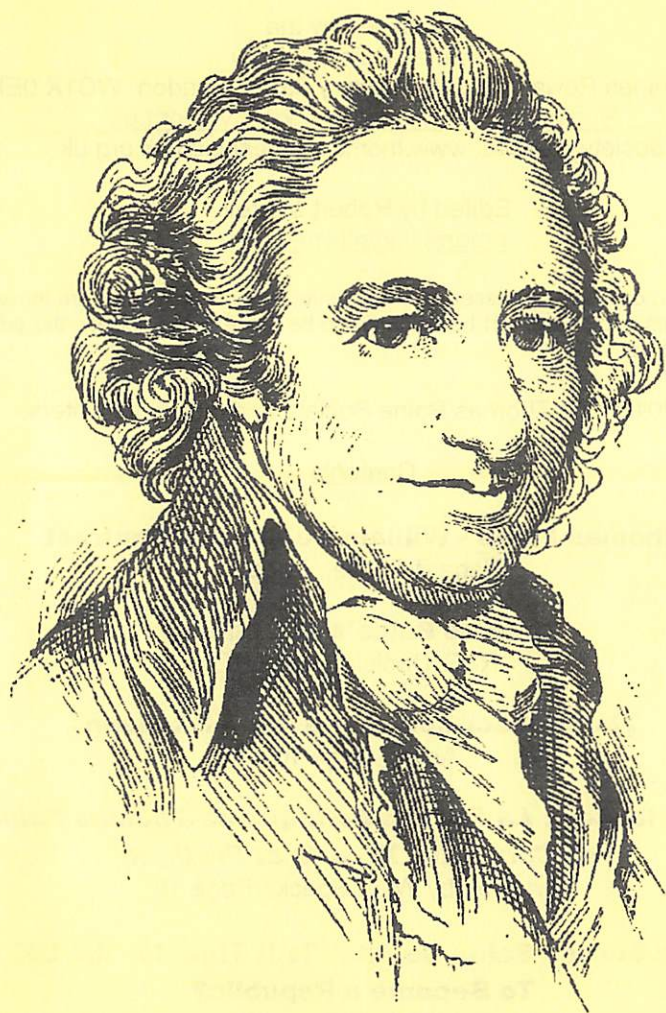


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Contents

Thomas Paine - William Cobbett, A Contrast

Richard Carlile. Page 1.

Thomas Paine's Astronomy

R. G. Daniels. Page 6.

The Prosecution of the Age of Reason

Anon. Page 10.

Book Review: *La Pensee Politique de Thomas Paine en Contexte: Theorie et Pratique*

Reviewed by W. A. Speck. Page 18.

The Sussex Salon Debate: 'Is It Time for the UK To Become a Republic?'

Paul Myles. Page 19.

THOMAS PAINE - WILLIAM COBBETT, A CONTRAST

Richard Carlile

This article was first published in *The Republican*, Vol.13. No.6.
February 10, 1826. The notes at the end are by the editor.

I have something new to say on each of the above names.

In consequence of it having been observed at the City of London Tavern, on January 30, that a bold publication of the writings of Thomas Paine had led to the establishment of Mechanics Institutes,¹ several papers have attempted to scout the connection. But snarl as they may, they cannot alter the fact. Mechanics' Institutes, such as they are now spread over the country, could not have been established twenty years ago. The then haughty priesthood would have effectively opposed its grim and trick-begotten countenance,² to deter all movement in the matter. We do not say that Thomas Paine laid down the plan of the Mechanics' Institutes, as it now exists, but he did lay down a principle that such schools of science would be more useful to mankind than the schools of the priests, seeing which, he saw, as the first step toward their establishment, that the power of the priests must be lessened. This has been done, and these institutes can now be established in Spain and Portugal, and that they are spread over the continent of Europe as well as over England. Every lesson in the sciences is a lesson that tends to divest one of the nonsense which the priest has taught. Nor does the fact, that a few priests subscribe to these scientific institutions, alter the case. There are thousands of priests in England who are honest enough to abhor the trick which is so profitable to them, and to renounce it too, if they could but see a means of supporting themselves in a honourable way. The Rev. Robert Taylor³ is only an exception as to his boldness of saying that which he felt nearer the truth than Christianity. Many may subscribe, without foresight as to the consequence of that subscription, and many, as is well known to be the case, from a love of science, from a desire to increase the scientific knowledge of the day. But the assertion cannot be overthrown, that the bold and successful publication of such writings as those of Thomas Paine's has paved the way to the unopposed establishment of schools of science for Mechanics. Paine had a great mechanical mind, to prove which, nothing is more necessary to be said, than to point to the IRONBRIDGE, which was his sole production.⁴ Much of his writings forms a recommendation to the study of the mechanics and other sciences, always connecting that recommendation with the insufficiency or indisposition

of the priest, as a general character, to teach man anything useful to be known. In his first assault upon the Christian religion, the first part of the *Age of Reason*, he offers science as a substitute, and shows us, that it is only to be obtained, in taking a different view of the operations of matter from which the priest wishes us to take.

The fact, that Mechanics' Institutes exist in England, in the United States of North America partially, and in Paris in a solitary instance, is a fact which shows, that such institutions can only spread themselves with such writings as those of Thomas Paine's. Had Paine lived to see them, he would have been their strenuous supporter and hailed them as the harbingers of better days for the useful part of mankind. We were therefore perfectly correct in toasting such institutions at Paine's birthday dinners; and Mt. Henman⁵ was correct, in associating the rise of those institutions as dependent upon the progress of such writings as those of Thomas Paine. Call him *Tom*⁶ Paine, call him an Infidel,⁷ or call him what you like; the principles taught by Thomas Paine, or by the INFIDEL Tom Paine are one and the same thing, and will make their way against all the royal, aristocratically, priestly, or loyal FIDELS (sic), or fiddlers, that will not or cannot understand, or if they do understand that will oppose them.

WILLIAM COBBETT

Yesterday, for the first time, I saw Mr. Cobbett and heard him address a public assembly in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The purpose of the meeting was to ask the public, or his public, to buy him a seat in the House of Commons, a buying and selling which has been for many years scouted by him as one of the greatest evils in the country. To begin right and cautiously, I confess that I wish to see Mr. Cobbett, Mr. Hunt,⁸ and all men of their pretensions in the House of Commons. But while I confess this wish, I also confess, that I would not waste five minutes of time to accomplish that object, in the case of either, nor give five farthings, towards its accomplishment. Upon any of their past political pretensions, they are not the men to do any good by being there. Still, if they get returned, without any expense to any but they who elect them, I shall be glad to see them returned as members as we shall then see what the politicians are worth, who strike at none of the master evils of the country.

Mr. Cobbett has but one peculiar recommendation, and that is the manner in which he has assaulted and continues to assault the present paper money system and the immense taxation which it supports.⁹ Here he is both right and useful to a great degree; but what his ultimate views are, with respect to a circulating medium, I am ignorant. The question for consideration is, whether a metallic currency be equal to the management of the commercial transactions

of this country. If not, and I think Mr. Cobbett, who had dabbled and benefited not a little in home made paper money, ¹⁰ must see that it is not, what is the proper limit to and what the proper security for a paper currency? That is the question for the legislature to decide; but I have no scheme to submit.

As long as one person will take the written promise to pay any other person, so long as there is a paper currency in existence. There are they who think that this, like all matters of trade, should be most free and not legislated upon; that it should have no kind of restrictions; and that the matter should be left to regulate itself, leaving all persons liable to immediate payment of their paper with metal or other property, or to avowed insolvency. The evil of the paper money system has been found in its being something more or less than a promise to pay; in its being legislatively allowed to pay paper money with paper, or not compelled to give real value for paper promises to pay. This has generated the evil of the present paper money system. Paper money in other respects, is nothing more than the ordinary system of credit in trade. If I want a hundred pound bill, as a matter of convenience, and take it, I credit the issuer of that bill with some property in exchange for that convenience, or he credits me with the loan of the bill, if I give him no value. A free paper money trade would produce no more paper than was convenient and necessary for the purposes of commerce generally. When immediately convertible to gold, no prudent tradesman would hold more than his business required, and an insolvent paper money issuer would be to him but another insolvent tradesman, or other person, whom he had credited with a view to profit. The evil then does not so much consist in an issue of paper money, as in the law which secured the issuer of such paper money from a payment in metal or other real properties. Such a law was licence for dishonest persons to play what tricks they pleased upon the honest part of the trading public.

This subject is not mine, any further than it is everybody's. I have not studied it, and think but little about it. Like all other evils of the kind which are confined to commercial transactions, it will work its own cure; though, in that working, it necessarily generates much misery. To me there seems a deeper evil, that which is the parent of all those minor ones and that is found in taxation which goes to pay men desirable wages, for the inculcation of the most abominable falsehoods among the mass of people, and keep them ignorant and stupid for the sole purpose of choosing them of the produce of their labour. I see no other evil or vice equal to the evil or vice of a religion established, protected and supported by law.¹¹

But however clear Mr. Cobbett might be on the question of paper money and its relations, he is most confused on the subject of trade, or what is commonly

called *free trade*. He spoke on this subject before the Lincoln-in-the-Fields assembly, and I see his words correctly reported in the *Morning Herald*, I could not have supposed that such a man could have committed such errors, even upon the first glance at the subject. But they are errors which we shall find to arise from a bigoted attachment to old systems, to country with or without honour, and to the nonsense about the "wisdom of ancestors".¹²

He says, that two nations cannot trade together and both gain. That for both to gain, there must be a third to give a higher price for the articles which the first sells to the second at a profit. He illustrates the case by supposing himself a butcher buying meat from another butcher at eight pence per pound, and selling it to a neighbouring gentleman at nine pence. Then, he says, we butchers both gain from the gentleman consumer, and adds, that for the two nations to gain, there must be a "gentleman nation" to buy at a higher price what the first sold to the second. This is a confined and imperfect view of the case. Two nations can trade together and both gain.

If England cannot get wine without sending cottons to France,¹³ nor France cottons without sending wines to England, both gain; England gains the wine, and France the cottons. This is not gain, says Mr. Cobbett, because value is given for value; he says neither gain; but I, and others, say both gain. If all property consists ultimately of labour, all the labour generated and well applied is clear gain; and if the labour in cottons could not have been well applied without sending them to France in exchange for wine, the wine is so much clear gain, and the same, if the wine could not have produced cottons, or if cottons could not have been obtained in France without the production and export of wine.

Gain is that which adds to our happiness, such as a plenty of food and raiment, even luxuries; and if I can only obtain wines and agreeable clothing, by sending books to France, I gain by that exchange, that which I could not otherwise have gained. If England and France were to produce something new, and the one could only be had in exchange for the other, there is mutual gain. To say that there can be no gain, unless the one party be in a condition to dictate terms and prices to the other, as Mr. Cobbett said in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, is just as wise and honest as it would be to say, that there is no gain in bold and successful robbery. It is a great thing to teach nations, and it will be well for Mr. Cobbett to learn it, that the highest amount of gain is ultimately to be obtained by the most free and fair trade, and not by the trick which one can practise upon the other, nor by oppression of the one, and the submission of the other. Mr. Cobbett's assertions were, that England has flourished by dictating the terms on which she would deal with other nations, and that she can only flourish while in the possession of power to dictate such terms. Never was an

idea more erroneous ; more vicious. It matters not whether England gets metal or food and raiment in exchange for her produce; the question is, which mode of trading will yield her people the greatest amount of comforts, to pursue a system that cannot fail to impoverish other nations, or a system that shall so enrich them, as to make them the consumers of twice or thrice the former quantity of our produce?

This subject will admit of extensive illustration, and I shall return to it. \but I have said enough to show, that Mr. Cobbett is not the wisest in the country, and no man will say that he is the most honest. Still I have no objection to him being sent into Parliament; for if he cannot teach, he may learn something, by clashing with opposition, and in being examined by men who take no notice of his writings. It requires more of impudence than of ability to pass for a wise man among the multitude; but it wants more ability than impudence, to pass for a wise man in a public assembly, where everything is exposed to all sorts of subtle opposition.

Editorial Notes.

The text of the article reproduced is given as Carlile published it with no attempt made to modify the punctuation or shorten the paragraphs.

1. For a report see *The Republican*, Vol.13. No.5. February 3, 1826, pp.129-137.
2. This appears to be a reference to the Society to Enforce His Majesty's Proclamation for the Suppression of Vice, better known to its critics simply as the Vice Society.
3. The Rev. Dr. Robert Taylor was an ex-Anglican priest who rejected the historicity of Jesus. Articles by him were published in *Republican*. He was jailed twice for blasphemy, serving a total of three years.
4. The reference is to the bridge at Monkswearmouth, which Paine believed the builders had used his patent for an iron bridge, and that no credit had been extended to him, or payment given. The bridge was demolished in 1925. It is no well established that while some casting made for a bridge by Paine were used in the construction, the design differed fundamentally from that of Paine.
5. Henman's comments are to be found in the report mentioned in note 1.
6. The abbreviated version of Paine's forename was used as a deliberate insult by his critics and political opponents.
7. A term of abuse levelled at many political radicals indicative of a charge of them being irreligious if not atheists.
8. Henry Hunt, 'Orator Hunt' was the main speaker at the meeting now called the Peterloo massacre. He was elected to Parliament in 1829 to represent Preston.
9. Cobbett wrote at length against paper money, and it was Paine's essay, *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance* (1796), which opposed paper money that was instrumental in converting Cobbett from a bitter critic of Paine to that of an enthusiastic supporter.
11. The reference is to the Church of England.
12. Paine warned about allowing the past to dictate the future.
13. This point takes on added force when it is remembered that it was penned when Britain was the world's leading producer and exporter of textiles.

THOMAS PAINE'S ASTRONOMY

R. G. Daniels

In the first part of *The Age of Reason*, written during the French Revolution and completed we are told only a matter of hours before his arrest, Paine devotes some pages to a general account of astronomy as an introduction to his ideas on Christian theology. It is worth looking at this account in the light of knowledge as it was then and as it is now, and also to consider the sources of Paine's information.

He begins with a comment on the 'plurality of worlds', an idea from the ancient philosophers gaining acceptance in scientific circles in the eighteenth century by virtue of the work of Halley and Herschell, indicating the vastness of space and the lack of uniqueness in the existence of the earth.

He then describes the solar system - the sun and its six satellites or worlds, all in annual motion around the sun, some satellites having their own satellites or moons in attendance, each world keeping its own track (the ecliptic) around the sun. Each world spins around itself (rotates on its own axis) and this causes day and night. Most worlds, in their self-rotation, are tilted against their line of movement around the sun (the obliquity of the ecliptic) and Paine quotes the correct figure for earth of $23\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$. It is this tilt that is responsible for the changing seasons and for the variation in the length of day and night over the world and throughout the seasons. Earth make 365 rotations in one year's orbit of the sun.

The six planets are then described with their distances from the sun. These figures are incorrect now but the figures Paine gives for the earth's distance, 88 million miles, agrees with the eighteenth century figure derived from Kepler's Laws of about 1620. In 1772 Bode formulated his empirical law of planetary distances giving the measurements more accurately than hitherto, but this information would not have permeated the circles in which Paine moved after his departure for America.

As proof that it is possible for man to know these distances he cites the fact that for centuries the precise date and time of eclipses and also the passage of a planet like Venus across the face of the sun (a transit) have been calculated and forecast.

Beyond the solar system, 'far beyond all power of calculation' (until Bessel calculated the distance of 61 Cygni in 1838) are the 'fixed' stars, and these

fixed stars 'continue always at the same distance from each other, and always in the same place, so does the sun in the centre of the system'. William Herschell communicated to the Royal Society in 1783 that this was not in fact so, and that all stars were moving but at rates indiscernible as yet to man. Paine repeats a current idea that these 'fixed' stars and suns probably all have their own planets in attendance upon them. Thus the immensity of space.

'All our knowledge of science is derived from the revolutions of those several planets or worlds of which our system is composed make in their circuit round the sun'. He regards this multiplicity as a benefit bestowed by the Creator - otherwise, all that matter in one globe with no revolutionary motion (there are echoes of Newton here) would have deprived our senses and our scientific knowledge, - it is from the sciences that all the mechanical are that contribute so much to our earthly felicity and comfort are derived'. Paine even suggests that the devotional gratitude of man is due to the Creator for this plurality.

The same opportunities of knowledge are available to the inhabitants of neighbouring planets and to the inhabitants of planets of other suns in the universe. The idea of a society of worlds Paine finds cheerful - a happy contrivance of the almighty for the instruction of mankind. What then of the Christian faith and the 'solitary and strange conceit that the Almighty, with millions of worlds equally dependent on his protection, should devote all his care to this world and come to die in it? Has every world an Eve, an apple, a serpent and a redeemer?' An so to the rest of *The Age of Reason*.

Where did Paine obtain his astronomical information and instruction? It is unlikely he had any books with him, he certainly did not have a bible. Paris, seething with the Revolution, had the astronomer Jean-Sylvain Bailly as mayor until his execution in 1793. Condorcet (author of *Progress of the Human Spirit*) and Lavoisier (the 'father of modern chemistry) were deeply involved and died in the Revolution. Laplace ('the French Newton') and the astronomer Joseph Jérôme Lefrançois de Lalande were also in and around Paris at this time. But all these scientists, like Paine, would have been too busy to teach or discuss astronomy. So Paine would have had to recall the lectures and practical demonstrations he attended in London before he went to America. They were given by Benjamin Martin, James Ferguson and Dr. John Bevis. It is worthwhile looking at the careers of these three men, mentioned only by surname early in *The Age of Reason*, because the facts, derived from the *Dictionary of National Biography*, afford some light on Paine's life in London.

Benjamin Martin (1704-1782). A ploughboy to begin with, he began to teach the 'three Rs' at Guildford while studying to become a mathematician, instrument-maker, and general compiler of information! He read Newton's *Opticks* (1705)

and became an ardent follower of his ideas. He used a £500 legacy to buy instruments and books in order to become an itinerant lecturer. He had over thirty major publications to his name as well as a number of inventions. He perfected the Orrery (not named after its inventor, as Paine states, but after the patron of the copier of the invention!), and used his own version in his lectures. He lived in London at Hadley's Quadrant in Fleet Street, from 1740 onwards. He died following attempted suicide in 1782.

James Ferguson (1710-1776). A shepherd-boy in Banffshire at the age of ten. He took up medicine at Edinburgh but gave up to sketch embroidery patterns and then to paint portraits and continue his interest in astronomy. He used the income from his painting to enable him to begin as a teacher and lecturer in London in 1748, where he had arrived five years before. His book, *Astronomy explained on Sir Isaac Newton's Principles* (1756), went to at least thirteen editions and was used by William Herschel for his own study of astronomy. George III called on Ferguson for tuition in mechanics, and he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1763. He became a busy lecturer in and around London, sometime also travelling to Newcastle, Derby, Bath and Bristol for speaking engagements. He occasionally had public disagreements with his wife - even in the middle of lectures!

Dr. John Bevis (1693-1771). He studied medicine at Oxford and travelled widely in France and Italy before settling in London prior to 1730. Newton's *Opticks* was his favourite reading matter, and in 1738 he gave up his practice and moved to Stoke Newington where he built his own observatory. Here, and at Greenwich, assisting Edmund Halley (who died in 1742) he did much astronomical work, and made a unique star-atlas, the *Uranographia Britannica*, the plates of which, however, were sequestered in chancery when the printer, John Neale, became bankrupt, and earned a reputation (internationally) as an astronomer. When Nevil Maskelyne became Astronomer Royal following the death of the Rev. Nathaniel Bliss in 1764, Bevis, who had hoped for the appointment himself, returned to his medical practice, setting up at the Temple [London]. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1765. But astronomy got him in the end, for, continuing his studies, he was quickly from his telescope one day he fell, sustaining injuries from which he died. It could only have been at this period in his life, at the Temple, as a FRS, that Paine knew him. 'As soon as I was able I purchased a pair of globes, and attended the philosophical lectures of Martin and Ferguson, and afterward acquainted with Dr. Bevis of the society called the Royal Society, then living in the Temple, and an excellent astronomer'.

Moncure Conway in his *Life of Paine* mentions that [Thomas 'Clio'] Rickman assigns the period of instruction in astronomy to the year 1767, but that he

himself preferred the earlier time of 1757, when Paine would have been twenty years of age. Moreover, he suggests that Paine would have been too poor to afford globes in 1766-7. A study of the lives of his mentors shows clearly that he met Martin and Fergusson fairly certainly at the earlier time, but Dr. Bevis only at the later period, having bought his globes, terrestrial and celestial, ten years previously. On the first occasion he was a staymaker with Mr. Morris of Hanover Street; on his second he was teaching at Mr. Goodman's and then in Kensington.

There were some important events taking place in astronomy at this time but they seem to have escaped Paine's notice. William Herschell discovered the seventh, telescopic, planet in 1781. He wanted to call it 'George's Star', but it is now called Uranus. The scientists in Paris would have known all about this important discovery but one supposes that there would have been no occasion to discuss it with Paine; in any case he did not speak French fluently. There had been transits of Venus across the sun in 1761 and 1769 (the only occasions that century) and Paine mentions them in a footnote to prove how man can know sufficient to predict these and similar events. There must have been occasions of much general public comment - especially when scientists were trying to calculate accurately the distance of the sun from earth at these events. And then in 1789, Herschell made his great forty foot telescope, the envy of astronomers everywhere, indeed, the National Assembly was later to promote a prize for such an undertaking. However, time, scarcity of the necessary metals and shortage of money prevented any such project succeeding in stricken France.

Thomas Paine had minimal experience at the eyepiece of a telescope and he showed no inclination later in his life to pursue astronomical studies. But in these brief pages of *The Age of Reason* he shows he has gained a very clear understanding of the solar system from those early days in London.



Benjamin Martin



James Ferguson

THE PROSECUTION OF THE AGE OF REASON

Described by Richard Carlile as "...the first serious and honest attack ever made upon Christian Idolatry in this country", Paine's *Age of Reason* was written during his stay in Paris. The second part was penned in the Luxemburg prison where Paine faced a strong possibility of execution. Luckily he survived and like his earlier *Rights of Man*, the *Age of Reason* had a large scale impact on radical thought, an impact that continues to this day. According to the Bishop of London, Cornish miners were reading the *Age of Reason* while a government spy reported its warm reception in Liverpool. It was found in the pockets of rebellious United Irishmen in 1798.

Francis Place, the living link between the Jacobins of the 1790s and the Chartists of the 1830s, read the *Age of Reason* while waiting for his wife to give birth in 1794. So impressed was he that he sought out the book's owner, a member of the London Corresponding Society, and himself joined the LCS. Such was the controversy provoked by the book in the LCS ranks that those who opposed atheism and deism broke away to form a new organisation.

Another who at this time read Paine and came under his influence was Eton pupil Percy Shelley, who in 1811 published his *The Necessity of Atheism*. In a sense he was lucky, the only penalties he suffered were expulsion from Oxford University and the end of his father's allowance. In 1814 he wrote *A Refutation of Deism*. Shelley was greatly admired by Carlile who devoted considerable space in the *Republican* to a discussion of his work. When the High Court condemned Shelley's *Queen Mab* as seditious and blasphemous, and the publisher burned his stock, Carlile rushed out his own edition. Sadly, Shelley never saw it as within a month he drowned in Italy.

Falling on hard times, Place hoped to improve his finances by publishing an edition of *Age of Reason*. In this he enlisted the aid of an impoverished bookbinder Thomas Williams. Anxious to keep the profit for himself, Williams cut Place out of the deal.

Thus it was upon the head of Williams that the wrath of the establishment fell. In June 1797 he was tried before Lord Kenyon for having sold a single copy of part two of the *Age of Reason*. The prosecutor in this case was Thomas Erskine who some years before had brilliantly defended Paine's *Rights of Man*. On the grounds that Christianity was part of the law of the land and any attack on it therefore was illegal, Williams, a sick man, was sentenced to a year in prison. Hearing the sentence, Williams asked if he might be allowed a bed in

prison. Lord Kenyon replied that he couldn't order that that as the publication was "horrible to the ears of Christians".

The prosecution of Williams had been instigated by the Society for the Suppression of Vice. The society's aim was the imposition of piety upon the poor by outlawing their pleasures, intellectual or otherwise. The ban on Sunday meetings which charged admission was the society's work. The Vice Society, as it was popularly known, floundered when it sought legislation to imprison adulterers. The ban the pleasures of the poor was one thing, to interfere with those of the rich just wasn't on.

A leading figure in the Vice Society was William Wilberforce. A Tory Member of Parliament and friend of William Pitt, he was an ardent anti-slavery campaigner. William Cobbett launched a furious attack on him for championing slaves in the West Indies while ignoring the wretched plight of labourers at home. Wrote Cobbett: "...what an insult to call upon the people under the name of free British labourers; to appeal to them on behalf of black slaves, when these free British labourers, these poor, mocked, degraded wretches, would be happy to lick the dishes and bowls out of which these black slaves have breakfasted, dined and supped". He continued: "...it is notorious that great numbers of your free British labourers have actually died of starvation".

When Erskine discovered that the Williams family was starving and the children suffering from small pox, he urged the Vice Society to exercise Christian mercy and content itself with the time Williams had spent in Newgate awaiting sentence. It declined. So angered was Erskine that he returned his fee and declined any further contact with the society.

In 1812 the bookseller Daniel Eaton was tried for having published a collection of Paine's essays which he called part three of *Age of Reason*. This was described as an impious libel representing Jesus as an impostor. Although he was aged sixty and in poor health, Eaton was awarded eighteen months and to stand in the pillory once a month. Such was the public outrage at this that the pillory fell into disuse.

Richard Carlile had read *Age of Reason* during one of his numerous stays in prison and decided to publish his own edition. This appeared in a half guinea edition in 1818. Having existed the ire of the authorities by reporting the massacre by the yeomanry of demonstrators for reform in Manchester, he was brought to trial in October 1818 on a charge of blasphemous libel for having published the book. Once again it was the Vice Society which had instigated the proceedings.

The trial lasted three days. Carlile defended himself in a marathon eleven hour speech in which he read aloud the whole of *Age of Reason*, thereby ensuring it could be included in the record. He also published the trial proceedings as a two penny pamphlet in an edition of ten thousand. The judge, Chief Justice Abbot, commented that it was no defence to repeat the libel complained of.

Carlile complained that proceedings in the trial were irregular and not according to the law and that therefore the verdict was contaminated. He protested the authority of the court to try the charge of blasphemy in that no person had been defamed. It was, he said, alleged that he had incurred the wrath of the Almighty, but no proof of this had been offered. He sought to prove to the jury that his intentions were good, and not wicked and malicious as charged, by showing the truth and moral tendency of the book he had published.

Carlile attempted to call as witnesses "The Archbishop of Canterbury, the High Priest of the Jews and the Astronomer Royal, with the most eminent men in each Christian Sect, to show the jury that Christianity could not be part of the law of the land, as Christianity could not be defined and no man could possibly say what it really was...". However, the Chief Justice would not let him do this.

After hearing a discourse on the virtues of Christianity and the demerits of its opponents from the Lord Chief Justice, the jury returned a verdict of guilty. Carlile received three years imprisonment and a fine of £1,500. Unable, or unwilling, to pay the fine, Carlile was obliged to spend a further three years behind bars, remaining in Dorchester prison until 1826. However, such were the peculiarities of the penal system of the time that he was able to continue editing his newspaper, the *Republican*, from his cell.

Carlile's place as publisher of *Age of Reason* was taken by his wife Jane. She too was imprisoned, part of the charge against her being the sale of W. T. Sherwin's biography of Paine, receiving two years imprisonment. As a married woman she was considered to have no property and so was not fined. She was followed by Carlile's sister Mary Ann who received two years imprisonment and a fine of £500.

Carlile's supporters formed themselves into Zetetical societies many of them volunteering to keep on Carlile's Fleet Street shop, the grandly named Temple of Reason, from which the *Age of Reason* and similar publications were sold. Not a few suffered imprisonment as a result. With the rise of Chartism and its unstamped press (a stamp duty had been imposed on papers to price them beyond the reach of the poor) some would again end up behind bars for upholding freedom of publication. The Carlile case was the last prosecution of

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Carlile attempted to call as witnesses "The Archbishop of Canterbury, the High Priest of the Jews and the Astronomer Royal, with the most eminent men in each Christian Sect, to show the jury that Christianity could not be part of the law of the land, as Christianity could not be defined and no man could possibly say what it really was...". However, the Chief Justice would not let him do this.

After hearing a discourse on the virtues of Christianity and the demerits of its opponents from the Lord Chief Justice, the jury returned a verdict of guilty. Carlile received three years imprisonment and a fine of £1,500. Unable, or unwilling, to pay the fine, Carlile was obliged to spend a further three years behind bars, remaining in Dorchester prison until 1826. However, such were the peculiarities of the penal system of the time that he was able to continue editing his newspaper, the *Republican*, from his cell.

Carlile's place as publisher of *Age of Reason* was taken by his wife Jane. She too was imprisoned, part of the charge against her being the sale of W. T. Sherwin's biography of Paine, receiving two years imprisonment. As a married woman she was considered to have no property and so was not fined. She was followed by Carlile's sister Mary Ann who received two years imprisonment and a fine of £500.

Carlile's supporters formed themselves into Zetetical societies many of them volunteering to keep on Carlile's Fleet Street shop, the grandly named Temple of Reason, from which the *Age of Reason* and similar publications were sold. Not a few suffered imprisonment as a result. With the rise of Chartism and its unstamped press (a stamp duty had been imposed on papers to price them beyond the reach of the poor) some would again end up behind bars for upholding freedom of publication. The Carlile case was the last prosecution of

Age of Reason, but it would be a long time before radicals could publish and distribute their publications without fear of legal penalties.

In prison Carlile wrote a long biographical essay on Paine. Of the *Age of Reason* he wrote: "It was written in France expressly to stem the torrent of French atheism.... Its purpose was bourgeois and reactionary rather than radical and proletarian... it contained truth and truth will not be confined to a nation or to a continent. But it will tend to fail as a standard criticism of superstition precisely because it is not atheistic".

In 1819 Cobbett had returned from America bringing with him Paine's bones. His aim in so doing was to atone for his youthful attacks on Paine by erecting a mausoleum which would be a place of radical pilgrimage. This did not happen and after Cobbett's death the bones were lost.

It was Carlile who established the tradition of celebrating Paine's birthday. The *Republican* of February 22, 1822 reported a gathering of Stockport republicans to celebrate the "natal day of Mr. Paine", while nearly seventy years later the *National Reformer* was reporting a children's' party on Paine's birthday organised by the West Ham branch of the National Secular Society.

Paine was a great influence on the Chartists. When it was founded in 1837 the East London Democratic Association stated its object was: "... to promote the Moral and Political conditions of the working classes by disseminating the principles propagated by that great philosopher and redeemer of mankind, the Immortal Thomas Paine. Bronterre O'Brian urged Chartists to read Paine along with Locke because "they will tell you labour is the only genuine property",

Today we live in an age of fanatical fundamentalism and theocratic intolerance. Even in the supposed democracies there are those who would willingly censor the reading of ordinary folk. Two centuries after its publication, the *Age of Reason* remains necessary reading for freethinkers and radicals. And we should never forget those such as Carlile who strove and suffered to make it available when to do so was extremely dangerous.

Note.

I do not know who wrote this interesting article, but rather than leave it on file I have decided to publish it. If I discover the identity of the writer it will be fully acknowledged.

Book Review

La Pensee Politique de Thomas Paine en Contexte: Theorie at Pratique. Carine Lounissi. 894pp. Paris Honore Champion 2012. ISBN: 978 – 2 – 7453 – 2359 – 0. £139.06.

This fundamental contribution to Paine's political thought, based on a Ph. D thesis at the Sorbonne, deserves to be translated into English so that it becomes available to all Anglophones interested in the subject. Dr Lounissi places his writings in context by examining the literature on which he apparently drew for inspiration, and also by discussing the often hostile reactions that they provoked.

One can only say that previous political thinkers *appear* to have influenced Paine because he notoriously cited very few authorities in his publications and insisted that his ideas were original. Thus when critics dismissed *Common Sense* as being derived from John Locke he denied that he had ever read *Two Treatises of Government*. There were contemporaries who took him at his word that his political thought was homespun. Edmund Burke declined directly responding to the *Rights of Man* claiming that Paine had 'not even a moderate portion of learning of any kind. He has learned the instrumental part of literature, a style, and a method of disposing his ideas, without having ever made a previous preparation of study or thinking—for the use of it'.

Notwithstanding this, commentators on Paine's political philosophy have sought to trace it back to previous philosophers. Thus despite his own disclaimer some have insisted that he was influenced by Locke since, even if he did not read his works, Lockean ideas were 'in the air', or he absorbed them 'by osmosis'. Lounissi concludes that, while at first sight Paine's thought often seems Lockean, on a deeper comparison between them differences emerge. For example both place the origins of government in a contract in which individuals agreed to set one up. Superficially these are similar if not identical models. But on closer examination they have significant differences. Locke accepted any government which was established by the contract – monarchy, aristocracy, democracy or, as he claimed was the case in England, a mixture of these. Paine by contrast denied that the original contract could set up any hereditary form of government since it could not bind future generations. Only a polity in which the people had a voice was legitimate.

Despite her scepticism Lounissi concludes that Paine's contractual theory

was sown in a Lockean soil. She also finds echo's in Paine of the contractual theories of Algernon Sidney and Rousseau. On the latter she is on firmer ground as Rousseau was one of the writers whom Paine did cite, along with Montesquieu, Voltaire and other *philosophes*, in *Rights of Man*. One of Paine's hostile critics lamented that France had been a 'generous and gallant nation' before it was 'unhappily sophisticated by the late – forged philosophy of ingenious, immoral vagabonds, such as *Rousseau* and *Paine*'. As with all direct quotations from English authors Lounissi commendably translates this into French in the text but quotes the original in her footnote on page 185.

The footnote cites the original in the edition of *Political Writings of the 1790s* edited by Gregory Claeys, in eight volumes published by Pickering and Chatto in 1995. These publishers have rendered a great service to students of Paine with this publication and also that of *Thomas Paine and America 1776 – 1809*, published in six volumes in 2009 of which Kenneth Burchell is editor. In her discussion of the reception of Paine's works Lounissi draws frequently on these collections of contemporary works.

It might be expected that a French scholar would be more informed about Paine's career in France than about his activities in America. Dr Lounissi, however, is a specialist in the civilisation of the United States at the University of Rouen, with a particular interest in the history of the early Republic. Her book demonstrates familiarity with politics and political theory on both sides of the Atlantic in the late eighteenth century. Thus she points out that the constitutional arrangements for the United States outlined in *Common Sense* owed much to Benjamin Franklin's plan for a union of the colonies spelled out at the Albany Congress of 1754.

Although his proposals were sketchy, leading some to argue that Paine was more concerned with the negative task of bringing down governments rather than the positive problem of replacing them, Lounissi shows that in America he did contribute to the constitutional debates of the revolutionary era. He was not directly involved in the drafting of the radical constitution for Pennsylvania in 1776. This did not prevent his critics, led by John Adams, from associating him with its provisions for a unicameral legislature elected annually by universal adult male suffrage. He certainly supported it, at least initially, in several publications. Again he had no part in the deliberations at Philadelphia in 1787 which resulted in the American Constitution, being overseas in England at the time. But he did approve it to the point of recommending its adoption by the British.

Paine did have a direct input into the drafting of the abortive French constitution of 1793, being appointed to the committee chaired by Condorcet

charged with drawing it up. Unfortunately, as Lounissi points out, it is impossible to discern precisely what his role in the process was, though she does deduce that parts of the document were influenced by passages in *Rights of Man*, while the prefatory declaration of rights owed much to Paine too. He also had a say in the debates which resulted in the setting up of the Directory in 1795. Although his contribution to them, mainly objecting to the restriction of the franchise, has been long known, Lounissi's familiarity with the French sources adds details not available elsewhere.

She also demonstrates a formidable knowledge of English sources. For example, she places discussion of the welfare proposals in the second part of *Rights of Man* and in *Agrarian Justice* in the context of the debate on the poor laws in the late eighteenth century. Her research unearthed an anecdote about Paine unknown to his biographers. Thomas Ruggles, in *The History of the Poor* published in 1793, recounted how he had recently sat next to Paine at a dinner, who informed him that, when his grandfather was an overseer of the poor at Thetford fifty years before, the poor rate was under £40. Now it was between £300 and £400. "In a short time if this evil is not stopped the friends of liberty will, with the greatest ease, walk over the ruins of the boasted constitution; its fall wants no acceleration from the friends of Gallic freedom.' To this a gentleman instantly replied 'Thomas, thy wish is father to the thought'."

After discussing Paine's ideas on poverty and property Lounissi proceeds to investigate his republicanism. She concludes that he was not a republican in the eighteenth – century tradition of the commonwealthmen. These, also known as classical republicans, argued that governments always sought to reduce the liberty of their subjects and that it was the duty of the virtuous citizen to be constantly vigilant to detect attempts to do so and resist them. One method rulers employed to distract citizens from their machinations was to corrupt them, for instance by encouraging trade in luxury goods, which allegedly reduced their will to defend their rights. Classical republicans were therefore opposed to commercial expansion. Paine by contrast welcomed commerce and industry, not only because they stimulated economic growth but also because he believed free trade helped to disseminate ideas of liberty in other areas of human activity.

Lounissi also investigates Paine's credentials as a historian. He announced his intention of writing a three - volume history of the American Revolution and then of giving an historical account of the French Revolution. Neither of these ambitious projects was ever realised. As she observes, Paine had a certain talent for missing rendezvous with historiography. His only major contribution to the history of the American Revolution was an open

Letter to Abbe Raynal objecting to his interpretation of it. Raynal put the quarrel between Britain and the colonies down to a dispute about the right to raise taxes. Paine insisted that the British government all along plotted to provoke the Americans into violent resistance to its measures in order to deprive them of their liberties.

Paine absorbed what he had so far written on the Revolution in France into the first part of *Rights of Man*. Just as his account of the American conflict was written to correct Raynal, as Lounissi observes, so that of the French was to put Burke right. She checks Paine's account of the events he describes and demonstrates that he frequently got them wrong. In summing up his accounts of the two revolutions she concludes that he was more a theorist than a historian of them.

Paine's second sojourn in America, following his return from France, is a period of his life that has been frequently skipped over quickly. Yet during his last few years Paine continued to publish quite prolifically. Lounissi and another French scholar, Marc Belissa, are now doing justice to his later works. For as Lounissi points out, even if these publications did not necessarily add new aspects to his thought, they are nevertheless important. Thus his political writings against the Federalists led by John Adams contributed to the debate over whether the ideals of the American Revolution were in danger until they were rescued by Thomas Jefferson.

After dealing with Paine's last years Lounissi ends the book with another account of his political activities in France. Thus she goes into detail on his role in the trial of Louis XVI, and publishes three appendices of contributions he made in the debates on the king's fate. Two of them have not previously appeared in any collection of his writings, while only inaccurate versions of the third were ever published.

This exhaustive investigation of Paine's political thought, which covers all his speculative writings except those on religion, is a colossal achievement. Its range is indicated by the bibliography, which takes up sixty five pages. It is a pity that the index is confined to the names of people mentioned in the text, and even then omits some. But a comprehensive index would have made an already lengthy book unwieldy and more expensive.

W. A. Speck

THE SUSSEX SALON DEBATE OF NOVEMBER 2012 ON: 'IS IT TIME FOR THE UK TO BECOME A REPUBLIC?'

Contributed by Paul Myles

The country may have celebrated the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in spectacular style this year, but is everything really happy and glorious with the monarchy in 21st Century Britain – or is it time for Britain to become a republic?

A committee member of the Thomas Paine Society UK was asked to join in this live debate in front of a 160 strong at the Brighton Dome Studio Theatre in November 2012. Paul Myles agreed to join in the Question Time style event. There were four panellists, all of whom gave a 5 minute opening and closing statement. The audience joined in either by asking questions or taking part in the snap opinion polls via the electronic voting system.

The opening theme was : **What can we learn from monarchies that have become republics in the past? Does the issue even matter in the modern world?**

The panel of 4 experts included:

Graham Smith, who heads the campaigning organization Republic , and has been outspoken on issues including Prince Charles's lobbying of Government departments, and which is calling for an honours system decided by the people;

Rafe Heydel-Mankoo , historian and royal commentator. One of North America's leading royal commentators, he is an expert in monarchy, protocol, honours and British traditions, Rafe is the former editor of *Burke's World Orders of Knighthood & Merit*. He is a trustee of the Canadian Royal Heritage Trust and a Research Associate at the leading public policy think tank ResPublica;

Richard Whatmore, Professor of Intellectual History and the History of Political Thought at the University of Sussex, whose interests include the history of democracy, the French Revolution and the Enlightenment.

Paul Myles of the Thomas Paine Society UK, which promotes the revolutionary thinker's contribution to democracy and freedom;

Graham Smith opened with a clear republican argument, that the monarchy is an outdated and quirky establishment, which does not add to the nation, not even in tourism terms.

Rafe Heydel-Mankoo was clearly pro monarchy, and took the familiar pro monarchical argumentative line, stability, 1000 years of history, glorious in the reigns. His later arguments were nuanced, acknowledging the need for some change.

Richard Whatmore brought gravitas and accuracy to the debate, and argued that European Union is much more important over the long term than anything the UK may struggle with locally.

Paul Myles took the position for disestablishment of the Church of England. Paul suggested that this was an achievable aim, and would re balance our society into a modern state over time. He pointed out that on the world map of secularity the UK was showing as yellow meaning "ambiguous" on this matter. Rafe agreed with Paul that England and Iran were the only two nation states with unelected clergy in their legislative chambers.

The first vote was 75% in favour of England becoming a republic, this showed the republican leanings of the mostly local audience. In conversation with Graham Smith and Rafe Heydel-Mankoo this was markedly different to many previous debates in the UK where these two regularly lock horns.

The debate was very lively with a lot of audience participation, the panellist's cut and thrust was matched by audience intervention and the passion really showed at times, both sides of the debate. Chillingly there was a moment where a young student member of the audience claimed the absolutist monarch from his home country in Africa was good and benevolent for all and he did not understand why we were debating authority. After a comment by Rafe that the polls had never shown such a high rating for the Royal Family in comparison to the leading politicians Myles riposted that that was like comparing the BBC "Eastenders" with "Question time", that one was emotional and frivolous and the other a serious attempt to deal with the issues of the day.

One of Rafe's arguments was the continuity of glorious monarchs in England over a thousand years, this point was efficiently dismissed by Myles and Whatmore pointing out the enforced interruption by Cromwell and by bringing up Thomas Paine's comment about William the Conqueror being " a bastard son of a whore", as the start of that thousand year history. . Whatmore also pointed out the Royal System had placed a crown on more than one " idiot".

Concluded on rear inner cover...

The evening went with a real swing, and notwithstanding the heat ended amicably, with the final vote showing no change in the audience position. The feedback from this event, one of a series of topics, was very favourable, perhaps showing that there is an appetite for a debate of this kind

The Sussex Salon is a roundtable event where academics, practitioners and commentators share their views on hot topics. The Sussex Salon Series is organised by Dr Ruth Woodfield, a University of Sussex sociologist and Director of Widening Participation for the School of Law, Politics and Sociology.