The American Deists

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Although nearly forgotten today, Elihu Palmer (1764–1806) is unquestionably the chief of American deists. Almost single-handedly, Palmer metamorphosed Enlightenment deism into a popular movement that rocked the Early Republic’s religious and moral sensibilities in the opening years of the nineteenth century. He imbued it with a strident militancy it hitherto had lacked by extending its standard criticisms of ecclesial hegemony to denunciations of political and social oppression, arguing that the “double despotism” of church and state were twin obstacles to the improvement of the race. He insisted that a rational investigation of the laws of nature disclosed the basis of ethical principles as well as religious ones and that both condemned the subjugation of women, the enslavement of peoples of color, and the coercion of conscience. Using the lecture circuit and the printed word, he spread his message with an eloquence and intellectual sophistication that forced even his most intractable opponents to take him seriously. He was, in short, not only the leading deist and social activist of his day but was one of the Early Republic’s finest thinkers. After him, neither popular religion nor theological discourse in the United States would be quite the same.

The son of a Connecticut farmer, Palmer was educated at Dartmouth College and ordained in the Presbyterian tradition. After losing at least two pulpits because of his increasingly liberal interpretations of Christian doctrine, he relocated to Philadelphia in 1791 and joined the newly founded Universal Society, an organization espousing a rather confused mixture of liberal Christianity and deism. Palmer’s association with the society was brief. After attempting under its auspices to deliver a discourse against the divinity of Jesus, he was run out of town by an outraged mob. He retreated with his wife and children to western Pennsylvania, where he read law with a brother and was admitted to the bar.

In the spring of 1793 Palmer forsook the wilderness and returned to Philadelphia to establish himself in law. Although there is no record, it is unlikely that the city’s inhabitants had forgotten or forgiven his earlier apostasy enough for him to have picked up much business as an attorney. To make matters worse, Palmer refused to retreat from his radical religious views. During a Fourth of July oration at Federal Point, he took the opportunity to repeatedly denounce “priestcraft” as an enemy to “reason and liberty,” which only rein-
forced orthodox Philadelphia’s dismissal of him as a godless and dangerous infidel.

But a worse fate than the calumny of his fellow citizens soon befell Palmer. One month after his Federal Point oration, the great yellow fever epidemic of 1793 swept through the city. Both Palmer and his wife fell ill. She died, while Palmer was left permanently and totally blind. Many Philadelphians sanctimoniously saw Palmer’s affliction as divine retribution. Benjamin Rush less piously suggested that Palmer lost his sight because he had refused to be bled during his illness. In any case, blindness spelled an end to his legal career, and Palmer knew it. Upon his recovery, he embarked on his final calling: He became a freelance deistical preacher.

In the thirteen years remaining to him, Palmer tirelessly stumped the eastern seaboard, spreading the deistic message. After spending some time in Georgia immediately after his recovery, he made his way north, where he helped found the Deistical Society of New York in late 1795 and drafted the organization’s statement of principles. New York City henceforth became his base of operations. From there, he helped organize deistical societies in other states, dictated scores of journal articles and pamphlets, and periodically traveled to Baltimore, Newburgh, Philadelphia, and other cities to deliver his increasingly popular lectures against the “double despotism” of religious bigotry and political oppression. He helped found and later assumed editorship of The Temple of Reason, the first major deistic newspaper in the Early Republic. When The Temple ceased publication in 1803, he replaced it with the Prospect, a weekly that ran for two years and was almost solely written by Palmer himself. At his death in 1806 (which occurred, characteristically, while he was on a lecture tour), Palmer was the best known—and hated—deist of his time.

Despite both his blindness and his crushing schedule, Palmer somehow found the time and energy to compose one of the Early Republic’s philosophical classics: Principles of Nature; or, A Development of the Moral Causes of Happiness and Misery among the Human Species (1801). The book is a distillation and refinement of the hundreds of speeches, tracts, and newspaper articles Palmer had produced in earlier years. Its primary purpose was to argue for a naturalistic ethics based on the notions of “reciprocal justice” and “universal benevolence,” but it was much more than just a treatise on ethics. It was also a textbook of militant deism, providing a complete critique of Christianity’s supernaturalistic assumptions as well as a thorough explanation of deism’s naturalistic ones. The book was an immediate success, notwithstanding its occasional stylistic clumsiness (partly attributable, no doubt, to the fact that it had been dictated), and ran through three editions in Palmer’s lifetime. Its chief merit was that it defended deism in an accessible yet rigorous manner. It avoided conceptual intricacies and technical jargon, which might baffle popular audiences, without eschewing logical argumentation and demonstration. It
was the only Early Republic treatise on deism that was more philosophical than polemical. It was also the first philosophical work of the new nation to enjoy such widespread popularity.

In the selections here from *Principles of Nature*, the standard by which Palmer both criticizes Christianity and advocates deism and naturalistic ethics is reason—"righteous and immortal reason," "the glory of our nature." For Palmer as for most Enlightenment thinkers, the definitive characteristic of the human species is its ability to dispassionately collect and appraise empirical evidence and then logically infer generalizations from it. If used correctly, this rational faculty is capable of exploring the natural realm, promoting social utility, enhancing individual felicity, and ensuring progress. If retarded through bigotry, superstition, or ignorance, it mutates to the point where it can be invoked as a justification for spiritual and political oppression. Palmer's entire career as a deist was devoted to encouraging his listeners to employ their reason freely and courageously and to distrust authority, whether theological or political. His *Principles* is just such a judicious exercise, as it demonstrates what he takes to be the absurdities of revealed religion, and then elucidates the normative and conceptual superiority of the religion of nature.

Palmer's case against Christianity attacks on two fronts. First, he dismisses it on logical grounds. The doctrine of eternal damnation is absurd, because it treats what by definition must be finite acts on the part of humans as if they were infinitely deserving of punishment. The doctrine of miracles violates the uniformity, consistency, and perfection of nature, thereby establishing religion "upon the ruin of the consistent harmony of the divine perfection; upon the ruin of all principle and all confidence." It is an "affront to the character" of the deity because it implies that God plays a catch-up game with creation, seeking to redress past errors or oversights through miraculous intervention. But such an assumption does violence to the divine attributes of wisdom, power, and goodness. Finally, Palmer rejects the doctrine of scriptural revelation as likewise inchoate. Following Paine's lead in *The Age of Reason*, Palmer argues that revelation can only be direct communication from God to a specific individual. As such, even though the revealed message or commandment may be binding to its immediate recipient, it can scarcely be so to others to whom the recipient relays it. At that point, it is mere hearsay and properly subject to the same doubts that any rational person has about all secondhand information.

Next, Palmer rejects Christianity because of what he sees as the immorality of its tenets. For Palmer, "all morality that is genuine, is drawn from the nature and condition of rational beings." Reason tells us, for example, that the virtuous person is one who acts consistently, who takes responsibility for his or her actions, and who refuses to punish innocents. But Christian dogma violates each of these premises. Scripture defends an ethical double standard, in which
God performs with impunity actions that would be condemned if performed by a human. The doctrine of original sin suggests that vices and virtues are transferable from one person to another, thereby eroding personal responsibility. Moreover, the doctrines of grace and rejuvenation imply that human virtue is insufficient for either individual felicity or morality, thus depriving humans of liberty as well as dignity. The atonement makes a virtue out of savagely punishing a blameless person—a futile attempt to eradicate evil with evil that violates common intuitions about distributive justice. In short, given the irrational basis of its moral prescriptions, Christianity twists the God of nature into an “arbitrary and malevolent tyrant,” unworthy of either veneration or respect. Although certain isolated moral maxims in Christianity are admittedly praiseworthy, Palmer denies they are uniquely Christian in origin since they were defended earlier by pagan philosophers. It is not enough for a religious system to contain a few noble principles. It must provide a “system of genuine morality,” based on reason, benevolence, and consistency. This Christianity utterly fails to do.

Palmer’s alternative to Christianity, as expressed here in the selections “The Religion of Nature” and “Principles of the Deistical Society of the State of New York,” is typically deistic. God is described as the First Cause, immutable and good, who sets in motion equally immutable laws of nature. But in his reflections on the basis of moral principle in Principles of Nature, Palmer breaks new ground, for no other deist in the American tradition so systematically applied the Enlightenment’s naturalistic orientation to ethical theory.

For Palmer, “moral principles,” or the foundations of ethics, must be based on “the physical constitution of human nature.” Evil and virtue are the products of human actions, not the mysterious interventions of a god or a devil. In fact, Palmer goes so far as to say that morality does not depend on the existence of the deity. Instead, it is “founded in the nature of man” and “rests upon the relations and the properties of human life.” In accepting this naturalistic premise as his starting point, Palmer obviously parts company with the traditional Christian ethical theory of divine command, which argues that an action is only virtuous or wicked insofar as it is commanded or forbidden by God.

But what are the relations and properties of human life from which ethical principles can be inferred? Sensation, answers Palmer, the physical capacity of experiencing pain and pleasure. It is obvious that the former is destructive of human well-being, while the latter is promotive of it. Reason dictates that the sensible person, then, will act in such a way as to maximize his or her chances for pleasure and minimize the possibility of pain. But the rational person also recognizes that his or her actions toward others are reciprocated in kind. Consequently, prudential self-interest demands that the individual behave toward others in such a way as to encourage reactions on their parts beneficial to his
or her well-being. Otherwise, human existence is reduced to a condition of
pain and vicious competition very much reminiscent of Thomas Hobbes’s state
of nature.

This analysis of the physical basis of well-being gives rise to Palmer's two
primary ethical principles: “universal benevolence” and “reciprocal justice.”
The first argues that the actions of sensitive, communal creatures always result
in “perpetual reprisals.” Consequently, self-interest dictates that the most rea­
sonable mode of behavior is one of benevolence to all of sentient creation. The
second argues that since all sentient creatures are equally capable of experienc­
ing deleterious pain or promotive pleasure, each has an equal right to avoid the
one and nurture the other. This suggests that all humans have an obligation to
treat others as they themselves would rationally desire to be treated.

Clearly Palmer’s naturalistic ethics has affinities with other ethical models of
his day. The similarity to Hobbes has already been noted, and there are also
parallels with the moral theories of James Stewart (1749–1822) and Volney.
But, as mentioned previously, Palmer’s naturalistic ethical theory, despite its
partially derivative character, is the only attempt by an American deist to ex­
tend Enlightenment naturalism to its logical normative conclusion. Given
deism’s emphasis on the primacy of virtue, this is no small accomplishment.

Principles of Nature; or, A Development
of the Moral Causes of Happiness
and Misery among the Human Species

Ignorance and Christianity

Believers in the Christian system of religion, are seldom aware of the diffi­
culties into which their theological theories have plunged them. They are in
habits of bestowing on this religion the most unqualified applause, and in most
cases, no doubt, the most sincere approbation; but the errors and absurdities,
the immorality and the incorrectness of principle, have never made any serious
impression upon their minds. The dreadful idea of opposing that which has
been called divine, strikes with terror the uninstructed mind, and ignorance
feeds the ecclesiastical deception. Ignorance is an excellent friend to an ancient
system of error, to the church and the different projects by which mankind
have been enslaved. If you can once persuade a man, that he is totally ignorant
of the subject on which you are about to discourse, you can make him believe
any thing. Impositions of this kind are furnished by every days experience; and
the victim of such imposition, is commonly the first to applaud the instrument
of his ruin.

Nothing can be more true, nothing more certain, or important, than that
man owes to himself due respect, that his intellect is an object of veneration,
Reason, the Glory of Our Nature

and its result interwoven with the best interest of human society. The distorted exhibitions of imaginary beings contained in all ancient theology, ought to excite within us a strong desire to discover truth, and reclaim the dignity which nature gave to man. Fanaticism, when armed with the artillery of Heaven, ought not to be permitted to shake the throne or empire of reason; the base is immortal, and the superstructure will be augmented in beauty and excellence, in proportion to the progress of knowledge and the destruction of religious bigotry. It is remarkable that, with many honest minds, the consciousness of intellectual independence has never been realized, and fear has prevented the activity of thought and the development of truth.

Sacred Scripture and Revelation

The Christian religion is compound and combination of all the theological writings of the followers of Moses and Jesus. We have no evidence that either of these men wrote any part, either of the Old or New Testament. From Genesis to the Apocalypse of St. John, a vast variety of fact, fable, principle, wickedness, and error is exhibited to view. The book, though bound together, appears to be in many respects discordant; the historical part has no accurate connection; the moral part is distorted, deficient, or wicked; the doctrinal parts are either unintelligible, or contrary to moral and philosophical truth. These positions shall be proved in the course of the examination of these sacred writings; it is sufficient for the present that the consideration which relates to the origin and nature of such productions, should form the basis of our inquiry. It is because man has forgotten the dignity of his nature; it is because he does not realize the force of his faculties, that he consents to yield to the impositions of superstition. What is a book, whether it be denominated sacred or not, unless the human mind is capable of discovering the evidence by which the truth of such book can be substantiated? The Bible, which means nothing more than a book; the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which mean nothing more than the heterogeneous writings contained in the former, and the incoherent and unintelligible will of various beings contained in the latter; what are all these to the correct decisions of human intellect, unless the matter therein contained can be collated with the immortal principles of truth in the system of nature...

If the sentiments and the doctrines be consistent with the nature of things, [one] may, on this account, pronounce them true; but they are true because they are consistent, and not because they have been revealed. . . . But . . . this book is said to be given by divine inspiration; but is it possible that inspiration can be either transferred, translated, altered, or revised? Certainly the very nature of the thing forbids it. If the scriptures be given by divine inspiration, their contents must be communicated to certain individuals by supernatural power. These individuals had no such power to transfer to other individuals
with the same force of authority, the celestial information which they had received. If it were binding on the first persons who received it, it could not be equally so upon the second, for the nature and force of the communication were essentially destroyed. The first power that communicated was divine, the second was human; the first was incapable of error, the second deceptive and fallacious. If it were therefore to be admitted that any human beings were ever inspired, it would not follow that the result of that inspiration could be communicated with certitude or divine authority to any other minds. The idea of transferring celestial information received by supernatural means, is absurd and impossible; it is as impossible as that man could become a God, and exercise the attributes of the Divinity. The idea of translating a supernatural system of religion, is equally incorrect. The readers of such a system, even in the original languages, could not know that the things therein contained were inspired by God himself, if those few be accepted who were supposed to be the recipients of such sacred instruction; much less could the reader in subsequent ages be assured of the truth or validity of such translated doctrines. To render this system correct, and keep up the chain of divine connection, it is not only necessary that the first prophets and apostles should have been inspired, but that all the translators, transcribers, printers, and printers' boys, should have been inspired also. In deficiency of such arrangement, the Christian believer at the present day, must be uncertain whether he believes in holy writ, or the imaginary conceptions and wild reveries of the human understanding. If inspiration be a thing founded in truth, there can be no occasion to alter or revise it. It is defect alone that creates the necessity of alteration and revision. If, therefore, the Bible was right at first, every alteration is a deviation from that rectitude; and consequently, in proportion as the scriptures have been altered and revised in modern times, the Christian believer has been led astray; he has not believed in the real and true word of God. If the scriptures were wrong at first, the faith of the primitive Christian, was nothing more than a delusive error; in either of these cases we are thrown into a dilemma, from which, clerical ingenuity alone will be able to extricate us. . . .

Original Sin, Atonement and Faith

We shall now proceed to an examination of the doctrines of the Christian religion, and compare them with the principles of a genuine and natural morality, the nature and character of man, and the perfections of the intelligent Creator of the universe. If the founder of this religion was destitute of authority in his mission, the doctrines which are applicable to him will fall of course; but so strong are the prejudices of mankind in favour of these doctrines, that it becomes necessary to expose the immorality of them before we can expect that they will be relinquished. The most important doctrines of this supposed celestial scheme, are those of original sin, atonement, faith. . . . This strange and
unnatural system, called the Christian religion, commences the development of its dogmas, by the destruction of every principle of distributive justice. It makes the intelligent beings who are now in existence accountable for the errors and vices of a man who lived six thousand years ago; a man who, its advocates say, God created upright, free from every kind of impurity, and placed in a state of uniform happiness, with a strong natural propensity to the practice of every virtue, and an equally strong aversion to every vicious and immoral principle; created in the image of God himself, and possessing an unqualified attachment to celestial purity and goodness. This man, nevertheless, transgressed the divine law, and this solitary violation becomes temporarily and eternally fatal to the human race. Moral impurity assumes a new shape, and becomes transferable through successive generations. Though none of this man’s descendants could possibly be partakers of this original criminality, they are, nevertheless, implicated in the consequences and effects of his primary apostasy. They sinned with him, and fell with him, in his first transgression. This is the language of pious and learned divines, and of the rectitude of the principle, we are not permitted to doubt, under pain of eternal damnation. But truth compels us to assert, that this doctrine, called original sin, is, in the first place, totally impossible, and in the second place, that it is as immoral and unjust, as the Creator is righteous and benevolent. The virtues and the vices of intelligent beings are not of a transferable but of a personal nature. In a moral point of view, the amiable or useful qualities of one man cannot become those of another, neither can the vices of one be justifiably punished in the person of another. Every man is accountable for himself; and when he can take no cognizance of the intentions or actions of any other man, how can he be justly responsible for their injurious effects, or applauded for any benefits resulting from them? If Adam or any other man, who lived several thousand years ago, was guilty of any immoral conduct, what has that to do with the moral condition of the present generation? Is a man to become criminal before he has existed? or, is he to be criminated afterwards, by the immoral conduct of those who lived long before him? Has not every man errors enough of his own to answer for, without being implicated in the injurious consequences resulting from the bad conduct of his neighbour? Shall there be no line of moral precision, by which human beings can be tried, condemned, or acquitted? It seems by the general tenor of this doctrine, that every rule of moral precision is here totally disregarded, and setting aside the want of justice, the whole business wears a farcical and ludicrous appearance. This original evil so destructive to the human race, commences by the eating of what is called the forbidden fruit. Whether this fruit was an apple, a peach, or an orange, is not material for us to know; if it was either the one or the other of these, and the truth was good, there could be no harm in eating it, and if bad, let him take the consequence whose ignorance or temerity induced the action. But whether good or bad,
whether eaten or not eaten, is nothing for us, and we are neither worse nor better for reading this foolish story. The moral impurity of the heart can bear no possible relation to the criminality of Adam, or any other man of that day or generation. Let Adam, therefore, and his partner Eve, together with the Devil and his snakes, attend to their own concerns, and if they have fallen into difficulties by their own follies and vices, let them extricate themselves as well as they are able. For myself, I have so much regard for all of them, that I hope they will not be damned forever. For notwithstanding much noise and clamour has been raised, I think that neither party was so bad as the pious ambassadors of Heaven have represented them. The story is almost too foolish to deserve a serious examination. Let intelligent man study his own nature, and the passions of his heart, let him observe his relative condition and the springs of his action, and he will soon discern the causes of his calamity. He will find that disorganization or physical death is an unavoidable appendage of animal life. That the very construction of his nature insures the certainty of a subsequent derangement, and that the primary qualities of all sensitive beings gradually lead to dissolution. No organic perfectibility of animal existence has been discovered yet, which is capable of excluding the anticipation of decay through the progressive operations of physical causes upon the constitution; and perfect moral rectitude, though it were capable of extending the period, could not give ultimate durability to beings organized like ourselves; nevertheless, we are told that death spiritual, temporal, and eternal, are the consequences of his primitive apostasy. By spiritual death, is meant moral turpitude of heart and character; but this in many beings, obtains but partially, and is always the effect of personal infraction of moral principle, bearing no possible relation to Adam. By temporal death, is meant that death which experience teaches us to be the fate of every creature in the present world, and this death, though an essential ingredient in the constitution of nature, is foolishly and unphilosophically attributed to the sin of Adam. If Adam, previous to his supposed apostasy, had been thrown into a fire, or immersed in water, would not one of these elements have disorganized him, or the other have drowned him? or would he have returned from these trials with all the beauties of youth and vivacity in his appearance? If it be contended that he would, a constitution must then be attributed to him of which the human mind can form no conception. If it be admitted that he must have perished, temporal death can then no longer be attributed to the commission of moral evil, and it must be acknowledged as an essential property of our primary and physical organization; and that death is as natural as life in the order of the world. By eternal death, is meant a state of endless punishment; and so powerful is the influence of this sin of Adam, upon the human race, that they all become liable to eternal torments on this account. One would have supposed that after having brought temporal death into the world, by this transgression, and after having corrupted every moral
principle of the human heart, the contrivers of the scheme might have been contented, without annexing to this crime, any other fatal consequences; but fanaticism and superstition delight in murder, misery, and eternal fire; and to this flaming lake I wish them a speedy passage, never more to rise to insult the dignity, or destroy the happiness of the human race. To punish the temporary and finite crimes of a finite life with eternal fire, would be to relinquish every principle of distributive justice, and to act like an arbitrary and malevolent tyrant. All the sins that ever have been committed do not deserve this unlimited severity of punishment; and to attribute to one solitary infraction of a moral law, these terrible consequences, is to lose sight of infinite benevolence and eternal justice. It is to represent the God of Nature as cruel and vindictive, and even less merciful than the majority of his creatures; it destroys all degrees in moral turpitude, and inflicts on a petty offender, a punishment not merited by the greatest criminal. It is therefore evident that this original sin has not produced, and that it could not produce, any of the consequences which have been attributed to it, for death is one of the physical properties of our nature. Vice is the result of individual and personal infractions of moral law, and an eternal hell is a bugbear of superstition, which has never answered, and never can answer any valuable purpose even in preventing crimes.

Another important doctrine of the Christian religion, is the atonement supposed to have been made by the death and sufferings of the pretended Saviour of the world; and this is grounded upon principles as regardless of justice as the doctrine of original sin. It exhibits a spectacle truly distressing to the feelings of a benevolent mind, it calls innocence and virtue into a scene of suffering, and reputed guilt, in order to destroy the injurious effects of real vice. It pretends to free the world from the fatal effects of a primary apostasy, by the sacrifice of an innocent being. Evil has already been introduced into the world, and in order to remove it, a fresh accumulation of crimes becomes necessary. In plain terms, to destroy one evil, another must be committed. To teach mankind virtue, they are to be presented with the example of murder; to render them happy, it is necessary to exhibit innocence in distress; to provide for them the joys of Heaven, wretchedness is to be made their portion on earth. To make them love one another, they must be taught that the Deity, regardless of this principle, voluntarily sacrificed his only begotten Son. In fine, to procure for intelligent beings, the happiness suited to their nature, cruelty and vindictive malice must be exhibited for their contemplation. This doctrine presented in its true colours contains neither justice nor utility. Its principle is vicious, and its consequences are not beneficial. The reflecting mind which views the operation of causes and their natural effects, possesses a nice and accurate power of discrimination. Moral precision is an important object of attention, and although it traces the nature of the infinitely combined relations subsisting among beings of the same species, it cannot discern either the justice
or the utility of the relation which suffering virtue can bear to the destruction of moral evil. No connection can be discovered between the exclamations of expiring innocence, and the triumphant march of vice over an apostate world. Does the suffering of the virtuous man destroy the evil habits or propensities of him who is vicious and abandoned, especially when he is told that these sufferings are to annihilate his own crimes? Can this induce the mind to exhibit any efforts wearing the appearance of reformation? Does it not rather contribute to the practice of vice, from the belief that the burden and effect must be sustained by another person? Yet this is the true ground on which this scheme of atonement is promulgated. It is exhibited as a substitute for moral perfection. It teaches man that his own virtues are insufficient for his felicity; that the cultivation of his faculties, and the discovery and practice of moral truth, can never lead to substantial happiness. This must be obtained from the sufferings and expiring groans of the Deity himself. But even on Christian principles, what useful purpose has this atonement answered? Though the believers of this religion have sacrificed the God of Nature, to gratify their pride, have they by this means accomplished their end? Have they established a sure foundation for the destruction of moral evil? Have they insured permanent happiness to every intelligent being? No; this desirable end is not completed. Sin, say they, is an infinite evil. Was the atonement infinite? Alas! No; for although Jesus Christ, who suffered, was equal to God himself, yet all of them acknowledge that it was the human, not the divine nature that partook of this suffering. If therefore, it was the human nature only that suffered, this suffering could make only a finite atonement, and if the sin was infinite, this atonement could not reach its nature or destroy its effects; for to have done this, the atonement must have been commensurate with the evil to be destroyed; but as the one is finite and the other infinite, no relation could have subsisted between them, and no beneficial effect has been, or can be produced from it. This method of destroying evil is an unfortunate one; it is essentially unjust in its principles, and useless in its effects; it professes to sacrifice an infinite being, but it denies the possibility of this sacrifice producing anything more than a finite atonement. If an atonement was necessary, it ought to have been as extensive and complete in its nature, as the offences intended to be destroyed by its influence. But instead of this, every thing is reversed. According to believers themselves, this atonement has not reached the condition of more than one tenth part of the human race. The efforts of Trinitarian wisdom have all failed, and notwithstanding the pretended good news of the gospel, every living creature is destined to never ending torment. The elect themselves are incapable of escaping eternal damnation, for without an atonement, they cannot be saved, and the atonement that has been made is not equal to the crime committed. If, therefore, our hopes of salvation are to rest on this vicarious suffering, we shall be essentially disappointed, and endless misery must be the lot of man. Priests and fanatics
of the world! Is this your scheme of infinite benevolence? Is this your theme of
divine eloquence? Is this the only way in which you can exhibit the perfections
of your God, and adore his eternal wisdom? Are murder, carnage, and injustice,
the objects in which you delight? Have you lost all attachment to moral virtue,
al veneration for the dignity and faculties of your nature? Have you dismissed
all respect for nature and for truth? Will you never learn wisdom from the book
of nature, will you never derive instruction from the permanency of her laws?
Is it only among miracles, ghosts, and crucified Gods that you delight to walk?
Oh! prejudiced and superstitious man, look at the splendid beauties of nature,
look at the vast machinery of the universe, and through these thou mayest
discern the intelligent organizer of the whole, perfect in all his attributes, and
worthy of thy adoration.

The next principle of discussion is, that of Christian faith; and this among
the believers of this religion, has been considered as a great virtue. But is this
substantially true? What is the real meaning of the word Faith? It is necessary
to inquire concerning its true definition, and from this inquiry we shall be able
to draw a conclusion whether or not the principle of faith is meritorious. Faith
is an assent of the mind to the truth of a proposition supported by evidence.
If the evidence adduced is sufficient to convince the mind, credence is the
necessary result; if the evidence be insufficient, belief becomes impossible. In
religion therefore, or in any other of the concerns of life, if the mind discerns
that quantum of evidence necessary to establish the truth of any proposition,
it will yield to the force and effect of the proofs which are produced; if, on the
other hand, the intelligence of man does not discern the necessary influence
of such evidence, infidelity will be the natural and unavoidable result. Why then
is the principle of faith considered as a virtue? If a man beholds the sun in its
meridian splendor, and declares the truth of this exhibition, is he meritorious
in making this acknowledgment? If any truth in nature is well substantiated and
supported by the testimony of his mind or his senses, does he deserve credit for
his mental acquiescence? No. Why then have the christian world annexed to
this principle of belief any degree of merit? Is necessary acquiescence a virtue?
Does man become entitled to praise for the acknowledgment of facts guaran-
teed by his senses, or essentially supported through the channel of his mental
faculties? Does truth really exist in the system of nature? And is this truth
discoverable by the operations of the human mind? And shall man, notwithstanding this, arrogate to himself a high degree of importance, for the rejection
of the splendid testimonies which are exhibited for his contemplation? No; after a full display of evidence, the mind must yield to its necessary and un-
avoidable influence; when therefore, the Christian religion represents faith as
being meritorious, it loses sight of the natural operations of the human mind;
it betrays an ignorance of nature, and becomes censurable by its deviation from
the primary and essential arrangements. Yet in this holy book, we are told, that
“he that believeth not shall be damned.” But what are we to believe? Are we
to believe that the Creator of the universe is the parent and friend of the whole
human race? Are we to believe that his wisdom acts in coincidence with general
felicity, or operates on the ground of universal happiness? Are we to believe that
the establishment of general laws is sufficient for the well being of intelligent
agents? Are we to believe the vast machinery of the universe to be under the
guidance and direction of eternal perfection? Are we to believe that the pri-
mary principles of our nature are sufficient for our improvement and ultimate
perfectibility? Are we to believe that the practice of moral virtue is essentially
connected with the dignity and final improvement of the human species? Are
we to believe that the establishment of good laws, and the exhibitions of moral
energies are essentially interwoven with the permanent happiness of sensitive
creatures? No! We are not permitted to believe this. What then is Christian
belief? What are the dogmas and principles to which we are required to give an
unqualified credence? However painful it may be to declare it, they are of the
following nature:—That the great Creator of the world sacrificed his only
begotten Son for the happiness of the human race; that he sent numerous
prophets and apostles, to teach and instruct mankind; that they were charged
with the disclosure of every species of celestial knowledge, relative to the future
felicity of intelligent beings; that they were unwearied in their attention to
enlighten and inform the human race; that they exhibited every possible effort
for the accomplishment of this desirable end, and all this to no valuable pur-
pose; that man is to be criminated for the bad conduct of a person who lived
six thousand years ago; that he can be made happy only by a crucified God; that
he can perform no virtue of himself; and yet, that without being perfectly holy,
he cannot be happy; that he must give an unlimited credence to the greatest
absurdities, and most palpable contradictions, and view the most immoral
specimens of human actions as sanctioned by the Deity; that he must venerate
the most senseless opinions, admire the most unexampled ignorance, and love
the most detestable crimes; in fact, that he must believe in a book which
contains, systematically considered, neither truth nor morality, neither purity of
sentiment nor principle, neither propriety of arrangement, nor progress of
human improvement; erroneous in all its primary establishments and vindictive
in all its consequences; unjust in its origin and malevolent in all its subsequent
movements; incorrect in its relations and impure in its intentions; destructive
to science, an insult to morality, and essentially injurious to human felicity. This
then is Christian faith. Great God of Nature! Must we then renounce the
justifiable exercise of all our faculties, in order to be happy? To attain felicity,
is it necessary that we believe in contradictions? Must we deem cruelty one of
the attributes of divinity? Must the benevolent mind be called to the view of
murder, in order to be fitted for the performance of its essential duties? Must
injustice and revenge be interwoven with the morality of man? Shall we never
be permitted to love truth, admire nature, and practise a pure and genuine morality? Oh, superstition! how much thou hast to answer for! Thine influence has corrupted the faculties of man, debased his heart, and rendered wretched the whole human race. Thou hast spread ruin, misery, and devastation over a beautiful and productive earth, and thou art deserving of the curses of every intelligent being in every part of the universe.

_Eternal Damnation_

Man is a being possessed of certain powers and faculties; of certain passions and propensities to actions, and these, by a primary law of nature, are subjected to the control of reason, and are to be directed by conscience or an internal moral sense of right and wrong. But what are these faculties, what these passions, which are essentially connected with the character and condition of intelligent agents? Our existence and all the properties of it are of a limited and finite nature; there is not a single quality of man, that is not imperfect; the parts of the aggregate of his life, do not constitute anything like infinity. In all his movements, in all his energies, in all the capacities of his being, he is regulated by finite and not by infinite principles. He is incapable of any actions which do not result essentially from the faculties which he is possessed of; all his conduct must have a strict reference to the causes which have produced it, and every effect must bear a proportion to its productive cause. If the cause be limited and imperfect, the effect must also be imperfect, for the effect can never rise superior to the cause, which has given it birth. Before we speak, therefore, of an infinite sin, or an infinite evil, we should consider the capacity of those beings, to whom this evil is attributed; if the acting agents are infinite in their nature and character, the effects of their operations may be so too, but if they are finite, their actions can lay no claim to an infinite effect. Sin is the consequence of the infraction of moral law; if this infraction be made by an infinite being, the criminality would be like the being who made it, that is of an infinite quality; but if the infraction be made by an imperfect being, the criminality is finite, and limited in its essential nature. It follows of course, as man is a finite and imperfect agent, he is incapable of the performance of any infinite act; if he cannot do an infinite act, he is incapable of an infinite evil, and does not deserve an infinite punishment; consequently, the idea of eternal death is unjust and unreasonable. But further, if every sin were an infinite evil, which is the Christian doctrine, it would merit an infinite punishment; but if one sin deserves an infinite punishment, what must be the punishment of him who is guilty of ten thousand sins? According to this doctrine he must be liable to ten thousand infinite punishments, which is a physical and moral absurdity. This doctrine of eternal death or infinite punishment, disregards the nature of human actions, and every principle of distributive justice. It inflicts on the smallest offender, as great extent and severity of punishment as on the most abandoned
criminal. It goes to the destruction of all moral virtue, by inducing man to believe, that the commission of one vicious action is as odious in the sight of God, and deserves as much punishment as a thousand violations of moral rectitude. It destroys all relations between the actions of men and the beneficial arrangements of corrective improvement. It makes man infinite, and the Deity unjust; both of which are inconsistent with the nature of things and the principles of eternal truth.

**Miracles**

The productions of the earth are subject to no supernatural derangement; they are exhibited with a constancy and specific similarity which discard every idea of perversion in physical law, and present the material world as a theatre of certitude which the efforts of superstition cannot destroy. The tides of ebb and flow, and all the relative operations of nature are preserved entire in despite of the malignity of superstition. This vast whole, this extensive universe thus subjected to the operation of immutable laws, is, nevertheless, distorted and deranged by Christian theology; its author is insulted, and the scientific deductions of human intellect perverted or destroyed. Religion, not content with the consistency and harmony of Nature, has sought for redress in the violation of her laws, and nothing short of miracles could satisfy the extravagant desires of pious and holy fanaticism.

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, by supernatural power. In the act of such violation, there must have been some great object in view, which could not otherwise be accomplished; the violation therefore must have been considered as the least of two evils, and the result as productive upon the whole, of the greatest possible good. But this represents an omnipotent GOD, surrounded with difficulties, and like imperfect creatures, disposed to make the best of a bad condition. It will be necessary for those who advocate the doctrine of miracles, to recur to the cause and primary establishment of the laws of nature. God is infinite in all his perfections; the laws of nature are an effect of the divine attributes, and must have been modified in the best possible manner, and to answer the best and wisest purposes. To alter, therefore, that which already had been done in the best possible manner, would be to make it worse, for no alteration or amendment could make that better which was already as good as it could be. If the world and the laws by which the world was governed, are the offspring of infinite wisdom, they must have been right in the first place, for it is a necessary character of infinite wisdom to perform whatever it does perform in the best possible manner. All alterations or violations in any system or set of laws, argues imperfection and want of discernment; but such imperfection and want of discernment cannot be the property of a perfect being. If God therefore is perfect, such perfection would
enable him to conceive and execute with a masterly hand. The mechanic who builds a machine, frequently alters his plan, and is under the necessity of attending to amendments and repairs; but his ignorance was the ground work of this, and a competent knowledge of the principles by which the machine was constructed, would have precluded the necessity of subsequent correction and amendment. The Creator of the world knew perfectly well the force and effect of principle before it was applied to the accomplishment of the variegated motions and operations of existence; ignorance, therefore, could have no share in modifying the vast powers of the universe, or the immutable principles by which it is directed. Wisdom, power, and goodness, combined in the management of the whole, and consequently the whole is formed exactly in such a manner as these three leading perfections of the divine character at first intended. To work a miracle therefore, would answer no very valuable purpose, and is derogatory to the attributes of God, by which it is supposed to be wrought. To establish a system of religion by evidence drawn from miracles, is to establish it upon the ruin of the consistent harmony of the divine perfection; upon the ruin of all principle and all confidence. When the consistent character of the author of such religion is destroyed, the religion itself is not worth much. Either God did things in the first place as they ought to be done, or he did not; if he did them as they ought to be done, there could have been no need of alteration, and consequently there could have been no such thing as a miracle; if he did not, then he must have been either imperfect, or have acted inconsistent with good principle; in either of which cases, his character as God would be destroyed, and the perfection of his existence sacrificed upon the altar of human folly. Fanaticism, which attempts to exalt its God by making him work wonders, is as great an enemy to true Theism as the open and professed Atheist. A wonder working God, who violates his own laws, and acts inconsistently with the principles which he himself has established, is no God at all. It is an immoral phantom conjured up on the wild vagaries of a superstitious imagination. It is easy to perceive that if there be in nature, a perfect God, he cannot be the author of those marvellous and even ridiculous violations of the laws of nature detailed in the Old and New Testament. His character must be uniform, consistent and perfect, just and equitable, and in perfect coincidence with the immortal laws of the moral and physical world. All things it is said, are possible with God. This is one of the maxims of that religion which has perverted all the principles of truth and justice; but this maxim is not true; it is not possible, for instance, that God should destroy his own excellence; it is not possible that he should act inconsistently with the properties and principles of his nature. This extravagant assertion instead of exalting the character of the Creator, would absolutely destroy it, by causing him to act without rule and without justice. But superstition can never do
enough for her God, until she has done a great deal too much. A consistent and immutable Deity, acting in strict conformity to the essential properties of his existence, would be, in the estimation of inconsistent superstition, an object far inferior to those wild and unruly divinities, who overturn states and empires, pervert the general order of nature, and occasionally, by way of amusement, drown the whole world, with all the inhabitants and animals therein existing. A man walking regularly upon the earth, and performing with fidelity all his moral duties, is by no means an object of attachment, but one walking upon the water, without doing any good, will draw forth the admiration of a gazing, foolish, and superstitious world. The passion for the marvelous has carried man from earth to heaven, and in the ranting fury of his zeal, he has supposed that his God would be pleased with all those moral distortions which at such unhappy moments agitated his own delirious mind. The idea of the existence of a miracle will be wholly destroyed by a just recurrence to the counterbalancing evidence, drawn from the experience of mankind. This experience bears testimony to the uniform operation of Nature's laws; it teaches man to repose in them unqualified confidence, and in all the common concerns of life, this confidence serves as the foundation of his courage, his activity, and his consolation. Here are then, two kinds of evidence opposed to each other; the one human experience, and other human testimony. Those who contend that miracles prove the divinity of the Christian religion, appeal to the testimony of witnesses to support the truth and existence of such miracles. Let this case be examined, and the superior weight of evidence will appear with convincing force. Believers declare that the miracles which were wrought to prove the truth of the holy Scriptures, were numerous and performed before great numbers of people. That the credit and veracity of these witnesses cannot be doubted; that they were honest and disinterested men; that they did not wish to be deceived themselves, nor could they possibly reap any advantage from deceiving others; that some of the eye witnesses were inspired men, in whom there was no guile, and that others were mere men of the world, whose feelings and interest would have rejected, if possible, the splendour of such supernatural evidence; that all these, however, yielded to the mighty energy of the mighty God; that they pronounced him a wonder working God, and that such marvellous facts had never before been presented to a wicked and apostate world. It is also declared and maintained, that the result of these pure and incorruptible witnesses has been transmitted down for more than two thousand years through the holy and incorruptible channel of the Church of Christ; that the present generation might as well doubt of the existence of Scipio or of Caesar, as to doubt of the existence of Jesus Christ and his apostles, and the miracles which by them were performed; that the unbeliever at this time, is working against all his own positions, destroying the nature of evidence, and unhinging the moral world. . . .
The Immorality of Christianity

The next point of examination, is the morality of the Christian religion. On this head, the advocates of this revealed system have made a mistake injurious to themselves, by extolling its morality above that of any other moral treatise; they have provoked inquiry and comparison, and the result serves only to diminish the pretended excellence of their scheme. It is not denied that this religion contains some good moral maxims. But it is denied that it contains anything like a pure system of genuine morality. Its moral maxims are but thinly interspersed, and they are inaccurate and incomplete, trifling, and often without utility, destitute of justifiable application to the moral condition of intellectual life. All morality that is genuine, is drawn from the nature and condition of rational beings. It is calculated to preserve and augment their happiness, to raise and extend the dignity and utility of social existence. It assumes for its basis, the genuine principles of a reciprocal justice, and an extensive benevolence. While it regards the felicity of others, it also regards the preservation of our own life and happiness. But the moral doctrine concerning injuries, contained in the Christian religion, is not established upon a principle of this mutual nature, but solicits an accumulation of insult, by commanding us after being smitten on one cheek to turn the other also. This is sacrificing the dignity of our character, and inviting fresh injuries. It is surrendering up the manly part of our nature, into the hands of him who is sure to trample it under foot. And again, it is said, "if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also"; that is, after thine enemy hath unjustly taken away a part of thy property, it becomes thy duty to bestow upon him the remainder. If thy coat is already gone, thou must give away the remainder of thy garments, and go naked thyself. If thine enemy do thee all possible injury, thou must in return exercise towards him sincere love and affection. If he persecute thee, thou shouldst bless him for his curses and persecutions. In short, to comply with the spirit of this morality, we must invert the order of nature, and bestow on crimes and continued abuse, the most endearing affections of our heart. Where is the believer who puts this morality in practice? It is not considered by every one as merely theoretical. Have you who are believers in this system, coats and other garments to bestow, in order to comply with its injunctions? Are you willing to surrender your natural dignity, to sink your nature to a level with the spaniel, in order to become a true Christian? And can you with any appearance of truth and justice, advocate the purity and celestial nature of this species of moral maxims? It may reasonably be presumed that if one coat had been obtained through the channel of a law suit, another law suit would be necessary in order to obtain the cloak. And thus this celestial morality would become the cause of endless litigation. But if we should accede to the truth of the assertion, that all the maxims held as moral by the professors of Christianity, were really and truly so, this would not prove the celestial origin of their reli-
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igion. For if we attribute to them all the excellence which is contended for, they still fall below ancient and modern dissertations on this subject. This religion does not draw its morality from the right source. But the correct, the elegant, the useful maxims of Confucius, Antoninus, Seneca, Price and Volney, beautifully display its principles from the physical and moral organization of intelligent beings. The writings of these men are in the hands of the public, and may be perused by every one whose prejudices do not forbid it, and when examined with a spirit of candor, they will rise far superior to the boasted morality of the Christian system. But when the numerous, cruel and immoral maxims contained in the Bible, are placed in the balance, they greatly outweigh all its genuine morality, and the influence of this religion upon the human heart and human actions verifies the remark . . . .

When the human mind takes a retrospective view of past ages, through the mirror of history; when it calls up to its contemplation, the murderous devastations, the horrid wars and cruelties which have desolated the Christian world; when it beholds the faggot every where lighted up for the destruction of man; when gibbets, imprisonment, and persecutions are presented on every quarter, when it sees domestic peace and tranquility tortured and almost annihilated, malevolence and sectarian spirit enkindling the most unbridled resentments to disturb the benevolent sentiments of the human heart; when, in fact, all Christendom exhibits a spectacle shocking to humanity, the weeping voice of Nature cries aloud, and demands a disclosure of the causes which have produced this general misery and distress. It asks in the name of Reason and Truth, whence all these calamities, whence these innumerable evils that have overwhelmed and laid waste a beautiful and productive earth? Where is the source of these human misfortunes? Where the fountain whence these miseries proceed? Righteous God of nature! What questions are these to ask in the face of the Christian church? But however painful the task, truth compels us to declare, that to this holy religion they are to be attributed. In this wonderful system of divine benevolence, we must seek for the origin. "Does the God of Nature then require devastation for homage, or conflagration for sacrifice? Would he have groans for hymns? Murderers to worship him, and a desert and ravaged world for his temple? Yet such, holy and faithful generations, are your works! these the fruits of your piety! You have massacred the people, reduced cities to ashes, destroyed all traces of cultivation, made the earth a solitude, and you demand the reward of your labours. For myself, I solemnly affirm by all laws, human and divine, by the laws of the human heart, that the hypocrite and the deceiver shall be themselves deceived. The unjust man shall perish in his rapacity, and the tyrant in his usurpation; the sun shall change his course, before folly shall prevail over wisdom and science, before stupidity shall surpass prudential economy in the delicate art of procuring to man his true enjoyments, and of building his happiness on a solid foundation" [Volney's Ruins].
It is strange to observe, that in reasoning upon theological subjects, men are disposed to abandon the correct ground of moral decision, and contend that those actions which would be unjust in man, would nevertheless be just when performed by the Creator. This is a mode of reasoning which perverts all the faculties of our existence, destroys the moral excellence of Deity, and overturns the foundation of principle. In all beings that are intelligent, moral principle is the same; and God has no more right to violate it, than any other being. He is essentially bound by the properties of his existence, and his character cannot be sustained without an undeviating attention to the immutable principle of justice.

The writings of Paul, that heated and fanatic zealot in the christian faith, are equally noxious to the cause of moral virtue, and are calculated to annihilate the most virtuous efforts of every individual. "It is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth; not of works lest any man should boast; of ourselves we can do nothing"; together with a hundred other passages of a similar nature, which go directly to suppress all the elevated exertions of the human faculties, and if literally followed, would turn man from intelligent activity, to a state of brutal indolence. It is extremely destructive to the moral happiness of mankind to teach them the want of powers, or the inadequacy of those they possess; because the fact is otherwise, because it is a solemn truth that the powers of man are competent to provide for his happiness; they are equal to the exigencies of his existence. It is superstition that has made him a fool, it is religious tyranny that has enslaved his mind, perverted his faculties, and tarnished the glory of his intellectual energies. Christianity has taught him two awful and destructive lessons; first, that he is incapacitated for the performance of moral actions; and secondly, in case he should perform them, they would add no merit or superior excellence to his character; that his best righteousness is like filthy rags which God would treat with marked abhorrence.

The repetition of such discouraging impressions must necessarily work an effect remarkably injurious to the virtuous activity of the human race. It is in conformity to this immoral instruction, that we see fanatic Christians every where boasting of their own inability, and doing violence to that internal sentiment which would otherwise constantly impel them to the performance of acts of justice, benevolence, and universal charity. In addition to the pointed declarations of the holy scriptures against the power and practice of morality, the inventors and promoters of the Christian religion have set up various kinds of doctrines, which diminish the motives to good actions, and lead the un instructed mind to repose confidence in something foreign from its own exertions and merit, such as atonement, baptism, faith, sacramental suppers, oblations, and ablutions, together with many other idle ceremonies and wild vagaries of a distempered and fanatic brain.

The idea that Jesus the son of Mary died for the sins of the world, and that
henceforth moral virtue can have no saving efficacy, is among the most destruc­tive conceptions by which the moral world has been insulted and per­verted. The supernatural grace of God, which Christians for so many ages have been in search of, has hitherto eluded the grasp of all rational and philosophic men; and to those who pretend to be acquainted with this celestial gift, it has been at times more trouble than profit; since innumerable doubts have been created concerning its reality and modes of operation in the human heart.

The cursory survey that has been taken of the immoral precepts and principles contained in the Old and New Testament, clearly proves that these books are not of divine origin. The God of the Jews and Christians, according to their own description, is a changeable, passionate, angry, unjust, and revengeful being; infuriate in his wrath, capricious in his conduct, and destitute, in many respects, of those sublime and immutable properties which really belong to the Preserver of the universe. The characters spoken of in the scriptures, as the favourites of Heaven, such as Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Jesus, and Paul, are none of them good moral characters; it is not probable, therefore, that they were selected by the Creator as the organs of celestial communication. In the Old Testament, national and individual justice is disregarded, and God is made the accomplice of crimes which human nature abhors. The maxims of the New Testament are a perversion of all correct principles in a code of moral virtue. The whole system is calculated to take man out of himself, to destroy his confidence in his own energies, to debase his faculties, vitiate his social affections, and brutalize the most useful qualities of human existence. The highest dignity of the human race consists in the practice of an exalted virtue, in the exercise of a fine sympathetic benevolence, in reciprocating our feelings and affections, in promoting the justice and order of society, in relieving the unfortunate and supporting the cause of truth, in diminishing evil and augmenting good; in short, in promoting universally the science, the virtue, and happiness of the world. There is, however, no possibility of faithfully performing these duties while under the shackles of Jewish and Christian superstition. The remedy consists in a return to nature, and in elevating our views and conceptions above those theological absurdities which have degraded man to a level with the beast, and taught him to respect his civil and ecclesiastical tyrants as beings of an higher order, or celestial messengers from a vindictive and revengeful God.

Natural Morality

The Origin of Moral Evil

The facts in the physical world are, many of them, difficult of solution; those of the moral world have perplexed still more the operations of the human understanding. The subtilty, the abstruseness, the incognizable character of moral existence, place it beyond the power of clear intellectual perception, and
the mind loses itself in those metaphysical combinations, whose successive variations are incalculable. But the difficulties which nature has thrown in the way of this inquiry, are much less numerous than those presented by superstition.

... Reason and theology, philosophy and superstition are at war upon this subject. The believers in the Christian religion, following the examples of their theological and fanatic predecessors, have searched the universe in quest of a satisfactory solution to that long altercated question, Whence came moral evil? One religious sectary, willing to screen the divinity from any just accusation relative to so nefarious a concern, has descended into hell, and discovered there all the characters and distorted machinery necessary to the production of such an effect; but here metaphysical and fanatic invention indulged itself in all the extravagance of delusion. It was necessary first to create this infernal country, and then to create inhabitants suited to the nature of the climate, and the unfortunate condition in which they were to reside. The idea of a Devil was accordingly formed, and the reality of his existence rendered an indubitable truth by the reiterated assertions of superstition. Ignorance and fanaticism greedily swallowed the foolish infernal dose which had been administered.

There is a remarkable disposition in the human mind, to remove the point of intellectual difficulty, as far from the reality of the case as possible, and then it triumphantly imagines that a solution has been given. This is a fact particularly in theological inquiry, in which a few retrogressive efforts of the mind, have been considered as an ample illustration of all the difficulties relative to the subject of Theism, and the existence of the physical universe. Similar to this idea, is the doctrine concerning moral evil, and the disposition which theologians have exhibited to remove the burden from their own shoulders and place it upon the devil's back. The whole infernal machinery with which we are presented by superstition, serves only to detach the mind from the true and real source of moral evil. While reflection is directed to another world, it is incompetent to a clear view of the facts existing in this, and the habit of such reveries produces a fanatic delirium subversive of all correctness of judgment. The existence of hell and the beings that dwell therein, being only supported by what is called divine revelation, it follows of course, that if this revelation is not true, a belief in anything that is a mere result of that system, cannot be substantially founded. Since then it is presumed, that in these chapters a competent refutation is given to the doctrine contained in the sacred books of the Jews and Christians, the idea of descending into hell, or having recourse to a devil, in search of moral evil, is futile and inconsistent. Another part of the Christian world, willing to avoid difficulties, which their antagonists had thrown in their way, abandoned the infernal abodes, and ascended into the celestial world, in quest of the origin of evil. They exhibited ingenious metaphysical reasoning upon the subject, declaring that God was the Creator of all things; that sin was
something and not nothing, and therefore he must be the Creator of sin or moral evil. This puzzled the advocates of the hell scheme, and a clerical warfare was engendered concerning two theological opinions, neither of which had any kind of existence in the nature of things. After heaven and hell had been searched through and through to find something which did not belong to either of them, the terror struck inquirer, as if fatigued with his atmospheric journey, seated himself once more upon the earth, and saw, or might have seen in the very bosom of society, and the perverted character of man, a clear and satisfactory solution of that difficult question, which, for so long a time, had occupied his attention in distant regions. It is in this manner, that the plainest subject is rendered mysterious, when a superstitious religion is industriously employed in subverting the independent power of thought. It is neither in the upper nor lower regions; it is not in heaven nor in hell, that the origin of moral evil will be discovered; it is to be found only among those intelligent beings who exist upon the earth. Man has created it, and man must destroy it.

But it is necessary to exhibit the proofs of this last assertion, and convince Christian theology of the innumerable errors, which for ages past have been imposed upon a credulous and deluded world. What is it then that constitutes a moral evil? It is the violation of a law of justice or utility, by any one of the human species, competent to distinguish between right and wrong. We have no other cognizable idea upon this subject. Facts and practice are presented continually to the view of the human mind; the decision of a correct mind, is always according to the nature and character of the case. The character of a human being, is made either good or bad by the actions he commits. If these actions are conformable to the principles of justice and universal benevolence, they are with great propriety denominated good; if they are unjust, cruel and destructive to sensitive and intellectual life, they are denominated bad. There are certain fundamental laws, suitable for the government of rational beings, and it is a departure from these laws, that vitiates the human character. It is proved in another part of this work, that virtue and vice are personal qualities, and that they result from personal adherence to, or personal infraction of moral law. It is only necessary in this place, to call the attention once more to the nature of human actions, and to the characteristic difference between them, in order to establish the position principally assumed in this inquiry; for it ought to be recollected, that even if it could be proved, which by the way it cannot, that even a deity or a devil had violated moral law, this would not affect the decision upon the subject in regard to man; because that evil could not be transferred from a different kind of beings in the other world, to those who exist upon earth. As the moral properties of all intelligent agents are personal; are essentially their own and not another's, as there can be no justifiable transfer between man and man, so it follows that there can be none between man and
devil. Every intellectual being must depend upon himself; must rest upon his own energies and be responsible for himself.

... Reason, or the intellectual powers of man, must eventually become both the deposit and the guardian of the rights and happiness of human existence. Reason has already acquired such strength and so far unfolded its powers, that it has already sealed the future destiny of the human race. It is the peculiar office of reason to look to the utter demolition of the ancient regimen of church and state. These twin sisters of iniquity are the moral giants, which have stalked with huge devastation over the face of the whole globe. Political despotism and supernatural religion have done more to render the human race vicious and depraved, than all other causes conjointly combined. If the passions of man and the impulses of his nature have frequently produced a moral eccentricity in his conduct, it is certain that a corrupt government and a corrupt religion have rendered him habitually wicked; have perverted all the conceptions of the mind upon moral and political subjects, and brutalized his intellectual existence. The most important step which can be taken for the extermination of vice and misery, is to destroy the artificial causes by which such evils are perpetuated. If other causes should be found to exist in the constitution of nature, they will be progressively removed by the light and power of science, and a more comprehensive view of the true interest of the human species. But efforts tending to make the individuals of a nation virtuous and happy, will never succeed extensively till the civil and religious tyranny under which they groan shall be completely annihilated.

... Despotism gives no encouragement to any kind of improvement, and the hope of human amelioration from this quarter will ever prove to be fallacious. Reason, righteous and immortal reason, with the argument of the printing types in one hand, and the keen argument of the sword in the other, must attack the thrones and the hierarchies of the world, and level them with the dust of the earth; then the emancipated slave must be raised by the power of science into the character of an enlightened citizen; thus possessing a knowledge of his rights, a knowledge of his duties will consequently follow, and he will discover the intimate and essential union between the highest interests of existence, and the practice of an exalted virtue. If civil and ecclesiastical despotism were destroyed, knowledge would become universal, and its progress inconceivably accelerated. It would be impossible, in such a case, that moral virtue should fail of a correspondent acceleration, and the ultimate extirpation of vice, would become an inevitable consequence. Ages must elapse before the accomplishment of an object so important to the elevated concerns of intelligent life; but the causes are already in operation, and nothing can arrest or destroy the benignant effects which they are calculated to produce. The power of reason, the knowledge of printing, the overthrow of political and ecclesias-
tical despotism, the universal diffusion of the light of science, and the universal enjoyment of republican liberty; these will become the harbingers and procuring causes of real virtue in every individual, and universal happiness will become the lot of man.

Morbidity Is Not Based on the Divine

If a thousand Gods existed, or if nature existed independent of any; the moral relation between man and man would remain exactly the same in either case. Moral principle is the result of this relation, it is founded in the properties of our nature and it is as indestructible as the basis on which it rests. If we could abandon for a moment every theistical idea, it would nevertheless remain substantially true, that the happiness of society must depend upon the exercise of equal and reciprocal justice. It would also be true, that benevolence is an amiable trait in the character of man; that the cultivation of his faculties is a duty imposed on him, because the faithful performance of his duty extends the circle of his real felicity; that vice is the bane of individual and social existence; that truth is to be preferred to falsehood, activity to indolence, temperance to debauchery, and generally, that science and virtue claim preeminently over ignorance and vice, the universal attachment of the human race. All these, and many other particulars of a like nature, would stand as immortal monuments of the real nature of moral principles, even after cultivated intellect shall have performed the last solemn act of duty relative to the ancient regimen, and shall have recalled bewildered man to the happy contemplation of the laws and immutable energies of the physical universe. If this be true, in regard to the essential nature of theological ideas, how much more powerfully will it hold upon every sectarian modification of the subject. If pure theism be independent of morality, and morality independent of that, because it rests upon the relations and the properties of human life, then it will be easy to conceive that the subordinate descriptions of sectarian theology, must be still more unconnected with the present subject. The character, however, of all the Gods of antiquity, is, of itself, a sufficient consideration to exclude them from any participation in the concerns of an exalted virtue. The Jewish God commands theft and murder; he puts a lying spirit into the mouth of his prophets; he repents and grieves for his past conduct; he is a God of fury, wrath, and vengeance. These actions and qualities are all attributed to him in the Old Testament! Is it possible that any man of common sense can believe, that moral principles which are so important to the best interests of human society, should be placed upon such an immoral and vindictive foundation? Can any one imagine that a being, so destitute of moral justice and benevolence himself, could serve as a solid basis on which to rest these qualities in human nature? No, this sectarian God, this malignant phantom of former ages, this compound of weakness and wickedness, is calculated to subvert all moral principle, both
in theory and practice, and present the moral world in the full exercise of the most detestable passions.

The wrathful and unrelenting character of the christian divinity, is not less hostile to the immaculate principles of a sound and excellent morality; imbittered in his anger, and infuriate in his vengeance, he lays his hand upon his innocent son, and offers him up a living sacrifice for the purposes which reason abhors, and justice utterly disclaims. Under the modification, name and character of the Holy Ghost, this being introduces himself to a woman, and violates those correct and delicate sentiments which ought to guide an intelligent being in cases of this kind. Under the name and character of Jesus Christ, he exhibits the most flagrant departures from the purity of moral sentiment and moral practice. ... The sectarian divinity, which christianity presents to us, is represented as a consuming fire, as a being possessing fiery indignation and an uncontrollable vengeance; as a being who disregards all just discrimination upon the subject of moral principle. He declares in some parts of the New Testament, that every thing shall be regulated by his arbitrary will without regard to the nature or character of the case. He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. (See Rom. chap. 9th, etc.) Is it possible that even a christian believer can suppose for a single moment, that the principles of genuine morality can rest upon such an arbitrary basis? No, a divinity of immoral description is the bane of moral virtue. The purest theism is independent of morality, and morality is independent of that; much less then can the corrupt and vitiated conceptions of barbarous ages be produced in support of a principle which could not exist without the intellectual faculties of man, and which cannot be destroyed while these faculties exist. The principle and the practice of immortal virtue, will long remain after the plundering and bloody theology of Moses, Jesus, and Mahomet, has ceased to afflict the human race. The essential principles of morality are founded in the nature of man, they cannot be annihilated, they are as indestructible as human existence itself.

Universal Benevolence

The sentiment which includes the whole sensitive and intelligent world, within the sphere of its benignant operations, is justly denominated universal benevolence. Every organized being, whether of a high or low station in animal existence, is susceptible of pleasure and pain; they are all alternately affected by the wishes, the passions, and the conduct of each other, and this influence is extended much farther than at first view would strike the mind of the most correct and accurate observer. The universe is a vast assemblage of living creatures, whose relations are reciprocal and reciprocated under a thousand different forms, and supported by a thousand different ligaments of an imperceptible nature. The parts are interested in the whole, and the whole is interested in the preservation and diversified modification of the parts. Noth-
ing is foreign or irrelative in the vast fabric to which we belong. Union is most intimate, and the intellectual destiny which awaits the human race, will ultimately disclose the consoling secret, that man's highest happiness consists in perspicuously discovering his true connection with nature, and the eternal duration of this connection. The circumscribed condition of man's excellence, his wants, his social duties, his appetites, and his passions, constitute a considerable drawback upon the comprehensive conceptions, which he would otherwise have been capable of forming concerning his relationship with nature, and the ultimate destination to which the powers of nature have devoted the component and immortal parts of his existence. The intellectual properties of man are, however, capable of being expanded so far as to indulge an opinion subversive of those narrow views which have excited sentiments of hostility between individuals and nations whose interests were the same, and whose duties ought to have been universally reciprocated. It is, no doubt, extremely natural and even absolutely necessary that each individual should feel an anxiety extremely impulsive respecting the preservation of his own existence, and the means by which it is to be rendered tranquil and comfortable; but this sensation, the first which is experienced by a sensitive creature, does not preclude that expansion of mind which would benevolently extend the circle of man's moral affections and duties, and which also prepares for himself an additional portion of exalted enjoyment. Sensation alone, or in other words mere animal existence, must be deprived in a high degree of the power and the pleasure of reciprocating those sentiments of moral sympathy, to which intelligent man is indebted for his highest happiness. The gradual increase of the capacity of sensation constitutes a continual approach toward the possession of those properties on which the sublimity of thought depends, and by which human reason recognizes the benefit of benevolent reciprocation. It is, however, denied by some, that man possesses any other qualities than those which are merely selfish or individual; that his sensual impulses repel every sentiment of comprehensive kindness and affection; that in every respect he is a being of insulated nature and character, and that the powers and properties of his existence are necessarily in a high degree hostile to the interest and well being of others. Two points of prominent and conspicuous importance invite the activity of mind in the solution of the present difficulty. The one point is the physical relation of man to all existence; the other is his moral relation to his own species and to all other inferior animals. The component parts of which man is formed, are all drawn from the great fountain of existence; they are essentially material in their nature, and destined to return to the source from which they sprang. Organized matter cannot lay claim to a preeminent essence; it is modification and refinement which produce visible exaltation, and not the native properties contained in the substance of which man is composed. The constant interchange of matter with matter, is a primary and immutable law of nature, and
should teach man through the channel of observation the ultimate destiny that awaits him, it should teach him that the pain which he inflicts upon sensitive existence will return upon himself with interest, and will pave the way for eternizing a system of misery fatal to the sensations of the whole animal world. Humanity has lessons of a different kind, pregnant with salutary instructions calculated to enforce conviction upon the intellectual powers of man. The spiritualization of human existence has made man a fool, it has taught him to spurn at matter, to condemn its power and ridicule its essence; whereas on the contrary, sound philosophy, which unfolds the connection between man and nature, is calculated to produce in the mind sentiments of respect and tranquility; respect for the aggregate of existence to which he belongs, and tranquillity at the idea of an eternal interest in this indestructible mass. The successive changes through which he is destined to pass, and the impossibility of relinquishing his connection with nature should inspire him with feelings of universal sympathy, and with sentiments of universal benevolence. Human reason has an important duty to perform in the institutions which it establishes; for these institutions will effect in succession, all the portions of matter destined to pass through an organized predicament. It is, no doubt, difficult to convince the human understanding of this physical or universal connection, or to make man see his true interest in this respect. It is, nevertheless, a solemn and philosophic truth that our sensations are, at this moment, suffering under the cruel lash of ancient institutions; that the whole animal world are reciprocating with each other a system of extensive and perpetual wretchedness resulting principally from that contempt which has been thrown upon the capacity of material substance, and our ignorance of an important and an indestructible connection with the great body of nature. If man had a comprehensive view of the successive changes of his existence, and a correct idea of the nature of sensation continually resulting from the renovation of organic forms, sympathy or universal benevolence, would become irresistibly impressive upon his moral powers, and form the basis of his subsequent conduct.

In the second place, man's moral relation to his own species, and to all other inferior animals, furnishes cogent evidence in favour of moral sympathy or universal benevolence. If the subject of man's physical connection presents us with some philosophical difficulties, the repeated and frequent necessity of performing his moral duties, will furnish a mass of instruction adequate to every important decision. The single idea of establishing the doctrine of perpetual reprisals, ought to constitute an ample refutation of those selfish opinions which regard only the individual to the exclusion of all the other members of society. It is the interest as well as the duty of every man to be just and benevolent; an opposite conduct would become the signal of universal discord, and the selfish principle which at first had for its object the preservation of self, would become the procuring cause of self destruction. The powers and the
properties of human existence are of a similar nature, and require a correspond­
ent method of treatment; beside, the intimate connection which subsists
between us in this respect, our enjoyments and our capacity of enjoying, are
augmented by every effort which the mind makes in a comprehensive system
of philanthropy. The narrow prejudice which makes one man the enemy of
another and one country the enemy of another, is not only disgraceful, but
subversive of the best interests of human society. Political governments, and
the prejudices which have been created and nurtured by these governments,
have set individuals and nations in battle array against each other, without any
good or substantial reason whatever. What is there in the nature of the case
which should make a Frenchman and an Englishman hostile to each other? Are
they not both men, possessed of similar faculties, equally indebted to nature for
the resources of their felicity, and capable of being made happy or miserable by
the operation of the same causes? Yes, and it is the iniquity of corrupt govern­
ment which has perverted those sentiments of the human heart by which one
human being is bound to another in a general system of interest, sympathy and
universal benevolence. This principle should also be extended to the whole
animal world, so as to exclude acts of cruelty, and annihilate every species of
injustice. The child that is permitted in early life to run a pin through a fly, is
already half prepared to run a dagger through the heart of his fellow creature!
It is the duty of parents and the business of instruction, to correct the ferocious
errors of former ages, and inspire society with sentiments of sympathy and
universal goodness. But to do this with effect, our political institutions must be
changed, and placed upon the broad basis of universal liberty and universal
justice. This will be a work of time, but it is as certain in the ultimate issue of
things, as the progress of the earth around the sun, or the general revolution
of the planetary system. The individual that withholds his intellectual contribu­
tion in this respect is either grossly ignorant, or a wicked traitor in the great
cause of human existence.

Moral Principle
In the sacred writings of the Jews and Christians; in all ancient theological
compositions, the idea of correct moral principle, had been so frequently aban­
donned, and so grossly violated, that the energy of thought, for many ages, was
inadequate to an upright and full investigation of the nature of human actions.
The subject is, no doubt, connected with considerable difficulties; but these
difficulties have been essentially augmented by the rubbish with which super­
stition has covered the moral character of man. The proofs of any inquiry,
which relate to moral principle, adhere so closely to the realities of physical and
intellectual existence, that the errors of an upright and intelligent mind, can
never assume a frightful and destructive character. They will be continually
modified, and undergo frequent corrections by the new information of which
the mind is continually susceptible. Moral science cannot, perhaps, be reduced to absolute certitude, or become susceptible of absolute perfection; it is in its nature progressive, and the infinite diversity of sensations, which constitute the essential basis of all our intellectual combinations and deductions, will furnish, at least, a suspicion, that the decisions of the mind upon this subject, ought frequently to be reexamined and subjected to a new and more accurate scrutiny. All the theological systems, that ever have been written, have never thrown a particle of light upon this most interesting inquiry; they have established precepts, some few of which are good, and others extremely immoral; but no analysis of the physical or moral powers of man has ever been exhibited; no development of the principle of causation, or the nature of those effects, which have essentially resulted from the constitution of animal or intellectual existence. In all these cases, supernatural theology has prudently observed an absolute silence, probably from a consciousness of the most profound ignorance. This single truth, of itself, evinces the moral deficiency of supernatural religion, and the necessity of returning to the basis of nature for a correct development of principle. Every thing that is discordant to this, has been established by the force of authority, and the reasonableness of such establishment, has never been a ground of serious inquiry.

If it should be objected, that it is impossible, even upon the basis of nature, to find an universal standard of morality, it will nevertheless appear, that a continual approach toward such a standard, must be far preferable to those arbitrary decisions, which theology has made upon this subject. There can be no internal force or excellence connected with a system established solely by external power, without reference to the essence, or character of the principles, which constitute the body of such a system. The internal excellence of the principle itself, together with capacity of mental discernment, is essential to the ultimate benefit, which may be expected from the natural operation of legal codes. But there is no better method of rendering a principle intelligible, than by shewing that it is consistent with nature, that it has resulted from her laws, that it is useful in its effect, that it is capable of being reduced to practice; in a word, that it is suited to the powers, condition, and character of the human species. There is another previous consideration also, which ought to be taken into the account before we shall be able to comprehend the essence of moral principle, or to understand the nature of those duties, which result from our original constitutions. That intellectual part of man, which supernatural theology has denominated a soul, has been viewed separate and distinct from the body, as a kind of spiritual and celestial inhabitant of a mean and material tenement; that their union would be of short duration, and that their final destination was extremely different. This led to reasonings and conjectures, that were erroneous; for as the corporeal sensations were entirely excluded from a participation in the cause, by which moral influence was produced, an
accurate knowledge of the sources of action, was necessarily excluded, and
spiritual mystery was substituted for philosophic demonstration. The human
mind is incapable of forming any conception of that which is not material; man
is a being whose composition is purely physical, and moral properties or intel­
lect, are the necessary results of organic construction. To ascertain, therefore,
the foundation of moral principle, it is necessary to revert to the physical con­
stitution of human nature, it is necessary to go to the source of sensation, to
the cause of impressions, and the diversity of these impressions; to the univer­
sality of the fact, that all human nature possesses the same, or similar sensations,
together with all the other additional circumstances resulting from the subse­
quent intellectual combinations of our existence. All human beings are suscep­
tible of pain, they are also, all susceptible of pleasure; they are all possessed of
the same senses, subjected to the same wants, exhibit the same desires, and are
satisfied with the same enjoyments. These positions cannot be controverted,
they are true in the general features of their character, and the inconsiderable
deviations resulting from the variations of animal structure, cannot, in any
eminent degree, shake the rectitude or universality of these positions. The
modification of the principle of animal structure in intelligent existence, is, no
doubt, diversified by a nice and inscrutable gradation, but the aggregate
amount of organic result must be nearly the same, and though the animal
sensation were to vary in a still higher degree, yet it would, nevertheless, be
substantially true, that certain comprehensive axioms might be laid down,
which would necessarily include within the sphere of their imperious effect,
every possible diversification of the sensitive faculties of human nature. That
happiness is to be preferred to misery, pleasure to pain, virtue to vice, truth to
falsehood, science to ignorance, order to confusion, universal good to universal
evil, are positions which no rational being can possibly controvert. They are
positions which mankind, in all ages and countries, must yield assent. They
are positions, the truth of which, is never denied, the essence of which, is never
controverted; it is the form and application only, which has been the cause of
social contention, and not the reality or excellence of the axioms themselves.
The universality of the principle of sensation, generates universal capacity of
enjoying pleasure, and suffering pain; this circumstance modifies the character
of human actions, and renders it necessary that every man should regard every
other man with an eye of strict justice, with a tender and delicate sensibility,
with a constant reference to the preservation of his feelings, and the extension
of his happiness; in a word, that the exercise of eternal justice should be con­
stantly reciprocated by all the individuals of the same species. If I assume to
myself the pretended right of injuring the sensations, the moral sentiments, or
general happiness of my neighbour, he has, undoubtedly, an equal right to
commit the same violence upon me; this would go to the destruction of all
right, to the total subversion of all justice; it would reduce society instantly to
a state of warfare, and introduce the reign of terror and of misery. It is a contradiction in terms to assert that any man has a right to do wrong; the exercise of such a pretended right, is the absolute destruction of all right; and the first human being who commits violence, has already prepared for himself a hell of retaliation, the justice of which, his own mind can never deny. It is, therefore, inconsistent with truth to say, that there is no such thing as a general standard of moral principle; this standard has a real existence in the construction of our nature; it is ascertained and regulated by the rule of reciprocal justice. It is absolute in the most important duties of human life; but in other cases of less weight and magnitude, it is discovered, by the calculations of judgment, by the process of the understanding, and will sometimes vibrate between the impressions of sense, and the subtile combinations which constitute an ultimate moral decision. If it be objected upon the suggestion of this idea, that the system of natural morality, is less perfect than that which has been revealed, the true answer is, that revealed morality, in the most intelligible cases, is incorrect and absurd: and in the more refined cases of difficulty, a total ignorance is manifested, so that it is evident, upon the very face of the record, that the subject of moral principle, in its subtile discriminations, was never examined or understood by Theological writers. The boasted maxim of the Christian religion, “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them,” is incorrect in point of phraseology, and in point of principle does not exceed any of the moral writers of antiquity, who lived many hundred years before Jesus Christ. If this scriptural declaration means to establish the doctrine of reciprocal justice, it is incontrovertibly right; but the idea of placing the essence of virtue in the wishes of the human heart, is not very correct. It is very possible that one human being may desire another to do unto him many things which ought not to be done, and which are, in their own nature, improper or immoral. To say, therefore, that our desires should constitute the basis of moral decision, is a declaration not consistent with truth, and which, in many cases, would subvert the very essence of moral principle. There is a fitness of suitableness in the thing itself, united with the consideration of the good or bad effect that would be produced, which ought to become the ground of uniform and universal judgment in the human mind. My neighbour may wish me to do unto him an act of serious and substantial injury, which being performed, ought to be returned to me in manner and form exactly the same; and thus, by an adherence to this maxim as it is now stated, a double injury would be produced, and the foundation of virtue be shaken to the centre. But waiving any criticism of this kind, and giving to this scripture declaration the full extent of what is contended for, it is, nevertheless, no more than a plain maxim of justice, which had been known and practised, in a greater or less degree, at all times and in all countries. All the local and unjust institutions of mankind in former ages, have not destroyed the essential relation
which man bears to man, nor have they been able, wholly to efface a knowledge of those duties, which result from these relations, and from the powers and principles of human existence. The more the subject of moral principle is examined, the more it will appear that there are certain general features in it, which the experience of man has partially recognized, and being fully developed and reduced to practice, would constitute a solid foundation for human felicity. The approach to such a standard of perfection, will be gradual and slow, but it must, nevertheless, from the very nature of man, be constant and certain. The following, says Volney, is conceived to be the primordial basis, and physical origin of all justice and right; whatever be the active power, the moving cause that directs the universe, this power having given to all men the same organs, the same sensations, and the same wants, has thereby declared, that it has also given them the same rights to the use of its benefits, and that in the order of nature, all men are equal. Secondly, inasmuch as this power has given to every man the ability of preserving and maintaining his own existence, it clearly follows, that all men are constituted independent of each other, that they are created free, that no man can be subject, and no man sovereign, but that all men are the unlimited proprietors of their own persons. Equality, therefore, and liberty, are two essential attributes of man, two laws of the divinity, not less essential and immutable, than the physical properties of inanimate nature; again, from the principle that every man is the unlimited master of his own person, it follows that one inseparable condition in every contract and engagement is the free and voluntary consent of all the persons therein bound; farther, because every individual is equal to every other individual, it follows that the balance of receipts and payments in political society, ought to be rigorously in equilibrium with each other; so that from the idea of equality, immediately flows that other idea, equity and justice.

Again, the same author observes, that there existed in the order of the universe, and in the physical constitution of man, eternal and immutable laws, which waited only his observance to render him happy. O men of different climes! look to the heavens that give you light, to the earth that nourishes you; since they present to you all the same gifts; since the power that directs their motion has bestowed on you the same life, the same organs, the same wants, has it not also given you the same right to the use of its benefits? Has it not hereby declared you to be all equal and free? What mortal then shall dare refuse to his fellow creature, that which is granted him by nature? O nations, let us banish all tyranny and discord! let us form one society, one vast family; and since mankind are all constituted alike, let there henceforth exist but one law, that of nature; one code, that of reason; one throne, that of justice; one altar, that of union. The foregoing impressive sentiments of this celebrated writer, disclose with clearness to the view of the human mind, the nature of moral principle and the foundation of all right and virtue. It is the reciprocation of
sensation, the mutuality of condition, of powers and wants, that constitute the immortal basis of justice, and lead to the establishment of rules, whose operation must ever be in strict coincidence with the happiness of the human species. The exceptions to those fundamental principles are so few, and so unimportant, as to form no strong objection against the general assertion, that there exist in the constitution of human nature, those essential properties which confer upon man the character of moral agent. To controvert, therefore, the existence of these moral principles, or the idea of a general standard in the morality of human actions, is to fly in the face of all experience, to oppose the universal consciousness of the human understanding, and deny the most conspicuous facts connected with the life of man.

The Religion of Nature

... It is this religion which, at the present period of the world, creates such frightful apprehensions in the household of faith, and threatens to shake to the centre, the chief corner stone on which the Church is built. These apprehensions are daily disclosed by Christian professors, and they depict in such strong colours, the fatal effects of Deism, that ignorant fanaticism believes it to be an immoral monster, stalking with gigantic strides over the whole civilized world, for the detestable purpose of producing universal disorder, and subverting all the sound principles of social and intelligent existence. Such are the horrid ideas which the enemies of this pure and holy religion are everywhere propagating amongst their credulous and deluded followers. This circumstance renders it necessary, that the true idea of Deism be fairly stated, that it may be clearly understood by those whose minds have hitherto been darkened by the mysteries of faith. Deism declares to intelligent man the existence of one perfect God, Creator and Preserver of the Universe; that the laws by which he governs the world, are like himself immutable, and of course, that violations of these laws, or miraculous interference in the movements of nature, must be necessarily excluded from the grand system of universal existence; that the Creator is justly entitled to the adoration of every intellectual agent throughout the regions of infinite space; and that he alone is entitled to it, having no copartners who have a right to share with him the homage of the intelligent world. Deism also declares, that the practice of a pure, natural, and uncorrupted virtue, is the essential duty, and constitutes the highest dignity of man; that the powers of man are competent to all the great purposes of human existence; that science, virtue, and happiness, are the great objects which ought to awake the mental energies, and draw forth the moral affections of the human race.

These are some of the outlines of pure Deism, which Christian superstition so dreadfully abhors, and whose votaries she would willingly consign to endless torture. But it is built upon a substantial foundation, and will triumphantly
diffuse happiness among the nations of the earth, for ages after Christian super­stition and fanaticism have ceased to spread desolation and carnage through the fair creation of God.

In surveying the history of man, it is clearly discovered, that the miseries and misfortunes of his existence are, in a high degree, the result of his ignorance and his vices. Ignorance renders him savage and ferocious; while science pours into his mind the benign sentiments of humanity, and gives a new colouring to his moral existence. Reason, which every kind of supernatural theology abhors; reason, which is the glory of our nature, is destined eventually, in the progress of future ages, to overturn the empire of superstition, and erect upon its ruins a fabric, against which the storms of despotism may beat in vain; against which superstition may wreak her vengeance without effect, from which she will be obliged to retire in agonizing tortures. It has been the opinion of some honest and intelligent minds, that the power of intellect is inadequate to the moral and political emancipation of man. This opinion, though sometimes it is found to be operative upon benevolent hearts, seems, however, to be at war with the intellectual structure of our existence, and the facts furnished by modern his­tory. In the great question which relates to human improvement, the cause which is productive of thought, cannot, in any high degree, be included as influencing the final decision. It is probable, however, that the opinion which refers intellect to organic material combination would favour most an unlim­ited improvement of the human species. If thought to be an effect of matter finely organized, and delicately constructed, the best method of augmenting its power would be, to preserve the whole human system in the most pure, regular, and natural mode of operation. Parents and instructors, in this respect, are capable of doing great injury, or of producing most important benefits to future ages.

The science of the world has been, in some measure, diminished by the propagation of an opinion, that there are only a few human beings who are possessed of what is called genius, to the exclusion of all the rest. This looks too much like mystery, and seems to include in it the idea that mind is sent from heaven, to occupy for a short time, a miserable and material tenement, and then return to its native home. It ought to be recollected that earth is the abode of man, and that of this the materials of his existence are composed, all are con­fined to this place of residence, and to the amelioration of sensitive and intel­ligent life, all his labours ought to be directed. He should learn to respect, and not despise his reason. He should learn to consider moral virtue, as the greatest good, as the most substantial joy of his existence. In order, however, to be eminently good, a full scope must be given to the operation of intellectual powers, and man must feel an unqualified confidence in his own energies. The double despotism of Church and state, has borne so hard upon human exist­ence, that man is sunk beneath its dreadful weight; but resuscitated nations are
about to teach kings and tyrants, a lesson awfully impressive, in regard to the
destiny which awaits the aggregate injustice of the world. The period is at hand,
in which kings and thrones, and priests and hierarchies, and the long catalogue
of mischiefs which they have produced, shall be swept away from the face of the
earth and buried in the grave of everlasting destruction. Then will arrive the era
of human felicity, in which the heart of unfortunate man shall be consoled; then
will appear the moment of national consolation, and universal freedom; then
the empire of reason, of science, and of virtue, will extend over the whole earth,
and man, emancipated from the barbarous despotism of antiquity, will assume
to himself, his true predicament in nature, and become a standing evidence of
the divinity of thought and the unlimited power of human reason.

... In examining the vast machinery of the universe, presented for our
contemplation, by the great Creator, the human mind is lost in a labyrinth of
reflection, and swallowed up in the most profound meditations! We behold on
every side, the most ineffable beauties and the most astonishing wonders; the
most splendid exhibitions of eternal wisdom, the most unbounded displays of
infinite benevolence, and the most testimonies of an incomprehensible power.
In this vast system, there are many things inexplicable to man; many events
beyond the power of human solution, and many arrangements incomprehen-
sible by the most scrutinizing efforts of human wisdom. But man should con-
sider himself as an unit in the totality of existence; as a part of a widely extended
whole, bearing a relation to every other part, and every other part bearing a
relation to his own modification of life. He should reflect that the world is
governed by general and immutable laws, and that the immutable operation of
these laws produces perpetual mutability in the infinitely diversified parts and
portions of the great fabric of nature. He ought to learn that change is the
eternal order in the established arrangements of the world, and he ought not
to be excluded from the general influence of fundamental laws established by
eternal wisdom. He should learn to be reconciled to his fate, and consider
death as a necessary and justifiable appendage of the present modification of
existence. He should be taught to love and practice virtue, but not through the
fear of an eternal hell; but because it is useful to society, and contributes to his
individual happiness. He should be taught to revere the power, which animates
and enlivens the great system of nature; but not to fear God on the one hand,
nor flatter him on the other, with an expectation of obtaining his favour. He
should disregard all ideas of ghosts, demons, and malignant spirits, and reason
on the cognizable properties of real existence. The mind of man should be
raised above the practice of vice, above the frowns of fortune, and the fears
of death. He ought to be the strong advocate of nature, and have confidence
in his own energies; his principles should be just and correct, his actions strictly
moral, and his sentiment in coincidence with the system of benevolence and
utility. No bugbears of superstition, no ghosts of fanaticism, no demons of hell
should be permitted to disturb his brain; but rising above all vice and all prejudice, he should consider himself as an associated being, and live for the benefit of himself and his fellow creatures.

Principles of the Deistical Society
of the State of New York

Proposals for forming a society for the promotion of moral science and the religion of nature—having in view the destruction of superstition and fanaticism—tending to the development of the principles of a genuine natural morality—the practice of a pure and uncorrupted virtue—the cultivation of science and philosophy—the resurrection of reason, and the renovation of the intelligent world.

At a time when the political despotism of the earth is disappearing, and man is about to reclaim and enjoy the liberties of which for ages he has been deprived, it would be unpardonable to neglect the important concerns of intellectual and moral nature. The slavery of the mind has been the most destructive of all slavery; and the baneful effects of a dark and gloomy superstition have suppressed all the dignified efforts of the human understanding, and essentially circumscribed the sphere of intellectual energy. It is only by returning to the laws of nature, which man has so frequently abandoned, that happiness is to be acquired. And, although the efforts of a few individuals will be inadequate to the sudden establishment of moral and mental felicity; yet, they may lay the foundation on which a superstructure may be reared incalculably valuable to the welfare of future generations. To contribute to the accomplishment of an object so important, the members of this association do approve of the following fundamental principles:—

1. That the universe proclaims the existence of one supreme Deity, worthy of the adoration of intelligent beings.
2. That man is possessed of moral and intellectual faculties sufficient for the improvement of his nature, and the acquisition of happiness.
3. That the religion of nature is the only universal religion; that it grows out of the moral relations of intelligent beings, and that it stands connected with the progressive improvement and common welfare of the human race.
4. That it is essential to the true interest of man, that he love truth and practise virtue.
5. That vice is everywhere ruinous and destructive to the happiness of the individual and of society.
6. That a benevolent disposition, and beneficent actions, are fundamental duties of rational beings.
7. That a religion mingled with persecution and malice cannot be of divine origin.
8. That education and science are essential to the happiness of man.
9. That civil and religious liberty is equally essential to his true interests.

10. That there can be no human authority to which man ought to be amenable for his religious opinions.

11. That science and truth, virtue and happiness, are the great objects to which the activity and energy of the human faculties ought to be directed.

Every member admitted into this association shall deem it his duty, by every suitable method in his power, to promote the cause of nature and moral truth, in opposition to all schemes of superstition and fanaticism, claiming divine origin.