XII THOMAS JEFFERSON

Self and Society

AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF CHANGING ATTITUDES AND actions concerning Negroes and Negro slavery, the writings of one man become a fixed and central point of reference and influence. In the years after the Revolution the speculations of Thomas Jefferson were of great importance because so many people read and reacted to them. His remarks about Negroes in the only book he ever wrote were more widely read, in all probability, than any others until the mid-nineteenth century. In addition to his demonstrable impact upon other men, Jefferson is important—or perhaps more accurately, valuable to historical analysis—because he permits (without intending to) a depth and range of insight into the workings of ideas about Negroes within one man as he stood in relationship to his culture. Jefferson's energetic facility with the pen makes it possible, uniquely so in this period of history, to glimpse some of the inward springs of feeling which supported certain attitudes towards Negroes. It then becomes possible to see the intricate interlacing of one man's personality with his social surroundings, the values of his culture, and the ideas with which he had contact. Thomas Jefferson was not a typical nor an ordinary man, but his enormous breadth of interest and his lack of originality make him an effective sounding board for his culture. On some important matters, therefore, he may be taken as accurately reflecting common presuppositions and sensitivities even though many Americans disagreed with some of his conclusions.

To contemplate any man-in-culture is to savor complexity. It will be easiest to start with Jefferson's central dilemma: he hated slavery but thought Negroes inferior to white men. His remarks on the Negro's mental inferiority helped kindle a revealing public controversy on the subject which deserves examination. But it will also be

necessary to return again to Thomas Jefferson, to his inward world where Negro inferiority was rooted. There it is possible to discern the interrelationship between his feelings about the races and his feeling about the sexes and thence to move once again to the problem of interracial sex in American culture. Finally, by tacking back to Jefferson and to the way he patterned his perceptions of his surroundings, it becomes easy to see how he assimilated the Indian to his anthropology and to America. His solution with the Negro was very different.

1. JEFFERSON: THE TYRANNY OF SLAVERY

Jefferson was personally involved in Negro slavery. On his own plantations he stood confronted by the practical necessity of making slave labor pay and by the usual frustrating combination of slave recalcitrance and inefficiency. Keeping the Negro men and especially the women and children clad, bedded, and fed was expensive, and keeping them busy was a task in itself.[1] Nor was his load lightened by daily supervision of a system which he genuinely hated, nor by realization that his livelihood depended on its continuation. This dependence almost inevitably meant that, for Jefferson the planter, Negroes sometimes became mere objects of financial calculation. "I have observed," he once wrote, "that our families of negroes double in about 25 years, which is an increase of the capital, invested in them, of 4. per cent over and above keeping up the original number." Successful maintenance of several plantations made for a measure of moral callousness: "The first step towards the recovery of our lands," he advised John Taylor, "is to find substitutes for corn and bacon. I count on potatoes, clover, and sheep. The two former to feed every animal on the farm except my negroes, and the latter to feed them, diversified with rations of salted fish and molasses, both of them wholesome, agreeable, and cheap articles of food." [2] For a man of Jefferson's convictions, entanglement in Negro slavery was genuinely tragic. Guiltily he referred

1. Since Jefferson's writings are at present available in different editions of varying scope and editorial standards, the following have been used in order of preference: Boyd, ed., *Papers of Jefferson;* Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams,* 2 vols. (Chapel Hill, 1959); Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson;* Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Jefferson.* Material relevant to Jefferson's management of his slaves has been collected in Betts, ed., *Jefferson's Farm Book,* especially pp. 5–47 of the Commentary.

2. Notes on Arthur Young's Letter [June 18, 1792], Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson,* VII, 120; to John Taylor, Monticello, Dec. 29, 1794, Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., *Writings of Jefferson,* XVIII, 197.

to his Negroes as "servants," thus presaging the euphemism of the nineteenth century. His hopes for transforming his slaves into tenants evidenced a desire to seek a way out, but financial considerations perpetually precluded action. In the end he freed a few of them, but more than a hundred remained in slavery.[3] He never doubted that his monetary debts constituted a more immediate obligation than manumission. Most Americans would have agreed.

Jefferson's heartfelt hatred of slavery did not derive so much from this harassing personal entanglement in the practicalities of slavery as from the system of politics in which he was enmeshed mentally. "Enmeshed" seems the appropriate term because the natural rights philosophy was the governing aspect of his theology and his science; it formed a part of his being, and his most original contribution was the graceful lucidity with which he continually restated the doctrine. Yet in Jefferson's hands natural rights took on a peculiar cast, for he thought of rights as being natural in a very literal sense. Rights belonged to men as biological beings, inhering in them, as he said in his draft of the Declaration of Independence, because "all men are created equal and independant" and because "from that equal creation they derive rights inherent and inalienable." [4] The central fact was creation: the Creator, whose primary attribute was tidiness, would scarcely have been so careless as to create a single species equipped with more than one set of rights. If Jefferson's own passion for order was reflected in these phrases, so was his agrarian penchant for solitude. What was reflected most clearly of all, though, was the extent to which the natural world dominated Jefferson's thinking. Creation was the central "fact" because it explained nature. And Jefferson was awed by nature, if "awe" may be used in connection with a man so immensely capable of placid receptivity. While apparently working from a "Supreme Being" to an orderly nature, in fact Jefferson derived his Creator from what He had created—a nature which was by axiom orderly. In the same way, he derived God-given rights from the existence of the class of natural beings known as men. To know whether certain men possessed natural rights one had only to inquire whether they were human beings.[5]

3. See especially Boyd, ed., *Papers of Jefferson,* XI, 653, XIII, 607–8, XIV, 492–93. Jefferson was wildly welcomed by his slaves upon his return from Europe: see the editorial note in *ibid.,* XVI, 167–68. Many school books still say that Jefferson freed his slaves.

4. Boyd, ed., *Papers of Jefferson,* I, 423.

5. I am much indebted to certain ideas in the analysis of Jefferson's ideology offered by Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson* (N. Y., 1948). Jefferson pushed the concept of "natural right" into fields where many of his contemporaries were unwilling to follow in 1790: he described majority rule

Without question Negroes were members of that class. Hence Jefferson never for a moment considered the possibility that they might rightfully be enslaved. He felt the personal guilt of slaveholding deeply, for he was daily depriving other men of their rightful liberty. With "my debts once cleared off," he wrote with a highly revealing slip of the pen, "I shall try some plan of making their situation happier, determined to content myself with a small portion of their ~~liberty~~ labour." [6] His vigorous antislavery pronouncements, however, were always redolent more of the library than the field. Slavery was an injustice not so much for the specific Negroes held in bondage as for any member of the human species. It was not simply that Jefferson was a benevolent master and had little contact with the cruelty of slavery, but that his approach to human society was always phylogenic. His most heartfelt denunciation of the notorious horrors of the slave trade, for example, consisted of a reference to "the unhappy human beings . . . forcibly brought away from their native country." [7] Wherever he encountered human cruelty, as he assuredly did in France, he saw not cruelty but injustice; as in so many other matters he was inclined to universalize particulars. Yet he was always the observer of particulars and too much interested in the welfare of Virginia to let his vision of slavery remain entirely academic. Slavery was an evil as well as an injustice, and from this standpoint Jefferson wrote one of the classic denunciations of the institution. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia,* written in 1781–82 in reply to queries from the secretary of the French legation in Philadelphia, François Barbé-Marbois, Jefferson answered a question on the "particular customs and manners that may happen to be received in that state" by discussing one matter only—the deleterious effects of slavery.

> There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal. . . . The parent storms, the child

as "the Natural law of every society" and claimed that "the right to have commerce and intercourse with our neighbors is a natural right." Boyd, ed., *Papers of Jefferson*, XVI, 179, 450. His original draft of the Declaration is in *ibid.*, I, 423–27.

6. To Francis Eppes, Paris, July 30, 1787, Boyd, ed., *Papers of Jefferson*, XI, 653; also to Nicholas Lewis, Paris, Dec. 19, 1786, *ibid.*, X, 615.

7. To Christopher Ellery, Washington, May 19, 1803, Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson*, IX, 466.

> looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances. And with what execration should the statesman be loaded, who permitting one half the citizens thus to trample on the rights of the other, transforms those into despots, and these into enemies, destroys the morals of the one part, and the amor patriæ of the other. For if a slave can have a country in this world, it must be any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labour for another: in which he must lock up the faculties of his nature, contribute as far as depends on his individual endeavours to the evanishment of the human race, or entail his own miserable condition on the endless generations proceeding from him. With the morals of the people, their industry also is destroyed. For in a warm climate, no man will labour for himself who can make another labour for him. This is so true, that of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labour. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? [8]

While he recognized the condition of slaves as "miserable," the weight of Jefferson's concern was reserved for the malevolent effects of slavery upon masters. These effects had always concerned antislavery men of every stripe, but with most of them one is not left wondering what would have remained of their antislavery views had they found slavery beneficial to white society. Fortunately Jefferson went to his grave convinced that slavery was a blight on the white community. With slavery's effect on black men he simply was not overly concerned.[9]

Indicative of Jefferson's approach toward the institution was his horror of slave rebellion. His apprehension was of course shared by most Americans, but he gave it expression at an unusually early date, some years before the disaster in St. Domingo. When denouncing slavery in the *Notes on Virginia* he gave vent to forebodings of a possible upheaval in America in a passage clouded with dark indirection. "Indeed I tremble for my country," he wrote passionately, "when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a

8. Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, ed. Peden, 162–63.

9. When confronted with the immediate practicalities of slave ownership Jefferson could more readily imagine its effect upon slaves; he ordered that his nailers not be whipped except in extreme cases, since whipping tended "to degrade them in their own eyes," Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, Washington, Jan. 23, 1801, Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., *Writings of Jefferson*, XVIII, 232.

revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest." The depth of his feeling was apparent, for he rarely resorted to exclamation marks and still less often to miracles without skepticism. Later, Negro rebellion in St. Domingo confirmed his fears, the more so because he was utterly unable to condemn it. Always blandly receptive to revolution as a mechanism of change, he foresaw a strange future for the Caribbean islands. "I become daily more and more convinced," he wrote in 1793, "that all the West India Islands will remain in the hands of the people of colour, and a total expulsion of the whites sooner or later take place." From the islands he gloomily turned to his own country. "It is high time we should forsee the bloody scenes which our children certainly, and possibly ourselves (south of the Potommac,) have to wade through, and try to avert them." St. Domingo, he became convinced, was merely "the first chapter"; and his mind dwelt on the possible second chapter almost morbidly: "if something is not done," he wrote melodramatically in 1797, "and done soon, we shall be the murderers of our own children." Then in the summer of 1800 the second chapter appeared to open, and Jefferson wrote self-consolingly from Monticello: "We are truly to be pitied." Twenty years later at the time of the Missouri Compromise he was still murmuring of his fears. Still adamant that Negroes must be free, he characteristically fused obligation with future fact: "Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free." Only the means were at question: white men must liberate Negroes in justice, or Negroes would liberate themselves in blood.[10]

While Jefferson thus hitched fear of rebellion to the antislavery cause, he refused to allow strong feelings on both matters to override his judgment as to the appropriate course of practical action. As a youth, in the first blush of Revolutionary enthusiasm, he had urged upon his native Virginia a program of gradual emancipation. "But it was found," he wrote years later in 1821, "that the public mind would not yet bear the proposition, nor will it bear it even at

10. Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, ed. Peden, 163; to James Monroe, Phila., July 14, 1793, Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson*, VII, 449–50; to St. George Tucker, Monticello, Aug. 28, 1797, *ibid.*, VIII, 335; to Benjamin Rush, Monticello, Sept. 23, 1800, *ibid.*, IX, 149; Autobiography (1821), *ibid.*, I, 77. For further evidence of his fears and of his certainty of eventual emancipation see his letter to William A. Burwell, Washington, Jan. 28, 1805, *ibid.*, X, 126–27; to Edward Coles, Monticello, Aug. 25, 1814, *ibid.*, XI, 416–20; to John Adams, Monticello, Jan. 22, 1821, Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, II, 569–70.

this day."[11] As early as the 1780's Jefferson fully recognized the difficulties involved in any practical program for freedom and shrank from publishing his *Notes on Virginia* because it contained strong antislavery expressions. His friend Charles Thomson agreed that there were just grounds for fearing southern reaction while agreeing too that if the "cancer" was not wiped out "by religion, reason and philosophy" it would be someday "by blood." James Monroe, on the other hand, thought the antislavery sentiments could well be published. They finally did appear, of course, but Jefferson remained pessimistic.[12] He wrote in 1786 concerning possible legislative action in Virginia that "an unsuccessful effort, as too often happens, would only rivet still closer the chains of bondage, and retard the moment of delivery to this oppressed description of men." Later he steadfastly refused to condemn slavery publicly, refused to join antislavery organizations, refused to endorse the publications of abolitionists, in each case because he thought that premature endorsement by a figure of his prominence might easily damage the antislavery cause.[13] It was neither timidity nor concern for reputation which restrained him; in fact he had good reason to think that antislavery pronouncements might solidify the institution. Francis Kinloch wrote him from South Carolina of "the general alarm" which a certain "passage in your Notes occasioned amongst us. It is not easy to get rid of old prejudices, and the word 'emancipation' operates like an apparition upon a South Carolina planter."[14] From wide experience Jefferson had acquired a strong sense of "how difficult it is to move or inflect the great machine of society, how impossible to advance the notions of a whole people suddenly to ideal right." He was acutely conscious of "the passions, the prejudices, and the real difficulties" compounded in American Negro slavery.[15]

2. JEFFERSON: THE ASSERTION OF NEGRO INFERIORITY

His sensitive reaction to social "passions" and "prejudices" was heightened by dim recognition that they operated power-

11. Autobiography (1821), Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson*, I, 76–77.

12. Thomson to Jefferson, N. Y., Nov. 2, 1785, Boyd, ed., *Papers of Jefferson*, IX, 9; Monroe to Jefferson, N. Y., Jan. 19, 1786, *ibid.*, 190.

13. *Ibid.*, VIII, 184, 227, 245, 356–57, X, 63, XII, 577–78; to Dr. George Logan, Washington, May 11, 1805, Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson*, X, 141–42.

14. Apr. 26, 1789, Boyd, ed., *Papers of Jefferson*, XV, 72.

15. To Walter Jones, Washington, Mar. 31, 1801, Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., *Writings of Jefferson*, X, 256; to St. George Tucker, Monticello, Aug. 28, 1797, Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson*, VIII, 335; See also Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, ed. Peden, 159.

fully within himself, though of course he never realized how deep-seated his anti-Negro feelings were. On the surface of these thoughts lay genuine doubts concerning the Negro's inherent fitness for freedom and recognition of the tensions inherent in racial slavery. He was firmly convinced, as he demonstrated in the *Notes on Virginia*, that Negroes could never be incorporated into white society on equal terms.

Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinction which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.—To these objections, which are political, may be added others, which are physical and moral.

The "real distinction which nature has made" was for Jefferson not only physical but temperamental and mental. Negroes seemed to "require less sleep," for "after hard labour through the day," they were "induced by the slightest amusements to sit up till midnight, or later" though aware that they must rise at "first dawn." They were "at least as brave" as whites, and "more adventuresome." "But," he wrote, withdrawing even this mild encomium, "this may perhaps proceed from a want of forethought, which prevents their seeing a danger till it be present. When present, they do not go through it with more coolness or steadiness than the whites." Negroes were "more ardent," their griefs "transient." "In general," he concluded, "their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection. To this must be ascribed their disposition to sleep when abstracted from their diversions, and unemployed in labour. An animal whose body is at rest, and who does not reflect, must be disposed to sleep of course." Within the confines of this logic there was no room for even a hint that daily toil for another's benefit might have disposed slaves to frolic and to sleep.[16]

Of far more serious import for the Negro's future were Jefferson's remarks on mental capacity. More than any other single person he framed the terms of the debate still carried on today.

Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous. It would be unfair to follow them to Africa for this investigation. We will consider them here, on the same

16. Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, ed. Peden, 138, 139.

stage with the whites, and where the facts are not apocryphal on which a judgment is to be formed. It will be right to make great allowances for the difference of condition, of education, of conversation, of the sphere in which they move. Many millions of them have been brought to, and born in America. Most of them indeed have been confined to tillage, to their own homes, and their own society: yet many have been so situated, they might have availed themselves of the conversation of their masters; many have been brought up to the handicraft arts, and from that circumstance have always been associated with the whites. Some have been liberally educated, and all have lived in countries where the arts and sciences are cultivated to a considerable degree, and have had before their eyes samples of the best works from abroad. . . . But never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never see even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture.[17]

Despite his stress on the necessity for "great allowances," Jefferson seemed unable to push the logic of environmentalism very far; in fact he stopped at just the point where that logic made a case for Negro inferiority. He seemed incapable of complimenting Negroes without immediately adding qualifications. "In music," he continued, picking up a widespread popular belief, "they are more generally gifted than the whites with accurate ears for tune and time, and they have been found capable of imagining a small catch." Further ability was "yet to be proved." [18]

Not content with a general assessment, Jefferson went on to disparage the widely known Negroes who had been puffed by the antislavery people as examples of the Negro's equal capacities. Those known to him were poets, and by speculating on the theoretical effects of slavery upon poetry he twisted the environmentalist logic into anti-Negro shape. "Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry.—Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the sense only, not the imagination." He dismissed Phyllis Wheatley with the airy remark that she was "not . . . a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism." Ignatius Sancho he treated with

17. *Ibid.*, 139–40.

18. *Ibid.*, 140. On music compare Crawford, *Observations upon Negro-Slavery* (1790), 31; George Buchanan, *An Oration upon the Moral and Political Evil of Slavery. Delivered at a Public Meeting of the Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, and Others Unlawfully Held in Bondage . . .* (Baltimore, 1793), 10. Compare with the concluding sentence from a 20th-century work of scientific racism: "The Negro has the lower mental faculties (smell, sight, handicraftmanship, body-sense, melody) well developed, the Caucasian the higher (self-control, will power, ethical and aesthetic senses and reason)." Robert Bennett Bean, "Some Racial Peculiarities of the Negro Brain," *American Journal of Anatomy*, V (1906), 412.

more respect but decided that Sancho's works did "more honour to the heart than the head" and substituted "sentiment for demonstration." Sancho was the best of his race, but among literary figures in England "we are compelled to enroll him at the bottom of the column," if, Jefferson added pointedly, he was in fact the real author of the material "published under his name." This higher criticism was surprising in a man who wrote twenty years later that "of all men living I am the last who should undertake to decide as to the merits of poetry. In earlier life I was fond of it, and easily pleased." [19]

Jefferson was thoroughly aware that the environmentalist argument could serve (and actually had) to make a case for Negro equality, and hence he went to great lengths to prove that the Negroes' lack of talent did not stem from their condition. He turned to the slavery of classical times and wandered happily and discursively among the Romans and the Greeks, arguing that ancient slavery was more harsh than America's yet produced slaves of talent and demonstrable achievement. Unaware that he might be inverting cause and effect he noted that some ancient slaves excelled "in science, insomuch as to be usually employed as tutors to their master's children." There had been slaves, then, who had demonstrated significant attainments; and those who had "were of the race of whites." As for Negroes, he concluded, "It is not their condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction." [20]

Having baldly stated his belief in innate inferiority, Jefferson immediately introduced his next subject by reopening the question he had just closed: "Whether further observation will or will not verify the conjecture, that nature has been less bountiful to them in the endowments of the head. . . ." What he now asked was suspension of decision, for he became increasingly aware of how far he had allowed himself to go. Genuine alarm underlay his admonition, toward the *end* of his passage on Negroes, that caution must be exercised "where our conclusion would degrade a whole race of men from the rank in the scale of beings which their Creator may perhaps have given them." But he extricated himself in highly satisfying fashion by dumping the whole problem in the broad lap of American science, thus permitting qualification of his previously stated position to the point of inconsistency. "The opinion, that they are inferior in the faculties of reason and imagination, must be hazarded with great diffidence. To justify a general conclusion,

19. Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, ed. Peden, 140–41; to John D. Burke, Washington, June 21, 1801, Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson*, IX, 267.
20. Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, ed. Peden, 141–42.

requires many observations, even where the subject may be submitted to the Anatomical knife, to Optical glasses, to analysis by fire, or by solvents. How much more then where it is a faculty, not a substance, we are examining; where it eludes the research of all the senses; where the conditions of its existence are various and variously combined; where the effects of those which are present or absent bid defiance to calculation."

Growing happier with his solution he thus labored the obvious fact that assessing mental ability was an immensely difficult task. With nearly audible relief he remodeled an anti-Negro diatribe into a scientific hypothesis, thus effectively depersonalizing a matter which was for him obviously of some personal importance. "To our reproach it must be said, that though for a century and a half we have had under our eyes the races of black and of red men, they have never yet been viewed by us as subjects of natural history. I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that . . . [they] may possess different qualifications." A "suspicion only" of "different qualifications" represented a rather different proposition from "It is not their condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction." [21]

In assessing one important quality in Negroes, however, Jefferson always remained firmly consistent. The "moral sense" was as fully developed in Negroes as in whites. On this subject Jefferson suddenly pressed environmentalist logic as far as it would go. "That disposition to theft with which they have been branded," he declared categorically, "must be ascribed to their situation." With dry detachment he explained the justice of Negro thievery: "The man, in whose favour no laws of property exist, probably feels himself less bound to respect those made in favour of others." Might not the slave "justifiably take a little from one, who has taken all from him?" [22]

Jefferson's strikingly divergent conclusions on the Negro's moral sense and on his intellect were reached without a particle of inconsistency, for the two qualities were, as far as he and many of his post-Revolutionary contemporaries were concerned, thoroughly discrete. The "moral sense, or conscience," as Jefferson explained, was "as much a part of man as his leg or arm" and was "made a part of

21. *Ibid.*, 142–43.
22. *Ibid.*

his physical constitution, as necessary for a social being." [23] To say that the Negro possessed it was the Jeffersonian analogue of the Christian axiom that the Negro possessed a soul. Just as the traditional Christian God had provided the soul, the Jeffersonian Creator had endowed men with the properties necessary for their existence, and no kinds of men could be assumed to lack what they could not live together without. Had the Creator not provided men with a moral sense He would have been "a pitiful bungler." [24] The moral sense might be temporarily impaired by slavery, but Negroes must be said to possess it, else Negroes could never be free. Indeed they could not even be men without it. No such requirement, on the other hand, pertained to the Negro's intellectual endowment.

3. THE ISSUE OF INTELLECT

This striking dichotomy between morals and intellect gave evidence of both the staying power of traditional Christian dualism and the alterations which had been produced in it by the growth of mechanistic naturalism. John Locke's epistomology, which emphasized the blank mind's reception of "sensations" from the external world, had paved the way for re-elaboration of the old concept of "faculties" of the mind. The faculties were now conceived as mechanisms for manipulating sensations, and it was owing chiefly to Locke that the most popular term for describing mental

23. To Peter Carr, Paris, Aug. 10, 1787, Boyd, ed., *Papers of Jefferson*, XII, 14–15; to John Adams, Monticello, May 5, 1817, Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, II, 512.

24. Letter to Carr, previous note. On an earlier occasion he wrote that "Nature has written her moral laws" in "the head and heart of every rational and honest man . . . where every man may read them for himself." Opinion on French Treaties, Apr. 28, 1793, Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson*, VII, 286. See also Jefferson to Maria Cosway, Paris, Oct. 12, 1786, Boyd, ed., *Papers of Jefferson*, X, 450; to Thomas Law, Poplar Forest, June 13, 1814, Bergh and Lipscomb, eds., *Writings of Jefferson*, XIV, 138–44, where Jefferson compared lack of moral sense in some individuals to physical birth defects. The same reasoning applied to liberty also, which was "given" to man "by the author of nature, because necessary for his own sustenance." Howell *v.* Netherland, Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson*, I, 474. See also Adrienne Koch, *The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (N. Y., 1943), chap. 3; Gladys Bryson, *Man and Society: The Scottish Inquiry of the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, 1945). Benjamin Rush once admitted that some savage men, for instance certain African and Russian tribes, lacked the intellectual and the moral faculties. Rush carefully explained, however, that this lack did not mean such savages had never possessed them; the moral faculty might be asleep and could be wakened. Rush was arguing particularly that the moral faculty was as much influenced by external factors as were the other faculties, "Inquiry . . . Moral Faculty," *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, 2d ed., 4 vols. (Phila., 1805), II, 16–18.

talents had become "capacities." Dr. Benjamin Rush, who was as much of a psychologist as anyone in America, cataloged the faculties (under the heading "Physiology") as instinct, memory, imagination, understanding, will, passions and emotions, faith, and the "Moral faculties in which are included what is called the moral sense,—Conscience, and the sense of Deity." [25] An important result of this psychological taxonomy was an unprecedentedly clear-cut separation of what we would call intelligence from the capacity for religious experience, a separation of considerable relevance to changing assessments of Negroes in the second half of the eighteenth century. In one area of experience, this separation smoothed the path for converting Negroes to the religion of their masters by allowing conversion to proceed without implying anything very drastically positive about over-all equality. In another, it meant that the Negro could be judged inferior in certain respects without any implication that he was less than human, as Jefferson amply demonstrated. It helped also to bring the debate on the Negro's nature down to earth, away from heaven which offered better protection, to the realm of his future status in American society. By rendering the concept of mental ability less amorphous than previously, it helped channel much of the debate on the Negro toward the gratifyingly specific question of whether or not he was the mental equal of the white man.

In the years before the Revolution antislavery men had increasingly recognized the importance, even the necessity, of asserting Negro mental equality, but Jefferson's suspicions as advanced in the *Notes on Virginia* greatly heightened the urgency of the question and stimulated much more widespread debate. Publication of the *Notes*—1785 in Paris, 1787 in London (more widely circulated) and 1788 (a pirated edition) in Philadelphia—was followed almost immediately by public criticism of Jefferson's views as well as by a marked increase in the frequency of speculation on the matter in general terms. In 1792 Gilbert Imlay, a man of strange fortunes who had lived for a time in Kentucky, set out to refute Jefferson at some length, saying flatly that "it is certain" that Negroes and whites "are

25. Benjamin Rush, *Sixteen Introductory Lectures, to Courses of Lectures upon the Institutes and Practice of Medicine . . .* (Phila., 1811), 18–19. Rush's psychology may be illustrated by his assertion that we are able "to reject the doctrine of innate ideas, and to ascribe all our knowledge of sensible objects to impressions acting upon an *innate* capacity to receive ideas." Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, II, 451. The concept of "moral sense" was widely disseminated in American colleges after the Scottish Common Sense philosophy was introduced at the College of New Jersey by John Witherspoon in the early 1770's.