College (1739-1766) observed, the authors of moral philosophy

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10 Elementa Philosophica: Containing chiefly, Noetica, or Things relating to the Mind or Understanding; and Ethica, or Things relating to the Moral Behaviour (Philadelphia, 1752), 1-2.
usually agreed on rules of conduct, but differed greatly in "the Foundation of the Obligation to observe those Rules, and in Criterion of Moral Good and Evil." ¹¹

John Locke provided an early impulse for the eighteenth century development of secular moral theory. Because he believed that man's greatest concern was with the condition of his "eternal estate," he concluded that "morality is the proper science and business of mankind in general." In An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), which was standard fare in every college by the middle of the eighteenth century, he argued cogently for a rationally conceived system of ethics. He employed the same arguments in destroying the concept of divinely implanted moral principles that he had used to attack the concept of innate ideas in general. In the latter case he attempted to disprove the widely held idea that there were "primary notions" or characters "stamped upon the mind of man, which the soul receives in its first being and brings into the world with it," by showing the fallacies of the very evidence which was offered in its support. The most popular argument in behalf of the concept of innate ideas was that there are certain principles "universally agreed upon by all mankind." Locke countered that "if it were true in matter of fact that there were certain truths wherein all mankind agreed it would not prove then innate, . . . but, which is worse, this argument of universal consent, which is made use of to prove innate principles seems to me a

¹¹An Essay on the Nature and Foundation of Moral Virtue and Obligation; Being a Short Introduction to the Study of Ethics, For the Use of the Students of Yale College (New Haven, 1765), 1.
demonstration that there are none such: because there are none to which all mankind give an universal assent."12

Locke argued that ideas do not exist in the mind "before the senses have conveyed any in." This meant that "ideas in the understanding are coeval with sensation." In other words, all of the materials of reason and knowledge come from experience.13 He believed that moral ideas, or principles, had to be derived from experience, i.e., sensation and reflection, in the same manner. Some had argued that "universal agreement" to certain moral principles indicated an innate knowledge of moral truth. Locke dismissed this argument by turning the evidence as before. "Where is that practical truth that is universally received, without doubt or question, as it must be innate?" he asked. "Whether there be any such moral principles wherein all men do agree, I appeal to any who have been but moderately conversant in the history of mankind, and looked abroad beyond the smoke of their own chimneys." Neither the history of mankind nor the observation of different societies offered any evidence of the existence of innate moral principles.14

Locke concluded that there were no such things as innate moral rules. But the fact that there were no innate moral principles did not mean that there was no moral truth, or that man could not discover this truth. Locke believed that

13Ibid., I, 9-10.
14Ibid., 25-36.
moral good is defined by the peculiar relationship between God and man, and that the comprehension of this relationship affords "such foundations of our duty and rules of action as might place morality amongst the sciences capable of demonstration." He believed that "the measure of right and wrong might be made out to anyone that will apply himself with the same indifferency and attention to the one as he does to the other of these sciences." But he warned that moral ideas are complex ideas that "require reasoning and discourse, and some exercise of the mind, to discover the certainty of their truth." 15 Locke believed that mental laziness would prevent most men from acquiring a certain knowledge of moral truth by the process of reason, and conceded that divine revelation would be the most familiar source of this truth. But he also believed that there was only a very fine line between inspiration and delusion. If one depended too much upon intuition or feeling, or "if strength of persuasion be the light which must guide us, I ask how shall anyone distinguish between the delusions of Satan and inspiration of the Holy Spirit?" 16 It was, to be sure, divine law which was the ultimate criterion of moral right and wrong. But the light of nature, or reason, would reveal those moral principles which reflected divine law.

_Reason must be our last judge and guide in everything._ I do not mean that we must consult reason and examine whether a proposition revealed from God can be made out by natural principles and if it cannot, that then we may reject it; but consult it we must, and by it examine whether it be revelation

15_**Ibid.**, II, 154.

16_**Ibid.**, II, 294.
from God or no; and if reason finds it to be revealed from God, reason then declares for it as much as for any other truth, and makes it one of her dictates.\textsuperscript{17}

Those who were convinced by Locke that there were no innate moral principles were faced with the task of defining the source and nature of moral virtue by reason, or by some human faculty other than reason, such as sentiment.

The eighteenth century moral theories most familiar to Americans were developed by British philosophers, with a significantly large number of moral tomes emanating from the Scottish universities at Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen. Wollaston and Price, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Locke and Hume, Stewart and Paley, were familiar names to those who had attended either British universities or one of the Colonial colleges. While seventeenth century curricula had placed great emphasis on divinity and metaphysics and had only reluctantly tolerated moral philosophy, during the first half of the eighteenth century this was reversed. By mid-century "moral philosophy was supreme and alone as the queen of the sciences."\textsuperscript{18} The subject was almost always taught by the college president and was usually the core of the senior year's work. It was primarily through the American colleges that eighteenth century moral theories were introduced into American thought during the Jeffersonian era.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{17}]\textit{Ibid.}, 295.
\item[\textsuperscript{18}]Norman S. Fiering, "President Johnson and the Circle of Knowledge," \textit{William and Mary Quarterly}, 3rd Ser., XXVIII (1971), 201; also see Fiering "Moral Philosophy in America 1650 to 1750 and its British Context" (unpublished Ph. D. diss., Columbia University, 1969).
\end{footnotes}
These theories have been lumped into two major categories by historians of philosophy -- the Intellectual and Sentimental Schools. 19 There were some areas of agreement between these two schools of moral philosophy. As L. A. Selby-Bigge has noted, they shared the common object of showing "that virtue is real and is worth pursuing in itself; that virtue and the motive to it are irreducible to a merely animal experience of pleasure and pain." And both schools "were agreed that it was not the mere will of God which constituted the distinction between right and wrong, nor his power which constituted the obligation to goodness." 20 The essential question on which they differed, one that held important implications for the development of a psychology of human nature, was whether moral perceptions originate in sense or in reason.

In broad outline, those who fell within the Intellectual School generally held that morality was a matter of absolute and immutable truth that reflected the essence of divine nature, and which was perceptible by the human intellect. The principal authors of this School were Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), William Wollaston (1660-1724), and Richard Price (1723-1791), all of whose works were read in the American college communities. Wollaston's The Religion of Nature delineated (privately printed 1722; first published 1724), which was used as a textbook of moral philosophy at Yale from 1740 to circa 1760, proclaimed

19 The eighteenth century categorization was more complex than this and will be developed in a subsequent chapter.

20 Selby-Bigge, British Moralists, I, xxii-xxviii.
reason to be the only valid foundation of virtue. In *Review of the principal
topics, etc.*, in *Morals* (1758), Price argued that reason was not only the
source of the knowledge of virtue, but that the perception of right and wrong
was alone a sufficient motive to obedience. Samuel Johnson, one of the first
American writers on moral philosophy, asserted the primacy of reason when
he wrote that "**Moral good** consists in freely choosing and doing whatsoever
Truth and right Reason dictate as necessary to be chosen and done, in order to
our true Happiness: **Moral Evil** the contrary; for moral Good must mean, the
Good of a moral agent; i.e., of [a] rational, conscious, free, self-exerting and
self-determining Agent." To establish the criteria of virtue, these authors
tried to identify morality with the intelligible nature of God and moral law with
ultimate truth. Clarke, in *Discourse concerning the unchangeable obligations
of Natural Religion* (1706), explained that the difference between good and evil
was determined absolutely by the **Nature of Things**. "Some things are in their
own nature Good and Reasonable and Fit to be done," he wrote, and "other
things are in their own nature absolutely Evil." Even the will of God is sub-
ject to the eternal rules of justice, equity, goodness and truth which define the
nature of things. And since God has made men in his own image and has given
them "those excellent Faculties of Reason and Will, whereby they are enabled
to distinguish Good from Evil, and to chuse the one and refuse the other," they
"should neither negligently suffer themselves to be imposed upon and deceived
in Matters of Good and Evil, Right and Wrong, or willfully and perversely allow

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21 *Elementa Philosophica*, 3.
themselves to be overruled by absurd Passions, and corrupt or partial Affections
to act contrary to what they know is Fit to be done." In summary, the
Intellectual School of moral philosophy elevated moral law to the sphere of
ultimate truth, reflecting the immutable nature of God, and communicated to
man through his a priori knowledge of the divine nature. And man's actions
should be both governed and judged by this immutable standard.

The sentimentalists generally did not deny the concept of absolute moral
truth, but they rejected the intellectualists' claim that reason alone was
sufficient guide to that truth. They argued that human intuition was a surer
basis for ethics than discursive reason. Like the intellectualists, most of the
sentimentalists stopped short of totally disregarding divine revelation, but in
general they played down the doctrine of supernatural sanctions.

The Scottish sentimentalist philosophy was first introduced in a serious
way in America in the middle third of the eighteenth century through the writings
of Francis Hutcheson. Hutcheson, who was professor of moral philosophy at
Glasgow from 1729 until his death in 1746, undertook the task of laying a solid
foundation for moral judgment that honored reason, as demanded by the pro-
ponents of natural religion, while rejecting the brand of rationalism that claimed
that reason alone was a sufficient guide to right conduct. For Hutcheson, the
ultimate source of human conduct was located not in reason, but in emotions
and feelings. Hutcheson founded his ethical theory on the concept of a moral
sense, an internal human sense capable of perceiving moral right and wrong.

22Selby-Bigge, British Moralists, II, 3-13.
This concept was introduced early in the eighteenth century by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, developed by Hutcheson, and elaborated in subsequent writings by Scottish authors such as Lord Kames (Henry Home), Thomas Reid, and Dugald Stewart. All of their works were widely read in America. Scottish Realism, "purportedly rational and scientific, yet rejecting skepticism and affirming the reality of the world and the evidences of a divine creator," was particularly suited in both its positive and negative aspects to the intellectual climate of eighteenth century America. It owed its appeal to "its systematic exposition of both reason and moral sentiment as supplementary factors in human life." It endorsed the validity of absolute moral standards without demanding a return to the theocentric ethics of the Calvinist era. In this commonsense approach, divine revelation was supplemented by a natural instinct, and thus the best of both possible worlds were brought together in a harmonious philosophy. To a small degree it provided the resolution of the dialectical antagonism between theologically and secularly oriented ethical theories. In contrast to the intellectualists, the Scottish sentimentalist ethical theory rested on the belief that human passions, emotions, feelings, etc., were good -- that they were divinely ordained -- perhaps they were the guiding voice of the Author of virtue within. Gladys Bryson has noted that "as the day was already past for arming oneself confidently out of the armory of the Bible and


the church, the day was now passing for trusting to reason as an infallible weapon and as a motive force in human life. What impressed these protestants against rationalism as universally effective in action was the equipment of senses, affections, passions, with which all men are endowed. "25 They did not demean the role of reason in human affairs, but simply insisted that reason follows intuition in the perception of true virtue.

The triumph of the sentimentalist philosophy in America is most vividly evidenced by the adoption of Scottish texts by practically every American college in the second half of the eighteenth century. This trend has been frequently attributed to the influence of the Scottish minister, John Witherspoon, who was brought to America to be president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) in 1767. But the earlier use of Scottish moral texts at other Colonial colleges shows that the Scottish philosophy preceded Witherspoon. Nonetheless Witherspoon's lectures on moral philosophy drew freely on the Scottish moralists, especially Hutcheson and Lord Kames. There is no doubt that their ideas were widely transmitted through his students, especially those who taught in the Presbyterian academies which proliferated in the south and west in the closing decades of the century. Another Scot, Francis Alison, a graduate of the University of Edinburgh, who taught moral philosophy at the College of Philadelphia, was also a close follower of Hutcheson, to the extent of requiring his students to prepare abridgements of Hutcheson's A Short Introduction to

Moral Philosophy (1747). It appears that either this work, or his more fully developed A System of Moral Philosophy (1755), were used as either primary or secondary texts, or as in the case of the College of New Jersey, were used as models in almost every American college by the mid-1780's.²⁶

Samuel Johnson, who was mentioned above as an early exponent of the intellectual school at King's College, was one of the first American writers on moral philosophy. The evolution of his thought, as revealed in his published works, recapitulates the trend toward sentimentalist ethics described in this chapter. Before 1745 his writing reflected a faithful adherence to the intellectualist doctrines of Wollaston. His New System of Morality (1746), and Elementa Philosophica (1752), reveal the persuasive influence of the Scottish philosophy.²⁷

The Scottish sentimentalist moral philosophy enjoyed its greatest popularity in America in the late eighteenth century, and found a very apt and responsive student in at least one of the Founding Fathers -- Thomas Jefferson.


Jefferson had embraced eighteenth century natural theology over traditional religious dogma while still a young man. His humanist inclinations had led to a search for a theory or system of ethics free of the need for divine sanction, one that would be sanctioned by the inward spirit of natural man. The sentimentalists attempted to show "that virtue is real and natural by relating it, not to the 'nature of things,' but to 'human nature,'" 28 and it is in this emphasis that their theory becomes an important part of this dissertation. It implied an optimistic view of human nature, and in its ultimate development it suggested that man is innately prepared for a harmonious social existence. Both of these themes were important elements in Jefferson's views on human nature.

28Selby-Bigge, British Moralists, 1, xii.
CHAPTER III

JEFFERSON'S INTRODUCTION

TO SENTIMENTALIST MORAL THEORY

Jefferson's knowledge of moral philosophy was comprehensive in the sense that he was familiar with at least the basic tenets of most of the moral theories propounded in the eighteenth century, and indeed with earlier theories extending back into antiquity. His grasp of the subject can be attributed both to formal study while at the College of William and Mary (1760-1762), and to extensive reading and study for the remainder of his life. His continuing fascination with moral philosophy is attested to by frequent references in his correspondence throughout his adult life, especially during his years of retirement at Monticello beginning in 1809.

Jefferson was probably introduced to moral philosophy in his last year of study at the College of William and Mary. His earlier formal training had been first under the Reverend William Douglas in St. James Parish, Goochland County from 1752 to 1757, where he was taught the rudiments of Latin, Greek, and French, and then for two years under the Reverend James Maury, a "correct classical scholar," in Fredericksville Parish, Hanover County. ¹ During the succeeding generation academies such as Maury's multiplied rapidly in the

¹Autobiography, 20.
more populated areas of Virginia, and some of the more advanced ones included introduction to moral philosophy through the writings of Locke, Hutcheson, Paley, Hume, etc. But during Jefferson's tenure the educational fare was probably restricted to classical languages and natural philosophy. 2

Precise description of the teaching of moral philosophy at the College of William and Mary is hampered by the absence of early records. It is clear, however, from a plan of reorganization approved by the Board of Visitors in 1727, that it was considered one of the main programs of study. And from 1729 there is a record of the continuous appointment of professors of moral philosophy until well into the nineteenth century. Though there is no record of the textbooks used at William and Mary, there is no reason to believe that the trend toward the sentimentalist school of ethics was not as definite there as in the other colleges. 3 The Flat Hat Club, a student organization at the College, owned a copy of Hutcheson's *A System of Moral Philosophy* (1755) at the time


3Lyon G. Tyler, *The College of William and Mary in Virginia: Its History and Work 1693-1907* (Richmond, 1909); A Catalog of the College of William and Mary in Virginia from its Foundation to the Present Time (1859); Early Courses and Professors at William and Mary College. From an address delivered by Lyon G. Tyler, December 5, 1904, before the Phi Beta Kappa Society William and Mary College, Williamsburg, Va. (1904); Herbert B. Adams, *The College of William and Mary: A Contribution to the History of Higher Education, With Suggestions for its National Promotion* (Washington, 1887); John M. Jennings, *The Library of the College of William and Mary in Virginia, 1693-1793* (Charlottesville, 1968); *The History of the College of William and Mary from its Foundation, 1660, to 1874* (Richmond, 1874).
Jefferson was a member. 4

Though the formal record of the college curriculum does not exist, there is sufficient evidence to show that the Scottish philosophy was impressed upon Jefferson during his stay at Williamsburg. William Small, professor at the College, George Wythe, distinguished Williamsburg lawyer, and Lieutenant Governor Francis Fauquier, each had a part in this process. Reminiscing fifty years later he recalled that at dinners with these three men he had heard "more good sense, more rational and philosophical conversations, than in all my life besides." 5 Jefferson looked upon both Small and Wythe as models of moral integrity, and as a young man, when faced by temptations or difficulties, frequently made his decisions after having tested the alternatives by asking himself what they would do in the same circumstances, or "what course in it will insure me their approbation." 6 I think that it may be surmised that Jefferson was introduced to the Scottish philosophy by Small, and that both Wythe and Governor Fauquier contributed subsequent stimulation.

Although fifty years after the fact Jefferson described Small as having been "as a father" to him, it is obvious that their relationship was on a more fraternal plane. Small was only eight years older than Jefferson, and it seems


5TJ to L. H. Girardin, Jan. 15, 1815, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 231-232.

6TJ to Thomas Jefferson Randolph, Nov. 24, 1808, Ibid, XII, 196-199.
that their social life extended beyond sedate philosophical conversations at the Governor's table to activities more characteristic of young men in the society of "Devilsburg."  

On the more serious plane, Jefferson did have a high regard for Small as a teacher, and accepted his academic guidance as well as his friendship. He later wrote that meeting him "was my great good fortune, and what probably fixed the destinies of my life."  

Small was appointed professor of natural philosophy at William and Mary in 1758, three years after having graduated from Marischal College, Aberdeen University. By a strange twist of events, he was suddenly called upon to fill temporarily the chair of moral philosophy in addition to his regular duties. He assumed this responsibility for two years, 1760-1762, the same years that Jefferson attended the College.

Small was a member of the Arts Class of 1751-1755 at Marischal College in Aberdeen and graduated M.A. in 1755. Until 1753 the regenting system was used at Marischal, under which a student was taught different subjects by the same regent throughout his college tenure. But in 1753 the curriculum was reformed, and each regent assumed the teaching responsibility within their areas of specialization. This would mean that Small in his fourth or magistrand year would have attended the moral philosophy class of Professor Alexander

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7 TJ to L. H. Girardin, Jan. 15, 1815, Ibid., XIV, 231-232; TJ to John Page, Apr. 9, 1764, Boyd Collection, I, 17; Autobiography, 20-21.

Gerard, then holder of the chair of Moral Philosophy at Marischal College. It was, incidentally, Gerard who was most responsible for the curriculum reform of 1753. It is likely that Small, when called upon to teach moral philosophy at William and Mary six years later, would have naturally fallen back upon his own student days under Gerard for the basic outlines of his course.

Though Gerard is not one of the most well known moral philosophers, his few publications and, just as importantly, his professional associations, place him in the sentimentalist school. He was a member of the Select Society of Edinburgh which in 1756 awarded him its first gold medal for the "best essay on taste." This was published in 1759 as *An Essay on Taste* and, passing through three English editions and two French, proved to be the most popular of his philosophical works.

As the title indicates, the Essay belongs to the vast genre of works in the eighteenth century that aimed at explaining the nature of beauty. Gerard, like other Scottish sentimentalists, was fascinated by human sensitivity to beauty. The natural human faculty that differentiated among visual scenes, among works of literature or music, and judged some to be aesthetically agreeable and others disagreeable, proved that man possessed an "internal sense," a sense of taste,

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that blended intellectual and physical sensations in an experience of beauty. Gerard cited Francis Hutcheson as one of the "modern philosophers" who recognized the internal sense of taste.  

As was true of many other similar undertakings in the eighteenth century, Gerard's Essay developed into a broader treatise on faculty psychology. Moral apprehension and appreciation fell within its scope as well as the apprehension and appreciation of beauty. Like the other Scottish sentimentalists, Gerard proposed a close relationship between moral philosophy and aesthetics. Indeed, one of the most frequently recurring descriptive phrases in sentimentalist philosophy is "moral beauty."

Gerard described the moral sense as the faculty "by which, in characters and conduct we distinguish between the right and the wrong, the excellent and the faulty." (69) The relationship between the apprehension of aesthetic and moral beauty is revealed in his description of the moral sense as the faculty to which "belongs our perception of the fairness, beauty, and loveliness of virtue; of the ugliness, deformity, and hatefulness of vice." Gerard described the moral sense as not only a perceptive faculty, but as "our internal governor prescribing a law of life." In other words, the moral sense operated not only in the simple judgment between virtue and vice, but it also conveyed the knowl-

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11Quotations are taken from the third edition (1780), facsimile reproduction with an introduction by Walter J. Hipple, Jr. (Gainesville, Florida, 1963), pages cited in the text. 

12For example see Francis Hutcheson's Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue (1725), and Lord Kames' Elements of Criticism 1762.
edge that "virtue is obligatory, right, and due; and that vice is undue, un­

The moral sense, and the other faculties of taste, according to Gerard, are universal "mental principles common to all men." (72) This was one of the essential tenets of sentimentalist moral philosophy, and perhaps the one most vulnerable to criticism. Gerard did not insist that all men are equally perceptive of or equally motivated by an appreciation of virtue. He specifically noted that internal senses "are originally implanted in very different degrees in different men." In some cases they are so languid "they scarce at all show themselves," and in some instances these senses are "incapable of a very high degree of improvement by any education, care or exercise." But he insisted that such a condition was very rare and that, in the generality of men, the internal senses were improvable. Indeed, Gerard laid upon man a responsibility for their improvement. They are "in a considerable degree intrusted to our own care," he wrote, and "the key to the improvement of any of the principles of taste, including the moral sense, is judicious exercise." (90-93)

Gerard also taught that human behavior could be explained, at least in part, by the healthy development of the sense of taste. He believed that when this internal sense was properly balanced, i.e., made up of a due proportion of the various components, it had "a peculiar tendency to confirm virtuous affections and principles." Conversely, he believed that "most wrong passions may be traced to some perversion of taste which produces them, by leading us to misapprehend their objects." (189-190)

In addition to all this, Gerard held that the development of taste also had
social implications. He believed that the person who exercised this internal sense enjoyed an increased serenity and satisfaction, and, in consequence of this, was prone to an increased attitude of benevolence. The refinement of taste will "increase the acuteness of the moral sense," he wrote, and thus "a man of nice taste will have a stronger abhorrence of vice, and a keener relish for virtue, in any given situation, than a person of dull organs can have, in the same circumstances." (192) Clearly, a community of men with developed tastes would exhibit qualities preferable to one in which the moral faculty remained undeveloped. In a related theme, he noted that a comparison between civilized and savage societies showed that civilization itself tended to encourage the cultivation of taste.

Gerard's description of the moral sense as an inherent faculty of perception and appreciation of moral virtue, and indeed as an encouragement to virtuous conduct, places him in the tradition of Scottish sentimentalist ethical theory. His theory of the developmental nature of the moral sense, and of the social implications of its operation, follow faithfully the tenets of the more well known Scottish writers and thus reinforce this classification. Since the Essay was first submitted to the philosophical society in Edinburgh in 1756, one might assume that it reflected his teaching in 1754, the year in which William Small was his student at Marischal College.

Whatever the case may be with Small and Gerard, there is evidence that the young Jefferson was impressed by another Scottish writer at this stage, Henry Home, Lord Kames. It is not known whether Small or George Wythe was responsible for pointing him to this Scottish jurist whose writings ran the gamut
from law to agriculture to metaphysics. It seems impossible to determine whether Jefferson first read Kames as a student of moral philosophy under Small, or as a student of law under Wythe.

In 1779 Wythe became the first "professor of law and police" in America. Prior to this date, American law students had to choose between study abroad, or individual study under the direction of some established lawyer in the colonies. It was Small who procured for Jefferson "a reception as a student of law" in Wythe's office in about 1762. Jefferson later described his teacher of law as "my faithful and beloved mentor in youth, and my most affectionate friend through life." Unfortunately little is known about his course of study and reading beyond his respectful abhorrence of Sir Edward Coke's *Institutes of the Lawes of England*. His reaction to Coke was probably not very different from that of other students of his generation, though he did later reveal a bit of pride in having conquered Coke before the appearance of the easier Blackstone's *Commentaries*. Wythe undoubtedly directed his student's attention to more modern legal works, and there is good reason to believe that Kames' *Historical Law Tracts* (1758) and *Principles of Equity* (1760) were among them. Although there is no extant record of Wythe's library, his later citation of Kames' *Principles* while judge of the High Court of Chancery in Virginia suggests his respect for the Scottish jurist. More importantly, the entries in

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14 George Wythe, *Decisions of Cases in Virginia by the High Court of Chancery, With Remarks upon Decrees by the Court of Appeals, Reversing some of those Decisions* (Richmond, 1795), 28.
Jefferson's commonplace book, a collection of quotations from various authors probably compiled during his years as a law student, reveal a keen interest in Kames' legal theories. As one biographer has put it, "from the evidence furnished by the Commonplace Book it cannot be doubted that the Scottish Lord was for him a master and a guide."\(^{15}\) The commonplace book contains extracts made by Jefferson from thirteen of the fourteen theses outlined by Kames in *Historical Law Tracts*. Although these entries cannot be dated with perfect exactness, the editor determined from internal evidence that they were written "when Jefferson was still a young man, before the conflict between the American colonies and the mother-country became quite acute, and certainly before the existence of the United States of America had become an accepted fact."\(^{16}\) In the years following when Jefferson accepted the responsibility of guiding younger men in self study programs in law, he always recommended strict attention to the study of "kindred sciences" such as ethics, religion, belles lettres, and criticism. The books Jefferson recommended usually included Kames' *Principles of Equity* as a legal text, but also his "moral essays" and his "Elements of criticism" in one of the categories of kindred sciences.\(^{17}\)

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16 Ibid., 11-16.

especially the tract on Property and the tract on Promises and Covenants, contain examples of Kames' interest in moral philosophy. Perhaps it was through the study of law that Jefferson was led to his Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion (1751).

But it is also equally plausible that Kames' Essays was used by Small in his moral philosophy course. It was a popular exposition of the Scottish sentimentalist theory and was widely circulated in America during the second half of the century. In any event, by 1771 Jefferson was already recommending "Ld Kaim's elements of criticism," his "Natural religion," as well as his "Principles of equity" as proper books for a gentleman's library.¹⁸ Since this was within three years of his having completed law studies with Wythe in Williamsburg, it would seem to indicate that his familiarity with Kames dated to his student days there. This assumption is further confirmed by a remark written by Jefferson in 1814 in which he stated that it had been "fifty years" since he had read Kames' Principles of Natural Religion [sic].¹⁹

Governor Fauquier's part in stimulating Jefferson's interest in the Scottish philosophy is less certain than that of Small and Wythe, though it is worth mentioning. One of Jefferson's biographers has written that "Fauquier is known to have been a follower of Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke and there is a possibility that he introduced the young student of William and Mary to the works of the


¹⁹TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 138-144.
English philosophers.\textsuperscript{20} Though no citation is given, this was presumably based upon George Tucker's biography of Jefferson published in 1835 which stated that "the Governor was said to have been a follower of Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke, in morals and religion," and that "the opinions recommended by [his] genius and taste, as well as rank, were not without their effect on a youthful mind, at once ductile and bold."\textsuperscript{21} Tucker indicates in an explanatory note that he was basing his "explanation of some of Mr. Jefferson's opinions" on information that he had received from such of his contemporaries as John Randolph and James Madison. Shaftesbury is generally credited with having invented the term moral sense early in the eighteenth century. In Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (1711)\textsuperscript{22} he defined the moral sense as a natural human instinct toward virtue. He argued, in opposition to the cynics, that man was inherently good and that his natural tendency to virtue was a reflection of the authority of the moral sense. Although some of the later writers in the sentimentalist tradition were critical of Shaftesbury, they were all in some degree indebted to him. Therefore, if Governor Fauquier

\textsuperscript{20}Editor's note in The Literary Bible of Thomas Jefferson: His commonplace Book of Philosophers and Poets, ed. by Gilbert Chinard, (Baltimore, 1928). 34.

\textsuperscript{21}The Life of Thomas Jefferson, Third President of the United States, With Parts of His Correspondence Never Before Published, and Notices of His Opinions on Questions of Civil Government, National Policy, and Constitutional Law (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1837), 1, 41.

\textsuperscript{22}This work included two treatises published earlier: 1) The Moralists, or the Philosophical Rhapsody (1709) and 2) Enquiry concerning Virtue, in two discourses (1699).
was a follower of Shaftesbury to the extent that this was taken note of by his contemporaries, one would have to assume that the philosophical conversations that Jefferson enjoyed reflected the sentimentalist ethical theory.

The evidence thus outlined seems to leave little doubt that Jefferson was acquainted with sentimentalist ethical theory by the time he had completed his studies at Williamsburg. At least one, or more probably all of his "amici omnium horarum," William Small, George Wythe, and Governor Fauquier, in their own way gave what was to be a lasting direction to his conception of moral philosophy.

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Following his admission to the bar in 1767 Jefferson returned to Albemarle County, presumably planning to assume the traditional role of a member of the Virginia aristocracy. His membership in the Virginia gentry was assured by both inheritance and education. The initial construction of Monticello in 1769, his election to the House of Burgesses in the same year, his marriage to Martha Wayles Skelton in 1772, in short, the major events of his life in the brief interlude before other events propelled him to a position of national leadership and international prominence, followed a pattern that would hardly be distinguishable from that of other young Virginia gentlemen of similar circumstances.

But if his life style during these early years was predictable in its conformance to tradition, there were already two visible personal characteristics that would soon set him apart from his peers. These characteristics, which bore a complementary relationship to one another, were an extraordinary intellectual curiosity and a prodigious devotion to study.

Near the end of his life Jefferson wrote: "I was a hard student until I entered on the business of life, the duties of which leave no idle time to those disposed to fulfill them; and now, retired, and at the age of seventy-six, I am
again a hard student."¹ One of his classmates at the College of William and Mary testified that the young Jefferson "could tear himself away from his dearest friends, to fly to his studies."² There is abundant evidence that his intellectual curiosity and studious discipline did not cease with the completion of his formal studies in Williamsburg, but that on the contrary, these traits remained constant for the remainder of his life. William Carmichael, the American chargé at the Spanish Court, sent Jefferson some books in 1788 with an accompanying note that said others would follow "to contribute to satisfy that thirst for general knowledge for which you are Distinguished."³ The Marquis de Chastellux, who met Jefferson for the first time in the spring of 1782, wrote that "it seems indeed as though, ever since his youth, he had placed his mind, like his house, on a lofty height, whence he might contemplate the whole universe." Jefferson was at that time but fifteen years beyond the completion of his law studies, but the French visitor described him as one "whose mind and attainments could serve in lieu of all outward graces; an American, who, without ever having quitted his own country, is Musician, Draftsman, Surveyer, Astronomer, Natural Philosopher, Jurist, and Statesman, . . . and finally a

¹TJ to Dr. Vine Utley, Mar. 21, 1819, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XV, 186-188.

²John Page to Skelton Jones, Esq., c. 1808, The Virginia Historical Register, and Literary Note Book, III (July, 1850), 142-151.

³William Carmichael to TJ, May 18, 1788, Boyd Collection, XIII, 176-177.
This description points to the two distinctive qualities of Jefferson's intellect -- the catholicity of his interests and the impressive competency that he achieved in so great a variety of subjects. His correspondence offers ample proof of the Marquis's observation that "no object has escaped Mr. Jefferson." His election to philosophic and scientific societies, both in America and Europe, and the conferring of honorary doctors degrees by William and Mary, Yale, and Harvard College, before his prominence as a national political leader, are further evidence of his intellectual distinction.

The diploma tendered by his alma mater in January 1783 seemed to summarize widespread opinion in its description of Jefferson as one "so imbued with letters, whether popular or recondite and abstruse, that all the fine arts seem to foregather in one man."5

The more specific evidence of his continuing career as a "hard student" is found in his library and his correspondence. And these sources reveal that he had more than a cursory interest in the subject of moral philosophy.

Jefferson's love for books is well known. "Sensible that I labour grievously under the malady of Bibliomanie," he wrote in 1789, "I submit to the rule of buying only at reasonable prices, as to a regimen necessary in that disease."6 He made this confession while in Paris, and later admitted that while there

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5Boyd Collection, VI, 221-222.

6TJ to Lucy Ludwell Paradise, June 1, 1789, Ibid., XV, 162-163.
"I devoted every afternoon I was disengaged, for a summer or two, in examining all the principal bookstores, turning over every book with my own hand, and putting by everything which related to America, and indeed whatever was rare and valuable in every science."\(^7\) During his lifetime he put together three personal libraries, and was largely responsible for the selection for the first collection for the University of Virginia.\(^8\) His first collection, the nucleus of which he inherited from his father, was lost by fire in February 1770. There is no inventory of this library available but presumably the major part would have been made up of those books he had bought while at Williamsburg. He estimated the cost of the books that were burned to be 200 pounds sterling, and sighed, "Would to God it had been the money!"\(^9\) He began his second collection immediately. When he returned to America from Europe in 1789, fifteen of the eighty-six crates containing his personal goods were filled with books.\(^10\) By 1814 this, the greatest of his libraries, had grown by his estimate to between nine and ten thousand volumes, well bound, the "abundance of them elegantly, and of the choicest editions existing." It had been accumulated through standing orders in the principal book-marts of Europe, in Amsterdam, Frankfort,

\(^7\)TJ to Samuel H. Smith, Esq., Sep. 21, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 190-194.


\(^9\)TJ to John Page, Feb. 21, 1770, Boyd Collection, I, 34-36.

\(^10\)Editorial note, Ibid., XVIII, 35.
Madrid, London, and Paris. When he offered the library to the United States Congress in 1814 he could justly say with pride that "such a collection was made as probably can never again be effected, because it is hardly probable that the same opportunities, the same time, industry, perseverance and expense, with some knowledge of the bibliography of the subject, would again happen to be in concurrence."¹¹ Within only a matter of weeks after having delivered this library to the Congress, Jefferson wrote to John Adams "I cannot live without books," and he set about the selection of his third library. He noted that this time, however, "fewer will suffice, where amusement, and not use, is the only future object."¹² This last collection accumulated during the last decade of his life, had grown to more than nine hundred items by the time of his death.

The catalogs of these last two libraries, the first by Jefferson in preparation for its transfer to Congress and the other printed for the auction of his second library in February 1829, present a valuable insight into his intellectual pursuits.¹³ As one might anticipate, history, law, and political theory are the subjects most amply represented. But in addition to these subjects, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, agriculture, fine arts, and belle lettres are extremely well represented.

¹¹TJ to Samuel H. Smith, Esq., Sep. 21, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 190-194.

¹²TJ to John Adams, June 10, 1815, Ibid., 299-302.

Jefferson's catalogs also reveal his categorization of knowledge. And in the long run, this is probably a more essential tool in the understanding of his concept of moral philosophy than the simple listing of his book collection. In the organization of his library Jefferson followed the major divisions of human learning outlined by Francis Bacon in *Advancement of Learning* (1605). He had gained an early respect for Bacon and considered him and Locke and Newton, as the "greatest men that have ever lived . . . as having laid the foundation of those superstructures which have been raised in the Physical and Moral sciences." The Baconian classification was well known in America by the end of the eighteenth century, and its first great division of knowledge, i.e., between Divinity and Philosophy, would undoubtedly have been very appealing to Jefferson. According to Bacon these two areas of knowledge were distinguished by the fact that Divinity (sacred theology) is "grounded only upon the word and oracle of God," whereas Philosophy is grounded in "the light of nature," i.e., is known to man through the operation of reason, sense induction, or "inward instinct." Secular knowledge was divided in the Baconian scheme in accordance with "the three parts of man's understanding, which is the seat of learning: history to his memory, poesy to his imagination, and philosophy to his reason."  

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16 *Ibid.*, 32. Although Jefferson followed his model, he was aware that
Jefferson adapted this classification of the faculties of the human mind, and organized his library under the major categories of history, philosophy, and the fine arts, each corresponding to that faculty of the mind that would have cognizance of the subject. His subdivision of these categories into more specific disciplines reveals a significant departure from the Baconian scheme, but this is probably due simply to the advanced sophistication of knowledge over the two centuries that separated the careers of Bacon and Jefferson. In the latter's classification scheme, history was divided into civil history (ancient and modern) and natural history (natural sciences). Fine arts were divided into beaux arts (architecture, gardening, painting, sculpture, music) and belles lettres (poetry, prose, oratory, criticism, etc.). Philosophy, reflecting its assignment to the faculty of reason, was divided into the major categories of mathematics and moral philosophy. It is the analysis of his assignment of titles to this last category that provides us with an insight into his concept of moral theory.

Jefferson prepared two tabular classifications; one begun c. 1783 for the arrangement of his greatest library, and the other for his last library which he began accumulating in 1815. The two tables are thus separated by approximately thirty years and reflect his categorization of knowledge at widely

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this division of knowledge did not originate with Bacon but had "been proposed by Charron more than twenty years before, in his book della Sagesse." TJ to Judge Augustus B. Woodward, Mar. 24, 1824, Lipscmb and Bergh Collection, XVI, 17-21. His reference was to Sieur de Charron, Of Wisdom, trans. George Stanhope, 3d. ed. (London, 1729), 124-134, who divided all knowledge into the basic divisions of Human and Divine, and subdivided the former according to the human faculties of Understanding, Memory, and Imagination.
separated stages in his intellectual development. But as far as moral philosophy is concerned, though there are changes in descriptive terminology, the essential body of knowledge represented in this classification remained the same in both tables. Under moral philosophy Jefferson subsumed a vast area of knowledge, including, generally, ethics, religion, law, and politics. This division conformed rather well to Bacon's category of Human Philosophy. In Bacon's scheme Human Philosophy encompassed the knowledge of "man segregate" and "man congregate." It was the knowledge of man in his individual physical and thinking existence, and in his social existence. It was the knowledge of human nature; of man as a rational and moral being; of man as an individual and as a part of a collective society.

In Jefferson's first classification, he divided moral philosophy into the major divisions of Ethics and Jurisprudence. Ethics is as then divided into Moral Philosophy, used here in the sense of ethical theory, and the Law of Nature and Nations. An interesting footnote at the bottom of the page gives an insight into his definition of moral philosophy:

*in classing a small library one may throw under this head [moral philosophy] books which attempt what may be called the Natural history of the mind or an Analysis of it's operations. The term and division of Metaphysics is rejected as meaning nothing or something beyond our reach, or what should be called by [some other name?]¹⁷

Though the footnote cannot be dated with any certainty, Jefferson's reference to "the Natural history of the mind or an Analysis of it's operation" is important in that, with the passage of time, the operation of the mind tends to assume a

greater importance in his thinking about human nature. Bacon had described man as a thinking and a physical being, and human nature as the mixture of these two sides of his being. Jefferson revealed in his correspondence an increasing interest in "mental philosophy" and the problems associated with the distinction between physical and mental man. 18

Jurisprudence, the second major classification of moral philosophy, was divided into Religious, Municipal and Oeconomical categories, and thus filled out the subject in the following tabular scheme:

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<th>Moral Philosophy</th>
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<td>Law of Nature &amp; Nations</td>
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18 Jefferson's correspondence reveals a growing fascination with mental philosophy. In 1824, he contemplated the recomposition of his classification table to transpose the subject of "the faculty of thought" from Philosophy to Natural History as a subdivision of Zoology. TJ to Judge Augustus B. Woodward, Mar. 24, 1824, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XVI, 17-21.
Jefferson's second classification, designed after 1815, encompassed the same areas of knowledge under the major division of Philosophy, but the descriptive terminology revealed a growing sophistication in his concept of moral philosophy. According to this table it included Morality, or ethics; Moral Supplements, or religion and law; and Social Organization, or politics, in the following scheme: ¹⁹

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Ethical ................ [Moral Supplements ........ [Religion .......... Law
      Morality......... Ethics [Ancient
                     Modern]
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Jefferson considered moral philosophy, in its broadest sense, as the knowledge of the "government of man," of the knowledge of "man segregate" and "man congregate." But he also considered it in a narrower sense as a psychology of human nature. In this sense, designated as Ethics in the above scheme, it encompassed "ideology, ethics, and mental science," or the knowledge of "man segregate" as a rational moral being. It embraced with essentially equal emphasis moral theory and mental philosophy. Jefferson considered ethics, religion, and law as complementary forces in the "government of man." ²⁰ Thus from his categorization of knowledge and from his

¹⁹From 1829 Catalogue.

²⁰TJ to Judge Augustus B. Woodard, Mar. 24, 1824, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XVI, 17-21.
correspondence, it is evident that he considered moral philosophy as the knowledge of the government of man in both his individual and social existences. It is also evident that he recognized that the knowledge of human nature bore a vital relationship to a proper knowledge of social organization.

Of the 4931 titles in the library sold to Congress in 1814, nearly half (2425) were classified by Jefferson under the heading of moral philosophy in its broader sense, and 138 were books falling under the more narrow definition of moral philosophy as the knowledge of human nature. Of the 931 titles listed for auction in 1829, the corresponding categories contained 308 and 80 respectively. Of course, neither the number of books in a library, or their subjects, offer satisfactory evidence of their influence on the owner. This is particularly true in the case of such extensive collections as those under consideration, which contained many presentation volumes as well as titles purchased by Jefferson simply because they "belonged" in a gentleman's library. When, however, it can be shown through other evidence such as marginalia and references in correspondence that the owner did indeed read certain books and thoughtfully considered their ideas, accepting some and rejecting others, one can begin to draw some conclusions as to the sources and

21 From Sowerby's inventory.

22 From 1829 Catalogue.

23 Chinard specifically rules out the use of Jefferson's library as a guide to the sources of his thought. The Literary Bible, 2.
development of his thought. What follows is an attempt to present that kind of evidence in the case of Jefferson and the eighteenth century theories of moral philosophy.
CHAPTER V
JEFFERSON'S APPRAISAL
OF MORAL THEORIES

One can presume, with some assurance I think, that Jefferson's first exposure to moral philosophy was through the writings of one or more of the Scottish sentimentalists. And one might argue that this fact alone largely accounts for his lasting loyalty to their theories, even in his later years when those theories were being subjected to numerous challenges. But one should not presume that this was a blind loyalty, or that its longevity can be attributed to his ignorance of other theories. His correspondence gives ample testimony of his awareness of the great proliferation of moral philosophies in the eighteenth century. In fact he found it "curious that on a question so fundamental, such a variety of opinions should have prevailed among men, and those, too, of the most exemplary virtue and first order of understanding." But this very proliferation of theories in itself, he concluded, showed "how necessary was the care of the Creator in making the moral principle so much a part of our constitution as that no errors of reasoning or of speculation might lead us astray from its observance in practice."¹ Jefferson weighed the contrary arguments offered by various writers and found them less appealing

¹TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 138-144.
than the moral sense theory offered by the Scots.

Discussions of moral philosophy in America in Jefferson's generation tended to categorize the various theories in accordance with their description of the "foundation of morality." The writings of the moralists themselves, and more frequently the writings of their critics, by their references to kinds of moral theories, established categories that were familiar to most contemporary students of the subject. The major categories thus established, and most familiar to the Americans, were those in which the foundation of morality was specified as either truth, reason, love of God or obedience to God, taste, egoism or self-love, utility, benevolence, sympathy, or the moral sense. The resulting classification of moral theories facilitated discussion and provided the structure on which most American criticism was raised. 2

In a like manner, Jefferson classified moral theories by the same criteria, and divided them into categories in which the foundation of morality was described as truth, love of God, taste, egoism, or the moral sense. 3 The depth of his understanding may be subject to question, but it is obvious that he had more than a passing familiarity with the basic terms of the various theories


3 Jefferson did not make a sharp distinction between moral sense and utility as the foundation of morality. He in fact described the moral sense as being utilitarian by nature. This will be developed at greater length in a later chapter.
and that he had given thoughtful attention to their strengths and weaknesses.

In the summer of 1814 Jefferson received from Thomas Law a copy of his recently published *Second Thoughts on Instinctive Impulses*.\(^4\) Law, a former officer in the East India Company, had emigrated from England in 1793 and taken up residence in Washington, D. C. He later achieved some prominence by his efforts to establish a national currency in the United States.\(^5\) He was also a not very sophisticated writer on the subject of moral philosophy. The book presented to Jefferson was a sequel to *Thoughts on Instinctive Impulses* published by Law three years earlier.\(^6\) Both books, undertaken to simplify the "metaphysics" of the subject, were firmly on the side of the sentimentalists and cited the writings of such Scottish moralists as Lord Kames, Adam Ferguson, and Dugald Stewart. Law was convinced "from self-examination, that God has inspired man with instinctive impulses to goodness, and aversions to evil, and with a consciousness giving happiness for beneficence, and misery for injustice," and that "discord, conflicts, and devastation ensue by a violation of these internal, immutable laws [impulses]."\(^7\) Law's gift is important not only because Jefferson said that it contained exactly his "own creed on the foundation

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\(^5\)See Gordon Goodwin in *DNB* s.v. "Law, Thomas."

\(^6\)Thomas Law, *Thoughts on Instinctive Impulses* (Philadelphia, 1810).

\(^7\)Law, *Second Thoughts*, 7.
of morality in man," but because in his letter of appreciation to the author Jefferson wrote a systematic exposition of his reactions to the contrary philosophies.

Jefferson first took up William Wollaston's *The Religion of Nature delineated*, a book widely circulated in America. "Of all the theories on this question," Jefferson wrote, "the most whimsical seems to have been that of Wollaston, who considers truth as the foundation of morality." Wollaston held that moral distinctions have their origin in reason. "Whatever will bear to be tried by right reason, is right," he wrote, "and that which is condemned by it, wrong." Reason was, for Wollaston, the bar of ultimate appeal in matters of moral judgment.

Jefferson would not have found great fault with this argument, but what he found "whimsical" was Wollaston's "great law" of natural religion: "That every intelligent, active, and free being should so behave himself, as by no act to contradict truth; or, that he should treat every thing as being what it is." The "fundamental maxim" on which this "great law" was erected was "that whoever acts as if things were so, or not so, doth by his acts declare, that

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8 TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, *Lipscomb and Bergh Collection*, XIV, 138-144.

9 Ibid.

they are so, or not so; as plainly as he could by words, and with more reality." And "no act (whether of word or deed) of any being, to whom moral good and evil are imputable, that interferes with any true proposition, or denies any thing to be as it is can be right." Wollaston built his moral philosophy on the association of immorality and untruth; i.e., an immoral act was the acting of an untruth. Conversely, morality was associated with truth; i.e., a moral act conformed to truth apprehended by the intellect.

Following Samuel Clarke, Wollaston declared that truth, the immutable standard by which all behavior is to be judged, "is determined and fixt by the natures of the things themselves." Clarke had said that acts are reasonable or unreasonable, fit or unfit, in their own nature. Wollaston agreed that truth was to be equated with the "nature of things," and that nothing can interfere with this truth without interfering with nature. "Truth is but conformity to nature," he wrote, "and to follow nature cannot be to combat truth."

Wollaston's conclusion was that all acts or omissions inconsistent with truth are morally evil and the forbearance of such acts and the acting in opposition to such omissions are morally good, and that "if the formal ratio of moral good and evil be made to consist in a conformity of men's acts to the truth of the case or the contrary, . . . the distinction seems to be settled in a manner undeniable, intelligible, practicable."11

Jefferson conceded that "truth is certainly a branch of morality," but he was particularly opposed to what he conceived to be Wollaston's equation

11 Ibid., 364-375.
between moral evil and intellectual error. He said that according to this theory, "the thief who steals your guinea does wrong only inasmuch as he acts a lie in using your guinea as if it were his own." Wollaston's attempt to establish truth as the foundation of morality was as "if a tree taken up by the roots, had its stem reversed in the air, and one of its branches planted in the ground." 

It cannot be determined whether this dismissal of Wollaston's theory resulted from Jefferson's failure to comprehend its philosophical subtleties, or that he was turned away by what he considered a purely metaphysical construct as a foundation for a philosophy of human morality. In either case, his criticism was brief but perceptive. He charged Wollaston with having attempted to posit a peripheral or secondary aspect of moral conduct as the foundation of morality.

Having thus disposed of Wollaston's theory, Jefferson turned to those moral philosophers who made the love of God the foundation of morality, without identifying any one author in particular.

Several eighteenth century moral theorists wrote of man's duties to God, to neighbor, and to self as the foundation of morality. To love God was one of those duties consistently enumerated, along with the obligation to fear, trust, and worship Him. This list of duties to God held several implications for moral theory. Depending upon one's understanding it might imply the obligation of obedience to or imitation of God because of the love of God; or because of the relationship existing between man and God, i.e., between Creator and

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12TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 138-144.
created; or because of divine sanction, i.e., the expectation of divine reward or fear of divine punishment.

One American author wrote that "Moral Virtue is a Conformity to the moral Perfections of God; or it is an Imitation of God, in the moral Perfections of his Nature, so far as they are imitable by his Creatures." This statement of course recognized the impossibility of the perfect imitation of God, but did not relieve man of the obligation to strive for perfection. "When God makes a Creature, he communicates to him some Degree of his own Perfections, though being limited, they cannot exist in the same Form and Manner, but under different Circumstances from what they are in the Creator." The different degrees to which God's perfections were communicated were what constituted the different ranks in the animal kingdom. "To Man," he continued, "he has communicated the superior Power of Reason and Understanding, whereby he is capable of forming some Ideas of the natural and moral Perfections of God and his Works." The conclusion suggested is that man can understand the nature of right and wrong, and is capable of moral virtue, i.e., limited conformity to the Perfections of God. The obligation to moral virtue arises from the fact that all creatures derive their degrees of Perfection from God, and therefore "their highest Perfection must consist in being like to the original and all-perfect Standard." For man to digress from the standard would mean the "Destruction of the Works of God." In summary, when God creates man as a moral agent "he endues him with a perfect Disposition and full Powers to do his duty, and be perfect," and to fall short of this duty is a "moral Defect" or sin. And to give sanction to the obligation "God's Favour and Approbation is necessarily extended
to his Creatures according to the Degree of their Likeness and Conformity to him." According to this writer, the expectation of divine reward or fear of divine punishment do not create obligation, but nevertheless, "for as our Existence depends upon his meer Good-Will and Pleasure, we ought to exist in such a Manner and for such Purposes as are agreeable to him." According to this theory then, man's morality is founded upon his duty to imitate God, an obligation imposed by his relationship to his Creator and reinforced by "that Sovereign Power and Authority which God has over us."  

Another American writer of moral philosophy, the Scottish president of the College of New Jersey and fellow signer with Jefferson of the Declaration of Independence, proposed that the foundation of morality lay in man's relationship to God. He believed that this foundation could be reduced to the proposition that "from reason, contemplation, sentiment and tradition, the Being and infinite perfection and excellence of God may be deduced; and therefore what he is, and commands, is virtue and duty," and that "we ought to take the rule of duty from conscience enlightened by reason, experience, and every way by which we can be supposed to learn the will of our Maker, and his intention in creating us such as we are." The obligation to virtue lay both in duties owed God (love, fear, trust, worship) and in self-interest (i.e., the hope of divine reward and avoidance of divine punishment.) He proposed that our relation to God "not only lays the foundation of many moral sentiments and duties, but

compleats the idea of morality and law, by subjecting us to him, and teaching us to conceive of him, not only as our Maker, preserver and benefactor, but as our righteous governor and supreme judge. As the being and perfection of God are irrefragably established, the obligation of duty must ultimately rest here." The belief in reward or punishment in a future state, and the fact that virtuous conduct does tend to promote happiness in the present state, simply "add to" the obligation imposed by man's relation to God. In summary, this writer believed that the obligation to virtue included intrinsic excellence, present happiness, duty to the Supreme Being, hope of future happiness and fear of future misery, but of these, the love of God was the most important. 14

These two examples seem to explain the love of God in terms of those duties owed by man to God, which were then proposed at least as part of the foundation of human morality. This may have been the conception to which Jefferson was responding when he wrote that the love of God, like truth, "is but a branch of our moral duties, which are generally divided into duties to God and duties to man." 15 But it is also possible that his criticism was in response to another moral theory in which "the love of God" was given a more specific and philosophical meaning.

Jonathan Edwards, described earlier as the most articulate defender of the Great Awakening, was also the author of a unique tract on moral

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14 John Witherspoon, Lectures on Moral Philosophy, 29-35.

15 TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 138-144.
philosophy. Although he had earlier voiced a predictable Calvinist disdain for secular philosophies of morals, his treatise entitled *The Nature of True Virtue* was not totally devoid of secular flavor. Edwards was critical of sentimentalist moral theories and this work was largely an attack on them. His criticism however did not deny them any value, but rather emphasized that they were the foundations of a secondary or inferior virtue. A moral sense, he wrote, as a fountain of personal benevolence or virtue "is a moral sense of a secondary kind, and is entirely different from a sense or relish of the original essential beauty of true virtue in the heart." (51-52) There did exist, he recognized, a general approval of the "common virtues" such as meekness, benevolence, charity, and justice, and a general disapproval of malice, envy, and the like, and he conceded that in some persons these likes or dislikes could emanate from high principles. "But yet," he warned, "I think it is certainly true, that there is generally in mankind a sort of approbation of them, which arises from self love." (57) In other words, the "common virtues," rather than being the result of the prodding of natural instinct, were frequently the result of man's approval of that style of life which would ultimately serve

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16 I find it puzzling that none of Edwards' works are included in the catalogues of Jefferson's libraries. But just as the inclusion of books is no evidence of their having been read, neither is their absence evidence of Jefferson's not having read them. I find it difficult to believe that he was not familiar with Edwards' writings, and indeed the tone of his criticism of the love of God theory, now under discussion, seems to have been in response to Edwards.

his own interests.

He wrote that God has established in man a natural conscience that will approve and disapprove of the same things as a spiritual sense, but under a very specific condition. "The natural conscience, if the understanding be properly enlightened, and stupefying prejudices are removed, concurs with the law of God, is of equal extent with it, and joins its voice with it in every article." That is to say that "if men's consciences were fully enlightened, if they were delivered from being confined to a private sphere, they would approve nothing but true virtue." It is at this very point, Edwards contended, that the sentimentalists make their mistake. "The sense of moral good and evil, and that disposition to approve virtue and disapprove vice, which men have by natural conscience, is that moral sense so much insisted on in the writings of many of late. A misunderstanding of this seems to have misled those moralists who have insisted on a disinterested moral sense, universal in the world of mankind, as an evidence of a disposition to true virtue, consisting in a benevolent temper, naturally implanted in the minds of all men." But, he continued, "neither this, nor anything else wherein consists the sense of moral good and evil which there is in natural conscience, is of the nature of a truly virtuous taste." The sense of conscience is not the same as a sense of true virtue because "wickedness may by long habitual exercise greatly diminish a sense of conscience." But even those natural instincts which result in the "common virtues," are not of the nature of true virtue because they are limited in the scope of their beneficence. (61-93)

Edwards' purpose was not to dismiss these "common virtues" but to show
their inferiority by comparing them to the nature and foundation of true virtue. He said that to inquire as to the nature of true virtue is to ask "what it is, which renders any habit, disposition, or exercise of the heart truly beautiful?" He offered as an answer that "true virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to being in general," which he then defined as meaning that "true virtue must chiefly consist in love to God; the Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best." Therefore one who has true virtue "must necessarily have a supreme love to God," and indeed "all true virtue must . . . summariy consist in this." (2-15) Thus Edwards asserted that the love of God was the foundation of true morality.

Hence it appears that those schemes of religion or moral philosophy which -- however well in some respects they may treat of benevolence to mankind . . . yet -- have not a supreme regard to God, and love to him laid as the foundation, . . . are not true schemes of philosophy, but are fundamentally and essentially defective. And whatever other benevolence or generosity towards mankind, . . . or moral qualifications which go by that name, any are possessed of, that are not attended with a love to God . . . to which they are subordinate, . . . there is nothing of the nature of true virtue or religion in them. And it may be asserted in general, that nothing is of the nature of true virtue, in which God is not the first and the last; or which with regard to their exercises in general, have not their first foundation and source in apprehensions of God's supreme dignity and glory, and in answerable esteem and love of him, and have not respect to God as the supreme end. (25-26)

Jefferson's criticism of this theory was sharply to the point: "If we did a good act merely from the love of God and a belief that it is pleasing to Him, whence arises the morality of the Atheist?"Obviously, to posit the love of God as the foundation of morality would exclude atheists from the ranks of moral

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18 TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 138-144.
mankind. Jefferson dismissed such a conclusion as nonsensical. "Diderot, D'Alembert, D'Holbach, Condorcet, are known to have been among the most virtuous of men." And since they were all professed atheists, "their virtue, then, must have had some other foundation than the love of God." Jefferson's retort was not a defense of atheism, but was a rejection of the love of God as the foundation of morality, a rejection demanded by his experience and intellectual integrity.

Jefferson's criticism resembled that of Shaftesbury who argued that religion and virtue, though in many respects related, should in the light of "the practice of the world" be considered separately. "We have known people," Shaftesbury wrote, "who, having the appearance of great zeal in religion, have yet wanted even the common affections of humanity, and shown themselves extremely degenerate and corrupt. Others again, who have paid little regard to religion, and been considered as mere atheists, have yet been observed to practice the rules of morality, and act in many cases with such good meaning and affection towards mankind as might seem to force an acknowledgement of their being virtuous." The sense of right and wrong, according to this writer, is as natural to man as natural affection itself, is a "first principle in our constitution," and one's being an atheist or theist would have no direct effect upon that faculty. In fact if the theist is incited to do good even when he hates it, or is restrained from doing some ill to which he is not otherwise averse, simply because of a belief in a Deity who enforces obedience to his absolute will by rewards and

\[19\] Ibid.
punishments, then there is no virtue or goodness in his action or restraint. In fact, where "awe alone prevails and forces obedience, the obedience is servile, and all which is done through it merely servile." True morality, according to Shaftesbury, is not the result of the love or fear of God, but of the love of virtue for its own sake. The belief in a God would be supportive only.

Jefferson turned next to the more secular moral theory in which the foundation of morality was held to be taste. Again he did not identify particular authors, but Shaftesbury is a good representative of the ethics of taste. According to this theory, if love of virtue was the motivation of a moral life, the cognition of virtue was found in the acquired faculty of taste. Shaftesbury asserted that there was "a beauty and charm in moral as well as natural subjects" and attempted to demonstrate the reasonableness of a proportionate taste and determinate choice in life and manners. He proposed, in other words, that a developed taste was as essential to the appreciation of morals as to the aesthetic beauty of a work of art.

Shaftesbury based this part of his moral theory on the notion that "actions,"

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20 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit (1699), Reprinted in Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (1711), ed. by John M. Robertson (Indianapolis, 1964), 237, 261-268.
Jefferson owned a 1714 edition which was part of the collection sold to Congress, and he purchased another copy for his last library. Sowerby, Catalogue, II, 13; 1829 Catalogue, 2.

21 Shaftesbury, Miscellaneous Reflections, the third volume of Characteristics (1711), 344.
insomuch as they are reflections of pity, kindness, gratitude, or their "contraries," become as "objects," and thus are subject to "liking or dislike."

He wrote that "the case is the same in the mental or moral subjects as in the ordinary bodies or common subjects of sense," and therefore, "in behaviour and actions, when presented to our understanding there must be found, of necessity, an apparent difference, according to the regularity or irregularity of the subjects." The mind scans each sentiment which comes before it; "it feels the soft and harsh, the agreeable and disagreeable in the affections; and finds a foul and fair, a harmonious and a dissonant as really and truly here as in any musical numbers or in the outward forms or representations of sensible things." This faculty, or sense of taste, can in no case remain passive, but "must approve in some measure of what is natural and honest, and disapprove what is dishonest and corrupt."22

This theory of taste as a foundation of morality was expanded by Francis Hutcheson, a professed disciple of Shaftesbury. In defense of the taste theory, he argued that there is a "Sense of Beauty natural to Men," a sense that determines "the Mind to be pleas'd with Forms, Proportions, Resemblances, Theorems," and that there is "another superior Sense, natural also to Men determining them to be pleas'd with Actions, Characters, Affections."23

22Shaftesbury, An Inquiry, 251-252.

23Francis Hutcheson, An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue (London, 1725) xvii. Citations are from a facsimile copy of the second edition of 1726 (New York, 1971). Jefferson owned a fifth edition (1753) which was part of the collection sold to Congress, purchased another copy for his last library, and selected it as a part of the first library at the University of Virginia. Sowerby, Catalogue, II, 13; 1829 Catalogue, 2; Catalogue of the Library of the University of Virginia (Charlottesville, 1828), 69.
Jefferson rejected taste as the foundation of morality, and indeed denied that it was even a "branch of morality." He agreed that man has "indeed an innate sense of what we call beautiful," but this sense, he said, was "exercised chiefly on subjects addressed to fancy, whether through the eye in visible forms, as landscapes, animal figure, dress, drapery, architecture, the composition of colors, etc., or to the imagination directly, as imagery, style, or measure in prose or poetry, or whatever else constitutes the domain of criticism or taste." In other words, he agreed that man had an innate sense by which he appreciated aesthetic beauty, but he considered this "a faculty entirely distinct from the moral one."24

Jefferson's opposition to the "taste theory" raises a puzzle. Both Hutcheson and Shaftesbury treated the moral sense as closely analogous to the sense of beauty even though the objects were different. Both posited a faculty of taste as the foundation of their moral sense theory. Yet despite Jefferson's basic agreement with their ideas, he seems to have rejected a key tenet. His rejection of taste as the foundation of morality reveals either confusion about the moral sense (as it was presented by Shaftesbury and the early Hutcheson), or a well-worked out conviction that aesthetic appreciation could be entirely distinguished from moral judgment.

Jefferson next turned to the egoists, who posited self-interest or self-love as the foundation of morality. Jefferson had studied at least three of the best known modern works written in this vein: La Rouchefoucauld's Réflexions ou...

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24 J to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 138-144.
Sentences et Maximes morales (1665), Bernard Mandeville's The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits (1714), and Claude Adrien Helvétius' De l'Esprit (1759).

The first of these was not a philosophical work in the strict sense, but was simply a collection of observations that in total presented a rather dismal appraisal of man as the victim of his own selfish passions. The appraisal is made up of observations which assign the primary motivational forces in human actions to passion rather than reason. His main conclusion is summed up in the maxim that "the mind is always the dupe of the heart." Jefferson rejected La Rouchefoucauld's pessimistic appraisal of human nature as being inconsistent with experience.

Mandeville's work, if equally cynical in its conclusions, was more philosophical in its exposition of the nature of man. He too concluded that all

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25 La Rochefoucauld's Réflexions was published in several editions. Because Jefferson's copy has been lost, it is not known which edition he owned. Sowerby, Catalogue, II, 46.

26 "VII. Ces grandes et éclatantes actions qui éblouissent les yeux sont représentées par les politiques comme les effets des grands desseins, au lieu que ce sont d'ordinaire les effets de l'humeur et des passions. XLII. Nous n'avons pas assez de force pour suivre toute notre raison. CII. L'esprit est toujours la dupe du coeur." La Rouchefoucauld, Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes morales (Fp 1665; Paris, 1961) 5, 15, 33.


28 The Fable of the Bees was first published in 1714, and a second Part appeared in 1729. Jefferson owned the work in two parts. The first Part went through several editions and since his copy is missing, it is not known which one he owned. He owned a first edition of Part II. Sowerby, Catalogue, II, 13. Citations are from Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees or
human behavior is ultimately reducible to some form of self-love, but, as the
title of his book suggests, he did not believe that this was necessarily a bad
thing. He argued that the private vices that resulted from individual selfish-
ness (self-love) accounted for the material progress of human society.

Mandeville's work was written largely as a retort to the generally optim-
istic portrait of human nature presented in Lord Shaftesbury's Characteristics
of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times. Shaftesbury had written that "vice and
virtue are found variously mixed and alternately prevalent in the several
characters of mankind." By this he meant that man was governed by the
mixture of three passions: "1) The natural affections, which lead to the good
of the public, 2) or the self affections which lead only to the good of the private,
3) Or such as are neither of these ... and which may therefore be justly
styled unnatural affections." A man was to be judged virtuous or vicious in
accordance with the comparative degree of influence exercised on his behavior
by each of these passions. He emphasized that the "natural affections," those
which enjoyed the approval of the moral sense, were those which tended to the
public good.

We have found that, to deserve the name of good or virtuous, a creature
must have all his inclinations and affections, his dispositions of mind and
temper, suitable, and agreeing with the good of his kind, or of that system
in which he is included, and of which he constitutes a part. To stand thus
well affected and to have one's affections right and entire, not only in

Private Vices, Public Benefits, ed. by Douglas Garman from the 1723 edition
respect of oneself but of society and the public, this is rectitude, integrity, or virtue.

In other words, man's natural affections tended toward the public good. His behavior, if faithful to his natural affections, if true to the apprehensions of his moral sense, would exhibit a natural benevolence to society at large and would be judged virtuous. No one could deny, said Shaftesbury, that "this affection of a creature towards the good of the species or common nature is as proper and natural to him as it is to any organ, part, or member of an animal body." 29

But it was exactly this point that Mandeville denied in The Fable of the Bees. If moral judgment was a matter of feeling as Shaftesbury proposed, man's actions would naturally be self-serving, according to Mandeville. Mandeville and Shaftesbury, in their conceptions of the ruling passions of man (egoism vs. benevolence), held fundamentally antagonistic appraisals of human nature.

"The reader . . . will soon perceive," wrote Mandeville, "that two systems cannot be more opposite than his lordship's [Shaftesbury's] and mine. His notions . . . are generous and refined: they are a high compliment to humankind, and capable by the help of a little enthusiasm of inspiring us with the most noble sentiments concerning the dignity of our exalted nature. What a pity it is that they are not true!" Such a portrait was inconsistent with daily experience, and indeed such "generous notions concerning the natural goodness

of man," he continued, "are hurtful as they tend to mislead and are merely chimerical."\(^30\) He believed, like Shaftesbury, that man was "a compound of various passions," and that all the passions, "as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no."\(^31\) But unlike Shaftesbury and more like La Rochefoucauld whom he cited in the text, he believed that the passions centered in self-love. "It is impossible," he declared, "that man . . . should act with any other view but to please himself."\(^32\)

Jefferson rejected Mandeville's appraisal of human nature, not because he did not recognize "the bias of the human mind from motives of interest," but because he was convinced that compassion and generosity were more influential in shaping human behavior.\(^33\) He was undoubtedly offended by Mandeville's moral cynicism which seemed to be prompted by an utter contempt for the human race. Perhaps he did not realize that Mandeville's contempt was less directed at the race than at man's attempts to gloss over his own true nature. From a philosophical viewpoint, Jefferson rejected egoism as the basis of a moral theory simply because he considered man's "relations with others as constituting the boundaries of morality." In other words, like Shaftesbury, he

\(^{30}\) Mandeville, _Fable_, 196-210.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 42.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 213-214.

conceived of morality and the obligation thereto in terms of man's social relations. Mandeville said that man was devoid of social concern, and that moral theories founded upon the supposition of such concern were exercises in self-deceit. Jefferson wrote that this concern was the only basis of morality -- for "to ourselves . . . we can owe no duties." Therefore self-love, he concluded, "is no part of morality." As if to underscore the argument, he proposed that self-love is exactly the "counterpart" of morality. "It is the sole antagonist of virtue, leading us constantly by our propensities to self-gratification in violation of our moral duties to others." These selfish propensities seduce us from the practice of benevolence and therefore they should be subdued by education, instruction or restraint. 34 Jefferson seems to have ignored Mandeville's basic thesis, i.e., that private interests are not inconsistent with society's interests. To be sure, he had described man's selfish passions as the moving forces that accounted for human behavior, but he had also attributed the progress of human achievement to these same forces. Jefferson, in his rebuttal, seemed to fear that private interests and societies' interests were necessarily antithetical.

Both Mandeville and Helvetius added a further argument to the theory of egoism. Both argued, with different examples, that man's benevolence to man, when it did exist, was motivated by the pleasure generated in the actor and was thus still an expression of self-love. Mandeville, in support of this idea, wrote that "there is no merit in saving an innocent babe ready to drop into the fire: the action is neither good nor bad, and what benefit soever the infant received,

34 TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, IX, 132-144.
we only obliged ourselves; for to have seen it fall, and not strove to hinder it, would have caused a pain, which self-preservation compelled us to prevent."

This reasoning was completed in his proposition that "the humblest man alive must confess, that the reward of a virtuous action, which is the satisfaction that ensues upon it, consists in a certain pleasure he procures to himself by contemplating on his own worth." 35

Jefferson specifically cited the French philosophe, Claude Adrien Helvétius, "one of the best men on earth," as "the most ingenious advocate of this principle." He quoted Helvétius as having written that "the humane man is he to whom the sight of misfortune is insupportable, and who to rescue himself from this spectacle is forced to succor the unfortunate object." 36 Helvétius was one of the most well known writers in the eighteenth century who supported the notion that self-interest is the sole motive to human action. He denied that man possessed any natural instinct or impulse to morality, and indeed denied that compassion or altruism were natural feelings. Man's benevolence, or sympathy, to man, insofar as it existed, was motivated solely by the anticipation of pleasure or reward of some kind. Thus self-interest or self-love was, according to Helvétius, the source of human virtue.

"It has been said," Jefferson wrote in rejoinder, "that we feed the hungry,

35Mandeville, Fable, 52.

36The quotation is from Claude Adrien Helvétius, De l'Esprit, Discours II, Chap. 2. "L'homme humain est celui pour qui la vue du malheur d'autrui est une vue insupportable, et qui, pour s'arracher a cet spectacle, est, pour ainsi dire, forcé de secourir le malheureux." Oeuvres Complètes (14 vols.; Hildesheim, 1967), I, 19-20n.
clothe the naked, bind up the wounds of the man beaten by thieves, pour oil and wine into them, set him on our own beast and bring him to the inn, because we receive ourselves pleasure from these acts." To be sure, he continued, man does feel a pleasure in acting benevolently or sympathetically toward his fellow man, but this does not make that pleasure the foundation of man's virtuous behavior. This is still "one stop short of the ultimate question." The ultimate question was not whether man received pleasure from good acts, or even if this pleasure motivated such acts. The ultimate question, Jefferson said, was "how happens it that they give us pleasure?" And the answer? "Because nature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feel and to succor their distresses, and protests against the language of Helvétius."37

It is evident that Jefferson was familiar with most of the moral theories of the eighteenth century. In his quest to comprehend the nature of man he had obviously given thoughtful consideration to the several theories discussed above, but found them unsatisfactory. It might be argued that his reasons reveal a lack of analysis or appreciation of the philosophical sophistication of the theories that he criticized. I would propose that the shallow character of his criticism can be attributed to the fact that his letter to Law was intended as nothing more than a superficial survey of moral theories and that his conclusions were the casual reflection of a correspondent. He was seventy-one years old when he

37 TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 138-144.
wrote the letter. The comments are incisive and penetrating, though frustratingly brief, and are valuable for two reasons. First, they reveal an earlier determination to understand the psychology of human nature through study. Second, his criticisms of these moral theories provide further insight into his approval of the moral sense theory. He concluded that the Creator had made the matter of morality a more natural part of the human constitution than was allowed in the other theories. He believed that God had planted within man's breast a moral instinct that both recognized virtue and urged man to its fulfillment. This instinct, this moral sense, was the foundation of morality in the theory of the Scottish sentimentalists.

These conclusions about human nature, formulated early in his life, exerted a molding influence on many related areas of Jefferson's thought. They shaped his views on race, religion, man's social dispositions, and political systems. The sources of his ideas on human nature, and their impact on these other areas of thought, will be shown in the following chapters. This development will affirm that Jefferson was at home in the realm of ideas, and that there is a chronological consistency, though not rigidity, in his views that reveals consciously developed intellectual convictions. 38

38 Even Daniel Boorstin, who has described all Jeffersonians as builders of "a kind of community which did not need the fiat of Scripture or the support of doctrine," and as pragmatists who "expected not thought but action, not ideas but things to hold his society together," concedes that Jefferson's social thought "was not a miscellany of practical maxims" but came rather "from a world of assumptions in science, metaphysics, and theology." Lost World, 7, 25.
CHAPTER VI
"THE BRIGHTEST GEM WITH WHICH THE HUMAN CHARACTER IS STUDDED"

The book which Jefferson said "contained exactly my own creed on the foundation of morality in man"\(^1\) was Thomas Law's *Second Thoughts on Instinctive Impulses* (1813). Law was a minor, but ardent, proponent of the sentimentalist view of human nature and ethical theory. His frequent citations to the writings of Lord Kames, Francis Hutcheson, Dugald Stewart, and Adam Ferguson reveal his indebtedness to the Scottish school, and his own writings are a faithful reflection of their ethical theories. His thesis is founded on the general proposition that "God has inspired man with instinctive impulses to goodness, and aversions to evil."\(^2\) In his first book on moral philosophy he had designed a classification of the several impulses to which man is susceptible. These were "Desires" and "Aversions," or those impulses such as hunger or sex or shelter that arise from man's sensual feelings; "Sympathy" and "Antipathy," those impulses "implanted in him, to be attracted by a kind of magnetic influence to promote the happiness of his fellow creatures, as a social being, and to repulse those who evince dissocial passions;" "Gratitude" and

\(^1\)TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, *Lipscomb and Bergh Collection*, XIV, 138-144.

"Revenge," the retributory impulses to requite kindnesses and retaliate injuries; "Desire" of "Approbation" and "Emulation;" and "Hope" and "Fear."

All of these instinctive impulses were, said Law, "given by our creator for our benefit and happiness" in accordance with the following scheme:

**Desires** to obtain gratifications, and **aversions** to avoid evil.

**Sympathy** to create harmony, and **antipathy** to restrain from discord.

**Gratitude** to requite kindness and **revenge** to punish injury.

**Desire** of approbation for the pleasure of pleasing, and ** emulation** to equal the meritorious.

**Hope** to stimulate to action, and **fear** to deter from danger.

Law believed that a moral code based on these principles, a code that would be in unison with the natural impulses "implanted in us for our own good," would tend toward human happiness. Moral codes that ignored these principles would, conversely, lead to confusion and misery. ³ His second book, which was the one to which Jefferson responded, was simply an illustrative elaboration of this theme, and seems to have been prompted by William Paley's attack on the moral sense theory in *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785). Law described Paley as having questioned the existence of any such human faculty as a moral sense, and having suggested that what moral maxims were supposedly apprehended by such a faculty were more likely laws of custom than laws of nature. But "is it not impious," Law countered, "to entertain for a moment the idea that the All-wise, All-good Creator has not implanted in man primary

³Law, *Thoughts*, 24, 72-73.
principles for morality, as in water for hydraulics, as in matter for mechanics, as in the universe for order?" The answer was plain: "Moral sensations are emanations from the Supreme, the peculiar gifts of God to man, which raise him above the animal, and prepare him for a more exalted state." Opposing moralists stray into error, he continued, because they "found their notion of faith, as they do their other tenets, on that rotten and crumbling pillar of their theology, the innate depravity of man. Did, indeed, man issue from the womb, as they pretend, a mass of moral putrefaction, with his heart ulcerated with guilt, and his mind darkened with prejudice, he would certainly want capacity to discover and honestly to confess the truth . . . . A man born blind might as easily form just and accurate ideas of the nature and properties of light, as a man born radically corrupt and irresistibly propelled by the bias of his nature, to the commission of iniquity, could form of the nature and tendencies of moral obligation."

God, said Law, has not created man morally blind, but has, rather, given him a sensitivity to moral sensations. Our judgment of human conduct, he continued, is conditioned by the favorable or unfavorable sensations we feel. "There is an attraction or repulsion produced by every thing more or less. God has implanted these sensations in his creatures, to direct them what to avoid and what to obtain for their happiness." In the contemplation of a moral decision, man only has to be sensible to this voice of God within, or in Law's

4Law, Second Thoughts, 4-7.

5Ibid., 19.
words, he only has to be sensible to "the preponderance of one or more sensations in favour or against a measure, or plan, etc." Law chided Locke for having, "in his zeal to overcome his antagonists," not only overlooked instinctive impulses but even having denied their existence. "It is usual to say [according to Locke and his disciples], that all knowledge is acquired by the five senses, but in correct language we should say through the five senses, which are merely the vehicles; because pleasurable or painful sensations are the corporeal, sensual or moral laws implanted in us for the preservation of health, for the enjoyment of our senses, and for the gratification of spiritual affections." Law believed that the sensations that man feels are more than simply experience transmitted to the consciousness through the senses. He believed that the sensations were products of the interaction of experience and man's natural principles, or the result of the judgment by the moral sense of the experience that had been transmitted through the senses. The importance of these moral sensations for man's happiness could not be overestimated. They are, Law concluded, "the ingredients which compose individual and general happiness or misery; health of body, peace of mind, tranquility in society and universal harmony depend upon these ever operating divine laws."

"I sincerely . . . believe with you," Jefferson wrote to Law after having read his book, "in the general existence of a moral instinct. I think it the

6Ibid., 33-34.
7Ibid., 53-54.
8Ibid., 140.
brightest gem with which the human character is studded, and the want of it as more degrading than the most hideous of the bodily deformities." These were the words of a seventy-one year old student of human nature. It was an affirmation of the Scottish moral philosophy that he had embraced a half century before, and that had not been seriously altered by subsequent study or experience. Since this philosophy, founded as it was on a generally optimistic view of human nature, shaped the former president's appraisal of mankind, it inevitably influenced his conception of the institutions by which a society should be governed. It will be important and necessary therefore to discover with more clarity just what Jefferson learned from the Scottish sentimentalists.

I think that there is little doubt that his conception of the Scottish philosophy was taken from the writings of Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, and Lord Kames. And of these three, whose writings are all directly related to one another and reflect the progressive refinement of a basic theme, the latter two were of greatest influence. This judgment is based upon both explicit references and the general statement of Jefferson's own philosophy as it can be constructed from his correspondence. This philosophy of human nature is firmly grounded on four basic principles that underlaid the sentimentalist ethical theory as developed by Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Kames. The evidence also shows clearly that Jefferson's knowledge of this moral sense theory went beyond the simple acceptance of their conclusions. Though his

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9 TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 138-144.
philosophical sophistication was modest, it is evident that he knew well the postulates and arguments that these moralists employed. He did not feel it necessary in his correspondence to reveal the systematic structure underlying his own philosophical conclusions. Most men do not. Yet there are references that show conclusively that he had been an attentive student of the sentimental theory, and that he had relied upon the essential building blocks that he found there in the erection of his own philosophy. To follow Jefferson to his own conclusions, and to establish with certainty the influence of the British moralists, it is necessary to describe those building blocks in some detail.

The first of the principles that Jefferson embraced was that man is by nature moral -- that he is endowed with an innate sense of moral right and wrong by which he is urged to moral actions. Shaftesbury in 1699 described this moral sense as a faculty that recognized "a beauty and a deformity as well in actions, minds, and tempers, as in figures, sounds, or colours," and which was "as natural to us as natural affection itself," a faculty that cannot "without much force and violence, be effaced, or struck out of the natural temper, even by means of the most extravagant belief or opinion in the world." This notion was attacked, as described in the preceding chapter, in Mandeville's Fable of the Bees (1714). The question of the existence of such a natural moral

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10 Shaftesbury, *An Inquiry*, 260-262. Jefferson bought copies of Shaftesbury's Characteristics for both of his major libraries. See Chapter 5, fn #20 above. His early familiarity with the work is revealed in his "Notes on Discontinuing the Establishment of the Church of England" (1776), Boyd Collection, I, 548-549.
sense was one of the most heatedly debated questions in ethical theory in the eighteenth century.

The most influential defender of the Shaftesbury thesis was Francis Hutcheson, professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow. Hutcheson had been a student at Glasgow from 1710 to 1716, after which he began his own private academy in Dublin. He continued in this vocation until accepting the chair of moral philosophy at Glasgow, where he succeeded his old teacher, Gershom Carmichael, and continued there until his death in 1746. Either while as a student at Glasgow, or during his early years in Dublin, he became disenchanted with the a priori arguments in Samuel Clarke's intellectualist moral philosophy. In the early 1720s he wrote his first book, the title of which announced his defense of Shaftesbury's moral theory against Mandeville's attack: An Inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue; in two treatises. In which the principles of the late Earl of Shaftesbury are explain'd and defended, against the author of the Fable of the Bees . . . with an attempt to introduce a mathematical calculation in subjects of morality (1725).  

One scholar finds that though he introduced the phrase moral sense, "the fact is that no coherent view can be extracted from Shaftesbury about the moral faculty or view about moral theory in general. In the course of his essays . . . are to be found simply certain suggestions which were taken over, adapted and elaborated into an explicit theory by Hutcheson." [David] Daiches Raphael, The Moral Sense (London, 1947), 16.

See Leslie Stephen in DNB s.v. "Hutcheson, Francis."

In February 1726 the Dublin Journal published three articles by Hutcheson also attacking the Fable of the Bees. Jefferson bought copies of Hutcheson's Inquiry for both of his major libraries. See Chapter 5, fn. #28 above.
In the preface Hutcheson declared his "principal Design" to be to show "that Human Nature was not left quite indifferent in the affair of Virtue to form it self Observations concerning the Advantage, or Disadvantage of Actions, and accordingly to regulate its Conduct." In reply to the argument in this vein by the intellectualist moralists he countered that "the weakness of our Reason, and the avocations arising from the Infirmity and Necessitys of our Nature, are so great, that very few Men could ever have form'd those long Deductions of Reason, which shew some Actions to be in the whole advantageous to the Agent, and their Contrarys pernicious." He did not believe that God would leave such an important matter as morality to be solely dependent on such an unreliable instrument as human reason. "The AUTHOR of Nature," he argued, "has much better furnish'd us for a virtuous Conduct, than our Moralists seem to imagine, by almost as quick and powerful Instructions, as we have for the preservation of our Bodys. He has made Virtue, a lovely Form, to excite our pursuit of it; and has given us strong Affections to be the Springs of each virtuous Action."\(^{14}\)

Hutcheson's basic plan was to first show that there is a sense of beauty natural to man which is evidenced by a near universal agreement among men in their approval of certain forms or proportions in art, architecture, etc. He believed that if he could persuade his readers that there was such an innate sense, then it would be an easy matter to persuade them "to apprehend another superior Sense, natural also to Man, determining them to be pleas'd with Actions,

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Characters, Affections." In other words, if it was accepted that there was a sense of beauty natural to man, then it should not be too difficult to demonstrate that there was also a natural sense by which men perceived the beauty of moral virtue.

According to Hutcheson's scheme, man is possessed of two types of perceptual senses. There are first of all, the external senses by which one perceives such simple ideas as color and sound and more complex ideas made up as compounds of simple ideas. These are ideas that "are rais'd in the Mind upon the presence of external Objects, and their acting upon our Bodys, are called Sensations." The mind is totally passive in this experience and has neither the power to refuse the idea nor to influence it in any way. These sensitive perceptions are accompanied immediately by either the sensation of pleasure or pain, and again, the recipient has no knowledge of the source of this sensation nor does he have the power to vary it. To this point, Hutcheson's theory parallels Locke's sensationalist theory.

But, according to Hutcheson, there is a higher order of ideas and sensations that derive from perceptions more complex than the simple discernment of length, breadth, color, etc. "There are," he wrote, "vastly greater Pleasures in those complex Ideas of Objects, which obtain the Names of Beautiful, Regular, Harmonious." He was thinking of art, architecture, musical compositions, awe inspiring natural scenes, etc. Obviously one could argue that these ideas

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15 Ibid., xvii.

16 Ibid., 1-4.
of beauty and harmony were perceptions of the external senses of seeing and hearing. But Hutcheson believed that the perception of beauty was superior to the simple faculty of seeing or hearing, and he believed that man is endowed with a faculty -- a sense of beauty -- which is a "Power" for perceiving the idea of beauty, and a sense of harmony which is the power for perceiving this idea, etc. He designated the powers by which these more complex ideas were perceived as internal senses. 17

Hutcheson constructed his argument carefully to show that there is a sense of beauty natural to men that is spontaneous, disinterested, and universal. In doing this he was laying the groundwork for the more questionable argument in the following treatise "Concerning MORAL GOOD and EVIL." He planned here to use many of the same arguments to demonstrate another internal sense from which arises "that Determination to be pleas'd with the Contemplation of those Affections, Actions, or Characters of rational Agents, which we call virtuous." This internal sense, superior to all the others of beauty, harmony, etc., he called the moral sense. 18

Moral goodness was defined by Hutcheson to denote man's "Idea of some Quality apprehended in Actions, which procures Approbation, and Love toward the Actor, from those who receive no Advantage by the Action." This quality would necessarily have to be constant and subject to universal recognition. Hutcheson believed that man was a rational creature in a universe governed by

17 Ibid., 7-11.
18 Ibid., xiv-xvii.
general laws. Because in the scheme of things man's happiness depended upon his actions, then "the Universe must be govern'd not by particular Wills, but by general Laws, upon which we can found our Expectations, and project our Schemes of Action." He believed that the standard of moral goodness was fixed as a general law of nature, and that the moral sense was the faculty by which man immediately recognized the reflection of the general law of morality in human virtue.

The second treatise, taken as a whole, was a strong attack against Bernard Mandeville's theory of self-interest as the prime motivation in human behavior. It is constructed around two major themes. First of all, Hutcheson attempted to prove "that some Actions have to Men an immediate Goodness." By this he meant that by a superior sense we feel pleasure in the contemplation of certain actions when observed in ourselves or in others. The second theme is an expansion of the first. What excites us to these virtuous actions, Hutcheson said, is not the pleasure felt in their contemplation, and much less the prospect of future reward, but a principle of action entirely different from interest or self-love.

The moral sense bore many of the characteristics of the other internal senses familiar to the readers of the first treatise. For example Hutcheson said that the operation of the moral sense was immediate and totally independent of the human will, and thus operates independently of any expectation of

19 Ibid., 106-111.
20 Ibid., 116.
advantage or any apprehensions of self-interest. "This moral Sense," he wrote, "either of our own Actions, or of those of others, has this in common with our other Senses, that however our Desire of Virtue may be counterballanc'd by Interest, our Sentiment or Perception of its Beauty cannot; as it certainly might be, if the only Ground of our Approbation were Views of Advantage." Like the sense of beauty in objects, the perception of beauty in virtue cannot be influenced or denied. An additional evidence of the disinterested nature of the moral sense is to be seen in the fact that it causes us to admire "even feign'd Characters, in the most distant Ages and Nations, according as they appear Kind, Faithful, Compassionate, . . . toward their imaginary Contemporaries." This would be impossible if there were no moral sense to make these actions appear beautiful. 21

Hutcheson anticipated another argument that might posit the approbation of virtue as deriving from a different kind of self-love; i.e., from the hope of divine reward. He dismissed religion as the basis of moral approbation by observing that "many have high Notions of Honour, Faith, Generosity, Justice, who have scarce any Opinions about the DEITY, or any Thoughts of future Rewards; and abhor any thing which is Treacherous, Cruel or Unjust, without any regard to future Punishments." 22

Following the arguments employed in the defense of the idea of the sense of beauty, Hutcheson declared that the perception of moral good is not derived

21 Ibid., 117-127.
22 Ibid., 128.
from custom, education, example, or study, since the judgment of an action is antecedent to the influence of either. 23 He denied that this meant that the moral sense depended upon innate ideas or knowledge. His conclusion, drawn from all of the arguments outlined above, was that the human mind is determined by the Creator "to receive amiable or disagreeable Ideas of Actions . . . antecedent to any Opinions of Advantage or Loss to redound our selves from them; even as we are pleas'd with a regular Form, or an harmonious Composition, without having any Knowledge of Mathematics, or seeing any Advantage in that Form, or Composition different from the immediate Pleasure." 24

The description of the moral sense as outlined above was recapitulated by Hutcheson in essentially the same terms in the first book of Philosophiae moralis institutio compendiaria, ethices et jurisprudentiae, naturalis elementa continens. Lib. III (1742). 25 In this work, intended for use as a textbook by university students, he combined his philosophy of ethics and pneumatology with his ideas on individual rights and civil law, the rights and obligations of the family relationship, political theory, and international law, to form a complete

23 Ibid., 134.

24 Ibid., 132-135.

25 Published in English translation in 1747 as A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy, in Three Books; Containing the Elements of Ethicks And the Law of Nature (Glasgow, 1747). Citations are from a facsimile copy of this edition (Ann Arbor, 1970). Jefferson owned a third edition (1764) which was part of the collection sold to Congress and purchased another copy for his last library. Sowerby, Catalogue, II, 12; 1829 Catalogue, 2.
system of moral philosophy typical of the eighteenth century model.

In Philosophiae moralis Hutcheson gave additional suggestions about the power of the moral sense. This "noble and most divine of all our senses," he wrote, has been implanted by nature "to regulate the highest powers of our nature, our affections and deliberate designs of action in important affairs."

It is "that Conscience by which we discern what is graceful, becoming, beautiful, and honourable in the affections of the soul, in our conduct of life, our words and actions." Hutcheson now described the moral sense as the governing power in man. It is, he declared, "the judge of the whole life, of all the various powers, affections and designs, and naturally assumes a jurisdiction over them; pronouncing that most important sentence, that in the virtues themselves, and in a careful study of what is beautiful and honourable in manners, consists our true dignity, and natural excellence, and supreme happiness." The authority of the moral sense is confirmed in that "altho' every event, disposition, or action incident to men may in a certain sense be called natural; yet such conduct alone as is approved by this diviner faculty, which is plainly destined to command the rest, can be properly called agreeable or suited to our nature." The moral sense obviously possessed an authority transcending that normally attributed to the human conscience.

In summary, Hutcheson argued that God had implanted within man a faculty, a moral sense, by which he was made immediately conscious of moral right

26 Hutcheson, Short Introduction, 15-17.

27 Ibid., 23-26.
and wrong. It was a faculty analogous to man's more easily demonstrated sense of beauty and harmony, but because its object was the superior beauty, i.e., virtue, the moral sense was the superior of all of man's internal senses. Its judgments were not dependent upon education, contemplation, custom, example or religion. Nor were its judgments subject to the bribery posed by the knowledge of advantage or the apprehension of self-interest. The moral sense was a reflection of God's concern for man's happiness. This happiness was to be attained only through fidelity to the law of man's nature and the divine law of morality. The moral sense was the ever present and functioning internal monitor urging man to that fidelity.

This was the faculty that Jefferson described as "the brightest gem with which the human character is studded" and the want of which is "more degrading than the most hideous of the bodily deformities." His conception of the moral sense conformed exactly to Hutcheson's description outlined above.

Jefferson wrote that "nature hath implanted in our breasts . . . a moral instinct." He believed that the moral sense was "instinct and innate" and that it was "as much a part of our constitution as that of feeling, seeing, or hearing." He believed that its function was to impel man to virtuous actions and to warn him against those that are vicious. 28 He advised his daughter Martha when she was only eleven years old that "if ever you are about to say any thing amiss or to do any thing wrong, consider before hand. You will feel something within you

which will tell you it is wrong and ought not to be said or done: that is your conscience, and be sure to obey it. Our maker has given us all, this faithful internal monitor, and if you always obey it, you will always be prepared for the end of the world: or for a much more certain event which is death."

Though this advice may seem to be nothing more than a solemn homily by a dutiful father, Jefferson, like Hutcheson, regarded the operation of the moral sense as much more than an easily disregarded twinge of discomfort arising from the contemplation of immoral behavior.

Jefferson's description of the operation of the moral sense conformed to Hutcheson's description of its analogy to the appreciation of beauty. Hutcheson had written that the operation of the moral sense was simply "a Determination of our Minds to receive amiable or disagreeable Ideas of Actions, when they occur to our Observation, . . . even as we are pleas'd with a regular Form, or an harmonious Composition." In one of his earliest expressions on this subject Jefferson wrote that "when any signed act of charity or of gratitude, . . . is presented either to our sight or imagination, we are deeply impressed with its beauty and feel a strong desire in ourselves of doing charitable and
grateful acts also. Or the contrary when we see or read of any atrocious deed, we are disgusted with its deformity and conceive an abhorrence of vice." 31

This statement also contains a subtle but definite implication of another characteristic of the moral sense which is reminiscent of Hutcheson's explication. The quotation is taken from a letter in which Jefferson was justifying the inclusion of works of fiction in a list of recommended books. The reader will note that he refers to virtuous acts presented either to our sight or imagination and to atrocious deeds which we see or read about. The significance of this argument is that it makes the moral sense responsive even to fictional acts or deeds, that "we are . . . wisely framed to be as warmly interested for a fictitious as for a real personage." 32 Hutcheson had written that the moral sense caused us to admire "even feign'd Characters, . . . according as they appear Kind, Faithful, Compassionate, . . . toward their imaginary Contemporaries." 33 In his work, this characteristic was offered as evidence of the disinterested nature of the moral sense. Certainly one could not anticipate advantage from the approval of virtuous conduct ascribed to fictional characters. By implication Jefferson attributed this same disinterested quality to the moral sense.

Jefferson also used Hutcheson's exact argument to show that the judgment

31 TJ to Robert Skipwith, Aug. 3, 1771, Boyd Collection, I, 76-81. The date of this reference is an additional evidence of Jefferson's early familiarity with the sentimentalist ethical theory.

32 Ibid.

33 Hutcheson, An Inquiry, 117-127.
of the moral sense was disinterested even in the anticipation of divine reward. Hutcheson had dismissed religion or divine sanctions as the basis of moral approbation by simply pointing to the fact that there were many who showed a high appreciation for moral virtue and despised its opposite, yet held no belief about a deity or the prospects of future reward or punishment. Jefferson pointed to Diderot, D'Alembert, D'Holbach, and Condorcet, men who had publicly affirmed their atheism, and yet who were "known to have been among the most virtuous of men." Like Hutcheson, Jefferson believed that such evidence was sufficient to show the independence of moral judgment from considerations of the prospect of divine sanctions. 34

Hutcheson had carefully elevated the role of the moral sense over that of reason in the matter of morals. He did not demean either the role or efficacy of reason in human affairs. But he did insist that the discovery of moral truth could more safely be entrusted to the moral sense than to the processes of intellectualization. He stated very specifically his belief that few men possessed the intellectual powers or energy that would be necessary to arrive at the conclusions that were rendered immediately by the moral sense. 35 Jefferson's description of the superiority of the moral sense in the matter of morals agreed with Hutcheson's. He wrote that "He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science."

Like Hutcheson he recognized that only a small part of the human family had

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34 TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, *Lipscomb and Bergh Collection*, XIV, 138-144.

the opportunity of education or training that would expose them to the discipline of intellectualized ethics, and even those would stand on a weak foundation.

"This sense is submitted indeed in some degree to the guidance of reason; but," he added, "it is a small stock which is required for this: even a less one than what we call Common sense." To illustrate his thinking, Jefferson used an example that, recast in dozens of forms, would become a basic faith in the nineteenth century Romantic philosophy of human nature. "State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor," he wrote. "The former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules." 36 It seems clear that throughout his adult life, Jefferson remained convinced that morality was not a matter of ethical systems made up of artificial rules. In 1787 he advised his nephew, who was entering college, that it would be "time lost" to attend lectures in moral philosophy because moral conduct was a matter of "sense" rather than science. Thirty-three years later, when his grandson was beginning college, Jefferson wrote that it would be "time lost" for him to attend professors of ethics. The rules of moral conduct could, he believed, "be as well acquired in the closet as from living lecturers." 37 Jefferson was certainly not an anti-intellectual, but like Hutcheson, he believed that the discovery of moral truth, and consequently man's happiness, was too important a matter to entrust to unaided reason. For this reason the

36 TJ to Peter Carr, Aug. 10, 1787, Boyd Collection, XII, 14-19.

37 Ibid.; TJ to Dr. James Cooper, Aug. 14, 1820, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XV, 264-266.
Creator had given men an internal monitor with superior jurisdiction in this area of human life. Jefferson's most eloquent statement of this belief is found in the head and heart dialogue contained in a letter to Maria Cosway.

[Heart] When nature assigned us the same habitation, she gave us over it a divided empire. To you she allotted the field of science, to me that of morals. When the circle is to be squared, or the orbit of a comet to be traced; when the arch of greatest strength, or the solid of least resistance is to be investigated, take you the problem: it is yours: nature has given me no cognizance of it. In like manner in denying to you the feelings of sympathy, of benevolence, of gratitude, of justice, of love, of friendship, she has excluded you from their control. To these she has adapted the mechanism of the heart. Morals were too essential to the happiness of man to be risked on the uncertain combinations of the head. She laid their foundation therefore in sentiment, not in science. That she gave to all, as necessary to all: this to a few only, as sufficing with a few. 38

This was the first major principle that Jefferson took from the Scottish sentimentalists -- that man is naturally endowed with an innate sense of moral right and wrong, and that the function of this internal monitor is to urge man toward a life of virtue. The logical extension of this argument, and one that Jefferson accepted, was that man is by nature moral.

The second major principle that Jefferson took from the Scottish sentimentalists was that man is naturally benevolent. This principle, like that of the moral sense, was suggested by Shaftesbury and then developed by Hutcheson and Kames later in the eighteenth century.

According to Shaftesbury, man's nature is shaped by the natural harmony of cosmological relationships. Man belongs to a "system" of animals, and the "whole system of animals, together with that of vegetables, and all other things

38 Oct. 12, 1786, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, X, 443-453.
in this inferior world" forms "one system of a globe or earth." The earth, as it "appears to have a real dependence on something still beyond, as, for example, either on its sun, the galaxy, or its fellow-planets, then is it in reality a party only of some other system." There is then ultimately "a system of all things" and "a universal nature" to which all its parts belong. "Therefore," he wrote, "if any being be wholly and really ill, it must be ill with respect to the universal system." or, in other words, the behavior of man can be called virtuous or vicious only on the basis of whether it contributes to the good or ill of the system. 39

Having determined this, Shaftesbury turned to the question of obligation or motivation to virtue. He believed that man's nature, in harmony with the "universal nature," is naturally inclined toward benevolence. He believed that this human inclination is proved by the natural affections such as parental kindness, zeal for posterity, concern for propagation and nature of the young, love of fellowship, and company, compassion, mutual succour, etc. He believed that this benevolent human affection towards the good of the species or common nature is as natural to man as any part or member of his body.

But he also recognized that there are other natural affections within the human breast, namely those that have regard for "the private nature or self-system." And it was obvious that there would be occasions in the human experience when the natural affections for the common system would contradict the natural affections for the self-system. Man is a mixture of these contradictory

affections and is judged virtuous or vicious with respect to their balance. It was his conclusion that "to deserve the name of good or virtuous, a creature must have all his inclinations and affections, his dispositions of mind and temper, suitable, and agreeing with the good of his kind, or of that system in which he is included," and that "to be wanting in any of these, or to have their contraries, is depravity, corruption, and vice." He drew the further conclusion that man is naturally inclined to the former state, and that his happiness is derived from the fulfillment of his natural social benevolence and that the habitual rejection of this natural inclination is the cause of misery. 40

Again building on the foundation laid by Shaftesbury, Hutcheson described benevolent affection as the immediate motive to all virtuous actions. He declared that every action that can be judged morally good has to originate in the affection towards ones fellow creatures, or in other words, in the natural affections imposed by the common nature of the species. Even the so-called cardinal virtues of temperance, courage, prudence and justice "obtain that Name, because they are Dispositions universally necessary to promote publick Good, and denote Affections toward rational Agents;" and to any extent that they are employed in the furtherance of private ends "there would appear no Virtue in them." 41 Thus benevolence, described by Hutcheson as "some Determination of our Nature to study the Good of others; or some Instinct, antecedent to all Reason from Interest, which influences us to the Love of

40 Ibid., 280-293.

41 Hutcheson, An Inquiry, 136-137.
"others" was posited as the true spring of virtue. It is the natural force operating within man that motivates that kind of behavior which would be approved by the moral sense. The relationship between the moral sense and benevolence is then complementary; the former performing an apprehensive function and the latter an energizing one. Acting together they stimulate moral behavior in man. 42

If benevolence was to be considered a part of the natural foundation of moral virtue in man, it would have to be, like the moral sense, a demonstrably universal human tendency or trait. The initial evidence offered by Hutcheson to confirm the universality of benevolence was the natural, disinterested, affection of parents for their children. But this was only a beginning, for this natural affection extended beyond the family circle to embrace friends, neighbors, communities, and eventually, all mankind. He acknowledged that the strength of the benevolent affection varied in proportion to the nearness of the relationship, and even conceded that this natural inclination could be diluted sometimes by the opposition of private interests. 43 But it is clear that Hutcheson considered benevolent affection as a natural human trait, extending to the most distant members of the species, and acting in conjunction with the moral sense

42Ibid., 155. Raphael notes this ambiguity in Hutcheson's failure to distinguish clearly between the discernment of right actions and the motive from which such actions are right to be done. He believes that this is due "to the fact that Hutcheson's chief aim in this work is not to establish the moral sense theory, but to refute the egoist. He wants to show that we often do actions from a motive other than self-love. This motive he holds to be benevolence." The Moral Sense, 22-23.

43Hutcheson, An Inquiry, 158-161.
to stimulate virtuous behavior in man.

It was on this theme that Lord Kames began his *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751), a book that apparently made a deep impression on Jefferson. Kames was an advocate and jurist by profession, serving as one of the lords of the justiciary court for more than thirty years. He also achieved a considerable reputation as a metaphysician and amateur agriculturist. He was a voluminous writer, producing at least twenty-one publications on law, moral philosophy and agriculture in a period spanning slightly more than a half century. 44 His literary reputation was undoubtedly known to a very limited number in America, although one of his books eventually went through thirty-one printings here. 45 Benjamin Franklin had met him during a visit to Scotland in October 1759, and the two carried on a spirited correspondence for several years thereafter. Kames included a list of maxims written by Franklin in both *Introduction to the Art of Thinking* (1761) and *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774), and also sent Franklin copies of *Principles of Equity* (1760) and *Elements of Criticism* (1762). The latter reciprocated by purchasing *Principles of Equity* and *Historical Law Tracts* for the Library Company of Philadelphia and also sent Kames a report on the situation of British affairs in America. 46 There can be no doubt that Kames' views on the

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44 See George Fisher Russell Barker, in *DNB* s. v. "Home, Henry, Lord Kames."


46 *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. by Leonard W. Larabee (10 vols.; New Haven, 1959--), II, 420; VI, 116-118; VIII, 431; IX, 5-10, 103-106,
relationship between Britain and the colonies endeared him to the hearts of those who read the *Virginia Gazette*. The issues of November 24, 1774 and March 4, 1775 contained a rather lengthy argument, attributed to "that judicious and dispassionate writer, Lord Kames," to the effect that in matters of commerce all privileges and opportunities should be equal and reciprocal as between the mother country and the colonies. "To bar a colony from access to the fountain head for commodities that cannot be furnished by the mother country but at second hand, is oppression; it is so far degrading the colonists from being free subjects to be slaves . . . . No connexion between two nations can be so intimate," he continued, "as to make such restraint an act of justice." The Parliament, in enacting legislation prohibiting the Americans from having any direct commerce with any nation other than Britain, had, in his opinion, "acted like a step mother to her American colonies." Such regulation, he concluded, "is not only unjust but impolitic; as by it the interest of the colonies in general is sacrificed to that of a few London merchants."47

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47 Purdie and Dixon's *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), Nov. 24, 1774; Dixon and Hunter's *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), Mar. 4, 1775. Caroline Robbins has pointed out that Francis Hutcheson voiced views about the relationship between colonies and mother countries that were known at least to those Americans who attended his classes in the early eighteenth century. These views included the assertion of the rights of colonists to resist tyranny. Robbins quotes a passage from *A System of Moral Philosophy* (1755): "If the plan of the mother-country is changed by force, or degenerates by degrees from a safe, mild, and gentle limited power, to a severe and absolute one; or if under the same plan of polity, oppressive laws are made with respect to the
November 17, 1774 contained "A Prophecy of Lord KAMES, concerning the North American Colonies." He was quoted as saying that the colonies were growing in both prosperity and population and that they would soon be "a Match for the Mother Country, if they choose to be independent." And, the prediction continued, once they were "delivered from a foreign Yoke, their first Care will be the Choice of a proper Government, and it is not difficult to foresee what Government will be chosen. A people animated with the new Blessings of Liberty, and Independence, will not incline to a kingly Government." Such sentiments and predictions would not have been unwelcome among the more angry of the Virginia gentry in 1774-1775.

Jefferson was attracted to Kames's writings early in his career. The numerous citations in his letters, spanning the greater part of his adult life, indicate that it was a lasting attraction. In fact, the similarities in their intellectual natures is amazing. Like Jefferson, Kames possessed a most active and varied intellectual curiosity. This is most vividly attested to by the subject matter of his publications. He was a member of the Ranken Club, the

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48 Purdie and Dixon's Virginia Gazette (Williamsburg), Nov. 17, 1774.
Select Society, and the Philosophical Society, which were the centers of Edinburgh's intellectual life. Kames and Jefferson also shared a less sophisticated credulity in their enthusiastic acceptance of the authenticity of the poems of Ossian.

A list of recommended books for a gentlemen's library composed by Jefferson in 1771 included "Ld. Kaim's elements of criticism," "Ld. Kaim's Natural religion," and "Ld. Kaim's Principles of equity."49 A list of books that he recommended for self study in law composed in 1790 included "Kaim's Principles of equity" and "Kaim's moral essays."50 He mentioned Kames' proposal of "an essence of dung, one pint of which should manure an acre" in a letter to George Washington in 1794.51 He provided another list of books recommended for the study of law in 1814. It included "Lord Kaim's Natural Religion," "Ld. Kaim's Elements of criticism," and "Lord Kaim's principles of Equity," the latter listing updated to specify the third edition of 1779.52 In the same year he suggested the inclusion of Lord Kames in "the roll of associates" advocating the moral sense principle.53 Jefferson's continuing interest

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50TJ to John Garland Jefferson, June 11, 1790, Ibid., XVI, 480-482.

51May 14, 1794, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, IX, 286-288.


53TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 138-144.
in Kames' writings is further indicated by his collection of the Scot's books. The collection sold to the Library of Congress in 1815 included ten different titles by Kames, making him one of the most frequently represented authors in the collection. Of these, the two that most influenced Jefferson's concept of human nature were *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* and *Historical Law Tracts*. The former of these continues the philosophical genre of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, and the latter exhibits a considerable application of human psychology to legal principles.

*Essays* was written "to illustrate the nature of man," and in so doing to support the authority of the natural senses, "external and internal." The author's thesis rests upon the proposition that man's "reasonings on some of the most important subjects, rest ultimately upon sense and feeling." He acknowledged the influence of both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, and conceived of

54 Sowerby lists the following: *Remarkable Decisions of the Court of Sessions, from the year 1730 to the year 1752, 1st ed., 1766* (Sowerby #1739); *Essays upon several subjects concerning British Antiquities, 3d ed., 1763* (Sowerby #2007); *The Decisions of the Court of Session from its first institution to the present time, 1st ed., 1741* (Sowerby #2186); *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion, 1st ed., 1751* (Sowerby #1254); *Historical Law Tracts, 2d ed., 1761* (Sowerby #2008); *Principles of Equity, 1st ed., 1760, 2d ed., 1767, 3d ed. 1778* (Sowerby #1716-17-18); *Introduction to the Art of Thinking, 2d ed., 1764* (Sowerby #1345); *Elements of Criticism, 3d ed., 1764* (Sowerby #4699); *Statute Law of Scotland abridged, 1st ed., 1757* (Sowerby #2183); *The Gentlemen Farmer, 2d ed., 1779* (Sowerby #710).

55 Jefferson's *Commonplace Book* contains extracts from thirteen of the fourteen theses outlined by Kames in *Historical Law Tracts*. Also the passages attacking Wollaston and relating duty to impulsive feeling in Jefferson's letter to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, bear a striking resemblance to Kames' wording in spite of his profession that it had been fifty years since he had read Kames' book.
his work as an extension of the scheme that they had begun. 56 He described the moral sense as having the authority of judgment over all our appetites and affections. Its authority is derived from the fact that it is an immediate feeling or sensation not influenced by reflection. From it man perceives those actions he is bound to perform and those he is bound to avoid. "It is the voice of God within us," he declared, "which commands our strictest obedience, just as much as when his will is declared by express revelation." But, like Hutcheson, he conceded that the moral sense is not the immediate motivation to human behavior. "Its province," he wrote, "is to instruct us, which of our principles of action [immediate motivations] we may indulge, and which of them we must restrain. It is the voice of God within us, informing us of our duty." 57

The immediate motivations, or principles of action, that make up the common nature of man were divided by Kames into five categories. The first two, directed toward self, are self-preservation and self-love. The other three, directed toward others, are fidelity, gratitude, and benevolence. Man's behavior is then, according to Kames, the reflection of these internal "appetites, passions, and affections" and in the normal course of things, they operate together for the general good. The role of the moral sense is that of instructor and governor, given "to regulate our actions, to enforce one motive, to restrain

56 [Kames, Henry Home, Lord], Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion (Edinburgh, 1751), 54-57, 121-122. Citations are from a facsimile copy of the first edition (Ann Arbor, 1970). Jefferson owned a first edition which was part of the collection sold to Congress. Sowerby, Catalogue, II, ii.

57 [Kames], Essays, 63-76.
another, and to prefer one to another, when they are in competition." This judgment by the moral sense in itself places man under obligation to obey. "The Author of nature has not left our actions to be directed by so weak a principle as reason," he wrote. Like Hutcheson he believed that the bulk of mankind had little capacity for such reasoning. "Nature has dealt more kindly by us," he continued. "We are compelled by strong and evident feelings, to perform all the different duties of life."58

The opening essay in Kames' work is about man's natural benevolence, and its arguments and conclusions conform readily to those of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. But its very placement as an introductory feature to the overall work is significant. It was Kames' plan to begin with this proposition of man's natural benevolence and to treat its ramifications for society with greater detail than either of the other two writers. His ultimate conclusions on this theme will be fully described in a later chapter.

With regard to the subject of benevolence, Kames concluded that nature has so designed man that we participate fully with the joys and miseries of our fellow creatures. "We have a strong sympathy with them; we partake of their afflictions; we grieve with them and for them; and," he wrote, "in many instances, their misfortunes affect us equally with our own."59 In the arguments by which he arrived at this conclusion, he launched a direct attack on those philosophers who had demeaned human nature by attributing a false

58Ibid. , 76-99, 122-127.

59Ibid. , 16.
stature to the power of pleasure and pain as the sole motivations to human behavior. "If man is considered as a being, whose only view, in all his actions, is either to attain pleasure, or to avoid pain," Kames wrote, "we must conclude pleasure and pain to be his only impulses to action." But he did not accept such a presupposition. "When we more attentively examine human nature," he countered, "we discover many and various impulses to action, independent of pleasure and pain."

Kames conceded that human existence was characterized by a continuous experience of impressions to which man is sensitive. And that, with the exception of some slight, insignificant impressions that can be safely neglected, the bulk of these impressions can be distinguished into pleasant and painful. These sensations are usually translated into desire or aversion, i.e., we desire to possess that which causes pleasant impressions and to avoid those which raise our aversion. No doubt it is true that "in infancy, appetite and passions, and the desires and aversions accompanying them are our sole impulses to action. But in the progress of life, when we learn to distinguish the objects around us as contributing to pleasure or pain, we acquire, by degrees, impulses to action of a different sort."

Of course it might be argued that self-love would naturally stimulate desire for those objects that contribute to one's pleasure and aversion to those that cause pain. And indeed, Kames conceded, pleasure and pain are the only motives to action so far as self-love is concerned. But our natural affections of compassion and benevolence are different in their nature from self-love. The latter operates "by means of reflection and experience," whereas the
former operate "by direct impulse, without the intervention of reason."

Natural affection is a direct impulse which "operates blindly, and in the way of instinct, without any view to consequences." Though it may be true that pleasure is the usual consequence of indulging the natural instinct, "it is not necessarily, nor indeed universally so." Locke, and the other philosophers like him, held too simplistic a notion about human nature according to Kames. They tried to cast human motivation into a one dimensional pattern. "They acknowledge no motive to action, but what arises from self-love; measures laid down to attain pleasure or to shun pain." Kames believed that man's nature is multi-dimensional. "So various is human nature, and so complicated its acting powers," he wrote, "that it is not readily to be taken in at one view."

He believed that though the pleasure-pain principle was operative, the natural affections were probably more important as impulses to action. 60

Kames believed that man feels many natural affections and their attendant impulses, but there are none more admirable than compassion or benevolence. It is the most valuable principle in human nature, one which unites mankind "by ties stronger than those of blood." Yielding to this instinct is frequently accompanied by pain, but not by aversion. It would seem that these experiences of pain would eventually blunt the benevolent impulse. "But the author of our nature has not left his work imperfect," Kames wrote. "He has given us this noble principle entire, without a counter-balance, so as to have a vigorous and universal operation. Far from having any aversion to pain, occasioned by

60 Ibid., 9-15.
social principles, we reflect upon such pain with satisfaction, and are willing
to submit to it upon all occasions with a cheerfulness and heart-liking, just as
much as if it were a real pleasure. 61

In summary, Lord Kames believed that human behavior is influenced by
both the pleasure-pain principle, operating from reflection and reason, and
natural affections which operate instinctively. He believed the latter to be
more influential. Of the natural affections, the most noble is compassion or
benevolence. He believed that man is "imbued with a principle of universal
benevolence" and wrote that "sympathy with our fellow-creatures is a principle
implanted in the breast of every man." 62 It is the universal and constant
bond that exists among the members of the human race. Kames, like Hutcheson,
recognized that though benevolence is universal, it is not "equally directed to
all men" and he conceded that it "gradually decreases, according to the dis-
tance of the object." But nature, he wrote, "to supply the want of benevolence
towards distant objects," has given power to abstract conceptions like religion,
country, and mankind "to raise benevolence or publick spirit in the mind."
This enabling trait in human nature serves "to excite us to generous and
benevolent actions, of the most exalted kind; not confined to particulars, but
grasping whole societies, towns, countries, kingdoms, nay, all mankind."
This universal system of benevolence, he concluded, "which is really founded
in human nature, and not the invention of man, is infinitely better contrived to

62 Ibid., 68, 82.
advance the good and happiness of mankind, than any Utopian system that ever has been produced, by the warmest imagination."63

Jefferson embraced these arguments by the Scottish sentimentalists that man is naturally benevolent. He believed that compassion and generosity are "innate elements of the human constitution."64 He believed that "every human mind feels pleasure in doing good to another."65 And in a passage that could serve as an abstract of Kames' first essay, Jefferson declared his conviction that nature has implanted in the heart of man "a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feel and succor their distresses."66

This declaration could accurately be described as the first article of faith in what Adrienne Koch has called Jefferson's "religion of humane morality."67 Though the record is at best cryptic, sometimes puzzling, and more often frustratingly silent in its revelation of Jefferson's religious beliefs, there is one area that is perfectly clear. He believed that the fundamental teaching of all religions is ethical, and more specifically, that the central thrust of Jesus' teaching was in the area of moral duties and relationships. He gave a great

63 Ibid., 82-86.

64 TJ to Dupont de Nemours, Apr. 24, 1816, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 487-488.

65 TJ to John Adams, Oct. 14, 1815, Ibid., XV, 76.

66 TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Ibid., XIV, 138-144.

deal of thought to the latter, especially during the years of his presidency, and consciously or unconsciously, he was formulating in his own mind an interesting correlation of sentimentalist and Christian ethics.

Jefferson described Jesus as a reformer. He believed that one of Jesus's most important achievements was the reformation of both the philosophical and theological ethical principles established by the ancient philosophers of Greece and Rome, and of Moses. Jefferson's criticism of the moral doctrines of Pythagoras, Epicurus, Epictetus, Socrates, Cicero, Seneca, and Antoninus was temperate; he indeed believed that only one blinded by prejudice could deny them the great degree of merit that they deserved. Their defect, in Jefferson's opinion, was that they were too self-centered. "Their philosophy," he wrote, "went chiefly to the government of our passions, so far as respected ourselves, and the procuring our own tranquillity. In our duties to others they were short and deficient. They extended their cares scarcely beyond our own kindred and friends individually, and our country in the abstract." His criticism of Moses was more severe. He believed that he "had bound the Jews to many idle ceremonies, mummeries, and observances, of no effect towards producing the social utilities which constitute the essence of virtue." In both instances, Jefferson had detected and criticized the lack of social benevolence as a basic force in their ethical theories.

He believed that it was this orientation that Jesus attacked in his brief ministry. Jesus offered, in contrast to their self-centeredness, a philosophy of morals that "embraced with charity and philanthropy our neighbors, our countrymen, and the whole family of mankind." In place of the teaching of
Moses that "instilled into his people the most antisocial spirit towards other nations; . . . [Jesus] preached philanthropy and universal charity and benevolence." This benevolent moral theory had been "disfigured by the corruptions of schismatizing followers," Jefferson warned, "who have found an interest in sophisticating and perverting the simple doctrines he taught, by engrafting on them the mysticisms of a Grecian sophist, frittering them into subtleties, and obscuring them with jargon." But when these "artificial vestments in which they have been muffled by priests . . . as instruments of riches and power to themselves" have been stripped off, there will be found remaining "the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man."

It was its emphasis on benevolence that led Jefferson to judge Jesus' system of morality "more perfect than those of any of the ancient philosophers."\(^{68}\) It was the same emphasis that led him, late in life, to blend the ethical theory of Jesus and that of the sentimentalists into an indistinct whole as revealed in the following passage in a letter to John Adams:

> If by religion we are to understand sectarian dogmas, in which no two of them agree, then your exclamation on them is just, "that this would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it." But if the moral precepts, innate in man, and made a part of his physical constitution, as necessary for a social being, if the sublime doctrines of philanthropism and deism taught us by Jesus of Nazareth, in which all agree, constitute

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\(^{68}\) TJ to Dr. Joseph Priestley, Apr. 9, 1803, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, X, 374-376; TJ to Edward Dowse, Esq., Apr. 19, 1803, Ibid., 376-378; TJ to Dr. Benjamin Rush, Apr. 21, 1803, Ibid., X, 379-385; TJ to Thomas Leiper, Jan. 21, 1809, Ibid., XII, 236-238; TJ to John Adams, Oct. 13, 1813, Ibid., XIII, 387-394; TJ to William Short, Aug. 4, 1820, Ibid., XV, 257-264.
true religion, then without it, this would be, as you again say, "something not fit to be named even, indeed a hell." 69

Jefferson subscribed to the Christian code of morality, in the form taught by Jesus, largely because it confirmed what he had already come to believe about the nature of man, i.e., that benevolence was a natural impulse in the human constitution.

The sentimentalist's appraisal of human nature, which attributed to man natural tendencies toward virtue and benevolence, attracted criticism from several different quarters. The potentially most destructive criticism was directed at the most apparent weakness. The sentimentalist theory declared man to be strongly motivated by an innate sense of benevolence toward his fellowman. This analysis of human nature was attacked with wrath by both cynics and skeptics. Neither their immediate experience nor their knowledge of man's historical record of atrocious behavior suggested to them such a natural sense. In response to Shaftesbury's theory of natural benevolence, Mandeville countered that "there is nothing so universally sincere upon earth as the love which all creatures, that are capable of any, bear to themselves; and there is no love but what implies a care to preserve the thing beloved, so there is nothing more sincere in any creature than his will, wishes and endeavours to preserve himself. This," he insisted, "is the law of nature."1 Shaftesbury had written that it was unreasonable to deny that man had a strong natural affection toward the good of the species or common nature. But Mandeville and others found it more unreasonable to propose than to deny such

1Mandeville, Fable, 156.
affections. They countered that it was man's so-called base passions, pride, lust, cruelty, that accounted for his behavior and indeed the course of history. And, he wrote, "if we consult history both ancient and modern, and take a view of what has past in the world, we shall find that human nature since the fall of Adam has always been the same." Closely related to this criticism founded on the evidence of history was another which attacked the sentimentalist concept with the argument that, even in contemporary experience, the proposal of universal benevolence would not stand examination. A cogent and representative statement of this criticism is that of Henry Saint-John, Viscount Bolingbroke: "We were not of Council with the Eternal Wisdom, when he resolved to form the human System, and therefore cannot presume to say that any principle is innate, till we find by Observation that it is common to all men, and constant in its Operation. If it be not common to all men," he continued, "if it doth not act upon some Occasions where it ought to act, good Sense will not let us attribute its Effects to an innate and fixed Principle." Bolingbroke did not believe that benevolence was a universal instinct in the human species as the sentimentalists claimed. The record of human cruelty and barbarism, including such primitive practices as raising children for sacrificial slaughter, gladiatorism as a source of human amusement, and the long record of Christian carnage, extended in new and modified forms into his own time. And "an innate Principle" he concluded, "which is not universal is an Absurdity."  

\[2\] Ibid., 178.  
This was a serious challenge to the validity of the whole moral sense concept. The answer of the Scottish philosophers is the third principle that Jefferson found attractive in the sentimentalist theory, and it provides an additional indication of his responsiveness to their philosophical guidance.

The question that was debated is whether there is a faculty natural to man which persuades him to a life of morality and benevolence. And if it is held that there is such a moral sense, how can one account for the diversity of behavior that exists and that has always been a part of man's history. The sentimentalist philosophers had proposed the reality of the moral sense with its implication of natural benevolence. The cynics had countered that compassion was no more natural to man than cruelty. "The only innate Principle," Bolingbroke wrote, "and the main Spring of all our Movements is the Love of our Being, the Desire of Pleasure, Aversion to Pain." There seemed to be no dearth of evidence to support his accusation.

The Scots had little choice but to acknowledge man's historical record of inhumanity, but they argued that bad conduct is not evidence against the reality of the moral sense. Hutcheson, for example, declared that "the absurd Practices which prevail in the World, are much better Arguments that Men have no Reason than that they have no Moral Sense of Beauty in Actions." But this kind of answer was more of a protest than a satisfactory rebuttal to the challenge. The Scots were forced either to give a better account of the

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4 Bolingbroke, Reflections, 33, 69.
5 Hutcheson, An Inquiry, 207-212.
diversity of moral behavior or abandon the concept of the moral sense.

Of course, none of the sentimentalists, though they had proposed the universal existence of the moral sense as an innate faculty, had claimed that the good side of man would always prevail. All of them had acknowledged a diversity of human conduct and a diversity of moral principles. But these diversities, they held, emerged from wrong judgment, from the confusion of real and apparent good.

Shaftesbury proposed that man's behavior was influenced and governed by a mixture of affections or passions. These he categorized as the natural affections, which tended toward the public good, the self affections, which tended toward the private good, and the unnatural affections, which tended to be contrary to either public or private good. He believed that the majority of mankind are in their daily lives governed by a mixture of natural and self affections, each enjoying varying degrees of dominance in flux, and together producing a nature reflecting the relative ascendance of these impulses. He believed that for the majority of men the natural affections would predominate, but he also recognized that in some the self affections would be the stronger and that this condition would be reflected in a vicious nature. This would not indicate the absence of natural affections or of a moral sense, but rather an alteration, for one reason or another, of the usual mixture of man's natural inclinations. And, he noted, it would be impossible for these natural affections to be effaced "without much force and violence" or to be "struck out of the

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6Shaftesbury, An Inquiry, 286.
natural temper, even by means of the most extravagant belief or opinion in the world. 7

It was those tendencies in a minority of men, or in an historically primitive context, that were contrary to the advantage of both the species in general and the creature in particular, that were so often used by the critics of the moral sense theory. Shaftesbury conceded that some men were governed by unnatural affections, and he was hard pressed to account for this while still retaining the basic thesis of a universal moral sense.

History shows, he admitted, that "this has been the reigning passion of many tyrants and barbarous nations" and even in the present it "belongs in some degree to such tempers as have thrown off that courteousness of behaviour which retains in us a just reverence of mankind, and prevents the growth of harshness and brutality."

Shaftesbury attempted to account for these moral perversions in two ways. There was first of all the possibility of mental imbalance. In these cases the moral sense is overruled by their insanity. But such a condition would account for only a small minority. By far the larger number of cases of unnatural affections could be attributed, according to Shaftesbury, to the lack of opportunity for the development of the natural affections. The distempers of nature described above are almost always "peculiar to the more savage nations" and are "a plain characteristic of uncivilised manners and barbarity." These passions do not enter "where civility or affable manners have the least place."

7 Ibid., 261.
There might be some undesirable traits in civilized man, but "such is the nature of what we call good breeding, that in the midst of many other corruptions it admits not of inhumanity or savage pleasure." By introducing this explanation for some of the diversity of human behavior, in both an historical and geographical sense, Shaftesbury was attributing a developmental quality to the moral sense faculty.

Hutcheson too acknowledged the diversity of human behavior, but, like Shaftesbury, argued that this did not invalidate the moral sense theory. He wrote that men frequently perform actions that tend toward their own harm, but that we do not from this infer that they are void of self-love. In the same sense, we should not infer that, because there are some actions performed which tend toward public harm, the performers are void either of a sense of morals or a desire for the public good. "And it is strange," he continued, "that Reason is universally allow'd to Men, notwithstanding all the stupid, ridiculous Opinions receiv'd in many Places, and yet absurd Practices, founded upon those very Opinions, shall seem an Argument against any moral Sense."

To Hutcheson the matter was plain. Man's irregular behavior was caused either by his mistaken appraisal of the tendency of his actions, or by the victory of his violent passions over the voice within. But rather than destroying the theory of a moral sense faculty, this only proved "that sometimes there may be some more violent Motive to Action than a Sense of moral Good; or that Men, by Passions, may become blind even to their own Interest." In other

\[\text{\textsuperscript{8}}\text{Ibid.}, 330-336.\]
words, Hutcheson did not believe that the critics had invalidated the moral sense theory. He did not believe that the universe was large enough, or the variety of character varied enough, to yield even a single person who was totally indifferent in regard to actions in interpersonal relationships. He wrote that the idea of a totally "ill-natur'd Villain" is incomprehensible. There were, no doubt, many instances of irregular behavior in man's record, but these were to be accounted for by reason of the perversion of his natural inclinations by religious or some other persuasion. Hutcheson believed that the crimes that fill history arise, not from malice or a delight in the misery of others, but rather from "an injudicious unreasonable Enthusiasm" for what is at best "some kind of limited Virtue." 9

Of the three philosophers under study, it was Lord Kames who gave the most spirited defense of the moral sense theory against the attacks of the critics. They ask, he wrote, "why was not every man endued with so strong a sense of morality, as to be completely authoritative over all his principles of action, which would prevent much remorse to himself, and much mischief to others?" Their question was, of course, inspired by the reality of irregular behavior observed both historically and in their fellowman. Kames replied that to have so created man would have resulted in a species unknown to our experience. "To complain of a defect in the moral sense," he explained, "is to complain, that we are not perfect creatures. And if this complaint be well founded, we may, with equal justice, complain, that our understanding is

9 Hutcheson, An Inquiry, 196-212.
but moderate, and that, in general, our powers and faculties are limited. Why should it be urged as an objection," he continued, "that the moral sense is imperfect, when all our senses, internal and external are imperfect? In short, if this complaint be, in any measure, just, it must go the length . . . to prove, that it is not consistent with the benevolence of the Deity, to create such a being as man."10

This answer was again more of a protest than an explanation. Kames gave a much more satisfactory defense by proposing an evolutionary or developmental capability for the moral sense faculty in man. It was his goal to show that the moral sense is natural, innate, and universal, but that it exists in varying degrees of development, and consequently authority, depending upon the experience of the subject observed.

In "the original situation of mankind," Kames proposed, "when the earth was uncultivated, and in a great measure barren," the necessities of life were scarce and difficult to obtain. Because of the very tenuous character of existence, man was rightly motivated by the principle of self-preservation. He was entitled to supply his needs in any way that he could without any condemnation from his moral sense. The competition for the means of sustaining life created perpetual discord, and it was the consequent barbarity that formed the human character. Man's most malevolent principles were encouraged. In this climate of primitive rudeness and illiteracy, man was governed by his most basic appetites, and thus his nature was inevitably cruel.

10Kames, Essays, 377-378.
This was, according to Kames, a portrait of primitive man in a "historical context and also of modern man in a primitive civilization." But this is not evidence that even the greatest of savages are destitute of the moral sense. "Their defect rather lies in the weakness of their general principles of action, which terminate in objects too complex for savages readily to comprehend." Rather than indicating an absence of an innate moral sense, their irregular behavior is the result of the lack of development of this faculty.

This development of the moral sense in the human species was shown by Kames to be recapitulated in the life of every individual. All men are governed by passions and appetites in their infancy, and it is only as they begin to form complex and general ideas that they begin to feel the urges of benevolent affections. "We acquire by degrees the taste of public good, and of being useful in life." As this occurs "the selfish passions are tamed and subdued, and the social affections gain the ascendant."

Kames conceived his larger task to be the analysis of human actions with the view of determining the "internal frame" from which comes human behavior, i.e., the development of a psychology of human behavior. 11 In pursuing this task, he developed a rather elaborate, if mechanical, appraisal of human psychology. "Man is a complex machine," he discovered, "composed of various principles of motion, which may be conceived as so many springs and weights, counteracting and balancing one another. These being accurately

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adjusted, the movement of life is beautiful, because regular and uniform. But if some springs or weights be withdrawn, those which remain, acting now without opposition from their antagonist forces, will disorder the balance, and disorder the whole machine." Kames recognized that man is subject to contrary impulses, but believed that if there were a proper equilibrium between these impulses, the result would be an essentially moral being. On the other hand, if one of the "weights" were removed, or if one of the "springs" were weak, and the essential equilibrium was thus disrupted, it would be reflected in inconstant and perverse conduct. As in the case of savage man, the moral sense would lack authority in such a case to overcome the imbalance and command obedience.

Perverse behavior then does not reflect the absence of a moral sense, but rather, in the general scheme of human psychology, a relative weakness of that faculty in the situation where a disequilibrium of passions exists. Kames always maintained that the moral sense is "rooted in the nature of man," but he also proposed that it could be significantly refined "by culture and education." This was an important point, and one that was especially appealing to Jefferson. Kames believed that one of the great advantages of modern over primitive civilization was in the opportunity for the development of the authority of the moral sense through education and imitation. This is not education in the normal sense, for Kames constantly maintained that only the "shining light of intuition," not reason, possessed authority in matters of moral perception. ¹² He meant

¹²Ibid., 110, 164-165.
an "education" of the moral sense by its exposure to higher realms of moral activity and approbation. To illustrate he wrote that "the most polished nations differ only from savages in refinement of taste . . . . Hence it is, that many actions, which make little impression upon savages, appear to us elegant and beautiful." And, on the other hand, "actions, which give them no pain, raise in us aversion and disgust." To illustrate this, he gave the example of the treatment of prisoners. The savage, accustomed to acts of cruelty, would feel little or no aversion to putting an enemy to death in cold blood, whereas such an act would shock a more civilized person "to the highest degree." This difference according to Kames, was simply a reflection of the difference of the refinement of their respective moral faculties. "The operations of the moral sense in a savage, bear no proportion to its operations in a person, who stands possessed of all the advantages which human nature is susceptible of by refined education." The refinement of the moral sense results in an ever stronger feeling of immorality on the occasion of every vicious action and in the end produces a more delicate and benevolent nature. 13

Kames thus explained the diversity of human behavior as the result, not of the absence of a moral sense, but of varying degrees of development of that innate universal faculty. A limited development, due to the conditions of a primitive society, resulted in only limited authority over the natural passions. The educational and other advantages of a more advanced culture contributed to the refinement of the moral sense which would in turn overrule the basic

13 Kames, Essays, 138-147.
appetites and result in socially approved behavior.

Jefferson too was forced to wrestle with the contradictions recognized by Bolingbroke and others. He was too familiar with history to be blinded by a naive appraisal of human nature. He was aware of human weaknesses, and the record of the good nature of man having been undermined by various evil inclinations and temptations. But, like the Scots, Jefferson argued that this was not evidence against the existence of a moral sense. "Some men," he wrote, "are born without the organs of sight, or of hearing, or without hands. Yet it would be wrong to say that man is born without these faculties, and sight, hearing, and hands may with truth enter into the general definition of man."

Likewise, by some unexplainable twist of nature, some men are born with such mental and moral defects as to render them different from the general species. But certainly "there is no rule without exceptions," he continued, and "it is false reasoning which converts exceptions into the general rule." Following Hutcheson, he believed that "the want or imperfection of the moral sense in some men, like the want or imperfection of the senses of sight and hearing in others, is no proof that it is a general characteristic of the species."

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14 Jefferson was probably introduced to Bolingbroke's writings while at the College of William and Mary. There are lengthy quotations from his "philosoph. works" in Jefferson's "Literary Bible," and he appears on the latter's recommended reading lists as early as 1771 and as late as 1821. In addition Jefferson owned a copy of Reflections concerning innate moral Principles (1752) cited above, which was part of the collection sold to Congress. Sowerby, Catalogue, II, 4; TJ to Robert Skipwith, Aug. 3, 1771, Boyd Collection, I, 76-81; TJ to Francis Eppes, Jan. 19, 1821, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XV, 304-306. Also see Chapter 5 above.

15 TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 138-144.
these protests did not satisfactorily rebut the criticisms that had been leveled at the moral sense theory. Jefferson, like the Scottish writers, was forced to account for the diversity of moral behavior that existed among men.

Like his Scottish mentors, he believed that human behavior was influenced by many different passions and affections, some of which tended toward the public good and some toward private interests, some benevolent and some selfish. And like them he believed that "the perfection of the moral character" was to be found in "a just equilibrium of all the passions." The corollary to this is that irregular behavior is the result of an imbalance or disequilibrium of the natural passions. In those very rare cases where there appeared to be the want of a moral sense, or where it was so extremely weak as to seem essentially inoperative, Jefferson believed that the defect could be alleviated or corrected by education. By this he meant that, if the condition "is not too profound to be eradicated," appeals to reason or intelligent self-interest might convince those "so unhappily conformed" to do good and eschew evil. For example, he believed that moralists could demonstrate that honesty promotes self-interest in the long run, and preachers could make a strong appeal to their desire for divine rewards or fear of divine retribution. This indicates Jefferson's belief that, though the moral sense is superior to reason in matters of moral judgment, reason will normally confirm the finding of the moral faculty. It also explains his description of religion as a "moral supplement" in his classification

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16TJ to John Adams, April 8, 1816, Ibid., 466-471.

17TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Ibid., 138-144.
of ethical knowledge discussed earlier.

In any event, the want of a moral sense would be very rarely encountered. The problem of diverse behavior among men stemmed not from the want, but rather the imperfection, of this innate monitor. Thus for Jefferson, as for Shaftesbury and the Scots, the problem of diverse behavior could be most effectively resolved by the attribution of a developmental quality to the moral sense.

Hutcheson wrote that "as some others of our immediate powers are capable of culture and improvement, so is this moral sense. . . . As we improve and correct a low taste for harmony by enuring the ear to finer compositions; a low taste for beauty, by presenting the finer works, which yield a higher pleasure; so we improve our moral taste by presenting larger systems, to our mind." 18 Early in his adult life Jefferson copied a passage from Kames' Historical Law Tracts that said that "moral duties, originally weak and feeble, acquire great strength by refinement of manners." 19 Jefferson wrote to his nephew, Peter Carr, that the moral sense "is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body." He cautioned his kin to "above all things lose no occasion of exercising your dispositions to be grateful, to be generous, to be charitable, to be humane, to be true, just, firm, orderly, courageous etc. Consider every act of this kind as

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18 Hutcheson, A System of Moral Philosophy (1755), Reprints of Economic Classics (New York, 1968), 59-60.

19 In his Commonplace Book, 103.
an exercise which will strengthen your moral faculties, and increase your worth. "20 As early as 1771 he wrote that even the benevolent emotions aroused by reading fiction "is an exercise of our virtuous dispositions; and the dispositions of the mind, like limbs of the body, acquire strength by exercise." Such exercise, he continued, "produces a habit of thinking and acting virtuously."21 He obviously believed that the moral sense could be developed by use, or "exercise."

Jefferson, like Lord Kames, recognized that an advanced culture encouraged the development of the moral sense, and that so long as the progress of civilization was diverse there would be diversity of moral judgments and behavior. He wrote that "men living in different countries, under different circumstances, different habits and regimes, may have different utilities; the same act, therefore may be [judged] useful and consequently virtuous in one country which is injurious and vicious in another differently circumstanced." He believed that the development of the moral sense was directly responsive to the needs of a culture in its various stages of refinement. He rejected, for this reason, the arguments that there could be no moral sense unless its judgments were absolute and universally consistent.22

Though ethical relativism in a trans-cultural context did not trouble

20 T.J. to Peter Carr, Aug. 10, 1787, Boyd Collection, XII, 14-19.


22 T.J. to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 138-144.
Jefferson, the same concept in a trans-racial context posed a perplexing dilemma. Most of Jefferson's biographers have described the contradictions or confusion that exists in his statements about race, and the attendant subject of slavery.\(^23\) There is clear evidence that he never totally resolved the conflict between his beliefs about human nature and his observations of what appeared to be racial differences. One of the sources of his mental dilemma is directly related to his belief in the universality of the moral sense.

Jefferson's beliefs about race were shaped by both direct observation and studies of writings on the subject. He accepted the "scientific" concept of a single creation for the human species, and accounted for the physical and mental differences that he observed between white, red, and black men as representing "varieties" within the species. The variety within species concept had already become an accepted principle in the taxonomy of animals.

In describing racial differences, Jefferson constructed a racial hierarchy based on physical, mental, and moral criteria. On the basis of physical and mental endowments, he appears to have concluded that the American Indian occupied a position between the white and black races. Contrary to some European scientific opinion, the Indian was described by Jefferson as physically strong and sexually potent. He is brave, when bravery is called for; he endures

torture with firmness and meets death without fear. The Indian is affectionate to his family, to the point of extreme indulgence toward his children, and is strong and faithful in his friendships. Though they attempt to appear "superior to human events," they are in reality keenly sensitive. The Indian possesses a vivacity and activity of mind equal to that of the white man in the same situation. They have demonstrated artistic and oratorical talents that, though uncultivated, prove strong sentiment and elevated imagination. Taking all these things into consideration, Jefferson concluded that the American Indian is formed "in mind as well as in body" on the same principles as the white race. He indeed anticipated the early political amalgamation and eventual physical amalgamation of the red and white Americans into a single people.

Using the same physical and mental criteria, Jefferson found that nature had made a greater distinction between white and black men than between white and red men. 24 The physical differences that he described, ranging from color to body odor, were, he said, "fixed in nature," and seemed to consign the Negro to the lowest realm within the species. One could easily deduce from his description in Notes on the State of Virginia that he found the natural Negroid features repugnant. He praised the superior beauty of both red and white and wrote that if "the circumstances of superior beauty, is thought worthy of attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man?" He seemed to believe that the monotony of the Negro's

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24Winthrop D. Jordan believes that "confronted by three races in America he [Jefferson] determinedly turned three into two by transforming the Indian into a degraded yet basically noble brand of white man." White Over Black, 477.
color matched what he suspected was a monotony of emotions behind their "immovable veil of black."

Jefferson conceded that the Negro was at least as brave as the white man, and probably even more adventuresome, but this, he wrote, probably proceeds "from a want of forethought, which prevents their seeing a danger till it be present." His appraisal of Negro sensibilities was in harmony with the prevailing estimates of the eighteenth century. He believed that they were "more ardent after their female," but that their love is more a sexual impulse than the "tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation" which characterizes the love between the male and female members of the white race. He said that the Negro is less sensitive to grief or affliction, and is able to soon forget both. "In general," he concluded, "their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection."

Turning to the mental faculties, Jefferson declared the Negro to be equal to the white in the power of memory, but much inferior in the powers of reason and imagination. The dullness of the latter faculty emphasized to him the inferiority of the Negro in comparison to the Indian. He had detected evidences of great imagination in the Indian which only awaited cultivation, but, he wrote, "never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never saw even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture." He noted their reputation for musical gifts, but cautioned that "whether they will be equal to the composition of a more extensive run of melody, or of complicated harmony, is yet to be proved." He also noted that misery is often the inspiration for great poetry, but that though there is among the blacks misery
enough, there has been no poetry.

Jefferson recognized that it would be unfair to make such comparisons between the white man and an African native who had never had the opportunities or inspiration of a civilized environment. But he denied that the same reasoning applied to a comparison of the white man and the American Negro. It would, of course, be proper to make allowances even in this case for differences in education and of the different spheres in which they moved. But having made this allowance the comparison was proper because, in the general sense, the American Negro walked "on the same stage with the whites." Jefferson believed that the mental disabilities of the American Negro as compared to the white man or the Indian resulted from nature rather than their circumstances. He offered two proofs. First, the slaves of the Romans were burdened by the same discouraging circumstances as the American slaves, yet the slaves in Rome were often their rarest artists because "they were of the race of whites." Second, every instance of the mixture of black and white in procreation has been observed to result in the improvement of the blacks in both body and mind, and this, he concluded, "proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life."25

It is clear that Jefferson believed the Negro, on the basis of both physical and mental criteria, to be inferior to both the white and red races of men. The slighter inferiority of the Indian to the white could be attributed to the lack of

the opportunities of a more civilized environment. Given time, he believed that the Indian genius would equal that of the white man. But Jefferson could not be as generous in the case of the American Negroes. He was uneasy in his judgment of the latter. He admitted that it was hazardous to affirm their inherent inferiority in the faculties of reason and imagination. But his final judgment, couched in the protection of "suspicion," was that "the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind."26

To have maintained this hierarchical pattern of relative strengths by a moral criterion would have conflicted in some degree with Jefferson's pronouncements on the universality of the moral sense. Thus one finds that, as he turned to this criterion, the hierarchy gives way to an image of general equality in the power of moral perception. The Indians, he wrote, are able to live in a society without government, laws, or coercive power, controlled only by "their manners, and that moral sense of right and wrong, which, like the sense of tasting and feeling in every man, makes a part of his nature." This easy compliment reflects the eighteenth-century representation of the American Indian as the noble savage.27 The more immediate and widespread contact between white

26 Ibid., 138.

27 Bernard W. Sheehan has noted that "the moral sense not only provided the basis on which white and Indian might come together but also, from the white man's point of view, put such relations in a moral context. The unity of mankind became more than a fact, it became a moral imperative." Seeds of Extinction, 28.
and black Americans along the eastern seaboard apparently necessitated, in Jefferson's mind, a fuller explanation. He wrote that though nature had been less bountiful to the Negro race in "the endowments of the Head," he believed that "in those of the heart she will be found to have done them justice." Perhaps anticipating objections, he went on to explain that the apparent disposition to theft among the Negroes "must be ascribed to their situation, and not to any depravity of the moral sense."28 Their membership in a society whose laws of property were for the benefit of only the propertied race could hardly be expected to elicit a respect for property from those who had none. The basis of the law of equity is reciprocation of rights, he argued, and the denial of reciprocation is by common sense a just cause for a denial of the attendant standards of moral right and wrong. This, Jefferson concluded, "is neither new, nor peculiar to the color of the blacks." He noted that in spite of this circumstance "we find among them numerous instances of the most rigid integrity, and as many as among their better instructed masters, of benevolence, gratitude, and unshaken fidelity."

I think it is clear that if Jefferson had based his theories of race on physical and mental criteria only, his conclusions would not have been a matter of confusion or doubt for either himself or his interpreters. But this was not the case. His psychology of human nature required consideration of the additional criter-

28 As Winthrop D. Jordan has noted, Jefferson's divergent conclusions about environmental influence on the Negro's intellectual and moral strengths were consistent with his belief in the independence of the intellectual and moral faculties. White Over Black, 439-440.
tion of moral sensitivity. And because this was true, he felt a very real reluctance to insist upon Negro inferiority when such a conclusion would not only imply the absence of a moral faculty but would consequently "degrade a whole race of men from the rank in the scale of beings which their Creator may perhaps have given them." He believed that the moral sense is as natural to the Negro as to any other race of men, and that it would be as universally evident if the proper encouragement and example were a part of their social environment.

The equality of moral sensitivity notwithstanding, Jefferson could not afford the Negro equal citizenship in the new nation. The basis of his denial was his judgment of their mental incapabilities, perhaps unconsciously reinforced by a personal revulsion to the physical features of their race. This seems to call into question the weight that he had professed to give to moral sensitivity as the

29 TJ to Chastellux, June 7, 1785, Boyd Collection, VIII, 184-186; TJ to Col. Benjamin Hawkins, Feb. 18, 1803, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, X, 360-365; TJ to Gov. William H. Harrison, Feb. 27, 1803, Ibid., 368-373; TJ to Baron Alexander Von Humboldt, Dec. 6, 1813, Ibid., XIV, 20-25. Daniel J. Boorstin believes that Jefferson "was not sure enough of the irrelevance of the Negro's color to assign him the same ancient parents as the white man; yet he was too much of an equalitarian to suggest that the Negro might have been created a distinct species." Lost World, 93. Erik H. Erikson attributes Jefferson's "passionate and diffident attempts to liberate himself from prejudices then apparently vindicated by the knowledge available to him and yet experienced as a human tragedy" to the psychological concept of pseudospeciation, i.e., that in the formulation of a new identity for America it was necessary to demonstrate the superiority of his own species. "At that time he seems to have needed for his new consciousness the certainty that white is beautiful, and that the nobility of emotion he saw in the white face guaranteed both moral power and restraint in the usurpation of power." Dimensions of a New Identity: The 1973 Jefferson Lectures in the Humanities (New York, 1974), 27-28, 113.
prime attribute of a social being. But Jefferson believed that an educated citizenry was essential to the success of democratic government. If the blacks were inherently incapable of becoming educated, they could never make good citizens. Jefferson had anticipated criticism of his "liberal" views on slavery contained in the Notes, but his widely read remarks about the Negroes elicited the most spirited criticism from defenders of the black race. He reluctantly answered at least some of those who took public issue with his views. His replies were consistently couched in terms of a hope that time would prove him wrong. "Nobody wishes more than I do," he wrote, "to see . . . proofs . . . that nature has given to our black brethren, talents equal to those of the other colors of men, and that the appearance of a want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence, both in Africa and America. I can add with truth," he continued in a statement that confirmed his contrary belief, "that nobody wishes more ardently to see a good system commenced for raising the condition both of their body and mind to what it ought to be, as fast as the imbecility of their present existence, and other circumstances which cannot be neglected, will admit." Almost two decades later he was protesting in the same vein. "Be assured that no person living wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a complete refutation of the doubts I have myself entertained and expressed on the grade of understanding allotted to them by nature, and to find that in this respect they are on a par with ourselves." Both of these letters were later described by Jefferson as "soft answers" intended to conceal the harshness of his convictions. Obviously the passage of time had not brought any evidence to change his mind since he had so definitively outlined his beliefs in the Notes.
Jefferson, in the early 1780s believed that the mental inferiority of the Negro was a powerful obstacle to the abolition of slavery. Though he recognized other obstacles more closely related to the economic fortunes and fears of the southern aristocracy, his judgment of the understanding given to the Negro by nature remained for him, despite his protestations, an undeniable argument against full citizenship. And despite his oft repeated affirmation of moral sensitivity as the prime qualification for a harmonious society, in the case of the American Negro, this quality was of insufficient import to overcome the other disability.  

His doubts about the Negro race notwithstanding, the developmental quality of the moral sense was an important part of the foundation of Jefferson's general optimism about the future and the progress of the human race. Though he should not be labeled an eternal optimist, he believed that the historical record demonstrated a general strengthening of the moral sense which was reflected in the progressive growth of benevolence in human affairs. There were moments of discouragement when the contemporary record seemed to expose man as the "only animal which devours his own kind," and when "civilization seems to have no other effect on him than to teach him to pursue the principle of bellum omnium in omnia."  

But on the whole, there was considerable improvement,

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31 TJ to Edward Carrington, Jan. 16, 1787, Boyd Collection, XI, 48-50; TJ to James Madison, Jan. 1, 1797, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, IX, 357-360. Boorstin, as well as others, focuses upon these statements to prove Jefferson's uncomplimentary view of human nature. Lost World, 173-179. I believe that such emphasis is in error, simply because it ignores the far greater testimony in favor of a contrasting conclusion.
and not only did he affirm at age seventy-three and again at eighty-two that he
would agree to live his years over, but hinted that he would like to be able to
return from the grave once in awhile "to see how things have gone on."

Jefferson believed that the general improvement in human nature was
evident in a growing harmony in interpersonal and international relations. In
one debate with the more sceptical John Adams he went so far as to declare that
no definite limits could be assigned to this progress. 33 Kames wrote that the
so-called law of nations is "no other but gradual refinements of the original
law of nature, accommodating itself to the improved state of mankind. The law
of nature, which is the law of our nature, cannot be stationary. It must vary
with the nature of man, and consequently refine gradually as nature refines."
In illustration he wrote at some length about how the treatment of prisoners of
war had become more humane in modern times. "Putting an enemy to death in
cold blood," he wrote, "is now looked upon with distaste and horror, and there-
fore as immoral; tho' it was not always so in the same degree." When Jefferson
read this, he paused to write in the margins of the appropriate pages:

this is a remarkeable instance of improvement in the moral sense. the
putting to death captives in war was a general practice among savage
nations. when men became more humanized the captive was indulged with
life on condition of holding it in perpetual slavery; a condition exacted on
this supposition, that the victor had right to take his life, and consequently
to commute it for his services. at this stage of refinement were the Greeks
about the time of the Trojan war. at this day it is perceived we have no

32 TJ to John Adams, April 8, 1816, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 466-
471; TJ to Abigail Adams, Jan. 11, 1817, Ibid., XV, 95-97; TJ to addressee
unknown, Dec. 18, 1825, Ibid., XVI, 139-140.

33 TJ to John Adams, June 15, 1813, Ibid., XIII, 252-256.
right to take the life of an enemy unless where our own preservation renders it necessary. but the ceding of his life in commutation for service admits there was no necessity to take it, because you have not done it. and if there was neither necessity nor right to take his life then is there no right to his service in commutation for it. this doctrine is acknowledged by later writers, Montesquieu, Burlamaqui, etc. who yet suppose it just to require a ransom from the captive. one advance further in refinement will relinquish this also. if we have no right to the life of a captive, we have no right to his labor; if none to his labor we have none to his absent property which is but the fruit of that labor. in fact, ransom is but commutation in another form.34

In a letter to Patrick Henry regarding the treatment of British prisoners during the Revolution, he repeated Kames' thesis when he wrote that "the practice . . . of modern nations of treating captive enemies with politeness and generosity is not only delightful in contemplation but really interesting to all the world."35

One further example of Jefferson's belief in the progressive refinement of human nature is to be found in his contribution to the revisal of the Virginia laws in the late 1770s. He told his old mentor, George Wythe, one of the members of the legislative committee that was charged with the task of revision, that he disliked the inclusion of the doctrine of lex talionis because, though it was a restitution of the common law, it "will be revolting to the humanised feelings of modern times."36

For Jefferson, as for the Scottish writers, the attribution of a developmental nature to the moral sense provided a resolution of the problems that

34Kames, Essays, 147-149. See Jefferson's personal copy in Rare Book Collection, Library of Congress.

35TJ to Patrick Henry, March 27, 1779, Boyd Collection, II, 242.

36TJ to George Wythe, Nov. 1, 1778, Ibid., 230.
arose from the acknowledgement of diverse moral behavior patterns. It allowed him to maintain a steadfast faith in the concept of the moral sense as a universal human faculty which, with a strength corresponding to the degree of its development, urged man to an increasingly benevolent and humane pattern of existence. It seems clear that he embraced the theory of the moral sense in the specific terms that were proposed by the Scottish sentimentalist philosophers. It seems clear also that this was not a case of his having simply accepted the conclusions of a popular philosophy, but rather of his having studied and followed closely both the basic meaning and development of the theory.
CHAPTER VIII
DESTINED FOR SOCIETY

The final idea of the Scottish sentimentalists that Jefferson embraced was one that had experienced considerable refinement between Shaftesbury and Lord Kames. Shaftesbury wrote that man's nature, and his ideas of morality, were shaped by his membership in the species system to which he belonged and ultimately to the universal system of all things. Inherent in this philosophy was the notion that man's natural affections, even the self-affections, tend toward the good of the species. He wrote that the wisdom of Nature "has made it to be according to the private interest and good of every one to work towards the general good, which if a creature ceases to promote, he is actually so far wanting to himself, and ceases to promote his own happiness and welfare." Man cannot, in other words, "be good or useful to himself than as he continues good to society, and to that whole of which he is himself a part." When man's natural constitution is impaired or disordered the result is personal torment. Likewise in the case of society, if the people collectively depart from Nature the result will be social misery. Thus moral virtue, "which of all excellences and beauties is the chief and most amiable; that which is the prop and ornament of human affairs; which upholds communities, maintains union, friendship, and correspondence amongst men; that by which countries, as well as private families, flourish and are happy, and for want of which everything comely, con-
spicuous, great, and worthy, must perish and go to ruin; that single quality, thus beneficial to all society, and to mankind in general is found equally a happiness and good to each creature in particular, and is that by which alone man can be happy, and without which he must be miserable." Shaftesbury's conclusion was that "virtue is the good, and vice the ill of every one."¹

The seed idea contained in this philosophy is that the moral sense as a powerful component of individual human nature is the foundation of a harmonious society. This idea was given considerable refinement by Hutcheson and Kames, culminating in the latter's belief that the primary object of the moral sense is to fit man to live in society.²

Hutcheson, once again expanding on an idea suggested by Shaftesbury, described man's natural benevolence as "the Foundation of all apprehended Excellence in social Virtues." He said that any controversy about any practice could be settled by simply inquiring whether this certain conduct or the contrary will most effectually promote the public good. In other words, morality is determined by the tendency or influence of the action "upon the universal natural Good of Mankind." That kind of action "which produces more Good than Evil in the Whole, is acknowledg'd Good; and what does not, is counted Evil." The morality of the actor, he concluded, is determined by how well he

¹ Shaftesbury, An Inquiry, 337-338.

² Louis Schneider has noted that the Scottish moralists "frequently engaged in what one may call gifted social-psychologizing, talented if not very systematic reflection about man as being endowed with certain traits who is constrained to operate within a social order." The Scottish Moralists on Human Nature and Society (Chicago, 1967), xvi.
makes "a Part of the great System." 3

Having concluded that the morality of an action is determined by its tendency toward the public good, Hutcheson proceeded to develop a calculus of morality by which one could judge between several actions, all of which to some degree met this criterion. He wrote that in comparing the moral quality of given actions to find which of them has the greatest moral excellency, and thus to help us choose the proper action, the moral sense leads us to judge that the virtue of an action is in proportion to the number of persons to whom happiness shall be extended. The obvious conclusion for Hutcheson was that "that Action is best, which procures the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers: and that, worst, which in like manner, occasions Misery." In those instances "when the Consequences of Actions are of a mix'd Nature, partly Advantageous, and partly Pernicious; that Action is good, whose good Effects preponderate the evil, by being useful to many, and pernicious to few; and that, evil, which is otherwise." Hutcheson's calculus of morality employed formulas to measure such variables as self-interest vs. public interest, degree of good vs. degree of evil, ability, intention, etc. But when the final calculations were made, "what then properly constitutes a virtuous Character, is not some few accidental Motions of Compassion, natural Affection, or Gratitude; but such a fix'd Humanity, or Desire of the publick Good of all, to whom our Influence can extend, as uniformly excites us to all Acts of Beneficence, according to our utmost Prudence and Knowledge of the Interests of others: and a strong

3Hutcheson, An Inquiry, 165-166.
Benevolence will not fail to make us careful of informing our selves right, concerning the truest Methods of serving the Interests of Mankind." From all these observations, Hutcheson concluded that the moral sense would recommend as most virtuous those actions that extend the greatest happiness to all those whom their influence can reach. 4

In concluding that benevolence was the foundations of the moral sense, and that all actions could be judged morally good only so far as they were useful to the public good, Hutcheson was amplifying what Shaftesbury had only suggested; i.e., that the moral sense is the foundation of a harmonious society.

While both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson praised the moral sense for its support of benevolence, and alluded to social criteria as the measure of human behavior, it was Lord Kames who added the final refinement of this theme by proclaiming that indeed the divine purpose of the moral sense faculty is to prepare men to live in society. Nowhere is Kames's influence on Jefferson clearer than in the latter's acceptance of this idea. Very early in his career Jefferson noted Kames's study of human nature as a foundation for a philosophy of law, and he copied in his commonplace book the Scottish jurist's observation in Historical Law Tracts that "man, by his nature is fitted for society, and society by it's conveniences is fitted for man." 5 Within a few years this statement defined the sociological dimension of Jefferson's theory of government.

Kames began with the proposition that man is prepared by "the constitution

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4 Ibid., 177-191.
both of his body and mind" to live in society. He asserted that this is indeed the end for which man is designed by the author of human nature. The human relationships imposed by the social existence obviously depend on the faithful observance of certain duties and conventions if it is to be a harmonious society. Among these duties are fidelity to promises, respect for property, reciprocation of favors, etc. Seeing then that fidelity to duties and conventions are necessary to a harmonious society, can it be that man’s reason is sufficient foundation on which to erect a society? The Scot’s answer was an emphatic no. Since man is evidently intended to live in society, and since mutual sympathy and trust are necessary to that condition, nothing in man, he declared, could be more finely adjusted than the natural affections to answer these purposes. 6 It may be gathered from the study of human nature, he concluded, that "that nature, which designed us for society, has connected us strongly together, by a participation of the joys and miseries of our fellow creatures." Sympathy, trust, compassion, and all the other components of a benevolent nature such as are approved by the moral sense -- these are "the great cement of human society." 7 Kames believed that it would be very strange indeed if man had been made by nature for society, and not possess within his very nature some impulse that would excite him and prepare him for that experience.

If we are fitted by our nature for society; if pity, benevolence, friendship, love, the general dislike of solitude, and desire for company, are natural

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6 Kames, Essays, 67.
7 Ibid., 16-17.
affections, all of them conducive to society, it would be strange if there should be no natural affections, no preparation of faculties, to direct us to do justice, which is so essential to society. But nature has not failed us here, more than in the other parts of our constitution. We have a feeling of property; we have a feeling of obligation to perform our engagements; and we have a feeling of wrong in encroaching upon property, and in being untrue to our engagements. Society could not subsist without these affections, more than it could subsist without the social affections properly so called. We have reason, a priori, to conclude equally in favour of both, and we find, upon examination, our conclusion to be just. 

Kames rejected the Hobbesian thesis that the state of nature is a state of war because he rejected the notion "that man, by nature, is a wild and rapacious animal." He also rejected the attendant thesis that moral systems are nothing more than unnatural artificial creations of modern societies. He believed rather that man is intended to live in societies, and that the author of human nature has planted within him an instinct, an impulse, a moral sense, that shaped the social affections and thereby created the possibility of communal harmony.

It seems clear that Jefferson encountered Kames' basic thesis, that man is by nature fitted for society, while he was studying law at Williamsburg. His correspondence shows beyond doubt that it came to be for him a basic article of faith. He believed that man was created to be a social being, and that the Creator had carefully and deliberately implanted within his nature the qualifying dispositions for that role. Indeed he believed that the goal of a harmonious society was the divine foundation underlying human morality.

8Ibid., 41, 117-119.

9Ibid., 136-137.
"Man was destined for society," he wrote to his young nephew in 1787. "His morality therefore was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong merely relative to this."\(^{10}\) He believed that God has "formed us moral agents" for the specific purpose "that we may promote the happiness of those with whom He has placed us in society, by acting honestly towards all, benevolently to those who fall within our way, respecting sacredly their rights, bodily and mental, and cherishing especially their freedom of conscience, as we value our own."\(^{11}\) Like Kames he believed that a society could not exist without a basic trust in the fidelity of the members to certain conventions, especially justice. "Man was created for social intercourse," he wrote to a close friend, "but social intercourse cannot be maintained without a sense of justice," Therefore, he continued, "man must have been created with a sense of justice."\(^{12}\) These inextricably related ideas, that God has created man to live in society and that He has deliberately shaped his nature for that purpose, form a constant theme in Jefferson's thought throughout his adult life. It is a theme that is summed up in his declaration that "the Creator would indeed have been a bungling artist, had he intended man for a social animal, without planting in him social dispositions."\(^{13}\)

\(^{10}\)TJ to Peter Carr, Aug. 10, 1787, Boyd Collection, XII, 14-19.

\(^{11}\)TJ to Miles King, Sep. 26, 1814, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 196-198.

\(^{12}\)TJ to Francis W. Gilmer, June 7, 1816, Ibid., XV, 23-26.

\(^{13}\)TJ to Thomas Law, Esq., June 13, 1814, Ibid., XIV, 138-144.
The channel through which this divine plan was implemented was, Jefferson believed, the moral sense, that innate faculty that is "as much a part of our constitution as that of feeling, seeing, or hearing; as a wise creator must have seen to be necessary in an animal destined to live in society."14 As the moral sense was the monitor of virtue within the individual, and thus the key to human happiness, it was collectively the monitor of virtue in society, and thus the key to social harmony. Just as individual morality was too important to entrust to reason, social harmony was too important to be founded upon man's rational faculty, and in the 'divine plan it too was assigned to the sentimental faculty. "The practice of morality being necessary for the well-being of society," Jefferson wrote, "[God] has taken care to impress its precepts so indelibly on our hearts that they shall not be effaced by the subtleties of our brain."15

Though Jefferson's faith may have won more general acceptance with the passage of time, it was based upon suppositions about human nature that were highly questionable to many of those who were engaged in the development of an American philosophy of government during the last three decades of the eighteenth century. And it was their doubts about human nature that inspired their fears of an anarchic tendency in democracy, and their consequent attempts to design safeguards for the government against the turbulence inherent in democratic passions. Jefferson accurately described this tension among the founding fathers as arising from the belief on the part of some that governmental power

14 TJ to John Adams, Oct. 14, 1816, Ibid., XV, 73-81. [Italics mine].

15 TJ to James Fishbeck, Sep. 27, 1809, Ibid., XII, 314-316.
should be exercised by an elite class in order to insure an orderly society, and those on the other hand who had confidence in the people as a whole and believed that they were the only safe depository of power.  

This relationship between theories of human nature and theories of the nature and function of government is a commonplace consideration in twentieth century political thought. Political scientists generally agree that most political ideas are grounded on some particular conception of human nature. The central question which shapes contemporary political ideas is the same one that was so obviously at the forefront of the debate among the founding fathers in eighteenth century America. Cast in its simplest terms, it asks whether man is naturally benevolent, and therefore inclined toward a harmonious social existence; or selfish and naturally disorderly, and thus ill-equipped for fashioning a harmonious community. If the optimistic view is accepted, human nature itself is seen as the basic source of social order. If the more pessimistic view is accepted, then one must look to some external source by which the disorderly tendency can be counteracted and order imposed. Political ideas shaped by the optimistic view, usually called "liberal," tend to stress less the regulatory function of government and to anticipate orderly amendment of its basic premises. Political ideas that rest on the pessimistic view of human nature, usually called


17 This discussion of contemporary political thought follows generally the survey by Glenn Tinder, Political Thinking: The Perennial Questions, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1974), 4, 21-29, 76-78.
"conservative," tend to emphasize strong and highly centralized political authority and a cautious approach to change. Few of the optimists, however, extend their confidence in human goodness to the point of advocating the abolishment of government. The liberals hold that man is good, but not perfect. They believe that human nature contributes to order in society, but that it is not in itself sufficient for social integration. They believe that social relationships should be regulated by a combination of natural inclinations and the limited exercise of governmental power. Even so, their beliefs contrast sharply with the conservative view that man is irremediably disorderly and that there are no natural inclinations with sufficient authority to insure harmonious social relations. These are not definitive descriptions of liberal and conservative political theories, but they illustrate the kind of ideas that are implicitly or explicitly a part of almost every political scheme.

The question of whether social harmony or estrangement is more natural to man has a long history. It was a subject of concern to the classical philosophers of Greece and Rome, and medieval philosophers from Augustine to Aquinas. Modern political theorists have had to take into consideration the Freudian attack on the concept of rational man. Freud's description of the basic nature of man calls into question previous political social theories, especially those posited on the concept of rational or benevolent man, and indeed offers a good degree of credibility to the general psychological premises of Hobbes, Burke, Hamilton, etc. His study led him to the conclusion that society and its coercive agent, government, would always be alien to the psychological nature of man. He wrote that societies and governments were both
artificial contrivances created to oppose the anarchy inherent in the freedom of
the individual following his natural instincts and passions. This means that the
advance of civilization, as represented in the development of societies, has been
achieved by the suppression or repression of powerful instincts basic to man's
nature. He found that "men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and
who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the
contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a
powerful share of aggressiveness." This means that as far as social relations
are concerned, "their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sex-
ual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on
him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually
without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him
pain, to torture and to kill him." Ordinarily this cruel aggressiveness is sub-
limated or directed at some relatively harmless purpose, but "in circumstances
that are favourable to it, when the mental counter-forces which ordinarily
inhibit it are out of action, it also manifests itself spontaneously and reveals man
as a savage beast to whom consideration towards his own kind is something
alien." Unlike the behavioral psychologists who would follow, Freud said that
man's aggressiveness is "an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in
man" rather than the result of experience. Society then exists only by the
frustration of individual instincts, a condition that is never totally and perm-
antly achieved. Freud warned that "in consequence of this primary mutual
hostility of human beings, civilized society is perpetually threatened with dis-
integration." There is no natural bond with sufficient authority to overrule the
instinctual passions. Therefore there must be an external authority to suppress man's natural aggressive forces. He said that the great task of civilization is to find a way to set limits to man's aggressive instincts without, if possible, compounding the neuroses that are caused by their cultural frustration. "One of the problems that touches the fate of humanity," he wrote, "is whether such an accommodation can be reached by means of some particular form of civilization or whether this conflict is irreconcilable." Freud was not optimistic about the possibility of finding such an accommodation because the command to "love thy neighbor," necessary to a harmonious society, is psychologically impossible in human nature. According to one writer, it is that aspect of Freud's thought that holds that "the insatiability of man's drives produces insecurities so deep that only social coercions can provide relief," that has had the greatest effect on modern political thinking.

Freud's revisionists have tended to be a bit more optimistic about the possibility of reconciling the conflict between cultural demands and individual instincts. They also have given more of their attention to the urgent relationship between psychology and political and social philosophies. Though they agree with Freud that the free gratification of man's instinctual needs is incompatible with civilized society, they propose diversion as preferable to repression of instinctual energy. They also tend to see man's behavior as the result of the


19Paul Roazen, Freud: Political and Social Thought (New York, 1968), 250-255.
interaction between psychological and sociological factors, and his psyche as the product of cultural as well as biological factors. Both disciples of Freud and his revisionists reject the notion of a moral world order. In Freud's words, "ethics are a kind of highway code for traffic among mankind." Ethical systems are simply fabrications of man "not based on an eternal world order but on the inescapable exigencies of human cohabitation."  

Most modern political theorists, though certainly not all, have rejected the notion that social estrangement is inherent in the nature of man, but they have had to account in other ways for the undeniable conflict that has constantly been a part of man's social history. Explanations of unseemly behavior have placed blame on divergent causes from Adam's sin to socio-economic imbalances, with consequent theories of the function of government ranging from rigid control to support of the human quest for an earthly paradise.

Though the influence of theories of human nature on political theory has thus been constant through history, there have been few if any times when this question has been more intensely debated than during the eighteenth century. The confluence of social and political change with Enlightenment ideas about the nature of man stimulated new thinking about political theory and institutions. And because of the peculiar task in which they were engaged, the question assumed a unique urgency for the founding fathers. Their debate was solidly in

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the historical tradition outlined above and specifically in the tradition of a
particular phase of that debate begun a century before and continuing with
increasing intensity through what R. R. Palmer has called The Age of the
Democratic Revolution.

This latter phase was introduced by the publication of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* after the English civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century. Hobbes
spoke directly to the question. He described the "generall inclination of all
mankind" as "a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that
ceaseth onely in Death." In consequence of this inclination, so long as men
"live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition
which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every
man." Having recognized this condition, "the finall Cause, End, or Designe
of men, (who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others,) in the intro­
duction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which wee see them live in
Common-wealths,) is the foresight of their own preservations, and of a more
contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that
miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent . . . to the
naturall Passions of men." Hobbes believed that communities are simply
groups of egotistical individuals who are united only in a geographical sense.
He also believed that social virtues, such as justice, equity, modesty, mercy,
are totally contrary to man's natural passions, and that in "the condition of
meer Nature," private appetite is the sole measure of good and evil. If social
virtues are necessary to society, then they must be imposed by "the terrour of
some Power" with sufficient authority to overrule the natural inclinations. This
power, according to Hobbes, was properly and necessarily invested in government. 21

Most of the censure directed at Leviathan resulted from Hobbes' "violation of the accepted norms of political theory construction," i.e., that political theory should be based on general characteristics of civilized people. But this was at the heart of Hobbes' political philosophy. The philosophy of human nature that underlay his political theory gave little credence to the authority of man's "civilized nature." His basic assumption was that man is an apolitical being, that he is not fitted by nature for society, and that even continual schooling in the rudiments of civility can never transform him into a social animal. Society is nothing more than a contrivance with no natural dependency among its members that might blend the parts into a whole. He really believed that European civilized Christians were but little removed from the nasty and brutish state of savagery, and that their civilization was therefore a very fragile creation. Hobbes' almost Calvinistic emphasis on man's wickedness led him to a political theory in which the function of government was to subdue man's asocial inclinations. Even so, he recognized that these inclinations could only be suppressed at best, and that his political order, "for all its compelling necessity, remained an alien presence, limited to playing upon the 'outside' of man." Because of man's natural egotism, government would always remain alien to his inner nature, but at the same time absolutely essential to a harmonious society. 22

21 Leviathan, 75, 96, 122, 128.

The Hobbesian portrait of man, which Jefferson later described as a "humiliation of human nature," and his political theories elicited many direct responses from outraged Englishmen who assaulted *Leviathan* in the defense of liberty, religion, tradition, and civilized man. The response most familiar to Americans was the indirect one that appeared in John Locke's political treatises written four decades after the appearance of *Leviathan*. The point of basic disagreement between Hobbes and Locke, of course, concerns the extent of authority to be given to government. Hobbes gave absolute power, whereas Locke insisted on limitations. What might be overlooked in this divergence of opinion is the role of their conceptions of human nature in shaping their ideas of the character and function of government. As has been shown above, Hobbes held an extremely pessimistic view of natural human inclinations, and consequently thought of government in terms of the necessity of absolute and irresistible power for the necessary regulation of human behavior. Locke held a more optimistic view of man, though certainly not a utopian one, and consequently described the regulatory function of government in different terms. The liberal case against political authority was an indictment, not of political authority in general, but of "authority personified and personalized." Locke substituted for the traditional model of society sustained by authority vested in a political center, a conception of self-sustaining society capable of self-direction. This view paved the way for the "socialization" of authority and as a result a new
Locke believed that social relations are shaped largely by man's economic desires and expectations, and that the function of government is simply to provide the opportunity for free economic intercourse and to act as arbiter through the application of laws "received and allowed by common consent to be the standard of right and wrong." The restraint on individual liberty necessary to this function is inoffensive because impersonal. Government is not thus alien to man's nature, but is "the soul that gives form, life, and unity to the commonwealth."

The underlying assumption in this political theory is that man is capable of not only creating such a government; but of also exercising supervision and control of its operations to the end that it remains faithful to the collective will. Locke acknowledged the role of bias and ignorance in human judgment, but he believed that in the long run men could be trusted to judge correctly in public matters through the expression of the collective will. This faith in the people as self-governors rested on the belief that the majority of men are naturally amenable rather than hostile toward one another.

A belief in the natural goodness of man gathered momentum steadily during the course of the eighteenth century and "became the common property of nearly

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every political critic." In spite of this trend, the debate over the nature of man and its relation to political theory was perhaps even more intense during the Jeffersonian era. The French Revolution elevated to a new intensity the debate over man's qualifications for self-government. To Jefferson and Adams, it confirmed that theirs was an "age of experiments in government" that had begun in America in the previous decade. Jefferson was a personal (and involved) witness to the events leading to the outbreak of revolution in July 1789. He offered friendly counsel and encouragement to Lafayette and the Patriot Party which tried after the opening of the Estates General in May to affect peaceful constitutional reform. He attended the meetings of the National Assembly almost daily from June to September and, in spite of his frequently voiced desire to return home, wrote that "this scene is too interesting to be left at present." Throughout the summer and fall he frequently expressed the belief that the revolution was proceeding quietly and steadily; that "the nation is in a movement which cannot be stopped." Jefferson believed that the Patriot Party, using America as its model, would be able to guide the movement past any temporary irregularities or interruptions. He believed it to be a revolution that would furnish material for a new chapter in the work of Montesquieu. Perhaps he saw an extension of his own influence in the Declaration of the Rights


of Man. But even more to the point, he saw in the revolution of 1789 the confirmation of his dreams and faith in the progress of the human spirit. It will not end here, he predicted; this "is but the first chapter of the history of European liberty." The redirection of the revolution in the mid-1790s came as a severe blow to Jefferson. He excused it as being the result of trying to accomplish too much too fast; of the leadership having been grasped from the moderate constitutionalists by radicals; of trying to advance liberty beyond that for which the French people were ready. It was nonetheless undoubtedly a painful experience to have to answer John Adams, who, looking back over the years to "the commencement of the Troubles in France" and recalling Jefferson's optimism, asked: "Let me now ask you, very seriously my Friend, where are now in 1813, the Perfection and perfectability of human Nature? Where is now, the progress of the human Mind? Where is the Amelioration of Society?" 28

The nature of the debate during the last decade of the eighteenth century is illustrated in the published arguments of Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine. These arguments, contained in Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) and Paine's The Rights of Man (1791), took place before the execution of the Royal family and the beginning of the Reign of Terror. They were thus


28John Adams to TJ, July 15, 1813, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIII, 313-316; TJ to the Marquis de Lafayette, Feb. 14, 1815, Ibid., XIV, 245-255.
unencumbered with the burden of explaining this turn of the revolution, and
were devoted to more theoretical aspects of the nature of government and its
relationship to the nature of man. These books appeared after the ratification
of the new American constitution, but during the years of suspense as to the
success of the infant republic. The terms of their arguments are included here,
not so much to suggest an influence on American thought, but to show the con-
tinuing debate through the era under study.

Burke portrayed government as an artificial contrivance erected to protect
men from their own natural evil inclinations:

Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants.
Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom.
Among these wants is to be reckoned the want, out of civil society, of a
sufficient restraint upon their passions. Society requires not only that the
passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and
body as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently
be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into sub-
jection. 29

In addition to recognizing that society requires the harnessing of human passions,
Burke also argued that "this can only be done by a power out of themselves;
and not, in the exercise of its function, subject to that evill and to those
passions which it is its office to bridle and subdue." The necessary power out
of themselves is the function of government which in Burke's scheme is a
"consideration of convenience" to administer artificial restraints upon man's
liberty to simply govern himself. Because of this arbitrary function, the

29 Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, and Thomas
Paine, The Rights of Man, in one volume (New York, 1961), 72. Citations
hereafter identified by individual author.
constitution of a government requires a delicate skill. He wrote that it requires, among other things, "a deep knowledge of human nature and human necessities." Conversely, and here we come to the application of his ideas to the French Revolution, "it is with infinite caution than [sic] any man ought to venture upon pulling down an edifice which has answered in any tolerable degree for ages the common purposes of society, or on building it up again, without having models and patterns of approved utility before his eyes."

Burke believed that the restraining power of government was the only barrier which prevented man from degenerating into the frightful control of his aggressive passions. The French revolutionaries were, to his mind, following a dream about the nature of man that would lead to disaster. All of their talk about the "metaphysic rights" of man indicated to him their naivete about the real forces that mold human behavior. Burke was convinced that the French revolutionaries were attempting to erect a new political edifice on the foundation of a naively optimistic opinion of the nature of man. He believed that political theories and institutions had to be founded on immediate and actual circumstances, not on metaphysical fantasies. Even if the "pretended rights" claimed by the French theorists were metaphysically true, they were, in their simplistic extremism, politically false.

In the final analysis Burke distrusted liberty in the abstract because without wisdom or virtue, "it is the greatest of all possible evils." He distrusted man's faculties, both rational and sentimental, as the source of social integration. He believed that government, as a "power out of themselves," was necessary to avoid the folly, vice, and madness that was the product of liberty "without
tuition or restraint." Based upon his observation of the needs of man, he emphasized the regulatory function of government, and cautioned that only "much thought, deep reflection, a sagacious, powerful and combining mind" could make a government that could temper together the "opposite elements of liberty and restraint." 30

Thomas Paine's rebuttal of Burke's political theory rested firmly on the contrary view of human nature. He despised Burke's "contemptible opinion of mankind," which Paine believed was the starting point of his overall theory. It is wrong, Paine wrote, to equate human nature with "a baseness of heart, and hypocrisy of countenance." He did not believe that man is the enemy of man, except where false systems of government have made it so, but rather that "man is so naturally a creature of society, that it is almost impossible to put him out of it." Man is naturally the friend of man, he wrote, and "instinct in animals does not act with stronger impulse, than the principles of society and civilization operate in man." Paine believed that society was intended in the natural order of things. More importantly, he declared that as nature created man for social life, "she fitted him for the station she intended." He believed that nature has implanted in man "a system of social affections, which though not necessary to his existence, are essential to his happiness." In sum, Paine believed that man is fitted by nature to live in society, and that "there is no period in life when . . . [his] love for society ceases to act." 31

30Burke, Reflections, 19, 72-75, 100, 263.

This conception of human nature and natural inclinations had a powerful influence in shaping Paine's political theory. He wrote that "to understand the nature and quantity of government proper for man, it is necessary to attend to his character." Whereas Burke, starting from a pessimistic view of man, had emphasized the regulatory function of government, Paine, beginning with an optimistic appraisal of man, emphasized a supportive function. First of all, he did not believe that government was the source of order in society. Rather than having its origin in governmental control, Paine declared that order was the result of "the principles of society and the natural constitution of man."

Order in society existed prior to government and thus order, not anarchy, would succeed the dissolution of government. He argued that "the mutual dependence and reciprocal interest which man has upon man, and all parts of a civilized community upon each other, create that great chain of connection which holds it together." Paine's conclusion then, logically growing out of these assumptions, was that

if we examine . . . the composition and constitution of man, the diversity of his wants, and the diversity of talents in different men for reciprocally accommodating the wants of each other, his propensity to society and consequently to preserve the advantages resulting from it, we shall easily discover that a great part of what is called government is mere imposition.

The achievements of the American and French Revolutions promised "a new era to the human race." They would prove that "government founded on a moral theory, on a system of universal peace, on the indefeasible, hereditary rights of man," was best suited to man's nature and his happiness. So conceived, the operation of government is restricted to the making and administering of laws that reflect the collective concerns of the members of society.
Whenever government had attempted in history to go beyond this role, its effect had been divisive rather than cohesive. In Paine's scheme, neither laws nor government are sacrosanct or protected by any shroud of tradition. Both are simple creations of man for the furtherance of his own happiness, and both must advance commensurately with the progress of knowledge and the human spirit.  

Burke, fearing man's natural instincts, propensities, and prejudices, revered tradition as an expression of the collective wisdom of the ages and man's protection against the error that might flow from momentary passions.  

Paine believed that man, fitted by natural inclinations to form societies, was capable of designing, modifying, and immediately supervising the operation of his own government without condemnation from the past or fear of the future. 

The question of human nature, and its relationship to the design of governmental institutions, assumed an urgency in the era of the American and French Revolutions and the "age of experiments is government." The debates in America were cast into divisions like those discussed above. The contending beliefs among the major political figures here is predictably suggested in their response to Paine's political ideas. For example, Jefferson, who had maintained a correspondence with Paine in the years since the beginning of the American Revolution, welcomed The Rights of Man as an expression reflecting the principles held by most Americans and expressed the hope that its publication here would counter some of the political heresies that had sprung up in the years

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32 Ibid., 392-401.

immediately preceding. John Adams, on the contrary, compared Paine's writing to the "Ravings and Rantings of Bedlam" and wrote that if Paine was to be recorded as the great author of the American Revolution, he wanted his own name to be "blotted out forever, from its Records." It was in recognition of the differences in their basic beliefs partially revealed in their response to Paine that caused Adams to add in his letter to Jefferson: "You and I ought not to die, before We have explained ourselves to each other."34

A great deal of explanation would be necessary to bridge the philosophic chasm that existed between those labeled "democratical" and those called "aristocratical" among the founding fathers. Jefferson's faith in human nature and its influence on his political ideas comes into sharper clarity when contrasted with the thought of the most influential spokesman of the "aristocratical" persuasion, Alexander Hamilton. Jefferson and Hamilton emerged as the leaders of the major contending factions in the political life of the new nation. The basic ideological antagonism between the two cabinet officers surfaced within weeks following Jefferson's arrival in New York to take up the duties of Secretary of State. This antagonism erupted into a public campaign of bitter invective by the fall of 1792. In response to President Washington's expression of concern about the disruptive effect of the argument between his two colleagues, Jefferson declared that his disapproval of Hamilton's policies was founded not on a mere "speculative difference," but from a deep-seated conviction that the Secretary of the Treasury's "system flowed from principles adverse to liberty, and was calculated to undermine and demolish the Republic."
Alexander Hamilton's appraisal of human nature and his concept of the function of government form a consistent philosophy from which emerged his notions about the proper character of government. This philosophy, combining a pessimistic appraisal of human nature, a distrust of the masses, and a strong doubt about the efficacy of democratic government is in every feature a rebuttal to Jefferson's tenets.

It is impossible to determine with certainty the roots of Hamilton's negative view of human nature, though one might attribute some influence to his movement in Presbyterian circles during his youth. In any event, his earliest surviving pronouncement on the subject, written while an undergraduate at Kings College, states rather emphatically that "a vast majority of mankind is entirely biassed by motives of self-interest. Most men are glad to remove any burthens off themselves, and place them upon the backs of their neighbours." Even though he mentioned once that "the general notion of justice and humanity are implanted in almost every human breast," this was a singular event and even then he cautioned that these were indeed fragile instincts. With this one exception, his declarations on human nature were consistently negative. They ranged from a relatively standard Calvinistic reference to the "depravity of human nature," to his conclusion several years later that "experience is a

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3Hamilton to George Clinton, Mar. 12, 1778, Ibid., 439-442.
continued comment on the worthlessness of the human race."  

He believed that mankind in general is vicious. He believed that self-interest is the "most powerful incentive of human actions; that "opinion [approbation], whether well of ill founded, is the governing principle of human affairs." He believed that invariably "momentary passions and immediate interest have a more active and imperious control over human conduct than general or remote considerations of policy, utility or justice." It is obvious that Hamilton did not hold any sentimental notions about man's natural virtue or benevolence.

Hamilton believed that the same passions that "govern most individuals," avarice, ambition, interest, also govern public bodies. This point was made several times during his long and passionate campaign in the 1780s for a stronger central government. Six months after the ratification of the first constitution of the new nation and before the Revolutionary War ended, he was

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6"The Federalist No. 6." Nov. 14, 1787, Ibid, 309-317. Hamilton believed that the "female heart" was even more susceptible to these inclinations than the male. He wrote his "beloved Betsy" shortly before their marriage that while men are "full of vices," females are "full of weaknesses." He said that he did not "entertain an ill opinion of all your sex," but experience had demonstrated that "there are very few of either [sex] that are not very worthless." Hamilton to Elizabeth Schuyler, Sep. 3, 1780, Ibid, II, 418-420.
already advocating a new design of government because, he wrote, "political
societies, in close neighbourhood, must either be strongly united under one
government, or there will infallibly exist emulations and quarrels. This is in
human nature; and we have no reason to think ourselves wiser, or better, than
other men." He perceived that as some of the larger states grew more popu-
rous and prosperous, motives of "vanity and self importance" would overpower
their true interest to preserve the union and schism would follow. He believed
that the success of the American experiment depended upon cooperation be-
tween the independent minded states, but he doubted that they would ever "be
brought to cooperate in any reasonable or effectual plan." He urged reforms
and exertions but "the answer constantly is what avails it for one state to make
them without the consent of the others?" He found that it was "in vain to
expose the futility of this reasoning" because "it is founded on all those passions
which have the strongest influence on the human mind." In arguing against
taxation by requisition for the support of the new government that would be
erected by a new constitution, he emphasized that under that arrangement
"states will contribute or not, according to their circumstances and interests."
Requisitioned contributions would not work because states function "on the
principle of human nature" and these "are as infallible as any mathematical

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7"The Continentalist No. II," Aug. 9, 1781, Ibid., 660-665 [italics mine];
Speech in the Constitutional Convention, June 18, 1787, Ibid., IV, 178-210.

8Hamilton to Robert Morris, July 22, 1782, Ibid., III, 114-116 [italics mine].
calculations."

Hamilton's belief in the power of self-interest and avarice shaped his conception of human nature, both in the individual and collective sense. This belief, which stands in such stark contradiction to Jefferson's belief in the function and power of the moral sense, contains strong implications which inevitably were expressed in Hamilton's ideas on government. His crusade for a stronger central government during the 1780s was obviously motivated by his fears for the success of the new nation, but it was largely shaped by his doubts about the efficacy of participatory government. These doubts stemmed directly from his appraisal of human nature and were manifested in his obvious lack of faith in both the interest and the ability of the masses to participate rationally in government. There is certainly a danger of exaggeration in the contrast that is thus developed between basic philosophical principles in the minds of Hamilton and Jefferson, but it appears that the latter's description of the disagreement as one between Aristocrats and Democrats is accurate.

Hamilton associated democracy with anarchy. His fear of "the amazing violence and turbulence of the democratic spirit" led to his belief that the original function of government is restraint. Government is instituted, he wrote, "because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice, without constraint." An accurate observation of the conduct of mankind, he continued, shows conclusively that societies of men do not act "with

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9Speech to the New York Ratifying Convention, June 25, 1788, Ibid., V, 114-125 [italics mine].
more rectitude or greater disinterestedness than individuals." In other words, the same anarchical tendencies that were generated in man by his very nature were transferred to men in the collective and would tend to generate anarchy in society.

Hamilton's distrust of the multitude and his association of anarchy with democracy were fixed by the time of his earliest participation in the establishment of the new nation. At the very beginning of the Revolution he warned that the democratic passions that would be generated in the struggle against British tyranny could very easily be transformed into a contempt and disregard for all authority. "In times of such commotion as the present," he declared, "while the passions of men are worked up to an uncommon pitch there is great danger of fatal extremes." He said that the multitudes do not have a "sufficient stock of reason and knowledge" to check their passions and to guide them. "The due medium is hardly to be found among the more intelligent, it is almost impossible among the unthinking populace." It was his belief that when the minds of the latter "are loosened from their attachment to ancient establishments and courses, they seem to grow giddy and are apt more or less to run into anarchy." It would require in such tempestuous times, he warned, "the greatest skill in the political pilots to keep men steady and within proper bounds" and to prevent "a spirit of encroachment and arrogance in them." In this context it is

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interesting to note the sharp contrast provided by Jefferson's comments on the opportunities afforded by the "spirit of revolution" for advancing and securing democracy in America. Rather than fearing the passions generated by the Revolution, he believed that they were essential to the achievement of the ultimate goals of the struggle. Rather than wanting to suppress them, he wanted to take full advantage of their force to establish "every essential right on a legal basis" while the people were alert and unified. "From the conclusion of this war we shall be going down hill," he wrote, and then the people "will be forgotten . . . and their rights disregarded." Now, in the passion of revolution, was the time for action, because those shackles that were not knocked off before the end of the war "will remain on us long, will be made heavier and heavier, till our rights shall revive or expire in convulsion." 12

Hamilton's convictions about the potential dangers inherent in the passions generated by the Revolution were reinforced by the history of the next thirteen years. The reactions of Jefferson and Hamilton to one event during that period serve to illustrate the different conceptual framework from which each of them acted. There is no doubt that the resort to arms by an army of discontented Massachusetts farmers in 1786 and early 1787 to prevent action against debtors served to support the arguments of those who were advocating an overhaul of the governmental apparatus established by the first constitution. The crisis had demonstrated the impotence of the central government to react to a situation that in its implications threatened the stability of the nation. To many it was

12 Notes, 154.
additional evidence that there was an urgent need for the strengthening of national authority. But for both Jefferson and Hamilton, Shays's Rebellion held meaning beyond the immediate crisis of government.

Jefferson was in Paris at the time of the rebellion, but he was aware of it by at least as early as January 1787. To him the event was of less importance than the potential dangers inherent in the great reaction that followed. He dreaded what appeared to him to be a headlong rush toward the embrace of an authoritarian style of government. To the author of the Declaration of Independence this would be an abhorrent betrayal of the principles that had led his generation into revolution against another authoritarian tyranny. He recognized the seriousness of the rebellion, but his reaction was a simple plea for patience. "I am persuaded myself," he wrote, "that the good sense of the people will always be found to be the best army. They may be led astray for a moment, but will soon correct themselves. The people are the only censors of their governors: and even their errors will tend to keep these to the true principles of their institution." Looking beyond the immediate problem he added that "to punish these errors too severely would be to suppress the only safeguard of the public liberty." What bothered him most however, was the fear that some might conclude, as a result of Shays's Rebellion, that "nature has formed man insusceptible of any other government but that of force." This, to Jefferson, would be the ultimate tragedy. He confessed that democracy was not perfect, that its very liberties made it subject to a degree of turbulence. But if this was

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13 TJ to Edward Carrington, Jan. 16, 1787, Boyd Collection, XI, 48-50.
an evil, it was one which paled in comparison to the evils of authoritarian systems. 14 His plea was for patience, for caution, for the avoidance of any precipitate decisions based upon hasty and unproved conclusions about the efficacy of the democratic system.

Shays's Rebellion meant everything to Hamilton that it did not mean to Jefferson. He considered it an event of immense proportions, fraught with awesome potentialities. "Who can determine," he asked, "what might have been the issue of her [Massachusetts'] late convulsions, if the malcontents had been headed by a Caesar or by a Cromwell?" 15 He pointed to the rebellion's pernicious influence on the neighboring state of Connecticut where "of late the Governt. had entirely given way to the people, and had in fact suspended many of its ordinary functions [including the imposition of taxes] in order to prevent those turbulent scenes which had appeared elsewhere." 16 It showed the need for the maintenance of a standing military force. Most importantly, the

14 TJ to James Madison, Jan. 30, 1787, Ibid., 92-97. That Jefferson's fears were well founded is shown in John Marshall's confession written in the same month in response to Shays's Rebellion: "I fear, and there is no opinion no more degrading to the dignity of man, that these have truth on their side who say that man is incapable of governing himself." Marshall to James Wilkinson, Jan. 5, 1787, The Papers of John Marshall, ed. by Herbert A. Johnson (1 vol.; Chapel Hill, 1974--), 1, 199-201. Marshall also was advocating that some examples be made "in order to impress on the minds of the people a conviction that punishment will surely follow an attempt to subvert the laws and government of the commonwealth." Marshall to Arthur Lee, Mar. 5, 1787, Ibid., 205-206.


16 Speech in the Constitutional Convention, June 26, 1787, Ibid., 218-220.
rebellion was to him a predictable exhibition of the "amazing violence and turbulence of the democratic spirit" wherein a notion "seizes the popular passions, they spread like wild fire, and become irresistible."

It was an experience that "corroborated the lessons taught by the examples of other nations; that emergencies of this sort will sometimes arise in all societies, however constituted; that seditions and insurrections are unhappily maladies as inseparable from the body politic, as tumours and eruptions from the natural body; that the idea of governing at all times by the simple force of law (which we have been told is the only admissible principle of republican government) has no place but in the reveries of those political doctors, whose sagacity dis­dains the admonitions of experimental instructions." In contrast to Jefferson's plea for patience, Hamilton veritably screamed that it was "time to awake from the deceitful dream of a golden age, and to adopt as a practical maxim for the direction of our political conduct, that we, as well as the other inhabitants of the globe, are yet remote from the happy empire of perfect wisdom and perfect virtue." This, said Hamilton, was the meaning of Shays's Rebellion.

Hamilton's reaction to the crisis in Massachusetts reflects a complex set of convictions which were only reinforced, not created, by the event. These

17Speech in the Constitutional Convention, June 18, 1787, Ibid., 178-210.


convictions, founded on a general distrust of human nature and of the masses, not only associated anarchy with democracy but indeed included a basic distrust in the democratic process as an efficacious form of government.

He believed in the first analysis that human nature is not suited to the pretensions of democracy. He believed that private prejudices and private interests would be ever present "antagonists too powerful for public spirit and public good." He said that "we may preach till we are tired of the theme, the necessity of disinterestedness in republics" but this will not make it occur.

The "turbulent and uncontrouling disposition" of the mass of the people will always require firm checks. The experiences of the 1780s only served to reinforce these convictions. As the French embarked upon their revolution in 1789, Hamilton warned Lafayette against too much zeal for democratic forms. He wrote him that he dreaded "the reveries of your Philosophic politicians who appear in the moment to have great influence and who being mere speculatists may aim at more refinement than suits either with human nature or the composition of your Nation."

Hamilton's basic distrust of the efficacy of the democratic process was obvious. It was not founded solely on his belief that democracy was too easily

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22 Speech in the Constitutional Convention, June 18, 1787, Ibid., IV, 178-210.

bent to anarchy, though this fear was consistently expressed. He believed that it was an inefficient process of government, lacking in the dynamism necessary to the successful ordering of national affairs. He shared the widespread belief in the eighteenth century that republicanism was not suited to nations of large geographic dimensions. But more basically, his dislike for the democratic process was again related to his view of human nature.

Hamilton saw no need to believe that the electoral process would produce good governors. In the first place, the electors for the most part would be unqualified, by both imperfect judgment and lack of interest, to choose good leaders. "It sometimes happens," he wrote for example, "that a temporary caprice of the people, leads them to make a choice of men, whom they neither love nor respect; and that they afterwards, from an indolent and mechanical habit, natural to the human mind, continue their confidence and support merely because they had once conferred them." In the second place, election to office by the democratic process would not by some magical power guarantee the skill or trustworthiness of those elected. Good government could not be created by republican incantation. Hamilton believed that one of the most basic weaknesses of republics lay in the fact that "persons elevated from the mass of the community by the suffrages of their fellow-citizens, to stations of great preeminence and power, may find compensations for betraying their trust,

24Speech in the Constitutional Convention, June 18, 1787, Ibid., IV, 178-210.

which to any but minds animated and guided by superior virtue may appear to exceed the proportion of interest they have in the common stock, and to overbalance the obligations of duty."

Hamilton warned that a man raised from the station of a private citizen to the rank of chief magistrate, possessed of but a moderate or slender fortune, and looking forward to a period not very remote, when he may probably be obliged to return to the station from which he was taken, might sometimes be under temptations to sacrifice his duty to his interest, which it would require superlative virtue to withstand. An avaricious man might be tempted to betray the interests of the state to the acquisition of wealth. An ambitious man might make his own aggrandizement, by the aid of a foreign power, the price of his treachery to his constituents.

Hamilton believed that there were few indeed that possessed such "superlative virtue." In speaking of those who could be candidates for judicial offices, he wrote that after "making the proper deductions for the ordinary depravity of human nature, the number must be still smaller of those who unite the requisite integrity with the requisite knowledge." There was no reason to believe, Hamilton declared, that elected bodies would always act with "an unbiased regard to the public weal." And what was the basis for this sentiment? It "results from the constitution of human nature." It was, he believed, a particular defect in the democratic process that "popular assemblies [are]

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28"The Federalist No. 78," May 28, 1788, Ibid., 655-663.

frequently subject to the impulses of rage, resentment, jealousy, avarice, and other irregular and violent propensities." And even more damning was the known fact "that their determinations are often governed by a few individuals, in whom they place confidence, and are of course liable to be tinctured by the passions and views of those individuals. "  

All of these expressions of contempt and distrust provide a striking contrast to Jefferson's belief in the ability of the people to govern themselves.

Finally, Hamilton believed that democratic government was less efficacious than other forms because it could not provide dynamic leadership. The "general disease which infects all our constitutions," he wrote, is "an excess of popularity. There is no order that has a will of its own. The inquiry constantly is what will please not what will benefit the people. In such a government," he concluded, "there can be nothing but temporary expedient, fickleness and folly."  

This tendency to inertia created by the fear of public judgment was, to Hamilton, a debilitating feature in the democratic process. As a young man he copied in a private notebook a line from Demosthenes' Orations: "As a general marches at the head of his troops, so ought wise politicians, if I dare to use the expression, to march at the head of affairs; insomuch that they ought not to wait the event, to know what measures to take; but the measures which they have taken, ought to produce the event."  

When he presented his ideas


32 Pay Book of the State Company of Artillery, [1777], Ibid., I, 373-411.
on government to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 he argued that "the goodness of a government consists in vigorous execution." This a republican government could not affect. It would necessarily be rendered "feeble and inefficient" by its own democratic principles. The ideological distance between Hamilton and Jefferson is shown by the contrast between the former's plea for vigorous government and the latter's confession to Madison, made at about the same time, that he was "not a friend to a very energetic government" because they always lead to oppression. A decade later, in his first inaugural address, Jefferson said that he believed the government of the United States to be the most powerful on earth precisely because of its democratic principles.

Hamilton believed by 1787 that his earlier fears had been realized, that the zeal for liberty generated in the Revolution had become "predominant and excessive." It was this passion that had shaped the Confederation, and rendered it inoperative.

There are few positions more demonstrable than that there should be in every republic, some permanent body to correct the prejudices, check the intemperate passions, and regulate the fluctuations of a popular assembly. It is evident that a body instituted for these purposes must be so formed as to exclude as much as possible from its own character, those infirmities, and that mutability which it is designed to remedy. It is therefore necessary that it should be small, that it should hold its authority during a considerable period, and that it should have such an independence in the exercise of its powers, as will divert it as much as possible of local prejudices. It should be so formed as to be the center of political knowledge, to pursue always a

33 Speech in the Constitutional Convention, June 18, 1787, Ibid., IV, 178-210.

34 TJ to James Madison, Dec. 20, 1787, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, VI, 385-393; Inauguration Address, Mar. 4, 1801, Ibid., III, 317-323.
steady line of conduct, and to reduce every irregular propensity to system. Without this establishment, we may make experiments without end, but shall never have an efficient government.

He did not doubt, he said, that the body of people in every country desired its prosperity, but, he added, "it is equally unquestionable, that they do not possess the discernment and stability necessary for systematic government."

The result of this disability is that "popular assemblies are frequently misguided by ignorance, by sudden impulses and the intrigues of ambitious men."35

Perhaps the statement that best illustrates Hamilton's association of human nature and the defects of democracy is found in his familiar speech in the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in June, 1787:

All communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and well born, the other the mass of the people. The voice of the people has been said to be the voice of God; and however generally this maxim has been quoted and believed it is not true in fact. The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right. Give therefore to the first class a distinct, permanent share in government. They will check the unsteadiness of the second, and as they cannot receive any advantage by a change, they therefore will ever maintain good government. Can a democratic assembly who annually revolve in the mass of the people, be supposed steadily to pursue the public good?36

This was an urgent question, and the answer could be anticipated to determine the course, and indeed the success or failure, of their experiment. Hamilton professed that he was "as zealous an advocate for liberty as any man," but openly acknowledged to the Convention that he despaired in the attempt to solve


36Speech in the Constitutional Convention, June 18, 1787, Ibid., IV, 178-210.
the difficulties of the time through a republican form of government. He believed that nothing short of a blend of monarchy and republicanism as represented in the British government, which he described as "the best in the world," could save America. He acknowledged that he was arguing an unpopular side, and that it would probably be unwise for the Convention to propose any other than a republican form of government. But at the same time he pleaded with his colleagues to "go as far in order to attain stability and permanency, as republican principles will admit." He answered his own rhetorical question quoted above: "Nothing but a permanent body can check the imprudence of democracy." He proposed that both the Executive and the Senate be elected for life as a means of encouraging fidelity in office and stability in government. This was what he meant by a blend of monarchy and republicanism. 37

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37Ibid.; Speech in the Constitutional Convention, June 26, 1787, Ibid., 218-220. Hamilton was apparently following Montesquieu closely in his development of this argument. This frequently cited authority on government had written that in any republic "there are always persons distinguished by their birth, riches, or honors: but were they to be confounded with the common people, and to have only the weight of a single vote like the rest, the common liberty would be their slavery, and they would have no interest in supporting it, as most of the popular resolutions would be against them. The share they have, therefore, in the legislature ought to be proportioned to their other advantages in the state; which happens only when they form a body that has a right to check the licentiousness of the people, as the people have a right to oppose any encroachment of theirs. The legislative power is therefore committed to the body of nobles, and to that which represents the people, each having their assemblies and deliberations apart, each their separate views and interests . . . . The body of the nobility ought to be hereditary. In the first place it is so in its own nature; and in the next there must be a considerable interest to preserve its privileges -- privileges that in themselves are obnoxious to popular envy, and of course in a free state are always in danger." Baron de Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws (1748), trans. by Thomas Nugent (New York, 1949), Vol. I, Bk XI, 155-156.
Though these ideas were rejected by the Convention, as he anticipated, Hamilton nevertheless worked untiringly for the ratification of the Constitution that was adopted. But his continuing despair in the succeeding years is evident in the fact that his faith in the success of the American experiment fluctuated in inverse proportion to the rising tide of republican sentiment.

Jefferson, in contrast, said that he believed that man "was a rational animal, endowed by nature with rights, and with an innate sense of justice; and that he could be restrained from wrong and protected in right, by moderate powers, confided in persons of his own choice, and held to their duties by dependence on his own will." In other words, Jefferson believed in the efficacy of republican government erected on the foundation of the democratic process. This does not mean that he held some naive notion that all men were created with an equal capacity for the exercise of the responsibilities of governing. It must be admitted that Jefferson was every bit as much an elitist as Hamilton. But his was a different kind of elitism. And there is a level at which their thinking is remarkably convergent. Both feared the corruption of men in power, but this fear is more pronounced in Jefferson than in Hamilton. This in part explains Jefferson's belief that the role of the masses as electors, and checks, was of as much importance as the role of the administrators. He explained to the Abbe Arnoux that he thought it necessary "to introduce the people into every department of government as far as they are capable of

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38TJ to Judge William Johnson, June 12, 1823, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XV, 439-452.
exercising it," because "this is the only way to ensure a long-continued and honest administration of it's powers." The people, he explained, "are not qualified to exercise themselves the EXECUTIVE department: but they are qualified to name the person who shall exercise it." Likewise "they are not qualified to LEGISLATE," and therefore they are called upon only to "chuse the legislators." And finally "they are not qualified to JUDGE questions of law; but they are very capable of judging questions of fact." They therefore in the form of juries "determine all matters of fact, leaving to the permanent judges to decide the law resulting from those facts." Jefferson believed that it was important that the most talented and qualified be given the responsibility for the administration of government. But he would disagree with Hamilton as to how that "first class" should be identified. He believed that there is "a natural aristocracy among men," one that rests upon the foundations of "virtue and talents." He believed that Hamilton's "first class" was really only an "artificial aristocracy," one that was "founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents." He was convinced that the foundations on which the artificial aristocracy rested were less desirable qualifications than those which marked the character of the natural aristocracy. The latter, he wrote, "I consider as the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society. And indeed, he continued, expanding a faith elaborated upon earlier, "it would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of the society." Even though there was then, a natural elite prepared by special talents and traits of character that could best perform
the responsibilities of government, Jefferson recognized the danger inherent in
the selection process by which they would be elevated to office, and especially
the need to guard against any trend toward granting them independence from the
will of the electors. The electoral process seemed to solve both problems. He
believed it best "to leave the citizens the free elections and separation of the
aristoi from the pseudo-aristoi, of the wheat from the chaff. In general they
will elect the really good and wise. In some instances, wealth may corrupt,
and birth blind them; but not in sufficient degree to endanger the society." And,
in marked contrast to Hamilton's appraisal of the masses, Jefferson believed
that once the electors had confided power to persons of their choice through the
electoral process, they could by the same process supervise them and hold them
"to their duties" by dependence on the will of the electorate. 39 Though his
faith in the citizens may have been based as much on quantitative as qualitative
considerations, Jefferson's answer to the question posed by Hamilton about the
efficacy of a democratic assembly would have been a definite yes.

This contrast between Hamilton's and Jefferson's philosophies of human
nature and politics is vivid, but is perhaps distorted to some degree unless
certain factors are kept in mind. In the first place Hamilton, though certainly
well read and familiar with both ancient and modern political writings, was more
executor than theorist. Jefferson's unhappy experiences as governor of Virginia
and as President only serve to underscore that he was more suited to the realm

39Ibid.; TJ to Abbé Arnoux, July 19, 1789, Boyd Collection, XV, 282-283;
TJ to John Adams, Oct. 28, 1813, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIII, 394-403.
of theory than practice. Secondly, our insight into Hamilton's political ideas is provided almost entirely by his efforts in the Constitutional Convention and in the ratification struggle that followed. His ideas were shaped by the urgent need to design immediate and practical solutions to political problems that threatened the very existence of the new republic. Jefferson's political theories were for the most part conceived in places like Paris or Monticello, far removed from the crisis atmosphere of Philadelphia in 1787. Jefferson was considered by some of his contemporaries as a philosophical dreamer, or as John Marshall called him a "speculative theorist,"40 appraisals resulting from a perhaps overly optimistic view of human nature and his vision of a political and social utopia separated by an ocean from the degeneracy of European cities and corruption of European politics. A remark by John Adams in 1791 is revealing. Jefferson had in a letter to Adams stated that their disagreement over the best form of government was obvious to both of them. Adams shot back an immediate challenge denying that this was obvious to him: "I know not what your idea is of the best form of Government. You and I have never had a serious conversation together that I can recollect concerning the nature of Government. The very transient hints that have ever passed between Us," he continued, "have been jocular and superficial, without ever coming to any explanation."41 The design

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of political theory may not require the same precision of definition, or compromise with circumstances, as the design of a political apparatus that must immediately assume the practical function for which it is called into being. This is not to demean the necessity or value of either, but simply to suggest that Hamilton's and Jefferson's political ideas, fashioned under different circumstances and out of different intellectual natures, do not form an exact philosophical dialogue. Perhaps if these circumstances were altered, their political ideas would have taken a different form from that described here.

Jefferson's and Hamilton's ideas on human nature and political institutions and on the relationship of one to the other accurately reflect the philosophical differences between the democratical and aristocratical factions among the founding fathers in a general sense. It would be inaccurate however to describe all Jeffersonians as naive optimists or all Federalists as morbid pessimists in their appraisal of human nature or in the attendant political implications. The example of James Madison provides a needed corrective to prevent such a distortion.

Madison and Jefferson, in what Adrienne Koch has called "the great collaboration," were the two men most responsible for designing the ideology of early American democracy. 42 Yet when one compares Madison's philosophical assumptions with those of Jefferson, some interesting contrasts develop. Madison's conception of human nature is not as clearly revealed as that of Jefferson, and the indications that are available are ambivalent. His biographers describe

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his feelings about the nature of man as more or less a balance between gloom and hope or between despair and optimism. Saul K. Padover concludes that Madison's "sober appraisal of human nature was, at bottom, Calvinistic rather than Jeffersonian, but he was enough of a child of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment to balance his gloom with a streak of hopefulness. While not sharing Jefferson's optimistic faith in progress and human perfectibility, Madison at the same time rejected the Hamiltonian concept of total human depravity." 43

Like Hamilton, Madison believed that "the strongest passions and most dangerous weaknesses of the human breast" are "ambition, avarice, vanity, [and] the honourable or venial love of fame." These passions acted together in a "conspiracy" which was largely responsible for man's failure in history to reconcile discordant opinions, to adjust conflicting interests, and to assuage mutual jealousies. The history of man was, according to Madison, a history of factions, contentions, and disappointments which displayed "the infirmities and depravities of the human character." This indicated to him that one of the functions of government is to control and regulate man's natural passions.

This appraisal did not, however, argue "that there is not sufficient virtue among men for self-government" or "that nothing less than the chains of despotism can restrain them from destroying and devouring one another." The optimistic strain in his appraisal of human nature is shown in his affirmation that "as there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain

degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence." In the final analysis, Madison believed that man's nature was composed of both good and bad, and that individual behavior reflected the balance of these elements. As a political theorist he believed that government could safely be built upon the supposition that man's better qualities were more influential than the baser sort. One of the cornerstones of his political theory was that "republican government presupposes the existence of these [better] qualities in a higher degree than any other form." He believed that the genius of the American people and the principles of the Revolution demanded that the designers of the Constitution rest all of their "political experiments on the capacity of mankind for self-government." How this balance between good and evil in man's nature affected his ideas on the design of government will be developed below.

Ralph L. Ketcham, in an article entitled "James Madison and the Nature of Man," has correctly noted that there are no explicit references in Madison's writings to the origins of his ideas about human nature. Ketcham suggests that they were probably derived from both Enlightenment and classical works ranging from Aristotle to Locke, all of which were standard fare for young scholars in the eighteenth century. I would suggest an even more immediate source of

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45 Journal of the History of Ideas, XIX (1958), 68n.
these ideas, and one that contains the same ambivalence that is characteristic of Madison's ideas.

Madison entered the College of New Jersey at Princeton in 1769, one year after John Witherspoon was brought from Scotland to be president of the colonial Presbyterian college. He received the bachelor of arts degree in 1771 but remained at the college for another year studying Hebrew and ethics under Witherspoon. Their relationship extended beyond the academic realm to the political realm as they served together as delegates to the Continental Congress after each had served on committees in 1776 designing constitutions for Virginia and New Jersey.

It seems plausible to suggest that Witherspoon's lectures on moral philosophy helped to shape Madison's ideas on the nature of man. This suggestion seems even more plausible in the light of the complexity of Witherspoon's blend of Calvinistic ideas of human depravity with the moral sense theory that had received so much currency in his native country.

Witherspoon taught that the principles of ethical systems must be based on the nature of man and must conform to the purpose of his creation. Since man's relation to God lies at the foundation of moral sentiments and duties, man "ought to take the rule of duty from conscience enlightened by reason, experience, and every way by which we can be supposed to learn the will of our Maker, and his intention in creating us such as we are." Though he did not accept either the intellectualist or sentimentalist arguments as being totally or exclusively true, he did teach that "a sense of moral good and evil, is as really a principle of our nature, as either the gross external or reflex senses, and as
truly distinct from both, as they are from each other." He described the sources of man's knowledge as I. Sensations, external and internal, and II. Reflection. His definition of the moral sense, taken from Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, was "the law which our Maker has written upon our hearts, and both intimates and enforces duty, previous to all reasoning." According to Witherspoon then, man is equipped with an internal monitor or sensation that unerringly reveals to him his duties to God (love, fear, trust, worship), to man (sincere and active love manifested in justice and mercy), and to self (discipline of desires and affections, protection of moral character and religious hope). And the obligation to this virtue is founded on the particulars of intrinsic excellence, present happiness, duty to the Supreme Being (most important), hope of future happiness, and the fear of future misery.46

In the classroom Witherspoon taught that man possesses a moral sense that "both intimates and enforces duty," but in the pulpit he was less optimistic about the forces that shape human behavior. Here he denounced in true Calvinistic fashion those "men of lax and corrupt principles" who took "great delight in speaking to the praise of human nature, and extolling its dignity, without distinguishing what it was, at its first creation, from what it is in its present fallen state." This praise, he said, was nothing but distorted speculations of the worldly mind, and were disproved by both the historical record and by daily experience, both of which "ought to humble us in the dust." Witherspoon preached that "all the disorders in human society, and the greatest part even of

46 Lectures on Moral Philosophy, 4, 11-17, 29-35, 45-61.
the unhappiness we are exposed to, arises from the envy; malice, covetousness, and other lusts of man." 47

While arguments for the existence of a moral sense and for the fallen state of man are not exactly dialectical opposites, there is an antagonism between them that is probably best described as one of emphasis. To credit man with a moral faculty that has the authority to both judge and urge correct moral behavior strongly suggests a generally optimistic view of human nature and the prospect of harmonious social relations. Conversely, to attribute to man an inherent depravity, which is irrepressibly expressed through base passions, just as strongly supports a generally pessimistic view of both. Madison, as a student of Witherspoon, was subjected to both emphases, which may well account for his conception of human nature.

The balance between the positive and negative aspects of the nature of man as conceived by Madison had a significant influence on his political theory. And just as his beliefs about human nature place him in a category somewhere between Jefferson and Hamilton, his related political ideas assume a similar relationship.

Madison's political theory begins with the assumption that government is necessary for a harmonious society. This fact was in itself a reflection on human nature. "If men were angels," he said, "no government would be necessary." He believed that the absence of government would lead to anarchy,

and then to despotism. But, he wrote, "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." 48 He wrote that the basic responsibility of political
institutions is the preservation of the safety and happiness of society. From a
negative viewpoint, this meant that government must have the strength to pro-
vide an "authoritative termination of occurring controversies," and to sub-
stitute "law and order, for uncertainty, confusion, and violence." 49 From a
more positive viewpoint, government was simply charged with the responsi-
bility of guarding or arbiting the personal and property rights of citizens who
lived in basic harmony anyway. Yet he was ever conscious that "the essence
of Government is power; and power, lodged as it must be in human hands, will
ever be liable to abuse." This danger was true of all forms of government.
"In monarchies, the interests and happiness of all may be sacrificed to the
caprice and passions of a despot. In aristocracies, the rights and welfare of
the many may be sacrificed to the pride and cupidity of the few." And even in
republics there is a danger "that the majority may not sufficiently respect the
rights of the minority." 50 All of these different forms of abuse were the
result of the weakness of human character. Like Hamilton he recognized that

48 "The Federalist No. 51," The Federalist, ed. by Earle, 335-341;
Speech in Virginia Convention, June 14, 1788, Hunt Collection, V, 197.

49 Madison to Edward Everett, Aug. 28, 1830, Ibid., IX, 383-403.

50 Speech in Virginia Convention, Dec. 2, 1829, Ibid., 358-364.
"bodies of men [governments] are not less swayed by interest than individuals" and indeed "are less controlled by the dread of reproach and the other motives felt by individuals." But though no form of government would be perfectly free from the danger of the abuse of power, he believed that the republican form was less vulnerable to abuse than any other. Recognizing the more positive aspects of man's nature, he believed that the people must ever control and regulate the power of government. Only a republican form, defined as "a government which derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people, and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure, for a limited period, or during good behavior," placed this control in the governed.

It was this preference for republican principles that signalled the end of the collaboration between Madison and Hamilton that had existed during the ratification struggle, and the beginning of the close political collaboration of Madison and Jefferson in the 1790s and after. As has already been noted, Madison believed in the ability of man to fashion and control his own political institutions. Like Jefferson he believed that there was "a deep distinction" between the Republican and Federalist philosophies, a distinction that had "its origin in the confidence of the former, in the capacity of mankind for self Govt and in a distrust of it by the other or by its leaders." He elaborated on this

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51 Madison to Thomas Ritchie, Dec. 18, 1825, Ibid., 231-236.


53 Madison to William Eustis, May 22, 1823, Hunt Collection, IX, 135-137.
theme in a political "position paper" published in the National Gazette. There he spelled out the Republican principle that the people themselves are the best keepers of their own liberties. "The sacred trust can be nowhere so safe," he wrote, "as in the hands most interested in preserving it." The other party, he said, fashioned its policies on the belief that "the people are stupid, suspicious, licentious" and that "they cannot safely trust themselves." Madison believed that the struggle between these contrasting philosophies had shaped the early political history of the new nation. Looking back over the first half-century of that experience, he judged that time had proven that it was the Republican principles that were in harmony with the spirit of the American people.

Jefferson and Madison were in perfect agreement on the principles of republican government, but as Adrienne Koch has noted, "there was no total unanimity on the methods or specific proposals for attaining their common ideals." Koch concludes that their partnership was "a working compromise, a powerful amalgam of two distinct minds striving to approximate the public good." Such minor differences as did exist can be traced almost entirely to three factors listed here in order of ascending importance: 1) the difference in their basic temperaments, 2) their relative involvement in the crises of the 1780s, and 3) the variance between their views of human nature. Moderation and temperance are the two words most frequently encountered in descriptions

54 Dec. 20, 1792, Ibid., VI, 120.
55 Madison to William Eustis, May 22, 1823, Ibid., IX, 135-137.
56 Jefferson and Madison, 43-46.
of Madison's thought. One biographer has written that Madison could be described as "the exegete of the American democracy and Jefferson as its poet;" that "where Jefferson had a sweeping vision and lively imagination, Madison was cool and exquisitely balanced. Jefferson loved to theorize about men and nature and to let his fancy soar; Madison was judicious and almost passionless." Madison's responsibilities in the Constitutional Convention demanded pragmatism over theory, and the empirical evidence of the events leading to that Convention reinforced his natural caution. But in the final analysis, it was more likely the difference in their optimism about human nature that was at the root of the differences in their political ideas.

Although both shared the belief that man possessed the virtue necessary to make democracy work, Madison's optimism was much more cautious than Jefferson's. This caution was revealed in a number of areas. A good example is his twofold argument in support of a senate in the proposed reorganization of the government under the new constitution. First he argued that "the necessity of a senate is . . . indicated by the propensity of all single and numerous assemblies to yield to the impulse of sudden and violent passions, and to be seduced by factious leaders into intemperate and pernicious resolutions." He also argued that "such an institution may be sometimes necessary as a defense to the people against their own temporary errors and delusions." He certainly held that the will of the people should always ultimately prevail over the views of the rulers, but "there are particular moments in public

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57 Padover, Complete Madison, 10.
affairs when the people, stimulated by some irregular passions, or some illicit advantage, or misled by the artful misrepresentations of interested men, may call for measures which they themselves will afterwards be the most ready to lament and condemn." Madison believed that in these critical moments growing out of the weakness of human character, there should be some "temperate and respectable body of citizens" to step in and "suspend the blow meditated by the people against themselves, until reason, justice, and truth can regain their authority over the public mind." 58 Another example that contrasts Jefferson's and Madison's confidence in man is shown in the latter's uneasiness about submitting important constitutional questions to the decision of the whole society. Whereas Jefferson tended to think in terms of frequent review and modification of the fundamental laws with the consent of the people, Madison believed that in spite of America's success in governmental revision in the 1770s, such "experiments are of too ticklish a nature to be unnecessarily multiplied." He feared that frequent appeals might not only "disturb the public tranquility by interesting too strongly the public passions," but that they would deprive the government of what Burke thought so important, "that veneration which time bestows on every thing, and without which perhaps the wisest and freest governments would not possess the requisite stability." 59

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59 "The Federalist No. 49," Ibid., 327-332. Jefferson seems to have been virtually answering Burke in a letter to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816, in which he strongly advocated the revision of the American constitution. "Some men look at constitutions with sanctimonious reverence, and deem them like the ark of the covenant, too sacred to be touched. They ascribe to the
Madison's ideas about the function and power of the presidency provide a final example of his reserve about human nature and its influence on his political ideas. Like the overwhelming majority of the other founding fathers, Madison felt no fear about the misuse of power by the executive so long as Washington occupied that office. But he argued fervently during President Washington's second administration that the function of the presidency must be defined on the basis of human nature in general rather than on the character of the existing magistrate. Madison was simply anticipating a future time when a person of less moral stature would occupy that office, and who would through defect of character feel a less noble devotion to his sacred trust.

The Republican principle that most closely united Madison and Jefferson, beyond their belief in the source of political authority, was their common faith men of the preceding age a wisdom more than human, and suppose what they did to be beyond amendment . . . . I am certainly not an advocate for frequent and untried changes in laws and constitutions. I think moderate imperfections had better be borne with; because, when once known, we accommodate ourselves to them, and find practical means of correcting their ill effects. But I know also, that laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also, and keep pace with the times." Jefferson actually proposed that constitutions should be reviewed every nineteen years. "Each generation is as independent of the one preceding, as that was of all which had gone before. It has then, like them, a right to choose for itself the form of government it believes most promotive of its own happiness." Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XV, 32-44.

60Political Observations (Philadelphia, 1795), 13.
in the ability of the people collectively to select wise rulers. Madison declared in the Virginia Convention of 1788: "I go on this great republican principle, that the people will have virtue and intelligence to select men of virtue and wisdom." He said that the Republicans put their first confidence not in rulers, but in the people who are to choose them. 61 Though Jefferson in 1776 expressed some doubts about the wisdom of the people's choice in elections, by 1789 his confidence matched that of Madison. By that time he had come to believe that "it is necessary to introduce the people into every department of government as far as they are capable of exercising it" as the means of insuring the honest administration of governmental powers. He was emphasizing that, though all of the citizens were not qualified to exercise executive or legislative responsibilities, they were amply qualified to choose by ballot those who should. 62 Both Madison and Jefferson shared the belief that this authority in the hands of the electorate was the ultimate safeguard against the misuse of political power by designing men. In this belief, they were expressing a faith in man collectively rather than man individually. And indeed there is a negative implication in this principle that, in Jefferson's case, was much stronger during his early career. In his Notes he proposed that "influence over government must be shared among all the people. If every individual which composes their mass participates of the ultimate authority, the government will be safe; because the

61 June 20, 1788, Hunt Collection, V, 223.

corrupting the whole mass will exceed any private resources of wealth; and public ones cannot be provided but by levies on the people." In terms of suffrage this meant that corruption "would be more effectually restrained by an extension of that right to such numbers as would bid defiance to the means of corruption." Like Madison, Jefferson believed that "in every government on earth is some trace of human weakness . . . which cunning will discover, and wickedness insensibly open, cultivate and improve." His faith in the masses contained in this early expression is obviously a functional trust in numbers more than a general trust in human nature. It is clear that, during the next two decades, Jefferson's faith in the masses came more and more to rest upon an optimistic view of human nature.

It seems to me undeniable that Jefferson's, Hamilton's, and Madison's conceptions of human nature, their beliefs in the relative ascendency of such behavioral shaping forces as benevolence and selfishness, were reflected in their notions about the kind of institutions necessary for the government of man in society. To Hamilton, experience was but a "continued comment on the worthlessness of the human race." Man, in his opinion, was by nature vicious, jealous, selfish, designing, and his behavior in society would reflect these most basic and powerful motivations. He consequently believed that a prime function of government is to restrain and to control these "fiery and destructive passions" in the human breast. Therefore, he concluded, government should be designed in such a way as to insure it sufficient power and
independence to carry out this responsibility. In the building of governments, Hamilton concluded, one should begin with the supposition that all men are motivated purely by self-interest and should not calculate on "the weaker springs of human character." This indictment of human nature extended even to those who would exercise the authority of government. But his distrust of leaders in power, presumably selected from "the rich and well born" and thus less subject to the temptation of self-interest, was far less intense than his fear of the "turbulent and changing" masses.

To Madison, the historical record was hardly less discouraging. It seemed to prove that man needed some power outside of himself as a guard against the anarchy inherent in the free exercise of the natural passions. Yet he was not a total pessimist, and believed that there were also positive impulses within the human breast that, under proper circumstances, would counterbalance the destructive passions. Though the regulatory power of government was necessary to insure an orderly society, Madison believed that men collectively possessed sufficient natural virtue to be vested through the democratic process with ultimate sovereignty even over the necessary power outside of themselves. It seems to me that Madison's political ideas were shaped by a mixture of pessimism about human nature in the individual context, and optimism about human nature in the collective or social context, where, on balance, positive impulses would prevail.

The larger part of this dissertation has been devoted to showing that Jefferson embraced the theory of the moral sense in the specific terms that were proposed by the Scottish sentimentalist philosophers. That he was familiar with their works from an early date has been established beyond doubt, and his continued interest and study in the years subsequent to his college experience is equally evident. The copying of particular passages from their works in his commonplace book is a positive indication of their appeal. The marginalia previously cited, though limited, is excellent testimony of thoughtful reading. The discussion of their theories in his personal correspondence, especially in the later years of his life, in an era long following his first exposure to them, points to his assimilation of their ideas and the lasting impressions which they must have made on him. We can safely conclude that Jefferson, throughout his mature life, possessed a striking familiarity with the writings of the Scottish sentimentalists. His understanding of the moral sense theory, both in premise and development, followed their school. And four basic principles from this theory -- that man is naturally moral, that he is naturally benevolent, that these natural faculties are susceptible to development, and that they prepare man for a social existence -- were important intellectual supports for Jefferson's faith in human nature.

It seems obvious to me that these same principles were equally important supports for his optimistic hope for a harmonious democratic society. It was Jefferson's belief in the better side of man, founded on the principles of the Scottish sentimentalists, that underlay his lasting confidence in "the natural
integrity and discretion of the people, and in the safety and extent to which they might trust themselves with a control over their government. He rejected as a "humiliation to human nature" the Hobbesian denial of a sense of justice and injustice natural to man. He believed that God had implanted in man's nature a hunger for society, that He had provided the necessary faculties and qualities, including a sense of justice, by which man could satisfy that hunger, and that therefore man could be freely trusted to regulate and control his society through a democratic system of self-government. He rejected the unproved association of democracy and anarchy, because he rejected the negative view of human nature on which the association rested. "I have so much confidence in the good sense of man, and his qualifications for self-government," he wrote, "that I am never afraid of the issue where reason is left free to exert her force." Jefferson's optimism about man differed in some degree from that of Madison, especially during the later years of their collaboration, mainly because his optimistic appraisal was shaped by a philosophy of human nature in the individual context.

When Jefferson extended this sentimentalism optimism to man in the collective context, his faith not only transcended Madison's but assumed what would be called by the mid-nineteenth century a romantic dimension.

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65 TJ to John Melish, Jan. 13, 1813, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIII, 206-213.  
67 TJ to Dodat, Aug. 3, 1789, Boyd Collection, XV, 326.
essential difference between Jefferson's appraisal of man and the romantic appraisal was not one of conclusion, but only of philosophical foundations. Jefferson's faith was summed up in his declaration that "as long as the masses can be protected, we may trust to them for light." This was an affirmation of the natural morality of man, and was the foundation of his admiration for the American yeoman. "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people," he once wrote, "whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue." The uncorrupted morals of these cultivators of the earth were to him a good example of man's natural goodness. So long as these innocents were protected, America was safe.

The implications of this optimistic faith in man and mankind were translated into a definition of the function of government. His definition, as outlined in his first inaugural address, was predictably brief and noticeably lacked emphasis on regulatory concerns. The sum of good government, he said, is one "which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned."

It has been written that "the theory of Jefferson, the political scientist,

68TJ to Archibald Stuart, May 14, 1799, Correspondence of Archibald Stuart, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

69Notes, 157; TJ to the Marquis de Lafayette, Feb. 14, 1815, Lipscomb and Bergh Collection, XIV, 245-255.

70Ibid., III, 317-323.
and the practice of Jefferson, the man of affairs, are not always free from inconsistency." 71 This is a frequently encountered indictment in political histories of the era. Daniel J. Boorstin charges that "once in power, Jefferson could not but recognize that his negative concept of government was imaginary." 72 Though there is certainly an element of truth in these charges, the apparent inconsistency is partially and accidentally explained in Boorstin's own observation that in Jeffersonian political theory governmental institutions "were nothing but the expedients by which diverse and feeble human minds grappled with transient problems." 73 More importantly, these accusations detract from Jefferson's consistent concern with the fundamental laws that ultimately define the relationship between governments and governed. It was his deep concern with constitutions, beginning in Virginia in 1776 and continuing through the rest of his life, that reveal the consistency of his thought about the non-transient challenges of human society and its necessary institutions, and his consistent faith in the people as the fashioners and guardians of their own liberty. His proposed constitutions for Virginia in 1776 and 1783, and his efforts on behalf of legal reform in the late 1770s were both attacks on the aristocratic structure of society. His bitter and continuing disappointment over the constitution that was adopted in Virginia in 1776, which fell far short of his goals in the extension


72 Boorstin, Lost World, 200.

73 Ibid., 186-187.
of the suffrage and equal representation, reveal a lingering belief that neither
his native state nor the United States by implication, "penetrated to the mother
principle, that 'governments are republican only in proportion as they embody
the will of their people, and execute it.'" In arguing for constitutional revision
in 1816 he wrote that "the true foundation of republican government is the
equal right of every citizen, in his person and property, and in their manage-
ment. Try by this, as a tally, every provision of our Constitution," he
challenged, "and see if it hangs directly on the will of the people."74 His con-
sistent faith in the natural morality of the people, strongly influenced by the
philosophical arguments of the sentimentalist ethical theory, expressed in his
definition of the role of the people in relationship to their government, seems
to me to render the apparent paradoxes in his political career less significant.

A half century after Jefferson's death, Walt Whitman, one of America's
best known romanticists, expressed sentiments about the nature of man that
capture in a most poignant way what might be described as the Jefferson credo:

I trust humanity: its instincts are in the main right: it goes false, it goes
true, to its interests, but in the long run it makes advances. Humanity al-
ways has to provide for the present moment as well as for the future: that
is a tangle, however you look at it. Why wonder then, that humanity falls
down every now and then? There's one thing we have to remember -- that
the race is not free (free of its own ignorance) -- is hardly in a position to
do the best for itself: when we get a real democracy, as we will by and by,
this humanity will have its chance -- give a fuller report of itself.

I am not a witness for saviors -- exceptional men: for the nobility -- no:
I am a witness for the average man, the whole. 75

74Notes, 104-124; TJ to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816, Lipscomb and
Bergh Collection, XV, 32-44; Editor's note, Boyd Collection, I, 330-331.

75Walter Teller, compiler, Walt Whitman's Camden Conversations (New
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