

The Religious and Political Philosophy of Tom Paine

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“Soon after I published the pamphlet COMMON SENSE, in America, I saw the exceeding probability that a revolution in the system of government would be followed by a revolution in the system of religion. The adulterous connection of church and state, wherever it had taken place, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, had so effectually prohibited, by pains and penalties, every discussion upon established creeds, and upon first principles of religion, that until the system of government should be changed, those subjects could not be brought fairly and openly before the world; but that whenever this should be done, a revolution in the system of religion would follow.”
(Age of Reason, pg. 51) ®

(For those who prefer poetry over philosophy, the following poem expresses the essence of Paine’s religious views.)

“The world’s the book where the eternal Sense
Wrote his own thoughts; the living temple where,
Painting his very self, with figures fair
He filled the whole immense circumference.
Here then should each man read, and gazing find
Both how to live and govern, and beware
Of godlessness; and seeing God all-where,
Be bold to grasp the universal mind.
But we tied down to books and temples dead,
Copied with countless errors from life, –
These nobler than that school sublime we call.
O may our senseless souls at length be led
To truth by pain, grief, anguish, trouble, strife,
Turn we to read the one original.” ®

Tommaso Campanella

Deism

1. “The true deist has but one Deity; and his religion consists in contemplating the power, wisdom, and benignity of the Deity in his works, and in endeavoring to imitate him in every thing moral, scientific, and mechanical.” (Age of Reason, pg. 84) ®
2. “The Creation speaks a universal language, independent of human speech or human language, multiplied and various as they be. It is an ever-existing original, which every man can read. It cannot be forged; it cannot be counterfeited; it cannot be lost; it cannot be altered; it cannot be suppressed. It does not depend upon the will of man whether it shall be published or not; it publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other. It preaches to all nations and to all worlds; and this Word of God reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God.” (Age of Reason, pg. 69) ®
3. “Deism then teaches us, without the possibility of being deceived, all that is necessary or proper to be known. The creation is the Bible of the deist. He there reads, in the hand-writing of the Creator himself, the certainty of his existence, and the immutability of his power; and all other Bibles and Testaments are to him forgeries.” (Age of Reason, pg. 185)
4. “The only religion that has not been invented, and that has in it every evidence of divine originality, is pure and simple deism. It must have been the first and will probably be the last that man believes. But pure and simple deism does not answer the purpose of despotic governments. They cannot lay hold of religion as an engine but by mixing it with human inventions, and making their own authority a part; neither does it answer the avarice of priests, but by incorporating themselves and their functions with it, and becoming, like the government, a party in the system. It is this which forms the otherwise mysterious connection of Church and State; the Church humane, and the State tyrannic.” (Age of Reason, pg. 186)
5. “Any system of religion that shocks the mind of a child cannot be a true system.” (Age of Reason, pg. 83) ®

God

1. "The only idea man can affix to the name of God, is that of a *first cause*, the cause of all things. And, incomprehensibly difficult as it is for a man to conceive what a first cause is, he arrives at the belief of it, from the tenfold greater difficulty of disbelieving it. It is difficult beyond description to conceive that space can have no end; but it is more difficult to conceive an end. It is difficult beyond the power of man to conceive an eternal duration of what we call time; but it is more impossible to conceive a time when there shall be no time." (Age of Reason, pg. 70) ®
2. "In like manner of reasoning, everything we behold carries in itself evidence that it did not make itself. Every man is an evidence to himself, that he did not make himself. . . ; neither could any tree, plant, or animal make itself; and it is the conviction arising from this evidence, that carries us on, as it were, by necessity, to the belief of a first cause eternally existing, of a nature totally different to any material existence we know of, and by the power of which all things exist; and this first cause, man calls God." (Age of Reason, pg. 70) ®
3. "God is the power of first cause, nature is the law, and matter is the subject acted upon." ("A Discourse of the Society of Theophilanthropists", 1797, Paris, France.)
4. "When at first thought we think of a Creator, our ideas appear to us undefined and confused; but if we reason philosophically, those ideas can be easily arranged and simplified. 'It is a Being whose power is equal to his will.' Observe the nature of the will of man. It is of an infinite quality. We cannot conceive the possibility of limits to the will. Observe, on the other hand, how exceedingly limited is his power of acting compared with the nature of his will. Suppose the power equal to the will, and man would be a God. He would will himself eternal, and be so. He could will a creation, and could make it. In this progressive reasoning, we see in the nature of the will of man half of that which we conceive in thinking of God; add the other half, and we have the whole idea of a being who could make the universe, and sustain it by perpetual motion;

because he could create that motion.” (“A Discourse at the Society of Theophilanthropists”, 1797, Paris, France)

5. “Do we want to contemplate His power? We see it in the immensity of the Creation. Do we want to contemplate His wisdom? We see it in the unchangeable order by which the incomprehensible WHOLE is governed. Do we want to contemplate His 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. In fine, do we want to know what GOD is? Search not written or printed books, but the Scriptures called the creation.” (Age of Reason, pgs. 69 - 70)
6. “Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? No; not only because the power and wisdom He has manifested in the structure of the creation that I behold is to me incomprehensible, but because even this manifestation, great as it is, is probably but a small display of that immensity of power and wisdom, by which millions of other worlds, to me invisible by their distance, were created and continue to exist.” (Age of Reason, pg. 72)
7. “But it is necessary to the happiness of man that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe.... It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief, if I may so express it, that mental lying has produced in society.” (Age of Reason, pg. 50) ®

Commentary:

- Clearly, Paine is no atheist. He is deeply convinced of the reality of Deity. Deity is not just an explanatory principle, not just a rational necessity to account for the world. It is that but it is more. Deity is a vibrant presence and is everywhere evident.
- Yet, atheism does have its point. It is rational to a degree because it rejects an anthropomorphic conception of God. To the conventional atheist, the personal God of organized religion

is a fanciful imputation, the ‘magnified silhouette’ of man as it were.

- Paine put his own twist on the true meaning of atheism, however, by claiming that belief in an anthropomorphic God of love and rage was, in reality, another species of atheism – and a more dangerous one. The most damaging form of atheism is not the rejection of God so much as it is the disfiguring of Deity through the limited imagination and the flawed intellect. For this reason, Paine held that conventional atheism that rejects God altogether is only half rational. It denies a personal God but is itself occluded from recognizing the existence of an impersonal Deity in all its majesty.
- If atheism is only half rational because it rejects a personal God, then, in a similar manner, to regard Deity as simply a transcendental First Cause is also only half right. A close examination of Paine’s writings makes it clear that Deity is not simply a remote Transcendent nor an impersonal First Cause. It is in fact deeply meaningful to contemplate Deity and Nature again and again because Deity is also immanent; it is the surcharge of all our profoundest insights and noblest activities. Deity is a vibrant, intelligent presence. It is neither locatable in some particular cosmic space nor is it frozen in some cosmic moment of *Fiat Lux*. It is a self-radiant and continuously creative center of existence. Its continual contemplation and study through the works of Nature is an eternal epiphany to the devoted individual.
- Deity is analogous to the Sun. The light of the sun is the luminous testimony of its existence and its perpetual fecundity is the evidence of its immediate potency. Yet, it is also true that the Sun’s overwhelming radiance is what keeps us from directly seeing its fullness or its real nature.
- Thus, Deity, like the Sun, is both distant and immediately present, both remote and near at hand. Like the golden orb that graces the plenum, Deity is the impartial source of all life and intelligence. It radiates, nourishes and destroys. It enlightens and dispels shadows through the power of rational understanding. Its presence brings hope and its absence despair. Deity is, according to St. Martin, the verb of Nature, the source of rhythm and motion.

- Deity, according to Paine, does not interfere in human affairs but invites us to emulate it by shedding the light of reason on all human challenges and thus reshaping the world according to its highest envisioned possibilities.
- The secular humanists who celebrate Paine's stress on equality and the rights of man, but blithely ignore his conviction that Deity is a directive, omnipresent force, are only half Paineites. Secular humanists usually turn to the materialism of science as an able ally to discovering the laws that should regulate human life and society. They are clearly unconditional on human rights but tepid at best about social obligations. What is more, their philosophy, although man-centered is often materialistic and flawed.

Man

1. "... (T)he choicest gift of God to man (is) the *gift of reason*; and having endeavored to force upon himself the belief of a system (Christianity) against which reason revolts, he ungratefully calls it *human reason*, as if man could give reason to himself." (Age of Reason, pg. 68) ®
2. "It is only by the exercise of reason that man can discover God. Take away that reason, and he would be incapable of understanding anything...." (Age of Reason, pg 70) ®
3. "... (T)here are two distinct classes of what are called Thoughts; those that we produce in ourselves by reflection and the act of thinking, and those that bolt into the mind of their own accord. I have always made it a rule to treat those voluntary visitors with civility, taking care to examine, as well as I was able, if they were worth entertaining; and it is from them that I have acquired almost all the knowledge that I have." (Age of Reason, pg. 83) ®

4. “Every person of learning is finally his own teacher, the reason of which is that principles, being a distinct quality to circumstances, cannot be impressed upon the memory; their place of mental residence is the understanding and they are never so lasting as when they begin by conception.” (Age of Reason, pg. 83)
5. “...(T)he consciousness of existence is the only conceivable idea we have of another life, and the continuance of that consciousness is immortality. The consciousness of existence, or the knowing that we exist, is not necessarily confined to the same form, nor to the same matter, even in this life.... We have not in all cases the same form, nor in any case, the same matter that composed our bodies twenty or thirty years ago; and yet we are conscious of being the same persons.” (Age of Reason, pg. 177) ®
6. “Who can say by what exceedingly fine action of fine matter it is that a thought is produced in what we call the mind? And yet that thought when produced ... is capable of becoming immortal, and is the only production of man that has that capacity.” (Age of Reason, pg. 177)
7. “If then the thing produced has in itself a capacity of being immortal, it is more than a token that the power that produced it, which is the selfsame thing as consciousness of existence, can be immortal also; and that as independently of the matter it was first connected with, as the thought is of the printing or writing it first appeared in.” (Age of Reason, pg. 178)
8. “That the consciousness of existence is not dependent on the same form or the same matter is demonstrated to our senses in the works of the creation, as far as our senses are capable of receiving that demonstration. A very numerous part of the animal creation preaches to us, far better than Paul, the belief of a life hereafter.” (Age of Reason, pg. 178)
9. “The slow and creeping caterpillar-worm of today passes in a few days to a torpid figure and a state resembling death; and in the next change comes forth in all the miniature magnificence of life, a splendid butterfly.... No resemblance of the former creature

remains; everything is changed; all his powers are new, and life is to him another thing. We cannot conceive that the consciousness of existence is not the same in this state of the animal as before; why then must I believe that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue to me the consciousness of existence hereafter?" (Age of Reason, pg. 178) ®

10. "As for morality, the knowledge of it exists in every man's conscience." (Age of Reason, pg. 185) ®

11. "I consider myself in the hands of my Creator, and that he will dispose of me after this life consistently with His justice and goodness. I leave all these matters to Him, as my Creator and friend, and I hold it to be presumption in man to make an article of faith as to what the Creator will do with us hereafter." (R, I)

Commentary:

- Paine contended that immortality is a rational belief. In The Age of Reason, Paine argues that immortality is not proved by an appeal to resurrection of the body. If the body can die once, then its resurrection is not any assurance that it will not die again. Immortality, says Paine, must refer to a continuous "consciousness of existence" without necessarily confining that consciousness to sameness of either form or of matter. Our form may change but our consciousness of existence continues. Furthermore, the matter we occupy now is not the same matter of twenty years ago. Nonetheless, we are the same individual or person. When we look at Nature, continues Paine, we can see most clearly the principle of immortality in miniature. Nature preaches the continuity of existence through a gradual change of state. Take for example the caterpillar and its transformation from its torpid form through a state that resembles death to that of a colorful butterfly. Its awareness is continuous even though its powers and form have gone through a transformation.
- The choicest gift of Deity to man is Reason. It is not human in origin because man cannot give reason to himself. Reason is

both a telescope and a microscope. It reveals the wisdom and power of God in both directions – whether turned toward the heavens or toward the earth. Intelligible principles of thought and of nature reflect the eternity of God’s wisdom. As the great 20th Century mathematician Ramanujan said: “An equation for me has no meaning unless it expresses a thought of God.”

- To Paine, man possesses an innate moral sense or ‘conscience’. It is a sort of a moral compass or what the Muslims call *fitrah*. However, while man does possess a conscience that can infuse reason with high purpose, man is susceptible to vice – though not originally sinful. In a word, man is imperfect. For there to be a perfect man, contends Paine, God would have to replicate himself. Thus, man is imperfect and is naturally subject to passions which he is not always able to overcome. However, society is a civilizing force which fosters virtue. In the end, man’s triumph over his vices is his badge of honor and his contributions to the happiness of society makes him a true emulator of Deity.

Religion

1. “My own mind is my own church.” (Age of Reason, pg. 50) ®
2. “Religion, considered as a duty, is incumbent upon every living soul alike, and, therefore, must be on a level to the understanding and comprehension of all...He (man) learns the theory of religion by reflection. It arises out of the action of his own mind upon the things which he sees, or upon what he may happen to hear or to read, and the practice joins itself thereto.” (Age of Reason, pg. 92)
3. “All religions are in their nature kind and benign, and united with principles of morality. They could not have made proselytes at first by professing anything that was vicious, cruel, persecuting, or immoral. Like everything else they had their beginning; and they proceeded by persuasion, exhortation, and example. How is it then that they lose their native mildness, and become morose and

intolerant? By engendering the Church with the State, a sort of mule-animal, capable only of destroying, and not of breeding up, is produced, called *The Church established by Law.*” (Rights of Man, pg. 167, Hook)) ®

4. “It is certain that, in one point, all nations of the earth and all religions agree. All believe in God. The things in which they disagree are the redundancies annexed to that belief, and therefore, if ever an universal religion should prevail, it will not be believing any thing new, but in getting rid of redundancies, and believing as man believed at first. Adam, if ever there was such a man, was created a Deist, but in the mean time, let every man follow, as he has a right to do, the religion and worship he prefers.” (Age of Reason, pg. 98) ®
5. “With respect to what are called denominations of religion, if every one is left to judge of his own religion, there is no such thing as a religion that is wrong; but if they are to judge of each other’s religion, there is no such thing as a religion that is right; and therefore all the world is right, or all the world is wrong. But with respect to religion itself, without regard to names, and as directing itself from the universal family of mankind to the Divine object of all adoration, *it is man bringing to his Maker the fruits of his heart*; and though those fruits may differ from each other like the fruits of the earth, the grateful tribute of every one is accepted.” (Rights of Man, pg 167, Hook) ®
6. “If we suppose a large family of children, who, on any particular day...made it a custom to present to their parents some token of their affection and gratitude, each of them would make a different offering and most probably in a different manner.... The parent would be more gratified by such a variety, than if the whole of them had acted on a concerted plan, and each had made exactly the same offering. This would have the cold appearance of contrivance, or the harsh one of controul. But of all unwelcome things, nothing could more afflict the parent than to know, that the whole of them had afterwards gotten together by the ears, boys and girls, fighting, scratching, reviling, and abusing each other about which was the best or the worst present.” (Rights of Man, pg. 251, Appleby)

7. “It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief . . . that mental lying has produced in society. When a man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind, as to subscribe his professional belief to things he does not believe, he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime. He takes up the trade of a priest for the sake of gain, and, in order to qualify himself for that trade, he begins with a perjury. Can we conceive anything more destructive to morality than this?” (Age of Reason, pgs. 50 - 51)

8. “As to the Christian system of faith, it appears to me a species of Atheism – a sort of religious denial of God. It professes to believe in a man rather than in God. It is a compound made up chiefly of Manism with but little Deism, and is as near to Atheism as twilight is to darkness. It introduces between man and his Maker an opaque body, which it calls a Redeemer, as the moon introduces her opaque self between the earth and the sun, and it produces by this means a religious, or an irreligious, eclipse of light. It has put the whole orbit of reason into shade.” (Age of Reason, pgs. 72 - 73)

Commentary:

- The religious element in man may be a socially constructive force since it encourages the emulation of Nature’s God and therefore the doing of one’s duty by each and all.
- The greatest fault of organized religion is it encourages both mindlessness (the abandonment of reason) and hypocrisy. The latter is termed ‘mental lying’ by Paine and is the root cause of what we term religious infidelity. There is no worse mental sin than pretending to believe what you do not really believe – especially about the sacred.

Theology and Science

1. “As to the theology that is now studied in its place, it is the study of human opinions and of human fancies concerning God. It is not the study of God Himself in the works that He has made, but in the works or writings that man has made” (Age of Reason, pg. 73) ®
2. “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.” (Age of Reason, pg. 73) ®
3. “We can have no idea of his (God’s) wisdom, but by knowing the order and manner in which it acts. The principles of science lead to this knowledge; 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.” (Age of Reason, pgs. 187 - 188) ®
4. “Every science has for its basis a system of principles as fixed and unalterable as those by which the universe is regulated and governed. Man cannot make principles, he can only discover them.” (Age of Reason, pgs. 73 - 74) ®
5. “All the properties of a triangle exist independently of the figure, and existed before any triangle was drawn or thought of by man. Man had no more to do in the formation of those properties or principles, than he had to do in making the laws by which the heavenly bodies move; and therefore the one must have the same divine origin as the other.” (Age of Reason, pgs. 74 – 75)
6. “It is from the study of the true theology that all our knowledge of science is derived; and it is from that knowledge that all the arts have originated.” (Age of Reason, pg. 76)
7. “I have said in the course of this discourse, that the study of natural philosophy is a divine study, because it is the study of the works of God in the creation. If we consider theology upon this ground,

what an extensive field of improvement in things both divine and human opens itself before us! All the principles of science are of divine origin. It was not man that invented the principles on which astronomy, and every branch of mathematics, are founded and studied. It was not man that gave properties to the circle and the triangle. Those principles are eternal and immutable. We see in them the unchangeable nature of the Divinity. We see in them immortality, an immortality existing after the material figures that express those properties are dissolved in dust.” (“A Discourse at the Society of Theophilanthropists”, 1797, Paris, France).

8. “The evil that has resulted from the error of the schools, in teaching natural philosophy as an accomplishment only, has been that of generating in the pupils a species of Atheism. Instead of looking through the works of creation to the Creator himself, they stop short, and employ the knowledge they acquire to create doubts of his existence. They labour with studied ingenuity to ascribe every thing they behold to innate properties of matter, and jump over all the rest by saying, that matter is eternal.” (“A Discourse at the Society of Theophilanthropists”, 1797, Paris, France).
9. “...(H)e (man) would then conceive, far beyond what any church theology can teach him, the power, the wisdom, the vastness, the munificence of the Creator. He would then see that all the knowledge mans has of science, and that all the mechanical arts by which he renders his situation comfortable here, are derived from this source; his mind, exalted by this scene, and convinced by the fact, would increase in gratitude as it increased in knowledge: his religion or his worship would become united with his improvement as a man; any employment he followed that had connection with the principles of the creation – as everything of agriculture, of science, and of the mechanical arts, has – would teach him more of God, and of the gratitude he owes to him, than any theological Christian sermon he now hears.” (Age of Reason, pg. 188) ®

Commentary:

- To Paine, only Nature contains the true, unbiased theology of the cosmos. The book of Nature is the eternal, uninterpolated cipher of God. Nature speaks a universal language that can be deciphered by the exercise of impersonal reason. For this reason, all science is the science of the sacred. There can be no real science without reverence. Scientific search is, in reality, a form of devotion to God. The scientific act is the mental act of contemplation. It is the reverential activity of studying Nature as the sacred scripture of God. In so doing the mind and spirit are exalted and society eventually improved by benevolent use of the knowledge garnered.
- The rational study of Nature is, in another sense, the search for eternal principles. Principles are eternal because they persist even though their forms and expressions change. All eternal principles originate in the “mind” of God. Thus, all true principles of thought are divine in origin. To discover these principles is to experience true epiphany and to be in a position to emulate Deity by using this knowledge to create a better civilization.
- These eternal principles pertain not only to the physical universe but to the moral and social universe as well. The principles of harmony, growth and continuity through change illuminate all fields of human endeavor. This is why Paine has issues with the academic or intellectual trivialization of science. The divorce of science (or natural philosophy) from the common good is really another form of atheism. (Thoreau claimed that the death knell of biology was the Latinization of flora and fauna.)
- The physical and social scientists of today would be heavily criticized by Paine. He was not a materialist nor did he simply hold to human rights independently of social obligations. Free will and knowledge were to be used for the sake of the common good and to minimize the forces of evil and violence.
- To Paine, life is a labyrinth but, more than that, it is a laboratory for discovery and for testing rational principles compatible with the good of society. But beyond the notions of labyrinth and laboratory, life is a library where each man can

learn the grammar of God, study the lessons of Nature and act in harmony with the laws of justice and mercy. This is the true pathway to God and to our participation in the Divine.

Society and Government

1. “The more perfect civilization is, the less occasion has it for government, because the more does it regulate its own affairs, and govern itself....” (Rights of Man, pg. 189, Appleby) ®
2. “Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher.” (Common Sense, pg. 17, Appleby) ®
3. “As Nature created him (man) for social life, she fitted him for the station she intended. In all cases she made his natural wants greater than his individual powers. No one man is capable, without the aid of society, of supplying his own wants; and those wants, acting upon every individual, impel the whole of them into society, as naturally as gravitation acts to a center.” (Rights of Man, pg. 187, Appleby)
4. “In order to gain a clear and just idea of the design and end of government, let us suppose a small number of persons settled in some sequestered part of the earth, unconnected with the rest, they will then represent the first peopling of any country, or of the world. In this state of natural liberty, society will be their first thought.... the reciprocal blessings of which, would supercede, and render the obligations of law and government unnecessary while they remained perfectly just to each other; but as nothing but heaven is impregnable to vice, it will unavoidably happen, that in proportion as they surmount the first difficulties of emigration which bound them together in a common cause, they will begin to relax in their duty and attachment to each other; and this

remissness will point out the necessity of establishing some form of government to supply the defect of moral virtue.” (Common Sense, pgs. 17 – 18, Appleby)

5. “Here then is the origin and rise of government; namely, a mode rendered necessary by the inability of moral virtue to govern the world; here too is the design and end of government, viz. Freedom and security.” (Common Sense, pg. 19, Appleby)
6. “For were the impulses of conscience clear, uniform and irresistibly obeyed, man would need no other law-giver; but that not being the case, he finds it necessary to surrender up a part of his property to furnish means for the protection of the rest; and this he is induced to do by the same prudence which in every other case advises him, out of two evils to choose the least. Wherefore, security being the true design and end of government, it unanswerably follows that whatever form thereof appears most likely to ensure it to us, with the least expense and greatest benefit, is preferable to all others.” (Common Sense, pg. 17, Appleby)
7. “I saw, or at least I thought I saw, a vast scene opening itself to the world in the affairs of America, and it appeared to me that unless the Americans changed the plan they were pursuing with respect to the government of England, and declared themselves independent, they would not only involve themselves in a multiplicity of new difficulties, but shut out the prospect that was then offering itself to mankind through their means.” (Age of Reason, pg. 82)
8. “I draw my idea of the form of 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....” (Common Sense, pg. 19, Appleby)
9. “By ingrafting representation upon democracy, we arrive at a system of government capable of embracing and confederating all the various interests and every extent of territory and population; and that also with advantages as much superior to hereditary government, as the republic of letters is to hereditary literature....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. It is the easiest of all forms of government to be understood and the most eligible to practice; and excludes at once the ignorance and insecurity of the hereditary mode, and the inconvenience of the simple democracy.” (Rights of Man, pg. 203, Appleby) ®

10. “Government is nothing more than a national association; and the object of this association is the good of all, as well individually as collectively. Every man wishes to pursue his occupation, and to enjoy the fruits of his labours and the produce of his property in peace and safety, and with the least possible expence. When these things are accomplished, all the objects for which government ought to be established are answered.” (Rights of Man, pg. 220, Appleby)
11. “A constitution is not the act of a government, but of a people constituting a government; and government without a constitution, is power without a right.” (Rights of Man, pg. 207, Appleby)
12. “As to religion, I hold it to be the indispensable duty of all governments, to protect all conscientious professors thereof, and I know of not other business which government hath to do therewith.” (Common Sense, pg 53, Appleby)

Commentary:

- The ‘social’ nurtures cooperative virtues and encourages the growth of the rational within the womb of human affections. Government by legitimately established law is a compact of the people with themselves to regulate vice and to let social and moral qualities flourish. ®
- Paine wanted to disentangle religion and politics in an institutionally sense. Government should be silent on religious matters while each member or government should enact the high moral principles concordant with his religious beliefs.
- Paine also wished to disentangle the pure religious impulse from organized and doctrinal religion. If each man’s mind is his own church, then no religious authority exists independent of our own reason. It is perfectly acceptable and natural for people

of similar beliefs to congregate and commune. But, religion should never cater to separatist human tendencies. It should be for mutual enlightenment and encouragement in meeting our obligations to each other with intelligence and compassion.

- Paine believed that men and women should free thought from corrupt politics and from corrupt religious organizations too. They should turn to Nature and its laws where they would eventually free thought from its slavery to power and self-interest. They would enter into the empyrean of the Divine and become coworkers with the universe. ®
- In a sense, to free the mind and heart from false institutions would not only make the science of Nature a sacred enterprise, but restore a naturalness to society and contribute to social harmony – the primary source of human uplift.
- Reverence for Deity, Man and Nature made society truly benevolent and was the harbinger of a universal civilization of the heart. In this sense, Paine valiantly fought for universal human rights not so much for the personal freedom to do as we wished, but to give us the latitude to cooperate for the common good. Ultimately, individual rights are golden opportunities to meet our responsibilities to others and to cooperate with others in the elusive pursuit of the common good – an activity that transcends the local to include the national, and ultimately, the global. ®

Summation:

“For my own part, I am fully satisfied that what I am now doing, with an endeavour to conciliate mankind, to render their condition happy, to unite nations that have hitherto been enemies, and to extirpate the horrid practice of war, and break the chains of slavery and oppression is acceptable in His sight, and being the best service that I can perform, I do it cheerfully.” (Rights of Man, pg. 251, Appleby) ®

Note:

The Theophilanthropists: A society founded by Paine and others in 1797. It was one of the first ethical societies of the world. It came from the Greek and meant, love of God and Man. The society met in a circle or a ring which symbolized an unbroken or unending devotion to God. The spirit of humanity was the basis for a moral life on earth. Theophilanthropy was rooted in the spiritual philosophy of the Illuminati that Bonneville brought from Germany. God was responsible for creating the universe but not responsible for man's actions. Atheists are mistaken. They are short sighted because they ascribe everything they perceive to the innate properties of matter and ignore the rest by saying that matter is eternal. God creates everything, including the sun, stars, planets, etc. All the principles of science are of a divine origin. Those principles are eternal and immutable. They are immortal because they continue to exist after the matter that expresses them has dissolved. Man, being in the position to rationally apprehend these eternal principles, is himself immortal and his soul does not die when the body turns to dust. Man accounts to God for his belief and not to other men.

The society studied Greek thinkers and poets as well as Confucius and other Chinese philosophers. The idea of the society was to encourage people to live a life of spiritual values and to come into harmony with God, Nature and Man.

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