

That I may be preserved from Atheism and Infidelity, Impiety and Profaneness, and in my Addresses to Thee carefully avoid Irreverence and Ostentation, Formality and odious Hypocrisy,

Help me, O Father

That I may be loyal to my Prince, and faithful to my Country, careful for its Good, valiant in its Defence, and Obedient to its Laws, abhorring Treason as much as Tyranny,

Help me, O Father

That I may to those above me be dutiful, humble, and submissive, avoiding Pride, disrespect and Contumacy,

Help me, O Father

That I may to those below me, be gracious, Condescending and Forgiving, using Clemency, protecting *Innocent Distress*, avoiding Cruelty, Harshness and Oppression, Insolence and unreasonable Severity,

Help me, O Father

That I may refrain from Calumny and Detraction; that I may avoid and abhor Deceit and Envy, Fraud, Flattery and Hatred, Malice, Lying and Ingratitude,

Help me, O Father

That I may be sincere in Friendship, faithful in Trust, and impartial in Judgment, watchful against Pride, and against Anger (that momentary Madness),

Help me, O Father

That I may be just in all my Dealings and temperate in my Pleasures, full of Candour and Ingenuity, Humanity and Benevolence,

Help me, O Father

That I may be grateful to my Benefactors and generous to my Friends, exerting Charity and Liberality to the Poor, and Pity to the Miserable,

Help me, O Father

That I may avoid Avarice, Ambition, and Intemperance, Luxury and Lasciviousness,

Help me, O Father

That I may possess Integrity and Evenness of Mind, Resolution in Difficulties, and Fortitude under Affliction; that I may be punctual in performing my Promises, peaceable and prudent in my Behaviour,

Help me, O Father

That I may have Tenderness for the Weak, and a reverent Respect for the Ancient; that I may be kind to my Neighbours, good-natured to my Companions, and hospitable to Strangers,

Help me, O Father

That I may be averse to Craft and Overreaching, abhor Extortion, Perjury, and every kind of Wickedness,

Help me, O Father

That I may be honest and Openhearted, gentle, merciful and Good, cheerful in Spirit, rejoicing in the Good of Others,

Help me, O Father

That I may have a constant Regard to Honour and Probity; that I may possess a perfect Innocence and a good Conscience, and at length become Truly Virtuous and Magnanimous,

Help me, Good God,  
Help me, O Father

And forasmuch as Ingratitude is one of the most odious of Vices, let me not be unmindful gratefully to acknowledge the Favours I receive from Heaven.

Thanks.

For Peace and Liberty, for Food and Raiment, for Corn and Wine, and Milk, and every kind of Healthful Nourishment,

*Good God, I Thank thee.*

For the Common Benefits of Air and Light, for useful Fire and delicious Water,

*Good God, I Thank thee.*

For Knowledge and Literature and every useful Art; for my Friends and their Prosperity, and for the fewness of my Enemies,

*Good God, I Thank thee.*

For all thy innumerable Benefits; for Life and Reason, and the Use of Speech, for Health and Joy and every Pleasant Hour,

*Good God, I Thank thee. . . .*

#### Doctrine to Be Preached (1731)

*Franklin describes himself in his Autobiography as an inveterate scribbler of private reflections, passing thoughts, and outlines of planned (but often never written) works. This selection, probably composed in 1731, appears to have been a memorandum Franklin intended to work up into a public discourse—possibly to be delivered at a meeting of the Philadelphia Junto Society, which Franklin had founded in 1727. It is not known whether he actually “preached” this doctrine at some time, but the memo reemerged some forty years later in abbreviated form in the Autobiography (see selections from the Autobiography, below).*

*The piece is an encapsulated account of Franklin’s deistic orientation, stressing the rational imperatives of virtue and knowledge.*

That there is one God Father of the Universe.  
That he [is] infinitely good, Powerful and wise.

That he is omnipresent.

That he ought to be worshipped, by Adoration Prayer and Thanksgiving both in publick and private.

That he loves such of his Creatures as love and do good to others: and will reward them either in this World or hereafter.

That Men's Minds do not die with their Bodies, but are made more happy or miserable after this Life according to their Actions.

That Virtuous Men ought to league together to strengthen the Interest of Virtue, in the World: and so strengthen themselves in Virtue.

That Knowledge and Learning is to be cultivated, and Ignorance dissipated.

That none but the Virtuous are wise.

That Man's Perfection is in Virtue.

### On the Providence of God in the Government of the World (1732)

On the Providence of God, which Franklin recorded in his *Commonplace Book*, appears to be the draft of a speech he delivered or intended to deliver to his "Pot Companions" of the *Junto Society*.

The essay is interesting on several counts. First, it indicates how far Franklin had retreated by 1732 from his earlier denial in the *Dissertation of human freedom*. In this piece, he still considers the deity to be all-powerful and supremely good, but he now thinks it reasonable to suppose that since God is also infinitely free—that is, totally unconstrained by externalities—he imparts a spark of divine freedom (along with power and goodness) to the creatures made in his image.

Moreover, Franklin argues that the omnibenevolent nature of God is such that he neither arbitrarily predestines certain individuals to eternal damnation and others to eternal bliss—a clear jab at Calvinism—nor totally distances himself from creation by leaving humans to the whimsy of chance. Neither course of action would be worthy of a deity who is supremely wise, good, and powerful. Instead, Franklin concludes that, given the "Power of the Deity," the only rational account of his relationship to creation is that he occasionally "interferes by his particular Providence and sets aside the Effects which would otherwise have been produced."

It is not at all clear how we are to read this passage. If by "interferes by his particular Providence" Franklin means the deity directly intervenes in the system of physical laws he has established—thereby, for example, magically preventing otherwise inevitable natural disasters such as earthquakes—then he seems to have stepped out of character, offering a most undeistic and obviously Calvinist doctrine of miracles and special providences. But there is no reason to suppose this is what Franklin had in mind. Instead, it seems more plausible to interpret his argument as a defense of the assumption that divine providence can sway, without

necessarily coercing, human sentiment away from evil and toward virtue. It is significant, for example, that the illustration with which Franklin highlights his point is a political rather than physical one: God's infinite goodness can prompt him to interfere with wicked ambitions in such a way as to "deliver" an oppressed but righteous nation from the grip of a "cruel Tyrant." This interpretation of providence allows Franklin, in typical deistic fashion, to salvage divine power and goodness without sacrificing either human freedom or the mechanistic orderliness of the physical realm. At any rate, his rather murky attempt to accentuate the benevolence of the deity, even to the extent of pushing himself into a corner possibly incompatible with his deism, only underscores Franklin's growing preoccupation with ethical matters.

Finally, it should be noted that Franklin's discussion of divine attributes as well as providence is based on inductive extrapolations from experience. Like all deists, he was intensely suspicious of a priori metaphysical speculation or ecclesial (and supposedly revealed) authority, believing instead that knowledge of the deity is best gleaned from an examination of the "book of nature." His analysis of divine providence, as he says, is not founded on "The Authority of any Books or Men how sacred soever; because I know that no Authority is more convincing to Men of Reason than the Authority of Reason itself."

When I consider my own Weakness, and the discerning Judgment of those who are to be my Audience, I cannot help blaming my self considerably, for this rash Undertaking of mine, it being a Thing I am altogether ill practis'd in and very much unqualified for; I am especially discouraged when I reflect that you are all my intimate Pot Companions who have heard me say a 1000 silly Things in Conversations, and therefore have not that laudable Partiality and Veneration for whatever I shall deliver that Good people commonly have for their Spiritual Guides; that You have no Reverence for my Habit, nor for the Sanctity of my Countenance; that you do not believe me inspir'd or divinely assisted, and therefore will think your Selves at Liberty to assent or dissent, agree or disagree, of any Thing I advance, canvassing and sifting it as the private Opinion of one of your Acquaintance. These are great Disadvantages and Discouragements but I am enter'd and must proceed, humbly requesting your Patience and Attention.

I propose at this Time to discourse on the Subject of our last Conversation: 'The Providence of God in the Government of the World. I shall not attempt to amuse you with Flourishes of Rhetorick, were I master of that deceitful Science because I know ye are Men of substantial Reason and can easily discern between sound Argument and the false Glosses of Oratory; nor shall I endeavor to impose on your Ears, by a musical Accent in delivery, in the Tone of one violently affected with what he says; for well I know that ye are far from

therefore to declare this act irrevocable, would be of no effect in law, yet we are free to declare, and do declare, that the rights hereby asserted are of the natural rights of mankind, and that if any act shall be hereafter passed to repeal the present or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural right.

To Peter Carr (10 August 1787)

*Jefferson was minister to France when he penned this letter of advice to his orphaned nephew Peter Carr. It is, as Jefferson says, "a sketch of the sciences to which I would wish you to apply." Included in its various injunctions are Jefferson's ruminations on ethics and religion.*

Dear Peter

. . . He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science. For one man of science, there are thousands who are not. What would have become of them? Man was destined for society. His morality therefore was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his nature as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality, and not the *το καλον* ["the beautiful"] truth, &c., as fanciful writers have imagined. The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body. This sense is submitted indeed in some degree to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is required for this: even a less one than what we call Common sense. State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules. In this branch therefore read good books because they will encourage as well as direct your feelings. . . . Above all things lose no occasion of exercising your dispositions to be grateful, to be generous, to be charitable, to be humane, to be true, just, firm, orderly, courageous &c. Consider every act of this kind as an exercise which will strengthen your moral faculties, and increase your worth.

4. Religion. Your reason is now mature enough to examine this object. In the first place divest yourself of all bias in favour of novelty and singularity of opinion. Indulge them in any other subject rather than that of religion. It is too important, and the consequences of error may be too serious. On the other hand shake off all the fears and servile prejudices under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a god; be-

cause, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear. You will naturally examine first the religion of your own country. Read the bible then, as you would read Livy or Tacitus. The facts which are within the ordinary course of nature you will believe on the authority of the writer, as you do those of the same kind in Livy and Tacitus. The testimony of the writer weighs in their favor in one scale, and their not being against the laws of nature does not weigh against them. But those facts in the bible which contradict the laws of nature, must be examined with more care, and under a variety of faces. Here you must recur to the pretensions of the writer to inspiration from god. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong as that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change of the laws of nature in the case he relates. For example in the book of Joshua we are told the sun stood still several hours. Were we to read that fact in Livy or Tacitus we should class it with their showers of blood, speaking of statues, beasts &c., but it is said that the writer of that book was inspired. Examine therefore candidly what evidence there is of his having been inspired. The pretension is entitled to your inquiry, because millions believe it. On the other hand you are Astronomer enough to know how contrary it is to the law of nature that a body revolving on its axis, as the earth does, should have stopped, should not by that sudden stoppage have prostrated animals, trees, buildings, and should after a certain time have resumed its revolution, and that without a second general prostration. Is this arrest of the earth's motion, or the evidence which affirms it, most within the law of probabilities? You will next read the new testament. It is the history of a personage called Jesus. Keep in your eye the opposite pretensions. 1. Of those who say he was begotten by god, born of a virgin, suspended and reversed the laws of nature at will, and ascended bodily into heaven; and 2. of those who say he was a man, of illegitimate birth, of a benevolent heart, enthusiastic mind, who set out without pretensions to divinity, ended in believing them, and was punished capitally for sedition by being gibbeted according to the Roman law which punished the first commission of that offence by whipping, and the second by exile or death *in furca*. . . . Do not be frightened from this inquiry by any fear of its consequences. If it ends in a belief that there is no god, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you feel in its exercise, and the love of others which it will procure you. If you find reason to believe there is a god, a consciousness that you are acting under his eye, and that he approves you, will be a vast additional incitement. If that there be a future state, the hope of a happy existence in that increases the appetite to deserve it; if that Jesus was also a god, you will be comforted by a belief of his aid and love. In fine, I repeat that you must lay aside all prejudice on both sides, and neither believe nor reject any thing because any other persons, or description of persons have rejected or believed it. Your own reason is the only oracle

118 given you by heaven, and you are answerable not for the rightness but uprightness of the decision. . . .

To the Rev. Isaac Story (5 December 1801)

*Jefferson responds to a nine-page manuscript entitled "The Metempsychosis-doctrine, in a limited sense, defended," written by Story.*

Sir

Your favor of Oct. 27 was received some time since, and read with pleasure. It is not for me to pronounce on the hypothesis you present of a transmigration of souls from one body to another in certain cases. The laws of nature have withheld from us the means of physical knowledge of the country of spirits and revelation has, for reasons unknown to us, chosen to leave us in the dark as we were. When I was young I was fond of the speculations which seemed to promise some insight into that hidden country, but observing at length that they left me in the same ignorance in which they had found me, I have for very many years ceased to read or to think concerning them, and have reposed my head on that pillow of ignorance which a benevolent creator has made so soft for us knowing how much we should be forced to use it. I have thought it better by nourishing the good passions, and controlling the bad, to merit an inheritance in a state of being of which I can know so little, and to trust for the future to him who has been so good for the past. I perceive too that these speculations have with you been only the amusement of leisure hours; while your labours have been devoted to the education of your children, making them good members of society, to the instructing men in their duties, and performing the other offices of a large parish. . . .

To Joseph Priestley (9 April 1803)

*Jefferson offers an early description of his planned but never written study of the Christian religion. For his synopsis of the proposed treatise, see the 1803 letter to Rush, next.*

Dear Sir

While on a short visit lately to Monticello, I received from you a copy of your comparative view of Socrates and Jesus, and I avail myself of the first moment of leisure after my return to acknowledge the pleasure I had in the perusal of it, and the desire it excited to see you take up the subject on a more extensive scale. In consequence of some conversation with Dr. Rush in the years 1798–99. I had promised some day to write him a letter giving him my view of the Christian system. I have reflected often on it since, and even

119 sketched the outlines in my own mind. I should first take a general view of the moral doctrines of the most remarkable of the antient philosophers, of whose ethics we have sufficient information to make an estimate: say of Pythagoras, Epicurus, Epictetus, Socrates, Cicero, Seneca, Antoninus. I should do justice to the branches of morality they have treated well, but point out the importance of those in which they are deficient. I should then take a view of the deism, and ethics of the Jews, and shew in what a degraded state they were, and the necessity they presented of a reformation. I should proceed to a view of the life, character, and doctrines of Jesus, who, sensible of the incorrectness of their ideas of the deity, and of morality, endeavored to bring them to the principles of a pure deism, and juster notions of the attributes of god, to reform their moral doctrines to the standard of reason, justice, and philanthropy, and to inculcate the belief of a future state. This view would purposely omit the question of his divinity and even of his inspiration. To do him justice it would be necessary to remark the disadvantages his doctrines have to encounter, not having been committed to writing by himself, but by the most unlettered of men, by memory, long after they had heard them from him; when much was forgotten, much misunderstood, and presented in very paradoxical shapes. Yet such are the fragments remaining as to shew a master workman, and that his system of morality was the most benevolent and sublime probably that has been ever taught; and eminently more perfect than those of any of the antient philosophers. His character and doctrines have received still greater injury from those who pretend to be his special disciples, and who have disfigured and sophisticated his actions and precepts, from views of personal interest, so as to induce the unthinking part of mankind to throw off the whole system in disgust, and to pass sentence as an imposter on the most innocent, the most benevolent the most eloquent and sublime character that ever has been exhibited to man.—This is the outline; but I have not the time, and still less the information which the subject needs. It will therefore rest with me in contemplation only. You are the person who of all others would do it best, and most promptly. You have all the materials at hand, and you put together with ease. I wish you could be induced to extend your late work to the whole subject. . . .

To Benjamin Rush (21 April 1803)

Dear Sir

In some of the delightful conversations with you, in the evenings of 1798–99, which served as an Anodyne to the afflictions of the crisis through which the country was then labouring, the Christian religion was sometimes our topic: and I then promised you that, one day or other, I would give you my views of it. They are the result of a life of enquiry and reflection, and very different from that Anti-Christian system, imputed to me by those who know

nothing of my opinions. To the corruptions of Christianity, I am indeed opposed; but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus himself. I am a Christian, in the only sense in which he wished any one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence, and believing he never claimed any other. At the short intervals, since these conversations, when I could justifiably abstract my mind from public affairs, this subject has been under my contemplation. But the more I considered it, the more it expanded beyond the measure of either my time or information. In the moment of my late departure from Monticello, I received from Doctr. Priestley his little treatise of "Socrates and Jesus compared." This being a section of the general view I had taken of the field, it became a subject of reflection, while on the road, and unoccupied otherwise. The result was, to arrange in my mind a Syllabus, or Outline, of such an Estimate of the comparative merits of Christianity, as I wished to see executed, by some one of more leisure and information for the task than myself. This I now send you, as the only discharge of my promise I can probably ever execute. And, in confiding it to you, I know it will not be exposed to the malignant perversions of those who make every word from me a text for new misrepresentations and calumnies. I am moreover averse to the communication of my religious tenets to the public; because it would countenance the presumption of those who have endeavored to draw them before that tribunal, and to seduce public opinion to erect itself into that Inquisition over the rights of conscience, which the laws have so justly proscribed. It behoves every man, who values liberty of conscience for himself, to resist invasions of it in the case of others; or their case may, by change of circumstances, become his own. It behoves him too, in his own case, to give no example of concession, betraying the common right of independent opinion, by answering questions of faith, which the laws have left between god and himself. Accept my affectionate salutations.

*Syllabus of an Estimate of the Merit of the Doctrines  
of Jesus, compared with those of others.*

In a comparative view of the Ethics of the enlightened nations of antiquity, of the Jews, and of Jesus, no notice should be taken of the corruptions of reason, among the antients, to wit, the idolatry and superstition of the vulgar, Nor of the corruptions of Christianity by the learned among its professors.

Let a just view be taken of the moral principles inculcated by the most esteemed of the sects of antt. philosophy, or of their individuals; particularly Pythagoras, Socrates, Epicurus, Cicero, Epictetus, Seneca, Antoninus.

I. Philosophers.

1. Their precepts related chiefly to ourselves, and the government of those passions which, unrestrained, would disturb our tranquility of mind. In this branch of Philosophy they were really great.

2. In developing our duties to others, they were short and defective. They embraced indeed the circles of kindred and friends: and inculcated patriotism, or the love of our country in the aggregate, as a primary obligation: towards our neighbors and countrymen, they taught justice, but scarcely viewed them as within the circle of benevolence. Still less have they inculcated peace, charity, and love to our fellow men, or embraced with benevolence, the whole family of mankind.

II. Jews.

1. Their system was Deism, that is, the belief in one only god. But their ideas of him, and of his attributes, were degrading and injurious.

2. Their Ethics were not only imperfect, but often irreconcilable with the sound dictates of reason and morality, as they respect intercourse with those around us: and repulsive, and anti-social, as respecting other nations. They needed reformation therefore in an eminent degree.

III. Jesus.

In this state of things among the Jews, Jesus appeared. His parentage was obscure, his condition poor, his education null, his natural endowments great, his life correct and innocent; he was meek, benevolent, patient, firm, disinterested, and of the sublimist eloquence.

The disadvantages under which his doctrines appear are remarkable.

1. Like Socrates and Epictetus, he wrote nothing himself.

2. But he had not, like them, a Xenophon or an Arrian to write for him. . . . On the contrary, all the learned of his country, entrenched in its power and riches, were opposed to him lest his labours should undermine their advantages: and the committing to writing his life and doctrines, fell on unlettered and ignorant men: who wrote too from memory, and not till long after the transactions had passed.

3. According to the ordinary fate of those who attempt to enlighten and reform mankind, he fell an early victim to the jealousy and combination of the altar and the throne; at about 33 years of age, his reason having not yet attained the maximum of its energy, nor the course of his preaching, which was but of about 3 years at most, presented occasions for developing a complete system of morals.

4. Hence the doctrines which he really delivered were defective as a whole, And fragments only of what he did deliver have come to us, mutilated, mistated, and often unintelligible.

5. They have been still more disfigured by the corruptions of schismatising followers, who have found an interest in sophisticating and perverting the simple doctrines he taught, by engraving on them the mysticisms of a Graecian Sophist, frittering them into subtleties, and obscuring them with jargon, until they have caused good men to reject the whole in disgust, and to view Jesus himself as an impostor.

Nowithstanding these disadvantages, a system of morals is presented to us, which, if filled up in the true style and spirit of the rich fragments he left us, would be the most perfect and sublime that has ever been taught by man.

The question of his being a member of the god-head, or in direct communication with it, claimed for him by some of his followers, and denied by others, is foreign to the present view, which is merely an estimate of the intrinsic merits of his doctrines.

1. He corrected the Deism of the Jews, confirming them in their belief of one only god, and giving them juster notions of his attributes and government.

2. His moral doctrines relating to kindred and friends were more pure and perfect, than those of the most correct of the philosophers, and greatly more so than those of the Jews. And they went far beyond both in inculcating universal philanthropy, not only to kindred and friends, to neighbors and countrymen, but to all mankind, gathering all into one family, under the bonds of love, charity, peace, common wants, and common aids. A development of this head will evince the peculiar superiority of the system of Jesus over all others.

3. The precepts of Philosophy, and of the Hebrew code, laid hold of actions only. He pushed his scrutinies into the heart of man; erected his tribunal in the region of his thoughts, and purified the waters at the fountain head.

4. He taught, emphatically, the doctrine of a future state; which was either doubted or disbelieved by the Jews: and wielded it with efficacy, as an important incentive, supplementary to the other motives to moral conduct.

#### To John Adams (12 October 1813)

*Jefferson reflects on the "corruption" of Christianity and refers to his edited "Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth," a compilation of New Testament synoptic texts stripped of their supernaturalist doctrine.*

Dear Sir

. . . To compare the morals of the old, with those of the new testament, would require an attentive study of the former, a search thro' all its books for its precepts, and through all its history for its practices, and the principles they prove. As commentaries too on these, the philosophy of the Hebrews must be enquired into, their Mishna, their Gemara, Cabbala, Jezirah, Sohar, Cosri, and their Talmud must be examined and understood, in order to do them full justice. Brucker, it would seem, has gone deeply into these Repositories of their ethics, and Enfield, his epitomiser, concludes in these words. "Ethics were so little understood among the Jews, that, in their whole compilation called the Talmud, there is only one treatise on moral subjects. Their books of Morals chiefly consisted in a minute enumeration of duties. From the law of Moses were deduced 613 precepts, which were divided into two classes, affirmative

and negative, 248 in the former, and 365 in the latter. It may serve to give the reader some idea of the low state of moral philosophy among the Jews in the Middle age, to add, that of the 248 affirmative precepts, only 3 were considered as obligatory upon women; and that, in order to obtain salvation, it was judged sufficient to fulfill any one single law in the hour of death; the observance of the rest being deemed necessary, only to increase the felicity of the future life. What a wretched depravity of sentiment and manners must have prevailed before such corrupt maxims could have obtained credit! It is impossible to collect from these writings a consistent series of moral Doctrine." Enfield, B. 4 chap. 3. It was the reformation of this "wretched depravity" of morals which Jesus undertook. In extracting the pure principles which he taught, we should have to strip off the artificial vestments in which they have been muffled by priests, who have travestied them into various forms, as instruments of riches and power to themselves. We must dismiss the Platonists and Plotinists, the Stagyrites and Gamalielites, the Eclectics the Gnostics and Scholastics, their essences and emanations, their Logos and Demi-urgos, Acons and Daemons male and female, with a long train Etc. Etc. or, shall I say at once, of Nonsense. We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists, select, even from them, the very words only of Jesus, paring off the Amphibologisms into which they have been led by forgetting often, or not understanding, what had fallen from him, by giving their own misconceptions as his dicta, and expressing unintelligibly for others what they had not understood themselves. There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man. I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging the matter which is evidently his, and which is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill. The result is an octavo of 46 pages of pure and unsophisticated doctrines, such as were professed and acted on by the *unlettered* apostles, the Apostolic fathers, and the Christians of the 1st century. Their Platonising successors indeed, in after times, in order to legitimate the corruptions which they had incorporated into the doctrines of Jesus, found it necessary to disavow the primitive Christians, who had taken their principles from the mouth of Jesus himself, of his Apostles, and the Fathers contemporary with them. They excommunicated their followers as heretics, branding them with the opprobrious name of Ebionites or Beggars.

For a comparison of the Graecian philosophy with that of Jesus, materials might be largely drawn from the same source. Enfield gives a history, and detailed account of the opinions and principles of the different sects. These relate to the gods, their natures, grades, places and powers; the demi-gods and daemons, and their agency with man; the Universe, its structure, extent, production and duration; the origin of things from the elements of fire, water, air, and earth; the human soul, its essence and derivation; the summum bonum

should be permitted to disturb his brain; but rising above all vice and all prejudice, he should consider himself as an associated being, and live for the benefit of himself and his fellow creatures.

Principles of the Deistical Society  
of the State of New York

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

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

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

9. That civil and religious liberty is equally essential to his true interests.

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

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

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

282 plates of metal" which they hoard. The emissary concludes his report by assuring his chief that the Otaheite priest attempted to instruct the foreigners in the one true Otaheite religion but barely escaped being soundly drubbed for his pains. This leads him to surmise that "these people seem to be under some indissoluble obligation to believe only what has previously been believed for them by their progenitors"—a subtle jab at religious bigotry that reminds one of the eloquent opening stanza of Freneau's "On the Abuse of Human Power": "Must man at that tribunal bow / Which will no range to thought allow, / But his best powers would sway or sink, / And idly tells him what to THINK."

### On the Powers of the Human Understanding

This human mind! how grand a theme:  
Faint image of the Great Supreme,  
The universal soul,  
That lives, that thinks, compares, contrives;  
From its vast self all power derives  
To manage or control.

What energy, O soul, is thine:  
How you reflect, resolve, combine;  
Invention all your own!  
Material bodies changed by you  
New modes assume, or natures new,  
From death or chaos won.

To intellectual powers, though strong,  
To moral powers a use belong  
More noble and refined;  
These lift us to the power who made,  
Illumine what seems to us all shade,  
The part to man assigned.

Both nurtured in the heart of man  
Serve to advance his social plan,  
And happier make his race;  
Hence Reason takes her potent sway,  
And *grovelling passions* bids obey  
That harm us and debase.

O ye, who long have walked obscure;  
Forever must those clouds endure  
Which darken human bliss?  
Though for some better state designed,  
Is there not rigour in the mind  
To make a heaven of this—

Eternal must that progress be  
Which Nature through futurity  
Decreases the human soul;  
Capacious still, it still improves  
As through the abyss of time it moves,  
Or endless ages roll.

Its knowledge grows by every change;  
Through science vast we see it range  
That none may here acquire;  
The pause of death must come between  
And Nature gives another scene  
More brilliant, to admire.

Thus decomposed, or recombined,  
To slow perfection moves the mind  
And *may* at last attain  
A nearer rank with that first cause  
Which distant, though it ever draws,  
Unequalled must remain.

Its moral beauty thus displayed  
In moral excellence arrayed  
Perpetually it shines:  
Its heaven of happiness complete  
The mass of souls united meet  
In orbs that heaven assigns.

### Reflections on the Constitution, or Frame of Nature

From what high source of being came  
This system, Nature's awful frame;  
This sun, that motion gives to all,  
The planets, and this earthly ball:



This sun, who life and heat conveys,  
And comforts with his cheering rays;  
This image of the God, whose beam  
Enlivens like the GREAT SUPREME.

We see, with most exact design,  
The WORLD revolve, the planets shine,  
In nicest order all things meet,  
A structure in ITSELF complete.

Beyond our proper solar sphere  
Unnumbered orbs again appear,  
Which, sunk into the depths of space,  
Unvarying keep their destined place.

Great Frame! what wonders we survey,  
In part alone, from day to day!  
And hence the reasoning, human soul  
Infers an author of the whole:

A power, that every blessing gives,  
Who through eternal ages lives,  
All space inhabits, space his throne,  
Spreads through all worlds, confined to none;

Infers, through skies, o'er seas, o'er lands  
A power throughout the whole commands;  
In all extent its dwelling place,  
Whose mansion is unbounded space.

Where ends this world, or when began  
This spheric point displayed to man?—  
No limit has the work divine,  
Nor owns a circumscribing line.

Beyond what mind or thought conceives,  
Our efforts it in darkness leaves;  
And Nature we, by Reason's aid,  
Find boundless as the power that made.

THOU, nature's self art nature's God  
Through all expansion spread abroad,  
Existing in the eternal scheme,  
Vast, undivided, and supreme.

Here beauty, order, power, behold  
Exact, all perfect, uncontrouled;  
All in its proper place arranged,  
Immortal, endless, and unchanged.

Its powers, still active, never rest,  
From motions, by THAT GOD impressed,  
Who life through all creation spread,  
Nor left the meanest atom dead.

#### Science, Favourable to Virtue

The mind, in this uncertain state,  
Is anxious to investigate  
All knowledge through creation sown,  
And would no atom leave unknown.

So warm, so ardent in research,  
To wisdom's *source* she fain would march;  
And find by study, toil, and care  
The secrets of all nature *there*.

Vain wish, to fathom all we see,  
For nature is all mystery;  
The mind, though perched on eagle's wings,  
With pain surmounts the scum of things.

Her knowledge on the surface floats,  
Of things supreme she dreams or dotes;  
Fluttering awhile, she soon descends,  
And all in disappointment ends.

And yet this proud, this strong desire,  
Such ardent longings to aspire,  
Prove that this weakness in the mind  
For some wise purpose was designed.

From efforts and attempts, like these,  
Virtue is gained by slow degrees;  
And science, which from truth she draws,  
Stands firm to Reason and her cause.

However small, its use we find  
To tame and civilize mankind,  
To throw this brutal instinct by,  
To honour Reason, ere we die.

The lovely philanthropic scheme  
(Great image of the power supreme,)  
On growth of science must depend;  
With this all human duties end.

#### On a Book Called Unitarian Theology

In this choice work, with wisdom penned, we find  
The noblest system to reform mankind,  
Bold truths confirmed, that bigots have denied,  
By most perverted, and which some deride.  
Here, truths divine in easy language flow,  
Truths long concealed, that now all climes shall know:  
Here, like the blaze of our material *sun*,  
Enlightened *Reason* proves, that GOD IS ONE—  
As that, centered in itself, a sphere,  
Illumines all Nature with its radiance here,  
Bids towards itself all trees and plants aspire,  
Awakes the winds, impels the seeds of fire,  
And still subservient to the Almighty plan,  
Warms into life the changeful race of man;  
So—like the sun—in heaven's bright realms we trace  
One POWER OF LOVE, that fills unbounded space,  
Existing always by no borrowed aid,  
Before all worlds—eternal, and not made—  
To THAT indebted, stars and comets burn,  
Owe their swift movements, and to THAT return!  
Prime source of wisdom, all-contriving mind,  
First spring of REASON, that this globe designed;  
Parent of order, whose unwearied hand  
Upholds the fabric that his wisdom planned,  
And, its due course assigned to every sphere,

Resolves the seasons, and sustains the year!—  
Pure light of TRUTH! where'er thy splendours shine,  
Thou art the image of the power divine;  
Nought else, in life, that full resemblance bears,  
No sun, that lights us through our circling years,  
No stars, that through yon' charming azure stray,  
No moon, that glads us with her evening ray,  
No seas, that o'er their gloomy caverns flow,  
No forms beyond us, and no shapes below!

Then slight—oh slight not, this instructive page,  
For the mean follies of a dreaming age;  
Here to the truth, by REASON'S aid aspire,  
Nor some dull preacher of romance admire;  
See ONE, SOLE GOD, in these convincing lines,  
Beneath whose view perpetual day-light shines;  
At whose command all worlds their circuits run,  
And night, retiring, dies before the sun!

*Here, MAN no more disgraced by Time appears,  
Lost in dull slumbers through ten thousand years;  
Plunged in that gulph, whose dark unfathomed wave  
Men of all ages to perdition gave;  
An empty dream, or still more empty shade,  
The substance vanished, and the form decayed!—*

Here Reason proves, that when this life decays,  
Instant, new life in the warm bosom plays,  
As that expiring, still its course repairs  
Through endless ages, and unceasing years.

Where parted souls with kindred spirits meet,  
Wrapt to the bloom of beauty all complete;  
In that celestial, vast, unclouded sphere,  
Nought there exists but has its image here!  
All there is MIND!—That INTELLECTUAL FLAME,  
From whose vast stores all human genius came,  
In which all Nature forms or REASON'S plan—  
FLOWS TO THIS ABJECT WORLD, AND BEAMS ON MAN!

#### On False Systems of Government, and the Generally Debased Condition of Mankind

Does there exist, or will there come  
An age with wisdom to assume,  
The RIGHTS by heaven designed;

The Rights which man was born to claim,  
From Nature's God which freely came,  
To aid and bless mankind.—

No monarch lives, nor do I deem  
There will exist one crown supreme  
The world in peace to sway;  
Whose first great view will be to place  
On their true scale the human race,  
And discord's rage allay.

REPUBLICS! must the task be your's  
To frame the code which life secures,  
And RIGHT from man to man—  
Are you, in Time's declining age,  
Found only fit to tread the stage  
When tyranny began?

How can we call those systems just  
Which bid the few, the proud, the first  
Possess all earthly good;  
While millions robbed of all that's dear  
In silence shed the ceaseless tear,  
And leeches suck their blood.

Great orb, that on our planet shines,  
Whose power both light and heat combines  
You should the model be;  
To man, the pattern how to reign  
With equal sway, and how maintain  
True human dignity.

Impartially to all below  
The solar beams unstinted flow,  
On all is poured the RAY,  
Which cheers, which warms, which clothes the ground  
In robes of green, or breathes around  
Life;—to enjoy the day.

But crowns not so;—with selfish views  
They partially their bliss diffuse  
Their *minions* feel them *kind*;—

And, still opposed to human right,  
Their plans, their views in *this* unite,  
To embroil and curse mankind.

Ye tyrants, false to HIM, who gave  
Life, and the virtues of the brave,  
All worth we own, or know:—  
Who made you great, the lords of man,  
To waste with wars, with blood to stain  
The Maker's works below?

You have no iron race to sway—  
Illumine them well with Reason's ray;  
*Inform* our active race;  
*True honour*, to the mind impart,  
With virtue's precepts tame the heart,  
Not urge it to be base;

Let laws revive, by heaven designed,  
To tame the tiger in the mind  
And drive from human hearts  
That love of wealth, that love of sway,  
Which leads the world too much astray,  
Which points envenomed darts:

And men will rise from *what they are*,  
Sublimed, and superior, far,  
Than SOLON guessed, or PLATO saw;  
All will be just, all will be good—  
That harmony, "*not understood*,"  
Will reign the general law.

For, in our race, deranged, bereft,  
The parting god some vestige left  
Of worth before possessed;  
Which full, which fair, which perfect shone,  
When love and peace, in concord sown,  
Ruled, and inspired each breast.

Hence, the small GOOD which yet we find,  
Is *shades* of that prevailing mind  
Which sways the worlds around:—

Let *these* depart, once disappear,  
And earth would all the horrors wear  
In hell's dominions found.

Just, as yon' tree, which, bending, grows  
To chance, not fate, its fortunes owes;  
So man from some rude shock,  
Some slighted power, some hostile hand,  
Has missed the state by Nature planned,  
Has split on passion's rock.

Yet shall that tree, when hewed away  
(As human woes have had their day)  
A new creation find:  
The infant shoot in time will swell,  
(Sublime and great from that which fell,)  
To all that heaven designed.

What is this earth, that sun, these skies;  
If all we see, on man must rise,  
Forsaken and oppressed—  
Why blazes round the eternal beam,  
Why, Reason, art thou called supreme,  
Where nations find no rest.—

What are the splendours of this ball—  
When life is closed, what are they all?  
When *dust to dust returns*  
Does power, or wealth, attend the dead;  
Are captives from the contest led—  
Is homage paid to urns?

What are the ends of Nature's laws;  
What folly prompts, what madness draws  
Mankind in chains, too strong:—  
Nature, *to us*, confused appears,  
On little things she wastes her cares,  
The great *seem sometimes* wrong.

## The New Age: Or, Truth Triumphant

In reason's view the times advance  
That other scenes to man disclose,  
When nature to her children grants  
A smiling season of repose;  
And better laws the wise will trace,  
To curb the wicked of our race.

Those happy ages, years of bliss,  
Had many an ancient sage foretold,  
Who, if they err'd or aught amiss,  
Predicted of this age of gold,  
It was, that crowns and courts and kings  
Would still attend this charge of things.

Strange thought, that they whose god is gain,  
Who live by war, who thrive on blood,  
Of half that live the curse the bane,  
Could ever rule among the good:  
These did some hateful fiend engage  
To banish peace and vex the age.

Man to be happy, as he may  
As far as nature meant him here,  
Should yield to no despotic sway  
Or systems of degrading fear;  
And sovereign man, new modell'd now,  
To sovereign man alone should bow.

The civil despot, once destroy'd,  
With all his base, tyrannic laws,  
The mind of man will be employ'd  
In aiding virtue and her cause:  
Enlighten'd once, inform'd and free,  
The mind admits no tyranny.

I saw the blest benignant hour  
When the worst plague of human race,  
Dread superstition, lost her power,  
And, with her patrons, black and base,

Fled to the darkest shades of hell,  
And bade at least one world farewell.

Fanatic flames extinguish'd all  
The energy of thought will rise:  
I see imposture's fabric fall,  
Each wicked imp of falsehood dies;  
And sovereign truth prevails at last  
To triumph o'er the errors past.

The moral beauties of the mind  
If man would to a blessing turn,  
And the great powers to him assign'd  
Would cultivate, improve, adorn:  
The sun of happiness, and peace  
Would shine on earth and never cease.

#### On Superstition

Implanted in the human breast,  
Religion means to make us blest;  
On reason built, she lends her aid  
To help us through life's sickening shade.

But man, to endless error prone  
And fearing most what's most unknown,  
To phantoms bows that round him rise,  
To angry gods, and vengeful skies.

Mistaken race, in error lost,  
And foes to them who love you most,  
No more fictitious gods revere,  
Nor worship what engenders fear.

O Superstition! to thy sway  
If man has bow'd and will obey,  
Misfortune still must be his doom  
And sorrow through the days to come.

Hence, ills on ills successive grow  
To cloud our day of bliss below;

Hence wars and feuds, and deadly hate,  
And all the woes that on them wait.

Here moral virtue finds its bane,  
Hence, ignorance with her slavish train.  
Hence, half the vigor of the mind  
Relax'd, or lost in human kind.

The social tie by this is broke  
When we some tyrant god invoke:  
The bitter curse from man to man  
From this infernal fiend began.

The reasoning power, celestial guest,  
The stamp upon the soul impress'd;  
When Superstition's awe degrades,  
Its beauty fails, its splendor fades.

O! turn from her detested ways,  
Unhappy man! her fatal maze;  
The reason which he gave, improve,  
And venerate the power above.

#### On the Abuse of Human Power, As Exercised over Opinion

What human power shall dare to bind  
The mere opinions of the mind?  
Must man at that tribunal bow  
Which will no range to thought allow,  
But his best powers would sway or sink,  
And idly tells him what to THINK.

Yes! there are such, and such are taught  
To fetter every power of thought;  
To chain the mind, or bend it down  
To some mean system of their own,  
And make religion's sacred cause  
Amenable to human laws.

Has human power the simplest claim  
Our hearts to sway, our thoughts to tame;

Shall she the rights of heaven assert,  
Can she to falsehood truth convert,  
Or truth again to falsehood turn,  
And at the test of reason spurn?

All human sense, all craft must fail  
And all its strength will nought avail,  
When it attempts with efforts blind  
To sway the independent mind,  
Its spring to break, its pride to awe,  
Or give to private judgment, law.

Oh impotent! and vile as vain,  
They, who would native thought restrain!  
As soon might they arrest the storm  
Or take from fire the power to warm,  
As man compel, by dint of might,  
Old darkness to prefer to light.

No! leave the mind unchain'd and free,  
And what they ought, mankind will be,  
No hypocrite, no lurking fiend,  
No artist to some evil end,  
But good and great, benign and just,  
As God and nature made them first.

#### On the Uniformity and Perfection of Nature

On one fix'd point all nature moves,  
Nor deviates from the track she loves;  
Her system, drawn from reason's source,  
She scorns to change her wonted course.

Could she descend from that great plan  
To work unusual things for man,  
To suit the insect of an hour—  
This would betray a want of power.

Unsettled in its first design  
And erring, when it did combine  
The parts that form the vast machine,  
The figures sketch'd on nature's scene.

Perfections of the great first cause  
Submit to no contracted laws,  
But all-sufficient, all-supreme,  
Include no trivial views in them.

Who looks through nature with an eye  
That would the scheme of heaven descry,  
Observes her constant, still the same,  
In all her laws, through all her frame.

No imperfection can be found  
In all that is, above, around,—  
All, nature made, in reason's sight  
Is order all, and *all is right*.

#### On the Universality, and Other Attributes of the God of Nature

All that we see, about, abroad,  
What is it all, but nature's God?  
In meaner works discover'd here  
No less than in the starry sphere.

In seas, on earth, this God is seen;  
All that exist, upon him lean;  
He lives in all, and never stray'd  
A moment from the works he made:

His system fix'd on general laws  
Bespeaks a wise creating cause;  
Impartially he rules mankind,  
And all that on this globe we find.

Unchanged in all that seems to change,  
Unbounded space is his great range;  
To one vast purpose always true,  
No time, with him, is old or new.

In all the attributes divine  
Unlimited perfections shine;  
In these enwrapt, in these complete,  
All virtues in that centre meet.

This power who doth all powers transcend,  
To all intelligence a friend,  
Exists, the *greatest and the best*  
Throughout all worlds, to make them blest.

All that he did he first approved  
He all things into *being* loved;  
O'er all he made he still presides,  
For them in life, or death provides.

### On the Religion of Nature

The power, that gives with liberal hand  
The blessings man enjoys, while here,  
And scatters through a smiling land  
The abundant products of the year;  
That power of nature, ever bless'd,  
Bestow'd religion with the rest.

Born with ourselves, her early sway  
Inclines the tender mind to take  
The path of right, fair virtue's way  
Its own felicity to make.  
This universally extends  
And leads to no mysterious ends.

Religion, such as nature taught,  
With all divine perfection suits;  
Had all mankind this system sought  
Sophists would cease their vain disputes,  
And from this source would nations know  
All that can make their heaven below.

This deals not curses to mankind,  
Or dooms them to perpetual grief,  
If from its aid no joys they find,  
It damns them not for unbelief;  
Upon a more exalted plan  
Creation's nature dealt with man—

Joy to the day, when all agree  
On such grand systems to proceed,  
From fraud, design, and error free,  
And which to truth and goodness lead:  
Then persecution will retreat  
And man's religion be complete.

### On the Evils of Human Life

To him who rules the starry spheres,  
No evil in his works appears:  
Man with a different eye, surveys,  
The incidents in nature's maze:  
And all that brings him care or pain  
He ranks among misfortune's train.

The ills that God, or nature, deal,  
The ills we hourly see, or feel,  
The sense of wretchedness and woe  
To man may be sincerely so;  
And yet these springs of tears and sighs  
Be heaven's best blessings in disguise.

Some favorite late, in anguish lay  
And agonized his life away:  
You grieved—to be consoled, refused,  
And heaven itself almost accused  
Of cruelty, that could dispense  
Such tortures to such innocence.

Could you but lift the dreary veil,  
And see with eyes or mind less frail  
The secrets of the world to come,  
You would not thus bewail *his* doom,  
To find on some more happy coast  
More blessings, far, than all he lost.

The seeming ills on life that wait  
And mingle with our best estate,  
Misfortune on misfortune grown,

And heaviest most, when most alone;  
Calamities, and heart oppress'd—  
These all attend us, for the best.

Learn hence, ye mournful, tearful race,  
On a sure ground your hopes to place;  
Immutable are nature's laws;  
And hence the soul her comfort draws  
That all the God allots to man  
Proceeds on one unerring plan.

Hold to the moral system, true,  
And heaven will always be in view;  
O man! by heaven this law was taught  
To reconcile you to your lot,  
To be your friend, when friendship fails,  
And nature a new being hails.

#### Belief and Unbelief: Humbly Recommended to the Serious Consideration of Creed Makers

What some believe, and would enforce  
Without reluctance or remorse,  
Perhaps another may decry,  
Or call a fraud, or deem a lie.

Must he for that be doom'd to bleed,  
And fall a martyr to some creed,  
By hypocrites or tyrants framed,  
By reason damn'd, by truth disclaim'd?

On mere belief no merit rests,  
As unbelief no guilt attests:  
Belief, if not absurd and blind,  
Is but conviction of the mind,

Nor can conviction bind the heart  
Till evidence has done its part:  
And, when that evidence is clear,  
Belief is just, and truth is near.

In evidence, belief is found;  
Without it, none are fairly bound  
To yield assent, or homage pay  
To what confederate worlds might say.

They who extort belief from man  
Should, in the out-set of their plan,  
Exhibit, like the mid-day sun  
An evidence denied by none.

From this great point, o'erlook'd or miss'd,  
Still unbelievers will exist;  
And just their plea; for how absurd  
For evidence, to take *your word!*

Not to believe, I therefore hold  
The right of man, all uncontrol'd  
By all the powers of human wit,  
What kings have done, or sages writ;

Not criminal in any view,  
Nor—man!—to be avenged by you,  
Till evidence of strongest kind  
Constrains assent, and clears the mind.

#### On Happiness, as Proceeding from the Practice of Virtue

This truth, upon the soul impress'd,  
Has been by every age confess'd,  
That in the course of human things  
Felicity from virtue springs.

Where vice prevails, or baseness sways,  
Remorse and pain the fault repays,  
The man of vice has no resource,  
But even in pleasure finds a curse.

If happiness can be sincere  
A virtuous conduct makes it here,  
That moral track to man assign'd  
A transcript from the all-perfect mind.



