

THE  
**FOLLY OF REASON.**

BEING  
**OUR PERFECT AND UNERRING  
GUIDE,**

TO THE KNOWLEDGE

**TRUE RELIGION.**

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IN ANSWER TO THE

**AGE OF REASON,**

OR AN

**INVESTIGATION OF TRUE AND OF  
FABULOUS**

**THEOLOGY.**

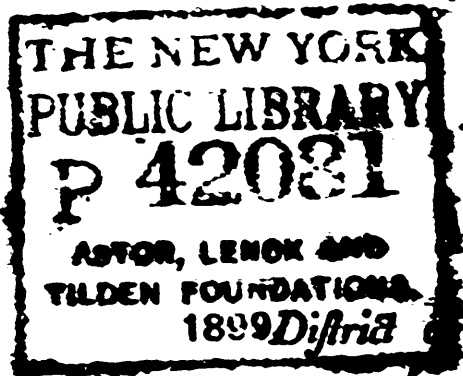
By **THOMAS PAINE**, author of Works entitled,  
"Common Sense, Rights of Man," &c.

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**NEW YORK:**

Printed by **TIBBOUT and O'BRIEN**, for  
**G. KEATINGE's Book-Store,**  
**BALTIMORE.**

1794.



**B**E it remembered, that on the third day of September, in the nineteenth year of the independence of the United States of America, GEORGE KEATINGE, hath deposited in this office, the title of a Book, the right whereof he claims as proprietor in the words following to wit: "*The Folly of Reason; being our perfect and unerring Guide to the knowledge of True Religion, in answer to the 'Age of Reason, or an investigation of true and of fabulous Theology.'*" By Thomas Paine, author of works entitled, "Common Sense, Rights of Man," &c.

In conformity to the act of Congress of the United States, entitled, "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned."

ROB. TROUP.  
Clerk of the District.

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TO THE CITIZENS

OF THE

*United States of America.*

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**T**HE AGE OF REASON, *recommended to your protection by Mr. Paine, as a guide for your eternal Salvation, and it being of a nature, rather to lead you into a labyrinth of absurdity and logic, than to serve any of the purposes of Religion, or Morality. The Author of this performance, having the same right of thinking as Mr. Paine, is induced to submit his remarks for your perusal, their not being an*  
answer

*answer to Mr. Paine's arguments ; by some they are looked upon as unanswerable, by others they are treated with the contempt they deserve ; a Divine would think it beneath him to notice them.*

*The Author has attempted to answer Mr. Paine's arguments against the Holy Scriptures, though not a Divine, if he has succeeded in so doing, it will shew, that it did not require the learned of the Church to confute him.*

**Baltimore, August 25th, 1794.**

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THE  
FOLLY OF REASON.

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**M**R. PAINE, begins his investigation of true and fabulous theology, by ridiculing every religious society, and by attacking such passages in the holy scriptures as *he* thinks most suits his purpose, more with the bigotry of a deist than with the impartial researches of a man of learning, or a philosopher.—To doubt the veracity of the scriptures at this day is truly (to use his own words) alarming: and it has turned out to the lot of a man, whose writings in the po-

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litical

litical world, has justly gained him the applause of every class of citizens, to attempt to create a jargon of logic, which by playing on the passions, not the reason of men, is calculated more to draw them from the practice of every moral duty than to instill in their minds either morality or brotherly love.

The author next proceeds to enquire, whether there be any thing in the nature and condition of man, to oblige him to think that he is not to admit any doctrines or institutions as revealed from God; but such as his own reason can prove to be necessary from the nature of things.

If reason be the universal agent if all the difference among men, (either in speculation or practice) be only such a difference as reason makes; then no-  
thing

thing can be more extravagant than to affirm any thing concerning the degree of perfection or imperfection of reason, as common to man. It is as wild and romantic as to pretend to state the measure of folly and wisdom of fear and courage—of pride and humility—of good humour and ill humour, common to mankind; for as these states of the mind are only so many stages of reason, so no uncertainty belongs to them, but which in the same degree belongs to reason.

REASON, no doubt is essential to all men, but it is no more than such a reason, as is a bare capacity to be instructed, or a nature fitted for any impressions, whether they be good or bad: So that moral or religious knowledge is not to be imputed to the in-

*ternal* light of our own reason or nature, but to the happiness of our education in faith and morality.

Thus you see that reason could not be implanted in us to be a *perfect* and unerring guide, to matters of Religion.

For it is the changeableness, corruption, and absurdities of this human reason, in its depraved state, that introduceth such a variation of our tempers, disorder in our passions and corruption in our hearts. And as this is the sole faculty by which mankind are distinguished from brutes, it must be confessed that all those irregularities, which cannot be imputed to brutes, must solely be ascribed to that faculty, by which we are distinguished from them; and consequently the pretence of the *absolute perfection* of human reason is absurd,  
it



it being productive of vice as well as virtue, and as capable of leading us into error, as to discover truth.

This may be well exemplified by the *ignorance* and *inconsistency*, and if I may be allowed to add, the vices of the Heathen Philosophers.

Aristotle and his school, held all things to be eternal, whereas, the Epicureans imputed them to chance: and none of them could dive into the true origin of evil; nor prescribe a certain form of worship to the Almighty; but they sometimes equalled themselves to the Gods, whom they worshipped, Socrates owned he knew nothing of God. They disagreed so much about the supreme happiness of man, that *Tully* says, it is impossible to reckon up their different sentiments. Their notions concern-

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ing the *immortality of the soul*, and a *future state* were equally weak and uncertain; neither had they any notion of the resurrection of the body.

This ignorance gave a loose to all manner of immorality and viciousness. Revenge, self-murder, fornication, unnatural lust, incest, and the most notorious vices were concealed under the name: of a Philosopher. Yet none will pretend to say, that Socrates, Plato, Tully and Seneca, wanted the *light of Reason*. Therefore to begin and discover our duty in all points, with all its true motives, merely by the help of *Natural Reason*, is like groping in an unknown way in an obscure twilight: and consequently the *light of Reason*, cannot be our *perfect* and *unerring* guide, and is equally capable of bad, as well

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as good impressions, according to the examples we see, or the means of our education, in its maturity, the sole agent of all the evil as well as of all the good we do; and in its highest *perfection* unable to settle any certain rule of morality.

As to his attack on the authenticity and falsehoods of the Bible, and his entire disbelief of revelation from God—I shall make but few observations.

First. The marks and tokens whereby to judge at all times of the truth of a revelation, is the credibility of the person who brings it: The excellency of the doctrine contained in the scriptures would almost not admit of a doubt of its being the word of God; and I hope I can prove that from the earliest time the scriptures has been  
handed

handed down to us pure and authentic.

Second. The doubting of the books of Moses and the Prophets, is truly astonishing, as it is well known, that it has been the established custom in the Jewish Church to read the Law and the Prophets every Sabbath day in the Synagogue, and these books were translated into Greek by the Heathens 300 years before Christ; and both the Old and New Testaments have been usually read at least one day in every week in Christian assemblies; and most frequently twice, or every day, and since it is evident that the frequent offices of religion and public solemn festivals enjoined thereby, have been constantly and publicly celebrated, and the laws contained therein, have been currently and generally

generally

generally applied and exercised from time to time, it must be ridiculous and absurd to even suppose that those writings were not always, and are not still genuine and uncorrupted, and the work of those authors to whom they are ascribed.

Now I might appeal to men of common sense, that if succeeding generations had not lain under the strongest convictions, that the authority of these writings was as sacred as the authors of them had pretended to be; they would certainly for the credit of their own nation, have entirely either suppressed them, or at least not vindicated their authority with so much zeal, for they were the composition of those inspired persons, whom their forefathers had most scandalously, ungratefully, and impiously affronted.

fronted, insulted, opposed, persecuted, and even tortured and murdered, because they had been the messengers of the plain unwelcome truths contained therein.

Now that God should suffer a book, that pretends to such marks of truth and authority, to make its way, and even in his name so long—more, than ever any other book or writing, did, through all the shocks and attacks of age and time, through all those casualties and changes, to which even monuments of brass and marble submit much sooner, and in spite of all the malice of such inveterate, powerful, and numerous enemies all along, is not only highly improbable, but in the nature of the thing plainly impossible.

Mr. Paine next remarks the inaccuracy

racy of the style, and the little use to be acquired from the reading of the Scriptures: to a moral man, the absurdity of such language would not require a reply: and if Mr. Paine would borrow a Bible, and read it through which I suspect he never has done, and he admits he never had one of his own in his sober moments, he might be tempted to acknowledge it the fountain, and foundation, of all useful and entertaining knowledge in matters of religion.

Read the Bible without prejudice, and you will soon be convinced that it pleases by its exactness, its instructions, being delightful, and containing nothing poor, mean, or superfluous; the style being every where adorned with necessary, easy, and natural metaphors.

*These divine compositions raise admiration.*

tion by the sublime manner wherein they speak of divine things; strike terror by the vehemency and force of expression; excite to a love of virtue, and hatred of vice, by the lively description they give of both, astonish by the severity of the threatenings in them: animate and encourage by the sweetness of their promises: inspire with zeal thro' a divine fire of which they are full: So that there is no book more proper to work upon the mind and affect the heart than the Holy Scriptures; and while you make them your study, they will arm you against all terrors and temptations, that oppose or hinder you in the prosecution of an honest and virtuous life, and furnish you with such consolation, hope and courage, that being firmly persuaded that you live under



der the protection of the Almighty, and in his favor, you will be able to despise torments and death itself, in their most dreadful aspects.

Now from what I have advanced, how does the arguments of the Age of Reason prove, that its disciple, Mr. Paine, is from his moral conduct, a better man in his actions through life, than any other person, whose life is regulated by the word of God so beautifully represented to us in the holy scriptures. Now for argument sake admitting that all matters of religion must be agreeable to right unprejudiced reason, yet this could be no ground for receiving nothing in religion, but what human reason could prove to be necessary; for human reason is no more right unprejudiced reason, than a sinner is sinless, or a man an angel.

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Admitting

Admitting also, that a man may go a great way towards rectifying his reason and laying aside its prejudices; yet no particular man can be a better judge of the rectitude of his own self-love, the sagacity of his own understanding, the brightness of his own parts, the justness of his own eloquence, and the depth of his own judgment.

For there is nothing to deceive him in self-love, in the opinion of his own merit, with judgment and eloquence: but what has the same power to deceive him in the opinion of his own reason. None seem so inevitably exposed to this fatality as those whose religion is to have no form but such as it receives from their own hearts.

A man that has his religion to chuse, and with this previous privilege, that he

he need not allow any thing to be religion, but what his own reason can prove to be so, is in as fair a way to be governed by his passions, as he that has his condition of life to chuse, with the liberty of taking that which his own reason directs him to.

Does any one now suppose, that nothing but right reason would direct him in the choice of his condition? Or that he would make the better choice, because he proceeded upon this maxim, that nothing could be right, but that which was agreeable to his own reason; or that his temper, his prejudices, his self-love, his passions, his partiality, would have no influence upon his choice, because he had resigned himself up to his own reason.

For

' For as our choice of a condition of life is not a matter of speculation, but of good and evil ; so however it is recommended to our reason, it chiefly excites our passions, and our choice will be just as reasonable as our tempers and passions are. And he who is made the most positive of the sufficiency of his own reason, will be the most likely to be governed by the blindness of his own passions.

Now it is just the same in the choice of a Religion, as in the choice of a condition of life ; as it is not a matter of speculation, but of good and evil ; so, if it be left to be stated and determined by our own reason, it rather appeals to our tempers, than employs our reason ; and to resign ourselves up to our own reason, to tell us what ought or not to be

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be a matter of Religion, is only resigning ourselves up to our tempers to take what we like, and refuse what we dislike in Religion.

For it is not only natural and easy for him, who believes that nothing can be a part of religion but what his reason can prove necessary to be so, to take that to be fully proved which is only mightily liked: and all to be entirely contrary to reason, which is only vastly contrary to his tempers; this I say is not only natural and easy to happen, but scarce possible to be avoided.

In a word, when *self-love* is a proper arbitrator betwixt a man and his adversary: when *revenge* is a judge of *meekness*: when *pride* is a true lover of *humility*: when *falsehood* is a teacher of *truth*: when *lust* is a fast friend of *chastity*;

*tity*: when the *flesh* leads to the *spirit*:  
 when *passion* delights in *self-denial*:  
 when *partiality* is a promoter of *equity*:  
 when the *palate* can taste the difference  
 between *sin* and *holiness*: when the *hand*  
 can feel the truth of a *proposition*: then  
 may human reason be a proper arbitra-  
 tor between God and Man. The *sole*,  
*final*, *just*, Judge of all, that ought or  
 ought not to be matter of a holy, di-  
 vine, and heavenly religion — Again, if  
 this be the state of reason, as has been  
 fully proved: if all we believe or dis-  
 believe, love or hate, chuse or refuse;  
 if all that is wise or absurd, holy or pro-  
 fane, glorious or shameful, in thought,  
 word or deed, be to be imputed to it;  
 then, it is as gross an absurdity to talk  
 of the perfection of human reason, as of  
 the unspotted holiness of human life, the  
 absolute

absolute purity of human love, the immutable justice of human hatred, and the infalibility of human conjectures.

Lastly. To pretend, that our reason is too perfect to be governed by any thing but its own light, is the same extravagance, as to pretend that our love is too pure to be governed by any thing but its own motions. For if all that is base and criminal in love: all that is unjust and wicked in hatred, be strictly and solely to be imputed to our reason—Then no perfection can be ascribed to our reason; but such as is to be ascribed to our love and hatred.

*F I N I S.*

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