

# JAFFA'S CRITIQUE OF CALHOUN AND THE CONSERVATIVE CIVIL WAR OVER THE CIVIL WAR

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In Harry Jaffa's *A New Birth of Freedom*, Stephen Douglas, Lincoln's primary antagonist in Jaffa's earlier work *Crisis of the House Divided*, has been replaced by John C. Calhoun. It is a replacement of Lincoln's real-life political opponent with a potentially more serious and more direct intellectual opponent. It is also, in part, a response to those conservative scholars who claim that Calhoun is the rightful heir to the philosophy of the American founding. These scholars champion Calhoun as a consummate conservative and lay the blame for the excesses of modern liberalism at Lincoln's feet. Willmoore Kendall, Russell Kirk, and M. E. Bradford, to varying degrees, belong to this school.<sup>1</sup> Jaffa's assault upon this line of thought is direct, and his counter-argument paints Calhoun as a proto-progressive and Lincoln as a defender of the spirit of the founding. By placing Jaffa's critique within the context of the divisions between traditionalist and classical liberal strains of conservatism, the ongoing debate between these factions can be seen within its broader philosophical context. Although an exhaustive examination of the different schools of conservative thought and their interpretations of the American founding is not the focus here (e.g., Jaffa's defense of Lincoln's thought and actions are largely left to Jaffa and others), a review of Jaffa's critique of Calhoun—both its strengths and its weaknesses—provides a valuable lens through which the debate itself can be reviewed and examined.

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<sup>1</sup> Kendall, however, is critical of Calhoun's concurrent majority theory. See Kendall, *The Conservative Affirmation*, x.

## I. THE CONSERVATIVE CASE FOR CALHOUN

Russell Kirk's seminal 1953 work, *The Conservative Mind*, helped, if not to establish, at least to define, popularize, and reinvigorate American conservative political thought in the latter half of the 20th century. As Bradford writes, "Where the study of [conservative] roots is concerned, we all begin with Russell Kirk."<sup>2</sup> In Kirk's book, Calhoun appears as a key figure in American conservative political thought; Lincoln decidedly does not make the cut. Calhoun is presented as the man who, in the decades leading up to the Civil War, endowed "Southern conservatism with a political philosophy"<sup>3</sup>—a philosophy which until that time, Kirk suggests, may have been strongly felt, but never systematically articulated or clearly defended. He praises Calhoun's political doctrine as "one of the most sagacious and vigorous suggestions ever advanced by American conservatism."<sup>4</sup> He has in mind Calhoun's concurrent majority doctrine and his challenge to contractual understanding of government as formulated on the grounds of natural right. It would be helpful, therefore, to discuss Calhoun's argument in some detail.

*Calhoun's Concurrent Majority Doctrine and the Critique of the State of Nature*  
Calhoun denies that a state of nature into which all men were born free and equal ever existed, or could exist. As he puts it, there is "not a word of truth in the whole proposition."<sup>5</sup> Such a state of nature, Calhoun believes, is a mere hypothesis, and a false and dangerous one at that. Critiquing the concept from a literal perspective, he argues (1) that men are not born, but rather infants are; (2) that infants are not free, because they lack intellectual capacity for freedom and are subject to their parents and the law; and (3) that they are not equal, either as infants or adults, because of differences in intellectual and moral capacities. He further objects to the idea of the state of nature conceived as a historical pre-political and pre-social condition in which all men were free and equal in the sense that they were not subject to any authority. Such a condition is contrary to the constitution of man and "opposed to his nature."<sup>6</sup> "His natural state is," rather, "the social and political."<sup>7</sup> But Calhoun does not view man's natural condition as one of universal peace or inherent good order. For although society and

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2 Bradford, *A Better Guide than Reason*, 217.

3 Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 170.

4 *Ibid.*, 181.

5 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 566.

6 *Ibid.*, 44; see also 45, 565-569.

7 *Ibid.*, 44.

government are natural to man,<sup>8</sup> there is, nevertheless, a “tendency to a universal state of conflict.” As he argues, man naturally “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.”<sup>9</sup> It is the duty of government to preserve and protect society from this tendency towards universal conflict. There is a danger, however, that the government itself will become a tool of oppression, another arena in which the natural tendency towards conflict will find expression through the sacrifice of one group’s interests for that of another. Democratic suffrage, Calhoun maintains, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for avoiding this danger.<sup>10</sup> It is insufficient because it does nothing to “counteract the tendency of the government to oppression and abuse of its powers.”<sup>11</sup> There remains the possibility, or perhaps likelihood in Calhoun’s view, that a tyrannical majority will arise and exploit the minority. Democratic suffrage is, nevertheless, the necessary condition for the rise of the form of government that would counteract the tendency towards despotism—namely, constitutional government. A proper constitution, according to Calhoun, sets up an interior structure—which he calls the organism—in the government. This structure opposes the tendency of the majority to suppress the minority by preventing any one interest, or group of interests, from wielding exclusive power. Such a constitution 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 laws, or a veto on their execution.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, “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, [the organism] prevents any one from oppressing the other.”<sup>13</sup> Calhoun stresses the difference, which he believes has been overlooked, between simple numerical majorities as the basis for popular government, and what he calls concurrent or constitutional majorities, through which particular group interests are enfranchised. This system, he believes, will ensure that only the common interests of the whole

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8 Hence there is no need to rely on the idea of an original social compact to legitimize government. It should be noted, however, that the Federal Government was formed by a compact according to Calhoun, though it was one made by the states and not the people as a whole; see *ibid.*, 82, 116, 371.

9 *Ibid.*, 7.

10 *Ibid.*, 13.

11 *Ibid.*, 14.

12 *Ibid.*, 21.

13 *Ibid.*, 22.

community are promoted.<sup>14</sup>

Calhoun's constitutional system is designed to protect the liberty of individuals and groups from infringement by political majorities operating through the government. Nevertheless, according to Calhoun, liberty is not appropriate for all people or peoples in equal degrees. Although his description of the prerequisites for political liberty and those to whom it should be denied is general, he clearly has slaves in mind. "No people," he writes, "can long enjoy more liberty than that to which their situation and advanced intelligence and morals fairly entitle them."<sup>15</sup> If liberty is given to a people who lack the requisite morals and intelligence, the result, according to Calhoun, will be anarchy, disorder, and eventually despotism. 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."<sup>16</sup> One should not attempt to "elevate a people in the scale of liberty, above the point to which they are entitled to rise."<sup>17</sup> Much less should one try to establish equality of condition, since inequality, Calhoun argues, is "indispensable to progress."<sup>18</sup> Men are naturally inclined to try to better their condition, and, due to the natural inequality in the capacities of individuals, the results of their efforts will necessarily be unequal. The impulse to better one's condition is the impetus behind progress, and forced equality of outcome, "by the interposition of the government, would put an end to the impulse, and effectually arrest the march of progress."<sup>19</sup>

#### *Kirk's Praise of Calhoun's Conservatism*

Kirk's depiction of Calhoun as a conservative is closely tied to Calhoun's critique of equality. Kirk sees the attempt to ensure the equality of condition through programs of economic leveling as tied to progressive and socialist political policies and as opposed to conservatism.<sup>20</sup> The agreement between Calhoun and Kirk also extends deeper into the role of equality in the American founding. The Declaration of Independence affirms that "all men are created equal." Calhoun, as noted earlier, denies this proposition. He further denies that it had a proper role in the American founding. Rather, he maintains, it was "inserted in our Declaration of

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14 *Ibid.*, 37-38.

15 *Ibid.*, 42.

16 *Ibid.*, 569; see also 42.

17 *Ibid.*, 43.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*, 44.

20 Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 9.

Independence without any necessity.”<sup>21</sup> Jefferson’s inclusion of the clause, Calhoun argues, was unnecessary to justify the Revolution, because the “[b]reach of our chartered privileges, and lawless encroachment on our acknowledged and well-established rights by the parent country, were the real causes, and of themselves sufficient, without resorting to any other, to justify the step.”<sup>22</sup> Kirk shares this assessment, claiming, “[T]he American Revolution was not an innovating upheaval, but a conservative restoration of colonial prerogatives.”<sup>23</sup> The Founders were merely defending the “inheritance they possessed;” namely, “the right of Englishmen and by prescription certain rights particular to themselves.”<sup>24</sup> Consequently, Kirk believes that Jefferson’s appeal in the Declaration to “*a priori* concepts” was unnecessary and opened a dangerous door to later progressive attempts to reform society.<sup>25</sup> Such attempts to found government upon an “ill-conceived design of natural equality is the most artificial of all man’s endeavors, as destructive of liberty as it is impotent to attain real equality of condition,” according to Kirk.<sup>26</sup> Calhoun, in Kirk’s mind, is a hero of conservatism, who “completes the work of . . . demolishing Jefferson’s abstract equality and liberty” and fights against “the tyrannical tendencies inherent in the manipulation of positive law by callous majorities [through his] struggles to devise an effective check on numerical preponderance.”<sup>27</sup>

### *The Lincoln Debate: a Conservative Critique of Lincoln*

If Calhoun is a hero of conservatism who defends the proper understanding of the American founding, then Lincoln, almost by necessity, becomes its enemy. In this view, Lincoln’s famous account of the birth of the nation in the Gettysburg Address, as “conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal,”<sup>28</sup> becomes a perversion of history. So too does his placement of the founding at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, “Four score and seven years ago,” at least to the extent he thereby emphasizes its preamble. These, indeed, are precisely the grounds on which Willmoore Kendall indicts Lincoln. Kendall argues that the dedication to equality contained in the Gettysburg Address is a heretical falsification of the facts of history and an attempt at a new founding on grounds different, and more precarious, than the original. He

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21 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 566.

22 *Ibid.*, 566.

23 Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 72.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*, 160.

27 *Ibid.*, 174.

28 Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings 1859-1856*, 536.

objects to Lincoln's elevation of the Declaration to a "constitutional status" and argues that "Lincoln is unwarranted in reading out of it a commitment to equality as a national goal or purpose, to say nothing of an *overriding* national purpose."<sup>29</sup> Lincoln's misdeed, moreover, was not limited in its effects on the events of the 1860s. Rather, according to Kendall, it has profound repercussions in the contemporary battle between liberalism and conservatism:

[T]he developing struggle between contemporary American conservatism and the Liberal Revolution is, correctly understood, a struggle between those who are determined to "make good" Abraham Lincoln's new act of founding on the one hand, and those who demand, with greater clarity each passing day, that the new act of founding be set aside in favor of the principles of the original founders.<sup>30</sup>

Bradford's analysis of the founding and indictment of Lincoln are similar, if more acerbic—the American Revolution was not revolutionary, only Lincoln was.<sup>31</sup> Lincoln is a "Jacobin," an "Illinois Cromwell," a "new Caesar," an "Eastern priest/king," an "enemy of the 'founding,'" or—appealing to the language of Eric Voegelin—a "gnostic," a millenarian, bent on immanentizing the *eschaton*.<sup>32</sup>

## II. JAFFA'S RESPONSE AND THE CASE FOR CALHOUN AS THE TRUE PROTO-PROGRESSIVE

Writing against these arguments in *A New Birth of Freedom*, Jaffa attempts to turn the table on these critics and, in part, to defeat them on their own grounds by demonstrating that it was Calhoun—and not Lincoln—who abandoned the philosophy of the founding in favor of new and more progressive political principles. Calhoun is depicted as a proto-progressive, "influenced decisively by Rousseau and Hegel,"<sup>33</sup> thinkers whom Calhoun's defenders identified as enemies of the conservatism they championed.<sup>34</sup> Jaffa's surprising claims warrant further examination.

### *Calhoun and Rousseau*

Bradford suggests that Lincoln opened the door to Presidential attempts to channel "something like Rousseau's General Will."<sup>35</sup> Jaffa levels a

29 Kendall, "Equality: Commitment or Ideal?" 99, 101, and more generally, 95-103.

30 Kendall, *Contra Mundum*, 69.

31 Bradford, *A Better Guide than Reason*, 36; see also 209.

32 *Ibid.*, 191, 215, 47, 156, 188.

33 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 86.

34 Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 147.

35 Bradford, *Remembering Who We Are*, 155.

counterclaim against Calhoun, asserting that, although Calhoun “begins his diatribe against the state of nature doctrine of the Founding Fathers by mistakenly identifying it with Rousseau, . . . he himself will end up as a disciple of the very doctrine he denounces.”<sup>36</sup> He argues first that Calhoun confuses the Founders’ and Locke’s view of the state of nature with Rousseau’s completely asocial state of nature. Calhoun suggests that Locke sees man’s natural state as one in which he “lived apart and separated from all others.”<sup>37</sup> Bradford makes the same assertion when he characterizes “Locke’s notion of politics” as a “presocial vacuum.”<sup>38</sup> Calhoun and Bradford are in error here since the Lockean state of nature, though perhaps pre-political, is not pre-social, as it is in Rousseau. Man may be “Lord of his own Person and Possessions . . . and subject to no Body,” but that does not mean he is isolated and alone.<sup>39</sup> He is free, and indeed likely, to engage in trade, enter into contracts, have a family, and participate in other social activities. As Locke argues, “[S]trong Obligations of Necissity, Convienience, and Inclination . . . drive him into *Society*.”<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Locke specifically addresses the objection that there was never a time when men were in the state of nature. Such a state exists right now between sovereign nations, and whenever people interact where there is no sovereign authority; for example, Locke suggests, a Swiss and an Indian meeting in the American wilderness.<sup>41</sup> Contrary to what Calhoun suggests, in Locke’s concept of the state of nature, men do not necessarily live in complete isolation.

Second, Jaffa alleges that Calhoun became a disciple of Rousseau. This claim rests on his argument that Calhoun’s concept of the concurrent majority is essentially the same as Rousseau’s general will.<sup>42</sup> Calhoun’s distinction between the product of the numerical majority and the “united consent of all,” which is attained by concurrent majorities, resembles Rousseau’s distinction “between the will of all and the general will.” “The latter,” according to Rousseau, “considers only the general interest, whereas the former considers private interest and is merely the sum of private wills.”<sup>43</sup> Rousseau, like Calhoun, is concerned that large associations of interests may develop and dominate the others. Rousseau’s solution to this problem is different than Calhoun’s, however. Rousseau

36 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 427.

37 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 567.

38 Bradford, *A Better Guide than Reason*, 214.

39 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, § 123.

40 *Ibid.*, § 77.

41 *Ibid.*, § 14.

42 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 427.

43 Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, 155.



calls for a small state in which political associations are prohibited. Each citizen is to make up his own mind, and the minor differences between citizens are supposed to cancel each other out to produce the general will. If there are interest groups, however, Rousseau advises that they should be multiplied so that no single party can dominate. Inequality among the factions must be prevented.<sup>44</sup> It is, perhaps, not a far step from this principle to Calhoun's idea of veto powers, which puts each faction on an equal footing.

Jaffa also points to a related but deeper connection between Calhoun and Rousseau; namely, that for both "[t]he ruling principle is a form of the will, not of reason."<sup>45</sup> Calhoun sees man primarily as a self-interested pursuer of his passions, rather than social interests, and government as a mechanism to regulate that self-interest. As Jaffa explains Calhoun's position, whatever the various interest groups can agree upon unanimously is presumed to be a rational or just outcome. What is decisive, according to Jaffa, is the form—everyone agreeing—and not the content of the will. He contrasts this with the Founders' view. The Declaration of Independence does not simply say that governments derive their powers from the consent of the governed; rather, it limits that consent to the derivation of "just powers": "Unless the governed are enlightened such that they understand *a priori* the distinction between just and unjust powers, consent alone will not make government legitimate."<sup>46</sup> In other words, there are powers that no consent can render just. The Declaration makes an appeal to natural right or natural law that is not found in Calhoun's teaching.<sup>47</sup> For Calhoun, according to Jaffa, minority factions deserve enfranchisement not because the individuals that compose them are bearers of natural or God-given rights, but because they are strong enough to demand a place in government. If excluded, they will threaten it with revolt and anarchy. As Calhoun argues, "Power can only be resisted by power."<sup>48</sup> A consequence of this, Jaffa argues, is that "[a] minority . . . that may be held in subjection need not be granted the veto."<sup>49</sup> (Here Jaffa has slaves in mind.) Wisdom, right, justice, or the good need not be taken into consideration in determining the will of the concurrent majority, or which minority interests are worthy of protection; only the agreement of the

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44 Ibid.

45 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 432.

46 Ibid.

47 There are laws of nature in Calhoun, "but they are laws of cause and effect. They are not prescriptive or normative, as in the political philosophy of the Declaration." Ibid., 431.

48 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 12.

49 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 438-9.



enfranchised interest groups is required.<sup>50</sup>

According to Calhoun, the idea that men are born free and equal in the state of nature is the most dangerous of all political errors. It is what brought revolution, anarchy, and despotism to Europe.<sup>51</sup> By discrediting these ideas, Calhoun is attempting to save the United States from following the same destructive path, but Jaffa believes that Calhoun is actually doing the opposite. Calhoun's political teaching, according to Jaffa, helped lead America towards civil war, and he is the thinker who made the most dangerous of all political errors.<sup>52</sup> By attacking the idea that liberty and equality are natural rights of man, Calhoun is undermining the principles that lie at the heart of the American founding and political order. Calhoun is only able to do this because he has conflated the doctrines of Locke and Rousseau. Furthermore, even though Calhoun frequently issues warnings about the dangers of the democratic majoritarianism in the American constitutional system, by Jaffa's account he is embracing a concept similar to Rousseau's general will. Jaffa, however, might be fairly criticized for going too far in his attempt to paint Calhoun as a disciple of Rousseau; it is easy to identify profound conflicts between the doctrines of Calhoun and Rousseau. For instance, they hold divergent positions on the state of nature, social contract, and equality. Nonetheless, Jaffa's critique of Calhoun remains useful (even if occasionally hyperbolic) in that he succeeds in identifying serious difficulties and dangers in Calhoun's political teaching.

### *Calhoun and Hegel*

Jaffa's critique does not rest solely on his attempt to align Calhoun with Rousseau; rather, he goes on to link Calhoun to the German Idealist, G.W.F. Hegel. On the surface, the idea that a Southern statesman like Calhoun is a crypto-German Idealist seems almost absurd. How can Jaffa assert that Calhoun was "decisively influenced" by Hegel, and further that Calhoun was one of the "most famous" right-wing Hegelians,<sup>53</sup> when he provides no evidence of Calhoun's familiarity with his contemporary's work?

Jaffa begins his attack on Calhoun by asserting that "Calhoun accepted Hegel's belief that history is the unfolding of the mind of God."<sup>54</sup> Further, Jaffa detects a Hegelian, if not a Marxist, character in many of

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50 *Ibid.*, 432. It is not at all clear that such an argument would be consistent with Rousseau's teaching.

51 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 569.

52 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 429.

53 *Ibid.*, 85-6.

54 *Ibid.*, 92.

Calhoun's arguments.<sup>55</sup> In the passages that Jaffa points to, Calhoun speaks of the unanticipated social and political changes that are resulting from progress in the development of the sciences. Far from being "unalterably opposed to 'progress,'" as Kirk claims,<sup>56</sup> Calhoun is often its champion.<sup>57</sup> As Calhoun writes,

I regard the advancement of mechanical and chemical improvements in the arts with feelings little short of enthusiasm; not only as the prolific source of national and individual wealth, but as the great means of enlarging man's dominion over the material world, and thereby of laying the solid foundation of a highly improved condition of society, morally and politically... I not only rejoice at the general progress of the arts in the world, but in their advancement in our own country.<sup>58</sup>

Calhoun believes that in this progress can be seen not merely the success of mankind, but the very workings of God in man. He claims that it would be "impious to doubt" that the advancement of the sciences will "greatly improve the condition of man,"<sup>59</sup> because

[i]t would be to suppose, that the all-wise and beneficent Being . . . had so constituted man, as that the employment of the high intellectual faculties, with which He has been pleased to endow him, in order that he might develop the laws that control the great agents of the material world, and make them subservient to his use—would prove to him the cause of permanent evil—and not of permanent good.<sup>60</sup>

Not only is man materially improved by this progress, but, in Hegelian or Marxist fashion, progress is supposed to confirm Calhoun's concurrent majority as a historically higher and more perfect form of government. Material and socio-political advancement are intertwined, so that progress in one follows upon progress in the other in a dialectical fashion. Further, by Jaffa's account, Calhoun sees his own political project as assuring the beneficence of material progress. The successful implementation of his political theory, in effect, will serve to justify history, progress, and indeed

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55 *Ibid.*, 85, 92, 439-443, 453-6.

56 Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 152.

57 Jaffa recognizes that Calhoun sees material progress as a mixed blessing, and that it does not "itself constitute moral and political progress." *A New Birth of Freedom*, 92. However, as discussed below, Jaffa goes on to argue that Calhoun sees his own political project as ensuring the ultimate goodness of that progress.

58 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 398-399.

59 *Ibid.*, 66.

60 *Ibid.*; See also Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 92.

even God.<sup>61</sup>

Calhoun argues that the political effect of the advancement of the sciences and intellectual faculties will be “to give ascendancy to that form of government best calculated to fulfill the ends for which government is ordained.”<sup>62</sup> Good government must arise from this development because it is necessary for the “well-being of our race,” and without it, social, political, and material change would likely be detrimental, thereby contradicting the premise of God’s providential goodness.<sup>63</sup> The anticipated ascendancy of Calhoun’s form of government will serve to moderate the chaos and upheavals caused by social, political, and material change and ultimately render them beneficial to mankind following a revolutionary time or transition period. Although change or progress may be temporarily disruptive, or even destructive of regimes, the “form [of Government] best adapted” to accomplish the ends of government will ultimately survive or emerge from the disorder, and that form is Calhoun’s concurrent majority.<sup>64</sup> Although Calhoun admits that the rational or perfect regime is exceedingly difficult to achieve, he suggests that he has found the blueprint for it, the form of constitution that will “perfect what the wisdom of the Infinite ordained.”<sup>65</sup> The concurrent majority system will put an end to “all strife and struggle” between different interests and “unite [the individual and social feelings] in one common devotion to country.”<sup>66</sup> Under such an order, “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.”<sup>67</sup> The contradictions and tensions between different interests, the forces which have driven political strife and revolutions throughout history, have been mastered by what amounts to a final state grounded in a rational political science.<sup>68</sup> Jaffa believes that Calhoun’s view of historical progress and his belief in the achievability of a final, perfect political order betrays his Hegelian and Marxist tendencies. Such a vision is utopian and decidedly un-conservative. Calhoun seems to affirm one of the principal doctrines listed by Kirk as undermining genuine conservatism; namely, the belief in the “perfectibility of man and the illimitable progress of society:

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61 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 91-4.

62 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 66.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., 66-7.

65 Ibid., 10; Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 93.

66 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 37-8.

67 Ibid.

68 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 93-4.

meliorism.”<sup>69</sup> Surprisingly, even Calhoun’s great defender, Russell Kirk, seems to endorse such a Hegelian teleology in relation to Calhoun when he declares that constitutions “are the voice of God expressed through a people,” and that “nature and God work through historical experience.”<sup>70</sup>

Other Hegelian elements not discussed by Jaffa can also be found in Calhoun’s thought. For example, Calhoun, like Hegel, believes that the “various stages of intelligence and civilization through which our race has passed”<sup>71</sup> exhibit a progressive development. In language that sounds as if it could have come out of Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*, Calhoun traces “the subsequent advance of our race in civilization and intelligence” to the less developed forms in which they are found “in the institutions of the Egyptians, the Hindoos, the Chinese, and the Jews.”<sup>72</sup> Even Calhoun’s concurrent majority theory contains parallels to Hegel’s thought. In Calhoun’s system, particular interests express their will through the mechanism of concurrent majorities, while much as for Hegel, particular interests find their expression through the mediating agency of various Estates;<sup>73</sup> that is, “associations, communities, and corporations.”<sup>74</sup> Through the Estates, the people “becomes part of the organism, [and] the mass attains its interests in a legitimate orderly manner.”<sup>75</sup> For Hegel, much as for Calhoun, the “constitution is essentially a system of mediation,” and as part of the “mediating organ, the Estates stand between the government at large on the one hand and the people in their division into particular spheres and individuals on the other.”<sup>76</sup> Calhoun’s use of the terms “organism” and “constitution” are likewise reminiscent of Hegel’s language. Although Hegel does not rely on the veto power as a means for achieving political unity, a Hegelian structure can nevertheless be detected in Calhoun’s description of the operation of the veto. As Calhoun explains, it is “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.”<sup>77</sup> It is not difficult to see a Hegelian

69 Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 10.

70 *Ibid.*, 175.

71 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 11.

72 *Ibid.*, 12.

73 Calhoun also repeatedly refers to the interests of differing “Estates.” See, for example, Calhoun’s “Fort Hill Address”: “[E]ach [interest] should be represented the government, as a separate estate, with a distinct voice, and a negative on the acts of its co-estates, in order to check their encroachments.” *Union and Liberty*, 373-4.

74 Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 346, 226.

75 *Ibid.*, 343.

76 *Ibid.*, 342-343.

77 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 29.

thesis, antithesis, and synthesis in Calhoun's account, although Hegel typically does not employ this terminology himself. It would be closer to Hegel's language to say that particular or abstract interests are mediated by a negating agency—the veto—to produce a universalized will and concrete political order.

Finally, Hegel, like Calhoun, objects to the idea of a state of nature as a proper foundation for political thought and denies that it could have been an actual historical condition that existed in the past. Calhoun seems to stand in complete agreement with Hegel's view that "Society and the State are the very conditions in which Freedom is realized."<sup>78</sup> He also agrees with Hegel that liberty, or freedom, "must be first sought out and won; and that by an incalculable medial discipline of the intellectual and moral faculties."<sup>79</sup>

Although there are a number of compelling correspondences between Calhoun and Hegel, as with his comparison of Calhoun and Rousseau, Jaffa can be faulted for appearing to suggest that there was direct influence, and for insisting so stridently that Calhoun was, in fact, a Hegelian. Jaffa seems to ignore profound methodological and substantive differences in their political theories and the lack of any documented connection between Calhoun and Hegelian thought. This does not mean, however, that the comparison is fruitless, nor that the resemblances in their thought are merely superficial. By demonstrating that Calhoun and Hegel share a similarly progressive view of history, and that elements of their view of the nature of government overlap, Jaffa certainly raises doubts about the extent to which Calhoun can be viewed as the answer to the modern progressive movement. The fact that Calhoun's thought shares as many similarities as it does to a German philosophy that deeply influenced the early progressive movement should certainly give conservatives seeking to champion Calhoun pause.

Furthermore, Jaffa is not the only person to notice a resemblance between the political thought of Hegel and Calhoun. In a 1939 article in the *American Political Science Review*, Gunnar Heckscher compares Calhoun's concurrent majority theory with Hegel's constitutional theory, concluding that the "resemblance is more than superficial."<sup>80</sup> More to the point, Heckscher notes that "[i]t is a well-known fact that the writings of

78 Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 41.

79 *Ibid.*, 40-41.

80 Heckscher, "Calhoun's Idea of 'Concurrent Majority' and the Constitutional Theory of Hegel," 587. Heckscher's thesis, however, is that the resemblances between Hegel and Calhoun's thought can be explained by their common origin in European conservatism, and especially the work of Edmund Burke.

John C. Calhoun were read and admired by German political theorists.”<sup>81</sup> He points specifically to the German-trained American political scientist Charles Edward Merriam, a prominent early progressive theorist. Merriam favorably cites Calhoun for his rejection of the “individualistic ideas of the ‘natural right’ school of political theory, indorsed in the revolution.”<sup>82</sup> “Calhoun and his school,” Merriam writes, “repudiated this idea, and maintained that liberty is not the natural right of all men, but only the reward of the races or individuals properly qualified for its possession.”<sup>83</sup> Although Merriam’s and Calhoun’s rejection of the state of nature and natural right are similar, Merriam’s views of racial superiority go beyond Calhoun’s more paternalistic approval of slavery. Merriam argues that “the Teutonic races must civilize the politically uncivilized. They must have a colonial policy. Barbaric races, if incapable, may be swept away; and such action ‘violates no rights of these populations which are not petty and trifling in comparison with its transcendent right and duty to establish legal and political order everywhere.’ ”<sup>84</sup> According to Merriam, the “propaganda of political civilization . . . is not only the right and privilege, but the mission and duty, the very highest obligation incumbent on the Teutonic races including the United States.”<sup>85</sup> This sentiment is not a far departure from Calhoun’s assertion that slavery is not “an evil, [but] a good—a positive good” that benefits both slaves and slave owners alike.<sup>86</sup> Slavery is a civilizing force, according to Calhoun, that has improved the condition of the enslaved Africans morally, intellectually, and physically.<sup>87</sup> Unlike Lincoln and many of the Founders, Calhoun looks towards slavery’s preservation and expansion rather than its eventual elimination.<sup>88</sup>

### *Calhoun and the Progressives*

The fact that Calhoun and some early progressives held deep-seated views about race does not prove that the two schools of thought are identical, of course, but it does demonstrate that the idea of racial equality is not one that can simply be used to try to distinguish Calhoun from early progressives. Furthermore, there are clear areas of agreement between Calhoun and

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81 Ibid., 585.

82 Merriam, *A History of American Political Theories*, 307.

83 Ibid., 312.

84 Ibid., 314.

85 Ibid.

86 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 474.

87 Ibid., 473.

88 Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1832-1856*, 603; Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 472-5, 549, 569-70; cf. Alexander Stephens, “Cornerstone Speech.”

later progressives like John Dewey, perhaps the greatest of the progressive political theorists. Like Calhoun, Dewey rejects the idea of democracy when understood as “nothing but a numerical aggregate.”<sup>89</sup> Rather, he writes, “if democracy be a form of society, it not only does have, but must have a common will; for it is this unity of will which makes it an organism.”<sup>90</sup> Only a slight twist of terminology distinguishes this from Calhoun’s theory, in which the organism of the constitution, through concurrent majorities, determines the “common interests of the whole,” or common will.<sup>91</sup> This emphasis on the unified will of a political society runs through Rousseau, Calhoun, Hegel, and Dewey. There is even a distinct similarity between Dewey and Calhoun in their view of the purpose of government. Calhoun tells his readers that the “ends for which government is ordained . . . are two fold; to protect, and to perfect society.”<sup>92</sup> And, further, that, “[t]o perfect society, it is necessary to develop the faculties, intellectual and moral, with which man is endowed.”<sup>93</sup> Only under government can man’s “faculties be fully developed.”<sup>94</sup> Correspondingly, for Dewey, the aim of public policy is to promote “the claim of every individual to the full development of his capacities.”<sup>95</sup> If government is to be involved in the perfection of society and the development of the faculties, however, and not merely in their protection—as maintained in *The Federalist*<sup>96</sup>—then this may seem to open the door to, or perhaps even necessitate, a very expansive role for government. Again, for the progressives, as Dewey says, “[t]he problem of democracy becomes the problem of that form of social organization, extended to all the areas and ways of living, in which the power of individuals shall not merely be released from mechanical external constraint but shall be fed, sustained and directed.”<sup>97</sup> The purpose of government is not merely to protect persons, property, and whatever natural rights individuals retain within the state; rather, it must be directed towards “establishing an entire social order, possessed of a spiritual authority that would nurture and direct the inner as well as the outer life of individuals.”<sup>98</sup> In other words, government must be concerned with man’s perfection, or the complete human good. According

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89 Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy,” 229.

90 *Ibid.*, 232.

91 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 38.

92 *Ibid.*, 40.

93 *Ibid.*

94 *Ibid.*, 568.

95 Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 33.

96 Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, *The Federalist*, 58.

97 Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, 40.

98 *Ibid.*, 39.



to the progressives, achieving these ends requires a rejection of the sort of constraints and limitations that the Founders placed on government and a turn toward organized social planning.<sup>99</sup> An expansion of the ends of government cannot but necessitate an expansion of the means available to it. If Calhoun accepts that government must be concerned with the complete human good, then he would seem to be soliciting the progressives' attempts to achieve this goal through governmental action.

Although there are clear and substantial similarities between Calhoun's thought and that of modern progressives, just as is the case with Rousseau and Hegel, these similarities do not indicate a strict equivalence. While they share certain premises and goals, there are also important divisions. Modern progressives emphasize the importance of equality in a way that is antithetical to Calhoun's teaching on the importance of inequality to progress and civilization.<sup>100</sup> Inequality is a natural product of liberty, according to Calhoun, not an unjust barrier to it that must be eliminated. Furthermore, Calhoun's concept of liberty is essentially a "negative" one: "Liberty leaves each free to pursue the course he may deem best to promote his interests and happiness, as far as it may be compatible with the primary ends for which government is ordained."<sup>101</sup> The primary way the government can promote man's progress is by protecting property rights and otherwise leaving individuals alone, free to pursue their own self-interests. This is certainly at odds with the progressive idea of positive liberty, which asserts that individuals have a right to various goods and services,<sup>102</sup> and it causes one to question the extent to which Calhoun would favor even state or local government's involvement in the moral or intellectual perfection of its citizens. Finally, progressives often emphasize the need for a strong central government to accomplish their goals, whereas Calhoun advocates for a weak and limited one. Again, the argument is not that Calhoun should be understood as a modern progressive or someone who would support all their policies, but rather that they share a common view of history, of progress, of the ends of

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99 *Ibid.*, 60.

100 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 43-4.

101 *Ibid.*, 40.

102 One of the most well known articulations of the new positive rights is contained in Franklin Roosevelt's 1944 State of the Union address, in which he describes a "second Bill of Rights." His list of rights includes: "The right to a useful and remunerative job . . . ; The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation; . . . The right of every family to a decent home; . . . The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health; The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment; . . . The right to a good education." Roosevelt, "State of the Union Message to Congress."

government, of the importance of achieving a fully unified political will, and of the need to reject Lockean notions of natural rights.

### *Calhoun's Scientism*

In addition to these commonalities between Calhoun and the progressives, Jaffa claims they share a positivistic and “scientific” approach to politics that accompanies their historicism.<sup>103</sup> Progressives like Merriam argue that the outmoded Lockean approach to politics must be replaced by “a more scientific way of approaching the questions of politics” and a fuller “knowledge of history.”<sup>104</sup> Calhoun, according to Jaffa, claims to be an adherent of a similarly “scientific” approach to politics, in which “[p]olitics . . . becomes, in effect, a branch of physics.”<sup>105</sup> Calhoun does in fact present his *Disquisition* as a work on the “science of government.” In it, the laws of human nature are directly compared to the laws governing “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.”<sup>106</sup> The task of governing becomes that of understanding the natural forces controlling human conduct and constructing a government that places them in proper balance, just as one constructs a smoothly-operating machine by balancing opposing physical forces. Jaffa identifies in this an attempt by Calhoun to construct a value-free social science modeled upon the physical sciences.<sup>107</sup> Calhoun explicitly says that he will endeavor in the *Disquisition* to avoid any terms implying moral judgment because he wishes “to restrict the inquiry exclusively to facts.”<sup>108</sup> Moral considerations are excluded, and human conduct is to be “viewed as mere phenomena,” obeying laws “which are as unquestionable as is that of gravitation, or any other phenomena of the material world.”<sup>109</sup> Jaffa contrasts Calhoun’s “scientific” approach to politics with Aristotle’s both on the grounds that it is value or virtue free and that it purports to

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103 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 429.

104 Merriam, *A History of American Political Theories*, 306.

105 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 440; see also, 431, and 439-454 generally.

106 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 5.

107 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 442.

108 Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 6.

109 *Ibid.*; quoted by Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 442.

share the degree of exactness that can be found in the physical sciences.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, according to Jaffa, “Calhoun’s assertion of a ‘scientific’ foundation for his statesmanship has no rival in his time until we encounter similar claims by his younger contemporary Karl Marx.”<sup>111</sup>

*The South’s Rejection of the Political Philosophy of the Founding*

According to Jaffa, a link between scientific and political progress similar to Calhoun’s can be seen reemerging directly as a justification for the South’s secession from the Union in a speech given by Alexander Stephens, the Vice President of the Confederacy. In this speech, known as the “Cornerstone Speech,” Stephens draws a parallel between progress in political institutions and that in the sciences in order to justify the Confederacy in rejecting the principles of the Founders and replacing those principles with ones grounded in newly understood truths about human nature. The speech is perhaps the strongest piece of evidence for Jaffa’s claim that the South and not Lincoln—as his detractors allege—was engaged in a new act of founding. In it, Stephens argues:

The prevailing ideas entertained by [Jefferson] and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old constitution, were that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally, and politically... .<sup>112</sup> Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural and normal condition. This, our

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110 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 440, 442. Jaffa makes a more extended argument in which he accuses Calhoun of being anti-Aristotelian. He labels Calhoun a modern individualist who “does not see, as Aristotle did, that the ontological priority of community to individuality is the foundation of all society and government.” *Ibid.*, 447-8. The difficulty with this argument is that Calhoun explicitly asserts the opposite when he declares that man’s natural state is “social and political.” Nevertheless, Jaffa is correct to point out that Calhoun’s theory relies on the premise that that man’s “direct or individual affections are stronger than his sympathetic or social feelings.” Calhoun, *Union and Liberty*, 6. Calhoun’s political system is grounded in self-interest, although his intention is to channel it to work for the social good.

111 Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 440. One might object to Jaffa’s assertion that Calhoun’s claim to be engaging in political science is unprecedented or un-American by pointing to *The Federalist*. In *Federalist* 9 Publius talks about the improvements that have been made in the “science of politics.” Further, in *Federalist* 31, Publius compares maxims in geometry with maxims in ethics and politics. Nevertheless, in *Federalist* 55 Publius remarks, “Nothing can be more fallacious than to found our political calculations on arithmetical principles.” *Federalist* 37 and 85 similarly caution against expecting mathematical certainty in politics.

112 Compare Calhoun’s critique of Jefferson’s belief in equality and the immorality of slavery in his “Speech on the Oregon Bill.” *Union and Liberty*, 569-70.

new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth. This truth has been slow in the process of its development, like all other truths in the various departments of science.<sup>113</sup>

Jaffa uses this speech to show that the principles behind the new Confederate government were decidedly un-conservative in character. Rather than “having its roots in ancestral wisdom” or tradition, the Confederacy, he argues, was grounded by faith in a new “modern science,” that rejected as “obsolete if not foolish” the political beliefs of the Founders.<sup>114</sup> The replacement of the Founders’ idea of equality with inequality and a new science of racial superiority formed the “soul of the Confederacy,” according to Jaffa.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, he says, such a rejection of traditional principles represents a “mid-nineteenth-century faith in science in its most comprehensive and naive form,” one which had its counterpart in Calhoun’s claim “to be pushing back the frontiers of political science on the model of physical science.”<sup>116</sup>

### III. CIVIL WAR BY OTHER MEANS

It might be asked why Jaffa found it important to discredit Calhoun’s political thought, and indeed so important that he sometimes exaggerates Calhoun’s progressiveness while ignoring conservative aspects of his thought. Within the context of *A New Birth of Freedom*, exposing Calhoun as a proto-progressive who rejected the philosophy of the American founding is an essential component of Jaffa’s defense of Lincoln against similar charges. Jaffa believes that to defend Lincoln’s thought and actions, he must necessarily reject Calhoun’s. Lurking beneath the debate over Lincoln and Calhoun, however, is an ideological clash between two strains of conservatism and two understandings of the American regime: the traditionalist—or Burkean—version, and the classical liberal—or Lockean—version. Jaffa’s intent is not simply to convince his reader that Lincoln is a conservative and that Calhoun is not, but to argue more broadly, even if less overtly, that the traditionalist form of conservatism as a whole is defective.<sup>117</sup> Jaffa’s argument, however, may also be used to

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113 Stephens, “Cornerstone Speech.” See also Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom*, 216-217, 222-4.

114 *New Birth of Freedom*, 222-3.

115 *Ibid.*, 223.

116 *Ibid.*, 224.

117 In one of Jaffa’s more flippant but amusing remarks, he writes that “For Calhounites, state rights, not natural rights, were the source of constitutional rights.” “The Soul of Buckley.”

highlight conflicts between Calhoun's thought and traditionalist views. Because traditionalists themselves have presented Calhoun as a standard-bearer for their form of conservatism, these conflicts suggest that there are internal contradictions and weakness within traditionalism—conflicts that undermine the possibility of viewing it as a genuine alternative or response to modern progressivism.

Despite all the obvious disagreements between progressives and traditionalists when it comes to actual matters of policy, Jaffa's work suggests that—at least from a theoretical perspective—they are much closer to each other than they are to the classical liberal thought of the Founders. It is possible to identify a number of areas of agreement and partial agreement between traditionalists and progressives, but the most crucial is their mutual rejection of the natural rights teaching enunciated in the Declaration. If one denies the existence a moral law or standard that human beings can access through the use of their reason, then one opens the door to moral relativism and legal positivism, regardless of whether one is advocating progressive or traditional causes. Consequently, Jaffa is quick to pounce on any conservatives that he views as making such a mistake.<sup>118</sup>

Jaffa understands the Civil War as a war over the truth and meaning of the Declaration and the place of equality and natural rights within the American regime. Further, for Jaffa, the dispute among conservatives over the correct understanding of Calhoun, Lincoln, and the Civil War is more than merely academic. "[P]artisan . . . scholarship" is in fact "the Civil War continued by other means."<sup>119</sup> The field of battle may have shifted, but the core of the conflict over our political principles and national self-understanding remains the same. At stake is nothing less than "the soul of the American Revolution, and the salvation of Western civilization."<sup>120</sup> And what is required for our political salvation, according to Jaffa, is a return of the conservative "movement to its roots in the political thought

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118 See, for example, Jaffa's criticism of Rehnquist in "Original Intent and Justice Rehnquist."

119 Harry Jaffa, "American Conservatism and the Present Crisis." Here Jaffa is criticizing what he sees as traditionalist partisan scholarship, but that does not mean that Jaffa is not partisan himself, nor does it mean that to be partisan is to be wrong. George Anastaplo, writing elsewhere in a footnote, asks if Jaffa's "noble partisanship" might "sometimes go too far." He cautions the reader, however, writing, "differences may be relegated to such out-of-the-way-places as footnotes—to those secluded places where an author's 'personality' may be permitted a disciplined but revealing license." Further, he advises, "most readers should probably leave the notes completely alone." Anastaplo, "American Constitutionalism and the Virtue of Prudence," 78, 129n1, 166n64.

120 Jaffa, "American Conservatism and the Present Crisis."

and actions of the American Founders and Abraham Lincoln.”<sup>121</sup> More particularly, he calls for a renewed understanding of, and a renewed faithfulness to the “doctrine of natural rights enunciated in the Declaration of Independence, and expounded by Lincoln.”<sup>122</sup> Lincoln is important for Jaffa as a defender of the natural rights interpretation of the American political order and the importance of the Declaration’s commitment to equality. Because traditionalists reject Lincoln and his interpretation of the role of the Declaration and natural rights in the Founding, they must be rejected, just as much as progressives, for abandoning and attempting to overturn America’s political creed. Any renewal of conservatism is consequently predicated on a “rejection of the ideas that have dominated American conservatism in the last half century.”<sup>123</sup> Instead of looking to tradition or revelation as a guide, conservatives ought to embrace classical liberal—or Lockean—political philosophy.<sup>124</sup> Although traditionalists and classical liberals<sup>125</sup> may share a common enemy in modern progressivism, their alliance, by Jaffa’s account, is a tenuous one at best, if not a dangerous one. The conservative movement is, in essence, a house divided that cannot permanently stand.

Contrary to Jaffa, it may be argued that the alliance between traditionalists and classical liberals ought not be tampered with, as long as there is still a common opponent in progressivism; that it is foolish to disturb this coalition, and that broad agreement over practical policy questions should trump any theoretical differences; that any battle between traditionalists and classical liberals might be more appropriately fought once the ranks of the progressives have been greatly reduced and weakened as a political force in American politics. Jaffa, however, leaves the impression that no substantial gains can be made against progressivism until conservatives are united behind a coherent political philosophy in the tradition of Lincoln, Locke, and the Declaration of Independence; that routing out the philosophical foundations of progressivism, whether among the progressives or the traditionalists, is essential to the

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121 Ibid.

122 Jaffa, “The False Prophets of American Conservatism.”

123 Ibid. It would be fair to ask if traditionalism is still the dominant strain of conservative thought today. Arguably, Jaffa’s own views and the views of those sympathetic to his positions now dominate the conservative movement.

124 Ibid.

125 Jaffa labels the political philosophy of the Founders “Old Liberalism” at one point. “Equality, Justice, and the American Revolution: In Reply to Bradford’s ‘The Heresy of Equality,’” 115. Some have labeled Jaffa’s interpretation of the Founding the “West Coast Straussian” position. Martin Diamond and Thomas West have also been included under this label. First Principles, “The American Experience.”

conservative movement.

Jaffa's seeming desire for a decisive ideological conflict within the conservative movement faces a serious hurdle, however. The problem is one of numbers: the forces aligned on either side of the debate are too few. The coalition that makes up the conservative movement as a political force does not divide up neatly into traditionalist and classical liberal camps.<sup>126</sup> The lines between the two sides are blurred, the coalition that makes up the movement is broader and more complex, and the number of conservatives who even recognize the theoretical conflict between traditionalism and classical liberalism are relatively few. In order to fight a political battle, it is advantageous to have clearly-defined sides, as well as a dispute that is practical and not simply theoretical. Furthermore, civil wars, even the kind that do not involve physical battles, are often very costly. It is not clear that some kind of reconciliation between traditionalists and classical liberals is impossible. Frank Meyer has made the argument that "although [those two streams of thought] are sometimes presented as mutually incompatible, [they] can in reality be united within one single broad conservative political theory, since they have their roots in a common tradition and are arrayed against a common enemy."<sup>127</sup> According to Meyer, the seeming conflict between the two schools of thought is a result of each side abstracting from and stressing two different aspects of a common Western political tradition. One side stresses the importance of freedom, individualism, and the reliance upon reason, while the other stresses the importance of virtue, order, and the reliance upon tradition. In doing so, both sides emphasize only part of the truth, and only a portion of the principles that led Western civilization to flourish. Meyer admits that there is sometimes a genuine tension between the two sets of principles, but he makes the case that this tension is actually healthy, and that a balance between the two must be struck. Further, he argues, the two sets of principles are actually complementary. For instance, he maintains that it is perfectly reasonable to believe "in virtue as man's proper end *and* his freedom under God as the condition of the achievement of that

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126 Jaffa has a tendency to oversimplify the thought of his opponents. As he argues, "we see the conservatism of the last half century compounded largely of paleoconservatives and neoconservatives. The many subgroups, of economic conservatives and social conservatives, of libertarians and traditionalists, are, for present purposes, sufficiently comprehended within these two larger categories." "The False Prophets of American Conservatism." Not only are all the different strains of thought he lists boiled down to two categories, but he goes on to argue that they both make the same fundamental mistake in understanding America. Jaffa sometimes leaves the impression that he is the only real conservative, that he is an army of one, and that all of his opponents are essentially identical.

127 Meyer, *What is Conservatism*, 8.



end.”<sup>128</sup> Similarly, one can admit that there are limits to the power of human reason without rejecting it altogether and placing “custom and prescription in irreconcilable opposition to it.”<sup>129</sup> Importantly, Meyer also emphasizes that once progressivism has taken hold in society, it is no longer enough for conservatives simply to argue for the maintenance of tradition. “Natural conservatism” is not enough when restoration—and not simply preservation—becomes necessary.<sup>130</sup> Something more than the appeal to tradition or history is needed when much of the tradition has already been uprooted. While Meyer may not succeed in reconciling every possible disagreement between classical liberals and traditionalists, his approach suggests that each side brings something useful to the conservative movement, and that attempts by one group to purge the other from the movement are not likely to be productive either practically or philosophically. Accepting the vital roles tradition, virtue, morality, culture, and religion play in society does not necessitate the rejection of the American commitment to liberty or equality. While Jaffa is right to defend Lincoln and the American understanding of natural rights from attack by traditionalists, he need not respond so dismissively or hostilely to traditionalism. Likewise, traditionalists would be wise to try to make peace with Lincoln and the Declaration of Independence. Even assessing the situation from a purely practical perspective, no political movement (conservative, or otherwise) can succeed if it openly rejects the Founders’ declaration of natural rights or Lincoln’s reassertion of them in the Civil War; both are part of the American political tradition.

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128 Ibid., 9.

129 Ibid., 11.

130 Ibid., 10.

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