The American Deists
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There is scarcely a figure in American letters more vilified, idolized, and ultimately tragic than Thomas Paine (1737-1809). As long as he contented himself with polemical defenses of American independence and the right to political self-determination, he was the darling of the young Republic. But the moment he stepped over the line of orthodox respectability in religious matters, the same people who earlier had applauded him as a noble patriot excoriated him as a "lily-livered sinical rogue," "a drunken atheist," a "detested reptile." The book that prompted these and other attacks was, of course, *The Age of Reason* (1794-95), probably the best-known treatise in the history of American deism. It is ironic, given the hostile reaction to the book's appearance, that Paine intended it as a response to the dogmatic atheism of the French Revolution. Paine, like his fellow deists on both sides of the Atlantic, was no atheist. But in the eyes of his Christian contemporaries, apostasy from scriptural faith was tantamount to godlessness.

Born in Norfolk, England, Paine was plagued with personal and professional embarrassment for the first half of his life. He tried being a corset maker, a merchant, and a customs official but failed miserably at each. One of the reasons for his lack of success was no doubt his affinity for the bottle, although it is doubtful that he was ever quite the hopeless drunkard his enemies later made him out to be. But another reason was his restlessness, partly temperamental, partly the result of his informal but at one time wide reading, which served to incapacitate him for steady and rather humdrum employment.

When he was almost forty, Paine left England and immigrated to the American colonies. There his luck swiftly and dramatically changed. His *Common Sense* (1776), the first public call for American independence, won him instant fame. His *Crisis* papers, written throughout the war, as well as *The Rights of Man* (1791-92), a defense of the French Revolution, cemented his reputation as America's leading political polemicist. Nor was his fame confined to the new Republic's shores. On the basis of his *Rights of Man*, Paine was made an honorary citizen of France and elected in 1792 to its National Convention. But his appeals for moderation during the high point of the Terror, combined with his pleas for clemency for Louis XVI, soon rankled the militant leaders of the convention, and Paine eventually found himself incarcerated in
the Luxembourg prison. If we take seriously his own account of what happened, he barely escaped the usual fate of “enemies” of the Republic.

While in France, Paine wrote parts I and II of *The Age of Reason* and was one of the founders of the Society of Theophilanthropy, a Parisian deistical fraternity. He returned to the United States in 1802, to be greeted by an almost unimaginable campaign of defamation by opponents of his deistic beliefs. The last seven years of his life were spent in barely tolerable poverty and increasing bitterness. At his death in 1809, he was in the unenviable position of having lived long enough to see the American deist movement, which his *Age of Reason* had done so much to spark, in its last convulsions. Most of the influential deists—such as Elihu Palmer, Paine’s close friend—had been spared that final indignity.

Paine’s deistic writings qualitatively fall somewhere between the cumbersome and at times incomprehensible ruminations of Ethan Allen and the often brilliant reflections of Elihu Palmer. He was no intellectual, although he fancied himself so. Nor was his reading especially deep, which he often freely admitted. Instead, he was an amazingly effective pamphleteer, able to capture the public imagination with a finely tuned and memorable phrase. In retrospect, his role in the history of American deism is best seen as that of ideologue. He inflamed emotions and sparked debate with his incendiary locutions, but he failed to provide enough raw material in the way of solid argumentation for the fire to catch hold. That task was performed, as we will see in the next chapter, by Paine’s young colleague Elihu Palmer.

The first selections from Paine are taken from *The Age of Reason* (Part I, 1794). In them, Paine divides his energy between an attack on revealed religion in general and Christianity in particular, and a defense of his deistic religion of nature.

Revelation, Paine correctly argues, is the foundation on which the three major Western religious traditions are based. This revelation, or the direct communication of God to humans, is recorded in sacred scripture, and unswerving belief in its literal truth is mandated. But according to Paine, such a mandate is unwarranted. Recorded revelation—even allowing that it actually occurred—is nothing more than hearsay, and often second- or thirdhand at that. No rational person can or ought to be expected to accept on authority what is essentially rumor, in either the secular or theological realms. Consequently, the revelatory origins of Christian dogma are evidentially suspect. After all, “a thing which everybody is required to believe, requires that the proof and evidence of it should be equal to all, and universal.” But revelatory communications are by definition personal and private.

Similarly, Christianity’s endorsement of miracles is a weakness rather than a strength. Miracles, asserts Paine, are such egregious violations of perceived regularity in nature that belief in them degrades the Almighty into “the char-
acter of a show-man, playing tricks to amuse and make the people stare and wonder." Moreover, acceptance of them is based on anecdotes that are centuries removed from the present day—hardly a firm evidential basis. Given, then, that stories of miracles violate everything known about the uniformity of creation, and that there is no direct or consensual experience of them, it is more rational to disbelieve than to believe in their truth. In a rather Humean-sounding passage, Paine rhetorically asks: "Is it more probable that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie?" The answer, for Paine, is obvious.

In typical deistic style, Paine also rejects Christianity because of what he perceives as its immorality. Paine is not at his best with this line of reasoning, however; his analysis is clearly less thoughtful than, for instance, Elihu Palmer's. Paine supports his point largely by reminding his readers of the historical atrocities committed in the name of Christianity. Palmer, on the other hand, bases his indictment on a reflective examination of Christian dogma's normative implications. Nor does Paine, again unlike Palmer, attempt to spell out systematically a theory of morality superior to Christianity's. He simply stipulates, somewhat mysteriously, that "the knowledge of [morality] exists in every man's conscience" and that this knowledge includes "doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy."

Paine's charge that the Christian system is immoral does not extend, however, to the person of Jesus. Jesus, in Paine's estimation, advocated a morality of a "most benevolent kind." He founded no system but "called men to the practice of moral virtues, and the belief of one God." He was, in short, a good deist. But his simple religion of virtue and nature was later corrupted by the irrational metaphysics of his followers—especially, in Paine's opinion, St. Paul, "that manufacturer of quibbles."

In place of Christian theology, Paine advocates what he calls "true" theology—that is, natural philosophy, "the study of the works of God." The deity does reveal himself, but not through the nonsensical and immoral pages of Scripture. Instead, "the word of God is the creation we behold." This is the true revelation, which not only discloses God's existence but also gives rise to the physical and moral sciences.

Paine argues that an examination of the book of nature shows that creation is lawlike in its operations. This uniformity points to the existence of scientific principles that are immutable and universal and that serve as the necessary basis of all human knowledge. But the existence of such principles in turn points to the presence of a First Cause, which established them and shares their characteristics. Thus "true" theology reveals the existence of a rational deity, of an "Almighty [who] is the great mechanic of the creation, the first philosopher, and original teacher of all science." This is clearly not much of an argument. There is no obvious justification for inferring the existence of a divine First
Cause merely on the basis of perceived regularity in nature. But Paine, ever the
polemicist, was not interested in encumbering the gripping eloquence of *The
Age of Reason* with philosophical subtleties.

Fortunately, Paine elsewhere attempted to be more circumspect in his re-
flections on this point. The selection entitled “The Existence of God” is such
an example. The essay was originally delivered at the first public meeting of the
Parisian Society of Theophilanthropy on 16 January 1797. In it, Paine reiter-
ates *The Age of Reason’s* conviction that the proper source of knowledge about
God is nature rather than Scripture, but he also fleshes out his earlier truncated
argument for the existence of the deity as First Cause. If we examine creation,
he claims, we discover that matter has certain predictable properties. Many of
these properties can be explained in terms of the nature of matter itself. But
one attribute associated with matter points beyond it—motion. “The natural
state of matter . . . is a state of rest. Motion, or change of place, is the effect of
an external cause acting upon matter.” Moreover, motion (or Newton’s gravi-
tation) can be either directly experienced or deduced as an attribute of all
matter, both on earth and throughout the solar system. It holds reality to-
gether and allows for the lawlike interactions of its constituents. Since motion
is not a property of material bodies themselves, and since it permeates all of
reality and thus maintains its integrity, it must have originated with and is kept
in existence by an external cause: “and that cause man calls GOD.”

The final selection from Paine, “My Private Thoughts on a Future State,”
was written, appropriately enough, toward the end of his life. For Paine, the
Christian insistence that humans can be divided into righteous and wicked (or
sheep and goats) is too harsh. The race may be numerically divisible, but not
morally so. A more rational—and just—alternative is to suppose that some
individuals are clearly virtuous, some clearly wicked, while others—possibly
the majority—are “neither good nor bad.” If future existence after physical death
is a possibility, Paine speculates, it follows that the first group will be rewarded,
the second punished, and the third, “too insignificant for notice, will be
dropped entirely.” Such a conjecture, Paine concludes, is more “consistent
with my idea of God’s justice” than the Christian dichotomy of eternal pun-
ishment or reward. From first to last, then, Paine remained loyal to the credo
expressed in the opening pages of *The Age of Reason*: “My own mind is my
own church.”

*The Age of Reason*

*The Author’s Profession of Faith*

. . . I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this
life.

I believe in the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist
in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy.

... I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

I do not mean by this declaration to condemn those who believe otherwise; they have the same right to their belief as I have to mine. 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. 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?

Of Missions and Revelations

Every national church or religion has established itself by pretending some special mission from God, communicated to certain individuals. The Jews have their Moses; the Christians their Jesus Christ, their apostles and saints; and the Turks their Mahomet; as if the way to God was not open to every man alike.

Each of those churches shows certain books, which they call revelation, or the Word of God. The Jews say that their Word of God was given by God to Moses face to face; the Christians say, that their Word of God came by divine inspiration; and the Turks say, that their Word of God (the Koran) was brought by an angel from heaven. Each of those churches accuses the other of unbelief; and, for my own part, I disbelieve them all.

As it is necessary to affix right ideas to words, I will, before I proceed further into the subject, offer some observations on the word revelation. Revelation when applied to religion, means something communicated immediately from God to man.

No one will deny or dispute the power of the Almighty to make such a communication if he pleases. But admitting, for the sake of a case, that something has been revealed to a certain person, and not revealed to any other person, it is revelation to that person only. When he tells it to a second person, a second to a third, a third to a fourth, and so on, it ceases to be a revelation
to all those persons. It is revelation to the first person only, and *hearsay* to every other, and, consequently, they are not obliged to believe it.

It is a contradiction in terms and ideas to call anything a revelation that comes to us at second hand, either verbally or in writing. Revelation is necessarily limited to the first communication. After this, it is only an account of something which that person says was a revelation made to him; and though he may find himself obliged to believe it, it cannot be incumbent on me to believe it in the same manner, for it was not a revelation made to *me*, and I have only his word for it that it was made to *him*.

When Moses told the children of Israel that he received the two tables of the commandments from the hand of God, they were not obliged to believe him, because they had no other authority for it than his telling them so; and I have no other authority for it than some historian telling me so, the commandments carrying no internal evidence of divinity with them. They contain some good moral precepts such as any man qualified to be a lawgiver or a legislator could produce himself, without having recourse to supernatural intervention. (It is, however, necessary to except the declaration which says that God *visits the sins of the fathers upon the children*. This is contrary to every principle of moral justice.)

When I am told that the Koran was written in Heaven, and brought to Mahomet by an angel, the account comes to near the same kind of *hearsay* evidence and second hand authority as the former. I did not see the angel myself, and therefore I have a right not to believe it.

When also I am told that a woman, called the Virgin Mary, said, or gave out, that she was with child without any cohabitation with a man, and that her betrothed husband, Joseph, said that an angel told him so, I have a right to believe them or not: such a circumstance required a much stronger evidence than their bare word for it: but we have not even this; for neither Joseph nor Mary wrote any such matter themselves. It is only reported by others that they *said so*. It is *hearsay upon hearsay*, and I do not choose to rest my belief upon such evidence.

It is, however, not difficult to account for the credit that was given to the story of Jesus Christ being the Son of God. He was born when the heathen mythology had still some fashion and repute in the world, and that mythology had prepared the people for the belief of such a story. Almost all the extraordinary men that lived under the heathen mythology were reputed to be the sons of some of their Gods. It was not a new thing at that time to believe a man to have been celestially begotten; the intercourse of gods with women was then a matter of familiar opinion. Their Jupiter, according to their accounts, had cohabited with hundreds; the story had therefore nothing in it either new, wonderful, or obscene; it was conformable to the opinions that then prevailed.
among the people called Gentiles, or mythologists, and it was those people only that believed it. The Jews, who had kept strictly to the belief of one God, and no more, and who had always rejected the heathen mythology, never credited the story.

... That many good men have believed this strange fable, and lived very good lives under that belief (for credulity is not a crime) is what I have no doubt of. In the first place, they were educated to believe it, and they would have believed anything else in the same manner. There are also many who have been so enthusiastically enraptured by what they conceived to be the infinite love of God to man, in making a sacrifice of himself, that the vehemence of the idea has forbidden and deterred them from examining into the absurdity and profaneness of the story. The more unnatural anything is, the more is it capable of becoming the object of dismal admiration.

... But if objects for gratitude and admiration are our desire, do they not present themselves every hour to our eyes? Do we not see a fair creation prepared to receive us the instant we are born—a world furnished to our hands, that cost us nothing? Is it we that light up the sun; that pour down the rain; and fill the earth with abundance? Whether we sleep or wake, the vast machinery of the universe still goes on. Are these things, and the blessings they indicate in future, nothing to us? Can our gross feelings be excited by no other subjects than tragedy and suicide? or is the gloomy pride of man become so intolerable, that nothing can flatter it but a sacrifice of the Creator?

Of Jesus Christ

Nothing that is here said can apply, even with the most distant disrespect, to the real character of Jesus Christ. He was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached and practised was of the most benevolent kind; and though similar systems of morality had been preached by Confucius, and by some of the Greek philosophers, many years before, by the Quakers since, and by many good men in all ages, it has not been exceeded by any.

Jesus Christ wrote no account of himself, of his birth, parentage, or anything else. Not a line of what is called the New Testament is of his writing. The history of him is altogether the work of other people; and as to the account given of his resurrection and ascension, it was the necessary counterpart to the story of his birth. His historians, having brought him into the world in a supernatural manner, were obliged to take him out again in the same manner, or the first part of the story must have fallen to the ground.

The wretched contrivance with which this latter part is told, exceeds everything that went before it. The first part, that of the miraculous conception, was not a thing that admitted of publicity; and therefore the tellers of this part of the story had this advantage, that though they might not be credited, they
could not be detected. They could not be expected to prove it, because it was not one of those things that admitted of proof, and it was impossible that the person of whom it was told could prove it himself.

But the resurrection of a dead person from the grave, and his ascension through the air, is a thing very different, as to the evidence it admits of, to the invisible conception of a child in the womb. The resurrection and ascension, supposing them to have taken place, admitted of public and ocular demonstration, like that of the ascension of a balloon, or the sun at noon day, to all Jerusalem at least. A thing which everybody is required to believe, requires that the proof and evidence of it should be equal to all, and universal; and as the public visibility of this last related act was the only evidence that could give sanction to the former part, the whole of it falls to the ground, because that evidence never was given. Instead of this, a small number of persons, not more than eight or nine, are introduced as proxies for the whole world, to say they saw it, and all the rest of the world are called upon to believe it. But it appears that Thomas did not believe the resurrection; and, as they say, would not believe without having ocular and manual demonstration himself. So neither will I; and the reason is equally as good for me, and for every other person, as for Thomas.

Of Scripture

... I now go on to the book called the New Testament. The new Testament! that is, the new Will, as if there could be two wills of the Creator.

Had it been the object or the intention of Jesus Christ to establish a new religion, he would undoubtedly have written the system himself, or procured it to be written in his life time. But there is no publication extant authenticated with his name. All the books called the New Testament were written after his death. He was a Jew by birth and by profession; and he was the son of God in like manner that every other person is; for the Creator is the Father of All.

The first four books, called Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, do not give a history of the life of Jesus Christ, but only detached anecdotes of him. It appears from these books, that the whole time of his being a preacher was not more than eighteen months; and it was only during this short time that those men became acquainted with him. They make mention of him at the age of twelve years, sitting, they say, among the Jewish doctors, asking and answering them questions. As this was several years before their acquaintance with him began, it is most probable they had this anecdote from his parents. From this time there is no account of him for about sixteen years. Where he lived, or how he employed himself during this interval, is not known. Most probably he was working at his father’s trade, which was that of a carpenter. It does not appear that he had any school education, and the probability is, that he could not
write, for his parents were extremely poor, as appears from their not being able to pay for a bed when he was born.

It is somewhat curious that the three persons whose names are the most universally recorded were of very obscure parentage. Moses was a foundling; Jesus Christ was born in a stable; and Mahomet was a mule driver. The first and the last of these men were founders of different systems of religion; but Jesus Christ founded no new system. He called men to the practice of moral virtues; and the belief of one God. The great trait in his character is philanthropy.

The manner in which he was apprehended shews that he was not much known at that time; and it shews also that the meetings he then held with his followers were in secret; and that he had given over or suspended preaching publicly. Judas could no otherways betray him than by giving information where he was, and pointing him out to the officers that went to arrest him; and the reason for employing and paying Judas to do this could arise only from the causes already mentioned, that of his not being much known, and living concealed.

The idea of his concealment, not only agrees very ill with his reputed divinity, but associates with it something of pusillanimity; and his being betrayed, or in other words, his being apprehended, on the information of one of his followers, shews that he did not intend to be apprehended, and consequently that he did not intend to be crucified.

The Christian mythologists tell us that Christ died for the sins of the world, and that he came on purpose to die. Would it not then have been the same if he had died of a fever or of the small pox, of old age, or of anything else?

The declaratory sentence which, they say, was passed upon Adam, in case he ate of the apple, was not, that thou shalt surely be crucified, but, thou shalt surely die. The sentence was death, and not the manner of dying. Crucifixion, therefore, or any other particular manner of dying, made no part of the sentence that Adam was to suffer, and consequently, even upon their own tactic, it could make no part of the sentence that Christ was to suffer in the room of Adam. A fever would have done as well as a cross, if there was any occasion for either.

This sentence of death, which, they tell us, was thus passed upon Adam, must either have meant dying naturally, that is, ceasing to live, or have meant what these mythologists call damnation; and consequently, the act of dying on the part of Jesus Christ, must, according to their system, apply as a prevention to one or other of these two things happening to Adam and to us.

That it does not prevent our dying is evident, because we all die; and if their accounts of longevity be true, men die faster since the crucifixion than before: and with respect to the second explanation, (including with it the natural death of Jesus Christ as a substitute for the eternal death or damnation of all mankind), it is impertinently representing the Creator as coming off, or revok-
ing the sentence, by a pun or a quibble upon the word death. That manufac-
turer of quibbles, St. Paul, if he wrote the books that bear his name, has helped
this quibble on by making another quibble upon the word Adam. He makes
there to be two Adams; the one who sins in fact, and suffers by proxy; the other
who sins by proxy, and suffers in fact. A religion thus interlarded with quibble,
subterfuge, and pun, has a tendency to instruct its professors in the practice of
these arts. They acquire the habit without being aware of the cause.

If Jesus Christ was the being which those mythologists tell us he was, and
that he came into this world to suffer, which is a word they sometimes use
instead of to die, the only real suffering he could have endured would have been
to live. His existence here was a state of exilement or transportation from
heaven, and the way back to his original country was to die. —In fine, every-
thing in this strange system is the reverse of what it pretends to be. It is the
reverse of truth, and I become so tired of examining into its inconsistencies and
absurdities, that I hasten to the conclusion of it, in order to proceed to some-
thing better.

How much, or what parts of the books called the New Testament, were
written by the persons whose names they bear, is what we can know nothing
of, neither are we certain in what language they were originally written. The
matters they now contain may be classed under two heads: anecdote, and
epistolary correspondence.

The four books already mentioned, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are
altogether anecdotal. They relate events after they had taken place. They tell
what Jesus Christ did and said, and what others did and said to him; and in
several instances they relate the same event differently. Revelation is necessarily
out of the question with respect to those books; not only because of the dis-
agreement of the writers, but because revelation cannot be applied to the
relating of facts by the persons who saw them done, not to the relating or
recording of any discourse or conversation by those who heard it. The book
called the Acts of the Apostles (an anonymous work) belongs also to the an-
ecdotal part.

All the other parts of the New Testament, except the book of enigmas,
called the Revelations, are a collection of letters under the name of epistles; and
the forgery of letters has been such a common practice in the world, that the
probability is at least equal, whether they are genuine or forged. . . .

Of Redemption

. . . The church has set up a system of religion very contradictory to the
character of the person whose name it bears. It has set up a religion of pomp
and revenue in pretended imitation of a person whose life was humility and
poverty.

The invention of a purgatory, and of the releasing of souls therefrom, by
prayers, bought of the church with money; the selling of pardons, dispensations, and indulgences, are revenue laws, without bearing that name or carrying that appearance. But the case nevertheless is, that those things derive their origin from the proxym of the crucifixion, and the theory deduced therefrom, which was, that one person could stand in the place of another, and could perform meritorious services for him. The probability, therefore, is that the whole theory or doctrine of what is called the redemption (which is said to have been accomplished by the act of one person in the room of another) was originally fabricated on purpose to bring forward and build all those secondary and pecuniary redemptions upon; and that the passages in the books upon which the idea or theory of redemption is built, have been manufactured and fabricated for that purpose. Why are we to give this church credit, when she tells us that those books are genuine in every part, any more than we give her credit for everything else she has told us; or for the miracles she says she has performed? That she could fabricate writings is certain, because she could write; and the composition of the writings in question, is of that kind that anybody might do it; and that she did fabricate them is not more inconsistent with probability, than that she should tell us, as she has done, that she could and did work miracles.

Since, then, no external evidence can, at this long distance of time, be produced to prove whether the church fabricated the doctrine called redemption or not, (for such evidence, whether for or against, would be subject to the same suspicion of being fabricated), the case can only be referred to the internal evidence which the thing carries of itself; and this affords a very strong presumption of its being a fabrication. For the internal evidence is, that the theory or doctrine of redemption has for its basis an idea of pecuniary justice, and not that of moral justice.

If I owe a person money, and cannot pay him, and he threatens to put me in prison, another person can take the debt upon himself, and pay it for me. But if I have committed a crime, every circumstance of the case is changed. Moral justice cannot take the innocent for the guilty even if the innocent would offer itself. To suppose justice to do this, is to destroy the principle of its existence, which is the thing itself. It is then no longer justice. It is indiscriminate revenge.

This single reflection will shew that the doctrine of redemption is founded on a mere pecuniary idea corresponding to that of a debt which another person might pay; and as this pecuniary idea corresponds again with the system of second redemptions, obtained through the means of money given to the church for pardons, the probability is that the same persons fabricated both the one and the other of those theories; and that, in truth, there is no such thing as redemption; that it is fabulous; and that man stands in the same relative condition with his Maker he ever did stand, since man existed; and that it is his greatest consolation to think so.
Let him believe this, and he will live more consistently and morally, than by any other system. It is by his being taught to contemplate himself as an out-law, as an out-cast, as a beggar, as a mumper, as one thrown as it were on a dunghill, at an immense distance from his Creator, and who must make his approaches by creeping, and cringing to intermediate beings, that he conceives either a contemptuous disregard for everything under the name of religion, or becomes indifferent, or turns what he calls devout. In the latter case, he consumes his life in grief, or the affectation of it. His prayers are reproaches. His humility is ingratitude. He calls himself a worm, and the fertile earth a dunghill; and all the blessings of life by the thankless name of vanities. He despises the choicest gift of God to man, the gift of reason; and having endeavoured to force upon himself the belief of a system against which reason revolts, he ungratefully calls it human reason, as if man could give reason to himself.

Of Miracles

Mankind have conceived to themselves certain laws, by which what they call nature is supposed to act; and that a miracle is something contrary to the operation and effect of those laws. But unless we know the whole extent of those laws, and of what are commonly called the powers of nature, we are not able to judge whether any thing that may appear to us wonderful or miraculous, be within, or be beyond, or be contrary to, her natural power of acting.

Of all the modes of evidence that ever were invented to obtain belief to any system or opinion to which the name of religion has been given, that of miracle, however successful the imposition may have been, is the most inconsistent. For, in the first place, whenever recourse is had to show, for the purpose of procuring that belief (for a miracle, under any idea of the word, is a show) it implies a lameness or weakness in the doctrine that is preached. And, in the second place, it is degrading the Almighty into the character of a show-man, playing tricks to amuse and make the people stare and wonder. It is also the most equivocal sort of evidence that can be set up; for the belief is not to depend upon the thing called a miracle, but upon the credit of the reporter, who says that he saw it; and, therefore, the thing, were it true, would have no better chance of being believed than if it were a lie.

Suppose I were to say, that when I sat down to write this book, a hand presented itself in the air, took up the pen and wrote every word that is herein written; would any body believe me? Certainly they would not. Would they believe me a whit the more if the thing had been a fact? Certainly they would not. Since then a real miracle, were it to happen, would be subject to the same fate as the falsehood, the inconsistency becomes the greater of supposing the Almighty would make use of means that would not answer the purpose for which they were intended, even if they were real.
If we are to suppose a miracle to be something so entirely out of the course of what is called nature, that she must go out of that course to accomplish it, and we see an account given of such a miracle by the person who said he saw it, it raises a question in the mind very easily decided, which is, —Is it more probable that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie? We have never seen, in our time, nature go out of her course; but we have good reason to believe that millions of lies have been told in the same time; it is, therefore, at least millions to one, that the reporter of a miracle tells a lie... 

In every point of view in which those things called miracles can be placed and considered, the reality of them is improbable, and their existence unnecessary. They would not, as before observed, answer any useful purpose, even if they were true; for it is more difficult to obtain belief to a miracle, than to a principle evidently moral, without any miracle. Moral principle speaks universally for itself. Miracle could be but a thing of the moment, and seen but by a few; after this it requires a transfer of faith from God to man to believe a miracle upon man's report. Instead, therefore, of admitting the recitals of miracles as evidence of any system of religion being true, they ought to be considered as symptoms of its being fabulous. It is necessary to the full and upright character of truth that it rejects the crutch; and it is consistent with the character of fable to seek the aid that truth rejects. Thus much for Mystery and Miracle...

Of the Immorality of Christianity

The most detestable wickedness, the most horrid cruelties, and the greatest miseries, that have afflicted the human race, have had their origin in this thing called revelation, or revealed religion. It has been the most dishonourable belief against the character of the divinity, the most destructive to morality, and the peace and happiness of man, that ever was propagated since man began to exist. It is better, far better, that we admitted, if it were possible, a thousand devils to roam at large, and to preach publicly the doctrine of devils, if there were any such, than that we permitted one such imposter and monster as Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and the Bible prophets, to come with the pretended word of God in his mouth, and have credit among us.

Whence arose all the horrid assassinations of whole nations of men, women, and infants, with which the Bible is filled; and the bloody persecutions, and tortures unto death and religious wars, that since that time have laid Europe in blood and ashes; whence arose they, but from this impious thing called revealed religion, and this monstrous belief that God has spoken to man? The lies of the Bible have been the cause of the one, and the lies of the Testament of the other.

Some Christians pretend that Christianity was not established by the sword; but of what period of time do they speak? It was impossible that twelve men
could begin with the sword: they had not the power; but no sooner were the professors of Christianity sufficiently powerful to employ the sword than they did so, and the stake and faggot too; and Mahomet could not do it sooner. By the same spirit that Peter cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant (if the story be true) he would cut off his head, and the head of his master, had he been able. Besides this, Christianity grounds itself originally upon the Hebrew Bible, and the Bible was established altogether by the sword, and that in the worst use of it—not to terrify, but to extirpate. The Jews made no converts; they butchered all. The Bible is the sire of the Testament, and both are called the word of God. The Christians read both books; the ministers preach from both books; and this thing called Christianity is made up of both. It is then false to say that Christianity was not established by the sword.

The only sect that has not persecuted are the Quakers; and the only reason that can be given for it is, that they are rather Deists than Christians. They do not believe much about Jesus Christ, and they call the scriptures a dead letter. Had they called them by a worse name, they had been nearer the truth.

It is incumbent on every man who reverences the character of the Creator, and who wishes to lessen the catalogue of artificial miseries, and remove the cause that has sown persecutions thick among mankind, to expel all ideas of a revealed religion as a dangerous heresy, and an impious fraud. What is it that we have learned from this pretended thing called revealed religion? Nothing that is useful to man, and every thing that is dishonourable to his Maker. What is it the Bible teaches us?—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it the Testament teaches us?—to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman engaged to be married; and the belief of this debauchery is called faith. As to the fragments of morality that are irregularly and thinly scattered in those books, they make no part of this pretended thing, revealed religion. They are the natural dictates of conscience, and the bonds by which society is held together, and without which it cannot exist; and are nearly the same in all religions, and in all societies. The Testament teaches nothing new upon this subject, and where it attempts to exceed, it becomes mean and ridiculous. The doctrine of not retaliating injuries is much better expressed in Proverbs, which is a collection as well from the Gentiles as the Jews, than it is in the Testament. It is there said, (XXV. 21) “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.” but when it is said, as in the Testament, “If a man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also,” it is assassinating the dignity of forbearance, and sinking man into a spaniel.

Loving of enemies is another dogma of feigned morality, and has besides no meaning. It is incumbent on man, as a moralist, that he does not revenge an injury; and it is equally as good in a political sense, for there is no end to retaliation; each retaliates on the other, and calls it justice: but to love in proportion to the injury, if it could be done, would be to offer a premium for a
crime. Besides, the word *enemies* is too vague and general to be used in a moral maxim, which ought always to be clear and defined, like a proverb. If a man be the enemy of another from mistake and prejudice, as in the case of religious opinions, and sometimes in politics, that man is different to an enemy at heart with a criminal intention; and it is incumbent upon us, and it contributes also to our own tranquillity, that we put the best construction upon a thing that it will bear. But even this erroneous motive in him makes no motive for love on the other part; and to say that we can love voluntarily, and without a motive, is morally and physically impossible.

Morality is injured by prescribing to it duties that, in the first place, are impossible to be performed, and if they could be would be productive of evil; or, as before said, be premiums for crime. The maxim of *doing as we would be done unto* does not include this strange doctrine of loving enemies; for no man expects to be loved himself for his crime or for his enmity.

Those who preach this doctrine of loving their enemies, are in general the greatest persecutors, and they act consistently by so doing; for the doctrine is hypocritical, and it is natural that hypocrisy should act the reverse of what it preaches. For my own part, I disown the doctrine, and consider it as a feigned or fabulous morality; yet the man does not exist that can say I have persecuted him, or any man, or any set of men, either in the American Revolution, or in the French Revolution; or that I have, in any case, returned evil for evil. But it is not incumbent on man to reward a bad action with a good one, or to return good for evil; and wherever it is done, it is a voluntary act, and not a duty. It is also absurd to suppose that such doctrine can make any part of a revealed religion. We imitate the moral character of the Creator by forbearing with each other, for he forbears with all; but this doctrine would imply that he loved man, not in proportion as he was good, but as he was bad.

If we consider the nature of our condition here, we must see there is no occasion for such a thing as *revealed religion*. What is it we want to know? Does not the creation, the universe we behold, preach to us the existence of an Almighty power, that governs and regulates the whole? And is not the evidence that this creation holds out to our senses infinitely stronger than any thing we can read in a book, that any imposter might make and call the word of God?

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As to the Christian system of faith, it appears to me as 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 man-ism 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.

The effect of this obscurity has been that of turning everything upside down, and representing it in reverse; and among the revolutions it has thus magically produced, it has made a revolution in Theology.

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.

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; and it is not among the least of the mischiefs that the Christian system has done to the world, that it has abandoned the original and beautiful system of theology, like a beautiful innocent, to distress and reproach, to make room for the hag of superstition.

It is a fraud of the Christian system to call the sciences human inventions; it is only the application of them that is human. 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.

For example: Every person who looks at an almanack sees an account when an eclipse will take place, and he sees also that it never fails to take place according to the account there given. This shews that man is acquainted with the laws by which the heavenly bodies move. But it would be something worse than ignorance, were any church on earth to say that those laws are an human invention.

It would also be ignorance, or something worse, to say that the scientific principles, by the aid of which man is enabled to calculate and foreknow when an eclipse will take place, are an human invention. Man cannot invent any thing that is eternal and immutable; and the scientific principles he employs for this purpose must be, and are, of necessity, as eternal and immutable as the laws by which the heavenly bodies move, or they could not be used as they are to ascertain the time when, and the manner how, an eclipse will take place.

The scientific principles that man employs to obtain the foreknowledge of an eclipse, or of any thing else relating to the motion of the heavenly bodies, are contained chiefly in that part of science that is called trigonometry, or the properties of a triangle, which, when applied to the study of the heavenly bodies, is called astronomy; when applied to direct the course of a ship on the ocean, it is called navigation; when applied to the construction of figures drawn by a rule and compass, it is called geometry; when applied to the construction of plans of edifices, it is called architecture; when applied to the measurement
of any portion of the surface of the earth, it is called land-surveying. In fine, it
is the soul of science. It is an eternal truth: it contains the mathematical demon-
stration of which man speaks, and the extent of its uses are unknown.

It may be said, that man can make or draw a triangle, and therefore a
triangle is an human invention.

But the triangle, when drawn, is no other than the image of the principle: it
is a delineation to the eye, and from thence to the mind, of a principle that
would otherwise be imperceptible. The triangle does not make the principle,
any more than a candle taken into a room that was dark, makes the chairs and
tables that before were invisible. All the properties of a triangle exist inde-
pendently 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.

In the same manner as, it may be said, that man can make a triangle, so also,
may it be said, he can make the mechanical instrument called a lever. But the
principle by which the lever acts, is a thing distinct from the instrument, and
would exist if the instrument did not; it attaches itself to the instrument after
it is made; the instrument, therefore, can act no otherwise than it does act;
either can all the efforts of human invention make it act otherwise. That
which, in all such cases, man calls the effect, is no other than the principle itself
rendered perceptible to the senses.

Since, then, man cannot make principles, from whence did he gain a
knowledge of them, so as to be able to apply them, not only to things on earth,
but to ascertain the motion of bodies so immensely distant from him as all the
heavenly bodies are? From whence, I ask, could he gain that knowledge, but
from the study of the true theology?

It is the structure of the universe that has taught this knowledge to man.
That structure is an ever-existing exhibition of every principle upon which
every part of mathematical science is founded. The offspring of this science is
mechanics; for mechanics is no other than the principles of science applied
practically. The man who proportions the several parts of a mill uses the same
scientific principles as if had the power of constructing an universe, but as he
cannot give to matter that invisible agency by which all the component parts
of the immense machine of the universe have influence upon each other, and
act in motional unison together, without any apparent contact, and to which
man has given the name of attraction, gravitation, and repulsion, he supplies
the place of that agency by the humble imitation of teeth and cogs. All the
parts of man's microcosm must visibly touch. But could he gain a knowledge
of that agency, so as to be able to apply it in practice, we might then say that
another canonical book of the word of God had been discovered. . . .
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.

The Almighty lecturer, by displaying the principles of science in the structure of the universe, has invited man to study and to imitation. It is as if he had said to the inhabitants of this globe that we call ours, “I have made an earth for man to dwell upon, and I have rendered the starry heavens visible, to teach him science and the arts. He can now provide for his own comfort, and learn from my munificence to all, to be kind to each other.”

Of what use is it, unless it be to teach man something, that his eye is endowed with the power of beholding, to an incomprehensible distance, an immensity of worlds revolving in the ocean of space? Or of what use is it that this immensity of worlds is visible to man? What has man to do with the Pleiades, with Orion, with Sirius, with the star he calls the north star, with the moving orbs he has named Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury, if no uses are to follow from their being visible? A less power of vision would have been sufficient for man, if the immensity he now possesses were given only to waste itself, as it were, on an immense desert of space glittering with shows.

It is only by contemplating what he calls the starry heavens, as the book and school of science, that he discovers any use in their being visible to him, or any advantage resulting from his immensity of vision. But when he contemplates the subject in this light, he sees an additional motive for saying, that nothing was made in vain; for in vain would be this power of vision if it taught man nothing.

Of True Revelation; and of God

But some perhaps will say—Are we to have no word of God—no revelation? I answer yes. There is a Word of God; there is a revelation.

The word of God is the creation we behold: And it is in this word, which no human invention can counterfeit or alter, that God speaketh universally to man. . . .

It is always necessary that the means that are to accomplish any end be equal to the accomplishment of that end, or the end cannot be accomplished. It is in this that the difference between finite and infinite power and wisdom discovers itself. Man frequently fails in accomplishing his end, from a natural inability of the power to the purpose; and frequently from the want of wisdom to apply power properly. But it is impossible for infinite power and wisdom to fail as man faileth. The means it useth are always equal to the end: but human language, more especially as there is not an universal language, is incapable of being used as an universal means of unchangeable and uniform information; and therefore it is not the means that God useth in manifesting himself universally to man.

It is only in the creation that all our ideas and conceptions of a word of God
My Own Mind Is My Own Church

can unite. The Creation speaketh an universal language, independently 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.

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 the book called the scripture, which any human hand might make, but the scripture called the Creation.

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.

In like manner of reasoning, everything we behold carries in itself the internal evidence that it did not make itself. Every man is an evidence to himself, that he did not make himself; neither could his father make himself, nor his grandfather, nor any of his race; 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.

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; and in this case it would be just as consistent to read even the book called the Bible to a horse as to a man. How then is it that those people pretend to reject reason?

Almost the only parts in the book called the Bible, that convey to us any idea of God, are some chapters in Job, and the 19th Psalm; I recollect no other. Those parts are true deistical compositions; for they treat of the Deity through his works. They take the book of Creation as the word of God; they refer to no other book; and all the inferences they make are drawn from that volume.
I insert in this place the 19th Psalm, as paraphrased into English verse by Addison. I recollect not the prose, and where I write this I have not the opportunity of seeing it:

The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
Their great original proclaim.
The unwearied sun, from day to day,
Does his Creator's power display,
And publishes to every land
The work of an Almighty hand.
Soon as the evening shades prevail,
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the list'ning earth
Repeats the story of her birth;
Whilst all the stars that round her burn,
And all the planets, in their turn,
Confirm the tidings as they roll,
And spread the truth from pole to pole.
What though in solemn silence all
Move round this dark terrestrial ball;
What though no real voice, nor sound,
Amidst their radiant orbs be found,
In reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice,
Forever singing as they shine,
THE HAND THAT MADE US IS DIVINE.

What more does man want to know, than that the hand or power that made these things is divine, is omnipotent? Let him believe this, with the force it is impossible to repel if he permits his reason to act, and his rule of moral life will follow of course.

The allusions in Job have all of them the same tendency with this Psalm; that of deducing or proving a truth that would be otherwise unknown, from truths already known.

I recollect not enough of the passages in Job to insert them correctly; but there is one that occurs to me that is applicable to the subject I am speaking upon. "Canst thou by searching find out God; canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?"

I know not how the printers have pointed this passage, for I keep no Bible; but it contains two distinct questions that admit of distinct answers. First,
Canst thou by searching find out God? Yes. Because, in the first place, I know I did not make myself, and yet I have existence; and by searching into the nature of other things, I find that no other thing could make itself; and yet millions of other things exist; therefore it is, that I know, by positive conclusion resulting from this search, that there is a power superior to all those things, and that power is God.

Secondly, 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.

**Conclusion**

Here we are. The existence of an Almighty power is sufficiently demonstrated to us, though we cannot conceive, as it is impossible we should, the nature and manner of its existence. We cannot conceive how we came here ourselves, and yet we know for a fact that we are here. We must know also, that the power that called us into being, can if he please, and when he pleases, call us to account for the manner in which we have lived here; and therefore, without seeking any other motive for the belief, it is rational to believe that he will, for we know beforehand that he can. The probability or even possibility of the thing is all that we ought to know; for if we knew it as a fact, we should be the mere slaves of terror; our belief would have no merit, and our best actions no virtue.

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. The probability that we may be called to account hereafter, will, to reflecting minds, have the influence of belief; for it is not our belief or disbelief that can make or unmake the fact. As this is the state we are in, and which it is proper we should be in, as free agents, it is the fool only, and not the philosopher, nor even the prudent man, that will live as if there were no God.

But the belief of a God is so weakened by being mixed with the strange fable of the Christian creed, and with the wild adventures related in the Bible, and the obscurity and obscene nonsense of the Testament, that the mind of man is bewildered as in a fog. Viewing all these things in a confused mass, he confounds fact with fable; and as he cannot believe all, he feels a disposition to reject all. But the belief of a God is a belief distinct from all other things, and ought not to be confounded with any. The notion of a Trinity of Gods has
Thomas Paine

enfeebled the belief of one God. A multiplication of beliefs acts as a division of belief; and in proportion as anything is divided, it is weakened.

Religion, by such means, becomes a thing of form instead of fact; of notion instead of principle: morality is banished to make room for an imaginary thing called faith, and this faith has its origin in a supposed debauchery; a man is preached instead of a God; an execution is an object for gratitude; the preachers daub themselves with the blood, like a troop of assassins, and pretend to admire the brilliancy it gives them; they preach a humdrum sermon on the merits of the execution; then praise Jesus Christ for being executed, and condemn the Jews for doing it.

A man, by hearing all this nonsense lumped and preached together, confounds the God of the Creation with the imagined God of the Christians, and lives as if there were none.

Of all the systems of religion that ever were invented, there is none more derogatory to the Almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason, and more contradictory in itself, than this thing called Christianity. Too absurd for belief, too impossible to convince, and too inconsistent for practice, it renders the heart torpid, or produces only atheists and fanatics. As an engine of power, it serves the purpose of despotism; and as a means of wealth, the avarice of priests; but so far as respects the good of man in general, it leads to nothing here or hereafter.

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 that forms the otherwise mysterious connection of church and state; the church human, and the state tyrannic.

Were a man impressed as fully and strongly as he ought to be with the belief of a God, his moral life would be regulated by the force of belief; he would stand in awe of God, and of himself, and would not do the thing that could not be concealed from either. To give this belief the full opportunity of force, it is necessary that it acts alone. This is deism.

But when, according to the Christian Trinitarian scheme, one part of God is represented by a dying man, and another part, called the Holy Ghost, by a flying pigeon, it is impossible that belief can attach itself to such wild conceits.

It has been the scheme of the Christian church, and of all the other invented systems of religion, to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights. The systems of the one are as false as those of the other, and are calculated for mutual support. The study
of theology as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing; and admits of no conclusion. Not anything can be studied as a science without our being in possession of the principles upon which it is founded; and as this is not the case with Christian theology, it is therefore the study of nothing.

Instead then of studying theology, as is now done, out of the Bible and Testament, the meanings of which books are always controverted, and the authenticity of which is disproved, it is necessary that we refer to the Bible of the creation. The principles we discover there are eternal, and of divine origin: they are the foundation of all the science that exists in the world, and must be the foundation of theology.

We can know God only through his works. We cannot have a conception of any one attribute, but by following some principle that leads to it. We have only a confused idea of his power, if we have not the means of comprehending something of its immensity. We can have no idea of his 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.

Could a man be placed in a situation, and endowed with power of vision to behold at one view, and to contemplate deliberately, the structure of the universe, the movements of the several planets, the cause of their varying appearances, the unerring order in which they revolve, even to the remotest comet, their connection and dependence on each other, and to know the system of laws established by the Creator, that governs and regulates the whole; he 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 man has of science, and that all the mechanical arts by which he renders his situation comfortable here, are derived from that source: his mind, exalted by the 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. Great objects inspire great thoughts; great munificence excites great gratitude; but the grovelling tales and doctrines of the Bible and the Testament are fit only to excite contempt.

Though man cannot arrive, at least in this life, at the actual scene I have described, he can demonstrate it, because he has knowledge of the principles upon which the creation is constructed. We know that the greatest works can be represented in model, and that the universe can be represented by the same
means. The same principles by which we measure an inch or an acre of ground will measure to millions in extent. A circle of an inch diameter has the same geometrical properties as a circle that would circumscribe the universe. The same properties of a triangle that will demonstrate upon paper the course of a ship, will do it on the ocean; and, when applied to what are called the heavenly bodies, will ascertain to a minute the time of an eclipse, though those bodies are millions of miles distant from us. This knowledge is of divine origin; and it is from the Bible of the creation that man has learned it, and not from the stupid Bible of the church, that teaches man nothing.

All the knowledge man has of science and of machinery, by the aid of which his existence is rendered comfortable upon earth, and without which he would be scarcely distinguishable in appearance and condition from a common animal, comes from the great machine and structure of the universe. The constant and unwearied observations of our ancestors upon the movements and revolutions of the heavenly bodies, in what are supposed to have been the early ages of the world, have brought this knowledge upon earth. It is not Moses and the prophets, nor Jesus Christ, nor his apostles, that have done it. The Almighty is the great mechanic of the creation, the first philosopher, and original teacher of all science. Let us then learn to reverence our master, and not forget the labours of our ancestors.

The Existence of God

Religion has two principal enemies, fanaticism and infidelity, or that which is called atheism. The first requires to be combated by reason and morality, the other by natural philosophy.

The existence of a God is the first dogma of the Theophilanthropists. It is upon this subject that I solicit your attention; for though it has been often treated of, and that most sublimely, the subject is inexhaustible; and there will always remain something to be said that has not been before advanced. I go therefore to open the subject, and to crave your attention to the end.

The universe is the bible of a true Theophilanthropist. It is there that he reads of God. It is there that the proofs of His existence are to be sought and to be found. As to written or printed books, by whatever name they are called, they are the works of man's hands, and carry no evidence in themselves that god is the Author of any of them. It must be in something that man could not make that we must seek evidence for our belief, and that something is the universe, the true Bible—the inimitable work of god.

Contemplating the universe, the whole system of Creation, in this point of light, we shall discover, that all that which is called natural philosophy is properly a divine study. It is the study of God through His works. It is the best study, by which we can arrive at a knowledge of His existence, and the only one by which we can gain a glimpse of His perfection.
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 Scripture called the creation.

It has been the error of the schools to teach astronomy and all the other sciences and subjects of natural philosophy as accomplishments only; whereas they should be taught theologically, or with reference to the Being who is the Author of them: for all the principles of science are of divine origin. Man cannot make, or invent, or contrive principles; he can only discover them, and he ought to look through the discovery to the Author.

When we examine an extraordinary piece of machinery, an astonishing pile of architecture, a well executed statue, or a highly finished painting where life and action are imitated, and habit only prevents our mistaking a surface of light and shade for cubical solidity, our ideas are naturally led to think of the extensive genius and talents of the artist.

When we study the elements of geometry, we think of Euclid. When we speak of gravitation, we think of Newton. How then is it that when we study the works of God in the creation we stop short, and do not think of God? It is from the error of the schools in having taught those subjects as accomplishments only, and thereby separated the study of them from the Being who is the Author of them.

The schools have made the study of theology to consist in the study of opinions in written or printed books; whereas theology should be studied in the works or books of the Creation. The study of theology in books of opinions has often produced fanaticism, rancor and cruelty of temper; and from hence have proceeded the numerous persecutions, the fanatical quarrels, the religious burnings and massacres, that have desolated Europe.

But the study of theology in the works of the creation produces a direct contrary effect. The mind becomes at once enlightened and serene, a copy of the scene it beholds: information and adoration go hand in hand; and all the social faculties become enlarged.

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 labor with studied ingenuity to ascribe everything they behold to innate properties of matter, and jump over all the rest by saying that matter is eternal.
Let us examine this subject; it is worth examining; for if we examine it through all its cases, the result will be that the existence of a superior cause, or that which man calls God, will be discoverable by philosophical principles.

In the first place, admitting matter to have properties, as we see it has, the question still remains, how came matter by those properties? To this they will answer that matter possessed those properties eternally. This is not solution, but assertion; and to deny it is equally as impossible of proof as to assert it. It is then necessary to go further; and therefore I say—if there exist a circumstance that is not a property of matter, and without which the universe, or to speak in a limited degree, the solar system composed of planets and a sun, could not exist a moment, all the arguments of atheism, drawn from properties of matter, and applied to account for the universe, will be overthrown, and the existence of a superior cause, or that which man calls God, becomes discoverable, as is before said, by natural philosophy.

I go now to show that such a circumstance exists, and what it is.

The universe is composed of matter, and, as a system, is sustained by motion. Motion is not a property of matter, and without this motion, the solar system could not exist. Were motion a property of matter, that undiscovered and undiscoverable thing called perpetual motion would establish itself. It is because motion is not a property of matter, that perpetual motion is an impossibility in the hand of every being but that of the Creator of motion. When the pretenders to atheism can produce perpetual motion, and not till then, they may expect to be credited.

The natural state of matter, as to place, is a state of rest. Motion, or change of place, is the effect of an external cause acting upon matter. As to that faculty of matter that is called gravitation, it is the influence which two or more bodies have reciprocally on each other to unite and be at rest. Everything which has hitherto been discovered, with respect to the motion of the planets in the system, relates only to the laws by which motion acts, and not to the cause of motion. Gravitation, so far from being the cause of motion to the planets that compose the solar system, would be the destruction of the solar system were revolutionary motion to cease; for as the action of spinning upholds a top, the revolutionary motion upholds the planets in their orbits, and prevents them from gravitating and forming one mass with the sun. In one sense of the word, philosophy knows, and atheism says, that matter is in perpetual motion. But the motion here meant refers to the state of matter, and that only on the surface of the earth. It is either decomposition, which is continually destroying the form of bodies of matter, or recomposition, which renews that matter in the same or another form, as the decomposition of animal or vegetable substances enters into the composition of other bodies. But the motion that upholds the solar system is of an entirely different kind, and is not a property of
matter. It operates also to an entire different effect. It operates to perpetual preservation, and to prevent any change in the state of the system.

Giving then to matter all the properties which philosophy knows it has, or all that atheism ascribes to it, and can prove, and even supposing matter to be eternal, it will not account for the system of the universe, or of the solar system, because it will not account for motion, and it is motion that preserves it. When, therefore, we discover a circumstance of such immense importance that without it the universe could not exist, and for which neither matter, nor any nor all the properties can account, we are by necessity forced into the rational conformable belief of the existence of a cause superior to matter, and that cause man calls God.

As to that which is called nature, it is no other than the laws by which motion and action of every kind, with respect to unintelligible matter, are regulated. And when we speak of looking through nature up to nature’s God, we speak philosophically the same rational language as when we speak of looking through human laws up to the Power that ordained them.

God is the power of the first cause, nature is the law, and matter is the subject acted upon.

But infidelity, by ascribing every phenomenon to properties of matter, conceives a system for which it cannot account, and yet it pretends to demonstration. It reasons from what it sees on the surface of the earth, but it does not carry itself on the solar system existing by motion. It sees upon the surface a perpetual decomposition and recomposition of matter. It sees that an oak produces an acorn, an acorn an oak, a bird an egg, an egg a bird, and so on. In things of this kind it sees something which it calls a natural cause, but none of the causes it sees is the cause of that motion which preserves the solar system.

Let us contemplate this wonderful and stupendous system consisting of matter, and existing by motion. It is not matter in a state of rest, nor in a state of decomposition or recomposition. It is matter systematized in perpetual orbicular or circular motion. As a system that motion is the life of it: as animation is life to an animal body, deprive the system of motion and, as a system, it must expire. Who then breathed into the system the life of motion? What power impelled the planets to move, since motion is not a property of the matter of which they are composed? If we contemplate the immense velocity of this motion, our wonder becomes increased, and our adoration enlarges itself in the same proportion. To instance only one of the planets, that of the earth we inhabit, its distance from the sun, the center of the orbits of all the planets, is, according to observations of the transit of the planet Venus, about one hundred million miles; consequently, the diameter of the orbit, or circle in which the earth moves round the sun, is double that distance; and the measure of the circumference of the orbit, taken as three times its diameter, is six hundred
miles. The earth performs this voyage in three hundred and sixty-five
days and some hours, and consequently moves at the rate of more than one
million six hundred thousand miles every twenty-four hours.

Where will infidelity, where will atheism, find cause for this astonishing
velocity of motion, never ceasing, never varying, and which is the preservation
of the earth in its orbit? It is not by reasoning from an acorn to an oak, from
an egg to a bird, or from any change in the state of matter on the surface of
the earth, that this can be accounted for. Its cause is not to be found in matter,
nor in anything we call nature. The atheist who affects to reason, and the
fanatic who rejects reason, plunge themselves alike into inextricable difficulties.
The one perverts the sublime and enlightening study of natural philosophy
into a deformity of absurdities by not reasoning to the end. The other loses
himself in the obscurity of metaphysical theories, and dishonors the Creator by
treating the study of His works with contempt. The one is a half-rational of
whom there is some hope, the other a visionary to whom we must be chari-
table.

When at first thought we think of a Creator, our ideas appear to us unde-
defined 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
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.

We know nothing of the capacity of the will of animals, but we know a
great deal of the difference of their powers. For example, how numerous are
the degrees, and how immense is the difference of power, from a mite to a
man. Since then everything we see below us shows a progression of power,
where is the difficulty in supposing that there is, at the summit of all things, a
Being in whom an infinity of power unites with the infinity of the will? When
this simple idea presents itself to our mind, we have the idea of a perfect Being
that man calls God.

It is comfortable to live under the belief of the existence of an infinite
protecting power; and it is an addition to that comfort to know that such a
belief is not a mere conceit of the imagination, as many of the theories that are
called religious are; nor a belief founded only on tradition or received opinion;
but is a belief deducible by the action of reason upon the things that compose
the system of the universe; a belief arising out of visible facts. So demonstrable
is the truth of this belief that if no such belief had existed, the persons who now controvert it would have been the persons who would have produced and propagated it; because by beginning to reason they would have been led to reason progressively to the end, and thereby have discovered that matter and the properties it has will not account for the system of the universe, and that there must necessarily be a superior cause.

It was the excess to which imaginary systems of religion had been carried, and the intolerance, persecutions, burnings and massacres they occasioned, that first induced certain persons to propagate infidelity; thinking, that upon the whole it was better not to believe at all than to believe a multitude of things and complicated creeds that occasioned so much mischief in the world. But those days are past, persecution has ceased, and the antidote then set up against it has no longer even the shadow of apology. We profess, and we proclaim in peace, the pure, unmixed, comfortable and rational belief of a God as manifested to us in the universe. We do this without any apprehension of that belief being made a cause of persecution as other beliefs have been, or of suffering persecution ourselves. To God, and not to man, are all men to account for their belief.

It has been well observed, at the first institution of this Society, that the dogmas it professes to believe are from the commencement of the world; that they are not novelties, but are confessedly the basis of all systems of religion, however numerous and contradictory they may be. All men in the outset of the religion they profess are Theophilanthropists. It is impossible to form any system of religion without building upon those principles, and therefore they are not sectarian principles, unless we suppose a sect composed of all the world.

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.

The Society is at present in its infancy, and its means are small; but I wish to hold in view the subject I allude to, and instead of teaching the philosophical branches of learning as ornamental accomplishments only, as they have hitherto been taught, to teach them in a manner that shall combine theological knowledge with scientific instruction. To do this to the best advantage some instruments will be necessary, for the purpose of explanation, of which the Society is not yet possessed. But as the views of this Society extend to public
good as well as to that of the individual, and as its principles can have no
nenemies, means may be devised to procure them.

If we unite to the present instruction a series of lectures on the ground I
have mentioned, we shall, in the first place, render theology the most delightful
and entertaining of all studies. In the next place we shall give scientific instruc­
tion to those who could not otherwise obtain it. The mechanic of every pro­fession
will there be taught the mathematical principles necessary to render him
a proficient in his art; the cultivator will there see developed the principles of
vegetation; while, at the same time, they will be led to see the hand of God in
all these things.

My Private Thoughts on a Future State
I have said in the first part of The Age of Reason, that “I hope for happiness after
this life.” This hope is comfortable to me, and I presume not to go beyond the
comfortable idea of hope, with respect to a future state.

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.
I do not believe because a man and a woman make a child that it imposes on
the Creator the unavoidable obligation of keeping the being so made in eternal
existence hereafter. It is in His power to do so, or not to do so, and it is not
in our power to decide which He will do.

The book called the New Testament, which I hold to be fabulous and have
shown to be false, gives an account in Matthew XXV of what is there called the
last day, or the day of judgment.

The whole world, according to that account, is divided into two parts, the
righteous and the unrighteous, figuratively called the sheep and the goats.
They are then to receive their sentence. To the one, figuratively called the
sheep, it says, “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you
from the foundation of the world.” To the other, figuratively called the goats, it
says, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and
his angels.”

Now the case is, the world cannot be thus divided: the moral world, like the
physical world, is composed of numerous degrees of character, running imperceptibly
one into the other, in such a manner that no fixed point of division can
be found in either. That point is nowhere, or is everywhere.

The whole world might be divided into two parts numerically, but not as
to moral character; and therefore the metaphor of dividing them, as sheep and
goats can be divided, whose difference is marked by their external figure, is
absurd. All sheep are still sheep; all goats are still goats; it is their physical nature
to be so. But one part of the world are not all good alike, nor the other part all wicked alike. There are some exceedingly good; others exceedingly wicked.

There is another description of men who cannot be ranked with either the one or the other—they belong neither to the sheep nor the goats; and there is still another description of them who are so very insignificant, both in character and conduct, as not to be worth the trouble of damning or saving, or of raising from the dead.

My own opinion is, that those whose lives have been spent in doing good, and endeavoring to make their fellow-mortals happy, for this is the only way in which we can serve God, will be happy hereafter; and that the very wicked will meet with some punishment. But those who are neither good nor bad, or are too insignificant for notice, will be dropped entirely.

That is my opinion. It is consistent with my idea of God's justice, and with the reason that God has given me, and I gratefully know that He has given me a large share of that divine gift.