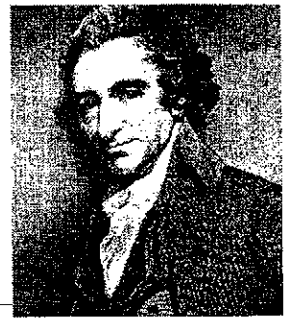


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ABOUT THE SOCIETY OF THEOPHILANTHROPISTS

Thomas Paine was one of the founders of this Society in Paris. Its MANUAL was printed in September 1796, probably largely drafted by Thomas Paine, and the first Society meeting was in January 1797. Paine's papers for the Society reveal his deistic sentiments.

*The first set of excerpts comes from the concluding section of "Prosecution of *The Age of Reason*".

---FROM THE MANUAL OF THE SOCIETY---

"[T]he general assemblies should be called fetes (festivals) religious and moral; ...those festivals should be conducted in principle and form, in a manner as not to be considered as the festivals of an exclusive worship; and...in recalling those who might not be attached to any particular worship, those festivals might also be attended as moral exercises by disciples of every sect, and consequently avoid, by scrupulous care, everything that might make the society appear under the name of a sect.

"The Society adopts neither *rites* nor *priesthood*, and it will never lose sight of the resolution not to advance anything, as a society, inconvenient to any sect or sects, in any time or country, and under any government.

"It will be seen, that it is so much the more easy for the Society to keep within this circle, because the dogmas of the Theophilanthropists are those upon which all the sects have agreed, their moral is that upon which there has never been the least dissent; and the name they have taken expresses the double end of all the sects, that of leading to the *adoration of God and love of man*.

"The Theophilanthropists do not call themselves the disciples of such or such a man. They avail themselves of the wise precepts that have been transmitted by writers of all countries and in all ages.

"The reader will find in the discourses, lectures, hymns and canticles, which the Theophilanthropists have adopted for their religious and moral festivals, and which they present under the title of *Annee Religieuse*, extracts from moralists, ancient and modern, divested of maxims too severe or too loosely conceived, or contrary to piety, whether toward God or toward man."

Next [are] the dogmas of the Theophilanthropists, or things

they profess to believe. These are but two, and are thus expressed....the Theophilanthropists believe in the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul....

They profess the immortality of the soul, but they are silent on the immortality of the body, or that which the Church of England calls the resurrection. The author of *The Age of Reason* gives reasons for everything he *disbelieves*, as well as those he *believes*; and where this cannot be done with safety, the government is a despotism and the Church an inquisition.

*This second set of excerpts is from Paine's paper, "The Existence of God – A Discourse at the Society of Theophilanthropists, Paris".

---THE OPENING PARAGRAPHS---

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

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

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

Continued on page 8, *Theophilanthropists*

IN THIS ISSUE

On Theophilanthropists by Thomas Paine	1	News and Notes	3, 7, 8
Acknowledgments and Announcements	2	<i>Ingersoll on Paine</i> by Irwin Spiegelman	4
Thomas Paine Friends News ~ "The Film Project"	3	<i>Thomas Paine: Prometheus Unbound</i> by Frances Chiu	6

Theophilanthropists, from page 1

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

Do we want to contemplate His power? We see it in the immensity of the Creation. Do we want to contemplate His wisdom? We see it in the unchangeable order by which the incomprehensible WHOLE is governed. Do we want to contemplate His munificence? We see it in the abundance with which He fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate His mercy? We see it in His not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful. In fine, do we want to know what GOD is? Search not written or printed books, but the Scripture called the creation.

—THE CLOSING PARAGRAPHS—

All men in the outset of the religion they profess are Theophilanthropists. It is impossible to form any system of religion without building upon those principles, and therefore they are not sectarian principles, unless we suppose a sect composed of all the world.

I have said in the course of this discourse that the study of natural philosophy is a divine study, because it is the study of the works of God in the creation. If we consider the world upon this ground, what an extensive field of improvement in things both divine and human opens itself before us!

All the principles of science are of divine origin. It was not man that invented the principles on which astronomy, and every branch of mathematics, are founded and studied. It was not man that gave properties to the circle and the triangle. Those principles are eternal and immutable.

We see in them the unchangeable nature of Divinity. We see in them immortality, an immortality existing after the material figures that express those properties are dissolved in dust.....

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

—Selections by Martha Spiegelman
