



The Age of Reason

Thomas Paine

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The Age of Reason represents the results of years of study and reflection by Thomas Paine on the place of religion in society.

Paine wrote: "Of all the tyrannies that affect mankind, tyranny in religion is the worst; every other species of tyranny is limited to the world we live in; but this attempts to stride beyond the grave, and seeks to pursue us into eternity."

The cool rationale of Paine's *The Age of Reason* influenced religious thinking throughout the world; and its pervasive influence continues to the present day.

The Age of Reason Details

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From Reader Review The Age of Reason for online ebook

Trevor says

Paine is not an atheist, far from it. He believes in the God who created the universe, not in the men who wrote a book. So, first he shows that the Bible was not written by God - showing the near endless contradictions contained in that book, showing where much of the old testament in particular is a handbook of genocide. As he says at one point Moses asks his followers to kill the mothers, fathers and brothers and then to debauch the daughters of those they conquer. For people to say they base their morality on such a book either means they have not read it or they have a particularly frightening idea about what is moral.

Read this book and then read the Bible - not the selected bits one might get shown in Sunday school about two of every kind hopping onto a boat, but the impossibly erratic mad father that God is in his tormenting of his own people.

God only becomes slightly nicer after his conversion to Christianity. He must be the only character in fiction that we praise for being both angry and jealous.

But this is not a book by an atheist, Paine still believed in God, a God who created the universe. Paine believed that to understand the mind of God one should study the book of his creation - the universe. It is a beautiful idea, and if it was not for Darwin I probably would have believed in such a God as the only logical explanation of the seemingly infinite complexity of the world. All changes with Darwin.

Many people here have said this book changed their lives - it is hardly surprising.

Simge says

Yazar, kitabında ba?tan itibaren inanç sistemleri söz konusu oldu?unda durdu?u noktayı belli ediyor ve böylece kendisini tanıman?z/anlaman?z henüz ilk sayfalardayken mümkün oluyor. Kitabın yorumlanması?nın hassasiyet gerektirdi?ine inand???m için tam olarak nasıl ifade edebilirim diye düşünüyorum fakat böyle bir kitabın bu kadar eski bir çağda böyle müthiş bir ustal?k ve gözlem gücü ile yazıld???n? görünce hayret etmemem ve hayranlık duymamam mümkün olmad? açıkçası?. Yazar, Eski ve Yeni Ahit'i oldukça kapsamlı bir şekilde ayrı ayrı ele alarak bu kitaplarda yer alan çelişkileri göstermi?. Bunu yaparken inananların inanç hakkına sahip çıkmayı elden bırakmad??? gibi, yer yer inand??? konuyu en sert şekilde savunmaktan da geri durmam?. Takdir, bu konuya ilgi duyup okuyanların olacaktır neticede elbette fakat kendi açımdan söylemem gerekirse, henüz okuma fırsatımın olmad??? Eski ve Yeni Ahit konusunda yapmamı? oldu?u alıntı ve bunlara yönelik yorumlarla beni oldukça bilgilendirdi?ini söyleyebilirim.

Marijan says

To say, that The Age of Reason is not original is like saying Hamlet is not original. All the things Paine wrote about were repeated so many times afterwards that the real meaning of the book is difficult to understand today. But I have no doubt that for its age it was well, revolutionary. And I'm sure that Paine would have a

lot to add if he lived in our age. For starters today deism seems almost as dated as the dogma he was writing against. And yet, it was an interesting insight in one of the greatest minds of its time, and probably all times.

Russell says

This book is a must-read for every American. Thomas Paine was one of the most influential thinkers in the founding of the United States and in the form that its government took. His thinking had a profound influence on many of the founding fathers, including the author of the constitution - Thomas Jefferson.

This book was Paine's commentary on religion and his defense of deism, as opposed to Christianity. It will help every American who reads it to understand the nature of thinking that motivated the founding fathers to institute the separation of church and state. It will also be a major eye-opener for those Americans who believe the popular myth that our government was founded upon Christian principles.

Modern readers won't find Paine's deistic reasoning to be entirely sound. However, his passionate and detailed criticism of Christianity is almost irrefutable when taken as a whole. In the long run, disagreements with Paine's reasoning are almost beside the point. The political ramifications of this book are the most important reason for every American to read it.

Pat Zandi says

Sad how he could not understand a 5th grade written book that proves itself as completely infallible. I have read the bible 12 times and I still cannot agree with any of his arguments. I suppose prior to God's salvation in my life I might have agreed with him on some of his arguments. However he wanted irrefutable proof in front of his eyes like Thomas but his eyes were dimmed with pride and a self gratifying way to explain away God that he would not become accountable to God himself or others. The law shows his guilt before a Holy and just God, and that he has a need of a Saviour but he could not make the connection of something any child knows. He became too smart for God, trying to be crafty in his own conceit. Making himself to be a fool before God and supposing himself to be wise before men!

I pray that others who read this will see that they need to lower their own thoughts for they are lofty and lifted up too high, Jesus says "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. -Matthew 11:29"

Meek ; when was the last time you studied that!

Seth Hanson says

This is another book that I found so riveting that I simply could not put it down and read the entire Part I in a single sitting. (Part II isn't really necessary in my opinion. Kind of like running up the score after the outcome of the game is no longer in doubt. Sure the fans might love it but sometimes you've got to know when to call off the dogs.) Considering that this book was mostly written in the 1790's, it is mind-boggling how fresh and relevant most of it still is. Maybe it was a classic case of encountering just the right information at just the right moment but I really, really loved this book. Such a breath of fresh air!

Adam says

This is a tough book (pamphlet?) to review, for a number of reasons. There is a difference between whether the point Paine is trying to make is well argued and well written (which it is), whether I enjoyed reading it (mostly), and whether I would encourage others to read it (strongly encouraged).

The arguments that Paine mounts against Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are that:

- Revelation can only be experienced individually, and therefore indicating that the Bible is the word of God via revelation is not true.
- God does not act with mystery and miracle, but instead in universal truths.
- The books of the Bible (both old and new testament) are self-conflicting, of dubious authorship, and thus not the word of God.

The pamphlet is written in two parts and at two different times. In the first part Paine indicates his own philosophy, and is written without reference to specific passages of the Bible. The second part is a rebuttal of each book of both the new and old testament. I would highly encourage anyone to read the first part, but skip the second unless you have a really high interest in reading more on his argument. I found the second part to be, while informative, very dull.

I identify myself as a Christian, and it was difficult at times to read this book objectively. There were a couple of things that helped me with this. First, Paine is not an Atheist but instead a Deist. He believes in a singular God, just not a God as described in the Bible, which means he isn't completely rejecting my own religious beliefs. Second, while Paine does not believe Jesus Christ to be the son of God, he does have a tremendous amount of respect for the words attributed to Jesus Christ. He saw in Jesus a kindred revolutionary. Third, I tried to read Paine in the voice of Michael Palin. For some reason, considering him as a member of the Monty Python troop made it easier to get through and see the sarcasm in some of his remarks.

Overall I felt *The Age of Reason* does a sound job of pointing out inconsistencies in the Bible, as well as identifying acts of God that seem, well, un-Godly. I think his argument is weakened some in the second part, especially when identifying areas of inconsistency within the books of the Bible. He points out such errors as disagreement among the sums of total people within a family. He indicates this as reason enough to say that, as the two chapters disagree, both must be false. I'm willing to forgive such errors and inconsistencies due to both the time when they were written and discrepancies in witness stories we hear even today. I mean, ask two people what my eye color is and one might say green and another brown. The disagreement doesn't indicate that I don't exist, just a subjective difference in observation.

I think *The Age of Reason* is an incredibly important pamphlet for all Americans to read, regardless of religious views. Paine was one of the founding father's of the United States, and his pamphlet "*Common Sense*" helped spur the start of the revolution. As we make arguments on how the US should be governed, it is important to have a good understanding of the views of those who created this nation, and the types of governance they wish to both promote and prevent.

Evan says

"It has happened, that all the answers that I have seen to the former part of 'The Age of Reason' have been written by priests: and these pious men, like their predecessors, contend and wrangle, and understand the Bible; each understands it differently, but each understands it best; and they have agreed in nothing but in telling their readers that Thomas Paine understands it not."

That, an opening salvo in part II of Paine's "The Age of Reason," makes me laugh out loud. Surprisingly and to my delight, so does much of the rest of it. This is Paine's great rant against religion, his belief in one detached deistic being who created a perfect world and let it go, hoping that we would do what is right by it. All that is good and moral exists in that creation and in the good works and deeds of ourselves. The rest are lies and hypocrisies and an affront to the reasoning minds God gave us. Such is the basic line of argument. Paine contends the Bible and the Church are two of the wrong things that the stewards of God's Earth have done. This is an entertaining, thought-provoking tract, screed, dissembling rant -- call it what you will. That it's not always easy to find a copy, and that even used copies go for at the cheapest \$10 on Amazon -- even for a public domain work -- bespeaks its relative suppression by those who continue to sweep the Founding Fathers' secularism and deism under the rug of history. This is a book that Christians do not like because it puts to the lie their contention that America was founded as a "Christian nation." Even so, I'll admit that sometimes, Paine's own arguments rest on suppositions rather than absolute fact, but more often than not he's on target. He trashes the absurdities of the Bible with aplomb, charting the origins of many of the myths and the perpetuation of those and subsequent strictures of the church to the good of its own authority, power and material enrichment. His most heretical assertion is that God did not write the Bible; that it is solely a cobbled creation of men; and even if done so by "divine inspiration" -- the latter is meaningless to Paine since it is completely unprovable, and most unlikely. Paine looks for horses, not zebras, and is more likely to believe that men lie than witness miracles. In the course of all this we get doses of science and natural law and philosophy and ruminations on ancient languages and so on.

I'm reading the beginning of part two, which puts me halfway through it, and which relates Paine's frightening brush with the terrors of the aftermath of the French Revolution. He barely finished part one of this work in France before the guards came for him. Luckily he came out of it, unlike so many of his friends.

Some readers of an atheistic or agnostic bent may not be pleased that Paine does not outright reject God, or even place his existence on the table for possible rejection. But the God he does believe in is so remote as to be effectively nonexistent, for any practical purpose. In any case, it is man with whom Paine has issues, particularly those of the cloth and those who follow them. His refutations of Biblical and Church doctrines, his lambasting of ideas like miracles, and his criticisms of violence in the name of a greater good are just some of the highlights.

It's good to be reading this after having just finished a book about Robert Ingersoll, the late 19th century atheist, who paid homage to Paine in his own writings and speeches.

"Whoever will take the trouble of reading the book ascribed to Isaiah, will find it one of the most wild and disorderly compositions ever put together; it has neither beginning, middle, nor end; and, except a short historical part, and a few sketches of history in the first two or three chapters, is one continued incoherent, bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application, and destitute of

meaning; a school-boy would scarcely have been excusable for writing such stuff; it is (at least in translation) that kind of composition and false taste that is properly called prose run mad."

"There now remain only a few books, which they call books of the lesser prophets; and as I have already shown that the greater are impostors, it would be cowardice to disturb the repose of the little ones. Let them sleep, then, in the arms of their nurses, the priests, and both be forgotten together."

OK, this next passage is so sharp and funny and deliciously tart and blasphemous that I had to up the book to four stars. In addition to showing -- as he does throughout the book -- the story inconsistencies and thus the unreliability of the tellers of the Bible, Paine basically suggests the apostles had all sampled Mary Magdalene's wares at some point and that she showed up before the Resurrection just to do some hooking up for hire (that one really enraged the clergy, as is stated in a footnote):

"The book of Matthew continues its account, and says, (xxviii. 1.) that at the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn, towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre. Mark says it was sun-rising, and John says it was dark. Luke says it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women, that came to the sepulchre; and John states that Mary Magdalene came alone. So well do they agree about their first evidence! They all, however, appear to have known most about Mary Magdalene; she was a woman of large acquaintance, and it was not an ill conjecture that she might be upon the stroll."

The final paragraphs are a gorgeous rumination on the nature of consciousness and immortality, in which Paine provides one of the most persuasive arguments for the possibility of continued consciousness in an afterlife.

Paine says that nature itself is a better chronicler and evidence of this than the crude, trite, banal, violent and contradictory stories of the Bible.

Too few books that I read go into these kinds of deeply philosophical issues, which I frankly crave, so now I'm going to have to give him five stars.

The full text of "The Age of Reason", parts 1 and 2, can be found here at Project Gutenberg:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03...>

A.J. says

Against four thousand years of combined Jewish and Christian tradition, Thomas Paine answers with the eighteenth century equivalent of: "Bitch, please." This isn't your NOMA (Non-overlapping magisterium) kind of argument; this is Total War. With a disciplined rationalism and an acidic wit, Paine produces an assault so complete on organized religion that it makes the so-called new atheist movement a bit of a misnomer. Paine was not an atheist in any sense of the word, but one does wonder if he might have found

himself with better company if he'd had the foresight to be born two hundred years later.

It's hard for me to convey how well written and put together this polemic is. Like with *Common Sense*, Paine proves himself to be a master of written argument. He starts with Genesis and marches forward until the end where he informs the reader: "I have now gone through the Bible, as a man would go through a wood with an axe on his shoulder, and fell trees. Here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never make them grow." And what is unique to Paine is that not a single one of his arguments is derived from anything but the text itself. Yet at the end it's hard to think that anything more was required.

The main axis of the argument is to show with respect to each book of the bible that it is anonymous and therefore without authority. Internal evidence, contradictions, time references, etc. mostly serve the function to discredit Moses, Joshua and so forth as the authors of the books attributed to them. Modern scholarship (such as the Documentary Hypothesis) confirms this. And once the text is discredited as either inauthentic or the product of non-eyewitness testimony (which even if true is revelation to the witness only and hearsay to everyone else), all the rest comes tumbling down. Paine is then able to conclude that: "The study of theology as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing; and admits of no conclusion." Once the pillar of a holy book—and this holds true for any religion—is pried loose, not much remains to talk about.

Not many books are literally laugh-out-loud funny, but this is one of them. Paine has no patience for priestcraft or spin doctors. This trend is common among the aforementioned new atheists, who quickly learned that religious argument has a much lower survivability stripped of its atmosphere of guilt and reverence. Forced to breathe the same rationalism as every other subject, religious fundamentalism must necessarily make a hasty retreat back into the mist of superstition.

I think reason that this book was more effective than your usual fanfare is that it goes straight to the text and never wavers from that aim. Gone are the teleological, transcendental, cosmological, and moral sideshows that at best end up at deism (which would actually work out rather well for Paine). This is the very heart of the matter.

I can't swear by everything here, but this is easily as entertaining and informative as anything else on the subject. Five stars.

Sam says

Now this was a very interesting read. Having picked it up for free on the kindle and not really knowing much about it I didn't have many expectations and honestly thought it would be a laborious and difficult read. I could not have been so wrong. Despite being written in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, it is still very readable and oddly very relevant. Granted Paine is a religious man to a certain extent, he does give an objective review of the bible and its passages and highlights not only the numerous inconsistencies and contradictions in the book itself but also highlights how these have passed across into the various Christian religions too. Not only was this very informative but it was also rather amusing, particularly with Paine's commentary and nods to some of the responses he received for previous published section of Reason. Highly

recommended.

VeRMiNaaRD says

Kitabın ilk yarısında verilmek istenen mesajı aldım. 2. yarısı çok karışık. Kitabın Mukaddes'i filan ne bileyim ben oraları anlamadım. Eğer inancınız çok sağlam ve sorgulamadan kabul ediyorsanız okumanıza gerek yok. Ha yok ben bir'e inaniyorsam onun ne derece mantıklı olduğunu sorgularım diyorsanız okuyun, ufkunuzu açar.

Wayne Barrett says

Whenever I have thought of 'the founding fathers' I have to admit, Thomas Paine would have been at the bottom of the list. Now that I have read 'The Age of Reason', I esteem this great man more than ever. I admire him, not only for all he did for our country and his writings, but for having the courage to publish something of this nature during his time.

One of the saddest fallacies of our country's history that has been passed onto generations even to this day is that the U.S. was founded on God and that all of our forefathers were devout Christians. Simply put, that is not true. Our forefathers always intended for there to be a separation between church and state, and many of those forefathers were not Christian and did not even believe in the Christian God in the biblical sense. George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson... just to name a few. The difference between them and Thomas Paine is that they mostly kept their opinions on the subject among themselves, because for politicians, espousing a disbelief in God is occupational suicide. Even now in the 21st century, whenever a candidate is running for office they make sure the news cameras catch them attending church. And who really believes any of our recent presidents were Christians?

Thomas Paine wrote 'The Age of Reason' during an era when leaders within this country had very recently been burning people at stakes for making comments such as he did in this book. I have read the Bible a few times, books on science and books on philosophy. I have read books on agnosticism and atheism and have been educated and inspired by many. What astounds me about this book is that it was written by a founding father in the years 1794, 1795. To me, he not only uses well documented facts and contradictions from the Bible, and examples from that Bible that only a fool or a horribly evil person would think would be okay to follow, (I mean, do you really want to love a God who has given orders to slaughter women and children?) but he has masterfully used the very thing he chose as his title for this work: reason!

Thomas Paine was shunned by the masses because of this book. Only 6 people showed up for his funeral. But I thank this man more than ever, because it's men like him who made a sacrifice and was not afraid to speak out that has helped keep this country out of the dark ages.

I think this is a brilliant book, one that I would recommend and one I am proud to have in my library.

Skyler Myers says

"Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon, than the Word of God. It is a history of wickedness, that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind; and, for my own part, I sincerely detest it, as I detest everything that is cruel."

PROs:

- * One of the greatest deconstructions of theistic religion that I've seen
- * When discussing religion, uses very sound reasoning, as the book title suggests
- * Very detailed critique of the Bible without ever using extra Biblical evidence
- * Shows countless inconsistencies and contradictions that renders the belief that the Bible is perfect untenable
- * It is actually quite humorous at times
- * Very good insight into the beliefs of one of the most important people in American history
- * Lots of historical information and value

CONs:

- * When discussing his own supernatural beliefs, his skeptical eye that he uses towards other people's religion ceases to exist
- * There is a slight bit of hypocrisy here
- * Unfortunately not even the great Thomas Paine is able to completely renounce all superstition

"People in general know not what wickedness there is in this pretended word of God. Brought up in habits of superstition, they take it for granted that the Bible is true, and that it is good; they permit themselves not to doubt of it."

This classic work by one of America's 'Founding Fathers' and the man whose pamphlet 'Common Sense' inspired the Declaration of Independence gave me very mixed feelings. On one hand, his views on the fatuousness of theistic religion are eloquent and concise, and extremely surprising for a man who lived in the 1700s. I will provide a small sample of his criticism of religion, first, his thoughts on religion being a product of how you are raised rather than truth, "That many good men have believed this strange fable, and lived very good lives under that belief (for credulity is not a crime) is what I have no doubt of. In the first place, they were educated to believe it, and they would have believed anything else in the same manner. There are also many who have been so enthusiastically enraptured by what they conceived to be the infinite love of God to man, in making a sacrifice of himself, that the vehemence of the idea has forbidden and deterred them from examining into the absurdity and profaneness of the story." On the trustworthiness of the miraculous claims of the Gospels, "As to the ancient historians, from Herodotus to Tacitus, we credit them as far as they

relate things probable and credible, and no further: for if we do, we must believe the two miracles which Tacitus relates were performed by Vespasian, that of curing a lame man, and a blind man, in just the same manner as the same things are told of Jesus Christ by his historians. We must also believe the miracles cited by Josephus, that of the sea of Pamphilia opening to let Alexander and his army pass, as is related of the Red Sea in Exodus. These miracles are quite as well authenticated as the Bible miracles, and yet we do not believe them." On Christian belief being a matter of chance rather than truth, "Be this as it may, they decided by vote which of the books out of the collection they had made, should be the WORD OF GOD, and which should not. They rejected several; they voted others to be doubtful, such as the books called the Apocrypha; and those books which had a majority of votes, were voted to be the word of God. Had they voted otherwise, all the people since calling themselves Christians had believed otherwise; for the belief of the one comes from the vote of the other." On the other hand, the superstitions of his time had taken too much of a hold on his mind for him to overcome them completely, which I will come to later in the review.

'The Age of Reason' is a two part book, the first being written when Paine was in France and when he thought that he only had a short time before he would be executed. For this part, Paine did not have a Bible so everything he said was by his excellent memory alone. Perhaps surprisingly, the majority of the first part seems to be a justification of Paine's deism rather than a polemic on religion. This work could easily be titled 'The Bible of Deism' rather than 'The Age of Reason'. Paine's main gripe with religion is not that it stifles intellectual development or that it inspires cruelty and hate, but that it shields us from the "true" religion of deism. This is where some of Paine's unconscious hypocrisy shows through. He criticizes others for their ridiculous claims of having the one true religion, while he himself makes this exact claim that he criticizes in others. Paine, raised a Quaker, even goes so far as to say that the Quakers are not only the ones closest to the truth of deism, but he actually says that the Quakers practically **are** deists. He says, "The religion that approaches the nearest of all others to true Deism, in the moral and benign part thereof, is that professed by the quakers:" Also this, "The only sect that has not persecuted are the Quakers; and... they are rather Deists than Christians." Are we meant to believe that Paine just happened to be born into the only true religion? This is the exact line of thought that he criticizes!

Paine goes on to describe what he thinks are proof of the deistic position, which amount to nothing more than a priori inductive arguments and god of the gaps arguments that we've heard a thousand times. He says that nothing can cause itself to exist; that humans can't cause themselves to exist, that trees can't cause themselves to exist, that the Earth couldn't have caused itself to exist, etc. He says that we have no explanation for the existence of these things, therefore it must be magic, which he calls "God". Would Paine have still been a deist if he lived two centuries later after the nebular hypothesis and evolution? It is impossible to know, and most people forgive Paine's deism simply due to the ignorance of when he lived. What is unforgivable is that Paine shouldn't have been so ready to blame the supernatural just because we didn't know the cause of something in his time; we have had people like this before, such as Democritus, Lucretius, Epicurus, Baron d'Holbach, Jean Meslier, Denis Diderot, etc. Unfortunately, Paine makes this mistake of thinking humanity won't gain more knowledge multiple times, mostly due to his erroneous deistic beliefs. He actually makes the argument that, because during his time, we didn't understand how acorns and seeds grow, that our "Creator" didn't want us to have this knowledge, and that our "Creator" only gave us the knowledge that we needed to function. He says, "Our own existence is a mystery: the whole vegetable world is a mystery. We cannot account how it is that an acorn, when put into the ground, is made to develop itself and become an oak. We know not how it is that the seed we sow unfolds... We know, therefore, as much as is necessary for us to know; and that part of the operation that we do not know... the Creator takes upon himself and performs it for us." In other words, if we can't explain it, it is magic and we aren't meant to know it. I hope it is obvious to see why this line of thought is not conducive to scientific discovery. He also makes numerous claims about the nature of this "Creator", such as what it can and can't do and what is easy and hard for it to do, while also making the claims that this "Creator" is incomprehensible to our minds. Here is

one of countless examples, "To an almighty power it is no more difficult to make the one than the other, and no more difficult to make a million of worlds than to make one." Apparently only Thomas Paine is immune to this supposed incomprehensibility. Not only was the universe "Created", but it was created *for* mankind! He says, "As therefore the Creator made nothing in vain, so also must it be believed that he organized the structure of the universe in the most advantageous manner for the benefit of man." Another example of his god of the gaps argumentation is this, "We cannot conceive how we came here ourselves, and yet we know for a fact that we are here."

Paine makes the case that the claim of theistic religions that they have the "word of God" is blasphemy to the *real* "Almighty", which of course is the one he happens to believe in. Not once does he condemn blasphemy as an imaginary crime and a pathetic attempt to thwart freedom of speech. He says that the *true* "word of God" is not written in any book, but is written for all eyes in the "Creation" of the "Creator". Again, would Paine hold this position if he knew that these items in nature formed natural and weren't created supernaturally? I doubt it, but we cannot know for sure. He says that we can learn about our "Creator" by studying the "Creation". In this case, what a monstrous "Creator" indeed! What would we think of a man who created parasites that feed on the living brains of innocent children? Of wasps that lay their eggs inside the innards of other living beings, only for them to hatch and have them eat their way out? Of horrible diseases such as the plague and smallpox? Of the illimitable genetic defects that plague animalkind? I could go on, but I think my point is made. Only a fiend would introduce such horrors into the world, yet Paine thinks this "Creator" is a moral one! How could the same man that so effortlessly refuted the claims of religion by memory alone come to such a baseless conclusion?! He knows the "Creator" is moral, he says, by the abundance that the "Creator" has given us. Even in the 21st century, with all our technology and wealth, almost a billion people are either starving or malnourished. Where is their "abundance"? The last error Paine makes is this statement, "It is certain that, in one point, all nations of the earth and all religions agree. All believe in a God." This is completely untrue; in fact, most societies believed in *gods*, not "a God", but there are also societies that believed in no gods whatsoever. Thomas Henry Huxley writes about his anthropological studies in the field, "There are savages without God in any proper sense of the word, but none without ghosts." He does have a statement about prayer which I like, "For what is the amount of all his prayers, but an attempt to make the Almighty change his mind, and act otherwise than he does? It is as if he were to say — thou knowest not so well as I."

This leads us to part 2 of 'The Age of Reason', which is more about debunking religion than praising deism. Paine, now equipped with a Bible, completely dissects the illimitable errors, saying, "I have furnished myself with a Bible and Testament; and I can say also that I have found them to be much worse books than I had conceived. If I have erred in any thing, in the former part of the Age of Reason, it has been by speaking better of some parts than they deserved." One of my favorite lines, "It has been the practice of all Christian commentators on the Bible, and of all Christian priests and preachers, to impose the Bible on the world as a mass of truth, and as the word of God; they have disputed and wrangled, and have anathematized each other about the supposeable meaning of particular parts and passages therein; one has said and insisted that such a passage meant such a thing, another that it meant directly the contrary, and a third, that it meant neither one nor the other, but something different from both; and this they have called understanding the Bible. It has happened, that all the answers that I have seen to the former part of 'The Age of Reason' have been written by priests: and these pious men, like their predecessors, contend and wrangle, and understand the Bible; each understands it differently, but each understands it best; and they have agreed in nothing but in telling their readers that Thomas Paine understands it not." Paine then systematically goes through every book of the Old Testament until he amasses a pile of errors that could reach the Sun. When he is done with the Old, he moves to the New, and after examining the evidence as to its truthfulness he has this to say, "If the writers of these four books had gone into a court of justice to prove an alibi... and had they given their evidence in the same contradictory manner as it is here given, they would have been in danger of... perjury, and would have justly

deserved it. Yet this is the evidence, and these are the books, that have been imposed upon the world as being given by divine inspiration, and as the unchangeable word of God." And finally, he concludes the New Testament with, "I have now gone through the examination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John;... it is, I believe, impossible to find in any story upon record so many and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books. They are more numerous and striking than I had any expectation of finding, when I began this examination, and far more so than I had any idea of when I wrote the former part of *"The Age of Reason."*" His summary, "What is it the Bible teaches us? — repine, cruelty, and murder. What is it the Testament teaches us? — to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman engaged to be married; and the belief of this debauchery is called faith. As to the fragments of morality that are irregularly and thinly scattered in those books, they make no part of this pretended thing, revealed religion. They are the natural dictates of conscience, and the bonds by which society is held together, and without which it cannot exist; and are nearly the same in all religions, and in all societies." For a summary of his views on Christianity, "Of all the systems of religion that ever were invented, there is none more derogatory to the Almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason, and more contradictory in itself, than this thing called Christianity. Too absurd for belief, too impossible to convince, and too inconsistent for practice, it renders the heart torpid, or produces only atheists and fanatics. As an engine of power, it serves the purpose of despotism; and as a means of wealth, the avarice of priests; but so far as respects the good of man in general, it leads to nothing here or hereafter." And finally, his thoughts on theology, "The study of theology as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing; and admits of no conclusion. Not any thing can be studied as a science without our being in possession of the principles upon which it is founded; and as this is not the case with Christian theology, it is therefore the study of nothing."

"There now remain only a few books, which they call books of the lesser prophets; and as I have already shown that the greater are impostors, it would be cowardice to disturb the repose of the little ones. Let them sleep, then, in the arms of their nurses, the priests, and both be forgotten together. I have now gone through the Bible, as a man would go through a wood with an axe on his shoulder, and fell trees. Here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never make them grow."

Jamie says

Thomas Paine plays the ace and brings the house of cards down: the wizard behind the curtain is dead, the emperor has no clothes.

Don't be mistaken, this would be shocking if it were written *today*. But no, incredibly, this was the eighteenth century, before modern scholarship, in the depths of scientific anthropocentrism and Biblical literalism. "If only," 200 years later, with what we now know— but here's America, trying to write Thomas Paine out of history books and cover up the trace.

Here's the kicker, though: it's split to Part I and Part II due to Paine's imprisonment during the French Revolution. *The Age of Reason* was both his urgent final words and his urgent first.

Lest I just start repeating praises that have already been sung, here's the review that nails the home run.

Darwin8u says

Wow. It is amazing to me to think this book was written in 1794/95. One of the most influential thinkers/writers/pamphleteers of the American AND French revolutions. You can't read Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins or Bart D. Ehrman and not feel that these authors ALL owe huge debts of gratitude to Thomas Paine and his last book. 'The Age of Reason', which essentially advocated deism, promoted humanism, reason and freethinking, and violently quarelled with ALL institutionalized religion (especially Christianity, viz the Bible), turned one of the heroes of the American Revolution into a social pariah. Only 6 people showed up for his funeral in 1809 (15 years after 'The Age of Reason' was first published) because many were still horrified by 'The Age of Reason'. Thomas Paine was an amazing thinker and like Hitch, I might not always agree with the end result of their thinking, but I am always amazed at the energy, force, originality and bravery of their thought.
