Thomas Paine

REPRESENTATIVE SELECTIONS, WITH
INTRODUCTION, BIBLIOGRAPHY, AND NOTES

BY

HARRY HAYDEN CLARK

Professor of English

University of Wisconsin
PREFACE

At a time when the forward-looking peoples of the world are engaged in the mighty task of preserving and enlarging the rights of the Common Man, the ideas of Thomas Paine, the most articulate spokesman of those rights, ought to be better known. Broadly speaking, these ideas are those of The Enlightenment, focused upon contemporary tyrannies, by one who lived in and was devoted to the democratic interests of England, America, and France.

Since Paine’s biography has been sympathetically written in much detail, and since some facts regarding his personal life have been used by hostile critics to bring his democratic ideas into discredit, it has seemed best to devote the present Introduction to the development of his ideas—religious, political, economic, humanitarian, educational, and literary, with emphasis on their genetic inter-relationship. It is hoped, however, that those who wish to view him biographically will be assisted by the Chronological Table devoted to his life, by the roughly chronological study of his ideas as they developed, and by the chronological arrangement of the selections. The sources of the texts appear in the notes, which also sketch the circumstances of publication and orient the individual selections in relation to current events. The texts have been slightly modernized in spelling and punctuation, and obvious typographical errors corrected; otherwise they are faithful reproductions of the originals.

Since it was customary, before the rise of Fascism, for those devoted only to American history to represent the Federalists and the Jeffersonians (with whom Paine was associated) as in sharp conflict, it is perhaps well to remind ourselves that they were both loyally American and, like brothers in one family,
differed mainly as to the extent to which the people could be trusted to govern themselves and the extent to which the national government should take precedence over the state governments. Toward tyranny, monarchy, the idea of one politically established church, and the kind of ideas now associated with Fascism, they presented a common front. As the Introduction will show, many of the Federalists were friendly with Paine and honored him, especially before 1793; conversely, Paine was proud of having been a pioneer in 1782 in urging that the Articles of Confederation be supplanted by the Constitution, fathered by the Federalists. Individual members of the two parties differed about theological dogma and sectarian preferences; but it should not be forgotten that Paine agreed with the Federalists to the extent of believing in one God as the Creator, in the human soul, in immortality, in the dignity of the human spirit, in the ideal (however they differed as to the means) of trying to promote and safeguard the good of all classes, and in the fact that the final test of true religion consists in doing good and in furthering the happiness of mankind.

I am grateful to both the Rockefeller Foundation and the Guggenheim Foundation for fellowships which enabled me to make use of rare materials in widely distant libraries not only in this country but in England and France. And I should like to record my indebtedness to Mr. James O'Donnell, especially for assistance in preparing the manuscript.

H. H. C.

February, 1944
THOMAS PAINE

I. RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL IDEAS

Broadly speaking, Paine's importance rests on the fact that he was an idealist, a man who envisaged a happier way of life for all men in the future, who thought in the light of first principles such as the equality and sacredness of all souls before God, and who, since he believed that in the past the life of the common people had been miserable, demanded a sharp break with the past, with tradition. During Paine's first years in America, as we shall see, while he was feeling his way along as an apprentice at propaganda, his ideas were not entirely consistent with one another and not without considerable elements of conservativism, as in Common Sense. After he went to France, however, and joined the cause of the ideologues, such as Condorcet, who motivated the French Revolution, he spoke consistently as an antitraditionalist who thought society could be reconstructed in the light of principles and ideals, "abstracted from time and usage."

Granting, then, his American apprenticeship, it seems best to begin our consideration of him in the light of his basic, governing religious and ethical ideas. John Adams, as we shall see, testified that Paine had doubts of religious traditionalism in 1776, and Paine himself said in 1791 that "for several years past"¹ he had intended to publish the ideas he advanced in The Age of Reason. Therefore it may not actually be such a violation of chronology as it might appear to con-

¹The Writings of Thomas Paine, edited by Moncure D. Conway, IV, 21, preface to The Age of Reason. (This is the standard edition of Paine. 4 vols. New York, 1894–1896. Hereafter referred to as Writings.)
sider his religious ideals first, especially since they involve at
the outset the Quakerism which was his birthright.

1. The Influence of Quakerism

The development of Paine's religious and ethical ideas can
be understood best, perhaps, in relation to four main religious
influences: Quakerism, Newtonianism, classicism, and the ex-
otic concepts of the Druids and ancient Persia and Egypt.
The earliest and most difficult to analyze in its effect upon him
was Quakerism. His best biographer, Moncure Conway, in-
sisted that he was "explicable only by the intensity of his
Quakerism..." 2 And there can be no serious question that
many early and lasting ideas and attitudes were given him by
it. Though never a member of any meeting, Paine could have
been a "birthright Friend," for, as he wrote, "My father being
of the Quaker profession, it was my good fortune to have an
exceedingly good moral education, and a tolerable stock of use-
ful learning." 3 One can easily see the influence of his father's
religion in the experience which, intense enough at the time to
be remembered decades later, must have bent or helped bend
Paine's subconscious mind permanently. "I well remember,"
he says, "when about seven or eight years of age, hearing a
sermon read by a relation of mine, who was a great devotee of
the church, upon the subject of what is called Redemption by the
death of the Son of God. After the sermon was ended, I went
into the garden, and as I was going down the garden steps
(for I perfectly recollect the spot) I revolted at the recollection
of what I had heard, and thought to myself that it was making
God Almighty act like a passionate man, that killed his son,
when he could not revenge himself any other way; and as I
was sure a man would be hanged that did such a thing, I could

2M. D. Conway, Life of Paine (New York, 1892), II, 201.
3Writings, IV, 62.
not see for what purpose they preached such sermons. This was not one of those kind of thoughts that had any thing in it of childish levity; it was to me a serious reflection, arising from the idea I had that God was too good to do such an action, and also too almighty to be under any necessity of doing it. I believe in the same manner to this moment; and I moreover believe, that any system of religion that has any thing in it that shocks the mind of a child, cannot be a true system.”  

Throughout his religious writings he professed deep admiration for the “moral and benign part” of the Quakers’ thought: “I reverence their philanthropy,” he proclaimed. The charity which led them to be pioneers in the abolition of slavery, prison reform, and a dozen other humanitarian enterprises found, of course, its ready response from Paine whose whole life was devoted to reforms for the good of mankind. He cited the Quakers as the sole exception to the general cruelty of Christian sects, and regarded them as “the only sect that has not persecuted...” Indeed, it was on the grounds of the reconstruction of society according to principles of good-will and mutual profit that Paine and the Quakers found themselves in complete agreement, and there, in an absolute sense, alone. He had reinforced childhood notions of their doctrines by reading the theologian Barclay; but, after all, the mystical apprehension of truth through the Inner Light and Paine’s insistence that a dry and rigid rationalism alone could be depended on were mutually exclusive. He often claimed that the Quakers were deists if they but knew it. It

4 *Writings*, IV, 64–65; see also p. 308, where he says that if all the people of the time of the Crucifixion had been Quakers, all would “have been damned because they were too good to commit murder.”  
is noteworthy, however, that he never brought them to re-
ciprocate.

Attention must be paid statements like the following from Mr. Conway: “Paine’s political principles were evolved out of his early Quakerism. He was potential in George Fox. The belief that every human soul was the child of God, and capable of direct inspiration from the Father of all, without mediator or priestly intervention, or sacramental instrumentality, was fatal to all privilege and rank. The universal Fatherhood implied universal Brotherhood, or human equality.” 10 And Conway adds that it was to protect this ideal from “oppression by the majority” that Paine developed his theory of inviolable private rights. Certainly Paine’s readiness to flout temporal authorities and outworn traditions in the cause of what he felt to be the right was in the Quaker tradition. His ability to live frugally and sacrifice financially for his causes, and his not too consistent passion for simplicity, probably stemmed from Quakerism.

Of this much we can be sure. Paine did have a Quaker background. He himself affirmed that his belief in a benevolent deity whose most important attribute was loving Fatherhood came to him from it. His passionate humanitarianism; sense of brotherhood with all men, and its corollary, the sense of the equality of all men’s rights; readiness to think and move independently; and his willingness to go “all out” for his beliefs could have come from Quakerism. There is every reason to believe, therefore, that he operated throughout life with Quaker attitudes and ideas in the back of his mind. Perhaps it is important to remember that usually they were in the back of his mind and did not emerge in anything like pure form.

It is hardly accurate, then, to say that Paine is “explicable only” in the light of Quakerism despite his reverence for their doctrines in general. His home was not intensely Quakeristic,

10 Writings, II, 262.
since his father had "married out of meeting" and been expelled from the Society. He was never actively affiliated with the Quakers, and he said in 1776, "I profess myself a member" of "the English church." He attacked the Quakers' pacifism, and he was so far from being considered "in his time the greatest exponent" of Quakerism that they, ordinarily the most charitable of sects, refused his dying plea to be buried with their brethren. Certainly Paine's general theology and that of his contemporary, the Quaker saint John Woolman, were in many ways mutually repellent. And on the personal side the mystical Woolman and rationalistic Paine had as little in common intellectually as they did in outward action. Woolman strove for humility, gentle persuasiveness, and freedom from bondage to the flesh. Paine, though capable of generosity and high friendship, was at times outrageously egotistical, bellicose, and subject in his later life to coarseness. Finally, the typically Quaker Woolman, though interested in reforms such as the abolition of slavery, believed the essential achievement of man to be self-conquest, and inner victory over self-indulgence and sin; Paine, the deistic humanitarian, saw man's warfare to be with principalities and institutionalized powers alone in which outward service overcame outward obstacles and would usher in Utopia.

2. The Influence of Newtonianism

One must look elsewhere for much of the motivation underlying the four major religious premises made by Paine: (a) that

Writings, I, 156.
Ibid., I, 121 ff., and 206 ff.
For further evidence refuting the thesis that Quakerism is the key to Paine, see R. B. Falk's excellent article, "Thomas Paine: Deist or Quaker?" Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, January, 1938.
nature, in the eye of rationalistic science, is a divine revelation; (b) that such science reveals "a harmonious, magnificent order"—that nature is law; (c) that the natural man shares the divine benevolence and that in this harmonious order his "wants, acting upon every individual, impel the whole of them into society, as naturally as gravitation acts to a center"; (d) and that an attempt to re-establish in politics and religion, a lost harmony with this uniform, immutable, universal, and eternal law and order, and to modify or overthrow whatever traditional institutions have obscured this order and thrown its natural harmony into discord will constitute progress, will rapidly decrease human misery, and will rapidly usher in "the birthday of a new world." Perhaps his inherited Quaker independence made it easier for him to break with the historical majesty of tradition which inhered in the Christianity of his time and place. But it seems likely that Paine derived these four major premises mainly from popularizations of Newtonian science and deism and from the climate of opinion which rationalism had helped to develop for over a century, and which is roughly denominated "The Enlightenment."  

Paine, with his natural bent toward science and ardent self-education, may have read Newton's *Principia* (1687, widely

---

16 *Writings*, IV, 340.
19  *Writings*, IV, 63.
20  *Ibid.*, IV, 64.
translated after 1729); if he did not read Newton himself, he could hardly have escaped learning the main outlines of his thought from the current popular diffusion of Newtonianism, which was almost literally "in the air." 21 For a man of Paine's delight in social discussion and debate, interested in science, Newtonianism and deism were accessible in scores of places, and especially in the social circles he frequented which gathered around Franklin in America, Godwin in England, and Condorcet in France. Some of the semipopular sources of his first information are known, however. In speaking of the period (1757–1759) when at the age of twenty he lived in London as a staymaker in the employ of Mr. Morris, Paine says, "As soon as I was able, I purchased a pair of globes, and attended the philosophical lectures of Martin and Ferguson, and became . . . acquainted with Dr. Bevis, of the society called the Royal Society, then living in the Temple, and an excellent astronomer." 22

Let us now return to an exposition of what have been called Paine's four premises. The author of The Age of Reason

21See Herbert Drennon, "James Thomson and Newtonism," University of Chicago Abstracts of Theses (Humanistic Series, 1930), VIII, 524. Paine's American friend, David Rittenhouse, the astronomer, was an ardent Newtonian. In a paper to be published shortly in the Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy, I have dealt at considerable length with "The Influence of Science on American Literature, 1775–1809." Voltaire had of course popularized Newtonianism in France. In summing up the work of the French Encyclopedists, John Morley (Diderot, London, 1880, p. 4) says, "Broadly stated, the great central moral of it all was this: that human nature is good, that the world is capable of being made a desirable abiding place, and that the evil of the world is the fruit of bad education and bad institutions."

22Writings, IV, 63, and see Conway's Life, I, 15–17. Conway says Paine "continued his studies in Thetford," and speaks of his "scientific books" which he unfortunately does not name. The parallels between Paine's ideas and those in the published lectures by Martin and Ferguson are cited in H. H. Clark's "An Historical Interpretation of Thomas Paine's Religion," University of California Chronicle, XXXV, 56–87 (January, 1933).
"honors Reason as the choicest gift of God to man, and the
faculty by which he is enabled to contemplate the power,
wisdom, and goodness of the Creator displayed in the cre-
ation." 23 If he appears to be attacking the Christian religion in
the light of reason, it should be borne in mind that this reason
was itself associated with religion and the supernatural. Since
only "the creation is the Bible of the deist," 24 "the principles
we discover there are eternal and of divine origin," 25 "for the
Creator of man is the creator of science, and it is through that
medium that man can see God, as it were, face to face." 26
"That which is now called natural philosophy, embracing the
whole circle of science, of which astronomy occupies the chief
place, is the study of the works of God, and of the power and
Wisdom of God in his works, and is the true theology." 27 To
Paine "the Creator of the Universe" is "the Fountain of all
Wisdom, the Origin of all Science, the Author of all Knowl-
dge, the God of Order and of Harmony." 28 "When we see a
watch, we have as positive proof of the existence of a watch-
maker, as if we saw him; and in like manner the creation is
evidence to our reason and our senses of the existence of a
creator." 29

At once an empiricist and a supernaturalist, Paine held that
"It is comfortable to live under the belief of the existence of
an infinite protecting power; and it is an addition to that
comfort to know that such a belief is not a mere conceit of the
imagination . . .; nor a belief founded only on tradition or re-
ceived opinion; but a belief deducible by the action of reason
upon the things that compose the system of the universe; a
belief rising out of visible facts: and so demonstrable . . . that
matter and the properties it has will not account for the system

23 Writings, IV, 322. See also IV, 192; 315-16; 334–35.
24 Ibid., IV, 189.
25 Ibid., IV, 191.
26 Ibid., IV, 191.
27 Ibid., IV, 216.
of the universe, and that there must necessarily be a superior cause.” 30 Like the Newtonians, Paine never ceased to “hope for happiness beyond this life” 31; “the belief of a future state is a rational belief, founded on facts visible in the creation: for it is not more difficult to believe that we shall exist hereafter in a better state and form than at present, than that a worm should become a butterfly. . . .” 32

In conscious revolt against the indoor, book-religion of the “gloomy Calvinists” and “the absurd and impious doctrine of predestination” 33 taught by “these fanatical hypocrites,” 34 his mind finds “a happiness in Deism, when rightly understood, that is not to be found in any other system of religion.” 35 “Do we not see a fair creation prepared to receive us the instant we are born—a world furnished to our hands, that cost us nothing? . . . Whether we sleep or wake, the vast machinery of the universe still goes on.” 36 “Do we want to contemplate [God’s] munificence? We see it in the abundance with which he fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate his mercy? We see it in his not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful.” 37 “The moral duty of man consists in imitating the moral goodness and beneficence of God manifested in the creation toward all his creatures.” 38

30 Ibid., IV, 244. In view of the widespread belief that Paine was a “filthy little atheist” (popularized even by so intelligent a man as Theodore Roosevelt in his Gouverneur Morris, Boston, 1893, p. 289), it is interesting to notice that Paine insists that materialism alone cannot explain the universe because that does not account for the motion imparted to the planets: a God, a “Creator of motion,” is necessary (Writings, IV, 240-241). As Conway points out (Ibid., IV, 238), Paine’s discourse on “The Existence of God” is a “digest of Newton’s Letters to Bentley, in which he postulates a divine power as necessary to explain planetary motion. . . .”
31 Ibid., IV, 27.
32 Ibid., IV, 179. On immortality, see also ibid., IV, 188; 285; 420.
33 Ibid., IV, 427, also 324 f., 334 ff., 355, 424 ff.
34 Ibid., IV, 324.
35 Ibid., IV, 316.
36 Ibid., IV, 31.
37 Ibid., IV, 46.
38 Ibid., IV, 83.
It should be borne in mind that Paine’s revolt against the Christian tradition, itself dualistic, was motivated by the perception that the historic relativism of a book-tradition was the prey of time and change; “the continually progressive change to which the meaning of words is subject, the want of an universal language which renders translation necessary, the errors to which translations are again subject, the mistakes of copyists and printers, together with the possibility of wilful alteration, are themselves evidences that human language, whether in speech or in print, cannot be the vehicle of the Word of God,” the eternity and universality of which demand “the idea, not only of unchangeableness, but of the utter impossibility of any change.”

Hence, under the tutelage of the Newtonians, he turned from books to nature, a testimony to all times and nationalities, which, approached reverently with “the divine gift of reason” and the method of science, reveals to him an immaterial Creator whose eternal and universal benevolence are manifest in “invariable principles and unchangeable order.”

Now it is of sovereign importance, if we would adequately interpret and judge Paine, that we should interpret his appeal not only to reason but to nature in the light of the contemporary meaning these two focal concepts had in the minds of the teachers who molded his mind in its plastic age. For the Newtonians and Paine mean, when they appeal to nature, vastly more than the original chaos of the pathless wilderness or a supine surrender to the capricious dictates of a savage appetite. Usually, nature means to them harmony, law, and order; and hence an appeal to nature can scarcely be interpreted as an appeal to anarchy. Paine is careful to define what he means by nature: “Man could not invent and make a universe—he could not invent nature, for nature is of divine origin. It is the laws by which the universe is governed. When, therefore, we look

---

39 Writings, IV, 38. 
40 Ibid., IV, 412.
through nature up to nature’s God, we are in the right road of happiness . . .” 41 “As to that which is called nature, it is no other than the laws by which motion and action of every kind, with respect to unintelligible matter, is regulated.” 42 “When we survey the works of Creation, the revolutions of the planetary system, and the whole economy of what is called nature, which is no other than the laws the Creator has prescribed to matter, we see unerring order and universal harmony reigning throughout the whole. . . . Here is the standard to which everything must be brought that pretends to be the work . . . of God.” 43 Having interpreted Paine’s mind in the light of contemporary philosophic definitions and their relative emphasis given by men whom Paine acknowledged as his teachers, we have now arrived at the very core of his thought, “the standard to which everything must be brought,” which is a divinely revealed and sanctioned law and order, in harmonious conformity to which society finds its happiness. Thus Newtonian deism, as interpreted by Paine, involved discipline and order just as did Calvinistic Federalism in America, or Anglican Toryism in England, although the difference in background and terminology has prevented many critics from recognizing it, at least in the case of Paine. Although Paine wrote The Rights of Man as a refutation of Burke’s Reflections on the French Revolution, the ultimate and underlying assumptions of the former are no more an intentional defense of anarchy than those of the

41 Ibid., IV, 311. Paine remarks of his own discovery of a ratio in financial laws, “I have not made the ratio any more than Newton made the ratio of gravitation,” which was of divine origin (ibid., III, 292).

42 Ibid., IV, 242 ff. It should be noted that in the light of changeless and inexorable law Paine attacked the idea of prayer as not only futile but “an attempt to make the Almighty change his mind, and act otherwise than he does” (ibid., IV, 44). See also his letter to Samuel Adams, ibid., IV, 202 ff.

43 Ibid., IV, 339. (Italics mine.) The thought here expressed is reiterated, ibid., IV, 46; 340; 366.
latter. For Paine’s “standard” was a divinely ordained “harmonious magnificent order.”

Since Newtonianism had supplied mathematical proof of a universal, all-embracing, divinely-ordered harmony, a universe throbbing with the rhythm of benevolence, and since the Creator and the creation cannot therefore be at strife, it follows that man, the crown of creation, shares this divine harmony manifesting the “infinite goodness” of the Creator. Newtonianism, by positing a cosmic harmony, furnished, in place of Puritan convictions of man’s total depravity, what seemed a mathematical foundation for a faith in the light of nature and in the pregnant theory of natural goodness. Thus Paine wrote, “man, where he is not corrupted by governments, is naturally the friend of man,... human nature is not of itself vicious.”

“The great mass of people are always just,” and “the safest asylum, especially in times of general convulsion when no settled form of government prevails, is the love of the people.” Hence Paine argued that the representative government must supplant monarchy, for if “the representative sys-

44Writings, IV, 340.


46Quoted in Conway’s Life, II, 4.

47Writings, I, 159. Of course Paine’s faith that an altruistic social life is natural may have been conditioned by earlier thinkers than Martin and Ferguson. We have noted his later familiarity with Grotius, who supported the above assumption by summarizing (De jure beli et pacis, “Prolegomena”) relevant views of ancient and Christian writers. And later references and quotations (Writings, IV, 323) suggest his familiarity with Tillotson, who had refuted Hobbes long before Shaftesbury or the followers of Newton, arguing that “men are naturally a-kin and Friends” (Works of Dr. John Tillotson [London, 1728], I, 305, March 8, 1688/9), and that “the frame of our Nature disposeth us to it [charitable altruism], and our inclination to society, in which there can be no pleasure, no advantage, without mutual Love and Kindness” (Ibid., I, 171, December 3, 1678). Anthony Collins, one of the militant deists, praised Tillotson as one “whom all English Free Thinkers own as their Head” (A Discourse of Free Thinking [London, 1713], p. 171); and he proceeds to quote Tillotson on the light of nature and the natural-
tem is always parallel with the order and immutable laws of nature and meets the reason of man in every part,” 48 such being, “the order of nature, the order of government must ... follow it.” 49 He held that “the sovereign authority in any country is in the power of making laws,” that “the government of a free country, properly speaking, is not in the persons, but in the laws,” 50 and that executives “are no other than authorities to superintend the execution of the laws,” 51 which are ultimately to be safeguarded by a constitution sanctioning not only the control of lawless individuals but also of aggressive parties. 52 The popular notion that Paine’s naturalism led him to plead for lawlessness would therefore appear to be based upon ludicrous misunderstandings. For the nature he wished to follow was the law and order of the harmonious Newtonian universe which promised a harmony among men whereby they could establish a parallel civil law and order.

This brings us to the last of what I have tried to define as Paine’s major premises. Paine’s contemporaries noted that in Common Sense (1776), The Crisis, and other early work, including The Rights of Man (1791–1792), if he had occasion to speak of the Christian religion, he did so in decent, if not respectful language; and the intolerant view that “the only religion that has not been invented ... is pure and simple Deism,” 53

ness of altruism. And there can be little question, I think, that Paine’s faith in this sort of natural goodness was reinforced by heralds of the French Revolution such as Rousseau (see Writings, I, 150; II, 334; III, 80–81 and 104), and by American democrats such as Jefferson. 48Ibid., II, 426. 49Ibid., II, 416–419. 50Ibid., II, 428. 51Ibid., III, 276. 52Ibid., III, 277. 53Ibid., IV, 150. Since it has now been shown that the vigorous deistic book entitled Reason the Only Oracle of Man (Bennington, 1784) was mainly the work not of Ethan Allen but of Dr. Thomas Young of Philadelphia, it is probable that Paine was familiar with its general viewpoint, because Young and Paine were close associates while trying to formulate the constitution of 1775. (See G. P. Anderson, “Who Wrote Ethan Allen’s ‘Bible’?” New England Quarterly, X, 685–696, December, 1937.)
coupled with his astonishing violence in denouncing the Bible and Christianity, appears only in *The Age of Reason* (1793–1795).

It seems probable that he honestly, if illogically, tried for a time to reverence both astronomy and a broad, rational Christianity, especially since in England and America, on account of the elasticity of Protestantism, most deists regarded themselves as still Christians. His liberally religious friends such as Franklin, Jefferson, Barlow, Martin, and Ferguson, and deistic predecessors such as Bolingbroke, Middleton, Pope, and others, maintained a loosely tolerant relationship with the church, setting a precedent the breaking of which required considerable provocation, even in the case of a man such as Paine.

It appears, then, that his private religious views became increasingly radical from his twentieth year, and increasingly conditioned other phases of his thought, although he gave public expression to his radicalism only as a result, perhaps, of such factors as

(a) the danger in France of losing "sight of morality, of humanity, and of the theology that is true" following "the total abolition" of the priesthood; and

(b) Burke's constant argument that a secular hierarchy is ultimately grounded upon an ecclesiastical and spiritual hierarchy; his defense there-

54 For Paine's favorable earlier references to Christianity see *Writings*, I, 56–57; 75–79; 92–99; 100; 171; 184; 188; 208; 212; 247; 250; 266. Most of these references are vague and incidental, although certainly tolerant. He speaks of himself, for example, in 1776, as one "who never dishonors religion either by ridiculing or cavilling at any denomination whatsoever" (*ibid.*, I, 121), and in *The Rights of Man*, Part Two, he argued that "the great Father of all is pleased with variety of devotion" and he urged better pay for "the inferior clergy" (*ibid.*, II, 503–504), although it is there, in 1792, that he shows his hostility to "the connection which Mr. Burke recommends, . . . the Church Established by Law," the adulterous union of Church and State. J. Auchincloss (*Paine's Confession of the Divinity of the Holy Scriptures: or the Sophistry of the second part of The Age of Reason* [Stockport, 1796, 2nd ed.], pp. 7 ff.) presents a list of quotations from *Common Sense* and *The Age of Reason* which contradict each other regarding the divinity of the scriptures.

55 *Writings*, IV, 21.
fore of the union of church and state, and his agency in defeating the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts by charging that the Dissenters championed the French Revolution; an economic crisis in England and in the France of 1789 described by Arthur Young, during which the mitigation of social suffering was discouraged, as Paine thought, by the royalists’ argument that poverty was the divine will; and by contact with brilliant minds such as those of Voltaire, Raynal, Boulanger, and Condorcet, whose social plans demanded the destruction of faith in the Church as the last refuge of obscurantism, persecution, and the divine right of kings. For it was such minds as these in conjunction with the current historical situation which helped to turn Paine’s earlier and genially tolerant Newtonianism into channels destructive.

Science, as we have seen, aided by “the divine gift of reason,” revealed to Paine a harmonious and universal order, progressive conformity to which constitutes progress. Such was the faith, in conjunction with the concrete example of America, which enabled him to march in the vanguard of that dauntless

---


55 See W. P. Hall, British Radicalism, 1791–1797 (New York, 1912), especially the early part on economic distress; and see the attitude toward the poor not only expressed by Burke but by such supporters as Hannah More (Village Politics) and Bishop Richard Watson (“The Wisdom and Goodness of God in having made both Rich and Poor”).

56 See H. H. Clark, “Thomas Paine’s Relation to Voltaire and Rousseau,” in the Revue Anglo-américaine, avril et juin, 1922. That Paine’s destructive violence may have owed something to the similar spirit of the Examen critique de la vie . . . de Saint Paul (1770) by N. A. Boulanger, is suggested by Paine’s extensive quotations from this work in The Age of Reason (Writings, IV, 173). For orientation see F. A. Aulard’s Christianity and the French Revolution, London, 1927.

57 Writings, I, 15.
band who dedicated themselves to the fair dream of perfectibility. If "the world has walked in darkness for eighteen hundred years, both as to religion and government," if men are naturally creatures of society, since their benevolent interests "impel the whole of them into society, as naturally as gravitation acts to a center," if "a great portion of mankind, in what are called civilized countries, are in a state of poverty and wretchedness far below the condition of an Indian,... the cause... lies not in any natural defect in the principles of civilization, but in preventing those principles having a universal operation." Even if a modern skeptic should regard religion as the vainest of theorizing about the unknowable, he cannot ignore religion in the case of Paine, for it was the fountainhead of his concrete work; and without understanding his religion one can scarcely understand and interpret correctly practical programs which, as Franklin said, had a "prodigious" effect in the actual, physical world. For Paine was in his mental habits essentially after 1787 an ideologue, especially devoted to methods deductive and a priori. He tells us again and again that his concern is with "principles, and not persons," "the principles of universal society," and his opponent Burke's alarm derived from the fundamentalism of the "religious war" against "an armed doctrine." Once the polar star of Newtonian deism had risen above Paine's mental horizon, he found his way, and henceforth he had but to walk toward the light. For Newtonian science, with its doctrine of the universality of law, had liberated him, as he thought, from the stifling bondage to historic

61*Writings*, IV, 380.
64*Ibid.*, II, 121.
relativism, from nationalism and a concern with local circumstances and temporal peculiarities, under which he thought Burke still labored.

This was the vantage ground from which Paine dauntlessly approached the temporal tribulations of a world where a progressive departure from the "harmonious, magnificent order" of nature and dependence upon the natural benevolence of the people, wherein lies social happiness, had been embalmed by blind "custom and usage."

3. The Influence of Classical Antiquity

We come now to the third main influence on Paine's religious thought—that of Classical Antiquity. In common with other deists, when pressed by Churchmen with the assertion that men could not lead serene and moral lives without the aid of Christian revelation, Paine naturally retorted with the example of the classical sages, who lived exalted lives before Christ. "Aristotle, Socrates, Plato . . . were truly great or noble." They arrived "at fame by merit and universal consent." He hopes that "what Athens was in miniature (the wonder of the ancient world), America will be in magnitude." However, probably being guided by "the immortal Montesquieu" who praised the ancient republics, Paine says that "Aristides, Epaminondas, Pericles, Scipio, Camillus, and a thousand other Grecian and Roman heroes would never have astonished the world with their names, had they lived under royal governments." They needed republicanism, but they did not need Christianity to be noble. In the second place, he regards Christianity as a debased "steal" from classicism—

66*Writings*, III, 269.
68*Writings*, I, 164 f.
"the Christian Church, sprung out of the tail of heathen mythology." Following Conyers Middleton’s *Letter from Rome* (Paine praised him as having courage, honesty, and “a strong original mind”), 70 he argued that “the trinity of gods . . . was no other than a reduction of the former plurality, which was about twenty or thirty thousand. The statue of Mary succeeded the statue of Diana of Ephesus. The deification of heroes changed into the canonization of saints,” and so on. “The Christian theory is little else than the idolatry of the ancient mythologists, accommodated to the purposes of power and revenue.” 71 And finally, Paine used the classicism of ancients such as Cicero to reinforce his Newtonian concept of immutable and universal natural law, deriving his knowledge through Middleton who wrote a life of Cicero. “In Cicero,” Paine says, “we see that vast superiority of mind, that sublimity of right reasoning and justness of ideas, which man acquires, not by studying bibles and testaments, and the theology of schools built thereon, but by studying the creator in the immensity and unchangeable order of his creation, and the immutability of his law. ‘There cannot,’ says Cicero, ‘be one law now, and another hereafter; but the same eternal immutable law comprehends all nations, at all times, under one common master and governor of all—God.’” 72 Because of the disparity of the “laws” in the Old and the New Testaments, Paine concludes that they are “impositions, fables, and forgeries,” since contradictions cannot derive from a God whose wisdom is “unchangeable.” 73

70 *Writings*, IV, 407. Paine shows his knowledge of Middleton’s *Letter from Rome* in saying that Middleton “made a journey to Rome, from whence he wrote letters to show that the forms and ceremonies of the Romish Christian church were taken from the degenerate state of the heathen mythology, as it stood in the latter times of the Greeks and Romans.”

71 Ibid., IV, 25.

72 Ibid., IV, 411.
4. The Influence of the Early Eastern Religions and Freemasonry

In addition to Quakerism, Newtonianism and classicism, a fourth general influence bearing on Paine's religious writings is that derived from a sketchy acquaintance with the religions of ancient Egypt, the Druids, and the Persians, especially as they related to Freemasonry. As expressed particularly in his Origin of Masonry and Answer to the Bishop of Llandaff, these ideas were gathered from second-hand and third-hand sources which intrigued Paine's speculative but unscholarly mind. This rather crude study in comparative religions merely reinforced ideas Paine had adopted much earlier from many other sources. He envisioned a world-wide, pre-Christian natural religion or rough deism, essentially the same in Persians, Druids, and Egyptians, and far superior in truth and purity to the jumbled corruptions of their ideas borrowed by the ancient Hebrews to form the Bible. The origin of Masonry he saw in an underground effort of these original deists to preserve the truth from the persecutions of a dominant Christianity. The purpose of this tenuous learning, however, was to attack the system developed by the church fathers into modern Christianity as a mere literal-minded corruption of Eastern allegories and myths combined with a shrewd plan for exploiting the people. The result of an interest which came late in life and was never thoroughly developed, Paine's knowledge of these esoteric religions was employed as a controversial weapon and cannot be ranked with Quakerism or Newtonianism as a truly formative factor in his personal idealism.

It was easy for Paine as a Newtonian to sympathize with the ancient sun worshippers. He worshipped God in the eternal and immutable laws which bound the universe to harmony and order. If they, born in a less enlightened age, mistook for the Creator of Order its central fact, the Sun, their error could be understood. The old religions Paine felt to be essentially one: "The religion of the Druids... was the same as the religion of the ancient Egyptians. The priests of Egypt were the professors and teachers of science, and were styled priests of Heliopolis, that is, the City of the Sun. The Druids in Europe... were the same order of men... The word Druid signifies a wise man. In Persia they were called Magi, which signifies the same thing."74 This "ancient religion of the Gentiles," moreover, was a deism "which consisted in the adoration of a first cause of the works of the creation, in which the sun was the great visible agent. It appears to have been a religion of gratitude and adoration, and not of prayer and discontented solicitation." Druidism, he insists, "that wise, elegant, philosophical religion, was the faith opposite to the faith of the gloomy Christian church."75 And the "scientific purity and religious morality" of its rites proved the members "a wise, learned, and moral class of men."76

To counteract the reverence felt for the ancient Hebrews as authors of the Bible, Paine made a particular point of comparing them unfavorably with his natural religionists, calling them unscientific and "most ignorant of all the illiterate world,"77 and sure to corrupt "a religion founded upon astronomy."78

The essay on Masonry is a fragment of an intended continuation of The Age of Reason. Paine was undoubtedly trying to

74Writings, IV, 301.
75Ibid., IV, 296.
76Ibid., IV, 298.
77Ibid., IV, 278–9. Needless to say, Paine, the champion of tolerance, was not anti-Semitic toward contemporaries.
78Ibid., IV, 299.
enlist the support of this very powerful social movement of his day by showing that its doctrines and his had always been fundamentally the same. He made extensive and ingenious extracts from what sources he could find on the ideas of Masonry to prove that "Masonry... is derived from the remains of the ancient Druids; who, like the Magi of Persia and the Priests of Heliopolis in Egypt, were Priests of the Sun. They paid worship to this great luminary, as the great visible agent of a great invisible first cause, whom they stiled 'Time without Limits.'" The reason for Masonic secrecy, he maintained, was that Christianity, as soon as it became dominant, had begun systematic persecutions which made it necessary for Christians who "remained attached to their original religion to meet in secret, and under the strongest injunctions of secrecy. Their safety depended upon it... From the remains of the religion of the Druids, thus preserved, arose the institution which, to avoid the name of Druid, took that of Mason, and practiced under this new name the rites and ceremonies of Druids." His immediate use of the theory was to say: "The Christian religion and Masonry have one and the same common origin: both are derived from the worship of the Sun. The difference between their origin is, that the Christian religion is a parody on the worship of the Sun, in which they put a man whom they call Christ, in the place of the Sun, and pay him the same adoration..."

Thus, in popularizing the exotic researches of pioneer scholars like Sir William Jones and others, Paine was himself something of a pioneer popularizer of the historical study of

---

79 See Bernard Fay, Revolution and Freemasonry, 1680–1800 (Boston, 1933).
80 Aside from his many Masonic friends, Paine's sources were George Smith, The Use and Abuse of Masonry, and an address by Mr. Dodd in dedicating the Freemason's Hall in London.
81 Writings, IV, 293.
82 Ibid., IV, 302.
83 Ibid., IV, 293.
comparative religions and of the idea (which is perhaps the essence of deism) of the wisdom of transcending narrow sectarianisms by reducing religion to those broad elemental principles which all nations and creeds have held in common. Such principles, having won the *consensus gentium* in all ages and lands, must represent, Paine thought, the pure gold of religious thought. As he wrote his old friend Samuel Adams, who, political liberal as he was, shrank back from Paine’s religious liberalism, “the World has been overrun with fable and creeds of human invention, with sectaries of whole Nations against all other Nations, and sectaries of those sectaries in each of them against each other. Every sectary, except the Quakers, has been a persecutor. Those who fled from persecution persecuted in their turn, and it is this confusion of creeds that has filled the World with persecution and deluged it with blood. Even the depredation on your commerce by the barbaric powers sprang from the Crusades of the church against those powers. It was a war of creed against creed, each boasting of God for its author, and reviling each other with the name of Infidel.”

He felt it high time to return to the universal and loving principles he believed would derive from a religion in accordance with natural law such as he thought the ancient religions had been.

If Paine did in the heat of conflict appear to attack Christianity as a whole, we should remember that at that time in France he identified it with Catholicism (which was used as a sinister political weapon of oppression and torture). In the light of the new science and the Higher Criticism, he thought he was obliged to attack the Church’s obscurantist hostility to the free play of thought. He was also driven to his position by the way in which so-called Christians like Bishop Watson were distorting Christianity to preach resignation to remediable evils and to discourage charity to the poor and op-

84Writings, IV, 204.
pressed. The exalted and charitable morality he preached, inculcating man’s imitation of God’s benevolence, was surely based on Christianity, as his best-intentioned opponents agreed. And at the risk of endangering the logic of his position, he is always reverent toward the Founder of Christianity: “The morality that he preached and practiced was of the most benevolent kind,” and “it has not been exceeded by any.”

He is steadfast in his praise of Quakerism, which surely embodies many of the doctrines most respected by modern Christians. And in the light of Unitarianism and modern liberal theology, it appears that Paine was far more of a Christian than he himself believed. In so far as modern Christianity has agreed with St. Paul that the greatest of the triune Christian virtues is charity, has agreed with Christ himself in his saying that inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of one of these you have done it unto me, it would have found support from Paine as a pioneer in what he called “the religion of humanity.”

II. POLITICAL IDEAS

While Paine’s political ideas were doubtless influenced by current events, economic conditions, and a wide variety of other things, it is important to remember that to a considerable extent these political ideas were logical deductions from his religious ideas which have just been considered. Indeed, according to his own testimony, for some time after having studied astronomy and having come to doubt Christianity, he “had no disposition for what are called politics . . . When, therefore, I turned my thoughts towards matters of government, I had to form a system for myself, that accorded with the moral and philosophic principles in which I had been

*Ibid.*, IV, 26. The ways in which Paine’s religion motivated his humanitarianism will be discussed in section III of this Introduction.
educated.” 

In the light of this important self-analysis by Paine himself regarding the genesis and logical articulation of his own ideas, the popular notion seems untenable according to which Paine is viewed as an honorable champion of political freedom who in his old age succumbed to religious infidelity which can be ignored or minimized by those who like political but not religious liberalism. This testimony would seem to show that his political theories grew out of his religious theories—his early Quakerism culminating in “scientific” deism—and their moral and philosophic implications. In his maturity he prided himself upon being a thinker, a logician, guided not so much by historical relativism as by logical abstractions, not so much by events inductively interpreted as by natural rights, the “rights of man” which he traced “to the time when man came from the hand of his Maker.”

1. Natural Altruism of the People

In the preceding section we have seen how, after some doubts in Common Sense and The Crisis, he came to accept the doctrine that men are naturally altruistic, or that self-interest would harmonize with the social good of all. This doctrine became the fountainhead of his political thought. To Burke’s muddling along by expediency based on random circumstances Paine would oppose a logical system of principles; he opposed Burke mainly, he said, because as the voice of entrenched conservatism the author of the hostile Reflections on the French Revolution had “taken up a contemptible opinion of mankind,” and

85 Writings, IV, 62–63.
86 Ibid., II, 303. Once (ibid., II, 362) he did concede the necessity of considering “place and circumstance” in relation to “principles of government,” but his primary emphasis is upon principles. See especially ibid., III, 61; see also II, 333, 359–360, 382, 386.
87 See ante, pp. xxii–xxiii, for full evidence.
88 Writings, II, 417. See ibid., II, 260–264, for Conway’s long list of contrasts between Paine and Burke (which is not always fair to
because he saw the multitude as "swinish." Thus Paine came to champion the dignity and sanctity of human nature. "To argue with a man," says he, "... whose philosophy consists in holding humanity in contempt, is like administering medicine to the dead ..." 90 "As far as my experience in public life extends, I have ever observed, that the great mass of the people are invariably just, both in their intentions and in their objects; but the true method of accomplishing an effect does not always show itself in the first instance." 91 "Man, were he not corrupted by governments, is naturally the friend of man, and ... human nature is not of itself vicious." 92

As an explanation of how Paine came to adopt this faith in natural altruism we should recall his native Quaker faith according to which men are not totally depraved, but have access to the "Inner Light" which is capable of guiding them toward charity to their fellow-men, considered as brothers because they are children of a Heavenly Father. As a disciple of Newton and his more expansive interpreters such as Martin and Ferguson, Paine adopted their view that God revealed himself in a creation which was ordered by a vast hierarchy of immutable laws by which all things are operated in harmony; since men were the crown of creation, they could not be at strife. Associated with this doctrine, was the belief that, natural laws being good, man could promote his happiness and that of his fellows by obeying these laws. Such a belief helps to account for the reconciliation which Paine (like many another eighteenth-century thinker) makes of the apparent opposition between natural altruism and self-interest. 93 As Pope put it, "self-love and social are the same." For natural laws

---

90 Writings, I, 233. 91 Ibid., III, 122.
92 Ibid., II, 453.
93 For Paine's uniting an appeal to self-interest with an appeal to natural altruism, see Writings, II, 196, 203, 403-409.
stemmed from Divine Goodness, and in obeying them from motives which might at first involve self-interest one automatically and inevitably promoted the best interests of society, Divine Goodness having ordained the laws so obeyed. The teachings of Locke, widely disseminated in the society Paine frequented, reinforced his view that human nature is malleable, the product of environment and education: if these are changed, we can change and perfect human nature. Classicists such as Cicero, interpreted by Conyers Middleton, later reinforced Paine's Newtonian view that a uniformitarian and elemental order of life was originally good, and that evil had come about by redundancies and incrustations (such as corruptions of church and state) fastening themselves on this order, and that men's natural altruism would shine forth once more if these could be eliminated. It is hardly necessary to mention the possibilities Paine had of absorbing a faith in the altruism of the people in his social intercourse with Franklin's circle in America, Godwin's circle in England, and Condorcet's circle in France where the purest and most benevolent doctrines of the French Revolution were constantly discussed. And finally, along with all the theories and abstractions, the supposedly inductive observations of a new frontier, the effects of transplanting men from the corrupt Old World to a New World environment, were not without influence on Paine. He illustrates very early the truth of Professor Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis that the American frontier bred democracy, an indifference to tradition and authority, and a respect for the ability of the common man to govern himself. Paine concluded that the American "scene ... generates and encourages great ideas." Emigrants, fleeing the governmental persecutions of the old world, dwelt in the new, "not as enemies, but as brothers ... In such a situation, man becomes what he ought." In view of Paine's constant conviction that only

*Writings, II, 402.*
the principles of the new world can regenerate the old, this
ascription of natural altruism to the effect of the frontier, the
new environment, is important.

Since it has been customary for so-called eminent critics of
Paine—witness Sir Leslie Stephen—to argue that the central
"weakness of his political theories is shown in his refusal to
allow for the stupidity and wickedness of mankind," 95 it be-
hooves us to examine with some care the way in which he would
put his faith in natural altruism into actual operation in con-
crete political affairs. In so doing he showed commendable
cautions, illustrating a point which is all important and which
critics of democratic reliance upon universal suffrage usually
ignore. Like his friend and idol Jefferson, Paine insisted that
in actual politics the people can be depended upon to govern
themselves only in so far as they are educated, only in so far as
their government is directed by representatives who together
represent a wide knowledge of the needs of all parts of the
country and of statesmanship. Responsibility, the degree of a
man's natural altruism, is balanced by the degree to which man
is educated. Paine does not say that in actual practice every
man, woman, and child is completely altruistic and to be en-
trusted with responsibilities of government. His doctrine
boils down, in actual political practice, to this: "There is al-
ways a sufficiency [of wisdom] somewhere in the general mass of
society for all purposes; but with respect to the parts of society,
it is constantly changing place." 96 The very young and the
very old are hardly capable of wise decisions; but by the
representative system it is possible for the people as a whole
constantly to replenish their Congresses with selected men—

95 *Fortnightly Review*, LX, 280 (August, 1893).
96 *Writings*, II, 416. See whole discussion, pp. 413-428, and Edwin
Martin's *Jefferson and the Idea of Progress*, an unpublished doctoral
dissertation (University of Wisconsin, 1941). See also V. E. Gibbons,
in "Tom Paine and the Idea of Progress," *Pennsylvania Magazine of
History*, LXVI, 191-202 (April, 1942).
such as Jefferson's *aristoi*—in the prime of their physical and intellectual life. This can hardly be regarded as a naïve or rash method of procedure, forming as it does the very bulwark of democratic government as opposed to feudalistic monarchy.

A corollary to Paine's belief in the natural dignity of man is that man in a state of nature, while inferior to educated man in a republic, is superior to man under existing monarchies. In Paine's time this belief had evolved into the concept of primitivism. God originally had created man good and benevolent. Hence when the first social state was formed, it partook of this benevolence. In succeeding ages, however, government had gradually gotten out of hand until it had become an instrument of evil. Contemporary governments in Europe with their tyranny and oppression were therefore instruments of evil weighing heavily upon a naturally benevolent people. This concept has several consequences in Paine's thought. First, in order to rid himself of the oppression of government, man must get back to nature. America, he says, "is the only spot in the political world where the principle of universal reformation could begin." The American scene "has something in it which generates and encourages great ideas."

---

97 Lois Whitney (Primitivism and the Idea of Progress [Baltimore, 1934], p. 227) concludes that "Paine uses nearly every one of the primitivistic presuppositions as the basis of a prophecy of unlimited progress. His panacea is the characteristic primitivistic one: go back to nature..." But let us note the following use of "nature": his chief objection to European governments (except that of France) in his day was that "they are in the same condition as we conceive of savage uncivilized life; they put themselves beyond the law as well of God as of man, and are, with respect to principle and reciprocal conduct, like so many individuals in a state of nature" (Writings, II, 454). H. V. S. Ogden concludes that "In any event, Paine's primitivism is not essential to his theory of natural rights," and that his "political theory in Part I [of Rights of Man] is essentially that of John Locke, and his use of the state of nature as well as his conception of it differs in no important respect from that of the earlier writer" (in "The Decline of Lockian Political Theory," American Historical Review, XLVI, 39 [October, 1940]).
In such a situation man becomes what he ought. He sees his species, not with the inhuman idea of a natural enemy, but as kindred; and the example shows to the artificial world, that man must go back to Nature for information.98

Again, he says that the common people out-of-doors often judge of public measures “in a cooler spirit than their representatives act in.”99 The safest asylum “in times of general convulsion when no settled form of government prevails, is, the love of the people. All property is safe under their protection.”100 A third consequence is the belief that kings originally gained power by force and plunder. “Could we,” he says, “trace Kings to their first rise, we should find the first of them nothing better than the principal ruffian of some restless gang, whose savage manners or pre-eminence in subtilty obtained him the title of chief among plunderers . . .”101 As a result modern governments are based on force rather than principle. At present the law of nations in practice is “just what they can get and keep till it be taken from them . . .”102 The present English government, he charges, arose out of the brigandage of William the Conqueror, and though many changes have since been made, the country has never yet regenerated itself.103 As a result the nation is burdened with a hereditary nobility, debauched and degenerate, which “to sober reason . . . [is] nonsense.”104 A fourth consequence is

98Writings, II, 402.
99Ibid., II, 149.
100Ibid., I, 159.
101Ibid., I, 80. See also ibid., III, 102. Scripture chronology, he says, shows that in the early ages of the world, “there were no kings; the consequence of which was, there were no wars; it is the pride of kings which throws mankind into confusion” (Ibid., I, 75). Royalty is condemned both by nature and Scripture (Ibid., I, 76).
102Ibid., II, 24.
103Ibid., II, 411–412. See Paine’s attack on George III (Ibid., I, 150).
104Ibid., I, 46. See also III, 102–103.
the belief that the source of evil in the world is bad government. Left to themselves the people would naturally oppose war. France is not the "natural" enemy of England: "The Creator of man did not constitute them the natural enemy of each other." There is in the heart of man "some tender chord tuned by the hand of its Creator, that struggles to emit in the hearing of the soul a note of sorrowing sympathy" which naturally opposes war and other evils. Paine, like Locke, makes here a distinction between government and society. "Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness." "Society in every state is a blessing" while government is at best "a necessary evil." When government degenerates to its present low state, it becomes the source of all evil. "Monarchical sovereignty," says Paine, is "the enemy of mankind, and the source of misery." And Paine concludes that all the great evils—war, poverty, crime, and violence—are the result of bad government.

2. The Social Compact

From the belief that man in a state of nature is naturally good, Paine came inevitably to adopt the social compact theory of the origin of government. According to this theory it

105 Writings, I, 268.
106 Ibid., II, 194. During the Revolution Paine said, however, that the "peaceable principle of the Quakers" was impractical, that the reign of Satan was not yet ended, and unless the whole world would lay down arms and negotiate, "the matter ends, and I take up my musket and thank heaven he has put it in my power."
107 Ibid., I, 69. This was his early view in Common Sense (1776). Eventually, however, in Agrarian Justice (1797), Paine suggests the modern view that government may be a source of benefit.
108 Ibid., II, 387.
109 Leprade (England and the French Revolution, p. 26) says Paine's theories "were based on the doctrine of the social contract that pervaded the political writings of the time." He was familiar with Locke and Rousseau (see Writings, I, 4; III, 64, 104).
was believed, in the words of Locke, that in a state of nature
"the execution of the law of Nature is ... put into every man's
hands, whereby every one has a right to punish the transgressors of that law to such a degree as may hinder its viola-
tion."\textsuperscript{110} This, however, would lead to endless confusion and
trouble. Therefore men formed a social compact by which they were so united
into one society as to quit every one his executive power of
the law of Nature, and to resign it to the public ... And this
puts men out of a state of Nature into that of a commonwealth,
by setting up a judge on earth with authority to determine all
the controversies and redress the injuries that may happen to
any member of the commonwealth ...\textsuperscript{111}

Much in the manner of Locke, Paine visualizes the origin
of government. "In order to get a clear and just idea of the
design and end of the government, let us suppose a small num-
ber of persons, meeting in some sequestered part of the earth,
unconnected with the rest; they will then represent the peopling
of any country or of the world. In this state of natural liberty,
society will be their first thought."\textsuperscript{112} Whenever formal
government is completely relaxed, he says at another time, so
that man is in a state of nature, a "general association takes
place and common interest produces common security." Thus,
says Paine, a "great part of that order which reigneth among
mankind is not the effect of government. It had its origin
in the principles of society\textsuperscript{113} and the natural constitution of

\textsuperscript{110} Locke, \textit{On Civil Government}, Book II, Chap. II, "Of the State of

\textsuperscript{111} Locke, \textit{op. cit.}, Chap. VII, "Of Political or Civil Society," sec-
tion 89. For orientation, see J. W. Gough, \textit{The Social Contract}
(Oxford, 1936), especially chap. XIV on America; and J. F. Felton,
\textit{The Social Contract and Its Influence on the American Revolu-
tion} (New York, 1891).

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Writings}, II, 116.

\textsuperscript{113} It should be remembered that by "society" Paine means the
natural association of men in a state of nature.
man. It existed prior to government...”114 Man cannot continue long to live in a state of nature, however. Life becomes too complex; he soon fails to live up to the law of nature; and thus government becomes necessary. When emigrants from Europe first arrived on our shores, he says, necessity forced them into a society “the reciprocal blessings of which would supersede, and render the obligations of law and government unnecessary while they remain perfectly just to each other.” As soon as the difficulties are surmounted, however, they will begin to relax their duty, and “this remissness will point out the necessity of establishing some form of government to supply the defect of moral virtue.”115 Observing the formation of government in Pennsylvania and in the United States itself, Paine explains how government by social compact comes about. In both instances, he says,

there was no such thing as the idea of a compact between the people on one side, and the government on the other. The compact was that of the people with each other, to produce and constitute a government...

Government is not a trade which any man, or any body of men, has a right to set up and exercise for his own emolument, but is altogether a trust, in right of those by whom that trust is delegated and by whom it is always resumable. It has of itself no rights; they are altogether duties.116

From this Paine concludes that the present governments in Europe are corrupt because they were not formed originally

114*Writings*, II, 406.
115*Ibid.*, I, 70. On the surface Paine's statement that government is necessary because the people are deficient in “moral virtue” seems inconsistent with his belief in the inherent goodness of man. It is, however, an inconsistency inherent in the Enlightenment itself. Cf. Locke’s statement, *op. cit.*, Chap. II, “Of the State of Nature,” section 6: Man can live in a “state of Nature” only so long as he is governed by the “law of Nature” which is “reason.”
on the social compact. The obscurity in which their origin is buried "implies the iniquity and disgrace with which they began." 117

3. Natural vs. Civil Rights

If the social compact may be taken as one of the ruling political principles of Paine's time, the doctrine of natural rights was certainly the other. According to this doctrine every man is equally endowed at birth by the Creator with certain inherent rights. Since these rights are twinborn with man himself, they cannot be signed away when the individual passes from a "state of nature" into a government based on the social compact. They can be wrested from the individual only by force, and thus a government is good or bad in proportion as it protects or transgresses these rights. Natural rights of a divine origin was a common concept in the Enlightenment. 118 Jefferson had it in mind when he wrote into the Declaration of Independence that all men "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights" to secure which governments are "instituted." Thus Paine, seeking for the origin of the rights of man, finds that it "is authority against authority all the way, till we come to the divine origin of the rights of man at the creation. Here our inquiries find a resting place, and our reason finds a home." 119 The rights of the people, he says, are absolute and inalienable; the people "have a right to them, and none have a right either to withhold them, or to grant them." 120 Whenever precedents fail, he says, "We must return to the first principles of things for information, and think, as if we were the first men that thought." We must get back to

117 Ibid., II, 138, 411.
118 Undoubtedly Paine was also influenced by the equalitarianism of his Quaker religion; his "individualism is a spiritualistic individualism, founded on a theology," says Halévy (The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism [1928], p. 88).
119 Writings, II, 304.
120 Ibid., III, 81; II, 133, 253.
the "first plain path of nature" and find there the natural rights of man.\textsuperscript{121}

What then, to Paine, are the natural rights of man? First, men have a natural right to national independence. This right, he says, "is a point which never yet was called in question. It will not even admit of debate. To deny such a right, would be a kind of atheism against nature...."\textsuperscript{122} Second, all men have a "natural, perfect right" to personal freedom. It is the natural dictate of the conscience.\textsuperscript{123} Third, men have a natural right of franchise. Attaching a property qualification to the right to vote, says Paine, "is too absurd to make any part of a rational argument." When a natural right is dependent upon property, it rests "on the most precarious of all tenures."\textsuperscript{124} Fourth, men have a natural right of free discussion. Paine vigorously condemned the Alien and Sedition Laws of the Adams administration\textsuperscript{125} because he considered freedom of speech the guardian of all the other rights. When "opinions are free, either in matters of government or religion, truth will finally and powerfully prevail."\textsuperscript{126} Fifth, a nation has at

\textsuperscript{121}Quoted by Conway, \textit{Life}, I, 75.
\textsuperscript{122}\textit{Writings}, I, 202.
\textsuperscript{123}\textit{Ibid.}, I, 7.
\textsuperscript{124}\textit{Ibid.}, III, 88.
\textsuperscript{125}\textit{Ibid.}, III, 414.
\textsuperscript{126}\textit{Ibid.}, IV, 195. In another place (III, 54–55), Paine implies that truth will prevail even though free speech is suppressed. It is important to recognize the emphasis which Paine places upon the fact that, while "civil right grows out of natural right" and man enters society to secure collective protection which he cannot enforce alone, the state "cannot... invade the natural [intellectual] rights which are retained in the individual, and in which the power to execute is as perfect as the right itself" (\textit{Ibid.}, II, 306–307). The first draft of this definition Gilbert Chinard originally attributed to Jefferson, and used it as the basis for arguing that his definition of liberty was "entirely different from the French conception as found in Rousseau" and that it represents the "key to the whole democratic system of government evolved by Jefferson" which involved an almost unique "combination of liberty and order, individualism and
all times a natural right of revolution. It has "an inherent indefeasible right to abolish any form of government it finds inconvenient, and to establish [in its place one which] accords with its interest, disposition, and happiness." 127

In Paine the end and function of both the social compact and the natural rights doctrine was to free the individual in order to rescue the reason from the eclipse into which it had passed. Extricate the reason from the beclouding corruptions of civilization and it will once again shine forth in the revelation of truth as when man first came uncorrupted from the hand of the Creator in the early ages of the world.128 Each man should rely on himself, says Paine, and the "simple voice of nature and reason will say" what is right.129 To Paine reason, freely employed, is the guide to principles of sound and orderly government. On all subjects of controversy "men have but to think, and they will neither act wrong nor be misled."130 He praised the Pennsylvania Constitution and the discipline" (Jefferson [Boston, 1829], pp. 80–85). Later, Conway having printed the document long before in his Life of Paine (I, 235–236), Chinard admitted that it "seems to be" by Paine (Correspondence of Jefferson and Du Pont de Nemours, p. lxxii). Doubtless Chinard is right, however, in tracing the basic idea to the Scottish jurist Lord Kames; Paine's familiarity with Kames is established by the fact that excerpts from his work were selected by Paine for publication in The Pennsylvania Magazine, January, 1775.

127 Ibid., II, 385. "That which a whole nation chooses to do it has a right to do" (ibid., II, 278). See also II, 267 ff., 397–399, 403, 427–428; III, 414–417.

128 "The function of the benefactor of mankind," says Professor A. O. Lovejoy, speaking of the eighteenth-century deistic reformer, "was not to proclaim to men truths which they had never known before, but to purge their minds of 'prejudices' and so to fix their attention upon the central, simple truths which they had really always known" ("The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," Modern Philology, XXIX, 287).

129 Writings, I, 71. The similarity of this to the Quaker Inner-Light doctrine is obvious.

130 Ibid., II, 399. See also III, 45–46.
Articles of Confederation as products of untrammeled reason and debate, and concluded from this that “when public matters are open to debate, and the public judgment is free, it will not decide wrong, unless it decides too hastily.” ¹³¹ This conclusion, based as it is on rationalism inspired by the scientific spirit, is a very important basis of Paine’s reliance on the people’s ability to govern themselves.

4. Anti-Traditionalism: Rational Principles and Progress

With the deification of reason Paine, like the French philosophers, repudiates tradition and the lessons of history. On the “pure ground of principle,” he says,

“antiquity and precedent cease to be authority, and hoary-headed error loses its effect. The reasonableness and propriety of things must be examined abstractedly from custom and usage; and, in this point of view, the right which grows into practice today is as much right, and as old in principle and theory, as if it had the customary sanction of a thousand ages.” ¹³²

Thus for Paine the Bible becomes a record of wickedness, Greek and Roman history ¹³³ becomes the history of inferior peoples, and English history becomes the record of violence. ¹³⁴ Paine praises the American Revolution for having swept away the “poison” of traditional institutions. By its means “every corner of the mind is swept of its cobwebs, poison and dust, and made fit for the reception of generous happiness.” ¹³⁵

¹³¹ Writings, II, 435.
¹³² Ibid., III, 61.
¹³³ Ibid., I, 252–253. The only ancient book, says Paine, which challenges universal consent and belief is Euclid’s Elements of Geometry. The “reason is, because it is a book of self-evident demonstration, entirely independent of its author and of everything relating to time, place, and circumstance.” See note 401, following.
¹³⁴ Ibid., I, 80–82.
¹³⁵ Ibid., II, 105–106.
Paine insisted that revolutions could be accomplished with little violence, provided they were based not upon men but upon principles. For the latter, properly disseminated, would appeal, he thought, to the innate rationality and altruism of everyone and thus opposition would be eliminated. He contended that a counter-revolution in France was impossible because, aided by philosophers, the mind of the people had previously discovered the truths or principles which caused the Revolution itself, and it was “impossible to put the mind back to the same condition it was in before.” Paine was uncompromising in his loyalty to principles. When the English government offered to pay £1000 for *The Rights of Man* in order to suppress it, Paine refused, saying that he could not “treat as a mere matter of traffic, that which I intended should operate as a principle.” “In taking up any public matter,” he said, “I have never made it a consideration... whether it be popular or unpopular; but whether it be right or wrong. The right will always become the popular, if it has courage to show itself, and the shortest way is always a straight line.” He insisted that a great

---

137 *Ibid.*, II, 522. Paine insists again and again on his own disinterestedness. Thus he wrote to Danton (*ibid.*, III, 138), “I have no personal interest in any of these matters, nor in any party disputes. I attend only to general principles.” He insisted that he did not write *The Crisis* from his personal interest in America; “my principle is universal. My attachment is to all the world, and not to any particular part...” (quoted by Best, *op. cit.*, p. 177). So also he contended (*Writings*, II, 454) that in *The Rights of Man* he “endeavored to establish a system of principles as a basis on which government ought to be erected...” Paine’s claim to impartiality is given some degree of credence by the fact that on July 4, 1792, he gave the radical “Society for Constitutional Information” £1000 and the right to publish his writings to enable them to spread the principles of the Revolution and the new government theories.  
138 *Writings*, III, 400. In the Preface to *The Rights of Man*, Part II, (*ibid.*, II, 394) he speaks of “Mr. Burke's outrageous opposition.” “He attacked principles which he knew (from information) I would contest with him, because they are principles I believe to be.
chasm separated revolutionary sentiment and mob violence. He repudiated those who by "wilful misrepresentations" promoted violence and thus lost "the great cause of public good in the outrages of a misinformed mob." The true way of change is by revolutionary sentiment which takes its "ground on principles that require no such riotous aid." By Paine's standards all good government must rest on "a strict adherence to principle." "Government is nothing more than a national association acting on the principles of society." These universal principles are to be read in the "windings and caverns of the human heart." But since the individual reason receives its knowledge from God Himself at the creation, therefore wherever principle is concerned "man ... is everywhere the same, drawn toward his fellow men." And the true idea of a great nation therefore "is that which extends and promotes the principles of universal society," and "whose mind rises above the atmosphere of local thoughts, and considers mankind ... as the work of one Creator." When bad governments fail, then it indicates that there has been a failure of principle, not of men. And therefore "instead of seeking to reform the individual, the wisdom of a Nation should apply itself to reform the system." In the same way Paine says the question in elections "is not properly a question upon Persons, but upon principles. ... When moral ... principles, rather than Persons, are candidates for Power, to vote is to perform a moral duty." Similarly Paine finds the

---

139 *Writings*, II, 294-296.
"confusion and contradiction" in Burke's *Reflections* attributable to his failure to steer his course by "some polar truth or principle."148

This adherence to principle underlies Paine's thought when he comes to compare and contrast the governments of America, France, and England. Paine insists over and over that the American Revolution was not a local affair, "but universal, and through which the principles of all lovers of mankind are affected."149 He doggedly maintained that the cause of the fight between the Colonies and England was not only economic but one of principle.150 The "rapid progress which America makes in every species of improvement" is due to the fact that our government began "on a principle."151 He attacked the Federalists because they put men above principles.152 Their policy has "no consistency of parts; and want of consistency is the natural consequence of want of principle."153 The new French government, like the American, was also based on principles. Paine claimed that Burke did not understand the French Revolution.

It has apparently burst forth...from chaos, but it is no more than the consequence of a mental revolution priorily existing in France. The mind of the Nation had changed beforehand,

150 Best, op. cit., p. 176.
151 *Writings*, II, 402. In America, he says (*ibid.*, I, 99), "law is King," but in Europe "the King is law."
153 *Ibid.*, III, 409. Paine demonstrates how, because he acts from principle and not from party, he may find himself on the side of the Federalists on some points. If "by Federalist is to be understood one who was for cementing the Union by a general government operating equally over all the States..., *I ought to stand first on the list of Federalists*, for the proposition for establishing a general government over the Union, came originally from me in 1783..." (*ibid.*, III, 386).
and the new order of things has naturally followed the new order of thoughts.\footnote{Writings, II, 333.}

Again Paine finds the same distinction between men and principles. Other revolutions in Europe have been the result of personal hatred. But in France the Revolution was “generated in the rational contemplation of the Rights of Man,” and distinguished “from the beginning between persons and principles.”\footnote{Ibid., II, 286.} Thus in the case of Charles I and James II in England “the revolt was against the personal despotism of the men; whereas in France, it was against the hereditary despotism of the established Government.”\footnote{Ibid., III, 133.} The Revolution failed, however, as soon as it ceased to follow principles. Had it “been conducted consistently with its principles,” he says, “there was once a good prospect of extending liberty through the greatest part of Europe.” But Paine adds that he “now relinquishes that hope.”\footnote{Ibid., II, 409-411.} In contrast to America and France the government of England, says Paine, is not based on principles. It is government by “jobbers.”\footnote{Ibid., III, 50 ff.} Parliamentary changes in England are meaningless and exhibit a nation under the government of temper, instead of a fixed and steady principle.\footnote{Ibid., II, 284.} Pitt’s early promise and failure, says Paine, shows that a “change of ministers amounts to nothing.... The defect lies in the system.”\footnote{Ibid., II, 479.} And without supplanting the existing frame of government no reform is possible because of the self-interest of both parties to maintain the \textit{status quo}.\footnote{Ibid., II, 506.}
5. Constitutions to Guarantee Representative Government

To guarantee their continuance Paine believed that the principles of sound government must be embodied in a written constitution. The main trouble with the English government is that it has no constitution. "A constitution is a thing antecedent to a Government; it is the act of a people creating a Government and giving it powers, and defining the limits and exercise of the powers so given..." Thus the "constitution is the property of a nation, and not of those who exercise the government." Paine insists therefore that a constitution rationally formulated and agreed upon is the only basis of government. He attributed the violence in France to the absence of a sound constitution.

For it is the nature of a constitution to prevent governing by party, by establishing a common principle that shall limit and control the power and impulse of party and that says to all parties, thus far shalt thou go and no further. But in the absence of a constitution men look entirely to party; and instead of principle governing party, party governs principle.  

152 Ibid., III, 63.
153 Ibid., II, 435. Paine had considerable to do with the formation of constitutional government in America. He helped to formulate the liberal Pennsylvania constitution. See J. P. Selsam, The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 (Philadelphia, 1936). On Paine's activities in favor of the formation of the Union prior to 1787, see H. H. Clark's introduction to Six New Letters of Thomas Paine (University of Wisconsin Press, 1939). Conway (L'ete, I, 224) says that Paine was not chosen to the Constitutional Convention because the Federalists feared his enthusiasm. He was always outspoken in his praise of the Constitution and the Union. "I feel myself hurt," he said, "when I hear the Union, that great Palladium of our liberty and safety, the least irreverently spoken of. It is the most sacred thing in the Constitution of America" (quoted by Best, op. cit., p. 221). He claimed that the "proposition" of "consolidating the states into a Federal Government" by means of a constitution came originally from him in 1782 (Writings, III, 214).
154 Ibid., III, 277.
The English Constitution is bad for at least "ninety-nine parts of the nation out of an hundred." It entails upon the nation the unnecessary expense of supporting three forms and systems of Government at once, namely, the monarchical, the aristocratical, and the democratical." In the second place, "it is impossible to unite such a discordant composition by any other means than perpetual corruption"; therefore the corruption "is no other than the natural consequence of such an unnatural compound of governments." 165 The truth probably is, thinks Paine, that no constitution exists. He challenged Burke to produce the English Constitution, and concluded "that though it has been so much talked about, no such thing as a constitution exists, and consequently...the people have yet a constitution to form." 166

Paine believed that the representative principle was the only sure safeguard of the principles embodied in the constitution. He proceeded throughout his works to analyze the advantages of the representative principle in great detail. In representative government "no office of very extraordinary power, or extravagant pay, is attached to any individual; and consequently there is nothing to excite...national contentions and civil wars."... 167 The representative government is "always in maturity; whereas monarchical government fluctuates through all stages, from non-age to dotage." 168 The representative system "admits of none but men properly qualified into the Government, or removes them if they prove otherwise. Whereas, in the hereditary system, a nation may be encumbered with a knave or an idiot for a whole lifetime..." 169

Moreover, the representative principle is merely a return to the order of nature. 170 Therefore if representative government was established in Europe, nations would "become acquainted, and the animosities and prejudices fomented by the

165 Writings, III, 60.
166 Ibid., II, 310.
167 Ibid., III, 69.
168 Ibid., III, 68-69.
169 Ibid., III, 68 f.
170 Ibid., I, 91.
intrigue and artifice of courts, will cease.”171 At the same time it would prevent civil war within a nation. “Had America been cursed with John Adams’s hereditary Monarchy, or Alexander Hamilton’s Senate for life, she must have sought, in the doubtful contest of civil war, what she now obtains by the expression of public will.”172 The principle of representation has still other advantages. It is “the strongest and most powerful center that can be devised for a nation.”173 It “diffuses such a body of knowledge throughout a nation, on the subject of government, as to explode ignorance and preclude imposition.”174 Finally the representative principle is the means of its own reform because “any error in the first essay could be reformed by the same quiet and rational process by which the Constitution was formed.”175

Paine’s conception of the representative principle is a very democratic one. The representatives themselves possess no power not delegated to them by the people in a constitution or “original compact which they have made with each other.” Therefore the “power of representatives is in many cases less but never can be greater than that of the people represented.”176 Though the power of the legislative body is always inferior to that of the people, yet it is to Paine superior to the executive and judicial branches of the government. The executive department must be “subordinate to the legislative as the body to the mind in a state of health; for it is impossible to conceive

171 Ibid., II, 512.
172 Ibid., III, 392.
173 Ibid., 6.
174 Ibid., II, 427.
175 Ibid., III, 388. Italics are mine. See also ibid., II, 244. Like Jefferson, Paine believed that the earth and its government belong to the living and not to the dead. He thought that each generation should have an opportunity to reaffirm or abolish the individual laws by which it was governed. He even suggested that no one law should continue without reaffirmation beyond thirty years (ibid., II, 165); later he suggested twenty-one years (ibid., III, 93).
176 Ibid., II, 139.
the idea of two sovereignties, a sovereignty to will and a sovereignty to act." The executive has no discretionary power, "for it can act no other thing than what the laws decree." 177 So also is the judiciary subordinate to the legislative. Paine attacks dependence merely on precedents. Every man "ought to be tried by the laws of his own country ... and not by opinions and authorities from other countries." 178 If the people of the United States through their representatives, says Paine, have no power over the judiciary, the judiciary may become domineering or even dangerous. 179

Paine's emphasis on the importance of the representative principle led him to attack the English rotten borough system. 180 It is no ill-grounded estimation to say, he says, "that as not one person in seven is represented [in Parliament], at least fourteen millions of taxes out of the seventeen millions, are paid by the unrepresented part." 181 The reform, however, "cannot be trusted to Parliament, but must be undertaken by a distinct body of men separated from every suspicion of corruption or influence." Paine therefore advocates "electing a National Convention. By this method ... the general Will ... will be known, and it cannot be known by other means." 182

A National Convention thus formed, would bring together the sense and opinions of every part of the nation, fairly taken.

177 *Writings*, III, 275.
180 "In 1793," writes W. P. Hall (op. cit., p. 35), "two hundred and ninety-four members of Parliament—a majority—were returned by constituencies, the greater part of which had less than a hundred voters; none had more than two hundred and fifty. At the most, less than fifteen hundred electors returned a majority of the House." He quotes another authority (E. Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons* [Cambridge, 1903], I, 311) to the effect that "from 1760 to 1832 nearly one-half of the members of the House of Commons owed their seats to patrons." 181
181 *Writings*, III, 87.
The science of Government, and the interest of the Public, and of the several parts thereof, would then undergo an ample and rational discussion, freed from the language of parliamentary disguise.  

6. Governmental Regularity to Promote the Good of All

Out of Paine's discussions emerges his ideal government which functions for the general good with the smoothness and economy of a machine. This ideal arises directly out of Paine's religious and humanitarian thought. When Paine took the Enlightened view of mankind and the world, the individual man acquired in his eyes a dignity he had not possessed before. This is the basis of his humanitarian thought. "I have no interest," he wrote, "distinct from that which has a tendency to meliorate the situation of mankind." He attacks Burke for indifference to the "wretched." In contrast Paine maintains that "the moral duty of man consists in imitating the moral goodness and beneficence of God manifested in the creation toward all his creatures." This "goodness of God to man" calls "upon all men to practise the same toward each other." But the "great mass of the poor in all countries are become an hereditary race, and it is next to impossible for them to get out of that state by themselves." The great need then is the reform of government. Self-interest alone is enough to dictate

Ibid., III, 91. It should be noted that it was this demand, elaborated in Paine's Address to the Addressers, that England should follow France and change her basic frame of government by calling a national convention of the populace, which alienated many of his former friends among the moderate reformers who only sought minor changes such as annual parliaments.

Ibid., III, 284.

Burke's Reflections has not "one glance of compassion, not one commiserating reflection" for the unfortunate.

Writings, IV, 83.

Ibid., III, 339.
reform, according to Paine. Public good is not "opposed to the good of individuals; on the contrary, it is the good of every individual collected." 188 Man's social nature itself adapts him for the perfect government. It is "capable of performing within itself almost everything necessary to its protection and government." 189 "The instant government is abolished, society begins to act; a general association takes place, and common interest produces common security." 190 Under good government, Paine insisted, reform takes place naturally, without effort, and corruption will not accumulate to degrade the poor. "When the general principles of a constitution are sound, the minor reforms which experience may demand are so easy to bring about that the nation will never be tempted to let abuses accumulate." 191 The ideal government, he says, is analogous to "the unerring regularity of the visible solar system." 192

The influence of Newton undoubtedly played a large part in Paine's formulation of his ideal machinelike government. "It is only by organizing civilization upon such principles as to act like a system of pulleys that the whole weight of misery can be removed." 193 Paine says that he took this idea of a machinelike government "from a principle in nature which no art can overturn, viz. that the more simple any thing is, the less liable it is to be disordered and the easier repaired when disordered." 194 This desire for simplicity in government naturally leads Paine to assert that since security is "the true design and end of government" the most economical government, the one "with the least expense and greatest benefit is preferable to all others." 195 It is partly due to this same desire for a smooth-working, simple government that he prefers the more simple and machinelike

192 *Writings*, III, 337. See also *ibid.*, I, 74.
unicameral system of government to bicameralism.\textsuperscript{196} This ideal of simplicity and smoothness leads Paine to sanction two other ideas of government: the need for local autonomy and the need for as few general laws as possible. A great advance in the science of government has been made, he says, "by the institution of a system which puts each part of a country in a position to govern all its private affairs."\textsuperscript{197} The same tendency to reduce government to the greatest possible simplicity is seen in his attitude toward law. "It is but few general laws that civilized life requires, and those of such common usefulness, that whether they are enforced by the forms of government or not, the effect will be nearly the same."\textsuperscript{198} In conclusion Paine says that the principle to be followed is that the amount of government necessary is "a little more than each [man] wants for himself and a great deal less than he thinks necessary for others. Excess of government only tends to incite to and create crimes which else had never existed."\textsuperscript{199} And Newtonianism appears to have helped inspire Paine's vision of political ideals applicable universally:

Men who study any universal science, the principles of which are universally known or admitted, and applied without distinction to the common benefit of all countries, obtain thereby a larger share of philanthropy than those who only study national arts and improvements. Natural philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy carry the mind from the country to the creation, and give it a fitness suited to the extent. It was not

\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Ibid.}, II, 232–233, 241–244, \textit{passim}. "My idea of a single legislature was always founded on a hope, that whatever personal parties there might be in the state, they would all unite and agree in the general principles of good government—that these party differences would be dropped at the threshold of the statehouse, and that the public good, or the good of the whole, would be the governing principle of the legislature within it" (\textit{Ibid.}, II, 182).

\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Ibid.}, II, 244.

\textsuperscript{198} \textit{Ibid.}, II, 408.

\textsuperscript{199} \textit{Ibid.}, II, 245.
Newton's honor, neither could it be his pride, that he was an
Englishman, but that he was a philosopher: the heavens had
liberated him from the prejudices of an island, and science had
expanded his soul as boundless as his studies. 200

III. ECONOMICS

1. Basic Factors in Paine's Economic Thought

In an earlier section it has been shown that the traditional
view of Paine as an ungoverned and impassioned radical was
considerably at variance with the truth. Actually he was a
deist of the Enlightenment, conditioned largely by the New-
tonian concept of a universe guided by inexorable and divinely-
created law. This implies that he approached all the problems
of his age in a manner now fairly well defined. At the creation
of the world God had promulgated laws on which every aspect
of existence is founded. It was generally believed that Locke,
Newton, 201 the Deists, and the neo-classical literary critics
had discovered these underlying laws in the fields of govern-
ment, astronomy, religion, and literature. 202 Due to insuf-
icient observation, inherited prejudices, or lack of knowledge,
however, men had either misconceived or not yet discovered
these divine laws in other fields, including economics. The
most important conditioning factor, then, in Paine's economic
theory is his attempt to find in these divine laws the basis of all

200 Writings, I, 300; see also II, 103, on science and international
brotherhood.

201 This concept of ideal law was never more succinctly expressed
than in Pope's couplet intended as an epitaph for Newton:

“Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night:
God said, Let Newton be1 and all was light.”

202 For the ideas which are basic in most phases of Enlightened
Thought, see A. O. Lovejoy's article, "The Parallel of Deism and
economic life. In actual practice this largely amounted to a subjective, deductive application of Newtonian natural law to the field of economics. A second conditioning factor is the unorganized state of economic study itself in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The classical economy of Adam Smith and the French Physiocrats was first fully expressed with the publication of The Wealth of Nations in 1776, yet it was the persistence of the old mercantilistic theory which was among underlying causes of the American Revolution. Even the new thought, however, was far from being a well-developed, consistent system, as the radical differences between Smith and the Physiocrats plainly show. It was easy, then, for one so inexperienced in economic thought, to embrace ideas not wholly valid in the light of modern knowledge. The third major conditioning factor is his commercial class background. He was destined by his Quaker parentage for commercial life. As a result, his successive occupations as staymaker, dissenting teacher, exciseman, and tobacco merchant imbued him with the commercial class spirit to such an extent that for many years after he began to write he was little more than its un-


204 L. H. Haney (History of Economic Thought, p. 157) says that it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century "that Economics was really founded as a science." Note, however, that Sir James Stewart's Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy (1767), only nine years prior to The Wealth of Nations, is the first attempt to formulate mercantilistic economy into a systematic theory. It is the high-water mark, says E. A. J. Johnson (Predecessors of Adam Smith, p. 9), of an "earnest effort to forge a set of principles out of the fragmentary economic ideas which more than two centuries of turbulent controversy had thrown to the surface."
conscious spokesman. His background does much to explain why he could never be a true agrarian. The last important conditioning factor is his position as an international figure. This not only lent scope to his belief in universal economic law, but enabled him, as his interest vacillated between the newborn American and French republics, to attack the inveterate enemy of the British commercial class—the hereditary monarchy and nobility.

The body of Paine’s economic thought can be divided into three categories. First, his conception of the economic world as a great natural community working together under a system of laws as harmonious as the Newtonian solar system itself. Second, his optimistic view of the natural reciprocity of interest between this great natural community and individual self-interest. Divine Providence, he saw, had endowed man with a desire to better his condition and this, without conflict, resulted in the social organism. Third, his application of these two principles to the specific economic problems of his age such as paper money, the bank, taxation, and agrarianism. These three aspects considered in order embrace every significant phase of Paine’s economic thought.

Paine believed very firmly in the existence of universal economic laws to which men must conform whether they will or no. It is not our doing a thing with a certain end in mind “that will cause it to produce that end,” he says; “the means taken must have a natural ability and tendency within themselves to produce no other, for it is this, not our wishes or policy, that governs the event.”

Though he makes no reference to it, Paine probably learned much of his early economic thought from such books as Malachy Postlethwayt’s *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*—a strange mixture of half-formulated economic theory and fact of the time. Published in 1751 and revised in 1774, it was widely read in America.

national states, therefore, must be based on priority-existing economic law. Hence the only legitimate national policy was free trade. He justified the alliance between France and Spain because it affirmed an economic law, the mines of Peru and Mexico being "the soul of this alliance." 207 On the same basis he justified the American Revolution because British colonial policy was an abrogation of economic law. As early as 1775 he saw American economic life being choked by the mercantile policy of Lord North. American commerce, he says in The Drama Interpreted, "has been drying up by repeated restrictions, till by one merciless edict the ruin of it is completed." 208 Only a year later he came out with Common Sense, in which he advocated a laissez-faire 209 policy which borders on economic determinism. He examines the dependence of America on England, he says, by "the principles of Nature and common sense" 210 and discovers that "Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America." 211 "As Europe is our market for trade, we ought to form no partial connection with any part of it." 212 A nation "in a state of foreign dependence, limited in its commerce, . . . can never arrive at any material eminence." It must have "the legislative powers" in its "own

207 Writings, II, 196.
208 Ibid., I, 50. C. J. Bullock (Monetary History of the United States) points out that this was literally true. For a contemporary study of the advantages which the mother country expected to derive from colonies, see A. Smith's Wealth of Nations, II, Book IV, Chap. VII, "Of Colonies" (particularly Part III, "Of the Advantages which Europe has derived from the Discovery of America").
209 Note that Paine's admiration for Smith (Writings, II, 314; III, 387 ff.) is explained partly by (1) their similar faith in a universal and benevolent order of nature; (2) their laissez-faire attack on coercive and restrictive laws which, according to Turgot, caused the American Revolution; (3) their attempt to minimize the duties and the expense of the sovereign; and (4) their idea that very little government is necessary.
210 Writings, I, 85.
211 Ibid., I, 87.
212 Ibid., I, 88.
hands." 213 England herself, he thinks, will benefit by American independence because it "is commerce and not the conquest of America by which England is to be benefitted." 214 As a result, he thinks that the "mercantile and reasonable part of England" will support the Revolution. 215 In The American Crisis (1777) Paine puts even greater emphasis on free trade. To a trading country, it is "an article of such importance that the principal source of wealth depends upon it; and it is impossible that any country can flourish ... whose commerce is engrossed, cramped and fettered by the laws and mandates of another." 216 By 1780 he felt that America was already reaping the fruits of free trade; already her case shows "the vast advantage of an open trade." 217 Paine repeated his defense of laissez-faire in his Letter to the Abbé Raynal (1782) 218 and extended it to other activities in The Rights of Man (1791). "Several laws are in existence for regulating and limiting workmen's wages. Why not leave them as free to make their own bargains, as lawmakers are to let their farms and houses?" 219

Though Paine opposed commercial restrictions, he favored a strong central government as a protection to commerce. This is not a serious departure from his basic free trade beliefs. In the years from 1780 to 1786 when the American state under the Articles of Confederation was in danger of disintegrating into thirteen separate entities, Paine based one of his arguments for a strong national government on the need for national protection and regulation of commerce. He rightly saw that thirteen states, each legislating its own commercial policy, would be far more inimical to commerce than one strong state. As early as the Crisis Paine realized that as long as we were "a medley of individual nothings," foreign nations will "govern our trade by their own laws and proclamations as they please." 220

213 Writings, I, 114. 214 Ibid., I, 114. 215 Ibid., I, 120.
214 Ibid., I, 204. 216 Ibid., I, 319. 217 Ibid., I, 378–379.
215 Ibid., II, 501. 218 Ibid., I, 319. 219 Ibid., II, 80.
219 Ibid., I, 378–379.
Introduction

It is only "by acting in union" that foreign usurpation of our trade "can be counteracted, and security extended to the commerce of America." He amplifies this argument considerably in his letters to Rhode Island on the Five Per Cent Impost in 1781 to 1783. The controversy arose when Rhode Island defeated a five per cent impost levy by refusing to ratify the measure after all the other states had approved it. Paine wrote six letters in which he tries to reason the Rhode Islanders into passing the impost levy. In the course of the letters he comes to the conclusion that commerce is too universal to be under the control of individual states. "Commerce is not the local property of any State, any more than it is the legal property of any person. . . . But as the commerce of every State is made up out of the produce and consumption of other States, as well as its own, therefore its regulation and protection can only be under the confederated patronage of all the States." From this he arrives at an assumption which sounds like commercial regulation by government. "The fairest prospects may fail," he says, "and the best calculated system of finance become unproductive of its end, if left to the caprice of temper and self-interest." Paine's stand on the impost can be partially harmonized with his free trade ideas, as has been indicated, but undoubtedly the real motivating force at this time was his patriotism which made him forget for the moment his oft repeated assertion that commerce by its own power could rule the world. He took the same position in the last years of his life by supporting Jefferson's Embargo.

Paine's belief in ideal economic law had other applications.

---

221 Ibid., I, 379-380.
223 Letter III.
224 Letter IV.
225 Letter to Jefferson, July 8, 1808.
In 1779 when peace was being proposed, the English insisted that the United States give up her fishing rights to the Newfoundland banks. Paine opposed the idea in three letters to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* by insisting that our fishing right was "a natural right." Contiguous territories, he says, have a natural economic interest in each other which cannot be signed away by treaty. Without the fisheries America would have no independence because only a political state founded upon underlying economic laws is stable. "There are but two natural sources of wealth and strength—the Earth and the Ocean—and to lose the right to either is, in our situation, to put up the other to sale."227

His conception of the economic interdependence of the world led Paine to insist on the freedom of the seas. The sea is "the world's highway;" he said, "and he who arrogates a prerogative over it, transgresses the right, and justly brings on himself the chastisement of the nations."228 Therefore Paine was led to consider the effect of navies on commerce. In 1776 he thought the two complemented one another; "to unite the sinews of commerce and defense is sound policy..."229 By 1780, with the Revolution well on the way to a successful conclusion by the alliance with France, Paine had changed his mind; we ought "to turn the navy into hard money" and rely on the French navy for protection.230 And by 1792, Paine had come to the conclusion that commerce needed no other protection "than the reciprocal interest which every nation feels in supporting it."231 The operation of economic law is universal and inevitable, and, as a consequence, commerce contains within itself "the means of its own protection."232

231 "Rights of Man," *Writings*, II, 450.
Commercially considered, then, navies "are losses." 233 The English attempt to abrogate economic law and monopolize the sea had led only to financial ruin.234

Two factors seem to underlie the change in Paine's viewpoint. First, he was coming to believe more and more in the efficacy of economic law to govern the world. And as a corollary, his antipathy to commercial restrictions of all kinds was increasing. Second, his position as a polemicist, favoring the French as against the English cause, colored all his assertions on economic subjects.

These two factors also form the basis of the stand he took later on other commercial problems involving universal economic law. In his letter to Washington in 1796 he made a vicious attack on the Jay Treaty with England. The treaty on the whole was advantageous to the United States, but did agree to some irksome restrictions on American commerce. Paine ignored its good points and condemned the treaty, partly on the basis of the commercial restrictions, but chiefly on the fact that it was inimical to French interests. All America's "rights of commerce and navigation are to begin anew," he said, "and that with loss of character to begin with."235 Shortly after his return to America in 1802, Paine was forced to face another important commercial problem. In 1803 American commerce was threatened with annihilation by the English Orders in Council and Napoleon's Milan Decree. Paine proposed to solve the problem by calling a Non-Importation Convention which would make use of a commercial embargo to force the warring nations to respect American commerce.236 Thus he takes the position that what a navy could not do, an economic boycott could. Paine carried this idea

233 [Writings, III, 365.]
235 [Writings, III, 252. See also ibid., 420 and 239 ff.]
236 [Ibid., III, 418-419.]
one step farther. Later in the same year he resurrected his earlier proposal for a Maritime Compact, "an Unarmed Association of Nations for the protection of the Rights and Commerce of Nations that shall be neutral in time of War." 237 The purpose of the Compact was to enforce the rights of neutral countries by means of economic pressure.

The economic boycott marks the high point of Paine's belief in the existence of basic economic law and its power to govern the world. The second central principle in his economic theory complements the first by correlating individual self-interest with these universal laws. Paine took the view popularized in the eighteenth century by Pope, according to whom God and Nature "bade Self-love and Social be the same." 238 Since all social law is divinely promulgated and the human reason is divinely guided, there could be no real antithesis between individual self-interest and economic social good. 239 Hence each individual merely by heeding the demands of his wants would gravitate toward harmony with society. Thus in both realms Paine stands for laissez-faire. 240 "Where nature and interest reinforce with each other," he said, "the compact is too intimate to be dissolved." 241

237 Writings, III, 421. The Compact was originally written and presented to "the ministers of all the neutral nations then in Paris in the summer of 1800" (ibid., III, 426). See also ibid., IV, 52. Paine, however, seems to have had the idea somewhat earlier. In 1707 he suggested the idea of an association of neutral nations to eliminate war by economic embargo (see ibid., III, 366).


240 See Kaye's introduction to Mandeville's Fable of the Bees (p. cxxxix) on laissez-faire: "This is the theory that commercial affairs are happiest when least regulated by the government; that things tend by themselves to find their own proper level; and that unregulated self-seeking on the part of individuals will in society so interact with and check itself that the result will be for the benefit of the community."

241 Writings, I, 296.
Introduction

The principle of self-interest as the motive power in human nature is one which Paine held throughout his life, although it is especially important in his writings before The Rights of Man. In The American Crisis it is this principle which he appeals to when he tries to reason the colonists into supporting the Revolution. When our interest and honor “are interwoven not only with the security but the increase of property, there exists not a man in America... who does not see that his good is connected with keeping up a sufficient defense.” 242 His adherence to the principle of self-interest is stated even more positively in The Rights of Man (1792). “The most effectual process,” he says, “is that of improving the condition of man by means of his interest; and it is on this ground that I take my stand.” 243 He restated the principle in Agrarian Justice (1797) in a less idealistic form. In any plan, he says, where “justice and humanity are the foundation of principles, interest ought not to be admitted into the calculation, yet it is always of advantage to the establishment of any plan to show that it is beneficial as a matter of interest.” 244

The occupation in which Paine saw self-interest operate is a very significant part of his theory. He followed Adam Smith245 in asserting that the division of labor is the chief source of wealth. Cultivation, he says in Agrarian Justice, “has given to created earth a tenfold value.” 246 In contrast to the old mercantilists who saw wealth wholly in terms of hard money derived from exploiting one’s neighbors and the French Physicocrats who saw it only in terms of the natural products of land, the new theory enormously widened the possibilities of wealth.

240Ibid., I, 313.
241Ibid., II, 456.
242Ibid., III, 339.
243Note the full title of Smith’s book: An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations. Note also the first sentence: “The annual labor of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life.”
244Writings, III, 337.
This new emphasis on the source of wealth had a tremendous effect on men's conception of the whole economic system. For the first time the true interrelation of the three great divisions of the world's economic life—the agricultural, the commercial, and the industrial—were realized for once and for all. However, though Smith saw the true interdependence of the economic life, his chief emphasis is still on the old commercial-agricultural life. He lived too early to know the possibilities of manufacturing. To his mind the two chief ways by which labor created wealth were still by agriculture and commerce; that is, the growing of natural products on the soil and the transportation of them from an area of low utility to an area of high utility.247

Paine follows quite closely this train of thought. Like Smith he emphasizes the interdependence of the economic life. "Let us hasten," he says, "to give encouragement to agriculture and manufacture, that commerce may reinstate itself, and our people have employment."248 Like Smith249 also he considered manufacturing to be the least valuable economic pursuit. Even at their best, he says, manufactures "are very unstable sources of national wealth. The reason is that they seldom continue long in one state. The market for them depends on the caprice of fashions, and sometimes of politics in foreign countries, and they are at all times exposed to rivalry and change."250 Paine, however, as we shall see later,

248 Writings, IV, 257.
249 The manufacturers, he said, have "generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public, and who accordingly have, upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed it" (quoted by Gide and Rist, op. cit., p. 66).
250 Writings, II, 15. Paine's interest in inventions at first glance seems to contradict this. In 1789 he wrote to Jefferson from England: "I have been to see the cotton mills—the potteries—the steel furnaces, tinplate manufacture—white lead manufacture—all these
Introduction

did not follow Smith in his admiration for agrarianism. It is commerce which is the center of his economic system. Commerce, he says, is like blood: "it cannot be taken from the whole mass in circulation" without the whole partaking of the loss. Should the "government of England destroy the commerce of all other nations, she would most effectually ruin her own." Paine scoffs at the old mercantilistic idea of a balance of trade. The merchants of London and Newcastle trade on the same principles as if they lived in different countries. But no nation can be "the seller and buyer of her own merchandise. The ability to buy must reside out of herself; and, therefore, the prosperity of any commercial nation is regulated by the prosperity of the rest." Paine's emphasis on commerce is further shown by his defense of the commercial class against the English nobility. "The contempt," he says, "in which the old government held mercantile pursuits, and the obloquy that attached on merchants and manufactures, contributed not a little to... its eventual subversion..." To the argument that royalty was needed to protect the people from the tyranny of powerful

things might easily be carried on in America" (Writings, IV, 101). J. M. Robertson (in his introduction to The Age of Reason, p. xi) says that as early "as 1778 he proposed the application of the steam-engine to navigation and counselled Fulton who was his friend." He praised the discoveries of the American Philosophical Society and did himself invent a plaining machine, a new crane, a smokeless candle, a scheme for using gunpowder as a motor, and an iron bridge which received considerable attention. (See Conway, Life, passim). It would be a mistake, however, to think that he saw at that time the connection between invention and manufacturing which we now know to have existed. The two things were still separate activities in the eighteenth century. For instance, Adam Smith, who, as we have seen, thoroughly disliked manufacturing, yet took very great interest in inventions of every sort.

251 Writings, II, 457.
252 Ibid., II, 459-460.
253 Ibid., II, 457.
nobles, Paine asks instead for the establishment of the middle class.

Establish the Rights of Man; enthrone Equality, ... let there be no privileges, no distinctions of birth, no monopolies; make safe the liberty of industry and of trade, the equal distribution of family inheritances, publicity of administration, freedom of press: these things all established, you will be assured of good laws, and need not fear the powerful men. Willingly or unwillingly, all citizens will be under the Law.²⁵⁵

Earlier in The American Crisis he had appealed to the self-interest of "the mercantile and manufacturing part" of England against the nobility. "It is your interest to see America an independent, and not a conquered country.... It matters nothing to you who governs America, if your manufacture find a consumption there."²⁵⁶ In England all improvements in commerce have been made in opposition to the government. "It is from the enterprise and industry of the individuals, and their numerous associations, ... that these improvements have proceeded." No man gave a thought to the government when he was doing "these things; and all he had to hope with respect to government, was, that it would let him alone."²⁵⁷

We may say, then, that Paine's ideal economic system as far as the individual is concerned assumes two basic things. The world is made up of individuals whose economic wants draw them into harmonious relationships. And the direction of this self-interest is chiefly commercial, though agriculture and manufacturing are contributory factors. There are several reasons why Paine gave such emphasis to commerce in his system. It was still the dominant thought of his time. The influence of his commercial class background with its laissez-faire tendencies

²⁵⁶Writings, I, 287.
²⁵⁷Ibid., II, 442.
is undoubtedly a large factor. His idealistic philosophy with its Newtonian associations would undoubtedly also see commerce as the center of the system. But a fourth stream of thought must be brought in to fully explain this emphasis. This is the strong cast of utilitarian thought found in his writings, especially the later pamphlets. Whatever form of government a country has, he wrote in Rights of Man, "it ought to have no other object than the general happiness." Applied to economics, this doctrine means that poverty (pain) leads to evil, while affluence (pleasure) leads to good. "Though I care as little about riches, as any man," he said, "I am a friend to riches because they are capable of good." The way to reach this state of plenty is through commerce. "I am an advocate for commerce," he said, "because I am a friend to its effects. It is a pacific system, operating to cordialize mankind, by rendering nations, as well as individuals, useful to each other." And as such it is far superior to "mere theoretical reformation."

This leads directly to the greatest service of commerce to mankind—its undoubted power to exterminate war. All that can result from war, he keeps telling the English people during the American and French Revolutions, are higher taxes and the destruction of commerce. He emphasizes over and over that no economic advantage can be gained by war. In economics what is to happen will happen whether there are wars or no. "It therefore cannot be policy to go to war to effect that at great expense, which will naturally happen of itself..." What possible inducement, he asks, has the farmer of one

238 Ibid., II, 328. "It is chiefly the dissenters," he said, "that have carried English manufactures to the height they are now at..."
239 Ibid., II, 434.
240 Ibid., III, 337.
241 Ibid., II, 456. See also p. 104.
242 Ibid., II, 200. The whole essay, "Prospects on the Rubicon," 1787, develops the idea that commercial interests, if free, will unite all nations in peaceful harmony and prevent wars.
243 Ibid., I, 282 ff.; II, 194; III, 134.
country to "go to war with the peaceful farmer of another country? Or what inducement has the manufacturer?" 264 From this Paine comes to the conclusion that were commerce "permitted to act to the universal extent it is capable, it would extirpate the system of war, and produce a revolution in the uncivilized state of governments." 265 Already, he thinks, "the increase of commerce" has lessened the war spirit in England. 266

2. Application of Paine's Ideas to Specific Problems

The remainder of Paine's economic thought deals with the application of his ideas. Three of his most important pamphlets concern economic problems of his time. *Dissertations on Government; the Affairs of the Bank; and Paper Money* (1786) attempts to settle such burning colonial problems as the inviolability of charters granted to commercial corporations by the colonial governments, the position and function of banking institutions in colonial society, and the restriction of paper money. *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance* (1796) is an attack on the English system of government finance. *Agrarian Justice* (1797) is one of the earliest attempts to solve the economic problem created by the development of an unpropertied working class in the last quarter of the century. Like the times in which they were written, the temper of these pamphlets rises from mild conservatism in the first to a form of liberalism in the third which was to become one of the dominant forces in the nineteenth century.

Like most of Paine's writings prior to his removal to France in 1787, the *Dissertations* pamphlet is conservative in tone. 267 It is the product of the most balanced period of his life.

264 Writings, II, 413. 265 Ibid., II, 456. 266 Ibid., I, 107. 267 It is a significant fact that Parrington (op. cit., I, 327-341), wishing to make Paine a radical, makes no reference to this very important pamphlet. Paine, however, was conservative on several matters at this period. See *Six New Letters of Thomas Paine* (Uni-
He was intimately associated with men like Washington, Morris, and John Adams, and undoubtedly was much influenced by their conservatism. The cause of the pamphlet itself is now well known. Morris and others in 1780 had subscribed a fund to aid the army. In order to increase the efficiency of the fund, they used it to establish a bank which was given a charter by Pennsylvania in 1782. In 1785–1786 the agrarian-debtor interests gained control of the legislature and began an attack on the charter. Paine contended that the Pennsylvania Assembly of 1786 had no legal right to abrogate the charter granted by the Assembly of 1782. Thus in defending the inviolability of the charter he took the side of the conservative commercial interests against agrarian and debtor interests.

The second part of the pamphlet defends the bank as an institution by explaining its function in the colonial financial structure. The petitions demanding the repeal of the charter charged in the main that the bank banned specie from the country, maintained itself independent of any obligation to the government, endangered public prosperity by accumulating wealth, encouraged foreign investments drawing large sums in interest out of the country, and, lastly, prohibited the issue of paper money. Paine replied to all these charges,

---

268 On backgrounds see Writings, II, 149–153. A good secondary source is W. G. Sumner, Robert Morris; Financier and Revolutionist.
269 Writings, II, 145.
270 The petitions were submitted by a considerable number of the inhabitants of Berks and the city of Philadelphia. A glance at a map will show that Chester and Berks by their position were frontier counties in 1781. Paine gives the full text of the petitions in footnotes (see Writings, II, 155–157).
reserving the last for special treatment. His defense of the merchant-stockholders and the bank brought him great unpopularity. 271 His replies, however, show that he both knew and sympathized with the problems of the merchant-stockholders. He accused the agrarian petitioners, who “live somewhere in Chester County,” of not being “certain of what they say,” 272 and the debtor petitioners of wanting to profit unfairly by the bank by keeping their loans “longer than they ought.” 273 His replies to specific charges show even more clearly that his sympathies were all with Morris and the commercial interests. To the charge that the bank drove specie out of the country, Paine justly replied that no two classes in America were “so much interested in preserving hard money in the country as the bank and the merchant.” 274 He defended the independence of the bank. If private enterprises like the bank are to be annually dependent on the “assembly for the continuance of their charter, the citizens which compose those corporations are not free.” 275 The assembly committee, he says, is not half so “capable of taking care of commerce, as commerce is capable of taking care of itself.” 276 He denied also that foreign investments were an evil; “we draw capital from them and they only interest from us, and as we shall have the use of the money . . ., the advantage will always be in our favour.” 277 He defended the bank’s stockholders against the charge of accumulating wealth. “It is the convenience which the stockholders, as commercial men, derive from the establishment of the bank,

271 Frank Smith, Paine’s recent biographer, says (American Literature, IX, 260 [May, 1937]) that Paine’s stand on the bank alienated the farmers, and that “the frontiersmen in Pennsylvania denounced him as a renegade.” So far as I know, no one has hitherto called attention to the fact that Paine also defended the bank in uncollected letters in The Pennsylvania Packet for March 25, 29; April 4, 7, 20; June 20, 28, 1786. I hope to reprint these.
273 Ibid., II, 161, note.
274 Ibid., II, 160.
275 Ibid., II, 170.
276 Ibid., II, 169.
277 Ibid., II, 171.
Introduction

and not the mere interest they receive, that is the inducement to them." 278 As an instrument for the promotion of commerce, the bank becomes a matter of general social good "in which all the state is interested." 279

The last third of the pamphlet is devoted to a defense of the bank for opposing issues of paper money. From the beginning paper money was regarded by the colonists as the cure-all for financial ailments. The Revolution itself was largely financed by it. The ever large class of colonial debtors found relief through it. Hence it was a lively and dangerous issue to oppose. Paine, however, faced the issue squarely. Nature, he says, has provided gold and silver as "the proper materials for money." 280 Therefore when an assembly undertakes "to issue paper as money, the whole scheme of safety and certainty is overturned, and property set afloat." 281 "Most of the advocates for tender laws," he says, "are those who have debts to discharge, and who take refuge in such a law, to violate their contracts and cheat their creditors." 282 This was the situation exactly. And by his stand Paine put himself plainly on the side of the merchant class against the debtor-agrarian interests. 283

278 Ibid., II, 170. Undoubtedly the convenience was a great inducement, but W. G. Sumner, op. cit., p. 102, says that for the first three years the bank paid a dividend of from thirteen to fourteen per cent.

279 Ibid., II, 163.

280 Ibid., II, 184.

281 Ibid., II, 177.

282 Ibid., II, 181.

283 The traditional explanation of Paine's stand in the pamphlet has been the charge that he was hired by Morris to defend the bank. There is no direct evidence to prove this; furthermore, the fact that he seems to have held the same views throughout life lessens the significance of such a charge even if proved. See also F. C. James, "The Bank of North America and the Financial History of Philadelphia," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXIV, 56-87; and A. J. McClurkin, "Summary of the Bank of North America Records," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXIV, 88-96.
Many things had happened between Paine's defense of the bank and his later pamphlets. In 1787 he went to France and soon became a fervent supporter of the early Revolution. In writing *Rights of Man* (1791–1792) and *The Age of Reason* (1794–1796) he had moved farther to the left.284 The real object of his attack now became the old régime in England—the hereditary enemy of the rising commercial class. And the real purpose of his *Decline and Fall* (1796) is to instigate a run on the Bank of England in order to break the government. It is therefore no difficult task to reconcile his defense of the American bank with his attack on the English bank. The first was merely a "company for the promotion and convenience of commerce,"285 while the latter was the prop of the English aristocracy and monarchy.

The pamphlet itself reveals two very important sides of Paine's economic thought—the application of Newtonian natural law to economics, and his commercial class consciousness. Paine contended that the English funding system, which over a long period had maintained government credit under an ever-increasing national debt by paying the interest with new borrowings, bore the symptoms of decay. Inherently, he said, this was only another form of paper money, and he proceeded to work out the law of its dissolution, the ratio "which the nature of the thing has established for itself:"286 Applying the ratio to the future, he predicted that in twenty years287 the funding system would march "to its irredeemable dissolution."288 The important thing is not Paine's prediction, but his faith that every financial structure, like the physical universe,

284 It should never be forgotten, however, that while Paine is usually regarded as an extremist, the French Revolutionists themselves regarded him as dangerously moderate after 1793.
285 *Writings*, II, 163.
Introduction

has an inexorable law by which it is governed. Who could have supposed, he concludes, that falling systems

admitted of a ratio apparently as true as the descent of falling bodies? I have not made the ratio any more than Newton made the ratio of gravitation. I have only discovered it, and explained the mode of applying it.289

In attacking the funding system Paine reveals also his commercial class consciousness in several ways. He attacks paper money and wants instead a sound money policy.290 He deplores the system of wars and the increase in taxation and debt which follow.291 He finds occasion to attack Pitt for foisting on the nation that "motley, amphibious-charactered thing called the balance of trade."292 He makes a plea for independent enterprise by condemning the dependence of the bank on the government, a connection, he says, "that threatens to ruin every public bank."293 Finally he sees in the funding system an instrument by which the dissolute aristocracy, "of arch-treasurers," are rapidly leading the nation "into bankruptcy."294 In the last analysis, then, the aristocracy becomes a mere hang-over from corrupt medieval society and a dead weight on a free economic system.

Earlier in the Rights of Man Paine made a direct attack on the property basis of the aristocracy. He analyzed the "landed interest," which Burke attempted to defend, as "a combination of aristocratical land-holders, opposing their own pecuniary interest to that of the farmer, and every branch of trade, commerce, and manufacture." The aristocratic landed interests, he asserted, were "not the farmers who work the land," but parasites who consumed the "rent."295 But in attacking the

289 Ibid., III, 292.
290 Ibid., III, 302, 308.
291 Ibid., III, 306.
292 Ibid., III, 310–311.
293 Ibid., III, 470–471.
294 Ibid., III, 297.
295 Ibid., III, 304, note.
law of primogeniture, Paine makes it very clear that he is attacking only the aristocratic basis of property. Property itself will always be unequal, due to the inequality of industry, talent, management, frugality, and opportunity. All that needs to be “required with respect to property is to obtain it honestly, and not employ it criminally; but it is always criminally employed when it is made a criterion for exclusive rights.” Thus his argument is no more or less than the plea of the rising commercial class in the latter part of the 18th century for the right of free endeavor against the feudal system of property ownership.

His last pamphlet, Agrarian Justice, which has long been mistaken for an exposition of agrarian philosophy, in reality is merely a more definite and astute attack on the English aristocracy in favor of the non-agrarian, non-aristocratic classes. How fundamentally non-agrarian Paine’s thought is can be seen by his concept of the source of wealth. The “cultivator and the manufacturer,” he says, “are the primary means of all the wealth that exists in the world beyond what nature spontaneously produces.” The contrast of this with the position of a true agrarian like Franklin clearly reveals Paine’s natural affinity with the commercial class. There are but three ways of acquiring wealth, says Franklin:

The first is by war, as the Romans did, in plundering their conquered neighbors. This is robbery. The second by commerce, which is generally cheating. The third by agriculture,

296 Primogeniture ought to be abolished, not only because it is unnatural and unjust, but because the country suffers by its operation” (Writings, III, 500).

297 Ibid., III, 268.

298 Farrington (op. cit., I, 337) asserts that “Paine, like Jefferson, was essentially a Physiocratic agrarian.” Gide and Rist, op. cit., p. 21, who have thoroughly examined the Physiocratic position, assert that the Physiocrats “never appreciated the weakness of the landowners’ position, and they always treated them with the greatest reverence.”

299 Writings, III, 268.
the only honest way, wherein a man receives a real increase of the seed thrown into the ground . . .

Paine had no such vision of an agrarian economy. He merely reasserts a very old English belief that all men have a natural right to the soil. The notion was given new prominence toward the end of the 18th century both by the prevalence of the natural rights’ doctrine and the rise of the commercial and unpropertied working classes.

Paine claimed that all property could be divided into two kinds: the uncultivated earth or natural property, and the improvements. He defended the right of the individual to “improved” property, but asserted that the earth “in its natural uncultivated state was, and ever would . . . continue to be, the common property of the human race.” The introduction of landed property, therefore, “dispossessed more than half the inhabitants of every nation of their natural inheritance, without providing . . . an indemnification for that loss, and has thereby created a species of poverty and wretchedness that did not exist before.” To right this wrong Paine claims that every proprietor “of cultivated land, owes to the community a ground-rent . . . for the land which he holds . . .” With the money thus obtained Paine proposes,

---

**Footnotes:**

300 Franklin, ed. by F. L. Mott and C. Jorgenson, American Writers Series, pp. 346–347.

301 Gide and Rist (op. cit., p. 559) assert that the idea is the instinctive possession of every nation, but that “in England the feeling seems more general than elsewhere, because, possibly, of the number of large proprietors and of the serious abuses to which the system has given rise . . . Even as far back as the seventeenth century, Locke, in his work *On Civil Government*, had ventured to declare that God had given the land as common property to the children of men.”

302 The idea was most notably expressed before Paine in the work of Thomas Spence in 1775 and William Ogilvie in 1781.

303 *Writings*, III, 329. Locke makes the same distinction in his chapter, “Of Property,” in *On Civil Government*.


To create a National Fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of twenty-one years, the sum of fifteen pounds sterling, as a compensation in part, for the loss of his or her natural inheritance, by the system of landed property.

And also, the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age.\footnote{306}

It is only by so "organizing civilization ... that the whole weight of misery can be removed." Paine claimed that his proposal would do that. It would relieve the lame, the blind, and the aged poor; it would prevent the rising generation from becoming poor; and it would do all this "without deranging or interfering with any national measures."\footnote{307}

In plain words Paine’s proposal is a tax on the English aristocracy\footnote{308} for the benefit of the lower classes. It is his most radical economic statement. It not only is not agrarian in temper, but actually points toward the sociological liberalism of the on-coming nineteenth-century industrial society. And as such, it may be asserted that, at the end of his life, Paine sponsored a line of thought which was to find expression in Bentham and Mill on one side and the Chartist Movement on the other.\footnote{309}

It should be noted that, in Common Sense, Paine began to regard government as a necessary evil, the less of it the better, and he ended in Agrarian Justice with an adumbration of the socialist view that government can by its collective power be beneficial, constructive, and humanitarian. In the light of Newtonianism, he believed that enlightened economic self-

\footnote{306}{\textit{Writings, III, 331.}}
\footnote{307}{\textit{Ibid., III, 338.}}
\footnote{308}{The pamphlet obviously does not apply to America where land was only too plentiful. Besides, Paine had not been in America for ten years.}

\footnote{309}{For an interesting study of the whole subject see J. Dorfman, "The Economic Philosophy of Thomas Paine," \textit{Political Science Quarterly, LIII}, 372–386 (September, 1938).}
Introduction

interest, if given free play in international commerce, would cause all nations to gravitate toward harmonious unity and friendship.

IV. HUMANITARIANISM

Today the most effective and appealing part of Paine's whole creed is the practicality of his humanitarianism. There is little in him of the aimless romantic's sorrow for suffering, or indeterminate sympathy for man in the abstract. He admired Rousseau and Raynal for their "sentiment in favor of liberty," but he plainly saw their weakness in the fact that, "having raised the animation, they do not direct its operation, and leave the mind in love with an object, without describing the means of possessing it." \(^{310}\) He was careful to give his most humanitarian document, the Second Part of the Rights of Man, the subtitle, "Combining principle and practice." \(^{311}\) As a rationalist of the Enlightenment he found social deformity irrational; as a Quaker nonconformist he found it inhuman. \(^{312}\) Paine is never tired of affirming that man has become too enlightened to allow unnecessary evil to remain in the world. "There is a morning of reason rising upon man . . . that has not appeared before." Man, uncorrupted by civilization, "is naturally the friend of man, and . . . human nature is not of itself vicious." Therefore social evil, if not upheld by government sanction, will naturally yield to the "dictates of reason, interest, and humanity." \(^{313}\)

\(^{310}\) Writings, II, 334.

\(^{311}\) Ibid., II, 390.

\(^{312}\) Crane Brinton (in the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, VII, 544-548) says that the best expression of Christianity at this time is the practical effort to alleviate suffering by the efforts of the evangelical sects of Wesley and the nonconformist Quakers. F. J. Klingberg (The Anti-Slavery Movement in England: A Study in English Humanitarianism, p. 33) shows that the agitation of the American Quakers in the last quarter of the 18th century contributed to the rise of the antislavery movement in England.

\(^{313}\) Writings, II, 453.
1. A Practical Humanitarian

Paine clearly saw that the practical need for humanitarianism was the consequence of civilization itself. A large mass of people in civilized society, he saw, were "in a state of poverty and wretchedness, far below the condition of an Indian" of North America.\textsuperscript{314} Thus at the present time "the most affluent and the most miserable of the human race are to be found in the countries that are called civilized."\textsuperscript{315} There is a great deal of justice in Paine's plea for a more humanitarian policy in government. Society was undergoing a revolution in his time. The old medieval society was rapidly crumbling away with the onslaught of modern industrial society. The new organization brought great benefits, but it also brought in its train a large number of social problems. The social sciences were not yet discovered and men generally were unaware of the new problems—so unaware that it was not until the great Reform Bill of 1832 that any important change was made. But to observing men of the middle class, who, like Paine,\textsuperscript{316} were in intimate contact with the condition of the people, the new situation was very clear. Thus for him the test of adequate government is the promotion of "the public good."\textsuperscript{317} Though part of it comes from his Enlightened theory of government, not a little

\textsuperscript{314} Writings, II, 454.
\textsuperscript{315} Ibid., III, 328.
\textsuperscript{316} Paine's humanitarian feeling toward the unfortunate generally seems genuine enough to have arisen from his observation of actual conditions. The hearts of the humane, he says (Writings, II, 403), are "shocked by ragged and hungry children" and the aged "begging for bread." The sight of misery, and "the unpleasant sensations it suggests," he says (ibid., III, 337), pleading for his Agrarian Justice plan, "... are a greater drawback upon the felicity of affluence than the proposed 10 per cent upon property is worth." So Gamaliel Bradford ("Thomas Paine," in Damaged Souls) testifies that "in the larger sympathy for the poor and downtrodden Paine's merits were real and his accomplishment substantial."
\textsuperscript{317} Writings, II, 137.
of the vehemence with which he attacks the feudalistic remains of the state and church in England comes from the contrast of their affluence and corruption with the poverty and suffering of a large mass of the people. A government which annually extorted seventeen millions from the poor and spent nine millions for interest on old war debts and eight millions preparing for new wars and for sinecure pensions obviously could not stand in the face of widespread suffering.\textsuperscript{318} He attacked the monarchy for the same reason. "It is inhuman," he said, "to talk of a million sterling a year, paid out of the public taxes of any country, for the support of any individual, whilst thousands who are forced to contribute thereto, are pining with want and struggling with misery."\textsuperscript{319} By the same process Paine was led to attack the church which was the ultimate sanction for the throne. Christians themselves who constantly defended the feudal hierarchy on Biblical authority\textsuperscript{320} and exalted "God's Wisdom in Having Made both Rich and Poor"\textsuperscript{321} forced Paine to attack Christianity itself. Paine thought that the priests would be better employed if they spent "their time in rendering the general condition of man less miserable than it is. Practical religion consists in doing good; and the only way

\textsuperscript{318}Ibid., II, 35, 137, 421.

\textsuperscript{319}Ibid., II, 448. Little would the uninformed observer think, he says (ibid., II, 403), that the "hordes of miserable poor" in the old countries "were the consequence of what in such countries they call government." Note that he also thought (ibid., II, 500) that the system of primogeniture "ought to be abolished."

\textsuperscript{320}The numerous clergymen who attacked The Rights of Man for tracing inequalities and suffering to the throne were fond of confounding Paine with such texts as the following: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation" (Romans, 13). This may account for his peculiar antipathy to St. Paul.

\textsuperscript{321}The title of a sermon preached by Bishop Watson, which Paine said (Writings, III, 327) led him to publish Agrarian Justice.
of serving God is that of endeavoring to make his Creation happy." Paine believed that the way to do that was for the government to inaugurate a comprehensive social policy. He is one of the first to realize that the social problem of his time had become too large for private philanthropy. The magnificent charities established by individuals are not enough, he said in *Agrarian Justice*. "It is only by organizing civilization upon such principles as to act like a system of pulleys, that the whole weight of misery can be removed." Unless conditions were improved by peaceful change, a "violent" revolution would be the consequence. Paine argued that it was foolish to put off humanitarian reform so long when the same good could be obtained by a "passive, rational, and costless revolution." It may be "an honor to the animal faculties of man to obtain redress by courage and danger, but it is far

---

222 *Writings*, III, 327. See also, *ibid.*, IV, 419.

223 Paine's analysis of the changed situation as early as 1792 is remarkably acute, and is essentially sound today. B. Kirkman Gray (*A History of English Philanthropy: From the Dissolution of the Monasteries to the Taking of the First Census* [London, 1905]), shows that for 120 years preceding 1800, the year of the first census, English philanthropy was entirely of a private nature. By that year, however, philanthropists had learned (p. 283) "that the amount of want was far greater than the efforts made to relieve it... The origin of this [new] want, of the pervasive and persistent inequalities and distress which characterise the modern state, are to be sought in the industrial system, in an organization under which the total wealth of the nation has increased so rapidly, under which also there has been so huge a concurrent outthrow of poverty, and poverty-born disease." Paine himself was forced to insist over and over that his plea of public aid for the unfortunate was not mere charity. "It is not charity but a right, not bounty but justice, that I am pleading for" (*Writings*, III, 337).

224 *Writings*, III, 337. "Out of this fact," says Gray (*op. cit.*, p. 285), "springs the principle of action which gives its distinct character to the philanthropy of the nineteenth century. This is the principle of State intervention. This is the mark of the nineteenth, exactly as voluntary association is the characteristic of the eighteenth century."
greater honor to the rational faculties to accomplish the same object by reason, accommodation, and general consent." 325

Paine’s efforts in the interest of peaceful reform touched at one time or another most phases of the rising humanitarian movement in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Like most other reformers of this period, Paine’s first important phase of humanitarian interest was his opposition to slavery. A few weeks after coming to America he wrote the short article, “African Slavery in America” (1774), now a pioneer document in the American anti-slavery movement. 326 Slavery, he says, has often been “proved contrary to the light of nature, to every principle of Justice and Humanity, and even good policy, by a succession of eminent men, and several late publications.” 327 Paine’s appeal is almost exclusively moral and

325 Writings, II, 514.

326 Important works and incidents in America immediately foreshadowing Paine’s abolitionism were: “A Short Account of that Part of Africa inhabited by the Negroes, etc.” (anonymous, 1762); Anthony Benezet, “A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, etc.” (1767); Benjamin Rush’s two short pamphlets denouncing the slave trade and the cruelty of some masters (1772); the resolutions of the American Quakers (in 1774 and 1776) excluding from membership all Quakers who engaged in the slave trade or who would not emancipate their slaves. Actually antislavery literature was written in America from the very beginning of the colonies. S. F. Poole (Anti-Slavery Opinions in the Colonies before 1800 [1843], p. 47) says that, from 1619 on, such men as Samuel Sewell, George Keith, Samuel Hopkins, William Burling, Ralph Sandford, Anthony Benezet, Benjamin Lay, and John Woolman all opposed slavery.

327 Writings, I, 4. The English movement was older than the American. F. J. Klingberg (The Anti-Slavery Movement in England, Chap. II) traces the rise of the movement and says that the year 1763, which had been preceded by fifty years of stray condemnations, marks the beginning of organized opposition in England (p. 23). By court decisions emancipation was effected in England by the Somerset case (directed by Granville Sharp) in 1772 and in Scotland by the Knight case in 1778. Paine cites Dr. Ames, Baxter, Durham, Locke, Carmichael, Hutcheson, Montesquieu, Blackstone, Wallace, the Bishop of Gloucester, and others who wrote in Europe on the
ethical. He denounces slavery as no less culpable than “murder, robbery, lewdness, and barbarity,” and asks that Americans immediately “discontinue and renounce it, with grief and abhorrence.” He condemns the scriptural argument for slavery as anti-Christian and says that, like the primitive Christians, it is “equally our duty while there is an Heathen nation” to spread the “Divine Religion.” All these arguments had been set forth many many times before in both England and America. Paine does not stop with a moral condemnation of slavery, but goes on to offer a definite plan for the actual abolition of American slavery. He urges that

prudent men, with the assistance of legislatures, determine what is practicable for masters, and best for them [the slaves]. Perhaps some could give them lands upon reasonable rent, some, employing them in their labor still, might give them some reasonable allowance for it; so as all may have some property, and fruits of their labors at their own disposal, and be encouraged to industry; the family may live together, and enjoy the natural satisfaction of exercising relative affections and duties, with civil protection, and other advantages, like fellow men.

It is difficult to determine whether Paine really contributed anything new to the anti-slavery movement. The truth seems to be that many had condemned slavery on moral grounds and had taken definite steps toward the abolition of the African slave trade and the amelioration of the condition of the slaves, subject before him. To these would have to be added such names as Sharp, Wesley, Whitefield, Samuel Johnson, George Fox, Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, and others.

\[328\] \textit{Writings}, I, 7, 8.

\[329\] \textit{Ibid.}, I, 9.

\[330\] \textit{Ibid.}, I, 8. A few weeks after Paine had written the essay, the first organized anti-slavery society in America was organized in Philadelphia. Paine was one of the members. See Conway, \textit{Life}, I, 52.
but few, especially in America, went as far as Paine in advocating complete abolition at home.\textsuperscript{331}

Later in the same year, 1775, in a short piece entitled "A Serious Thought,"\textsuperscript{332} Paine predicts that the day is not far away when God's Providence will be visited upon the British Empire for its treatment of savage peoples. Especially is England culpable because ever since "the discovery of America she hath employed herself in that most horrid of all traffics, that of human flesh..."\textsuperscript{333} And he looks forward to the day when God "shall have blest us, and made us a people dependent only upon Him, then may our gratitude be shown by an act of continental legislation, which shall put a stop to the importation of Negroes for sale, soften the hard fate of those already here, and in time procure their freedom."\textsuperscript{334} Five years later Paine wrote the "Preamble to the Act Passed by the Pennsyl-
vania Assembly, March 1, 1780,"\textsuperscript{335} which prohibited negro slavery in that state.\textsuperscript{336}

\textsuperscript{331} Conway, in a preface to Paine's essay (\textit{Writings}, I, 2), gives all the credit to Paine. The aim of Paine's predecessors in America, says Conway, was "to excite horror of the traffic in Africans abroad, but they did not propose to restrict the home traffic, much less to emancipate the slaves." Therefore, concludes Conway, "to Thomas Paine belongs the honor of being the first American abolitionist." This seems to be an over-statement when we consider that Franklin, Jefferson, Madison, Pinckney, Rush, Dwight, John Adams, Washington, Col. Humphreys, Barlow, and many others opposed slavery at this time. See Pocle, \textit{op. cit., passim}. Jefferson himself had made an effort in the Legislature of Virginia to emancipate the slaves by government decree as early as 1769. See F. C. Prescott, \textit{Hamilton and Jefferson} (1934), p. xiv.

\textsuperscript{332} \textit{Writings}, I, 65-66. It is supposed to be an anticipation of the Declaration of Independence.

\textsuperscript{333} \textit{Ibid.}, I, 65.

\textsuperscript{334} \textit{Ibid.}, I, 66.

\textsuperscript{335} \textit{Ibid.}, II, 29-30.

\textsuperscript{336} Conway (\textit{ibid.}, I, 3) says that this was "the first legislative measure of negro-emancipation in Christendom." Note, however, that emancipation took place in England (though by the ruling of a court) eight years previous to this.
2. Social and National Security

Probably the most significant aspect of Paine's humanitarianism is his attempt to secure some measure of social security for the mass of the people. In this he stands at the beginning of the movement which since has come to be the most important function of the modern state. By his time political rights had been pretty well secured, but the security of social rights as a function of government was still in the formative state. Paine, however, by 1795 had formulated a fairly consistent, if rather crude and unpractical, system of social legislation. His scheme involves the elimination of gross property inequalities by abolishing such restrictions as the law of primogeniture and establishing an income tax, the liberalization of laws restricting the wages of labor, and a plan of state aids and pensions through income and other taxation.

Paine joined the widespread attack on the law of primogeniture as a means of diminishing property inequalities. In England for various reasons, the rise of the new merchant capitalists eager for land, the rise of the industrial system, the revival of the enclosure after 1760, the domination of Parlia-

---

337 Locke's essay *On Civil Government* (1690), for example, considers only political rights. Even where Locke attacks slavery (Book I, Chap. 3; Book II, Chap. 4), it is political right alone that he considers.

ment by the landed interests, the revival of agriculture itself,\textsuperscript{339} a movement was afoot in the last half of the 18th century in which the rich were rapidly becoming richer and the poor poorer. As a result the great mass of English workmen were transformed from small holders of land\textsuperscript{340} into a rapidly increasing class of unpropertied factory and agricultural workers. To enlightened thinkers like Paine, seeking always for the equal and normal, the law of primogeniture had become the symbol of this movement, and they attacked it as unnatural in itself and inimical to society. The great landed estates, says Paine, have become a "matter of national concern." The law of primogeniture, which maintains them, "ought to be abolished, not only because it is unnatural and unjust, but because the country suffers by its operation."\textsuperscript{341} As the system now operates, the younger children, deprived of their inheritance, are thrown on the public for maintenance,\textsuperscript{342} "the freedom of elections" are violated by the overbearing influence of the "monopoly of family property,"\textsuperscript{343} and a large part of the national domain is rendered unproductive by being devoted to parks and chases "at a time when the annual production of

\textsuperscript{339} See F. A. Ogg and W. R. Sharp (Economic Development of Modern Europe [1936], pp. 120-125), who discuss the movement and its causes at length.

\textsuperscript{340} D. G. Barnes (A History of the English Corn Laws from 1660-1846 [1930], p. 113) says that the small landowner "had chiefly disappeared by 1780-85."

\textsuperscript{341} "The peer and the beggar are often of the same family. One extreme produces the other: to make one rich many must be made poor" (\textit{idem}).

\textsuperscript{342} Lord Morley in his \textit{Life of Cobden} (Chap. VII) estimates that even after the Reform Act of 1832, and until as late as 1846, four-fifths of the House of Commons represented the landowning class (quoted from Ogg and Sharp, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 120-1). Note that in Agrarian Justice Paine inverts the argument that suffrage should be based on property. There he argues that every individual has a natural right to the landed property of the world and that since property at present is a qualification for suffrage, therefore all men should have the vote because they all own property.
grain is not equal to the national consumption.” 344 Paine’s solution is “a progressive tax, operating to extirpate the unjust and unnatural law of primogeniture, and the vicious influence of the aristocratical system.” 345 Paine’s stand on the income tax antedates by thirty-five years any serious consideration of the tax as a definite policy of government finance. 346 It is true that England enacted a war income tax in 1798 which ran until 1816, but it did not have for its purpose the elimination of property inequalities. In Agrarian Justice Paine carried his plan one step further and now plans to levy an inheritance tax “at the moment that property is passing by the death of one person to the possession of another.” 347 It is significant that Paine subjects to taxation both land (natural property) and personal property. Every man has a right to share the natural property. Paine adds, however, that “personal property is the effect of society.” Therefore, the individual owes “a part of that accumulation back again to society from whence the whole came.” 348 The inheritance tax itself, unlike the

344 Paine gives as his authority the Reports on the Corn Trade (Writings, II, 500). Actually the scarcity of grain in these years was due to a number of other causes. Barnes (op. cit., pp. 113–114) discusses the relation of the Enclosure to the Corn Laws. Note, however, Arthur Young’s Inquiry into the Propriety of Applying Wastes to the Better Support and Maintenance of the Poor (1801).

346 Writings, II, 502. See also II, 498: The “chief object of this progressive tax (besides the justice of rendering taxes more equal than they are) is . . . to extirpate the unnatural law of primogeniture . . .”

345 E. R. A. Seligman in The Income Tax (1914), the authoritative book on the subject, shows (pp. 116 ff.) that it was not until after 1830 that any serious thought was given to the income tax as a possible permanent source of government finance. On the background of the tax in Paine’s time, see pp. 82–89.

347 Writings, III, 333.

348 Ibid., III, 340. It is out of such a view as Paine’s that the modern view of the tax, i.e., as simply a tax levied by the state’s inherent taxing power, has grown. Other early theories as to the right to institute such a tax are those of Bentham (merely the state’s right to regulate property), on the one hand, and of Münzinger, Bluntschli,
income tax, was a common form of taxation long before Paine’s day. His chief contribution, however, was, as we shall see, the social purpose for which he wished to expend his income and inheritance taxes.

The second step in Paine’s plan of social security for the masses is his desire to improve the status of the laboring classes. Though he does not in general have much to say on the subject, yet in what he does say, he reveals clearly where he stands. His first important pamphlet, “The Case of the Officers of the Excise” (1772), is an attempt to show that low wages are the cause of corrupt excisemen. “Poverty, in defiance of Principle, begets a Degree of Meanness that will stoop to almost anything.” But it is not until the Second Part of Rights of Man and Agrarian Justice that Paine makes his really significant statements. The two most oppressive laws which at this time were rapidly pushing the great mass of English labor into a state of hopeless and servile poverty were the Quarter Sessions Assessment and the Law of Settlement. By the first wages “were to be settled each year by the justices of the peace in each county, and no employer must give and no workman ask for more than the established rate of wages.” Paine attacks these laws “regulating and limiting workmen’s wages.” Why not leave the laborers as “free to make their own bar-

Wagner, and Ely (the state is a feudal lord which inherits part of its vassal’s property), on the other. See W. J. Shultz, Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, VIII, 43-48.

British Museum Copy, p. 15. Paine was chosen by the excisemen to address Parliament in their behalf. He spent the winter of 1772-73 trying to influence members of Parliament. Later in 1792 (Writings, II, 503), he refers again to the “condition of the inferior revenue-officers.”

gains, as the lawmakers are to let their farms and houses? Personal labor is all the property they have. Why is that little, and the little freedom they enjoy, to be infringed? He goes on to point out that while the legal wages of the worker are fixed, no laws are made to regulate the prices of commodities which the laborer must buy. With the rapid rise in prices this situation had become so bad in 1795 that laborers had to be given poor relief from the government in order to subsist. When Paine wrote *Agrarian Justice* in 1795–1796, he subjected personal property as well as land (natural property) to his inheritance tax because, he says, the accumulation of personal property is, in many instances, the effect of paying too little for the labor that produced it; the consequence of which is, that the working hand perishes in old age, and the employer abounds in affluence." The second law, the Law of Settlement, which was not repealed until 1834, provided that when the lower classes moved from one parish to another in search of work, they were liable to be returned.

331 Paine is entirely right in identifying the lawmakers with the employers of labor and the owners of land. See above, and Rogers, *op. cit.*, Chap. XVII.

332 *Writings*, II, 501.

333 "Real wages were particularly low in the eighteenth century because of a steep rise in commodity prices accompanied by only a mild increase in money wages" (*Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, XV, 306). Rogers (*op. cit.*, p. 407) says that in 1745 wheat was "between 21s. and 22s. the quarter; after 1780, it was rarely below 50s.; and towards the end of the century it rose to double that price." See the whole of his Chap. XIV, pp. 387–413, "Wages of Labour after the Rise in Prices."

334 To be "frequently in receipt of Poor Relief was, for forty years between 1795 and 1834 the lot of nearly every farm labourer in southern England" (S. and B. Webb, *English Local Government: English Poor Law History: Part I* [1927], p. 344).

335 *Writings*, III, 340. Cf. also John Woolman (Everyman's Library), p. 221, "If a Man successful in Business expends Part of his Income in Things of no real Use, while the Poor employed by him pass through great Difficulties in getting the Necessaries of Life, this requires his serious Attention."
Introduction
to the parish "from which they had come, for fear their support would fall on the parish in which they wished to settle." 356 Paine wishes to substitute for this despicable law his new fund (raised by taxing the rich) in order that the "dying poor will not be dragged from place to place to breathe their last, as a reprisal of parish upon parish." 357 Thus, we may say, that on the question of labor Paine may be considered a predecessor of the great nineteenth-century labor reform movement which was soon to follow.

The last step in Paine's social security scheme is an elaborate system of state aids and pensions at all the critical periods in the lives of the masses. He attacked the existing system of state charity under which there was "a constant increase in the number and wretchedness of the poor, and in the amount of the poor-rates." 358 Paine often has a poignant sense of the evils of poverty which could only come from first-hand observation. Under his own plan, he says, the "hearts of the humane will not be shocked by ragged and hungry children, and persons of seventy and eighty years of age, begging in the streets." 359 In the Rights of Man 360 he says his plan includes, besides the abolition of present poor rates, state aid for the poor, the education of children, 361 pensions for the aged, donations for births and marriages, funeral expenses for laborers

356 Cheyney, op. cit., p. 630. The law also provided for many other restrictions on the removal of workers from place to place. It was really a survival of medieval servitude which wished to fix the laborer to the soil. It was not abolished until the new industrialists added their voices to the protests of labor. The original act had been enacted in 1662. See S. and B. Webb, op. cit., p. 314 ff.
357 Writings, II, 493. It is significant too that one of the expenditures which Paine wishes to make from his fund is an allowance for the expenses of funerals of persons traveling for work and dying away from home.
358 Ibid., II, 469.
359 Ibid., II, 493.
360 See Ibid., II, 493, for the list.
361 For Paine's theories of education see Section V, following.
dying away from home, and employment for the casual poor in London and Westminster. By his statistics on taxation Paine pointed out that “the lives of one hundred and forty thousand aged persons” could be rendered comfortable by the “million a year of public money” expended on the King. He carries the plan further in Agrarian Justice, to whose title he had affixed the statement that it was a plan for meliorating the condition of men by creating in every nation a national fund, to pay every person when arrived at the age of 21 years, the sum of fifteen pounds, to enable him or her to begin the world. And also, ten pounds per annum.

Another reform in which Paine was interested in his early days in America was the abolition of dueling. For various reasons the practice which had lapsed in the early days of the colonies underwent a recrudescence in the Revolutionary period. Paine justly looked on it as an evil hang-over of an uncouth, uncivilized age. It is “Gothic and absurd,” yet he


363 Writings, II, 489.


365 Greene (op. cit., p. 376) says it was “natural enough that the Revolutionary era should be marked by a considerable increase in dueling.” The reasons are (1) the intercolonial wars in the mid-eighteenth century; (2) the increase of royal forces in the colonies; (3) the large number of young men, especially of the South, sent abroad to be educated in the European code of honor; (4) the large number of foreign officers in the colonial army forced the colonial officers to maintain the code. Says (p. 380) that Lafayette once challenged the British peace commissioner, the Earl of Carlisle, to a duel, but that Washington stopped the match by suggesting that Lafayette’s chivalric ideas were out of date. In England (p. 369) dueling had become so prevalent in this period that by 1780 it was endangering the freedom of debate on the floor of Parliament.
notes that many defend it "on principle" as a mode of settling differences where the law does not apply.\textsuperscript{366} Robertson, the historian, had defended the practice in the time of Charles V on the notion that the effect of its "gentleness" on modern manners was beneficial to mankind.\textsuperscript{367} Paine replies that it was only "the spirit of chivalry and romantic knighthood still prevailing in those fighting times" of Charles V which caused it to last so long.\textsuperscript{368} He does not offer a solution for dueling. It is a "melancholy truth," he said, that more strenuous laws have not stopped the practice. Neither have well-established religious systems prevented it, for it is in such countries that it is most peculiarly prevalent. Since it was a survival of the "Gothic" ages, Paine probably felt that only when the general mind had become more enlightened, only when reason had come to prevail, would the practice die a natural death.

The movement to abolish the death penalty in the last quarter of the century also found in Paine one of its early advocates.\textsuperscript{369} To the crusading humanitarians of the Enlightenment the medieval system of punishment, especially the death penalty, exemplified gothic barbarism at its worst.\textsuperscript{370} Bocca
tia's Dei delitti e delle pene\textsuperscript{371} in 1764 was a reasoned protest

\textsuperscript{366} Writings, I, 40.
\textsuperscript{367} See Reign of Emperor Charles V, Book V.
\textsuperscript{368} Writings, I, 42.
\textsuperscript{369} For general backgrounds see Coleman Phillipson, Three Criminal Law Reformers: Bocca

\textsuperscript{370} The 18th-century critics of capital punishment were entirely justified by facts as to the genuine wickedness of the practice, though they were wrong in attributing it wholly to the medieval era. The death penalty did not attain its greatest use until it became a political instrument of the national states. Bye (op. cit., p. 2) says an estimate shows "that in the twenty years reign of Henry VIII, 72,000 executions took place." Even as late as 1780 (p. 1) "the Penal Code of England embraced 240 capital offences."

\textsuperscript{371} Paine could hardly have escaped coming in contact with Bocca
tia's work which, together with Voltaire's Commentary, was trans-
against the medieval system of wholesale execution and marks the beginning of a movement which later led to the great penal and prison reforms of nineteenth-century England. Though the system of capital punishment was brought to America in a much abbreviated form, yet as early as 1780 Paine's co-religionists, the Pennsylvania Quakers, were agitating for the abolition of the remnant that remained. Paine looked on capital punishment mainly as an instrument of monarchical government. Since monarchy, however, was a corrupt medieval institution, Paine saw in the French Revolution the means to abolish both monarchy and capital punishment. As France "has been the first of the European nations to abolish royalty," he said, "let her also be the first to abolish the punishment of death, and to find out a milder and more effectual substitute." In 1793 in the French Assembly Paine twice opposed the execution of Louis XVI. Marat accused Paine of opposing the execution because he was a Quaker, and Paine replied that he opposed it from both "moral motives and motives of public policy." At any rate Paine must be given credit for his sincerity, since it led to his unpopularity and imprisonment.

lated into English in 1768. Phillipson (op. cit., pp. 11, 99) thinks the influence of Beccaria in America began immediately after the Revolution.

Puritan Massachusetts recognized only twelve capital crimes. See Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, III, 192-195.

The penal code of William Penn had been outlawed at the time of Queen Anne. The American Quakers, however, were free to agitate, and from the establishment of the Pennsylvania constitution in 1780 to 1794 succeeded in limiting capital punishment in that state to first degree murder.

"Monarchy, in France, was a system pregnant with crime and murder . . . " (Writings, III, 123).

Ibid., III, 124.

Ibid., III, 125, 127. On the possible Quaker source for Paine's opposition to capital punishment, see Conway, Life, I, 306. Conway, ibid., II, 15-16, gives too much credit to Paine and the Quakers as the originators of the movement against the practice. Most of the
Early in the 1780's Paine joined in the crusade to establish copyright laws in America.\textsuperscript{377} A pirated, inaccurate edition of the Abbé Raynal's \textit{Revolution in America} in 1782 led Paine to attack the lawless state of the publishing business. Just as he put great emphasis on the natural political rights of the individual, so he put equal emphasis on the natural literary rights of the author. "A man's opinions, whether written or in thought, are his own," he said, "until he pleases to publish them himself..."\textsuperscript{378} But the copyright will do more than establish the rights of the author, it will establish the literary and intellectual independence of the nation. Literature can never flourish in a country unless "the works of an author are his legal property"; to treat "letters in any other light than this, is to banish them from the country, or to strangle them in birth."\textsuperscript{379} Paine sees in the copyright the solution:

The state of literature in America must one day become a subject of legislative consideration. Hitherto it has been a dis-enlightened thinkers after Beccaria opposed capital punishment before Paine—Rousseau, Voltaire, Kant, Condorcet, Marat (who wrote a book opposing the practice in 1789), Robespierre, Manuel, and others. In America Benjamin Rush on March 9, 1787, read a paper, "An Inquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals and upon Society," before the Society for Promoting Political Enquiries which convened for the occasion at the home of Franklin. Rush bases his philosophical argument on Hutcheson's belief in a moral faculty and takes his facts from John Howard's \textit{The State of Prisons in England and Wales} (1777). Paine belonged to the Society and may have heard the paper before leaving for Europe a few weeks later.

\textsuperscript{377} On the history of the copyright, see Thorvald Solberg, "International Copyright in the Congress of the United States" in \textit{Essays Offered to Herbert Putnam} (1929), ed. by W. W. Bishop and A. Keogh, and R. R. Bowker, \textit{Copyright, Its History and Its Laws} (1912), especially Chap. IV.

\textsuperscript{378} \textit{Ibid.}, II, 68. This is a striking instance of Paine's foresight. Maine in \textit{Popular Government} (pp. 131-132, 247) many years later attributed the "intellectual sterility" of America to the same cause—"the long refusal of Congress to grant an international copyright. The want of such copyright effectually crushed American author-
interested volunteer in the service of the revolution, and no man thought of profits; but when peace shall give time and opportunity for study, the country will deprive itself of the honor and service of letters and the improvement of science, unless sufficient laws are made to prevent depredations of literary property.  

When Paine wrote these words in 1782, no copyright laws whatever existed in America. Until the establishment of the Constitution in 1787, Congress had had no power to act. A recommendation from Congress, however, combined with "a vigorous copyright crusade by Noah Webster, who traveled from capital to capital," led all the states but one to pass copyright laws between 1783 and 1786. Though Paine cannot be said to have had an important part in the enactment of this legislation, yet he very clearly saw the literary consequences of lax copyright laws.

Paine's last and, to the modern reader, most relevant reform is his advocacy of disarmament and an international association of nations. He toys with both ideas as early as The

ship in the home market by the competition of the unpaid and appropriated works of British authors...a literary servitude unparalleled in the history of thought."

380 Writings, II, 69, note.
381 Bowker, op. cit., p. 35.
382 The first Congressional act was passed in 1790. America, however, has continued to be very lax about copyright. Over a hundred years was to elapse before any foreigner could acquire a copyright under the Act of 1891. Even as late as 1920 Solberg (op. cit., p. 422) could say that "as regards international copyright the United States occupies an undignified and criticized position."

383 Paine was one of the earliest but not the first to advocate an international association of nations. William Penn had formulated such a plan and the "pacific federation" of Rousseau and Saint-Pierre is said to have influenced to some extent the Holy Alliance. Paine's ideas on internationalism seem to have arisen from a sense of common interests within the rising commercial class in the Enlightenment. For backgrounds see Elizabeth York, Leagues of Nations, (1919); H. N. Brailsford, Olines of Endless Age (1928); and H. A. Gibbons, Nationalism and Determinism (1930).
Rights of Man, where he has a vision of the American and French Revolutions resulting in a world federation of nations. At the end of Part I he says that in a world of turmoil like the present "nothing of reform in the political world ought to be held improbable" and that, as a result, the system of war and intrigue in the European courts "may provoke a confederation of Nations to abolish it." 384 Again in Part II, in the chapter on "Ways and Means of Improving the Condition of Europe," he says that a subject of such "equatorial magnitude" embraces "the whole region of humanity" and "blends the individual, the nation, and the world." 385 In the same passage he gives some reasons for the need of international association and disarmament. The wretchedness of Europe, he says, "lies not in any natural defect in the principles of civilization, but in preventing those principles having a universal operation." The result is a "barbarous system" in which nations spend their energies in war "like so many individuals in a state of nature." 386 And the consequence of this is that, whereas the national governments waste millions in war, the civil governments have "scarcely a fortieth" part of the taxes collected to devote to humanitarian improvements. 387 All this, says Paine, is highly irrational. Nature has distributed the materials of manufactures and commerce "in various and distant parts of a nation and of the world," and since "they cannot be procured by war so cheaply... as by commerce, she has rendered the latter the means of extirpating the former." 388 On this basis he suggests, near the end of Rights of Man, his first proposal for naval disarmament: an "alliance" of all the navies of Europe, in which no power will build any "new ship of war" and all navies will be reduced to "one tenth of their present force." In connection with this proposal all new territories in the new conti-

---

384 *Writings*, II, 389.
ments are to be opened "to the general commerce of the world." 389

Paine referred to these proposals again in "The Eighteenth Fructidor," his address to the French people in 1797, 390 and in the next year he formulated both his ideas on disarmament and a league of nations into a definite pact which was submitted to Talleyrand in 1798 and to all the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Europe in 1800. 391 The proposal was entitled a "Maritime Compact," "an Unarmed Association of Nations for the protection of the Rights and Commerce of Nations that shall be neutral in time of War." 392 The association was to have a president and a congress, a common flag, and was to enforce its demands by economic sanctions.

This is the end and high-water mark of Paine's humanitarianism. A lyrical passage in the last paragraph of Rights of Man indicates a vision of the reform movement as inevitable, coming like the swelling of buds in the spring.

V. EDUCATION

The basic source of all Paine's hopes for a better world is his faith in education, the free play of reason, and enlightenment, not only as a utilitarian tool but also as the means of revealing to mankind God's majesty in nature and his beneficence, the imitation of which would draw men of all nations into brotherly unity.

389 Writings, II, 511. It is interesting today to note his prophecy in 1792 of "the independence of South America, and the opening of those countries of immense extent and wealth to the general commerce of the world."

390 Ibid., III, 366-367. Commerce contains within itself "an unarmed neutrality."


Ibid., III, 427.
Introduction

Paine was proud of his own success at self-education. At the age of twenty, as we have seen, he had learned a great deal about Newtonianism and its broader implications from "the philosophical lectures of Martin and Ferguson," and from Dr. Bevis, "an excellent astronomer." He had been teaching school when Benjamin Franklin, himself an impassioned apostle of enlightenment, discovered him in 1774. Paine, however, looked upon education as a lifelong process, and he made the most of his great opportunities of association with men like Franklin, Rittenhouse, Rush, Jefferson in America; Godwin, Holcroft, Barlow, Rickman, Horne Tooke, and Hardy in England; and Condorcet, Lafayette, Brissot, and others in France. "As to the learning that any person gains from school education," he exclaims, "it serves only, like a small capital, to put him in a way of beginning himself afterward. Every person of learning is finally his own teacher." He said that the more important books of antiquity being available in translations, we could transcend them by including them in our up-to-date knowledge of science.

A child of the Enlightenment, Paine insists that "all the knowledge man has of science... comes from [the unwearyed observation of] the great machine and structure of the universe." The scientist, in studying the laws of nature created by God, is thus thinking God's thoughts after him and coming into reverent kinship with God. This is the fountainhead of truth, toward which all sincere thinking naturally tends. Thus

303 Ibid., IV, 62.
304 Ibid., IV, 63.
305 See the chapter on educational views in the introduction to Franklin (New York, 1935) by F. L. Mott and C. E. Jorgenson, together with the bibliographical items they cite. A. O. Hansen, Liberalism in American Education in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1926), provides useful orientation, with emphasis on perfection and the idea of progress.
306 Writings, IV, 64.
307 Ibid., IV, 193.
we can understand, perhaps, how Paine, in common with many rationalists of his age, came to make a religious dogma of the conviction that "when opinions are free, either in matters of government or religion, truth will finally and powerfully prevail." Conversely, he believed that hitherto the lack of progress in the amelioration of humanity's lot had been caused by the tendency of church and state, Catholic or Established Church and monarchy, to thwart the free play of scientific knowledge and the fearless debating of all issues in the light of reason alone. He points to the persecution of scientists such as Galileo by the church, and its various attempts to ban knowledge as in the case of Diderot's *La Grande Encyclopédie*. As "priestcraft was always the enemy of knowledge, because priestcraft supports itself by keeping people in delusion and ignorance, it was consistent with its policy to make the acquisition of knowledge a real sin." But Paine not only attacks Catholicism and monarchy as enemies of the free play of ideas; he attacks also the study of languages and urges a sharp shift in the subject matter of education to science and the study of nature, religiously considered. "It would ... be advantageous to the state of learning to abolish the study of the dead languages, and to make learning consist, as it originally did, in scientific knowledge." Paine's chapters on education in *The Age of Reason* and his Discourse to the Theophanthropists entitled "The Existence of God" are among the most glamorous glorifications we have of the study of science as a divine subject as opposed to the study of language and theology embalmed in books.

Before going into this aspect of Paine's theory, however, it

---

*Writings*, IV, 195.


*Writings*, III, 57. See the whole discussion, *ibid.*, IV, 50–64, 236–246.
is necessary to note that he did not, as is usually thought, reject all past experience. A too "great inattention to past occurrences," he said, "retards and bewilders our judgment in everything, while, on the contrary, by comparing what is past with what is present, we frequently hit on the true character of both and become wise with very little trouble. It is a kind of countermarch by which we get into the rear of time, and mark the movements and meanings of things as we make our return." Paine expressed, as we have seen, a high regard for two ancient traditions, the Eastern and the Classical—though he utterly rejected any tradition tainted with medieval authority. The reason, of course, is not hard to discover. In Paine's eyes, as in the eyes of all the Enlightenment, these ancients, living prior to Christianity and the Dark Ages, did not have their reason corrupted by a degenerate tradition and hence were able to discover a large measure of truth from the natural order of the world. In the teachings of Zoroaster and the ancient Egyptian allegorists he saw, through the eyes of Henry Lord and Sir William Smith as well as through the historians of Freemasonry, the original uncorrupted worship of a divine revelation in nature, centering in the sun. His chief interest, however, was in the "classical" ancients of whom he knew considerably more than has usually been suspected. He did not know the classic languages, but he read much in translation. "Though I went to the grammar school," he said, "I

\[401\] *Ibid.*, I, 197. It is well to remember, however, that if Paine rejected the servile study of the past as a complete ethical guide, he may be considered as one of the early exponents of critical historical study. He thought that a historical "society for inquiring into the ancient state of the world and the state of ancient history, so far as history is connected with systems of religion ancient and modern, may be a useful and instructive institution" (*ibid.*, IV, 331). He was a contemporary of the historian Gibbon, critical of early Christianity; and in his critical self-reliant spirit and stress on science and rationalism, Paine foreshadowed modern critical practitioners of intellectual historiography such as James Harvey Robinson.

\[402\] See section on religion, pp. xxvii–xxxii above.
did not learn Latin, not only because I had no inclination to learn the languages, but because of the objection the Quakers have against the books in which the language is taught. But this did not prevent me from being acquainted with the subjects of all the Latin books used in the school.”

Paine’s claim is borne out by the many references to the classics in his work. With Cicero, Tacitus, Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Aesop, Thucydides, Pericles, Scipio, Camillus, Aristides, Epaminondas, Plutarch, Xenophon, and Democritus he shows some degree of familiarity. In Periclean Athens, he says, he saw more to admire and less to condemn in that great extraordinary people than in anything which history affords. Like Montesquieu, he could think of no higher hope for his beloved America, than that embodied in his prophecy that “what Athens was in miniature, America will be in magnitude. The one was the wonder of the ancient world; the other is becoming the admiration of the present.”

In spite of his high praise of ancient civilization, Paine was convinced of its inferiority when compared to the present. “We do great injustice to ourselves” by supposing “ourselves inferior” to Greece and Rome. “I have no notion of yielding the palm of the United States to any Grecians or Romans that were ever born.” That being the case, and the valuable contributions of the Greeks to science being translated, Paine urged a crucial shift in the subject matter of education from letters to science, from the study of man to the study of nature.

403 Writings, IV, 62-63.
404 Ibid., IV, 56, 61.
405 Ibid., II, 424.
406 Ibid., I, 252-253.
407 Franklin, Jefferson, Hopkinson, and Rush were all advocating a similar shift. In his “Observations upon the Study of the Latin and Greek Languages” (1789), Rush contended that as long as science had to be approached through Latin and Greek, education would “always be confined to a few people. But it is only by rendering knowledge universal, that a republican form of government
The chief motive for Paine's emphasis on science as the subject matter of education was religious. He concluded *The Age of Reason* with the conviction that "we can know God only through His works," through Nature and Science.\(^{406}\) In contrast to the study of theology in books of opinion which "has often produced . . . the numerous persecutions, the fanatical quarrels, the religious burnings and massacres, that have desolated Europe," Paine notes that the "mind becomes at once enlightened and serene" and the "social faculties become enlarged" when man looks "through the works of the creation to the Creator himself,"\(^ {409}\) for "the Almighty is the great mechanic of the creation; the first philosopher and original teacher of all science."\(^ {410}\) Paine takes particular care to warn that astronomy, the queen of the sciences, will lead to atheism if taught "as accomplishments only."\(^ {411}\) Instead it "should be taught theoretically" in a series of lectures which would "render theology the most delightful and entertaining of all studies."\(^ {412}\) He would therefore convert every "house of devotion into a school of science," dedicated to teaching her "immutable laws."\(^ {413}\) For "all the principles of science are of divine origin. Man cannot make, or invent, or contrive principles; he can only discover them; and he ought to look through the discovery to the author."\(^ {414}\) "Every part of science, whether connected with the geometry of the universe, with the systems of animal or vegetable life, or with the properties of inanimate matter, is a text as well for devotion as for philosophy—for gratitude, as for human improvement."\(^ {415}\) For humanitarian uses, sci-

\(^ {406}\) *Writings*, IV, 191.
\(^ {411}\) *Ibid.*, IV, 239.
\(^ {412}\) *Ibid.*, IV, 246.
\(^ {413}\) *Ibid.*, IV, 194.
\(^ {414}\) *Ibid.*, IV, 239.
ence is, he says, "a continual source of tranquil pleasure" which is capable of accompanying "the mind all the way through life," making one "happy in old age," while a life of mere sensuality or greed eventually leads to misery. He cites Franklin as an example of how the study of science develops a mind which "becomes at once enlightened and serene, a copy of the scene it beholds: information and adoration go hand in hand; and all the social faculties become enlarged." This brings us to the practical application of Paine's theory of education and knowledge of political matters. The important point to keep clearly in mind is that, like Jefferson, Paine insisted that his faith in democracy, in the ability of the people to operate their own government for their own good, as being superior to monarchy, depended squarely upon his faith that the people could be educated, could acquire the knowledge of political affairs and political needs which he deemed essential. "Sovereign power without sovereign knowledge," he says, "that is, a full knowledge of all the matters over which that power is to be exercised, is a something which contradicts itself." Like the great author of Areopagitica, Paine has a passionate conviction that where there was freedom to debate all aspects of a given question in the light of complete knowledge, it would be instinctive for men to accept what was true. It is on this basis that he justifies his reliance on the majority. For "it will sometimes happen," he admits, "that the minority are

416 Writings, IV, 128.
417 Ibid., IV, 239; see also p. 460.
418 Jefferson (Works, ed. Bergh, XIII, 401) said that the people in America were so well informed that they "may safely and advantageously reserve to themselves a wholesome control over their public affairs and a degree of freedom, which in the hands of the canaille of the cities of Europe, would be instantly perverted to the demolition of everything public and private." See C. F. Arrowood, Thomas Jefferson and Education in a Republic (1930), and R. J. Honeywell, The Educational Work of Thomas Jefferson (1931).
419 Writings, II, 135.
right, and the majority are wrong, but as soon as experience proves this to be the case, the minority will increase to a majority, and the error will reform itself by the tranquil operation of freedom of opinion and equality of rights." 420 Thus knowledge was indispensable: "Be ... the reform to be accomplished whatever it may, it can only follow in consequence of obtaining a full knowledge of all the causes that have rendered such reform necessary, and everything short of this is guesswork or frivolous cunning." 421

With the new thought and the deification of the human reason, it was natural that education should come to play a role which it had hitherto not known both as to scope and content. With freedom of opinion and debate guaranteed by good government, scientific education would enlighten man as to the true religion and also by inventions further his worldly success. We have already seen how he thought that the knowledge of the laws of nature would unite mankind in belief in the broad and basic principles of a universal and humane religion. If at times Paine appears to be primitivistic, it is important to remember that he recognizes that "the natural state is without those advantages which flow from agriculture, arts, science, and manufacturing," and that he thought these could be continually improved by utilitarian education and invention. 422 He insisted that "one good schoolmaster is of more use than a hundred priests": 423 science, and the ideas associated with it, when disseminated by education, will promote world brotherhood. There is impressive evidence that his own writing served as the "lodestar" and the text in the vast "School of Political Knowledge" represented by the multitude of Democratic-Republican Societies formed by the common people of his age to promote the brotherhood of man by peaceful means and by adult

420 Ibid., III, 274.
421 Ibid., III, 86.
422 Ibid., III, 328; also I, 20 ff.
423 Ibid., IV, 252.
education. Not only the scope, however, but the content of education was affected by the new emphasis on human reason. The deductive system of scholastic education dependent on authority and classical tradition necessarily, under the new conception of the human reason, had to give way to a scientific content and the inductive method intent on discovering new truths, religious and utilitarian, and the means of communicating them.

VI. LITERARY THEORY AND PRACTICE

Let us now turn to Paine's literary theory and practice. Scholars agree that the key to his importance lies not in his ideas, common in his era, but in his great "mastery of the art of popular persuasion." As a perfectibilian rationalist, confident that men's conduct is merely the externalization of opinion, Paine held that the chief means of changing opinion and so reforming the world was writing, which he accordingly exalted. By "letters, the tongue of the world," a man may command "a scene as vast as the world... Jesus Christ and his apostles could not do this." Some light is cast on the truth of the current notion that Paine was an economic determinist by his categorical statement that the French Revolution was "no more than the consequence of a mental revolution priorly existing in France" engendered by "the writings of the


425 C. E. Merriam, Political Science Quarterly, XIV, 402. Of course contemporary economic distress made people attentive to writing embodying suggestions for relief. But since Paine's ideas were available in dozens of books and pamphlets by others, the enormous demand for his own writings must be ascribed not so much to what he said as to how he said it.

426 Writings, II, 103; IV, 287. See also ibid., I, 16. He said that "one philosopher though a heathen" was of "more use" than all the "conquerors that ever existed."
French philosophers.”\textsuperscript{427} Naturally, therefore, Paine thought with considerable care regarding the principles which underlie effective writing as a means of inculcating ideas. What were these principles, these literary theories, which enabled him to exert, as Franklin and Washington said, a “prodigious”\textsuperscript{428} influence in “working a change in the minds of many men”?\textsuperscript{429} His theory is valuable because, whatever one may think of other fine-sounding and untried theories hatched in a scholar’s study, Paine’s theory actually bore the fruit of success in the fiery “times that try men’s souls.”

From scattered sources evidence has been collected\textsuperscript{430} which defines seven of Paine’s literary theories and aims. First, he sought candor, simplicity, and clarity. He would “rid our ideas of all superfluous words, and consider them in their natural bareness and simplicity.”\textsuperscript{431} “I speak a language full and intelligible,” he remarks, in summing up his writing on “every subject.” “I deal not in hints and intimations. I have several reasons for this: First, that I may be clearly understood. Secondly, that it may be seen I am in earnest; and, thirdly, because it is an affront to truth to treat falsehood with complaisance.”\textsuperscript{432}

\textsuperscript{427}See \textit{ibid.}, II, 333–334. Although Paine corrected some of Raynal’s errors of fact, he said that Raynal “displays great powers of genius, and is a master of style and language” (\textit{Writings}, II, 79).

\textsuperscript{428}\textit{Writings of Benjamin Franklin} (ed. Smyth, IX, 562).

\textsuperscript{429}Washington’s \textit{Writings} (ed. Ford, IV, 4).

\textsuperscript{430}See note 462, following.

\textsuperscript{431}\textit{Writings}, II, 238. Since Hugh Blair’s \textit{Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres} were published in Philadelphia in 1784 by Robert Aitken in the bookstore where Paine had worked, it seems reasonable to suppose that Paine had read them. (See C. R. Hildeburn, \textit{A Century of Printing . . .}, Philadelphia, 1886, II, 426.) Paine cites with praise (\textit{Writings}, I, 110) James Burgh’s \textit{Political Disquisitions}, published in Philadelphia in 1775, in which (I, xiv) he argues for perspicuity and force in style.

\textsuperscript{432}\textit{Writings}, IV, 405. Referring to his papers in the \textit{Providence Gazette} (January 18, 1783), Paine wrote, “I do not, neither shall I, rest the case upon elegance of language, or forcible expression. I mean to state it with all the plainness of conversation, and put the
In discussing a passage in *Common Sense* which had been willfully misinterpreted, Paine said it was “exceedingly plain, and expressed in such easy and familiar terms, that it scarcely admits of being made plainer.” According to *The Rights of Man* as “a book calmly and rationally written, ... in a fair, open, and manly manner.” He forbade himself “the use of equivocal expression or of mere ceremony.” “I bring reason to your ears, and in language as plain as A, B, C, hold up truth to your eyes.” In discussing the Deane affair he wrote, “As it is my design to make those who can scarcely read understand, I shall therefore avoid every literary ornament, and put it in language as plain as the alphabet.”

His second ideal was boldness. It is, he says, “curious to observe how soon this spell (of sentimental attachment to merits of it without a gloss.” In “The Public Good” (*Writings*, II, 31) he said he aimed to have the reader find it “studiously plain, and, as far as I can judge, perfectly candid. What materials I could get at I have endeavored to place in a clear line, and deduce such arguments therefrom as the subject required.”

435 *Ibid.*, II, 115; see also I, 182, and I, 84.
436 *Ibid.*, I, 178. In writing *Common Sense* it is probable that Paine was influenced by the literary taste of his patron and idol, Franklin, whom he intended to surprise with the pamphlet. Jefferson, a careful student of style, concluded that “No writer has exceeded Paine in ease and familiarity of style, in perspicuity of expression, happiness of elucidation, and in simple and unassuming language. In this he may be compared with Dr. Franklin; and indeed his Common Sense was, for awhile, believed to have been written by Dr. Franklin, and published under the borrowed name of Paine ...” (Jefferson’s *Writings*, Monticello edition, XV, 305). And he may have been influenced somewhat by Dr. Benjamin Rush, who suggested it and to whom Paine read it section by section. The literary theories of Dr. Rush are set forth in his *Essays, Literary, Moral, and Philosophical* (second ed., Philadelphia, 1806), pp. 27–42. Rush advocated simplicity and took Swift as his model. For Franklin’s literary theories, see Mott and Jorgenson’s *Franklin*, pp. xvi–lvii.

437 *Writings*, I, 409.
monarchy) can be dissolved. A single expression, boldly conceived and uttered, will sometimes put a whole company into their proper feelings: and whole nations are acted upon in the same manner.” In transferring this literary method, acquired in the rough and tumble of politics, to religion, Paine said he was pioneering in “a style of thinking and expression different to what had been customary in England.” “The hinting and intimating manner of writing that was formerly used on subjects of this kind, produced skepticism, but not conviction. It is necessary to be bold. Some people can be reasoned into sense, and others must be shocked into it. Say a bold thing that will stagger them, and they will begin to think.” The general spirit of Paine’s approach is suggested in his conclusion, “I have now gone through the Bible, as a man would go through a wood with an axe on his shoulder and fell trees.”

Third, Paine was well aware of the controversial value of wit, properly controlled. “Wit,” he said, “is naturally a volunteer, delights in action, and under proper discipline is capable of great execution. ’Tis a perfect master in the art of bush-fighting; and though it attacks with more subtility than science, has often defeated a whole regiment of heavy artillery. . . . ’Tis a qualification which, like the passions, has a natural wildness, that requires governing. Left to itself, it soon overflows its banks, mixes with common filth, and brings disrepute on the fountain.” Contemporaries often compared Paine’s wit to that of Voltaire. John Adams attributed the Federalists’ defeat in part to a failure to guard themselves against “that scoffing, scorning wit, and that caustic malignity of soul, which appeared so remarkably in all the writings of Thomas Paine.”

438 Ibid., II, 481. 439 Ibid., II, 394.
440 Quoted in Conway’s Life, II, 298; see also Writings, III, 404.
441 Writings, IV, 151.
442 Ibid., I, 16; see also IV, 342.
443 John Adams, Works, IX, 278.
Fourth, Paine recognized the importance of an appeal to feeling. He would touch the heart and spring the imagination, an aim which involved such niceties of composition as vivid figures, connotation, antithesis, balance, and cadence, productive of emotional or poetic pleasure. Paine confessed that he had "some talent for poetry; but this I rather repressed than encouraged, as leading too much into the field of imagination." This vein appears in sentimental and Arcadian colors in his early essays of 1775 such as "Cupid and Hymen." Later, however, this poetic bent, subordinated to a serious purpose, gave eloquence and beauty to his style. Rationalist as he was, he insisted that "the mind of a living public... feels first and reasons afterwards." "My principal design," he said in The Crisis, "is to form the disposition of the people to the measures which I am fully persuaded it is their interest and duty to adopt, and which need no other force to accomplish them than the force of being felt." When Paine wished to say that Burke and the conservatives pitied the rich but forgot the poor, he wrote: "He pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird." In refuting the traditionalists' appeal to precedents, he wrote: "It is [quoting] authority against authority all the way, till we come to the divine origin of the rights of man at the creation. Here our enquiries find a resting place and our reason finds a home." "The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man; neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow." It is probable that the King James Version of the Bible, which Paine had studied until he had memorized most of it, helped to mold his style in those passages where it is most freighted with emotion and where it displays his nice regard for rhythm.

---

"Writings, IV, 63.
444 Ibid., I, 379.
444 Ibid., II, 304.
440 Ibid., I, 395.
447 Ibid., II, 288.
448 Ibid., II, 278.
metrical units, for the music of the spoken word. Paine is often most attractive when he forgets his rationalistic philosophy and writes from the heart, allowing his style to vibrate with his deep sympathy for the sufferings of the poor and the unfortunate. "I speak an open and disinterested language," he said, "dictated by no passion but that of humanity... my country is the world, and my religion is to do good."¹⁴⁵¹

Paine's fifth literary ideal involved the fruitful co-operation of the imagination and the judgment, both being regarded as essential to good writing. Like the neo-classicists,¹⁴⁵² he held that "the mainspring which puts all in motion corresponds to the imagination; the pendulum which corrects and regulates that motion, corresponds to the judgment.... If the judgment sleeps whilst the imagination keeps awake... the master of the school is gone out and the boys are in an uproar." His stress is upon a carefully adjusted balance and upon sternly purposeful control. He elaborates his ideal in censuring the style of the Abbé Raynal, parts of whose work he admired:

... How very few men there are in any country, who can at once, and without the aid of reflection and revisal, combine warm passions with a cool temper, and the full expansion of the imagination with the natural and necessary gravity of judgment, so as to be rightly balanced within themselves, and to make a reader feel, fancy, and understand justly at the same time. To call three powers of the mind into action at once, in a manner that neither shall interrupt, and that each shall aid and invigorate the other, is a talent very rarely possessed. It often happens that the weight of an argument is lost

¹⁴⁵⁰ On Paine's "manner of composing" while walking, fashioning each sentence as a unit, see Hogg's Life of Shelley (ed. by Dowden), p. 517 ff.
¹⁴⁵¹ Writings, II, 472. See the moving passage (II, 493) which concludes his fourteenth concrete suggestions for alleviating suffering.
by the wit of setting it off; or the judgment disordered by an in-
temperate irritation of the passions: yet a certain degree of ani-
mation must be felt by the writer, and raised in the reader, in
order to interest the attention; and a sufficient scope given to the
imagination, to enable it to create in the mind a sight of the per-
sons, characters and circumstances, of the subject: for with-
out these, the judgment will feel little or no excitement to office,
and its determinations will be cold, sluggish, and imperfect.
But if either or both of the two former are raised too high, or
heated too much, the judgment will be jostled from its seat,
and the whole matter, however important in itself, will dimin-
ish into a pantomime of the mind, in which we create images
that promote no other purpose than amusement.43

This passage shows remarkable insight regarding the modus
operandi of the writer of effective “applied” prose, especially
when one considers that it was written in America in 1782, and
it shows that Paine’s power of winning assent through his
writing was the result not of any hit-or-miss methods but of a
carefully contemplated theory of literary art.

Having advocated this difficult balance and control of imagi-
nation and judgment necessary to the writer, Paine’s sixth ideal
involved the adjustment of language to thought with such ex-
quise precision as to create exactly the impression desired, and
no other. The ex-soldier knew that ammunition is not more
essential than accurate aiming. He sums the matter up as fol-
lows: “To fit the powers of thinking and the turn of language
to the subject, so as to bring out a clear conclusion that shall
hit the point in question and nothing else, is the true criterion
in writing.”44 Conscious of his own earlier excesses in or-

43 Writings, II, 69–70. Speaking of Deane’s address, Paine
stressed the need of a dignified style in public utterances. He said
that “The spirit and language of it differ exceedingly from that cool
penetrating judgment and refinement of manners of expression which
fits, and is absolutely necessary, in the Plenipotentiary. His censures
are coarse and vehement . . .” (ibid., I, 397).
44 Ibid., II, 110.
nateness, he grew to understand that the means should always be subordinated to the end, the part to the whole, that writing may fail “through an excess of graces,” if, as in Raynal’s case, “the coloring is too high for the original,” even though “the conception is lofty and the expression elegant.” As he boasted later, mindful, no doubt of his own struggles for literary self-control and artistic integrity, “To judge rightly, and to write clearly, and that upon all sorts of subjects, to be able to command thought and as it were to play with it at pleasure, and be always master of one’s temper in writing, is the faculty of a serene mind and the attribute of a happy and philosophical temperament.” Just as Paine thought that the creation reveals the Creator, so a man’s literary creation reveals his character. As we shall see shortly, Paine’s stress on precision and the command of one’s thoughts and words form part of his deistic creed involving obedience to the law and order which is nature.

Having satisfied himself as to the perfection of the units of his composition, striving, as we have seen, for candor, simplicity, and clarity, for boldness, for wit, for an appeal not only to reason but to feeling, for a balance between judgment and imagination, and for a purposeful and precise adjustment between language and ideas with reference to a definite audience, Paine strove, finally, to arrange his units, his carefully constructed sentences, in an architectonic pattern designed to give them their maximum effectiveness. He worshipped order in everything, but especially in literary composition. He especially censured Raynal, William Smith, and Burke for their disregard for order. In one of his happy phrases, he said that in trying to answer Burke’s Reflections he had been obliged to tread “a pathless wilderness of rhapsodies.”

---

455 Ibid., II, 110. 456 Ibid., III, 402.
457 Ibid., II, 110. See also (IV, 379) his criticism of Isaiah.
method,” he said, “because I see and am convinced of its beauty and advantage. It is that which makes all business easy and understood, and without which everything becomes embarrassed and difficult.” For “it is only by reducing complicated things to method and orderly connection that they can be understood with advantage, or pursued with success.” Being usually obliged to write in haste in the face of emergencies, Paine seldom achieved perfect order in practice. Yet he is careful to light the way through his compositions by telling us what he is going to do, that he is doing it, and that he has done it. He makes liberal use of “signpost” sentences as well as “flash-backs” such as the “Recapitulation” at the end of Part One of The Age of Reason. Such a method, in addition to the logical articulation of his ideas and their “darnable iteration,” gave his writing such an orderly clearness that even the most unliterary readers could not miss his meaning.

Thus we have come full circle, Paine’s last ideal of orderly method serving to make possible his first ideal of clear simplicity. Just as the first is grounded ultimately on his deistic faith that “man must go back to nature for information,” since “perfection consists in simplicity,” so his last ideal, that of order, is also grounded on his deistic faith. For the test of the revelation even of God himself is that “harmonious, magnificent order that reigns throughout the visible universe,” an order which is “the standard to which everything must be brought that pretends to be the work or word of God.” Furthermore, the constant stress which Paine lays upon disciplined control, upon harmonizing a writer’s powers by allegiance to a judgment which “corrects and regulates,” “governing” wit, upon being able to “command thought and... play with it at pleasure” and to “hit the point in question and nothing else,” is surely a reflection of current scientific deism

460 For some examples see Writings, I, 290, 329; II, 83–84, 520; III, 337; IV, 62.
of Paine's age, which involved a disciplined conformity to that law and order which we have seen this disciple of Newtonianism identifying with nature. Paine especially admired Bolingbroke and Pope as "Freethinkers" or deists, and it will be recalled that the latter, believing that "Order is Heav'n's first law," was the great exponent of disciplined precision and orderliness in literary composition. Paine's patron, Franklin, as we have seen, also exalted discipline and order in writing. Order was the passion of the age, not only in religion and politics and writing, but in art as well. Such were the literary theories which guided him in his literary practice, which enabled him to command the attention of more than half a million readers, vigorously stirring them to accept the political, religious, economic, and social doctrines that helped to call into being the American Republic and the French Republic, as well as many humanitarian movements of later days. His style served as a trusty tool and was occasionally not without elements of beauty. As I have tried to indicate, however, one fundamental basis of his literary theories, as of his political, economic, social, and educational theories, is found in his own peculiar blending of science and deism.

Paine's style was given superlative praise, as we have seen (note 436), by Jefferson, who thought that Paine was "the only other writer in America who can write better" than he (Jefferson) could himself. Indeed, it was the Father of Democracy who admitted that he "professed the same principles"

463 See ibid., IV, 54, where he says "all the arts have originated" from the "knowledge of science" (Newtonianism) which leads to "the true theology." For a more detailed discussion, see H. H. Clark, "Thomas Paine's Theories of Rhetoric," Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, XXVIII, 307-339 (1933).

464 Of course Paine must have been influenced by the literary discipline of neo-classicism, but it should be remembered that neoclassicism and deism reinforced each other. See A. O. Lovejoy, op. cit.

466 Quoted in D. E. Wheeler's Life . . . of Thomas Paine, I, 327.
as those in *Rights of Man*. Those who have been accustomed to honor Jefferson but belittle Paine should remember this fact, and also Jefferson's high tribute in 1801 when Paine was bitterly attacked by his Calvinistic-Federalistic contemporaries: in advancing the original sentiments of democracy, he told Paine, "it will be your glory to have labored, and with as much effect as any man living."\textsuperscript{465}

\textsuperscript{465} Jefferson's *Writings*, Monticello Edition, VIII, 207; X, 224. If Jefferson was wiser than Paine in some ways, it is worth debating whether, in the light of history, Paine was not wiser in advocating (1) a coercive union as opposed to states' rights (which eventually encouraged secession and the Civil War); and (2) a league of nations and international co-operation, commercial and otherwise, as opposed to isolationism.