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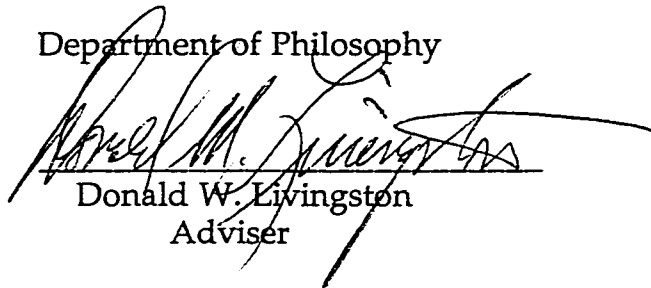
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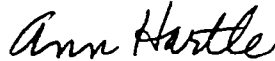
The Constitution of Man:
John C. Calhoun and a Solid Foundation for Political Science

By

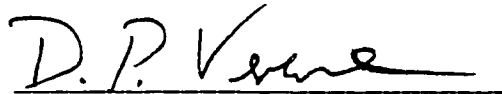
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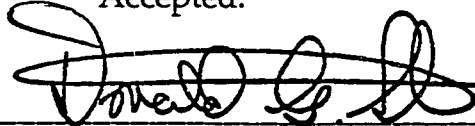


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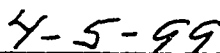


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The Constitution of Man:
John C. Calhoun and a Solid Foundation for Political Science

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An Abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate
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of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Philosophy

1998

John C. Calhoun was the only American political writer of the period from the 1770's until the 1860's to set down a general and systematic philosophical account of the nature of man and government. Also, Calhoun expounded an ideal of constitutional government that is compelling and, in many respects, original. But, while he is widely known as a great American statesman, Calhoun has not yet been adequately characterized as a moral and political thinker. In this study, a beginning is made at showing that on the basis of the range, the depth, and the originality of his ideas, Calhoun deserves to be considered as one among the great moral and political philosophers of the West. The overarching aim of my dissertation is to characterize Calhoun accurately as a moral and political thinker by writing what will be the first philosophic work on Calhoun's ideas that treats of fundamental themes in a manner that conveys the essence and the whole of his thought.

Inspired by the foundational work of Newton, La Place, and others, Calhoun sought to lay a solid foundation for the science of government by discovering and articulating – through the use of “metaphysical reasoning” – what I have called the first principle of politics, “that principle without which government would not exist, and with which its existence is necessary.” Calhoun locates this principle in human nature, and calls it the “two-fold constitution of our nature.” In his Disquisition on Government, Calhoun shows how the great questions comprehended by political science can be given their definitive answers in terms of that principle.

My study includes a critical discussion of the manner in which Calhoun explains the great phenomena of politics by recourse to this first principle. The phenomena and issues illuminated and explained include, among others: the origin and fundamental nature of society, government, and constitution; the moral character of citizens and government leaders; the unification or division, and the strength or weakness of the community; and the degree of knowledge of personal and public good that is achieved by participants in a political order.

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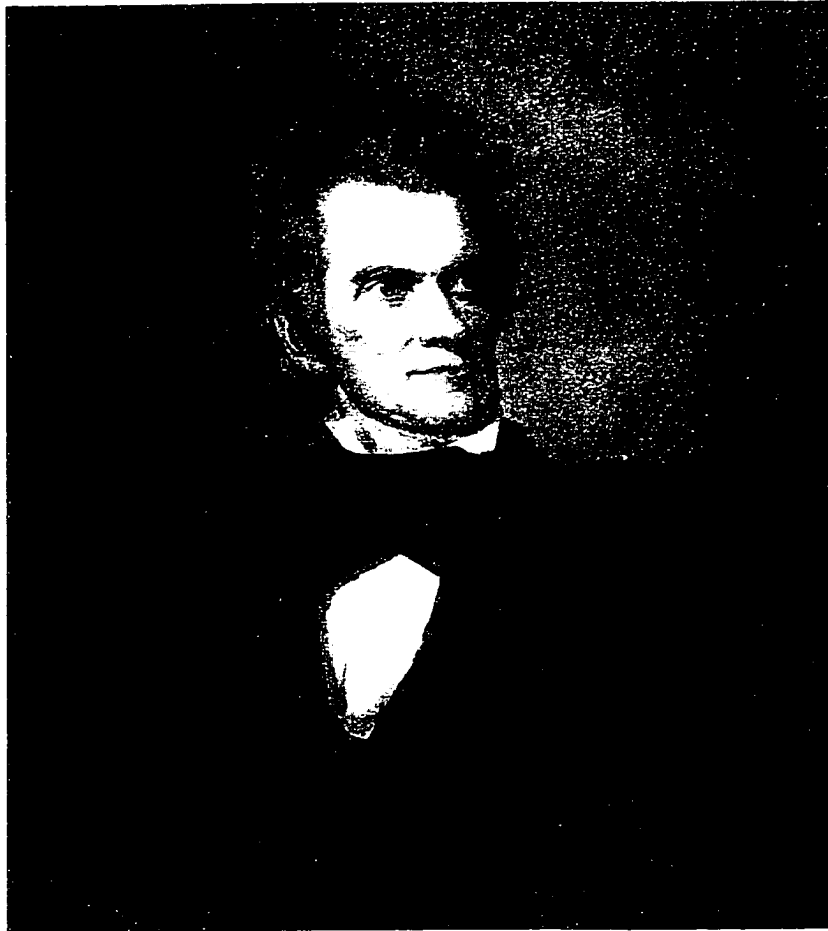
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*For my wife Carman, and our son
William Nathaniel*

To the Memory of

JOHN C. CALHOUN

The Preeminent Philosopher and Statesman Of The United States,
And Their Greatest Legislator, Vice-President, And Cabinet Member;
Whose Genius Through a Long Life Was Devoted To The Peace, Harmony,
Enlightenment, and Liberty of the Union Created By
The Constitution of 1787



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INTRODUCTION

Now, by far the most important kind of wisdom . . . is that which governs the ordering of society, and which goes by the names of justice and moderation.

– Plato, Symposium

Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood so established, that unless we love the truth, we cannot know it.

– Pascal, Pensees

The vast disparity between God and man is never more evident than in the wisdom of their respective judgments. Indeed, our merely human contrivance of historical writing must sometimes appear as a paltry and insignificant conceit when compared to the motions and perceptions of God's eye. But this inequality between God and man, being a direct reflection of comparative goodness and intelligence, has an imperfect analogue amongst men themselves.

Human historical judgments reflect the intelligence and moral character of the judges as much as they report the deeds and words of those who are judged. Whole societies and cultures, like individual men, may be known by the judgments they pronounce. Thus we may readily deduce and clearly perceive the condition of men's souls -- including our own -- by first observing what is approved or disapproved, and why. This sobering recognition has accompanied me throughout the present investigation, serving all the while and all at once, as a warning, a guide, and a source of inspiration.

John C. Calhoun (1782-1850) occupies a special place within the American political and intellectual pantheon. He stands out from among the major American political thinkers -- who include Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, Adams, Randolph, and Taylor -- because he offered not merely isolated reflections on politics and related matters, but a systematic speculative-philosophical account of the nature of man and government. This circumstance entitles him perhaps to recognition as America's preeminent political philosopher. Also, since he was the only American from colonial times until at least the 1860's to expound a timeless and

systematic political doctrine about the human good, Calhoun is evidently the prime candidate among American thinkers for induction into the Western philosophical canon.¹ Yet, while he is widely known as an influential politician and statesman, Calhoun has not yet been adequately characterized either as a moral and political thinker or as a statesman. This is so because understanding Calhoun's philosophic ideas and apprehending his true stature as a statesman are intimately related enterprises. In this study, a beginning is made at showing that on the basis of the range, the depth, and the originality of his ideas, Calhoun deserves to be considered as one among the great moral and political philosophers of the West.

My overarching aim in this study is to identify and to articulate the fundamental elements of Calhoun's philosophy, and to describe their basic interrelations one to another within the context of critical discussion. This project, ambitious though it is, may be viewed as an essential feature of a more general and far more extensive project: that of situating Calhoun's speculative ideas in relation both to political history or experience and to the Western philosophical tradition.

While studying the essay that follows, the reader should keep in mind that this latter project is not my present object. For the latter project assumes not merely a careful study of Calhoun's ideas, but an extensive knowledge both of other political thinkers and of the political traditions and practices of the West. Recognizing that this more ambitious project is beyond my present erudition, I have chosen a more modest task. But, in order to gauge the

¹ See the foreword by Russell Kirk to The Essential Calhoun: Selections from Writings, Speeches, and Letters, ed. by Clyde N. Wilson (London: Transaction Publishers, 1992), ix: "... Calhoun's political thought is more original and more closely reasoned than that of any other American statesman."

originality and general significance of Calhoun's ideas fully, of course, the more ambitious, comparative study would be in order, that it may serve as the foundation for such appraisal. Even so, the present work will hardly be found to desist from this general, intellectual-historical mode of evaluation. After all, such evaluative reflections need not be wholly excluded from such a work, so long as they are proffered as more suggestive than doctrinaire. Therefore, the general intellectual-historical pronouncements which do appear in the present work should be construed by the reader as more tentative and suggestive than as finally settled and insisted upon.

Calhoun is now, and always has been, more widely known as a politician and statesman than as a philosopher. The reason for this is twofold: first, the statesmanly and philosophical concerns were so evenly matched in Calhoun; secondly, practical political issues naturally elicit stronger emotions and solicitude as compared with speculative ones. Add to this reason that "Calhoun was a controversial figure who stood against the course that American history has taken", toward whom "hostility is inevitable"², and it is hardly surprising that his statesmanly career has received far more critical attention than his speculative ideas. This means, however, that historians, together with a few political scientists, have been left virtually alone to interpret Calhoun's life and ideas for successive generations according merely to the conceptual categories and prejudices peculiar to their own respective disciplines, with little or no input and correction from other

² See Clyde N. Wilson, John C. Calhoun: A Bibliography, *Bibliographies of American Notables*, No. 1 (London: Meckler, 1990), 4.

fields, including for example, philosophy and economics.³ This circumstance, of itself, should suggest that much of the existing literature on Calhoun is highly problematic.

Much has been written on the great political events of Calhoun's life and on his struggles as a politician and statesman. Indeed, most of the critical attention Calhoun has received thusfar has been from either biographers or political historians, who have typically characterized Calhoun as a man distinctly American and distinctly Southern.⁴ Yet, while some of these more strictly historical works have considerable merit, they have, for various reasons, fallen short in characterizing Calhoun. By focusing on certain facts about Calhoun's upbringing and political career, and by failing both to fathom and to appreciate fully the depth, originality, and significance of his philosophical thought; these biographers and historians --- including those most sympathetic to the man in his struggles --- have often fallen into the error of depicting Calhoun as a merely contingent and "historical" figure whose ideas and actions could have little relevance or meaning beyond his

³ But, exceptions so far as economics is concerned include Giuseppe Butta, "Politica, economica e societa nel pensiero di John C. Calhoun" *Historica* 34 (January-March 1981): 3-8, and especially Francis J. Donoghue, "The Economic and Social Principles of John C. Calhoun" Ph. D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1969.

⁴ The standard biography of Calhoun is Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1944-1951). The best one-volume treatment is Margaret L. Coit, *John C. Calhoun: American Portrait* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950).

own age.⁵

Comparatively little has been written on the universal character of Calhoun's thought.⁶ Consequently, not merely among economists and philosophers, but even among a vast majority of political scientists and historians today, little or nothing is known about Calhoun as a philosopher concerned with timeless truths about the human condition. And yet, Calhoun the philosopher stood out in an era renowned for its great orators and statesmen.⁷ Indeed, as a philosopher-statesman, Calhoun stands out among both statesmen and philosophers in general.

⁵ On Calhoun's continuing relevance, see, for example, Peter F. Drucker, "A Key to American Politics: Calhoun's Pluralism" Review of Politics 10 (October 1948): 412-426; Thomas Fleming, The Politics of Human Nature (New Brunswick, N.J., and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988); Russell Kirk, "Calhoun Endures" Southern Partisan 9 (Third Quarter 1989): 20-24; Felix Morley, Freedom and Federalism (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1951); Vukan Kuic, "John C. Calhoun's Theory of the 'Concurrent Majority'" American Bar Association Journal 69 (April 1983): 482-486; Wilhelm Ropke, The Social Crisis of Our Time (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "Calhoun Restored" The Nation 170 (April 1, 1950): 302; and Eugene Genovese, The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992): 3, ". . . we could, if we would, profit greatly from a reasoned engagement with the thought of Calhoun, Dew, Bledsoe, Thornwell and others as we grapple today with the staggering problems of a world in headlong transition to the Lord knows what."

⁶ The most noteworthy exception to the general neglect of Calhoun's ideas has been August O. Spain, The Political Theory of John C. Calhoun (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968), originally published in 1951. Aside from Spain's work, published treatments of Calhoun's philosophy hereto have been either superficial or piecemeal or both. Spain's study is helpful, especially in its treatment of Calhoun's American contemporaries and predecessors. It is also useful in suggesting the extent of Calhoun's influence subsequent to his death, as well as his enduring relevance as a political thinker. Still, it fails to penetrate to the essentials of Calhoun's philosophy by exploring, for example, his conceptions (1) of the role of the human constitution in giving rise to social and political actuality, and (2) of the causal role of the structure of government. By so failing, Spain's work also fails to view Calhoun's speculative ideas within the broader historical context of the Western philosophical tradition.

However, because the present essay falls short of a thorough characterization of Calhoun's ideas, for reasons already mentioned, it is best to view Spain's work and the present essay as complementary.

⁷ On Calhoun's oratory, see, for example, Francis Wharton, "Mr. Calhoun's Parliamentary Eloquence" United States Magazine and Democratic Review 14 (February 1844): 11-130; E. L. Magoon, Living Orators in America (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849); and Andrew C. McLaughlin, "Publicists and Orators, 1800-1850" In William P. Trent et al., eds., The Cambridge History of American Literature, 2:70-91 (New York: Macmillan, 1917-1921, 3 vols.

In his speeches, letters, and political writings, one finds combined the impress of extensive practical political experience and a marked preference for metaphysical discourse. Unique among political theorists, Calhoun --- like Cicero, Marcus Aurelius, and Edmund Burke --- brought to his meditations on morals and politics the first-hand experience of a statesman. His political and philosophical thought evolved over a forty-year period in public office, during which he held several of the highest offices of the American union, including those of senator (15 years), congressman (7), Secretary of War (7), Secretary of State (1), and vice-president (7). Unique among statesmen, Calhoun possessed those prodigious powers of the intellect needed to penetrate to remote and recondite causes. The metaphysical character of his mind may be illustrated by considering how, even in speeches and letters on the most practical and concrete issues, say, on a tariff bill or on a matter of foreign affairs, one typically finds a leavening of speculation in terms of universal principles. As he would demonstrate many times during the course of his political career, Calhoun possessed that rare faculty of considering "circumstances in their combinations", and of determining their relative power in "propelling events."

In Calhoun, as in perhaps no other statesman or philosopher in history, we find an even and harmonious blend of two disparate modes of thinking and living, the vita contemplativa and the vita activa.⁸

⁸ See The Wisdom of Conservatism, 4 vols. ed. Peter Witonski (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1971), 1883: "It is rare to find a man in the history of practical politics in whom the vita activa and the vita contemplativa were so equally matched." And compare, for example, the lives and ideas of Cicero and Marcus Aurelius. Though a speculative philosopher of ability, Cicero's governmental experience was less extensive and varied than Calhoun's. On the other hand, Aurelius' political experience was comparatively limited, both in range and extent, while his compendium of moral precepts (the Meditations), though universally interesting and instructive, lack the systematic character of a general speculative philosophy such as we find in both Calhoun and Cicero.

Speculative philosophy and the art of statesmanship are ever susceptible to mutual alienation and division, either through the corruption of one or of the other, or of both.⁹ But Calhoun achieved a kind of easy balance between statesmanship and philosophy -- a balance, that is, between the highest form of practical wisdom (phronesis) and theoretical wisdom (theoria). In fact, as this work will suggest, Calhoun's life was a forceful and dramatic demonstration of the natural and proper intimacy between statesmanship and true philosophy, and of the tragic frustrations and setbacks to which both are susceptible in the world of practical politics.

Those versed in the Western political philosophical tradition who study Calhoun's ideas with care will have no difficulty recognizing that the American philosopher is a thinker in the great Classical Republican tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, St. Augustine, Machiavelli, and Hume.¹⁰ Calhoun spoke clearly and directly to the great and fundamental moral and political issues that confront every generation. A catalogue of the issues which he addressed would be lengthy, and would include the following.

Whence do society, government, and constitution come? -- or in what do they have their origins? What are the fundamental political preconditions of human survival and human flourishing? What is the proper relation between liberty and order? What are sovereignty and self-rule? -- and how can a people attain these? What determines, in a given instance, the proper or salutary extent of governmental power? What determines, in a given instance, the proper or salutary extent of the liberty of

⁹ See Donald W. Livingston, Hume's Philosophy of Common Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). In particular, see chapters 1 and 12. See also Plato's dialogue Gorgias.

¹⁰ Compare J. William Harris, "Last of the Classical Republicans: An Interpretation of John C. Calhoun" Civil War History 30 (September 1984): 255-267.

individuals? What are the sources of national strength and patriotism, or of the physical and moral power of a community? -- and what factors encourage or retard their development? What are the chief determinants of the morals of political leaders, and of the people of a general community? What combination of conditions gives the greatest impetus possible to the desire of each person for self-improvement? What is the true nature of liberty? What is the fundamental relationship between liberty and virtue? How might the government of a community be so organized or reformed, so as to serve as the government of the whole community, without prejudice to any portion?

Calhoun gave answers to these fundamental and critically important questions, and to others of equal import.

Inspired by the foundational insights and discoveries of Galileo, Newton, La Place, and others, Calhoun sought to lay a solid foundation for the science of government by discovering and articulating -- through the use of "metaphysical reasoning" -- what I call the first principle of politics, "that principle without which government would not exist, and with which its existence is necessary." Calhoun finds this principle in human nature, and calls it the "two-fold constitution of our nature." In his Disquisition on Government (posthumously, 1851), Calhoun shows how the great questions comprehended by political science can be given their definitive answers in terms of that principle.

This study includes a critical discussion of the manner in which Calhoun explains the great phenomena of politics by recourse to this first principle. In calling this work "critical", however, it should be remembered that genuine criticism involves recognizing and appreciating the insight and

other strengths of a thinker as well as apprehending and censuring his deficiencies. Consequently, the true critic is animated first and foremost by a spirit of empathetic understanding and appreciation; and this spirit is as conducive to fairness and truth as it is inimical to, for example, that petty reserve and peevish contrariety which are sometimes mistaken for genuine criticism.¹¹

The phenomena illuminated and explained herein include, among others: the origin and fundamental nature of society, government, and constitution; the moral character of citizens and government leaders; the unification or division, and the strength or weakness of the community; and the degree of knowledge of personal and public good that is achieved by participants in a political order. As I will show, Calhoun's discovery and articulation of a first principle makes possible a concise, natural, and elegant theoretical explanation of the political world. As we shall also see, in addition to making this foundational discovery, Calhoun expounded an ideal of constitutional government that is compelling and, in many respects, original. But, the reader will ask, how is it that these important points about Calhoun's philosophy have not been brought out previously?

The literature on Calhoun indicates that his philosophic ideas have fallen subject to a variety of neglect so complete that superficial and

¹¹ Failing to apprehend these truths about the nature of criticism can lead to mistaken assessments of genuine criticism by others. See, for example, Richard N. Current, John C. Calhoun (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1966), 159, where Current charges August O. Spain, The Political Theory of John C. Calhoun (previously cited), with being "uncritical."

misleading treatments stand today in the guise of authorities.¹² These ill-conceived and shallow interpretations continue to influence scholars and laymen, thereby obfuscating Calhoun's ideas. One reason for this neglect and mistreatment is that political thinkers, such as Calhoun, of the generation following the American Founding have received only slight attention in comparison to their fathers. Thus the ideas of Jefferson¹³ (1743-1826), Madison (1751-1836), and Hamilton (c1755-1804) have received vastly more critical attention from subsequent generations of Americans than the ideas of John Randolph of Roanoke (1773-1833), John Taylor of Caroline (1753-1824), and Calhoun. Another reason for the neglect is, of course, that Calhoun has been portrayed by generations of historians as a leading statesman (which he was) and only tangentially as a political thinker. But these reasons alone are not sufficient to explain the relative poverty of the literature on Calhoun's ideas, and the failure thusfar to characterize him both as a statesman and as a philosopher. In fact, most of the blame for this poverty and failure must be laid squarely at the feet of the reigning "liberal-progressive-egalitarian" orthodoxy of our day.

As a statesman, Calhoun contested the ascendancy of this potent

¹² See, for example, Gerald M. Capers, John C. Calhoun, Opportunist: A Reappraisal (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1960); Richard N. Current, John C. Calhoun (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963); Richard Hofstadter, "John C. Calhoun: The Marx of the Master Class" in Hofstadter's The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948); and Ralph Lerner, "Calhoun's New Science of Politics." American Political Science Quarterly 57 (December 1963): 918-932.

¹³ Significantly, there is considerable evidence that Jefferson and Calhoun were friends; and a single meeting, supposed to have taken place in 1806 at Monticello, has become the source of a romantic Southern legend. Biographer Margaret Coit has described that meeting between the seasoned President and a youthful Calhoun "as akin to the old Greek mystic torch race, where the wearied runner passed the lighted torch up to a fresh hand which carried it on to the goal." Coit also points out that, significantly, Calhoun never used the fact of their friendship as political capital. See Margaret Coit, John C. Calhoun: American Portrait (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950), 34-36.

political and emotional-intellectual force. As a philosopher, he left to posterity some of the intellectual weapons with which future generations might combat what he deemed the pernicious and destructive effects of this force. So the relative poverty of the literature on Calhoun's ideas is largely a consequence of the current predominance and fashionability of rival and antithetical ideas. The predominance of such ideas over contemporary culture, then, has rendered many of Calhoun's ideas, for a time, unfashionable. But then, truths are necessarily unfashionable where thought suffers distemper. Indeed, a cure for this distemper may lie, for example, in some re-affirmation and further development of certain unfashionable ideas. Finding "weighty admirers" in every generation¹⁴, Calhoun has endured both the shallow attacks of political dabblers and the bitter, defamatory, and more determined onslaughts of bigoted ideologues with axes to grind.¹⁵

Reviewing the literature, a leading Calhoun scholar, Professor Clyde N. Wilson, notes how "historical evaluations of Calhoun tend to fall into two schools, both of which date back to Calhoun's own lifetime":

One school is attracted by his intellect and character, the tragic nobility of his career, and the timeless elements of his political thought. This

¹⁴ See Clyde N. Wilson, John C. Calhoun: A Bibliography, *Bibliographies of American Notables*, No. 1 (London: Meckler, 1990), 2:

. . . Calhoun played a larger role in his times than common report, focusing on the slavery controversy, has allowed. But in addition to this, Calhoun has another significance that is not shared by most public figures of the same stature in his own time and later. A suprisingly large number of observers, from diverse generations, countries, and viewpoints, have found him to be a political thinker of permanent interest. While Calhoun is very far from being the most admired of American statesmen, he has never at any time lacked weighty admirers. And except for Jefferson and Lincoln, it is hard to think of any American statesman who has had admirers from more diverse points of the compass and the political spectrum, and for reasons that transcend the issues of his own time.

¹⁵ See, for example, Gerald M. Capers, John C. Calhoun, Opportunist: A Reappraisal (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1960), Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1955) and Hermann E. von Holst, John C. Calhoun (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1882).

school crested in the 1950s and has had a minor revival in the 1980s. It began in Calhoun's lifetime and has never died entirely away. The other school portrays him as either deluded or fanatical, or both, warped by ambition and unrealistic abstractionism. This view originates in contemporary journalistic criticism and has continued to the present.¹⁶

Describing how the literature has developed, Wilson adds: "Perhaps superficiality is the greatest problem, for many writers have assumed that Calhoun has already been adequately characterized, and they need do no more than refer to an accepted stereotype¹⁷." And yet: "Other writers have constantly discovered new aspects of his career and new applications of his political thought¹⁸." In fact, one of the major problems with the literature on Calhoun is that "there has been little interchange between the two groups." Consequently, "the literature does not so much progress as go round in circles", so that "large gaps remain in our knowledge¹⁹."

The present work is an attempt to break out of this basically fruitless

¹⁶ See Clyde N. Wilson, John C. Calhoun: A Bibliography, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 3. This uncritical repetition and perpetuation of stereotypes occurs not only in general histories, but in local studies as well. One such stereotype is the view that Calhoun discarded his early nationalist philosophy in the late 1820's in favor of sectionalism. See, for example, A. V. Huff, Jr. Greenville: The History of the City and County in the South Carolina Piedmont (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 103:

In 1828 after Congress adopted an even higher tariff [than in 1824], Vice President Calhoun joined the fray by proposing nullification as an ultimate remedy. He abandoned his Young Republican views in the South Carolina Exposition and Protest, which he wrote anonymously for the antitariff faction in the state. The Constitution, he argued, was a compact between the states, not the people, and a state convention could declare a federal law null and void within its boundaries.

In fact, Calhoun never abandoned his Young Republican views. Instead, Calhoun held to his Classical Republican philosophy throughout his forty-year national career. What changed were not the principles of his philosophy, but the circumstances to which those principles were to be applied. Never a "nationalist" in the sense of consolidation and centralization of power, Calhoun was a federalist in the literal, political scientific sense of the term. Consequently, he understood that strong attachment to the Union, along with liberty, has its foundation in more local loyalties.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 3.

circular pattern. But this should be done not by seeking, for example, an impossible rapprochement between these two irreconcilable camps, but by presenting a more accurate understanding of Calhoun's life and ideas. In this way, superficial perspectives and the perverse sentiments and passions that such perspectives generate and reinforce may be overcome only by achieving greater depth of understanding. A deeper and more critical perspective will allow us, for example, to clear away the conceptual brambles which have cluttered the literature hereto. These brambles have their sources in both innocent superficiality and in the "righteous" conviction that Calhoun was a sophist in behalf of some interest or other. Although spawned from a variety of perspectives and motivations, these allegations of sophistry share in common the property of being unfounded, as the present study will undertake to show. Thus Calhoun has been labelled, to give but few examples: "the Marx of the master class" (Hofstadter: 1948); an "opportunist" (Capers: 1948); a "philosopher of reaction" (Current: 1963); "the bigot who defended human servitude" (Coit: 1950); and a pragmatist or unprincipled equivocator whose early nationalism gave way to a decentralist and states' rights position (Thomas: 1968). What remains is to consider just how this greater depth of understanding may be achieved.

Every scholarly task, like every human life, has both burdens and advantages peculiar to itself. The main burden involved in characterizing Calhoun accurately as a statesman and philosopher is manifold, and consists of addressing at least three overlapping and mutually reinforcing prejudices. These are that Calhoun was: (1) a mere politician and not a high statesman; (2) a sophist in behalf of the slave-holding interest; and (3) a strictly

“American” or even “Southern” political thinker whose ideas are of limited application and relevance. In addressing these defamatory claims, however, we must keep in clear view the nature and significance of those honours and appellations which the authors of such claims would deny Calhoun. As I shall emphasize, sophistry and philosophy are mutually exclusive and antithetical activities, since philosophy involves disinterested pursuit of the truth. So statesmanship and philosophy are universalistic and disinterested; while sophistry and “mere” politics are necessarily particularistic and partial. Consequently, the burden for the sympathetic interpreter of Calhoun is to establish both the universal character of his ideas and the disinterested nature of his motives. This study concentrates mostly on the former task.

Evidently, posterity will be free to take full and proper advantage of the guidance and inspiration which Calhoun’s philosophy and statesmanly example offer only after the poisoned well of the interpreters’ has been redeemed and purified. What we find once the charges of sophistry or special pleading have been dispatched is that the field for interpretation of Calhoun’s ideas is largely open. Ironically then, one advantage to having one’s ideas neglected, or discounted as mere rationalizations of narrow interest, is that they are less often, and perhaps less seriously, misunderstood. Thus, in interpreting Calhoun, we are not burdened in the way that interpreters are of say, the philosophies of Hume, Hegel, or Nietzsche. For as one Hume scholar has written: “More than any other modern philosopher, Hume has appeared as the construct of the conceptual frameworks that interpreters have imposed upon him²⁰.” So the main burden confronting the interpreter of Calhoun’s

²⁰ See Donald W. Livingston, Hume’s Philosophy of Common Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1.

ideas at present is not to argue against false but well-established interpretations of his ideas as philosophy (rather than as sophistry). Instead, his peculiar burden is to see to it that Calhoun's ideas become generally acknowledged as elements of a timeless philosophical speech, as was intended by Calhoun himself.

Now, I have said that Calhoun has not been adequately characterized either as a philosopher or as a statesman. But, given that these vocations are so thoroughly intertwined in Calhoun, being modes of activity which are only distinct conceptually, these two projects can hardly be carried out independently of one another. In fact, as I suggested earlier, the main reason why writers continue to misinterpret Calhoun's words and deeds as a statesman is that they have failed to grasp the essential points of his philosophy. Indeed, in a self-critical moment, Calhoun said: "My politics, I think I may say with perfect truth, has been a system founded on certain fixed principles; and to carry them into effect has been my highest ambition." Despite such suggestions, however, historians and political scientists have failed to understand Calhoun's political behavior at crucial junctures in the political history of the United States because of a prior failure to grasp both the substance and implications of Calhoun's moral and political philosophical ideas and his self-consciously conceived role as an agent within an established tradition of political practice. In fact, this kind of superficiality has tended to be self-perpetuating within the literature, and many of these misinterpretations originated among Calhoun's contemporaries and continue to be echoed or repeated uncritically by historians and others.

In a recent work, Professor Wilson observes: "There remains much to be said about various unexplored aspects of [Calhoun's] political thought, but the most pressing need is to see its range and wholeness ²¹." Indeed, as Wilson suggests, there is as yet no philosophical work on Calhoun's ideas that treats of fundamental themes in a manner that conveys the essence and the whole of his thought.

Intended to fill this lacuna, the present essay was composed with an eye to the full range of Calhoun's ideas, and in a manner designed to convey the impress of the whole of his thought. Being a comprehensive study of Calhoun's moral, social, and political philosophy, this work involves a detailed analysis and assessment of certain fundamental insights of the complex of his ideas, and of their more important interrelations. In order to convey an accurate sense of the whole of his thought, it was necessary to uncover and to arrange in proper order the fundamental themes and insights of Calhoun's work. This could be done only by taking seriously and by evaluating critically his claim to have laid a solid foundation for political science. Calhoun announces this intention at the beginning of his most theoretical work, A Disquisition on Government.

Once Calhoun's intentions and claims on this score are taken seriously, the careful student of the Disquisition, now liberated, for example, from the "unthinking stereotypes which dominate much of the [secondary] literature", is able to descry the underlying unity in his thought. ²² When this critical

²¹ See the introductory essay of The Essential Calhoun: Selections from Writings, Speeches, and Letters, ed. by Clyde N. Wilson. (London: Transaction Publishers, 1992), xvii. Professor Wilson is co-editor of The Papers of John C. Calhoun, ed. Robert L. Meriwether and W. Edwin Hemphill. 19 vols. to date (covering 1801-1844) of a projected 25-vol. edition. (Columbia, S. C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1959-).

²² See Clyde N. Wilson, John C. Calhoun: A Bibliography, 4.

perspective is achieved, it becomes evident that, through his writings, Calhoun reveals to us a bold new understanding of the human political world. Moreover, as I shall suggest, this understanding is one fraught with new and exciting practical political possibilities and theoretical horizons.

So the key to understanding the whole of Calhoun's philosophy, including his pronouncements on disparate moral and political issues, is to understand first his project of laying a solid foundation for political science. Toward this end, Part I of this essay examines the method and discovery by which Calhoun sought to provide that foundation; while Part II shows how this foundation makes possible the definitive explanation of the great issues comprehended in the science of politics.

Chapter I is a wide-ranging discussion of the relation between political experience and political science. Here I introduce Calhoun's conception of the nature of metaphysical reasoning, and examine the possibility and importance of distilling science from political phenomena.

In Chapter II, the most basic or fundamental discovery resulting from Calhoun's application of metaphysical reasoning to the complex and diverse phenomena of politics will be presented and examined. What Calhoun calls "the two-fold constitution" of man's nature will be explicated in systematic fashion; and this internal constitution or principle is one, it turns out, whose fundamentality and explanatory power for politics is comparable to that of the Law of Gravitation for physics. After explicating and analyzing this principle, the second half of Chapter II will consist of conjecture on the intellectual-historical sources and inspirations which led to Calhoun's discovery and development of this fundamental scientific principle.

Chapter III begins with a description of the characteristics of a scientific first principle, then discusses how Calhoun conceived of the principle of man's two-fold constitution as the first principle of the science of politics. In this chapter, we begin to see the scope and explanatory power of this first principle. In this way, Chapter III serves as a general introduction to Part II, where several specific applications of the principle are treated in detail.

The purpose of Part II is to establish, through concrete illustrations, the fundamentality of Calhoun's "two-fold constitution" as the first principle of politics. Toward this end, I shall review a few central questions of moral and political philosophy, and explain how Calhoun approached and answered these questions through the use of this principle. The effect of these detailed explanations will be to clarify what Calhoun means by man's "two-fold constitution", and to establish its prodigious explanatory power as the first principle of the science of politics.

Chapter IV examines a theme which dominates the first part of Calhoun's Disquisition, his view that society, government, and constitution spring directly from human nature, and specifically, from the "two-fold constitution" of our nature. Here we begin to see how Calhoun explains the great variety of societal and governmental arrangements that we find in history as so many modifications of this internal constitution operating as a decisive influence on human action. Here also, while discussing the respective ends of society and government, we begin to see a fundamental connection that will be developed later between man's two-fold internal constitution and political constitution.

Having explored Calhoun's conception of the origin and ends of society

and government, we begin in Chapter V to examine his conception of political constitution. Government is necessary because without it, man's internal constitution would lead him to sacrifice the interests of others to his own supposed interest. But, while government is a solution to this problem, government is itself problematic, also because of man's internal constitution. In the absence of political constitution, governmental powers tend to become converted into instruments of abuse and oppression. At the centre of Calhoun's explanation of the origin and nature of government and constitution is his discovery and paradoxical insight that both tyranny and the various forms of resistance to tyranny share a common source in human nature. So the problem of society, and its solution through government, and the problem of government, and its solution through political constitution -- all have their source in the "two-fold constitution" of man's nature. This chapter presents the first of two principles whose instantiation, according to Calhoun, is necessary for the realization of constitutional government. This first principle of constitution is the right of suffrage, or a process and convention whereby the rulers are made responsible to the ruled. But the right of suffrage, as we shall see, is insufficient, of itself, to fulfill the ends of political constitution. To accomplish this, it is necessary to instantiate another principle in addition to the right of suffrage. Chapter VI discusses this other principle.

This second and sufficient principle of political constitution is a human convention which Calhoun calls "organism." Here, in Chapter VI, we have a critical discussion of that teaching for which Calhoun is best known, the doctrine of the concurrent majority. Calhoun taught that every

society, no matter how homogeneous, consists of a plurality of portions or interests as regards the action and inaction of government. For there to be genuine constitutional government, where the public good enjoys the constant and unadulterated solicitude of the citizenry, each of the major interests of the community must have the power of self-protection in the form of a veto on the legislative enactments initiated and supported by the other interests. This system of vetoes or negatives is what Calhoun means by "organism", and organism, combined properly with the right of suffrage, is what makes a political constitution. Also in Chapter VI, in discussions of the proper source of laws and the nature of constitutional interests, we are introduced to the Calhounian-Classical Republican view that individual liberty and constitutional government are moral and intellectual attainments.

Having shown in Chapters IV, V, and VI how Calhoun explains society, government, and political constitution in terms of man's two-fold constitution, I continue in the remaining chapters to exhibit the great explanatory power of this first principle. In these final chapters, I examine several important aspects of Calhoun's claim that the most fundamental distinction as regards all the various forms of government is not that, for example, between the monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic forms respectively, but is instead the distinction between absolute government, on the one hand, and constitutional government, on the other hand.

In Chapter VII, I examine one of Calhoun's most important and pioneering philosophical speeches, his insight that the principal influence on the development of the moral character of the individuals of a community,

and of their governmental leaders, is the structure of government itself, and specifically, the means by which governmental power and influence are obtained. Calhoun shows that government may be understood as a structure of incentives and disincentives, or of rewards and punishments, that, in combination with other, less important factors, influences the development of the moral sentiments of the individual and fixes his conceptions of his own good and of the good of society. The spectacle of government, as a public example of how power and influence may be effectively acquired and retained, exerts an influence over the general community which tends to be morally decisive, shaping moral characters for good or ill, and thereby, the destinies of humanity. At the centre of this moral development is man's two-fold internal constitution, which, as an innate and active principle of human nature, is susceptible of many and disparate manifestations. Also in this chapter, I examine Calhoun's striking contention that, as a determinant of moral character, the structure of a community's government tends to be more decisive and powerful than all other causes combined, including, for example, both religion and education.

In Chapter VIII, I explore Calhoun's account of the community's power, or of its ability to sustain itself as a distinct and independent moral and political substance and going concern in the face of internal and external threats. The critical distinction is made between the power of government, on the one hand, and the power of the community, on the other hand. Calhoun taught that there are both moral and physical causes of the power of the community, and that the moral causes are "by far" the more important.

The wide-ranging discussion of this chapter also comprehends

Calhoun's views on the causes of progress, and his now quite controversial views on the nature and source of individual liberty. Calhoun argued that a proper balance or ratio between governmental power and liberty is what gives a community its greatest strength, by giving the greatest impulse possible to the innate desire of each person to improve his condition. Government secures the fruits of the individual's exertions, while liberty leaves each free to pursue that course which he deems best "to promote his interest and happiness." When there is either too much liberty or too much power, the power of the community is accordingly diminished, and the "march of progress" is retarded, or -- in more extreme cases -- reversed. Viewing the metaphysical conceptions of act and potency as active principles operating within an historical framework, Calhoun is able to explain how human liberty is a reward for moral and intellectual virtue, and how despotism, or lawless rule, may be understood as a fitting punishment for the ignorance, sloth, and depravity of general communities, or of portions thereof.

With Chapter IX, I conclude this work by describing how Calhoun's speculative philosophizing in politics pertains to that concern at the centre of all true philosophizing, the project of self-knowledge. All other philosophical issues and problems lead out from and back to man's struggle for self-knowledge. By studying Calhoun, we can see how the struggle for self-knowledge is at the centre of the various issues and problems comprehended both by political philosophy and by the art of the statesman. In this chapter, I show how Calhoun's philosophy brings to light dimensions of the project of self-knowledge that are generally overlooked. In particular, his account of the various forms and elements of absolute and constitutional

regimes sheds new light on this project, and even suggests what may be the principal cause of self-knowledge, on the one hand, and of ignorance, on the other.

Throughout this work, my primary concern is with the developmental fate, as it were, of man's "two-fold constitution" as an active principle of human nature, and as an elemental mainspring of human action. Upon this development -- for good or ill -- have rested the fates of entire political orders, of entire civilizations, and, even, in our present nuclear age, of the entire species of man.

PART I

A "SOLID FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE"

I do not view politicks as a scramble between eminent men; but as a science by which the lasting interest of the country may be advanced.

-- Calhoun (15 April 1820)

[It would be] as impossible to lay any solid foundation for the science of government, as it would be to lay one for that of astronomy, without a like understanding of that constitution or law of the material world, according to which the several bodies composing the solar system mutually act on each other, and by which they are kept in their respective spheres.

-- Calhoun, A Disquisition on Government

CHAPTER I
METAPHYSICAL REASONING,
AND SCIENCE OUT OF POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

I hold [political science and legislation] to be subject to laws as fixed as matter itself, and to be as fit a subject for the application of the highest intellectual power.

-- Calhoun, "Speech on the Force Bill"

In a letter dated June 15, 1849, Calhoun, now ailing and with under a year to live, wrote from Fort Hill to Anna Maria Calhoun Clemson, his favorite daughter:

I devote all the time left me, to finishing the work I commenced three years ago, or more . . . I finished, yesterday, the preliminary [the Disquisition], which treats of the elementary principles of the Science of Government. . . . I am pretty well satisfied with its execution. It will be nearly throughout new territory; and, I hope, to lay a solid foundation for political Science. I have written, just as I thought, and told the truth without fear, favor, or affection.¹

Sixteen years earlier, in December 1832, Calhoun had resigned his position as vice-president of the United States to begin his new career as U. S. Senator from South Carolina.

The President at the time, Andrew Jackson (1764-1845), in earlier years an admirer and subordinate of Calhoun, now, from various causes and subsequent events, had a strong aversion for both the theory and the person of Calhoun. Vice-President Calhoun had argued in the widely circulated South Carolina "Exposition" (December 1828) that the various states of the Union each possessed the right to interpose its authority between the citizens of that state and any law of the United States when it considered that law repugnant to the interests of the members of that state, and could declare that law null and void within its territory. This right of interposition, argues the "Exposition", is the only possible constitutional remedy for settling disputes between the states and the federal government. Holding a fundamentally different view of the relation between the states and the federal government of the Union, one whose internal logic proscribed any such right of interposition, Jackson had declared that he would have Calhoun, the vice-

¹ Calhoun, Correspondence (Washington, 1900), 766-768.

president, impeached for treason, and that Calhoun should hang from the highest gallows. One of the nullifying declarations of his Vice-President reached Jackson late at night; in a fit of exultation the President had the law officers of the government called out of their beds to say whether at last here was not a hanging offense.

Jackson issued a manifesto condemning both the doctrine of interposition, as articulated by Calhoun, and the recent acts of South Carolina in upholding the right of the member states of the Union to nullify and thereby render inapplicable within their borders, any act by the general or federal government of the Union which that state, through its properly authorized organs, had found to be either unconstitutional or repugnant in general. In the Senate, Daniel Webster (1782-1852), although not a supporter of the administration, undertook to answer Calhoun, and he was fetched from his lodging, when the time came, in the President's carriage. Meanwhile, Calhoun, after resigning the vice-presidency in December of 1832, had returned home to South Carolina, where he was promptly elected by the legislature to represent the state as U. S. senator.

Amidst rumours that if he arrived in Washington D. C., to assume his duties in the Senate, President Jackson planned to have him arrested and tried for treason, Calhoun assumed his seat on January 4, 1833, without incident.² Beginning on February 15, Calhoun delivered over a two-day period what was clearly the most impassioned, and arguably the most powerful address of his nearly forty-year-long career in high office. Freed

² But however Jackson may have yelled and fumed in private, his public demeanor evinced more restraint and circumspection. In fact, as of February 1833, no one had broken any law. The officials of South Carolina could nullify or "break" a law the following March if they chose. But who was to indict and try them after all. Indeed, it was the very prospect of federal officers trying to coerce state officers that brought the Congress to compromise.

from the confines of his position as President of the Senate, he took up the issue of the wisdom and constitutionality of that measure which was the immediate cause of the current antagonism between President Jackson and the people of South Carolina, the newly proposed protective tariff.³ This proposed legislation, called the Revenue Collection (or "Force") Bill, if passed, would have given President Jackson the authority to coerce South Carolina (and any other state) into obeying its measures.

This confrontation between an American Vice-President and an American President represents a central and pivotal chapter in the history of the United States. More generally and importantly, however, it represents a timeless debate over the nature of political right, and a struggle between statesmanship, on the one hand, and those forces, in any age, which tend to the betrayal of the public trust and to the destruction of the general welfare of communities. In this chapter, we begin our examination of the political philosophic ideas of a man who had a first-hand, practical experience of this debate and struggle so extensive and varied as to be unsurpassed by any other political writer.

As we shall see, Calhoun viewed the issues and problems confronting the statesman, on the one hand, and those of the political philosopher, on the other hand, as lying together on a single continuum, with the former being by their nature less abstract, and the latter, more abstract. That human capacity which was capable of exploring the natural relations and connections between all of these various issues and problems, Calhoun called

³ An admirer of Aristotle, as we shall see below, Calhoun was well-known for the energy and skill with which, during his statesmanly career, he upheld the following precept from the *Politics*: ". . . the laws are, and ought to be, relative to the constitution, and not the constitution to the laws."

“metaphysical reasoning.” Ranging through all the different levels and dimensions of abstraction of which the human mind is capable, “metaphysical reasoning” may be variously employed: by the statesman, whose over-riding concern is with the good of a specific community; and by the political philosopher, whose analogous ultimate concern is with giving a sound timeless speech about the human good. Also, as we shall see, Calhoun viewed statesmanship and political philosophizing as intimately related and mutually illuminating arts.

In the present work, a discussion of various natural relations between statesmanship and political philosophizing will then set the stage for that treatment of the central elements of Calhoun’s philosophy which is the central concern of this essay. On our way to examining Calhoun’s timeless philosophical ideas about the human good, however, we would do well to acquaint ourselves with the historical context within which these ideas were inspired and developed.

By 1830, the era of good feeling between the various states and sections of the fledgling American Republic which had begun with the close of the war with Great Britain in 1814 was but a fading memory. In early 1833, the president of the United States was threatening to invade and conquer South Carolina, one of the original thirteen states, whose citizens had bade defiance to a general government they deemed usurpatory, and who were presently occupied with organizing and arming themselves to resist the invader. At the centre of this conflict -- later dubbed the “Nullification Crisis” -- stood John C. Calhoun, having just recently resigned the vice-presidency in order to

represent his home state before the United States Senate.

Calhoun was opposed to the Revenue Collection [Force] Bill, or "The Bloody Bill", as he called it, since the bill was, in effect, "President Jackson's call for shot and powder to put down nullification and enforce the tariff act in South Carolina⁴." Despite a storm of charges aimed at impugning the motives and actions of both himself and his beloved South Carolina, Calhoun -- undaunted, if not unruffled -- addressed the Senate, and defiantly and systematically revealed the falsity of these charges and the folly of the proposed bill.

Some years later, the distinguished British historian and political thinker Lord Acton (1834-1902) would recognize and remark on both the pressing relevance and the timeless character of Calhoun's remarks at the time. An immensely learned and respected scholar, Acton was also an enthusiastic admirer of Calhoun, his older contemporary. In his correspondence with Mary Gladstone, daughter of his close friend and political ally, Prime Minister William Gladstone (1809-1898)⁵, Acton listed what he considered "the hundred best books" ever written. These included Plato's Laws, Aristotle's Politics, St. Augustine's Letters, Dante's Divine Comedy, Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, Maine's Ancient Law, Darwin's Origin of Species, and also, Calhoun's Disquisition on Government.⁶

After reviewing Calhoun's statesmanly conduct during America's Nullification Crisis in the early 1830's, Acton wrote:

⁴ See Margaret Coit in John C. Calhoun ed. Margaret Coit (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), 38.

⁵ William Gladstone trusted Acton "more entirely than any other man", while another British statesman, John Morley, called him "one of the most remarkable men of our time." See Herbert Paul, Lord Acton to Mary Gladstone (New York, 1904) and John Morley, Recollections (New York, 1917) I, 229-235.

⁶ Pall Mall Magazine (Volume XXXVI, No. 147).

Calhoun defended [South Carolina's] nullifying ordinance in the Senate, and in speeches and writings, with arguments which are the very perfection of political truth, and which combine with the realities of modern democracy the theory and the securities of medieval freedom.⁷

Such esteem for Calhoun both as a philosopher and as a statesman was shared by other eminent men of the time, both at home and abroad, including the distinguished British political economist and philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Indeed, the impress of Calhoun's influence -- along with those of his father James Mill (1773-1836) and of Alexis De Tocqueville (1805-1859) -- is evident in Mill's most ambitious political treatise, Considerations on Representative Government (1861).⁸ Ten years after Calhoun's death, Mill wrote:

One of the American states, under the guidance of a man who has displayed powers as a speculative political thinker superior to any who has appeared in American politics since the authors of the Federalist, claimed a veto for each state on the custom laws of the Federal

⁷ John Dalberg-Acton, "Political Causes of the American Revolution" in Essays in the History of Liberty (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1985), 240. On Acton's life see, for example, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics (Chicago, 1951). Also, in Robert L. Schuettinger, Lord Acton: Historian of Liberty (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1976) the author illustrates how Acton was an "historian who made history." Acton had been a student of and was greatly influenced by Ignaz von Dollinger (1799-1890), who was the outstanding Catholic ecclesiastical historian in Germany in the nineteenth century. In 1895, Acton, although without earned academic degrees, assumed the Regius Professorship of Modern History at Cambridge, one of the most prestigious chairs of history in the scholarly world and his first real academic position.

⁸ See, for example, Mill's formulation of Chapter I, "To What Extent Forms of Government Are a Matter of Choice", and his discussion of political maturity in Chapter IV, "Under What Social Conditions Representative Government is Inapplicable."

Congress: and that statesman, in a posthumous work of great ability⁹ which has been printed and widely circulated by the legislature of South Carolina, vindicated this pretension on the general principle of limiting the tyranny of the majority and protecting minorities by admitting them to a substantial participation in political power.¹⁰

But Calhoun's achievements and talents were not always so well received by those who, during his lifetime, found themselves standing

⁹ The allusion is to Calhoun's Disquisition on Government and also perhaps, to his Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States, in so far as the former was intended as an introduction to the latter.

Significantly, Alexis de Tocqueville's influential commentary on the doctrine of interposition conflicts with the favorable assessments of both Acton and Mill. In Democracy in America (Vol. I), Tocqueville writes:

The entire doctrine of Nullification is comprised in a sentence uttered by Vice President Calhoun, the head of that party in the South, before the Senate of the United States, in 1833: "The Constitution is a compact to which the States were parties in their sovereign capacity: now, whenever a compact is entered into by parties which acknowledge no common arbiter to decide in the last resort, each of them has a right to judge for itself in relation to the nature, extent, and obligations of the instrument." It is evident that such a doctrine destroys the very basis of the Federal Constitution and brings back the anarchy from which the Americans were delivered by the act of 1789. [See Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Volume I (New York: Vintage Classics, 1990), 411.]

But Calhoun had Tocqueville, among others, in mind when he wrote to Francis Wharton, a Philadelphian, in 1843 about government and trade in Europe: "The conception on that side of the Atlantic is universally false in reference to our system of government. It is indeed a most remarkable system -- the most so that ever existed. I have never yet discussed it in its higher elementary principles, or rather, I ought to say, in reference to higher elementary principles of political science. If I should have leisure, I may yet do it."

Tocqueville's concern in the 1830s was to oppose what he perceived to be a dangerous trend in America toward decentralization, and a weakening of the general government of the Union. In fact, Tocqueville's concern in this instance, atypically enough, was rooted in only a superficial analysis of events. Failing to detect what was in fact a deeper counter-current of affairs, Tocqueville did not see that the dominant trend in America at the time was, in fact, toward greater centralization and consolidation. Calhoun, of course, would document this trend toward political consolidation in his Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States (posthumously, 1851).

¹⁰ J. S. Mill, Considerations on Representative Government (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1958), 244-245.

opposite to him on matters of policy.¹¹ One of the more notable instances of this singular lack of appreciation was recorded during the nullification crisis.

At a critical juncture during his "Speech on the Revenue Collection [or Force] Bill" (February 15-16, 1833), Calhoun explicitly affirmed high statesmanship and its necessarily philosophical character against the attacks of one senator¹² who, unable to comprehend and to follow the line of his discourse on previous occasions, had chided Calhoun and contemptuously accused him of engaging in "metaphysical reasoning." What the frustrated and uncomprehending senator was complaining about was, of course, Calhoun's metaphysical turn of mind and elevated powers of reasoning, and the fact that he was disposed to bring these powers to bear on the practical affairs of state.

In the introduction I remarked on the metaphysical character of Calhoun's mind, and on his disposition to bring it to bear on practical

¹¹ For a review a various assessments of Calhoun's person, intellect, and career, see John C. Calhoun, ed. Margaret Coit (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), Part Two "John C. Calhoun Viewed By His Contemporaries" and Part Three "John C. Calhoun in History." For example, Frederick Douglas, the famed Negro leader and abolitionist, calls Calhoun, suprisingly to some, "this mighty man"; while Calhoun's colleague, friend, and sometimes opponent in the Senate, Daniel Webster, in a notable eulogy, referred to Calhoun as "a man of extraordinary power, -- much the ablest man in the Senate, in fact, the greatest man that he had known through his entire public life." Of Calhoun's bearing and person, Webster writes:

I think there is not one of us but felt when he last addressed us from his seat in the Senate, his form still erect, with a voice by no means indicating such a degree of physical weakness as did, in fact, possess him, with clear tones, and an impressive, and I may say, an imposing manner, who did not feel that he might imagine that we saw before us a Senator of Rome, when Rome still survived. . . .
 . . . [Mr. Calhoun] had the basis, the indispensable basis, of all high character; and that was, unspotted integrity -- unimpeached honor and character. If he had aspirations, they were high, and honorable, and noble. There was nothing groveling, or low, or meanly selfish, that came near the head or the heart of Mr. Calhoun. . . .

¹² Senator Clayton of Delaware.

political problems.¹³ As a leading student of Calhoun's ideas has written:

Calhoun possessed a mind of extraordinary keenness and toughness. His insight into complex social phenomena and the movement of the forces of history was beyond the ken of average men; and later events bore out a number of prophecies that he made with remarkable accuracy.¹⁴ Close observation, hard and deliberate thinking, and bold pursuit of ideas to their logical conclusions characterized his treatment of the problems that interested him. His judgment of the "juncture" of affairs was usually sound, and he had a [great]¹⁵ deal of facility in setting forth his views in debate. It has been said of him, probably with some exaggeration, that he always came to the halls of Congress the best informed man on any subject to which he directed his attention. On the other hand, it was often complained that he was too "metaphysical." His mental habit of following ideas into their logical interrelations annoyed some of his contemporaries and made him a formidable opponent.¹⁶

¹³ See, for example, his "Speech on the Veto Power" (February, 1842), in which Calhoun argued against Henry Clay's resolution for a constitutional amendment to restrict the veto power of the president by requiring only a simple majority to override a presidential veto, and by eliminating the "pocket veto." The genius of Calhoun's critical remarks – involving as they did a typical admixture of theoretical discourse and practicality – was widely acknowledged. According to one noteworthy source,

Mr. Calhoun's speech on this occasion is justly esteemed one of the ablest, most luminous, and unanswerable ever delivered on the nature of government. We noticed, at its conclusion, that he was warmly congratulated by both friends and opponents, indiscriminately; all concurring in eulogy on the profound, statesmanlike, and comprehensive knowledge displayed in his remarks, not only on the origin of the Constitution, but the genius and true theory of our institutions. (See The Congressional Globe, 27th Congress, Second Session, p. 266.)

¹⁴ The author provides a brief and incomplete but illustrative list of Calhoun's prophecies in August O. Spain, The Political Theory of John C. Calhoun (New York; Octagon Books, Inc. 1968), 41, fn 46.:

[Calhoun] predicted the opening up of Japan to foreign trade. [See Calhoun, Works, 6 vols. (Charleston and New York, 1851-1867), Vol. IV, p. 244.] He foresaw that the emancipated Negroes would remain in a status of subordination to the white community in the South. [Works, Vol. V, pp. 204-205.] He forecast the culmination of abolitionism in disunion, black suffrage and renewed "slavery" for the Negro after the war, and "carpet-bag" days in the South. [Works, Vol. VI, pp. 285-313.]

¹⁵ Due to an apparent publication error, an adjective is missing from August O. Spain, The Political Theory of John C. Calhoun (New York; Octagon Books, Inc. 1968), 33. Lacking a ready means of independent verification, I have inserted an adjective which appears to me to be the most likely and the most consistent with Spain's account.

¹⁶ See August O. Spain, The Political Theory of John C. Calhoun (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968), 33.

Born in the Carolina Upcountry in 1782¹⁷, during the last year of the War for Independence, Calhoun grew to maturity during a time when the public virtues of patriotism and statesmanship, so recently and resoundingly affirmed by Americans during their secessionist struggle with Great Britain, were still highly prized and widely cultivated. And yet, the period of Calhoun's national political career, from 1811 until 1850, was one of rapid and often painful social change, with the youthful and robust American republic, all at once, expanding westward, industrializing, and becoming wealthier and more populous by the year. It was an age in which Americans, now secure in their political independence, were becoming more and more susceptible to the lure of material prosperity, with its manner of living characterized by a preoccupation with effective time management and an impatience with all those "useless" pursuits which do not redound, more or less directly, to some material advantage for the pursuer. The life of contemplation that of necessity undergirds the practice of statesmanship was being eroded during Calhoun's time; a circumstance, incidentally, which did not go unnoticed by the Carolinian.

In America, a political golden age characterized by elevated discourse and thought, aimed both at advancing our theoretical understanding of politics and at serving the general interest of society, was giving way, by degrees, during the first half of the nineteenth century, to an age of the mere

¹⁷ Calhoun descended from the Calhoun or Colquohoun clan in southern Scotland, centred on the western shore of Loch Lomond. For background on this clan, see David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), especially 644-646.

politician and to the reign of the sophistry of narrow interest.¹⁸ Observing the effects in Europe of the same degenerative process, the Irish philosopher-statesman Edmund Burke (1729-97), as early as 1790, gloomily and insightfully declared that an age of chivalry was passing away, only to be succeeded by an age of “sophisters, economists, and calculators.” In America, in the course of a few short decades, between 1790 and 1860, the republican virtues of wisdom, moderation, and love of country would be eclipsed as pre-eminent social forces by mediocrity, opportunism, avarice¹⁹, ruthlessness, and love of power. As if in tragic parody, earlier elevated examples and careers, logical flowerings of a Classical Republican era, would be followed by puerile and degenerate forms: the magnanimity of George Washington, by the savage pragmatism of Ulysses S. Grant; the courage and wisdom of the implacable Patrick Henry, by the wily ambition of Martin Van Buren; the pious restraint of Robert E. Lee, by the calculating barbarism of William Tecumseh Sherman; and, perhaps most strikingly of all, the high intelligence and patriotism of

¹⁸ In a letter to Alexander Hamilton, Jr., dated 28 March 1830, Calhoun wrote:

The distinction between the statesman and the politician is broad and well defined. The former is an ornament and blessing to his country, but the latter a pest. No one is worthy of the publick [sic] confidence, who does not place himself on principle and services as the means of advancement. Intrigue and cunning will, I trust, prove as feeble, as they are detestable.

¹⁹ Calhoun was especially concerned that Americans would become distracted by love of money:

One thing alarms me – the eager pursuit of gain which overspreads the land, and which absorbs every faculty of the mind and every other feeling of the heart. (Senate, 6 February 1837)

I know how difficult it is to rouse a country so bent on gain as ours; but let us not forget how worthless all the wealth of the world is without liberty & good political institutions. (To Samuel D. Ingham, 18 December 1836)

I can not doubt, for what I daily see, that our whole system is rapidly becoming a mere money making concern to those, who have the control of it; and that every feeling of patriotism is rapidly sinking into a universal sperit [sic] of avarice. (To James E. Colhoun, 28 April 1832)

Calhoun himself, by the cleverness, hypocrisy, and sophistry of America's most revered president, Abraham Lincoln.²⁰ A logical consequence of this degeneration of political discourse and practice was the impatience, incomprehension, hostility, and resistance that genuine statesmanship would meet with, more and more frequently, during this transitional period of American history.

The Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) has explained why statesmanship, amongst other arts, would meet with such a response. For indifference, hostility, and resistance to the art of the statesman is an attitude which rose to predominance in the nations of the West during Calhoun's lifetime and persists with intensified strength in our day. In The Revolt of the Masses (1929), Ortega argues that since the nineteenth century the West has been in decline, in large part, because of a revolt of "mass man" against learning. One aspect of this revolt is the negative attitude toward statesmanship described hereto. According to Ortega, this attitude is to be

²⁰ See, for example, Edgar Lee Masters, Lincoln The Man. (New York: Dodd-Mead & Company, 1931). A book of hard facts and intelligent interpretation, uncomfortable to those who have idealized Lincoln, the United States Congress actually attempted to ban Lincoln The Man. Reviewing Masters' book, which was written in 1931, H. L. Mencken wrote:

Seldom have I read so brilliant a picture of the decay of the old American spirit . . . The writing here is so eloquent as to be genuinely moving . . . The American people, North and South, went into the war as citizens of their respective states, they came out as subjects . . . And what they thus lost they have never got back.

Masters reveals, amongst much else, how Lincoln was essentially an unprincipled opportunist who, for example, as President, allowed powerful Northern industrialists to determine policy decisions, stumbled onto the slavery issue and used it to consolidate his power, and cynically used religious rhetoric, although not religious himself, to advance his agenda. Also, Lincoln's contempt and disregard for the constraints endemic to constitutional government were resoundingly demonstrated during his Administration. The list of Lincoln's weighty and criminal offenses against the Constitution and the American people is very long, and includes the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, the unlawful creation of a state (West Virginia) out of an existing state (Virginia), the emancipation of the slaves, and the violent suppression of duly authorized state governments both North and South.

attributed not merely to that distraction which results from avarice and hedonistic longing, but to certain moral and intellectual consequences of scientific advance and increasing specialization. Thus he argues that what amounts to a modern insolence toward the statesman and his art is a novel and unprecedented development. In his chapter titled "The Barbarism of 'Specialization'", Ortega observes:

. . . [the specialist] was a human product unparalleled in history. [He] serves as a striking concrete example of the species [of mass man], making clear to us the radical nature of the novelty. For, previously, men could be divided simply into the learned and the ignorant, those more or less the one, and those more or less the other. But your specialist cannot be brought in under either of these two categories. He is not learned, for he is formally ignorant of all that does not enter into his specialty; but neither is he ignorant, because he is "a scientist", and "knows" very well his own tiny portion of the universe. We shall have to say that he is a learned ignoramus, which is a very serious matter, as it implies that he is a person who is ignorant, not in the fashion of the ignorant man, but with all the petulance of one who is learned in his own special line.

And such in fact is the behavior of the specialist. In politics, in art, in social usages, in the other sciences, he will adopt the attitude of primitive, ignorant man; but he will adopt them forcefully and with self-sufficiency, and will not admit of -- this is the paradox -- specialists in those matters. By specialising him, civilisation has made him hermetic and self-satisfied within his limitations; but this very inner feeling of dominance and worth will induce him to wish to predominate outside his speciality. The result is that even in this case, representing a maximum of qualification in man -- specialisation -- and therefore the thing most opposed to the mass-man, the result is that he will behave in almost all spheres of life as does the unqualified, mass-man. (emphasis added) ²¹

Having defined the specialist in terms of two opposite aspects, learning and ignorance, Ortega describes the influence on society and culture of this distinctive sub-class of modern mass-man:

Anyone who wishes can observe the stupidity of thought, judgment,

²¹ Jose Ortego y Gasset, The Revolt of the Masses (New York: W. W. Norton, 1932), 112.

and action shown to-day in politics, art, religion, and the general problems of life and the world by the "men of science", and of course, behind them, the doctors, engineers, financiers, teachers, and so on. That state of "not listening", of not submitting to higher courts of appeal which I repeatedly put forward as characteristic of the mass-man, reaches its height precisely in these partially qualified men. They symbolise, and to a great extent constitute, the actual domination of the masses, and their barbarism is the most immediate cause of European demoralisation. Furthermore, they afford the clearest, most striking example of how the civilisation of the last century, abandoned to its own devices, has brought about this rebirth of primitivism and barbarism.²²

But this rebirth of primitivism and barbarism in the nineteenth century which Ortega describes is, in the end, but another instance -- however modern may be its dress and novel its effects -- resulting from a universal tendency of human nature noted long ago by Plato (c.427-347BC).

In the Apology, while arguing against the accusation by the Athenian court that he is a professor of divine wisdom, Socrates has occasion to critically assess the knowledge possessed by the poets and skilled craftsmen of Athens. Reporting how he undertook this assessment in order to ascertain the veracity of the oracle of the god at Delphi, which had declared that no one was wiser than himself, Socrates thus describes a tendency on the part of "specialists" to claim competency in areas outside their fields:

. . . on the strength of their technical proficiency [the poets and skilled craftsmen] claimed a perfect understanding of every other subject, however important, and I felt that this error more than outweighed their positive wisdom. So I made myself spokesman for the oracle, and asked myself whether I would rather be as I was -- neither wise with their wisdom nor stupid with their stupidity -- or possess both qualities as they did. I replied through myself to the oracle that it was best for me to be as I was.²³

²² The Revolt of the Masses, 112-113.

²³ See Plato, Apology, 22d-22e.

And so, Socrates chose for himself what may be called a “learned ignorance” over being what Ortega called a “learned ignoramus.” The great significance of Socrates’ choice here becomes clearer when we think of Socrates of the Apology not merely as an individual and a philosopher, but as a poetic character representing philosophy itself. On this interpretation, Plato, through the character of Socrates, is arguing that philosophy, by virtue of its uniquely general outlook and subject matter, possesses a sort of immunity to the stupidity peculiar to the specialist, a special guard against the natural tendency to claim knowledge beyond one’s area of qualification. Being general in its nature, philosophy claims as one part of its domain the areas between the special arts and sciences. From a commanding height, then, philosophy surveys all the various fields that make up the topoi or “places” of human experience. As a result of this uniquely broad perspective and of the wisdom that this perspective makes possible, a duty of philosophy, which we find embodied in the person of Socrates, is to go about correcting the distorted understandings that naturally result from the narrow perspectives which characterize the other, non-philosophic vocations. —

As it turns out, true statesmanship partakes of philosophy’s immunity in the face of the stupidity that attends specialization; therefore statesmanship is itself philosophical. The philosophic aspect of the art of statesmanship manifests itself most strikingly in the steadfast refusal of the statesman to grant special favor to private or partial interests. This immunity, borne of philosophic perspective, is what impels the statesman to pursue without distraction the general or public interest, keeping a concern for the whole steadfastly before him, or keeping his eye out, as would a worthy shepherd,

not merely for this or that animal charged to his care, but for the entire flock. In this sense, then, what Ortega described as the decline of the West may be attributed to the rejection by mass-man of all thinking that possesses a philosophical aspect -- the rejection of statesmanship, for example.

That trait which, above all others, distinguishes the statesman from the mere politician is his fixed disposition to inquire into the proximate and more remote effects of an existing law, or into the effects that may reasonably be expected from one merely proposed, that its causal relation to other laws and established practices of a community may be assessed, and the ultimate desirability of the measure in question determined. As Plato makes clear in his dialogue Gorgias, the statesman is both a scientist and an artist, while the politician is merely an imposter who flatters. While donning the robe of the statesman, the politician as flatterer pursues, more or less covertly, his narrow interest of power and glory, while distracting a restless mass away from what is good for them by captivating them with the merely pleasurable (panem et circenses). Of course, over the ages, a variety of means have been employed by Flattery to dupe the masses into believing that its rule is wise, just, and benevolent. And few thinkers have described this process of deception and corruption as concisely and poignantly as that famous friend of Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), the Frenchman Etienne De La Boetie (b. 1530). In his Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, De La Boetie wrote that:

Plays, farces, spectacles, gladiators, strange beasts, medals, pictures, and other such opiates, these were for ancient peoples the bait toward slavery, the price of their liberty, the instruments of tyranny. By these practices and enticements the ancient dictators so successfully lulled their subjects under the yoke, that the stupified peoples, fascinated by the pastimes and vain pleasures flashed before their eyes, learned subservience as naively, but not so creditably, as little children learn to read by looking at bright picture books. Roman tyrants invented a

further refinement. They often provided the city wards with feasts to cajole the rabble, always more readily tempted by the pleasure of eating than by anything else. The most intelligent and understanding amongst them would not have quit his soup bowl to recover the liberty of the Republic of Plato. Tyrants would distribute largess, a bushel of wheat, a gallon of wine, and a sesterce²⁴: and then everybody would shamelessly cry, "Long live the King!"²⁵

In such ways, says Socrates in the Gorgias, Flattery regularly uses Pleasure as a bait to catch Folly, and deceives Folly into thinking that she (Flattery) is of supreme worth. Sophistic, an imposter, poses as legislation, while a more general (but unnamed) form of flattery poses as that art which is preeminently concerned with the health of the human soul, Politics.

Ever solicitous of the health of the American body politic, Calhoun, through observation and careful study, acquainted himself thoroughly with the various inroads of sophistic into that body, and determined, in the manner of a physician having long traced the progress of a deadly disease, to restore the health of the patient. Toward this end, Calhoun understood that "metaphysical reasoning" must be used to expose the flattery of the mere politician, and to re-establish the rule of legislation and justice, or, more generally, the rule of the art of politics.²⁶ Spurning intellectual sloth and base motives as well as the cursory and superficial kind of inquiry into the effects of a community's legal and moral practices which naturally attends these, Calhoun, through the example of his labour both as statesman and as

²⁴ The Romans were accustomed to reckon sums of money in sesterces, large sums in sestericia, and sums of a thousand sesterces. A silver coin, a single sesterce possessed the value of two asses and a half. See Universal Dictionary of the English Language, ed. by Robert Hunter and Charles Morris (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1897), 4214.

²⁵ Etienne De La Boetie, Discourse on Voluntary Servitude (New York: Free Life, 1975), 69-70.

²⁶ On 7 March 1821, Calhoun said in a letter to Andrew Jackson: "To love the people is to promote their lasting interest; and not to flatter them; and on this principle posterity will decide."

philosopher, underscored the value of “metaphysical reasoning” as a principal and indispensable means of inquiry into the remote and recondite causes of the human good. However, as I noted previously, Calhoun found it necessary to defend such reasoning in self-conscious and explicit fashion on at least one occasion. Thus, within his searching and defiant “Speech on the Force Bill” (February 15-16, 1833), we find an embattled but fully roused Calhoun rebutting accusations which had been levelled, in the preceding weeks of the so-called Nullification Crisis, against both himself and his beloved South Carolina. These accusations, both by various members of the Senate and others, included narrow selfishness, vaunting ambition, and disloyalty to the Union. Moreover, in an effort to discredit both Calhoun’s arguments in behalf of the states’ right of interposition and the recent actions of South Carolina in resisting enforcement of the Revenue Collection Bill, one Senator had also accused Calhoun himself of practicing the obfuscatory art of a “metaphysician.” And so, it was this accusation which presented Calhoun with an occasion for singling out “metaphysical reasoning” as a distinct topic or object of speculation within his speech, so that it might be treated in isolation, as it were, from any concrete matter of policy.

Undaunted by the charge of “metaphysician”, Calhoun responded in the face of his impatient, hostile, and uncomprehending critics (and others who were there) in his characteristic philosophical fashion, by laying bare the difference between true and false forms of “metaphysical reasoning”, and by vigorously defending the application of such reasoning, in its true form, to political subjects. Calhoun rejected as a false form of reasoning “that scholastic refinement which makes distinctions without difference”,

declaring that “no one can hold it in more utter contempt than I do.” (434)²⁷ But this false form must not be confused with that which, “far from deserving contempt”, is “the highest attribute of the human mind.” (434) For by true metaphysical reasoning, Calhoun meant:

. . . the power of analysis and combination – that power which reduces the most complex idea into its elements, which traces causes to their first principle, and, by the power of generalization and combination, unites the whole in one harmonious system . . . It is the power which raises man above the brute – which distinguishes his faculties from mere sagacity, which he holds in common with inferior animals. It is this power which has raised the astronomer from being a mere gazer at the stars to the high intellectual eminence of a Newton or Laplace; and astronomy itself from a mere observation of insulated facts into that noble science which displays to our admiration the system of

²⁷ Throughout this work, all number references appearing in isolation at the end of quotations refer to a recently formed collection of Calhoun’s major theoretical works that includes several of his major speeches. See Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun, edited by Ross M. Lence (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992).

the universe.²⁸ (434)

Having thus defended metaphysical reasoning as an indispensable element of statesmanship, Calhoun then turned to his detractors in the Senate and defiantly put the question as to the ultimate direction and issue of human political practice:

And shall this high power of the mind, which has effected such wonders when directed to the laws which control the material world,

²⁸This scintillating defence of metaphysical reasoning was repeated several years later within the context of a Calhoun response in the Senate to similar charges by Henry Clay (10 March 1838):

I cannot retort on the senator [Clay] the charge of being metaphysical. I cannot accuse him of possessing the powers of analysis and generalization, those higher faculties of the mind (called metaphysical by those who do not possess them) which decompose and resolve into their elements the complex masses of ideas that exist in the world of the mind, as chemistry does the bodies that surround us in the material world; and without which those deep and hidden causes which are in constant action, and producing such mighty changes in the condition of society, would operate unseen and undetected. The absence of these higher qualities of mind is conspicuous throughout the whole course of the senator's public life. To this it may be traced that he prefers the specious to the solid, and the plausible to the true. To the same cause, combined with an ardent temperament, it is owing that we ever find him mounted on some popular and favourite measure, which he whips along, cheered by the shouts of the multitude, and never dismounts till he has rode it down. . . .

And of course, the defense of genuine metaphysical reasoning had been a concern of other thinkers prior to Calhoun, including, for example, David Hume, in his essay "Of Commerce" in Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 253-254:

The greater part of mankind may be divided into two classes; that of *shallow* thinkers, who fall short of the truth; and that of *abstruse* thinkers, who go beyond it. The latter class are by far the most rare . . . All people of *shallow* thought are apt to decry even those of *solid* understanding, as *abstruse* thinkers, and metaphysicians, and refiners; and never will allow anything to be just which is beyond their own weak conceptions. . . . General reasonings seem intricate, merely because they are general; nor is it easy for the bulk of mankind to distinguish, in a great number of particulars, that common circumstance in which they all agree, or to extract it, pure and unmixed, from the other superfluous circumstances. Every judgment or conclusion, with them, is particular. They cannot enlarge their view to those universal propositions, which comprehend under them an infinite number of individuals, and include a whole science in a single theorem. Their eye is confounded with such an extensive prospect; and the conclusions, derived from it, even though clearly expressed, seem intricate and obscure. But however intricate they may seem, it is certain, the general principles, if just and sound, must always prevail in the general course of things, though they may fail in particular cases; and it is the chief business of philosophers to regard the general course of things. I may add, that it is also the chief business of politicians; especially in the domestic government of the state, where the public good, which is, or ought to be their object, depends on the concurrence of a multitude of causes . . . (emphasis added)

be forever prohibited, under a senseless cry of metaphysics, from being applied to the high purpose of political science and legislation? (434)

Calhoun's question here underscores the perennial struggle between Politics and Flattery over the well-being and fate of the human soul. Politics, as the ruling art of the soul, consists of the subsidiary arts of justice and legislation, arts concerned, roughly speaking, with the survival and improvement of men, respectively. As Plato teaches us, those forms of flattery which correspond to justice and legislation are their imposters: being sophistic and false rhetoric, respectively. As an assiduous and extraordinarily gifted student of political practice and truth, Calhoun understood the struggle between Politics and Flattery, in all of its moment and implications, as few men ever have. Having already determined, perhaps, to influence, as he may, the ultimate issue of this perennial spiritual struggle, Calhoun, on that bleak winter evening in February 1833, prophesied that the day would come when Politics, having once been provided a solid foundation, would gain a permanent and enduring ascendancy over Flattery. With an enormous confidence, and a boldness that must have elicited doubt and reservation from all those not intimately acquainted with the man, Calhoun, in effect, issued a promise that he would fulfill sixteen years later, with the completion of his Disquisition on Government:

I hold [political science and legislation] to be subject to laws as fixed as matter itself, and to be as fit a subject for the application of the highest intellectual power. Denunciation may, indeed, fall upon the philosophical inquirer into these first principles, as it did upon Galileo and Bacon when they first unfolded the great discoveries which have immortalized their names; but the time will come when truth will prevail in spite of prejudice and denunciation, and when politics and legislation will be considered as much a science as astronomy and chemistry. (434)

And so, the principal aim of Calhoun the philosopher was to “lay a solid foundation for political Science.” Indeed, as we shall see, it is only in terms of this overarching foundational project that all of Calhoun’s moral and political theorizing on specific topics may be understood.

But serious students of the Western tradition of political theorizing will, of course, note the boldness and audacity of Calhoun’s claim²⁹ to have actually provided, at long last, a solid foundation for politics; especially since this field of inquiry has, within the span of the many years and centuries preceding Calhoun, received so much solicitude from those few men of the highest genius -- including Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Hobbes, and others. And yet, however daring and implausible Calhoun’s claim may seem, it is, nevertheless, one that deserves serious consideration, coming as it does from the pen of one so renowned in his lifetime for statesmanly skill and experience. For clearly, implicit in Calhoun’s claim to have laid a solid foundation for political science through the completion of the Disquisition, there was his prior assessment that such a foundation had not yet been provided -- or, perhaps, that it had been provided, but somehow lost in the sands of time. Calhoun’s explicit pronouncements, however, leave to unresolvable conjecture his views about the precise status of politics as a science prior to his own work. For example, his express claims, in the letter of June 15, 1849 (already cited), do not preclude the possibility that he considered previous attempts to provide a solid foundation for political science as having been at least partially successful.

Because of a lack of documentary evidence, we are, unfortunately, left

²⁹ Recall the letter by Calhoun to his daughter Anna Maria Clemson which was cited at the very beginning of this chapter.

to conjecture on Calhoun's views of the previous accomplishments of the Western tradition of political theorizing, without any hope of definitive resolution. What is clear, however, is that Calhoun believed that political science, as he found it in the first half of the nineteenth century, did not possess a solid foundation. Charged with exhibiting the veracity of Calhoun's claim to have provided this foundation, a main thesis of the present work is that, while it seems demonstrably true that Calhoun was not the first to found the science of politics, it was this planter and statesman of the antebellum American South who gave it a solid foundation. But this distinction between founding political science and giving it a solid foundation, as well as what constitutes "foundation" and "solidity" in themselves, will, of course, be made clearer as we proceed through Part I of this work, and will, it is hoped, become clearer still as we move through the various topics and discussions that form Part II.

As the matter appears prima facie, and as I shall argue in due course, it would be both an exaggeration and an unjust disparagement of previous thinkers to claim that Calhoun founded the science of government, as if this had never been done before his time. And yet, as I shall also argue, it would be neither inaccurate nor unjust to say that it was Calhoun who gave this -- what Plato and Aristotle established as the ruling science -- a solid foundation. In order to establish both Calhoun's claim to have given political science a solid foundation and my support of that claim, let us begin by considering what precisely is involved in the founding of a science, and in the founding of the science of politics in particular.

Scientific activity, on its face, and of whatever variety of science

considered, involves a disciplined movement from the known into the unknown. More specifically, it involves the transformation of a collection of insulated facts through their arrangement and explanation in terms of some first principle. The scientific process involves the organization, and, at various advents, the repeated re-organization, of observations, facts, and insights, concerning often disparate issues, in terms of the ultimate causal relations of the phenomena which are their objects. The ultimate aims of any science are: to give a definitive explanation, so far as human capacities allow, to the phenomena that fall within the range of its inquiry; to stake out, in the most precise terms that the subject allows, the boundaries of that range; and to suggest the nature of the basic connections of the matter of its range to the matter of the other sciences. Now, in so far as concrete facts and observations have begun to be organized and explained in terms of general principles, one may say that scientific activity in that field has commenced, and that the work of laying a foundation for that science is underway.³⁰ A "first" foundation for a science is achieved when some leap is made inferentially from more concrete principles in terms of which the more proximate causes of phenomena have previously been explained. This is a leap to a higher level of generality, and specifically, to a level whose peculiar noetic elevation makes possible the perception and explanation of all the disparate phenomena found within the range of the science in terms of a single general principle.³¹ Such principles have been called "first principles"; the reason being that although a first principle cannot be first in the order of discovery,

³⁰ And of course, in the earliest stages of inquiry and inference, identifiable fields of subject matter are themselves, at best, only vaguely sensed and loosely apprehended.

³¹ "Noetic" is a cognate of the Attic Greek "nous", often translated as "mind", "reason" or "understanding."

since it is itself a logical culmination from prior inferences, it is properly considered of primary importance in the explanation of causes.

To satisfy the requirements of being the first principle of a science, a principle must be, at once, sufficiently general and abstract in character to embrace and to encompass all of the concrete phenomena of the subject, while excluding those principal concerns belonging to other sciences. A first principle, then, simultaneously encompasses and excludes: it encompasses certain phenomena and excludes alien concerns. Now, that which determines for a given science what phenomena it encompasses and how that phenomena is to be approached by the scientist are those questions which form the heart of that science, and which, taken together, express its peculiar, defining concerns.³² With politics, for example, these questions include: What is the nature of the life well lived?; What are the proper ends of society, of government, and of political constitution?; What is justice?; and What are the pre-conditions of human survival and flourishing? It is such questions which, through an orderly delineation of the field of enquiry, define a given science and set it apart as a separate and distinguishable enterprise.

And so, the phenomena said to be encompassed by a science are encompassed on certain specific terms, and the peculiar nature of these terms is established by the questions distinctive of the particular science in question. It should be noted, too, that this encompassing of phenomena by a science -- an inclusion on terms specified by the defining questions of the science -- is then entirely consistent with the circumstance that the various sciences are commonly found to study some of the same concrete phenomena. Put more simply: we find, of course, that the different individual sciences study some

³²I am indebted to Carman Busby McCuen for assistance on this point.

of the same objects in light of their own essentially unique concerns. For example, the physicist, to the extent that man is an object of his science, is concerned with a man as one physical object amongst others, bound by his nature to obey the various laws that govern the material world; while the economist, having man also as one amongst the objects of his science, is concerned with man as a rational and purposive agent whose actions are determined by subjective value judgments about the human good, an agent disposed by his nature and conditions to obey the various laws of human action and social cooperation. In this way, when it so happens that the same phenomena -- in this instance, human actions -- are studied by the different sciences, it is the questions and concerns peculiar to each science respectively that determine the distinctive manner in which the phenomena is approached. These points having been established, the next question is: How are what I have called the defining questions of a science related to first principles?

The answer is: that the first principle of a science is the key to answering those questions which define that science. For it is through an unfolding of the manifold nature of this first principle that the phenomena of a given field of scientific enquiry are given their definitive explanation. Indeed, it is precisely this point which I plan to have established and illustrated with regard to Calhoun's reflections on the nature of government by the end of this essay. But, before we begin to explore the system and particulars of that more advanced and refined sort of scientific explanation which Calhoun offers, let us consider the prior achievements that such explanation presupposes.

When the first, rudimentary “foundation” of a science is achieved through the speculative inference and articulation of a first principle, the achievement resides not so much in the accuracy and certainty of the general principle arrived at, but more, perhaps, in the degree of generality of the principle itself. This is so, in part, because all of the earliest efforts of men to lay foundations for the various sciences necessarily end in explanations and models that are merely rough and approximate, with imperfections in the form of problems both unsolved (and, sometimes, unaddressed) lingering long after this first foundation has been achieved.

But however imperfect may be that initial foundation and the first principle that constitutes the core of that foundation’s substance, what matters most is that the notion of a principle that comprehends in a single sweep, as it were, all of the matter of the science has been arrived at and brought to bear in organizing the already established facts and (now) subordinate principles of that discipline. And so, at this relatively early stage of scientific inquiry, achievement lies more in the specification of a general principle, however rough and merely approximate that principle may be, than in the ability of that principle to explain, for example, in a definitive manner, every aspect of all the disparate phenomena which that science encompasses.³³

Still, it appears that the initial or earliest founding(s) of a science comes not with that first articulation of a first principle, but comes instead with an articulation of all of the fundamental problems comprehended by that

³³ And so: scientific inquiry does not begin with the articulation of a first principle, since some considerable prior knowledge of what the matter of the subject consists of, and therefore, also, a basic knowledge of that scientific field’s boundaries, is required before one may form the notion of a single principle that purports to be the key to explaining all the fundamental issues and problems of that field.

science. For example, in a preface to his translation of Plato's Republic, Allan Bloom writes:

. . . after the Republic I translated Rousseau's Emile, the greatest modern book on education. Rousseau was one of the great readers of Plato, and from my time on that work I gained an even greater respect for the Republic. Emile is its natural companion, and Rousseau proved his greatness by entering the lists in worthy combat with it. He shows that Plato articulated first and best all the problems, and he himself differs only with respect to some of the solutions.³⁴

And so, on the view that the original founding of a science consists of an able articulation of the problems comprehended by the field, we might argue that it was, in fact, Plato, with the writing of his Republic, who founded the science of politics by articulating all the problems of that field "first", and perhaps even "best", as Bloom claims. But regardless of the particular intellectual achievement or breakthrough which one chooses to designate as the "founding" act, as it were, it must be granted that there is a good deal of noetic distance between articulating the fundamental problems whose study and solution are the objects of a science, on the one hand, and actually solving these problems through the articulation of a sound first principle, on the other hand. This distance may be measured, apparently, both in terms of time and of understanding, or, more precisely, in terms of the advantage that time and cumulative experience and wisdom give to a later thinker.³⁵ And all this perhaps makes up the difference between founding a science and giving it a solid foundation, and also perhaps, the difference between Plato and Calhoun.

³⁴ Plato, The Republic of Plato, trans. Allan Bloom (U. S. A.: BasicBooks, 1991), x.

³⁵ Thus, one is reminded of Sir Isaac Newton's quip when he was asked to account for those discoveries that have immortalized his name. Newton explained -- with a modesty of demeanor surprising to his contemporaries -- that he had been able to see further than others because he had stood on the shoulders of the intellectual giants who had preceded him.

Having just suggested, in a tentative way, what “foundation” and “solidity” are, let us proceed with our exploration of the subject by considering a number of additional but related issues. In the wide-ranging discussion that constitutes the remainder of this chapter, the effort is made to outline the respective roles of political philosophy and statesmanship, and to set the stage for the explication and analysis of Calhoun’s over-arching philosophical project which constitutes the remainder of this work. This closing section of Chapter I includes discussions of the relation between custom and theory, and the nature of political reform; and it begins with a consideration of the nature of science as a human convention.

In the course of explaining how a science comes to be founded, the philosopher is, of course, obliged to address a whole range of logical questions such as the following: Is a body of organized knowledge eo ipso scientific, or should the term “science” specify not just any fixed or settled scheme of organization, but an organization of a particular character as regards accuracy and correspondence, one, for example, that is more or less true to the essences and interrelations of things (or to what the Greeks called the topoi³⁶)?; Does a science by definition have a foundation, and is it not, at least in large part, this foundation which makes a body of knowledge organized, and therefore a science?; and also, Is it not the case that a science can be, and indeed, as a human convention or artifice, must be, more or less well-founded, but necessarily lacking a perfect or unshakeable foundation?

This last question, and the truth about the artificial character of science which it underscores, suggests that a science as an organized body of

³⁶ Translated “places.”

observations, facts, and insights will naturally suffer, during its history, a long succession of deaths and rebirths. As new insights are made, or as older ones are neglected or lost altogether, a science progresses or regresses, with the actual explanatory power of its fundamental principles expanding or contracting accordingly. When, during a process of noetic contraction or devolution, a science degenerates to the point where a principle sufficiently general in character to at least purport to explain the phenomena that falls under its scope is lacking, all substance of a firmly established science, if not all pretence of it, is lost. At the other extreme, in considering the ultimate limits of noetic expansion, it is not difficult to see that human limitations and weaknesses make impossible any perfect science, for such would presuppose a complete or divine knowledge.

One critically important implication of this impossibility of a perfect or complete human science is that an untranscendable liability of humans to folly or error makes impossible the complete and final establishment of any science, an establishment, that is, which involves the laying of an unshakeable and perpetual foundation. Such a foundation is impossible of human attainment because, although it is not possible for truth to be refuted, the truth, in so far as its influence over human opinion and affairs is concerned, is always susceptible of being subverted by falsehood, or otherwise lost. Truths, when not lost (sight of) outright, are susceptible of becoming unfashionable, through various and largely unfathomed turns of the human fancy. Moreover, although the will of God, working through and above nature, always and of necessity prevails, it appears that neither truth and virtue, on the one hand, nor error and vice, on the other hand, will ever be

able to gain final and complete victory over the other in the conduct of human affairs in this earthly life.

And yet, while Scripture, underscored by history, confirms that no final and complete victory is in store for truth, justice, and virtue during man's earthly life, an ascendancy of the science of Politics over sophistic and false rhetoric has, from time to time, been achieved. And this ascendancy of Politics, while not perpetual, has, in the more notable instances, endured for no inconsiderable time. The most conspicuous instances in which Politics, for a time, has enjoyed an ascendancy over Flattery, are those in which constitutional governments, being uniquely fitted to the internal and external conditions of their respective communities, gave to these communities a surpassing moral and physical power which has won their people immortal fame and glory. These most illustrious governments of history include the constitutional regimes of Great Britain and the United States, and what has been perhaps the most remarkable government in history, the Roman Republic.

But those happy intervals in which Politics has gained and held ascendancy over Flattery include more than these most conspicuous and glorious examples of constitutional government. Indeed, more generally: Politics may be said to have prevailed over sophistic during any given time in human history when, through whatever propitious combination of circumstances, a community enjoyed a governmental regimen closely suited to its peculiar physical and moral conditions. And this is so -- as will become much clearer in Chapter VIII -- regardless of whether the governmental form discovered to be fitted to the community in question happened to be the

mildness of constitutions or the harshest of despotisms. Thus politics, as a science, is affirmed during those instances in which a general community benefits -- whether merely through survival, or through an improvement of the conditions of its individuals -- from the circumstance of its governmental regimen being peculiarly suited to its circumstances, physical and moral, and internal and external. In such instances, politics as science is affirmed by the participants in these political orders, however directly or obliquely, deliberately or unwittingly, through their acquiescence and assistance in the application of its principles and through their pious submission to its truths.

But to say that politics as science is affirmed in such instances is not to say that any extensive political theorizing is, of necessity, being affirmed and resorted to. In fact, until recent times, that "un-theoretized" political knowledge which is embedded in evolving human custom and institutions, and in the memories of individuals within the historical political order, has, in general, proved a far stronger influence on political practice than whatever combination of knowledge, opinion, and (in some cases) favored prejudices which political theorists have woven into their abstract systems of explanation.

Within this older or more traditional relationship between political custom and political theory, custom, or the evolved and existing political practice of a community, was typically recognized by the theorist as possessing real authority and value. Recognizing first that custom is a natural and indispensable receptacle of human experience and accumulated wisdom capable of guiding mens' actions in salutary ways with only occasional assistance from philosophical reflection; political theorists learned that, to

promote the well-being of the community through the medium of the statesmanly art, they must content themselves with modifying only this or that existing practice, without undertaking to replace an entire system of existing practice with, for example, some model of the human good approved only by hyper-abstract reasoning. In this more traditional relationship between custom and theory, then, custom was treated deferentially by philosophy, and its influence on the direction of the community was typically decisive as well as salutary.

During the modern era, however, this more traditional relationship between custom and theory has tended to be inverted within particular communities as a result of a combination of complex and diverse social, intellectual, and cultural forces. These forces coalesced in the French Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.³⁷ Whereas previously, evolved custom and tradition operated spontaneously as the principal receptacles, transmitters, and disseminators of both political knowledge and political opinion; later, in the wake of the so-called Enlightenment, a rebellious and undeferential form of political theorizing came to be looked upon by more and more persons as this receptacle, transmitter, and disseminator.³⁸

A more or less direct result of this inversion of the traditional

³⁷ The best-known discussion of this inversion was given by Edmund Burke in his Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790). But the deepest philosophical analyses of this inversion were given, ahead of time, by David Hume in his A Treatise of Human Nature (1739-40) and by Giambattista Vico in his New Science (1725). More recently, there is Albert Camus' criticism of the influence of the French Revolution titled The Rebel (1951) and Michael Oakeshott's influential essay titled "Rationalism in Politics" (1962). Also, an illuminating recent discussion of all of these works and of others appertaining to the theme may be found in Donald W. Livingston, Hume's Philosophy of Common Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Ch. 12.

³⁸ In truth, as we shall see, both custom and theory have important roles to play in gathering, transmitting, and disseminating political knowledge and opinion. And these roles, it turns out, are complementary.

relationship between custom and theory, and of the consequent hegemony of abstract political theorizing over unreflective custom, has been the bloodiest and most destructive century in human history -- the twentieth century. Historians in some future age, free from the prejudicing dogmas of our time, will trace the more proximate causes of the spectacular and unparalleled barbarisms of twentieth century wars and political oppression to the more fundamental fact that so many of those living at the time were so deeply enamored of abstract political ideals formulated and pursued without a due deference and regard to the wisdom of evolved custom. And so, paradoxically, a reckless and irresponsible conception and pursuit of the abstract ideals of liberty, equality, and universal fraternity in this century have led to the most hellish parade of barbarisms and catastrophies that man has brought down upon himself since the Fall.

More generally, these disastrous practical consequences resulting from the inversion of the traditional relationship between custom and theory suggest, perhaps, that any attempt to put political theory into practice is destined to be fraught with great difficulties and dangers, however sound the theory itself. This is so because of the necessarily general character of a theory as a timeless explanation derived through a process of abstracting from particulars.

Great dangers and difficulties naturally attend the application of political theory to practice because of the necessity and inherent difficulty of ascertaining the relevant particular conditions of the community in terms of which the theory must be adapted and modified. But a due sensitivity to such dangers and difficulties is a moral and intellectual attainment, and

therefore not a power which all men possess automatically or necessarily. Consequently, the ascertainment of this knowledge of particulars about community requires a degree of effort and empathetic genius which the romantic political idealist, for example, in his eagerness and haste to instantiate his favored conception of the political good, must view as part of a tedious, irksome, and ultimately unnecessary preliminary. Intoxicated by the beauty of some vision of the good concocted by a political imagination undisciplined by rational insight and practical experience; the political romantic, unencumbered by wisdom and perhaps ineducable, flouts the high prudence of statesmanship, blithely indifferent to its beneficent strictures and contemptuous of its laborious method. Edmund Burke, who Calhoun once called "the wisest of modern statesmen, . . . [one] who had the keenest and deepest glance into futurity"³⁹, referred to such political romantics quite aptly and disdainfully as the "Terrible Simplifiers."

Thus have impatience and haste, born of zeal, ignorance, and sloth, moved the utopian idealists of the twentieth century and before, to proffer their bold but inchoate and tragically flawed proposals, and to impose them, through their control of the apparatus of government, on the hapless inhabitants of numerous communities. In contrast to the sloth, carelessness, and incomprehension of this romantic idealist, there is the realism, diligence, thoroughness, and empathetic genius characteristic of the statesman, who recognizes that an existing government, in almost every instance, is to be preferred over one that has reality only as an idea in the mind. This

³⁹Calhoun, *Works*, 6 vols. (Charleston and New York, 1851-1867), Vol. III, p. 591 Evidently, so far as statesmanship is concerned, Calhoun modelled himself after a number of eminent men, including, especially, Cicero and Burke. In turn, Calhoun's example as statesman would serve as a model for others, including Jefferson Davis, a U.S. Senator and later President of the Confederate States of America (1861-1865).

preference of the statesman stems from his recognition of the proven utility or usefulness of the existing government in fulfilling its Divinely ordained end of preserving society, as contrasted with the untried and unproved character of some proposed alternative. Unlike the utopian, the statesman takes into account not only the uncertainty of the utility of the proposed regimen, but the dislocations and hazards that must attend any effort by a community to exchange one form of governance for another; an exchange that, if undertaken, must be brought off, probably, in the face of enemies of the community, both internal and external.

In his widely read essay titled "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth", the Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume (1711-1776) remarked on this important truth, pointing out that:

It is not with forms of government, as with other artificial contrivances; where an old engine may be rejected, if we can discover another more accurate and commodious; or where trials may safely be made, even though the success be doubtful. An established government has an infinite advantage, by that very circumstance of its being established; the bulk of mankind being governed by authority, not reason, and never attributing authority to any thing that has not the recommendation of antiquity. To tamper, therefore, in this affair, or try experiments merely upon the credit of supposed argument and philosophy, can never be the part of a wise magistrate, who will bear a reverence to what carries the marks of age; and though he may attempt some improvements for the public good, yet will he adjust his innovations, as much as possible, to the ancient fabric, and preserve entire the chief pillars and supports of the constitution.⁴⁰

This preference for an existing government over one merely proposed may be said to be a fixed disposition and inclination of the statesman. And it is a disposition that may be reasonably countermanded only when a

⁴⁰ See "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth" in David Hume, Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1987), 512-513.

community finds itself in the gravest of extremities, as when its government has become abusive of its powers, to such a degree, that the continued existence of the community itself may be said to be threatened by any continuance of depredations by its distempered government.

Significantly, the essentially conservative disposition of the statesman which Hume describes corresponds to and complements, as a causal force, a common and natural conservative disposition on the part of the general community. But this confluence of two conservative forces or impulses finds an analogue where a desire for reform predominates over the reflexive desire for stability. Thus, the bold yet responsible intellect and imagination characteristic of the statesman -- laboring both to conceive and to bring into effect needed reforms -- corresponds to and complements the determination and resolve of the generality either to resist the abuse and oppression of distempered government or, less dramatically, to clear away outmoded yet extant legal forms which, contrary to their original purpose, have become destructive of the public good.

It is John Locke (1632-1704), in his Second Treatise on Government, who has described most famously the process whereby a people's natural tendency to obedience and acquiescence in a prevailing government may be

overridden -- a description with which Calhoun was surely familiar.⁴¹ Acknowledging first the enormous weight of custom and habit in human life, and thereby anticipating a major theme in both Hume and Burke, Locke observed:

People are not so easily got out of their old Forms, as some are apt to suggest. They are hardly to be prevailed with to amend the acknowledg'd Faults, in the Frame they have been accustom'd to. And if there be any Original defects, or adventitious one introduced by time, or corruption; 'tis not an easie thing to get them changed, even when all the World sees there is an opportunity for it. ⁴²

But age-old custom, Locke recognized, even when reinforced by ignorance and sloth, are not so weighty in their subduing and tranquilizing effects as to render men altogether insensible to the sting of despotism and therefore insusceptible to arousal. Locke writes:

. . . Revolutions happen not upon every little mismanagement in publick affairs. Great mistakes in the ruling part, many wrong and inconvenient Laws, and all the slips of human frailty will be born by the People, without mutiny or murmur. But if a long train of Abuses, Prevarications, and Artifices, all tending the same way, make the design visible to the People, and they cannot but feel, what they lie under, and see, whither they are going; 'tis not to be wonder'd, that they should then rouse themselves, and endeavor to put the rule into such hands, which may secure to them the ends for which

⁴¹ It is said that Calhoun, at age 13, read a volume and a half of Locke on The Human Understanding, along with Rollin's Ancient History, Robertson's America and Charles the Fifth, the large edition of Cook's Voyages, and Browne's Essays. See John S. Jenkins, The Life of John C. Calhoun (Auburn, N.Y.: James M. Alden, 1850), 21, and also William P. Starke, 'Account of Calhoun's Early Life,' in the Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1899, II, 72.

Although the author knows of no direct evidence to the effect, due in part to the fact some of Calhoun's library was auctioned off in the 1890's from his son's estate, it is hardly possible that Calhoun was not familiar with Locke's political writings, especially his Second Treatise, formally titled An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government (1690). For it is well-known that the political writings of the Englishmen Locke and Sidney (1622-1683) were well read among Americans of Patrick Calhoun's generation. See, for example, Bernard Bailyn, Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967).

⁴² John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 414.

Government was at first erected, . . .⁴³

As we shall see in Chapters IV, V, and VI, Calhoun would take the analysis of tyranny and of resistance to tyranny several steps beyond Locke and others, explaining how both are rooted ultimately in a single principle of human nature. While elaborating on the fundamental principles of political constitution, Calhoun would also show how many of the great dangers and inconveniences which naturally attend violent revolution may be avoided. For revolutions may, in some instances, be effected peacefully through the deliberations and agreements reached in constitutional conventions; while in other cases, less comprehensive reform may be effected through a formalized amending procedure already sanctioned and specified in an existing constitution. For not only the improvement of political arrangements, but also the conservation of these arrangements, necessitates some reform of a community's governmental arrangements from time to time. Indeed, in a passage whose insight Calhoun would often underscore⁴⁴, Burke says: "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve."⁴⁵

On this view, conservation and correction go hand in hand, and change *per se*, it should be noted, does not qualify as reform. Calhoun echoes this Burkean insight in his Discourse when he praises the Framers of the U.S.

⁴³Locke, Two Treatises of Government, 415.

⁴⁴In John C. Calhoun, Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun, ed. Ross M. Lence (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992) see, for example, in the Disquisition, 30-31, 40, on the manner in which constitutional regimes preserve themselves through compromise and on the anthropological source of political reform, and in the Discourse, 200-213, 220-221, on the amending power of the U. S. Constitution.

⁴⁵Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France ed. Thomas H. D. Mahoney (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1955), 24.

federal constitution for inserting an amendment provision into that compact between the states. Explaining their rationale for the inclusion of an amending power, Calhoun says:

Those who formed [the Constitution of '87] were not so vain as to suppose that they had made a perfect instrument; nor so ignorant as not to see, however perfect it might be, that derangements and disorders, resulting from time, circumstances, and the conflicting elements of the system itself, would make amendments necessary.
(201)

And so true statesmanship involves a natural and salutary conservatism that is characterized by sober and imaginative adaptability. But, whatever may be the most wise and expeditious means of effecting some beneficent and needed change in a society's political arrangements, it is the proper object of the statesmanly art to determine.

More generally, an act of statemanship is an instance of the right application of sound political principle; not, of the indifferent application of any old principle, however supportive, for example, that principle may be, once enacted, of a ruling party's favored prejudices. As Plato teaches in the Republic⁴⁶, statesmanship is the highest form of prudence (phronesis), with a lesser but more familiar form of prudence being that of the individual citizen or subject. As Plato's followers during the Italian Renaissance taught, wisdom (sapientia) is an actualized condition of the understanding and feelings, and prudence (prudencia) is that form of wisdom appertaining to human action. The wisdom "in action" that is prudence may be contrasted, for example, to the wisdom spoken that is eloquence (eloquentia). But prudence, or wise action, is by its nature complex and not simple. It consists of a rightly ordered combination of general understanding and of knowledge

⁴⁶ Bk. VI, 505b.

of relevant particulars. As the highest form of prudence, statesmanship is concerned with the mastery of all those general principles, belonging to whatever arts ⁴⁷, the understanding of which is requisite for the survival and flourishing of the political community. In addition, statesmanship as an art is committed to the apprehension of that multitude of relevant particulars appertaining to the circumstances and well-being of that specific community which, in a given time, is under its protection and care. This mastery of requisite general principles and the apprehension of relevant particulars together form that noble science to which Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), for example, was referring when he said: "There is no Science, the Study of which is more useful and commendable than the Knowledge of the true Interest of one's Country . . . ⁴⁸"

But it was Aristotle (384-322BC) who has given us perhaps the finest summary of the qualifications of the legislator or statesman. In his Politics, which Calhoun greatly esteemed ⁴⁹, Aristotle wrote:

[the science of government] has to consider what government is best and of what sort it must be, to be most in accordance with our aspirations, if there were no external impediment, and also what kind of government is adapted to particular states. For the best is often unattainable, and therefore the true legislator and statesman ought to be acquainted, not only with (1) that which is best in the abstract, but

⁴⁷ Among these auxiliary arts are oratory, internal policing, generalship, and judgeship, which Plato discusses in the Statesman (304a-305e).

⁴⁸ Benjamin Franklin, A Modest Enquiry into the Nature and Necessity of a Paper Currency, 1729.

⁴⁹ Evidently, Aristotle was one of Calhoun's favorite authors, and the Politics, one of his favorite books. This may be surmised from the fact that Calhoun advised one A.D. Wallace, a young man contemplating entering politics, to read the elementary treatises on government, "including Aristotle's, which I regard as among the best." See Correspondence, p. 469. Citing the same letter, and claiming that "now and then definite similarities appear" between Calhoun's theorizing and the work of Aristotle (and also of Burke), August O. Spain, in his The Political Theory of John C. Calhoun (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968), p. 35, cites the same letter and goes so far as to say that "Aristotle and Burke were without doubt [Calhoun's] favorite authors."

also with (2) that which is best relatively to circumstances. We should be able further to say how a state may be constituted under any given conditions (3); both how it is originally formed and, when formed, how it may be longest preserved; the supposed state being so far from having the best constitution that it is unprovided even with the conditions necessary for the best; neither is it the best under the circumstances, but of an inferior type.

He ought, moreover, to know (4) the form of government which is best suited to states in general; for political writers, although they have excellent ideas, are often unpractical. We should consider, not only what form of government is best, but also what is possible and what is easily attainable by all. There are some who would have none but the most perfect; for this many natural advantages are required. Others, again, speak of a more attainable form, and, although they reject the constitution under which they are living, they extol some one in particular, for example, the Lacedaemonian. Any change of government which has to be introduced should be one which men, starting from their existing constitutions, will be both willing and able to adopt, since there is quite as much trouble in the reformation of an old constitution as in the establishment of a new one, just as to unlearn is as hard as to learn. And therefore, in addition to the qualifications of the statesman already mentioned, he should be able to find remedies for the defects of existing constitutions, . . . ⁵⁰

This summary of the statesman's qualifications makes it clear that the art of statesmanship possesses a speculative and theoretical dimension, since the statesman must be acquainted with that regime which "is best in the abstract" and that one which "is best relatively to circumstances." And so a mere acquaintance of a man with the concrete and particular circumstances of his community, however thorough, is not enough to qualify him as a statesman. Instead, as Aristotle says, the statesman must be a sort of master of both the universal and the particular -- or one possessing both theoretical and practical knowledge.

In his quest for that theoretical knowledge or knowledge of the

⁵⁰Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk. IV, Ch. 1, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1205-1206.

universal that will enable him to better arrange and direct the affairs of his community, the statesman may consult an evolving tradition of political theorizing or science: For a theory, after all, is an interpretation and explanation of experience, more or less correct. Cast in general language, a theory is an abstractive distillation of wisdom and understanding from experiences that are themselves always concrete and particular. This wisdom and understanding consists of insight into essences and causes, or into causal relations between existents. Political theory, at its best, is a faithful distillation of wisdom or causal insight from political experience or practice which will, if skillfully applied, bestow great and lasting benefits on a community through an imparting of responsible direction.

And yet, the primary aim of political theorizing is art or science, and only secondarily the assistance of the statesman. And so political theorizing has theoretical understanding as both its immediate aim and its ultimate aim, while it owes its origin to and gets a continuous impulse from the desire of statesmen and communities to solve practical problems of governance. The life of a statesman who was also a political philosopher -- such as Calhoun's -- provides a rare but dramatic illustration of the origin, aim, and practical use of political theorizing. For example, Calhoun's doctrines of the concurrent majority and of interposition are clearly, to some extent, a product of the mounting sectional discord in America between 1825 and 1850. And yet, the universality of these principles becomes evident once they are apprehended against the backdrop of a more extensive historical understanding; especially when one recognizes that these principles have been successfully employed in different political orders remote from one

another both in time and in cultural development or substance.⁵¹ But having argued that statesmanship has a speculative or theoretical dimension, and that the immediate and ultimate aim of all theorizing, including political theorizing, is art or science, let us pause briefly to consider the source of art or science in human nature.

Distinctive among created things, man is capable of science and art because his experiences are connected by memory. For as Aristotle teaches in the Metaphysics:

By nature animals are born with the faculty of sensation, and from sensation memory is produced in some of them, though not in others. And therefore the former are more intelligent and apt at learning than those which cannot remember; those which are incapable of hearing sounds are intelligent though they cannot be taught, e. g. the bee, and any other race of animals that may be like it; and those which besides memory have this sense of hearing can be taught.

The animals other than man live by appearances and memories, and have but little of connected experience; but the human race lives also by art and reasonings. Now from memory experience is produced in men; for the several memories of the same thing produce finally the capacity for a single experience. And experience seems pretty much like science and art, but really science and art come to men through experience . . .⁵²

Upon reaching this point in his discourse, Aristotle invokes the authority of his mentor, repeating Polus' declaration in the Gorgias that while ". . . experience guides our life along the path of art, inexperience [propels us] along the path of chance."⁵³

⁵¹ This point will become quite clear in later chapters, where both historical incidences of the application of the principle of concurrent majority are reviewed and the principle itself is explicated through comparison with a rival principle (Ch. 6). But for a contrary view that denies the universality of the doctrine of the concurrent majority, see, for example, the introductory essay in John C. Calhoun: A Profile, ed. John L. Thomas (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), x.

⁵² Aristotle, Metaphysics, Bk. I, Ch. I, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. McKeon, 689.

⁵³ Plato, Gorgias, 448c

But the notion that remembering is at the centre of art implies, of course, that forgetfulness threatens to reduce men in this earthly life to the level of inexperience and artlessness. Indeed, some recent writers have expressed the concern that man is now moving in the direction of artlessness, not through the usual mode of carelessness and inattention, but by his own choosing. In an essay titled "History, Toynbee, and the Modern Mind" (1957), Frederick Wilhelmsen observed that "history is no longer a category of the consciousness."⁵⁴ Following Wilhelmsen on this theme was Richard M. Weaver (1910-1963), a professor of rhetoric at the University of Chicago, who wrote of our modern era:

Amnesia as a goal is a social emergent of unique significance. I do not find any other period in which men have felt to an equal degree that the past either is uninteresting or is a reproach to them. When we realize the extent to which one's memory is oneself, we are made to wonder whether there is not some element of suicidal impulse in this mood, and at least an impulse to self-hatred. One of the obvious and easy ways to take leave of oneself is to forget, to cease to hold in consciousness what one has been. This is personal annihilation, for no man exists really except through that mysterious storehouse of his remembered acts and his formed personality. His very reality depends upon his carrying the past into the present through the power of memory. If he does not want identity, if he has actually come to hate himself, it is natural for him to try to get rid of memory's baggage. He will travel light. But it will be a deprived kind of travelling, cut down to immediate responses to immediate challenges. The element that makes his life a continuum will be missing and in the absence of this he cannot be a human being capable of culture. To be human is to live extensively in two tenses, the past and the future, both of which require for their construction the mind and therefore the memory.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Frederick Wilhelmsen, "History, Toynbee, and the Modern Mind: Betrayal of the West," *Modern Age* (Summer, 1957), 38.

⁵⁵ Indeed, perhaps the best recent discussion of the vital importance of memory and the preservation of experience for human well-being is Ch. 3 "The Attack on Memory" in Richard M. Weaver, *Visions of Order: The Cultural Crisis of our Time* (Bryn Mawr: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1964).

And so, through willful forgetting, modern men aspire to “travel light” by liberating themselves from the responsibilities and pains associated with identity. But, by short-sightedly adopting this course, these latter-day Lotus-eaters unwittingly denude themselves of all culture, and indeed, of the very possibility of acculturation and meaningful life. The consequences of this perverse self-imposition of amnesia are felt in every department of life, including the cultural, the economic, the spiritual, and the political.

The spectacular barbarisms of the twentieth century are only the most striking political and moral consequences of modern man’s self-imposed amnesia. These barbarisms include two world wars, systematic and technologically assisted attempts at genocide, and vast totalitarian regimes that have already -- by the century’s end -- handily won the ignominious distinction of being the bloodiest regimes in human history.

But in order to minimize forgetting, and to avoid thereby a consequent slide into artlessness and barbarism, humane and patriotic men may yet avail themselves of a convention designed, at least in part, for that purpose. Hence, one partial remedy for forgetfulness is art in the form of written theoretical discourse, where general and timeless truths are set down in the hope that they may be preserved in perpetuity.⁵⁶ And so, although most of the valuable rules of politics have been discovered over and over again

⁵⁶One reason the remedy is only partial is that rich and manifold idiomatic meaning is often untranslatable, and therefore untransmittable in its entirety and full integrity from one culture to another. So diversity of experience between (and within) cultures and the variable degrees of sophistication and subtlety among different languages make full and faithful transmission of meaning, and therefore, the full preservation of memory and human experience, impossible. And so some loss of experience and forgetfulness on the part of our species is a result of man’s punishment for undertaking the construction of the Tower of Babel. Another way of putting this is that man’s prideful nature tends to render him artless and animal-like, while proper humility before God makes possible art and a general advancement of the species.

during the course of history⁵⁷, sound political theory, as a record of general truths, stands in more or less successful defiance of human forgetfulness. As Lord Acton has written: “. . . the science of politics is the one science that is deposited by the stream of history, like grains of gold in the sand of a river; and the knowledge of the past, the record of truths revealed by experience, is eminently practical, as an instrument of action and a power that goes to the making of the future⁵⁸.” And so political theory, at its best, is both a recording and a timeless account of the knowledge of political life gained through experience.

At its worst, however, a political theory is a highly plausible and seductive piece of abstract sophistry which, through misdirection, brings the gravest kind of harm to a community; the sort that threatens or even ends

⁵⁷ Echoing an exchange on this topic between Clinias and the Athenian in Plato's Laws, Bk. VII, Ch. 10, Aristotle, in the Politics, Bk. VII, Ch. 10, he speaks thus of the division of the state into classes and the separation of husbandmen from warriors:

It is true indeed that these and many other things have been invented several times over in the course of ages, or rather times without number; for necessity may be supposed to have taught men the inventions which were absolutely required, and when these were provided, it was natural that other things which would adorn and enrich life should grow up by degrees. And we may infer that in political institutions the same rule holds.

⁵⁸ Lord Acton, Essays in the History of Liberty, ed. Rufus Fears (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1985).

But if political science is thus bound to wait, as it were, on experience or history, then this suggests that earlier theorists will naturally be constrained or limited in the scope of their discoveries and insights in a way that later theorists will not be. Hume noted the existence and influence of such perspectival limitations in his essay “Of Civil Liberty” in Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 87-88:

Those who employ their pens on political subjects, free from party-rage, and party-prejudices, cultivate a science, which, of all others, contributes most to public utility, and even to the private satisfaction of those who addict themselves to the study of it. I am apt, however, to entertain a suspicion, that the world is still too young to fix many general truths in politics, which will remain true to the latest posterity. We have not as yet had experience of three thousand years; so that not only the art of reasoning is still imperfect in this science, as in all others, but we even want sufficient materials upon which we can reason. It is not fully known, what degree of refinement, either in virtue or vice, human nature is susceptible of; nor what may be expected of mankind from any great revolution in their education, customs, or principles.

outright a people's existence. And so, as scientific theories go, it seems that the political is a particularly rough and heady concoction; one whose effects, for good or ill, depend both on the skill and care employed in its making, and on the manner, whether judicious or injudicious, of its consumption. Depending on these two circumstances -- namely, the faithfulness of its construction and the manner of its application; a political theory, as a construction of the philosophical imagination, will prove, for a given community under the direct influence of its principles, either an elixir that gives continued life and increased strength, or a deadly poison.

What the particular outcome of the implementation of political theory may be for a given community, in a given instance, will depend on the aforementioned circumstances; but that some degree of theory and of theorizing is bound to emerge and to operate as an influence on the political practice of the human community is, from a consideration of the inherently speculative and imaginative nature of man and of the external conditions in which he must ever find himself, a circumstance too evident to require lengthy review. For every human community, of necessity, has recourse, throughout the course of its existence, to political theorizing and theory in some form. And yet, the quality and general sophistication of the theory and theorizing may vary widely between different communities. Thus a theory that is to be acted upon or instantiated may be -- in judging both its substance and the form⁵⁹ in which it is cast -- either elevated, refined, and powerful, on the one hand, or rudimentary, slight, and humble, on the other hand, or, in fact, some coherent combination of these qualities. But the fact of the

⁵⁹ Different forms would include a myth, or narrative of some other sort, a treatise, a dialogue, an essay, an oration, et cetera.

universal occurrence and inevitability of political theory and of theorizing in human communities implies that some universal feature of the human condition exists which naturally prompts men to conjecture on alternative governmental arrangements.

That feature of the human political condition which naturally prompts men to theorize and which, indeed, makes political theory a requisite of human survival and flourishing, is the circumstance that society is a living and therefore ever-changing spontaneous order of man-made conventions. Thus human society, wherever found and of whatever variety, is a spontaneously evolving order of convention, an order which is itself set within a more general evolving natural order. And so political theory is elicited as much perhaps by practical necessity as by human curiosity or wonder.

As Aristotle made clear in both his political and metaphysical treatises, act and potency, as active principles, operate at every level of the Divinely inspired world, in the social sphere as well as in the natural. And it is this circumstance which challenges men to contribute to and to extend the general system of order inspired by the Divinity ⁶⁰, a task for which man, as a created being, is peculiarly equipped, with his power of "analysis and combination" which Calhoun called "metaphysical reasoning." But in claiming that social change or evolution is a fundamental cause of all political theorizing, let us note, more specifically, that it is the changing moral and physical conditions of the community which are the circumstances which compel the introduction of some degree of political theorizing into political practice,

⁶⁰In Aristotle, while there is a divinely inspired world, there is no divinely created world. And, of course, it is in St. Thomas Aquinas that we find the most famous philosophical statement to the effect that our world is both divinely inspired and divinely created.

however unreflective may be the particular culture in question. Thus the statesman, however removed he may seem, in a given instance, from the abstract language and general concerns of theory, is naturally disposed to consult those speculative insights which it is the charge of the theorist to arrange in proper relation one to another as elements in a general and timeless speech about the human good.

That both political theory and political practice are susceptible to influence by the other is too evident to require argument and illustration. And yet, what bearing or influence the theoretical enterprise of laying of "a solid foundation for political Science" may have ultimately on the practical political affairs of men is a question whose answer is apparently among those the most difficult to ascertain. Toward an eventual resolution of this question however, we might conjecture that in an attempt to underscore some fundamental causal relationship concerning the influence of political theory on practice, an historian of politics might attempt to draw correlations between the successes and failures that, taken together, form the history of the theoretical enterprise, on the one hand, and the actual advents and subversions of sound government which, analogously, form the history of political practice, on the other hand. That there exists some elementary and determinate causal relation between political theory and political practice that is susceptible of discovery is not here denied, though it must be acknowledged that the specific outlines of this relation have lain, as yet, in obscurity.

What is far more apparent and easily ascertained, however, on a review of political experience, is that historically, governments have been

formed more through indirection and the unintended consequences of human action than through any deliberate and systematic planning on the part of individuals. This is so because of the peculiar nature of government's fundamental ends, and specifically, of government's relation to society. For the ship of state is one that, by virtue of the nature of its Divinely ordained purpose to preserve society, can never enter dry-dock, as it were, for refurbishment or repair. It is a ship that, of necessity, must be refitted, when the necessity arises, at sea, plank by plank. Calhoun underscored this truth about the formation of governments within his general discussion, in the Disquisition, of the great difficulty of forming a constitutional government worthy of the name. Concerning such governments, he says:

. . . their construction has been the result, not so much of wisdom and patriotism, as of favorable combinations of circumstances. [Constitutional governments] have, for the most part, grown out of struggles between conflicting interests, which, from some fortunate turn, have ended in a compromise, by which both parties have been admitted, in some one way or another, to have a separate and distinct voice in the government. Where this has not been the case, they have been the product of fortunate circumstances, acting in conjunction with some pressing danger, which forced their adoption, as the only means by which it could be avoided. (58)

The most notable examples of constitutional governments formed in the first way, through a struggle between conflicting interests ended fortuitously by a compromise, include the Roman Republic and the constitutional monarchy of Great Britain. Examples of the latter sort, where constitutional arrangements were the product of fortunate circumstances in combination with some pressing danger which forced their adoption, include two pioneering and renowned but tragically short-lived American experiments, those federal systems known respectively as the Confederate

States of America (1861-1865) and the United States of America (1788-1861) ⁶¹ .

Having reviewed those instances in which constitutional governments have been successfully formed and, once formed, effectively maintained for some considerable time, as well as those instances in which such governments, once formed, have degenerated rapidly into absolute forms, Calhoun writes:

It would seem that it has exceeded human sagacity deliberately to plan and construct constitutional governments, with a full knowledge of the principles on which they were formed; or to reduce them to practice without the pressure of some immediate and urgent necessity. Nor is it surprising that such should be the case; for it would seem impossible for any man, or body of men, to be so profoundly and thoroughly acquainted with the people of any community which has made any considerable progress in civilization and wealth, with all the diversified interests ever accompanying them, as to be able to organize constitutional governments suited to their condition. But, even were this possible, it would be difficult to find any community sufficiently enlightened and patriotic to adopt such a government, without the compulsion of some pressing necessity. (58)

A lack of patriotism and enlightenment on the part of the generality, wherever found, combined with the sheer complexity of a community “which has made any considerable progress in civilization and wealth”, constitutes an apparently insurmountable barrier to any attempt, by a community, at a thorough-going, self-aware, and rationalistic political planning and construction that could prove effective and salutary. Long before the Austrian economists Ludwig von Mises (1881-1973) and Friedrich

⁶¹ Lincoln’s refusal to turn over military and commercial installations in the seceded Southern states to those states, such as Ft. Sumter in Charleston Harbor, was tantamount to a denial of the right of those or of any state, South or North, to secede. It was this denial which in effect ended the federal regime that had been established in 1788 and put in its place a consolidated Northern regime which anachronistically and hypocritically retained the confederal-federal title, “the United States of America.”

von Hayek (1899-1992)⁶² explained to the world why central or “rationalistic” economic planning could never work, due to the sheer complexity of market relations and the intractable nature of the knowledge problems that attend these relations, Edmund Burke and John C. Calhoun were suggesting how the sheer complexity of political communities and the moral and intellectual limitations endemic to human nature, taken together, would doom to failure all attempts at a thoroughly planned politics. The various and enormously costly utopian political experiments of the twentieth century are shocking and eloquent testimonies to the truths about rationalistic planning, both economic and political, underscored by these economists and statesman-philosophers.

Human political practice, then, is to be a largely unplanned affair, if it is to bestow the benefits of protection and improvement on society, and thereby to fulfill faithfully those ends for which it is Divinely intended. This means, of course, that the methods of the statesman, as will become more evident in later chapters, are the subtle and sophisticated ones of indirection, and therefore bear no resemblance -- in the eyes of the political knower -- to the hopelessly crude and simplistic nostrums of the political planner. And so we have just established, or rather, underscored, the fact that political practice is of necessity a largely unplanned affair. And in the end, it is this bare fact which sets limits on the applicability of any political theory, and thus on the influence of political theory on political practice. The significance of this fact about government and about political practice in general becomes even

⁶²See, for example, von Mises' Socialism (1922), Liberalism (1927), Critique of Interventionism (1929), and Human Action (1949); and von Hayek's The Road to Serfdom (1944), Individualism and Economic Order (1948), The Constitution of Liberty (1960), and Law, Legislation, and Liberty (1973).

clearer when we consider the implications for the application of theory of both the abstract character and the idealistic dimension of theory itself.

We find that there are limits to the application of any political theory, and these limits are due largely to the nature of theory itself as an explanatory account of both political actualities and political ideals. Another way of saying this is that political theory is necessarily both descriptive and prescriptive, despite the fact that rhetorical emphases on the part of the theorist may serve to disguise this fact in certain instances. In addition to its description, theory has an idealistic and prescriptive dimension which, in order to exert a salutary and beneficent effect on practice, must heed the imperatives of that practice. By virtue of their general and abstract character, the ideals expressed and espoused within a general theory of politics are radically under-determined in character. Indeed, as components within a general, speculative theory, these ideals-from-theory are necessarily abstract and under-determined, and because of this, they possess no immediate practical utility. But these ideals may prove ultimately useful, of course, when they are translated by the art of the statesman into the idiom of his community, and determined or adapted with regard to the history, present circumstances, and aspirations of that community. That the statesman recognizes the unfitness of these ideals-from-theory for immediate application, as well as the dislocations and dangers to which their heedless application might expose a community, has already been suggested. What remains is to explain the nature of those ideals which a community should pursue.

The practical and attainable ideals of a community are the proximate

and identifiable ones embedded in the existing moral and political practices of the community. As the great twentieth century English political philosopher Michael Oakeshott (1901-1990) points out, one of the primary responsibilities of the statesman is to identify those ideals “intimated” by the political tradition and existing practice of the community. In his essay titled “Political Education” (1962), Oakeshott writes that politics springs “neither from instant desires, nor from general principles, but from the existing traditions of behavior themselves”⁶³:

In politics, . . . every enterprise is a consequential enterprise, the pursuit, not of a dream, or of a general principle, but of an intimation. What we have to do with is something less imposing than logical implications or necessary consequences: but if the intimations of a tradition of behaviour are less dignified or more elusive than these, they are not on that account less important. Of course, there is no piece of mistake-proof apparatus by means of which we can elicit the intimation most worthwhile pursuing: and not only do we often make gross errors of judgment in this matter, but also the total effect of a desire satisfied is so little to be forecast, that our activity of amendment is often found to lead us where we would not go. Moreover, the whole enterprise is liable at any moment to be perverted by the incursion of an approximation to empiricism in the pursuit of power. These are features which can never be eliminated; they belong to the character of political activity.⁶⁴

Political tradition and current practice intimate or suggest ideals because political traditions and existing practices, taken together, express the actualized political condition of a people. And all actualized conditions, whether in the natural or the human world, are the result of some more or less successful realization of an ideal, an ideal internal to the specific created existent(s) under consideration -- as in the case of an oak tree or of a man, for

⁶³See Michael Oakeshott, “Political Education” in Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays (Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1991), 56.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 57.

example. But the “existent” with which we are here most concerned is a group of men constituting an organized society, and their political traditions and existing political practice are, taken together, the measure of their actualized condition politically.

But, recalling our metaphysical framework, every actualized condition, whether political, moral, cultural, or whatever, involves a residual potency and an internal ideal that together suggest the possibility of further actualization. This is so because, as Aristotle and St. Thomas teach, every created existent is a combination of act and potency; and no created existent, including man, is susceptible of a full actualization of its potential in this earthly life.⁶⁵

And so the upshot of this discussion of what Oakshott calls “intimations” is that men are always to be found in some actualized condition or other, a condition expressed in terms of the traditions and existing practices of their political communities. This actualized condition contains within itself, those salutary ideals which the statesman is concerned to uncover. Having once uncovered or identified these ideals, the statesman is naturally concerned to organize and to orchestrate their pursuit by the general community. Sound theory, then, properly applied, aims at the realization, in proper sequence and time, of those ideals embedded in and suggested by existing moral and political practice. These ideals, however, are not to be acted upon all at once. Instead, the intimated ideals internal to existing moral and political practice are to be acted on, in prudential

⁶⁵ Aristotle would deny the full realizability of man’s potential on the grounds that we cannot contemplate continuously; while St. Thomas would add the additional ground that fuller actualization involves a certain direction of the soul towards God, personal salvation of the human soul through God’s grace, and the falling away, at death, of matter or body.

succession, as determined by the concrete identifiable needs and aspirations of the (principal interests of) the general community. This process of reform in succession allows the proximate and more remote effects of the particular measures involved in the reform, once acted upon, to be assessed. Through such assessment, the ultimate desirability of various features of the reform may be determined. And so such is the nature of genuine and responsible political reform. And also, a vitally important negative implication of the foregoing "Oakeshottian" explanation of reform is that ideals that are derived from any source other than existing practice are to be shunned as arbitrary, incongruous, and dangerous, including those derived through "abstract" and "objective" reason, for example.

Put in somewhat simpler terms, the statesman leads the community into and through reforms of its institutions, when such reforms are needed; and he leads by being out in front, as it were, but not too far. For a danger inherent in all efforts to reform the social and governmental institutions of a community comes from a tendency of some among the well-intentioned to hasten a community down the path to the fulfillment of some favored abstract ideal through an excess of zeal and deficiency of care. The costs of such haste and carelessness will of necessity be borne by the community at large, and these costs will take the form either of some excess of personal liberty or of governmental power which will, in its inexorable effects, weaken the moral and physical strength of the community through disorder and chaos. In this way, an unthinking and precipitous imposition of some favored abstract ideal upon the community must, in its ultimate effects, either retard for a time or permanently halt a community's march toward

improvement and progress.

Calhoun understood what Oakeshott would say about political tradition and intimated ideals. While Vice-president under both John Quincy Adams (1767-1848) and Andrew Jackson, he served as presiding officer over the Senate during the 1820's. There, Calhoun learned lessons in respect for political tradition by listening to the often wild and lengthy harangues of the brilliant, fiery, and eccentric John Randolph of Roanoke (1773-1833).

A frail and tubercular Virginia planter-statesman in the habit of strolling into the chambers of Congress with hound dogs at his side and riding crop in hand, Randolph is unfortunately far better known today for his eccentricities than for either his brilliant oratorical performances or his sturdy republicanism and doctrine of states' rights.⁶⁶ This circumstance is all the more lamentable because Randolph gained much of his political schooling at the feet, figuratively speaking, of the great Irish philosopher and statesman, Edmund Burke. And it was, in part, through John Randolph that Calhoun learned so much from the Irishman.⁶⁷ Taking Burke as his model of a statesman, Calhoun was no doubt familiar with the master's pronouncements on the role of tradition and the art of the legislator, including this one:

[Men] should approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude. By this wise prejudice we are taught to look with horror on those children of their country who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces and put him into the kettle of magicians, in hopes that by their poisonous weeds and wild incantations they may regenerate the paternal constitution

⁶⁶ On one occasion, Randolph was scolded for thus bringing his hounds into the Congressional chambers. With characteristic wit and insight, however, Randolph assured the complaining fellow that his beasts were both "better-mannered and better-bred" than the complainant himself.

⁶⁷ See Russell Kirk, *John Randolph of Roanoke: A Study in American Politics* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1978).

and renovate their father's life.⁶⁸

In his own time, Burke opposed the French Enlightenment with British tradition, contempt for tradition with pious regard, and wild abstractionism with responsible and empathetic inquiry into the elements of sound policy. Understanding the folly of pursuing hyper-abstract and alien ideals, the statesman resolutely and piously follows the path laid out for a community by Providence in the practical and attainable ideals intimated by existing moral and political practice. Such was the course Calhoun would pursue for forty years as legislator and executive at the highest levels of American government, a course which finds its warrant in experience and in true philosophy.

And so, in this opening chapter, I have described Calhoun's conception of metaphysical reasoning and how science may be distilled from political experience. Also, in the process of explaining how political theory, political practice, and statesmanship are related one to another, I have begun to show what is involved in the founding of a science. With these important preliminaries now discharged, we are prepared to turn to a consideration of how, in more specific terms, Calhoun set about to lay a "solid foundation for political Science."

⁶⁸ See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 109-110. Here Burke is transforming, through an act of political imagination, the legend of the daughters of Peleas, king of Thessaly, who are said to have followed the advice of Medea and so treated their father.

CHAPTER II

THE TWO-FOLD CONSTITUTION OF MAN'S NATURE

With this chapter, we shall begin to consider the results of Calhoun's application of metaphysical reasoning to the phenomena of politics. For Calhoun, the power of metaphysical reasoning made possible his discovery of a fundamental principle by means of which the science of government could be given a solid foundation. The aim of this chapter is to present and to explicate that vitally important principle, and to conjecture on how Calhoun arrived at its discovery and formulation.

The scientific inquirer into political phenomena, like the scientist of the physical world, is concerned with the identification and study of elemental forces and their interactions one with another, as well as with the state of affairs to which their interaction gives rise. Those forces with which the political scientist is principally concerned, and which constitute the proper objects of his study, are ones which naturally originate in and automatically emanate from the breast of the human individual, and which are conditioned, in a given instance, by the complex of circumstances, natural and artificial, in which man finds himself. Such forces, by their nature, give rise inexorably to actualities or fixed conditions which are themselves, in turn, susceptible of further modification through the ongoing operation of the original forces as developed or modified by evolving circumstance.

In other words, scientific inquiry into politics, and therefore political science itself, is possible because regularities exist in human political practice and behaviour. There are two principal causes of these regularities: the institutions of government and the human passions. Thus, there can be a science of politics because laws and forms of government tend to shape human actions and characters in uniform ways.

Calhoun's concern as a metaphysical inquirer into the phenomena of politics was to uncover that primal force, or relation of forces, in terms of which other, subsidiary forces, and ultimately, the various fixed conditions of political actuality, could be explained. This concern to provide an explanation, through the identification of fundamental and formative forces, of all the various and multitudinous actualized states or conditions in which man has ever or could ever find himself, is a concern that is the very hallmark of the sciences of humanity, and of the ruling science of politics¹ in particular. For it is only through an apprehension of the general operational tendencies of these forces that any responsible and efficacious effort can be made to secure more firmly, if not permanently, those occasional and substantial advances that occur in political practice, and through this, to enhance the prospects for human survival and flourishing. It is in this way, as I explained in Chapter I, that the immediate and practical concerns of the statesman give rise to political theorizing and to political philosophy.

Social and political conditions wrongly understood are the basis of all ill-conceived efforts at reform. Even more seriously, such misunderstandings have frequently been a principal cause of a more comprehensive form of political and social alteration: revolution. But these misunderstandings may, of course, be attributed in large part to the complexity of the phenomena themselves. Indeed, it has been perhaps the sheer variety of actualized conditions historically that has constituted the principal obstacle to advance in the various sciences of human thought and action. This ever-growing variety of human political experience, only the more recent portion of which is preserved in the historical record, tends to overwhelm even the most

¹ On politics as the ruling science, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. I, 1094a.

incisive and determined metaphysical inquirer. The vast and manifold particularity of historical political orders itself typically derails all inquiry through distraction and hopeless bewilderment.

But this variety of actualized social and political conditions is itself to be attributed to the vast variety of modifications of which the primal forces of politics, as it were, are susceptible; and these primal forces reside, as we shall see, within the human individual. That there, in fact, exists an ongoing and reciprocal causal interplay or action between the primal, originative forces in individuals, on the one hand, and existing social and political conventions, on the other hand, further complicates the basic problem confronting the political scientist. Again, the concern is to identify the originative, primal forces that are the principal source of all social and political conventions, conventions that in turn tend to condition in determinate ways the primal forces themselves.

Added to what may be called the inherent complexities of political phenomena is the circumstance that no subject susceptible of exploration and systematic examination by the human mind has proved more liable to obfuscation due to prejudice and partiality of interest than has politics. And yet -- as has been recognized since antiquity -- the necessity of perfecting our understanding of politics is greater than our corresponding need to master any other subject. Recent advances in other sciences, theoretical and applied -- especially, of course, advances in physics and chemistry -- have made more pressing than ever the necessity of advancement in the science of politics. This necessity is so urgent and pressing because it may very well be that the very existence of the human race is hinged upon some general and secured

advance in the political practice and maturity of the species, through a refinement of political practice in the separate communities in which the species is comprehended. As if predicting the increasingly conspicuous and ominous lag between politics and technological development in the twentieth century, Calhoun wrote: "What I dread is, that progress in political science falls far short of progress in that which relates to matter, and which may lead to convulsions and revolutions that may retard or even arrest the former."² About the longer run of history, however, Calhoun was optimistic.³

Still, Calhoun saw that a general improvement and refinement of political practice could not take place, for example, in a wholly spontaneous and unreflective fashion. Indeed, such improvement would require the kind of sound and responsible theorizing that is rooted in the careful and astute observation of political actualities. Anticipating in a general way the great dangers for man and his world that could arise from this developmental disparity between politics and modern science, Calhoun set out to forestall and to lessen such dangers, so far as possible, through the use of "the highest attribute of the human mind."⁴

Through the application of metaphysical reasoning to the vast and complex phenomena of politics, Calhoun arrived at a central or "first" principle, an all-pervading and determinative force of human behavior, in terms of which the whole complex of phenomena may be understood. As I

² Calhoun to Mrs. T. G. Clemson, November 21, 1846; April 28, 1848, *Correspondence*, ed. J. F. Jameson, 712, 752-753.

³ Calhoun's long-run optimism is discussed in Chapter VIII, in a discussion of the nature of progress. See also the *Disquisition*, pp. 64-67, and especially p. 66.

⁴ With startling prescience, Jonathan Swift described some of the dangers of this emerging developmental disparity between modern science and the art of politics. In *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Swift brilliantly satirizes the Enlightenment supposition that the power made available by modern science is an unconditional good. This satire is discussed in Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 293-298.

shall demonstrate over the course of this work, this principle makes possible a panoramic view of human political experience, a view of the whole, as it were, in terms of essence. But, what is this first principle, and how did Calhoun discover it?

In the first paragraph of his Disquisition on Government, we find that Calhoun's immediate and over-riding aim as a political philosopher is to explain that phenomenon at the very center of politics, namely, the very existence of government itself. But to form a "clear and just conception of the nature and object of government", one must identify those forces endemic to human nature from which government originates. (5)

According to Calhoun, there is "a constitution or law of our nature" in which government originates. But more precisely, there exists within every human individual, a "law, without which government would not, and with which, it must necessarily exist." (5) So fundamental is this law or constitution of human nature that, until it is uncovered and identified, it would be . . .

. . . as impossible to lay any solid foundation for the science of government, as it would be to lay one for that of astronomy, without a like understanding of that constitution or law of the material world, according to which the several bodies composing the solar system mutually act on each other, and by which they are kept in their respective spheres. (5)

According to Calhoun, then, the first question to be considered in undertaking to lay a solid foundation for political science is: "What is that constitution or law of our nature, without which government would not exist, and with which its existence is necessary?" (5) Raising this question at the very beginning of the Disquisition⁵, Calhoun calls it "the first question to

⁵ At the end of the first paragraph.

be considered” in laying a solid foundation for “the science of government.”

(5) As the reader moves forward into the Disquisition however it becomes evident that the phrase “the first question to be considered” has more significance than is at first apparent. In fact, the more closely one studies the Disquisition, the more one sees that this “first question” is “first”, not for any light or incidental reason, but because it is conceived by the author as the foundational question of the science of government. Indeed, if we ponder the relation between the question and Calhoun’s project of laying “a solid foundation” carefully enough, we can see Calhoun’s implication that this “first question” is the foundational question of the science because it is the question upon whose formulation the solid founding of the science had to wait. In fact, as I shall demonstrate over the course of this work, it was Calhoun’s formulation of this question, along with his proper answering of it, which would at last make possible a simple and natural theoretical system of politics, a streamlined explanation in terms of fundamental forces or tendencies, expressed in the form of principles, and unencumbered by inessentials and error.⁶

Evidently, that question whose answer only could provide the science of government with a solid foundation is a question which comprehends, at once, every fundamental consideration regarding government, including its origin, its proper object, its problematic character (or its tendency to abuse and

⁶ As Calhoun’s most recent biographer says:

It is hard to read Calhoun’s most famous essay without being impressed. Never a great prose stylist, he is able to achieve a kind of stripped-down elegance and power in The Disquisition that is unexcelled in American political writing. Accept his assumptions, and it is difficult not to be swept along to his conclusions.

See Irving H. Bartlett, John C. Calhoun: A Biography (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 353.

oppression), and the solution of the problems naturally attending its operations through political constitution. As the question implies, government has its origin in a certain “constitution or law of our nature”, and also, government and this “law of our nature” must subsist together. (5) And these two circumstances, taken together, are the phenomenal source, as it were, of all the great issues and problems comprehended by the science of government.⁷ It was through the formulation and answering of this comprehensive question that Calhoun was able to set forth in the Disquisition a simple and natural system of politics, and to advance thereby our understanding of the political world beyond the bounds set by previous theorizing.

The answer to the foundational question posed by Calhoun was formulated by him in the form of a principle which, as it turns out, has a two-fold or dual character. This principle states (1) that man is by nature a social being and (2) that, as a rule, those feelings we experience in reference to our own well-being are felt more intensely than those we experience in reference to the well-being of other persons. As Calhoun put it:

. . . while man is created for the social state, and is accordingly so formed as to feel what affects others, as well as what affects himself, he is, at the same time, so constituted as to feel more intensely what affects him directly, than what affects him indirectly through others; or, to express it differently, he is so constituted, that his direct or individual affections are stronger than his sympathetic or social feelings. (6)

This principle of human nature has a dual or diadic structure, then, and was accordingly dubbed by Calhoun, the “two-fold constitution of [man’s]

⁷For example: What is justice?; What is liberty?; What is the source of political authority?; What is the proper proportion of individual liberty to governmental power?; What is sovereignty?; What is the best form of government?; and so on.

nature.” (7) And yet, there are several labels which Calhoun employs within the Disquisition to refer to the phenomenon which is here called “the two-fold constitution of [man’s] nature” – and this variety of labels is evidently a fact of some significance.

On the first page of the Disquisition, Calhoun is concerned to convey to the reader some accurate sense of the scale and magnitude of the political philosophical project with which he (Calhoun) has been occupied, and his hope clearly is to elicit a proper reception and appreciation of both this project and of the discoveries that are to be revealed in the pages to follow. On this opening page then, we find Calhoun comparing his political philosophical project of laying “a solid foundation for the science of government” to the universally-acclaimed and paradigmatic foundational work that had been done two centuries previously in astronomy. The natural philosophers of a former age had discovered “that constitution or law of the material world, according to which the several bodies composing the solar system mutually act on each other, and by which they are kept in their respective spheres.” Analogously, Calhoun had set for himself the task of discovering “that law, without which government would not, and with which, it must necessarily exist”, or “that constitution or law of our nature.” (5) And so, for important rhetorical reasons, the “constitution or law of the material world” has a counter-part in a “constitution or law” of the political world, and thus Calhoun succeeds through an analogical use of language in underscoring the nature and significance of his philosophical project.

Only two pages more into the Disquisition, however, this initial rhetorical emphasis gives way to a more straight-forward analytical concern

for accurate labelling, when the phrase “two-fold constitution of his nature” is employed while the phenomenon underlying that label is being carefully analyzed. And then, after this “two-fold constitution of [man’s] nature” has received its initial explication and analysis (6-9), what remains is to describe in a systematic fashion how all the great issues and problems of political science may be explained in terms of this “constitution”, which is henceforth referred to as either “that constitution of our nature”, “the constitution of man”, or “that principle of our nature⁸.” This second and final label-change then reflects Calhoun’s natural discursive shift from explicating and analyzing the principle itself within the first several pages of the work (pp. 6-9) to his demonstration of the explanatory power of the principle -- a demonstration which constitutes the remainder of the work (9-78).⁹ And so, a combination of rhetorical and analytic concerns explain the various labels which Calhoun uses to describe the phenomenon at the centre of the human political world. But having now conjectured on the meaning of this succession of labels within the Disquisition, let us return to a consideration of the phenomena which these labels represent.

As formulated, the principle both combines and underscores two essential features of human nature: namely, that we are social by nature, and therefore have a social aspect; and that the feelings we have for self are generally felt more intensely, and therefore, in this sense, have primacy over, those the feelings we experience in behalf of others. What I shall refer to henceforth and in the main as Calhoun’s “dual-principle” may be said then to

⁸ See pages 9, 11, 15, 19, 26, 30, 55.

⁹ These three final labels, especially “that principle of our nature”, are intended perhaps to convey a sense of activity, or the image of a natural force emanating from man which both conditions and is itself conditioned by other forces in the world.

be composed of (1) a “social aspect” and (2) a “primacy relation.”

The dual-principle is an attempt to describe the essential manner in which our feelings or sentiments are structured by nature, and ultimately, by our Creator. As it turns out, this determinate structure or manner of feeling is one of those critically important features of human nature which make us social and political animals [zoon politikon]. Moreover, this structuring of sentiment is Providential, and forms the substance of the foundational principle that, when combined with and conditioned by volition and rationality, forms that nature which is distinctly human and therefore political.

That man is “so constituted as to be a social being”, Calhoun declares “an incontestable fact” (5) and an “unquestionable” phenomenon of our nature. (6) On man’s social nature, Calhoun writes:

His inclinations and wants, physical and moral, irresistibly impel him to associate with his kind; and he has, accordingly, never been found, in any age or country, in any state other than the social. In no other, indeed, could he exist; and in no other -- were it possible for him to exist -- could he attain to a full development of his moral and intellectual faculties, or raise himself, in the scale of being, much above the brute creation. (5)

In order to establish what is, as we shall see, the indispensable presence of the dual-principle as a feature or active principle of human nature, Calhoun presents and explores a series of hypotheticals in which human nature is supposed to be fundamentally different from how we actually find it.

As we have said, the social aspect of human nature is that force originating in man’s distinctive natural constitution which impels him “to associate with his kind.” (6) But, says Calhoun, if man were bereft of all

social or sympathetic feeling, yet otherwise impelled by physical inclinations and wants to associate with his kind -- were such a condition possible -- one might expect that the logical and natural consequence of this condition would be remediless and boundless disorder and confusion, followed by the demise of the entire species. And yet God, instead, has seen fit to incline man "irresistibly" to that state in which his physical and moral inclinations and wants may be more or less successfully pursued. This He did by structuring our sentiments or feelings in a particular determinate way.

In that strictly hypothetical condition in which man is bereft of all social feeling, yet forced to associate with others of his kind through physical inclinations and wants; confusion, disorder, and the destruction of the race would result, because no sense or estimate could be made of the benefit or injury we do to others through word and deed, however motivated, or, through neglect, whether from indifference or hostility. Thus there would be no guide by which to reform or amend our words and actions so as to achieve the desired effect, whatever it may be in a given instance. In this way, social or sympathetic feelings are a vital source of information and understanding, and we register certain feelings of others, more or less effectively, through our capacity for sympathetic feeling. In sum, then, "... man is so constituted as to make the social state necessary to his existence and the full development of his faculties" (5-6)

While the social aspect of human nature is given only a "matter of fact", cursory treatment in the introduction to the Disquisition, it comes up for special emphasis half-way through the work. The general context for this emphasis is Calhoun's correction of certain influential political errors of his

time, including that “great and dangerous” notion that “all people are equally entitled to liberty”, and another error, one “not less great and dangerous” and “usually associated’ with the former, that “liberty and equality are so intimately united, that liberty cannot be perfect without perfect equality ¹⁰.” (42-43)

Having shown how these two opinions are erroneous, Calhoun proceeds by examining a third opinion in which these two “great and dangerous errors have their origin” – namely, that “all men are born free and equal.” (44) And specifically, it is his critical discussion of this third and originative opinion which forms the immediate discursive context of Calhoun’s most extensive theoretical treatment in the Disquisition of the social nature of man. Here, we find a crucially important elaboration of his bare speculative pronouncements about the sociality of man which are presented near the beginning of the Disquisition. (5-9) And so Calhoun’s criticisms of such “prevalent” opinions, which are found, incidentally, not only in the middle section of the Disquisition (42-44) but also in at least one of his political speeches ¹¹, must be sifted with a view to finding the materials with which to piece together Calhoun’s overall conception of human sociality.

As one would expect to find even in the most theoretical writings of a philosopher who was also a statesman, the rhetorical emphases that punctuate his timeless theoretical account of the human good have been

¹⁰ And by “equality” here, what is intended is not “equality of citizens, in the eyes of the law”, which is, according to Calhoun, a variety of equality “essential to liberty in a popular government”, but instead, a false and destructive form of equality, “equality of [material] condition.” (43)

¹¹ “Speech on the Oregon Bill” (June 27, 1848)

determined, to some perceptible degree, by the overshadowing political issues and problems of his time. Indeed, anxious to lay to rest false opinions which he believed were exercising a negative influence over both political theorizing and practice at the time, Calhoun found it appropriate to include analyses of these opinions not only in his political speeches but in his timeless treatise on government as well.

All told, Calhoun singles out for explicit critical analysis in the Disquisition four “prevalent” and false opinions of his time, including those three already mentioned, which declare: (1) “all people are equally entitled to liberty” (42); (2) “liberty and equality are so intimately related, that liberty cannot be perfect without perfect equality” (43); (3) “all men are born free and equal” (44); and (4) “all men are equal in a state of nature” (44).

As we shall see presently in the case of the latter two opinions and in Chapter VIII regarding the first two, Calhoun’s criticisms possess not only the historical and contingent aspect to be expected from practical polemics, but a universal or timeless aspect as well. For it was apparently Calhoun’s perception of the sheer magnitude of the obfuscatory and destructive power of such false opinions, along with a sense that the prevalence of such opinions in his own day underscored a universal human tendency to such error and destruction, which prompted him to include critical analyses of these opinions as parts of his timeless political philosophic speech in the first place. Once summoned into action, Calhoun’s power of “metaphysical reasoning” proceeds in a seemingly exorable fashion to lay bare some of the more remote and recondite causes and practical consequences of these opinions.

Proceeding to his criticism of the last two opinions listed above, Calhoun begins by declaring flatly that “nothing can be more unfounded and false” than the view that “all men are born free and equal.” (44) Accordingly, this “prevalent opinion” rests “upon the assumption of a fact, which is contrary to universal observation, in whatever light it may be regarded.” (44) And what needs explaining next, of course, is how an opinion “so destitute of all reason, ever could have been so extensively entertained.” (44)

In one of his most powerful addresses before the Senate, the “Speech on the Oregon Bill” (June 27, 1848), Calhoun predicted that if the American federal union should perish, an historian in some future day would find among the ultimate, remote, and recondite causes of its dissolution the widespread belief of the time in the merely hypothetical truism that “all men are born free and equal.” By the 1840’s, this notion had become an axiom “in the minds of a vast majority on both sides of the Atlantic”, and was being “repeated daily from tongue to tongue, as an established and incontrovertible truth.” (565)

A typical Calhoun oration, the Oregon speech spoke on many levels of abstraction and to an audience extending far beyond those then occupying the Senate chamber, making connections and revealing truths thereto hidden from listeners more modestly endowed with energy, character, and intellect. The speech was, at a more concrete level, a “point-by-point refutation of the arguments defending the exclusion of slavery from the territories on the basis of the U. S. Constitution, the Ordinance of 1787, the Missouri Compromise, and the intentions and thoughts of Thomas Jefferson ¹².” At a more abstract level, it underscored the real source of sectional conflict between the North

¹² See editor Ross Lence’s introduction to the speech in Union and Liberty, 539.

and the South -- differences in their fundamental beliefs about human nature. Calhoun and the South contemptuously rejected as erroneous and impious the French Enlightenment notions of natural liberty and equality, human perfectibility, and the cult of the individual, which were, during this period, being championed by more and more Northerners.¹³ On this occasion, Calhoun gave special critical attention to the notion that “all men are born

¹³In the 1860's, of course, the military phase of the conflict between South and North which Calhoun is here describing would unfold. The man who was arguably the greatest theologian that the South produced before the war, Dr. James Henley Thornwell, a friend of Calhoun, had this to say about the war ten year before its outbreak:

The parties in this conflict are not merely abolitionists and slaveholders -- they are atheists, socialists, communists, red republicans, Jacobins, on the one side, and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other. In one word, the world is a battleground -- Christianity and atheism are the combatants and the progress of humanity is at stake.

Some years later, looking back on that armed conflict, Robert Lewis Dabney, one of the most brilliant of the Southern Presbyterian theologians, presaging Michael Oakeshott's influential and important essay titled “Rationalism in Politics” (1947), observed how: “Providence ordained that the modern rationalism should select as its concrete object of attack our form of society and our rights.” Following Calhoun and Thornwell, Dabney saw that the conflict between North and South could never be sufficiently explained in terms of superficial differences over principles of political practice. The conflict, instead, resulted from deep cultural, philosophical, and religious differences. Noting the great differences between what may be called the Southern way of life and that of the North, Dabney stated bluntly:

We might safely submit the comparative soundness of Southern society to this test: that it has never generated any of those loathsome isms, which Northern soil breeds, as rankly as the slime of Egypt its spawn of frogs. While the North has her Mormons, her various sects of Communists, her Free Lovers, her Spiritualists, and a multitude of corrupt visionaries whose names and crimes are not even known among us, our soil has never proved congenial to the birth or introduction of a single one of these inventions.

The fears of Calhoun, Thornwell, of other Southerners, and of friends of ordered liberty, wherever found at the time, have been summarized by the late scholar of Southern thought, M. E. Bradford:

It was not only what the Yankees were attempting to do to the South but, even more important, what they were doing to themselves which made the moral and intellectual leaders of our region doubt whether they wished to leave their children in any political or moral connection with the modern power state In the North was a regime whose primary faith was in the human will and intellect, in the ability of man through science and politics to subdue the entire Creation and reshape it according to his fondest dreams. The political form of this culture was that of a juggernaut, embodying a radical spirit

free and equal”, meticulously dissecting what he had identified as “the most false and dangerous of all political errors” (565):

Taking the proposition literally (it is in that sense it is understood), there is not a word of truth in it. It begins with “all men are born,” which is utterly untrue. Men are not born. Infants are born. They grow to be men. And concludes with asserting that they are born “free and equal,” which is not less false. They are not born free. While infants they are incapable of freedom, being destitute alike of the capacity of thinking and acting, without which there can be no freedom. Besides, they are necessarily born subject to their parents, and remain so among all people, savage and civilized, until the development of their intellect and physical capacity enables them to take care of themselves. They grow to all the freedom of which the condition in which they were born permits, by growing to be men. Nor is it less false that they are born “equal.” They are not so in any sense in which it can be regarded; and thus, as I have asserted, there is not a word of truth in the whole proposition, as expressed and generally understood. (565-566)

If one were to hear such observations and arguments presented without knowing their historical context, there might be an inclination to chide Calhoun for banality, and even, to dismiss the passage as a whole as facile, pointing out that such obvious truths could not escape the notice even of the most humble intellect. But this, of course, would be to underestimate man’s capacity for folly in general and for conceit and self-delusion in particular. As will be made clearer in Chapter VIII, “liberty is the noble and highest reward bestowed on mental and moral development, combined with favorable circumstances.” (569) Writing in 1848, in the wake of the American conquest of Mexico and during the revolutionary tumult that had seized much of Europe, Calhoun attacked in head-on fashion, time and again, what were then and still are in our day the most popular and influential misconceptions about liberty and equality:

Instead . . . of liberty and equality being born with man; instead of all

men and all classes and descriptions being equally entitled to them, they are high prizes to be won, and are in their most perfect state, not only the highest reward that can be bestowed on our race, but the most difficult to be won -- and when won, the most difficult to be preserved. [Indeed, liberty and equality] have been made vastly more so by the dangerous error I have attempt to expose, that all men are born free and equal, as if those high qualities belonged to man without effort to acquire them, and to all equally alike, regardless of their intellectual and moral condition. The attempt to carry into practice this, the most dangerous of all political errors, and to bestow on all, without regard to their fitness either to acquire or maintain liberty, that unbounded and individual liberty supposed to belong to man in the hypothetical and misnamed state of nature, has done more to retard the cause of liberty and civilization, and is doing more at present, than all other causes combined. While it is powerful to pull down governments, it is still more powerful to prevent their construction on proper principles. It is the leading cause among those which have placed Europe in its present anarchical condition, and which mainly stands in the way of reconstructing good governments in the place of those which have been overthrown, threatening thereby the quarter of the globe most advanced in progress and civilization with hopeless anarchy, to be followed by military despotism. Nor are we exempt from its disorganizing effects. (569, emphasis added)

This passage came as a thundering remonstrance and warning when first delivered in 1848, as sheer prophecy in the 1860's, and has since lingered, occasionally ringing forth both as a stinging reminder and as a fresh rebuke for present political sins and for older ones yet unabsolved. Also, such passages by Calhoun, persisting into posterity, may supply historians in more distant, future ages with the formula for the political epitaph of our prideful and self-deluded age.¹⁴

As it turns out, the great popularity of the false opinion that all men are born free and equal is due, in large part, to its being "confounded with

¹⁴ Looking back on the twentieth century, these historians may be inclined perhaps to declare that we lived in an age of political superstition, when inchoate and hyper-abstract theory was given preference over time-tested practice -- an age in which the predominant influences on policy were the opiate ideologies of abstract natural rights, natural liberty, natural equality, centralization, consolidationism, and nationalism.

another [opinion], [one] which has some semblance of truth -- but which, when properly understood, is not less false and dangerous." (44) This other opinion is the view that "all men are equal in the state of nature", an idea which, in modern times, has been given impulse, currency, and intellectual sanction by political thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. As it turns out, Calhoun's criticism of the idea of a state of nature forms an important part of the negative or critical aspect of his efforts, in the nineteenth century, to lay a solid foundation for political science. Like Hume in the eighteenth century, Calhoun understood how the idea of a state of nature, once freed from the confines of a closet philosophy, might serve as a vital weapon within the intellectual arsenal of the modern ideologically-motivated sophist and tyrant. Also like Hume, Calhoun saw that much of modern political theorizing, a la Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, was unsound because of its adherence to certain false suppositions about human nature. Political theorizing had been derailed in modernity by the acceptance of such faulty and misleading notions as the state of nature and abstract natural rights. And Calhoun's aim was to expose these errors, to re-assert the older and sounder tradition of Classical Republicanism, and to advance in the discovery of political truth through the framework provided by that tradition.

Calhoun commences his criticism of this central element of much of modern political thought by justly characterizing the state of nature as "a state of individuality, supposed to have existed prior to the social and political state; and in which men lived apart and independent of each other." (44) Although ultimately critical of the view that "all men are equal in a state of nature", Calhoun freely acknowledges the logic of certain conclusions that

have been drawn once the suppositions of the general hypothesis have been granted. For "If such a state ever did exist, all men would have been, indeed, free and equal in it; that is, free to do as they please, and exempt from the authority or control of others --- as, by supposition, it existed anterior to society and government." (44) Calhoun's ultimate criticism of the "state of nature" thesis, a criticism applicable to the thesis in all its various forms -- whether Hobbesian, Lockean, Rousseauian, or Rawlsian ¹⁵ -- is that there are, after all, no grounds for granting any such suppositions. For the "state of nature" is, after all, "purely hypothetical." (44) Being purely hypothetical, the state of nature "never did, nor can exist; as it is inconsistent with the preservation and perpetuation of the race." (44)

Preferring a more literal and accurate use of language, Calhoun chides those who have persistently referred to "the state of nature." (44) Given its purely hypothetical, and therefore unhistorical and impossible character, it is "a great misnomer to call" that "state of individuality" conjectured and popularized by mainstream modern political theorizing "the state of nature." (44) "Instead of being the natural state of man, it is, of all conceivable states, the most opposed to his nature -- most repugnant to his feelings, and most incompatible with his wants." (44) Calhoun's rejection of all so-called "state of nature" theory as an attempt to explain certain fundamental features of the human moral and political condition stemmed from his recognition of the original sociality of human nature. But while affirming the original sociality

¹⁵ And while it is true that each of these theorists ultimately denies the historical facticity and the historical possibility even of the state of nature as a state of pre-societal, autarchical individuality, it is nevertheless also true that their theories and those of others have had the effect of giving rise to and of perpetuating a popular vulgarization and distillation of the theoretical construct, the "state of nature." It is principally such popular, crude, and influential distillations from the far more nuanced and reserved accounts of the various "state of nature" theorists that Calhoun is criticizing here.

of man, Calhoun was also careful to reject the view that man is social by nature without being political,¹⁶ “for society can no more exist without government, in one form or another, than man without society.” (567) And so, as he writes in his Oregon speech:

. . . that cannot justly be called a state of nature which is so opposed to the constitution of man as to be inconsistent with the existence of his race and the development of the high faculties, mental and moral, with which he is endowed by his Creator.

Nor is the social state of itself his natural state; for society can no more exist without government, in one form or another, than man without society. It is the political, then, which includes the social, that is his natural state. It is the one for which his Creator formed him, into which he is impelled irresistibly, and in which only his race can exist and all its faculties be fully developed. (567-568)

In opposition, then, to the mainstream modern political theorizing which embraced the concept of the state of nature, Calhoun affirmed the older tradition of Classical Republicanism, which held as one of its fundamental axioms and presuppositions that “the natural state” for man is “the social and political -- the one for which his Creator made him, and the only one in which he can preserve and perfect his race.” (44) Thus, it is not the case that “instead of being social in his nature”, man was created without sympathy for his own kind, and independent of others for his safety and existence.” (7)

As, then, there never was nor could be such a state as the, so called, state of nature, “it follows, that men, instead of being born in it, are born in the social and political state; and of course, instead of being born free and equal, are born subject, not only to parental authority, but to the laws and institutions of the country where born, and under whose protection they

¹⁶ This point may be viewed as part of Calhoun’s more or less direct rebuttal to communitarian anarchists, whether individualist or collectivist.

draw their first breath." (44) Man's original sociality, then, gives rise naturally to the relations of authority and subordination, and these relations are -- despite whatever abuses may, at times, be found to attend them -- necessary and constitutive of the human good. Freedom and equality, to the extent that these constitute human goods, are not the naturally and inexorably wrought features of an unactualized human condition, but are instead achievements, or products of moral actualization and of the skillful self-assertion of individuals and groups.

The second aspect of Calhoun's dual-principle is what I have called the "primacy" relation, and it is this aspect, in combination with man's social nature, that forms both the underlying cause and ultima ratio not only of society, but of government and political constitution as well, as we shall see in Chapter IV.

The primacy relation underscores a primal fact or aspect of the human condition, one "not less incontestable" than that man is social by nature: for "while man is created for the social state, and is accordingly so formed as to feel what affects others, as well as what affects himself, he is at the same time, so constituted as to feel more intensely what affects him directly, than what affects him indirectly through others;" (6) Another way of describing this fundamental feature of the human condition is to say that ". . . [man] is so constituted, that his direct or individual affections are stronger than his

sympathetic or social feelings ¹⁷.” (6) Calhoun intentionally avoids the expression “selfish” feelings, as applicable to the individual feelings, because it implies “an unusual excess of the individual over the social feelings, in the person to whom it is applied; and, consequently, something depraved and vicious.” (6) His express aim is to “exclude such inference, and to restrict the inquiry exclusively to facts in their bearings on the subject under consideration, viewed as mere phenomena appertaining to our nature --- constituted as it is; and which are as unquestionable as is that of gravitation, and any other phenomenon of the material world.” (6)

In asserting the primacy of the individual over the social feelings, Calhoun does not overlook or disregard those instances in which the social feelings tend to overpower the individual feelings. Such feelings are sometimes found, for example, (a) in the relation of mother and infant, and (b) when they result from “the force of education and habit over peculiar [individual] constitutions.” (6) But these instances in which the social or

¹⁷We find the notion of the primacy of individual feeling developed by Calhoun, at least in a more rudimentary form, as early as 1838. Having occasion to review the motives and career of his fellow senator, Daniel Webster, Calhoun addressed the Senate thus (22 March 1838):

I do not deny that he possesses many excellent qualities. My object is truth, and I intend neither to exaggerate nor detract. But I must say that the character which he attributes to himself is wholly unlike that which really belongs to him. So far from that universal and ardent patriotism which knows neither place nor person, that he ascribes to himself, he is, above all the distinguished public men with whom I am acquainted, remarkable for a devoted attachment to the interest, the institutions, and the place where Providence has cast his lot. I do not censure him for his local feelings. The Author of our being never intended that creatures of our limited faculties should embrace with equal intenseness of affection the remote and the near. Such an organization would lead us constantly to intermeddle with what we would but imperfectly understand, and often to do mischief where we intended good. But the senator is far from being liable to such a charge. His affections, instead of being too wide and boundless, are too concentrated. As local as his attachment is, it does not embrace all within its limited scope. It takes in but a class even there — powerful, influential, and intelligent, but still a class which influences and controls all his actions, and so absorbs his affections as to make him overlook large portions of the Union . . .

sympathetic feelings are felt more intensely than the individual feelings are, comparatively speaking, "few, and always regarded as something extraordinary. The deep impression they make, whenever they occur, is the strongest proof that they are regarded as exceptions to some general and well understood law of our nature; just as some of the minor powers of the material world are apparently to gravitation." (6-7) In this manner, what seem solid counter-examples and therefore grounds for objection to Calhoun's primacy thesis are neatly revealed as merely exceptions which, far from upsetting the rule of individual feeling, underscore it. And so, while admittedly "[man's] social feelings may . . . in a state of safety and abundance, combined with high intellectual and moral culture, acquire great expansion and force; . . .", this force is not ". . . so great as to overpower this all-pervading and essential law of animated existence." (7) As a rule, then, a man feels more intensely those things which affect him directly than those which affect him indirectly through others; and the occasional sympathetic feeling which constitutes a departure from this rule is thus regarded as remarkable and extraordinary; and this regard is itself evidence of the exceptionality of those times, in the course of human affairs, when the social feelings predominate.

Having announced and argued for the primacy of individual feeling, Calhoun goes further and asserts this primacy to be:

. . . a phenomenon, not of our nature only, but of all animated existence, throughout its entire range, so far as our knowledge extends. It would, indeed, seem to be essentially connected with the great law of self-preservation which pervades all that feels, from man down to the lowest and most insignificant reptile or insect. In none is it stronger than in man. (7)

Calhoun thus observes how the primacy relation operates throughout all of animated nature, "so far as our knowledge extends", and links this insight about the structure of sentience, or the natural orientation and directionality of feeling, with the goal of self-preservation. The solicitude of "all that feels" for self-preservation, manifested among humans as frequently and as forcefully as amongst the members of other species, is only the most striking and direct evidence of the primacy relation. This basic orientation or structure of feeling constitutive of individual, animate beings determines, in large part, the success or failure of each being's project of self-preservation. Were we -- along with the rest of animate creation -- not disposed through this internal constitutional structuring of our feeling to favor self over others, there would be no prospect for the survival of this creation -- assuming, of course, that the species which together constitute this creation could once come into existence without such structuring.

That humans share the primacy relation with the rest of animated nature, and the social aspect with many species of higher mammals, are circumstances which, taken together, suggest that while rationality and volition are rightly considered those features which are distinctively human, the dual-principle is the more fundamental and influential force of human nature. For, as we shall see through illustrations presented in Part II, it is the dual-principle of our nature, with its determinate structuring of human feelings, which establishes, in every instance, the context within which human rationality and volition must operate, and not, for instance, the other way around. This context in which rationality and volition are bound, in every instance, to operate, is a network of general operational tendencies

formed through the causal interaction of the dual-principle, on the one hand, and the external institutional and natural conditions in which man finds himself, on the other hand.¹⁸

In order to illustrate and to underscore the great importance and fundamentality of the primacy relation as a feature of human nature, Calhoun presents a series of hypothetical scenarios in which the individual and social feelings are experienced differently. The ultimate aim of this presentation of hypotheticals is to exhibit the actual causal role of the primacy relation as a necessary condition of human survival and flourishing. Two purely hypothetical alternatives to the primacy of individual feeling are considered. One, in which the social feelings are, as a rule, felt more intensely than the individual feelings; and another, in which the social feelings and individual feelings are felt with equal intensity. (8) According to Calhoun, a “necessary result” of both of these conditions, were it possible for men to be so constituted, “would seem to be, that all individuality would be lost; and boundless and remediless disorder and confusion would ensue” (8):

For each, at the same moment, intensely participating in all the conflicting emotions of those around him, would, of course, forget himself and all that concerned him immediately, in his officious intermeddling with the affairs of all others; which, from his limited reason and faculties, he could neither properly understand nor manage. Such a state of things would, as far as we can see, lead to endless disorder and confusion, not less destructive to our race than a state of anarchy. (8)

Hence confusion, disorder, and, finally, the destruction of the race,

¹⁸Incidentally, one task of the political philosopher includes identifying the essential nature of the relations between the dual-principle, on the one hand, and those specifically human features of volition and rationality, on the other hand. Calhoun’s speech about these relations is a central but largely implicit feature of the Disquisition, yet one that will not be treated directly in the present essay.

would ensue, were it possible for men to be once so constituted that either the primacy of social feelings held, or that a condition of parity between the individual and social feelings existed. The existence of either condition, were this possible, would preclude the existence of government as we know it, that is, as a convention whose object is to discourage selfishness and to encourage benevolence. (8) But if government "could by possibility exist" under either hypothetical condition, "its object would be reversed" (8):

Selfishness would have to be encouraged, and benevolence discouraged. Individuals would have to be encouraged, by rewards, to become more selfish, and deterred, by punishments, from being too benevolent; and this, too, by a government, administered by those who, on the supposition, would have the greatest aversion for selfishness and the highest admiration for benevolence. (8-9)

And so the particular manner in which our sentiments have been structured implies and necessitates a determinate role for government -- namely, encouraging benevolence and deterring selfishness. Also, neglect of self combined with "officious intermeddling" in the affairs of others, along with the confusion and disorder these must bring, mark the hypothetical schemes presented above as thoroughly unworkable and destructive. Hence, both the primacy of social feelings and the principle of equal intensity, as it were, between the individual and social feelings -- if realizable -- would bring about the destruction of the entire race. That such has not been the fate of our species is due to the intentions and workings of a Divine Providence:

To the Infinite Being, the Creator of all, belongs exclusively the care and superintendence of the whole. He, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, has allotted to every class of animated beings its condition and appropriate functions; and has endowed each with feelings, instincts, capacities, and faculties, best adapted to its allotted condition. To man, he has assigned the social and political state, as best adapted to develop the great capacities and faculties, intellectual and moral, with

which he has endowed him; and has, accordingly, constituted him so as not only to impel him into the social state, but to make government necessary for his preservation and well-being. (9)

Calhoun then recognized that sound political theory and practice come in large part from an accurate and extensive understanding of human nature. In pious deference to the Divine creation, he wrote that in politics “. . . we must take men as they are, and do the best we can with them, constituted as they are¹⁹.” Calhoun would reject, for example, as wildly unrealistic, irresponsible, and dangerous the abstractionism of writers like the Englishman William Godwin (1756-1836), who, in his Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793), ultimately rejected government as corrupting, asserted the perfectibility of man, and predicted that, in time, rational consensus would replace authority and obedience in human affairs.²⁰ For Godwin, government was an unnecessary evil to be discarded when men have reached a level of understanding its evils so that society may right itself. When this point is reached, reason will become the sole determinant of human actions. In contrast, Calhoun roundly rejected all forms of political fantasy and unrealism, including the Godwinian doctrines of anarchism and human perfectibility. Calhoun maintained that “We must take human nature as it

¹⁹Calhoun, Correspondence (Washington, 1900), 693.

²⁰See Political Justice, Bk. I, Bk. II, and Bk. V respectively:

Man is not . . . a perfect being, but perfectible . . . It is only by giving free scope to (the excursions of an inventive mind), that science, philosophy and morals have arrived at their present degree of perfection, or are capable of going on to that still greater perfection, in comparison to which all that has already been done will appear childish.

And:

. . . render the plain dictates of justice level to every capacity; remove the necessity of implicit faith; and the whole species will become reasonable and virtuous. It will then be sufficient for juries to recommend a certain mode of adjusting controversies, without assuming the prerogative of dictating that adjustment. It will then be sufficient for them to invite offenders to forsake their errors . . .

is, and accommodate our measures to it, instead of making the vain attempt to bend it to our measures ²¹.”

According to Calhoun, man is impelled into the social state by a Divine structuring of both his internal nature or constitution, and of his external environment, which includes his proximity and intercourse with others of his kind. Prominent among those features of his internal nature that impel him into the social state is his capacity for social or sympathetic feeling. This combination of the internal and external ordering of man's world establishes the distinctive outline and character of the human condition. The internal constitution of man, featuring the dual-principle as a distinctive combination of sociality with the primacy of individual feeling, operates within an external environment in which scarcity of material resources is the rule rather than the exception. Remarking on these internal and external circumstances a century earlier, David Hume, in his Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (1751), referred to man's earthly condition as one marked by “scarcity of resources” and “limited benevolence.”

Although man is blessed with an internal constitution and external environment that have proved thusfar essentially conducive to his survival and flourishing, the human condition is, of course, far from unproblematic, and the survival of the race, as a consequence, far from secured. The peculiar Divine structuring of his power of feeling or of sentiment has thusfar assisted man in avoiding final destruction, whereas we might, according to Calhoun, reasonably expect that his fate would have proved quite different had this structuring resembled either of the other two scenarios considered above. But

²¹ Calhoun, The Works of John C. Calhoun ed. Richard Cralle, 6 vols (Columbia, S.C., New York, 1851-1855), II, 648 (1937).

despite the overall fitness of man for his environment, what remains to be considered are the problems naturally attending man's nature as these problems relate to social and political organization. For as it turns out, both society and government are highly problematic organizational forms, in large part because they have their origin in the dual-principle of our nature.

According to Calhoun, the human condition, as it actually is, naturally presents certain fundamental problems that man himself must struggle with and attempt to solve. Specifically, man is left to perfect certain parts of the Divine creation, in so far as circumstances, which include his capacities, allow. Yet the most fundamental political problem presented by this human condition is one occasioned by the operation of the dual-principle itself, as we shall see in Part II, chapters IV, V, and VI. For "that constitution of our nature which makes us feel more intensely what affects us directly than what affects us indirectly through others, necessarily leads to conflict between individuals." (7) And this is so because each person, in consequence of the operation of the dual-principle, and perhaps, of the primacy relation especially, "has a greater regard for his own safety or happiness, than for the safety or happiness of others; and, where these come in opposition, is ready to sacrifice the interests of others to his own." (7)

The natural result of the operation of the dual-principle, then, is a "tendency to a universal state of conflict, between individual and individual; accompanied by the connected passions of suspicion, jealousy, anger and revenge -- followed by insolence, fraud and cruelty -- and, if not prevented by some controlling power, ending in a state of universal discord and confusion, destructive of the social state and the ends for which it was ordained." (7)

The controlling power here referred to is none other than that one “wherever vested, or by whomsoever exercised” that is “GOVERNMENT.” (7) And yet government, as the controlling power whose purpose is to counteract the tendency to a universal state of conflict by preserving society, is itself problematic. This problem of government, like the problem that directly threatens society, has its source in the dual-principle. Whereas the dual-principle, in its natural operations, tends to create a condition of universal conflict which necessitates the controlling power that is government, it is the dual-principle also which is the principal cause of oppressive and abusive government. This is so, Calhoun tells us, because “the powers which it is necessary for government to possess, in order to repress violence and preserve order, cannot execute themselves. They must be administered by men in whom, like others, the individual are stronger than the social feelings.” (9) And so, “powers vested in [governmental leaders] to prevent injustice and oppression on the part of others, will, if left unguarded, be by them converted into instruments to oppress the rest of the community.” (9) The only effective means by which injustice and oppression at the hands of governmental leaders can be prevented, is political CONSTITUTION, a human artifice which, like GOVERNMENT, springs from the dual-principle, as will also be explained in Part II.

Having explicated the “two-fold constitution” of man’s nature, or what I have called Calhoun’s dual-principle, I shall proceed now to conjecture on the intellectual-historical process by which he came to apprehend and to formulate this principle. This conjecture will constitute the remainder of this chapter and will also appear at certain appropriate places within Chapter III.

In Calhoun's written works, including his political speeches and theoretical treatises, direct references to other thinkers are rare indeed.²² And yet, it is possible to spy out various influences. One may ask, for example: What inspired Calhoun to write theoretical works on politics?; How did he come to conceive the project of laying a foundation for political science?; and What was the intellectual route by which he was able, ultimately, to provide a solid foundation for political science through the discovery of its first principle?

Passages from his Disquisition and from his "Speech on the Revenue Collection [Force] Bill" (Feb.15-16, 1833), already cited²³, are sufficient demonstration of the inspiration Calhoun derived from pioneers of science like the mathematician La Place (1749-1827), and from the foundational discoveries of those natural philosophers of earlier times, including Bacon (1561-1626), Galileo (1564-1642), and Newton (1642-1726). These passages

²² For a general account of the intellectual influences on Calhoun see August O. Spain, The Political Theory of John C. Calhoun (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968), 33-37. Also, see the introduction to Clyde N. Wilson ed., The Essential Calhoun: Selections from Writings, Speeches, and Letters (London: Transaction Publishers, 1992), xvii-xviii, where Wilson observes:

It is of limited usefulness to discuss Calhoun's thought in terms of the influences upon him, in the manner of literal-minded scholars: "Calhoun got this from Aristotle" or "Calhoun revised Madison's faction theory here." This is a sophomoric way of approaching the subject. Calhoun was an original thinker; that is, he made use of his intellectual heritage in his own way, for his own purposes.

Unlike Daniel Webster or Thomas Hart Benton or Charles Sumner, he does not stud his speeches with bookish allusions to display his learning. His library was dispersed at the death of his eldest son and cannot be recovered. This, together with the paucity of direct allusions to other thinkers, limits what we can know about influences. We do know that he was well educated in the classics and modern history. He was also interested in political science, theology, economics, the applied sciences, and other subjects, and studied hard and purposefully all his life. (emphasis added)

²³ Chapter I.

could be supplemented by others²⁴, of a similar character, uncovered on a general review of the vast Calhoun corpus of letters, speeches, and high theoretical tracts, soon to be comprehended, by his editors, in twenty-five weighty volumes. Still, it is not known that Calhoun actually read the works of these intellectual pioneers.²⁵ More likely, Calhoun was familiar with their discoveries through word of mouth and popular secondary work. And so, it seems likely that Calhoun drew his inspiration to science somewhat indirectly from thinkers like Newton, La Place, and others. For indeed, from the seventeenth century on, it was common to talk of founding a science of this or that. Consequently, an idiom of speech and thought existed by Calhoun's time which suggested the course that might be taken by one with both an intense interest in politics and a metaphysical turn of mind. Inspired by the remarkable discoveries of modern natural philosophy, Calhoun resolved to get us beyond mere political star-gazing, as it were, and to transform politics into a noble science which "displays to our admiration the system . . ." of the political universe. (434)

To better understand Calhoun's project of laying a solid foundation for political science, it is helpful to view that particular theoretical enterprise within the broader context of what is involved in giving a solid foundation to all the various sciences, as this was presented by the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) in the introduction to A Treatise of Human Nature (1739). Hume, like Calhoun a century later, had been inspired by the recent

²⁴ See, for example, the Disquisition, page 7, where the dual-principle is compared to the law of gravitation, and page 42, where Calhoun speaks of a "fixed law" which inexorably rewards virtue with liberty and punishes vice with "lawless and despotic rule."

²⁵ For recall, as we pointed out before, that Calhoun's library was dispersed at the death of his eldest son. And presumably, prior to this dispersement, no one recorded the titles.

discoveries of the natural philosophers. By 1730, and about the time that Hume began to philosophize, Newton, Locke and Bacon towered over European culture and the arts as the giant grey intellectual eminences which would inspire and, in many ways, determine the agenda and direction of the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, of which Hume was to become a central figure.²⁶ In particular, the influence of Newton on the Enlightenment and on Hume was fundamental. Newton had discovered the fundamental laws through which one might explain the physical properties and movements of every material particle in the universe. Not only did Newton instruct mankind in physics, but he also set an example which students of the sciences appertaining to human nature and conduct would follow. While still in his teens, Hume would conceive his Newtonian project of a science of human nature upon which all other sciences would be ultimately dependent for their foundation.

In his Treatise, Hume argues that all of the various sciences are in some measure dependent upon a science of man, observing that "... all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another²⁷." This is true, says Hume, not only of sciences such as logic, morals, criticism, and politics, "whose connexion with human nature is more close and intimate", but even of "Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion, . . . since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties²⁸." Hume's philosophical researches in the Treatise

²⁶ See Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, vol. I, The Rise of Modern Paganism (London: W. W. Norton & Comp., 1966), 308-321.

²⁷ David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), xv.

²⁸ *Ibid*, xv.

underscored the centrality and fundamentality of the science of human nature. Stirred by the recent advances of the natural philosophers, Hume optimistically held out the prospect that “changes and improvements” in the other sciences might be made after we are thoroughly acquainted with “the extent and force of human understanding”, “the nature of the ideas we employ”, and “the operations we perform in our reasonings”²⁹, innovations which Hume himself would bring off in his Treatise, and in the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748) that would follow. According to Hume, “the science of man is the only foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation”³⁰. What Hume proposed was “a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security”³¹. This system would be founded on an explanation of the principles of human nature that Hume himself would provide.

To achieve this complete system of the sciences, Hume called for the abandonment of that “tedious lingring method, which we [philosophic researchers] have hitherto followed”, and its replacement with a bold new strategem:

. . . instead of taking now and then a castle or village on the frontier, [we should] march up to the capital or center of these sciences, to human nature itself; which being once masters of, we may every where else hope for an easy victory. From this station we may extend our conquests over all those sciences, which more intimately concern human life, and may afterwards proceed at leisure to discover more fully those, which are the objects of pure curiosity. [For] there is no question of importance, whose decision is not comprized in the science

²⁹ Ibid, xv.

³⁰ Ibid, xvi.

³¹ Ibid, xvi.

of man; and there is none, which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science.³²

Hume called this new method of inquiry “experimental philosophy”³³, and explained that it operates by undertaking to establish principles on the authority of experience only, and by excluding, as presumptuous and chimerical, any hypothesis that sought grounding in anything else.

Whether by suggestion from reading Hume or by coincidence, Calhoun adopted the direct method of “experimental reasoning” which Hume advocates, and undertook to apply it directly to the phenomena of politics. Whereas Hume, in his experimental philosophizing, and after having set forth the fundamental elements of the foundational science of human nature, had focussed more strictly on understanding moral phenomena; Calhoun would focus on those fundamental features of human nature in terms of which the phenomena of politics may be explained. Indeed, it is possible that Calhoun was inspired by Hume’s success, with the completion of his Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (1751), in laying a new foundation for moral science. For Hume had proclaimed his ambition to provide a systematic philosophical account of moral phenomena. But, whether inspired by Hume’s example or not, Calhoun was clearly driven by an aspiration similar to Hume’s, with his aim of giving a solid foundation to political science. Indeed, the projects of Hume in morals and Calhoun in politics are not merely similar as regards their scope and ultimate aims, but are related and overlapping due to the close relation of the subjects themselves.

³² Ibid, xvi.

³³ Ibid, xvi.

Leaving behind “the tedious lingering method” of previous political investigations, and marching up “directly to the capital or center” of the sciences, “to human nature itself”; Calhoun was able to identify those principles of the more general science of human nature directly relevant to politics, where politics is understood as that particular science which considers “men as united in society”³⁴. The crowning result of applying this direct method of observation and reasoning to the phenomena of politics was the discovery by Calhoun of the dual-principle, or the first principle of political science. While Hume, with the completion of the Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (1751), would display his aspiration to become the Newton of moral science; Calhoun, with the writing of his Disquisition on Government (1851), would evince a similar ambition to become the Newton of political science.

A more easily demonstrated influence on Calhoun’s thought was his study of political economy. As an American statesman of the period from 1811 until 1850, Calhoun’s principal concern was the maintenance of prosperity and harmony as the Union underwent vast territorial expansion and economic development. This circumstance, combined with Calhoun’s personal determination to discharge successfully his statesmanly duties, was sufficient to make him a careful and thorough student of the theory and application of the principles of political economy. As historian and Calhoun scholar Clyde N. Wilson points out, for example,

Between the resolution of the nullification conflict (1833) and the Wilmot Proviso (1846) -- fully a third of his career -- the greater part of [Calhoun’s] public life was directed towards matters of economics. He

³⁴ *Ibid*, xv.

paid some attention in this period to foreign affairs and to threshold defenses against the as-yet-weak threat of abolitionism, but Calhoun devoted more study and more major speeches to economic questions than all other subjects put together.

In so doing he developed comprehensive programs, distinct from those of both the Whigs and the Democrats, in regard to the tariff, government finance, the public lands, internal improvements, and especially currency and banking — all the vexed issues of the “Jacksonian” era.³⁵

In a speech of 1842, Calhoun summarized his position on economic matters: “Free Trade: Low Duties: No Debt: Separation from Banks: Economy: Retrenchment: and Strict Adherence to the Constitution.” This summation would eventually be used by his supporters as a slogan in his campaign for the 1844 Democratic presidential nomination.

Calhoun’s economic policies and platform were considered by many, among the more reflective portion of Americans, as partaking more of reason and principle than the often sophistical, opportunistic, and narrowly expedient positions of the two major parties. As Professor Wilson points out, “[Calhoun’s] program won adherents and admirers from both parties and was regarded by many thoughtful Americans, as much or more in the North as in the South, as exemplary of true republican statesmanship³⁶.” These opinions of his contemporaries would be corroborated in the 1950’s by Bray Hammond, who is generally considered the finest historian of banking of the period. Remarking on Calhoun’s mastery of complex currency and banking issues, Hammond praised the Carolinian’s understanding of economics as superior

³⁵ Clyde N. Wilson, “‘Free Trade: No Debt: Separation From Banks:’ The Economic Platform of John C. Calhoun” (unpublished), 1.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 1.

to those of other statesmen and politicians of the time.³⁷

One may conjecture that it was through his study of the principles of political economy, prompted by the solicitous concerns of high statesmanship, that Calhoun was introduced to what the great Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises (1881-1973), in his monumental Human Action: A Treatise on Economics (1949), called the “methods of reasoning” peculiar to the so-called “Classical” economists.³⁸ Early on in his national political career, Calhoun worked from previous economic theorizing and experience to shape his own system of political economy. It seems probable, then, that from his study of the doctrines of economists including Adam Smith (1723-1790), David Ricardo (1772-1823), Jean-Baptiste Say (1767-1832), and Thomas Cooper (1759-1839), Calhoun -- as philosopher -- took up the political economist’s concern for discovering what may be termed “the laws of human action and social cooperation”³⁹, laws or principles by means of which the economists had sought to explain the phenomena of man’s behavior in a more or less regulated market. But Calhoun’s concern was not merely with laws or principles governing man’s behavior as an economic agent, whether consumer or producer. Instead, as a political philosopher, and as a statesman, Calhoun was concerned with how individuals and groups understand and pursue their human good, as this is conceived in the broadest sense. Although a political economist himself, he understood that politics -- the science of human survival and human flourishing -- is the ruling science, and that economics, along with the other sciences, is subordinate to it. For

³⁷ See Bray Hammond, Banks and Politics in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 37, 111, 234-237, 367-368, 427-429, 609.

³⁸ See Ludwig von Mises, Human Action: A Treatise on Economics (Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1966), 2.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

this view of the relation of economics to politics, Calhoun found ample confirmation in Aristotle, and in the founder of modern economics himself, the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith. As Smith writes:

Political economy, considered as a branch of the science of a statesman or legislator, proposes two distinct objects: first, to provide a plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people, or more properly to enable them to provide such a revenue or subsistence for themselves; and secondly, to supply the state or commonwealth with a revenue sufficient for the public services. It proposes to enrich both the people and the sovereign.⁴⁰

But while it was Calhoun's concern with every aspect of the human good, and not merely with man's material well-being, that guided his efforts in laying a new and solid foundation for political science, it was perhaps his acquaintance with the peculiar "methods of reasoning" of the economists which determined, to some very considerable degree, the method which he would employ in order to accomplish this task. For once we consider in retrospect the nature and role of the dual-principle, for example, as characterized in the Disquisition, it appears that Calhoun -- emulating the economists -- set out to discover those fundamental principles at the base of the science of government which are both analogous to and inextricably connected with the economists' "laws of human action and social cooperation."

In fact, it is evidently the case -- as will become clearer over the course of this essay -- that through his novel application of the "economic reasoning" method of the Classical School, Calhoun revolutionized political theorizing. For it was ultimately this method of approach through economics which made possible the Disquisition, with its ordering and explanation of

⁴⁰ See Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Bk. I, and Adam Smith, An Inquiry Into The Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1981), Vol. I, 138.

the phenomena of politics with an unprecedented and unparalleled clarity, precision, and thoroughness. But, to understand the significance of this novel application, a review is in order of certain fundamental features of much of political understanding and practice prior to Calhoun as well as of those "methods of reasoning" of the economist which, we have conjectured, Calhoun seems to have employed in his political philosophizing.

An ancient and persisting error in political thinking and practice has been the opinion that there are no laws either of social cooperation or of political organization which legislators are bound to consult. Closely associated with this opinion has been the belief that men can organize society and its political arrangements any way they please, a view that has been widely entertained among the vulgar in every age and which has likewise, in every age, been more or less influential in shaping governmental policy and general culture. And yet, no other single opinion, belief, or supposition has done more to hinder and to forestall even inquiry into the fundamental principles of society and government. Moreover, this erroneous opinion -- that men can organize society and its political arrangements any way they please, and without any of the constraints that science might impose -- has been closely allied with another opinion, one not less erroneous, and one scarcely less destructive in its influence: this latter opinion is that all social and political problems may be reduced ultimately to moral problems.

For centuries the opinion has been held, in some one respectable quarter or other, that what is needed to construct the ideal society is good princes and virtuous citizens, because, it was believed, with righteous men, any utopia might be realized. This false opinion touches on a question of

such great import that the value of a successful address to it can hardly be exaggerated. The question is: Are good rulers and virtuous citizens more the effects or the causes of good society and government, or are they, in equal proportion, their causes and effects? The question reaches to the very core of the subject matter of politics, and, cast in another form, may be put this way: Is politics, as a practical art, concerned at its most fundamental level, more with the problems of coordinating the disparate wills of individuals in a community, or with the problems of improving their morals? A successful and permanent resolution of this question is indispensable not only to the advance of political science, but to any substantial and enduring advance of the human race. For the most influential political theorizing prior to Calhoun, including the systems of Plato, Aristotle, Locke, and Rousseau, has left this vital issue unresolved.

In the introduction to Human Action, von Mises describes the hopelessly simplistic view of society and politics which had for so many centuries exerted a powerful influence on the public affairs of men, and which had, through the intellectual misdirection it fostered, long forestalled theoretical advances. Prior to the innovations of the Classical School of economics, says von Mises,

. . . all were fully convinced that there was in the course of social events no . . . regularity and invariance of phenomena as had already been found in the operation of human reasoning and in the sequence of natural phenomena. They did not search for the law of social cooperation because they thought that man could organize society as he pleased. If social conditions did not fulfill the wishes of the reformers, if their utopias proved unrealizable, the fault was seen in the moral failure of man. Social problems were considered ethical problems. What we needed in order to construct the ideal society, they thought, were good princes and virtuous citizens. With righteous men any

utopia might be realized.⁴¹

But this view would be overturned, at long last, in the eighteenth century, by the discoveries of the political economists. According to von Mises:

. . . economics opened to human science a domain previously inaccessible and never thought of. The discovery of a regularity in the sequence and interdependence of market phenomena went beyond the limits of the traditional system of learning. It conveyed knowledge which could be regarded neither as logic, mathematics, psychology, physics, nor biology.⁴²

The Classical School viewed human society in a new way, and this way revealed that economics and politics are sciences concerned first and foremost, not with morals, but with complex coordination problems and the solution of these problems through science itself. As von Mises observes:

[People] learned with stupefaction that there is another aspect from which human action might be viewed than that of good and bad, of fair and unfair, of just and unjust. In the course of social events there prevails a regularity of phenomena to which man must adjust his actions if he wishes to succeed. It is futile to approach social facts with the attitude of a censor who approves or disapproves from the point of view of quite arbitrary standards and subjective judgments of value. One must study the laws of human action and social cooperation as the physicist studies the laws of nature. Human action and social cooperation seen as the object of a science of given relations, no longer as a normative discipline of things that ought to be — this was a revolution of tremendous consequences for knowledge and philosophy as well as for social action.⁴³

The Classical School, then, taught that when economies and governments fail, they tend to do so not because of the moral failings of

⁴¹ Ludwig von Mises, Human Action: A Treatise on Economics (Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1966), 2.

⁴² *Ibid*, 1.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 2.

individuals, but because of problems in their structures, and specifically, in their failure to coordinate successfully the actions and interests of individuals and groups. Thus poverty and distempered government are the results primarily of coordination problems, and not of moral failings by individuals or groups. Conversely, economic systems are successful when they produce material prosperity for their members; and governmental systems are successful when the individual interests and souls of the community are ordered in a salutary and beneficent manner, in order, for example, that the community may be unified and virtue realized in individuals, as will be demonstrated in Chapter VII. And these successes, both in economics and in politics, are due to the on-going solution of complex coordination problems. And so, the material and spiritual prosperity enjoyed by a community are the results primarily of the solution of complex coordination problems -- economic and political problems respectively -- and are not primarily the consequences of the moral example and educative efforts of virtuous individuals.

Free of the false and confining suppositions of the older view of society and politics which had been cleared away by the labor of two generations of political economists, Calhoun, in the 1830's and 1840's, was able to proceed with his search for the fundamental laws of politics. But Calhoun's apparent innovation in applying analogically the economists' "methods of reasoning" to the phenomena of politics has gone essentially unnoticed by later political theorists, and indeed, was overlooked even by von Mises. Thus writes von Mises:

For more than a hundred years, . . . the effects of this radical change in the methods of reasoning were greatly restricted because people believed that they referred only to a narrow segment of the total field

of human action, namely, to market phenomena. The classical economists met in the pursuit of their investigations an obstacle which they failed to remove, the apparent antinomy of value. Their theory of value was defective, and forced them to restrict the scope of their science. Until the late nineteenth century political economy remained a science of the “economic” aspects of human action, a theory of wealth and selfishness. It dealt with human action only to the extent that it is actuated by what was – very unsatisfactorily -- described as the profit motive, and it asserted that there is in addition other human action whose treatment is the task of other disciplines. The transformation of thought which the classical economists had initiated was brought to its consummation only by modern subjectivist economics, which converted the theory of market prices into a general theory of human choice.

. . . The modern theory of value widens the scientific horizon and enlarges the field of economic studies. Out of the political economy of the classical school emerges the general theory of human action, praxeology. The economic or catallactic problems are embedded in a more general science, and can no longer be severed from this connection. No treatment of economic problems proper can avoid starting from acts of choice; economics becomes a part, although the hitherto best elaborated part, of a more universal science, praxeology.⁴⁴

It was a precursor of von Mises, and the “father” of the neo-classical or “Austrian School” of economics, Carl Menger, professor of political economy at the University of Vienna from 1873 to 1903, who made the discovery in value theory in the latter half of the nineteenth century which in turn made possible this expansion of the scientific scope of economics. In 1871, in his Principles of Economics (Grundsätze der Volkswirtschaftslehre), Menger expounded a theory of value that was to resolve the question that had so long perplexed the great classical economists.⁴⁵ As one historian of economic thought describes it:

[Menger’s theory] was the subjective theory of value based on the

⁴⁴ Ibid, 2-3.

⁴⁵ The history of economic thought now credits Menger, William Stanley Jevons, an English economist, and Leon Walras, a French economist, with having established independently the subjective theory of value at roughly the same time. See M. Blaug, Economic Theory in Retrospect (Homewood: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1962), 272-273.

principle of marginal utility. It dispelled the classical notion that the value of a thing is an objective measure intrinsic in the good itself. Economic goods were now seen to be valued subjectively in terms of the satisfaction that the user expects to derive from their incremental use. . . . the subjective theory of value . . . was to become the foundation of the whole Austrian system It remained for Menger's two great disciples, Friedrich von Wieser and Eugen von Bohm-Bawerk, to refine the subjective theory⁴⁶

And so prior to the subjective theory of Carl Menger and the consequent expansion of economic science into a general theory of human action, Calhoun, in the 1840's, was applying the methods of reasoning of the economists' analogically to the problems and issues of political science.

Hence: That man, actuated by the dual-principle of his nature, is social, and yet tends to sacrifice the interests of others to himself, is a decisive consideration for Calhoun. Also, Calhoun understood that, as von Mises points out, it is quite futile to approach such social facts with the attitude of a censor. Any praise or blame that may be attached to such behavior is, strictly speaking, beside the point. Consequently, as one writer has pointed out, Calhoun believed that the statesman is concerned to legislate, "not for men in the abstract or for men in general, but for a particular portion"⁴⁷. And in considering how men might be brought more into line -- or kept in line -- with what they ought to do, the legislator, Calhoun maintained, must be guided by his shrewd perception of what actually moves these men. Thus: "We must take human nature as it is, and accomodate our measures to it, instead of making the vain attempt to bend it to our measures"⁴⁸. In saying

⁴⁶ See Thomas C. Taylor, The Fundamental of Austrian Economics (England: The Adam Smith Institute, 1980), 1.

⁴⁷ See Ralph Lerner, "Calhoun's New Science of Politics" in John C. Calhoun: A Profile, ed. John L. Thomas (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 194.

⁴⁸ See The Works of John C. Calhoun, edited by Richard K. Cralle, 6 vols., Vol. I, 648.

this, Calhoun intended that human nature is always to be found in some fixed condition of realization between the extremes of pure potency and pure act. Therefore, history itself consists of the ongoing interaction of the two principles, potency and act, as we noted in Chapter I. Moreover, not only are men always to be found in some definite and fixed condition of realization, but they are, likewise, always found to behave in more or less strict accord with certain untranscendable features of their nature, variously conditioned. Evidently, the most prominent and influential of these features are those underscored by Calhoun's dual-principle – namely, sociality and the primacy of individual feeling. A fixed and untranscendable aspect of human nature, susceptible of only limited conditioning or modification, the dual-principle stands as an immovable cornerstone within the human constitution, a force that gives substance and shape to all human being and becoming, as will become clearer in Part II.

And so, Calhoun's political theorizing may well have been inspired, at least in part, by the classical economists' concern with discovering "the laws of human action and social cooperation."

In economics, the older view of society, presented above, was overthrown by Adam Smith and others because it had not answered ". . . the question regarding what factors compelled the various acting individuals to behave in such a way that the goal aimed at by the whole's inexorable evolution was attained..."⁴⁹ Distracted and misled by this older view, men had failed to perceive that the market is a spontaneously ordered convention formed by humans acting on their individual or subjective value judgments about their material well-being. But indeed, it was classical political economy

⁴⁹ Ludwig von Mises, Human Action: A Treatise on Economics, 1.

which underscored the important principle of spontaneous cooperation, and this principle was the great social scientific discovery of the eighteenth century. Calhoun followed up this victory of the economists over the old view of society with a complete and perhaps incontrovertible rout of that view from the standpoint of political science.

In politics, the older view of society could not measure up, because, as we may readily and easily infer from Calhoun's speculative speech on the causes of public and private morals⁵⁰, which is examined in Chapter VII, it could not account for why virtuous men are either corrupted or excluded from power under some governmental arrangements, while vicious men are either improved or excluded from power under others. As we shall see in Chapter VII, Calhoun argues that good princes and virtuous citizens are more the effects than the causes of good society and government. And so, as we shall also see, virtue, both moral and intellectual, is more an effect than a cause of sound government generally, and of political constitution in particular.

Political theorizing prior to the discoveries of the Classical School had failed to give a definitive account of the process by which the virtues or the vices are elevated and diffused throughout a community.⁵¹ In Plato's Republic, for example, the author, through the medium of his interlocutors, underscores the fundamental truth that the achievement of the good life depends largely upon a proper organization of government. And in more specific terms, we are informed by Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics that the legislator makes the citizen good through habituation, and that "[right]

⁵⁰ See the Disquisition, 38-40.

⁵¹ See Chapter VII.

habituation is what makes the difference between a good political system and a bad one.”⁵² And yet, while the Platonic and Aristotelian accounts are sound as far as they go; they do not, for example, describe, in specific terms, the process by which the moral virtues or vices are elevated and diffused throughout a community. Moreover, these accounts do not specify that particular principle of our nature in terms of which we may be rightly habituated – the dual-principle. These and other philosophical accounts of politics prior to Calhoun, although often brilliant and highly suggestive, were not sufficiently detailed, forceful, and unambiguous on this point to disabuse men of the view that the manner in which society is organized is a matter of indifference once the dictates of empowered fancy are carried out.⁵³

Closely associated with this older and vulgar understanding of society and politics – with its over-simplistic and superficial account of causes – was the view – at least equally ancient and influential – that virtuous leaders and citizenry are to be produced by the more direct paedeutic and exhortatory measures characteristic of civic education and religious instruction. Indeed, until the eighteenth century, men had attained, at best, only a partial and rudimentary understanding of the influence of those tendencies which are naturally and inexorably associated with the structure of government itself. Again, as we shall see more clearly in Chapter VII, this older “paedeutic” view of soul-crafting must be viewed as a naive and rudimentary conception unequal to the task of explaining sufficiently the advent, in a given instance, of virtue or of vice in an actual community. And it was this theoretical

⁵² See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1985), Book I, 34.

⁵³ Calhoun’s *Disquisition* is capable of effecting such disabuse, but has not done so to the degree that it might because the work has been largely neglected due to certain other historical and philosophical reasons.

failure, coupled with the disappointment and disillusionment which naturally attended every effort to realize a virtuous citizenry and ruling class through the application of its principles, which contributed to the overthrow of the older view of society already mentioned. And so the older view of society, together with what I have called the “paedeutic” view of soul-crafting, although disproved in practice countless times over the centuries, long persisted by mere default both as theoretical models and as guides to action. It was only with the articulation of what may be called the “structural” or “institutional” views of Calhoun and the classical political economists that these older views on society and morals would be obliged to stand against rival explanations which they could not hope to match or overcome.

In this context, it is appropriate to note that both Calhoun and the classical political economists are precursors of a school of political-economic thought that emerged in the 1970’s and which is now exerting considerable influence in both academic and governmental circles. I refer to the School of Public Choice economics, as it is commonly called -- a school that involves a specific set of research projects called “Constitutional Economics.” According to one of its founders and principal members, Nobel Laureate James M. Buchanan, of the Center for the Study of Public Choice at George Mason University ⁵⁴:

‘Constitutional economics’ (constitutional political economy) was introduced as a term to define and to classify a distinct strand of research inquiry and related policy discourse in the 1970’s and beyond. The subject matter is not new or novel, and it may be argued that ‘constitutional economics’ is more closely related to the work of Adam Smith and the classical economists than its modern ‘nonconstitutional economics’ counterpart. Both areas of inquiry involve positive analysis that is ultimately aimed at contributing to the discussion of

⁵⁴Fairfax, Virginia.

policy questions. The difference lies in the level of or the setting for analysis, which in turn implies communication with different audiences.

Orthodox economic analysis . . . attempts to explain the choices of economic agents, their interactions one with another, and the results of these interactions, within the existing legal-institutional-constitutional structure of the polity. . . . By both contrast and comparison, constitutional economic analysis attempts to explain the working properties of alternative sets of legal-institutional-constitutional rules that constrain the choices and activities of economic and political agents, the rules that define the framework within which the ordinary choices of economic and political agents are made. In this sense, constitutional economics involves a 'higher' level of inquiry than orthodox economics; it must incorporate the results of the latter along with many less-sophisticated sub-disciplines.⁵⁵

And so modern constitutional economics, like Calhoun's political theorizing, involves a continuation of and logical extrapolation from central features of the research that characterized classical political economy.

According to Buchanan:

. . . constitutional economics is related to classical political economy and it may be considered to be an important component of a more general revival of the classical emphasis, and particularly as represented in the works of Adam Smith. . . . One obvious aim of the political economists was to offer an explanation and an understanding of how markets operate without detailed political direction. In this respect, orthodox neoclassical economics follows directly in the classical tradition. But the basic classical analysis of the working of markets was only a necessary step toward the more comprehensive purpose of the whole exercise, which was that of demonstrating that, precisely because markets function with tolerable efficiency independently of political direction, a powerful normative argument for constitutional structure exists. That is to say, Adam Smith was engaged directly in comparing alternative institutional structures, alternative sets of constraints within which economic agents make choices. (emphasis added)⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See James M. Buchanan, Explorations into Constitutional Economics (College Station: Texas A& M Press, 1989), 57.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 58-59.

For various reasons, as economics developed as a social science throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, attention was diverted from the research projects comprehended by modern constitutional economics. In the 1970's however, these projects re-emerged as part of a more general critical reaction against the theory of welfare economics, whose principal aim was to describe and analyze the alleged failures of the market, and to suggest how government intervention into the market might benefit general society. Inverting this research paradigm of the welfare economists, constitutional economists, like their precursor Adam Smith in his intellectual battle with the then-dominant doctrine of mercantilism, recognize and underscore today the essential viability of spontaneously functioning markets, and aim to describe and to analyze not market failure, but legal, institutional, and governmental failure.

Calhoun's political theorizing, like classical political economy, emerged from the moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, as we shall see in Chapter III. Significantly, two principal figures of this intellectual movement, David Hume and Adam Smith, were both moral philosophers and political economists. As a modern embodiment of classical political economy, constitutional economics is "similarly located" in relation to moral philosophy, "regardless of [contemporary] disciplinary fragmentation"⁵⁷.

But during that period in which attention was being diverted in economic research from the earlier legal-institutional-constitutional concerns which had characterized Smithian political economy, Calhoun, during the period from the publication of the South Carolina Exposition (1828) until his

⁵⁷ Ibid, 59-60.

death in 1850, was occupied with just such concerns. The Disquisition, for example, may be viewed as a comparative institutional study of absolute and constitutional forms of government, as will become clearer in the last three chapters of this work. Also, a principal feature of Calhoun's theorizing is his constitutional ideal in which the system of the concurrent majority plays a central role. In expounding this constitutional ideal, Calhoun echoes Adam Smith and anticipates the constitutional economists with his preoccupation with the question: How can persons live together in liberty, peace, and prosperity?⁵⁸ And so, for the aforementioned reasons, it is quite reasonable that Calhoun is viewed by Public Choice theorists today as a precursor of constitutional economics.⁵⁹

To conclude this chapter: By focussing on how government has its origin in human nature, and on how human actions are, in turn, influenced by these governmental arrangements, Calhoun sought to explain the phenomena of politics in terms of some first principle. To do this, he took the political economist's concern with discovering the laws of human action and social cooperation as these relate to market phenomena in particular and applied it to the phenomena of politics generally. This revolutionary achievement of Calhoun remains as a permanent legacy for man despite the fact that it has thusfar gone unnoticed by mainstream political theorists.

Finally, in this chapter, you have been introduced to what Calhoun calls the "two-fold constitution of [man's] nature", a principle whose full

⁵⁸ Ibid, 60.

⁵⁹ Another precursor, as Buchanan points out, is Knut Wicksell (1851-1926), a Swede who was by many accounts a brilliant political reformer and economic theorist. At work around the turn of the century, Wicksell's most important work in economic theory include Value, Capital and Rent (1893), Interest and Prices (1898), and Lectures on Political Economy (1901-4).

significance for the scientific explanation of politics will be underscored throughout the remainder of this work. Going beyond mere explication, I have conjectured on how Calhoun derived this fundamental principle: by noting the inspiration to science he received from the discoveries of natural philosophers such as Newton and Galileo; by remarking on the similarity of his project of giving a solid foundation to political science to Hume's projects a century earlier, which included both founding moral science and in showing that all the particular sciences are logically rooted in a more fundamental science of human nature; and finally, by suggesting how Calhoun, through the insight and inspiration he received from the Classical School of economics, revolutionized political theorizing and set the whole of political science on a new and firm footing.

As we have seen, Calhoun's application of metaphysical -- and specifically, of "economic" -- reasoning to political phenomena came to fruition in the discovery of a distinctly political law of human feeling, action and association -- or what I have called the "dual-principle" of our nature. In the next chapter, I shall review the precise nature of the role of this principle, as Calhoun conceived, within the science of politics. Chapter III will assess the dual-principle in the light of its posited status as first principle. In making this assessment, we shall further explore those intellectual influences on Calhoun which prompted him both to conceive of the project of providing a solid foundation for political science and to develop the dual-principle as the first principle of that science.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST CAUSE OF POLITICS,
AND THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Having presented Calhoun's dual-principle, his conception of metaphysical reasoning, and what is involved in the foundation of a science, we are prepared to consider the dual-principle as the first principle of political science. This consideration, the subject of the present chapter, will, in turn, set the stage for a demonstration of the explanatory power of the dual-principle in Part II. Prior to such demonstration, however, it is essential to form a clear and accurate idea of what a scientific first principle is and what it should do, so that we will know one when we see it, and thereby appreciate its peculiar and vitally important contribution to scientific explanation.

A science (scientia) is an organized body of knowledge. The first principle of a science is the key to the answer of those questions which together form the heart of that science. As we pointed out in Chapter I, it is these questions which, as the defining features of a science, delineate a field of inquiry by establishing and maintaining its borders, and set it apart as a separate and distinguishable enterprise. A science is founded and re-founded over time as these questions and their answers are successively criticized and refined against the standard of thorough and accurate explanation, a standard which must itself undergo evolution and development. These questions and answers are captured and synopsized in the formulation of a first principle. For science aims, above all, at a comprehensive view of its subject matter; that is, science aims at the attainment of an intellectual vantage point that makes the whole of its subject visible and understandable, and this vantage point is achieved through the successful formulation of a first principle.

The kind of comprehensive view that a scientific first principle affords may be justly described as synoptic; and such a view can be captured only

through the lens, as it were, of a single principle. For a synoptic vision is one in which things are "seen together", and not apart. In this sense, then, man stands between God and the lower animals; because the Divinity is pan-optic or "all-seeing", and the lower animals are constrained by their more limited natures to view things in isolation one from another. But, although man is incapable of the panoptics of Divinity, or of seeing everything in its fullest detail all at once, he may attain a far more limited yet still exalted vision of phenomena. So the sciences, after all, are, or at least aspire to be, so many synoptic visions for man. And specifically, political science aspires to a synoptic vision -- of man, and for man.

But without the transforming and revelatory lenses afforded by sound general principles, phenomena would subsist, as they do for the lower animals, merely as a jumble of experiences and conditions without any understandable relation one to another. Hence the meaning and significance of personal, physical, and historical events, in so far as these fall within the province of the science in question, simply could not be understood. The crowning noetic achievement of scientific inquiry, in whatever field considered, comes through the successful formulation of a first principle in terms of which all other, subsidiary principles and the phenomena of the science generally, may be explained. Like those general principles that were formed before it, a first principle is a means of optical assistance, an aid to the mind's eye, as it were. And as so many aids to vision, it may be said of first principles -- as well as of their co-temporaneous subsidiary principles and historically antecedent principles -- that they possess speculative power. For the term "speculation" derives from the Latin verb speculare, meaning, to

“spy out.” And in this sense, the philosopher, as the discoverer of first principles, is that grinder of the lens through which the subject may be viewed with clarity and understanding, in all of its manifold complexity.

But the lens fashioned by the theoretical scientist or the philosopher not only magnifies the object, but transforms it from a vast and bewildering array of insulated facts and opinions into an orderly whole. In this way, a first principle transforms phenomena and reveals underlying essence(s). For as Aristotle notes in the Metaphysics, “. . . the things best to know are first principles and causes. For through them and from them all other things may be known but not they through the things covered by them ¹.”

Science, then, is not merely about looking at the world in a different way, but about seeing it, by looking at it in the right way. Like the Golden Mean of Aristotelian moral philosophy, where there are many ways to miss the mark, but only one way to hit the bull’s eye through the performance of a virtuous action; the matter of every science is susceptible of many interpretations, but of only one true account. That there are many ways of looking at the political world is too obvious to require argument. But that there is only one way of seeing it -- a way that has undergone improvement and refinement over the ages -- is a point which few, especially in our time, have understood, and which even fewer will admit. This is so because, in whatever age considered, opinions abound and insight is rare. So seeing the political world, and not merely looking at it, is, of course, the main concern of the political scientist. And, so far as political science is concerned, what is

¹ Aristotle, Metaphysics, tr. John Henry MacMahon in On Man in the Universe, ed. Louise Ropes Loomis (Roslyn, New York: Walter J. Black, 1943), 9.

needed is a panoramic view of human political practice.²

As I said earlier, Calhoun's avowed aim of laying "a solid foundation of political Science", as well as his claim, with the completion of the Disquisition, to have covered "nearly throughout new territory", involves an implicit criticism of previous political theorizing. But precisely because of the implicit character of this criticism, we are left to conjecture on the range and substance of this criticism. Proceeding thus, it is perhaps the case that the content and tenor of Calhoun's criticism of previous political theorizing, were these made express, would have been similar to that critical appreciation bestowed by David Hume on the accomplishments of some ancient philosophers in their speculations on morals.³ In the abstract for his Treatise, Hume wrote:

Most of the philosophers of antiquity, who treated of human nature, have shewn more of a delicacy of sentiment, a just sense of morals, or a greatness of soul, than a depth of reasoning and reflection. They content themselves with representing the common sense of mankind in the strongest lights, and with the best turn of thought and expression, without following out steadily a chain of propositions, or forming the several truths into a regular science.⁴

Hume understood that the various sciences, including physical science, morals, and politics, have their origin in antiquity. But he saw, emerging in his own day, the fruits of "a new kind of philosophy." These fruits, Hume wrote in the 1730's, were products of a "philosophical spirit, which has been much improved all over Europe within these last fourscore years⁵." This

² A panorama differs from a Divine panoptical vision, since seeing in every direction is not the same as seeing everything that is, has been, and will be, all at once.

³ I base this conjecture, in part, on Calhoun's admiration of the political writings of both Plato and Aristotle, as documented in Chapter I.

⁴ See David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, 645.

⁵ That is, since the 1650's. Ibid, 645.

spirit had been “carried to as great a length [in Britain] as in any other [kingdom]”, and was characterized by the “application of experimental philosophy” to whatever subject was under consideration, whether it be the physical world, human reason, morals, criticism, or politics. The method of “experimental philosophy”, as we saw in Chapter II, is to reject any conclusion not authorized by experience, and to push on to the discovery of general principles, and connections between these principles, so far as our faculties will allow.⁶

Reflecting on advances in the study of the physical world as compared to those in the study of the moral world, both in antiquity and in modernity, Hume remarked:

Tis no astonishing reflection to consider, that the application of experimental philosophy to moral subjects should come after that to natural at the distance of above a whole century; since we find in fact, that there was about the same interval betwixt the origins of these sciences; and that reckoning from THALES to SOCRATES, the space of time is nearly equal to that betwixt my Lord Bacon and some late philosophers in England⁷, who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing, and have engaged the attention, and excited the curiosity of the public. So true it is, that however other nations may rival us in poetry, and excel us in some other agreeable arts, the improvements in reason and philosophy can only be owing to a land of toleration and of liberty.⁸

Viewing this intellectual progress in modernity from the vantage point of the late twentieth century, we can see -- with greater distinctness and clarity perhaps than was possible in Hume's day -- how the spread of toleration, liberty, and the method of experimental philosophy in Europe, and

⁶ Ibid, 646.

⁷ See David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, where on page xvii he lists in a footnote: Locke(1632-1704), Shaftesbury (1671-1713), Mandeville (c1670-1733), Hutcheson (Hutcheson) (1694-1746), Butler (1692-1752). Hume also suggests that this list is incomplete.

⁸ Ibid, xvi-xvii.

especially in Great Britain and America, from the seventeenth until the middle of the nineteenth century, made possible the advancement and firmer establishment of the physical, moral, and political sciences that have their origins in antiquity. Having their noble and inspiring beginnings in Thales, Socrates, and Plato respectively, these sciences would be provided more solid foundations, as well as greater refinement in general, in the hands of Newton, Hume, and Calhoun. The modern pioneers of science, employing the method of experimental philosophy, would push beyond previous insights toward the discovery and articulation of scientific first principles.

It is correct to say that Calhoun strove “to emulate his avowed models: Newton, Laplace, Galileo, and Bacon⁹.” But more specifically, he sought to make of politics -- to use Hume’s expression -- a “regular science.” To accomplish this, Calhoun had to discover that general principle in terms of which the numerous and often disparate topics properly subsumed within the science could be both unified and explained ¹⁰ -- that is, the first principle of the science of politics. But, one may ask: How may we know a first principle when we see one? And: how can we know that the dual-principle of Calhoun is, in fact, the first principle of politics, rather than, for example, either a subsidiary principle, or merely a false conception that, by virtue of its combination of falsity and plausibility, is capable of misleading?

As the transforming and revelatory lens of a science, and as the key to the answer of all of its defining questions, a first principle, when it is present

⁹ See Ralph Lerner, “Calhoun’s New Science of Politics” in John C. Calhoun: A Profile, ed. John L. Thomas (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968, 194-195.

¹⁰ These topics include, for example, the origin and nature of justice, of society, of government, of constitution, of the vices and virtues, of knowledge, of power, of war and of peace, and of happiness. In short, they include all of the issues comprehended under the topic “human good.”

in an explanatory account, is distinguishable in a number of ways. As an element amongst other elements within the account, it has the character of being recurrent, all-subsuming, inescapable, fundamental, and omni-present, or manifested in some form or other. Moreover, a first principle properly forms the great unifying thread which binds together the entire account of phenomena of which a given science consists. Thus the great unifying thread running throughout Calhoun's Disquisition on Government is the "two-fold constitution of [man's] nature", or the dual-principle.

The dual-principle, recall, is the notion (1) that man is social by nature, and (2) that, as a rule, each man feels more intensely those things which affect him directly than those things which affect him indirectly through others. As the first principle of political science, the dual-principle surfaces at every critical juncture within the Disquisition. For example, it is the source: (1) of the tendency of society, considered in isolation from government, to be unstable; (2) of tyranny, or of the tendency of government, considered in isolation from political constitution, to disorder and to abuse of its powers; (3) of warfare, whether civil or between polities; (4) of political constitution (which is peaceful, effective, and systematic resistance to tyranny); (5) of the self-protective behavior of taxpayers, and of the self-aggrandizing behavior of tax-consumers; (6) of both liberal and strict constructions of written constitutions; and of more.

Several, but not all, of these "surfacing" or manifestations of the dual-principle will be examined at length in Part II. The present concern is to indicate how the dual-principle, as a primal force of human nature, may give rise to a wide variety of actualized political conditions; conditions, even, that

are opposites. Thus the force of the dual-principle as active may result, in a given instance, in the oppression and abuse of governmental power that is tyranny, on the one hand, or it may, through proper channeling and conditioning, take the form of skillful resistance to tyranny. Similarly, the force of the dual-principle may, in conjunction with other forces, give rise to either war or peace, justice or injustice, division or unity, vice or virtue, and finally, through all of the preceding, to either misery or happiness. In later chapters, we will discuss the various factors, including religion, education, and the structure of government, which determine how, in a given instance, the dual-principle will manifest itself. These chapters will make clear that the dual-principle as active is the pre-eminent, inescapable, and untranscendable political force, and therefore the natural and proper locus of all statesmanly and political philosophic concern. The fate of individuals, social classes, and entire communities turns upon the fate of the dual-principle as an unconditioned active principle of human nature. In short, the principle of human sociality and the principle of the primacy of our individual feelings are susceptible to a wide variety of both near-Divine and near-demonic developments. As if portending the formulation of the dual-principle, Aristotle, in Book I of the Politics, expressed his concern over the fate of those forces which would eventually be isolated and described by that principle:

A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature, and yet he who first founded the state was the greatest of benefactors. For man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all; since armed injustice is the more dangerous, and he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used by intelligence and virtue, which he may use for the worst ends. Wherefore, if he have not virtue, he is the most unholy and the most savage of animals, and the most full of lust and gluttony. But justice is the bond of men in states, for the administration of justice, which is

the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society.¹¹

Pursuing this concern with the developmental fate of men in society and under government, Calhoun arrived at the dual-principle, or the first principle of politics, through direct observation, and through reflection on universal experience. The two components of this principle, human sociality and the primacy relation, are, let us recall, "incontestable facts." (5-6) But, with Calhoun having formulated this first principle, one may ask, does scientific standard and scruple demand that we proceed to demand a further principle, one in back of the dual-principle, as it were? This question must be answered in terms of what it is for a principle to be a first principle, and with regard to the nature of the particular subject in question. Also, towards answering this question, let us recall that a principle, to be a first principle, must, through an unfolding of its manifold structure, provide definitive answers to all of those questions which define a subject and set its limits. Any other principle, more or less general in character, or constituted by different elements or relations, must fail in this particular. To determine whether a given principle is a first principle, then, we must first behold an exhibition of its explanatory power. Calhoun's Disquisition is one such exhibition; an exhibition a part of which is re-enacted in the analysis that constitutes Part II of the present work.

Understanding that a scientific principle is but an account of this or that realm of causation, and wisely rejecting the notion of an infinite series of

¹¹ Aristotle, Politics in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1130, 1253a 29-39.

causes¹², Aristotle advised that once one is in possession of a first principle, one should not “demand a further principle beyond it.” In the Nicomachean Ethics, we are told that principles are often to be treated differently, and therefore in accordance with their place within a science, their explanatory power, and the nature of the phenomena to be explained. Hence:

[as scientific enquirers we] should [not] make the same demand for an explanation in all cases. Rather, in some cases it is enough to prove that something is true without explaining why it is true. This is so, e. g. with origins, where the fact that something is true is the first principle, i. e. the origin. Some origins are studied by means of induction, some by means of perception, some by means of some sort of habituation, and others by other means. In each case we should try to find them out by means suited to their nature, and work hard to define them well.¹³

As it turns out, the origin of politics, expressed in the form of its first principle, may be studied through direct observation, including perception and apperception. And it is enough to prove, through the use of direct observation, that humans are social by nature and that the primacy relation holds as a rule, rather than explaining in addition why these things are so. The articulation of these two primal facts, in the form of the dual-principle, captured the essence of this origin. But while the existence of the two elemental components of the dual-principle, sociality and primacy, may be established by a combination of perception and apperception, the question may be put as to the manner in which the principle – considered as a complex

¹² Aristotle, Metaphysics in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon. See Bk. II, Ch. 2:

But evidently there is a first principle, and the causes of things are neither an infinite series nor infinitely various in kind. . . . the final causes cannot go on ad infinitum – walking being the cause of health, this for the sake of happiness, happiness for the sake of somethings else, and so one thing always for the sake of another.

¹³ Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, tr. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1985), 18 1098b 1-7.

whole -- generates the political actuality or phenomena that we experience directly, including, as we shall see in Part II, historical governments and our own actualized intelligences and moral characters. And this question leads us to consider a matter of the greatest importance -- namely, that Calhoun conceived the first-principle of political science as a dual-principle rather than as a simpler, unitary principle.

For a principle, as was suggested earlier, is an account or a kind of speech about causal forces and relations, a speech that affords a synoptic view of things. Because it is a causal account, the manner in which a principle is formulated can never be a matter of indifference, since a theoretical account must mirror that of which it is an account. In this way, noetic structure, or the structure of those principles which taken together express our knowledge and understanding of things, must mirror or reflect, so far as possible, the structure of being itself. The structure of Calhoun's first principle, then, should mirror or reflect those elemental forces and relations of forces which constitute the origin of politics. And indeed, it was with an eye to the necessity of a noetic mapping, as it were, of political life, that Calhoun formulated the first principle of politics as a dual-principle.

It is perhaps only through an explicit understanding of what a scientific principle is and should do, just reviewed, that we can gain a true understanding of the significance of Calhoun's formulation of the dual-principle. For otherwise, the subtlety and unexplicit nature of Calhoun's own account on this score would cause us to overlook and therefore fail to grasp the full significance and import of Calhoun's contribution to political science; namely, the discovery of its first principle. For, taken as distinct and

separate elements, human sociality, on the one hand, and the primacy of individual feeling, on the other hand, were facts noted and remarked upon, presumably, since the beginning of human history. Calhoun's signal contribution was to join these two readily observable and "incontestable facts." And it is precisely this union that made possible a truly comprehensive explanation of the disparate phenomena of politics.

So a brief review of political life is sufficient to demonstrate how either of these facts without the other can do no more than give a partial explanation of the human political condition. And, when pressed into service to provide a comprehensive account of the various and diverse phenomena of politics, these partial explanations could not but distort perspective, and thereby mislead. So any account that does not acknowledge both facts -- sociality and the primacy of individual feeling -- and conceive them in proper relation one to another, is bound ultimately to prove unsatisfactory as an account purporting to explain the whole. For example, men are social by nature, but sociality, of itself, does not explain the necessity and unavoidability of government, nor the tendency of government itself to disorder and tyranny. On the other hand, men, as a rule, are governed by their individual feelings, but this fact, of itself, cannot explain either the pleasure we take in society, or the benevolence of which our nature is capable.

But, to the casual and superficial observer, Calhoun's account of the first principle of politics may seem hackneyed and unoriginal. For as a matter of course, "man is social by nature" and "tends naturally to favor himself over others" -- commonplaces registered both by philosophers and by the vulgar from time immemorial. But this casual observation fails to note the

fundamental causal relation between these two elements as implied by Calhoun throughout the Disquisition. For it is not sociality in isolation from the primacy of individual feeling, or vice versa, but the combination of the two, which gives rise to all political actuality. This circumstance, in which the first principle of a science is not a description of a single and univocal force, but of a combination of different and sometimes conflicting forces giving rise through complex interactions to a vast variety of actualized conditions, is probably the reason why the dual-principle was not formulated sooner.

The dual-principle contains opposites -- the individual (selfish) feelings and the social (sympathetic) feelings respectively -- and is therefore dialectical in its operations. This circumstance gives political phenomena a kind of complex and dynamic character that they would not have if its foundational principle were unitary and univocal. In other words, this complexity and dynamism of political phenomena is the direct and ongoing result of the dialectical opposition between the two essential elements of the dual-principle, and is naturally mirrored and explained by the structure and substance of genuine political science. And so political phenomena require for their explanation a fundamental principle whose elements -- the causal interactions of which -- can explain and account for those phenomena.

In order to formulate an explanatory account of political phenomena which possesses that complexity which characterizes the dual-principle as active, Calhoun had to resist what Hume -- echoing another philosopher¹⁴ -- would describe as that "love of simplicity, which has been the source of much

¹⁴Shaftesbury, 3rd Earl of (Anthony Ashley Cooper), Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (London: 1732), 116.

false reasoning in philosophy ¹⁵.” Indeed, this love of simplicity may help to explain why advances in moral and political science at every level, and not merely as concerns the discovery and articulation of a first principle, have not been more readily forthcoming.

According to Hume, two of the most influential philosophers of the modern period, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, fell prey to this love of simplicity in their speculations. ¹⁶ Specifically, these thinkers maintained what Hume called the selfish system of morals, or the doctrine of universal selfishness. In An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, in an appendix titled “Of Self-love”, Hume describes both the doctrine of universal selfishness and the method by which that doctrine is derived.

. . . a Hobbist readily allows, that there is such a thing as friendship in the world, without hypocrisy or disguise; though he may attempt, by a philosophical chymistry, to resolve the elements of this passion, if I may so speak, into those of another, and explain every affection to be self-love, twisted and moulded, by a particular turn of imagination. But as the same turn of imagination prevails not in every man, nor gives the same direction to the original passion; this is sufficient, even according to the selfish system, to make the widest difference in human characters, and denominate one man virtuous and humane, another vicious and meanly interested. ¹⁷

¹⁵David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. J.B. Schneewind (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1988), 90.

¹⁶ Anticipating Hume, Shaftesbury had given short shrift to such simplifiers, writing: Modern projectors . . . wou’d new-frame the human Heart; and have a mighty fancy to reduce all its Motions, Balances and Weights, to that one Principle and Foundation of a cool and deliberate *Selfishness*. Men, it seems, are unwilling to think they can be so outwitted, and impos’d on by Nature, as to be made to serve her Purposes, rather than their own. They are asham’d to be drawn thus out of *themselves*, and forc’d from what they esteem their true *Interest*.

Shaftesbury, 3rd Earl of (Anthony Ashley Cooper), Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (London: 1732), 116-117.

And so, interestingly enough, the tutor of young Shaftesbury was none other than one of the most famous of the “modern projectors” (Shaftesbury) and lovers of simplicity (Hume): John Locke.

¹⁷David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, 89.

And so some thinkers have undertaken in their speculations to dissolve all actions and sentiments which appear to have their origin in sympathetic feeling and benevolence into an original and unmitigated principle of selfishness, and to explain all actions and sentiments as so many modifications of the univocal and selfish original principle. But, according to Hume, it is in experience that one finds the materials necessary both for a refutation of the selfish system of morals and for an antidote to the delusional effects of “philosophical chymistry.” Thus writes Hume:

I esteem the man, whose self-love, by whatever means, is so directed as to give him a concern for others, and render him serviceable to society: As I hate or despise him, who has no regard to any thing beyond his own gratifications and enjoyments. In vain would you suggest, that these characters, though seemingly opposite, are, at bottom, the same, and that a very inconsiderable turn of thought forms the whole difference between them. Each character, notwithstanding these inconsiderable differences, appears to me, in practice, pretty durable and untransmutable. And I find not in this more than in other subjects, that the natural sentiments, arising from the general appearances of things, are easily destroyed by subtile reflections concerning the minute origin of these appearances.¹⁸

For example:

Does not the lively, chearful colour of a countenance inspire me with complacency and pleasure; even though I learn from philosophy, that all difference of complexion arises from the most minute differences of thickness, in the most minute parts of the skin, by means of which a superficies is qualified to reflect one of the original colours of light, and absorb the others?¹⁹

Buttressing this trenchant and somewhat ironical demonstration against both the selfish system and “philosophical chymistry” with a more general argument, Hume writes:

To the most careless observer, there appear to be such dispositions as

¹⁸ Ibid, 89-90.

¹⁹ Ibid, 90.

benevolence and generosity; such affections as love, friendship, compassion, gratitude. These sentiments have their causes, effects, objects, and operations, marked by common language and observation, and plainly distinguished from those of the selfish passions. And as this is the obvious appearance of things, it must be admitted; till some hypothesis be discovered, which, by penetrating deeper into human nature, may prove the former affection to be nothing but modifications of the latter. All attempts of this kind have hitherto proved fruitless, and seem to have proceeded entirely, from that love of simplicity, which has been the source of much false reasoning in philosophy ²⁰

Trying to account for how Hobbes and Locke came to espouse the selfish system, Hume noted that these two thinkers, in fact, “lived irreproachable lives”, and therefore, since they each possessed “strong restraint in their own disposition”, the cause of their allegiance to the selfish hypothesis must lie in their having succumbed to the love of simplicity, a love whose effects would be compounded by “a careless and precipitate examination” of human nature. ²¹

In contrast to the distorting oversimplifications of the selfish system of Hobbes and Locke, Calhoun, with his dual-principle, seems to have preserved

²⁰ Ibid, 90.

²¹ Hume, however, recognized that not every individual inclined to accept the selfish hypothesis was impelled by such innocent motives. Thus he writes:

There is a principle, supposed to prevail among many, which is utterly incompatible with all virtue or moral sentiment; and as it can proceed from nothing but the most depraved disposition, so in its turn it tends still further to encourage that depravity. This principle is, that all benevolence is mere hypocrisy, friendship a cheat, public spirit a farce, fidelity a snare to procure trust and confidence; and that, while all of us, at bottom, pursue only our private interest, we wear these fair disguises, in order to put others off their guard and expose them the more to our wiles and machinations. What heart one must be possessed of who professes such principles, and who feels no internal sentiment that belies so pernicious a theory, it is easy to imagine: And also, what degree of affection and benevolence he can bear to a species, whom he represents under such odious colours, and supposes so little susceptible of gratitude or any return of affection.

See David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, 88.

and carefully conveyed the complexity of those forces from which all political life originates, and with which it must necessarily exist. Giving weight to both self-love and benevolence, the dual-principle appears to express, at least in general terms, the fundamental, underlying structure of the human political condition. This structure consists of the fundamental causal relations between sociality and the primacy of individual feeling, relations, as it turns out, which Calhoun underscores not only with his formulation of a dual-principle, but also with a progressive unfolding of that principle which constitutes the substance, organization, and drama of the Disquisition on Government. And so the underlying philosophical theme of the Disquisition, a theme inaccessible to the casual reader, is that it is the active principles of sociality and the primacy of individual feeling, and the causal interactions between these two principles, which form human communities, and maintain them, once formed.

But, paradoxically, in addition to serving as the primal anthropological source out of which all human social and political organization develop, the dual-principle is also the source of the great problems or liabilities which naturally attend such organizations, as it is an aim of Part II to demonstrate. And so, from man's nature arise all of the substance and difficulties of those social and governmental forms whose ultimate purpose is the perpetuation and perfection of the species. More specifically, Calhoun's account of the specific manner in which the dual-principle gives rise to government -- the guardian of civil society -- and to political constitution -- the guardian and perfecter of government -- along with the problems and difficulties associated with their formation and maintenance, will be explored in Chapter IV. For

now, however, some more detailed account should be given of the historical development by which the dual-principle came to be formulated by Calhoun in order that the general significance of the principle as the first principle of political science may be underscored. Toward this end, we may proceed by recognizing that to a casual observer, the two elements which make up the dual-principle may appear as ultimately contradictory sub-principles, representing forces which are not merely susceptible to mutual opposition and antagonism, but which preclude even social and political organization because they are ultimately irreconcilable. And so, to this observer, the principle of sociality seems flatly and irreconcilably opposed to what we may call the "primacy principle." Indeed, it is only a more sustained inquiry into the nature of the individual and social feelings and of their relations one with another which dissolves the irreconcilability endemic to this more superficial perspective. And so, forces which appear the most opposed and contradictory from the standpoint of a superficial theoretical perspective may turn out to be reconcilable in practice. On this view, then, we might conceive of Calhoun's Disquisition as a theory of political life whose aim is to underscore this reconcilability of ostensibly opposing forces or principles, and to provide an account of the various concrete forms which this reconciliation takes in particular instances.

And so, one may conjecture that, in addition to the influence of love of simplicity on some political thinkers prior to Calhoun, it was an apparent irreconcilability between the two constitutive elements of the dual-principle which prevented the formulation of that principle by earlier theorists. The need for such conjecture is in fact suggested by a certain chain of

developments in the history of moral philosophy which led up to Calhoun's discovery.

During the modern period -- the beginning of which coincided with the political writings of Machiavelli (d.1527) and the metaphysics of Descartes (d. 1650) -- the apparent ultimate contrariety and irreconcilability between our social feelings and individual feelings prevented for generations a more or less explicitly articulated theoretical rapprochement, as it were, between these two principles within the realms of moral and political science. During this period, both the individual feelings and the social feelings would have their respective advocates and spokesmen. A philosophical debate ensued which constitutes one of the most significant chapters in the intellectual history of the West. This debate would culminate in important advances in both moral and political science, as will be indicated below.

Thomas Hobbes (1651) and Bernard Mandeville (1729), each in his own way, have argued vigorously in behalf of the view that in human affairs, it is self-love and not the love of others which is predominant.²² But, as was suggested earlier, there has been a tendency on the part of those thinkers anxious to illustrate what they conceive as the causal preponderance of self-love and individual feeling to go too far in their emphases of that principle,

²² See Leviathan and The Fable of the Bees. And see also, Spinoza (1632-1677), who, like Hobbes and Mandeville, places great emphasis on self-love -- even to the point of valorizing it as very few have. In particular, there is his conception of the self-preserving "conatus", or endeavor, in Bk. IV of his "Euclidean" treatise on metaphysics and morals, titled The Ethics (1677):

Proposition 20: The more every man endeavors and is able to seek his own advantage, that is, to preserve his own being, the more he is endowed with virtue. On the other hand, in so far as he neglects to preserve what is to his advantage, that is, his own being, to that extent he is weak.

Proposition 22: No virtue can be conceived as prior to this one, namely, the conatus to preserve itself.

Proposition 25: Nobody endeavors to preserve his being for the sake of some other being.

and to conclude that all those feelings and actions which apparently originate in a natural sentiment of benevolence and sympathy are in fact only modifications of an original principle of self-love.

In a scandalous dialogue titled Fable of the Bees, Mandeville had had the bad taste and temerity, as some saw it, to argue that the public good might in some instances be best served by an essentially unimpeded exercise of self-interestedness which he ironically labelled "private vice." For example, Mandeville suggested that self-interest and individual feeling is the principal force which generates and propels those market economies which continue to bestow in such over-flowing abundance the material and technological wherewithal of modern civilization. By so arguing, Mandeville anticipated Hume's paradoxical and somewhat troubling dictum that "avarice" is "the spur of industry"²³. But in spite of all of its notoriety and influence²⁴, Mandeville's disquisition on the virtue of selfishness has been overshadowed by the political disquisitions of another and earlier spokesman for the selfish hypothesis, Thomas Hobbes.

In Hobbes' Leviathan we find what is perhaps the most forceful and influential statement of the selfish thesis ever written. In a memorable passage, Hobbes describes what he conceives to be a universal tendency on the

²³See David Hume, "Of Civil Liberty" in Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 93. But also see Hume's forceful rebuttal to Mandeville's defense of vice in "Of Refinement in the Arts" in the same work, 280:

. . . let us never pronounce vice in itself advantageous. Is it not very inconsistent for an author to assert in one page, that moral distinctions are inventions of politicians for public interest; and in the next page maintain, that vice is advantageous to the public? And indeed it seems upon any system of morality, little less than a contradiction in terms, to talk of a vice, which is in general beneficial to society.

²⁴ Mandeville's influence has extended, for example, at least as far as the classical political economists, and through them, to modern non-Marxist economic theorists, as well as to the metaphysical and historical speculations of the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), in this New Science.

part of men to mutual suspicion, dissociation, and mutual destruction -- a tendency resulting from their essentially self-loving constitutions. Hobbes writes:

It may seem strange to some man, that has not well weighed these things, that Nature should thus dissociate, and render men apt to invade and destroy one another; and he may therefore, not trusting to this inference, made from the passions, desire perhaps to have the same confirmed by experience. Let him therefore consider with himself, when taking a journey, he arms himself, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doors; when even in his house, he locks his chests; and this when he knows there be laws, and public officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall be done him; what opinion he has of his fellow-subjects, when he rides armed; of his fellow-citizens, when he locks his doors; and of his children and servants, when he locks his chests. Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions as I do by my words? ²⁵

And it is the answer which Hobbes gives to this question which provides some of the assumptions and part of the theoretical foundation for his famous derivation of government and civil society from a state of nature. This answer is that:

. . . neither of us accuse man's nature in it. The desires and other passions of man are in themselves no sin. [And] no more are the actions that proceed from those passions, till they know a law that forbids them; which till laws be made they cannot know nor can any law be made till they have agreed upon the person that shall make it. ²⁶

And so the passion which impels men into civil society, according to Hobbes, is not benevolence, but is instead self-love -- or precisely that principle which makes the state of nature that state of war "of every man, against every man." And self-love renders the state of nature hellish, thereby propelling men, through aversion, into civil society, and then, paradoxically

²⁵ See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan in British Moralists*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), Vol. II, 292.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 292.

enough, supplies the cohesive elements which alone tend to preserve government and society. Put another way: it is self-love, and self-love, almost exclusively, which holds men suspended in civil society by a combination of positive and negative inducements. As Hobbes writes:

The passions that incline men to peace, are fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them. And reason suggesteth convenient articles of peace, upon which men may be drawn to agreement.²⁷

And so self-love, manifesting itself negatively as fear of death, and positively as a desire for commodious living, forms the cement that holds all political communities together.

Consequently, according to Hobbes, men are so far impelled by their individual feelings, self-love, or by their “cupiscible” part, that in order to establish and maintain civil society, there must arise some “visible Power to keep them in awe, and tye them by feare of punishment to the performance of their Covenants, and [to] the observation of . . . Lawes of Nature . . .²⁸.” That “visible Power”, of course, is government or “Commonwealth.”

But while this awe-inspiring earthly “Power” forcibly moderates the natural and potentially violent passions of self-interested men by instilling in them a fear of punishment unto death -- ever-tending to prevent a devolution of political community back into the state of nature -- men retain their essentially selfish natures -- now muted -- into civil society. And so, while the fear of punishment and death inspired by the awesome power of Leviathan saves men from anarchy and civilizes him, “All society . . . is either for gain or for glory: that is, not so much for love of our fellows as for

²⁷ Ibid, 293.

²⁸ Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. C.B. MacPherson (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 223.

love of ourselves.”

Reacting to Hobbes’ powerful rhetorical and substantive emphases on individual feeling and self-love, (Anthony Ashley Cooper) the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), a pupil of Locke, would argue for an original and independently operating instinct of benevolence, an instinct through which our apparently social feelings may be explained as actual or genuine. In an essay titled Sensus Communis: And Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour (1709), later comprehended in a three volume work titled Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (1711), Shaftesbury attacked what he believed to be Hobbes’ thesis of universal selfishness, according to which the individual feelings are unrelieved by any sympathetic or social feeling. Shaftesbury maintained that any author who knows himself cannot without self-contradiction and self-delusion believe that all human actions stem from selfish motives. He writes:

You have heard it (my Friend!) as a common Saying, that *Interest governs the World*. But, I believe, whoever looks narrowly into the Affairs of it, will find, that *Passion, Humour, Caprice, Zeal, Faction*, and a thousand other Springs, which are counter to *Self-Interest*, have as considerable a part in the Movements of this Machine. There are more *Wheels and Counter-Poises* in this Engine than are easily imagined. ’Tis of too complex a kind, to fall under one simple View, or be explain’d thus briefly in a word or two. The Studiers of this *Mechanism* must have a very partial Eye, to overlook all other Motions besides those of the lowests and narrowest compass. ’Tis hard, that in the Plan or Description of this Clock-work, no Wheel or Balance shou’d be allow’d on the side of the better and more enlarg’d Affections; that nothing shou’d be understood to be done in *Kindness*, or *Generosity*; nothing in pure *Good-Nature* or *Friendship*, or thro’ any *social* or *natural* Affections of any kind: when, perhaps, the main Springs of this Machine will be found to be either these very natural Affections themselves, or a compound kind deriv’d from them, and

retaining more than one half of their Nature.²⁹

In his Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit (1699), Shaftesbury had drawn up “a formal *Scheme of the Passions*”, which purported to show “their *Geneology and Relation*; how they are interwoven with one another, or interfere with our *Happiness and Interest*.”³⁰

Another Englishman anxious to rebut the selfish hypothesis of Hobbes was Joseph Butler (1692-1752), a theologian. Amongst Butler’s immediate concerns was to counteract that augmentation of popularity and currency given the selfish hypothesis by the publication of Mandeville’s Fable of the Bees (1725). Viewing the work of Shaftesbury, on the one hand, and Hobbes and Mandeville, on the other hand, as partial and incomplete, Butler, in his Three Sermons Upon Human Nature (1726) presented what he believed was a more balanced and accurate account of human nature and motivation.

Aiming to describe the generality of mankind, and not exceptions; Butler observed that men are neither exceptionally self-regarding to the exclusion of benevolence nor exceptionally benevolent to the exclusion of self-interest. Indeed, he saw that the affections of self-love and benevolence are by no means necessarily incompatible. And above all, his aim was to describe how the opposite principles of self-love and benevolence coincide, and act in conjunction with one another. In his sermon “Upon Human Nature” (1726), Butler writes:

There is a natural principle of benevolence in man; which is in some degree to society, what self-love is to the individual. And if there be in

²⁹ See Shaftesbury, 3rd Earl of (Anthony Ashley Cooper), Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (London: 1732), 115-116. Incidentally, Shaftesbury retired to Naples in 1711 due to bad health, and there perhaps he met and influenced Giambattista Vico. In his New Science (1725, 1730, 1744), Vico would make much of the Shaftesburyan concept of sensus communis.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 115-116.

mankind any disposition to friendship; if there be any such thing as compassion, for compassion is momentary love; if there be any such things as the paternal or filial affections; if there be any affection in human nature, the object and end of which is the good of another; this is itself benevolence, or the love of another. Be it ever so short, be it in ever so low a degree, or ever so unhappily confined; it proves the assertion, and points out what we were designed for, as really as though it were in a higher degree and more extensive. I must however remind you that though benevolence and self-love are different; though the former tends more directly to public good, and the latter to private: yet they are so perfectly coincident, that the greatest satisfactions to ourselves depend upon our having benevolence in a due degree; and that self-love is one chief security of our right behaviour towards society. It may be added, that their mutual coinciding, so that we can scarce promote one without the other, is equally a proof that we were made for both.³¹

Butler goes on to argue that, as principles within the human soul, self-love and benevolence may be distinguished from “several [other] passions and affections” which, like themselves, “do in general contribute and lead us to public good as really as to private”³².” Also within the soul, reigning over all the various affections and passions, including self-love and benevolence, “There is a principle of reflection in men, by which they distinguish between, approve and disapprove their own actions”³³.” Of this ruling principle, Butler writes:

We are plainly constituted such sort of creatures as to reflect upon our own nature. The mind can take a view of what passes within itself, its propensions, aversions, passions, affections, as respecting such objects, and in such degrees; and of the several actions consequent thereupon. In this survey it approves of one, disapproves of another and towards a third is affected in neither of these ways, but is quite indifferent. This principle in man, by which he approves or disapproves his heart, temper, and actions, is conscience; for this is the strict sense of the

³¹ See Joseph Butler, The Sermons of Joseph Butler in The Works of Joseph Butler 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1850), vol. II, 4-6.

³² *Ibid*, 6-7.

³³ *Ibid*, 9.

word, though sometimes it is used so as to take in more. And that this faculty tends to restrain men from doing mischief to each other, and leads them to do good, is too manifest to need being insisted upon.³⁴

As it turns out, then, Butler's moral psychology and philosophy is indeed "a synthesis, with corrections, of the doctrines of his immediate predecessors in the analysis of human nature"³⁵.

Butler's synthesis would be both corroborated and developed in the writings of the Scottish moralists of the eighteenth century, including those of Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), David Hume, and Adam Smith.³⁶ In his Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil (1725), Hutcheson would advance so far as to provide us with a formula with which we might actually compute the benevolence of our actions, or of the degree of our love for others. He writes:

. . . That as all Men have Self-Love, as well as Benevolence, these two Principles may jointly excite a Man to the same Action; and they are to be consider'd as two Forces impelling the same Body to Motion; sometimes they conspire, sometimes are indifferent to each other; and sometimes are in some degree opposite. Thus, if a Man have such strong Benevolence, as would have produc'd an Action without any Views of Self-Interest; that such a Man has also in View private Advantage, along with publick [sic] Good, as the Effect of his Action, does no way diminish the Benevolence of the Action. When he would not have produc'd so much publick Good, had it not been for Prospect of Self-Interest, then the Effect of Self-Love is to be deducted, and his Benevolence is proportion'd to the remainder of Good, which pure Benevolence would have produc'd [sic]. When a Man's Benevolence is

³⁴ Ibid, 9.

³⁵ See "Joseph Bulter" in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1967), 432-434. Significantly perhaps, this synthesis by Butler in moral philosophy, involving a theoretical rapprochement between the apparently contrary principles of self-love and benevolence, is analogous to the synthesis by Plato in metaphysics between the opposing Parmenidean and Heraclitean accounts of persistence and change, a synthesis, with corrections, that was achieved by recourse to the notions of potency and act.

³⁶ See, in particular, Hutcheson's Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue (1725), Hume's Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (1751), and Smith's The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759).

hurtful to himself, then Self-Love is opposite to Benevolence, and the Benevolence is proportion'd [sic] to the Sum of the Good produc'd, added to the Resistance of Self-Love surmounted by it. In most Cases it is impossible for Men to know how far their Fellows are influenc'd [sic] by the one or other of these Principles; . . .³⁷

But despite the natural obscurity of the phenomena in question:

. . . the general Truth is sufficiently certain, That this is the way in which the Benevolence of Actions is to be computed. Since then, no Love to rational Agents can proceed from Self-Interest, every Action must be disinterested, as far as it flows from Love to rational Agents.³⁸

As the eighteenth century progressed, such developments of the “compatibilist” view of self-love and benevolence by earlier British moralists such as Butler and Hutcheson would be refined and systematized by others including David Hume and Adam Smith. Apparently then, it is directly from the writings of at least one of the British moralists, who included Butler, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith, that Calhoun drew insight and perhaps inspiration too from a ‘reconciliation’ in theory between the affections of self-love and benevolence. Through these thinkers, Calhoun would have been exposed to a scientific explanation of how these apparently opposed and incongruous forces are reconciled in practice.

In the absence of any thorough documentary account of Calhoun’s readings, we are left to conjecture. And this route leads us to the view that, of all the works by the British moralists who sought explicitly to forge a dualistic explanation for moral science which comprehended both self-love and benevolence, those of Hume and Smith are the most likely to have found their way to the Carolinian’s study. This is so because of the great popularity

³⁷ See Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil in British Moralists*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), vol. I, 86-87.

³⁸ See Francis Hutcheson, *Concerning Moral Good and Evil in British Moralists*, vol. I, 87.

of Hume's essays in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and of the prestige of classical political economy during and following the same period, of which Smith, after 1776, became the best-known representative. But regardless of the specific intellectual-historical route by which the "reconciliatory", "compatibilist", and dualistic doctrine of moral sentiment espoused by Butler and the Scottish philosophers came to Calhoun's attention, it appears that this advance in moral science paved the way for precisely the sort of development which Calhoun, in the following century, would effect in the science of politics.

A number of considerations lead one to conjecture, for example, that Calhoun was, in no small degree, indebted to Adam Smith. In fact, it seems likely that Calhoun read not only Smith's widely acclaimed economic treatise, An Inquiry Concerning the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776), but his moral treatise, A Theory of Moral Sentiments (1763), as well. In the latter work, it is possible to uncover passages whose language and substance bear a clear and close resemblance to formulations in the Disquisition. For example, in formulating his dualistic conception of moral sentiment, Smith explains that Providence is responsible for both the origin of the principles of self-love and benevolence, and of their respective force and peculiar juxtaposition within the human breast. In The Theory of Moral Sentiment, Smith writes:

Every man, as the Stoics used to say, is first and principally recommended to his own care, and every man is certainly, in every respect, fitter and abler to take care of himself than of any other person. Every man feels his own pleasures and his own pains more sensibly than those of other people. The former are the original sensations -- the latter the reflected or sympathetic images of those sensations. The former may be said to be the substance -- the latter the shadow.

(emphasis added)³⁹

Smith's dualistic, moral philosophical conception of selfish "substance" and sympathetic "shadow" find a political philosophical mirror and analogue in the Disquisition, where Calhoun writes:

. . . government has its origins in this twofold constitution of his nature; the sympathetic or social feelings constituting the remote -- the individual or direct, the proximate cause. (7)

Also, in addition to anticipating and perhaps instructing Calhoun by arguing that men are impelled by both self-love and benevolence; Smith, in many places, prefigured Calhoun by underscoring the primacy of the individual feelings. For instance, in a famous passage, Smith says:

Man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. (emphasis

³⁹ See Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1976), 359, and recall Calhoun, in the Disquisition, p 6: ". . . while man is created for the social state, and is accordingly so formed as to feel what affects others, as well as what affects himself, he is, at the same time, so constituted as to feel more intensely what affects him directly, than what affects him indirectly through others, or, to express it differently, he is so constituted, that his direct or individual affections are stronger than his sympathetic or social feelings."

added)⁴⁰

And from Smith's analysis, we may infer, for example, that the primacy that subsists of the individual feelings over the social feelings has an analogue in the realm of social interaction and communication. Specifically, we may locate this analogue in the manner and habit by which we tend to address the self-interest of others, and in turn, both expect and find that they address our self-interest as well. Indeed, that each man tends by necessity and habit to address the self-interest – and not the benevolence – of other men, is certainly a central fact of human existence. Finally, to round out the comparison between Smith and Calhoun, each philosopher viewed self-interest both as a Providential dispensation of great practical importance and as a phenomenological cornerstone of the various sciences of society and man. For recall that Calhoun, in the Disquisition, says:

To the Infinite Being, the Creator of all, belongs exclusively the care and superintendence of the whole. He, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, has allotted to every class of animated beings its condition and appropriate functions; and has endowed each with feelings, instincts, capacities, and faculties, best adapted to its allotted condition.
(9)

And in Smith, we find the same insight and substance, and again, a

⁴⁰ Adam Smith, An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1976), Vol. I, 26-27. And Smith continues:

Nobody but a beggar chuses [sic] to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens. Even a beggar does not depend upon it entirely. The charity of well-disposed people, indeed, supplies him with the whole fund of his subsistence. But though this principle ultimately provides him with all the necessaries of life which he has occasion for, it neither does nor can provide him with them as he has occasion for them. The greater part of his occasional wants are supplied in the same manner as those of other people, by treaty, by barter, and by purchase. With the money which one man gives him he purchases food. The old cloaths [sic] which another bestows upon him he exchanges for other old cloaths which suit him better, or for lodging, or for food, or for money, with which he can buy either food, cloaths, or lodging, as he has occasion.

manner of expression which closely resembles. To wit:

In every part of the universe we observe means adjusted with the nicest artifice to the ends which they are intended to produce; and in the mechanism of a plant, or animal body, admire how every thing is contrived for advancing the two great purposes of nature, the support of the individual, and the propagation of the species.⁴¹

So there is a sense in which the dual-principle is to be found in Smith's writings, in so far as benevolence and self-love both are acknowledged as important and untranscendable mainsprings of human action.⁴² Moreover, as we have seen, Smith agrees with Calhoun in assigning primacy to the individual feelings over the social feelings, and in regarding the primacy relation and the social nature of man as beneficent bestowals of a Divine Providence. But there is also a crucially important sense in which the dual-principle is not to be found in Smith, or in any other thinker prior to Calhoun.

For it was the Carolinian who first conceived of benevolence and self-love as twin elements of a single principle in terms of which the great questions of political science could finally be definitively addressed. And so the Scottish moralists, despite their innovations, would leave for some future thinker the task of demonstrating how the Creator intends that men achieve

⁴¹ Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 168.

⁴² The survey of the close similarities between the views of Smith and Calhoun could easily be continued. For example, both men would affirm a robust and healthy self-love while condemning selfishness where the term implies, as Calhoun wrote, "an unusual excess of the individual over the social feelings, in the person to whom it is applied; and, consequently, something vicious and depraved." (6) This view is presaged in Smith's invidious comparison between the miser and the man of moderation and elevated feeling. To wit, there is a great difference "between the character of a miser and that of a person of exact economy and assiduity. The one is anxious about small matters for their own sake; the other attends to them only in consequence of the scheme of life which he has laid down to himself." See The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 286.

the salutary reconciliation of the principles of self-love and benevolence through the art of the statesman and the science of politics.

Previously in this chapter, we have just specified, in a general way, the intellectual-historical route by which Calhoun first laid hold on that dualistic, moral philosophical principle which would provide the basic conceptual material from which he would fashion a dual-principle as the first principle of political science. Now, we are prepared to turn to and to consider another fundamental and important issue concerning that principle -- namely, the nature and extent of the causal force of the dual-principle within human history.

The precise nature of Calhoun's specifically political scientific project should become clearer still as we compare it to a different but related project that is pursued in the writings of one of his older contemporaries, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

Although there is no direct and conclusive documentary evidence to the effect, it is possible, as I shall demonstrate shortly, that Calhoun read some of Kant's political writings, and was much influenced by them. Although the essay "Perpetual Peace" (1795) has been Kant's most widely read political work, our concern here is with an earlier and less frequently read essay, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" (1784).

In the "Idea for a Universal History", Kant argues that in order for the science of history to gain a full mastery of its subject matter, or to achieve the aim of a definitive explanation of the human past, which is the proper aim of historical science, it must examine "the free exercise of the human will on a

large scale⁴³." By such examination, it is proposed, history as science "will be able to discover a regular progression among freely willed actions"⁴⁴." According to Kant, historical investigation undertaken from such a wide angle gives one hope that "what strikes us in the actions of individuals as confused and fortuitous may be recognized, in the history of the entire species, as a steadily advancing but slow development of man's original capacities"⁴⁵."

Kant maintained that all history, including the history of man, is lawful and, specifically, teleological -- a fact that can be ascertained only when the historian adopts a sufficiently broad perspective, as just noted. Kant also believed that he had descried in history a spontaneous, evolving, and teleological ordering process at work: In fact, history, properly understood, is that process. Kant would underscore, by example and analogy, the lawful character of history and the need for a wide and deep perspective to apprehend its lawfulness, writing:

Thus marriages, births, and deaths do not seem to be subject to any rule by which their numbers could be calculated in advance, since the free human will has such a great influence upon them; and yet the annual statistics for them in large countries prove that they are just as subject to constant natural laws as are the changes in the weather, which in themselves are so inconsistent that their individual occurrence cannot be determined in advance, but which nevertheless do not fail as a whole to sustain the growth of plants, the flow of rivers, and other natural functions in a uniform and uninterrupted course.⁴⁶

Rounding out his view that history is a lawful, natural process

⁴³ See Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" in Great Political Thinkers: Plato to the Present, ed. Willian Ebenstein and Alan O. Ebenstein, fifth edition (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 533.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 533.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 533.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 533.

involving a gradual and progressive development of human capacities, Kant observes:

Individual men and even entire nations little imagine that, while they are pursuing their own ends, each in his own way and often in opposition to others, they are unwittingly guided in their advance along a course intended by nature.⁴⁷ They are unconsciously promoting an end which, even if they knew what it was, would scarcely arouse their interest.⁴⁸

While arguing that history is thus lawful, Kant undertakes to account for the opposite view. He does so by conceding that it appears that no “law-governed history of mankind” is possible, since men “neither pursue their aims purely by instinct, as animals do, nor act in accordance with any integral, prearranged plan like rational cosmopolitans⁴⁹.” Observing that human history could not be lawful in either of these two ways, Kant sets out to discover some other way in which it could be lawful. Thus:

The only way out for the philosopher, since he cannot assume that mankind follows any rational purpose of its own in its collective actions, is for him to attempt to discover a purpose in nature behind [the apparently] senseless course of human events, and decide whether it is after all possible to formulate in terms of a definite plan of nature a history of creatures who act without a plan of their own.⁵⁰

Kant’s ambition here is not to write such a history, wherein human events are given their definitive explanation in terms of a definite plan of nature. Instead, he hopes to succeed “in finding a guiding principle for such a history, and then leave it to nature to produce someone capable of writing it

⁴⁷ The influence of Scottish thinkers on Kant is especially evident here, with his explanation of nature working spontaneously through history being analogous to Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” explanation of the operations of forces in a market economy.

⁴⁸ See Immanuel Kant, “Idea . . .” in Great Political Thinkers, 533.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 533.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 533-534.

along the lines suggested”⁵¹:

Thus nature produced a Kepler who found an unexpected means of reducing the eccentric orbits of the planets to definite laws, and a Newton who explained these laws in terms of a universal natural cause.⁵²

And so, as Kant saw it, his project of explaining human history in terms of a plan of nature is analogous to that of Kepler. After finding “a guiding principle for such a history”, he would leave for another the Newtonian task of writing that history “along the lines suggested” by the principle. The principle, as it turns out, is a certain teleological conception of human history, the substance and outline of which Kant reveals in the form of six propositions.⁵³

Including the brief elaborations tacked on to each proposition, this section of the work is only about two pages long. These propositions and their elaborations, incidentally, constitute the balance of the “Idea for a Universal History” after its introduction, with the entire essay running only three pages. In order to understand how Kant may have influenced the political philosophic ideas of Calhoun, let us review these propositions:

First Proposition: All the natural capacities of a creature are destined sooner or later to be developed completely and in conformity with their end.

Second Proposition: In man (as the only rational creature on earth), those natural capacities which are directed towards the use of his reason are such that they could be fully developed only in the species, but not in the individual.

⁵¹ Ibid, 534.

⁵² Ibid, 534.

⁵³ Following Kant, Hegel (1770-1831) is the most distinguished and profound of those who would take up this Newtonian aspect of this historical enterprise. See his historical-interpretive work titled The Philosophy of History together with his metaphysical-historical work, The Phenomenology of Spirit.

Third Proposition: Nature has willed that man should produce entirely by his own initiative everything which goes beyond the mechanical ordering of his animal existence, and that he should not partake of any other happiness or perfection than that which he has procured for himself without instinct and by his own reason.

Fourth Proposition: The means which nature employs to bring about the development of innate capacities is that of antagonism within society, in so far as this antagonism becomes in the long run the cause of a law-governed social order.

Fifth Proposition: The greatest problem for the human species, the solution of which nature compels him to seek, is that of attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally.

Sixth Proposition: This problem is both the most difficult and the last to be solved by the human race.

It should be noted here, at the outset of the comparison between the ideas of Kant and Calhoun, that there are some fundamental and remarkable affinities between the respective political philosophic accounts of the "Idea for a Universal History" and of the Disquisition. But the full force of these affinities will not be evident to the reader at this point in our presentation of Calhoun's ideas. What may already be evident to the reader, however, is that the "Fourth Proposition", with its mention of "antagonism within society", is compatible with and, to some degree, reminiscent of Calhoun's dual-principle, as presented in the previous chapter. To demonstrate the full extent of this compatibility, let us review Kant's elaboration on the "Fourth Proposition":

By antagonism [within society], I mean in this context the unsocial sociability of men, that is, their tendency to come together in society, coupled, however, with a continual resistance which constantly threatens to break this society up. This propensity is obviously rooted in human nature. Man has an inclination to live in society, since he feels in this state more like a man, that is, he feels able to develop his

natural capacities. But he also has a great tendency to live as an individual, to isolate himself, since he also encounters in himself the unsocial characteristic of wanting to direct everything in accordance with his own ideas. He therefore expects resistance all around, just as he knows of himself that he is in turn inclined to offer resistance to others.⁵⁴

Within just a generation or so after Kant penned his essay on universal history, that paradoxical relation of elemental forces internal to human nature which he captures here in the expression “unsocial sociability” would be synopsised by Calhoun in the expression “two-fold constitution of [man’s] nature.” (7) For according to Calhoun, man is impelled irresistibly, by his nature, into the social state (5-6); yet that nature, too, necessarily leads him into conflict with others (7), for reasons that will become clear in Chapter IV. But whereas, on a superficial view of the subject, it would be expected that the “antagonism in society” which results from man’s “unsocial sociability” or “two-fold constitution” would lead necessarily to universal conflict, misery, and, finally, to the destruction of the misfitted species; in fact, this “antagonism in society” -- far from weighing down as a curse upon humanity -- is in fact that which, according to Kant, “nature employs to bring about the development of innate capacities”, and which both Kant and Calhoun viewed as a Providential blessing.⁵⁵ (9) Speaking of the natural disposition of each man to resist being directed by others, Kant says:

It is this very resistance which awakens all man’s powers and induces him to overcome his tendency to laziness. Through the desire for honor, power or property, it drives him to seek status among his fellows, whom he cannot bear yet cannot bear to leave. Then the first true steps are taken from barbarism to culture, which in fact consists in the social worthiness of man. All man’s talents are now gradually developed, his taste cultivated, and by a continued process of

⁵⁴ Ibid, 535.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 536.

enlightenment, a beginning is made towards establishing a way of thinking which can with time transform the primitive natural capacity for moral discrimination into definite practical principles; and thus a pathologically enforced social union is transformed into a moral whole.⁵⁶

In another passage, Kant is more emphatic and, indeed, almost lyrical, in his insistence on the providential character and role of man's "unsocial sociability":

All the culture and art which adorn mankind and the finest social order man creates are fruits of his unsociability. For it is compelled by its own nature to discipline itself, and thus, by enforced art, to develop completely the germs which nature implanted.⁵⁷

To some degree anticipating Calhoun both as regards the substance of his speech on the dual-principle and the manner of its illustration, Kant goes on to underscore the indispensability of this mutual resistance of man to man, born of his internal, providentially ordered constitution, through the use of a hypothetical scenario. For as we saw in Chapter II, Calhoun employs hypothetical argument to establish the desirability and superior utility of the dual-principle, vis-a-vis other proportions of individual to social feeling⁵⁸, as well as to suggest its providential character.⁵⁹ Like Calhoun⁶⁰, Kant recognized that, while man's social qualities are far from unproblematic -- being susceptible even of wicked mis-development -- they are both indispensable

⁵⁶ Ibid, 535.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 536.

⁵⁸ Recall the hypotheticals, where the individual and social feelings are felt (1) with equal intensity, and (2) where the social are felt more intensely than the individual.

⁵⁹ pages 8-9, 44-45.

⁶⁰ See pages 36-37 of the *Disquisition*, and Chapter VII of the present work, on Calhoun's discussion of how the government of the numerical majority tends to divide a community. Here, Calhoun explains how the social or sympathetic feelings may become so mis-developed and deformed, for example, that "devotion to party becomes stronger than devotion to country." More generally, social feeling, variously developed or misdeveloped, forms an essential part of the foundation of every political order -- however free or abusive its government may be.

and susceptible of salutary conditioning as well:

Without [the] social qualities (far from admirable in themselves) which cause the resistance inevitably encountered by each individual as he furthers his self-seeking pretensions, man would live an Arcadian, pastoral existence of perfect concord, self-sufficiency and mutual love. But all human talents would remain hidden for ever in a dormant state, and men, as good-natured as the sheep they tended, would scarcely render their existence more valuable than that of their animals. The end for which they were created, their rational nature, would be an unfulfilled void. Nature should thus be thanked for fostering social incompatibility, enviously competitive vanity, and insatiable desires for possession or even power. Without these desires, all man's excellent natural capacities would never be roused to develop.⁶¹

Beyond explaining what "antagonism in society" consists of and how it is Providential, Kant goes on to account for why its Providential character tends to go uncomprehended by the common run of men. Men whose thinking is dominated by love of ease, for example, will be blind to the good that may come from such antagonism. Indeed, "antagonism in society" and the discomfort and unrest which commonly attend it are viewed by such men as unqualified evils to be extirpated. And so, there persists to our day a longing on the part of men to end all antagonism and conflict between themselves for perpetuity -- a longing apparently as old as the species itself. Yet the reasoned, philosophical response to this longing is -- like philosophy itself, of course -- of much more recent origin. Thus we find the poet Homer

(c. 8th Century BC) giving voice to this ancient longing, and then, his refutation at the hands of a philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 540-480 BC).

Heraclitus writes:

Homer was wrong in saying: 'Would that strife might perish from among Gods and men!' He did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe; if his prayer were heard, all things would pass away.⁶²

And so, according to Heraclitus, Kant, and Calhoun, what men desire and what nature intends are opposed to one another.⁶³ Yet it is nature that governs man, and not the other way around. And in its wise governance, nature displays an indifference toward human desires that is magnificent and unshakeable. Says Kant:

. . . nature does not seem to have been concerned with seeing that man should live agreeably, but with seeing that he should work his way onwards to make himself by his own conduct worthy of life and well-being. . . .

Man wishes to live comfortably and pleasantly, but nature intends that he should abandon idleness and inactive self-sufficiency and plunge instead into labor and hardships, so that he may by his own adroitness find means of liberating himself from them in turn. The natural impulses which make this possible, the sources of the very unsociableness and continual resistance which cause so many evils, at the same time encourage man towards further development of his natural capacities. They would thus seem to indicate the design of a wise creator -- not, as it might seem, the hand of a malicious spirit who had meddled in the creator's glorious work or spoiled it out of envy.⁶⁴

Significantly, this teleological conception of history as nature developing in time -- a nature unconcerned with whether or not particular

⁶²Of Heraclitus' writings, only 130 "fragments" have survived. Some are sentences; some are only phrases.

⁶³In the case of Calhoun, this will become especially apparent in Chapter VIII, in the discussion of his conception of the role of liberty and despotism in relation to the human good.

⁶⁴See Immanuel Kant, "Idea . . ." in *Great Political Thinkers*, 535-536.

individuals or classes are living agreeably or not -- is also found in Hegel (1770-1831). In his most influential work, The Philosophy of History (1837, posthumously), Hegel writes:

The special interest of passion is thus inseparable from the active development of a general principle: for it is from the special and determinate and from its negation, that the Universal results. Particularity contends with its like, and some loss is involved in the issue. It is not the general idea that is implicated in opposition and combat, and that is exposed to danger. It remains in the background, untouched and uninjured. This may be called the cunning of reason -- that it sets the passions to work for itself, while that which develops its existence through such impulsion pays the penalty, and suffers loss. For it is phenomenal being that is so treated, and of this, part is of no value, part is positive and real. The particular is for the most part of too trifling value as compared with the general: individuals are sacrificed and abandoned. The Idea pays the penalty of determinate existence and of corruptibility, not from itself, but from the passions of individuals.⁶⁵

And so, according to Hegel, the "cunning of reason" is that force at the centre of the historical process which "sets the passions to work for itself." And man's "unsocial sociability", as Kant describes it, is that original opposition of passions through which one may account for how "particularity contends with its like" in the social and political world.⁶⁶ Therefore, anticipating Hegel's metaphysical-teleological interpretation of history, Kant's "Fourth Proposition" also bears a close resemblance to and indeed presages Calhoun's explanation of the "two-fold constitution of [man's] nature." For

⁶⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, The Philosophy of History (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), 32-33.

⁶⁶ Hegel's "cunning of reason" and Kant's "unsocial sociability" are, as it turns out, each developments of separate but related concepts characteristic of the Scottish Enlightenment moralists. The spontaneous and ordering character of the "cunning of reason" resembles the "invisible hand" process in political economy described by Adam Smith. Even later in the nineteenth century, following Hegel, Darwin would also employ the Smithian invisible hand-spontaneous order notion, as he received it indirectly through Herbert Spencer's Social Statics (1850), to develop his biological conception of natural selection (1859).

recall that the Third Proposition states: “The means which nature employs to bring about the development of innate capacities is that of antagonism within society, in so far as this antagonism becomes in the long run the cause of a law-governed social order⁶⁷.” Also, as we shall see in later chapters, the other five propositions of Kant’s “Idea for a Universal History” include other elements which are in essential agreement with Calhounian conceptions.

But in order to understand fully the significance of the similarities and agreement between Calhoun and Kant, we must keep before us the differences between the philosophical projects undertaken in the “Idea for a Universal History” and the Disquisition on Government respectively. Kant’s aim, as noted above, is to present a “guiding principle” which will suggest the lines of a definitive philosophical history of mankind. On the other hand, Calhoun’s overarching purpose in the Disquisition is to “lay a solid foundation for political Science.” Reflecting these respective aims, Kant’s principle of the “unsocial sociability” of man purports to be the key to deciphering the teleological nature of human history, whereas Calhoun’s “dual-principle” is supposed by its author to be that first principle of politics in terms of which all the disparate issues and phenomena of political science may be given their definitive explanation. In Chapter IV, I shall illustrate the relationship between Kant’s philosophical-historical project and Calhoun’s political-scientific project.⁶⁸

Having now, in the preceding section of this chapter, made a beginning at explaining how Calhoun’s dual-principle may be understood as the first

⁶⁷ See Immanuel Kant, “Idea . . .” in Great Political Thinkers, 535.

⁶⁸ This discussion will centre on Kant’s “Proposition Six”, as we shall see.

principle of political science, I shall conclude this chapter by considering the literary form and manner in which Calhoun presents and argues for this thesis. Toward that end, let us then consider the structure and organization of A Disquisition on Government, as well as the place of the Disquisition within Calhoun's literary corpus.

It was stated earlier in this chapter that the "two-fold constitution of [man's] nature" appears at every critical juncture of Calhoun's Disquisition on Government, and is the unifying element of that work. Naturally enough, then, efforts to understand the essence of Calhoun's philosophic thought must focus on how Calhoun, in the Disquisition, brings this principle to bear in order to explain the great and sometimes disparate topics of politics. But before proceeding to display the essence, scope, and unity of Calhoun's political philosophic ideas -- which is the object of Part II of the present essay -- we should first consider Calhoun's immediate object in writing the Disquisition, and begin thereby to suggest its significance as a theoretical work within the Western philosophical tradition. Toward this end, a discussion of the place of the Disquisition on Government within the literary corpus of Calhoun will constitute the remainder of this chapter, and serve thereby as an introduction to Part II.

Perhaps the earliest reference in Calhoun's correspondence to the literary and philosophical project that would become the Disquisition on Government (1851) occurs in a letter to Francis Wharton (1820-1889)⁶⁹, written on Christmas day, 1843. Calhoun wrote from Fort Hill:

The conception on [the other] side of the Atlantic is universally false in reference to our system of government. It is indeed a most remarkable

⁶⁹ An enthusiastic admirer and younger contemporary of Calhoun, Francis Wharton was admitted to the Philadelphia bar in 1843. He was subsequently a much-published legal scholar.

system -- the most so that ever existed. I have never yet discussed it in its higher elementary principles, or rather, I ought to say, in reference to higher elementary principles of political science. If I should have leisure, I may yet do it.⁷⁰

Calhoun withdrew from the Senate in 1843, after ten years there, to pursue his presidential aspirations. During this period, he began to work on the Disquisition, as well as on another theoretical work titled A Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States. The completion of these works suffered delay however, because their author was called out of political retirement in the following year by President John Tyler, who, with unanimous bipartisan support, convinced Calhoun to serve as Secretary of State. Calhoun was needed to preside over the settlement of a number of momentous and thorny international issues, including, most importantly, the matter of annexing Texas. But even after these questions were happily resolved, no retirement was in store for one whose intellectual gifts, parliamentary skills, and moral character were so sorely needed in the government of that day. Re-elected U. S. Senator in 1845, Calhoun served in that capacity until his death in 1850, "dying in harness", as it were.

Calhoun, then, began working on the Disquisition perhaps as early as 1843, and almost seven years elapsed between what is perhaps his first mention of it and the completion of the work.⁷¹

And so, in the last several years of his life, Calhoun wrote his two longest and most theoretical works, the Disquisition (roughly 73 pp.) and A Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States (roughly

⁷⁰ See The Papers of John C. Calhoun, ed. Clyde N. Wilson et al., 23 vols. to date (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), Vol XVII, 549.

⁷¹ See Gustavus Pinckney, Life of John C. Calhoun (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans, and Cogswell Co., 1903), 230-243.

203 pages).⁷² Calhoun, in fact, viewed the Disquisition as a preliminary high theoretical piece intended to introduce the longer and considerably less abstract Discourse.⁷³ This statement of intention raises, however, a number of questions about the significance of these two works, and about their relations one to another. For example: Are the Disquisition and Discourse to be viewed as essentially distinct but related works, or as distinct elements of a single work? For it is clearly apparent from Calhoun's description of the Disquisition as a "preliminary" that the two works are intimately related, and are not therefore to be viewed in utter isolation one from another. In fact, there is certainly a sense in which the Disquisition and the Discourse can be viewed as complementary elements within a single treatise on politics, either as a work on the constitution and government of the United States primarily, or as a general theoretical piece whose principal concrete illustration consists of an explication and analysis of the structure and historical development of the constitution and government of the United States. While the correspondence of Calhoun just cited clearly supports the former interpretation as an account of their relations one to another; the latter view of the two works is one whose historical and philosophical value is quite substantial, and should be apparent to even the casual reader of these works.

The fact that the Disquisition and Discourse came from the pen of their author as two physically distinct works, however, suggests that the status intended for the Disquisition was more substantial than that of a mere introduction to a longer work. Its status as "preliminary", along with its

⁷² One biographer has called the Discourse, aptly enough, The Treatise on the United States Constitution. See Gustavus Pinckney, Life of John C. Calhoun, 235.

⁷³ See Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1899, Vol. II, ed. J. F. Jameson, 768, "To Mrs. T. C. Clemson, June 15, 1849."

physical distinctness, gives it the status of an independent work, though a work that has semantic and thematic obligations beyond itself. Conceived as a preliminary, the broader semantic obligation of the Disquisition was to clear the way, and to lay a kind of groundwork or foundation for the arguments to be advanced in the Discourse.

This understanding of the Disquisition as a vital preliminary suggests, however, that the relationship between the two works is rather asymmetrical, with the Discourse being more dependent for the rhetorical and theoretical support provided by the Disquisition, than the Disquisition is dependent on the Discourse for concrete illustration of the general principles which it sets forth. Indeed, this thesis of an asymmetrical relation between the two works seems especially compelling, since within the Disquisition itself several concrete historical illustrations of the system of the concurrent majority are given, including the shorter accounts of trial by jury (49-50), the Polish Diet (53-54) and the Iroquois Confederacy (54), and the longer and for more detailed and substantial accounts of the Roman Republic (67-72) and the British Constitution (72-78), which close the work. Also, as the Discourse shows, the example of the United States as an historical illustration of the principles of the concurrent majority is a problematic one. For although founded as a government of the concurrent majority, its sheer complexity as the world's first large scale federal polity proved too demanding for those for whom it was established.⁷⁴ In a short time⁷⁵, the complexity of this

⁷⁴ I have made a beginning at explaining how this is so in Winston L. McCuen, "States' Rights and The American Founding: What Went Wrong?", Southern Partisan, Vol. XVI, Fourth Quarter, 1996, 24-27.

⁷⁵ Calhoun argues that the beginning of the end of the American federal system may be traced to the passage, by the first Congress, of the 25th section of the Judiciary Act, approved the 24th Sept. 1789. See the Discourse, 223-226.

governmental system proved too much for the actualized political maturity of a majority of the American citizenry. As a consequence, the federal democratic republic that was established by 1789 with the ratification by nine of the original thirteen American states soon fell into disrepair, and was, by degrees, between 1789 and 1865, transformed into an consolidated, absolutist, democratic empire.⁷⁶ And so the Disquisition -- being amply stocked with concrete illustrations of its own -- does not stand in strict dependence on the Discourse for any illustration of its positive constitutional ideal. And yet, the example of the genius, power, and decline of the American federal union, as described in the Discourse, may be viewed as an additional illustration of the challenge and glory involved in the establishment and maintenance of constitutional government as described in the Disquisition.

The Discourse is both an historical and a philosophical work. It is historical, since it affirms in systematic fashion the historically accurate account of the American Union as a compact between sovereign and independent states. The work is philosophical since Calhoun, writing in the 1840's, is arguing not merely the historical point that the Union as founded was a federal and not a consolidated regime, but the moral and political philosophical point as well, that the best form of polity for any combination of communities, such as the American states then were, is a federal one that would make self-government by these communities possible once again.

My view that the Disquisition does not depend on the Discourse for concrete illustration of the principle of the concurrent majority has then been

⁷⁶ This is not to say the some vestiges of the original republican government of the United States did not remain by 1865, and even into the late twentieth century. In fact, imperial practice has supplanted republican practice in America by degrees, and especially, through a series of watersheds, including most conspicuously the military conquest of the South in 1865, the New Deal, and the Great Society of the 1960's.

established. But there is another sense in which the Disquisition does depend on the Discourse. For while the Discourse, with its focus on the establishment and subsequent decline of American federalism, is not principally concerned with providing any concrete illustration of an enduring constitution redounding to the lasting power, liberty, and happiness of a people⁷⁷; it does provide a classic and detailed example of the process whereby republics, and especially federal republics, degenerate into despotisms. Indeed, this account of the degeneration of American federalism is further illuminated and evinces a broader historical significance when placed against the theoretical backdrop provided in the Disquisition (31-38), where Calhoun provides us with a systematic account of the degeneration of political regimes. And this systematic, philosophical account of degeneration, it should be noted, is reminiscent of but somewhat different from that scheme outlined by Aristotle in the Politics (Book V). But the Discourse is more than a classic and detailed political scientific description of political degeneration: it is a spirited and responsible call for reform.

Recalling the original constitution of the patient as robust and of unprecedented promise (81-222), and having traced Her present affliction from its onset through its various stages (222-267), Calhoun, as physician of the American body politic, ends by outlining a regimen which the patient, if She is to find cure for Her malady, must administer to Herself (267-284). Calhoun proposed a series of constitutional reforms, including a dual

⁷⁷At the very end of the Discourse, however, Calhoun does consider the "happy" example of the formation of the state government and constitution of South Carolina. But this example of the salutary effects of the system of the concurrent majority is clearly not designed to provide supporting illustration for argument in the Disquisition, but is instead inserted to give force to Calhoun's general polemical aim in the Discourse of bringing wayward America, or the South at least, back to true federalism and republicanism.

executive, or two presidents (275-277), and the end of federal judicial review as it had come to be practiced and widely (mis-)understood by 1840, with the state courts no longer being regarded as co-equals with the courts of the general government (223-239).⁷⁸

And so the Discourse is more than just a statesmanly work addressed to thoughtful and politically active Americans. In addition, the Discourse is part of a more general timeless philosophical speech whose theoretical elements are presented mostly in the Disquisition.

On the whole, then, it appears that the Discourse is more dependent on the Disquisition than the opposite.

The Disquisition, as we have said, is a work of political theory, and specifically, an extended reflection on the nature of man and government. The Discourse is a philosophical history of the establishment and subsequent functioning of the American federal union, and features a systematic examination of the document of that union, the Constitution of 1787. These two works may be read separately to great profit, or together, to even greater profit. The Disquisition is a timeless speech about the human good by a philosopher. The Discourse is an historical and speculative speech about the good of a particular people written by a passionately involved statesman and citizen. Significantly, those who, since the mid-nineteenth century, have

⁷⁸ In Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun, ed. Ross M. Lence (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992), 79, the editor aptly notes:

Although Calhoun's Discourse follows an elaborate outline, the subject matter can be divided into three general categories: (1) the original intentions of the founders concerning the formation and ratification of the Constitution; (2) the dangers inherent in the encroachment of the federal government upon the reserved powers of the states; and (3) the call for the restoration of the doctrine of the concurrent majority, if consolidation and disunion are to be avoided. Within this general framework, Calhoun provides a critical analysis of each of the articles of the Constitution, as well as all the major agencies of the general government. Also included is an analysis and critical reading of many documents, especially Federalist #10, #39, #51, and #78.

opposed Calhoun's views on the Constitution of '87 and the nature of the American union, as well as on other fundamental issues, including the nature of sovereignty, liberty, and slavery, have typically either ignored or failed to grasp the high theoretical speech of the preliminary Disquisition.

With the writing of the Disquisition together with the Discourse, Calhoun established himself as a philosophic expositor of the Constitution of '87 without equal. Calhoun's principal aim in the Disquisition was to lay a solid foundation for political science. Yet by providing this foundation, Calhoun also provided a coherent and extensive theoretical defense of American federalism. The purpose of the Discourse was, as Calhoun tells us, "to consider the character, origin, and structure of the Government of the United States." Alarmed by the growing influence of misconceptions about this Government among both the citizenry and office-holders of the American Union, Calhoun reserved these topics as the subject of a separate and lengthy volume. The Discourse establishes, through historical and philosophical argument, the fact of the United States' being, at the start, in 1789, a federal system of governance: the Disquisition established the utter propriety and justness of that form of governance for the disparate American communities, taking into consideration, as it did, the particular moral condition and physical circumstances of these communities.

Having, then, considered the significance of the Discourse as a statesmanly, philosophical, and historical work, and having explored the nature of its relation to its preliminary, the Disquisition, we may proceed with our consideration of Calhoun's intentions regarding the latter work.

Biographer Gustavus Pinckney has summarized admirably Calhoun's

immediate intentions in writing the Disquisition, and has commented, with considerable insight, on how the work should be read. Pinckney (1903) argues that Calhoun's aim in writing the Disquisition was:

To provide a brief and serviceable summary of his discoveries and their application Consequently, in this volume is contained the distilled essence of the long results of a lifetime. All heterogeneous matter, all complicating detail, every irrelevance, all surplusage, is pruned away and eliminated, and the result is a handbook of political science, as remarkable for completeness as it is for brevity. Indeed, brevity is the difficulty at the same time that it is the merit of such a work. One who has given but indifferent attention to these subjects is wholly unprepared to derive the full benefit of what is here compressed into such narrow compass.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Writing at the turn of the century, Pinckney continues by lamenting the poor reception given to the work as of his time:

. . . the minds of many, in reference to these topics, are in much less condition than mere passivity; the minds of many are completely possessed by certain prejudices and misconceptions, which render the successful inoculation of correct ideas almost hopeless.

One is reminded by this comment of a remark by Robert E. Lee. One year after the end of the War for Southern Independence, in 1866, Lee wrote to Jubal Early, one of his former lieutenants, who had, along with many others, beseeched Lee to make some public statement about the justice of the Southern cause. Lee decided against such a course of action, observing that: "At present, the public mind is not prepared to receive the truth."

Lee understood, as philosopher Richard Weaver would later observe, that "People must be in a state of grace to listen to the truth, more especially when it comes as a remonstrance." See Gustavus Pinckey, Life of John C. Calhoun, 233-234, and Richard M. Weaver, "Lee the Philosopher" in The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver (Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1987), 175.

Evidently, the Disquisition, as well as Calhoun's originality and genius as a moral and political philosopher, have gone largely unappreciated in large part because men have not yet grasped the full meaning and significance of the dual-principle as the first principle of political science. The brevity of the work, combined with its author's unembellished and straightforward style, encourage a brisk reading that tends to leave one with the sense that one has apprehended fully when, in fact, one has not. That the work is sooner read than understood, while true of any great literary work, is perhaps especially true of Calhoun's Disquisition. But the Disquisition differs from other works which bear repeated reading in this particular: by allowing the reader, through its brevity and simplicity of style, to form the feeling or illusion of full and complete apprehension, and to neglect thereby further study and examination of this and other works of the author.

A breath-takingly short seventy-three pages, the Disquisition on Government stands within the general corpus of Calhoun's works as the would-be treatise of a man too occupied with the great political struggles of his time to adopt the longer form. But despite its brevity, Calhoun's Disquisition on Government is a complete political speech. It is a complete speech, not because it comprehends within its covers an exhaustive treatment of every conceivable political issue, including all of the political implications of concerns and subjects more remote from politics. For such completeness is obviously impossible of human attainment. Instead, Calhoun's Disquisition is a complete political philosophical speech because all of the basic issues of politics are addressed in terms of a scientific first principle.⁸⁰ This makes Calhoun's Disquisition that rarity within the Western political philosophic tradition; a systematic, yet concise and economical explanation of the central phenomena of the science of government and of political life generally. Indeed, as I have already intimated in Part I thusfar, and will proceed to demonstrate in Part II, what makes possible this unusual and even striking

⁸⁰ More specifically, the Disquisition is a complete speech because it involves the explanation of moral and political opposites in terms of a single principle, including the individual and social feelings, liberty and order, government and anarchy, tyranny and resistance, virtue and vice, unity and division, war and peace, et cetera. On the nature of the complete philosophical speech, see the epilogue of Donald Phillip Verene, Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) titled "The Tablet of Philosophy", 256-257:

... The lovers of wisdom applied themselves here to learning in common the art of the complete speech: the speech that moves from opposition to opposition throughout experience, recalling the whole of things and imitating its truth in words. Within this process, ... thought moves from the finding of *topoi* to the judgments of reason that follow from them and issue in *argumenta*. These *argumenta* are at the same time enclosed in a course of higher speech that is the true narration of what is. This is the thought of the circle, the perfect motion that runs from beginning to middle to end, and in the end is its beginning. The art of the philosopher is the art of circular thinking, or what is called speculation.

Speculation is insight into inner form. It sees ... the nature of a thing through its opposite and forms a circle of thought.

combination of systematicity, economy of style, and brevity are the very discovery and use of the dual-principle as the first principle of political science.

PART II

THE STRUCTURE OF THE POLITICAL UNIVERSE REVEALED

. . . the things best to know are first principles and causes. For through them and from them all other things may be known but not they through the things covered by them.

— Aristotle, Metaphysics

CHAPTER IV
THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF
SOCIETY, GOVERNMENT, AND CONSTITUTION

I have said that it is in terms of the dual-principle that every fundamental consideration regarding government may be explained, including its origin, its proper object, its problematic character (or its tendency to abuse and oppression), and the solution to the most fundamental problem which naturally attends its operations. This claim will be substantiated systematically and in detail in the present chapter and in the two that follow it. The specific concern of the present chapter, as the first of a trilogy, is to explain how and whence both government and political constitution originate.

As we saw in Chapter II, in our initial explication of the dual-principle, Calhoun taught that society cannot subsist without government because the dual-principle, and the primacy relation, in particular, in its inexorable operation, "necessarily leads to conflict between individuals." (7) Hence we saw how, according to Calhoun, the dual-principle inclines each person to have "a greater regard for his own safety or happiness, than for the safety or happiness of others; and, where these come in opposition, is ready to sacrifice the interests of others to his own." (7) And so, there exists "the tendency to a universal state of conflict, between individual and individual: accompanied by the connected passions of suspicion, jealousy, anger and revenge -- followed by insolence, fraud and cruelty -- and, if not prevented by some controlling power, ending in a state of universal discord and confusion, destructive of the social state and the ends for which it is ordained." (7) This tendency to the destruction of the social state, it should be emphasized, is a permanent feature of the human condition, and therefore cannot be permanently defeated or overcome. Instead, this tendency resides always in

the bosoms of individuals and on the spiritual periphery of the polity, as it were, waiting to be unleashed in periods of confusion and disorder. In this way, then, the dual-principle is that "constitution or law of our nature, without which government would not exist, and with which its existence is necessary . . ." (5)

But this universal and ever-present tendency to the destruction of the social state is, on the whole, held in check by another inexorable product of the dual-principle, and thereby prevented from becoming an enduring actualized condition with which and within which men must contend. So the fundamental problem of society is its tendency to dissolution as a result of certain operations of the dual-principle. And, paradoxically enough, the inexorable product of the dual-principle that is the solution to this fundamental problem is that "controlling power, wherever vested, or by whomsoever exercised, [that] is GOVERNMENT." (7) Thus, as Calhoun writes:

It follows then, that man is so constituted, that government is necessary to the existence of society, and society to his existence, and the perfection of his faculties. It follows, also, that government has its origin in this two-fold constitution of his nature; the sympathetic or social feelings constituting the remote -- and the individual or direct, the proximate cause. (7)

In this way, through the mysterious workings of a Divine Providence, a problem created and posed by the operation of natural forces is inexorably palliated, if not cured outright, by nature herself. And this dispensation is all the more peculiar and wondrous, because both the problem and its solution stem, as we have explained, directly from the same principle.

As if self-consciously echoing the speech of Hobbes on the origin of

government, Calhoun argues that the controlling power that is government is the solution to the problem of conflict between individuals. For at the very beginning of Part II of Leviathan, titled "Of Commonwealth", Hobbes writes:

The finall [sic] Cause, End, or Designe [sic] of men, . . . in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which we see them in Commonwealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre [sic], which is necessarily consequent . . . to the naturall [sic] Passions of men, when there is no visible Power to keep them in awe, and tye [sic] them by feare [sic] of punishment to the performance of their Covenants, . . .¹

But Calhoun differs from Hobbes and all other political theorists regarding the specific manner and concerns with which he tracks and records "the naturall Passions of men" and the effects of these passions as they relate to political life. Indeed, regarding the specifically political implications of these "Passions", what other thinkers had merely approached through their speculative investigations, and only approximated by suggestion in their writings, Calhoun saw in depth and distinctly, and expressed with a clarity and precision that can only come from a fuller mastery of the subject.

Because of our ignorance of the exact nature of the various intellectual influences on Calhoun, it is an open question as to what extent the depth, clarity, and precision of his account may be attributed to prior advances in theory. But however that may be, Calhoun -- as I shall show over the course of this trilogy of chapters -- saw the fundamental problem regarding society -- that is, its tendency to dissolution -- more clearly, and conveyed this problem to posterity with more precision, than anyone had before. For according to Calhoun, it is not merely "the naturall Passions", generally conceived, which

¹Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. C B. Macpherson (England: Penguin Classics, 1985), 223.

form the fundamental cause of government, but the dual-principle of our nature, in particular. Also, in tracking the development and effects of “the naturall Passions of men”, Calhoun, as we shall also see, would contribute much to the construction of a comprehensive account of the fundamental relations between the passions and government.

Having tracked the passions and their effects from the formation of society to its threatened destruction, and then to the palliation of that threat through the inexorable advent of government; Calhoun, pushing on into the thickets of political phenomena, discovered the source of a further and far more momentous effect of the passions. This more momentous effect is the tendency of government, once formed, to abuse and oppression. For recall that

. . . government, although intended to protect and preserve society, has itself a strong tendency to disorder and abuse of its powers, as all experience and almost every page of history testify. The cause is to be found in the same constitution of our nature which makes government indispensable. The powers which it is necessary for government to possess, in order to repress violence and preserve order, cannot execute themselves. They must be administered by men in whom, like others, the individual are stronger than the social feelings. And hence, the powers vested in them to prevent injustice and oppression on the part of others, will, if left unguarded, be by them converted into instruments to oppress the rest of the community. (9)

And so governmental abuse and oppression is to be explained in terms of the capacity of the dual-principle to manifest itself through the necessarily human agency of government. Therefore once again, that which makes government indispensable, also renders it problematic.

But of course, the tendency of government to abuse and oppression had been a central theme in political writing long before the nineteenth

century. Still, the question remains as to the sufficiency of its explanation prior to Calhoun.

In Rousseau, for example, we find that this fundamental problem of government is conceived soundly, but only in a general way. For instance, as Rousseau writes in his Social Contract:

Just as the private will acts constantly against the general will, the government makes a continual effort against sovereignty. The more this effort increases, the more the constitution is altered. And since there is here no other corporate will which, by resisting the will of the prince, would create an equilibrium with it, sooner or later the prince must finally oppress the sovereign and break the social treaty. That is the inherent and inevitable vice which, from the birth of the body politic, tends unceasingly to destroy it, just as old age and death destroy the human body.²

Yet despite the obvious depth, insight, and accuracy of this analysis, Rousseau was prevented by the unavailability of a concisely formulated first principle from giving a far more definitive and tightly reasoned account of the problem of government, as I have called it. For observe that within Rousseau's account there is no recognition, for example, of the fundamental, underlying connection in human nature between the "private will" of individuals and political constitution. Thus Rousseau, unlike Calhoun, presents no well-developed theoretical account to the effect that the problem of government and its solution have a common source. And so, recalling our earlier assessment of Hobbes: whereas the unavailability of a sound first principle prevented Hobbes from giving the kind of economical and definitive explanation of the fundamental problem of society -- namely, its

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Social Contract in The Basic Political Writings (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 192. Deriving from the Latin *nascere*, "to be born", a "nation" is a kind of "birth." Thus Rousseau understood that all nations, like individuals, are mortal.

tendency to dissolution; it was the same theoretical lacunae which would bar Rousseau from a like explanation of the fundamental problem of government, or of its tendency to abuse and oppression. Therefore, what previous thinkers would only approximate in their speculations, Calhoun would flush out, and draw into plain view.

But having suggested Calhoun's originality on this score, let us return to our earlier point that the tendency of government to abuse and oppression is an effect of the passions of more moment than the tendency of the social state to destruction. This insight stems from Calhoun's explanation of how there is, in nature, no inexorable or automatic palliative for governmental abuse and oppression, as there is for the tendency of society to dissolution. That is, where the natural and inexorable advent of government keeps the natural tendency of the social state to destruction in check; there is no corresponding natural and inexorable process -- spontaneously generated and essentially unreflective -- whereby the tendency of government to abuse and oppression may be prevented from a full and abiding realization. This insight and circumstance explains as well why anarchy is a rare and unsustained event, while the oppression and abuses of power associated with despotism or lawless rule are, in every age, of such frequency and persistence. This is so, Calhoun suggests, because, as indispensable features of a Providential plan, the tendency to anarchy and the tendency to despotism respectively have different roles to play within human affairs and history.

In fact, Calhoun viewed despotism as, at some level, a positive dispensation, because it provides a solution and alternative, however rough and attended by abuses, to the problem of warring factions, anarchy, and social

dissolution. And that anarchy is necessarily an ephemeral condition which tends to pass away into despotism or absolute government is another aspect of the same dispensation. In light then of his providential view of government, it should come as no surprise that Calhoun called anarchy and not despotism the "greatest of all evils." (30) Indeed, according to Calhoun, despotism is far from being an unqualified evil. Instead, even the most despotic and abusive government may be, at the very least³, appreciated for that measure of security and order that it does provide society. On the other hand, anarchy, as a suspension of government, offers no such benefit, but instead is itself the absence of all security and protection.⁴ Thus, ". . . any, the worst form of government, is better than anarchy." (568)⁵

As things are actually and providentially ordered, however, a combination of forces, born of our nature and surroundings, all but preclude outright anarchy as an actualized and enduring condition. Indeed, the very existence of anarchy is restricted and circumscribed by these forces to that of a mere possibility or tendency always checked in its operation, more or less effectively, by an effective counter-tendency. Anarchy then, when it does occur, is a strictly ephemeral condition which results from a temporary suspension of the action of government, from whatever causes. In contrast, the tendency of government to abuse and oppression has no counter in nature whose inexorable operation could thus limit its existence, as with

³In fact, the providential role of despotic government extends far beyond that of being merely a disagreeable, painful, and even brutal alternative to anarchy, as I shall show in Chapter VIII, in a critical discussion of Calhoun's conception of liberty.

⁴Cf. Rudolph von Ihering: "Anarchy, that is to say the absence of any state force, is not a state at all, and anyone who puts an end to it by any means whatsoever, whether it be a usurper from within or a conqueror from without, renders a service to society. He is both a saviour and a benefactor, for of all states the most insupportable is that in which there is no state." Quoted by M. Prelot, *Dictionnaire de sociologie*, in an article titled "Autorite."

⁵See the "Speech on the Oregon Bill" [June 27, 1848].

anarchy, to a mere possibility, or at worst, to a fleeting and transitory episode, like a bad dream. Instead, to find a cure, or better yet, a preventative for such distempered government, we must look, Calhoun says, not to some natural cause, but to an artificial one. Specifically, "that, by which [abuse and oppression by government] is prevented, by whatever name called, is what is meant by CONSTITUTION, in its most comprehensive sense, when applied to GOVERNMENT." (9)⁶ And so constitution is an artificial, and not a natural cause of just and moderate government; whereas, again, government is a natural, and not an artificial cause of social order. This distinction of Calhoun's between the artificiality of constitution, on the one hand, and the natural character of society and government, on the other hand, is a crucially important one that requires further elaboration.

Towards such elaboration and clarification, let us first consider Calhoun's definition of constitution. Accordingly, for Calhoun, the term "constitution", in its most comprehensive sense, while it comprehends what is commonly called "constitution", or what I shall call henceforth "political constitution", also includes all the other means of resistance to governmental oppression. These other means include armed rebellion, tyrannicide, nonviolent civil disobedience, and a myriad of other means of resisting governmental abuse and oppression. Therefore, when we speak of "political constitution" then, we are, according to Calhoun, referring to constitution in the strict sense of the word. With this definition in hand, let us now return to our consideration of the artificial character of constitution.

First, we have shown that government and constitution each have

⁶And compare Aristotle in the *Politics*: "A constitution is the organization of offices in a state, and determines what is to be the governing body, and what is the end of each community." See Aristotle, *Politics*, in *Great Political Thinkers* (previously cited), 121.

their source or origin in the dual-principle of man's nature. Now, our aim is to explain how government differs significantly from constitution as regards their respective origins. For according to Calhoun, "[political] constitution is a contrivance of man, while government is of Divine ordination. [So] man is left to perfect what the wisdom of the Infinite ordained, as necessary to preserve the race." (10) As it turns out, the implications of this marked difference are many and profound. For indeed, the fact that government, and also society, are of Divine ordination, while constitution is of human contrivance, are those fundamental conditions which frame political life and pose one of the greatest challenges of man's earthly existence. Constitution, then, is the perfection of government, but is not essential to the existence of government or of society. But, to fully appreciate this fundamental and important difference between (natural) government and (artificial) constitution, we must understand first some of those differences which exist between society and government themselves.

First, society and government alike are "necessary to the existence and well-being of our race, and equally of Divine ordination." (8) But, "although [they] are . . . intimately connected with and dependent upon each other -- of the two society is the greater. [Society] is first in the order of things, and in the dignity of its object; that of society being primary -- to preserve and perfect our race; and that of government secondary and subordinate, to preserve and perfect society." (8) And so, reminiscent of Aristotle, there is for Calhoun a natural order of objects or ends with regard to which things are arranged. And the things and order specified here is of course: society first, and then government. But this order, it should be emphasized, is not a temporal one,

according to which actual or historical societies precede into existence the respective governments which are their protectors. For in specifying their different objects, Calhoun underscores explicitly the contrast between the direct relation of society to the race, on the one hand, and the indirect relation of government to the race, on the other hand. Thus Calhoun ranks society and government with regard to the relative dignity of their respective ends or objects, and independently of any other consideration.

Calhoun's aim here is to describe, in good Aristotelian order, the most fundamental natural relations between man, society, and government against the backdrop of a more general account of a resultant natural hierarchy of means and ends. Society is the more proximate means, and government, the more remote means, to the preservation and perfection of the race. Therefore, so far as political science is concerned, there is no end beyond the preservation and perfection of the race. And this circumstance is itself pregnant with important implications. For if, as we noted in Chapter I, political science is the ruling science; then the dignity and value of the ultimate end of that science must exceed the dignity and value of the corresponding ultimate ends in every other science. For example, the corresponding ultimate ends of economics and moral science appear to be, respectively, the material sustenance and prosperity of man and the spiritual preservation and perfection of the individual. However, weighty as these ends of moral and economic science are, they must be, on the previous supposition, of less moment and import than the preservation and perfection of the race. Having underscored this important implication of Calhoun's view on the respective ends of society and government, it is necessary for us

now to return to the central thread of our discourse, whose aim is to indicate the importance of the difference between the natural character of society and government, on the one hand, and the artificial nature of political constitution, on the other hand. Toward this end, let us begin by considering the natural character of society.

In explicating Calhoun's view that society is natural, we may -- for reasons that will soon be apparent -- choose as our starting point his observation that the human race is not comprehended in a single society or community, and then examine his account of the cause of this circumstance. Thus Calhoun observes that the human race, in every age and wherever found, is naturally and inevitably comprehended in a plurality of more or less well-organized societies or communities, and is never found to subsist as a mere aggregate of individuals, or even as a single unitary community. (11)

In his causal account of this circumstance, Calhoun writes:

The limited reason and faculties of man, the great diversity of language, customs, pursuits, situation and complexion⁷, and the difficulty of intercourse, with various causes, have, by their operation, formed a great many separate communities, acting independently of each other. Between these there is the same tendency to conflict -- and from the same constitution of our nature -- as between men individually; and even stronger -- because the sympathetic or social feelings are not so strong between different communities, as between individuals of the same community. (11)

And so the tendency to conflict between individuals has an analogue

⁷Calhoun was not unaware of the complex and crucially important causal role of complexion in social and political organization and evolution. For example, in his "Speech on the Proposed Occupation of Yucatan" (Senate, May 15, 1848), commenting on recent antagonisms between Indians and European settlers in that region, Calhoun wrote, with characteristic honesty and insight:

I have no aversion to any race, red or black, but my sympathies are for the white race. I am not so much sophisticated by misguided philosophy or false philanthropy as to lose the natural feelings which belong to me.

in and shares a common source with the tendency to conflict between communities. But, as one should be able to surmise from reflection on this and contiguous passages in the Disquisition (10-12), Calhoun gives us much more than an explanation of the circumstance that the human race tends always to be comprehended in a plurality of separate communities. Indeed, within such passages, we have the outlines of a theory of feeling or sentiment in terms of which not only the geographical extent and boundaries of historical communities may be explained; but also, we have what is evidently an essential element of a general metaphysical account of human warfare, an account in the tradition, for example, of that great philosopher of war, Karl von Clausewitz (1780-1831).⁸ Pointing up this element, the Carolinian writes:

So powerful, indeed, is [the] tendency [to conflict between communities], that it has led to almost incessant wars between contiguous communities for plunder and conquest, or to avenge injuries, real or supposed. (11)

Therefore, not only may society, government, and political constitution be explained in terms of the “two-fold constitution of [man’s] nature”, but the existence of separate communities, political boundaries, alliances, and interpolity wars as well. Hence communities, like individuals, partake of sentiments or feelings, individual and social, and therefore: “Self-preservation is the supreme law, as well with communities as individuals.” (11) Unlike von Clausewitz, however, Calhoun spent far more time and energy examining and explaining those conflicts that occur within communities than on those which occur between independent political communities.

⁸ A contemporary of Calhoun, see Clausewitz’ famous and influential treatise On War (1833).

As a constitutional theorist and statesman, Calhoun was mostly concerned with effectively counteracting the tendency to conflict between those orders, classes, or interests which together compose the general community. Still, it would be an error to suppose, for example, that Calhoun's concentration on the causes of intrapolity conflict is a mere reflection of those particular struggles which preoccupied him as a statesman. Instead, Calhoun's theoretical speech in the Disquisition suggests how the behavior of a polity, vis-a-vis other polities, depends to a large degree upon its internal political organization. Thus the manner in which a polity comes to conceive of its interests vis-a-vis other polities depends in large part, though not exclusively, on an internal relation between the society, on the one hand, and the structure and operational tendencies of its government, on the other hand. Thus Calhoun's emphasis in the Disquisition on the problems attending internal conflict apparently stems from a deep insight into the behavioral tendencies of polities.⁹

Another emphasis by Calhoun worth noting is that he focussed more on those problems relating directly to government than on those problems appertaining to the nature and evolution, for example, of those institutions, conventions, sympathies, and shared concerns which together constitute a society. Thus Calhoun was more a political than a social philosopher.

Calhoun did not, for example, give priority to tracing the causal relations between the dual-principle and those relations of authority, equality, and subordination which form an essential part of the spiritual fabric and

⁹ My conjecture here on the causes of Calhoun's emphasis on the intra-communal is not directly and unequivocally confirmed, for example, by any explicit, self-reflective statement by Calhoun himself. However, the various "structuralist" arguments of Calhoun which I present and review over the course of Part II of this work do seem to substantiate my conjecture. These arguments emphasize, as we shall see, the complex causal role of the structure of government.

essence of every civil society. Necessary features of all human association, the relations of authority, subordination, and equality, each in its proper place, play indispensable roles in the preservation and progress of the race. Being occupied with other matters, Calhoun also did not undertake to describe how, exactly, the dual-principle of our nature contributes to the formation of those diverse associations, including family, local community, and the church, which, taken together, form civil society, and in which the relations of authority, subordination, and equality must be played out. And yet, as we shall see directly, Calhoun's focus on the more strictly political and governmental is replete with helpful intimations for the social philosopher.

For indeed, as an active principle both animating and emanating from every individual person within these associations, the dual-principle, in either its actualization or mis-actualization, is surely one among the great causes which determines in the first place, what kinds of relations -- whether of equality, or of authority and subordination -- exist among individuals and among associations respectively in a given instance. Hence the interests or portions that make up a community may be, in relation to one another, on equal or unequal terms as regards their respective control of the powers of government, and as regards their capacities thereby, either to protect themselves from the other interests, or to aggrandize themselves at the expense of the other interests. Likewise, individuals, among themselves, may be equals or unequals. So a principal cause that determines all these relations, in a given instance, is the dual-principle, or how our individual and social feelings have been developed or misdeveloped.

Moreover, from the explicit pronouncements which Calhoun does

offer, we can readily see that it is through the operation of both aspects of the dual-principle, with the active principles of sociality and primacy working in combination with one another, that social wholes or associations are formed. In this sense, the dual-principle is a principal cause of the formation and maintenance of all human associations, ranging from the most elementary form, the family, to the most complex forms, which include whole civil societies, and confederacies or looser alliances between such communities.¹⁰ Also, the two principles, through their joint operation, and through that conditioning which they undergo at the hands of institutional forms, including the structure of government, contribute much toward establishing the membership, the boundaries, and the distinctive dispositions and priorities of the individual members of these associations, and therefore, of the associations themselves.

Within any human association, the individual comes to identify at least a part of his own interest with that of the whole. Hence an association always expresses some aspect of the general conception of self-interest of its

¹⁰ For a brilliant, detailed, but still much-neglected philosophical discussion of the various forms of human association, "simple and private, or mixed and public", as well as of the outlines of their various relations one to another, see Johannes Althusius (1557-1638), *Politica* (1603), an abridged translation of Politics Methodically Set Forth and Illustrated with Sacred and Profane Examples.

The principal theorist of the justly-renowned Dutch Confederacy, Althusius begins his treatise *Politica* by stating that conception of the science for which he will argue systematically:

Politics is the art of associating (*consociandi*) men for the purpose of establishing, cultivating, and conserving social life among them. Whence it is called "symbiotics." The subject matter of politics is therefore association (*consociatio*), in which the symbiotes [*symbiotici*: those who live together] pledge themselves each to the other, by explicit or tacit agreement, to mutual communication of whatever is useful and necessary for the harmonious exercise of social life.

The end of political "symbiotic" man is holy, just, comfortable, and happy symbiosis, a life lacking nothing either necessary or useful.

See Johannes Althusius, *Politica* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1995), 17.

individual members, and this is the common interest whose pursuit is the natural end of the association itself -- a point that will become clearer in Chapter VI, where we discuss organism, or the second principle of constitution. Therefore every human association is formed and remains in existence for the sake of a collective pursuit of some shared good. Moreover, from the preceding extrapolations from Calhoun's explicit account of the dual-principle and related issues into the realm of social philosophical explanation, still others are suggested.

To wit: Human association, when viewed as a development of the dual-principle of our nature, is a means by which the individual can more effectually pursue his own good. Or, as in the case of the family, for example, where the relations of authority and subordination naturally predominate, association is a means by which the individual can be effectively directed in the pursuit of his own good. And so forms of association can be, of course, incalculably more advantageous to the individual than any solitary pursuit of the good. But in addition to facilitating pursuit by the self for the sake of the self, association also makes more effectual the assistance of and care for others. Thus association, at its best, and in its various forms, facilitates the actualization of individual natures through a more effectual pursuit of individual interests, by the self and by others. But having now suggested the positive role of associations in promoting human survival and flourishing, it remains to consider how corrupt forms of association militate against these goods. For although we may agree with Thomas Paine that society in every instance is a blessing¹¹, if by this he intends that men require society, it is

¹¹ See Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, ed. Henry Collins (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), see especially Ch. I "Of Society and Civilization", 185-192.

nevertheless true that human associations are not unqualified goods. For indeed, although of Divine ordination, human society and association, like government, is susceptible of corruption and ill-usage. And while the specific nature of the corruption and ill-use of which human associations are susceptible must form the subject of another study, it will do to give a general sense of this problem here.

As Calhoun suggests in the Disquisition (52), human associations at their best involve an enlistment of the individual on the side of the social feelings to promote the good of the whole community; whereas, at their worst, they involve an enlistment of the social feelings on the side of the individual to promote the interests of parties or factions¹² at the expense of the whole community. For example, a strong and sensible devotion to country is an instance wherein the individual has been enlisted on the side of social feelings, which include that just patriotism whose motive is the promotion of the common good of the whole community. (37) On the other hand, a betrayal of the common good out of devotion to party is an instance wherein the social feelings have been enlisted on the side of some individual or partial interest. (37)

Calhoun's account here of the social feelings associated with war, on the one hand, and with faction, on the other, was anticipated by Shaftesbury (1671-1713), whom we introduced in the previous chapter. On the social feelings as these tend naturally to be developed and manifested in war, Shaftesbury writes:

¹² James Madison (1751-1836), in The Federalist [1787], no. 10, defined faction thus:
By a faction I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.

'Tis strange to imagine that *War*, which of all things appears the most savage, shou'd [sic] be the Passion of the most heroic Spirits. But 'tis in *War* that the Knot of *Fellowship* is closest drawn. 'Tis in *War* that mutual Succour is most given, mutual Danger run, and *common Affection* most exerted and employ'd [sic]. For *Heroism* and *Philanthropy* are almost one and the same. ¹³

But the healthy and estimable forms of sociality associated with warfare are more closely related than one might expect to those destructive and opprobrious forms associated with oppression and faction. Thus Shaftesbury continues:

Yet by a small mis-guidance of the Affection, a Lover of Mankind becomes an Oppressor and Destroyer.

Hence other Divisions amongst Men. Hence, in the way of Peace and Civil Government, that *Love of Party*, and Subdivision by *Cabal*. For Sedition is a kind of *cantonizing* already begun within the State. To *cantonize* is natural; when the Society grows vast and bulky: And powerful States have found other Advantages in sending Colonys [sic] abroad, than merely that of having Elbow-room at home, or extending their Dominion into distant Countrys [sic]. ¹⁴

Again anticipating Calhoun, and a Calhounian theme that will be developed in later chapters, Shaftesbury sees that there exists an important causal connection between the form or structure of a community's government, on the one hand, and the specific manner in which the social feelings tend to develop or misdevelop, on the other hand. Exploring this connection, Shaftesbury writes:

Vast empires are in many respects unnatural: but particularly in this, That be they ever so well constituted, the Affairs of many must, in such Governments, turn upon a very few; and the Relation be less sensible, and in a manner lost, between the Magistrate and People, in a Body so unwieldy in its Limbs, and whose Members lie so remote from one another, and distant from the Head.

¹³ Shaftesbury, 3rd Earl of (Anthony Ashley Cooper), *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (London: 1732), 113.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 113.

'Tis in such Bodys as these that strong Factions are aptest to engender. The associating Spirits, for want of Exercise, form new Movements, and seek a narrower Sphere of Activity, when they want Action in a greater. Thus we have *Wheels within Wheels*. And in some National Constitutions, notwithstanding the Absurdity in Politicks [sic], we have *one Empire within another*.¹⁵

So the social feelings, like the individual and other feelings, must have some developmental outlet; and this development, in communities governed imperially, tends to produce and to perpetuate divisive associations, or factions of various sorts. Moreover, within empires, the processes by which factitious feelings and associations are developed and perpetuated tend to become so ingrained in the national consciousness as to become amusing pastimes, and eventually, traditions. Describing such perverse and destructive circumstances, Shaftesbury writes:

Nothing is so delightful as to incorporate. *Distinctions* of many kinds are invented. *Religious Societys* are formed. *Orders* are erected; and their Interests espous'd [sic], and serv'd [sic], with the utmost Zeal and Passion. Founders and Patrons of this sort are never wanting. Wonders are perform'd [sic], in this wrong social Spirit, by those Members of separate Societys [sic]. And the *associating Genius* of Man is never better prov'd [sic], than in those very Societys [sic], which are form'd [sic] in opposition to the general one of Mankind, and to the real Interest of the State.

In short, the very Spirit of *Faction*, for the greatest part, seems to be no other than the Abuse or Irregularity of that *social Love*, or

¹⁵Ibid, 114.

common Affection, which is natural to mankind.¹⁶

According to both Calhoun and Shaftesbury, then, the various associations which together make up civil society are corrupted when the naturally subordinate ends or interests of associations intermediate to government and the individual become objects of “greater solicitude” for their members than “the safety and prosperity” of the general community. (37) Hence the health or corruption of such associations is to be explained in terms of the particular expressions and forms which allegiance takes. And specific allegiances are, in turn, the result of the manner in which the dual-principle of human nature is developed and conditioned in a given instance. This broad distinction between healthy and corrupt forms of association

¹⁶*Ibid*, 114-115. And apparently, the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico, inspired by Shaftesbury’s account of the corruption of social feeling, formed his own historical, circular conception of the rise, maturity, decline, and fall of nations in his *New Science* (1725). Vico held that this corruption is part of a more general phenomenon which he describes as a reversion into barbarism. But this barbarism differs from the barbarism from which men first arose; it is not the barbarism “of sense”, but the barbarism “of reflection.”

In *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), Chapter 1, 42-43, Donald P. Verene describes, in Vichian terms, the corruption of social feeling:

When a people declines there is an overgrowth of the self by the passions. The individual becomes the lair of the passions, rather than a force of character directing them.

. . . The return to barbarism is not simply yielding to the baser passions. It involves a corruption of the highest faculties of the soul – *memoria, fantasia* (imagination), and *ingegno* (wit, ingenuity). In the barbarism of reflection we become beasts of the intellect formed as an instrument of desire. The powers of the mind are put in the service of the passions in order to lie, trick, misrepresent, steal, hide, and deceive. All life becomes politics. . . .

The barbarism of reflection that is typical of the end of a nation’s life is like that at the lowest level of Dante’s *Inferno* (cantos 30-34). Those who have committed sins of the body or sins of violent greed are not at this level; at this lowest level are those who have violated humanity itself by poisoning the common confidences necessary to human society. They turn their *ingegno* into *insidia*. They live like the *lonza* (“leopard”), the third of the three beasts that impede Dante’s way at the beginning of the *Divina commedia*. They are the falsifiers in words and deeds, the corrupters of the social fabric. At this level the social nature of humanity is eroded by fraud, by treacheries against guests and hosts, friends and intimates, and relatives. The barbarians of reflection are the last men, who have turned the intellect into an insidious instrument; they are devoid of virtue and full of desire.

suggests, in turn, that the development of feelings and the manner in which interests are conceived are intimately related phenomena. Hence the processes by which the human sentiments may be developed and conditioned must be of the greatest concern to the statesman.

Also, it should be noted here that the distinction between healthy and corrupt forms of association suggests that there exists an ultimate commensurability between the interests of all the various individuals that make up a political order, as well as between the respective interests of the various natural intermediate associations that make up the general community, including families, the farming interest, the mercantile interest, and so on. And so each type of assemblage or association existing intermediately -- or between the individual and the general community -- has a natural end which its members are to be solicitous of in proper proportion, so that the respective natural ends of the individual and the general community may also be properly cultivated and attained. But the great problem here, of course, is that human understanding and feeling, as actualized conditions, often work in opposition to a true or sound conception of interest. Therefore the natural ends of individuals and associations, as well as the proper means of pursuing these ends, are not automatically and infallibly recognized and pursued by men. Thus, for example, associations may be formed whose members, working from a false understanding of interest and animated by base and unpatriotic feeling, exert a force contrary to the general welfare of society. More often, however, it is the case that associations which were originally formed on the supposition of the more effectual pursuit of a bona fide and real interest, degenerate by degrees into

factitious and partial associations whose actions are destructive of the true interest of the general community, and therefore, of the interests of all the individual members of that community.

Short of giving an exhaustive treatment of the topic of the commensurability of natural ends and interests here, let us note that, whatever the extent of their susceptibility to corruption, associations are necessary, inescapable, and indispensable forms through which man must pursue his good and the good of others. And it is, specifically, the associations of families, neighborhoods, and churches that give to civil society its substance, structure, and spirit. Occupying a middle position between the individual and the government of the general community, these associations serve as mediative organs, protective buffers, and paedetic structures whose contributions to the ends of human survival and flourishing are so vast as to be without precise calculation. In addition, these intermediate institutions have as part of their natural and proper ends the “assist[ing of] people who need assistance by giving charity or advise or consolation or companionship.”¹⁷

In his brilliant but now much neglected treatise on government titled Politica, the German theorist Johannes Althusius (1557-1638) identified the family as the most fundamental political unit.¹⁸ Similarly, the great nineteenth century Southern Presbyterian theologian Robert L. Dabney (1820-1894) described the family as a “little commonwealth”, and Virginia as a “commonwealth of commonwealths.” In asserting that the family, and not the individual, for example, is the most fundamental political unit,

¹⁷See Robert H. Bork, Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline (New York: ReganBooks, 1997), 329.

¹⁸See Johannes Althusius, Politica (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), 27-32.

Althusius and Dabney were following in a tradition that included, for example, St. Augustine, and which would also include Calhoun. In the City of God (413-426), Augustine (354-430) characterized the fundamental moral and political role of the family in this way:

Now a man's house ought to be the beginning, or rather a small component part of the city, and every beginning is directed to some end of its own kind, and every component part contributes to the completeness of the whole of which it forms a part. The implication is quite apparent, that domestic peace contributes to the peace of the city -- that is, the ordered harmony of those who live together in a house in the matter of giving and obeying orders, contributes to the ordered harmony concerning authority and obedience obtaining among the citizens. Consequently it is fitting that the father of a household should take his rules from the law of the city, and govern his household in such a way that it fits in with the peace of the city.¹⁹

And from the family as the primary form of political association come derivative and more extensive forms such as the village, the city, the province, the state, and the nation. Therefore politics requires communion with the other, and cannot be established or maintained solely by the self; and civil society consists of intermediate associations that serve as mediating structures between government and the individual.

Still, the main point to remember here is that, whatever their extent and wherever found, political associations are formed in large part through the reciprocal inter-action of the two elements which together make up the dual-principle of our nature. For in the act of association, individual feeling extends, as it were, beyond the individual, and this extension makes possible the identification by the individual of his interest with the interests of others, and thereby, the recognition of a common good. Operating at the same time,

¹⁹ St. Augustine, City of God (London: Penguin Group, 1984), 876.

social feeling, and specifically our capacity through sympathy to register the significance for others of conditions in which they find themselves, makes possible a re-inforcement of the self-interested impulse to associate. Therefore, sociality and the primacy of individual feeling each play a vital role in forming and sustaining communities; and their causal interaction one with the other is essential to the formation and maintenance of all political association.

Also, as regards the natural character of human society, we should note that, due in large part to the influence of the dual-principle, human community tends naturally to assume a composition and structure that precludes the possibility of a mere aggregate of individuals, or the formation and subsistence of an undifferentiated mass of people. Thus, in combination with other forces, the dual-principle gives rise, in every instance, to a rich and varied fabric of social relations which, however problematic or flawed, has as its ultimate natural ends the preservation and perfection of the race. And so, to summarize: According to Calhoun, the dual-principle is the cause of society or community, as well as the source of its fundamental problem, or tendency to dissolution; and analogously, the dual-principle is also, as we have seen, the cause of that controlling power which is government, as well as the source of its fundamental problem, or tendency to abuse and oppression. But still, this summary falls far short of describing, or even of suggesting, the full causal force of the dual-principle. For as we have already seen, this principle may be employed to explain a much wider range of phenomena, including, for example, factions, war, and patriotism.

Having now considered a whole range of issues appertaining to the

origin and nature of society, we may now proceed with our explication and analysis of the origin and nature of that “controlling power that is GOVERNMENT.” But recall that our aim in this chapter, in addition to examining Calhoun’s description of the origin and nature of society and government, is to begin at least to explain the rationale and significance of his claim that society and government are of Divine ordination, whereas constitution is a contrivance of man. (10) Still, in order to gauge the significance of this claim, as it is to be both suggested and demonstrated in the chapters that follow, we must first complete our examination of Calhoun’s conception of the origin and nature of Divinely ordained government.

Government, in contradistinction to society, is that controlling power, “wherever vested, or by whomsoever exercised” which tends to prevent the disintegration of civil society resulting from a natural and contrary tendency to universal conflict between individuals. This conflict, or rather, the universal tendency of each person to conflict with every other, is, as we noted earlier, a natural consequence of the operation of the dual-principle, and of the principle of the primacy of individual feeling in particular. For recall that each individual, by virtue of the primacy relation, tends naturally to have a greater regard for his own safety or happiness, than for the safety or happiness of others; “and, where these come in opposition, is ready to sacrifice the interests of others to his own.” (7) But it is man’s immediate experience of the tendency of every other to have a greater regard for self, his recognition of the same tendency on his own part, and a sense of the danger to all that must attend any fuller actualization of this tendency, which together make

possible the advent and subsistence of government as a solution to this problem of universal conflict. Hence man becomes reconciled to the external form of restraint imposed on his passions by government through his acknowledgement and acceptance of this important truth about his nature. Where men have rebelled against such acceptance, in whatever way, they have rebelled against not any particular form of government, but against the institution of government itself, and jeopardized not merely their well-being, but their very existence. But such rebellions, when they occur, are the issue of men whose delusion stems either from a natural eccentricity of character or from extraordinary external circumstances, or from some combination of these factors. And the punishment for such rebellion, and the correction of its error, is never long in coming; taking the form either of despotism from within or of subjection from without.

But, while government is that controlling power which naturally and inexorably arises to counter the tendency to "a state of universal discord and confusion, destructive of the social state and the ends for which it is ordained"; government itself may be kept from fulfilling the ends for which it was ordained by its tendency to abuse and oppression, or by the fact that the powers of government "cannot exercise themselves", but "must be administered by men in whom, like others, the individual are stronger than the social feelings." (9) And so it is only through the successful and ongoing counter-action of this tendency to abuse and oppression that government can, with regularity, persistence, and thoroughness, fulfill its great ends of protecting and perfecting society. Thus the natural ends of society, government, and political constitution are intimately related and connected.

And indeed, the interdependency of these ends was duly noted by Calhoun.

Having its origin in the same principle of our nature, constitution stands to government, as government stands to society; and, as the end for which society is ordained, would be defeated without government, so that for which government is ordained would, in a great measure, be defeated without constitution. (9)

But here, it is important that one not overlook Calhoun's qualification -- "in a great measure", because by it we are reminded that constitution differs from government in being a human contrivance, and not of Divine ordination. For recall that "Man is left to perfect what the wisdom of the Infinite ordained", and so, what is to be perfected are society and government, and the means man is to employ to effect this perfection is constitution. But, unlike the relation between society and government, in which the latter is charged with both the protection and perfection of the former: it is not necessary, in the last resort, for constitution to protect government per se because men will have government at any rate, as we have already shown. And this circumstance, it must be emphasized, should be considered as a Divine dispensation; and significantly, it is one that dramatically underscores human frailty and human limits.

For let us note that man is "left to perfect what the wisdom of the Infinite created", not to protect it. (10, emphasis added) Hence the suggestion by Calhoun here is that men -- in order to be entrusted with the duties not only of perfecting government, but with protecting it as well -- would have themselves to be constituted differently. And so the term "protection" here implies the preservation of government per se, and not, for example, the maintenance of a particular and desired form of government in the face of forces of devolution. Therefore man is not entrusted by the Divinity with the

task of preventing the total dissolution of government, any more than he is, as we saw earlier, entrusted with preventing the total dissolution of society.

For to suppose that man is so entrusted, one would have to suppose also that the all-wise and benevolent Divinity has equipped man with capacities by means of which such challenges might be successfully met. And so, in order to protect a government from total dissolution -- and not merely from its devolution into an absolute or more absolute form -- men would have to possess capacities, intellectual and moral, at least substantially greater or more powerful than those which they actually have. But this, of course, would be to alter human nature drastically, and to make us creatures of a fundamentally different sort; and this is a supposition which political inquiry, as a science bound to take men as they actually are, cannot grant.

In fact, when we gauge man's powers by recourse to personal experience and general history, what we find, of course, is not a being so replete with endowments, moral and intellectual, as to be capable, merely by a casual exercise of his own will, of holding government in existence, and thereby, of averting anarchy. Instead, we find a being of far humbler endowments who is compelled by necessity -- or by the force of unremitting circumstances -- to an abiding acquiescence in government. Indeed, when we look at man the political animal, we find a being of a race which has engaged for millenia in a tortuous and bloody struggle to discover and instantiate those principles by whose proper application government may be perfected only, but not protected. Therefore Providence has fitted man's capacities to his challenges, and has bid him long since to commence the struggle for improvement, redemption, and favor in the eyes of Him who man once

betrayed.

And so the end of constitution, as a human contrivance, is not to protect government, but to perfect it. But in order to perfect government, it is necessary first to arrive at an essentially correct assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of our nature. Thus the perfection of government through the instantiation of constitution is predicated on a more or less correct assessment of human nature, both as regards its actualized condition and its remaining potentiality. Such an assessment would, as it turns out, provide the materials for a methodological principle which Calhoun would embrace, a principle that was, in fact, a central feature in the writings of the Classical political economists. This principle is to be found, for example, in the writings of David Hume and John Stuart Mill.

Political writers have established it as a maxim, that, in contriving any system of government, and fixing several checks and controuls [sic] of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a knave, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest.²⁰

The very principle of constitutional government requires it to be assumed that political power will be abused to promote the particular purpose of the holder; not because it is always so, but because such is the natural tendency of things, to guard against which is the especial use of free institutions.²¹

But even if, for the sake of argument, one were to grant the supposition that man is possessed of moral and intellectual faculties that must render him superior to any natural tendency to abuse of governmental power, the question may be raised, of course, as to the need of political

²⁰ David Hume, "On the Independency of Parliament," Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 42.

²¹ J.S. Mill, Considerations on Representative Government, vol. 19 of Essays on Politics and Society, Collected Works (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 505.

constitution itself for beings so powerful and advanced. For in such case men would be more akin to creatures guided, as Hume says, by natural justice, and in no need whatever of government. Hence:

Had every man sufficient sagacity to perceive, at all times, the strong interest, which binds him to the observance of justice and equity, and strength of mind sufficient to persevere in a steady adherence to a general and a distant interest, in opposition to the allurements of present pleasure and advantage; there had never, in that case, been any such thing as government or political society, but each man, following his natural liberty, had lived in entire peace and harmony with others. What need of positive law where natural justice is, of itself, a sufficient restraint? Why create magistrates, where there never arises any disorder or iniquity? Why abridge our native freedom, when, in every instance, the utmost exertion of it is found innocent and beneficial? ²²

Constituted as we are, however, it is evident from the Divine organization of things that, whatever our powers, they are, as Calhoun says, not sufficient to ensure the all but perpetual protection and presence of government which we actually enjoy through a dispensation of the Divinity. Unable to destroy and efface the Divine creations that are society and

²²See David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principals of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1988), 34. A quite similar view is to be found in a widely misunderstood passage of Rousseau, from the *Social Contract* in *The Basic Political Writings*, 150:

. . . each individual can, as a man, have a private will contrary to or different from the general will that he has as a citizen. His private interest can speak to him in an entirely different manner than the common interest. His absolute and naturally independent existence can cause him to envisage what he owes to common cause as a gratuitous contribution, the loss of which will be less harmful to others than its payment is burdensome to him. And in viewing the moral person which constitutes the state as a being of reason because it is not a man, he would enjoy the rights of a citizen without wanting to fulfill the duties of a subject, an injustice whose growth would bring about the ruin of the body politic.

Thus, in order for the social compact to avoid being an empty formula, it tacitly entails the commitment – which alone can give force to the others – that whoever refuses to obey the general will will be forced to do so by the entire body. This means merely that he will be forced to be free. For this is the sort of condition that, by giving each citizen to the homeland, guarantees him against all personal dependence – a condition that produces the skill and the performance of the political machine, and which alone bestows legitimacy upon civil commitments. Without it such commitments would be absurd, tyrannical and subject to the worst abuses. (emphasis added)

government, even through the ignorance, vice, and folly of which he is susceptible, man is left to labor for the perfection of these creations. And so, as Calhoun tells us,

There is no difficulty in forming government. It is not even a matter of choice, whether there shall be one or not. Like breathing, it is not permitted to depend on our volition. Necessity will force it on all communities in some one form or another. Very different is the case as to constitution. Instead of a matter of necessity, it is one of the most difficult tasks imposed on man to form a constitution worthy of the name; while, to form a perfect one -- one that would completely counteract the tendency of government to oppression and abuse, and hold it strictly to the great ends for which it is ordained -- has thus far exceeded human wisdom, and possibly ever will. (9-10)

Such then is the nature of the Divinely constructed human condition as regards the basic structure of its more specifically political or public aspect.

And so it is, then, only by recourse to the first principle of politics -- the "dual-principle of our nature" -- that one can gain a proper and accurate idea of a perfect political constitution, a perfect government and of a perfect political order generally. The goal of human striving, in the political realm, is to hold government strictly to the ends for which it was ordained, namely, the protection and perfection of society. And it is, in turn, through the attainment of these ends that a society, as a spontaneous and evolving order formed by acts of association, is able to confer upon that portion of the race which it comprehends both protection and perfection. And so, the ultimate success or failure of the race to preserve and perfect itself turns largely on the success or failure of men to establish and maintain "a constitution worthy of the name."

A perfect government is one held strictly to the fulfillment of the great ends for which it was ordained; and a perfect constitution is that which does

the holding. Short of perfection, however, the best government is one held more or less strictly to its proper ends; and only a constitution which achieves this is one "worthy of the name." Therefore the question must be put, How is the tendency of government to abuse and oppression to be counteracted?:

Or, to express it more fully -- How can those who are invested with the powers of government be prevented from employing them, as the means of aggrandizing themselves, instead of using them to protect and preserve society? (10)

Having posed this "important and difficult" question, Calhoun proceeds to answer it, and begins by rejecting as inadequate two more or less plausible proposals.

It cannot be done by instituting a higher power to control the government, and those who administer it. [For] This would be but to change the seat of authority, and to make this bigger power, in reality, the government; with the same tendency, on the part of those who might control its powers, to pervert them into instruments of aggrandizement. Nor can it be done by limiting the powers of government, so as to make it too feeble to be made an instrument of abuse; for, passing by the difficulty of so limiting its powers, without creating a power higher than the government itself to enforce the observance of the limitations, it is a sufficient objection that it would, if practicable, defeat the end for which government itself is ordained, by making it too feeble to protect and preserve society. (10)

To fulfill, then, the great ends for which it is ordained, government must possess powers of a certain nature and extent as the means for the accomplishment of these ends. And it is in the liability of these powers or means to ill-usage that government's tendency to abuse and oppression resides. Moreover, it is, perhaps in part, through an analysis of the inadequate proposals presented above that Calhoun came to that insight which, once formulated into language, expresses the peculiar nature of the great political challenge that confronts men in every age. The challenge is

one of arriving, through experience, intellect, and imagination, at those particular, concrete arrangements whereby governmental power will be held in its exercise strictly to the fulfillment of its proper ends. This is a challenge with which every people struggles, more or less successfully, throughout the life of their community, because “The [governmental] powers necessary [to preserve and protect society] will ever prove sufficient to aggrandize those who control it, at the expense of the rest of the community.” (10) Thus the possibility of self-aggrandizement by the possessors of governmental power arises out of the necessary and unavoidable disposition and extent of those same powers. And so, according to Calhoun, the nature and extent of the powers of government can never be matters of indifference, since they are determined with regard to what powers will be required by government to fulfill its proper ends, as we shall see in Chapter VIII in our discussion of the proper ratio of power to liberty.²³ Yet still, as Calhoun also points out, the means required to fulfill these ends will always or of necessity be of an extent sufficient to encourage and make possible self-aggrandizement on the part of those in possession of power. Therefore, provisions will always be needed to counter-act this ever-present tendency to self-aggrandizement on the part of the rulers. But before examining the specific nature of the provisions that would be required, let us consider first the nature and extent of the powers that government actually needs.

For government is charged, first and foremost, with the protection of society, therefore the nature and extent of its powers are to be determined by reference to this end. And specifically:

In estimating what amount of power would be requisite to secure the

²³ There, I shall examine in more explicit fashion Calhoun’s conception of how government is to perfect society.

objects of government, we must take into the reckoning, what would be necessary to defend the community against external, as well as internal dangers. Government must be able to repel assaults from abroad, as well as to repress violence and disorders within.
(10-11)

Hence, so long as the race is comprehended in more than a single society or community, where these communities "act independently of each another", "exigencies will occur, in which the entire powers and resources of the community will be needed to defend its existence" (11):

When this is at stake, every other consideration must yield to it. [Because] Self-preservation is the supreme law, as well with communities as individuals. And hence the danger of withholding from government the full command of the power and resources of the state; and the great difficulty of limiting its powers consistently with the protection and preservation of the community. (11)

It is, therefore, through a consideration of the nature and necessity of governmental power that Calhoun is able to refine his original question concerning the problem of government, namely, "How is the tendency of government to abuse and oppression to be counteracted?". (10) And this original question, once refined, asks: "By what means can government, without being divested of the full command of the resources of the community, be prevented from abusing its powers?" (11)

This is a question, says Calhoun, involving difficulties which, "from the earliest ages, wise and good men have attempted to overcome -- but hitherto with but partial success" (11):

For this purpose many devices have been resorted to, suited to the various stages of intelligence and civilization through which our race has passed, and to the different forms of government to which they have been applied. The aid of superstition, ceremonies, education, religion, organic arrangements, both of the government and the community, has been, from time to time, appealed to. Some of the

most remarkable of these devices, whether regarded in reference to their wisdom and the skill displayed in their application, or to the permanency of their effects, are to be found in the early dawn of civilization --- in the institutions of the Egyptians, the Hindoos, the Chinese, and the Jews. The only materials which that early age afforded for the construction of constitutions, when intelligence was so partially diffused, were applied with consummate wisdom and skill. To their successful application may be fairly traced the subsequent advance of our race in civilization and intelligence, of which we now enjoy the benefits. For, without a constitution -- something to counteract the strong tendency of government to disorder and abuse, and to give stability to political institutions -- there can be little progress or permanent improvement. (11-12)

This passage in the Disquisition underscores both the historical character and the immense practical value of political constitution. Part of Calhoun's aim here is to call attention to the great variety of which governmental arrangements admit, on account of the variety of which human nature itself admits, as a determinate compound of potency and act. For man is susceptible in his development of various "stages of intelligence and civilization." Earlier innovations and advances have made possible our present enjoyment of accumulated wisdom and of all the material and spiritual benefits that this wisdom tends to confer. And it is, in particular, to innovations in politics, and especially, to the successful construction of political constitutions, that we owe that general progress which we as a race have already achieved, and hope to achieve in the future.

But there is even more to this passage, things only obliquely suggested, that will be evident only to the more discerning and experienced reader of Calhoun. And here we learn more about the kind of political thinker he was. Here indeed, at this level of interpretation, one can see how Calhoun's thinking is at the furthest remove from the deracinated and dreamlike

ruminations of the closet philosopher. For it was long before Calhoun that the practical merits of political constitution had been firmly and resoundingly established. Therefore Calhoun's role as a political thinker was not that of the hyper-abstract utopian idealist, but that of an inquirer into the operations of a political institution of proven efficacy.

So Calhoun was a philosophical expositor of government in general and of constitution in particular. This role suggests, in turn, that Calhoun, in his political philosophical reflections, was disposed to assign more weight and value to that wisdom embedded in traditions of political practice than to abstract theoretical models of dubious solidity.²⁴ Being first and foremost an expositor of political reality and experience, Calhoun upheld a method of theorizing that preserved a direct, unmediated relation to political practice.

²⁴ And, as it turns out, this more direct relation of the political thinker to political practice is, as Leo Strauss has observed, the mark of those theorists who together make up what has been called the Classical Republican tradition. (See Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?")

This is the political-theoretical tradition of Plato and Aristotle, and of Cicero, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas — a tradition eclipsed in popularity during modernity by a counter-tradition, but carried on nevertheless by thinkers like Hooker, Hume, Althusius, Burke, and Calhoun.

The modern counter to Classical Republicanism, comprised in fact of a group of related theoretical traditions, is represented by such mainstream thinkers as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Marx, and Rawls. Despite the various and important differences between these thinkers, each tended in his theorizing to assume a methodological standpoint from which the various traditions of political practice must be viewed non-diaphanously, or through the medium of prior theorizing. For example, with Hobbes and Marx there is the medium of their materialistic and mechanistic assumptions about nature; and with Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, and Rawls, there is, of course, the theoretical assumption of a state of nature. This basic methodological standpoint, predictably enough, tends to exercise a decisive and obfuscatory influence over the conclusions of the theorist concerning the causes and effects of specific practices. Hence, the peculiar methodological standpoint of the "modern" theorist must interfere with both the descriptive and prescriptive enterprises characteristic of political theorizing itself. In contrast, however, the Classical Republican theorist, although cognizant of the concerns and findings of the theoretical tradition with which he has a spiritual affinity, retains his direct relation to practice, because his own theoretical tradition is characterized by a direct methodological standpoint which precludes any ideational mediation that could interfere with effective observation and reflection on political practice.

It was, then, through both his first-hand and historical study of political reality, and not, for example, through some prior allegiance to a theoretical tradition, with all of its presuppositions and suggested practical agenda, that Calhoun came to favor some political practices and traditions over others. Believing that political practices and traditions can and should be observed and assessed directly with regard to their salutary or pernicious effects on man, and naturally favoring those practices and traditions most conducive to human survival and flourishing, Calhoun came to view human history as, in large degree, a struggle between better and worse political traditions.

Indeed, in his role as statesman, Calhoun viewed himself as perhaps a major player within a world-wide historical political struggle -- a struggle between two rival political traditions. By way of rounding out our initial account in this chapter of the significance and historical role of political constitution, it will do to indicate the nature of this struggle as well as to suggest Calhoun's part in that struggle.

The example and fate of the United States, as a system founded on the principle of federative and limited power was, Calhoun believed, of great and decisive influence historically. On this view, the course of subsequent history depended upon the success or failure of the American governmental experiment. So in 1833, during the nullification crisis, not only America, but the entire world, had reached yet again a critical juncture in its political development, and hence in its general moral and intellectual development as well. The eyes of the rest of the most advanced and civilized portion of the world were on the United States as these states struggled with the question as

to whether they were elements in a federal or a consolidated government.

In his "Speech on the Force Bill" [February 1833], Calhoun pointed to the meaning and significance of this struggle in America, and its place in human history. Speaking before the Senate, he declared that "the question in controversy involves that most deeply important of all political questions, whether ours is a federal or a consolidated government -- a question, on the decision of which depend, as I solemnly believe, the liberty of the people, their happiness, and the place which we are destined to hold in the moral and intellectual scales of nations." (439)

So far as its influence on the course of human history is concerned, the magnitude and ultimate issue of this American struggle could scarcely be overestimated:

[For] Never was there a controversy in which more important consequences were involved; not excepting that between Persia and Greece, decided by the battles of Marathon, Platea, and Salamis -- which gave ascendancy to the genius of Europe over Asia -- which, in its consequences, has continued to affect the destiny of so large a portion of the world even to this day. There are often close analogies between events apparently very remote, which are strikingly illustrated in this case. In the great contest between Greece and Persia, between European and Asiatic polity and civilization, the very question between the federal and the consolidated form of government was involved. The Asiatic governments, from the remotest time, with some exceptions on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, have been based on the principle of consolidation, which considers the community as but a unit, and consolidates its powers in a central point. The opposite principle has prevailed in Europe -- Greece, throughout all of her states, was based on a federal system. All were united in one common but loose bond, and the governments of the several States partook, for the most part, of a complex organization, which distributed political power among different members of the community. The same principles prevailed in ancient Italy; and if we turn to the Teutonic race, our great ancestors -- the race which occupies the first place in power, civilization, and science, and which possesses the largest and fairest part of Europe -- we shall find that their governments were

based on federal organization, (439-440)

As a philosophic expositor of government and constitution, then, Calhoun was able to gauge the historical significance not only of the outcome of the nullification crisis in nineteenth century America, but of “Marathon, Platea, and Salamis” as well, and to see the vital connections between these events remote in time from one another.

Beginning with the ancient Greeks, Europe gained and held a preeminence over Asia and the rest of the world which had endured up to his own day because its communities have, comparatively speaking,

embraced the principles of ordered liberty and limited government.²⁵ For these principles enhance greatly the power of the communities in which they are successfully instantiated, as will be clearly illustrated in Chapter VIII. Because of this greatly enhanced power, communities organized on the principle of constitution tend to enjoy a decided and sometimes overwhelming practical advantage over those organized on the principle of absolutism. This practical advantage, and the preeminence that it makes possible, are in fact the most conspicuous evidence of the great practical value

²⁵ The underlying social, cultural, and economic reasons for the Greek commitment to ordered liberty and limited government are brilliantly illuminated in Victor Davis Hanson, The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and The Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization (New York: Free Press, 1995). Departing from an urban emphasis and prejudice which has distorted our understanding of Classical Greece, Hanson locates the origin of the city-state in the historic innovation of the independent family farm, 3-4.

The rise of independent farmers who owned and worked without encumbrance their small plots at the end of the Greek Dark Ages was an entirely new phenomenon in history. This roughly homogenous agrarian class was previously unseen in Greece, or anywhere else in Europe and the surrounding Mediterranean area. Their efforts to create a greater community of agrarian equals resulted, I believe, in the system of independent but connected Greek city-states (*poleis*) which characterized Western culture. . . .

The original Greek *polis* is best understood as an exclusive and yet egalitarian community of farmers that was now to produce its own food, fight its own wars and make its own laws, a novel institution that was not parasitic on its countryside but instead protective of it. The history of the *polis*, then, should neither be seen primarily as linked to the rise of overseas trade and commerce, nor as a Malthusian race between population and food production, nor even as a war between the propertied and the landless, much less a saga of the intellectual brilliance of the urban few. All that is the Greece of the university and the lecture hall, not the Greece that concerns us today. Rather, the historical background of Greece, especially its democratic background, is best understood as the result of a widespread agrarianism among the rural folk who were the dynamos from which the juice of Hellenic civilization flowed.

...

The Greeks envisioned themselves uniquely as farmers and freeholders of vines, fruit-trees, and cereal land. "The largest class of men," Aristotle wrote, "live from the land and the fruits of its cultivation" (Pol. 1.1256a39-41).

Like Jefferson before him, Calhoun was an active and enthusiastic agriculturist, and understood first-hand the Greek teaching that virtues traditionally bred on the farm -- self-reliance, honesty, piety, a healthy suspicion of urban sophistication, and a stern ethic of accountability" -- are the core values of democratic citizenship.

of a "constitution worthy of the name."

And of course, the issue of whether the United States would henceforth possess a federal or a consolidated government was decided, at least for a time, over ten years after Calhoun's death, on the American battlefields of the 1860's. Yet significantly, the great English historian Lord Acton, in 1866, echoing Calhoun's prophecy about the general historical import of the struggle in America between the party for federalism and the party for consolidationism, somberly and insightfully remarked on the outcome of the military conflict, just concluded, which had, for a time, decided that issue. Assessing the place of the American war in history, Acton wrote:

The cause that was to triumph comes forth from the conflict with renovated strength, and confirmed in the principles which must react dangerously on the other countries of the world. The spurious liberty of the United States is twice cursed, for it deceives those whom it attracts and those whom it repels. By exhibiting the spectacle of a people claiming to be free, but whose love of freedom means hatred of inequality, jealousy of limitations of power, and reliance on the State as an instrument to mould as well as to control society, it calls on its admirers to hate aristocracy and teaches its adversaries to fear the people. The North has used the doctrines of Democracy to destroy self-government. The South applied the principle of conditional federation to cure the evils and to correct the errors of a false interpretation of Democracy.²⁶

On this view, the Southern Confederacy represented the last great effort by Western civilization to stem the tide of a compelling and in some ways new form of the old Asiatic political absolutism, a form born of an imbalance between the principles of power and liberty which it was the distinction of the West to have mastered, at least for a time. This new and beguiling form of

²⁶ See "The Civil War in America: Its Place in History" in Lord Acton, Essays in the History of Liberty (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1985), 278.

the old despotism would employ, in succession, the alienating operation of a radical individualism, and the levelling operation of a radical collectivism; operations whose combined effects would be to reduce and to subjugate civil society as never before; to isolate the individual from the voluntary associations from which he once secured cultivation and protection; and to place him, completely helpless, exposed, and impoverished, both materially and spiritually, before the vast and unprecedented power of the modern totalitarian state.²⁷

As an eloquent and redoubtable defender of constitution and ordered liberty during his own lifetime, as a statesmanly model for Southerners including Jefferson Davis, and as the spiritual father of the Confederate Constitution of 1861, Calhoun has already descended to posterity as a central figure in the American struggle between absolute government and constitution. But still, there remains the more difficult task of assessing Calhoun's place in world history both as a philosopher and as a statesman. For it is evidently only against the backdrop of the monumental and momentous world-wide historical struggle between the rival traditions of absolutism and consolidationism, on the one hand, and constitutionalism and federalism, on the other hand, that we may begin to assess the importance of Calhoun's contributions to political theory and to the statesmanly art.

²⁷ David Hume described one aspect of this novel despotism in his essay "Of Public Credit." Whereas it was "the common practice of antiquity, to make provision, during peace, for the necessities of war, and to hoard up treasures before-hand, as the instruments either of conquest or defense", the "modern expedient" is "to mortgage the public revenues, and to trust that posterity will pay off the incumbrances contracted by their ancestors: And they, having before their eyes, so good an example of their wise fathers, have the same prudent reliance on *their* posterity; who, at last, from necessity more than choice, are obliged to place the same confidence in a new posterity."

By way of suggesting the universal significance of Calhoun's ideas in this chapter, I have shown, for example, that one of Calhoun's principal aims as a political philosopher was to provide a satisfactory answer to the question: "How is . . . [the] tendency of government to abuse and oppression to be counteracted?" (10)

Along the way toward answering this fundamental question, we have seen how Calhoun recasts the question successively; a fact, as it turns out, that is not without significance. Thus the second formulation of this question is: "How can those who are invested with the powers of government be prevented from employing them, as the means of aggrandizing themselves, instead of using them to protect and preserve society?" (10); and the third, "By what means can government, without being divested of the full command of the resources of the community, be prevented from abusing its powers?" (11)

As presented in the Disquisition, these subsequent recastings of the original question regarding the fundamental problem of government serve to underscore the great issues encompassed by the question, namely, the security of the community physically, in the face of internal and external threats, and the preservation of its liberty against the advances and aggrandizement of distempered government. And having now presented the question in its various forms, and suggested thereby its scope and fundamentality, we shall soon proceed in the next two chapters to present Calhoun's answer to this question. There, we shall find an account of those necessary and sufficient elements of which any genuine political constitution consists.

But in order to suggest ahead of time what is in fact the great significance of Calhoun's answer, both historically and philosophically, to this

question, I shall proceed now with the comparison, begun in Chapter III, between the political scientific project of Calhoun and the philosophical-historical project of Immanuel Kant. In the course of this comparison, similarities will emerge, in addition to those already noted, between the Disquisition and Kant's "Idea for a Universal History." While keeping in view that their philosophical agendas differ somewhat, we shall see that striking similarities exist between the manner in which Calhoun and Kant conceived what I have called the fundamental problem of government, or its tendency to abuse and oppression.

Unlike Calhoun, Kant leaves the problem of government unsolved. Nevertheless, as we shall see, Kant does describe the problem in rather specific terms, and perhaps contributes thereby to its eventual solution.

In the previous chapter we saw how Kant's aim in his "Idea for a Universal History" was to find a "guiding principle" in terms of which a definitive explanation of human history could be made. This principle is presented in the form of six propositions, the last two of which appertain most directly to the problem of government. Proposition Five states that "The greatest problem for the human species, the solution of which nature compels him to seek, is that of attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally"; while Proposition Six declares that "This problem is both the most difficult and the last to be solved by the human race." But now to ascertain what Kant intended, let us consider these propositions in the light of the elaboration that their author provides.

In his elaboration of Proposition Five, Kant gives us a glimpse of an ideal political constitution, and suggests what role it would play in protecting

and perfecting our species. Here Kant argues, as Calhoun would later, both that society is indispensable to human flourishing and that political constitution is a human contrivance whose aim is the perfection of government, and thereby, the protection and full development of the species.

Kant writes:

The highest purpose of nature -- i. e., the development of all natural capacities -- can be fulfilled for mankind only in society, and nature intends that man should accomplish this, and indeed all his appointed ends, by his own efforts. This purpose can be fulfilled for mankind only in a society which has the greatest freedom, and therefore a continual antagonism among its members, but also the most precise specification and preservation of the limits of this freedom in order that it can co-exist with the freedom of others. The highest task which nature has set for mankind must therefore be that of establishing a society in which freedom under external laws would be combined to the greatest possible extent with irresistible force²⁸, in other words of establishing a perfectly just civil constitution. For only through the solution and fulfillment of this task can nature accomplish its other intentions with our species.²⁹

As we shall see in the coming chapters, the ideal of constitutional government which Kant outlines here finds its fuller development as Calhoun's doctrine of the concurrent majority. Calhoun explains, for example: how maximum freedom under the law can be combined with "irresistible force"; how that antagonism between individuals born of

²⁸ The "irresistible force" Kant refers to here is the power of the community, moral and physical, which government, as the agent of the community, may be authorized to wield for the sake of that community's protection. In Chapter VIII, I discuss this communal power and its relation both to the liberty of the individual and to those powers delegated by the sovereign, whether popular or otherwise, to government for the sake of protecting the general community. Also, Kant's view that communal power and freedom under the law may be maximized together under genuine constitution is reflected in Calhoun's view that "the more perfectly a government combines power and liberty -- that is, the greater its power and the more enlarged and secure the liberty of individuals, the more perfectly it fulfils the ends for which government is ordained." (45)

²⁹ Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" in Great Political Thinkers: Plato to the Present, ed. by Alan O. Ebenstein and William Ebenstein, fifth edition (Forth Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 536.

human nature must persist³⁰, yet may be transfigured into a beneficent force; and how, in specific terms, sound political constitution makes possible the fulfillment of human capacities. Also, as we shall see in Chapter VII, Kant anticipates, in a general way, Calhoun's account of the influence on morals of constitutional government. At present, however, we are concerned most of all with the problem of government, as we have called it, and how Kant evidently anticipated and perhaps influenced Calhoun on this score. Kant's discussion of this problem in the "Idea for a Universal History" comes in his elaboration of Proposition Six, which declares that "The [problem of attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally] is both the most difficult and the last to be solved by the human race."³¹

Elaborating on his sixth and final proposition, Kant demonstrates, in specific terms, that he understands fully what I have called the problem of government.³² Kant approaches the problem in much the same way that we saw Calhoun addressing it earlier in this chapter. For both philosophers, government has its origin in human nature, yet the problem of government has its origin there as well. Thus Kant writes:

The difficulty (which the very idea of this problem clearly presents) is this: if he lives among others of his own species, man is an animal who needs a master. For he certainly abuses his freedom in relation to others of his own kind. And even although, as a rational creature, he desires a law to impose limits on the freedom of all, he is still misled

³⁰ And compare Calhoun in the Disquisition: "Those who exercise power and those subject to its exercise – the rulers and the ruled – stand in antagonistic relations to each other. The same constitution of our nature which leads rulers to oppress the ruled – regardless of the object for which government is ordained – will, with equal strength, lead the ruled to resist, when possessed of the means of making peaceable and effective resistance." (pp. 12-13)

³¹ Kant, "Idea for a Universal History . . .", 536.

³² But understanding the problem of government is not the same as understanding its solution, as we shall see in the case of Kant in Chapter VI, where we find him denying any role for resistance to the legislator, and thereby, as I shall show in Chapters V and VI, undermining the entire project of political constitution in counteracting the tendency of government to abuse and oppression.

by his self-seeking animal inclinations into exempting himself from the law where he can. He thus requires a master to break his self-will and force him to obey a universally valid will under which everyone can be free. But where is he to find such a master? Nowhere else but in the human species. But this master will also be an animal who needs a master. Thus while man may try as he will, it is hard to see how he can obtain for public justice a supreme authority which would itself be just, whether he seeks this authority in a single person or in a group of many persons selected for this purpose. For each one of them will always misuse his freedom if he does not have anyone above him to apply force to him as the laws should require it. Yet, the highest authority has to be just in itself and yet also a man.³³ This is therefore the most difficult of all tasks, and a perfect solution is impossible. Nothing straight can be constructed from such warped wood as that which man is made of. Nature only requires of us that we should approximate to this idea.³⁴

So government, of itself, is problematic because it is necessarily administered by men in whom the individual feelings are felt more intensely than the social feelings (Calhoun) or in whom the "self-seeking animal inclinations" and a desire for natural freedom tend to predominate if left unchecked (Kant). And the "master" Kant speaks of here is of course a

³³ And recall Calhoun, who begins by posing the question: "How can those who are invested with the powers of government be prevented from employing them, as the means of aggrandizing themselves, instead of using them to protect and preserve society?" (10)

Having posed this "important and difficult" question, Calhoun proceeds to answer it. He points out that: "It cannot be done by instituting a higher power to control the government, and those who administer it. [For] This would be but to change the seat of authority, and to make this bigger power, in reality, the government; with the same tendency, on the part of those who might control its powers, to pervert them into instruments of aggrandizement."

And, going a step further in his analysis, Calhoun points out: "Nor can it be done by limiting the powers of government, so as to make it too feeble to be made an instrument of abuse; for, passing by the difficulty of so limiting its powers, without creating a power higher than the government itself to enforce the observance of the limitations, it is a sufficient objection that it would, if practicable, defeat the end for which government itself is ordained, by making it too feeble to protect and preserve society." (10)

³⁴ See Kant, "Idea for a Universal History . . ." 536-537, and cp. Calhoun: "It may be difficult, or even impossible, to make a perfect organism — but, although this be true, yet even when, instead of the sense of each and of all, it takes that of a few great and prominent interests only, it would still, in a great measure, if not altogether, fulfil the end intended by a constitution." (22-23)

constitutional structure so designed as to hold government strictly to the great ends for which it was ordained (Calhoun) and to attain a “civil society which can administer justice universally” (Kant).

But for Kant, overcoming the problem posed by the human agency of government is one great cause of the difficulty of “attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally”, but it is not the only cause. Listing other causes that have prevented the attainment of such a society, and, by such listing, describing in positive terms the pre-conditions for this society, Kant also -- and quite inadvertently, of course -- gives us some sense of the value of the historical significance of Calhoun’s theory of constitution as a contribution to politics, both practical and theoretical.

Thus in the closing passage of his “Idea for a Universal History . . .”, Kant says:

A further reason why this task must be the last to be accomplished is that man needs for it a correct conception of the nature of a possible constitution, great experience tested in many affairs of the world, and above all else a good will prepared to accept the findings of this experience. But three factors such as these will not easily be found in conjunction, and if they are, it will happen only at a late stage and after many unsuccessful attempts.³⁵ (emphasis added)

In the next two chapters, I shall examine Calhoun’s conception of the elements of constitution, presenting in these successive essays two principles which Calhoun believed constitute sound constitutional government when taken together and applied properly to a community fit for such government. These principles are the right of suffrage, and something which Calhoun calls “organism.” As we review these principles of constitution, then, let us consider whether or not together they form the “correct conception” of

³⁵ Kant, “Idea for a Universal History . . .”, 537.

constitution which Kant held to be one of three necessary conditions of “a civil society which can administer justice universally³⁶.”

³⁶ With this final passage by Kant, he may also have explained why Calhoun’s philosophical theory of constitution, and his doctrine of concurrent majority in particular, have not yet been given that critical attention and acclaim which invariably attends political ideas which men are eager to translate into practice. Assuming that Calhoun’s conception of constitution is essentially correct, what remains is for men to gain more experience (or, at least, to learn more from experience which they already have) and to attain a good will necessary to “accept the findings of this experience.”

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF CONSTITUTION

Power can only be resisted by power – and tendency by tendency. Those who exercise power and those subject to its exercise – the rulers and the ruled – stand in antagonistic relations to each other. The same constitution of our nature which leads rulers to oppress the ruled – regardless of the object for which government is ordained -- will, with equal strength, lead the ruled to resist, when possessed of the means of making peaceable and effective resistance.

– John C. Calhoun, A Disquisition on Government

In the preceding chapter we began our examination of Calhoun's account of the origin of political constitution, and found that he located that origin in the "two-fold constitution of [man's] nature." We saw how the constitution of man is the source not only of society and government, but of the perfection of these through political constitution. What remains to be considered, however, is Calhoun's answer to the question addressing what I have called the fundamental problem of government. For recall that the basic question, susceptible of a variety of formulations, is: How can the tendency of government to abuse and oppression be counteracted? In this chapter, we shall examine the first of two elements or principles which together form a constitution. This first or primary element of constitution is the right of suffrage.

In answering this question regarding the fundamental problem of government, Calhoun begins by claiming that it is not necessary to examine the various contrivances of the celebrated governments of history. (12) Secondly, he declares that he will not treat of constitution "in its most comprehensive sense." (9,12) For this procedure would involve an equally unnecessary consideration of the entire gamut of human conventions designed to prevent the powers of government from being converted into instruments of oppression, conventions that include, for example, an armed citizenry and local militias.

Setting aside these broader and more ambitious projects, Calhoun proposes something "far more limited." This more limited project involves explaining "on what principles government must be formed, in order to resist, by its own interior structure -- or, to use a single term, organism -- the

tendency to abuse of power.” (12) This “structure, or organism, is what is meant by constitution, in its strict and more usual sense; and it is this which distinguishes, what are called, constitutional governments from absolute.”

(12) The next question to be considered then is: “How [must] government . . . be constructed, in order to counteract, through its organism, this tendency on the part of those who make and execute the laws to oppress those subject to their operation [?]”. (12) This recasting, yet again, of the original question underscores the fact of the human agency of government and identifies specifically a tendency on the part of the rulers to oppress the ruled.

In answer to this question, Calhoun stresses that there is but one way in which this tendency may be effectively counteracted,

. . . and that is, by such an organism as will furnish the ruled with the means of resisting successfully this tendency on the part of the rulers to oppression and abuse. [For] power can only be resisted by power -- and tendency by tendency. Those who exercise power and those subject to its exercise -- the rulers and the ruled -- stand in antagonistic relations to each other. The same constitution of our nature which leads rulers to oppress the ruled -- regardless of the object for which government is ordained -- will, with equal strength, lead the ruled to resist, when possessed of the means of making peaceable and effective resistance. Such an organism, then, as will furnish the means by which resistance may be systematically and peaceably made on the part of the ruled, is the first and indispensable step towards forming a constitutional

government.¹ (12-13)

Political constitution, then, has its source in man's internal nature or constitution. And while it is the dual-principle of our nature that gives rise to governmental abuse and oppression, it is, likewise, the dual-principle that is the source of resistance to these ills. For the members of a ruling class, animated by this principle, tend naturally to become identified in their interest -- an interest characterized not merely by a disregard of the ruled, but by a willingness to aggrandize themselves at the expense of the interests of the ruled. And the members of the class of the ruled, likewise animated by the principles of sociality and of the primacy of individual feeling, will tend to identify in suffering and to combine in resistance to aggrandizement by rulers. In this way, offense and redress share a common origin. The resolution of the struggle between the rulers and the ruled in individual instances will be determined then in large part by the organization and other strategems of the contestants.

So the tendency of government to oppression and abuse is to be met

¹ Montesquieu, in The Spirit of the Laws (1748), had understood, albeit with considerably less precision and system than Calhoun, how power must be opposed by power, and tendency by tendency. A century before Calhoun, the Frenchman observed that:

Democratic and aristocratic states are not in their own nature free. Political liberty is to be found only in moderate governments; and even in these, it is not always found. It is there only when there is no abuse of power; but constant experience shows us, that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry his authority as far as it will go. Is it not strange, though true, to say, that virtue itself has need of limits?

To prevent this abuse, it is necessary from the very nature of things, power should be a check to power. A government may be so constituted as no man shall be compelled to do things to which the law does not oblige him, nor forced to abstain from things which the law permits.

See Baron de Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 150.

not by mere verbal appeals to justice and mercy, for example, but by a sufficiently powerful counter-tendency. This means that the feelings of indifference, temerity and haughty disregard for the interests of others that provide the principal impulse to oppression and abuse of governmental power, where such power is unconstrained, can be opposed and effectually countered by organized redress and skillful self-assertion that has its source in a reservoir of sentiment containing all those feelings "ever incident to enforced submission to what is regarded as injustice and oppression." (53)

According to Calhoun, then, constitutional structures are man-made conventions which acknowledge and address the various laws of human nature as these relate more or less directly to politics. Having its source in human nature, the counter-tendency -- or the tendency to resist oppression and abuse by government -- may, through human ingenuity, be marshalled and given effectual expression in practical provisions suited to the various existing conditions of a community. In this way, that current of sentiments constitutive of this primal counter-tendency are effectively channelled by man, and thereby made effectual in preventing the powers of government from being perverted. The aim of political constitution therefore is to guard the powers that it is necessary for government to possess and exercise in order to achieve, on an ongoing basis, its Divinely ordained ends. Political constitution is then, at bottom, a learned or sagacious response to the natural tendencies or laws of human nature; a response capable of being effectual because it is made by recourse to those very laws.

Avoiding the dangers, shocks, dislocations, and uncertainties which naturally attend armed resistance to tyranny, political constitution makes

possible a peaceful, ongoing, systematic, and effectual resistance to tyranny. Hence man is left to perfect Divinely ordained government, and he is to do this by learning how to guard the powers which it is necessary for government to have. But the only way that this may be accomplished is through self-understanding, as I shall explain in Chapter IX, in a discussion of the relationship between constitutional government and self-knowledge. Therefore, it is the pain, suffering, and inconvenience associated with governments whose powers are unguarded which are among the most powerful forces that prod men into self-inquiry and self-understanding. And so, as I suggested earlier, as we shall see more clearly in Chapter VIII, in a discussion of liberty and slavery, exploitation and despotism may be viewed Providentially as means to general human progress.

But a constitution can be formed, and the powers of government guarded, Calhoun says, again speaking emphatically, "only . . . by or through the right of suffrage", or "the right on the part of the ruled to choose their rulers at proper intervals, and to hold them thereby responsible for their conduct." (13) Hence,

. . . the responsibility of the rulers to the ruled, through the right of suffrage, is the indispensable and primary principle in the foundation of a constitutional government. When this right is properly guarded, and the people sufficiently enlightened to understand their own rights and the interests of the community, and duly to appreciate the motives and conduct of those appointed to make and execute the laws, it is all-sufficient to give to those who elect, effective control over those they have elected. (13)

But the right of suffrage, while indispensable to the founding of constitution, is the first but not the only principle of its foundation; "for it would be a great and dangerous error to suppose, as many do, that it is, of

itself, sufficient to form constitutional governments.” (13)

Here, Calhoun is drawing attention to an error all the more frequently committed since the onset of the rage for democratic government which began during the latter half of the eighteenth century. As will soon become apparent, this particular error in political thinking is one whose pernicious and destructive effects during and since Calhoun’s lifetime have been so extensive and far-reaching that they are virtually incalculable.

In the Disquisition, Calhoun undertook the speculative and historical task of exposing and correcting the erroneous and widespread belief that the right of suffrage, of itself, is sufficient to found a constitutional government. He wrote:

To this erroneous opinion may be traced one of the causes, why so few attempts to form constitutional governments have succeeded; and why, of the few which have, so small a number have had durable existence. It has led, not only to mistakes in the attempts to form such governments, but to their overthrow, when they have, by some good fortune, been correctly formed. So far from being, of itself, sufficient -- however well guarded it might be, and however enlightened the people -- [the right of suffrage] would, unaided by other provisions, leave the government as absolute, as it would be in the hands of irresponsible rulers; and with a tendency, at least as strong, towards oppression and abuse of its powers . . . (13)

Living and writing in a time that historian R. R. Palmer has aptly dubbed an “age of democratic revolution”², Calhoun observed first-hand the great and tragic destructiveness of this political error. Political orders all over Europe and in America, the most advanced and civilized portions of the world, were undergoing substantial, and often radical, transformation. Calhoun the statesman witnessed all of the political innovation and change

² See R.R. Palmer, The Age of Democratic Revolution, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959).

that marked his age with the greatest concern; giving cautious approval here, and expressing there, misgivings accompanied by stern and fully-reasoned remonstrance. With his faculty of considering circumstances in their combinations, and of determining their relative power in propelling events, Calhoun was able to predict with remarkable accuracy the fate of many of the political reform efforts of the period. Indeed, a better understanding of Calhoun's stature both as a statesman and as a political theorist may be derived from viewing his role as a critical participant in the "age of democratic revolution."

By the end of the eighteenth century, the spell of royalty had been broken, and the utility and power of the monarchical form had been surpassed by a governmental form that was compelling and, in some ways, new. This form was representative democracy. In the introduction to his Democracy in America (1835-40), the great French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-59) declared boldly that "a new science of politics is needed for a new world", a science that would educate this new and apparently irresistible democratic form. Although he viewed the emergence in his own time of this compelling new form of government as a Providential fact resulting from "the gradual development [in history] of the principle of equality", Tocqueville feared that democracy in the modern age would be abandoned to its wild instincts, and would develop into a savage and dangerous political beast. In Democracy, he called on the statesmen of the time to tame democracy's wild instincts by subduing its attendant vices and by developing fully its inherent virtues. Tocqueville describes this new task of

statesmen as follows:

The first of the duties that are at this time imposed upon those who direct our affairs is to educate democracy, to reawaken, if possible, its religious beliefs, to purify its morals; to mold its actions; to substitute a knowledge of statecraft for its inexperience, and an awareness of its true interest for its blind instincts, to adapt its government to time and place, and to modify it according to men and to conditions.³

And so a new political world needed a new science of politics. For with the revolutions in America and in France, democracy had appeared on the historical scene by the end of the eighteenth century in an essentially new form, and was carrying all before it. In the Old World, the democratic impulse was tearing asunder centuries-old social forms that had once grown up and flourished under the monarchical and aristocratic political forms. In the New World, the democratic impulse became happily transfigured into a more enlightened and humane form, and yet the conservation and perpetuation of this form were far from secured. Appearing in a feral condition -- like a child without parental guidance -- and threatening to develop into forms whose oppression and abuse of governmental power would exceed the most tyrannical systems ever administered by kings or nobles; this democratic form required education. Foremost among these educators of democracy was John C. Calhoun.

Thus the Disquisition has as one of its central elements a detailed and systematic examination of the constitutional and absolute forms of democracy. Indeed, in light of the emphasis that Calhoun gives to the comparison of these two disparate forms of democracy in that work, it is possible to read the Disquisition as an extended and definitive polemic in

³ See Alexis De Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2 vols. (New York: Vintage Classics, 1990) vol. I, 7.

behalf of constitutional democracy.

This special concern of Calhoun to consider the elements and problems associated with the democratic form is clearly evinced, for example, within his general comparison of all of the various absolute and constitutional forms of government; even where the author is busy driving home the central points of that theoretical speech for which he is most famous -- the doctrine of the concurrent majority. There, in an effort to educate democracy, Calhoun sharpens and clarifies what had been thereto a muddled and woefully unclear distinction between two forms of majorities -- the numerical majority and the concurrent majority -- which are the central and distinctive elements of absolute democracy and constitutional democracy respectively.

By making clear the differences between the absolute form and constitutional form of democracy, as regards their respective elements and operations, Calhoun laid a foundation for that "new science of politics" whose necessity Tocqueville had heralded; a science of democratic government. This newly-founded science would be a branch of an older and more general science of politics; this more general science being one that treats of all the various regimens of government -- monarchical, aristocratical, and democratical -- as regards their common or shared features. This achievement of Calhoun's provided the theoretical groundwork and justification for the reform of existing democratic governments wherever found, and thereby set the stage for a truly enlightened reformation of democratic governments world-wide.

And yet, since Calhoun's time, democracy has proved to be, on the whole, an inattentive and unruly student. Nevertheless, the master's

lessons, replete with their truths, survive as a ready resource until a time when the child is disposed to receive them.

Amongst these lessons, there was one which Calhoun was perhaps most eager to commend both to his contemporaries and to posterity. It was, that however indispensable the right of suffrage may be in forming a constitution,

. . . of itself, [this right] can do no more than give complete control to those who elect, over the conduct of those they have elected. In doing this, it accomplishes all it possibly can accomplish. This is its aim -- and when it is attained, its end is fulfilled. It can do no more, however enlightened the people, or however widely extended or well guarded the right may be. The sum total, then, of its effects, when most successful, is, to make those elected, the true and faithful representatives of those who elected them -- instead of irresponsible rulers -- as they would be without it; and thus, by converting it into an agency, and the rulers into agents, to divest government of all claims to sovereignty, and to retain it unimpaired to the community. (13-14)

And so genuinely responsible government, according to Calhoun, is government held by the elements of constitution to its sacred and Divinely ordained trust to the care of the general community. But the right of suffrage, after all, constitutes but one of these elements.

Before going on to consider that other requisite element or principle, however, we should pause to consider the question, how the right of suffrage, as a supposedly "indispensable" element of constitutional government, is applicable not only to democratic regimens, where its role is perhaps more readily apparent, but to aristocratic and monarchical regimens as well. For to readers in our modern democratic age, the vast majority of whom may be supposed to be unfamiliar with the internal operations of constitutional monarchies and aristocracies, it is not immediately evident

that the right of suffrage ever existed as a “primary and indispensable” element in such governments. Indeed, such a reader might object that Calhoun’s account of political constitution is in fact not the universal and systematic account that it purports to be, but is instead a much more limited speech, or an account of constitutional democracy only.

But what may appear to the modern “democratic” reader as just such a difficulty or limitation in Calhoun’s account is in fact a result of a too-narrow conception of the nature of the right of suffrage on the part of the reader himself. For recall that the formal definition of suffrage that Calhoun sets forth is not the “one man, one vote” conception characteristic of a more contemporary parlance, but is instead: “the right on the part of the ruled to choose their rulers at proper intervals, and to hold them thereby responsible for their conduct.” (13) And so, we should note that this definition does not, of itself, specify all the specific and determinate forms which the principle of suffrage may take within a given governmental framework. In particular, the definition does not specify whether the right of suffrage is to operate aided or unaided in a given historical instance by what Calhoun calls “a proper organism.”

This distinction between the right of suffrage unaided by organism and the right aided by organism is introduced only later in the Disquisition (23), since it was Calhoun’s intention to consider first the simplest and most familiar conceptions of democracy and suffrage – absolute democracy and the right of suffrage unaided respectively -- before going on to make an invidious comparison of these with their corresponding constitutional forms.

Calhoun’s account of the elements of constitutional government is, in

truth, one which appertains to all possible constitutional governments, regardless of whether the regimen of the government is monarchical, aristocratic, democratic, or any actualizable combination of these three forms. Nevertheless, for the sake of greater clarity and expedience, I shall postpone until the next chapter a fuller demonstration of the truth of this interpretation, where I will, for example, also undertake the related task of explaining in detail the difference between the right of suffrage unaided and the right aided by organism. Here, however, I would point out that only a slight review of some of the historical examples of constitutional governments which are illustrated and analyzed in the Disquisition is necessary to support my interpretation of the scope and applicability of Calhoun's account of constitution. Thus, Calhoun lists the Poland of the Diet (53-54), which was technically a monarchy (though an elective and not an hereditary one); the Roman Republic (69-72); and the constitutional monarchy of Great Britain (72-78). And each of these regimes, it should be noted, was heavily aristocratic.

Another way to illuminate Calhoun's account of the right of suffrage is to consider the nature of sovereignty. For in speaking of the right of suffrage as "the right on the part of the ruled to choose their rulers at proper intervals, and to hold them thereby responsible for their conduct", the question naturally arises as to the locus of ultimate and final authority within a community.

The thinker credited most with having dealt with such authority as a distinct speculative, philosophical issue has been the Frenchman Jean Bodin (1530-1596). In his Six Books on the State (1576), Bodin defines sovereignty

(*majestas* in Latin) as “the absolute and perpetual power of the state, that is, the greatest power to command” while defining the state itself as “a lawful government, with sovereign power, of many households and their common affairs.”⁴ But Bodin is careful to distinguish between sovereignty itself and the “custodians and keepers of sovereign power.” For sovereign power that has been delegated can be recalled when it so pleases the sovereign itself, just as “those who have lent or pawned their goods to others remain the true owners and possessors.” And this sovereign, according to Bodin, may be either the prince or the people, depending on the community.⁵ Still, since his over-riding concern was with social unity⁶ and the indivisibility of political authority, Bodin – like Hobbes a century later – preferred monarchy to both aristocracy and democracy. Naturally then, Bodin’s rhetorical emphasis in the Six Books of the State is on the “sovereign prince”, and not, as it would be with Calhoun three centuries later, on the people as sovereign within unitary political structures, and on the states as sovereign within a federal structure.

And so, with these concerns and emphases, Bodin writes:

. . . those who give to others the power and authority to judge and command for a defined period of time, or to be recalled at pleasure, retain power and authority that the others exercise but in the nature of a temporary lease or loan. The governor of a country or the lieutenant of a prince surrenders his power at the expiration of his term, being but the depository and keeper for someone else. It makes no difference whether the official is of high or low rank. If the absolute power granted to the lieutenant of the prince were [itself the] sovereign, it

⁴ See Jean Bodin, Six Books on the State in Great Political Thinkers: Plato to the Present, ed. William Ebenstein and Alan O. Ebenstein (San Antonio: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 389.

⁵Ibid, 389.

⁶ Bodin is the best-known theorist of the *Politiques*, a group of Catholic administrators, lawyers, and publicists whose loyalty to France and unwillingness to sacrifice her interests to the Roman Church took the form of trying to save the nation from a high tide of religious fanaticism. Bodin’s Six Books was published only four years after the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre (August 24, 1572).

could be used against the prince himself, who would be left with but an empty title, and the subject would command his lord, the servant his master -- which would be absurd.⁷

And analogously, concerning popular sovereignty, Bodin says:

If the people grant annually absolute power to one or several citizens, without control or appeal, shall we say that they possess sovereignty? Only he is absolutely sovereign who, after God, acknowledges no one greater than himself. These citizens elected to highest office therefore do not possess sovereignty, as they are but trustees of the power lent to them for a given time. The people do not deprive themselves of sovereignty when they entrust absolute authority to one or several rulers, either for a limited time set in advance or to be revoked at their pleasure.⁸

So it is essential to keep in view the distinction between sovereignty, on the one hand, and the powers of the sovereign, on the other hand. For certain powers of the sovereign may be delegated by the sovereign itself and then divided among the various departments of a government so organized; but sovereignty itself -- as Bodin would argue, and as Calhoun would later corroborate (101, 433-434) -- is both indivisible and non-transferable. Also, by way of underscoring further the distinction between the sovereign and its powers, there is to be considered the "highest act of sovereignty", that of reforming or abolishing an existing governmental system, or of creating a new one. (194) For such powers strikingly illustrate the greater fundamentality of the sovereign as compared with mere government. Thus Calhoun, in the Discourse, declares: "A power which can rightfully do all this, must exist in full plenitude, unexhausted and unimpaired; for no higher act of sovereignty can be conceived." (194)

⁷ Ibid, 389-390.

⁸ Ibid, 390.

In addition to being non-transferable and indivisible, sovereignty is illimitable.⁹ And Bodin underscored this quality of the sovereign by stressing that the essence of sovereignty consists in the making of general laws. Thus he writes:

The first characteristic of the sovereign prince is the power to make general and special laws, but -- and this qualification is important -- without the consent of superiors, equals, or inferiors. If the prince requires the consent of superiors, then he is a subject himself; if that of equals, he shares his authority with others; if that of his subjects, senate or people, he is not sovereign.¹⁰

So the authority of a sovereign is necessarily unbounded and unboundable, and therefore illimitable.

Finally, sovereignty, with all of its necessary qualities, is evidently a good, as indeed we have assumed it to be, since it is "the absolute and perpetual power of the state"¹¹, and therefore may be presumed to play an essential role, for example, in preserving and perfecting society. Because it is such a good, it necessarily follows that all attempts to either transfer, divide, or limit sovereignty tend naturally and necessarily to its absolute destruction, and thereby to the destabilization, imperilment, and destruction of the political community itself.

But now, let us consider how these insights into the nature of sovereignty may assist us in understanding the right of suffrage.

⁹Significantly, however, Calhoun points out that, although sovereignty is illimitable, "a sovereign may voluntarily impose restrictions on his [own] acts, without, in any degree, exhausting or impairing his sovereignty. Examples of such voluntarily restriction are given in the *Discourse* (pp. 194-196), where Calhoun notes: "the people of the several states, regarded as parties to the constitutional compact, have imposed restrictions on the exercise of their sovereign power, by entering into a solemn obligation to do no act inconsistent with its provisions, and to uphold and support it within their respective limits."

¹⁰Jean Bodin, *Six Books on the State*, 392.

¹¹Ibid, 389.

We may begin by asking: Is there a fundamental difference between absolute and constitutional governments respectively as regards the location of sovereignty? For apparently, it is in the nature of communities with absolute governments to locate sovereignty in something other than the general community. Within such communities, a dominant prince, or an assemblage of nobles, as the case may be, is generally acknowledged as, for instance, the "dread sovereign." In contrast, however, it is the nature of communities with constitutional governments, regardless of whether they are monarchies, aristocracies, or democracies, to locate sovereignty in the general community. These observations lead us to consider the process by which sovereign status comes to be located; and here we discover that the advent and operation of the right of suffrage as an element of constitutional government is an essential part of this process.

More generally, we find that the two elements or principles of constitution -- which Calhoun terms "the right of suffrage" and "organism" respectively -- are formal means or devices by which government, or the exercisers of powers, are divested either of that actual sovereignty or pretension to sovereignty which they enjoy under the various absolute forms: monarchical, aristocratical, and democratical. For not only in constitutional democracies, but in constitutional monarchies and constitutional aristocracies as well, sovereignty resides not in those who exercise the powers of government, but in the general community. These devices or contrivances of constitution, through their respective operations, secure sovereignty -- or the ultimate right and power of rule -- for the general community.

This securing of sovereignty by the elements of constitution transforms the nature of government itself in one fundamental respect. Guarding the powers of the government as it does, political constitution, through the operation of its elements, makes government an agency of the sovereign, and a representative of the general community. Hence it follows that the right of suffrage and the sovereignty of the general community are intimately related; since the act of a people asserting the right to choose their rulers "at proper intervals", and "to hold them thereby responsible for their conduct", is tantamount to the community declaring itself sovereign. Moreover, where the assertion of the right of suffrage is successful, government is thereby transformed from being the private possession of individual rulers into a public trust. In this way, a people's assertion of the right of suffrage is an essential part of a more general assertion of popular sovereignty. And from this fact too, it follows, for example, that assertions of the right of suffrage unaided by organism -- representing as they do incomplete masteries of the principles of constitution -- tend naturally to fail as more general assertions of popular sovereignty.

But serious bids for popular sovereignty are essentially moral and intellectual phenomena, and therefore cannot be brought off, for example, by mere physical reflexivity, sporadic outbursts or mindless verbal ejaculations. Indeed, successful assertions of the elements of constitution and of popular sovereignty are premised on moral and intellectual virtue or attainment, whereas absolutism and a sovereignty that resides in the one or the few are features characteristic of a community whose generality is sunk in vice and ignorance.

So skillful, sustained, and effectual self-assertion on the part of a generality in behalf of the rights of suffrage and sovereignty signifies a momentous advance in the moral and political maturation and development of that community. Hence irresponsible rulers rule where government, and not the general community, is the sovereign. Indeed, it is only through skillful self-assertion on the part of the community at large that the power and right of sovereignty can be once wrested from government, and the individual possessors of political power made responsible to the general community, and solicitous of its interests, instead of their own. Every individual, every community, and every generation, then, is confronted with the hard reality of this incontrovertible fact and uncircumventable requirement: that the elevated understanding and moral character that are the pre-conditions and foundation of popular sovereignty and political constitution do not come to men inexorably or automatically either from nature or from the Divinity more directly.

Still, the beneficial consequences for a community wrought by its practical achievement of the right of suffrage, momentous as they are, should be apprehended clearly and not exaggerated. For as we have just suggested, moral and intellectual attainment admit of various degrees along a scale.¹² And, in so far as such attainment relates to the struggle for and instantiation of political constitution in a community, we may observe that, according to Calhoun, the level of attainment required to establish the right of suffrage unaided by organism differs from and is inferior to that level which is required to establish and maintain a full-fledged constitution, where the right is aided by organism. For such reasons, Calhoun is careful not to exaggerate

¹²On page 40, in the Disquisition, Calhoun speaks of a "scale of patriotism and virtue."

the intellectual and moral virtues of communities that have established the right of suffrage unaided. In fact, Calhoun is quite anxious, as we saw earlier in this chapter, to disabuse those who tend to conflate the right of suffrage with constitution. Calling attention to the great difference between governments with the right of suffrage unaided, on the one hand, and fully constitutional governments, on the other hand, Calhoun writes:

[For] it is manifest that the right of suffrage, . . . transfers, in reality, the actual control over the government, from those who make and execute the laws, to the body of the community; and, thereby, places the powers of the government as fully in the mass of the community, as they would be if they, in fact, had assembled, made, and executed the laws themselves, without the intervention of representatives or agents. The more perfectly it does this, the more perfectly it accomplishes its ends; but in doing so, it only changes the seat of authority, without counteracting, in the least, the tendency of the government to oppression and abuse of its powers. (14, emphasis added)

Therefore, with the assertion and instituting by a community of the right of suffrage, the seat of political authority is changed -- since it is shifted from government itself to the general community -- but the tendency of government to abuse and oppression is not counteracted "in the least." And, as Calhoun tells us, exaggerations of the actual benefits conferred upon the political community by the right of suffrage have, paradoxically, rendered many communities susceptible to the advances of the most oppressive and abusive political regimen of all, absolute democracy. For democratic governments, ancient and modern alike, having once, by some fortunate combination of circumstances, managed to establish the principles of constitution, have tended to degenerate into absolute democracies, and then into military despotisms, or absolute monarchies. One of the principal reasons for this degeneration, Calhoun says, is that men have expected more

from the right of suffrage than it can possibly accomplish. This false expectation, it turns out, is rooted in another error; and this error concerns the number and nature of the interests of which any political community is composed.

Anxious to correct these fateful and destructive errors, Calhoun explains that . . .

If the whole community had the same interests, so that the interests of each and every portion would be so affected by the action of the government, that the laws which oppress and impoverish one portion, would necessarily oppress and impoverish all others -- or the reverse -- then the right of suffrage, of itself, would be all-sufficient to counteract the tendency of the government to oppression and abuse of its powers; and, of course, would form, of itself, a perfect constitutional government. The interest of all being the same, by supposition, as far as the action of the government was concerned, all would have like interests as to what laws should be made, and how they should be executed. All strife and struggle would cease as to who should be elected to make and execute them. The only question would be, who was most fit; who the wisest and most capable of understanding the common interest of the whole. This decided, the election would pass off quietly, and without party discord; as no one portion could advance its own peculiar interest without regard to the rest, by electing a favorite candidate. (14-15)

The common exaggeration of the powers and effects of the right of suffrage is then rooted in an over-simplified conception of the composition of the political community as regards the numbers and dispositions of its various interests. Calhoun calls attention to the grave consequences of such exaggeration by considering the strictly hypothetical situation in which the entire community has the same interests as regards the action or inaction of government. If such a condition held, Calhoun explains, then the right of suffrage, of itself, would be sufficient to prevent abuse and oppression by government. The problem, of course, is that, the political community must

always consist of multiple and diverse interests as regards the action or inaction of government, for reasons that will be stated directly. While Calhoun treated as strictly hypothetical and unrealizable the condition in which an entire community has the same interests as regards the action or inaction of government, many friends of the democratic form have sought to implement the right of suffrage on the basis of just this view of society. But Calhoun was not the only one to see the erroneous and dangerous nature of this supposition.

The German philosopher Hegel, like Tocqueville and Calhoun, was concerned that the new emergent democratic spirit should become disciplined and responsible by being tempered with political wisdom. In his Philosophy of Right (1821), Hegel explained how one potentially influential and prevalent variety of superficial political thinking arises from a tendency of the human mind to cling to abstractions. This kind of abstract thought, Hegel observed, naturally gives rise to notions whose advocacy can lead to the most pernicious consequences for human society and civilization. Hegel illustrates his point about the potentially destructive and vicious character of such abstract thought by examining the popular notion that "every single person should share in deliberating and deciding on political matters of general concern" (695). Hegel declares that to hold such a view,

. . . on the ground that all individuals are members of the state, that its concerns are their concerns, and that it is their right that what is done should be done with their knowledge and volition, is tantamount to a proposal to put the democratic element without any rational form into the organism of the state, although it is only in virtue of the possession of such a form that the state is an organism at all. This idea comes readily to mind because it does not go beyond the abstraction of "being a member of the state," and it is superficial thinking which clings to abstractions. [On the other hand,] The rational consideration of the

topic, the consciousness of the Idea, is concrete and to that extent coincides with a genuine practical sense. Such a sense is itself nothing but the sense of rationality or the Idea, though it is not to be confused with mere business routine or the horizon of a restricted sphere.¹³

Anticipating Calhoun, Hegel saw how an improper reliance on abstract thought could lead to an oversimplified view of society; a view that would, in turn, serve as a supposition on the basis of which a false and destructive conception of democratic government would be promulgated. As we shall see below, by viewing society falsely as a single and undifferentiated mass, many well-intentioned friends of the democratic form would maintain that the right of suffrage alone is a sufficient condition of true or constitutional democracy. Dismissing the superficial and hopelessly oversimplified view of society that an improper reliance on abstract thought gives us, Hegel goes on to describe the actual nature of society as invariably composite and differentiated:

The concrete state is the whole, articulated into its particular groups. The member of the state is a member of such a group, i. e. of a social class, and it is only as characterized in this objective way that he comes under consideration when we are dealing with the state. His mere character as universal implies that he is at one and the same time both a private person and also a thinking consciousness, a will which wills the universal. This consciousness and will, however, lose their emptiness and acquire a content and a living actuality only when they are filled with particularity, and particularity means determinacy as particular and a particular class-status; or to put the matter otherwise, abstract individuality is a generic essence next higher in the scale. Hence the single person attains his actual and living destiny for universality only when he becomes a member of a Corporation, a society, &c., and thereby it becomes open to him on the strength of his skill, to enter any class for which he is qualified, . . .¹⁴

¹³G. W. F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right in Great Political Thinkers: Plato to the Present, ed. William Ebenstein and Alan O. Ebenstein (Austin: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 695.

¹⁴Ibid, 695.

And so society, in every instance, consists of various classes, orders, portions, or interests, and therefore is never found to subsist as a single, undifferentiated mass of individuals. While Hegel explains the intellectual process whereby the view of society as an undifferentiated mass arose, and insists that society is, of necessity, complex and composite, Calhoun locates the necessity of this compositeness in a necessary or unavoidable feature of the relation between a community and its government.

So only after comprehending first the necessary complexities of human society can we begin to understand and to appreciate the operational powers and limitations of the various elements of political constitution.

Next, we shall review Calhoun's account of how all communities are necessarily composite and complex, and examine some of the implications of this insight, as Calhoun understood them, for the task of constructing and maintaining constitutional government. Here, indeed, we shall see precisely why the right of suffrage is but one element of constitution.

According to Calhoun, any community must be composed of more than one interest as regards the action or inaction of its government.¹⁵ Indeed, it is this unavoidable circumstance which poses one of the greatest challenges for a people and its statesmen¹⁶:

. . . [For] nothing is more difficult than to equalize the action of the government, in reference to the various and diversified interests of the community; and nothing more easy than to pervert its powers into instruments to aggrandize and enrich one or more interests by

¹⁵ See the Disquisition, 14-19.

¹⁶ Rousseau conceived the matter and its importance in a manner quite similar to Calhoun: "If there were no different interests, the common interest, which would never encounter any obstacle, would scarcely be felt. Everything would proceed on its own and politics would cease being an art." Social Contract in The Basic Political Writings (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 156, fn. 2.

oppressing and impoverishing the others; and this too, under the operation of laws, couched in general terms -- and which, on their face, appear fair and equal. (15)

But, one may ask, for example, is this problem of equalizing the action of government universal, as Calhoun seems to suggest here, or is it characteristic only, for example, of larger and more complex and heterogeneous communities? For clearly the problem of equalizing the action of government would admit of different degrees of difficulty, depending on the concrete circumstances of a community; and for those smaller and highly homogeneous communities, could it truly be said that such equalization is a problem at all?

Addressing this question expressly, however, Calhoun emphasizes that, in fact, the problem exists . . .

[in] all [communities]; the small and the great -- the poor and the rich -- irrespective of pursuits, productions, or degrees of civilization -- with, however, this difference, that the more extensive and populous the country, the more diversified the condition and pursuits of its population, and the richer, more luxurious, and dissimilar the people, the more difficult is it to equalize the action of the government -- and the more easy for one portion of the community to pervert its powers to oppress, and plunder the other. (15)

So the basic problem of equalization, we are told, is always present in some form or other. Indeed, as we shall soon see, the weight of the problem of equalizing governmental action is always such that no community can, with impunity, neglect to address it. Thus the problem is both universal and universally serious; and while many generations and communities have and must continue to fall short in meeting the moral and intellectual challenge posed by this problem, both the problem and the challenge are perpetual and therefore, in this sense, unavoidable. But in order to see more clearly how

the problem of equalization is both universal and universally serious, it is necessary to consider its origin. In the Disquisition, the discursive context within which Calhoun reveals the nature of this origin is his discussion of the operational tendencies of the principle of right of suffrage unaided by organism.

In the previous chapter, I introduced my claim that part of the originality and merit of Calhoun's political thought consists in the persistence and skill with which he tracks the operations and effects of the dual-principle, or that "constitution or law of our nature." In further support of this claim, we see here how, given institutional arrangements where constitution is absent, the "two-fold constitution of our nature" inclines men who are subdivided into groups and organized as the diverse interests of the community to wage a form of warfare with each other. Calhoun makes this point explicitly in discussing the right of suffrage and the necessary diversity of interests within the political community. He observes how:

. . . it necessarily results, that the right of suffrage, by placing the control of the government in the community must, from the same constitution of our nature which makes government necessary to preserve society, lead to conflict among its different interests -- each striving to obtain possession of its powers, as the means of protecting itself against the others -- or of advancing its respective interests, regardless of the interests of others. (15)

Hence, where the powers of government are unguarded by constitution, the various interests of the community are set in opposition to one another, and are forced to strive for control of the powers of government in order to protect themselves. Once power is obtained by one or a coalition of interests, and the other interests are excluded from control of government,

the interest(s) in power finds itself at liberty, and enticed by the prospect of material gain, to aggrandize itself at the expense of the excluded portion. More subtle and less conspicuous than military warfare, this warfare between the diverse interests of a community is waged under the form of law or by recourse to the legislative, executive, and judicial powers of government. Often parading under the mask of justice and high statesmanship, narrow interest employs sophistry to disguise its aggression through its control of government at the expense of the remaining portion of the community.

Whereas men, impelled by the dual-principle, tend to war each against every other, where there is society but no controlling power or government; men, where there is society and a government whose powers are unguarded by constitution -- still impelled by the dual-principle -- combine and separate into diverse interests which tend to war, once again, each interest or portion, against every other. And so, with the advent of government, warfare between individuals ends, but is replaced by warfare between groups that is conducted under the form of law. Less conspicuous than either physical combat between individuals or between nations, legislative warfare between interests, Calhoun saw, can be at least equally grave and destructive. Hence a part of Calhoun's genius is in educating men about this more subtle but at least equally dangerous form of warfare; and this legislative warfare, it should be noted, is waged with all the more intensity and destructiveness in geographically larger, more populous, and wealthier polities, such as in the vast nation-states characteristic of the twentieth century.

A government of unguarded powers leads then to a power grab, conducted more or less intensely, between the great interests or portions of a

political community. The immediate object of the striving of these various interests is the control of the powers of government; powers which, once obtained, may be used first defensively and then offensively to promote real and merely imagined interests respectively. Machiavelli (1469-1527) is amongst those earlier authors who have commented on this particular tendency of human nature. In his Discourses on Livy (1531), he wrote: "Men rise from one ambition to another: first, they seek to secure themselves against attack, and then they attack others"¹⁷.

Seeking relief from this evil, Calhoun would begin by giving a causal account of the process and conditions within which the various interests of a community engage in such struggle. Ultimately, his aim would be to show how men, comprehended within the various interests of the community, can attain security from attack, and also be dissuaded -- and, in some cases, forcibly prevented¹⁸ -- from attacking others.

As if recounting the various stages in the operation of some law of the physical universe, Calhoun describes in specific terms the stages of the process by which an interest obtains governmental power:

. . . a struggle will take place between the various interests to obtain a majority, in order to control the government. If no one interest be strong enough, of itself, to obtain it, a combination will be formed between those whose interests are most alike -- each conceding something to the others, until a sufficient number is obtained to make a majority. (15)

Where the right of suffrage has been instituted and the powers of

¹⁷ Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince and The Discourses (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), Chapter XLVI, 231.

¹⁸ This forcible prevention may occur where there is, for example, successful secession by a member state or interest of a federal or confederal structure from that structure, where the right of secession is disputed and resisted militarily by one or more of the other parties of that compact.

government are unguarded, then, the dual-principle may lead not only to a striving for these powers by individual interests, but to coalition-building in the pursuit of power. Relentless in its operation, the dual-principle, in time, tends always to overcome whatever psychological and institutional impediments lie in its path, and to assert itself in a manner that establishes the basic structure of political actuality. Hence,

The process may be slow, and much time may be required before a compact, organized majority can be thus formed; but formed it will be in time, even without preconcert or design, by the sure workings of that principle or constitution of our nature in which government itself originates. When once formed, the community will be divided into two great parties -- a major and a minor -- between which there will be incessant struggles on the one side to retain, and on the other to obtain the majority -- and, thereby, the control of the government and the advantages it confers. (15-16)

And so, once power is obtained by one interest or coalition, there is still no end to the struggle between the interests of the community. For in absolute democracies, where the right of suffrage is established, and where the powers of government remain unguarded by constitution, the offices of government are vacated and refilled, at regular and designated intervals, by elections. And here, the dual-principle, operating where the right of suffrage holds and the powers of government are unguarded by constitution, must lead inevitably to a permanent division of the community, so long as it remains under this form of government, into two great parties. Therefore the dual-principle, we should emphasize, is, under certain circumstances, capable of visiting upon a community such evils as division, legislative warfare, and all of their attendant woes.

As I noted earlier though, one may object that, however compelling

may be Calhoun's account thusfar regarding communities in which interests are more strongly marked and diverse, the tendencies to division and warfare cited by this account do not hold in all communities. In particular, one may try to argue that such war-like behavior and inclinations neither predominate nor even subsist as traits at all common in those more homogeneous communities in which interests are much less diverse. In rebutting this objection, Calhoun plumbs the depths of those causes which determine, in the end, the structure and behavior of the various interests that together make up communities, and which govern them, whether jointly under constitution, or by one or a group of interests to the exclusion of the rest, without constitution. He writes:

So deeply seated, indeed, is this tendency to conflict between the different interests or portions of the community, that it would result from the action of the government itself, even though it were possible to find a community, where the people were all of the same pursuits, placed in the same condition of life, and in every respect, so situated, as to be without inequality of condition or diversity of interests. The advantages of possessing the control of the powers of the government, and, thereby, of its honors and emoluments, are, of themselves, exclusive of all other considerations, ample to divide even such a community into two great hostile parties. (16)

In support of his claim that the advantages of possessing control of the powers of government is, of itself, enough to divide any community into two great hostile parties, Calhoun describes in considerable detail the nature of these advantages and the decisive weight and influence which they must, in every instance, be expected to carry in political life. Thus:

In order to form a just estimate of the full force of these advantages -- without reference to any other consideration -- it must be remembered, that government -- to fulfill the ends for which it is ordained, and more especially that of protection against external dangers -- must, in the present condition of the world, be clothed with powers sufficient to

call forth the resources of the community, and be prepared, at all times, to command them promptly in every emergency which may possibly arise. For this purpose large establishments are necessary, both civil and military (including naval, where, from situation, that description of force may be required) with all the means necessary for prompt and effective action -- such as fortifications, fleets, armories, arsenals, magazines, arms of all descriptions, with well-trained forces, in sufficient numbers to wield them with skill and energy, whenever the occasion requires it. The administration and management of a government with such vast establishments must necessarily require a host of employees, agents, and officers -- of whom many must be vested with high and responsible trusts, and occupy exalted stations, accompanied with much influence and patronage. To meet the necessary expenses, large sums must be collected and disbursed; and, for this purpose, heavy taxes must be imposed, requiring a multitude of officers for their collection and disbursement. The whole united must necessarily place under the control of government an amount of honors and emoluments, sufficient to excite profoundly the ambition of the aspiring and the cupidity of the avaricious; and to lead to the formation of hostile parties, and violent party conflicts and struggles to obtain the control of the government. (16-17, emphasis added)

This is an account whose accuracy and detail evinces the extensive practical experience of its author, years of experience as legislator in both houses of Congress, as vice-President, and as Secretary of the departments of State and of War. In particular, this passage reflects Calhoun's experience as Secretary of War under President James Monroe, when the Carolinian gained his reputation as an expert administrator by completely reorganizing a department he found riddled with corruption and in almost complete disarray just after the second war with Great Britain (1812-1814). These experiences as statesman provided the materials and the unshakeable base from which a philosophical analysis of causes would emerge.

From this extensive and varied practical experience, Calhoun perceived that, "as far as the honors and emoluments of the government and

its fiscal action are concerned, it is impossible to equalize it." And the reason for this is obvious. "Its honor and emoluments, however great, can fall to the lot of but a few, compared to the entire number of the community, and the multitude who will seek to participate in them." (17) But, even aside from this circumstance, "there is a reason which renders it impossible to equalize the action of the government, so far as its fiscal operation extends . . .". (17) And so, even if the honors and emoluments of government were somehow sufficiently abundant and susceptible of division as to make possible their equal distribution to all members of the community -- which is manifestly, of course, an impossibility¹⁹ -- the interests of the community would still be liable to conflict one with another, Calhoun says, because of the nature of the fiscal process itself. Of this process, Calhoun writes:

Few, comparatively, as they are, the agents and employees of the government constitute that portion of the community who are the exclusive recipients of the proceeds of the taxes. Whatever amount is taken from the community, in the form of taxes, if not lost, goes to them in the shape of expenditures and disbursements. The two -- disbursement and taxation -- constitute the fiscal action of the government. They are correlatives. What the one takes from the community, under the name of taxes, is transferred to the portion of the community who are the recipients, under that of disbursements. But, as the recipients constitute only a portion of the community, it follows, taking the two parts of the fiscal process together, that its action must be unequal between the payers of the taxes and the recipients of their proceeds. (17)

Indeed, says Calhoun, this inequality in the fiscal action of the government is necessary and therefore unavoidable. For the only way that it can be avoided would be to construct a system in which "what is collected from each individual in the shape of taxes, shall be returned to him, in that of

¹⁹ It is impossible because honours by their nature are not susceptible of equal division and universal distribution. Under the present U. S. constitution, for example, there can be only one president of the United States, two senators per state, and so on.

disbursements." (17) But this arrangement would, of course, render the entire process "nugatory and absurd", and thereby fail to achieve the proper object of the fiscal action of government itself, which is to fund as equitably as possible those enterprises sanctioned by the general community and for its security and improvement. (17) And so, although it is possible, but "no easy task", to exact an equal share of taxes from individuals, regarded separately from disbursement; the two -- taxation and disbursement -- united "cannot possibly be made equal." (17)

Having described how the fiscal action of government is necessarily unequal as regards its operations on individuals within the community, Calhoun's next concern is to trace the broader effects of this fiscal action and to mark those general tendencies which characterize this necessary activity of government, in whatever community considered. Calhoun finds that, as a result of the unequal fiscal action of government,

. . . it must necessarily follow, that some one portion of the community must pay in taxes more than it receives back in disbursements; while another receives in disbursements more than it pays in taxes. It is, then, manifest, taking the whole process together, that taxes must be, in effect, bounties to that portion of the community which receives more in disbursements than it pays in taxes; while, to the other which pays in taxes more than it receives in disbursements, they are taxes in reality -- burthens, instead of bounties. This consequence is unavoidable. It results from the nature of the process, be the taxes ever so equally laid, and the disbursements ever so fairly made, in reference to the public service. (17-18)

Here, however, Calhoun issues a proviso to cover two cases; pointing out (1) that the account he has given of the effects of the fiscal activity of the government rests on the assumption that "the disbursements are made within the community", and (2) that the proceeds of the taxes are not paid in

tribute. (18) For in either of these cases, "the burthen would fall on all, in proportion to the amount of taxes they respectively paid." These exceptional cases aside, it is important to consider the various forms which disbursement can take, so that their differential bearing on the welfare of the various portions of the community can be ascertained. For a bounty, Calhoun says, is a bounty, whatever its particular form, and some forms confer more benefit than others. He explains:

Nor would it be less a bounty to the portion of the community which received back in disbursements more than it paid in taxes, because received as salaries for official services; or payments to persons employed in executing the works required by the government; or furnishing it with its various supplies; and any other description of public employment -- instead of being bestowed gratuitously. It is the disbursements which give additional, and, usually, very profitable and honorable employments to the portion of the community where they are made. But to create such employments, by disbursements, is to bestow on the portion of the community to whose lot the disbursements may fall, a far more durable and lasting benefit -- one that would add much more to its wealth and population -- than would the bestowal of an equal sum gratuitously; and hence, to the extent that the disbursements exceed the taxes, it may be fairly regarded as a bounty. The very reverse is the case in reference to the portion which pays in taxes more than it receives in disbursements. With them, profitable employments are diminished to the same extent, and population and wealth correspondingly decreased. (18)

So the extent and form which disbursements take, in any given instance, can never be a matter of indifference for a community. Indeed, such matters are of the greatest importance to every individual and to every portion of the community, since they have, in their effects, the greatest bearing on the well-being of each portion, and of the whole. For the fiscal action of government, aside from the two exceptions cited above, necessarily involves some form of redistribution of wealth within the community.

These differential effects of the fiscal action of government are such that they directly and indirectly result in the strengthening of some portions of the community and in the proportional weakening of others. In this way, the distinctive life, variety, or moral and physical substance that make up a community can be fundamentally transformed and reshaped, within the course of a few years, or perhaps more swiftly still, merely by the fiscal action of its government. For this reason, the fiscal processes of government rightly receive the close attention of every patriot and the most steadfast safeguarding and maintenance from the statesman.²⁰ Such attention and vigilance is necessary, because not only does the fiscal action of government tend naturally to impoverish and weaken some portions while enriching and strengthening others, but the action itself tends to divide the general community. Describing this tendency to division, Calhoun writes:

The necessary result, then, of the unequal fiscal action of the government is, to divide the community into two great classes; one consisting of those who, in reality, pay the taxes, and, of course, bear exclusively the burthen of supporting the government; and the other, of those who are the recipients of their proceeds, through disbursements, and who are, in fact, supported by the government
(18-19)

These two great classes are the tax-payers and the tax-consumers, respectively; and they arise naturally and inevitably, as a result of the taxing process. And once formed, these two classes stand in antagonistic relations one to another, "in reference to the fiscal action of the government, and the entire course of policy therewith connected":

For, the greater the taxes and disbursements, the greater the gain of the one and the loss of the other -- and vice versa; and consequently, the more the policy of the government is calculated to increase taxes and

²⁰ This kind of redistribution of wealth between interests is, of course, a central theme of the South Carolina Exposition (1828), as written by Vice President Calhoun.

disbursements, the more it will be favored by the one and opposed by the other. (19)

The natural antagonism between the tax-payers and tax-consumers will, Calhoun says, exist in some form in any community. And this inevitable and perennial antagonism must ever be counted among those forces which tend to the division of the community. Therefore this tendency to division must stand as a necessary attendant and liability of an activity indispensable to the preservation and improvement of the community, and as such, the aim of the statesman must be the prudential and circumspect one of counteracting this tendency without seeking to eradicate the tendency at its source. Anxious to illustrate the weight of this statesmanly concern, Calhoun explains those cruel and unhappy conditions which must result from a fuller actualization of this tendency. Specifically, the effect of every increase in taxes and disbursements is to enrich and strengthen the members of the class of tax-consumers while impoverishing and weakening those of the class of tax-payers. Recalling no doubt his own struggle against such fell redistributionism in the form of Henry Clay's so-called "American System" of economic protectionism, Calhoun explains how natural and almost irresistible it is for tax-consumers to favor additional tax increases that would further line their nests, as it were. Calling attention to the ultimate direction and effect of this tendency, he writes:

This [process], indeed, may be carried to such an extent, that one class or portion of the community may be elevated to wealth and power, and the other depressed to abject poverty and dependence, simply by the fiscal action of the government; and this too, through disbursements only -- even under a system of equal taxes imposed for revenue only. If such may be the effects of taxes and disbursements, when confined to their legitimate objects -- that of raising revenue for the public service -- some conception may be formed, how one portion

of the community may be crushed, and another elevated on its ruins, by systematically perverting the power of taxation and disbursement, for the purpose of aggrandizing and building up one portion of the community at the expense of the other. (19)

At this point, however, skeptics may protest that benevolence and public spirit on the part of the ruling portion of the community may be sufficient, of themselves, to prevent such aggrievous perversion of the taxing power; a perversion so advanced in its development as to prove fatal to the afflicted portions, and thereby, possibly, to the entire community. Calhoun explains, however, that such optimism is unfounded, and utterly naive. Arguing once again by recourse and reference to the inexorable operations of the "two-fold constitution of our nature", this time in reference to the behavior to be reasonably expected from the members of the two great classes, the tax-payers and the tax-consumers; Calhoun shows how the power of taxation and disbursement, where unguarded by constitutional provisions, will be transformed by members of opposing interests into a tool of aggressive self-aggrandizement and exploitation. And this transformation is, moreover, not a mere possibility among other possibilities, but an eventuality whose actualization is unavoidable. Hence,

That [the power] will be so used, unless prevented, is, from the constitution of man, just as certain as that it can be so used; and that, if not prevented, it must give rise to two parties, and to violent conflicts and struggles between them, to obtain the control of the government, is, for the same reason, not less certain. (19)

And so the dual-principle appears once again, operating within the human moral and political world with a certainty and predictability akin to the operation of the force of gravity in the material world; a kind of political gravity, as it were. What makes possible the perversion of the power of

taxation and disbursement, the division of the community into two warring parties of taxpayers and tax-consumers, and the elevation of one on the ruins of the others, is not, as Calhoun has pointed out all along, the power of taxation and disbursement itself, but rather the activation of that power in the absence of sufficient constitutional constraint. And the problem of the perversion of this power is exasperated, recall, by the circumstance of the community being wealthier, more populous, and composed of interests more diverse.

And recall, as well, that the occasion for Calhoun's discussion of the nature and problems of the taxing power, just considered, was to illustrate how the right of suffrage, as one element of political constitution, is insufficient, of itself, to counteract the tendency of government to abuse and oppression. Indeed, the two -- namely, the perversion of the taxing power, and the insufficiency of the right of suffrage, of itself -- are closely related. For recall that the right of suffrage transfers sovereignty from the government to the community. And where there is no constraint on election by recourse to sheer numbers, that interest or combination of interests which succeeds in carrying the election of political representatives by the marshalling of a majority of votes will, once empowered, be free, until the succeeding election, to implement policies that will aggrandize itself at the expense of the remaining, powerless portion of the community.

In this system of governance -- where mere numbers predominate, or where "King Numbers"²¹ rules -- it must be expected that the power of taxation and disbursement will be among those powers of government most

²¹ "King Numbers" is a term coined and used by John Randolph of Roanoke, introduced in Chapter I, as a means of criticizing the weaknesses and abuses of absolute democracy, or of what Calhoun would call the "government of the numerical majority."

assiduously striven after by the contenders for power. And the same principle of our nature that leads to the manipulation and perversion of that power by the ruling interests of the community for the purpose of their aggrandizement at the expense of the remaining portion, is the force which causes the dominant majority, for a time, to oppress and abuse the minority. Indeed, the perversion and manipulation of the taxing power is but one of the ways in which a dominant majority can oppress and abuse a powerless minority. For however it may be masked in the external forms of piety, innocence, and impartiality, this form of oppression through the abuse of the taxing power, Calhoun points out, is as destructive and vicious as any other form thusfar invented by human ingenuity in the service of evil. Indeed, the guise of justice and equity under which it is most often found to operate serves to render it all the more effectual, and therefore all the more pernicious.

Having thus established the nature and necessity of the power of taxation and disbursement, as well as its susceptibility to perversion, we are free now to return to the central topic of our discourse, of which the preceding discussion of the power of taxation and disbursement constituted but a part. Thus we return to a consideration of the merits and demerits of the right of suffrage, unaided by any other provision.

As a statesman and political thinker living and writing during an "age of democratic revolution", Calhoun's rhetorical emphasis, in the Disquisition, on the nature of the right of suffrage, and on the problems attending that right in certain circumstances, is altogether fitting. Although,

as we indicated earlier and will see more clearly later, the right of suffrage is not to be construed too narrowly as an element of democratic government only, or as, for example, merely the right of a citizen to cast a vote for some favored candidate; the arrival on the historical scene, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, of representative democracy as a compelling and, in many ways, new political form made it all the more necessary and urgent to specify in precise terms the proper role of suffrage as an element of constitutional government. It is for this reason that we find Calhoun, as the Tocquevillian educator of democracy, warning his contemporaries and posterity that in an absolute democracy, "the dominant majority, for a time, would have the same tendency to oppression and abuse of power, which, without the right of suffrage, irresponsible rulers would have" (19-20).

But, as the great twentieth century historian of power, Bertrand De Jouvenal, has pointed out, Calhoun was not the first to observe that "unlimited power is equally dangerous, whatever its source and wherever it rests."²² Instead, we should remember that Calhoun's systematical causal analysis of the elements of constitutional government, as set down in the Disquisition (1851), came in the wake of a spasm of horror in response to the excesses of revolution in France. Twenty years after the despotism of the Convention, the French writer and politician, Benjamin Constant (1764-1830) would write:

When no limits are set to the representative authority, the representatives of the people are not the defenders of liberty but the candidates for tyranny. Moreover, once tyranny comes to be, it may well be the more hideous for the tyrants being more numerous. . . .

An assembly which can neither be suppressed nor restrained is, of all possible authorities, the blindest in its movements and the most

²² See Bertrand De Jouvenal, On Power: The Natural History of Its Growth (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993), 322-325.

incalculable in its results, even for the members who compose it. It plunges into excesses which, on a first view, seem inconceivable. An ill-considered bustle about everything; an endless multiplicity of laws; the desire to gratify the passions of the popular party by self-abandonment to their pressure or even by encouraging them to press; the rancorous hatred inspired in it by the resistance which it meets or the disapproval which it senses; the flouting of national sentiment and the stubborn clinging to error; often enough the esprit de corps which gives strength but for usurpation only; the alternation of rashness and timidity, violence and feebleness, favouritism to one and distrust of all; the motivation by purely physical sensations, such as enthusiasm or panic; the absence of all moral responsibility, and the certitude of safety in numbers from either the reproach of cowardice or the dangers attending on rashness; such are the vices of assemblies when they are not confined within bounds which they cannot overstep.²³

Also, according to another writer of the post-Revolution period:

Too long have we asserted that opinion was queen of the world -- opinion, changing, passionate and capricious opinion, is a tyrant whom we should distrust not less than other tyrants.²⁴

So the behavior of rulers within absolute political systems is essentially the same, regardless of the form of regimen, whether a monarchy, an aristocracy, or a democracy. In each, those who control governmental power and its exercise are ultimately irresponsible, because they are not compelled by some external constraint on that power to exercise it in behalf of the general community. Regarding the handling of power, then, there is no great difference between the various absolute forms. Indeed, as Calhoun goes on to argue, no reason can be assigned, why an irresponsible ruler of the more traditional sort, say an absolute monarch, would abuse his power, "which would not apply, with equal force, to the [dominant majority]" in an absolute democracy." (20)

The dominant majority, for the time, would, in reality, through the

²³ Benjamin Constant, *Cours de politique constitutionnelle* (ed. of 1836), 16-17.

²⁴ Sismondi, *Etudes sur les constitutions des peuples libres* (ed. of 1836), 204.

right of suffrage, be the rulers -- the controlling, governing, and irresponsible power; and those who make and execute the laws would, for the time, be, in time, but their representatives and agents. (20)

Anticipating the popular objection that an authorization of governmental activity by large numbers of the community, through the right of suffrage, can mitigate, to some degree, the abuse and oppression of which government is susceptible; Calhoun argues that no palliation from the evils attending unguarded power may reasonably be expected from that quarter, and that the objection, however popular, is wholly unfounded.²⁵ Hence, even though the dominant majority, in an absolute democracy, would constitute a majority of the community, this fact would not "counteract a tendency originating in the constitution of man; and which, as such, cannot depend on the number by whom the powers of the government may be wielded" (20).

And so:

Be it greater or smaller, a majority or minority, it must equally partake of an attribute inherent in each individual composing it; and, as in each the individual is stronger than the social feelings, the one would have the same tendency as the other to oppression and abuse of power. The reason applies to government in all its forms -- whether it be that of the one, the few, or the many. In each there must, of necessity, be a governing and governed -- a ruling and a subject portion. The one implies the other; and in all, the two bear the same relation to each other -- and have, on the part of the governing portion, the same tendency to oppression and abuse of power. Where the majority is that portion, it matters not how its powers may be exercised -- whether directly by themselves, or indirectly, through representatives or agents. Be it which it may, the minority, for the time, will be as much the governed or subject portion, as are the people in an aristocracy, or the subjects in a monarchy. The only difference in this respect is, that in the government of a majority, the minority may become the majority, and the majority the minority, through the right of suffrage; and thereby change their relative positions, without the intervention of force and revolution. (20)

²⁵In his Discourse, Calhoun criticizes this view as espoused and perpetuated by James Madison in Federalist # 10.

So that condition or circumstance, which renders a government of the majority at least as abusive and oppressive as the other forms of absolute government, is the dual-principle of our nature. The majority, unconstrained in its exercise of governmental power, partakes of the dual-principle -- and this circumstance prompts it to disregard the interests of the minority, at whose expense it is, for a time, free to aggrandize itself. And yet, the opinion has been widely entertained, that a government of the majority is one in which the tendency of government to abuse and oppression is effectually counteracted by the limited duration of the rule of the majority, and the uncertainty of its tenure. But this popular opinion, too, Calhoun explains, is utterly false and unfounded. In truth, the very opposite of this opinion turns out to be the case, because . . .

. . . the very uncertainty of the tenure, combined with the violent party warfare which must ever precede a change of parties under such governments, would rather tend to increase than diminish the tendency to oppression. (20-21)

Anticipating Calhoun's analysis here of absolute democracies and the behavior of their ruling numerical majorities, Hume, in his essay titled "On the Rise of the Arts and Sciences", described the disposition and conduct characteristic of a single ruler whose power is absolute but of uncertain or limited tenure. Hume writes:

Arbitrary power, in all cases, is somewhat oppressive and debasing; but it is altogether ruinous and intolerable, when contracted into a small compass; and becomes still worse, when the person, who possesses it, knows that the time of his authority is limited and uncertain. Habet subjectos tanquam suos; viles, ut aliens.²⁶ He governs the subjects

²⁶ Hume is quoting Tacitus, *The Histories* 1. 37: ". . . now he keeps us under his heel as if we were his slaves, and regards us as cheap because we belong to another" (Loeb translation by Clifford H. Moore). As editor Eugene E. Miller points out, "Hume's quotation varies from the Latin original."

with full authority, as if they were his own; and with negligence or tyranny, as belonging to another. A people, governed after such a manner, are slaves in the full and proper sense of the word; and it is impossible they can ever aspire to any refinement of taste or reason. They dare not so much as pretend to enjoy the necessaries of life in plenty or security.²⁷

Echoing and developing this Humean insight, Calhoun's aim here is not to point to a merely incidental abuse associated with absolute democracy, but to a problem inherent to that form of government, where tenure is limited and uncertain.²⁸ Because, while rulers of societies with non-democratic regimens may hold tenure for a limited time only, either by a deliberate decision of the sovereign, by custom (as in the case of a regent) or by

²⁷ See, Hume, Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 116-117.

²⁸ Uncertain, that is, unless term limits are in place, and the ruling major has not yet been elected to hold its last possible successive term.

Also, it should be duly noted that Calhoun allows that governments based on the principle of suffrage unaided by organism may be well suited to some smaller and simpler societies, while a governmental organization with both suffrage and organism would prove a liability for such communities. Hence:

The more numerous the population, the more extensive the country, the more diversified the climate, productions, pursuits, and character of the people, the more wealthy, refined, and artificial their condition – and the greater the amount of revenues and disbursements – the more unsuited would the community be to . . . a [numerical majority] government, and the more rapid would be the passage [through a process of degeneration to a more absolute form.] On the other hand, [degeneration] might be slow in its progress amongst small communities, during the early stages of their existence, with inconsiderable revenues and disbursements, and a population of simple habits; provided the people are sufficiently intelligent to exercise properly, the right of suffrage, and sufficiently conversant with the rules necessary to govern the deliberations of legislative bodies. [The numerical majority government] is, perhaps, the only form of popular government suited to a people, while they remain in such a condition. Any other would be not only too complex and cumbersome, but unnecessary to guard against oppression, where the motive to use power for that power would be too feeble. And hence, colonies, from countries having constitutional governments, if left to themselves, usually adopt governments based on the numerical majority. But as population increases, wealth accumulates, and, above all, the revenues and expenditures become large – governments of this form must become less and less suited to the condition of society; until, if not in the mean time changed into governments of the concurrent majority, they must end in an appeal to force, to be followed by a radical change in its structure and character; and, most probably, into monarchy of the absolute form . . . (33-34)

accident; democratic regimes necessarily restrict the ruling party to a limited period of rule, and this is so whether the party be representatives or the majority of the general citizenry (as in a direct democracy). And so the circumstance of limited tenure, of itself, makes the rulers' abuse of the ruled a necessary feature of absolute democracy, whereas such abuse is merely an incidental feature of the aristocratic and monarchical regimes. This necessity or inexorability of abuse and oppression is one reason why Calhoun stresses that an absolute democratic government has the capacity to be at least as abusive and oppressive as either an absolute monarchy or an absolute aristocracy.

And so, far from mitigating the natural tendency of government to abuse and oppression, limited tenure and the large number required to elect the power-holders in absolute democracies render such democracies more abusive than other absolute forms. But such truths about absolute democracy and the right of suffrage unaided -- as highlighted by Calhoun and other Tocquevillian educators of democracy -- have had to struggle for recognition against a mighty tide of popular and uncritical prejudice in favor of the democratic form.²⁹ Unfortunately, a distinctly modern, post-eighteenth century conflation of the liberty of the individual with democracy has served, for the most part, to emotionalize calls for democratic reform around the world. In this way, the modern hedonistic rage for freedom from restraints of all kinds tends to fuel man's current infatuation with the democratic form.

²⁹ See Vernon L. Parrington, "The Master Political Mind of the South" in The Romantic Revolution in America (New York, 1927), 72-74:

[Calhoun] was convinced that America had too thoughtlessly accepted the principle of political democracy as a sufficient safeguard against the danger of arbitrary government. Soon or late it must discover, what the South already was discovering, that numerical democracy, unrestrained by constitutional limitations on its will, is no friend to political justice.

But the emotionalized calls for liberty-through-democracy which have dominated the post-Enlightenment political world have tended thusfar more to the establishment of democratic and totalitarian absolutisms than to the securing of liberty for the individual. Indeed, precisely this paradoxical and tragic outcome was foreseen, at least in outline, by Montesquieu, where he writes:

As in democracies the people appear to do very nearly what it wills to do, liberty has been supposed to reside in governments of the species: the Power of the people has been confused with the liberty of the people.³⁰

And earlier still, writers had remarked on those great abuses and inconveniences which naturally attend the application of the principles of democracy in their more rudimentary forms. Cicero, for example, roundly condemned absolute democracy:

There is no government to which I should more quickly deny the title of commonwealth than one in which everything is subject to the power of the multitude. For as we have decided that there was no commonwealth at Syracuse or at Agrigentum or at Athens when those cities were ruled by tyrants, or here at Rome when the decemvirs were in power, I cannot see how the name of commonwealth would be any more applicable to the despotism of the multitude. For in the first place a people exists only when the individuals who form it are held together by a partnership in justice, according to your excellent definition, Scipio. But such a gathering as you have mentioned is just as surely a tyrant as if it were a single person, and an even more cruel tyrant, because there can be nothing more horrible than a monster which falsely assumes the name and appearance of a people.³¹

So modern misconceptions concerning both the nature of liberty and of democracy have tended to reinforce one another, and to perpetuate and augment thereby man's earlier ignorance of the elements of educated and

³⁰ Montesquieu, *L'esprit des lois*, Book XI, chap. ii.

³¹ Cicero, *De Republica*, III, xxxiii. Emphasis added.

humane constitutional democracy. Bent on shattering these misconceptions in systematic fashion, Calhoun would emerge as the preeminent Tocquevillian educator of democracy, responding to the Frenchman's call scarcely a decade after Democracy in America appeared.

But, in the century and a half since Calhoun's death, men have been slow to master the lessons placed before them. Indeed, modern totalitarian regimes, beginning with the French revolutionary liberal despotism and including the communist and fascist forms of the present century, may be viewed, in large part, as logical consequences of the failure of modern democracy to become fully educated.

With Calhoun, as with Cicero, Montesquieu, and others, the sort of "totalizing" political absolutism that men have inaugurated and suffered in the twentieth century would have come as no surprise. Reminiscent of Aristotle in the Politics (Book V), Calhoun provides us with a detailed and systematic account of the tendency of the various forms of government to degeneration. (32-33) Within this account, Calhoun describes, for example, the various stages by which a government of the numerical majority tends to degenerate into dictatorship. From a combination of causes, power becomes concentrated into the hands of fewer and fewer individuals as the major and the minor parties of the democracy struggle with one another to secure, each for itself, the honors and emoluments of government. Eventually, the conflict between the two parties must be transferred from an appeal to the ballot-box to an appeal to force, and thence the dictatorship is born.

It is possible, of course, to mistake political degeneration for something else. For example, in a recent work, Robert Nozick has wrongly

attributed prudential “zigzag” behavior to certain democratic electorates, and has mistaken thereby degeneration for mass prudence.³² In his causal analysis of the behavior of modern democratic electorates, and of the American electorate, in particular, Nozick argues that these democratic electorates actually desire a zigzag or alternation in the empowerment of opposing political parties and agendas, and that, moreover, this zigzag behavior is sensible and reflects a kind of shrewdness and wisdom. Nozick writes:

The electorate wants the zigzag. Sensible folk, they realize that no political position will adequately include all of the values and goals one wants pursued in the political realm, so these will have to take turns. The electorate as a whole behaves in this sensible fashion, even if significant numbers of people stay committed to their previous goals and favorite programs come what may. For there may be a significant swing bloc of voters that will shift to new goals and make the difference – that the least ideologically committed voters may determine an election is abhorrent to the view that wishes politics to institute one particular set of principles, yet desirable otherwise – and in any case, a new generation of voters will appear on the scene ready to seek a different balance, eager even to try something new.³³

On this view, then, it is through the more or less conscious will and prudence of the American electorate, for example, that the Democratic and Republican parties have been made to alternate control of the Presidency in recent decades. But this analysis of the behavior of contemporary electorates is utterly false and unfounded, and could perhaps, by misleading, prove pernicious. For in the first place, it is simply not true that “no political position will adequately include all of the values and goals one wants

³² See Robert Nozick, The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations (London: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 286-296.

³³ *Ibid*, 295.

pursued in the political realm”, unless by “adequately” we mean a kind of comprehensive and sophisticated pursuit of the good that must itself presuppose something akin to that manifest impossibility -- human perfection; in which case we may rightly raise the issue of the superfluity of any distinctly political pursuit of the good at all. But also, in addition to raising such objections to Nozick’s interpretation of voter behavior, let us consider an alternative explanation of the recent “zigzag” pattern in democratic rule.

According to Calhoun, in the Disquisition (32-34), one of the stages in the process of the degeneration of a democracy is when -- after principles and policy have lost all real influence in elections, “and cunning, falsehood, deception, slander, fraud, and gross appeals to the appetites of the lowest and most worthless portions of the community, would take the place of sound reason and debate”-- the government would vibrate between two factions (for such will parties have become) at each successive election. Thus Calhoun describes this relevant part of the process:

Neither [faction] would be able to retain power beyond some fixed term; for those seeking office and patronage would become too numerous to be rewarded by the offices and patronage at the disposal of the government; and these being the sole objects of pursuit, the disappointed would, at the next succeeding election, throw their weight into the opposite scale, in the hope of better success at the next turn of the wheel. These vibrations would continue until confusion, corruption, disorder, and anarchy, would lead to an appeal to force -- to be followed by a revolution in the form of the government. (33)

Hence the phenomena which Nozick describes as a sensible zigzag by the popular electorate is, in truth, the vibration of power between parties, turned factions, which are impelled by various causes, including the dual-

principle, to wage deadly legislative warfare against each other. The vibration occurs because the honors and emoluments to be had by the victorious party are too few to satisfy all members of the coalition of interests, constitutive of the party, needed to win the election through a numerical majority. But the legislative warfare conducted by the rival parties or factions during succeeding elections is but a prelude to military despotism, assuming the process goes uninterrupted in its course.

So, through a misconception of the causes determining the behavior of democratic electorates, it is possible to valorize -- quite unwittingly -- what is, in fact, one stage in a process of degeneration of the political arrangements of a community into the crudest and purest form of absolute government, a military despotism.

And so the right of suffrage, although an element indispensable to the formation of a constitution, cannot, without some other provision, counteract the tendency of government to oppression and abuse. Therefore, the question must be put: What is that other provision? Or: what is that additional element which, together with the right of suffrage, combines to form a constitution that will counteract the tendency of government to abuse and oppression? It is Calhoun's answer to this question which forms the substance of the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

ORGANISM, OR WHAT MAKES A CONSTITUTION

All organic action, as far as our knowledge extends – whether it appertain to the material or political world, or be of human or divine mechanism – is the result of the reciprocal action and reaction of the parts of which it consists. It is this which confines the parts to their appropriate spheres, and compels them to perform their proper functions. Indeed, it would seem impossible to produce organic action by a single power – and that it must ever be the result of two or more powers, mutually acting and reacting on each other. And hence the political axiom – that there can be no constitution, without a division of power, and no liberty without a constitution.

– John C. Calhoun

A Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States

In this chapter I shall address the question: What is that additional element or principle which, together with the right of suffrage, combines to form a constitution that will counteract the tendency of government to abuse and oppression?

Lest we should incline to pass over the account of this second element of constitution without grasping its importance, Calhoun informs us that "of all of the questions embraced in the science of government, it involves a principle, the most important, and the least understood; and when understood, the most difficult of application in practice." (21) For it is, indeed, this principle "which makes the constitution, in its strict and limited sense." (21) This additional provision, recall, must be of a "character calculated to prevent any one interest, or combination of interests, from using the powers of government to aggrandize itself at the expense of the others." (21) So, this is the nature of the evil to be prevented; and it is "just in proportion as [this provision] shall prevent, or fail to prevent it, in the same degree it will effect, or fail to effect the end intended to be accomplished." (21)

There is, Calhoun tells us, but "one certain mode" by which the end intended can be accomplished; and that is "by the adoption of some restriction or limitation, which shall so effectually prevent any one interest, or combination of interests, from obtaining the exclusive control of the government, as to render hopeless all attempts directed to that end." (21) Hence abuse and oppression can be prevented only by the adoption of some restriction that will prevent merely a portion of the community, as regards its interests, from gaining exclusive control of government. And so the mark of constitutional government, as opposed to an absolute one, is that it is

inclusive as regards the possession and exercise of governmental power.

Inclusion is achievable only through adequate restriction; a restriction that successfully prevents the exclusive control of government. This preventing of an exclusive control of government by a single interest or combination, may, again, be effected by only "one mode"; and that is,

. . . by taking the sense of each interest or portion of the community, which may be unequally and injuriously affected by the action of the government, separately, through its own majority, or in some other way by which its voice may be fairly expressed; and to require the consent of each interest, either to put or to keep the government in action. This, too, can be accomplished only in one way -- and that is, by such an organism of the government -- and, if necessary for the purpose, of the community also -- as will, by dividing and distributing the powers of government, give to each division or interest, through its appropriate organ, either a concurrent voice in making and executing the laws, or a veto on their execution. (21)

To comprehend the full meaning of this passage, we must of course understand what Calhoun intends by "interest" and "sense." To take the sense of a community, or some portion thereof, is to register, through whatever procedure has been ordained by that community as a sovereign entity, those opinions of its members which concern their own good and the good of the general community. "Sense", then, refers to opinion about what the human good is and how to attain that good. Moreover, the opinion registered as "sense" is politically relevant in a way that other, private opinion is not, since it is supposed to have some more or less direct bearing on the action of government. This circumstance, in turn, implies that there is an important relation to be considered between opinion and law. Indeed, this relation has been remarked on by a number of political thinkers, including, for example, David Hume, who pointed out that all political

authority is rooted in opinion, and not, as is sometimes believed, in the physical force exercised by government. Hume writes: “. . . though men be much governed by interest; yet even interest itself, and all human affairs, are entirely governed by opinion ¹.” This opinion to which Hume referred is not the idle, ephemeral, and deracinated expression of fancy which so often, in our day, form the substance of editorial pages and opinion polls. Rather, Hume meant by “opinion” that abiding and slowly evolving body of belief that a people have concerning their own identity and well-being -- as an historical community with both spiritual connections to the past and hopes for the future.

Like other political philosophic issues of fundamental import, the relation between opinion and political authority has been alternately emphasized and neglected as a theme in Western political theorizing. In the sixteenth century, the now obscure French political thinker Etienne De La Boetie (1530-1563) observed that government does not have to be popularly elected to enjoy general public support, and posed the question as to why people consent, for example, to tyranny and to their own enslavement. Better known today for his famous friendship with Michel de Montaigne than for his political thought, De La Boetie, in his Discours de la Servitude Volontaire (1552 or 1553), went so far as to issue a radical call for mass nonviolent resistance or civil disobedience as a method for the overthrow of tyranny, and thereby underscored the view that all political authority is rooted in opinion. A century later, Thomas Hobbes -- largely in agreement with La Boetie about the centrality of the role of opinion in politics, but impelled more by a

¹ See “Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic” in David Hume, Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1987), 51.

concern for the establishment and preservation of order than for liberty -- observed that: “. . . the Actions of men proceed from their Opinions; and in the well governing of Opinions, consisteth the well governing of men’s Actions, in order to their Peace, and Concord².” Sympathetic to both De La Boetie’s concern for liberty and Hobbes’ concern for order, Hume, in an essay titled “Of the First Principles of Government”, would write:

Nothing appears more surprizing to those, who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye, than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few; and the implicit submission, with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers. When we enquire by what means this wonder is effected, we shall find, that, as FORCE is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular.³

But it was from the pen of Rousseau that the fundamental relation between opinion and political authority would be given what is perhaps its most eloquent description hereto, in a chapter of the Social Contract titled “Classification of the Laws.” Here Rousseau argues that “to set the whole in order or to give the commonwealth the best possible form, there are various relations to consider.” The fourth and “most important” of these relations is one “not engraved on marble or bronze, but in the hearts of citizens”, and “it is the true constitution of the state.” This relation is that between opinion and law, which Rousseau describes thus:

Every day it takes on new forces. When other laws grow old and die away, it revives and replaces them, preserves a people in the spirit of its institution and imperceptibly substitutes the force of habit for that of authority. I am speaking of mores, customs, and especially of opinion,

² Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. C. B. MacPherson (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 233.

³ See “Of the First Principles of Government” in David Hume, Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary, 32.

a part of the law unknown to our political theorists but one on which depends the success of all the others; a part with which the great legislator secretly occupies himself, though he seems to confine himself to the particular regulations that are merely the arching of the vault, whereas mores, slower to arise, form in the end its immovable keystone.⁴

The influence on Rousseau of Plato and Montesquieu, as regards the nature of law, is so great as to be in this passage nearly audible; for it is in opinion that we find, for instance, the "spirit of the laws." Indeed, constituting its spirit and, therewith, the proper material and base of its substance, opinion is the keystone or foundation of the laws. Along with customs and mores, opinion is both the original source and the sustaining force of laws. As the keystone which supports the "arch" of particular regulations, opinion generally proves more resistant both to sudden shocks and to gradual erosion than do, for example, the idiosyncratic convictions of private will. Indeed, as a reflection of human understanding and feeling, opinion may be, in whatever degree, either dark with ignorance or enlightened, partial or patriotic, and coarse or refined.

At its best, the deep opinion of a people, expressed through the organs of their interests and government, is a faithful and accurate recitation about their good. At its worst, opinion is delusional, and, if allowed consistently to shape the government and to animate its policies domestic and foreign, it will lead inexorably to the ruination of the community, and, to the ruin of neighboring communities, either through infection, rivalry, or some combination of the two. But however sound or deluded it may be in a given instance, this opinion of a people about their own good is that phenomenon

⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Social Contract in The Basic Political Writings (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 172.

in terms of which both the laws and the general history of a community are ultimately to be understood. Although its recommendation of the good may be usurped by the private will of rulers and therewith disregarded for a time, opinion possesses an inertial force by which it will inevitably re-assert itself, even in the wake of a period of prolonged submersion and of convulsions which can rack a polity and bring ruin upon its people. In these and in less troubled times, opinion tends to exercise a constant and stabilizing influence over the institutions -- political and otherwise -- which make up a society.

By taking the sense of the community, the organs of interests and government, at more or less regular intervals, tap into and draw from that reservoir of living and changing belief which alone can animate a government and imbue it with the spirit and concerns of those for whose protection and improvement it is ordained to exist. When established with regard to the principles of human nature, and to the actualized moral and physical conditions of that nature as possessed by the living community, these organs may serve as faithful oracles of the human good. However, in their absence, or where they are improperly formed, the deep opinion of a people goes unregistered, and that which forms the substance and guiding principles of governmental policy is not the interest of the general community, but is instead the alleged interest of what Rousseau called the dominant and

usurpatory “partial associations” of the community.⁵

So Calhoun would agree with Rousseau that opinion is the proper source of law; and with Hume, that opinion is the source of all political authority.

Acting on these insights, Calhoun – both as constitutional theorist and as statesman -- sought to promote the cause of justice by explaining the nature of those constitutional provisions by which opinion or “sense” is

⁵ Rousseau understood well the dangers attending partial associations :

If, when a sufficiently informed populace deliberates, the citizens were to have no communication among themselves, the general will would always result from the large number of small differences, and the deliberation would always be good. But when intrigues and partial associations come into being at the expense of the large association, the will of each of these associations becomes general in relation to its members and particular in relation to the state. It can be said, then, that there are no longer as many voters as there are men, but merely as many as there are associations. The differences become less numerous and yield a result that is less general. Finally, when one of these associations is so large that it dominates all the others, the result is no longer a sum of minor differences, but a single difference.

Rousseau’s command of the solution to this problem, however, was not so well developed, but it was nevertheless a promising beginning toward the solution that Calhoun would propose a century later, in the form of the doctrine of concurrent majority:

For the general will to be well articulated, it is therefore important that there should be no partial society in the state and that each citizen make up his own mind. Such was the unique and sublime institution of the great Lycurgus. If there are partial societies, their number must be multiplied and inequality among them prevented, as was done by Solon, Numa, and Servius. These precautions are the only effective way of bringing it about that the general will is always enlightened and that the populace is not tricked.

See Rousseau, Social Contract in The Basic Political Writings, 156. And finally, it was evidently Rousseau’s imperfect grasp of the principle of concurrent majority which led him to emphasize all the more vigorously the advantages of simple government and small communities. In a famous passage, he writes:

When, among the happiest people in the world, bands of peasants are seen regulating their affairs of state under an oak tree, and always acting wisely, can one help scorning the refinements of other nations, which make themselves illustrious and miserable with so much art and mystery?

A state thus governed needs very few laws; and in proportion as it becomes necessary to promulgate new ones, this necessity is universally understood. The first to propose them merely says what everybody has already felt; and there is no question of either intrigues or eloquence to secure the passage into law of what each has already resolved to do, once he is sure the others will do likewise .

See Rousseau, Social Contract, 203-204.

more regularly and thoroughly brought to bear in preserving and transforming the laws and governmental structures of communities. Also, by adopting this view of the source of proper law and political authority, Calhoun was able to avoid, for example, a vicious circle of reasoning concerning the nature and source of law which has ensnared and misled others. Rehearsing this circle, the historian Bertrand De Jouvenal writes:

Political authority should be just; it needs, that is to say, to act in conformity with the law. But the law, we are told, is nothing more than the epitome of the rules given out by political authority itself. Therefore the authority which makes laws is, by definition, always just.⁶

On this view, the legislator is judged to be omni-competent and infallible. But even this -- recall -- was not asserted by one so bold and so seemingly vicious as the sophist Thrasymachus, in the Republic.⁷ Still, many thinkers have fallen into this error, including, as De Jouvenal points out, one so able as Kant. For as he writes in the Metaphysic of Ethics:

The people is never entitled to resist the supreme legislator of the state; for a rule of law is only made possible by the submission of all to the legislative will. Any right of rebellion, or even of sedition, is, therefore, totally inadmissible. . . .

The people's duty to put up with abuse of the supreme power, even when it finds it insupportable, is based on the consideration that resistance to the sovereign body of laws should never be regarded as other than illegal, and as involving, even, the overthrow of the entire legal constitution. For the people to have a right to resistance, there would first need to be a public law permitting them to resist; in other words, the sovereign body of laws would need to contain a provision making it no longer sovereign.⁸

And so, according to Kant and other legal positivists, "Laws are the

⁶ See Bertrand De Jouvenal, On Power: The Natural History of Its Growth, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993), 335-336.

⁷ See Republic, Book I, 339a-340c.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, Metaphysic of Ethics (Fr. tr. Barni. Paris: 1853) first part. xlvii.

only source of the law. Therefore, whatever is in a law is law, and there can be no remedy against the laws⁹." But the erroneous circularity of legal positivism which, as Kant shows us, leads quite logically to a denial of the right of resistance¹⁰, is overcome when one recognizes, as Hume, Rousseau, Calhoun and others have, that law properly has its source in the spontaneously evolving moral opinion of communities. And so the right of resistance exists because the dynamic nature of human society and opinion, as expressions of the movement of individuals and of whole classes and communities from potency to act, makes possible a dissonance and tension between evolving opinion and the inherent stasis of law. The right of resistance, then, is one of the means by which such dissonance and tension is dissipated into a greater harmony between evolving opinion and existing law, and is therefore necessary.

Being clearer now about the meaning and import of "sense", let us consider now what Calhoun intends by an "interest." For as it turns out, some of the most common and serious misunderstandings of the system of concurrent majority, and therefore of Calhoun's political theorizing in general, originate in a failure to apprehend what Calhoun means by an interest.

First, it has been noted that Calhoun does not provide us with a direct,

⁹ De Jouvenal, On Power, 336.

¹⁰ In light of Kant's understanding of the essential role of resistance between individuals and groups, due to man's "unsocial sociability", in improving and advancing the race, as I described it in Chapter III, it is a bit surprising and disappointing that Kant would err by denying a role for resistance in any form to the power of the legislator.

explicit, and systematic speculative account of the subject.¹¹ Still, it would be wrong to conclude that he does not provide us with some of the elements and outline by means of which such a speculative account might be built. Consequently, in gathering together and organizing the elements of a more systematic account of interests, one is obliged to supplement what Calhoun does say expressly about interests with inferences (1) from speculative claims and analyses concerning other, related issues, and (2) from the concrete historical examples of interests that Calhoun cites. Also, to avoid confusion, I shall refer to the sort of “interest” with which we are principally concerned here as a constitutional interest, thereby underscoring its natural oracular and legislative role within a governmental structure, and distinguishing it from individual, national, or other interests.

The fundamentality of the phenomenon of constitutional or “Calhounian” interests both as a practical concern of the statesman and as a theoretical subject of the philosopher can hardly be overstated. These interests are self-identified social groupings which, as we shall see, stand at the phenomenal crossroad, as it were, between evolving society and that “controlling power” which is government. This being the case, it appears that

¹¹ In the words of Calhoun’s most recent biographer:

Calhoun never really explains what he means by an ‘interest.’ He is obviously thinking of the conflicting interests of agrarian and manufacturing, and of slave and free labor communities, but it is not clear that he appreciated the importance of other variables such as language, religion, ethnicity, and ideology in defining and reconciling interests.

See Irving H. Bartlett, John C. Calhoun: A Biography (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 353. But, judging from the variety of historical examples of interests that Calhoun does present – which will be illustrated shortly – it is evident that Calhoun did have at least something like the wider appreciation of the sheer variety of interests that Bartlett fails to credit him. See also Ralph Lerner, “Calhoun’s New Science of Politics” in John C. Calhoun: A Profile (New York; Hill & Wang, 1968), 211: “. . . we wonder what constitutes an interest.”

any substantial and abiding future advances in political practice must be predicated, in part, on some further disclosure and theoretical account of the origin and nature of interests. But future speculation on the nature of constitutional interests would do well to pick up where previous advances have left off, and so must take account of the pioneering work of Calhoun, among others.

For Calhoun, an interest is a man-made convention through which individuals and smaller groups, in combination with each other, pursue shared goods. Because they are means for pursuing shared goods, interests are necessarily social in character, and, therefore, it is impossible for an individual, of himself, to constitute an interest in this (constitutional) sense of the word.¹² Common nature, or shared natural attributes, make possible the pursuance of common goods through the vehicles of interests, while that sphere of independent and free thought and action known as liberty, where this exists in a proper proportion to governmental power, makes possible the pursuit of those goods unique to the individual. We find Rousseau, for example, in the preceding century, driving toward this insight about interests when he wrote:

. . . if the opposition of private interests made necessary the establishment of societies, it is the accord of these same interests that made it possible. It is what these different interests have in common that forms the social bond, and were there no point of agreement among all these interests, no society could exist. For it is utterly on the basis of this common interest that society ought to be governed.¹³

And it is the successful pursuit of both these commonly shared goods

¹² The mistaken view that a Calhounian interest is susceptible to a reductio ad absurdum, whereby every individual could logically be an interest onto himself, may be found, for example, in Louis Hartz, "The Constitution: Calhoun and Fitzhugh" in John C. Calhoun: A Profile, ed. John L. Thomas (New York: Hill & Wang, 1968), 164-170.

¹³ Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Social Contract in The Great Political Writings, 153.

and the goods unique to the individual which together constitute, after all, the proper and salutary actualization of human nature. Public and private goods are attained, in large part, through these public organs or conventions known as interests. Therefore, a constitutional or "Calhounian" interest is of the greatest moment for the survival and successful actualization of humanity.

Moreover, because it is a group of individuals organized around the pursuit or defense of some commonly shared good or set of goods, an interest can never be a mere aggregate of individuals. As Calhoun's analysis indicates, what is referred to here, for convenience's sake, as "interest", has been variously referred to as "order", "class", or "portion"; a variety of labels which itself suggests the great variety to which this form of association is susceptible. Ultimately, the extent of the variety of shared goods, and therefore, of interests, is limited only by the nature of man, and by the condition that their pursuit and attainment are susceptible of being affected, either beneficially or harmfully, by the action or inaction of government.¹⁴

Historically, constitutional interests have been formed on the basis of some combination or admixture of the following principles: family ties, common history, common legal status, and common economic, religious, or cultural interests. Indeed, the slightest reflection on history confirms the great variety and diversity of which human association, in the form of interests, orders, classes, or portions, is susceptible. For example, the great interests at the base and centre of some of the most renowned constitutional governments hereto include: the patricians and plebeians of the Roman

¹⁴ For recall from the previous chapter that even the most homogeneous community contains at least two interests regarding the action or inaction of government, the taxpayers and the tax-consumers.

Republic (c. 500-31 BC); the king, lords, and commons (Great Britain); and, every individual of the nobles and gentry present, in electing the king, and the king, the senate, bishops and deputies of the nobility and gentry of the palatinates, in adopting any measure or enacting any law (Poland of the Diet). But an interest, in addition to being constituted on the basis of some principle, as it were, of history, economics, culture, or religion, may also be organized on the basis of some principle of politics, including for example, the facilitation of trade or common defence. For such indeed is the case with distinct unitary political communities that have joined together to form either a confederacy or a federation.¹⁵ And so, just as distinct social and economic classes, or legal orders, may constitute the interests of a constitutional unitary state; the distinct, sovereign, and independent member states of a federation or confederation constitute the interests which are characteristic of both federal and confederal governmental forms.

In the Discourse, Calhoun is careful to distinguish the federal form of governance both from a confederacy, on the one hand, and from a unitary or national government, on the other hand. A government is federal, "because it is the government of States united in political union, in contradistinction to a government of individuals socially united; that is, by what is usually called, a social compact." In other words: a government is federal and not national, when "it is the government of a community of States, and not the government of a single State or nation." (82) On the other hand, the difference between a federation and a confederacy lies not in their foundations, but in the superstructures of the respective systems. (85) And

¹⁵ As for example, with the Hanseatic League (c. 1157-1669) and the American Federal Republic.

so, in federal and confederal structures alike, the individual member States retain “their separate existence, as independent and sovereign communities.”

(85) But these distinctions may be clarified even more. Thus a federal government “differs and agrees, but in opposite respects, with a national government, and a confederacy”:

[a federal government] differs from [a national government], inasmuch as it has, for its basis, a confederacy, and not a nation; and agrees with it in being a government: while [a federal government] agrees with [a confederal government], to the extent of having a confederacy for its basis, and differs from it, inasmuch as the powers delegated to it are carried into execution by a government -- and not by a mere congress of delegates, as in the case of a confederacy. To be more full and explicit -- a federal government, though based on a confederacy, is, to the extent of the powers delegated, as much a government as a national government itself. It possesses, to this extent, all the authorities possessed by the latter, and as fully and perfectly. The case is different with a confederacy; for, although it is sometimes called a government -- its Congress, or Council, or the body representing it, by whatever name it may be called, is much more nearly allied to an assembly of diplomatists, convened to deliberate and determine how a league or treaty between their several sovereigns, for certain defined purposes, shall be carried into execution; leaving to the parties themselves, to furnish their quota of means, and to cooperate in carrying out what may have been determined on. (116-117)

The confederal form is ancient, and may be illustrated by numerous examples, including, as regards their constitutive constitutional interests: the Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Tuscarora, and Mohawk tribes of the Confederacy of the Six Nations (founded in the sixteenth century by Hiawatha and Dekanawida), and the American states under the Articles of Confederation (United States, 1781-1789).¹⁶ But federal structures are “new,

¹⁶ Also: the seven northern provinces of the Low Countries (1581–1795), the cantons of the Swiss confederacy (1291-1798, and 1815-1848), the north German towns and merchants of the Hanseatic League (c. 1157-1669), and the Hellenic League of the Persian Wars (500-449 BC).

peculiar, and unprecedented”¹⁷, and include, for example: the American states under the Constitution of 1787 (United States, 1789-1860¹⁸); and the states of the American South under the Confederate Constitution of 1861 (Confederate States of America, 1861-1865).¹⁹

So the principles on the basis of which constitutional interests emerge and persist fall under the general categories of family, common history and legal status, economics, religion, culture, and politics. Also, what I have called political interests and common territory are characteristics unique to those constitutional interests that make up federal or confederal structures. However, what remains is to clarify our understanding of what constitutional interests are so that we may distinguish them from other forms of association, including political parties, and the so-called “pressure groups” or “special interests” of contemporary political scientific parlance. Even at the outset of our investigation, however, it appears that associations of a sort properly fitted to assume the power and position of a constitutional interest within a community are hardier substances than the relatively ephemeral phenomena that are political parties, pressure groups, and “special interests.” For the former are actually portions of the community in ways that the latter are not, being more directly perpetuated across generations through the

¹⁷ See A Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States in Union and Liberty, 117.

¹⁸ Though not commonly acknowledged, the election of Abraham Lincoln, a sectional candidate, signalled the end of all but the pretence and form of American federalism as established in 1789. Lincoln’s subsequent resistance by force to secession involved in effect a denial of the principle of state sovereignty, and thereby, a denial of the federal character of American government. With his forcible suppression of the forces of federalism, both North and South, Lincoln did much to transform the United States into a centralized, consolidated, and imperial regime. For such reasons, the year 1860 may be selected as the terminus of the American federal republic, though it is perhaps possible to set the date earlier, say, with the passage of the Revenue Collection or “Force” Bill, 1833.

¹⁹ Also, the Swiss Confederation (1848-present).

agency of the family.²⁰ Still, it should be remembered that a detailed and systematic account of the origin and nature of interests falls beyond the scope of the present work. Toward such an account, however, I offer the previous and following observations and elaborations from Calhoun's own limited but suggestive account.

As I shall indicate below, that fundamental aspect of the nature of constitutional interests most neglected by recent writers is what we may call their moral and intellectual element. But Calhoun understood quite well this moral-intellectual element or dimension of constitutional interests. As we shall see in Chapters VIII and IX, in discussions of the sources of a community's power and of self-knowledge, liberty is a reward for virtue, both moral and intellectual. And political constitution, as we shall see in this and later chapters, is a principal and indispensable means by which liberty is secured. But, as we have already begun to argue, interests are essential elements in any genuine political constitution, and so certain fundamental relations exist between moral and intellectual attainment or virtue, on the one hand, and the interests of constitution, on the other hand.

Just as political and civil rights are not a natural inheritance of man, as we shall see in Chapter VIII, the status of constitutional interest is not conferred on a group as a natural inheritance. Interests are not made by government fiat, but are instead those evolved and matured social elements from which a community may fashion for itself a constitutional government. And so certain kinds of associations may become constitutional interests

²⁰ And so, the patricians, the plebeians, the [British] Crown, the [British] Commons, and the various states of the American Union were self-perpetuating, family-based associations in ways that, for example, feminists, homosexuals, pedophiles, the GOP, the National Organization of Women (NOW), the NAACP, the Christian Coalition, the ACLU, and the National Rifle Association (NRA) could not be.

through recognition by communities and empowerment through (but not by) the organs of government. Like rights and liberties, the recognition by the community of one of its groups or portions as a constitutional interest must come as a result of skillful, courageous, and successful self-assertion on the part of the members of that group and in behalf of their commonly held aim. Specifically, certain kinds of associations can attain the formal and legal power of self-protection within a governmental framework, as will soon be explained. And so, since it necessarily involves the recognition of certain groups as constitutional interests, political constitution presupposes a high level of moral and intellectual attainment on the part of certain portions of the community.²¹

By overlooking this moral and intellectual aspect of interests, demagogues and well-intended ignoramuses have been prone both to issue and to act upon the most extravagant, unfounded, and fatuous claims concerning the abilities and "rights" of certain favoured groups to exercise political power. But grossly exaggerated estimates of the actualized moral and intellectual abilities of a portion of the community to rule themselves and others -- if acted upon -- must lead ultimately to the direst consequences for all concerned. And so, as we saw in Chapter I, flattery and pretension -- including self-flattery and conceit -- show themselves, once again, to be at odds with the methods and aims of the statesmanly art.

²¹ We noted earlier that the constitutional interests peculiarly characteristic of federal and confederal structures are the various distinct, sovereign, and independent communities the terms of whose political union form the substance and articles of their constitutional compact. From this, and from our discussion of the moral and intellectual dimension of interests, we may infer that sovereignty, as the (political) principle common to those interests peculiar to federal and confederal structures, involves moral and intellectual attainment. In this sense, then, federations and confederacies are moral and political attainments premised on that moral and intellectual virtue required on the part of communities to establish and maintain their sovereignty.

Common nowadays, this oversight concerning the moral and intellectual character of constitutional interests has led to some of the most serious misinterpretations of the motives and ideas of Calhoun. This oversight is especially evident, for example, in an essay by Samuel Dubois Cook titled "The American Liberal Democratic Tradition, the Black Revolution, and Martin Luther King, Jr."²² Oblivious to the moral aspect of liberty and interests, Cook charges Calhoun with sophistry, or with manipulating ideas in order to serve the narrow ends of Southern slaveholders, and with not taking into account the well-being and interests of the slaves themselves. Cook writes:

Calhoun's political theory is symbolic of a special irony in American political thought. His doctrine of the "concurrent majority" is a powerful formulation of the rights of minorities and of their constitutional protection against what Alexis de Tocqueville called "the tyranny of the majority." Clearly, he makes a telling point: majorities are inclined to trample asunder the rights of minorities, and hence they must be restrained by organizations and instruments of power. The problem is complex because the political system does not consist of a single minority but an endless variety of minorities -- including subminorities of identifiable interest. Calhoun was only interested in the protection of a particular minority²³ -- and a

²² This essay forms the introduction to Hanes Walton, Jr., The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), xiii-xviii.

²³ Cook provides no substantiation for this view of Calhoun's motives and concerns. In truth, Calhoun was mindful of and sympathetic to the well-being of the slave. See, for example, his "Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions" [February 6, 1837] in Union and Liberty, pp. 463-476:

Never before has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn of history to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually. It came among us in a low, degraded, and savage condition, and in the course of a few generations it has grown up under the fostering care of our institutions, as reviled as they have been; to its present comparatively civilized condition. This, with the rapid increase of numbers, is conclusive proof of the general happiness of the race, in spite of all the exaggerated tales to the contrary. (473)

Significantly, then, Calhoun describes American slavery as a civilizing institution for a tribal people, implying, of course, that the people are capable of improvement.

particularly cruel and anti-democratic minority at that: the aristocratic, semi-feudal, slaveholding Southern minority against the majority of the nation, and maybe against the majority of the South itself.²⁴

But in charging Calhoun with sophistry, Cook never goes beyond mere assertion.²⁵ Instead of being substantiated by argument in terms of the actual statesmanly career of Calhoun and the conditions of the time, the charge merely hangs suspended in mid-air -- supported only by the blustering prejudice of egalitarian demagoguery. To his credit, however, Cook's more constructive aim is to point out how Calhoun's teachings may perhaps be converted someday into means of helping black Americans more directly:

One of these days, Calhoun is going to be rediscovered, dusted off, updated, and used in the contemporary power and ideological struggles. He may well become purged and "blackized." If so, the political theory of the Black Revolution will be catalyzed, enlarged, and

²⁴ Hanes Walton, Jr., The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), xvi-xvii.

Cook continues:

Calhoun's formulation was designed and put forth with eloquence and skill to enable and to justify -- indeed, to sanctify -- the right of a regional minority to keep a racial minority in bondage. Thus, ironically, we have here an argument in behalf of the freedom and constitutional right of a white minority to keep a black minority in chains. Calhoun did not recognize the radical inconsistency, and in view of his racist presuppositions, there was none. Like others, he bifurcated the human order into white life and black life; he made the former superior, sacred, and an end in itself while the latter was made inferior, profane, and a tool for the former. (p. xvii)

²⁵ This circumstance renders Cook vulnerable to the charge of having committed the fallacy of ad hominem ("poisoning the well"). Here, the effort has been made to impugn Calhoun's objectivity concerning the public good by claiming that he had a vested interest in the view he defended. But even if Calhoun had had a nonrational motive for supporting the institution of slavery as it existed in the South at the time, that circumstance, of itself, would not mean that his position was either false or vicious, and it certainly does not mean that one can decide ahead of time that all of his arguments for the position can be dismissed.

enriched.²⁶

Unfortunately, however, Cook's apparent admiration for Calhoun and gratitude for his ideas are overwhelmed by a spirit of resentment, vengefulness and spite that has its origin largely in a common misunderstanding of the actual conditions of the slave.²⁷

It would be the height of irony if the arguments advanced, prior to the Civil War, by the most gifted and influential apologist for black enslavement were converted, in the waning decades of the twentieth

²⁶Hanes Walton, Jr., The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), xviii. One of Cook's suppositions here appears to be that blacks, in order to benefit from constitutional elements like the concurrent majority, with its negative or veto for interests, must be able to possess and exercise that veto directly and en bloc as blacks. But this supposition is itself demonstrably false, and it implies, in turn, that blacks and other minorities who have not yet been recognized as distinct interests, have not yet benefited from the operations of the principles of constitutional government – a supposition that is also demonstrably false. Later in this chapter, I shall indicate how, according to Calhoun's account of organism, social groups that do not themselves possess the status of constitutional interest tend, in a truly constitutional regime, to reap the benefits of protection and improvement by virtue of being subsumed within a larger group that does have that status within the general society. Thus, the larger group, with its constitutional status, tends to extend a protective umbrella over all of its constitutive elements. Indeed, it is when this protection and assistance are perceived as inadequate by some smaller group within the interest that a beginning is made at the formation of a new and additional constitutional interest based on the principle of that smaller and discontented group.

²⁷One scholarly work that constitutes a partial redress of this misunderstanding is Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1974), 2 vols. Time on the Cross is a pioneering account of the actual living and working conditions of the slave in the antebellum South and of the viability of the "peculiar institution" as part of the Southern economy. In addition to arguing for the general economic viability of the Southern slave labor system, Engerman and Fogel, through sophisticated statistical method, support and corroborate such reports on the general well-being of the slave as were given, for example, by Calhoun, in his "Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions" [February 6, 1837] in Union and Liberty, 467:

... the Central African race ... had never existed in so comfortable, so respectable, or so civilized a condition, as that which it now enjoyed in the Southern States. The population doubled in the same ratio with that of the whites – a proof of ease and plenty, while, with respect of civilization, it nearly kept pace with that of the owners
...

century, into arguments for black liberation.²⁸ Ideas, sometimes, have strange careers, ambiguous legacies, and complex destinies -- to the embarrassment and chagrin of their originators. Once afloat the continuum of history, they are free agents and often rebellious ones.²⁹

And more specifically, Cook writes:

Ideas have a way of begetting a strange breed of children. Calhoun is "relevant" in a corrective, creative, and useful way to the Black Revolution. Perhaps this is a unique brand of poetic justice designed by the gods to mock the human condition. Substitute in his argument "black" for the aristocratic South, the interest he represented. Apply his doctrine of "concurrent majority" to the current racial predicament. Among the interesting conclusions is the necessity of a black veto on issues of public policy in order to promote and protect black interest.³⁰

²⁸ Taking this cue is Lani Guinier, a Pennsylvania Law School Professor, in The Tyranny of the Majority: Fundamental Fairness in Representative Democracy (New York: The Free Press, 1994). But, following the intimations and basic ideological agenda of Cook, Guinier's analysis of interests is seriously flawed, in large part due to her failure to understand and to acknowledge the moral and intellectual dimension of interests. But Guinier's confusion about the nature of interests receives no correction when the views of Calhoun and Guinier are wrongly conflated in R. Randall Bridwell and William J. Quirk, Judicial Dictatorship (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 96-100. By failing even to grasp the problem of majority tyranny as highlighted so well by Tocqueville, Calhoun, and others, Quirk and Bridwell would apparently have us bury our heads in the sand, in good Madisonian fashion, and "trust the majority."

²⁹ Hanes Walton, Jr., The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), xviii.

³⁰ Cook goes too far in claiming that a black veto is necessitated according to Calhoun's principle of concurrence. Instead, he might argue that Calhoun's doctrine is compatible with a black veto, assuming that such a black interest could be formed on the basis of sufficient moral and intellectual attainment by blacks themselves; since, as I explained earlier, a true constitutional interest is not a boon or a dole to be dispensed, for example, by governmental fiat.

Indeed, there are surely individual blacks in America and elsewhere today who would fit the moral and intellectual criteria of full participants in a constitutional political order, and possibly, of leaders of an independent black interest. On the assumption that blacks as a whole within a nation could be recruited as members of such an interest, one happy consequence of such an actuality might be that these people, as members of a distinct interest possessing a veto power, would become self-governing, and therefore, could no longer expect help from whites. This new, independent condition would foster latent virtues in blacks themselves, and would remove them finally from the vice-inducing conditions of being managed and of living off the public dole.

On this view, a Calhounian constitutional interest could not, for example, be a lobby seeking "their" share of tax disbursements and privileges. Indeed, Calhoun would object that a regime of pork, as it were, dominated by such lobbies is decadent, and requires reformation.

Add to the equation another Calhounian jewel: the plural executive.³¹ But, in this case, make one president black, another white, and the third an American Indian woman.³²

But such daring proposals for reform beg the questions that we have already begun to raise in this chapter concerning the nature of constitutional interests in general and their moral and intellectual dimension in particular. For clearly, the manner and judgment with which a community grants or confers the status of interest on one of its portions is no light or trivial matter, since ultimately both the physical and spiritual survival and well-being of the entire community are at stake. In particular, the community must be careful to distinguish between an interest and a faction. For the members of an interest are united and actuated by a common interest which is not adverse to the individual interests of other citizens, or to the general good of the society; while the members of a faction are pursuing an end which is adverse not only to the interests of other citizens and of the community as a whole, but to the true interests of the members of the faction themselves.³³

Having made a beginning at least at describing the nature of "sense" and "interest", let us continue our inquiry into these and related topics by considering further their roles as elements of the principle of organism, or of

³¹ In his Discourse, Calhoun proposed that the U. S. Constitution be amended so as to have a dual (and not a tripartite) executive, reminiscent of Sparta and Rome, pp. 275-278. But Calhoun's prescription of a dual executive was contingent upon moral and political conditions at the time. Consequently, Calhoun would have no objection, a priori, to, for example, a tripartite executive per se, so long as it is suited to a community's moral and physical circumstances.

³² Hanes Walton, Jr., The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), xvii.

³³ Recall the accurate and concise definition of faction by James Madison (1751-1836), in The Federalist [1787], no. 10:

By a faction, understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.

what makes a constitution.

In a constitutional system of government, the various interests of a community are ordered in relation one to another, such that the powers of government are divided and distributed among them. Each interest is given, "through its appropriate organ, either a concurrent voice in making and executing laws, or a veto" on the execution of the laws. (21) Calhoun refers to this structure in which interests are organized as an "organism", since each interest speaks and acts for itself and, thereby, for the whole community, through "its appropriate organ." These organs combined make up the organism that is the unique and distinguishing feature of the political constitution of a particular community. This general arrangement is indispensable, Calhoun says, since . . .

It is only by such an organism, that the assent of each [interest] can be made necessary to put the government in motion; or the power made effectual to arrest its action, when put in motion -- and it is only by the one or the other that the different interests, orders, classes, or portions, into which the community may be divided, can be protected, and all conflict and struggle between them prevented -- by rendering it impossible to put or to keep it in action, without the concurrent consent of all. (21-22)

Having provided a discussion of the nature of organism, Calhoun turns to a consideration of its relation to the right of suffrage:

. . . organism . . ., combined with the right of suffrage, constitutes, in fact, the elements of constitutional government. The [right of suffrage], by rendering those who make and execute the laws responsible to those on whom they operate, prevents the rulers from oppressing the ruled; and [organism], by making it impossible for any one interest or combination of interests or class, or order, or portion of the community, to obtain exclusive control, prevents any one of them from oppressing the other. It is clear, that oppression and abuse of power must come, if at all, from the one or the other quarter. From no other can they come. It follows, that the two, suffrage and proper organism combined, are sufficient to counteract the tendency of

government to oppression and abuse of power; and to restrict it to the fulfillment of the great ends for which it is ordained. (22)

So, while the right of suffrage thus commands the rulers: "Serve not yourselves, but that portion of the community which has elected you"; organism compels them to: "Serve for the sake of the whole community, or without prejudice to any portion thereof." But however much hope this explanation and model of constitution may inspire, Calhoun is quick to follow that no panacea for political evils is being proposed or promised herewith. Fully aware that human nature suffers irremediably from certain grave faults, and duly chastened by the principle of human imperfectibility; Calhoun points out that, in the presentation of constitution (recounted above), he ". . . assumed the organism to be perfect, and the different interests, portions, or classes of the community, to be sufficiently enlightened to understand its character and object, and to exercise, with due intelligence, the right of suffrage." (22) But, "To the extent that either may be defective, to the same extent the government would fall short of fulfilling its end." (22)

So elementary principles, however sound, are often difficult of application, and commonly meet with impediments that prevent any full and complete application, a circumstance examined in some detail in Chapter I. This difficulty of application, or the impossibility of a full application, cannot, however, impugn the principle of suffrage or the principle of organism, because "In reducing them to proper form, in applying them to practical uses, all elementary principles are liable to difficulties; but they are not, on the account, the less true, or valuable." (22) Nor is a government which falls short of fulfilling its ordained ends, due to an incomplete or defective application of either or both of these principles, one whose very

existence can “impeach the truth of the principles on which it rests.” (22) For the principles retain their truth independent of this or that effort at practical application; hence they suggest an ideal form of government that can be more or less approximated in individual historical instances, but never fully attained once and for all. So the ideal suggested by these two principles possesses a practical value that can in no way be slighted or diminished by any defective application of the principles or partial attainment of the ideal itself.

While it is impossible to achieve, in this life, a perfect and perpetual constitutional government, we are left with the assurance by Calhoun that, when we are most favored by circumstances, a regime that is at the very least tolerably good lies within the reach of our humble capacities. For as man is imperfect, and irremediably so, no perfect social order ever can be created. Thus men are not made for utopias, or for any other perfect things. And of course, it is no mere coincidence that the word “utopia”, of Greek origin, translates “no place, or no where”, since a perfect society with perfect men could never come to be in the merely earthy realm of human existence.³⁴ Indeed, as Russell Kirk tells us, “All that we can reasonably expect is a tolerably ordered, just, and free society, in which some evils, maladjustments, and suffering will continue to lurk. [And], By proper attention to prudent reform, we may preserve and improve this tolerable order³⁵.” Nor can human governments, however well constructed, outstrip once and for all

³⁴ This insight is mirrored in a quip by the British historian Thomas Babington, Lord Macaulay (1800-1859), On Lord Bacon [1837]: “An acre of Middlesex is better than a principality in Utopia.”

³⁵ Russell Kirk, The Politics of Prudence (Bryn Mawr: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1993), 21.

the machinations of knavery.³⁶

Laboring as statesman for the preservation and improvement of the “tolerable order” that was, in his day, the United States of America, Calhoun would oppose the spiritual forbears of those ideologues, who, with their promise of the perfection of man and society, would convert “a great part of the twentieth-century world into a terrestrial hell³⁷.” Since his death, Calhoun, through his writings, and in defiance of the fatal conceit of human perfectability, has upheld a practical and salutary ideal of constitutional government.

Calhoun’s ideal of constitutional government, expounded systematically in his Disquisition on Government, differs from a utopian proposal in the wisdom it evinces about human nature and about the human condition generally, and in its recognition of human imperfectibility in particular.³⁸ The ideal is useful and worthwhile apart from the impossibility of any full and perpetuate instantiation of it, because it serves as a guide for reform and a rule by which to measure progress or regress in the political affairs of man. Hence we are told that “Where the organism is perfect, every interest will be truly and fully represented, and of course the whole

³⁶ As the rhetorician Richard M. Weaver has remarked in an incisive essay titled “[Robert E.] Lee the Philosopher”, in The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver (Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1987), 173: “There is no political structure which knaves cannot defeat, and subtle analyses of the psyche may prove of more avail than schemes of world parliament.”

³⁷ Russell Kirk, The Politics of Prudence, 21.

³⁸ Cf. John L. Thomas, “Introduction” in John C. Calhoun: A Profile (New York: Hill & Wang, 1968), xii: “. . . despite his self-styled realism, [Calhoun’s] political thought is tinged with a pronounced utopian shade highlighting predicted consequences which his premises made unlikely.” See also in the same volume Ralph Lerner, “Calhoun’s New Science of Politics”, 221: “In the last analysis, the general applicability of Calhoun’s system is open to serious question, thereby exposing him to the charge of ‘closet ingenuity.’”

But what these criticisms ignore, of course, is that Calhoun’s constitutional theory is in fact an exposition of principles of already demonstrated efficacy. So in considering the “applicability” of his theory, we are to judge the faithfulness and descriptive incisiveness of Calhoun’s exposition, since we are not addressing a closet theory.

community must be so." (22) But:

It may be difficult, or even impossible, to make a perfect organism -- but, although this is true, yet even when, instead of the sense of each and of all, it takes that of a few great and prominent interests only, it would still, in a great measure, if not altogether, fulfil the end intended by a constitution. For, in such case, it would require so large a portion of the community, compared with the whole, to concur, or acquiesce in the action of the government, that the number to be plundered would be too few, and the number to be aggrandized too many, to afford adequate motives to oppression and the abuse of its powers. Indeed, however imperfect the organism, it must have more or less effect in diminishing such tendency. (22-23)

What is realizable so far as the improvement of government is concerned, although short of perfection, is sufficient to hold it strictly to its proper ends. While the possibility of the creation of a perfect organism is doubtful, an imperfect organism may serve our needs admirably. And these needs are served when the plundering by a dominant portion of another portion that is without the power of self-protection is prevented by a wise and effectual application of the two principles of constitution, suffrage and organism.³⁹

Between the dark, ever-lurking possibility of plunder and the utter impossibility of perfect government there lies the realizable prospect of a "tolerably ordered, just, and free society"⁴⁰. As the tell-tale sign of governmental oppression, such plundering occurs only where there are both

³⁹ A concern to prevent such plundering, which must necessarily weaken the entire community and therefore the power at the disposal of its leader, prompted Machiavelli, in The History of Florence, Book VII, to remark that: "It is true that some divisions [within the community] are harmful to the republic while others are helpful to it. Those that are accompanied by sects and partisan factions are harmful. Since, therefore, a ruler of a republic cannot prevent enmities from arising within it, he at least ought to prevent them from becoming sects." As Calhoun would explain, the means of preventing the formation of sects is to give each significant interest in the community the power of self-protection, and, thereby, a concurrent voice in the government.

⁴⁰ Russell Kirk, The Politics of Prudence, 21.

unguarded governmental powers and goods of quality and quantity -- holdings of the defenseless portion of the community -- sufficient to activate the impulse to plunder on the part of the ruling interests.

The differing sets of circumstances in which plundering through government either occurs or is prevented are captured and synopsized in Calhoun's formulation, in the passage above, of what I call his "plunder principle." Where those to be plundered are too few, and their holdings are of insufficient quantity, relative to the number and appetites of the plunderers, to excite the avarice of the latter, and to move them thereby to plunderous action; these few and their holdings are, for the time, passed over by their predator as unworthy of its interest and effort. But where, on the other hand, the quantity and quality of spoils of an unprotected portion are sufficient to whet the appetites of the plunderers, no time is wasted in the commencement of the vicious and ultimately self-destructive process whereby one part of the body politic feeds upon and reduces to impotence the remaining portion. Indeed, once the requisite conditions present themselves, the process of plunder proceeds with an inexorability akin to the operation of certain forces in the physical world. And all of this plundering is done, typically, under the masking forms of piety, patriotism, and law, as I indicated in the previous chapter in the discussion of legislative warfare. But whatever may be the particular colorings and intonations of its righteous guise and cloak, plundering by recourse to legislative warfare is, of course, an act of spiritual and material cannibalism directed at one's fellow countrymen and, therefore, ultimately, at one's self. The aim of the science of government, and of constitution in particular, is to prevent such cannibalism.

So the lawful and inexorable operations synopsisized in Calhoun's "plunder principle" are yet another illustration supportive of his view that the phenomena of political science and legislation are ". . . subject to laws as fixed as matter itself . . ."⁴¹ For it was surely reflection on some such lawful regularities and operations in the political world which prompted the great Massachusetts Federalist Fisher Ames (1758-1808) to offer observations such as the following, in an anti-Jeffersonian tract titled provocatively "The Dangers of American Liberty." An elder contemporary of Calhoun, Ames observed how:

The political sphere, like the globe we tread upon, never stands still, but with a silent swiftness accomplishes the revolutions, which, we are too ready to believe are effected by our wisdom, or might have controlled by our efforts. There is a kind of fatality, in the affairs of republics, that eludes the foresight of the wise, as much as it frustrates the toils and sacrifices of the patriot and the hero. Events proceed, not as they were expected or intended, but are impelled by the irresistible laws of our political existence. Things inevitable happen, and we are astonished, as if they were miracles, and the course of nature had been overpowered or suspended to produce them.⁴²

A generation later, Calhoun would echo this refrain of truths about the science and matter of politics, having witnessed for himself, time and again, the lawful but largely unwieldy and uncontrollable operations of the laws of that science. Like Ames and other political writers, Calhoun's own disposition toward such laws was the piously studious one which Lord Bacon (1561-1626) expressed in regard to the laws of the physical world: "Nature, to

⁴¹ See "Speech on the Force Bill" in Union and Liberty, 434.

⁴² See Fisher Ames, "The Danger of American Liberty", The Portable Conservative Reader, ed. Russell Kirk (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1982), 85.

be commanded, must be obeyed ⁴³.”

As I suggested in Chapter I, while discussing the application of metaphysical reasoning to political phenomena, the statesman aims at an ever-greater mastery of human affairs through an understanding of those laws which govern the political world, and in terms of which its actualized conditions and changes can be explained. Therefore statesmanship is activity in accordance with the laws of politics, and a sustained effort to effect the good of one's community through an accurate perception and apprehension of the current direction and force of such laws as these appertain to the prospects of the community. Operating in a manner largely independent of the will of man, the laws of the political world, like the principles of medical science, are susceptible, once mastered, of being either piously and deferentially managed by the doctor of the polis (the statesman), or manipulated by sophists for the sake of fulfilling base and narrow ends. So a mere awareness or theoretical understanding of certain laws of the political world is no assurance, of itself, of a responsible and beneficent application of such knowledge; just as expertise in medical science, of itself, is no guarantee of a disposition on the part of the physician to cure. ⁴⁴

So the objects peculiar to the statesman and the sophist respectively differ in at least one very important respect, and the explanation of this difference is given by Aristotle in Book III of the Nicomachean Ethics.⁴⁵ There, in a discussion of what distinguishes a voluntary act from an involuntary one, the crucial distinction is made between an ignorance of the

⁴³ Francis Bacon, Aphorisms Concerning The Interpretation of Nature and The Kingdom of Man, aphorism iii, in The English Philosophers From Bacon to Mill, ed. Edwin A. Burt (New York: Modern Library, 1967), 28.

⁴⁴ See Plato, Gorgias, 464a-467e.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book III, 1110b-1111b.

particulars appertaining to an act, such as who is doing it, what he is doing, and what instrument he is using to do it, on the one hand, and ignorance of the universal, on the other hand. Aristotle teaches that the form of ignorance distinctive of a vicious action is not an ignorance of particulars, but is instead an ignorance of the universal, by which he means the (moral) Good. Hence the sophist, either by deliberately manipulating the laws of the political world for the sake of narrow and base ends, or by wickedly exploiting conditions produced by their operation, may possess some knowledge of particulars (the laws); but he is ignorant of the universal or good (the will and knowledge of how to manage the laws piously and deferentially for noble ends). So the mastery of these laws by the sophist is incomplete, whereas that by the statesman is complete. Thus, for example, while the statesman's steadfast aim will be to steer the community clear of those conditions in which the plunder principle becomes active; the sophist will be on hand to cynically exploit whatever opportunities for self-advancement may arise from the violent, cannibalistic and suicidal operation of this principle, and to give this principle new impulse and direction, as his "interests" dictate.

Aside from the occasional statesman and the more numerous sophists that are met with in the political world, there is, of course, that multitude of politicians of the humbler sort, a considerable portion of whom are both corrupt and incompetent, and who practice what one might call a political form of quackery. Like higher sophistry, this quackery typically consists of attempts to manipulate for narrow ends the fundamental laws of politics, following a partial and vague apprehension of these laws. But the designs of high sophistry and those of common quackery differ both as regards their

degrees of ingenuity and their probabilities for successful result -- so that the quality and quantity of plunder which the sophist and quack may be expected to expropriate will differ accordingly. For common quackery typically leads the petty politician to pursue policies whose effects are as likely to slight his own designs as they are those of his rivals; a farcical display indeed, and one that would have an amusing aspect were it not for the suffering and hardship caused thereby.

But the various laws of the political world are all interrelated. And since the dual-principle is the first principle or law of politics, it must be expected that its developmental fate is closely connected to the operational fate of every other, subsidiary principle of politics, including the plunder principle. Thus for example, where the powers of government are unguarded, the dual-principle of man's nature may lead the empowered portions of a community to plunder some unprotected portion. Consequently, the challenge confronting the statesman is to develop and to re-channel the force of the dual-principle in ways that will redound not to the destruction of the community or to any of its portions, but to the welfare of the entire community. So our consideration of the disposition and deportment of the statesman toward the various laws of the political world, including the dual-principle and the principle of plunder, forms an important part of our more general discussion of the fundamental relations between the two principles of political constitution, suffrage and organism.

Calhoun tells us that the effect of organism is "neither to supersede nor diminish the importance of the right of suffrage; but to aid and perfect it."
(23) The object of the right of suffrage is to "collect the sense of the

community"; and "The more fully and perfectly it accomplishes this, the more fully and perfectly it fulfils its end." (23) But the most it can do, by itself, is to collect "the sense of the greater number: that is, of the stronger interests, or combination of interests; and to assume this to be the sense of the community." (23) And yet, the inequities and other disadvantages for the community which necessarily result from the limited capacity of the right of suffrage to collect the sense of the community may be obviated when organism is introduced. Hence:

It is only when aided by a proper organism, that [the right of suffrage] can collect the sense of the entire community – of each and all its interests; of each, through its appropriate organ, and of the whole, through all of them united. This would truly be the sense of the entire community; for whatever diversity each interest might have within itself – as all would have the same interest in reference to the action of the government, the individuals composing each would be fully and truly represented by its own majority or appropriate organ, regarded in reference to the other interests.⁴⁶ In brief, every individual of every interest might trust, with confidence, its majority or appropriate organ, against that of every other interest.⁴⁷ (23)

The right of suffrage, then, in a truly constitutional regime, will operate within each individual interest, and only by the leave of each interest, for itself, as a specific mode of determining the policy positions and

⁴⁶ And so lesser "interests" within empowered or constitutional interests would, short of seeking independent and constitutional status, be "forced to distinguish between minor wishes and essentials." See Ralph Lerner, "Calhoun's New Science of Politics" in John C. Calhoun: A Profile, 212.

⁴⁷ There is, of course, the possibility that an outside interest could buy out the support of the leadership of a more parochial interest. But if the general membership of an interest allows its leadership to be thus corrupted, especially on an ongoing basis, then they forfeit thereby their status as an independent interest.

representation of that interest.⁴⁸ In this way, the sense of the entire community is more fully and effectually taken through the more thorough and nuanced operation of the right of suffrage combined with proper organism. And so if, as Hume says, all political authority is rooted in opinion, then those arrangements which best facilitate the registering and empowerment of opinion throughout the community cannot but render government all the more authoritative, and thereby all the more fit to discharge its great ends of protecting and perfecting society.

There are, then, two different modes by which the sense of the community may be taken; "one, simply by the right of suffrage, unaided; the other, by the right through a proper organism." (23) Each collects the sense of a majority. But the majority resulting from the first procedure differs from that of the second, not only as regards its origin, but as regards its scope and its substance. Indeed, a substantial and necessary quantitative difference between the two majorities gives rise inevitably to great qualitative differences between the regimes of which they are distinguishing features. For as we shall see, Calhoun argues that a political system which implements the first mode will be much less popular or representative in character than one

⁴⁸ And so:

Calhoun rejected an infinite regress by which the sense of every portion would be determined by the concurrent majority of its parts. Within each portion the numerical majority would rule.* This is not to assume internally homogeneous portions, but rather the presence of an interest that overrides many lesser interests. Whatever diversity of interests there may be within a given minority portion, all the people of that portion have the same interest 'against that of all others, and, of course, the government itself.'

See Ralph Lerner, "Calhoun's New Science of Politics" in John C. Calhoun: A Profile, 211. *Lerner notes that in the Discourse, Calhoun "did suggest a way of taking the concurrent consent of 'the more strongly marked interests' of each of the several [American] states." And so it is up to the members of an interest to determine amongst themselves the specific mode or majority by which the sense of that interest will be taken.

which implements the second.

The first mode, in which the right of suffrage operates unaided, “. . . regards numbers only, and considers the whole community as a unit, having but one common interest throughout; and collects the sense of the greater number of the whole, as that of the community.” (23) The second mode, however, where the right is aided by proper organism, “regards interests as well as numbers -- considering the community as made up of different and conflicting interests, as far as the action of the government is concerned; and takes the sense of each, through its majority or appropriate organ, and the united sense of all, as the sense of the entire community.” (23-24) Calhoun calls the majority produced by the first mode the “numerical, or absolute majority”, and that produced by the second, the “concurrent, or constitutional majority.” (24) The constitutional majority is so called because “it is an essential element in every constitutional government -- be its form⁴⁹ what it may.” (24)

Certainly one of Calhoun’s greatest contributions as a political thinker has been his clarification of the great differences between these two kinds of majority. Indeed, this speculative speech is of the greatest practical importance for man, in whatever political condition found; and the ideal of constitutional government that it recommends has been achieved more or less only by a few of the most politically advanced communities of our time.⁵⁰ (24-28) Clarifying these differences, Calhoun writes:

So great is the difference, politically speaking, between the two majorities, that they cannot be confounded, without leading to great and fatal errors; and yet the distinction between them has been so entirely overlooked, that when the term majority is used in political

⁴⁹ That is: monarchical, aristocratic, democratic, or some admixture of these.

⁵⁰ One of the most noteworthy examples is the Swiss Federation.

discussion, it is applied exclusively to designate the numerical – as if there were no other. (24)

In fact, the baleful consequences of this oversight had already proved vast and incalculable by Calhoun's time. And so Calhoun's general philosophic speech in the Disquisition about the two kinds of majority owes its development in large part to immediate and often pressing statesmanly concerns. In particular, Calhoun was arguing against people such as Justice Joseph Story (1779-1845) and Daniel Webster, who were reinterpreting the U. S. Constitution as a "numerical majority" constitution.⁵¹

But with the spread of the democratic ideal around the world during the last century and a half, the effects of this oversight have been perhaps more momentous and harmful than they were before Calhoun's death in

⁵¹ For example, Calhoun's "South Carolina Exposition" [1828] did much to set the terms for the famous two-week debate (1830) between Robert Young Hayne (1791-1839) and Webster. For a searching philosophical re-examination of the debate, see "Two Orators" in Richard M. Weaver, The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1987), 104-133. Weaver demonstrates that – popular American folklore notwithstanding – it was Hayne (championing states' rights, nullification, and the compact theory of the Constitution), and not Webster (championing the nationalist or centralist view of the Constitution), who had the better or truer argument. But the myth of a Websterian-nationalist victory lives on, as in, for example, Garry Wills, Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 126-133. Webster had begun his national political career as a New England secessionist, but had by 1830 become an influential proponent of nationalist centralization. However, due in part to Calhoun's influence, Webster would move in the direction of recanting his earlier "nationalist" position of the "Second Reply to Hayne" (Jan. 26-27, 1830), as evidenced in one of his last speeches, "The Constitution and the Union" (March 7, 1850) at which a dying Calhoun was present. See The Papers of Daniel Webster: Speeches and Formal Writings, ed, Charles M. Wiltse (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1986), Vol. I, 285-347, and Vol. II, 513-551, respectively.

Another "nationalist" opponent of Calhoun was Joseph Story, associate justice of the Supreme Court from 1811, author of nine massive legal commentaries and professor of law at Harvard from 1829. Story did much to promote the "nationalist" view of the Constitution, as a justice alongside John Marshall (1755-1835), through his collaboration with Webster, and through his authorship of an influential textbook of the 1830's titled A Familiar Exposition of the Constitution of the United States. Story developed a nationalist theory of the Union that would legitimate and reinforce a pre-existing nationalist-consolidationist tendency in American political life. On theories of the Union and its perpetuity, see Kenneth M. Stampp, The Imperiled Union: Essays on the Background of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

1850. And this circumstance, no doubt, must be attributed in some wise to the failure of men to heed Calhoun's insightful and prophetic warning:

Until this distinction is recognized, and better understood, there will continue to be great liability to error in properly constructing constitutional governments, especially of the popular form, and of preserving them when properly constructed. Until then, [constitutional or "concurrent majority" democracy] will have a strong tendency to slide, first, into the government of the numerical majority, and, finally, into absolute government of some other form. (24)

The overlooking of the distinction between the numerical majority and the concurrent majority leads, we are told, to a series of errors, the first of which is "to confound the numerical majority with the people; and this so completely as to regard them as identical." (24) This false identification of the numerical majority with the people is a "consequence that necessarily results from considering the numerical majority as the only majority." (24) But, as Calhoun is quick to point out, human political ingenuity, expressed in the formation of history's most illustrious governments, had long since disproved the opinion that the numerical was the only form of majority.⁵² Yet men have persisted in this error, as Calhoun explains:

All admit, that a popular government, or democracy, is the government of the people; for the terms imply this. A perfect government of the kind would be one which would embrace the consent of every citizen or member of the community; but as this is impracticable, in the opinion of those who regard the numerical as the only majority, and who can perceive no other way by which the sense of the people can be taken -- they are compelled to adopt this as the only true basis of popular government, in contradistinction to governments of the aristocratical or monarchical form. Being thus constrained, they are, in the next place, forced to regard the numerical majority, as, in effect, the entire people; that is, the greater part as the whole; and the government of the greater part as the government of the whole. It is thus the two come to be confounded, and a part made

⁵²As we saw earlier, these include: the Roman Republic, the constitutional monarchy of Great Britain, and the American federal union.

identical with the whole. And it is thus, also that all the rights, powers, and immunities of the whole people come to be attributed to the numerical majority; and, among others, the supreme, sovereign authority of establishing and abolishing governments at pleasure. (24-25)

The practical effects of conflating the numerical majority with the people have been very great. In fact, this confusion has been the most formidable single obstacle hereto to the effectual application of the principles of constitution, and to the maintenance of these principles once established:

This radical error . . . has contributed more than any other cause, to prevent the formation of popular constitutional governments -- and to destroy them even when they have been formed. It leads to the conclusion that, in their formation and establishment nothing more is necessary than the right of suffrage -- and the allotment to each division of the community a representation in the government, in proportion to numbers. If the numerical majority were really the people; and if, to take its sense truly, were to take the sense of the people truly, a government so constituted would be a true and perfect model of a popular constitutional government; and every departure from it would detract from its excellence. But as such is not the case -- as the numerical majority, instead of being the people, is only a portion of them -- such a government, instead of being a true and perfect model of the people's government, that is, a people self-governed, is but the government of a part, over a part -- the major over the minor portion. (25)

But the evils⁵³ that have attended this error have been due not simply to a failure to identify any kind of majority other than the numerical; resulting in a disposition to settle, for want of any discernible alternative, for a popular government of a part over the whole. They have, in addition, resulted from a fundamental failure to understand and appreciate organism, or more specifically, the restrictions or limitations characteristic of organism.

⁵³ Recall the evils: political degeneration that includes the formation of rival factions, legislative warfare, the plundering of unguarded portions, and revolution in the direction of absolutism and military despotism.

This failure has led to the ironic and tragic spectacle of sincere, devoted, and intelligent friends of popular and constitutional government opposing, when proposed, and attacking and destroying, when once established -- quite unwittingly -- the practical provisions of truly constitutional forms of government. This tragedy has played time and again in history, and with particular frequency since the dawning in the late eighteenth century of the modern democratic age. But, as Calhoun points out, this opposition to and attack on the elements of constitution has resulted from a case of mistaken identity.

Moreover, the error of confusing the numerical majority with the people leads to other errors, “. . . equally false and fatal, in reference to the best means of preserving and perpetuating [the true elements of constitutional government], when, from some fortunate combination of circumstances, they are correctly formed”:

For they who fall into these errors regard the restrictions which organism imposes on the will of the numerical majority as restrictions on the will of the people, and, therefore, as not only useless, but wrongful and mischievous. And hence they endeavor to destroy organism, under the delusive hope of making government more democratic. (25)

But the damage to the cause of popular and constitutional government inflicted unwittingly by its friends⁵⁴ has been supplemented by the damage deliberately wrought by the baneful machinations of real (but typically

⁵⁴ A recent example of friends of popular government attacking the very elements of constitution which popularize government is Quirk and Bridwell, *Judicial Dictatorship*, 63-111. Rightly concerned to counter-act an over-concentration of power in the American federal judiciary, the authors reject the sort of Calhounian organism which predominated in the original Constitution, prior to the 14th Amendment in particular. They propose popularizing the Congress without the use of organism. But this scenario was anticipated and thoroughly criticized by Calhoun in the *Discourse* (264-277), where he shows that such false “popularization” of the Congress would lead eventually to a dictatorial Executive.

unavowed) enemies of constitution and the people. I refer to those willful obstructionists and usurpers of just authority, found in whatever community considered, whose interest it has been to obtain and retain control of the government through a strictly numerical majority. In all of this folly, be the intentions of its perpetrators what they may, is to “be found the reason why so few popular governments have been properly constructed, and why, of these few, so small a number have proved durable.” (26) And “Such must continue to be the result, so long as these errors continue to be prevalent.” (26)

Having considered the error of conflating the numerical majority with the people, and of thus taking a part for the whole, Calhoun proceeds to examine another error, “of a kindred character, whose influence contributes much to the same result”: it is the opinion, prevalent in his time, but perhaps more prevalent still in our own, that a written constitution, containing suitable restrictions on the powers of government, is sufficient, of itself, without the aid of any organism -- “except such as is necessary to separate its several departments, and render them independent of each other -- to counteract the tendency of the numerical majority to oppression and abuse of power.” (26) This discussion in the Disquisition of a written constitution, far from being a superfluous digression or a mere embellishment even of a central theme, serves as a further important means of illustrating the nature, elements, and proper role of political constitution. The relative novelty and vast proliferation of written constitutions since the eighteenth century, indeed, made imperative an explicit treatment of the subject. In a recent work titled The Origins of American Constitutionalism,

Donald Lutz writes:

American political theory is fundamentally grounded in the notion of constitutionalism, and the United States is above all a constitutional political order. Even more, the American people, building upon their British heritage and their own experience, invented modern constitutionalism and bequeathed it to the world. The importance of this contribution can be easily summarized. In 1787 the only written constitutions in the world existed in English-speaking America; today, almost every nation feels it necessary to have such a document. Even though most nations do not have true constitutional government despite their having constitutions, those living under a constitutional government number almost one billion people, and another billion and a half live in countries struggling to achieve constitutionalism.⁵⁵

So the American state constitutions were the first written constitutions in history. And Calhoun, writing during the early years of this stunning and unprecedented proliferation and spread of constitutionalism, was among the first to examine and criticize how written constitutions work.⁵⁶ In assessing its strengths and weaknesses, Calhoun's overriding concern was to exhibit further the indispensable nature of the role of organism in forming and maintaining a political constitution "worthy of the name."

A friend of written constitution properly understood and appropriately rendered, but anxious to point up its limits and its liability to abuse in particular, Calhoun observes:

A written constitution certainly has many and considerable

⁵⁵ Donald S. Lutz, The Origins of American Constitutionalism (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 1. Lutz also recognizes how a people can be known, to some degree, through their constitution:

A constitution provides a definition for a way of life. It contains the essential political commitments of a people and is a collective, public expression of particular importance. One can read a letter to gain insight into the mind of an individual, or read a set of treatises and pamphlets to obtain a sense of the range of positions on a particular issue. A constitution, a document of political founding or refounding, however, amounts to a comprehensive picture of a people at a given time. (p.3)

⁵⁶ I am indebted to Dr. Donald Livingston for calling my attention to this important point.

advantages; but it is a great mistake to suppose, that the mere insertion of provisions to restrict and limit the powers of the government, without investing those for whose protection they are inserted with the means of enforcing their observance, will be sufficient to prevent the major and dominant party from abusing its powers. (26)

And the great mistake referred to here is one of disregarding the natural and inexorable operation of the "two-fold constitution" or dual-principle of man's nature. For as we have seen, in taking its direction and force from the particular circumstances in which it must develop and operate, the dual-principle tends always to bestow on every individual and group a disposition to self-preservation and self-promotion which itself tends to spill over, through an unchecked intensification of individual feeling, into disregard for the interests and well-being of others. In this particular instance, we find the major and dominant party, under a government of the numerical majority, feeling and acting in the only way in which they may reasonably be expected to act. Thus we are told that:

Being the party in possession of the government, they will, from the same constitution of man which makes government necessary to protect society, be in favor of the powers granted by the constitution, and opposed to the restrictions intended to limit them. As the major and dominant party, they have no need of these restrictions for their protection. The ballot box, of itself, would be ample protection to them. Needing no other, they would come, in time, to regard these limitations as unnecessary and improper restraints -- and endeavor to elude them, with the view of increasing their power and influence. (26)

Here we see yet again how external or institutional circumstances effect human behavior, through their influence on the dual-principle. In this way, nature and circumstances combine as history to illustrate the great laws of social and political association which constitute the essence of the subject

matter of political science. As we saw in Chapter II, the particular institutional circumstances in which we find ourselves tend to effect decisively how we conceive both our interest as regards the action or inaction of government, and the means by which this interest may be served. Not only individuals, but whole communities, as well as self-identified portions thereof, tend to be animated and actuated by an instinct for self-preservation through partaking of the dual-principle. And in the struggle for self-preservation and self-promotion by individuals, groups, and whole communities, the control of the powers of government and the manner in which these powers are exercised are, as we noted earlier, of the greatest importance. Hence, under a government of the numerical majority, the dominant and majority party and the minor and weaker party are alike animated by the dual-principle, but their widely differing circumstances as regards the possession and exercise of governmental power cause them to behave in very different ways. Far from enjoying the security, leisure, and physical advantage that comes with such power, the minor or weaker party would take the opposite direction and attitude as regards the limitations of power enumerated and suggested in a written constitution. They would, Calhoun says,

. . . regard [these limitations] as essential to their protection against the dominant party. And, hence, they would endeavor to defend and enlarge the restrictions, and to limit and contract the powers. But where there are no means by which they could compel the major party to observe the restrictions, the only resort left them would be, a strict construction of the constitution, that is, a construction which would confine these powers to the narrowest limits which the meaning of the words used in the grant would admit. (26-27)

But to this strict construction of the minor party,
. . . the major party would oppose a liberal construction -- one which

would give to the words of the grant the broadest meaning of which they were susceptible. It would then be construction against construction; the one to contract, and the other to enlarge the powers of the government to the utmost. (27)

And so, by unfortunate turns, a written constitution -- as the sacred and oracular utterances of a sovereign community -- may be rendered a debased and debasing instrument of a despotic majority. Ironically, both the noblest and most vicious of human passions combine in their influence to render the once clear and compelling words of the community muddled and uncertain. The minor party and the major party, actuated by necessity of protection and narrowness of interest respectively, conspire, as it were, to exploit the natural pliability of language in behalf of their respective causes, a circumstance which, itself, presages an end to all intelligent and responsible public discourse and interpretation concerning the constitution. Moreover, the major party, where it does not set aside boldly and forthrightly the now empty forms of constitutional governance, counts on the sloth and inattention of the generality while it proceeds through whatever intrigues and false eloquence is necessary, to cloak the injustice of its aggressive advances against the remainder of the community. But, Calhoun asks: "of what possible avail could the strict construction of the minor party be, against the liberal interpretation of the major, when the one would have all the powers of the government to carry its construction into effect -- and the other be deprived of all means of enforcing its construction?" (27) To which the answer given is: ultimately none.

For no doubt recalling his own inability, during the 1830's and 40's, to turn the American states back to their original and proper republican course,

and speaking therefore from his own bitter and tragic experiences as statesman, Calhoun writes:

In a contest so unequal, the result would not be doubtful. The party in favor of the restrictions would be overpowered. At first, they might command some respect, and do something to stay the march of encroachment; but they would, in the progress of the contest, be regarded as mere abstractionists; and, indeed, deservedly, if they should indulge the folly of supposing that the party in possession of the ballot box and the physical force of the country, could be successfully resisted by an appeal to reason, truth, justice, or the obligations imposed by the constitution. For when these, of themselves, shall exert sufficient influence to stay the hand of power, then government will be no longer necessary to protect society, nor constitutions needed to prevent government from abusing its powers. (27)

And, in a private letter Calhoun wrote:

. . . the phantom of strict construction -- a thing good in the abstract, but in practice not worth a farthing, without the right of interposition to enforce it; as the experience of more than forty years has shown. Every body is for strict construction; . . . but in fact, it will ever be found to be the construction of the permanent minority against the permanent majority, and of course of itself valueless.⁵⁷

So here, with characteristic insight and unassailable realism, Calhoun informs us of the utter folly of trying to stay "the march of encroachment" with mere words. Words, at best, are sufficient to meet only the words of another; but tendency must be met by tendency. Therefore, according to Calhoun, one who appeals to mere words in responding to such encroachment evinces an ignorance whose proper punishment is the despotism that such ignorance must inevitably allow. With his formulation which states that "Power can only be resisted by power -- and tendency by tendency" (12), Calhoun was refining a point which Hume had made a century earlier, in the Treatise. Anticipating Calhoun with his employment

⁵⁷ To Duff Green, 20 September 1834.

of a simile comparing forces in the political world to those in the physical, and addressing certain uncomprehending enemies of the British Constitution, Hume had declared that:

As matter wou'd [sic] have been created in vain, were it depriv'd [sic] of a power of resistance, without which no part of it cou'd [sic] preserve a distinct existence, and the whole might be crowded up into a single point: So 'tis a gross absurdity to suppose, in any government, a right without a remedy, or allow, that the supreme power is shar'd [sic] with the people, without allowing, that 'tis lawful for them to defend their share against every invader. Those, therefore, who wou'd seem to respect our free government, and yet deny the right of resistance, have renounc'd [sic] all pretensions to common sense, and do not merit a serious answer.⁵⁸

Mounting the kind of vigorous defense of organism by which Hume had sought a century earlier to conserve the British constitution and British liberties, Calhoun, in the Discourse, strode forward to defend the American constitution and American liberties:

. . . in [a governmental system] constituted as ours, it would seem neither reasonable nor philosophical to look to the government of the United States, in which the delegated powers are vested, for the means of resisting encroachments on the reserved powers. It would not be reasonable; because it would be to look for protection against danger, to the quarter from which it was apprehended, and from which only it could possibly come. It would not be philosophical; because it would be against universal analogy. All organic action, as far as our knowledge extends -- whether it appertain to the material or political world, or be of human or divine mechanism -- is the result of the reciprocal action and reaction of the parts of which it consists. It is this which confines the parts to their appropriate spheres, and compels them to perform their proper functions. Indeed, it would seem impossible to produce organic action by a single power -- and that it must ever be the result of two or more powers, mutually acting and reacting on each other. And hence the political axiom -- that there can be no constitution, without a division of power, and no liberty without a constitution. To this a kindred axiom may be added -- that there can be no division of power,

⁵⁸ See Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 564.

without a self-protecting power in each of the parts into which it may be divided; or in a superior power to protect each against the others.⁵⁹ Without a division of power there can be no organism; and without the power of self-protection, or a superior power to restrict each to its appropriate sphere, the stronger will absorb the weaker, and concentrate all power in itself. (168)

And in the same work, Calhoun employs an apt simile to drive home the point. To wit:

. . . where the powers of government are divided, nothing short of a negative -- either positive, or in effect -- can protect those allotted to the weaker, against the stronger -- or parts of the community against each other. The party to whom the power belongs, is the only party interested in protecting it; and to such party only, can its defence be safely trusted. To intrust it, in this case, to the party interested in absorbing it, and possessed of ample power to do so, is, . . . to trust the lamb to the custody of the wolf. (218)

And so, both Hume and Calhoun understood that there can be no right on the part of a portion of the community without its possessing too a remedy in the form of a power of resistance sufficient to protect itself against every invader.

So the interpretation or semantic construction of a written constitution by rival parties may be distinguished from a disinterested interpretation of it by an individual, or, as we shall see shortly, from an interest within the governmental system known as the concurrent majority. For construction occurs, when it occurs, more frequently in a governmental system in which

⁵⁹ An example of a superior power which is interested in and disposed to protect the parts of a realm may be found, for example, in those hereditary kings of old who held titles simultaneously to several lands. The inclination and common practice of such a monarch was to protect each portion of his realm from depredation from the others, and from other rival states. That such an arrangement may be considered organism attests to the variety of concrete forms of which this principle of constitution is susceptible.

absolute elements are predominate over the constitutional⁶⁰, and this circumstance inevitably renders interested the interpretation of the

⁶⁰This suggests, however, that those governments with written constitutions in which constitutional elements predominate are also vulnerable to the corrosive effects of construction. Indeed, as Calhoun shows in his Discourse, the United States enjoyed such a constitution at its founding. For the fate of communities with written constitutions depends in large part upon underlying social, cultural, and intellectual trends.

This critically important point was made by the Italian philosopher Vico, in the 1730 edition of his New Science. (See Cinque libri di Giambattista Vico de' principy d'una scienza nuova d'intorno alla comune natura delle nazioni (Naples: Felice Mosca, 1730), 457. Translated by Donald Phillip Verene.) Describing that degenerate condition of the human mind and soul which he calls the "barbarism of reflection", Vico writes:

Because, unlike in the time of the barbarism of sense, the barbarism of reflection pays attention only to the words and not to the spirit of the laws and regulations; even worse, whatever might have been claimed in these empty sounds of words is believed to be just. In this way the barbarism of reflection claims to recognize and know the just, what the regulations and laws intend, and endeavors to defraud them through the superstition of words.

In his Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge (Yale University: New Haven, 1997), 48-49, Donald Phillip Verene elaborates on this passage from Vico:

In the age of ultimate civil disease, the law, which makes man a social animal, is corrupted into a "superstition of words." The law unconnected to justice becomes a repository of wit. The law can be whatever anyone clever enough with words can convince us it is. This is a world without reason or shame. . . .

. . . Modernity is a state in which the soul has lost the internal proportion of its faculties. The intellect and wit walk the world without natural connections to images formed by the imagination, the passions arising in the body, and the turns of events caused by the gods. The senses and spirit are indulged but are not involved in life as sources that guide it. The intellect has become perverse, living off its own reality of facts and thoughts, seeing only itself in the world. In society this becomes a quest for certainty and luxury, for strategies of the ego, careers, and means of control and accomplishment. The barbarian within is released through the circuits of critical reflection that run through all forms of thought and evaluate all forms of conduct. It is a joyless business. It is a shallow heart.

So the limitations and liabilities attending a written constitution are especially pronounced in our modern, barbaric age. Indeed, Vico's historical account, if true, has sobering and chilling implications for our understanding of the theory and practice of modern constitutionalism, and of American constitutionalism in particular. Some of these implications have been suggested recently by a former United States Court of Appeals judge and nominee to the U. S. Supreme Court, Robert H. Bork, in Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline (New York: ReganBooks, 1996). Bork describes how the U. S. Supreme Court has set aside the original republican spirit of the American constitution, and has, during the last several decades of judicial activism, distorted and misinterpreted that document so as to promote and instantiate the social and cultural agenda of modern liberalism, contrary to the wishes of a powerless majority, and contrary to the true interests of all Americans.

community's written constitution. This interested or partial interpretation is construction; and being thus interested, construction reveals itself both as a symptom of governmental distemper, and as an augury of even greater despotism. Unless the natural progress of this tendency to degeneration is reversed, the struggle between the major party and the minor party must end in the subversion and overthrow of the constitution.

In his pioneering account of how written constitutions may be subverted, Calhoun describes how such subversion may occur by any one or some combination of three distinct processes. He lists them as:

the undermining process of construction -- where [the constitution's] meaning would admit of possible doubt -- or by substituting in practice what is called party-usage, in place of its provisions, or, finally, when no other contrivance would subserve the purpose, by openly and boldly setting them aside. By the one or the other, the restrictions would ultimately be annulled, and the government be converted into one of unlimited powers. (27)

Various scenarios of subversion can be readily imagined and, of course, documented. For instance, the first two processes, construction and party-usage, may be used either in succession or in combination one with another to achieve their purpose of subversion. Or, these two may be used to prepare the way for the third, by misleading and confusing a community, and by weakening its will to resist. Typically, a period of piecemeal usurpation and moral obscurantism precedes a final subversion, or an open and avowed replacement of the constitution by something else.⁶¹ And so, as a dead letter, a written constitution can remain for an indefinite period as a central part even of the formal structure of a community's government.

⁶¹ Cp. James Madison, in his "Speech in the Virginia Convention" [June 16, 1788]: "I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations."

So long as the original document subsists, however, as an intelligible speech capable of eliciting memories and sympathies for the concerns toward which it was originally directed, it poses a threat to the existing, usurpatory order.⁶² This circumstance, in the eyes of the ruling party, necessitates a campaign of spiritual expurgation and eradication that includes an attack on these now subversive memories, and a further construction of the constitution. So long as the pretence of constitutional government is to be kept up, and the form of the original document retained, the usurpers may find that, to achieve their ends and to rest secure in their possession of power, it may be necessary not merely to render the original written constitution a dead letter, but to transform it into an instrument of authority whose interpretation and application is the exclusive prerogative of the ruling and usurpatory party. In this way, a written constitution may subserve the purposes of the usurper not so much as a dead letter but as a living instrument of tyranny that is itself capable of deadening the independent spirit and historical identity of the community.⁶³ There are, then, a variety of ways to subvert a written constitution and to convert thereby a government from one of limited into one of unlimited powers; where those for whose protection the provisions to restrict and limit the powers of government are inserted are not vested with the means of enforcing their application.

⁶² And so a dead letter may be resurrected, as it were, as happened in the late Soviet Union, whose now defunct constitution allowed for secession by member republics. Lying dormant from the period of the establishment of the Soviet constitution until the 1990's, this article of secession was still available during the recent breakup as a source of legitimacy for newly independent republics.

⁶³ Thus, the states and citizens of the American Union have suffered a steadily intensifying barrage of jurisprudence aimed at transforming American society root and branch, and without the consent of the American people themselves. Much of this jurisprudence is said to be derived from the dubiously adopted 14th amendment, and especially from its "due process" and "equal protection" clauses. See Raoul Berger, Government by Judiciary: The Transformation of the Fourteenth Amendment (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1997).

But a written constitution, by virtue merely of being written, is not alone in being insufficient to prevent the major and dominant party from abusing its powers. Challenging a widely held view, and again, intent on demonstrating the indispensability of organism, Calhoun points out that “a division of government into separate, and, as it regards each other, independent departments . . .” will not prevent such abuse either. (27)

For the last two and a half centuries, the most influential variant of the idea of separate and independent departments has been, of course, that of Montesquieu.⁶⁴ Embraced by many earnest friends of popular constitution, including the American Framers, there has prevailed a tendency, Calhoun observes, to assume that a division of government into separate and independent departments would, of itself, be sufficient to prevent the conversion of government into one of unlimited powers. As in his critical treatment of written constitution, Calhoun shows how the benefits that may reasonably be expected from such a provision have been greatly exaggerated, especially by its ardent, well-meaning, but somewhat careless proponents. By contrast, Calhoun, gauging not only the virtues of the provision, but its limitations as well, explains how . . .

Such a division may do much to facilitate [government’s] operations, and to secure to its administration greater caution and deliberation; but as each and all the departments -- and, of course, the entire government -- would be under the control of the numerical majority, it is too clear to require explanation, that a mere distribution of its powers among its agents or representatives, could do little or nothing to counteract its tendency to oppression and abuse of power. To effect this, it would be necessary to go one step further, and make the several departments the organs of the distinct interests or portions of the community; and to clothe each with a negative on the others. But the effect of this would be to change the government from the numerical into the concurrent majority. (27-28)

⁶⁴ The Spirit of the Laws (1748)

So a single constituency, whose sense is taken at regular intervals in accordance with the principle of the numerical majority, would control, all at once, each of the departments of government -- legislative, executive, and judicial -- formed by the division. But this control of each and all the departments of government by a single constituency -- or rather, a numerical majority portion of that constituency -- would present only an illusion of independence on the part of these departments. For the dominant major party, having mustered a numerical majority through the right of suffrage, would control every branch or department of the government, and the minor party would be denied any effectual power of self-protection through its exclusion from the powers of government, whether legislative, executive, or judicial. And so a mere division of the powers of government into separate departments, even if it is a division noted in the articles of a written constitution, is not sufficient, of itself, to prevent the government from being converted into one of unlimited powers.

There are, then, as Calhoun points out, many obstacles to forming and preserving popular constitutional government, so long as "the distinction between the two majorities", numerical and concurrent, is overlooked, and the false opinions prevail (1) that the numerical majority is identical to the people, and (2) that a written constitution, with suitable restrictions and a proper division of the powers of government, is sufficient to counteract the tendency of the numerical majority to abuse its power. Having thus considered Calhoun's account of these obstacles, we are prepared to examine, in greater detail, his claims that "the concurrent majority is an indispensable

element in forming constitutional governments", and that "the numerical majority, of itself, must, in all cases, make governments absolute."

Earlier, it was said that the necessary consequence of taking the sense of the community by the concurrent majority is "to give each interest or portion of the community a negative on the others." It is precisely this negative on the part of the various interests of the society, as Calhoun points out, that is the crucial and distinguishing element of all constitutional government.

It is this mutual negative among . . . [the] various conflicting interests [of the community], which invests each with the power of protecting itself -- and places the rights and safety of each, where only they can be securely placed, under its own guardianship. Without this there can be no systematic, peaceful, or effective resistance to the natural tendency of each to come into conflict with the others: and without this there can be no constitution. It is this negative power -- the power of preventing and arresting the action of the government -- be it called by what term it may -- veto, interposition, nullification, check, or balance of power -- which, in fact, forms the constitution. They are all but different names for the negative power. In all its forms, and under all its names, it results from the concurrent majority. Without this there can be no negative; and, without a negative, no constitution. (28)

As we have seen, the interests or portions of the community, like individuals, are unavoidably animated by the dual-principle. Each interest or portion, therefore, where power is unguarded, will naturally have "a greater regard for his own safety or happiness, than for the safety or happiness of others; and, where these come in opposition, is ready to sacrifice the interests of others to his own." (7) The genius of the concurrent majority is that it prevents that conflict between portions that would arise naturally from the operation of the dual-principle of our nature where the powers of government are unguarded, as in a system of absolute government.

Although still, of course, animated by the dual-principle, the interests of the community, within a constitutional system, each enjoy the power of the negative through which the others are prevented from sacrificing its interest. Possessing the power of self-protection, each portion is moved by the dual-principle both to actively defend itself and to unite with the other portions to protect and perfect the entire community. In this way, political constitution “worthy of the name” is a solution to the fundamental problem of politics -- that of effectually and beneficially coordinating the wills of individuals through a more immediate and proximate coordination of the wills of distinct interests or portions of the community. This coordination is achieved by recourse to those devices Calhoun calls the “concurrent majority” and the “mutual negative” of interests.

Moreover, these devices characterize all constitutional governments, “be their forms what they may” (29). For it is, indeed,

. . . the negative power which makes the constitution -- and the positive which makes the government. The one is the power of acting -- and the other the power of preventing or arresting action. The two, combined, make constitutional governments. (29)

Through this account of the relation of constitution to the negative power, and of the negative power to the concurrent majority, Calhoun shows that a government formed strictly and exclusively on the principle of the numerical majority is necessarily an absolute government. Hence:

. . . as there can be no constitution without the negative power, and no negative power without the concurrent majority -- it follows, necessarily, that where the numerical majority has the sole control of the government, there can be no constitution; as constitution implies limitation or restriction -- and, of course, is inconsistent with the idea of sole or exclusive power. And hence, the numerical, unmixed with the concurrent majority, necessarily forms, in all cases, absolute government. (29)

And so, depending on whether the government of a community is absolute or constitutional in character, the portions or interests of that community will be bound either to violently contend for an exclusive control of the powers of government, or to be constrained to exercise those powers in open and peaceful collaboration with the other interests.

Whereas the effectual limitation of the possession and exercise of governmental power is the hallmark of every constitutional government; an exclusive possession and exercise of these powers is the hallmark of every absolute government. Therefore, the dual-principle has either to be constrained and developed by limitation, and made thereby to subserve the interests of the general community; or it is to be left unfettered and undeveloped where power is held and exercised in an exclusive manner, and allowed thereby to serve merely the private will and appetites of the ruling portion.

Limited power and exclusive power, and not the number of those who happen to hold and exercise governmental power, are the features which mark the great and broad distinction among all the varieties of human government, constitutional and absolute respectively. As Calhoun explains,

It is, indeed, the single, or one power, which excludes the negative, and constitutes absolute government; and not the number in whom the power is vested. The numerical majority is as truly a single power, and excludes the negative as completely as the absolute government of one, or of the few. The former is as much the absolute government of the democratic, or popular form, as the latter of the monarchical or aristocratical. It has, accordingly, in common with them, the same tendency to oppression and abuse of power. (29)

Penetrating below surface appearances, Calhoun has identified those

characteristics which distinguish all absolute governments, on the one hand, from all constitutional ones, on the other; and which establish the fundamental kinship between governments falling within these two distinct classes respectively. Thus the shared characteristic of exclusive power underscores the natural kinship of all the various absolute forms -- democratical, aristocratical, and monarchical -- that are ostensibly dissimilar. Analogously, there has to be considered the natural kinship, based on the shared characteristic of limited power, among the corresponding and again, ostensibly dissimilar, constitutional forms -- democratical, aristocratical, and monarchical. Hence,

Constitutional governments, of whatever form, are, indeed, much more similar to each other, in their structure and character, than they are, respectively, to the absolute governments, even of their own class. All constitutional governments, of whatever class they may be, take the sense of the community by its parts -- each through its appropriate organ; and regard the sense of all its parts, as the sense of the whole. They all rest on the right of suffrage, and the responsibility of rulers, directly or indirectly. On the contrary, all absolute governments, of whatever form, concentrate power in one uncontrolled and irresponsible individual or body, whose will is regarded as the sense of the community. And, hence, the great and broad distinction between governments is -- not that of the one, the few, or the many -- but of the constitutional and the absolute. (29-30)

But this account leads us to at least one unexpected implication. That is, that contrary to common opinion -- so far as their formal structures and distinctive operational tendencies are concerned -- a constitutional monarchy is a more popular form of government than a democracy of the absolute variety, because in the monarchy the sense of the whole community is taken by taking the sense in all its parts separately, whereas, in the democracy, the

sense of the major and dominant portion alone is taken. And so, in registering the sense of the community, a constitutional monarchy considers the great interests of the community directly and numbers indirectly, whereas the absolute majority considers numbers only. By contrast, a constitutional democracy, by virtue of its formally constituted structure, involves the direct consideration of both interests and numbers. To use an expression employed by Lincoln for sophistical purposes in the Gettysburg Address; all constitutional governments, regardless of regimen, are governments “of the people, by the people, and for the people⁶⁵.” By contrast, all absolute governments, regardless of regimen, are governments of, by, and for some portion of the people only.

Along with the primary principles of exclusive power and limited power which characterize absolute and constitutional governments respectively, and which jointly form “the great and broad distinction between governments”; there are, Calhoun says, principles secondary in nature, which “very strongly” mark the difference between these forms of government. These secondary principles are the respective conservative principles of the two types of government, absolute and constitutional, or: “the principle by which they are upheld and preserved. This principle, in constitutional governments, is compromise -- and in absolute governments, is force . . .” (30)

Constitutional governments are preserved by compromise, and

⁶⁵ See Garry Wills, Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America (previously cited). In his textual analysis of the “Gettysburg Address”, Will approves of Lincoln’s remaking of America.

absolute governments, by force.⁶⁶ These conservative principles have their origin in and correlate directly to the means of resistance to oppression by government available to the community. Where no means other than force is available, government, in order to preserve itself in the face of forcible resistance, must itself have recourse to force. Where, on the other hand, an “authorized and effectual resistance” by recourse to the organism of political constitution is available, government is able to uphold and preserve itself through a compromise of interests. As Calhoun explains,

. . . the same constitution of man which leads those who govern to oppress the governed – if not prevented – will, with equal force and certainty, lead the latter to resist oppression, when possessed of the means of doing so peaceably and successfully. But absolute governments, of all forms, exclude all other means of resistance to their authority, than that of force; and, of course, leave no other alternative to the governed, but to acquiesce in oppression, however great it may be, or to resort to force to put down the government. But the dread of such a resort must necessarily lead the government to prepare to meet force in order to protect itself; and hence, of necessity, force becomes the conservative principle of all such governments. (30)

Recall from Chapter IV, that constitution, “in its most comprehensive

⁶⁶ Calhoun does not overlook what is ostensibly an exception to his view that absolute governments “exclude all other means of resistance to [their] authority than that of force”, namely, absolute democracies, or governments of the numerical majority. He writes:

It is true that, in such governments, the minor and subject party, for the time, have the right to oppose and resist the major and dominant party, for the time, through the ballot box; and may turn them out, and take their place, if they can obtain a majority of votes. But, it is no less true, that this would be a mere change in the relations of the two parties. The minor and subject party would become the major and dominant party, with the same absolute authority and tendency to abuse power; and the major and dominant party would become the minor and subject party, with the same right to resist through the ballot box; and, if successful, again to change relations, with like effect. But such a state of things must necessarily be temporary. The conflict between the two parties must be transferred, sooner or later, from an appeal to the ballot-box to an appeal to force . . . See the Disquisition, 31-32.

sense", includes all of those means by which the powers of government may be prevented from being converted into instruments to oppress the community. (9) This definition comprehends, then, forcible resistance, constitution in its strict sense, and any other artifice of an individual or group by which the prevention of such conversion may be effected. Hence general rebellion, nonviolent civil disobedience, tyrannicide, and a communally authorized proposal of secession, for example, are, in this sense of the term, just as "constitutional" as the right of suffrage properly combined with organism. And yet, obviously, means of resistance differ in their degrees of expediency, or in the practical short-term and long-term benefits which they may reasonably be expected to confer on the community in a given situation, as well as in the costs that naturally attend their application. Put another way: each means possesses its own distinctive preconditions, strengths, and limitations. And it is the art of the statesman only, which can determine, in a given instance, what means are best suited to constrain government to the fulfillment of its proper ends.

Tyrannicide, for example, can confer the benefit of immediate or instantaneous release from oppression, but the cost of such sudden extrication of a people may be the martyrdom of the tyrant and the valorization -- through some perverse turn of the human imagination -- of the mannerisms and vices that distinguished his rule. Moreover, the practical and pernicious effects of such martyrdom and valorization may weigh on the race for generations. In contrast to shallow political expediency and unthinking vindictiveness, then, statesmanship is concerned with both short- and long-term consequences in its selection of the various means of

resistance to be employed against governmental oppression.

Before the advent of political "constitution" in the "strict and more usual sense", men, confronted with and tortured by oppressive government, were constrained to an unavoidably difficult and woeful choice between forcible resistance and acquiescence in oppression. (12) But the sheer agony and general discomforture which inevitably attend this choice, combined with the grave problems which naturally attend the active pursuit of either option, have given rise, over time, through efforts of the human imagination, operating under a kind of necessity, to the innovation that is political constitution in its "strict and more usual sense." In this way, recourse to the crude and rudimentary contrivance that is armed resistance tends to give way, with the advance of political understanding, to the cultivation of the more refined and sophisticated art of political constitution. As Calhoun suggests, the development of this art makes possible not merely resistance to oppression that is already present or actualized, but an exclusion of the very possibility of oppression:

. . . the government of the concurrent majority, where the organism is perfect, excludes the possibility of oppression, by giving to each interest, or portion, or order -- where there are established classes -- the means of protecting itself, by its negative, against all measures calculated to advance the peculiar interests of others at its expense. Its effect, then, is, to cause the different interests, portions, or orders -- as the case may be -- to desist from attempting to adopt any measure calculated to promote the prosperity of one, or more, by sacrificing that of others; and thus to force them to unite in such measures only as would promote the prosperity of all, as the only means to prevent the suspension of the action of the government -- and, thereby, to avoid anarchy, the greatest of all evils. It is by means of such authorized and effectual resistance, that oppression is prevented, and the necessity of resorting to force superseded, in governments of the concurrent majority -- and, hence, compromise, instead of force, becomes their conservative principle. (30-31)

And so the conservative principle of constitutional governments is compromise. But the principle of compromise, Calhoun intimates, can be traced to yet another principle -- a principle which, to be "more strictly correct", is itself the conservative principle of constitutional governments. Standing in back of compromise, this more correct principle is:

. . . the necessity which compels the different interests, or portions, or orders, to compromise -- as the only way to promote their respective prosperity, and to avoid anarchy -- rather than to the compromise itself. (31)

But in order to understand how and why the provisions of political constitution function so well when properly implemented, it is necessary to appreciate the prodigious and unequalled practical force of this necessity. Indeed,

No necessity can be more urgent and imperious, than that of avoiding anarchy. It is the same as that which makes government indispensable to preserve society; and is not less imperative than that which compels obedience to superior force. Traced to this source, the voice of a people -- uttered under the necessity of avoiding the greatest of calamities, through the organs of a government so constructed as to suppress the expression of all partial and selfish interests, and to give a full and faithful utterance to the sense of the whole community, in reference to its common welfare -- may, without impiety, be called the voice of God. To call any other so, would be impious. (31)

Constitution, then, although a human artifice, takes on a divine character when it operates successfully as an ongoing force for the perfection of Divinely ordained society and government. For constitution makes possible an ongoing and permanent -- if not a perpetual -- realization of the common welfare. As a human artifice with a divine character, constitution is the practical and existential opposite of anarchy, which Calhoun labels "the

greatest of all evils.” (30) Commonly believed the opposite of government, since it translates literally, “no government”, or “the absence of government”, anarchy, more correctly speaking, is a negation and absence of those conditions which make possible the protection and perfection of society, and through this, the protection and perfection of the race. But mere government, indifferently constituted, is not, as has been shown, sufficient of itself to achieve, as fully as it might, the great ends for which it was ordained. This fuller and more complete achievement is possible only where government has been rendered constitutional. For this reason, then, a more direct and precise opposite of anarchy is not government, indifferently organized, but constitutional government in its various forms.

Calhoun, then, could appreciate the “libertarian” criticisms of governmental abuse and oppression by anarchists such as his younger contemporary (Pierre Joseph) Proudhon (1809-1865), while rejecting as tragically ill-considered their fundamental assumption that government is, by its very nature, wicked, harmful to man, and beyond redemption. For example, in his General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century (1851), Proudhon, who has been called the father of anarchism, penned the following scintillating criticism of government:

To be GOVERNED is to be watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right nor the wisdom nor the virtue to do so. To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction noted, registered, counted, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, prevented, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, drilled, fleeced, exploited, monopolized, extorted from, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word

of complaint, to be repressed, fined, vilified, harrassed, hunted down, abused, clubbed, disarmed, bound, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, derided, outraged, dishonored. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality.⁶⁷

But, while Proudhon and other anarchists, including Godwin, Thoreau, Spooner, Tucker, and more recently, Rothbard and Friedman, have viewed government, or the state, as an unnecessary evil; Calhoun viewed government as both necessary and good, though susceptible to corruption.⁶⁸ According to Calhoun, the anarchists, however well-intentioned, err by mistaking corrupt actualization for fundamental essence. And so, against the anarchist's categorical condemnation of government, we can imagine Calhoun citing Aristotle, as did Rousseau (though for a somewhat different reason), on the title page of his Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (1755). In the Politics, Aristotle said: "Not in depraved things but in those well oriented according to nature, are we to consider what is natural."⁶⁹ But proffering a practical ideal of government involves, of course, much more than refuting the anarchist.

In explaining the conservative principles of absolute and constitutional governments respectively, Calhoun employs the use, for illustrative

⁶⁷ See P. J. Proudhon, General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century, trans. John Beverly Robinson (London: Free Press, 1923), 293-294, with some alterations from Benjamin Tucker's translation in Instead of a Book (New York, 1893), 26. If one first accepted the fundamental assumption of anarchism that the state is evil, or at least hopelessly inept in promoting the human good, one might then be inclined to add to this list of the domestic "infelicities" of the state those which attend its efforts either to defend society or to aggrandize itself at the expense of other communities, including war, conquest, subjugation, the expansion of state power, and so on.

⁶⁸ See William Godwin, Inquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793); Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (1849); Lysander Spooner, No Treason: The Constitution of No Authority (1870); Benjamin Tucker, Instead of a Book (1893); Murray N. Rothbard, For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto (1973); and David Friedman, The Machinery of Freedom (1973).

⁶⁹ Aristotle, Politics, Bk. II.

purposes, of ideal or pure forms. He does so self-consciously, however, being keenly and fully aware that all historical governments do and must fall between the extremes of pure absolutism and pure constitutionalism respectively. Hence he says:

In stating that force is the conservative principle of absolute, and compromise of constitutional governments, I have assumed both to be perfect in their kind; but not without bearing in mind, that few or none, in fact, have ever been so absolute as not to be under some restraint, and none so perfectly organized as to represent fully and perfectly the voice of the whole community. Such being the case, all must, in practice, depart more or less from the principles by which they are respectively upheld and preserved; and depend more or less for support, on force, or compromise, as the absolute or the constitutional form predominates in their respective organizations. (31)

So pure and ideal political identities, of the sort described, are not to be met with in history, where instead we can find and create only admixtures from the various elements distinctive of these pure and ideal forms. Significantly, pure forms of the various regimes -- monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy -- are realizable, whereas the pure and ideal⁷⁰ forms of absolute and constitutional government respectively are not. Hence a pure monarchy is possible, but not a pure absolute monarchy or a pure constitutional monarchy. And likewise as regards the two other regimens, aristocracy and democracy. For example, the government of the United States, as formally constituted -- although not a direct democracy, as existed for a time in several Greek city-states -- is a pure democracy, in the sense that it consists of no aristocratical and monarchical elements. This circumstance is further evidence, supportive of Calhoun's claim that "the great and broad distinction between governments is -- not that of the one, the few, or the

⁷⁰ Hence, pure absolute government may be understood as a pure negative ideal; while pure constitution may be upheld as the transcendent and positive governmental ideal.

many -- but of the constitutional and the absolute." (29-30)

Historical governments, of necessity, involve some admixture of absolute elements with constitutional elements, but they do not, of necessity, involve any admixture of the elements which distinguish the democratical, aristocratical, monarchical forms respectively. And so although the government of the United States may be formally constituted and even subsist, for a time, as a purely democratic regime, as opposed to an aristocratical or monarchical one; it could never subsist as a purely constitutional regime.

Finally, it appears that the perennial and incessant opposition in human affairs between oppression and resistance, as diverse and opposing manifestations of the dual-principle, excludes the possibility of any complete and final victory either for absolutism or for constitutionalism in this earthly life. Indeed, so far as this life is concerned, perhaps the best that can be reasonably hoped for is a more frequent occurrence of those periods in which constitution enjoys a durable and permanent, though not perpetual, ascendancy over absolutism. Still, during even such happy periods, when men make their greatest advances in culture and in science, absolutism persists in an attenuated form -- relatively dormant for a time, but ready nonetheless to make its own bid for ascendancy when human vigilance in defense of ordered liberty subsides.

CHAPTER VII

UNITY OR DIVISION,
AND THE ELEVATION AND DIFFUSION OF VIRTUE OR OF VICE

That which corrupts and debases the community, politically, must also corrupt and debase it morally.

Calhoun, A Disquisition on Government

In the remainder of this work, we shall see how, in explaining the variety and implications of the developmental fate of the dual-principle, Calhoun has succeeded in answering some of the most vexing and therefore long-standing questions of the science of politics. In this chapter, the questions to be addressed include: What are the fundamental causes of a salutary unification of a political community?; and, What are the principal causes of the morals of a people, and of their governmental leaders?

As I shall indicate, Calhoun offers a deep causal account of why communities enjoy unity and a virtuous citizenry and leadership, on the one hand, or suffer the afflictions of division, degeneracy, and corruption, on the other hand. Calhoun understood that the great questions concerning the moral character and unity of a community are intimately related, and indeed, cannot be fully understood when considered in isolation from each other. Indeed, Calhoun believed and understood that the political and the moral are intimately and necessarily connected. He recognized, for example, the close causal connections between social unity and the moral virtue of the individual, on the one hand, and between vice and the division of the community, on the other hand.

In the Disquisition on Government, Calhoun's account of the moral character of individuals and of the unity or division of community (36-40) is situated alongside other related accounts which together form a comparison of absolute to constitutional government (24-67). His explanation of what determines the morals of a people and their leaders comes in the wake of his explanation of those fundamental forces which tend either to the unification or to the division of the community; and it is in the same order that these

subjects will be treated here. Making no claim to treat in exhaustive fashion the various routes by which men attain excellence of character, or fail in this regard, Calhoun isolates and describes the principal though heretofore most neglected avenue by which the mass of men in any society tend to moral excellence, and thereby, to a general condition of flourishing, or to their opposites, depravity and wretchedness. Calhoun's specific concern as regards morals in the Disquisition is to explain the process by which either virtue or vice is elevated to positions of power and diffused throughout an entire community.

Midway through the Disquisition, after having presented and explained the various elements which make up constitutional and absolute governments respectively, Calhoun begins a comparison of these opposing governmental forms which carries through to the end of the work. One of his principal aims in this section is to exhibit, by means of comparison, the virtues of constitutional government as the highest political form of which human nature is susceptible.

To begin with, we are told that governments of the concurrent majority "have greatly the advantage" over governments of the numerical majority "in respect of their respective tendency, in reference to dividing or uniting the community." (36) The tendency of governments of the concurrent majority is "to unite the community, let its interests be ever so diversified and opposed; while that of the numerical is to divide it into two conflicting portions, let its interests be, naturally, ever so united and identified." (36) From Chapter V, in the discussion of the necessary effects of the process of taxation and disbursement, and of the necessarily limited supply of the honors and

emoluments of government, we learned that the numerical majority, operating in isolation from organism, will tend to divide the community, "let it be ever so homogeneous." (36) So now, let us focus more directly on the causes of the unification or division of communities as these appertain to the concurrent and numerical majorities.

The numerical majority will tend to divide the community into two great parties "which will be engaged in perpetual struggles to obtain the control of the government":

The great importance of the object at stake, must necessarily form strong party attachments and party antipathies – attachments on the part of the members of each to their respective parties, through whose efforts they hope to accomplish an object dear to all; and antipathies to the opposite party, as presenting the only obstacle to success. (37)

The attainment of a numerical majority in order to carry elections and to obtain thereby control of the powers of government becomes the all-consuming aim and preoccupation of the two great parties. Once obtained, this power may be wielded by the dominant or major party without incumbrance or restriction. The force of the party attachments and party antipathies thus formed is sufficient to divide the community and to render it thereby susceptible to all the dangers and inconveniences that must naturally attend such division. The force of these attachments and antipathies, then, may be sufficient to place in jeopardy not only the prospects of the community for improvement, but its very survival as an independent and identifiable political entity. Adverting to the natural and intimate connections between human nature and political actualities, Calhoun explains the origin and extent of these attachments and antipathies in terms of the strength of which certain passions are susceptible:

In order to have a just conception of [the force of these passions], it must be taken into consideration, that the object to be won or lost appeals to the strongest passions of the human heart -- avarice, ambition, and rivalry. It is not then wonderful, that a form of government, which periodically stakes all its honors and emoluments, as prizes to be contended for, should divide the community into two great hostile parties; and that party attachments, in the progress of the strife, should become so strong among the members of each respectively, as to absorb almost every feeling of our nature, both social and individual; or that their mutual antipathies should be carried to such an excess as to destroy, almost entirely, all sympathy between them, and to substitute in its place the strongest aversion. (37)

So a government of the numerical majority, by virtue of its very structure, and independent of the motives and sentiments of individual men, causes the social and individual feelings to become absorbed in a struggle between the two great warring parties into which the community has been divided. It is this governmental structure which divides the community through an absorption of the individual and social feelings, and this absorption takes the concrete form of an extinction of sympathy between members of the two parties respectively, and the creation of feelings of the greatest aversion between them.

In relating his account of how vices such as avarice, ambition, and rivalry tend to be encouraged and developed under the government of the numerical majority, Calhoun had but to identify and to describe a process then running its course in the United States. Writing in the late 1840's, Calhoun was the most distinguished antagonist of the process of the division of the American Union that had been advancing more or less steadily since the Missouri Compromise of 1820. Jefferson himself described the Compromise as coming like a "fire-bell in the night" that awakened him

from the happy contentment of his retirement years at Monticello and filled him with terror.¹

Indeed, the period in American history from 1820 until the outbreak of war in 1861 stands as a classic illustration of how a government with elements of the numerical majority that are insufficiently counterbalanced can tend to the formation of strong party attachments and mutual antipathies which, in turn, can eventually divide and destroy a community. In his last speech before the Senate (March 4, 1850), less than a month before his death, Calhoun -- in a final desperate attempt to preserve both American liberties and the Union -- had somberly recounted the severing of the religious and political cords and the bonds of affection which had held the American Union together since its establishment with the ratification of the Constitution of 1787.² Unable to reverse the inexorable operations of this process, Calhoun predicted, almost to the exact year of its outbreak, the war whose costs would include nearly one million American casualties³ and the Constitution.

Under the joint influence of party attachments and mutual antipathies, Calhoun tells us, it is not surprising that "the community should cease to be the common centre of attachment, or that each party should find that centre only in itself" (37):

It is thus, that, in such governments, devotion to party becomes stronger than devotion to country -- the promotion of the interests of party more important than the promotion of the common good of the

¹ See Thomas Jefferson, letter "to John Holmes" in The Portable Thomas Jefferson, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), 567-569.

² See "Speech on the Admission of California -- and the General State of the Union" in Union and Liberty, 586-588.

³ See The New American Desk Encyclopedia (New York: New American Library, 1989), 273. About 600,000 Northern and 300,000 Confederate casualties, with around 600,000 Americans killed.

whole, and its triumph and ascendancy, objects of far greater solicitude, than the safety and prosperity of the community. It is thus, also, that the numerical majority, by regarding the community as a unit, and having, as such, the same interests throughout all its parts, must, by its necessary operation, divide it into two hostile parts, waging, under the forms of law, incessant hostilities against each other. (37)

The government of the absolute or numerical majority tends, therefore, to divide the community by diverting and by transforming our individual and social feelings in negative ways. By its absorption and transformation of our feelings, we tend to become deluded as regards our real interests both as individuals and as members of some class, interest, or portion of the general community. In this way, governmental structures, when unsuited to the community for which they are established, tend to become a principal cause of the encouragement and perpetuation of ignorance in that community. And while it is, of course, true that individual persons in such a community may, through strength of mind, pierce through the veil of delusion that befuddles and misleads others, as Calhoun did in his time, and to apprehend the fundamental causes of the community's distemper; it is equally true that the task of challenging and reversing the pernicious effects of this governmental structure often proves

overwhelming.⁴

In contrast, however, to the government of the numerical majority, which tends to divide the community, the government of the concurrent majority tends to unite it. Specifically,

The concurrent majority . . . tends to unite the most opposite and conflicting interests, and to blend the whole in one common attachment to the country. By giving to each interest, or portion, the power of self-protection, all strife and struggle between them for ascendancy, is prevented; and, thereby, not only every feeling calculated to weaken the attachment to the whole is suppressed, but the individual and the social feelings are made to unite in one common devotion to country. (37-38)

As I explained in Chapter IV, every government may be conceived and understood as a distinctive system of incentives and discentives. Every actual or historical governmental structure is distinctive not merely because of its own peculiar design, but because of its manner of interacting with and influencing the interests and institutions that make up a society. A

⁴ Adam Smith has eloquently described how faction tends to corrupt the moral sentiments, and what life is like for those few reasonable, moderate, and candid individuals who continue to struggle in lonely isolation within a society thoroughly distempered by factionalism. In The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984), 155-156, he writes:

It is needless to observe, I presume, that both rebels and heretics are those unlucky persons, who, when things have come to a certain degree of violence, have the misfortune to be of the weaker party. In a nation distracted by faction, there are, no doubt, always a few, though commonly but a very few, who preserve their judgment untainted by the general contagion. They seldom amount to more than, here and there, a solitary individual, without any influence, excluded, by his own candour, from the confidence of either party, and who, though he may be one of the wisest, is necessarily, upon that very account, one of the most insignificant men in the society. All such people are held in contempt and derision, frequently in detestation, by the furious zealots of both parties. A true party-man hates and despises candour; and, in reality, there is no vice which could so effectually disqualify him for the trade of a party-man as that single virtue. The real, revered, and impartial spectator, therefore, is, upon no occasion, at a greater distance than amidst the violence and rage of contending parties. To them, it may be said, that such a spectator scarce exists any where in the universe. Even to the great Judge of the universe, they impute all their own prejudices, and often view that Divine Being as animated by all their own vindictive and implacable passions. Of all the corrupters of moral sentiments, therefore, faction and fanaticism have always been by far the greatest. (emphasis added)

governmental structure effects a community, for good or ill, according to its suitability for that community. Specifically, it is a matter of whether or not the powers of the government, both as regards their nature and extent, are suited to the internal and external circumstances of the particular community in question. Hence a governmental structure whose operational effects on one community are salutary may be, for another community, detrimental in the extreme. What matters then is not the structure of government, considered in isolation from the community for which it is intended, but the favorable or unfavorable interrelation of the two, governmental structure and community. A distinctive feature of constitutional governments, or governments of the concurrent majority, when they are well suited to the community for which they are intended, is thus described by Calhoun:

Each [interest or portion of the community] sees and feels that it can best promote its own prosperity by conciliating the goodwill, and promoting the prosperity of the others. And hence, there will be diffused throughout the whole community kind feelings between its different portions; and, instead of antipathy, a rivalry amongst them to promote the interests of each other, as far as this can be done consistently with the interest of all. Under the combined influence of these causes, the interests of each would be merged in the common interests of the whole; and thus, the community would be a unit, by becoming the common centre of attachment of all its parts. And hence, instead of faction, strife, and struggle for party ascendancy, there would be patriotism, nationality, harmony, and a struggle only for supremacy in promoting the common good of the whole. (38)

And so we see that the community may be unified and therefore rendered a unit by a government of the concurrent majority. But recall that in Chapter V, in our discussion of the role of the right of suffrage, we saw that the government of the numerical majority is premised on the view that the community is a single unit, or of only one interest as regards the action of

government. And so that which is the starting assumption of the numerical majority system is the causal result of the concurrent majority system. For Calhoun saw that unity is a result of first acknowledging a necessary plurality and diversity of interests within the community; an acknowledgement effectually conveyed through the organization of its government so as to register the sense of each interest separately, and of giving each significant interest in the community the power of self-protection. On the other hand, says Calhoun, division results from assuming, at the start, that the community consists of merely a single interest as regards the action or inaction of government, and in manifesting this assumption in an organization of the government that disregards the necessary plurality and diversity of the community's interests.

This point brings us to a consideration of one of the most fateful shortcomings of modern mainstream political theorizing. This theorizing, as evinced, for example, in the influential writings of Hobbes, Locke, and, to some degree, Rousseau, tends to regard the community as a single, undifferentiated unit, and fails thereby to acknowledge the political community's natural and unavoidable diversity of interests. The most notable exception to this mainstream tradition, in this regard, has been, of course, the political thought that has emerged in response to American colonial, confederal, and federal political experience, a tradition that includes the writings of the so-called Federalists and anti-Federalists, as well as Calhoun's own works, including his Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States (1851).

But once the fact of the necessary diversity and plurality of interests is

conceded, the question may be raised as to the ultimate commensurability or incommensurability of these interests. Although a question Calhoun did not treat directly and explicitly, he did, one may readily surmise, hold that any natural interests of a community will be ultimately commensurable one to another, and each to all. As evidence for this view, we might expect him, were he called upon, to cite actual historical examples in which the cooperation between interests, redounding to their mutual benefit and to that of the entire community, was produced by the system of concurrent majority. Such cooperation and benefit, he might argue, is suggestive of an ultimate natural or metaphysical commensurability between individual interests. For Calhoun, such examples would serve as proof of a glorious and beneficent Divine Providence that has established commensurability of interests as a possibility to be actualized by man through the art of statesmanship.⁵ However, on the issue of the ultimate commensurability or incommensurability of interests, Calhoun's clear-eyed optimism and piety appears to contrast sharply with, for example, the ominous pessimism and impiety of his younger German contemporary, Karl Marx, with his

⁵ Cf. Francis Hutcheson, An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, and Design, p. 67 in An Inquiry in the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue (London: 1753):

Interest must lead *Beings* of limited Powers, who are incapable of a great *Diversity* of Operations, and distracted by them, to choose this *frugal Oeconomy* of their Forces, and to look upon such Management as an Evidence of *Wisdom* in other *Beings* like themselves.

conception of inevitable class conflict.⁶ But, Marx and others notwithstanding, Calhoun would point out that the participants in a well-ordered constitutional regime possess a participatory understanding of the commensurability of interests; an understanding which serves both as the ground of abstract understanding and theoretical explanation of this commensurability by the political philosopher, and as the guide and inspiration of the statesman occupied with reform or preservation.

It is noteworthy too that the system of the concurrent majority, properly implemented, does not merely minimize or eliminate conflict between interests, but disposes them to friendly competition to promote the common good through the promotion of other interests. But however improbable may seem the notions of ultimate commensurability of interest and friendly competition between the different portions of the community,

⁶ A more systematic comparison between these two thinkers should be quite instructive, and has yet to be carried out. Calhoun anticipated Marx in providing an account of class struggle, for example. Calhoun placed more emphasis on the causal role of the structure of government in aggravating or resolving such conflict, whereas Marx tended to view government as merely part of the ideological superstructure residing on the foundation of material productive forces. See, for example, in A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy (International Library Publishing Company Inc., 1904), 12, where Marx writes:

At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations the distinctions should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.

A bare and highly problematic beginning in comparing the ideas of Calhoun and Marx on class struggle has been made in two studies hostile to Calhoun: Richard N. Current, "John C. Calhoun, Philosopher of Reaction" Antioch Review, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Summer 1943), 223-234; and Richard Hofstadter, "John C. Calhoun: The Marx of the Master Class," in The American Political Tradition (New York, 1948).

their reality and possibility become clearer when we examine, for example, that portion of the Disquisition pertaining to the extension of the right of suffrage, or of what we called in Chapter V, the first principle of constitution. (35-36)

Here we are told about another advantage which governments of the concurrent majority have over those of the numerical majority, one that does much to explain their respective tendencies to unite and divide the community, and which "strongly illustrates" the more popular character of concurrent majority governments. According to Calhoun, concurrent majority governments "admit, with safety, a much greater extension of the right of suffrage." (35) He writes:

[The right of suffrage] may be safely extended in such governments to universal suffrage: that is -- to every male citizen of mature age, with few ordinary exceptions; but it cannot be so far extended in those of the numerical majority, without placing them ultimately under the control of the more ignorant and dependent portions of the community. For, as the community becomes populous, wealthy, refined, and highly civilized, the difference between the rich and the poor will become more strongly marked; and the number of the ignorant and dependent greater in proportion to the rest of the community. With the increase of this difference, the tendency to conflict between them will become stronger; and, as the poor and dependent become more numerous in proportion, there will be, in governments of the numerical majority, no want of leaders among the wealthy and ambitious, to excite and direct them in their efforts to obtain the control. (35-36)

This highly suggestive passage goes far towards explaining not only the tendency towards demagoguery in absolute democracies, but also, the persistence and volatility of class conflict during our modern democratic era. In particular, it underscores the vulnerability of democracies in which

absolute elements predominate to socialistic-communistic revolution.⁷ Also, the fact that class conflict has tended not to reach violent revolutionary proportions in other communities⁸ is hardly mere coincidence. For as Calhoun says of governments of the concurrent majority:

There, mere numbers have not the absolute control; and the wealthy and intelligent being identified in interest with the poor and ignorant of their respective portions or interests of the community, become their leaders and protectors. And hence, as the latter would have neither hope nor inducement to rally the former in order to obtain the control, the right of suffrage, under such a government, may be safely enlarged to the extent stated [i.e., universal male suffrage], without incurring the hazard to which such enlargement would expose governments of the numerical majority. (36)

So the degree to which a community is susceptible to class conflict and to the convulsions and inconveniences which naturally attend such conflict may be determined, in large part, by reference to the proportion of absolute to constitutional elements within that community's government. In particular, absolute democratic governmental structures tend to breed class conflict due to their inability to extend suffrage safely, while constitutional democracies tend to enjoy more harmonious relations between their various classes. Therefore, the structure of a community's government -- through its distinctive operational tendencies -- is a principal cause of either conflict or harmony between classes.⁹

But although governments of the concurrent majority tend to

⁷ The Provisional Government (Jul. to Oct. 1917) of Alexander Kerensky (1881-1970) and the Weimar Republic (1919-1933) were two such ill-fated democracies.

⁸ For example, the United States, Canada, and Great Britain.

⁹ Evidently then, Calhoun's "structuralist -governmental" explanation of class conflict constitutes a refutation -- ahead of time -- of the Marxian view that class conflict arises primarily from the workings of material productive forces. And so communities with the same productive forces may fare differently as regards their susceptibility to and experience of class conflict, due to their possessing fundamentally different governmental structures.

harmonize the various portions of a community, and thereby underscore the ultimate commensurability of individual interests, they neither promise nor bring about the sort of radical re-constituting of human nature proposed, for example, by Marx, with his idyllic Marxian Man appearing at the end of history.¹⁰ Instead, Calhoun, as we have seen, rejected all such prognostications of the infinite perfectibility of man as so many dangerous delusions rooted ultimately in human arrogance and conceit. With an Augustinian appreciation of human frailty, Calhoun viewed our human, all-too-human passions as untranscendable features capable of only limited development and improvement, and our general human condition, indelibly marked by original sin, as susceptible, in this earthly life, of palliation at best. Thus Calhoun, the Christian statesman, would give a chastened recommendation of life. To his daughter, the beloved Anna Maria, he wrote:

You must not suppose, that in contending ag[ai]nst corruption & interest, that I am impelled by the hope of success. Had that been the case, I would long since have retired from the conflict. Far higher motives impel me; a sense of duty; to do our best for our country, & leave the rest to Providence. I hold, the duties of life, to be greater than life itself, and that in performing them manfully, even ag[ai]nst hope, our labour is not lost, but will be productive of good in after times. Indeed, I regard this life very much as a struggle ag[ai]nst evil, & that to him, who acts on proper principle, the *reward is in the struggle, more than in the victory itself*, although that greatly enhances it. So strong is my faith in this belief, my dear Daughter, that no appreciation of my efforts, either by the present, or after times, is necessary to sustain me in struggling to do my duty in resisting wrong, especially where our

¹⁰As we are told in Capital, private property and the proletariat are opposites forming an antagonistic "whole." But this whole is bound ultimately for dissolution, since private property possesses an inherent tendency to generate more and more proletariat, and the proletariat is "conscious of itself as a dehumanization and hence abolishes itself." See Karl Marx, Capital in The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978). And for an excellent critical summary of Marx's economics and philosophy, see Thomas Sowell, Marxism: Philosophy and Economics (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985).

country is concerned, although I put a high value on renown.¹¹

Within the limits of human nature as established by God, however, much can be accomplished for which it is the duty of all men to strive. Through the contrivances of constitutional art, as it were, the various passions are susceptible of being put in the service of man. For example, the rivalry elicited by the government of the concurrent majority differs fundamentally from that incited and promoted by the government of the numerical majority. The latter is a bitter struggle for the control of the powers of government, marked by lack of scruple, between two great hostile and irreconcilable parties; while the former is a friendly competition in which the various interests of the community, secure in themselves through the power of self-protection, vie with one another amiably and with mutual deference to promote the interests of each other and of the whole. Thus rivalry as a passion developed or actualized within the concurrent system is rendered a force for unity rather than division. Hence, through the operation or influence of the structure of the government of the concurrent majority, the human disposition or passion of rivalry is turned to the good of man, and away from his destruction.

This influence of the structure of government on the passions suggests, of course, the intimate relation between the political and the moral, and more specifically, the relation between unification and virtue, and between public and private morals. Having described the difference in the operation of the concurrent and numerical systems from a more strictly political point of view, or as regards, in particular, the unification or division of the community (36-38); Calhoun turns to consider their effects from a moral

¹¹To Anna Maria Calhoun Clemson, 7 March 1848; Clemson University.

point of view (38-40). Doing so, he finds that the effects of the two disparate systems, numerical and concurrent, would be as great from the moral point of view as from the political:

Indeed, public and private morals are so nearly allied, that it would be difficult for it to be otherwise. That which corrupts and debases the community, politically, must also corrupt and debase it morally. The same cause, which, in governments of the numerical majority, gives to party attachments and antipathies such force, as to place party triumph and ascendancy above the safety and prosperity of the community, will just as certainly give them sufficient force to overpower all regard for truth, justice, sincerity, and moral obligations of every description. It is, accordingly, found that in the violent strifes between parties for the high and glittering prize of governmental honors and emoluments -- falsehood, injustice, fraud, artifice, slander, and breach of faith, are freely resorted to, as legitimate weapons -- followed by all their corrupting and debasing influences. (38)

Such, then, are the effects on public morals of the operation of the government of the numerical majority. On the other hand, the effects on public morals of the operation of the government of the concurrent majority are quite different:

In the government of the concurrent majority, . . . , the same cause which prevents such strife, as the means of obtaining power, and which makes it the interest of each portion to conciliate and promote the interests of the others, would exert a powerful influence towards purifying and elevating the character of the government and the people, morally, as well as politically. (38-39)

So government effects community through its various operations, or through the exercise of its powers. Also, governments may differ among each other as regards both the authorized and unauthorized powers they possess and exercise. Analogously, communities differ among one another as regards their internal and external conditions, or as regards their material, moral, and physical circumstances. When government and community are combined, as

they must be for the preservation of the latter, the structure and operations of government cannot but effect the community, as we have seen, in various and important ways.

That governmental arrangements influence the morals of the community had, of course, been a much discussed theme of some political writers prior to Calhoun. Kant, for example, understood in a very general way the salutary effects of political constitution on a community suited for that governmental form. In his "Idea for a Universal History", speaking of constitution as a "state of restriction", he observed:

Man, who is otherwise so enamored with unrestrained freedom, is forced to enter this state of restriction by sheer necessity. And this is indeed the most stringent of all forms of necessity, for it is imposed by men upon themselves, in that their inclinations make it impossible for them to exist side by side for long in a state of wild freedom. But once enclosed within a precinct like that of civil union, the same inclinations have the most beneficial effect. In the same way, trees in a forest, by seeking to deprive each other of air and sunlight, compel each other to find these by upward growth, so that they grow beautiful and straight -- whereas those which put out branches at will, in freedom and in isolation from others, grow stunted, bent and twisted.¹²

With his arboreal simile, Kant explains how constitutional government is a means by which man disciplines himself with an eye to a fuller development of his natural capacities. The same natural inclinations that existed before the advent of constitutional government exist with it. Yet, the structure peculiar to that form of government channels and conditions these inclinations in salutary ways, whereas before, in the state of unrestrained freedom, these inclinations tended to mis-development and to social dissolution.

¹²See Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History" in *Great Political Thinkers*, ed. William Ebenstein and Alan O. Ebenstein (Austin: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1988), 536.

Kant's simile concerning the influence of government on morals is apt and instructive as far as it goes; but the problem with his account, of course, is that there is no explanation of precisely how the structure of government effects moral development. Like other political writers prior to Calhoun¹³, Kant did not explain the specific process whereby morals are effected by governmental arrangements. As we shall see, it was discoveries such as this which made it possible for Calhoun to draw more sharply what had been thereto a very vague and imperfectly drawn distinction between absolute and constitutional forms of government. This theoretical development and clarification, in turn, served to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of each form, thereby preparing the way for the improvement of political practice.

It is in his discussion of the effects on public and private morals of the operation of the numerical and concurrent systems that Calhoun discloses an insight which, independent of any other contribution or consideration, warrants for its author a place alongside the best moral and political thinkers

¹³ There is Aristotle, for example, who came as close perhaps as anyone prior to Calhoun to describing this process. In Book IX of the Nicomachean Ethics, he says that "law is reason that proceeds from a sort of intelligence and understanding" (1180 a). Also, at 1179b-1180a:

. . . it is hard for someone to be trained correctly for virtue from his youth if he has not been brought up under correct laws, since the many, especially the young, do not find it pleasant to live in a temperate and resistant way. Hence laws must prescribe their upbringing and practices; for they will not find these things painful when they get used to them. Presumably, however, it is not enough to get the correct upbringing and attention when they are young; rather, they must continue the same practices and be habituated to them when they become men. Hence we need laws concerned with these things also, and in general with all of life. For the many yield to compulsion more than to argument, and to sanctions more than to what is fine.

See Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics. Trans. by Terence Irwin. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), 293.

of the West. This disclosure begins with his observation that the concurrent and numerical systems differ so dramatically in their effects on public morals because the two systems, by virtue of their different structures, involve different means of acquiring governmental power or influence. Hence “the means of acquiring power -- or, more correctly, influence” -- in governments of the concurrent majority is the reverse of that in governments of the numerical majority (39):

Instead of the vices, by which it is acquired in that of the numerical majority, the opposite virtues -- truth, justice, integrity, fidelity, and all others, by which respect and confidence are inspired, would be the most certain and effectual means of acquiring it. (39)

The disclosure proceeds as Calhoun tracks the good effects of the concurrent system and the bad effects of the numerical system from the public realm into the private realm, or from their effects on the moral behavior of political leaders to their effects on the character of ordinary citizens and subjects. Hence, the effects on morals of these governmental systems extend beyond those who take an active part in the governmental affairs of the community. The final revelation of the insight comes when Calhoun turns to consider governmental systems or structures as one among all the various causes of the formation of the moral character of the people.

Comparing these various causes, he finds that:

For all the causes which contribute to form the character of a people, those by which power, influence, and standing in the government are most certainly and readily obtained, are, by far, the most powerful. These are the objects most eagerly sought of all others by the talented and aspiring; and the possession of which commands the greatest respect and admiration. But, just in proportion to this respect and admiration will be their appreciation by those, whose energy, intellect, and position in society, are calculated to exert the greatest influence in forming the character of a people. (39)

In asserting, as he does, that the influence of governmental arrangements on morals tends to exceed the combined influences of religion and education, Calhoun does not intend to deny that -- so far as the moral development of particular individuals, groups, or classes within a society are concerned -- there are instances in which the latter causes, either singly or in combination, have overpowered the former. Calhoun's argument here, typical of the Disquisition, is one rooted in an observation of general tendencies, or of the operation of laws of human association. Hence, any apparent counter-examples may be explained in terms of some account of an inordinate or atypical influence of some counter-vailing tendency, or combination of tendencies. Individual historical instances, then, in which religion and moral education, generally conceived, have been found to be the preponderate moral influence on individuals or groups, are recognized as remarkable, or as something extraordinary.

Certainly there have been and will continue to be numerous instances historically in which religion and moral education, welling up, as it were, either in some influential leader or in some group, have succeeded for a time in overpowering the moral influence of governmental structure. But like those instances, described in Chapter II, in which the social feelings are for a time felt more intensely than the individual feelings, the unusual or exceptional character of such instances is evinced in our reactions to these occurrences. As participants ourselves in some political order, we are acquainted with what we might call the normal, inertial, and unreflective course of human political behavior. For this reason, we tend naturally to

view instances in which religion or moral education prevail as remarkable and extraordinary. Reflecting on such extraordinary instances, or participating in one ourselves, we are at least dimly aware that some fundamental law of human behavior and association has been overpowered, for a time, by some counter-vailing force. Thus the deep impression made within a general society by the behavior of morally "independent" individuals or groups, whenever such countervailing tendencies prevail for a time, is the strongest proof, Calhoun might say, that such instances are to be regarded as exceptions to some general though vaguely understood law of our nature. And this law of the political world declares through its operation that the structure of government, or the manner in which the interests or portions of the community are organized politically, is the principal cause of the moral character of a people.

Moreover, the particular means required to obtain governmental power and influence, in a given instance, tend to receive the sanction and approval of those "whose energy, intellect, and position in society, are calculated to exert the greatest influence in forming the character of a people." (39) This sanction and approval, issued from whatever reasons, tends to prove, in every instance, morally decisive for the entire community. Hence the means by which power is obtained sets the moral example and tone, as it were, for the entire community. Respect and appreciation for power, influence, and standing in the government tend to confer legitimacy on the means by which these goods are obtained, whatever those means may be, and independent of whether this respect and appreciation are well-placed or ill-placed in a given instance. For the consideration of whether or not

governmental power, influence, and standing deserve respect and appreciation in a given instance requires a feat of reflection towards which the mass of individuals in any community, being essentially unreflective by habit, are indisposed.

The statesman, then, must be thoroughly acquainted with and ever mindful of the full force of what we may call the example of governmental power. For recall, as we argued earlier, that David Hume was correct in teaching that all political authority is rooted in opinion, and in underscoring thereby a perennial circumstance which naturally prompts one concerned with the origin and legitimacy of political arrangements to a consideration of the various causes of opinion. Following up on Hume's insight, Calhoun teaches that a major influence on opinion and behavior, especially among the politically unreflective portion of the community, is the means by which power is gained and held.¹⁴

Were the mass of men constituted differently, so as to be more reflective and deliberative, one should expect that the influence of the structure of government, relative to the other causes which determine the moral character of a people, including education and religion, would not be so great. But, lest we fall under the delusion that the actions of the mass of men are determined and directed by their own sustained and self-conscious reasoning, Hume reminds us that ". . . mankind are almost entirely guided by [internal] constitution and temper, and . . . general maxims have little influence, but so far as they affect our taste or sentiment."¹⁵ Taking human

¹⁴ Although our focus here is on the example of political power and its influence on morals, other kinds of power exist which provide public examples that tend to influence morals, including, for example, economic or financial power.

¹⁵ See David Hume, "The Sceptic" in Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 169.

nature as it is, however, the example of political power, for good or ill, tends to overwhelm all other influences on morals combined through its continual presence, sheer palpability, and the deep and unfading impression these sear into the awareness of every portion of the community. So governmental power, standing, and influence tend to hold a fascination and prestige in the eyes of men that are, in the end, all but unassailable and insuperable; and this circumstance is perhaps as frustrating and vexing to the informed and patriotic reformer as it is to the careless and inchoate revolutionary or to the self-consciously malevolent enemy of order.

In any community, the mass of men, along with the talented and aspiring, tend to live and to act unreflectively within a network of overlapping systems of incentives and disincentives of which that political community consists. Typically foremost among these systems, both as regards its visibility and its influence on the community, is that structure of incentives and disincentives, or of rewards and punishments, that is the principal controlling power of society that is government. Within a community, government is a system of incentives and disincentives over and among other systems, which, in its influence, whether direct or indirect, reaches every corner of that general community and beyond.

Thus, says Calhoun, the means by which governmental power, standing, and influence are obtained are the principal causes of the moral character of a people:

If knowledge, wisdom, patriotism, and virtue, be the most certain means of acquiring them, they will be most highly appreciated and assiduously cultivated; and this would cause them to become prominent traits in the character of the people. But if, on the contrary, cunning, fraud, treachery, and party devotion be the most certain, they will be the most highly prized, and become marked features in their

character. (39)

So the virtues tend to become marginalized and scarce where they lack utility in gaining or retaining governmental power: And likewise with the vices. Sound constitution makes the virtues useful in the acquisition of power, standing, and influence; and by rendering them thus useful, diffuses them throughout a community.

Recalling our discussion in the previous chapter of what an interest is; in a governmental system in which every significant ¹⁶ constitutional interest in the community has the power of self-protection, the individual members of the interests, acting together, will elevate to places of trust and power, those who will, through their wisdom and experience, not only represent that interest faithfully and skillfully, but who will be honoured and respected by members of the other interests, because of their elevated moral character and their manifest disposition to join with those outside their peculiar interest in pursuit of the commonweal. The example of such wise and virtuous leadership, in turn, inspires imitation on the part of the generality,

¹⁶ Although Calhoun does not state explicitly and directly what makes an interest significant, one may responsibly surmise from his account in the Disquisition that a significant interest is one which, were it to be excluded from governmental power to the point that it is unable to protect itself against the depredations of other, empowered interests; the quantity of its material holdings, and the extent to which these holdings excite the avarice of the powerful, are such that the plunder principle, discussed in Chapter VI, would become active. In the Discourse, for example, Calhoun describes the process whereby the Southern states, by degrees, lost their power of self-protection and were thereby rendered vulnerable to depredations originating in the Northern and Western sections of the Union. (See the Discourse in Union and Liberty, 224-239.) More recently citizens of several northern Italian provinces, chafing under disproportionate fiscal exactions and interference in provincial affairs by the central government in Rome, have formed the Lega Norde (Northern League), a decentralist-secessionist organization. Around the world, scores of decentralist movements now exist among interests or portions of communities, whether unitary or confederal, whose members are bent on escaping the operation of the plunder principle as described by Calhoun. And the United States, of course, are the most striking and momentous illustration in modern times of such a movement, being themselves born in secession and founded on the principle of decentralized power.

and the virtues, through their new association with power and the prestige this imparts to them, become widespread. In this way, a genuinely constitutional political order elevates virtue and diffuses it throughout a community. On the other hand, the circumstances and the forces at work characteristic of a community with an absolute form of government are quite different.

Under absolute governmental forms, whether monarchical, aristocratic, or democratic, all of the disparate, significant interests of the community do not enjoy the power of self-protection through the use of a veto or negative on the actions of other interests. Where there is no institutional provision of protection through such a power, each interest will seek to obtain control of the power of government to defend itself from the others. In the absence of constitutional elements such as the power of the veto or negative, a struggle for power inevitably occurs between the various interests of the community which results in control for one dominant interest or group of interests, with the other interests being excluded from effectual power and possibly even from participation in the government itself. In such a state -- where self-preservation is the desperate and all-consuming pre-occupation of the powerless, and where a desire for self-aggrandizement becomes, inevitably, the seducer of the powerful -- both those who possess power and those excluded from it for a time will, it must be expected, resort to any means, including slander, fraud, and deception of any sort, either to obtain or to retain power, as their situation dictates. Such a desperate and corrupting state of affairs cannot, in its influence, but react dangerously upon the formation of the moral characters of the mass of the

community. Under such conditions, leaders or representatives will be selected from the various interests who will, by their example, prompt widespread and vicious imitation.

And so, where vicious means are requisite to gain or to retain political power, the example of governmental power hangs over the community like an enervating pall -- seducing, implicating, corrupting, and deadening. However, where virtue is a necessary qualification for political office and influence, the example of power attains a luminous brilliance and enlivening force which penetrates, like the warming and nurturing rays of the sun, to every corner of the community -- inspiring, exhorting, and purifying.

Nor is the moral force of the example of governmental power and influence restricted to the political or governmental realm. Indeed, power is acquired and retained at the various levels of society by various means, and these means are commonly determined, in no slight degree, either directly or indirectly by the political organization of the society's interests. Thus there are structures of power internal to what I called, in Chapter IV, the intermediate institutions of the community, and these structures are formed, to some degree, through the influence of the moral example of government. Hence the various economic, religious, and cultural institutions and behavior patterns of the community are ultimately and inevitably effected, in various ways, by the moral example of government. The precise nature of the influence of government's example here depends upon how the various intermediate institutions respond to this example. That is, whether they respond, generally speaking, with acquiescence, imitation, or defiance, or with some combination of these. Thus a people are not merely corrupted or

uplifted directly by the vicious or virtuous examples of their political leaders, but by the responses of the intermediate institutions of the community which made the ascendancy of these leaders to positions of power and public prominence possible in the first place. Moreover, there is to be considered the formation of those quasi-governmental organizations whose principal aim is the expansion and allocation of governmental patronage -- including lobbying groups characteristic of spoils systems -- which are only the more apparent manifestations of the process whereby the example of governmental power effects the general community. Indeed, on a general review of the matter, the full effect and importance of the moral example of governmental power -- itself an effect of some balance or imbalance in the political organization of the interests of a community -- is impossible to calculate with precision, and can hardly be over-estimated. Having then suggested the range of the effects of the moral example of government, we are prepared to return to the main thread of our discourse and to consider Calhoun's view of the full power or causal force of which this example is susceptible.

Being the principal causes of the character of a people and of their leaders, the means of obtaining power and influence, once fundamentally altered, through whatever circumstances, will bring sweeping changes:

So powerful, indeed, is the operation of the concurrent majority, in this respect, that, if it were possible for a corrupt and degenerate community to establish and maintain a well-organized government of the kind, it would of itself purify and regenerate them; while, on the other hand, a government based wholly on the numerical majority, would just as certainly corrupt and debase the most patriotic and virtuous people.
(39)

So if power corrupts, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely, as

Lord Acton said¹⁷; it is also true that the restrictions on power provided by sound constitution purify public and private morals, and that constitutionally exercised power tends to purify them absolutely. According to Calhoun, then, wholesale transformations of the moral character of the community, effected through some alteration of the structure of government in relation to the various interests or portions of the community, may be wrought within the course of a single generation or so. Whole communities can rise or fall on “the scale of patriotism and virtue”, as Calhoun called it, within the span of but a few years. (40) Less dramatic but just as evident are the operational tendencies of these two disparate systems where a single government consists of some admixture of their elements. There we find that so great is the difference between the effects on moral character of these disparate elements, that:

. . . just as the one or the other element predominates in the construction of [the] government, in the same proportion will the character of the government and the people rise or sink in the scale of patriotism and virtue. Neither religion nor education can counteract the strong tendency of the numerical majority to corrupt and debase

¹⁷See Lord Acton, letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton [April 5, 1887].

the people.¹⁸ (39-40)

From the insights just presented, which Calhoun relates in his articulation of what may be called his “power principle” of morals, a number of natural and ready inferences may be made. For example, in mixed regimes, or where the political arrangements of the community consist of some admixture of absolute and constitutional elements, some combination of both vices and virtues will serve as the most certain and effectual means of obtaining governmental power. Therefore, some peculiar and unholy blend of vices and virtues -- or muted and attenuated forms of each -- will yet prove more effective than its morally purer alternatives, both good and bad. Hence, on the one side, this mixed or muted moral character will possess more utility than a more purely vicious character when the latter, through an

¹⁸ At first glance, Calhoun’s observation that governmental structure tends to be the principal determinant of moral character appears to diminish the positive role of religion in society by relegating religion to a role that is morally subsidiary to government. In truth, however, religion’s role in society would be thus diminished only if it turned out that this role is necessarily restricted to efforts to save individual souls through direct religious instruction. As it turns out, though, the role of religion in society involves much more. In fact, Calhoun’s insight that the structure of government tends to be the principal cause of the morals of a people suggests that religion may have an additional and critically important role to play in establishing and maintaining beneficent and salutary governmental structures. Put another way: Although the salvation of individual souls through effective religious instruction is the most direct and visible aspect of religion’s role in society, there is another less direct and far less visible aspect of religion’s role or duty in society which is often overlooked. This less visible and less direct aspect is the part that religion is intended by the Creator to play directly in the establishment and preservation of a governmental form that is suited to the moral and physical circumstances of its community. Here, religion operates either as a revolutionary force for change or as a conservative force, depending on whether or not a community, in a given instance, has a government suited to its peculiar internal and external -- or moral and physical -- circumstances. (See the Disquisition in Union and Liberty, 41.) But regardless of whether sound religion, in a given instance, assumes a more revolutionary or a more conservative posture, it always serves to cultivate and to perfect the statesmanly art in a community by infusing that art with Divine wisdom. And so, as it turns out, there are at least two indentifiable aspects of religion’s role in society: a paedeutic aspect, where the soul of the individual is to be saved through direct educative and proselytizing efforts; and a statesmanly aspect, where religious doctrine is brought to bear on the human condition indirectly for the sake of establishing and preserving sound government.

excess of vice, would offend, once exposed, the moral sensibility of the public, and thereby suffer setback or failure in his bid for power. On the other side, the mixed character will be at a premium, for the purpose of obtaining or retaining power, where a more virtuous character, whose unwillingness and refusal to resort to all the various popularly acceptable means for the acquisition of power must render him ineffectual in comparison to one less scrupulous. In turn, the public, especially its less reflective portions, will tend to suffer, condone, and even imitate, in their private morals, this mixture of vice and virtue.

Another easy inference from these insights is that when vice is useful in obtaining power, exhortations to the generality to renounce it and to embrace virtue instead typically amount to little more than so many vain and futile pleas which must meet with failure more often than not. So one may lament the presence of vices in individual men; dispositions which issue in large part from unconstrained government. But, Calhoun would say, to endlessly castigate such men about their degenerate condition, and by fecklessly exhorting them to improve, without addressing the underlying cause of their infirmity, bespeaks an ignorance born of sloth whose proper, natural, and inevitable reward is despotism.

Vice, once empowered, cannot be effectively met by vapid exhortations to virtue or by appeals to justice unsupported by physical force. Instead, effective resistance to tyranny begins with a sense of slighted interest in the heart of the oppressed individual, and culminates in the formation of a successful confederacy with others of like feeling. Thus appeal to individual interest is at the core of resistance to tyranny. So the very root of resistance to

tyranny is not a disinterested virtue, were such a thing possible, or even benevolence, but is instead the selfish interest of the oppressed. Therefore virtue and interest cannot be understood independently of one another.

Whereas a political constitution worthy of the name establishes virtue as the rule and vice as the exception, absolutism tends to the opposite by making vice the rule and virtue the exception. In communities without genuine constitution, the virtues and the men who possess them and stay true to them in the face of a vice-producing or morally corrupting government will tend to be marginalized, and thereby consigned to the lot of the powerless. Also in such communities, the virtues themselves, where they do not suffer the neglect and indifference of a corrupt and uncomprehending generality, will suffer derision and willful misrepresentation at the hands of those among the most talented and gifted of the corrupt who deem the preservation of the existing reign of vice as necessary to the perpetuation of their own power, wealth, and prestige. The great expenditures of effort by upright or virtuous men, in any age, in abstaining from recourse to the vicious means endemic to a faulty political organization, and the disadvantage in pursuit of worldly gains they suffer thereby, are testimony to the great influence of political arrangements on morals and on human life generally.¹⁹

But in order to understand and to appreciate fully Calhoun's speech, just presented, on the principal cause of moral virtue, one must understand first the erroneous beliefs which had hindered much of the previous moral

¹⁹ And, as a Christian, Calhoun held that during those darkest hours when men must live under the stifling pall of despotism or governmental oppression, the righteous man may attain his greatest triumphs in the face of a thousand temptations by heeding the promise, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)

and political theorizing and practice; errors which Calhoun was able, for various reasons, to overcome.

Hitherto, the main obstacle to the improvement or purification of morals in political communities has been the mistaken view that if only we could fill political offices with virtuous men, the commonweal would win the constant and exclusive solicitude of every portion of the community, and all would be well, regardless of the influence of the structure of government itself. As I pointed out in Chapter II, the greatest single impediment to improvement in political practice has been the erroneous view that all political problems may be reduced ultimately to moral problems, and not to problems relating directly to the effective and beneficent coordination of individual wills and interests through the coordination of the various portions or general interests of the community. Another erroneous belief, closely associated with the former, is that education and religion, as influences on morals, are sufficient either of themselves and in combination with each other -- when applied vigorously and in a manner commensurate with a true understanding of human nature -- to effectively counteract or, even, to preclude outright any tendency to tyranny and abuse of power that the human breast may harbour.

It should be noted that these two errors have typically exerted their greatest influence over political theorizing and practice not as free-standing beliefs, but as essential elements within an older but too simplistic model of the political good. What is neglected in this model is a consideration of the causal role of the very structure of government itself on the development of human understanding and feeling, and, through these, on human action. By

isolating and explaining this causal role of the structure of government, Calhoun was able to provide a more accurate and subtle account of all those conditions that shape the moral character of humanity and its political leaders.

To review: according to Calhoun, a principal proximate cause of the moral character of a people and their political leaders is the means by which governmental power is acquired or retained, while the principal and more remote cause of moral character is the structure of government itself. In the remainder of this chapter, in order to highlight and to further illustrate Calhoun's philosophic speeches on the unification of the community and on the formation of moral character, I shall discuss some intimations of Calhoun's teaching within the philosophical tradition.

In Chapter II, while conjecturing on how Calhoun came up with the dual-principle of our nature, I said that he conceived of the science of government as concerned essentially with the solution of complex coordination problems. On this view, the statesman, as the practitioner of the science, is concerned ultimately with the salutary coordination of human wills, and only mediately and indirectly, with preserving and improving the morals of the general community, and of its leaders. For it is principally through the solution of complex coordination problems, says Calhoun, that morals are improved and perpetuated. Significantly, something approaching this conception by Calhoun of what may be called the coordination problem of morals had been propounded a century and a quarter before by the Italian philosopher and professor of rhetoric,

Giambattista Vico (1668-1744).²⁰

Showing a Platonic concern for moral virtue while echoing the scandalous theme of Mandeville²¹ that the passions can be made to redound to public benefit, Vico, in his New Science (1744), teaches that:

Legislation considers man as he is in order to turn him to good uses in human society. Out of ferocity, avarice, and ambition, the three vices which run throughout the human race, it creates the military, merchant, and governing classes, and thus the strength, riches, and wisdom of commonwealths. Out of these three great vices, which could certainly destroy all mankind on the face of the earth, it makes civil happiness.²²

And so, according to Vico, the human passions can be moderated and made into human virtues. Moreover, he regards this singular and paradoxical propensity of nature as proof that there is Divine Providence, and further, that there is a divine legislative mind:

For out of the passions of men each bent on his private advantage, for the sake of which they would live like beasts in the wilderness, [the divine legislative mind] has made the civil institutions by which they may live in human society.²³

Although insightful and suggestive, the relationship between legislation and the passions as articulated by Vico would require a fuller development, one in terms of the specific means or practical constitutional

²⁰ The conception of politics as essentially or primarily a coordination problem may also be found in Spinoza, Hume, Smith, Hegel, and more recently, in the works of Nobel laureate economist (1974) and philosopher, F. A. Hayek. See especially, Hayek's The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies on the Abuse of Reason. (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1952); Law, Legislation, and Liberty: A New Statement of the Liberal Principles of Justice and Political Economy, Vol. I, Rules and Order (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973); and Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).

²¹ See The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Benefits.

²² Giambattista Vico, The New Science of Giambattista Vico (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 62.

²³ *Ibid*, 62.

provisions through which the passions may be transformed so as to effect civil happiness. As stated previously, such provisions had already appeared at various times in history. And incidently, these provisions are produced, in large part, by what Vico himself called human ingenium. What remained to be done after Vico, however, was to give a philosophical account of these practical provisions, or to explain them in terms of human nature and of a first principle of politics. In retrospect, it seems so fitting as to be beyond mere coincidence that the deliverance of such an explanation would come from a philosopher, such as Calhoun, who was himself a master practitioner of the statesmanly art. Indeed, Calhoun's Disquisition on Government may be read as a systematic and orderly development – through the discovery and theoretical use of the dual-principle – of Vichian and Platonic insights into the nature of moral virtue and its relation to history and to the development of the passions.

Toward the end of the Disquisition, in a passage that may, indeed, be considered the logical and dramatic climax of the work, Calhoun describes what he considers to be the greatest possible achievement of the science of government, and issues a warning as to the dire consequences to be expected from the logical inversion and corruption of this achievement through ignorance:

. . . to enlist the individual on the side of the social feelings to promote the good of the whole, is the greatest possible achievement of the science of government; while, to enlist the social on the side of the individual to promote the interest of parties at the expense of the good of the whole, is the greatest blunder which ignorance can possibly commit. (52)

Here we have a final and climactic statement suggesting both the great

explanatory power of the dual-principle for political science and legislation, and the vital importance of the dual-principle as a force active in the breasts of leaders and of the generalty in concrete political orders. The fate of the dual-principle as active, we are told, is the principal determinant of the fate of whole political communities. What is at stake, so far as the development or conditioning of the dual-principle is concerned, is nothing less than the destinies and fortunes of entire regions, communities, and civilizations.

The fundamental similarity (and kinship even) between the accounts of Vico and Calhoun, presented here, is obvious and striking. Each philosopher conceives the ultimate aim of legislation as the transformation of the human passions for the good of men, and each understands the destruction that must ensue where sound legislation is absent from human affairs. But what is perhaps more noteworthy, in light of the fact that it is not known that Calhoun read Vico, are similarities such as the following. For Calhoun, in another passage of the Disquisition, refers to "avarice, ambition, and rivalry" as the "strongest passions of the human heart" (37), as if echoing Vico's trilogy -- "ferocity, avarice, and ambition" -- whose combined power, once developed, "could certainly destroy all mankind on the face of the earth." So legislation in general, and constitution in particular, is concerned with the harmonizing of the most turbulent human passions.

The individual feelings and the social feelings are permanent fixtures of the human constitution -- ineradicable and untranscendable. Indeed, along with other and more widely discussed human attributes, such as volition and rationality, these feelings and their fundamental relations one to another are the defining features of human nature. As Calhoun says: we, as a rule, feel

more intensely those things which affect us directly than those which affect us indirectly through other people. This being the case, it is proper that the legislator tends to show more concern with the development and effects of the individual feelings than with those of the social feelings. And yet, the legislator must ultimately be concerned with both kinds of feeling, because it is possible, as we have seen, for either the social or the individual feelings to become developed and directed in such a way as to give preferment to some partial interest over that of the general interest of the community. So not only may there arise selfish feelings, where the term "implies an unusual excess of the individual over the social feelings", and therefore "something depraved and vicious" (6); but also, there is the possibility of the social feelings, including benevolence and patriotism, becoming misdirected, as we saw in Chapter III.

Where the powers of government are left unguarded, such misdevelopment and misdirection of human feeling tend to become the rule rather than the exception. On the other hand, it is the restraining and channeling structure characteristic of the system of the concurrent majority which compels both the individual and the social feelings to become oriented toward the common interest and welfare of the community. Hence, through salutary direction, development, and orientation, the individual and social feelings are made to serve the whole community.

While political absolutism, or the absence of constitution, gives the fullest range possible to the human capacity for vice; political constitution gives the fullest range possible to the human capacity for virtue. Under constitution, the powers of government are guarded, or held to their proper

uses in order that through their exercise, the ends for which government is Divinely ordained -- namely, the protection and perfection of society -- may be achieved. This restriction or limitation of the actions of the human agency of government tends to prevent the formation of vices through license or excess freedom of action. For as Aristotle teaches in the Nicomachean Ethics, virtues and vices are fixed dispositions which arise through habituation. One becomes good by doing good deeds, and bad, by doing bad ones. In Book II of the Ethics, Aristotle makes the connection between legislation and moral habituation a bit more explicit:

. . . the legislator makes the citizens good by habituating them, and this is the wish of every legislator; if he fails to do it well he misses his goal. [The right] habituation is what makes the difference between a good political system and a bad one.²⁴

Developing this Aristotelian insight about government and moral habituation further, Calhoun would specify the principal cause or process by which this habituation must occur, the influence of the structure of government itself as regards the various interests of the community. According to Calhoun, men become habituated in the political realm either within the framework of the limitations on actions and the passions imposed by constitution, or within a framework in which no such limitations exist. It is for this reason that Calhoun says, in a variety of ways within the compass of the Disquisition, that the dual-principle of our nature may be developed or conditioned in dramatically different ways and therefore may issue in dramatically different results -- in virtue or vice, justice or injustice, moderation or brutality, or in some combination of these -- depending on the

²⁴ See Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, tr. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1985), Book I, 34.

particular governmental structure that channels and modifies it, thereby producing determinate moral sentiments and dispositions in both a citizenry and its leaders.

Working within the great republican theoretical tradition established by Plato and Aristotle, Calhoun understood that virtue is an indispensable pre-condition of eudaimonia, or of the life well lived (5), and taught that a community in which governmental power is well-ordered is one in which virtuous or well-ordered souls tend to predominate.²⁵ By showing that the ordering of governmental power is the principal cause of the ordering of souls, Calhoun built on the insights of earlier thinkers and advanced this tradition of political thought.²⁶ Understanding that constitution, as a human contrivance, tends to the perfection of Divinely ordained society and government, Calhoun, like Plato, viewed the art of politics as a form of human imitation of the Divinity. Through a wise application of the principles of this art, an order is brought to human affairs, and this order contributes to and extends the order of the natural world as established, irrevocably to man, by the Divinity. The political community may indeed be conceived as the soul writ large, as Plato described it in the Republic²⁷, but order is given to the soul of the individual by that order given previously to

²⁵ There being no single English word that can convey its meaning fully and accurately, eudaimonia is inadequately translated "happiness." According to Aristotle, this enduring condition of full physical, moral, and intellectual flourishing for the individual requires for its realization such goods as virtue, moral and intellectual, friendship, a modicum of material goods, and good fortune. In light of these conditions, then, we can see how constitutional government conduces to eudaimonia in many ways and at many levels, while absolute government, and the inconveniences and abuses associated with it, tends to preclude outright the realization of this blessed condition.

²⁶ Also, being a Christian, and philosophizing by the light of Christian teaching, Calhoun may be said to have contributed to that Christian tradition of political thought which upheld blessedness (beatitudo) in substitution of pagan happiness (eudaimonia) as the highest good attainable for man in this earthly life.

²⁷Plato, Republic, Bk. II, 368d.

the community, as Calhoun suggests in the Disquisition. Moreover, sound constitution involves the bringing together of the right and the useful. By giving utility to virtue and by taking it from vice, constitution underscores the political-metaphysical truths of the ultimate commensurability between individual interests, the naturalness of virtue, and the unnatural or disfiguring character of vice.

Because they involve an imitation and extension of the Divine ordering of nature, well-ordered communities in general, and constitutional ones in particular, stand as so many pious tributes to the Divinity. And so, while the struggles and triumphs of individual righteous men are certainly pleasing to God, what is still more pleasing are well-ordered communities. Understanding this, Calhoun would readily concur with another philosopher-statesman, Marcus Tullius Cicero: "That nothing, indeed, of the events which occur on earth is more pleasing to that supreme and prepotent God who rules this entire universe than these societies and associations of men, cemented by law, which are called states²⁸." And from amongst political orders, what God prefers most of all is a republic, or a government of the whole community through whose organs He can hear His own voice. For such is the voice of the people, Calhoun tells us, when a government is so constructed -- as truly constitutional governments are -- in order "to suppress the expression of all partial and selfish interests, and to give a full and faithful utterance to the sense of the whole community, in reference to its common welfare." (31)

So the term "republic", properly speaking, should not be considered as synonymous with "democracy", since, both technically and etymologically,

²⁸Marcus Tullius Cicero, De Republica Bk. VI.

"republic" denotes a government of the whole community, regardless of regimen -- that is to say, regardless of whether it is a government whose agency is the one, the few, or the many. Plato acknowledged this important truth by the naming of his greatest dialogue.²⁹ But, in modern times, the term "republic" has been co-opted by advocates of the democratic form intent on disparaging aristocracy and monarchy. Consequently, the false view and narrow conceit has arisen which declares that only a democracy can be a government of the whole community. Indeed, so deeply seated has been the conflation of representative democracy with "republic" since Machiavelli, that virtually every subsequent political thinker, including Hume and even Calhoun himself, may be found, at times, to use the terms interchangeably. This popular but technically improper usage notwithstanding, Calhoun's Disquisition, with its careful and discriminating analysis of the various governmental regimens, and of the great distinction between their corresponding absolute and constitutional forms, constitutes a return to the older, more profound, and more humane tradition of Classical Republican thought.³⁰

Finally, a republic is a government of the whole community, regardless

²⁹ And Rousseau, heavily influenced by Plato, declares in the Social Contract: "I . . . call every state ruled by laws a republic, regardless of the form its administration may take. For only then does the public interest govern, and only then is the "public thing" [in Latin: res publica] something real" See Social Contract in The Basic Political Writings (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987),162.

³⁰On Calhoun's republicanism, see for example, Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought 3 vols.(New York: Harcourt Brace, 1927); vol. 2, 69-82; and J. William Harris, "Last of the Classical Republicans: An Interpretation of John C. Calhoun" Civil War History 30 (September 1984); 255-267. Also, illuminating background works include: Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography" William and Mary Quarterly 39 (April 1982); 334-356; Robert E. Shalhope, "Thomas Jefferson's Republicanism and Antebellum Southern Thought" Journal of Southern History 42 (November 1976); 529-556. M. E. Bradford, "A Teaching for Republicans: Roman History and the Nation's First Identity" in Bradford, A Better Guide than Reason: Studies in the American Revolution (La Salle, Ill.: Sherwood Sugden & Co., 1979), 3-27.

of regimen, whose parts enjoy the strength and spirit that come from a salutary and natural unification, and in which virtue has been elevated to positions of power and diffused throughout the community. With his account of the unity and division of the community, Calhoun has given us an explanation of the behavior of the various interests or portions of a society in terms of the feelings either of mutual antipathy or of mutual sympathy. With his account of the formation of public and private morals, he has explained, in terms of underlying causes, the words and conduct of our governmental leaders and of ourselves as participants in a political order. Through the insight of these accounts, future generations are provided with an indispensable intellectual means both of avoiding the dangers and inconveniences of division, the rule of vice, and depravity, and of extricating themselves from these, once embroiled. After Calhoun, men could ask whether their government, by virtue of its structure, fosters unity and virtue, or division and vice.

CHAPTER VIII

THE POWER OF THE COMMUNITY

The people must fight for its law as for its walls.

– Heraclitus of Ephesus (ca. 490 BC)

. . . goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the state.

-- Plato, Socrates' Defense

You, ye modern peoples, have no slaves, but you are slaves yourselves; the slaves' liberty is paid for by yours. Do not claim credit for this state of things to me; I see in it a proof, not of humanity, but of pusillanimity.

– Rousseau, Social Contract

In this chapter, I address the question: What are the principal causes which determine the strength or weakness of a community? Or, put another way: What factors either enhance or diminish a community's prospects for continued political independence, or, for survival even, as a distinct political and cultural entity ?

Calhoun raises this question within the context of his comparison, in the Disquisition, between absolute and constitutional government. His account of the strength or weakness of a community (43-48) comes almost directly in the wake of his discussion of the factors that determine the moral character of leaders and generality and the unity or division of a community (36-40).

In Chapter IV, in the discussion of the origin and objects of government, we learned that government, in order to fulfill the great ends for which it is Divinely ordained, must be allotted a measure of power by the community sufficient to secure those ends. There Calhoun told us, in more specific terms, that:

In estimating what amount of power would be requisite to secure the objects of government, we must take into the reckoning, what would be necessary to defend the community against external, as well as internal dangers. Government must be able to repel assaults from abroad, as well as to repress violence and disorders within. (10-11)

Government, then, must be allotted power sufficient to allow it to organize, marshal, and wield effectively, against internal and external enemies, that strength which must ever reside in the community. This point brings us to a vitally important distinction: that between the power of government, on the one hand, and the power of the community, on the other hand. Here we have a distinction that has not always been clear and strongly

marked¹, as it is, as we shall see, in Calhoun's works. One reason for this obscurity is that with absolute governments, including those of the democratic form², sovereignty resides not in the general community but in those who exercise the powers of government. Therefore, in former times, an absolute monarch was commonly referred to as the "sovereign"; an appellation affixed to the royal person not merely from flattery, as we learned in Chapter V. For, at various times, lands, as well as their human occupants and movable holdings, have been claimed by the ruler as his personal property, to be treated and disposed of, without the encumbrance of law or other outside authority, as befits his fancy and preference. The distinction between the power of government and the power of the community³ came to be made only after elements characteristic of constitutional governments were introduced, and men began to reflect on the differences between the absolute and constitutional systems respectively. Before political constitution was achieved, then, a prevailing tendency was to equate the power of the community and the power of its government. But with the advent or attainment of constitution, a distinction not merely emerged, but was created,

¹ See, for example, Bertrand De Jouvenal, On Power: The Natural History of Its Growth. Although De Jouvenal does a superb job tracing the growth of governmental power since the twelfth century, his work is somewhat unbalanced because it lacks a positive account of the power of the community.

² In an absolute democracy, of course, the sovereign is not the agents who hold governmental office, strictly speaking. Here, sovereignty resides in the major, or the numerical majority, of which the governmental officers are the representatives. What matters most however is that, with an absolute democracy, as with the other absolute forms, sovereignty resides in some partial interest, and therefore in something less than the general community.

³ Here, another important distinction emerges: that between (1) the governmental powers a community may reserve to itself, such as initiative, referendum, and the far weightier powers of abolishing a government, and of replacing the existing government with another; and (2) the raw physical and moral power of a community, such as will be described in detail below, which is susceptible of being organized and wielded by government in behalf of the general community. Government, of course, may either discharge this trust faithfully by wielding this power for the sake of the community, or betray its trust by wielding the power of the community primarily for the sake of the protection and preservation of itself.

as it were, which men would, from that time on, perceive and act upon. In the constitutional systems that were erected, lands, with their human occupants and holdings, were no longer regarded as the private realms and possessions of those who held and exercised governmental power. And so, as men learned to distinguish between absolute and constitutional governments, with their distinctive and disparate elements, they learned also to distinguish between the power of government, on the one hand, and the power of the community, on the other hand.⁴

In the Disquisition, this distinction is present and unmistakable, but it is not given the kind of emphasis received by the distinction between constitutional government, on the one hand, and absolute government, on the other hand. But having noted the vital distinction between governmental power and communal power, and remarked on its pedigree, we are prepared to proceed now with an examination of Calhoun's account of the power of the community.

As stated previously, this account of communal power comes, in the Disquisition, within the context of a detailed comparison between absolute governments and constitutional governments respectively as regards the ability of these disparate forms to fulfill the great ends for which they are Divinely ordained, namely, the protection and perfection of society. Because of a rhetorical and thematic emphasis already noted⁵, Calhoun is concerned, specifically, with comparing the government of the constitutional or

⁴These two distinctions, clearly, are closely related, since the phenomena about which they speak are intimately and inextricably intertwined. As a consequence of this close relation of the two distinctions, where one remains in obscurity, the other will tend to remain obscure as well.

⁵In Chapter VI, we noted that, according to Calhoun, the most important distinction concerning the kinds of government is not that of the one, the few, and the many, but rather that between the constitutional and absolute forms of these three.

concurrent majority to the government of the absolute or numerical majority. Thus we are told that:

If the two be compared, in reference to the ends for which government is ordained, the superiority of the government of the concurrent majority will not be less striking. These, as has been stated, are twofold: to protect, and to perfect society. But to preserve society, it is necessary to guard the community against injustice, violence, and anarchy within, and against attacks from without. If it fail in either, it would fail in the primary end of government, and would not deserve the name. (40)

Calhoun's account of the power of the community comes approximately midway through the Disquisition (40-48), and it forms an important part of the more general and comprehensive comparative account just mentioned.

The account of power begins on page 40 with accounts of other subjects which, to the uninitiated or superficial reader, may appear as at best only remotely related to the topic of power. However, viewed retrospectively, from page 48 to page 40, the outline, as well as the full breadth and depth, of Calhoun's account of communal power in the Disquisition may be clearly discerned. The account begins with Calhoun's addressing directly a question whose answer had, until then, been held in abeyance: namely, What is involved in the perfection of society? For recall that the second Divinely ordained end of government, coming after the primary concern of preserving and protecting society, is the perfection of society. (8)

According to Calhoun, a government of superior merit not only protects society from internal and external dangers, but maintains those conditions necessary for the perfection of society. As will become clear directly, the means or process by which society is perfected, it turns out, relate

directly to the principal concern of this chapter: the principal sources of the strength of a community. This circumstance naturally led Calhoun to examine a myriad of issues relating more and less directly to both issues; examinations which yielded insights, as we shall soon see, that would illuminate both these fundamental subjects and others.

Specifically, Calhoun's comparison of the two kinds of majority -- numerical and concurrent -- led him to consider, in detail, the relation between the fate of the liberty of the individual under a given governmental form, on the one hand, and the strength or weakness of the community whose protection and perfection is the aim of that government, on the other hand. Along the way, Calhoun gives us an account of how the security provided to the community by sound government, combined with a proper measure of liberty for individuals, issues in progress, improvement, and civilization. As Calhoun says,

To perfect society, it is necessary to develop the faculties, intellectual and moral, with which man is endowed. But the mainspring to their development, and, through this, to progress, improvement and civilization, with all their blessings, is the desire of individuals to better their condition. For this purpose, liberty and security are indispensable. (40)

Calhoun viewed this "mainspring" of human development, "the desire of individuals to better their condition", as an innate, universal, ineffaceable, and untranscendable feature of human nature. It is a fact as fundamental, axiomatic, and incontestable as the natural sociality of man and the primacy of his individual over his social feelings, and an assumption that rests, like these, on universal experience. Satisfied as to its axiomatic status, Calhoun's great and overriding concern was with the developmental fate of

this principle. He asked, in essence: Under what social and political conditions is this innate desire of man for improvement of his condition given its greatest impetus for salutary development? His answer was: those under which every individual is assigned the greatest liberty consistent with social order. And so, for Calhoun, the liberty of the individual and the security provided for the community by a wise and judicious exercise of governmental power work together -- in a dialectical and mutually reinforcing manner -- to perfect society; and this is what is meant, in specific terms, by his claim that the perfection of society is one end of government. He explained the proper and ideal relation between liberty and governmental power in this way:

Liberty leaves each [person] free to pursue the course he may deem best to promote his interest and happiness, as far as it may be compatible with the primary end for which government is ordained [i. e., the protection of society] -- while security gives assurance to each, that he shall not be deprived of the fruits of his exertions to better his condition. These combined, give to this desire [for improvement] the strongest impulse of which it is susceptible. (40)

And so both individual liberty and governmental power are needed to give the strongest impulse possible to the desire of individuals to better their condition. But here the question arises as to the correct proportion of the two -- liberty and power. This question, as should be readily apparent, is certainly one of the most important speculative questions addressed by the political philosopher, as well as one of the most vital practical questions addressed, in concrete and individual instances, by the statesmanly art. For a proper quantity or measure of governmental power provides security, and a salutary combination of power and liberty is what is meant by the expression "ordered

liberty.” And, as this expression implies, liberty is susceptible of being disordered as well as ordered.

Referring to the possibility of a disordered liberty, Calhoun says:

For, to extend liberty beyond the limits assigned, would be to weaken the government and to render it incompetent to fulfill its primary end --the protection of society against dangers, internal and external. The effect of this would be, insecurity; and, of insecurity -- to weaken the impulse of individuals to better their condition, and thereby retard progress and improvement. (40)

Therefore liberty becomes unordered or disordered when there is too much of it. On the other hand, as Calhoun points out, governmental power, like liberty, also becomes disordered when there is an excess of it. Consequently, the ultimate effect of both of these excesses, it turns out, is the same:

[For] to extend the powers of the government, so as to contract the sphere assigned to liberty, would have the same effect, by disabling individuals in their efforts to better their condition. (40)

And so, by creating and perpetuating insecurity within the community, excess of power and excess of liberty each tend to weaken the impulse of individuals to better their condition. Liberty and power are by nature opposing forces that it is the concern of the statesmanly art to tame and to reconcile one with the other. The aim and duty of the philosopher is to provide a general principle that will serve as a guide for determining in individual cases the proper proportion of these forces. Calhoun addressed this problem directly, conceived such a principle, and specified it in explicit terms. Thus:

Herein is to be found the principle which assigns to power and liberty their proper spheres, and reconciles each to the other under all circumstances. For, if power be necessary to secure to liberty the fruits of [liberty's] exertions, liberty, in turn, repays power with interest, by

increased population, wealth, and other advantages, which progress and improvement bestow on the community. By thus assigning to each its appropriate sphere, all conflicts between them cease; and each is made to co-operate with and assist the other, fulfilling the great ends for which government is ordained. (40-41)

So the general principle begins by specifying that liberty and power each should have their own spheres, separate from and inviolable by the other. Yet the question remains: Once the necessity of distinct and inviolable spheres for power and liberty has been conceded, what determines, in a concrete instance, where an actual or historical polity is concerned, the proper ratio of power to liberty for that community? Put another way, the question is: What considerations or circumstances should determine how large or small each of these spheres should be in a given instance?⁶ (40-48) Calhoun's general principle to the effect that liberty and power should be assigned distinct and inviolable spheres becomes determinate when certain appropriate circumstances are recognized and acknowledged during the process of its application.⁷ Thus the ratio of power to liberty is to be set with regard to the conditions in which a community finds itself; and ideally, this

⁶ And incidentally, liberty and power together exhaust the possibilities as to the more specifically political circumstances under which human life is lived and human actions are executed. In this sense, power and liberty are both mutually exclusively and jointly exhaustive phenomena, since either a particular kind of action is left to the governance of the discretion and prudence (or lack of these) of the individual or of private groups, or it is circumscribed or prohibited to the individual by government.

⁷ Calhoun's insistence on a due consideration of these circumstances implies, of course, that there is no responsible and nonarbitrary way to determine the ratio of liberty a priori. And Rousseau, for example, recognized this as well: "When the question arises which one is absolutely the best government, an insoluble question is being raised because it is indeterminate. Or, if you wish, it has as many good answers as there are possible combinations in the absolute and relative positions of peoples."

See Social Contract in The Basic Political Writings (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 190. And again on p. 179: "There has always been a great deal of argument over the best form of government, without considering that each one of them is best in certain cases and the worst in others."

ratio is subsequently altered or adjusted, as needed, to fit these circumstances as they change.

And since the circumstances of different communities are different, the ratios of liberty to power in these communities will likewise and of necessity differ. As Calhoun explains, the principle, “which assigns to power and liberty their proper spheres, and reconciles each to the other under all circumstances”, when

. . . applied to different communities, will assign to them different limits. It will assign a larger sphere to power and a more contracted one to liberty, or the reverse, according to circumstances. To the former, there must ever be allotted, under all circumstances, a sphere sufficiently large to protect the community against danger from without and violence and anarchy within. The residuum belongs to liberty. More cannot be safely or rightly allotted to it. (41)

But what, it may be asked, are the relevant circumstances in acknowledgement of which the specific limits of the spheres of liberty and power respectively are to be established? In answering this query, Calhoun observes first of all that “. . . some communities require a far greater amount of power than others to protect them against anarchy and external dangers; and, of course, the sphere of liberty in such, must be proportionally contracted.” (41) In fact, “The causes calculated to enlarge the one and contract the other, are numerous and various.” (41) These “numerous and various” causes fall into either of two categories:

Some are physical -- such as open and exposed frontiers, surrounded by powerful and hostile neighbors.⁸ Others are moral -- such as the different degrees of intelligence, patriotism, and virtue among the mass of the community, and their experience and proficiency in the art of self-government. (41)

⁸ A prime and recent example, of course, is Zionist Israel, with her woes since the founding in 1947. Since her birth as a nation, modern Israel has successfully fended off repeated and potentially deadly attacks from nearly every geographical side.

But the moral causes of power, on the one hand, and the physical causes of power, on the other hand, are not of equal weight. Of these two classes of causes, “the moral are, by far, the most influential.” (41) Calhoun arrives at this conclusion by observing how. . .

A community may possess all the necessary moral qualifications, in so high a degree, as to be capable of self-government under the most adverse [physical] circumstances; while, on the other hand, another may be so sunk in ignorance and vice, as to be incapable of forming a conception of liberty, or of living, even when most favored by [physical] circumstances, under any other than an absolute and despotic government.⁹ (41)

It should be noted that the principle of the ratio of liberty to power is not a mere contrivance of the theoretician. Instead, it is a principle made active by Providence itself, and a force that is continuously influencing and determining the destinies of communities. The internal and external conditions of communities naturally and spontaneously call forth, as it were,

⁹ This theme was also much emphasized by Rousseau. See, for example, Social Contract in The Basic Political Writings, 187: “Since liberty is not a fruit of every climate, it is not within the reach of all peoples. The more one meditates on this principle established by Montesquieu, the more one is aware of its truth. The more one contests it, the more occasions there are for establishing it by means of new proofs.” And p. 171:

What makes a constitution of a state truly solid and lasting is that proprieties are observed with such fidelity that the natural relations and the laws are always in agreement on the same points, and that the latter serve only to assure, accompany, and rectify them. But if the legislator is mistaken about his object and takes a principle different from the one arising from the nature of things (whether the one tends toward servitude and the other toward liberty; the one toward riches, the other toward increased population; the one toward peace, the other toward conquests), the laws will weaken imperceptibly, the constitution will be altered, and the state will not cease being agitated until it is destroyed or changed, and invincible nature has regained the empire.

And p. 165:

Just as an architect, before putting up a large building, surveys and tests the ground to see if it can bear the weight, the wise teacher does not begin by laying down laws that are good in themselves. Rather he first examines whether the people for whom they are destined are fitted to bear them.

the operation of this principle. In this sense, liberty and power tend to find their own levels, as well as their own proper relations one to the other. Thus Calhoun says, that "The principle, in all communities, according to these numerous and various causes, assigns to power and liberty their proper spheres ¹⁰." (41) Problems arise however, because other, opposing tendencies exist whose operations upset this balance, once formed, or prevent the establishment of this salutary balance. ¹¹ An aim and duty of the statesman, then, is to take the cue intimated by Providence, and to legislate for the community in recognition and acknowledgement of the particular ratio of liberty to power suited to that community. ¹² In this way, the natural and spontaneous operation of the principle is reinforced and formalized by the legislative activity of the statesman, and the tendency to progress is given greater impulse thereby as human reason and effort reinforce the spontaneously operating reason in nature.

Calhoun recognized that the power of the ratio principle to naturally

¹⁰ Cf. Joseph de Maistre (1752-1821) in his Letter to X [1811]: "Every nation has the government it deserves."

¹¹ One such opposing and disrupting force has been the modern doctrine of abstract natural rights, which David Hume, for example, identified as a philosophical, as opposed to a religious, superstition.

¹² No one has undertaken as yet the task of teasing out from Calhoun's theoretical work a theory of justice. By way of a beginning, however, it appears that Calhoun's "ratio" principle of liberty and governmental power is that principle of justice analogous to (but substantively quite different from) the two principles of "justice as fairness" espoused by John Rawls in his A Theory of Justice (1971). Rawls errs in absolutizing his artificially derived principles of "equal liberty" and "difference." For the "original position" rules out, among other things, a knowledge of the moral and political maturity of the various portions of the community, as well as any knowledge of the community's external circumstances. Without such knowledge, no truly rational and workable principles of justice can be derived. For this and other reasons, Calhoun rejected the [Kantian] a priorism that would later undergird Rawl's account.

In fact, Calhoun did not espouse any "theory of justice" in the modern sense, but upheld instead a view of justice more akin to the ancient notion of civic friendship. Thus the various interests of the community, once attaining the power of self-protection through the veto, suffer their moral dispositions to be transformed by this constitutional structure, and consequently become well-disposed or friendly toward one another while pursuing the public good.

and spontaneously instantiate itself is susceptible to being thwarted, to some degree and for some time, by various opposing forces. In addition, though, he saw that a key to improving the human condition, so far as possible, lay in a full and continuous instantiation and acknowledgement of the principle through the application and refinement of the statesmanly art. It is, one may conjecture, for this reason especially that he made an explicit articulation of the principle a central feature of the Disquisition so as to alert and instruct posterity. And without doubt, historical events of his day played a part in determining this rhetorical and paedeutic emphasis.

Growing to manhood during the period of the French Revolution and of the subsequent rise of Bonaparte to the offices of first consul (1799), first consul for life (1802), and emperor (1804), Calhoun was provided with striking illustrations of the effects of both excessive liberty and excessive power respectively. The peculiar circumstances of that Enlightenment-Romantic age and the fundamental political problems that beset the nations of that period prompted Calhoun, in his writings, to place greater emphasis on the dangers naturally attending excessive liberty than he might have under different conditions.¹³ Like Burke before him, Calhoun understood and dreaded, in behalf of humanity, certain intellectual forces or ideas cultivated during the French Enlightenment and unleashed by the revolution in France beginning in the 1780's. Arguably the most revolutionary and destructive of these ideas was the utterly false doctrine which proclaimed that all men are entitled to extensive liberty, regardless of the external conditions of the community in which they live, or of their own

¹³For a penetrating and definitive analysis of these circumstances and problems, see Michael Oakeshott's classic essay, "Rationalism in Politics" (1947).

actualized moral abilities to exercise that liberty in a manner consistent with the commonwealth. Identifying this doctrine of abstract, universal liberty as subversive of human well-being and progress, Calhoun strove to call men back to an older and sounder understanding of liberty. Thus we find him, in the Disquisition, warning future generations that . . .

To allow liberty, in any case, a sphere of action more extended than [the ratio principle] assigns, would lead to anarchy; and this, probably, in the end, to a contraction instead of an enlargement of its sphere. Liberty, then, when forced on a people unfit for it, would, instead of a blessing, be a curse; as it would, in its reaction, lead directly to anarchy -- the greatest of all curses. (42)

In direct, open, and courageous defiance of an increasingly popular and empowered Enlightenment ideology, Calhoun remonstrated against the fell doctrine of abstract liberty, just recalled. Specifically, he pointed out that the doctrine of abstract liberty stands in direct opposition to nature, and, in particular, to the Providential principle of the ratio of liberty to power. Thus he underscores how . . .

No people, indeed, can long enjoy more liberty than that to which their situation and advanced intelligence and morals fairly entitle them. If more than this be allowed, they must soon fall into confusion and disorder -- to be followed, if not by anarchy and despotism, by a change to a form of government more simple and absolute; and, therefore, better suited to their condition. And hence, although it may be true, that a people may not have as much liberty as they are fairly entitled to, and are capable of enjoying -- yet the reverse is unquestionably¹⁴ true -- that no people can long possess more than they are fairly entitled to. (42)

With a general philosophical speech, in the Disquisition, on the nature of liberty (40-48), Calhoun sought not only to promote man's understanding

¹⁴In Union and Liberty (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992), 42, "unquestionably" is mistakenly rendered "questionably." See Works of J. C. Calhoun, ed. Richard K. Cralle, 6 vols. (Columbia: A. S. Johnston, 1851), vol. I, 55.

of the political world down through subsequent ages, but to arrest certain trends of an age, already begun, in which men would be driven increasingly to distraction, disorder, and self-destruction by the Sirens' song of a false liberty. This French Enlightenment view of liberty emphasized, rightly enough, that liberty is a necessary condition of human attainment. But Enlightenment optimism led to an over-emphasis on liberty's role as a precondition of human attainment; thereby obscuring and subverting the insight that liberty should be understood primarily as a consequent of or reward for such attainment. The practical consequences of this unbalanced, Enlightenment view of liberty, once its truth was assumed, have been many and profound. One such consequence is that extensive liberty for the individual came to be held as an absolute and inalienable right for all people independent of their social and moral condition. Because it was newly conceived as a good that need not be earned, but only insisted upon, "liberty" as an idea and desired condition became all the more popular and seductive. So an error which apparently arose from honest oversight would, in time, be elevated to the status of both theoretical truth and practical ideal by virtue of that sanction which it naturally gives to powerful and untamed human passions.

No longer an ideal to inspire men to moral and intellectual attainment and to skillful self-assertion in the public or governmental sphere, liberty was held to be a boon to be bestowed gratuitously on all like, without regard to moral qualification. Indeed, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the term "liberty", in many important and influential quarters in Western political communities, had come to designate mere license. What was in fact

license and not liberty, in turn, was conceived as an inalienable right, and as an indispensable pre-condition of the good life -- a life that itself had been newly conceived as essentially hedonistic.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the ideal of genuine liberty was abandoned by many as too demanding and eventually ridiculed as inherently religious and therefore irrational and reactionary.

Calhoun was not alone in remarking on the ascendancy of abstract liberty and the consequent demise of genuine liberty. Others who lamented and opposed this trend include Hume, Burke, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, John Randolph, Benjamin Constant, Tocqueville, Acton, and Hegel. Arguably the greatest metaphysician of the nineteenth century, Hegel, in his Philosophy of Right (1821), presented what is perhaps the definitive statement on the pedigree of the notion of abstract liberty. Calling it "abstract freedom", and contrasting it with authentic liberty, or what he calls "concrete freedom", Hegel wrote:

The bond of duty can appear as a restriction only on indeterminate subjectivity or abstract freedom, and on the impulses either of the natural will or of the moral will which determines its indeterminate good arbitrarily. The truth is, however, that in duty the individual finds his liberation; first, liberation from dependence on mere natural impulse and from the depression which as a particular subject he cannot escape in his moral reflections on what ought to be and what might be; secondly, liberation from the indeterminate subjectivity which, never reaching reality or the objective determinacy of action, remains self-enclosed and devoid of actuality. In duty the individual acquires his substantive freedom.¹⁶

Also:

¹⁵ The resurgence of materialistic hedonism in the last two centuries finds as a political analogue the promulgation of the doctrine of abstract liberty and the vast proliferation of "rights" since the French Revolution. To the post-Enlightenment man or woman, therefore, more rights signify more pleasures, not more responsibilities or duties.

¹⁶ G. F. W. Hegel, Philosophy of Right in Great Political Thinkers: Plato to the Present, ed. William Ebenstein and Alan O. Ebenstein (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 694.

Duty is a restriction only on the self-will of subjectivity. It stands in the way only of that abstract good to which subjectivity adheres. When we say: "We want to be free," the primary meaning of the words is simply: "We want abstract freedom," and every institution and every organ of the state passes as a restriction on freedom of that kind. Thus duty is not a restriction on freedom, but only on freedom in the abstract, i. e. on unfreedom. Duty is the attainment of our essence, the winning of positive freedom.¹⁷

Having warned us about the pitfalls of pursuing abstract freedom, Hegel, like Calhoun, goes on to explain the positive and indispensable role of concrete freedom within the life of the individual and the community:

. . . concrete freedom consists in this, that personal individuality and its particular interests not only achieve their complete development and gain explicit recognition for their right (as they do in the sphere of the family and civil society) but, for one thing, they also pass over of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and, for another thing, they know and will the universal; they even recognize it as their own substantive mind; they take it as their end and aim and are active in its pursuit. The result is that the universal does not prevail or achieve completion except along with particular interests and through the cooperation of particular knowing and willing; and individuals likewise do not live as private persons for their own ends alone, but in the very act of willing these they will the universal in the light of the universal and their activity is consciously aimed at none but the universal end.¹⁸

For Hegel, then, concrete freedom or liberty was an essential part of the natural and salutary movement of individuals and communities from potency to act. The full actualization of individuals and communities

¹⁷ Ibid, 696.

¹⁸ See Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* in *Great Political Thinkers*, 695. And to round out the account just presented, Hegel held that the state is the actuality of concrete freedom (p. 695): In contrast with the spheres of private rights and private welfare (the family and civil society), the state is from one point of view an external necessity and their higher authority; its nature is such that their laws and interests are subordinate to it and dependent on it. On the other hand, however, it is the end immanent within them, and its strength lies in the unity of its own universal end and aim with the particular interest of individuals, in the fact that individuals have duties to the state in proportion as they have rights against it.

depends upon the preservation and prudential expansion of concrete freedom. To protect concrete freedom, the Siren call of abstract freedom must be resisted, and the notion of abstract freedom itself must be exposed in all its superficiality. Hegel and Calhoun both perceived the great practical dangers which naturally result from widespread adherence to the notion of abstract freedom. Like Hume and Burke before them, Calhoun and Hegel strove in their own ways -- from their own perspectives and with their own literary styles and modes of analyses -- to rebut false notions of liberty and to underscore and describe the true nature of liberty.

In an age when men were becoming increasingly distracted and corrupted by false, hedonistic, and atheistic "liberty", Calhoun held fast to the conception of true liberty as a reward for virtue, declaring that liberty's "greatest praise -- its proudest distinction is, that an all-wise Providence has reserved it, as the noblest and highest reward for the development of our faculties, moral and intellectual." (42) In the twentieth century, this view of liberty would be corroborated by the French historian De Jouvenal, in his On Power: The Natural History of Its Growth (1945). Echoing the themes of both Hegel and Calhoun on the nature of genuine liberty, De Jouvenal writes:

We form an idea of liberty "instinctively," or so we think; but it is in reality a throwback of the collective memory to the day of the freeman. Unlike man in a state of nature, the freeman is not a philosopher's dream, but actually existed in those societies which Power had not invaded. It is from him that we derive our notion of individual rights. All we have forgotten is how they were hedged around and defended. We have become so inured to Power that we have come to regard our liberties as held in grant from it. But viewed historically, the right to liberty was not an act of generosity on the part of Power: its birth was of another kind. And the chief clash with our modern ideas lies in this: that in the past this right was not of general extent, based on the hypothesis that there was in each man a dignity which Power had on principle to respect. It was the personal right of certain men, the fruit

of a dignity to which they had enforced respect. Liberty was an achievement, which won the name of subjective right by self-assertion.¹⁹

So the modern concept of abstract, universal, and equal liberty is a “stolen” concept, derived from an older, historical concept of true liberty. Also, we can now see that rights and liberties are natural only in the sense that they are achieved through some substantial actualization of natural moral and intellectual potential.

Understanding clearly that authentic liberty is a fundamental political good, Calhoun realized that misconceptions and errors concerning the nature of such goods must be exposed by recourse to sound fundamental principles, and reduced thereby to the status of innocuous intellectual curiosities. In specific terms, Calhoun’s struggle to disabuse men of false and pernicious notions of liberty naturally involved calling them back to a clear conception of the two Divinely ordained ends of government, and of their proper relation one to the other. Thus he declaims that . . .

Liberty, indeed, though among the greatest of blessings, is not so great as that of protection; inasmuch, as the end of the former is the progress and improvement of the race — while that of the latter is its preservation and perpetuation. And hence, when the two come into conflict, liberty must, and ever ought, to yield to protection; as the existence of the race is of greater moment than its improvement.²⁰ (42)

And so, to review Calhoun’s argument concerning liberty thusfar: (1) there is an active Providential principle which tends by its spontaneous operation to assign proper spheres to the power of government, on the one hand, and to the liberty of the individual, on the other hand; (2) the

¹⁹ Bertrand De Jouvenal, On Power: The Natural History of Its Growth (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993), 354.

²⁰ See also Calhoun’s “Speech on the Oregon Bill” [July 27, 1848] in Union and Liberty, 568.

statesman -- being ever-solicitous of the well-being and progress of the community -- takes his cue from the Providential principle operating in history and strives to establish and maintain a proper ratio between power and liberty; (3) the moral and physical circumstances of a community are to be considered in establishing the ratio of liberty to government power; and finally, (4) the claims of power, and therefore of protection, outweigh, in every instance, those of liberty and progress, and these claims of power are consequently to be given priority over the claims of liberty and improvement. In Chapter IV, in the discussion of the origin of government and constitution, we noted that "man is left to perfect what the wisdom of the Infinite ordained." (10) Here we have a specific and crucially important illustration of one way in which this perfection is to proceed: man must learn about liberty and power from direct experience and from the study of history; and then set about to improve his condition through the understanding derived from these sources.

It is in the light of the preceding observations that we can understand more fully Calhoun's climactic statement in the Disquisition on the nature of true liberty. We are warned:

. . . it is a great and dangerous error to suppose that all people are equally entitled to liberty. [Liberty] is a reward to be earned, not a blessing to be gratuitously lavished on all alike -- a reward reserved for the intelligent, the patriotic, the virtuous and deserving -- and not a boon to be bestowed on a people too ignorant, degraded, and vicious, to

be capable either of appreciating or of enjoying it.²¹ (42)

And so, in a passage that would serve as a fitting political epitaph for post-Enlightenment man, Calhoun teaches us that nature and the art of the statesman reserve liberty for the deserving. As the passage continues, the

²¹ And compare Rousseau, Social Contract in The Basic Political Writings, p.166: "For nations, as for men, there is a time of maturity that must be awaited before subjecting them to the laws. But the maturity of a people is not always easily recognized; and if it is foreseen, the work is ruined. One people lends itself to discipline at its inception; another, not even after ten centuries." Thus Rousseau criticized the efforts of Peter the Great, for example: "He prevented his subjects from ever becoming what they could have been by persuading them that they were something they are not." And again, quite insightfully, p. 164:

For an emerging people to be capable of appreciating the sound maxims of politics and to follow the fundamental rules of statecraft, the effect would have to become the cause. The social spirit which ought to be the work of that institution, would have to preside over the institution itself. And men would be, prior to the advent of the laws, what they ought to become by means of laws.

Also, we have occasion here to correct yet another popular political error of our time. Many so-called "libertarians" insist that liberty is first and foremost a pre-condition of social progress and individual improvement. But having adopted the unbalanced Enlightenment view that we just examined, modern "libertarians", paradoxically enough, are fundamentally mistaken about what liberty is, and therefore, about what precisely this pre-condition of progress is. But this error can be cleared up by apprehending the following insight: Where there is sufficient residual, natural freedom after the sphere of governmental power has been established, there is the possibility that such "liberty" will afford the opportunity for skillful self-assertion that will secure the true or civic liberty that characterizes genuine constitutional government (Thus, as Calhoun says, liberty is a reward for virtue). This civic or public liberty, in turn, makes possible a more secure and subtle inquiry into the good, and thereby, greater self actualization and social progress. The distinction between natural freedom and civic liberty, then, is of crucial importance for understanding the conditions of human flourishing. Moreover, latter-day "libertarians" typically fail to make any clear distinction between natural freedom and civic liberty, probably because their sense of these is mediated by their overriding concern with what Hegel called "abstract freedom", or the insistence born of natural rights theorizing that rights and liberty exist independent of moral and social circumstances.

In truth, the modern doctrine of abstract libertarianism is inherently hostile to real or civic liberty; all ad hoc protestations by individual libertarians notwithstanding. Libertarianism insists on the moral and legal recognition of a fixed and unchanging ratio of liberty to governmental power; a ratio determined from "rational" consideration of an abstract model of human nature, rather than from a close and statesmanly consideration of a community's actualized moral and intellectual condition and physical circumstances in a given instance. But it is entirely on the basis of such concrete and particular moral, intellectual, and physical circumstances that the principles of concurrent majority and liberty are established, when they are established.

THE
LIBERTARIAN
MISADVENTURE

Providential character of liberty becomes clearer still, as does the baseness, folly, and ultimate futility of resisting the Divine dispensations regarding it. For human well-being and progress lie in a ready and cheerful acquiescence to the ordinances of the Divinity as intimated through nature. Thus Calhoun writes:

A reward more appropriate than liberty could not be conferred on the deserving -- nor a punishment inflicted on the undeserving more just, than to be subject to lawless and despotic rule. This dispensation seems to be the result of some fixed law -- and every effort to disturb or defeat it, by attempting to elevate a people in the scale of liberty, above the point to which they are entitled to rise, must ever prove abortive, and end in disappointment. The progress of a people rising from a lower to a higher point in the scale of liberty, is necessarily slow -- and by attempting to precipitate, we either retard, or permanently defeat it. ²²
(42-43)

Wording the matter a bit differently in one of his last major speeches, Calhoun directly and vigorously attacked Jefferson's erroneous but enormously influential expression, lionized in the American Declaration of Independence, that "all men are created equal." Calhoun said:

. . . the quantum of power on the part of the government, and of liberty on that of individuals, instead of being equal in all cases, must necessarily be very unequal among different people, according to their different conditions. For just in proportion as a people are ignorant, stupid, debased, corrupt, exposed to violence within and danger without, the power necessary for government to possess, in order to preserve society against anarchy and destruction becomes greater and greater, and individual liberty less and less, until the lowest condition is reached, when absolute and despotic power becomes necessary on

²²In this and related passages in the Disquisition, as I suggested earlier, lie the basis from which Calhoun's theory of justice may be inferred. Also implied in this passage is a theory of history; one that would presumably share much in common with the history of liberty proposed, but only partially executed, by Calhoun's younger English contemporary, the Catholic historian Lord Acton.

the part of government, and individual liberty extinct.²³

In Chapter IV, in the discussion of the relation of anarchy to despotism, we conjectured that Calhoun viewed despotism as a positive and Divine dispensation, since it provides a solution to the problem of warring factions, anarchy, and social dissolution. In addition to this dispensation, there is, from the passage just quoted, another Divine dispensation of great moment that may be descried, and whose existence and influence throughout human history, I again conjecture, Calhoun recognized.

On this view, Calhoun saw how great good for man could issue from what we might call the sting of despotism. For the great suffering and inconvenience which naturally attend a despotism, or a government of unconstrained powers, where they do not thoroughly demoralize and incapacitate a people, commonly have the effect of rousing men from the moral and intellectual slumber into which they have fallen.²⁴

But the sheer unconventionality, unpopularity, and even alien

²³ See "Speech on the Oregon Bill" [July 27, 1848] in Union and Liberty, 568. On the lionization of Jefferson's famous dictum, see also Barry Alan Shain, The Myth of American Individualism: the Protestant Origins of American Political Thought (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁴ Clearly, Calhoun, in conceiving his "positive" account of despotism, drew inspiration and instruction from Holy Scripture. In the Book of Daniel, for example, a morally corrupted people of Judah fall before a foreign invader, then are morally transformed and purified while suffering under Babylonian despotism.

Calhoun as philosopher sought to discover, through the use of metaphysical reasoning, the phenomenal source or mainspring of despotism and liberty, vice and virtue, and ignorance and knowledge within human nature itself as a part of Divine creation. In this sense, every great scientific and philosophical discovery underscores further the wonder of Creation and the glory of God. Therefore every great philosophical work is great first and foremost by being a testimony of Divine Wisdom.

John Henry Cardinal Newman underscored this truth about philosophy within the context of describing the centrality of philosophy to a liberal arts education: "Not to know the relative dispositions of things is the state of slaves or children; to have mapped out the universe is the boast, or at least the ambition, of Philosophy."

character of Calhoun's views on despotism, liberty, and slavery in our time -- including the revulsion which they frequently elicit now -- are due in large part to an increasing unfamiliarity with the traditional Christian moral, historical and cosmological conceptions from which these views were derived. This unfamiliarity or ignorance is the result of a process of secularization now centuries old. And so, in order to understand better Calhoun's views on liberty and slavery, it is necessary to recall traditional Christian doctrine. Explaining both liberty and slavery in terms of the Fall, St. Augustine writes in The City of God:

This is prescribed by the order of nature: it is thus that God has created man. For "let them," He says, "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every creeping thing which creepeth on the earth" (Gen. i. 26.). He did not intend that His rational creature, who was made in His image, should have dominion over anything but the irrational creation -- not man over man, but man over the beasts. And hence the righteous men in primitive times were made shepherds of cattle rather than kings of men, god intending thus to teach us what the relative position of the creatures is, and what the desert of sin; for it is with justice, we believe, that the condition of slavery is the result of sin. And this is why we do not find the word 'slave' in any part of Scripture until righteous Noah branded the sin of his son with this name. It is a name, therefore, introduced by sin and not by nature. The origin of the Latin word for slave is supposed to be found in the circumstance that those who by the law of war were liable to be killed were sometimes preserved by their victors, and were hence called servants. And these circumstances could never have arisen save through sin. For even when we wage a just war, our adversaries must be sinning; and every victory, even though gained by wicked men, is a result of the first judgment of God, who humbles the vanquished either for the sake of removing or of punishing their sins. Witness that man of God, Daniel, who, when he was in captivity, confessed to God his own sins and the sins of his people, and declared with pious grief that these were the cause of the captivity (Dan. ix). The prime cause, then, of slavery is sin, which brings man under the dominion of his fellow -- that which does not happen save by the judgment of God, with whom is no unrighteous, and who knows how to award fit punishments to every variety of offence. But our Master in heaven

says, "Every one who doeth sin is the servant of sin" (John viii. 34.) and thus there are many wicked masters who have religious men as their slaves, and who are yet themselves in bondage; "for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (II Pet. ii. 19). And beyond question it is a happier thing to be the slave of a man than of a lust; for even this very lust of ruling, to mention no others, lays waste men's hearts with the most ruthless dominion. Moreover, when men are subjected to one another in a peaceful order, the lowly position does as much good to the servant as the proud position does harm to the master. But by nature, as God first created us, no one is the slave either of man or of sin. This servitude is, however, penal, and is appointed by that law which enjoins the preservation of the natural order and forbids its disturbance; for if nothing had been done in violation of that law, there would have been nothing to restrain by penal servitude. And therefore the apostle admonishes slaves to be subject to their masters, and to serve them heartily and with good-will, so that, if they cannot be freed by their masters, they may themselves make their slavery in some sort free, by serving not in crafty fear, but in faithful love, until all unrighteousness pass away, and all principality and every human power be brought to nothing, and God be all in all.²⁵

So men were not slaves by virtue of their original nature, but became susceptible to just enslavement through the Fall. Also, the sin of the slave is conceived as a major cause of slavery, while liberty is a reward reserved only for the righteous.²⁶ But the unrighteousness of the slave does not "pass away", nor is freedom achieved, without effort on behalf of the slave himself.

Underscoring my claim that Calhoun viewed despotism and slavery as Providential, let us recall from Chapter IV that the dual-principle is the source of both tyranny and resistance to tyranny. For the fundamental cause

²⁵ St. Augustine, *The City of God* in *Great Political Thinkers: Plato to the Present*, 221-222.

²⁶ But through historical accident, of course, those who qualify, from a moral point of view, as free men, may fall into servitude, for example, through either usurpation or conquest from without. Indeed, such may be the unfortunate fate of moral superiors in any community in which the generality is, for example, so distracted by its own sloth, depravity, and ignorance, that it lacks the patriotism and foresight to prevent the enslavement of the entire community. Such tragic episodes may be viewed as natural and often unavoidable attendants of imperfect (Latin, *imperfectum*) human justice, or of what the ancient Hellenes called Dike (human justice), as compared with the complete (*perfectum*) divine justice (Themis).

that impels men to desist from sacrificing the interests of others to their own interest is not the voluntary and unilateral forbearance of the oppressor, but the effectual resistance by those whom they are oppressing and abusing -- individuals who, like themselves, feel more intensely those things which affect them directly than those things which affect them indirectly through others. And so, vigilance is, indeed, the price of liberty²⁷, and a slouch into despotism from time to time is apparently inevitable, since a vigilance that is truly eternal is an attainment wholly beyond human capacity. And despotism then, because of the pain it inflicts, may in some sense be viewed as a just punishment whose Providentially intended effect is to rouse the oppressed portion of the community, and to spur its members on to moral and intellectual attainment, and to the reward for these attainments, liberty.²⁸

But while despotism is the just punishment of a people or class for sloth, depravity, and ignorance, liberty is a fitting and just reward for labor, virtue, and understanding. Or, as Calhoun puts it:

. . . just as a people rise in the scale of intelligence, virtue, and patriotism, and the more perfectly they become acquainted with the nature of government, the ends for which it was ordered, and how it ought to be administered, and the less the tendency to violence and disorder within, and danger from abroad, the power necessary for government becomes less and less, and individual liberty greater and

²⁷ See John Philpot Curran (1750-1817), "Speech upon the Right of Election of the Lord Mayor of Dublin" [July 10, 1790]: "The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance; which condition if he break, servitude is at once the consequence of his crime and the punishment of his guilt." Commonly attributed to Jefferson. And compare Demosthenes, *Philippic 2*, sec. 24: "There is one safeguard known generally to the wise, which is an advantage and security to all, but especially to democracies as against despots. What is it? Distrust."

²⁸ An interesting and rewarding political philosophical exercise would be to compare what I have here called the sting of despotism to the sting of Socrates the gadfly, referred to in the *Apology* of Plato. Clearly, these forms of punishment are complementary, each aiming at the human good. In this sense, the justice involved in despotism is akin to the justice involved in refutation. By means of despotism, vice and ignorance are excoriated, thereby clearing the way for virtue and knowledge. Thus slavery is a just punishment for the former, and liberty the just reward for the latter.

greater.²⁹

Intelligence, virtue, and patriotism are then goods to be striven for and conditions whose realization tend naturally to be rewarded by liberty, while ignorance, vice, and narrow selfishness are deviations from the path of salutary realization that tend naturally to be punished by despotism. Remonstrating against certain influential political philosophical superstitions of post-Enlightenment Europe and America, Calhoun went on, in his "Speech on the Oregon Bill" to demolish the spurious notions of natural liberty and natural equality in the light of an understanding of both true liberty and true equality. Having established the causal and historical connections between virtue and liberty, on the one hand, and between vice, despotism, and slavery, on the other hand, Calhoun explains how the differing moral and physical circumstances of communities lead naturally and inevitably to different ratios, for these communities, between governmental power and liberty. But, in this regard too, communities may differ not only between themselves, but within themselves.

As we saw in Chapter IV, the political community itself is never a single, undifferentiated whole. Therefore, it has often been the case historically that, for the sake of the safety and well-being of an entire community, the differing portions of that community are assigned more or less liberty than that of its other portions, depending on their capacity to enjoy it -- that is, depending on their actualized capacity to exercise liberty in a

²⁹ "Speech on the Oregon Bill" [July 27, 1848] in *Union and Liberty*, 568. This theoretical passage prompts the question: Did Calhoun speculate about blacks who had achieved moral and intellectual merit? Or did he, for example, condemn the entire race in America to slavery perpetually? Indeed, in the literature on Calhoun, such questions remain as yet largely undeveloped and unanswered.

manner consistent with the public good. The natural and inevitable result then of a substantial difference of moral actualization between the portions or classes of a community tends to be the assigning of an unequal liberty.³⁰ As Calhoun observes:

Instead . . . of all men having the same right to liberty and equality, as is claimed by those who hold that they are all born free and equal, liberty is the noble and highest reward bestowed on mental and moral development, combined with favorable circumstances. Instead, then, of liberty and equality being born with man; instead of all men and all classes and descriptions being equally entitled to them, they are high

³⁰ Following Aristotle, of the Nicomachean Ethics, Calhoun held that there are degrees of goodness and viciousness. Thus he spoke of a "scale" of intelligence, virtue, and patriotism. As a rule of thumb, then, we may say that moral differences are "substantial" when disparities in moral actualization between the different portions of a single community become so great that failure to acknowledge the difference through differential legislation threatens the safety and well-being of the entirety. Rousseau understood this as well. See the Social Contract, Bk III, chap. xv :

What is this? That liberty requires slavery to maintain it? It may be so. Extremes meet. Whatever is unnatural has its disadvantages, and that is truer of civil society than of anything else.

Circumstances unfortunately arise in which a man can keep his liberty only at the cost of another's, in which the citizen can enjoy perfect freedom only on the condition of the slave being very much a slave. Such was the position of Sparta. You, ye modern peoples, have no slaves, but you are slaves yourselves; the slaves' liberty is paid for by yours. Do not claim credit for this state of things to me; I see in it a proof, not of humanity, but of pusillanimity.

And, anticipating Calhoun's reflections on these insights as they pertained to the antebellum South, Edmund Burke, in his speech on conciliation with America, wrote:

Where [liberty and slavery co-exist in a community] those who are free are by far the most proud and jealous of their freedom. I cannot alter the nature of man. The fact is so, and these people of the southern colonies are much more strongly, and with a higher and more stubborn spirit attached to liberty than those to the northward. Such were all the ancient commonwealths, such were our Gothic ancestors, and such in our day were the Poles; such will be all masters of slaves who are not slaves themselves. In such a people the haughtiness of domination combines itself with the spirit of freedom, fortifies it, and renders it invincible.

With such passages, then, Rousseau and Burke do much to explain what less philosophically-minded historians have marvelled at but failed to understand for decades now, the indomitable spirit of Southern arms and of white Southerners generally. At once referring to and partaking of this spirit, Southerners, for generations after the war of the 1860's, have been quick to remind others that the Confederacy outfought the North, but ultimately lost the war merely to superior numbers and materiale.

prizes to be won, and are in their most perfect state, not only the highest reward that can be bestowed on our race, but the most difficult to be won -- and when won, the most difficult to be preserved. ³¹

A failure to comprehend Calhoun's view that liberty is a reward for virtue has led some critics to charge him with inconsistency in his defense of the liberty of the individual. ³² Specifically, it has been held that the doctrine of the concurrent majority is essentially a theory of minority rights, and that as such it is inconsistent with any defense of slavery, including that which Calhoun espoused. ³³ As we saw in Chapter VI, in our discussion of constitutional interests, less charitable critics have accused Calhoun of sophistry outright, and specifically, of constructing the doctrines of nullification and the concurrent majority as elaborate and base justifications of rule by the "aristocratic" Southern planter class and of the South's "peculiar institution." But, of course, Calhoun was not the first philosopher

³¹ See "Speech on the Oregon Bill" [July 27, 1848] in Union and Liberty, 568-569. And compare again Rousseau, who, as his less astute interpreters have failed to see or to acknowledge, was rightfully and utterly disdainful of the modern notion of equal, abstract, and universal liberty. Addressing himself to the Poles, he said:

I am conscious of the difficulties in the way of the plan to free your peoples. What I fear is not only misconception of their interests, amour propre and prejudice on the part of the masters. This obstacle surmounted, there are still to fear the vices and poltrooneries of the serfs. Liberty is a succulent food but takes a good digestion; only healthy stomachs can stand it. (Emphasis added)

I am moved to laughter by those debased peoples who, lured into rebellion by strong drink, talk grandly of liberty without having the least idea of it, and, with their hearts full to the brim with all the servile vices, imagine that to be free it is only necessary to be mutinous.

High and sacred liberty! If these wretched people could know you, if they could realize to price that must be paid to win you and keep you, if they were conscious that laws are sterner taskmasters than tyrants, their feeble souls, enslaved by the passions which must be kept down, would fear you a hundred times more than slavery; they would flee you in terror as a burden too great to be borne.

³² See, for example, Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr., The Decline of American Liberalism (New York: Atheneum, 1980), 95-115, whose criticisms of Calhoun will be examined shortly.

³³ But compare Clyde N. Wilson, "Calhoun and Community" in Chronicles of Culture 9 (July 1985): 17-20, where Wilson argues that the concurrent majority is not a theory of minority rights but a theory of consensus. Also, on Calhoun's defense of slavery, see especially the "Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions" (February 6, 1837) and the Disquisition.

to be charged with sophistry, or with sophistry in behalf of some aristocratic interest in particular.³⁴ For example, defending Plato against a similar charge, a recent writer explains that to call any philosophy “aristocratic” in the sense of class interest is meaningless; because “preoccupation with the interests of one class to the detriment of others is not philosophy”, and “philosophy is

³⁴See especially, Richard N. Current “John C. Calhoun, Philosopher of Reaction” in Antioch Review, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Summer 1943), 223-234:

The shade of John C. Calhoun, who died in 1850, still haunts the Southern scene. He, after all, was the original architect of the Solid South. He it was who took Jefferson’s liberal doctrine of states’ rights and identified it with a policy of reaction. He, more than anyone else, made the presence of the Negro an occasion for repressing white men along with black. Wherever contemporary Bourbons take counsel together, somewhere in their midst hovers the ghost of the Great Nullifier.

But such baseless name-calling and superficiality had its beginning amongst Calhoun’s contemporaries. For example, Abraham Lincoln, an admirer of Webster’s “Reply to Hayne”, would take aim at Calhoun and his doctrine of concurrent majority in his 1857 speech on the Dred Scott decision:

They have him [the Negro] in this prison house; they have searched his person, and left no prying instrument with him. One after another they have closed the heavy iron doors upon him, and now they have him, as it were, bolted in with a lock of a hundred keys; the keys in the hands of a hundred different men, and they scattered to a hundred different and distant places, and they stand musing as to what invention, in all the dominions of mind and matter, can be produced to make the impossibility of his escape more complex than it is.

But we need not conjecture concerning Lincoln’s apparent impatience with the constraints that must necessarily attend constitutional government, since this impatience would be amply demonstrated beginning in the Spring of 1861, with, for example, his unconstitutional creation of West Virginia, his brutal suppression of popular sovereignty in Maryland, and his suspension of the writ of habeas corpus throughout the North. Nor do we need concern ourselves with the issue of the sincerity and solicitude of Mr. Lincoln regarding the well-being of the Negro, as this too would be made plain in due course; with his general emancipation of slaves in the Confederate states only (not in the neutral or border states), in a manner woefully deficient as concerned the material provision and protection of the newly emancipated population.

So what then are we to think of the self-righteous complaining of a burglar about the security system designed to thwart his depredative impulses.

disinterested or it is not philosophy³⁵." But Calhoun's statesmanly labors and theoretical writings, like Plato's dialogues, were themselves directed against such sophistry. Still, twenty-five centuries have passed since the dialogues of Plato were written, and the ideological prejudice against its author, although by no means wholly exhausted or moribund, do not represent and recall to consciousness -- as Calhoun's work does today -- a part of the spirit, experience and rationale of an extant political community. Calhoun's political writings, unlike the dialogues, are capable still of evoking, among Americans at least, the most intense emotional and intellectual reactions, both sympathetic and hostile, because they form part of the story of living communities and their still-going concerns. These circumstances suggest perhaps that a general recognition of the disinterested and truly philosophical character of Calhoun's work lies somewhere in the future; since a like recognition was effected, during the course of generations after Plato's death, to such a degree as to render the word Platonism synonymous with the word philosophy.³⁶ Still, we should expect that Calhoun, like Plato, will have enemies in any age, since their philosophies are implications of a system of nature that is itself aristocratic, and whose mysteries and interworkings are not equally disclosed to all. And so, to call their philosophies aristocratic is

³⁵ See the introduction by Huntington Cairnes in Plato, The Collected Dialogues of Plato, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), xvi.

And indeed, pushing subjectivism a step beyond the level of willful sophistry, Karl Marx, by articulating his epistemological doctrine of polylogism -- according to which the logical structure of the mind differs in the members of various classes -- impugned the objectivity of nearly every other socio-political thinker, excepting of course himself and a very few other favored writers. See Ludwig von Mises, Human Action: A Treatise on Economics (Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc. 1966), 77-91.

³⁶ See Ralph Waldo Emerson "Plato; Or, The Philosopher" in The Portable Emerson, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Viking Penquin Inc., 1983), 295-324: "... Plato is philosophy, and philosophy, Plato,-- at once the glory and shame of mankind, since neither Saxon nor Roman have availed to add any idea to his categories. ..."

meaningful only in the sense that nature itself is aristocratic, or involves differences in actualized abilities which sometimes necessitate legal distinctions.³⁷

But whatever may be the fate of Calhoun's reputation in the coming decades and centuries, let us consider where things stand now, especially as regards the charge of sophistry. For until a more general and widespread recognition of the disinterested and philosophical character of his political ideas is attained, we can expect that Calhoun's personal character, statesmanly career and writings will continue to be subjected to the grosser forms of misinterpretation and insult -- both deliberate and unintentional -- at the hands of shallow and uncomprehending critics, the likes of which they have already withstood.³⁸

The charge against Calhoun of sophistry in defense of the Southern slave-holding class can ultimately, of course, be answered only by a systematic investigation of the words and actions of the man as political leader against the backdrop of events and conditions of his times; a task beyond the scope of the present work. In lieu of such conclusive rejection of the charge, however, let us examine a representative sample from those critics who have so misunderstood and accused Calhoun. This examination should help us form some sense of the persisting opposition to and prejudice against Calhoun's ideas.

In his widely-read book, The Decline of American Liberalism (1955), historian Arthur Ekirch writes:

Under the leadership of John C. Calhoun, the statesmen and

³⁷ See Plato, The Collected Dialogues of Plato, xvi.

³⁸ On the enduring quality of Calhoun's ideas, see Russell Kirk "Calhoun Endures" in Southern Partisan 9 (Third Quarter): 20-24.

intellectuals of the South tried to work out an exposition of [classical] liberalism in terms of the defense of slavery. In its espousal of states' rights, free trade, and an agricultural type of society, the proslavery argument, it was true, adhered to many of the basic tenets of Jeffersonian liberalism. But southern liberalism as a theory could not be squared with the practice of slavery, and by the time of Jefferson's death, in 1826, the South was turning against the basic principles of the natural rights philosophy and its corollaries of liberty and equality. In the next decade the South stood ready to accept Calhoun's argument that slavery was 'a good -- a positive good . . . the most safe and stable basis for free institutions in the world.'³⁹

Furthermore:

. . . it was Calhoun, to a greater extent than any other antebellum statesman or thinker, who attempted to reconcile a liberal philosophy with the defense of slavery. A realist in his views on politics and economics, Calhoun had no patience with the classic liberalism of Jefferson or the romantic liberalism exemplified in the revolutions of 1848 in Central Europe. . . . Despite his repudiation of the Jeffersonian heritage and his ardent defense of the interests of the slavocracy, Calhoun in contrast to most of his contemporaries sensed the danger to liberalism inherent in the power of the Jacksonian majority, and in the nationalizing tendency of manifest destiny. Calhoun's flaw lay in his associating his principle of minority rights with the illiberal cause of slavery.⁴⁰

Sympathetic to some form of Classical Liberalism himself, Ekirch's attitude toward Calhoun is ambivalent -- being at once attracted to the "principle of minority rights" that he finds, and revolted by the defense of slavery. Rooting his Classical liberalism in a "natural rights philosophy" that holds that "all men are by nature born free and equal", Ekirch is led by his own assumptions and principles to charge Calhoun with inconsistency and

³⁹ See Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr., The Decline of American Liberalism (New York: Atheneum, 1980), 110.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 111-112.

incoherence.⁴¹ In back of this charge of inconsistency, it should be noted, lies an insinuation of sophistry, with the suggestion being that Calhoun -- whatever may have been his success in illuminating other issues -- was hopelessly uncritical and biased in his treatment of the issue of slavery, and therefore led to sacrifice the interests of the general American community to Southern sectional interest. The ultimate source of both the charge of inconsistency and the insinuation of sophistry is, of course, the fallacious assumptions and tenets of abstract natural rights that we exposed earlier in this chapter, including the notions that rights exist independent of the moral and physical conditions of society, and that all men are, of necessity, entitled to equal liberty. Once the critic's assumptions are exposed and examined, then, a different assessment of Calhoun's project of forging a liberal philosophy is suggested.

First, Calhoun does in fact articulate a doctrine of liberalism, as Ekirch says; but it is the doctrine of abstract natural rights liberalism, and not Calhoun's Southern "liberalism", which fails through incoherency. Calhoun viewed liberalism as a political doctrine that is subsidiary to a general republican doctrine that is concerned with both liberty and order; and liberalism's proper end is to underscore the role and benefits of a more extensive and secure liberty for the individual. Thus liberalism, of itself, is

⁴¹ This error is repeated in Richard N. Current, John C. Calhoun. (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), 128:

By 1861 something had happened, in the South, to the old ideas of Jeffersonian democracy. The state-rights doctrine had been detached from the liberal principle and joined to a reactionary one. The ideals of freedom-loving farmers were adapted to the interests of slaveholding planters, and the party of Jefferson was transformed into the party of Jefferson Davis. Between these two men stood two others who handed on the torch and altered its fuel and its flame as they did so. One was John Randolph of Roanoke. The other and much the more significant was Calhoun. In helping thus to make Jefferson the light of illiberalism, Calhoun left his most important mark upon the development of American political thought.

not a complete political doctrine; since a concern with the role of liberty must be balanced against a prior and more compelling concern with security. In this sense, then, true liberalism is a rhetorical emphasis on only one aspect -- albeit a crucially important one -- of a general republican doctrine. Classical liberalism's emphasis on liberty as conducing to improvement of the individual and of the general society must then be balanced against the prior and more weighty concerns with the preservation and perpetuation of the human race through order.⁴²

Calhoun -- unlike Locke, Jefferson, and other "abstract" liberals -- recognized that a more extensive liberty, along with slavery and other forms of subordination, lies at some determinate point on a single moral and intellectual continuum or scale. Again, according to Calhoun, liberty is a reward for moral and intellectual attainment, whereas slavery, where it is not the result of conquest or of inheritance merely⁴³, is a salutary and just punishment for sloth, ignorance, and depravity. And so slavery in every instance is not an evil; nor is liberty in every instance a good. In truth, both slavery and extensive liberty are good or bad according to that combination of moral and physical circumstances in which a community finds itself.

But however profound and suggestive may be Calhoun's general philosophical speech in the Disquisition and elsewhere on the nature of

⁴² But modern, twentieth century liberalism, and not Classical Liberalism, is the political antipode of Classical Republicanism; since, while Classical Liberalism is but a partial doctrine emphasizing the virtues of liberty, modern liberalism -- by extolling radical hedonism and license -- stands in opposition to both the liberty of the individual, rightly conceived, and to order.

⁴³ Here, of course, a debate may be joined between, for example, Aristotle and St. Augustine on the justice of slavery through conquest and inheritance. Calhoun's own position regarding these matters has not yet been satisfactorily determined or explained. But, for a useful starting point, see George Fitzhugh, "The Politics and Economics of Aristotle and Mr. Calhoun" in DeBow's Review 23 (August 1857); 163-172.

slavery and liberty, this speech must, for the present, receive only that incomplete attention required for an elucidation of the central concern of this chapter -- the power of the community and its cause.

For recall that the central concern of this chapter is to examine one aspect of the developmental fate of the dual-principle of our nature; that aspect concerned with the causes which contribute to the strengthening or weakening of the community. It is this concern that has obliged us to consider a number of important subsidiary accounts provided by Calhoun in the Disquisition, such as the nature of liberty and its proper relation of governmental power, the relation of ordered liberty to progress, and, finally, the relation of progress or improvement to the power of the community. And, before moving on to what may be considered the climax of Calhoun's account of the power of the community (47-48), we must suffer one final but crucially important digression -- an excursus concerning the varieties and nature of human equality whose insights are necessary for a fuller understanding of Calhoun's account of the causes of the strength or weakness of a community.

After refuting the notion that "all people are equally entitled to liberty" (42), Calhoun proceeds to examine "another error, not less great and dangerous, usually associated with [the notion of equal liberty]" (43). This second great and influential error was the view, held by many during his time and since, that "liberty cannot be perfect without perfect equality." (43) As the supposition goes, perfect liberty requires perfect equality for its (i.e., liberty's) full realization and effectual maintenance.

Identifying as erroneous this view of the relation of liberty to equality,

Calhoun conjectures that the error of perfect equality, as we may call it, tends to arise because liberty and equality are at some level and to some extent intimately related. This level and extent are specified by Calhoun, when he concedes that liberty and equality, indeed, are "united to a certain extent -- and that equality of citizens, in the eyes of the law, is essential to liberty in a popular government ⁴⁴." (43) But this equality before the law, or "in the eyes of the law", differs fundamentally from the variety of equality implied by those who accept the notion of perfect equality as an axiom of politics. The proponents of the notion of perfect equality mean by equality not "equality before the law" but instead, "equality of condition"; therefore, they maintain that "equality of condition is essential to liberty." (43)

In addition to his aim, in the Disquisition, of giving a timeless speech about the origin and causes of the power of the community, Calhoun was clearly concerned with the more immediate and pressing task of rebutting what was in his time the increasingly popular and subversive doctrine of perfect equality. For during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries, the notion of perfect equality that had been bandied about in metaphysical discourse since the earliest times was developed into the full-blown political theoretical doctrine and practical programme of egalitarianism.

In the Disquisition, Calhoun meets the fundamental contentions of radical egalitarianism head on. (43) Writing in the 1840's, at the same time that Marx and Engels were formulating and publishing the Communist

⁴⁴ For a classic and valuable statement of the nature of liberty and equality, including a withering critique of Mill's On Liberty, The Subjugation of Women, and Utilitarianism, see James Fitzjames Stephen, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, ed. Stuart D. Warner (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1993).

Manifesto (1848), Calhoun penned a refutation of equality of condition in terms of the fundamental principles of human nature and society. Calhoun undertook to demonstrate that equality of condition, on the one hand, and liberty and progress, on the other hand, are utterly incompatible.

The reason is, that inequality of condition, while it is a necessary consequence of liberty, [it] is, at the same time, indispensable to progress. In order to understand why this is so, it is necessary to bear in mind, that the main spring to progress is, the desire of individuals to better their condition; and that the strongest impulse which can be given to it is, to leave individuals free to exert themselves in the manner they may deem best for that purpose, as far at least as it can be done consistently with the ends for which government is ordained -- and to secure to all the fruits of their exertions. (43)

Calhoun, then, made explicit a natural and profoundly important connection between inequality of condition and human progress; and he went on to locate the ultimate source of all inequality of condition in differences between individuals. Thus, Calhoun observes, "individuals differ greatly from each other, in intelligence, sagacity, energy, perseverance, skill, habit of industry and economy, physical power, position and opportunity." (43) And "the necessary effect of leaving all free to exert themselves to better their condition, must be a corresponding inequality between those who may possess these qualities and advantages in a high degree, and those who may be deficient in them." (43) Anticipating the different strategies to be employed by the various egalitarian regimes of the 20th Century, Calhoun identified two courses of action by which inequality of condition might be prevented:

The only means by which this [inequality] can be prevented are, either to impose such restrictions on the exertions of those who may possess them in a high degree, as will place them on a level with those who do not; or to deprive them of the fruits of their exertions. (43)

But each of these strategems unavoidably entails costs that are fatal to progress and, therewith, to the strength of the community. This is so because:

. . . to impose restrictions on [those who possess a greater share of the aforementioned qualities and advantages] would be destructive of liberty — while, to deprive them of the fruits of their exertions, would be to destroy the desire for bettering their condition.⁴⁵ (43-44)

Having thus carefully dissected the notion of perfect equality, and exposed the utter impracticality and perniciousness of all egalitarian political schemes based on its assumption, Calhoun employs a simile in order to drive home the point that inequality of condition is a natural, inevitable, and salutary consequence of liberty. Society, says Calhoun, may be viewed as consisting of different orders or ranks, unequally situated as regards their distance from the front line, but moving forward together like an organized and disciplined body of soldiers.

It is, indeed, this inequality of condition between the front and rear ranks, in the march of progress, which gives so strong an impulse to the former to maintain their position, and to the latter to press forward

⁴⁵ Much of this criticism of egalitarianism by Calhoun in the *Disquisition* is to be found in Hume's second enquiry. Hume, like Calhoun a century later, saw that perfect equality is "impracticable", as well as recognizing that, were it not so, it would be extremely pernicious, as are many of the effects naturally attending attempts to instantiate it. Hume, as usual, is both trenchant and eloquent:

Render possessions ever so equal, men's different degrees of art, care, and industry will immediately break that equality. Or if you check these virtues, you reduce society to the most extreme indigence; and instead of preventing want and beggary in a few, render it unavoidable to the whole community. The most rigorous inquisition too is requisite to watch every inequality on its first appearance; and the most severe jurisdiction, to punish and redress it. But besides, that so much authority must soon degenerate into tyranny, and be exerted with great partialities; who can possibly be possessed of it, in such a situation as is here supposed? (See *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Section III, Part II.)

The discursive contexts in which the accounts by Calhoun and Hume of egalitarianism occur differ, and this difference explains, to some degree, their different emphases and elements. Hume is marshalling arguments against the egalitarian as a part of a general discussion of justice and of the nature and origin of property. Calhoun, as we have said, is concerned to demonstrate how equality of condition is opposed to progress and community power, and his more general aim is to exhibit the superior virtues of governments of the concurrent majority as compared with governments of the numerical majority.

into their files. This gives to progress its greatest impulse. To force the front rank back to the rear, or attempt to push forward the rear into line with the front, by the interposition of the government, would put an end to the impulse, and effectually arrest the march of progress. (44)

Far from conceding, then, that inequality of condition is a necessary but unfortunate effect of liberty, Calhoun recognizes the force and influence in human affairs, once again, of the beneficent workings of the Hand of Providence. The Creator, Calhoun saw, has so arranged things as to compel that inequality of condition which naturally occurs between individuals to issue in progress and general improvement. Thus the "march of [human] progress" is premised upon the existence of an inequality of condition that flows naturally from individual differences wherever liberty, or at least

natural freedom ⁴⁶, is found. ⁴⁷

So material and moral-intellectual differences between the front and rear ranks of society are the mainspring of continued progress for the entire community, and for the species. But, as we saw earlier, moral and intellectual differences between the front and rear ranks can become so great, as societies change and evolve, as to warrant the introduction and maintenance, for a time, of some form of legal distinction and subordination between these ranks, in order to preserve society and to promote progress. For those more advanced morally and intellectually possess more prudence, and therefore have less need of direction by general rules or laws; whereas, on

⁴⁶ Recall a distinction made earlier between civic liberty and natural freedom, where the former is secured through some power of self-protection, while the latter exists merely by the prerogative of government.

⁴⁷ And so for Calhoun as slave-holder, for example, there was no dilemma of choosing between progress and slavery. See Eugene D. Genovese, The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 46-48:

... Calhoun... celebrated material progress and worried less than many of his contemporaries about its negative side. ... He gloried in the discoveries of science and the advance of technology; the compass and the revolution in navigation; the printing press and the spread of literacy; steampower, the magnetic telegraph, and the irreversible conquests of the industrial revolution. He especially singled out the diffusion of knowledge as an impetus to civilization 'unexampled in the history of the world.'

Calhoun did not doubt that this material progress was engendering a better world. God surely had not given it to us for evil. Evils he saw but primarily as the short-run convulsions of the "transition," for governments had not yet learned to master the pace and content of progress. Man had a bright future, but he had to learn patience and, above all, avoid the temptation to plunge into the wild social experiments that would transform the enormous good of material progress into a nightmare.

In defending slavery as a positive good, Calhoun preferred the politically wise course of restricting himself, so far as he could, to the specifics of black slavery. But, despite irate disclaimers, he could not avoid the higher ground of 'slavery in the abstract.' His writings and speeches make clear his belief that only slavery, in one form or another, could sustain republican government and the freedom upon which material as well as moral progress depended.

See the Disquisition, pp. 63-67, and "Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions", 474-475.

the other hand, the rear ranks, having humbler moral and intellectual attainments, and less prudence, or internal direction, would have need of more law, or external control. So wider moral and intellectual differences tend naturally to be expressed in terms of heterogeneous or separate legal codes within a single community.⁴⁸ Moreover, by preserving both the social order and a maximum responsible amount of liberty in every class or order, the dynamic of the march of progress is preserved; and progress continues so far as fortune and the current moral, intellectual, and material attainments of the various ranks of the community allow. Also a feature of the process of human progress, the general discomfort and suffering caused by such legal subordination, when it comes by degrees to be felt as more and more an affront to an advancing lower rank, serves as a negative inducement and Providential aid for that rank in eventually shedding their legal and social subordination through skillful assertion.⁴⁹ In this way, the general march of progress for the race may be advanced by such struggles within particular communities.⁵⁰

Having thus described the dynamics of the "march of progress",

⁴⁸ Therefore slavery, for example, is by no means of necessity, or in every instance, the "enormity" that it is now almost universally claimed to be. But compare Eugene D. Genovese, The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860, 3.

⁴⁹ Of course, one important obstacle that societies must work to avoid is legal ossification, whereby progress is brought to a halt or perhaps even reversed out of a failure to reform laws so as to keep pace with changing social conditions.

⁵⁰ But such struggles may be settled with more or less judiciousness. For compare the wise compromise in Rome of the patricians with the plebeians to the bitterness of black-white race relations in America since the rise of abolitionism as a political force in the 1830's and the coercive and precipitous emancipation of black slaves in 1863. This bitterness has continued into the late twentieth century; as neo-abolitionist liberalism mindlessly continues to foment and to perpetuate bitterness between the races through the legislative enactment of preferential treatment of all sorts, including hiring and admissions quotas, and through "Orwellian" revisions of history aimed, for example, at vilifying the Southern Confederacy and at bolstering the self-esteem of blacks.

Calhoun digresses for a bit from his account of the power of the community. This digression (44-45) aims at rebutting the Jeffersonian notion that “all men are created equal.” Calhoun explains that the two great and influential errors just considered -- namely, the notions of equal liberty and perfect equality -- have their source in the mistaken and baneful idea of Jefferson, as well as in the related notion, given common currency and influence by mainstream modern political theorizing, that all men are equal in a state of nature.⁵¹ Having explained the relations of all these errors one to another, Calhoun returns from the digression to consider further the central topic of this chapter -- the power of the community and its causes.

Recall that this central topic falls, in the Disquisition, within a comparison between absolute governments, on the one hand, and constitutional governments, on the other hand. Given the increasing ascendancy and popularity of the democratic form in his day, however, Calhoun gives special attention, as we noted earlier, to a comparison of absolute and constitutional forms of democracy respectively, or to a government of the numerical majority as compared to a democratic government of the concurrent majority.

On page 45 of the Disquisition, reviewing all the various points and arguments which he had just presented in order to explain the causes of a community's power (40-45) -- items we have just reviewed as well --, Calhoun declares that . . .

. . . from all that has been said, . . . the more perfectly a government combines power and liberty -- that is, the greater its power and the more enlarged and secure the liberty of individuals, the more

⁵¹ Recall that Calhoun's discussion of the Jeffersonian expression, “all men are created equal”, and of the idea that “all men are equal in a state of nature”, were treated in Chapter II, in connection with the social aspect of man as a component of the dual-principle.

perfectly it fulfills the ends for which government is ordained. (45)

Here, we must recall our earlier distinction between the powers assigned to government by the sovereign, whether popular or otherwise, on the one hand, and the power of the community, on the other hand.⁵² Holding this distinction steadily before us will prevent misinterpretation of Calhoun's meaning in this crucial but somewhat compressed passage. To review and clarify this potentially misleading passage: the "power" that is to be combined with liberty here refers to whatever powers, in a given instance, happen to be delegated to government by the sovereign; but the power referred to immediately after, by the expression "the greater its power", refers not to the powers assigned or delegated to government, which are susceptible, for example, of enumeration, but to the power of the community which its government both has at its disposal and is authorized to wield for the sake of defending the community from internal and external dangers. The soundness of this interpretation is, of course, corroborated by the fact that, according to Calhoun, as we have seen, the powers assigned to government stand necessarily within a ratio with the liberty of the individual, a ratio characterized by the relation of inverse proportionality. For recall that liberty is a residuum after power, more extensive where the powers of government are fewer and more modest, and more limited where its powers are more numerous and imposing. Therefore, it is one thing to speak of powers duly assigned to a government by a sovereign (or assumed usurpatorily by government) as being extensive, and quite another to speak of the great reserve of communal power susceptible of being wielded by a government, as

⁵² For a useful discussion of Calhoun's notion of sovereignty in historical context, see August Spain, The Political Theory of John C. Calhoun (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968), 164-183.

the internal and external circumstances of the community dictate.

In comparing the government of the concurrent majority to the government of the numerical majority, Calhoun aimed to show that the former is better suited to fulfill the Divinely ordained ends of government -- the protection and perfection of society -- in part because it is better suited than the latter "to combine a higher degree of power and a wider scope of liberty." (45) As Calhoun explains,

The concurrent majority . . . is better suited to enlarge and secure the bounds of liberty, because it is better suited to prevent government from passing beyond its proper limits, and to restrict it to its primary end -- the protection of the community. But in doing this, it leaves, necessarily, all beyond it open and free to individual exertions; and thus enlarges and secures the sphere of liberty to the greatest extent which the condition of the community will admit, as has been explained. The tendency of government to pass beyond its proper limits is what exposes liberty to danger, and renders it insecure; and it is the strong counteraction of governments of the concurrent majority to this tendency which makes them so favorable to liberty. On the contrary, those of the numerical, instead of opposing and counteracting this tendency, add to it increased strength, in consequence of the violent party struggles incident to them, as has been fully explained. And hence their encroachments on liberty, and the danger to which it is exposed under such governments. (45)

So, when the powers assigned to government are effectually guarded, then so too is the liberty of the individual. Or, the arrangement or organization of government that achieves the one also achieves the other; just as the organization that fails to achieve one, likewise fails to achieve the other. Guarded power and secured liberty are therefore two effects of the same cause, namely, the organization of a community's government on the principles of the concurrent majority; while unbounded power and the absence of liberty are, analogously, both natural effects of the application of

the principles of the numerical or absolute majority.⁵³

According to Calhoun, the fate of liberty is a feature which most strongly marks the great differences between these two governmental systems. Thus, he says,

. . . liberty is little more than a name under all governments of the absolute form, including that of the numerical majority; and can only have a secure and durable existence under those of the concurrent or constitutional form. The latter, by giving to each portion of the community which may be unequally affected by its action, a negative on the others, prevents all partial or local legislation, and restricts its action to such measures as are designed for the protection and the good of the whole. In doing this, it secures, at the same time, the rights and liberty of the people, regarded individually; as each portion consists of those who, whatever may be the diversity of interests among themselves, have the same interest in reference to the action of the government.”⁵⁴ (45-46)

And specifically, as regards absolute democracy, or government of the numerical majority:

The essence of liberty comprehends the idea of comprehensible power - - that those who make and execute the laws should be controlled by those on whom they operate --that the governed should govern. . . . No government based on the naked principle that the majority ought to govern, however true the maxim in its proper sense, and under proper restrictions, can preserve its liberty even for a single generation. The history of all has been the same -- violence, injustice, and anarchy, succeeded by the government of one, or a few, under which the people

⁵³ But, as noted in Chapter VI, the system of numerical majority does not, of necessity or in every instance, issue in the pernicious effects described here. Recall that this system may be the most advantageous for a community of smaller population and geographical extent, and more modest revenue.

⁵⁴ Rousseau was also deeply concerned about the usurpation of republican government by partial or private interests. See the Social Contract in The Basic Political Writings: “Nothing is more dangerous than the influence of private interests on public affairs; and the abuse of the laws by the government is a lesser evil than the corruption of the legislator, which is the inevitable outcome of particular perspectives” (179) And: “In a perfect act of legislation, the private or individual will should be nonexistent; the corporate will proper to government should be very subordinate; and consequently the general or sovereign will should always be dominant and the unique rule of all the others.” (177)

seek refuge from the more oppressive despotism of the many . . .⁵⁵

Calhoun, then, makes explicit a fundamental connection between individual liberty and the system of concurrent majority. The quest for liberty is not an activity of the lone individual, in the sense that he might actually achieve liberty for himself through his own exertions merely.⁵⁶ Hobbes saw this clearly, commenting in Part II of *Leviathan*:

Whether a Commonwealth be Monarchical, or Popular, the Freedome [sic] is still the same. But it is an easy thing; for men to be deceived, by the specious name of Libertie [sic]; and for want of Judgement to distinguish, mistake that for their Private Inheritance, and Birth right, which is the right of the Publique [sic] only.⁵⁷

Instead, the struggle for liberty is essentially social. It is a struggle not between lone individuals but between individuals organized in different social groups or classes.⁵⁸ In addition, liberty for the individual is impossible of attainment without attention, for example, to the manner in which the significant interests of a community are organized in reference to the government. But Calhoun's point about the social character of the struggle for liberty would be banal perhaps, were it not set within the context of what

⁵⁵ Quoted from Calhoun's *Works*, vi, 32, by Lord Acton, "The Anglo-American Tradition of Liberty" in *Essays in the History of Liberty*, ed. J. Rufus Fears (Indianapolis: LibertyClassic, 1985), 240.

⁵⁶ Here we have the surfacing, for example, of a fundamental tension or opposition between modern a-social or "atomistic" individualism commonly espoused by the so-called "libertarians", on the one hand, and the actual social or communal character of any authentic struggle for liberty, on the other hand.

⁵⁷ See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 266-267. Hobbes goes on in this passage to castigate certain influential political theorists who, by their anti-monarchical and pro-democratic biases, have given force to the false notion that liberty is a mere private inheritance of the individual.

⁵⁸ The patricians and plebeians in Rome; the crown, nobles, and commons in England; the Upcountry farmer and the Lowcountry planter in South Carolina.

is, in fact, a definitive explanation of the process whereby liberty is attained.⁵⁹

For Calhoun, true liberty is no winged or ephemeral existent, but is instead a robust and substantial reward for virtue that endures as long as virtue (and a modicum of good fortune⁶⁰) itself endures. A moral substance that enriches and enlivens by opening new horizons of actualization for its possessors, liberty is the spiritual life-blood of all civilization and high culture. Liberty for the individual is achieved -- when it is achieved -- through the proper application of the principles of the concurrent majority.⁶¹

But before learning that liberty can be given a secure and durable existence only through the proper implementation and maintenance of the principles of the concurrent majority, men put their faith in individual resistance to tyranny, through whatever means, and in the forceful overthrow of the tyrant. But both of these methods are, of necessity, attended by difficulties and dangers which must often prove overwhelming. Thus Calhoun explains,

Individual resistance is too feeble, and the difficulty of concert and co-operation too great, unaided by such an organism, to oppose, successfully, the organized power of government, with all the means of the community at its disposal; especially in populous countries, of great extent, where concert and co-operation are almost impossible. Even

⁵⁹In addition, his rhetorical emphasis on the social character of the struggle for liberty came, one may suppose, in part as a response to an atomistic or false form of individualism then becoming more and more popular.

⁶⁰One is reminded of the example of King Priam as described by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book A, 1101a. A virtuous man once blessed with all goods that make for happiness (*eudaimonia*), including sufficient material goods, family, friends, and so on; Priam suffered calamities "great and numerous." Aristotle gives the example of Priam to show that some good fortune is a necessary condition of the good life.

Analogously, it appears that the survival of liberty depends on some good fortune as well as on the virtues of its possessors, both in the sense that some good fortune is necessary for the perpetuation of virtue in the soul and that good fortune is needed alongside virtue, as in, for example, a war to defend liberty.

⁶¹Recall the *Disquisition*, 46.

when the oppression of the government comes to be too great to be borne, and force is resorted to in order to overthrow it, the result is rarely ever followed by the establishment of liberty. The force sufficient to overthrow an oppressive government is usually sufficient to establish one equally, or more, oppressive in its place. And hence, in no governments, except those that rest on the principle of the concurrent or constitutional majority, can the people guard their liberty against power; and hence, also, when lost, the great difficulty and uncertainty of regaining it by force. (46)

History is replete with examples of tyrannical power being opposed and then supplanted by some other power that would prove even more tyrannical, notwithstanding that the original aim of the revolutionaries, though not necessarily their leaders, had been the establishment of liberty. Examples of revolutions that have gone awry, before and since Calhoun's day, include the successions to power by Cromwell in England, by Robespierre and

Bonaparte in France, by Lenin in Russia, and by Mao in China.⁶² Having established⁶³ that the struggle for liberty is essentially social in character, that individual resistance to tyranny is too feeble, and that organized resistance

⁶² St. Thomas, too, had clearly understood the dangers involved in an imprudent resistance to tyranny:

. . . if there be not an excess of tyranny it is more expedient to tolerate the milder tyranny for a while then, by acting against the tyrant, to become involved in many perils more grievous than the tyranny itself. For it may happen that those who act against the tyrant are unable to prevail and the tyrant then will rage the more. But should one be able to prevail against the tyrant, from this fact itself very grave dissensions among the people frequently ensue: the multitude may be broken up into factions either during their revolt against the tyrant, or in process of the organization of the government, after the tyrant has been overthrown. Moreover, it sometimes happens that while the multitude is driving out the tyrant by the help of some man, the latter, having received the power, thereupon seizes the tyranny. Then, fearing to suffer from another what he did to his predecessor, he oppresses his subjects with an even more grievous slavery. This is wont to happen in tyranny, namely, that the second becomes more grievous than the one preceding, inasmuch as, without abandoning the previous oppressions, he himself thinks up fresh ones from the malice of his heart. Whence in Syracuse, at a time when everyone desired the death of Dionysius, a certain old woman kept constantly praying that he might survive her. When the tyrant learned this he asked why she did it. Then she said: "When I was a girl we had a harsh tyrant and I wished for his death; when he was killed, there succeeded him one who was a little harsher. I was very eager to see the end of his dominion also, and we began to have a third rule still more harsh — that was you. So if you should be taken away, a worse would succeed in your place."

St. Thomas ends by saying that the deposing of a tyrant is an action to be undertaken not "through the private presumption of a few", but "by public authority." See On Kingship in The Great Political Thinkers: Plato to the Present, 262-263.

Also, replete with irony, history affords us the words and eventual fate of Abraham Lincoln. In 1860, Lincoln denounced John Brown's raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, saying:

That affair, in its philosophy, corresponds with the many attempts, related in history, at the assassination of kings and emperors. An enthusiast broods over the oppression of a people till he fancies himself commissioned by Heaven to liberate them. He ventures the attempt, which ends in little else than his own execution.

But had Lincoln been available to comment on the broader effects of his own assassination at the hands of the "enthusiast" Booth, five years hence, he might have concluded that such affairs may end, not only in the execution of the assassin, but in the deification of the fallen leader. Immediately upon dispatching the President with a pistol and jumping to the stagefloor below, Booth, a native of Virginia and an actor by vocation, coolly faced the surprised and terrified onlookers, and shouted the motto of that commonwealth, "Sic semper tyrannis!" See J. G. Nicolay and John Hay, eds., Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln (New York: The Century Co., 1894), vol. 5, 314-319.

⁶³ Disquisition in Government in Union and Liberty, 46.

without the provision of some organism of constitution commonly leads to a worse tyranny; Calhoun turns from his discussion of how liberty for the individual and the community may be attained to consider the implications of this discussion for the main topic under examination -- the power of the community.

Calhoun saw that liberty, achieved -- as it must be -- through the establishment of the principles of the concurrent majority, has been a principal cause of the power of the most illustrious communities in history. Having laid the groundwork for an explicit treatment of communal power, Calhoun pulls up and summarizes the discussions that immediately precede. (46-47) Here he reminds us that he has established that governments of the concurrent majority are "more favorable to the enlargement and security of liberty" than governments of the numerical majority, and that he has also shown that, being more favorable to liberty, governments of the concurrent majority "must necessarily be more favorable to progress, development, improvement, and civilization -- and, of course, to the increase of power which results from and depends on these, than those of the numerical majority." Recall, as well, that, as Calhoun has also shown, it is liberty which gives to progress, development, improvement, and civilization "their greatest impulse." (47) And so, before proceeding, we should note that a definite and somewhat complex causal link is being asserted here by Calhoun, running from the establishment of a government of the concurrent majority to the securing and expansion of individual liberty, then from liberty to progress, development, improvement, and civilization, and finally, from these latter goods to an enhanced power for the community. The final

conclusion of this enthymeme is, as we shall see, that the prudential establishment of the system of the concurrent majority produces the greatest power that the community is capable of possessing.

Approaching now the climax of his account of the power of the community, Calhoun's next concern is to illustrate how progress, development, improvement, and civilization are goods which contribute greatly to the increase of a community's power. Before reviewing Calhoun's demonstration to this effect, however, there is a distinction to which we must first attend so as to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Within his general account of the power of the community, Calhoun distinguishes between what he calls the elements of power, on the one hand, and the causes of power, on the other hand.

In common parlance, when the subject under discussion is the power of a particular country or nation, what is being referred to is what Calhoun calls the elements of power, as distinguished from the causes of power. The elements of power are those concrete and easily identified features wherein the power of a community resides, including the various technological instruments and modes of organization through which that power is both constituted and projected.⁶⁴ In the *Disquisition*, Calhoun lists the various elements of power employed by men up to his time. This list is enumerated within a brief historical sketch that illustrates nicely the mutability of the elements of power and the merely contingent and temporary usefulness of many of them. (47) In addition to listing these elements and emphasizing their mutable and transitory character, this sketch also serves as Calhoun's

⁶⁴The chariot, the stirrup, "Greek" fire, the long bow, cavalry, the smoothbore musket, the rifle, the tank, bombers and fighters, nuclear armament, . . . ; and the phalanx, the legion, the general staff, Strategic Air Command, . . .

demonstration of the manner in which progress, development, improvement, and civilization contribute greatly to the increase of power.

Calhoun writes:

In the earlier stages of society, numbers and individual prowess constituted the principal elements of power. In a more advanced stage, when communities had passed from the barbarous to the civilized state, discipline, strategy, weapons of increased power, and money -- as the means of meeting increased expense -- became additional and important elements. In this stage, the effects of progress and improvement on the increase of power, began to be disclosed; but still numbers and personal prowess were sufficient, for a long period, to enable barbarous nations to contend successfully with the civilized -- and, in the end, to overpower them -- as the pages of history testify. But a more advanced progress, with its numerous inventions and improvements, has furnished new and far more powerful and destructive implements of offence and defence, and greatly increased the intelligence and wealth, necessary to engage the skill and meet the increased expense required for their construction and application to purposes of war. The discovery of gunpowder, and the use of steam as an impelling force, and their application to military purposes, have for ever settled the question of ascendancy between civilized and barbarous communities, in favor of the former. Indeed, these, with other improvements, belonging to the present state of progress, have given to communities the most advanced, a superiority, where other circumstances are nearly equal, in favor of those whose governments have given the greatest impulse to development, progress, and improvement; that is, to those whose liberty is the largest and best secured. (47)

The prodigious material, technological, and military effects of economic liberty are phenomena and causes with which even many of those less inclined to careful observation, in the late twentieth century, are so familiar that they hardly need emphasis here. Over two centuries ago, Adam Smith, in his Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776), described how, through economic liberty for individuals and participation in an international division of labor, even small nations could

become economic giants and thereby better fend for themselves politically and militarily. Calhoun cites England and the United States as "striking examples, not only of the effects of liberty in increasing power, but of the more perfect adaptation of governments founded on the principle of the concurrent, or constitutional majority, to enlarge and secure liberty." (47-48)

But familiar as we have become in our age with the manner and processes by which liberty contributes greatly to the power of the community from a material point of view, what has been much overlooked, of late, is the other and more important avenue by which the ordered liberty of the individual redounds to the power of the community.

Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, men have been captivated by a rapid succession of technological advances touching nearly every aspect of their lives. As a result, individuals and nations have become increasingly pre-occupied with the material and technological sources of power. Witnessing the effects of this revolution, already well under way by 1850, Calhoun saw fit to call mankind back to a consideration of that other way in which liberty contributes to the power of the community. This other way consists of what Calhoun calls the moral causes of power, as distinguished from the physical. According to Calhoun,

. . . in estimating the power of a community, moral, as well as physical causes, must be taken into the calculation; and in estimating the effects of liberty on power, it must not be overlooked, that it is, in itself, an important agent in augmenting the force of moral, as well as of physical power. [Liberty] bestows on a people elevation, self-reliance, energy, and enthusiasm; and these combined, give to physical power a

vastly augmented and almost irresistible impetus.⁶⁵ (48)

But “elevation, self-reliance, energy, and enthusiasm” are not “the only elements of moral power.” Underscoring once again how liberty is an effect of a proper and wise application of the principles of the concurrent majority, Calhoun adds to this list of elements “harmony, unanimity, devotion to country, and a disposition to elevate to places of trust and power, those who are distinguished for wisdom.” (48) These additional elements,

. . . when the occasion requires it, will, without compulsion, and from their very nature, unite and put forth the entire force of the community in the most efficient manner, without hazard to its

⁶⁵ This formalistic and speculative account of power, found in the Disquisition, was a refinement of practical lessons learned over thirty years previously as a statesman. Leading the nation during the War of 1812 as a young “War Hawk” Congressman, Calhoun addressed the House of Representatives thus (25 February 1814): “He who, in estimating the strength of a people, looks only to their numbers and physical force, leaves out of the reckoning the most material elements of power – union and zeal. Without these, the former is inert matter. Without these, a free people is degraded to the miserable rabble of despotism; but with these, they are irresistible.”

institutions or its liberty.⁶⁶ (48)

So a community whose members possess the moral and intellectual virtues necessary to maintain a constitutional government and a free economic system will reap a decisive material advantage in the form of the greater wealth that freer markets naturally tend to produce, whereas a community whose members lack the requisite virtue and wisdom suffer a government whose power is absolute and which imposes severe restriction

⁶⁶ Certainly, there was some very considerable understanding of the role played by morale or the various moral causes of communal power, but these accounts simply lack the clarity, depth, and systematicity to be found in Calhoun's account of the subject in the Disquisition. Montesquieu, for example, observed how:

Athens was possessed of the same number of forces, when she triumphed so gloriously, and when with so much infamy she was enslaved. She had twenty thousand citizens, when she defended the Greeks against the Persians, when she contended for empire with Sparta, and invaded Sicily. She had twenty thousand when Demetrius Phalereus numbered them, as slaves are sold by the head in a market-place. When Phillip attempted to lord it over Greece, and appeared at the gates of Athens, she had even then lost nothing but time. We may see in Demosthenes how difficult it was to awake her: she dreaded Philip, not as the enemy of her liberty, but of her pleasures. This famous city, which had withstood so many defeats, and after having been so often destroyed, had as often risen out of her ashes, was overthrown of Chaeronea, and at one blow deprived of all hopes of resource. What does it avail her, that Philip sends back her prisoners, if he does not return her men? It was ever after as easy to triumph over the Athenian forces, as it had been difficult to subdue her virtue.

See Baron Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws in Great Political Thinkers: Plato to the Present, emphasis added, 465. Also, Calhoun himself contrasted the ancient understanding that liberty is a reward for virtue with the modern hedonistic view that liberty may be enjoyed without cost. In the House of Representatives on 31 January 1816, he said:

All free nations of antiquity entrusted the defence of the country, not to the dregs of society, but to the body of citizens; hence that heroism, which modern times may admire but cannot equal. I know that I utter truths unpleasant to those who wish to enjoy liberty without making the efforts necessary to secure it. Her favor is never won by the cowardly, the vicious or indolent. It has been said by some physicians that life is a forced state; the same may be said of freedom. It requires efforts; it presupposes mental and moral qualities of a high order to be generally diffused in the society where it exists.

on the economic actions of men, thereby impoverishing the entire community. And so the moral, intellectual, governmental, and economic analogues of moral virtue, wisdom, constitutional government, a free market, and wealth have as their natural counterparts, vice, ignorance, political absolutism, an unfree economy, and poverty.

Concluding his comparison of governments of the concurrent majority to governments of the numerical majority as regards the manner and extent to which they tend to develop and augment the power of the community, Calhoun merely reiterates how he, in the preceding pages, has established through explanation and argument the superiority of the former over the latter "in developing the elements of moral power." (48) Indeed, says Calhoun, "so vast is this superiority, that the one, by its operation, necessarily leads to their development, while the other as necessarily prevents it." (48) Finally, in a passage that serves as guide and resonates as a warning to all statesmen and citizens thenceforth, Calhoun observes how it is the physical and moral causes combined that "give to a community its maximum of power." (48) Consequently, "either of them, without the other, would leave [the community] comparatively feeble." (48)

Calhoun's speech about the power of the community, though an integral part of a timeless account of the human good presented in the Disquisition, had its inception, to some extent, as a response to certain political trends of the day which the author found troubling and, indeed, ominous. As we have just seen, in this account considerable rhetorical emphasis is given to the role of the moral causes of power, their superior importance to physical causes, and to the fact that men tend to "overlook" the

former and to become pre-occupied with the latter. Calhoun's rhetoric here is aimed at rebutting the assumptions about power of an ideal of government that has been espoused by men in nearly every age -- men utterly possessed by the vision of a grand and powerful state. The most distinguished and influential proponent of this view in America has been Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804), a founding father, and one of the authors, along with John Jay and James Madison, of the famous Federalist Papers.

Hamilton had envisioned an imposing and extensive democratic regime for Americans that would dominate the Western Hemisphere, and exist on at least equal diplomatic, commercial, and military terms with the great European powers of the day. His plan for a consolidated, centralized, and national organization of American government was, however, rejected by the ruling portion of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Nevertheless, as Calhoun shows in his Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States, the vision and spirit of the Hamiltonian ideal of government lived on in the minds of many influential Americans during the years following the Framing, making significant inroads into American political practice beginning almost immediately after the ratification of the federal Constitution. Calhoun, as well as many others, was alarmed by the possibility that these inroads of the nationalist view would lead eventually to the usurpation of the federal democratic republic which was established in 1788, and to the establishment of the sort of highly centralized imperial democracy of which Hamilton and others had long dreamed.

In Federalist No. 11, Hamilton wrote of "what this country can

become" with "a striking and animating kind" of government, a "vigorous national government", under which "the natural strength and resources of the country, directed to a common interest, would baffle all the combinations of European jealousy to restrain our growth." He called on Americans to "concur in erecting one great American system" so that Americans would be "superior to the control of all transatlantic forces or influence, and able to dictate the terms of the connection between the old and the new world⁶⁷." Confronted with such a grand and energetic American regime, Europe would cease to be, as she had been for so long, "mistress of the world."

Hamilton rightly perceived that for America to assume a place at the center of the world system of nations, based on the merits of sheer power and grandeur, the hitherto strong local and state authorities and loyalties of Americans must be effaced by a radical re-organization of American government. This re-organization would involve the erection of a single central governmental authority that would command the periphery and reserve for itself the loyalty of all Americans, citizens who would then subsist as bare individuals within one great and undifferentiated aggregate. Like Hobbes and Rousseau before him, Hamilton viewed the local allegiances of citizens not as the indispensable core and sinew of a liberty-loving republic,

⁶⁷ See Alexander Hamilton in The Federalist [1787-1788], no. 11:

Let Americans disdain to be the instruments of European greatness. Let the thirteen States, bound together in a strict and indissoluble Union, concur in erecting one great American system, superior to the control of all transatlantic force or influence, and able to dictate the terms of the connection between the old and the new world!

The Hamiltonian term "American system", would be taken up by Henry Clay and others in the 1820's, who would strip the term of its original meaning and then use it to designate euphemistically a comprehensive system of national economic planning involving an elaborate combination of protective tariffs. In the South Carolina Exposition (1828), Vice-President Calhoun would argue in systematic fashion that the then proposed "American system" was unconstitutional and tyrannical.

but as impediments to be overcome. Although Hobbes and Rousseau were theorists of the unitary state who, unlike Hamilton, said little or nothing about local political authorities within a federal system of governments, they viewed with suspicion and distrust any independent social authority aside from government itself. While Hobbes tended to see in such independent associations as churches, trade unions, and even families, a threat to the Sovereign's power, Rousseau tended to conflate such authorities with what he aptly called "partial associations" or factions, fearing that, by dividing the individual's allegiance, such associations would prevent a full and faithful instantiation of the dictates of the General Will.

But not every American of the period fell under the spell of Hamilton's vision of an Imperial American State. In fact, as was suggested earlier, in noting the rejection by the Constitutional Convention of Hamilton's plan, an overwhelming majority of Americans then supported a federal or confederal, and not a national, organization of government. Among the most brilliant and vocal of the opponents of Hamiltonian centralization and consolidation was the Virginian Patrick Henry (1736-1799). As an Anti-Federalist, Henry opposed not only Hamilton's imperial ideal, but the essentially federal system of government proposed by the Convention as well. To Henry and other Anti-Federalists, the proposed constitution lacked the necessary guarantees against a usurpation by the general or federal government of the Union of powers reserved by the individual States. Before the Virginia ratifying convention, Henry eloquently and angrily repudiated the Hamiltonian doctrine:

the American spirit has fled from hence; it has gone to regions where it has never been expected; it has gone to the people of France, in search of splendid government, a strong, energetic government. Shall we

imitate the example of those nations who have gone from a simple to a splendid government? Are those nations more worthy of our imitation? What can make an adequate satisfaction to them for the loss they have suffered in attaining such a government, for the loss of their liberty? If we admit this consolidated government, it will be because we like a great, splendid one. Some way or other we must be a great and mighty empire; we must have an army, and a navy, and a number of things. When the American spirit was in its youth, the language of Americans was different; liberty, sir, was then the primary object.⁶⁸

Inheriting the view and sentiments of Patrick Henry through his own Anti-Federalist father, Patrick Calhoun⁶⁹, John C. Calhoun would spend the better part of his statesmanly career defending the American states from the

⁶⁸ See The Debate of the State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution, As Recommended by the General Convention at Philadelphia in 1787, ed. J. Elliot (Philadelphia, 1866), III, 53.

⁶⁹ See Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun, vol. I "Nationalist, 1782-1828" (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1944), 23-24.

onslaught of the Hamiltonian spirit of splendid government.⁷⁰ According to Calhoun, Hamilton and the lovers of splendid government in every age err by losing sight of the ends for which society and government are ordained; the ends of government being the protection and perfection of society, and those of society, the protection and perfection of the race. Indeed, Calhoun viewed the quest for splendid government as a deviation from and betrayal of these Divinely ordained ends, whereas the pursuit and maintenance of simple or moderate rule -- of what Jefferson aptly called a "wise and frugal government" -- is obedience to God and a pious acknowledgement of Divine

⁷⁰ But, beginning in the latter half of Calhoun's life, the Hamiltonian spirit was on the ascendency in America. This spirit received additional impetus during the war of conquest against Mexico (1846-1848), which Calhoun opposed. Thus, during those years he could report: "Our people have undergone a great change. Their inclination is for conquest & empire, regardless of their institutions & liberty; or, rather, they think they hold their liberty by a divine tenure, which no imprudence, or folly on their part, can defeat." (To Anna Maria Calhoun Clemson, 26 December 1847)

Addressing the Senate concerning the propriety and wisdom of the war on Mexico, Calhoun said:

You know the American constitution too well, -- you have looked into history, and are too well acquainted with the fatal effects which large provincial possessions have ever had on the institutions of free states, -- to need any proof to satisfy you how hostile it would be to the institutions of this country, to hold Mexico as a subject province. There is not an example on record of any free state holding a province of the same extent and population, without disastrous consequences. (4 January 1848)

A century earlier, David Hume had suggested that, in time perhaps, more sophisticated constitutional governments would include, as a part of their internal structure or organism, some enforceable provision outlawing conquests. Hume wrote:

... extensive conquests, when pursued, must be the ruin of every free government; and of the more perfect governments sooner than of the imperfect; because of the very advantages which the former possess above the latter. And though such a state ought to establish a fundamental law against conquests; yet republics have ambition as well as individuals, and present interest makes men forgetful of their posterity.

See David Hume, "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth" in Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1987), 529.

intent.⁷¹

Evidence of this Divine intent may be found in Calhoun's account of power; specifically, in the fact that, all other circumstances being equal between two communities, the one with moderate government will tend to prevail over another with splendid government, should conflict between the two parties ensue, because the ordered liberty that characterizes moderate government lends a decisive advantage in the form of superior physical and moral power. The existence and decisive nature of this advantage in physical⁷² and moral power leads men to adopt moderate government first out of concern for self-preservation; and only later do they discover perhaps its Divine character and its fuller significance for human improvement and progress.⁷³ While Hamilton saw how a base form of power may be had through political centralization and consolidation, Calhoun saw how a morally and physically superior form of power may be attained through the

⁷¹ Here, in the struggle between the Jeffersonians and the Hamiltonians, we have a reenactment in America of the age-old struggle characterized by Plato in Republic, Bk. II, 372a-373d, between the true or healthy city, on the one hand, and the luxurious and feverish city, on the other hand. An extremely popular misreading of the Republic mistakes the feverish city, with its professional guardians, for Plato's highest political ideal; but see 372d, where Socrates himself embraces the healthy city, while Glaucon calls it "a city of sows", because of its lack of luxury, ornament, and spice, and urges Socrates to give an account of the "feverish" or luxurious city.

⁷² The Hand of Providence may also be seen in the superior physical or material power produced by freer markets as compared with ones more restricted. The protection of private property and freedom of exchange by moderate government tends to give its community a decided physical and moral advantage over communities where the economy is more heavily restricted, or where liberty is less extensive or less well secured.

⁷³ And so what Aristotle said is true of all governments -- namely, that they have their origin in the desire of humans to survive, and their persistence, in this desire combined with the desire for improvement -- has an analogue in what I have just described as the origin and persistence of moderate government or commonwealth. Thus in the Politics we read, "When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life."

See Politics, Bk. I, 1252b28-30, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1129.

preservation of ordered liberty. What Calhoun understood but what the exponents and idolators of splendid government in every age fail to see, is that the fundamental political choice for mankind then is not between liberty and power, but between liberty and just power, on the one hand, and slavery and distempered government on the other hand. In the final section of the *Disquisition* (67-78), Calhoun underscores once again the ideal of constitutional government organized on the principle of concurrent majority. There he describes the effects of the Roman and British constitutions, with whose celebration the *Disquisition* concludes. Such governments tend to

. . . unite and harmonize conflicting interests -- to strengthen attachments to the whole community, and to moderate that to the respective orders or classes; to rally all, in the hour of danger, around the standard of their country; to elevate the feeling of nationality, and to develop power, moral and physical, to an extraordinary extent. (76)

Also, Calhoun anticipated the popular objection that constitutional governments must necessarily suffer disadvantage when compared with absolute governments as regards the marshalling and projection of a community's power, due to the divisions of power endemic to the former. In the *Discourse*, arguing for a restoration of the federal character of the American Union, he wrote:

Instead of weakening . . . government by counteracting its tendencies [to abuse and oppression], and restricting it to its proper sphere, [the negative or veto powers] would render it far more powerful. A strong government, instead of being weakened, is greatly strengthened, by a correspondingly strong negative. It may lose something in promptitude of action, in calling out the physical force of the country, but would gain vastly in moral power. The security it would afford to all the different parts and interests of the country -- the assurance that the powers confided to it, would not be abused -- and the harmony and unanimity resulting from the conviction that no one section or interest could oppress another, would, in an emergency, put the whole resources of the Union, moral and physical, at the disposal of the

government – and give it a strength which never could be acquired by the enlargement of its powers beyond the limits assigned to it. It is, indeed, only by such confidence and unanimity, that a government can, with certainty, breast the billows and ride through the storms which the vessel of State must often encounter in its progress. The stronger the pressure of the steam, if the boiler be but proportionally strong, the more securely the bark buffets the wave, and defies the tempest.⁷⁴

So, one may ask: what kinds of ships of state are constitutional and absolute governments respectively? For the structures of all governments, like the designs of ships, are not all alike. And the ship of state, where the government is constitutional, is a steamship which can, “with certainty, breast the billows and ride through the storms.” Because of the prodigious power generated and harnessed through its combination of opposing forces - - government (positive) and constitution (negative) respectively -- constitutional government subsists as an innovative design that must necessarily outstrip other, more primitive ships of state. Swifter, safer, and more powerful, the constitutional steamship can never find its match amongst those now obsolete vessels of absolutism that are driven merely by wind, sail, or rowing arm. Still, for various reasons, the different communities which together comprehend the species have not been equally prompt in recognizing this point.

As Calhoun and others understood, an irretrievably foolish and vainglorious people will spare no expense to have a government suited to them, a magnificent and splendid one, just as a fop will wear nothing but the

⁷⁴ See the Discourse in Union and Liberty, 218-219.

finery that flatters most, even if it means his financial ruin.⁷⁵ In fact, the costs of splendid government are too seldom considered. As we have seen, the costs of such political grandeur are ordered liberty, and therefore moral power -- and hence, possibly, political independence and even the survival of the community itself. In addition, the extravagance and general immoderacy which characterizes such governments tend ultimately to reduce even a people once free and prosperous to penury, to abject dependence on government itself, and to enslavement under a despot.

To conclude: At the beginning of this chapter, I said that certain political goods -- virtue, unity, and strength of community -- share in common their fundamental causes, as do their corresponding political evils -- vice, division, and weakness. Virtue, unity, and strength reach the highest levels of actualization of which they are susceptible when the dual-principle of our nature is allowed to develop within the framework of a governmental structure suited to a community where each significant interest or portion within that community enjoys the power of self-protection. On the other hand, vice, division, and weakness are suffered to develop to the most ominous and destructive proportions of which they are susceptible when the dual-principle is allowed to tragically misdevelop within the framework of a governmental structure where some one interest or portion of the

⁷⁵ And so there is such a thing as political aesthetics, as it were, where the people or the ruling portion of a community insist on having a government suited to their taste, whether that taste be more modest or more extravagant, and crude or more refined. In this way, we can surmise a great deal about the substance and character of a people by observing the form of governance they either suffer or actively and enthusiastically uphold.

Thoreau had some sense of this. Speaking critically of many of his fellow Americans, he declared: ". . . the people must have some complicated machinery or other, and hear its din, to satisfy that idea of government which they have." See "Civil Disobedience" in The Portable Thoreau, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 110.

community possesses exclusive control of the powers of government, and exercises those powers to the prejudice of the remaining, powerless portion, and thereby, to the detriment of the entire community. Whether a community is strong or weak depends therefore on the manner in which its various portions or interests are organized in relation to the powers of government. So the structure of government, and the fitness or unfitness of a particular governmental structure for that community to which it has been assigned -- because of their influence on the development of the understanding and sentiments of individuals -- determine in large part the material condition and moral character of the community. By so doing, governmental structure also determines in large part the chances of the community for survival and flourishing.

CHAPTER IX

THE CONCURRENT MAJORITY

AND

THE PROJECT OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

“From law arises security: From security curiosity: And from curiosity knowledge.”

David Hume, *“On the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences”*

In this final chapter, I conclude my examination of Calhoun's account of the developmental fate of the dual-principle by exploring the influence of the different kinds of governmental structure -- absolute and constitutional -- on inquiry into the human good. For the good as it pertains both directly and indirectly to man is what is meant by the human good, and it is the knowledge of that good which we call self-knowledge. Hence self-knowledge refers both to the good of the individual as individual and to the good of the human community considered as a whole.

But the peculiarly human project of attaining self-knowledge is one which has as both its source and its definition a fundamental problem stemming directly from the human condition. This problem was framed in a very general way by Rousseau, when he said: "We always want what is good for us, but we don't always see what it is¹." So each person is confronted with a knowledge problem, as it were, concerning his own good, or his true interest; and so too is every community. This fact is a central feature of the human condition, and from it we may infer that inquiry into the good naturally proceeds at several different levels, including the level of the individual, of the family, and of the general community.

As we shall see, according to Calhoun, the governmental system of the concurrent majority tends to foster and to perpetuate inquiry into the good at each of these levels. Put another way: analogous to the manner in which the system of the concurrent majority is conducive to unity, moral virtue, and communal power, this system of government also cultivates and preserves intellectual virtue, including the disposition to inquiry itself. In this chapter,

¹ See Rousseau, *Social Contract* in *The Basic Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 155.

I shall review Calhoun's account of the influence of various governmental arrangements on such inquiry; and by such review, I shall reveal, in particular, how the developmental fate of the dual-principle, or of the first principle of political science, is related to successful or unsuccessful inquiry into the good.

Calhoun did not give a philosophical speech about self-knowledge per se. Unlike his speeches on the principal causes of moral virtue, unity, and communal strength, there is no conceptual isolation of this issue in his works, and therefore no treatment of the issue as a distinct subject demanding explicit notice or emphasis.² Consequently, his account of the influence of governmental structure on human inquiry and understanding must be sifted from discussions organized around different but related topics.³ Nevertheless, as we shall see below, essential elements of a general philosophical speech about inquiry into the good are present in his work. In fact, as we amplify these elements, and determine their proper relations one to another, we can see such a speech emerging. Indeed, as we shall see presently, what actually emerges and presents itself, as it were, through such

² It is certainly important and interesting to consider why a given thinker gives emphasis to one topic and not to another. The gamut of political scientific and philosophic topics is so extensive that emphasis on some subjects to the neglect of others is inevitable. Calhoun's emphasis on the conditions necessary for communal unity and moral virtue in citizenry and leaders reflects his view that the primary aim of government is the protection of society, while his failure to treat in more explicit fashion the topic of this chapter reflects perhaps his association of the project of attaining more and more self-knowledge with the second aim of government, the improvement or "perfection" of society, and with the second aim of society, the perfection of the race. The rationale for this sort of prioritizing is suggested, for example, by Aristotle in the Politics, where he says that political society arises from mutual dependence for the sake of material well-being and safety, but persists for the sake of improvement, or eudaimonia.

³ The topics covered in this response include: how trial by jury works; why trial by jury based on the system of numerical majority would not work; the necessity at work in trial by jury as compared with the necessity underlying the operation of government; and other topics subsidiary to these.

amplification is a speculative treatment of the issue of inquiry and self-knowledge that is important, and in some respects perhaps, quite original.

Before surveying and assessing the elements of this speech in Calhoun, however, let us gain a clearer conception of what we have called the project of self-knowledge by adverting to its origin and history as an object of speculation within the Western philosophical tradition.

The project of self-knowledge has been regarded by some philosophers, most notably Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, as both a practical concern of the greatest importance and as the fundamental speculative problem at the center of all philosophizing.⁴ In the early eighteenth century, the Italian philosopher Vico conjectured on the historical origin of this project. While so doing, Vico uncovered and revealed the various dimensions of the project. In his New Science (1744), Vico describes how the great Athenian law-giver Solon was made author of the expression Gnothi seauton ("Know thyself"). According to Vico:

Solon must have been a sage of vulgar wisdom, party leader of the plebs in the first times of the aristocratic commonwealth at Athens. This fact was indeed preserved by Greek history where it narrates that at first Athens was held by the optimates. In this work we shall show that such was universally the case in all the heroic commonwealths. The heroes or nobles, by a certain nature of theirs which they believed to be of divine origin, were led to say that the gods belonged to them, and consequently that the auspices of the gods were theirs also. By means of the auspices they kept within their orders all the public and private institutions of the heroic cities. To the plebeians, whom they believed to be of bestial origin and consequently men without gods and hence without auspices, they conceded only the uses of natural liberty. . . . Solon, however, had admonished the plebeians to reflect upon themselves and to realize that they were of like human nature with

⁴See, for example, Plato, Socrates' Defense, especially 38a. And for a recent defense of the Socratic humanistic conception of philosophy and the project of self-knowledge, see Donald Phillip Verene, Philosophy and the Return to Self-knowledge (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997).

the nobles and should therefore be made equal with them in civil rights – unless, indeed, Solon was [a poetic character for] the Athenian plebeians themselves, considered under this aspect [of knowing themselves and demanding their rights].⁵

Having noted how Solon was transformed by the Athenian people from an individual into a poetic character symbolizing the Athenian plebeians and their successful resistance to noble dominion, Vico, moving forward in history and west-ward across the Adriatic, observes how not only the Athenians, but the Romans too, “must also have had such a Solon among them”:

For the plebeians in the heroic struggles with the nobles, as ancient Roman history openly tells us, kept saying that the fathers of whom Romulus composed the Senate (and from whom these patricians were descended) non esse caelo demissos, “had not come down from heaven”; that is, that Jove was equally [just] to all. This is the civil history of the expression Iupiter omnibus aequus, into which the learned later read the tenet that all minds are equal and that the differences they take on arise from differences in the organization of their bodies and in their civil education. By this reflection the Roman plebeians began to achieve equality with the patricians in civil liberty, until they entirely changed the Roman commonwealth from an aristocratic to a popular form.⁶

So Vico saw how a spirit akin to Solon’s, but one native to Italy, the spirit of Romulus⁷⁸, working among the Romans, roused the plebeians to resist patrician abuse and oppression by first reflecting on the injunction “Know thyself.” In Athens, as in Rome, this reflection bore profound practical results:

⁵ Giambattista Vico, The New Science of Giambattista Vico, tr. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 133.

⁶ Ibid, 133.

⁷ Ibid, 134.

⁸ Significantly, in the final section of the Disquisition (67-78), Calhoun reviews the developments and events by which the principle of concurrent majority was adopted by the Romans, in the establishment of the Republic.

. . . because from this reflection there sprang up at Athens all the institutions and laws that shape a democratic commonwealth, and because of the first peoples' habit of thinking in poetic characters, these institutions and laws were attributed by the Athenians to Solon, just as, by the Egyptians, all inventions useful to human civil life were attributed to Thrice-great Hermes.⁹

But the spirit of inquiry and of skillful and courageous self-assertion which the Athenians called "Solon" and the Romans called "Romulus" could not be confined to Athens and Rome. Indeed, Vico, in the New Science, undertakes to demonstrate, "both by reasons and by authority", that "the plebeians of the peoples universally, beginning with Solon's reflection, changed the commonwealths from aristocratic to popular."¹⁰ After the successful resistance of the Athenian plebeians and the establishment of a democratic commonwealth, says Vico, "the celebrated saying, 'Know thyself,' which, because of the great civic utility it had had for the Athenian people, was inscribed in all the public places of the city."¹¹

Having described how the idea of self-knowledge originated in civil struggle, Vico goes on to remark how "Later the learned preferred to regard it [the saying, 'Know thyself'] as having been intended for what in fact it is, a great counsel respecting metaphysical and moral things."¹² In the New Science, as we have just seen, Vico reminds us that the idea of self-knowledge has a public and civic origin, and that the concept is to be understood not merely by the individual as a metaphysical and moral counsel but by the

⁹ Vico, The New Science, 134.

¹⁰ Vico, The New Science, 133-134, emphasis added. It should be noted that Vico is not saying that democratic resistance to aristocracy is always successful. Instead, he is saying that men are, by their nature, susceptible of being roused to such resistance and are capable, at least over the course of several generations, of achieving a level of political actualization or maturity whereby they can successfully govern themselves as a people.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 134.

¹² *Ibid*, 134.

citizen or participant in a political order as a civic doctrine. The Athenians acknowledged and, indeed, underscored for posterity the naturally close and intimate relations between the moral, the metaphysical, and the civic dimensions of the project of self-knowledge when they reputed Solon the law-giver as “a sage in esoteric wisdom” and made him “prince of the Seven Sages of Greece.”¹³

The several dimensions of this project, reflected in a full-blooded and manifold idea (and ideal) of self-knowledge, would be underscored in Plato’s Apology, for example, where Socrates tells his courtroom audience that he could never quit philosophizing while living, since a human life without (philosophical) self-examination would not be worth living.¹⁴ There also, Socrates is portrayed as the gadfly that harasses and stings the otherwise lazy and plodding horse (the Athenian people), urging them on to self-improvement through critical inquiry and self-examination.¹⁵ Clearly, Socrates’ aim is to produce not only better persons but also better citizens – men of more advanced understanding and feeling, fit for taking on more duties and responsibilities, both private and public.¹⁶

Having reviewed, with the assistance of Vico, the historical origin of the project of self-knowledge, and having therewith examined the various

¹³ Ibid, 134.

¹⁴ Plato, Apology, 38a: “. . . to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and . . . life without this sort of examination is not worth living.”

¹⁵ Ibid, 30e-31a.

¹⁶ Since Plato, the project and idea of self-knowledge have undergone many alterations and reformulations. For evidence of this change, see, for example, David L. Norton, Personal Destinies: A Philosophy of Ethical Individualism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). Norton reviews the “eudaimonisms” of British Absolute Idealism, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre.

dimensions of this project, we are prepared now -- with a somewhat clearer conception of the project in hand -- to review that speech about the nature and attainment of self-knowledge that we have found in the works of Calhoun.

In Chapters VII and VIII, we examined Calhoun's account of a number of "the many and striking advantages" of the concurrent or constitutional majority over the numerical or absolute majority. Chapter IX will round out this subsection of the present work by considering yet another of these "striking advantages" of constitutional over absolute government, an advantage regarding the tendency of constitutional government to promote inquiry into and understanding of the good of individuals and communities, and the tendency of absolute government to retard and inhibit such inquiry and understanding.

In the Disquisition, the general discursive context within which Calhoun begins his discussion of the influence of governmental structure on inquiry into the good is again, that systematic comparison of absolute and constitutional forms of government which forms the middle portion of the Disquisition.¹⁷ Having concluded his discussion of the moral and physical causes of communal power, Calhoun considers two objections that may be raised against the system of concurrent majority. (48) The first objection is that, as compared with their corresponding absolute forms, constitutional governments are difficult to construct; and this objection is addressed by Calhoun in a series of discussions (10-28) which our present purpose does not

¹⁷ This comparison falls between the introductory discussions of the origin, nature, and ends of society, government, and constitution, and the concrete historical examples of the system of concurrent majority, the Roman Republic and British Constitution, which together form the final portion of the Disquisition.

oblige us to review. Instead, it is Calhoun's response to a second common objection to the system of concurrent majority which concerns us here. (48) This second objection states that this governmental system would be "impracticable to obtain the concurrence of conflicting interests", where these interests were "numerous and diversified", or, "if not, that the process for this purpose, would be too tardy to meet, with sufficient promptness, the many and dangerous emergencies, to which all communities are exposed." (48-49) But while undertaking to give this objection the "fuller notice" it "deserves" and has not "yet received" (48-53, and especially 49), Calhoun also suggests how one might construct a full-blown philosophical speech on the influence of governmental structure on human inquiry and understanding.

After first acknowledging the plausibility of this objection, Calhoun proceeds to explain how the perspective that gives rise to it is narrow, and how the objection itself, formed on but a partial view, is therefore problematic. Says Calhoun:

The diversity of opinion is usually so great, on almost all questions of policy, that it is not surprising, on a slight view of the subject, it should be thought impracticable to bring the various conflicting interests of a community to unite on any one line of policy -- or, that a government, founded on such a principle, would be too slow in its movements and too weak in its foundation to succeed in practice. But, plausible as it may seem at the first glance, a more deliberate view will show, that this opinion is erroneous. (49)

And so, what seems to some observers as an utterly impractical

contrivance¹⁸, and to others, a dangerously slow and cumbersome device, appears so, Calhoun says, only on a partial and superficial view of the circumstances with regard to which men must govern themselves. A deeper and fuller view reveals, however, not only the eminent workability of the system of concurrent majority, but also that system's comparative advantages over all other governmental forms. Calhoun shows this by first observing how, "when there is no urgent necessity, it is difficult to bring those who differ, to agree on any one line of action", since "Each will naturally insist on taking the course he may think best -- and, from pride of opinion, will be unwilling to yield to others." (49) This acknowledgement of the weight or influence of "diversity of opinion" combined with "pride of opinion", as it turns out, lends greater plausibility and authority to Calhoun's own view, especially as he proceeds to explain how "the case is different when there is an urgent necessity" present. For when an urgent necessity is indeed present, the various interests of the community are compelled by a force of circumstances all but irresistible, to "unite on some common course of action, as reason and experience both prove." (49) That such urgent necessity possesses such prodigious compulsory power, and that its influence over men is so great as to be all but irresistible, "reason and experience both prove", as Calhoun proceeds to show, first by means of analysis, and later, by the use of

¹⁸ See, for example, Darryl Baskin, "The Pluralist Vision of John C. Calhoun" in *Polity* 2 (Fall 1969): 49-65; and Louis Hartz, "The Constitution: Calhoun and Fitzhugh" in *John C. Calhoun: A Profile*, ed. John L. Thomas (New York: Hill & Wang, 1968), 164-170. But compare John Fischer, "Unwritten Rules of American Politics" in *Harper's Magazine* 197 (November 1948): 27-36; Peter F. Drucker, "A Key to American Politics: Calhoun's Pluralism" in *Review of Politics* 10 (October 1948): 412-426; and Wilhelm Ropke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950).

examples.¹⁹ Thus:

When something must be done -- and when it can be done only by the united consent of all -- the necessity of the case will force to a compromise -- be the cause of that necessity what it may. On all questions of acting, necessity, where it exists, is the overruling motive; and where, in such cases, compromise among the parties is an indispensable condition of acting, it exerts an overruling influence in predisposing them to acquiesce in some one opinion or course of action. Experience furnishes many examples in confirmation of this important truth. (49)

But before citing actual historical examples in order to illustrate how the system of concurrent majority works constantly to predispose the various interests of the community to agree, Calhoun examines that instance of the practical operation of the concurrent majority with which men are "most familiar", namely -- trial by jury. Thus trial by jury, where an unanimous agreement on the part of jurors is required to reach a verdict, is a legal or jurisprudential analogue of the political system of constitutional government. In other words, trial by jury is a system of concurrent majority writ small, because there,

. . . twelve individuals, selected without discrimination, must unanimously concur in opinion -- under the obligations of an oath to find a true verdict, according to law and evidence; and this, too, not unfrequently under such great difficulty and doubt, that the ablest and most experienced judges and advocates differ in opinion, after careful examination. And yet, as impracticable as this mode of trial would seem to a superficial observer, it is found, in practice, not only to succeed, but to be the safest, the wisest and the best that human ingenuity has ever devised. When closely investigated, the cause will

¹⁹ Recall again the historical examples of concurrent majority governments which Calhoun discusses. On pp. 54-55 of the Disquisition, Poland of the Diet and the Iroquois Confederacy of North America are proffered as examples of the successful operation of the concurrent majority. At the end of the Disquisition, the examples of the British Constitution and the Roman Republic are presented. In his Discourse, to which, as we said in Chapter III, the Disquisition serves as introduction, the examples of the United States and the Constitution of South Carolina are proffered. And finally, in his "Speech on the Force Bill" (1833), Calhoun adverts to the Greek Confederacy against the Persians, and to the Twelve Tribes of Israel, as examples of the implementation of the principle of concurrence (444-445).

be found in the necessity, under which the jury is placed, to agree unanimously, in order to find a verdict. The necessity acts as the predisposing cause of concurrence in some common opinion; and with such efficacy, that a jury rarely fails to find a verdict.²⁰ Under its potent influence, the jurors take their seats with the disposition to give a fair and impartial hearing to the arguments on both sides -- meet together in the jury-room -- not as disputants, but calmly to hear the opinions of each other, and to compare and weigh the arguments on which they are founded -- and, finally, to adopt that which, on the whole, is thought to be true. Under the influence of this disposition to harmonize, one after another falls into the same opinion, until unanimity is obtained. Hence its practicability -- and hence, also, its peculiar excellence. Nothing, indeed, can be more favorable to the success of truth and justice, than this predisposing influence caused by the necessity of being unanimous. It is so much so, as to compensate for the defect of legal knowledge, and a high degree of intelligence on the part of those who usually compose juries. (49-50)

Trial by jury, then, brings to bear the principle of the concurrent majority for the sake of insuring, in so far as this is possible, that, by virtue of the very mode of trial, a true verdict will be reached on the basis of law and evidence. Citing the overwhelming and as yet unsurpassed success of this legal or judicial convention in promoting truth and justice, Calhoun contrasts the practicality and peculiar excellence of this mode of trial, based on the concurrent majority, to another, hypothetical one, in which the system of numerical majority is employed.

If the necessity of unanimity were dispensed with, and the finding of a jury made to depend on a bare majority, jury trial, instead of being one of the greatest improvements in the judicial department of government, would be one of the greatest evils that could be inflicted

²⁰ In trial by jury, of course, "opposing counsel try to enhance the likelihood of a fair hearing by rejecting potential jurors who have an interest in the trial's outcome", and this effort to promote fairness has the effect of offsetting, to some degree, the fact that "a jury's failure to find a verdict rarely entails dire consequences for the jurymen." And so constitutional interests tend to be more interested than jurymen of a petit jury; but this greater interest does not tend to interfere with justice or the continuation of government since the compulsion stemming from the fear of anarchy is proportional greater than the corresponding pressure on a jury due to whatever discomfiture is caused by a hung jury. But cf. Ralph Lerner, "Calhoun's New Science of Politics" in John C. Calhoun: A Profile, 215, fn. 39, from which I have just quoted.

on the community. It would be, in such case, the conduit through which all the factious feelings of the day would enter and contaminate justice at its source. (50)

The particular mode or procedure by which a trial is conducted is then far from being a matter of indifference, in so far as this mode directly determines the fate of inquiry into the motives and actions of the accused as these appertain to his guilt or innocence. But let us consider more closely this issue of what I have called the fate of inquiry. For here we are considering the fate of inquiry by a jury into the guilt or innocence of the accused; and the jurors' knowledge of the guilt or innocence of the accused, if attained, constitutes a part of that knowledge of the good of both the accused and of the general society.

While the system of concurrence tends to compel the jurors, through the need to reach unanimity of opinion, to push further into the matter of the guilt or innocence of the accused, requiring of them thereby a more diligent and thorough investigation of the evidence and law which appertain to the case; a mode of trial based on the principle of the numerical majority, in contrast, tends, by the very nature of its operation, to cut short such inquiry, thereby allowing personal feeling and prejudice, rather than a careful regard for evidence and law, to determine the outcome. Since, in the numerical system, only a bare majority would be required to hand down a verdict, jurors will be encouraged, by the very structure of the system, to act as disputants for one side or the other, instead of calmly reviewing together the facts of the case. Where there arises a minority opinion, the major will have no reason, aside from some personal regard for truth and justice on the part of its members, to register or to come to terms with this opposing opinion.

Therefore, since a simple numerical majority would be sufficient, by itself, to determine the verdict and thus carry the day, inquiry would tend to come to a halt as soon as some such majority is reached; an advent which, in every case but those rare occasions where the vote is evenly split, must come so soon as to pre-empt inquiry altogether. And even in those rare instances where, prior to the formation of a bare majority, inquiry is pursued for a time, the opposing jurists would find that their natural human susceptibility to intellectual sloth and moral laxity are encouraged, under this numerical system, by their knowledge that one vote only is needed to determine a verdict and to free themselves, in the most rapid and expeditious fashion, from the intellectual, emotional, and even physical demands of their judicial labours. Furthermore, the circumstance of needing but one vote, instead of being compelled to reach unanimity, would naturally lead both sides to direct all their labors toward persuading that one juror on the other side most susceptible to being turned from his current contrary opinion to agreement. For this reason, inquiry into law and evidence will proceed only far enough to convince this least opposed juror, because, once a bare majority is secured, there is no compulsion to pursue the inquiry further so as to convince the other, more determined opponents among the jurors.

The fate of inquiry into the guilt or innocence of an accused party, and the final success or failure of a jury to reach a true verdict based on law and evidence, are determined then, to a very great extent, by the particular nature of the mode of trial, and the influence of this judicial structure in determining the feelings and dispositions of jurors. As it turns out, therefore, it is the mode or structure of trial by jury itself, whether it be

organized on the numerical system, the concurrent system, or some other, which tends to determine, more than any other factor, the fate of inquiry in trials and the particular verdicts rendered by juries. In addition, as Calhoun points out, trial by jury based on the principle of concurrent majority constitutes “one of the greatest improvements in the judicial department of government” in part because it compensates for “the defect of legal knowledge, and [the absence of] a high degree of intelligence on the part of those who usually compose juries.”²¹ (50) Analogously, only a moment’s reflection will confirm that no such compensation for deficiencies of legal knowledge and native intelligence would be forthcoming from a mode of trial based on the numerical principle. There, no palliative is to be had for ignorance of the law and the greater susceptibility to error of modest or humble intellects. On the other hand, such a palliative is an essential feature of the mode of trial based on the principle of concurrence, where there is, as we have seen, a requirement of unanimity that brings improvement of disposition and understanding,

As it turns out, the various strengths of trial by jury, based as it is on the concurrent principle, and the various deficiencies that may be rightly attributed to a hypothetical mode of trial by jury based on the numerical principle, all have their analogues in the comparison between constitutional and absolute government. We shall examine these analogues between trial by jury and constitutional government, points only intimated by Calhoun in the Disquisition (50-51), after we have presented and examined his account of how, in a well-organized government founded on the principle of the

²¹ Here, there is a defect or omission in the Union and Liberty edition of the Disquisition, as I have indicated with brackets.

concurrent majority, necessity compels the various interests or portions of the community to agree.

Having examined the underlying forces at work in trial by jury, the "most familiar" example of the system of concurrent majority, Calhoun proceeds to compare these forces to those at work within an entire governmental system organized on the principle of concurrent majority. The requirement of unanimity which constitutes the central feature of trial by jury is analogous to but different in kind from the necessity for unanimity among interests or portions within a government based on the principle of concurrent majority. Underscoring this analogy and the main difference between these two forms of necessity, Calhoun says,

The necessity for unanimity, in order to keep the government in motion, would be far more urgent, and would act under circumstances still more favorable to secure it. It would be superfluous, after what has been stated ²², to add to other reasons in order to show that no necessity, physical or moral, can be more imperious than that of government. It is so much so that, to suspend its action altogether, even for an inconsiderable period, would subject the community to convulsions and anarchy. But in governments of the concurrent majority such fatal consequences can only be avoided by the unanimous concurrence or acquiescence of the various portions of the community. Such is the imperious character of the necessity which impels to compromise under governments of this description. (50-51)

Calhoun next proceeds to compare the force of the necessity for unanimity in trial by jury to the corresponding force of the necessity for unanimity at work in governmental systems of the concurrent majority. The force or "influence" of the latter, governmental form of necessity, Calhoun observes, is "overpowering", and, "to have a just conception" of the nature

²² Recall Calhoun's discussion of anarchy as the greatest political evil as recounted in Chapter IV.

and extent of this influence, “the circumstances under which it would act must be taken into consideration” (51):

These [circumstances] will be found, on comparison, much more favorable than those under which juries act. In the latter case there is nothing besides the necessity of unanimity in finding a verdict, and the inconvenience to which they might be subjected in the event of division, to induce juries to agree, except the love of truth and justice, which, when not counteracted by some improper motive or bias, more or less influences all, not excepting the most depraved. In the case of governments of the concurrent majority, there is, besides these, the love of country, than which, if not counteracted by the unequal and oppressive action of government, or other causes, few motives exert a greater sway. [The love of country] comprehends, indeed, within itself, a large portion both of our individual and social feelings; and, hence, its almost boundless control when left free to act. But the government of the concurrent majority leaves it free, by preventing abuse and oppression, and, with them, the whole train of feelings and passions which lead to discord and conflict between different portions of the community. Impelled by the imperious necessity of preventing the suspension of the action of government, with the fatal consequences to which it would lead, and by the strong additional impulse derived from an ardent love of country, each portion would regard the sacrifice it might have to make by yielding its peculiar interest to secure the common interest and safety of all, including its own, as nothing compared to the evils that would be inflicted on all, including its own, by pertinaciously adhering to a different line of action. (51)

According to Calhoun, when all these things are considered, the wonder is not, as a superficial critic might conclude²³, that the interests or portions of the community, placed under such a governmental system, should compromise: Instead, the wonder, says Calhoun, would be if these interests should not compromise. This is so because “the motives for concurring” are “so powerful”, while “those opposed to it” are “so weak.” (51) Before proceeding with our explication of Calhoun’s account of the

²³ See, for example, Ralph Lerner, “Calhoun’s New Science of Politics” in John C. Calhoun: A Profile, 215: “. . . Calhoun was convinced – if not convincing – that the impulse to compromise would be well-nigh irresistible.”

impulse of the various interests of the community, under the concurrent system, to compromise, let us pause to review, as we promised earlier, the various features of the analogue Calhoun has suggested between trial by jury and the governmental system of the concurrent majority.

The principle of concurrent majority, being internal to both the judicial convention (trial by jury) and the general governmental convention (the government of the concurrent or constitutional majority) ensures that these two human artifices give rise to effects that are to some degree parallel to one another or analogous, while what makes their corresponding effects analogous rather than identical to one another is the fact that the respective ends of these conventions differ.

The ultimate aim of trial by jury is justice, whereas the corresponding ultimate aim of constitutional government is the protection and perfection of society. The prior and more immediate aim of both conventions is knowledge, albeit knowledge of different sorts. The immediate aim of the jury is a true verdict, and knowledge of the guilt or innocence of the accused, whereas the knowledge that is the immediate aim of the interests of the governmental system in question is knowledge of the public or common good. But while trial by jury and constitutional government differ as regards their ultimate aims, and are similar only in a general way as regards their immediate aims, it is important not to become distracted by these differences or dissimilarities and to overlook thereby a commonly shared feature that is of the greatest importance. Being both founded on the principle of concurrent majority, trial by jury and constitutional government both tend, by virtue of their very structures, to promote sustained, thorough, and

effective inquiry into the concerns that are their respective and intended objects.

In both cases, the need for unanimity predisposes the various parties concerned to join together to reach some common opinion and course of action. Just as the opinion of every juror must be registered, and all opinions must agree, before a verdict may be declared, so that a sentence may be issued and justice discharged; where there is constitutional government, the opinion or sense of every significant interest of the community must be registered, and all these interests must concur, before government is duly authorized either to act or to refrain from action on the matter under consideration. Also in both cases, the very structure of the "concurrent" artifice tends through its influence to compensate for defects of knowledge as well as for any absence of a high degree of intelligence on the part of the human agents thinking and acting within the system.²⁴ Trial by jury tends to compensate for deficiencies in legal knowledge and experience amongst the jurors, while the government of the concurrent majority tends to compensate for deficiencies in political knowledge on the part of the leaders and members of the various interests of the community. Therefore, similar to the manner in which an absence of the legal expertise of the judge is compensated by the influence of the structure of the legal convention known as trial by jury; so too, within the governmental system of the concurrent majority -- regardless of its particular regimen²⁵ -- the absence or discontinuation of the direct application of political knowledge that

²⁴ Calhoun, as we have seen, makes this point about compensating deficiencies of knowledge explicitly concerning trial by jury (50), but does not speak explicitly on this point in the Disquisition with regard to interests pursuing the public good within a constitutional system.

²⁵ That is, regardless of whether it is a government of the one, of the few, of the many, or some combination of these.

characterized the personal rule of the monarch²⁶ is compensated, in a constitutional regime, by the influence of the structure of government.²⁷ Moreover, from all that has been said, and from what Calhoun has stated explicitly as well as from what he has merely intimated, we may responsibly infer that, analogous to the manner in which trial by jury makes a presiding officer of the judge, the governmental system of the concurrent majority renders the statesman the defender and principal perpetuator of the constitution. Hence, with the emergence of constitutional as opposed to absolute government, the personal government of the monarch is replaced by the statesman, who serves the community mediately or indirectly in the capacity of guardian and perfecter of its political constitution. Just as the artifice that is trial by jury allows men to circumvent the liabilities or to avoid the dangers of entrusting absolute and exclusive judicial power, in cases of capital crimes, to individual judges; the human artifice which Calhoun calls the system of concurrent or constitutional majority allows men to avoid the far greater liabilities and dangers of entrusting absolute and exclusive governmental power to any single man or group of men.

But in addition to compensating for defects of knowledge, the concurrent system also tends to compensate for any absence of high intelligence on the part of human agents thinking and acting within the system. (50) Thus trial by jury has been found to work astonishingly well despite the fact that more humble intelligences usually compose juries; while

²⁶ Thus it is typically the case that the person who occupies the position of hereditary monarch is one from among the more prosperous and educated portion of the population.

²⁷ Like any other human convention, the structure of a government is an embodiment of knowledge. For example, the system of concurrent majority, with its system of mutual negatives, reflects, by its very structure or organization, a certain true conception of human nature — namely, that we may be corrupted by power and become tyrannical, thereby abusing ourselves and others.

in constitutional governments, any lack of high intelligence -- whether of a king in a monarchy, nobles in an aristocracy, or commons in a democracy -- tends to be compensated as well by the very structure of government itself. On the other hand, however, no such compensation issues from an absolute governmental structure, where the shortcomings born of the myopia of lesser intellects tend to be felt in all their woeful force.

More generally, then, constitutional government provides a hedge against those dangers and inconveniences which naturally attend a more extensive ignorance and a more limited intelligence. Indeed, reviewing the matter further, we can see how the emergence in history of such legal and governmental artifices or conventions as trial by jury and constitutional government qualify as significant and vitally important advances in man's knowledge of himself. Such contrivances underscore how man has brought to self-consciousness the fact of his own essentially weak and sinful nature; a conception of his nature confirmed by every page of history, and to which no grounded objection may be put.

Having thus reviewed the analogue between trial by jury and constitutional government, we may continue now with our examination of Calhoun's views on the nature and extent of the impulse of interests within a constitutional system to compromise.

After considering the relative strength of the motives for concurring and of those for not concurring (50-51), Calhoun goes on to provide "a juster estimate of the full force of this impulse to compromise." (51-52) There Calhoun emphasizes how, within a well-founded governmental system of the concurrent majority, compromises are not compelled and extracted from

grudging and niggardly parties, or from interests each of whom is disposed, for example, to carefully and warily register as a cost or sacrifice every compromise on its own part, and to discount the contributions through compromise of every other interest. Instead, the governmental system of the concurrent majority tends to shape and to transform human feelings and dispositions, in ways that, on a slight view of the subject, seem improbable, if not fantastic. In Chapters VII and VIII, we saw how this transformative character or moral influence of the system of concurrent majority plays the primary role in producing a morally virtuous governmental leadership and citizenry. What remains, however, is to consider the role of this transformative property, and of the system of concurrent majority in general, in fostering intellectual virtue, in promoting inquiry into the Good, both individual and communal, and finally, in contributing to the project at the center of all truly philosophical inquiry, the project of self-knowledge. This role will become clearer as we proceed with our examination of Calhoun's views on the impulse to compromise.

Previously in this work, we have seen how government of the concurrent majority, by virtue of its very structure, influences human feelings and dispositions in significant and beneficent ways, and indeed, has the power to transform and to purify human moral and intellectual characters. As we saw in Chapter VII, in our discussion of the elevation and diffusion of virtue or of vice, we can begin to learn about the underlying principles upon which a particular government is founded by observing how the various interests of that community feel about and act toward one another. But even more conspicuous, and therefore, more easily ascertained,

are the moral characters of governmental leaders, and their [moral-intellectual] dispositions or indispositions both to inquire into the good of the generality and to engage in compromise, as the representatives of the various portions of the community, each one with the others for the sake of obtaining and perpetuating that good. Calhoun calls the difference between absolute and constitutional government as regards their respective influence on the formation of the moral character and intellectual disposition of governmental leaders "striking", thereby suggesting that it is perhaps the most conspicuous difference between these two disparate systems. He reminds us how in governments of the numerical majority:

. . . each faction, in the struggle to obtain the control of the government, elevates to power the designing, the artful, and unscrupulous, who, in their devotion to party -- instead of aiming at the good of the whole -- aim exclusively at securing the ascendancy of party. (52)

Calhoun traces this most prominent and striking difference, the difference between the leaders of these two disparate systems, back to its source. He finds that the conditions which, in Chapter VII, we saw issuing in a morally virtuous citizenry and leaders, are also those basic conditions that issue in intellectual virtue, or in a disposition to sustained inquiry into the public good; while, on the other hand, those conditions which conduce to a morally vicious citizenry and leaders also conduce to intellectual vice or to an indisposition to such inquiry. These basic conditions are, as we have seen in the previous two chapters, the dual-principle of our nature combined with the structure of government itself. Hence Calhoun says,

. . . in governments of the concurrent majority, individual feelings are, from its organism, necessarily enlisted on the side of the social, and made to unite with them in promoting the interests of the whole, as

the best way of promoting the separate interests of each; while, in those of the numerical majority, the social are necessarily enlisted on the side of the individual, and made to contribute to the interest of parties, regardless of that of the whole. (52)

As we saw in Chapter VII, the principal force by which feelings may be enlisted is not religion or education, or their corrupt forms -- superstition²⁸ and propaganda²⁹ -- but is instead the structure of government itself. But for Calhoun, to say that the structure of government is the principal cause by which the individual and social feelings are enlisted -- either on the side of the public good, or of some private and exclusive interest -- is merely a more specific and technical way of saying that the structure of government is the principal cause of the morals of the community. And, when Calhoun speaks of the morals or moral character of the individuals of the community, he means not the moral virtues or vices, narrowly conceived, but the moral dispositions of persons as these appertain to inquiry and understanding as well.³⁰ Hence, we may say that, according to Calhoun, a well-founded government of the concurrent majority, by enlisting the individual feelings on the side of the social, does more than all other causes combined, including

²⁸ In our more secular, post-Enlightenment age, we might well add to this list of influences on morals, false philosophy. For a speculative account of the distinction between true and false forms of philosophy, see Donald Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), including Chapter 10, "Metaphysical Rebellion."

²⁹ Thus it was not, for example, National Socialist propaganda or the viciousness of individual leaders which were the principal causes of the spectacular barbarisms inflicted by the Third Reich. Instead, as Donald Livingston has pointed out, the principal cause was the structure of the modern consolidated nation-state itself. See Donald Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), Chapters 13 and 14.

³⁰ Therefore Calhoun never draws a sharp distinction between the moral and intellectual virtues and vices. Unlike, for example, Aristotle and Hume, Calhoun never wrote a work principally on morals, where some exhaustive listing and careful discrimination of the various virtues and vices would be expected. Focussing primarily on the more strictly political philosophic themes of the origin and nature of government and constitution, Calhoun had no occasion, as did Aristotle, to categorize the virtues and vices as either moral or intellectual. See the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bks. II-VI.

religion and education, to dispose the various interests and individuals of the community to discover and pursue their common good. Analogously, a government whose structure is absolute, by enlisting the social feelings on the side of the individual, does more than all other causes combined, including the corrupt forms of religion and education -- superstition and propaganda respectively --, to discourage, to stifle, or even, to preempt outright effective inquiry into the public good.

The attitude of governmental leaders toward the general welfare and toward inquiry concerning such welfare is one of either solicitude, indifference, or contempt, in whatever degree; and this attitude is disclosed, quite unavoidably of course, either through their words or their actions, or through both. The solicitude for the public good that characterizes leaders in genuinely constitutional regimes has its counterpart in the narrow and callous indifference to such good that is typical of absolute rulers. In so far as these attitudes become known by the generality, and because opinion, as we have seen, is the ultimate source of political authority; the practical ramifications of such attitudes are not to be discounted or underestimated. Another way of saying this is that, on the most personal and pragmatic grounds, it is far from being a matter of indifference what structure of government a community has, since this structure determines, in large part, the disposition and attitudes of those who exercise governmental power. For indeed, the attitude of those who exercise power is itself a principal cause of the stability or instability of a given regime.

According to Calhoun, it is because a government of the concurrent majority tends to produce, by its very structure, leaders who possess the

various moral and intellectual virtues, that such governments repose on a foundation of greater solidity. So once again (52-53), the numerical and concurrent systems are compared by Calhoun; this time, with regard to the solidity of their respective foundations. Calhoun observes how:

Both, ultimately, rest on necessity; for force, by which those of the numerical majority are upheld, is only acquiesced in from necessity; a necessity not more imperious, however, than that which compels the different portions, in governments of the concurrent majority, to acquiesce in compromise. There is, however, a great difference in the motive, the feeling, the aim, which characterize the act in the two cases. In the one, it is done with that reluctance and hostility ever incident to enforced submission to what is regarded as injustice and oppression; accompanied by the desire and purpose to seize on the first favorable opportunity for resistance – but in the other, willingly and cheerfully, under the impulse of an exalted patriotism, impelling all to acquiesce in whatever the common good requires. (53)

As we saw in Chapter VI, force is the conservative principle of absolute government, while compromise is the conservative principle of constitutional government (30); yet both kinds of government rest on necessity, or on the overriding need to preserve society. But this preservation or protection is achieved in different ways, according to whether the guardian of the community that is government has either an absolute or a constitutional organization. In both cases, the acquiescence of the various individuals and interests that compose the community to those measures which government employs to protect society is required. Yet the spirit in which this acquiescence is given differs widely, according to whether it is elicited by force or by compromise. According to the specific manner in which it brings about acquiescence in its society-protecting measures, the structure of government tends to elicit affection or disaffection for itself or for those who exercise its powers. In this way, absolute governments, by virtue

of their very structures, function in ways that tend, to some degree, to undermine their own legitimacy and viability, while, on the other hand, constitutional regimes naturally tend, in this regard, to legitimize and to strengthen themselves.

As we noted in Chapter VIII, in the discussion of the moral and physical causes of power, Calhoun believed that the abuses and oppression which naturally attend absolute government are ultimately beneficial, in the sense that they prompt men -- through the great suffering and inconveniences they impose -- to devise the remedy that is constitution. Along these lines, Calhoun also believed that the tendency of absolute government to under-cut its own authority by encouraging leaders to be indifferent to and even jealous of the public good may be viewed as part of a Providential plan in which the abuses that attend absolute government encourage political innovation and thereby instruct men on the superior virtues of constitution.

Having presented and amplified the essential elements of Calhoun's speech about self-knowledge and inquiry into the good, we are prepared now to review some general aspects and implications of this speech.

Calhoun's political philosophizing sheds light on the project of self-knowledge in basically two different ways. According to Calhoun, knowledge of the good is pursued on at least two different levels: (1) at the level of interests, as a public enterprise; and (2) at the level of the individual and of the family, as an essentially private enterprise. As regards the former [public] enterprise, the system of the concurrent majority promotes extensive and effectual inquiry into the nature of the interests of the various portions of the

community, fosters mutual understanding and hence self-criticism among these portions, and thereby plays an indispensable role in the advancement of all those interests. Regarding the latter [private] enterprise, by safeguarding and ordering the liberty of the individual (45), as we saw in Chapter VIII, the system of concurrent majority also promotes sustained and effectual inquiry into the good of self, family, and friends, and promotes directly thereby the interests of individuals. So the positive and prominent role of the system of the concurrent majority in promoting inquiry into the good and the good itself may be contrasted with the influence of the system of numerical majority, or of absolute government in general. For absolute government tends to retard inquiry into the good, as we have seen, both at the level of interests, by fostering bitter antagonism and estrangement between the various portions of the community where one portion or combination of portions is allowed to dominate and abuse the remaining portions, and at the level of the individual and the family, by failing to secure liberty and material possessions, and by stifling thereby the natural desire for self-improvement. (40-46). The result is that the human good tends to be more frequently and fully realized under constitutional government than under absolute government. Significantly, Calhoun's account of how the project of self-knowledge is pursued at several different levels underscores the Platonic and Vichian view, examined earlier, that the project has several dimensions, including, as we have labelled them, the metaphysical, the moral, and the civic.

Still, the question may be raised: How important is the role played by constitutional government in promoting inquiry and self-knowledge, or by

absolute government in preventing these, as compared with other factors?

Success at such inquiry clearly depends on several, and not merely one, cause. For instance, there is the degree of resolve and determination of the individual inquirer, as well as the manner in which inherited wisdom and other inherited goods may either facilitate inquiry or bestow knowledge about the self directly. And so inherited goods -- including native genius -- and individual resolve may be listed alongside the structure of government as causes determining the fate of self-inquiry. But what remains is to assess the relative weight or influence of these causes.

Earlier in this chapter, we saw that it is the mode or structure of trial by jury which tends to determine, more than any other cause, the fate of inquiry in trials, and the justness or unjustness of particular verdicts rendered by juries. In fact, it was strongly intimated that the particular structure or mode of trial tends to influence the verdict more than all other factors combined. And so, it was said, the fact of whether the verdict was rendered, for example, by an individual judge, or by a jury organized either on the numerical majority principle, or the principle of concurrent majority, is that factor which tends to determine verdicts, thereby overriding the combined force of all other factors, such as the good or bad moral character, and the humble or more powerful intellects, of the judge or jurors.

Analogously, we may argue that it is the structure of government which determines, more than any other single cause, the fate of inquiry into the general welfare and into the self. Put another way: the principal cause of one's own ignorance or self-knowledge is the developmental fate of the dual-principle, specifically, as this fate is determined by the influence of the

structure of the government that one lives under. Generally speaking, in communities that do not enjoy constitutional governance, self-examination tends to be either (1) restricted by the active interference of the governmental structure that does prevail, or (2) inhibited by that government's failure to police effectively between private individuals and groups, or both. As a result, inquiry into the public good by the various interests of society is precluded outright; and self-examination, in so far as it is pursued in other ways, is rendered a private, marginal enterprise which is constantly subject to upset, suspension, and distortion as a direct or indirect result of distempered government. All other factors being equal, then, the structure of the government one lives under, through its influence on the development of the understanding and of the sentiments, is the principal cause either of the learning that a community enjoys or the ignorance that it suffers. Thus the structure of a community's government is either its greatest inducement or its greatest impediment to self-knowledge and fulfillment through self-examination.³¹

³¹ In his essay, previously cited, titled "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences", David Hume argues that a confederation of states connected by trade and policy is remarkable for its tendency to advance reason and to restrain authority and power. Hume writes:

. . . the divisions into small states are favorable to learning, by stopping the progress of authority as well as that of power. Reputation is often as great a fascination upon men as sovereignty, and is equally destructive to the freedom of thought and examination. But where a number of neighboring states have a great-intercourse of arts and commerce, their mutual jealousy keeps them from receiving too lightly the law from each other, in matters of taste and of reasoning, and makes them examine every work of art with the greatest care and accuracy. The contagion of popular opinion spreads not so easily from one place to another. It readily receives a check in some state or other, where it concurs not with the prevailing prejudices. And nothing but nature and reason, or, at least, what bears them a strong resemblance, can force its way through all obstacles, and unite the most rival nations into an esteem and admiration of it.

To underscore this speculative account of the merits of the confederal form, Hume continues by citing the unparalleled cultural and intellectual example of ancient Greece as a "cluster of little principalities." See David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary* (Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1987), 120-121.

But the influence of governmental structure on inquiry is so great that it tends to exceed the influence not merely of this or that other factor, such as the resolve of the individual inquirer, or the inspiration, opportunities, and ready-to-hand knowledge bestowed through inheritance. Instead, the influence of the structure of a community's government on the fate of self-inquiry on the part of individuals and interests tends, in every instance, to exceed the influence of all other factors combined.

Although Calhoun does not make this claim explicitly, it evidently may be inferred from his parallel argument, examined in Chapter VII, concerning the influence of governmental structure on the development of the moral virtues. There, we heard Calhoun claim:

So powerful, indeed, is the operation of the concurrent majority . . . that, if it were possible for a corrupt and degenerate community to establish and maintain a well-organized government of the kind, it would of itself purify and regenerate them; while, on the other hand, a government based wholly on the numerical majority, would just as certainly corrupt and debase the most patriotic and virtuous people.
(39)

And add to this, that the developmental fate of the intellectual virtues, as we have already shown in this and in earlier chapters, is intimately connected with the fate of the moral virtues, as well as with the unification or division, and the strengthening or weakening, of the community. Consequently, we may infer from all of this that implicit to Calhoun's account comparing constitutional to absolute government is the claim that the structure of a community's government tends to be more influential than all other causes combined in determining the fate of inquiry into the good and the intellectual dispositions of the members and interests of the community.

Still, there is yet another important point which one may infer from

Calhoun's comparative account of governments. It is that whereas the government of the concurrent majority conduces to enlightenment and self-understanding on the part of both interests and individuals; absolute government, including the government of the numerical majority, tends to foster and to perpetuate not only a condition of passive ignorance, but, even worse, a state of active self-delusion. So an individual, as well as a portion of the community, can become deluded about the nature of its best or true interest, and be prompted thereby to behave in ways that are ultimately destructive both of self and of others. Consequently, there is a sense in which absolute government is inherently obscurantist in character, opposing by its very structure the discovery, spread, and beneficent use of knowledge. On the other hand, genuine constitutional government, by virtue of its very structure, possesses both a revelatory power that makes accurate determinations of interest possible, and a structure which renders these determinations the fundamental guidelines and conditions of all governmental activity.

But clearly, the implications of Calhoun's account of absolute government as inherently obscurantist and of constitutional government as inherently revelatory are many and weighty, and therefore cannot be reviewed systematically here. Nevertheless, it should be readily apparent from what has been said that the influence of governmental structure on human inquiry is so extensive that no dimension of human life goes uneffected. Indeed, there are many objects and applications of human inquiry. And so, more or less directly, the structure of a community's government must effect not only inquiry into the individual and public good,

as we have seen, but also that inquiry and investigation at the center of all scientific and theological study, and of all artistic inspiration and creation as well.

Anticipating Calhoun, Hume has perhaps most skillfully gauged the broader effects of governmental organization and structure on human inquiry, pointing out in the introduction to his Treatise how, for example, “. . . improvements in reason and philosophy can only be owing to a land of toleration and of liberty”³².

More generally, in his essay titled “On the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences”, Hume observes how “. . . it is impossible for the arts and sciences to arise, at first, among any people unless that people enjoy the blessing of free government.”³³ In that essay, Hume explains how the arts and sciences cannot arise in a community dominated by the unconstrained power of a personal ruler because the lives and property of citizens are secure neither from the deprivations of fellow-citizens nor from the ruler himself.³⁴ According to Hume, only time and experience can teach men the comparative benefits of free government, or of government according to general rules or law, over personal rule, or government by the arbitrary will

³² See David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), xvii.

³³ See p. 115 in David Hume, Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary, ed. Eugene Miller (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1987), 111-137. And Hume goes on to specify (p. 124): “. . . That though the only proper Nursery of these noble plants [the arts and sciences] be a free state; yet may they be transplanted into any government; and that a republic is most favourable to the growth of the sciences, a civilized monarchy to that of the polite arts.”

³⁴ David Hume, Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary, ed. Eugene Miller (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1987), 118.

of man.³⁵ So, as time passes, and as men accumulate experience and learning, nomocracy, or the rule of law, tends to replace arbitrary rule. In this way, a reasoned observance of general rules that are more and more of a people's own making gradually supplants an older system characterized by unquestioning obedience to the dictates either of one man or of a small group who possess absolute and unconstrained power.³⁶ And it is this nomocratic regimen or rule of law that makes possible the rise of the arts and sciences. Thus, says Hume: "From law arises security: From security curiosity: And from curiosity knowledge."³⁷ So curiosity or wonder is a disposition and feeling necessary for inquiry and knowledge, and one fostered and perpetuated only by a government whose power is constrained. And as we have seen in this and in previous chapters, it is only constitutional governments, or governments of the concurrent majority, which fit this description.³⁸

Finally, to close, we may say that while government founded on the principle of concurrent majority promotes self-realization by first promoting self-inquiry and self-understanding; absolute government tends to condemn all efforts toward self-realization to failure by retarding self-inquiry and preventing self-understanding. As Vico reminds us, with the establishment

³⁵ Significantly, Hume's account of the historical movement from arbitrary rule to the rule of law complement Calhoun's Providential view, discussed earlier, that the movement of men from absolute to constitutional government is prompted largely by the "sting of despotism" characteristic of the absolutism.

³⁶ F. A. Hayek has developed this Humean thesis in Studies in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). See, in particular, "Notes on the Evolution Systems of Rules of Conduct", 66-81, and "Rules, Perception, and Intelligibility", 43-65.

³⁷ David Hume, "The Rise of the Arts and Sciences" in Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary, ed. Eugene Miller (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1987), 118.

³⁸ Again anticipating Calhoun, the examples that Hume provides in this essay include the Roman republic and the English constitution.

and maintenance of sound political constitution, the project of self-examination and self-knowledge receives a public and formal sanction. As Calhoun shows us, knowledge of the human good and the instantiation of that good in a given instance depend, more than any other factor, on the beneficent influence of a constitutional structure of government. And so Calhoun, with his expository account of the concurrent majority, develops, as we have seen, the notion of self-knowledge as a civic doctrine. And yet, in the tradition of Plato, Vico, and others, Calhoun also preserves and develops further the manifold conception of the project of self-knowledge as encompassing metaphysical, moral, and civic dimensions that are naturally and intimately related one to another. Indeed, in closing it should be noted that, from all that has been established in this and in previous chapters, Calhoun's Disquisition on Government -- with its systematic comparison of absolute and constitutional government -- may in fact be read as an extended reflection on the fate of the project of self-knowledge. This way of reading the Disquisition is perhaps the best or most fruitful way, and it is one, in fact, that we may say is recommended by its author near the end of the work, where Calhoun gravely admonishes posterity, that the great pain, suffering, and inconvenience which naturally attend distempered and absolute government "will endure until the governing and the governed shall better understand the ends for which government is ordained, and the form best suited to accomplish them under all the circumstances in which communities may be respectively placed." (67)

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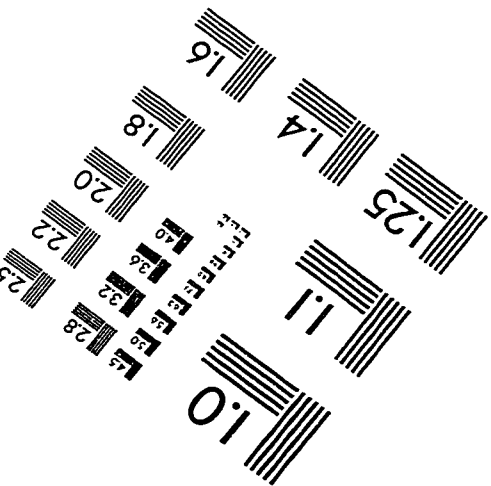
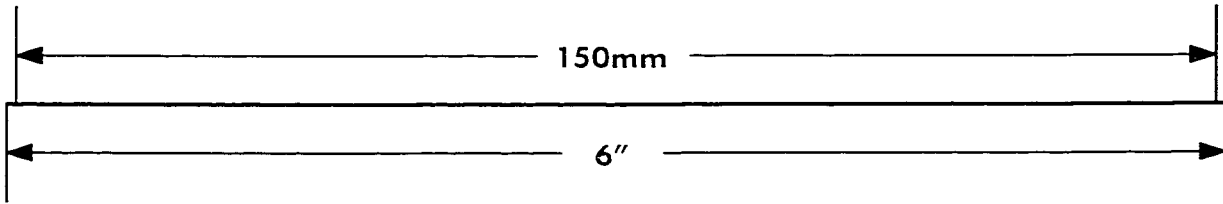
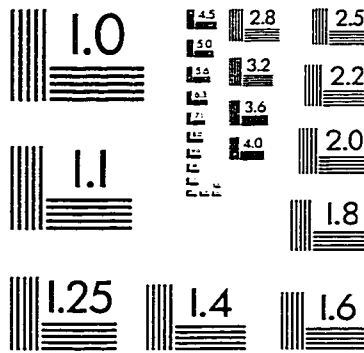
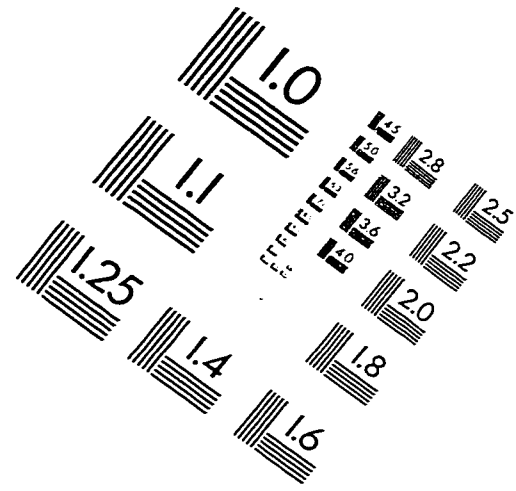
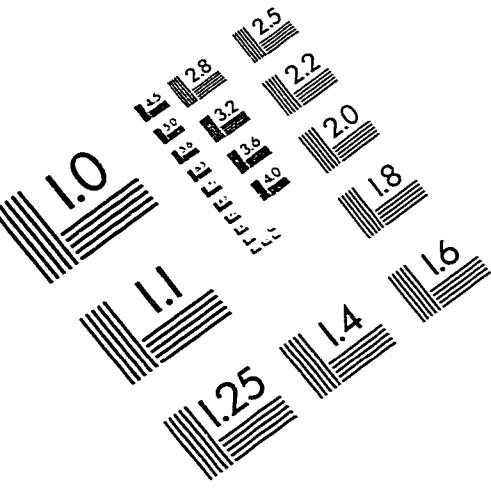
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