

Newtonianism: How Thomas Paine Devalued the British Monarchy by Transforming John Locke's Empiricism and Social Contract Theory

Jana Šklíbová

ABSTRACT

The following student contribution concerns Thomas Paine's Newtonian concepts of society and government in the context of the Age of Enlightenment. Its aim is to demonstrate how Thomas Paine reinterpreted Enlightenment political thought as proposed by the empiricist theorist, John Locke, by using the principles of Newtonianism. Paine's Newtonian politics is closely connected with his deistic faith. His political theory is devoted to the vision of a free society as a manifestation of the benevolent The Watchmaker. With this mission in mind, Paine attempted to devalue the contemporary models of the state of nature and social contract theory as interpreted by John Locke and to offer a more democratic version of these concepts. Paine's key ideas in this respect are expressed in his most famous works Common Sense, The Rights of Man and The Age of Reason.

KEYWORDS

Thomas Paine, republic, society, government, Newtonianism, John Locke

Of the men who were involved in the formation of the first American Republic, none demonstrated a more passionate commitment to Newtonian science, or had a more peculiar role in early American politics, than Thomas Paine. While the co-founders of the United States of America were members of the upper class and thus predestined to govern American society in the manner of Locke's social contract theory, Paine's origins can be found in lower orders of England. He was born into a family of a corset-maker in Thetford, 1737.

One author observes that Paine's mission in life is to promote the religion of nature: "To follow nature [...] was itself a religion, which Thomas Paine, the secular preacher, taught to all those who would listen, or at least read his work."¹ The author further claims that "Paine's adulation of nature, his infatuation with it, was the basis of his religious faith,"² which is reflected in his political philosophy. On the contrary, others hold that it is science, not religion, that has influenced Paine's political thought.³ Extending these insights into Paine's philosophy, it is suggested here that although it may be true that Paine is a prophet of the religion of nature, i.e. deism, and he himself is a keen scientific inventor, he rarely draws distinction between science and religion. For Paine, the religion of nature is the science of nature.

Indeed, Paine's political philosophy cannot be considered separately from his interest in science and religion. One cannot fully comprehend the political views of Paine and a few other Founders of the early American Republic, unless one appreciates the fact that they were "essentially Nature worshipers – God worshipers through nature."⁴ Paine builds all his political philosophy upon the laws of nature: the laws of the scientist, Sir Isaac Newton, who has set the wheels of the

1 Jack Fruchtman, *Thomas Paine and the Religion of Nature* (John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 7.

2 Fruchtman, *Thomas Paine*, 7.

3 Edward Larkin, *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 116.

4 Ralph C. Roper, "Thomas Paine: Scientist-Religionist," *The Scientific Monthly*, Vol. 58, No. 5 (1944), 101

great The Watchmaker in motion. For Paine, political philosophy is the revelation of this “Creator of Science.”

Paine uses his understanding of Newton’s natural laws of the universe, which operate through science and which are revealed in nature, to develop a revolutionary theory of society and government, the vision of which is to improve and reform society. Paine thus takes his unique place among those Founding Fathers of the United States who believed that it is in the power of Newtonianism to “begin the world all over again.”⁵

*Nature, and Nature’s Laws lay hid in Night:
God said, Let Newton be! and All was Light.*⁶

As Pope celebrated Newton’s breakthroughs, the principal catalyst for Paine’s vision of a better world on American soil in particular was exactly the publication of Sir Isaac Newton’s widely disseminated tract *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. The *Principia* subsumed prior knowledge of astronomy such as Kepler’s ideas of orbits and Galileo’s theory of rotation into the theory of gravity and motion.⁷ Newton found a logical explanation of how the force pulling an apple of a tree also binds the apple to the ground and how this force attracts one object to another. In describing this law of nature, Newton’s discovery in science promoted the idea that the principles of gravitation extend to all laws in universe, including social and political ones. Consequently, there appeared the vision of humankind being able to perfect contemporary socio-political institutions by copying the patterns of celestial bodies of universe. Theological explanations of political, social and economic concepts were thus challenged, as Newtonian science worked as “a vaccine against the predations of superstition and faith-based authoritarianism.”⁸ This is the heart of Newtonianism; an idea of an enlightened and better world as expressed in Alexander Pope’s verse.

Newtonianism, or Newtonian politics, is understood as the application of Sir Isaac Newton’s scientific interpretation of the physical world to political philosophy. It “implies an ordered, predictable, mechanical law-governed political world resembling the way in which the planets follow ordered, prescribed, and predictable paths.”⁹ The image of individuals within human society is considered in Newtonian politics in terms analogous to planets and their gravitational forces. The American Newtonians thus used “ideas and metaphors of enlightened science to use in

5 Thomas Paine, *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, Vol. 1, edited by Philip S. Foner, (New York: The Citadel Press, 1946), 109.

6 Alexander Pope, “Epitaph,” in Richard Striner, “Political Newtonianism: The Cosmic Model of Politics in Europe and America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (1995), 588. Accessed 29-04-2016: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2947039>.

7 Timothy Ferris, *The Science of Liberty: Democracy, Reason, and the Laws of Nature* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 6.

8 Ferris, *The Science of Liberty*, 6.

9 James A. Robinson, “Newtonianism and the Constitution” *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 1, No. 3/4 (1957), 252. Accessed 29-04-2016: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2109303>.

constructing political mechanism and rationalizing political order.”¹⁰ Consequently, the American political theorists created a set of enlightened laws which they interpreted and explained along the same lines that Isaac Newton thought about the laws of Nature. Simply, Americans adopted “mechanical metaphors, compared natural laws and natural rights [of the pre-Enlightenment period] to the laws of mechanics, and generally anticipated a science of politics similar to a science of physics [being a modern set of human natural rights].”¹¹

The American world of Newtonian political theory includes both explicit language formulation of Newtonian science and scientific notions reflecting the climate of deistic opinions and general Newtonian *mentalité*.¹² One of the most crucial paradigms of Newtonian politics which dominated especially the early formative years of the first American Republic was a theory known as the method of counterpoise:

[Americans] when discoursing on the divine government of the world, often declared it to be axiomatic that the Creator always accomplishes his ends by the simplest and most direct means, they also tended to assume that he is frequently under the necessity of employing what may be called the method of counterpoise – accomplishing desirable results by balancing harmful things against one another.¹³

There has arisen a problem of accepting this Newtonian axiom in early American politics. A more popular belief commonly held in American culture is that it is the conservative Christian, John Locke, who ought to be noted for the foundations of the first American Republic. Steven Koven, one author interested in ideological settings of the United States of America, claims that Lockean principles “formed the basis for America’s Declaration of Independence and were largely adopted by Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, and by James Madison, father of the U.S. Constitution.”¹⁴ Contrary to this popular belief, many American politicians have surmised that the Constitution of the United States of America is founded upon Newtonianism. Woodrow Wilson, the twenty-eighth President of the United States, is probably one of the first and the most important figures making a parallel between Newtonian science and the Constitution.¹⁵ He claims:

The government of the United States was constructed upon the Whig theory of political dynamics, which was sort of unconscious copy of the Newtonian theory of the universe. In our own day, whenever we discuss the structure or development of any thing, whether in nature or in society, we consciously or unconsciously follow Mr. Darwin; but before Mr. Darwin, they followed Newton. [...] In brief, they [the Founding Fathers] had sought to balance executive, legislature, and judiciary off against one another by a series of checks and counterpoises, which Newton might readily have recognized as suggestive of the mechanism of the heavens.¹⁶

10 Richard Striner, “Political Newtonianism,” 583.

11 Robinson, “Newtonianism and the Constitution,” 253.

12 Striner, “Political Newtonianism,” 584.

13 Striner, “Political Newtonianism,” 585.

14 Steven Koven, *Public Budgeting in the United States: The Cultural and Ideological Setting* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 26.

15 Robinson, “Newtonianism and the Constitution,” 253.

16 Woodrow Wilson, *Woodrow Wilson: The Essential Political Writings*, edited by Ronald J. Pestritto (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2005), 175.

Although Wilson's observation may be true in that early American politics approximates a type of "unconscious copy of the Newtonian theory of the universe," it is argued here that such a universal system appears to be too democratic to be put in practice for the wealthy Founding Fathers, as Wilson himself eventually admits. However, this does not change the fact that Newtonianism rapidly influenced a modern and very progressive understanding of the structure of society and government as it is to be discussed in Paine's philosophy.

Contrary to the American Newtonians, who follow Pope's words that after Newton all has become enlightened, their British antagonists – empiricists – neither agree that nature has been revealed *in toto* by Newton, nor believe that nature ever could be completely comprehended.¹⁷ John Locke is especially skeptical about the human ability to "gain clear knowledge of the cosmic system."¹⁸ On the one hand, Locke proposes the idea that human reason provides people with power to govern themselves without divine instructions – his famous thesis attacking absolutism. On the other hand, he emphasizes that reason cannot bring the knowledge of the essential substance of the physical world to human mind. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke states: "We are so far from being admitted into the secrets of nature that we scarce so much as ever to approach the first entrance towards them."¹⁹ In the light of empiricism, Locke expresses a deep-rooted conviction that reason "provides nothing more than ideas of secondary qualities of physical things" and thus human beings are never able to comprehend "the true inner substance of physical things or the full and essential details of cosmic interactions."²⁰ Obviously, Locke attempts to cast doubt on Newtonianism, making it appear to be beyond the compass of human understanding.

Paine attacks Locke directly on this point. "All the knowledge that man has of science and of machinery, by the aid of which his existence is rendered comfortable upon earth," Paine argues, "and without which he would be scarcely distinguishable from a common animal, comes from the great machine and structure of the universe."²¹ Paine's deism gives him the certainty that the Watchmaker reveals the cosmic model of society to all those who can observe nature. In contrast to Paine's religion of nature, Locke's theory of knowledge is derived from the thought structure of conservative religions. It is mostly based on Christian revelation, through which God communicates only with the chosen ones by means beyond the ordinary course of nature. In sharp disagreement with Locke, Paine holds that it is by observing nature that man can find the principles which govern society, just as Newton has found the principles which govern the world of physics.²²

17 Michael Foley, *Laws, Men and Machines: Modern American Government and the Appeal of Newtonian Mechanics* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 12.

18 Striner, "Political Newtonianism," 589.

19 John Locke, *Locke: Political Writings*, edited by David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 188.

20 Striner, "Political Newtonianism," 589.

21 Thomas Paine, *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, Vol. 1, edited by Philip S. Foner (New York: The Citadel Press, 1946), 666.

22 Howard Penniman, "Thomas Paine – Democrat," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (April, 1943), 260. Accessed 19-05-2016: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1949385>.

Paine believes that the problem of knowledge arises when it comes to the custom of contemporary education, in which Locke's conservative dogma is generally accepted. The deep-rooted custom of education and prejudice of knowledge proposed by John Locke render common people blind of their natural rights by creating artificial beliefs and differences among classes. The only possible hindrance to complete knowledge of the Watchmaker that differentiates people from each other is education which members of various social classes can access.²³ Paine writes: "Men are naturally the same [...]; it is education alone which marks the differences among them."²⁴ The result of these conservative prejudices is only harmful. There would be minimal social differences among people if knowledge of the Watchmaker was not artificially concealed because, in Paine's deism, "man cannot make principles: he can only discover them."^{25, 26}

Paine knows that this conservative pattern of education, either formal or else acquired through participation in social customs, political institutions, et cetera is conducive to moral corruption in both society and government. Provided that common people are given better educational opportunities, it would not be possible for elites to keep political decisions as restraints on society. Paine holds that this pattern of education and philosophy of knowledge as proposed by Locke works only as an "ideology employed by elites to conceal their political motives."²⁷ In opening lines of *Common Sense*, Paine openly expresses his reservation about the set of laws made in Britain which "excludes a man from the means of information."²⁸ He writes:

And though the expressions be pleasantly arranged, yet when examined they appear idle and ambiguous; and it will always happen, that the nicest construction that words are capable of, when applied to the description of some thing which either cannot exist, or is too incomprehensible to be within the compass of description, will be words of sound only, and though they may amuse the ear, they cannot inform the mind. [sic]²⁹

These lines show Paine's conviction that a set of rights and laws which is not readily understood by human reason must be deliberately manipulated by man. Such a law is not based on the observation of the principles of the Watchmaker, but on the prejudices and pride of aristocrats who hide behind a false knowledge of God.

Contrary to Locke, Paine believes that knowledge of Newtonian science brings with it the amelioration of human social conditions. If it were not for the artificial constraints of education, all the laws of the great Creator of Science would be understood. Indeed, Newtonian laws are much beyond the power of elites to control common people. He claims:

23 William Christian, "The Moral Economic of Tom Paine," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (July, 1973), 371–372. Accessed 05–03–2016: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708958>.

24 Thomas Paine, *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, Vol. 2, edited by Philip S. Foner (New York: The Citadel Press, 1946), 334.

25 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 488.

26 Christian, "The Moral Economics of Tom Paine," 372.

27 Larkin, *Thomas Paine*, 35.

28 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 8.

29 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 8.

Though man may be *kept* ignorant, he cannot be *made* ignorant. The mind, in discovering truth, acts in the same manner as it acts through the eye in discovering objects; when once any object has been seen, it is impossible to put the mind back into the same condition it was in before it saw it.³⁰

All that is necessary to put cosmic model of society into practice is to have wise men stop deflecting people from the truth of the Watchmaker. When people get rid of conservative religious dogmas and see the light of the Watchmaker again, they become free of inequality in society. Only then, are the true natural principles of the World to be followed.

A fundamental distinction in the political theory of most Enlightenment thinkers, including American Newtonians, is that drawn between people and government. In order to explain who ought to be granted sovereignty in the state, many of them posit a state of nature. In Newtonian politics, the state of nature is rarely understood as a pre-societal state of humankind as it is explained by Locke. Although both Locke and Paine agree on the general definition of the state of nature, i.e. “a relational concept describing a particular set of moral relations that exist between people,”³¹ the aim of this natural state considerably differs in their theories.

Locke asserts that “man living according to reason, without a common superior on earth, to judge between them, is properly the state of nature.”³² Since reason is limited in common people for Locke, God sets aristocrats above commoners and confers on them “an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty.”³³ The members of the aristocracy are thus privileged by God to form government, the moral duty of which is to control the diversity of human powers found in different classes which leads to diversity of human interests and wants. This is the empiricist John Locke’s concept of the social contract: the beginning of social stratification.

Paine does not give his consent to this social contract. “Great part of that order which reigns among mankind is not the effect of government,” Paine asserts, “It has its origins in the principles of society and the *natural* constitution of man.”³⁴ The state of nature is in Paine’s thought the state of peace, as man and his natural constitution is the creation of the Watchmaker. This state “existed prior to government, and would exist if the formality of government was abolished.”³⁵ Were it not for Locke’s elitist model of government, this state of nature would simply proceed naturally.

Although there might appear differences in human powers in the state of nature, Paine believes that people are essentially good and moral enough to create a social hierarchy themselves. This political premise cannot be detached from his deistic faith: “The moral duty of man consists in imitating the moral goodness and beneficence of God manifested in the creation toward all his

30 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 320.

31 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. “Locke’s Political Philosophy,” Accessed on May 9, 2016. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/>

32 John Locke, *Locke: Political Writing*, edited by David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 350.

33 Locke, *Political Writings*, 350.

34 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 421 (emphasis mine).

35 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 421.

citizens.”³⁶ For Paine, this moral duty was facilitated, if not ensured, by the (dis)harmony of interests, wants and affections that reigns among all people. In *Common Sense*, he claims: “Thus necessity [which has arisen from the diversity of human nature], like gravitating power, would soon form [people] into society, the reciprocal blessing of which, would supersede, and render the obligations of law and government unnecessary while they remain perfectly to each other.”³⁷ Although Paine, like Locke, also accepts the possibility of differences in human powers, Paine does not see this as a premise for social hierarchy. Human goodness, the imitation of God’s benevolence, ensures peace among humankind. In other words, this alone is enough to ensure an equal social compact. Thus, the state of nature is neither a chaotic state from which the universe was created, nor a pre-societal state from which people evolved into hierarchical society. It is the state of equilibrium.

What Paine does in his theory of the state of nature is use the Newtonian method of counterpoise. Similarly to Newton’s celestial mechanics, in which the planets’ centrifugal force is balanced by its centripetal force, the diversity in human powers is balanced against each other. Like the planets’ countervailing forces cause the planets to behave as they ought to, the diversity of interests, wants and affections found in human nature makes people cooperative. In his *Rights of Man*, Paine further develops his premise expressed in *Common Sense*, using similar Newtonian language:

Nature created [man] for social life, she fitted him for the station she intended. In all cases she made his natural wants greater than his individual powers. No one man is capable, without the aid of society, of supplying his own wants; and those wants acting upon every individual, impel the whole of them into society, as naturally as gravitation acts to a center.³⁸

In his *Rights of Man*, Paine continues:

But [Nature] has gone further. She has not only forced man into society, by a diversity of wants, which the reciprocal aid of each other can supply, but she has implanted in him a system of social affections, which, though not necessary to his existence, are essential to his happiness.³⁹

Paine is obviously aware of human imperfections, as his famous words in *Common Sense* indicate: “Nothing but heaven is impregnable to vice.”⁴⁰ However, he consistently argues that if left to each other, people would remain peaceful. Paine professes a benevolent God, and thus he believes that human nature as a creation of this God “is not of itself vicious.”⁴¹ What makes society and its natural functioning consistent is exactly this “system of social affections” found in all people.

In Locke’s concept of the social contract, human beings become confined to injustice just because they accept to be a part of society. Man, though a rational creature in his state of nature, abandons this state of nature in order to give up his own reason, freedom and natural rights. Man leaves this perfect state of equality and peace, Locke suggests, only to become a subject of

36 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 557.

37 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 69.

38 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 421.

39 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 421.

40 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 69.

41 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 421.

injustice. This idea is definitely against both human reason and natural principles of man. Still, Locke does not find it necessary to explain the rationale behind this act of social compact. It seems that he assumes that this irrationality to which man subjects himself is a matter of fact: the Word of Christian God, the guidance for the rule of the aristocracy.

In sharp disagreement with Locke, Paine sees the diversity of human powers as a method of creating an autonomous, self-regulating society yet before the establishment of government. Locke on the other hand attempts to set government above society for the diversity of human powers. By the same method of reasoning, Paine creates a theory which makes society more consistent than government. This seemingly contrasting feature of man, which Locke considers as a premise for social hierarchy, is perceived by Paine as the natural mechanics of man which parallel the natural laws of physical world. The Founding Father James Wilson, one of the most influential, though not so famous theorists of the early American Republic, follows this premise of Paine's: "I search not for contradictions: I wish to reconcile what is seemingly contradictory."⁴²

As Bertrand Russell purported, Locke, being a member of the upper class, "is driven by his worship of property."⁴³ Locke holds the contentious Marxist dictum that economic power in the form of capital is the only real source of political power. He believes that political control ought to be vested within the aristocracy "and all this only for the public good."⁴⁴ On the contrary, Paine holds it that economy ought to be a source of equality:

The mutual dependence and reciprocal interest which man has upon man, and all parts of a civilized community upon each other, create that great chain of connection which holds it together. The landholder, the farmer, the manufacturer, the merchant, the tradesman, and every occupation, prospers by the aid which each receives from the other, and from the whole.⁴⁵

Paine believes that social amelioration depends upon this great chain of connection, the self-interest of individuals, which naturally promote peace among humankind. According to Paine, the economic needs of man impel people of different social classes as well as different nations into cooperation and bind them together in one center in which they find satisfaction from their mutual help and cooperation in the form of commerce. In Wilson's summary: "Happiness is the centre, to which men and nations are attracted."⁴⁶

Locke's ideas of society are premised on an elitist conception wherein sovereignty should be granted to aristocracy. In fact, the purpose of Locke's philosophy of society and government within the interpretation of human reason is a stratagem to maintain the *status quo* of the contemporary hierarchical society, many principles of which stem from a medieval world view and theological rule of patriarchs.⁴⁷ By contrast, Paine's premises are based on the enlightened

42 Stephen A. Conrad, "The Rhetorical Constitution of Civil Society at the Founding: One Lawyer's Anxious Vision," *Indiana Law Journal*, Vo. 72, Issue 2 (1997), 339.

43 Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd, 1946), 575.

44 Locke, *Political Writings*, 350.

45 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 421.

46 Quoted in Conrad, "The Rhetorical Constitution," 340.

47 Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 577.

world view of Newtonianism: the reflection of the Watchmaker. He summarizes his theory of the social contract as follows:

Man, with respect to all those matters, is more a creature of consistency than he is aware, or than governments would wish him to believe. All the great laws of society are laws of nature. Those of trade and commerce, whether with respect to the intercourse of individuals, or of nations, are laws of mutual and reciprocal interest. They are followed and obeyed, because it is the interest of [the people] so to do, and not on an account of any formal laws their governments may impose or interpose.⁴⁸

“But how often is the natural propensity to society disturbed or destroyed by the operations of government,” Paine argues, “when the latter, instead of being ingrafted on the principles of the former, assumes to exist for itself.” [sic]⁴⁹ To demonstrate that the government of the British monarchy is not the creation of the Watchmaker, but a product of “obstinate prejudices” and English “national pride,” Paine attacks the Constitution of Britain. Appealing to the laws of scientific reasoning by stating a simple example of a machine in motion, Paine contends that the British governmental system is:

[...] *felo de se*; for as the greater weight will always carry up the less, and as all the wheels of a machine are put in motion by one, it only remains to know which power in constitution has the most weight, for that will govern; and though the others, or a part of them, may clog, or, as the phrase is, check the rapidity of its motion, yet so long as they cannot stop it, their endeavours will be ineffectual; the first moving power will at last have its way, and what it wants in speed is supplied by time.⁵⁰

By this example of a machine in motion, Paine observes that one part of this system inevitably engrosses or dominates the other parts and eventually magnifies its own power because of its various prerequisites and thus superiority in the functioning of the whole machine. This can be seen in a monarch’s right in the Constitution to appoint the wealthy members of the aristocracy, who in turn control the Commons.⁵¹ The machinery of the British monarchy always becomes the means of the minority to rule the majority. It is a governmental system of oligarchy. Still, Locke finds the machinery of the constitutional monarchy as a type of a republic, as the authority of a king is limited, which, according to Locke, is a result of a rational and well-mannered system of the Constitution when it is compared to absolutism.

Contrary to the machinery of the British government, Paine sees a republic as “a body contained within a circle, having a common centre, in which every radius meets; and that centre is formed by representation.”⁵² In his theory of the state of nature, Paine explains that “simple democracy was society governing itself without the aid of secondary means.”⁵³ “By ingrafting representation upon democracy,” Paine further clarifies, “we arrive at a system of government capable of embracing and confederating all the various interests and every extent of territory

48 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 423.

49 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 423.

50 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 72.

51 Alfred O. Aldridge, *Thomas Paine’s American Ideology* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984), 57.

52 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 436.

53 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 435.

and population.”⁵⁴ Paine believes that government in this “well-constituted republic requires no belief from man beyond what his reason can give.”⁵⁵ All the citizens, regardless of social class, can see “the rationale of the whole system, its origin and its operation”⁵⁶ because its principles are based on the principles of nature. While the mixed government of the constitutional monarchy proposed by Locke serves as a protection for the aristocracy from “inspection and indictment by the citizenry,”⁵⁷ Paine’s democratic republic with unicameral body invites people to take an active part in government.

It is fundamental for Paine that unicameralism ought to be expressed through the decision of the majority in government. Majority-rule is the only reasonable method of maintaining the natural constitution of society.⁵⁸ A more complete statement of Paine’s belief in majority-rule is found in his “Dissertation on First Principles of Government.” He writes:

In all matters of opinion, the social compact, or principle by which society is held together, requires that the majority of opinions become the rule for the whole, and that minority yield practical obedience thereto. This is perfectly comfortable to the principles of equal rights: for, in the first place, every man has a *right to give an opinion* but no man has a right that his opinion should *govern the rest*.⁵⁹

According to Paine, there are only two types of government: one that grows “out of the people” and the other that grows “over the people.”⁶⁰ The former that is set up by unicameralism, a natural social compact, that is reasonable and accessible to all members of society is “the only mode in which governments have a right to arise, and the only principle on which they have a right to exist.”⁶¹ The latter, based on mixed governments, is the result of prejudices and injustice: “In mixed governments there is no responsibility: the parts cover each other till responsibility is lost; and the corruption which moves the machine, contrives at the same time its own escape.”⁶² If the majority of opinions, as Paine describes in the above quote, becomes the rule for the whole, the collective responsibility would eliminate corruption and inequality in government.

If people are free to obtain true knowledge of the Watchmaker, all members of society may inform each other in government. This situation could work as a form of checks and balances. When all members of society, regardless of their social status, take part in government, all views are exchanged and shared. According to Paine, this might add to general enlightenment of people. It appears, then, that it is only right that decisions in government ought to be made by the majority of people.⁶³ In the long run the majority in contrast to the minority will decide rightly because

54 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 435.

55 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 402.

56 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 402.

57 Elsie Belger, *Thomas Paine: Common Sense for Modern Era* (San Diego: SDSU Press, 2007), 279.

58 Penniman, “Thomas Paine – Democrat,” 252.

59 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 2, 600.

60 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 278.

61 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 278.

62 Paine, *The Complete Writings*, Vol. 1, 403.

63 Penniman, “Thomas Paine – Democrat,” 261.

any counter-arguments will be balanced against each other in the manner of Newtonian method of counterpoise.

Joy Hakim observes that “it wasn’t hard for [the Founding Fathers] to go from Newton’s idea – of a universe governed by understandable laws and regulated with nature’s checks and balances,” as it is demonstrated in Paine’s philosophy, “to a constitution with clear laws and a government system kept orderly with its own checks and balances.”⁶⁴ Paine undoubtedly exerted a great influence on the first attempts of the Founding Fathers to establish a constitution during the early Republic. His ideas of unicameralism are reflected in the Articles of Confederation. However, its effects were too radical for the contemporary standards of government. As Paine had expected in his theory, people in the unicameral system became completely autonomous and self-regulating. However, the gravitating center – Congress – started losing control over the vast territory and population of the Republic. Consequently, there appeared a fear of anarchy. Paine’s political opponent, John Adams, recalls this problem in his *Defence [sic] of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*:

Those attractions and repulsions by which the balance of nature is preserved; or those centripetal and centrifugal forces by which the heavenly bodies are continued in their orbits, instead of rushing to the sun, or flying off in tangents among comets and fixed stars; impelled or drawn by different forces in different directions, they are blessing to their own inhabitants and the neighboring systems; but if they were drawn only by one, they would introduce anarchy wherever they should go.⁶⁵

Adams finds Paine’s unicameralism too democratic. He believes that Paine’s method of proposing unicameralism is rooted in a similar oppressive power that Paine has found in the machinery of the British constitutional monarchy. By vesting power in a king, despotism would arise. By giving power to people, anarchism would arise.

Woodrow Wilson observes another problem of Paine’s unicameralism: “the trouble with this theory is that government is not a machine, but a living thing [...] it is the theory of organic life [...] It is modified by its environment, necessitated by its tasks, shaped to its functions by the sheer pressure of life.”⁶⁶ Such a system requires an equal society as it is found in its natural state – a situation hardly imagined for an America in which the economic system was grounded upon slavery. The constitution of the early American Republic eventually shifted from Paine’s commitment to Newtonian system to those ideas promoted by Locke, which were considered as more secure for the contemporary economic situation.⁶⁷

For his ideas in the *Age of Reason*, some call Paine an atheist. Contrary to this, Paine professes a benevolent God, the Creator of the Universe. Paine holds it that it is God’s wish to involve all of his people in government on earth. Only thus, the oppression created by conservative religions

⁶⁴ Joy Hakim, *A History of US: From Colonies to County: 1735–1791* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 165.

⁶⁵ Striner, “Political Newtonianism,” 603.

⁶⁶ Wilson, *The Essential Political Writings*, 176.

⁶⁷ Foley, *Laws, Men and Machines*, 22.

and Lockean philosophy of knowledge and social contract theory could be overcome. Paine's belief is reflected in the famous pamphlet *Common Sense*, the book *Rights of Man* and other essays and articles.

Paine reinvents Locke's principles and founds them on the principles of Nature. Man, moral and good in nature, enters society because of his diversity of social wants and economic needs. The force that impels man into society is not the artificial system of social hierarchy but the divine system of social affections, which is reflected in the system of Heaven. To achieve the state of nature, it is necessary to devalue the machinery of contemporary governments which are monopolized by the rich. After that, man can be an equal part of the organic whole, the center of government in the form of unicameralism.

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Jana Šklíbová is an MA student at the Department of English and American Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy of University of Pardubice. She has long been interested in the life and political philosophy of Thomas Paine. In her MA thesis she is examining a possible political influence between the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy and Thomas Paine's concept of republicanism.

