THOMAS PAINE: A QUAKER REVOLUTIONARY

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The publication of Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" in January, 1776, mobilized public support for the principles of the American Revolution. Paine's pamphlet clearly articulated the already existing, but latent, values of the republican ideology in American society: the sacrifice of individual interests to the greater good of the whole, an ambivalent combination of equality of opportunity and equality of condition, a distrust of power and the necessity to control it and a conviction of the natural and inalienable rights of men.¹

The immediate influence of this republican ideology on the thought of American revolutionaries has been attributed to the writings of the Commonwealthmen.² However, the identification of the Protestant Dissenting tradition, among the broader influences of the ideology, has encouraged some historians to suggest that Quaker thought played a crucial role in the formation of American ideals.³ Effective proof of such an assertion has remained elusive though, since any direct impact on the political climate of 1776 Philadelphia appears to be negated by the Society of Friends' opposition to involvement in political affairs and its uncompromising stance on pacifism.⁴ However, an ideological connection can be indicated if a founding father were proven to be sincerely Quaker in his thought, but, to date, none

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2. Ibid., 15.
4. Arthur J. Mekeel, "The Founding Years," Friends in the Delaware Valley, ed. John M. Moore (Philadelphia, 1981), 39-42. At the time of the French and Indian War in 1756, the Quakers as a Society dissociated themselves from political involvement in Pennsylvania affairs, believing such participation to be inconsistent with their pacifist convictions. Also see Arthur J. Mekeel, The Relation of the Quakers to the American Revolution. (Washington D.C., 1979). Mekeel provides a detailed account, by colony, of Quaker political and military involvement, as well as non-involvement during the American Revolution. He does not indicate any strong Quaker influence on the ideology of the Revolution itself.
has been identified. In this respect, the socio-religious thought of Thomas Paine has been overlooked as evidence of a Quaker influence on the ideology of the American Revolution.

Although his Quaker upbringing is an established fact, the problem of Paine’s Quakerism, with regard to its impact on the ideology of the American Revolution, is a very complex one. The identification of such an influence is difficult to prove not only because most of Paine’s correspondence and autobiographical materials, providing insight for his thought, were accidently destroyed in a fire over a century ago, but also in order to depict Paine in his entirety requires a knowledge of Revolutionary America, England and France as well as a familiarity with eighteenth century science, theology and political thought. Accordingly, the current purpose is not to negate those other strands of thought by proposing an exclusively Quaker influence on Paine’s ideology, but rather to suggest, through circumstantial evidence, that Quaker thought was the predominant strain of influence on Paine’s ideology during his first years in America.

Quakerism, which arose in England during the religious upheaval of the Cromwellian period in the middle of the 17th century was based on the fundamental doctrine of that of God in every man or the “inner light.” This conviction maintains that the “relation between Christ and man is an organic one.” Accordingly, all human beings are “aware of their common relation to one God and, hence, to each other.” This religious concept, combined with a pragmatic stress on the ethical principles recorded in the Scriptures, produced a strong sense of social responsibility among the Quakers. This social and ethical consciousness resulted in three distinct social testimonies which became distinguishing marks of the early Quaker movement as well as of the Society of Friends subsequently.

5. See Frederick Tolles, Meeting House and Counting House (Chapel Hill, 1948), 247-50. Tolles points out that although Benjamin Franklin was, and still is, frequently mistaken as the prototype of an honest Quaker, he espoused no religious convictions.


7. Paine had bequeathed most of his belongings to a Mrs. Bonneville who had cared for him in the last years of his life. Paine’s personal papers were handed down to her son in whose St. Louis residence they were destroyed by fire.

The most prominent of these testimonies is the Peace testimony, announced as early as 1660. The early Quakers believed that through an appeal to the Inner Light in all men the pride and vanity and greed which were the cause of war would be eliminated. Consequently, the Friends refused both the payment of war taxes and conscription into the militia. This strong adherence to pacifism was unique among all other seventeenth and eighteenth century non-conformist sects, earning the Quakers, at various times, either the silent respect or the condemnation of the ruling government.9

The second testimony, that of equality, was founded on the premise that every human being, regardless of race, sex or religion, possesses the same Inner Light, thus making all men equal in the eyes of God. This conviction manifested itself in the equal role of women in the ministry and subsequently in the anti-slavery activities of the Friends as well as in their support of women’s involvement in social reform. Consequently, the Society of Friends became a pioneer in the abolition of slavery and in the struggle for women’s rights.

Finally, the Quaker testimony on simplicity involved a direct witness to the world against all self-love and vanity. Simplicity was illustrated by the adoption of plain dress, the use of the plain language and the utilitarian education which young Friends received.

These socio-religious convictions were expressed in the Quakerism of the generations of both Thomas Paine and his father, although the respective environments of these two Quaker generations were distinctly different. Paine’s father, Joseph, grew up under the last vestiges of the early evangelizing Quaker movement, which still bore marks of the prophetic fervor of the first generation.10 Thomas, however, was a product of the subsequent quietist period, an era marked by increasing withdrawal from society at large. During this time, Quakers became less active in their outward ministry while rather cultivating their inward spiritual endowments.11

Although the quietist period has frequently been considered responsible for the passiveness of the Society at that time, quietism did not spell lethargy and inaction; rather it was a revised emphasis on the right way to initiate action. In fact, the quietist period, with the

11. This shift in environment was due, among other things, to the deaths of the first generation of leaders George Fox, William Penn and Robert Barclay accompanied by a decline in the missionary spirit.
decline of an evangelizing ministry, was a time of much inner spiritual activity which ultimately enabled the Friends to disregard accepted social ideas and prompted their activity as pioneers in various social causes. This fact is significant in an examination of the Quaker influence on young Thomas Paine.

The Quaker milieu which surrounded Paine during the period 1737-1777 commenced with the influence of his father and his birthplace. Paine was born in the village of Thetford in the county of Norfolk, England, on January 29, 1737. His Quaker upbringing resulted from his father's strong religious convictions which assured a religiously-guarded education for the young Paine who later 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 useful learning. Though I went to the grammar school, I did not learn Latin, not only because I had no inclination to learn languages, but because of the objection the Quakers have against the books in which the language is taught. I had some talent for poetry; but this I rather repressed than encouraged as leading too much into the field of imagination.\(^{12}\)

This religiously-guarded education was illustrative of the quietist period's attempt to shield Quaker children in their education from the worldly influences of imaginative writings and the classical languages.\(^{13}\) Similarly, according to quietist practice Paine was taken "to the meetinghouse in Thetford from the age of six where he spent at least eight hours each week."\(^{14}\) This practice of protracted worship resulted from the quietist emphasis on the need constantly to cultivate the "immediate connection of the human soul with God."\(^{15}\)

However, Joseph Paine, a product of the earlier evangelizing period, made certain that quietism was not the only aspect of Quakerism which influenced his son. He made every attempt to instill the spirit of the martyrs in his son's blood by maintaining a collection of prophetic tracts and Journals detailing the personal religious experiences of these first Quaker missionaries and mar-

\(^{12}\) Quoted from "Age of Reason," The Writings of Thomas Paine, ed. Moncure D. Conway (4 vols., New York, 1908), IV, 62.

\(^{13}\) Howard H. Brinton, Quaker Education in Theory and Practice (Wallingford, Pa., 1967), 45.


\(^{15}\) Jones, op. cit., I, 33.
tyrs. Such a library, which "formed in multitudes of Quaker homes, the main body of reading matter," provided a susceptible Quaker youth like Tom with "the formative ideas of his faith." Also Joseph Paine's indefatigable spirit of social responsibility influenced "his son's rejection of hierarchies in church and state and his active support for reforms ranging from anti-slavery to the abolition of duelling."

Moreover, a penchant for dissent was fostered in both Joseph and his son by their surrounding environment. The Quaker historian, William Braithwaite, maintains that Norfolk, the county in which Paine was reared, was a hot-bed of the Quaker dissenting tradition. By 1699 Quaker dissent had become so rampant in the county that its Justice and Grand Jurors drafted a petition to the House of Commons requesting that steps be taken to suppress the sect. The petition was apparently unsuccessful, since "Norfolk became a very strong center of Quaker life in the early 1700's."

The next formative period of Paine's life came when he moved to Lewes in the county of Sussex. There his Quaker milieu expanded. This period of Paine's life, 1768-1774, is critical for an understanding of his political convictions since it was in Lewes that he came to adopt the political and social consciousness which would manifest itself later in his actions during his first years in America.

Paine arrived in the village of Lewes in 1768 as an excise man and established a residence at the Bull House. The Bull House was the village's social center consisting of lodgings, a tobacco shop, a meetinghouse and, most significantly, the White Hart Inn, the "re-

16. Thomas Paine, The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine, ed. Philip S. Foner (2 vols., New York, 1945), II, 1189; Best, op. cit., 129; Conway, Life of Paine, II, 201. Conway claims that "in a profound sense Paine was George Fox himself." These assertions have been strongly opposed by Harry H. Clark, "An historical Interpretation of Thomas Paine's Religion," University of California Chronicle (Jan., 1933), 59-60, and by Robert P. Falk, "Thomas Paine: Deist or Quaker?" Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography vol. 62 (1938), 52-63. Both Clark and Falk maintain that Paine was only slightly influenced by his Quaker upbringing and then only in his humanitarian outlook. Apart from this moral influence of Quakerism, it should be noted that both Clark and Falk emphasize Paine's deistical works, "Rights of Man" and "Age of Reason," apparently giving little consideration to the possibility of a transformation in Paine's thought in later life after his writing of "Common Sense."

17. Jone, op. cit., 1, 196.

18. Foner, op. cit., 3; Aldridge, op. cit., 8.

sort of Lewes' intellectual circle." Here Paine's Quakerism became tempered by the prevailing Whig political convictions of the time. To be sure Paine mixed with those of various religious professions, but his more intimate acquaintances were from the Quaker milieu surrounding him during his first forty years, 1737-1777.

Paine lived in the quarters of the Quaker Samuel Ollive, the tobacconist at Bull House, who was a member of the White Hart intellectual circle. His closest companion, however, was the Quaker Thomas "Clio" Rickman, a member of Sussex Friends Meeting. Together with Paine Rickman contributed some of the most "obstinate and agitation" works to the White Hart's "Headstrong Book," a collection of prose and political essays reflecting the convictions of the whig tradition. Accordingly, Rickman maintained that "in politics Paine was at this time a Whig." It would thus seem that Paine's exposure to the Whiggism of the White Hart club grounded him firmly in the ideology of that tradition.

By this time a more radical strain, the Commonwealth tradition, with roots in the age of the Puritan ascendancy in England, had achieved increasing popularity. The Commonwealth ideology was based on a conviction in "extending the rights of Englishmen to all mankind," freedom of thought, religious toleration and the classical form of a republican government under the English theory of a mixed constitution. This ideology had been embraced by Harrington and Sidney, Locke and Newton, Hutcheson and the Scottish school and,
finally, during the reign of George III, by Pownall and Wilkes. Gordon Wood regards this ideology, and particularly the contributing ideas of Milton and Sidney, as the dominant intellectual influence of the American Revolution. Paine’s intimate contact with these influences helped to merge Quaker conviction and Whig principle in his personal ideology.

During the two year period 1772-1774 most of Paine’s time was spent traveling between Sussex and London. He had volunteered to act as a lobbyist for his fellow excisemen who had become “disgruntled about their low wages and the risking of their lives for an unpopular cause.” At this time Paine wrote his first public appeal, “The Case of the Officers of Excise,” which produced little effect as evidenced by Parliament’s decision to ignore the excisemen’s requests. In addition, Paine’s exposure to London’s labor and hunger riots, his witnessing of the Wilkes controversy and its rallying of the social orders behind the Commonwealth ideology, and his personal failure in the excise cause all combined to enhance his compassion for the poor and resulted in his espousal of the Commonwealth ideology. This socio-political ideology complemented and strengthened Paine’s existing Quaker disregard for privilege and

27. Ibid., 386.
30. Aldridge, op.cit, 22; Paine, Writings, ed. Foner, II, 11-12; In “The Case of the Officers of Excise” Paine argues that an increase in wages would bring about greater efficiency and a tremendous increase in the revenue of the state. He warns against the evils resulting from inadequate salaries, cautioning that “poverty, in defiance of principle, begets a degree of meanness that will stoop to anything.”
31. Walter J. Shelton, English Hunger and Industrial Disorders (Toronto, 1973), 203. The cause of these riots was the financial deficit created by England’s involvement in the Seven Year’s War and the attempt by businessmen and employers to raise prices or lower wages, respectively, to protect their profits.
32. Leonard Krieger, “The Kings at Home: The Ascending Powers” in Felix Gilbert’s The Norton History of Modern Europe (New York, 1970), 749. John Wilkes was a member of Parliament who was prosecuted in 1763 for an article he wrote attacking the credibility of Lord Bute, the chief minister of George III. The publication of a similar article in 1768 resulted in Wilkes’ expulsion from Parliament. Although Wilkes was subsequently elected to Parliament four times in succession, he was imprisoned for twenty-two months and prohibited from taking his seat in the Commons. This incident raised the revolutionary issue of the political rights of the electors. “Wilkes and Liberty” became the political catchall as the Commonwealth movement came to be embraced by the unprivileged, unenfranchised and unpropertied members of English society.
33. Paine, Writings, ed. Foner, II, 464. Paine claimed that his experience in London as a lobbyist placed him in a unique position “to see into the numerous and various distresses which the weight of taxes even at that time of day occasioned.”
aristocracy and can be viewed as an inheritance of traditional Quaker political values.

The political values espoused by Quakers were best expressed in the political theory of William Penn. Penn came to support the Whig ideology actively during the years 1676-1682 when he lived in the tiny hamlet of Worminghurst, Sussex, not far from what would become Paine's residence in the town of Lewes. In the elections of 1679, Penn "worked actively on behalf of Algernon Sidney," one of the founding fathers of the Commonwealth ideology. In fact, Frederick Tolles maintains that Sidney's influence on Penn branded the Quaker as "a Whig and a Dissenter" who "laid down the basic Whig principles upon which Pennsylvania was founded." Penn gathered a substantial portion of the "First Purchasers" of the Pennsylvania colony from the county of Sussex where he had launched an extensive sales and advertisement campaign. Many of these Quaker neighbors were familiar with Penn's political tracts, "England's Great Interest in the Choice of this New Parliament" and "One Project for the Good of England." Both treatises were written in 1679 and reflected the ardent Whig principles which the Pennsylvania proprietor implemented in his own colony. The Whig conviction of religious toleration, ably expressed in these works, was extremely attractive to the Quaker inhabitants of Sussex, and in particular to Friends in Lewes who suffered "much religious persecution" during the 1670's and 1680's.

Essentially then, Penn's Holy Experiment was derived from the combination of Quaker religious thought and Whig political ideals, both of which found agreement in religious toleration and a conviction in the personal liberty exercised for the public good. Furthermore, the influence of Penn's writings, his Holy Experiment, and the peaceful coexistence of a Whig-Quaker tradition permeated the subsequent generation of Sussexmen, leaving an indelible mark on Thomas Paine who, "for some years, collected taxes in that county while keeping a residence in Lewes."

In short, Thomas Paine left England for the American colonies with a Commonwealth ideology. At the same time his cultural and

35. Ibid., 127, 133.
37. Ibid.
38. Braithwaite, op.cit., 179.
religious milieu in England grounded his personal ideology in Quakerism, and it was from this idealistic basis that the author of "Common Sense" adopted the complementary philosophy of Commonwealth Whiggism. This fundamental Quaker influence would also condition the milieu in which Paine moved upon arriving in Philadelphia in 1774 and was to manifest itself in his first series of socio-political writings in that American city.

Despite the fact that Paine's strong support for the cause of American independence earned him the label "Quaker apostate," it is a significant point that in his friendships he gravitated towards those who, like himself, had been nurtured in the principles of Quakerism. During his early years in Philadelphia, 1774-1777, Paine's Quaker milieu consisted of those Friends who had adopted the principle "that offensive war was never to be considered, but that a war of defense was Christian and therefore justifiable." Many Friends who held this opinion and whose actions contravened the Peace Testimony were disowned during the Revolutionary War.¹⁰

A number of these former members united in 1781 with other like-minded individuals to establish a new body known as the Free Quaker Monthly Meeting of Philadelphia. They adopted this name "since they based their rules of conduct and action on freedom from the restraints which characterized the main body of the Society." While the Free Quakers resembled the main body in their acceptance of its "general doctrines, organization and mode of conduct in worship," they differed in their "omission of any theological statement of belief, the abolition of all offenses for disownment" and in their "encouragement to participate in civil affairs and in the military defense of the country."¹³ At the height of the Free Quaker movement

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⁴¹. Isaac Sharpless, *Quaker Experiment in Government* (Phila., 1902), 234; Sharpless maintains that one fifth of the "adult male Friends in Philadelphia had joined the American army or had taken places under the Revolutionary government" at the outbreak of war. Considering that there were about 5000 Friends in the Philadelphia area in 1766, Sharpless is speaking of approximately 200 who were disowned in the first years of the war. See also Robert Froud, *History of Pennsylvania* (2 vols. Philadelphia, 1798), II, 278, 339, and Mekeel, op. cit., 132, 169, 335.
⁴². Mekeel, op. cit., 289.
⁴³. Ibid., 285.
in the 1790's, there were well over one hundred members, about half of whom had been disowned for participation in the war. 44

Although Paine never officially joined the Free Quakers, he was very much in sympathy with their principles as reflected by his many intimates in that group. Had he been living in Philadelphia in 1781 and afterward he would doubtless have become an active member of the Religious Society of Free Quakers. 45 Still, there is evidence of a "Free Quaker milieu" in Paine's American life as early as 1775 when "the company that would converse with him included patriotic Quakers such as Christopher Marshall who circulated about the city promoting independence along with Timothy Matlack, a former Quaker and brewer." 46

Marshall, a former druggist, although disowned earlier for involvement in forgery, maintained his Quaker contacts and often attended meeting. He took an active part on the Whig side in the contest with the mother country and was elected to the Committee of One Hundred in November 1774 as well as to the Pennsylvania Provincial Council in June 1776. 47 Matlack, like Paine, was raised in a staunch Quaker household and experienced the same religiously-guarded education. Several years later his devotion to the main tenets of Quakerism prompted him to "make a religious journey to New England in 1783" to visit the Free Quaker group in that area. 48 At the time of his initial acquaintance with Paine, in 1775, Matlack was

44. Junior League of Philadelphia, The Free Quakers and Their Meeting House (Phila., 1976), 3; Mekeel, op. cit., 286. The fact that there were 50,000 Quakers in America out of a population of 1,580,000 during the Revolution gives one an idea of how small the Free Quaker group was. According to Mekeel, a small group of Free Quakers developed in New England in 1783. However, there was not as strong a feeling of alienation among the New England Friends as prevailed in Philadelphia and by 1795 most of these separatists had rejoined the main body of the Society (See Mekeel, op. cit., 286-289).

45. Paine journeyed to France in 1781 in search of further financial relief for the American cause. After he returned later the same year he lived in Bordentown, New Jersey, and, briefly, on his farm in New Rochelle, New York. He left America in 1787, travelling to Europe in order to pursue the revolutionary cause of France and did not return to this country until 1802.

46. Hawke, op. cit., 39; Aldridge, op. cit., 46. Matlack had been disowned in 1765 for unsound business practices (Mekeel, op. cit., 290, n. 2).


employed as a clerk to the Secretary of the Continental Congress.49 Two years later he was appointed Secretary to the Pennsylvania Assembly. In this capacity Matlack conducted a frequent correspondence with Paine, primarily discussing official business of the Assembly, and occasionally sharing personal grievances over the Society of Friends' pacifist stance in the Revolution.50 The most intimate companion of Paine's like-minded milieu, however, was General Nathanael Greene. In July 1776, when he volunteered as a soldier for the Continental cause, Paine requested the position of aide-de-camp to Greene at Fort Lee in Manhattan.51 During their brief nine month association Paine and Greene "became good friends on both political and personal grounds."52 Greene's religiously-guarded education in Covington, Rhode Island, made him familiar with the most prominent Quaker texts, including Robert Barclay's Apology and the Complete Works of William Penn.53 Consequently Greene's socio-political ideas were "little more than a paraphrasing of old shibboleths with a good seasoning of Quaker doctrine."54 This fact is reflected in his inherent conflict of conscience over participation in war when, in later years, Greene declared:

To me war was ever a business of necessity . . . and unavoidable from the plans of our creation; but I am averse to it from its being opposite to my temper and feelings.

I thought the cause of liberty was in danger, and as it was attacked by a military force it was necessary to cultivate a military spirit among the people.55

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49. A.M. Stackhouse, Patriot and Soldier (n.p., 1910), 92. During his tenure as clerk to the Secretary of the Congress, Matlack engrossed the Declaration of Independence.

50. Conway, Life of Paine, I, 94; In one of his letters, dated October 10, 1777, Matlack, acting as Secretary to the Assembly, informs Paine that he is requested to join the Continental Army at Valley Forge so that the Assembly can "obtain more regular and constant intelligence of the proceeding of G. Washington's army." Matlack completes the letter with an interesting personal allusion which reflects his mutual discouragement over the Society's pacifist stance: "I expect to send you a copy of the Testimony of the late Yearly Meeting . . . 'tis a poor thing." Here, Matlack refers to the testimony of the 1777 Yearly Meeting which dealt with the Society's decision to "stand firm" in their adherence to the Peace Testimony.


52. Aldridge, op. cit., 47; This fact is also reflected in the abundant correspondence between Paine and Greene after the former's return to civilian life. The correspondence can be found in Paine, Writings, ed. Foner, II.


54. Ibid., 33.

55. Greene quoted in Ibid., 40-41.
Accordingly, the "Fighting Quaker's" annoyance with the Friends' failure to uphold the cause of independence compelled him to accuse the Society of hypocrisy and, subsequently, to request that he be "put from under the care of Friends for the future."

Paine shared Greene's convictions and, if anything, this friendship made the radical Paine more militantly patriotic and even stronger in his condemnation of the "Tory" Quakers. Sentiments of this kind are clearly demonstrated in the first pamphlets of his American Crisis series, written during the nine month association with Greene.

Paine's fervent patriotism is evidenced in the "American Crisis #1," written in December 1776 to rally the recently defeated army of Washington. In memorable words which have etched themselves on countless patriotic minds throughout American history Paine began his work:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated."

Subsequently, in "American Crisis #3," written in April 1777, Paine condemns the "treasonable Quakers" for their "supposed neutrality" in the Revolution. His basic support of Quaker principles, however, is illustrated by the distinction Paine makes between his patriotic Quaker milieu and the Crown partisans of the Society when he states: "A religious Quaker is a valuable character and a political Quaker a real Jesuit." This distinction is a significant one since it reinforces the fact that Paine's personal sympathies still rested with the religious principles of the Society. However, he had reconciled those principles with his republican convictions and thereby came to

56. Nathaniel Greene, The Papers of General Nathanael Greene, ed. Richard Showman, (2 vols., Chapel Hill, 1976), II. 183-184. In a letter to his brother, dated October 27, 1777, Greene writes: "The Quakers voluntarily lent General Howe 5,000 pounds sterling at his arrival in this city [Phila.] . . . The Friends say they wish G. Washington's army was cut into pieces that there would be peace. These are lamb like wishes, and breathe that universal benevolence they profess for all mankind!" East Greenwich (Rhode Island) Monthly Meeting Minutes, April 5, 1777, quoted in Greene, op. cit., II. 104, n. 4.
58. "American Crisis #3" in Ibid., I, 206-20.
59. Ibid.
the conclusion that the truest expression of Quakerism was exhibited by those who eventually became Free Quakers. Moreover, it was this “true expression” of Quakerism that was reflected in Paine’s political works during his first two years in America, writings which initiated the American Revolution by articulating the ideology of that cause for independence.

The Quaker Influence on the Socio-political Writings of Paine, 1774-76

Thomas Paine’s socio-political ideology, like that of his contemporaries, was influenced by the broad context of the European Enlightenment. This intellectual renaissance, characterized by the thought of Locke, Montesquieu, Hume and Newton, permeated the social environments of both eighteenth century England and America, leaving an indelible mark on the pamphleteers of the period. Accordingly, there are those historians who insist that Paine’s first political writings, and in particular “Common Sense,” mirror his later deistic works, “Rights of Man” and “Age of Reason,” writings which unmistakably reflect the rationalism of the Enlightenment period. 60

Still, when making this attempt to link the Tom Paine of 1774-76 with deism, it is important to recognize that the English radical “knew little of the writings” of the Enlightenment thinkers.61 Nor was he “under any deistical influence during [his editorship] of the Pennsylvania Magazine.”62 These facts negate any direct rationalist influence on the Thomas Paine of 1774-76, enhancing the potential influence of those with whom he did associate during this period who consisted largely of what might be called a Free Quaker milieu.

Moreover, Paine’s first writings, as we shall see, mirror a uniquely Quaker configuration in his thought. To be sure, many elements of the Quaker philosophy were part of the broader Enlightenment context. However, no other writer of the period emphasizes equality, simplicity and pacifism as strongly as does Paine, or employs that specific configuration with such consistency. Paine’s first writings, as editor of the Pennsylvania Magazine are illustrative of his Quaker

60. See Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (Chicago, 1948); Gustav A. Koch, Republican Religion (New York, 1933).
62. Edwards, op. cit., 28. Although Paine became friendly with Franklin, Jefferson and Priestly during his first two years in Philadelphia, “he knew none of them well enough, as yet, to call upon any ideas other than his own.”
influence and, more significantly, form the basis for his subsequent work "Common Sense," the vehicle which mobilized the American public for the Revolution.

The first article Paine published entitled "African Slavery" (1774) clearly reflected a Quaker bias. The only previous statements of this type had been written by John Woolman in 1754 and Anthony Benezet in 1767, pleading respectively for the abolition of slavery and of the slave trade. The compelling principle of the anti-slavery cause on the part of the Quakers was their belief in "that of God in every man." This cause had been increasingly nurtured by the Society of Friends for nearly a century in both America and England before the appearance of Paine's article in 1774.

Consequently, in this first article, Paine entreats his reader to consider the argument set forth by many Friends at this time:

"With what consistency, or decency do Americans complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they hold so many hundred thousands in slavery; and annually enslave many thousands more without any pretense of authority or claim upon them?"

Also consistent with his Quaker heritage is Paine's admonition: "How just, how suitable our crime is to the punishment with which Providence threatens us?" David B. Davis in his work, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, maintains that "the Quakers, more than any other religious group, had long expressed misgivings over the sinfulness of slavery and consequently, "interpreted each step toward a total disengagement from slaveholding as a tangible

63. Thomas Drake, Quakers and Slavery in America (New Haven, 1950), 25; Mekeel, "The Founding Years," loc. cit., 31. Woolman's publication, "Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes" played a significant role in convincing the Friends that they should abandon slaveholding.

64. David B. Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823 (Ithaca, 1975), 230; Jones, Quakers in the American Colonies, 511-518. The Quakers of Germantown Meeting had presented the first group protest against chattel slavery as early as 1688. The first official Quaker statement against slaveholding appeared in the minutes of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1758 although that body did not prescribe disownment for the keeping of slaves until 1776. Similarly, English Quakers Samuel and John Fothergill preached against slavery in the 1750's, abetting "future English Quaker abolitionists" as well as laying the foundations "for more secular and radical abolitionism" in England. (See Mekeel, "The Founding Years, loc. cit., 44.)

sign of growing religious purity." This fact is demonstrated by the minute of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in adopting an anti-slavery stance in 1758.

This meeting very earnestly and affectionately intreats Friends to consider seriously the present circumstances of these and the adjacent provinces, which, by the permission of Divine Providence, have been visited with the desolating calamities of war and bloodshed, so that many of our fellow [colonists] are now suffering in captivity and fervently desires, that ... we may manifest an humbling sense of their judgements, and ... would steadily observe the injunction of our Lord and Master to "do unto others as we would they should do unto us"; which it now appears to this meeting, would induce such Friends who have any slaves to set them at liberty."

Similarly, Paine, like many Quakers of the late eighteenth century, proposed a program of gradual emancipation for blacks. Unlike the Quakers, he simultaneously advocated immediate emancipation from monarchy. These themes formed the basis of the revolutionary's 1775 article, "A Serious Thought" which resembles the Yearly Meeting minutes of 1758, particularly in its reference to divine punishment:

When I reflect on ... the use [Britain] hath made of the discovery of this new world—that the little paltry dignity of earthly kings hath been set up in preference to the great cause of the King of Kings ... [and] that ever since the discovery of America she hath employed herself in the most horrid of all traffics, that of human flesh ... hath yearly ravaged the hapless shores of Africa, robbing dominions in the west—when I reflect on these, I hesitate not for a moment to believe that the Almighty will finally separate America from Britain ... And when the Almighty shall have blest us, and made us a people dependent only upon Him, then may our first gratitude to 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."

Clearly, Paine's intention to equate the cause of anti-slavery with that of American independence was an essential element in the ideology of the Revolution. This anti-slavery element, moreover, was a true expression of Paine's Quaker, humanitarian convictions.

66. Davis, op.cit., 213, 251-252. Although Davis maintains that many English Quakers worked for the abolition of slavery to alleviate their own guilt over the poor conditions of the English working class, he does not recognize the fact that the Society of Friends adopted the anti-slavery cause in order to purify the Society of the taint of unChristian practices.
68. Paine, op.cit., ed. Conway. I. 65-66. Also interesting to note in this passage is Paine's implication of the immanence of God, a conviction not held by the deist.
Another strong connection exists between Paine’s Quakerism and his position on non-violence. Paine’s brief article on “Duelling,” written in May 1775, indicates the influence of Quaker pacifism on his thought. In this he states that the custom of duelling is a “gothic and absurd manner of accommodating certain kinds of personal differences and of redressing...injuries.” 69 Duelling, being based on the matter of pride, is “absurd” for Paine just as it was for the Quakers who, in adherence to their Peace Testimony, sought to remove the pride and vanity which provided all cause for war. He ends his condemnation by maintaining that duelling “offers a plain illustration of how little mankind are, in reality, influenced by the principles of the religion by which they profess to be guided.” 70 However, as much as Paine “abhorred the method of violence,” his pacifism was a conditional one. 71

In July 1775 in his article “Thoughts on Defensive War” Paine acknowledges that the idealism of the Society’s Peace Testimony cannot be practiced in the real world:

I am thus far a Quaker, that I would gladly agree with all the world to lay aside the use of arms, and settle matters by negotiation; but unless the whole will, the matter ends and I take up my musket and thank heaven he has put it in my power. 72

Still, Paine’s adherence to defensive warfare is conditioned by his love of religious liberty, a truly Quaker conviction. For Paine, “political liberty (secured through the defense of property) is the visible pass which guards the religions.” Therefore, he is “fully convinced that spiritual freedom is the root of political liberty.” 73 This was also the belief of William Penn in his establishment of the Holy Experiment. 74 However, while Paine sought to protect that religious liberty through defensive warfare, after negotiations with the Crown had failed, Penn secured religious freedom through his successful, personal rapport with the monarchs of his period. Therefore, both approaches must be perceived in the context of their personal and historical circumstances. Essentially then, Paine was a Quaker on

69. Ibid., 40.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid., 56.
72. Ibid., 55.
73. Ibid., 56-57.
the issue of pacifism, as far as his circumstances would permit and, in this sense, his type of pacifism was sincere.

One of Paine's last controversial articles for the *Pennsylvania Magazine* which appeared in August 1775, "An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex," was the first appeal for female rights issued in America. The English radical appears to equate the female's social condition with the bondage of slavery and in this respect it may be possible that he was advocating greater social and political responsibilities for American women after the anticipated separation from Britain. Like his anti-slavery appeal, this article is grounded in Paine's espousal of the Testimony on Equality which appears "within the Quaker meeting in the equal opportunity for all to take part regardless of age, sex or ability.”

Affronted in one country by polygamy, which gives them their rivals for inseparable companions; enslaved in another by indissoluble ties, which often join the gentle to the rude, and sensibility to brutality; Even in countries where they may be esteemed most happy they are . . . robbed of freedom of will by the laws, the slaves of opinion, which rules them with absolute sway. surrounded on all sides by judges who are at once their tyrants and seducers—who does not feel for the tender sex? Yet such I am sorry to say is the lot of women over the whole earth."

Paine ends this appeal by requesting that his American brothers not deny their women "that public esteem which, after the esteem of one's self, is the sweetest reward of well-doing."  

Paine's most comprehensive and effective articulation of the Revolutionary ideology, however, came in January 1776 after he had resigned from the editorship of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. The effectiveness of "Common Sense" in mobilizing public support for the Revolutionary ideology was extraordinary. Paine's pamphlet "went through twenty-five editions and reached literally hundreds of thousands of readers in the single year 1776." Only three months after its initial publication roughly 150,000 copies of "Common Sense" had been sold in a population of approximately 1,580,000.

75. Brinton, *Religious Philosophy*, 132. Naturally, the Society's equal treatment of women experienced a gradual evolution, as did many of the social testimonies of Friends. However, Quakers from the time of their establishment highly encouraged females to participate in religious affairs, social reform and most significantly, the open ministry. Paine's article is unmistakably a reflection of his Quaker background since the Friends were the only non-conformist sect which permitted such equal treatment of females.
77. *Ibid.*, 63-64.
There is little doubt among contemporary historians of the American Revolution that “Common Sense” provided the final and most direct impetus in the cause for independence. The most prominent of these historians have credited the influence of Newton, Locke, Milton, Sidney and Price as the primary influences on Paine’s ideas as expressed in “Common Sense.” In fact, however, the predominant influence is that of Quakerism. The ideas set forth in the work are reflective of Quaker thought in four significant respects: 1) the articulation of the obligations and basis for civil government; 2) the incessant expression of pacifism; 3) a millennial spirit reminiscent of early Quakerism; and 4) the simplicity of style in which the pamphlet was written.

First, the influence of Penn, the political theorist of the Quakers, on the thought of Paine has been previously traced to their mutual residence in Sussex, England. This influence was instrumental in shaping Paine’s ideas, as detailed in “Common Sense,” on the obligations of civil government to society. Paine begins his piece by addressing this issue:

Society is produced by our wants, government by our wickedness . . . Society in every state is a blessing, government in its best state is but a necessary evil

Here is the origin and rise of government; namely, a mode rendered necessary by the inability of moral virtue to govern the world; here is the design and end of government. Freedom and security."

Similarly, William Penn, in his “One Project for the Good of England” (1679), makes the same distinction between loyalty to the state and loyalty to society. Penn encourages the establishment of civil government because of man’s inability to reach consensus on moral/religious matters. Furthermore, Penn, like Paine, views the obligation of government as the protection of civil interests:

Scripture interprets [Religion] to be loving God above all, and our neighbors

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78. Eric Foner, *op. cit.* 79. Consumer statistics cannot account for the number of people who actually read “Common Sense.” However, these statistics can be considered the most accurate barometer for the popularity of Paine’s pamphlet for the time period. Moreover, Foner maintains that “Common Sense” reached not only the literate but was “read to all ranks,” including the illiterate.
as ourselves; but practice teacheth us that too many merely resolve it into
opinion and form... since 'tis so hard to disabuse men of their wrong
apprehensions of religion... we must recur to some lower but true principle
for the present. 'Tis this, that civil interest is the foundation and end of civil
government, and thus: The good of the whole is the rise and end of government;
but the good of the whole must need be the interest of the whole, and conse-
quently the interest of the whole is the reason and end of government."

More significantly, Penn emphasizes the importance of government in securing a particular type of civil interest: religious liberty. In his advocacy of religious toleration Penn asserts that "the liberty of [conscience] in reference to faith and worship towards God... must not be denied" to those who "acknowledge the civil government under which they live." Naturally, for Penn, the duty of the government was to secure this religious liberty.

Again, Paine draws his influence from Penn in his "Common Sense" assertion that "as to religion, I hold it to be the indispensable
duty of government to protect all conscientious professors, thereof."
Accordingly, Paine "fully and conscientiously believes" that the will
of God insists on "a diversity of religious opinions." In this sense,
his republicanism reflects "an attempt to re-establish in politics and
religion a lost harmony with the uniform, immutable, universal and
eternal moral law." Hence, the basis for Paine’s republicanism, like
Penn’s, was predominantly Quaker in its attempt "to make the
people’s welfare—the public good—the exclusive end of government;" this was the fundamental value upon which the Revolutionary
ideology was based.

Second, in regard to his repeated expression of pacifism which constantly emerges throughout "Common Sense," Paine’s advocacy
of short-term war must be perceived in the context of his hope for
peace in the long-term. He believed that only active pacifism, or a
war for peace, would suffice since "every quiet method for peace had
been ineffectual." Furthermore, Paine claims that it is America’s
"duty to mankind at large, as well as to [the colonists],... to

82. William Penn, “A Persuasive to Moderation to Church Dissenters” in ibid.,
II, 729.
84. Clark, loc. cit., 60.
85. Wood, op. cit., 53.
86. Paine, op. cit., ed. Conway, I, 88. Paine is here referring to the colonial
attempt to initiate peace by offering the Olive Branch Petition of 1775 which was
rejected by George III.
renounce the alliance” with England since any dependency on the monarchy “tends directly to involve [America] in European wars” against those “who would otherwise seek friendship.” He maintains that in a time when the “fate of war is uncertain” America, due to its undesired association to Britain, should “never suffer itself to be drained of inhabitants to support the British arms in either Asia; Africa or Europe.” Consequently, Paine urges the necessity of action to effect the cause of independence.

The espousal of defensive warfare, by Paine, is the stumbling block upon which most historians dismiss any impact of a Quaker influence on him.” It has been previously illustrated however that there did exist a group of Free Quakers whose adherence to both the major body of principles of the Society and the cause for independence were sincere. In this respect, Paine’s Revolutionary ideology was Quaker initiated and included a firm conviction in a future of peace.

Third, the content of “Common Sense” appears to be the political counter-part of the early Quaker religious proclamation tracts. This similarity is due to Paine’s early exposure to these tracts, as previously mentioned, at his father’s encouragement. The vocabulary of Biblical millennialism is of primary significance in the early Quaker tracts and in Paine’s writing. These early Quaker pamphleteers, in their attempt to arouse the anticipation of their readers and prepare them for a new world, stressed that involvement in the millennial process was a personal responsibility to which everyone must attend. William Dewsbury in his “True Prophecy of the Mighty Day of the Lord” (1655) calls on all men to share in a world struggle against pride and self-will, and suggests that by doing so they will be rewarded with life in a new world, another “Garden of Eden.”

Stand faithful in [the Lord's] counsel, and walk in his power, everyone in your measure; and be bold in the Lord for you are the Army of the Lord God Almighty . . . in doing so you shall escape the wrath of God which is coming upon the children of disobedience in this nation for the Lord will make the earth as the Garden of Eden . . .

87. Ibid.
88. Ibid., 87.
Rejoice, rejoice! Ye saints and children of the Most High God, walk in his power and you shall walk as Kings upon the earth, and shall sing the new song that none can sing!"

Likewise Paine proclaims:

We have it in our power to begin the world over again. The birthday of a new world is at hand . . . O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression . . . O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind . . . for [the mission of American independence] is, in great measure, the cause of all mankind at large . . .

The Almighty hath implanted in us these unextinguishable feelings for good and wise purposes. They are the guardians of his image in our hearts."

Another aspect of the proclamation tract was “a message of warning or an appeal to a particular group and situation.” The warnings these tracts contained were primarily directed “against corrupt administrators of the law.” Consistent with this tradition Dewsbury addresses the political leaders of Cromwellian England:

To you rulers of England you have seen the power of the Lord manifest on many that are in the place where you are, a cloud of witnesses: the bishops and the King, the lords and the late [Rump] Parliament, who professed the name of Christ but would not obey his counsel of their own hearts and improved their power for their own ends. But our righteous God hath overturned them to their everlasting shame and contempt."

“Common Sense” serves as a fitting analogy to Dewsbury’s tract in its similar identification of the hypocrisy of England’s rule and its warning against self-centered corruption, by the king, of English law:

I affirm that it would be policy in the King at this time to repeal the [Intolerable] acts, for the sake of reinstating himself in the government of the provinces, in order that he may accomplish by craft and subtlety, in the long run.

90. William Dewsbury, “True Prophecy of the Mighty Day of the Lord” in Hugh Barbour & Arthur O. Roberts, Early Quaker Writings, 1650-1700 (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1973), 101-102. Dewsbury was one of the first religious Seekers to join George Fox on 1652. He became a prominent member of the Valiant Sixty, a group of itinerant ministers initiated by Fox to carry out the Quaker Lamb’s War by spreading truth to all parts of England. Dewsbury in this particular prophetic tract condemns the Commonwealth government of Oliver Cromwell and beseeches his fellow countrymen to prepare for the millennium.
93. Ibid.
94. Dewsbury, loc. cit.
what he cannot do by force and violence in the short run. Reconciliation and ruin are nearly related."

Additionally, early Quaker proclamation tract writers utilized "Old Testament prophets to illustrate the sins of Israel" and thereby "bewail the state of England" in order to change public policy towards religious toleration. Such is the case with Dewsbury who employs quotations from the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel in condemning the luxurious lifestyle of the religious and political leaders of England. Accordingly, Dewsbury accuses these leaders of hypocrisy in their preference to "feed with the fat, and make a prey for the people as the false prophets did" while simultaneously shunning these ministers of "the true religion."

Similarly, Paine draws from the Old Testament prophet Gideon to legitimate his claim that monarchy and hereditary succession are against the will of the Almighty. Paine points out that Gideon, after having successfully "marched against [the Midianites] with a small army [of Jews] was requested to become King of Israel." However, Gideon, "in the piety of his soul replied, 'I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you!'" Paine's subsequent "bewailment of the state of England" is a derivative of the fact that a human monarchy had long been established in the country with the result that "every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression, freedom hath been hunted and . . . England hath given her warning to deaart." Finally, both pamphlets contain visions of the near or distant future; an essential characteristic of all early Quaker proclamation tracts. Dewsbury informs his readers:

The mighty day of the Lord is coming, and has appeared in the North of England and is arising toward the South; and shall overspread this nation and all nations of the world."

"Common Sense" also offers a vision of America's near future:

The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps as numerous

96. Wright, op. cit., 128.
97. Dewsbury, loc. cit., 98.
99. Ibid., 101.
100. Wright, op. cit., 128.
as all Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom from the events of a few months. 102

Clearly, Paine's "Common Sense," like the proclamation tracts of the early Quakers, delivers the most compact and incisive statement of the Quaker world view. Still, the content of Paine's pamphlet is only partial evidence of a strong Quaker influence; the style in which the piece was written shows the strong impact of Quaker thought on Paine's writing.

Fourth, in regard to the literary style of "Common Sense" Paine himself opens the work with the remark that he "offers nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments and common sense," nothing could be more true. 103 American historians have often maintained that the work is unique in that Paine's "rhetoric was clear, simple and straightforward; his arguments rooted in the common experiences of a mass readership."

In this respect, Paine's style differed from those of contemporary pamphleteers who would frequently employ Latin, florid language, an ample amount of quotation from classical works and a host of artful literary devices in order to demonstrate their scholarship. Moreover, the use of such literary devices as satire, elusive irony and flat parody by American political writers reflect the "stylistic modes associated with the great age of English pamphleteering" which "for all of their high self-consciousness of literary expression . . . were not great documents." In this sense, Paine's "Common Sense" could not have been written by any English or American pamphleteer other than a Quaker.

The religiously-guarded education experienced by Paine, as previously mentioned, actively discouraged the learning of Latin or exposure to the Classics and as well disuaded the Quaker pupil from imaginative literary devices and florid language. This fact explains the noticeable absence of those literary mechanisms in Paine's "Common Sense." More significant, "plainness of literary style was a desideratum with the Quakers," as demonstrated by the Dewsbury tract. The phrasing and vocabulary of these first Friends was adopted "from the English of the middle-classes and from the Bible," a quality which is the hallmark of "Common Sense." In short,

103. Ibid., I, 84.
104. Eric Foner, op. cit., xvi.
"Common Sense," by virtue of its content and style, can only be regarded as the product of a "dyed-in-the-wool Quaker."

Conclusion

The ideology of any socio-political movement is the composite of innumerable and diverse theological, social, political and economic influences. The American Revolution is a good illustration of this fact. Hence, to maintain that Quaker thought provided the exclusive influence on the ideology of the Revolution would be historically irresponsible. However, the backgrounds from which the American forefathers came to espouse the Revolutionary ideology were as diverse as the numerous influences which combined to create that ideology. In this respect, Thomas Paine's contribution to the '76 ideology was motivated by his strong Quaker background and convictions.

Being a product of his age, Paine eventually adopted the rationalism of the Enlightenment period. However, his later espousal of Jeffersonian deism was conditioned by the similarity of that philosophy to Quaker thought: both placed a fundamental significance on the individual's right to private judgment in religious matters, a de-emphasis on the significance of the Scriptures in shaping religious conviction, opposition to the mediation of clergy between God and the individual and an emphasis on humanitarianism. Nevertheless, contemporary historians insist that Paine's Quakerism played a minimal, if any, role in his Revolutionary involvement, pointing to his belief in defensive warfare. However, to single out pacifism as the sole test of Quaker conviction is to denigrate the very basis of Quaker thought itself, the Inner Light, which guides the individual in his search for religious and moral truth. Paine then, like his associates of the "Free Quaker milieu," was following the leading of his Inner Light in his conviction as to the rightness of the Revolutionary cause.

Finally, whatever his politico-religious preference was in later years, Paine's first socio-political writings reflect a uniquely Quaker configuration characterized by the triad of pacifism, equality and simplicity. Together with his ability to articulate simply the ideas behind the Revolution, the content of Paine's works are silent testimonies to the Quaker legacy of our nation.