

# Thomas Jefferson Resources

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## 1. Introduction

Thomas Jefferson chose to pursue a life of active involvement in politics. Unlike his friend Thomas Paine, Jefferson did not publish philosophical and religious treatises for his political enemies to use against him. As a result, Jefferson's views on many controversial issues can only be discerned through study of his private letters. Several of the most important of these letters are collected here.

It is well known that Jefferson possessed multiple copies of Lucretius' *On The Nature of Things*, and Jefferson certainly had access to the work of Pierre Gassendi, who translated the *Life of Epicurus* written by Diogenes Laertius. Jefferson seems to have mentioned Epicurus directly in only a few letters, however, most notably his letter to William Short dated October 31, 1819. If one knows what to look for, though, many other references of Epicurean significance can be found in Jefferson's writings.

What follows are a number of the most significant examples in which Jefferson wrote in favor of Epicureanism and against Platonism and Stoicism. Please keep in mind that a basic framework of key Epicurean principles, such as is provided in Norman DeWitt's article [Epicurus: Philosophy for the Millions](#) or [here on this website](#), is essential for understanding the significance of many of these references.

(NOTE: The letters are listed here first with an excerpt; more complete copies of these letters can be found further down the page or at the links included. It appears that the founders.gov links have changed over time so if any links are incorrect please report them to [Cassius@Epicureanfriends.com](mailto:Cassius@Epicureanfriends.com))

- **[Thomas Jefferson to William Short, October 31, 1819](#)** This letter contains Jefferson's explicit endorsement of Epicureanism along with his statement "I too am an Epicurean." Jefferson shows here that he understood Epicurus' true views to have been grossly misrepresented, and that he understood Epicurus to have been the arch-enemy of Platonism. Jefferson also states that he considered Jesus of Nazareth to have been a man of great personal merit bent on reforming the corrupt theology of Judaism, but that the theology that Jesus' followers developed after his death was a fabrication built on a corrupt variation of Platonism.
- **[Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, July 5, 1814](#)** Here Jefferson denounces Plato (labeling *The Republic* as full of "whimsies, puerilities, and unintelligible jargon") and stating of the Platonisms grafted into Christian theology that "nonsense can never be explained."
- **[Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, August 15, 1820](#)** Here Jefferson complains to Adams about Christian theology and states that "To talk of *immaterial* existences is to talk of *nothings*. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are *nothings*, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise."

- **Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson, January 9, 1816** Here Jefferson refers to the doctrines of Epicurus as “notwithstanding the calumnies of the Stoics and caricatures of Cicero, [...] the most rational system remaining of the philosophy of the ancients, as frugal of vicious indulgence, and fruitful of virtue as the hyperbolical extravagances of his rival sects.”
- **Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, August 10, 1787** This letter is famous for Jefferson’s advice to his nephew on religion, but it also contains much of interest regarding philosophy. As discussed elsewhere on this site, Epicurus held that Nature endows men with the capacity to discern truth through three faculties: (1) the senses, (2) the pain/pleasure mechanism, and (3) the “Anticipations.” Epicurus’ works describing the third faculty in detail are lost, but here we see Jefferson making a point that is similar to the description of Epicurus’ theory of Anticipations as reconstructed by Norman DeWitt. Jefferson wrote: “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 [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 plowman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, & often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules.”
- **Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, December 11, 1823** In this brief letter to the president of South Carolina College, Jefferson thanks Cooper for sending him Cooper’s article on “The Scripture Doctrine of Materialism,” and states: “That the doctrine of Materialism was that of Jesus himself was a new idea to me. Yet it is proved unquestionably. We all know it was that of some of the early Fathers.”
- **Jefferson to Maria Cosway, 1786 The “Head and Heart” letter** In this fascinating letter Jefferson stages a debate in his own mind between “Head” and “Heart.” Many readers will find the winner of this debate to be most unexpected, but the conclusion is entirely consistent with Epicurus’ dethronement of the Platonic ideal of “reason” or “logic” as the guide of life.
- **Thomas Jefferson to Justice William Johnson 12 June 1823** Here Jefferson makes another reference to man’s “innate sense of justice.” “Ours, on the contrary, was to maintain the will of the majority of the convention and of the people themselves. We believed, with them, that man was a rational animal, endowed by nature with rights and with an innate sense of justice; and that he could be restrained from wrong and protected in right by moderate powers confided to persons of his own choice and held to their duties by dependence on his own will. We believed that the complicated organization of kings, nobles, and priests was not the wisest nor best to effect the happiness of associated man; that wisdom and virtue were not hereditary; that the trappings of such a machinery consumed by their expense those earnings of industry they were meant to protect, and, by the inequalities they produced, exposed liberty to sufferance. We believed that men enjoying in ease and security the full fruits of their own industry, enlisted by all their interests on the side of law and order, habituated to think for themselves and to follow their reason as their guide, would be more easily and safely governed than with minds nourished in error and vitiated and debased, as in Europe, by ignorance, indigence, and oppression. The cherishment of the people, then, was our principle, the fear and distrust of them that of the other party.”
- **Selected Quotations** This section includes a number of short quotations of significance to the Epicurean view of a proper life, such as “I had rather be shut up in a very modest cottage with my books, my family and a few old friends, dining on simple bacon, and letting the world roll on as it liked, than to occupy the most splendid post, which any human power can give.”

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## 2. Thomas Jefferson to William Short, October 31, 1819

Note: [A scan of the original document can be found here. If that link fails, click here and search for William Short 1819.](#) A good transcription is also available at [StephenJayGould.org](http://StephenJayGould.org).

Your favor of the 21<sup>st</sup> is received. My late illness, in which you are so kind as to feel an interest, was produced by a spasmodic stricture of the ilium, which came upon me on the 7<sup>th</sup> inst. The crisis was short, passed over favorably on the fourth day, and I should soon have been well but that a dose of calomel and jalap, in which were only eight or nine grains of the former, brought on a salivation. Of this, however, nothing now remains but a little soreness of the mouth. I have been able to get on horseback for three or four days past.

As you say of yourself, I too am an Epicurean. I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us. Epictetus indeed, has given us what was good of the stoics; all beyond, of their dogmas, being hypocrisy and grimace. Their great crime was in their calumnies of Epicurus and misrepresentations of his doctrines; in which we lament to see the candid character of Cicero engaging as an accomplice. Diffuse, vapid, rhetorical, but enchanting. His prototype Plato, eloquent as himself, dealing out mysticisms incomprehensible to the human mind, has been deified by certain sects usurping the name of Christians; because, in his foggy conceptions, they found a basis of impenetrable darkness whereon to rear fabrications as delirious, of their own invention. These they fathered blasphemously on him who they claimed as their founder, but who would disclaim them with the indignation which their caricatures of his religion so justly excite. Of Socrates we have nothing genuine but in the Memorabilia of Xenophon; for Plato makes him one of his Collocutors merely to cover his own whimsies under the mantle of his name; a liberty of which we are told Socrates himself complained. Seneca is indeed a fine moralist, disguising his work at times with some Stoicisms, and affecting too much of antithesis and point, yet giving us on the whole a great deal of sound and practical morality. But the greatest of all the reformers of the depraved religion of his own country, was Jesus of Nazareth. Abstracting what is really his from the rubbish in which it is buried, easily distinguished by its lustre from the dross of his biographers, and as separable from that as the diamond from the dunghill, we have the outlines of a system of the most sublime morality which has ever fallen from the lips of man; outlines which it is lamentable he did not live to fill up. Epictetus and Epicurus give laws for governing ourselves, Jesus a supplement of the duties and charities we owe to others. The establishment of the innocent and genuine character of this benevolent moralist, and the rescuing it from the imputation of imposture, which has resulted from artificial systems, \*\*\*\* invented by ultra-Christian sects, and unauthorized by a single word ever uttered by him, is a most desirable object, and one to which Priestley has successfully devoted his labors and learning. It would in time, it is to be hoped, effect a quiet euthanasia of the heresies of bigotry and fanaticism which have so long triumphed over human reason, and so generally and deeply afflicted mankind; but this work is to be begun by winnowing the grain from the chaff of the historians of his life. I have sometimes thought of translating Epictetus (for he has never been tolerably translated into English) by adding the genuine doctrines of Epicurus from the Syntagma of Gassendi, and an abstract from the Evangelists of whatever has the stamp of the eloquence and fine imagination of Jesus. The last I attempted too hastily some twelve or fifteen years ago. It was the work of two or three nights only, at Washington, after getting through the evening task of reading the letters and papers of the day. But with one foot in the grave, these are now idle projects for me. My business is to beguile the wearisomeness of declining life, as I endeavor to do, by the delights of classical reading and of mathematical truths, and by the consolations of a sound philosophy, equally indifferent to hope and fear.

I take the liberty of observing that you are not a true disciple of our master Epicurus, in indulging the indolence to which you say you are yielding. One of his canons, you know, was that "that indulgence which prevents a greater pleasure, or produces a greater pain, is to be avoided." Your love of repose will lead, in its progress, to a suspension of healthy exercise, a relaxation of mind, an indifference to everything around you, and finally to a debility of body, and hebetude of mind, the farthest of all things from the happiness which the well-regulated indulgences of Epicurus ensure; fortitude, you know is one of his four cardinal virtues. That teaches us to meet and surmount difficulties; not to fly from them, like cowards; and to fly, too, in vain, for they will meet and arrest us at every turn of our road. Weigh this matter well; brace yourself up; take a seat with Correa, and come and see the finest portion of your country, which, if you have not forgotten, you still do

not know, because it is no longer the same as when you knew it. It will add much to the happiness of my recovery to be able to receive Correa and yourself, and prove the estimation in which I hold you both. Come, too, and see your incipient University, which has advanced with great activity this year. By the end of the next, we shall have elegant accommodations for seven professors, and the year following the professors themselves. No secondary character will be received among them. Either the ablest which America or Europe can furnish, or none at all. They will give us the selected society of a great city separated from the dissipations and levities of its ephemeral insects.

I am glad the bust of Condorcet has been saved and so well placed. His genius should be before us; while the lamentable, but singular act of ingratitude which tarnished his latter days, may be thrown behind us.

I will place under this a syllabus of the doctrines of Epicurus, somewhat in the lapidary style, which I wrote some twenty years ago; a like one of the philosophy of Jesus of nearly the same age, is too long to be copied. Vale, et tibi persuade carissimum te esse mihi.

— Thomas Jefferson

\*\*\*\* e. g. The immaculate conception of Jesus, his deification, the creation of the world by him, his miraculous powers, his resurrection and visible ascension, his corporeal presence in the Eucharist, the Trinity; original sin, atonement, regeneration, election, orders of Hierarchy, &c.

### **Syllabus of the doctrines of Epicurus**

Physical The Universe eternal.

Its parts, great and small, interchangeable

Matter and Void alone.

Motion inherent in matter, which is weighty & declining

eternal circulation of the elements of bodies.

Gods, an order of beings next superior to man.

enjoying in their sphere their own felicities,

but not meddling with the concerns of the scale of beings below them

Moral Happiness the aim of life

Virtue the foundation of happiness

Utility the test of virtue.

Pleasure active and in-dolent.

In-dolence is the absence of pain, the true felicity

Active, consists in agreeable motion

it is not happiness, but the means to produce it.

thus the absence of hunger is an article of felicity; eating the means to produce it.

The summum bonum is to be not pained in body, nor troubled in mind

i.e. In-dolence of body, tranquility of mind.

to procure tranquility of mind we must avoid desire & fear, the two principal diseases of the mind.

Man is a free agent.

Virtue consists in: 1. Prudence 2. Temperance 3. Fortitude 4. Justice

to which are opposed: 1. Folly 2. Desire 3. Fear 4. Deceit

### 3. Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, July 5, 1814:

[Full version at founders.archives.gov](http://founders.archives.gov)

.... I am just returned from one of my long absences, having been at my other home for five weeks past. Having more leisure there than here for reading, I amused myself with reading seriously Plato's *Republic*. I am wrong, however, in calling it amusement, for it was the heaviest task-work I ever went through. I had occasionally before taken up some of his other works, but scarcely ever had patience to go through a whole dialogue. While wading through the whimsies, the puerilities, and unintelligible jargon of this work, I laid it down often to ask myself how it could have been, that the world should have so long consented to give reputation to such nonsense as this? How the *soi-disant* Christian world, indeed, should have done it, is a piece of historical curiosity. But how could the Roman good sense do it? And particularly, how could Cicero bestow such eulogies on Plato! Although Cicero did not wield the dense logic of Demosthenes, yet he was able, learned, laborious, practised in the business of the world, and honest. He could not be the dupe of mere style, of which he was himself the first master in the world. With the moderns, I think, it is rather a matter of fashion and authority. Education is chiefly in the hands of persons who, from their profession, have an interest in the reputation and the dreams of Plato. They give the tone while at school, and few in their after years have occasion to revise their college opinions. But fashion and authority apart, and bringing Plato to the test of reason, take from him his sophisms, futilities and incomprehensibilities, and what remains? In truth, he is one of the race of genuine sophists, who has escaped the oblivion of his brethren, first, by the elegance of his diction, but chiefly, by the adoption and incorporation of his whimsies into the body of artificial Christianity. His foggy mind is forever presenting the semblances of objects which, half seen through a mist, can be defined neither in form nor dimensions. Yet this, which should have consigned him to early oblivion, really procured him immortality of fame and reverence.

The Christian priesthood, finding the doctrines of Christ levelled to every understanding, and too plain to need explanation, saw in the mysticism of Plato, materials with which they might build up an artificial system, which might, from its indistinctness, admit everlasting controversy, give employment for their order, and introduce it to profit, power and pre-eminence. The doctrines which flowed from the lips of Jesus himself are within the comprehension of a child; but thousands of volumes have not yet explained the Platonisms engrafted on them; and for this obvious reason, that nonsense can never be explained. Their purposes, however, are answered. Plato is canonized; and it is now deemed as impious to question his merits as those of an Apostle of Jesus. He is peculiarly appealed to as an advocate of the immortality of the soul; and yet I will venture to say, that were there no better arguments than his in proof of it, not a man in the world would believe it. It is fortunate for us, that Platonic republicanism has not obtained the same favor as Platonic Christianity; or we should now have been all living, men, women and children, pell mell together, like beasts of the field or forest. Yet "Plato is a great philosopher," said La Fontaine. But, says Fontenelle, "Do you find his ideas very clear?" "Oh no! he is of an obscurity impenetrable." "Do you not find him full of contradictions?" "Certainly," replied La Fontaine, "he is but a sophist." Yet immediately after he exclaims again, "Oh, Plato was a great philosopher." Socrates had reason, indeed, to complain of the misrepresentations of Plato; for in truth, his dialogues are libels on Socrates.

But why am I dosing you with these antediluvian topics? Because I am glad to have some one to whom they are familiar, and who will not receive them as if dropped from the moon. Our post-revolutionary youth are born under happier stars than you and I were. They acquire all learning in their mother's womb, and bring it into the world ready made. The information of books is no longer necessary; and all knowledge which is not innate, is in contempt, or neglect at least. Every folly must run its round; and so, I suppose, must that of self-learning and self-sufficiency; of rejecting the knowledge acquired in past ages, and starting on the new ground of intuition....

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### 4. Jefferson to John Adams, August 15, 1820:

.... But enough of criticism: let me turn to your puzzling letter of May 12. on matter, spirit, motion etc. It's crowd of scepticisms kept me from sleep. I read it, and laid it down: read it, and laid it down, again and again: and to give rest to my mind, **I was obliged to recur ultimately to my habitual anodyne, 'I feel: therefore I exist.'** I feel bodies which are not myself: there are other existencies then. I call them *matter*. I feel them changing place. This gives me motion. Where there is an absence of matter, I call it *void*, or *nothing*, or *immaterial space*. On the basis of sensation, of matter and motion, we may erect the fabric of all the certainties we can have or need. I can conceive *thought* to be an action of a particular organisation of matter, formed for that purpose by it's creator, as well as that *attraction* in an action of matter, or *magnetism* of loadstone. When he who denies to the Creator the power of endowing matter with the mode of action called *thinking* shall shew how he could endow the Sun with the mode of action called *attraction*, which reins the planets in the tract of their orbits, or how an absence of matter can have a will, and, by that will, put matter into motion, then the materialist may be lawfully required to explain the process by which matter exercises the faculty of thinking. When once we quit the basis of sensation, all is in the wind. **To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise:** but I believe I am supported in my creed of materialism by Locke, Tracy, and Stewart.

At what age of the Christian church this heresy of *immaterialism*, this masked atheism, crept in, I do not know. But a heresy it certainly is. Jesus taught nothing of it. He told us indeed that 'God is a spirit,' but he has not defined what a spirit is, nor said that it is not matter. And the ancient fathers generally, if not universally, held it to be matter: light and thin indeed, an ethereal gas; but still matter. Origen says 'Deus reapse corporalis est; sed graviorum tantum corporum ratione, incorporeus.' Tertullian 'quid enim deus nisi corpus?' and again 'quis negabit deum esse corpus? Etsi deus spiritus, spiritus etiam corpus est, sui generis, in sua effigie.' St. Justin Martyr '{to Theion phamen einai asomaton oyk oti asomaton—epeide de to me krateisthai ypo tinos, toy krateisthai timioteron esti, dia toyto kaloymen ayton asomaton.}' And St. Macarius, speaking of angels says 'quamvis enim subtilia sint, tamen in substantia, forma et figura, secundum tenuitatem naturae eorum, corpora sunt tenuia.' And St. Austin, St. Basil, Lactantius, Tatian, Athenagoras and others, with whose writings I pretend not a familiarity, are said by those who are, to deliver the same doctrine. Turn to your Ocellus d'Argens 97. 105. and to his Timaeus 17. for these quotations. In England these Immaterialists might have been burnt until the 29. Car. 2. when the writ de haeretico comburendo was abolished: and here until the revolution, that statute not having extended to us. All heresies being now done away with us, these schismatists are merely atheists, differing from the material Atheist only in their belief that 'nothing made something,' and from the material deist who believes that matter alone can operate on matter.

Rejecting all organs of information therefore but my senses, I rid myself of the Pyrrhonisms with which an indulgence in speculations hyperphysical and antiphysical so uselessly occupy and disquiet the mind. A single sense may indeed be sometimes deceived, but rarely: and never all our senses together, with their faculty of reasoning. They evidence realities; and there are enough of these for all the purposes of life, without plunging into the fathomless abyss of dreams and phantasms. **I am satisfied, and sufficiently occupied with the things which are, without tormenting or troubling myself about those which may indeed be, but of which I have no evidence.** I am sure that I really know many, many, things, and none more surely than that I love you with all my heart, and pray for the continuance of your life until you shall be tired of it yourself.

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## 5. Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson, January 9, 1816

My dear and ancient friend, —

An acquaintance of fifty-two years, for I think ours dates from 1764, calls for an interchange of notice now and then, that we remain in existence, the monuments of another age, and examples of a friendship unaffected by the jarring elements by which we have been surrounded, of revolutions of government, of party and of opinion. I am reminded of this duty by the receipt, through our friend Dr. Patterson, of your synopsis of the four Evangelists. I had procured it as soon as I saw it advertised, and had become familiar with its use; but this copy is the more valued as it comes from your hand. This work bears the stamp of that accuracy which marks everything from you, and will be useful to those who, not taking things on trust, recur for themselves to the fountain of pure morals.

I, too, have made a wee-little book from the same materials, which I call the Philosophy of Jesus; it is a paradigm of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book, and arranging them on the pages of a blank book, in a certain order of time or subject. A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen; it is a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists, who call me infidel and themselves Christians and preachers of the gospel, while they draw all their characteristic dogmas from what its author never said nor saw. They have compounded from the heathen mysteries a system beyond the comprehension of man, of which the great reformer of the vicious ethics and deism of the Jews, were he to return on earth, would not recognize one feature. If I had time I would add to my little book the Greek, Latin and French texts, in columns side by side. And I wish I could subjoin a translation of Gossendi's Syntagma of the doctrines of Epicurus, which, notwithstanding the calumnies of the Stoics and caricatures of Cicero, is the most rational system remaining of the philosophy of the ancients, as frugal of vicious indulgence, and fruitful of virtue as the hyperbolical extravagances of his rival sects.

I retain good health, am rather feeble to walk much, but ride with ease, passing two or three hours a day on horseback, and every three or four months taking in a carriage a journey of ninety miles to a distant possession, where I pass a good deal of my time. My eyes need the aid of glasses by night, and with small print in the day also; my hearing is not quite so sensible as it used to be; no tooth shaking yet, but shivering and shrinking in body from the cold we now experience, my thermometer having been as low as 12 degrees this morning. My greatest oppression is a correspondence afflictingly laborious, the extent of which I have been long endeavoring to curtail. This keeps me at the drudgery of the writing-table all the prime hours of the day, leaving for the gratification of my appetite for reading, only what I can steal from the hours of sleep. Could I reduce this epistolary corvee within the limits of my friends and affairs, and give the time redeemed from it to reading and reflection, to history, ethics, mathematics, my life would be as happy as the infirmities of age would admit, and I should look on its consummation with the composure of one "*qui summum nec me tuit diem nec optat.*"

So much as to myself, and I have given you this string of egotisms in the hope of drawing a similar one from yourself. I have heard from others that you retain your health, a good degree of activity, and all the vivacity and cheerfulness of your mind, but I wish to learn it more minutely from yourself. How has time affected your health and spirits? What are your amusements, literary and social? Tell me everything about yourself, because all will be interesting to me who retains for you ever the same constant and affectionate friendship and respect.

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## 6. Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, August 10, 1787

Dear Peter, —

I have received your two letters of December 30 and April 18, and am very happy to find by them, as well as by letters from Mr. Wythe, that you have been so fortunate as to attract his notice & good will; I am sure you will find this to have been one of the most fortunate events of your life, as I have ever been sensible it was of mine. I enclose you a sketch of the sciences to which I would wish you to apply, in such order as Mr. Wythe shall advise; I mention, also, the books in them worth your reading, which submit to his correction. Many of

these are among your father's books, which he should have brought to you. As I do not recollect those of them not in his library, you must write to me for them, making out a catalogue of such as you think you shall have occasion for, in 18 months from the date of your letter, & consulting Mr. Wythe on the subject. To this sketch, I will add a few particular observations.

Italian. I fear the learning of this language will confound your French and Spanish. Being all of them degenerated dialects of the Latin, they are apt to mix in conversation. I have never seen a person speaking the three languages, who did not mix them. It is a delightful language, but late events having rendered the Spanish more useful, lay it aside to prosecute that.

Spanish. Bestow great attention on this, and endeavor to acquire an accurate knowledge of it. Our future connections with Spain and Spanish America, will render that language a valuable acquisition. The ancient history of that part of America, too, is written in that language. I send you a dictionary.

Moral Philosophy. I think it lost time to attend lectures on this branch. 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 [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, & 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. The writings of Sterne, particularly, form the best course of morality that ever was written. Besides these, read the books mentioned in the enclosed paper; and, 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 & increase your worth.

Religion. Your reason is now mature enough to examine this object. In the first place, divest yourself of all bias in favor of novelty & 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 & 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; because, 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 & 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 in 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, & 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 & reversed the laws of Nature at will, & 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, & the second by exile, or death in fureâ. See this law in the Digest Lib. 48. tit. 19. §. 28. 3. & Lipsius Lib 2. de cruce. cap. 2. These questions are examined in the books I have mentioned under the head of religion, & several others. They will assist you in your inquiries, but keep your reason firmly on the watch in reading them all.

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, & 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, you must lay aside all prejudice on both sides, and neither believe nor reject anything, because any other persons, or description of persons, have rejected or believed it. Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven, and you are answerable, not for the rightness, but uprightness of the decision. I forgot to observe, when speaking of the New Testament, that you should read all the histories of Christ, as well of those whom a council of ecclesiastics have decided for us, to be Pseudo-evangelists, as those they named Evangelists. Because these Pseudo-evangelists pretended to inspiration, as much as the others, and you are to judge their pretensions by your own reason, and not by the reason of those ecclesiastics. Most of these are lost. There are some, however, still extant, collected by Fabricius, which I will endeavor to get & send you.

Traveling. This makes men wiser, but less happy. When men of sober age travel, they gather knowledge, which they may apply usefully for their country; but they are subject ever after to recollections mixed with regret; their affections are weakened by being extended over more objects; & they learn new habits which cannot be gratified when they return home. Young men, who travel, are exposed to all these inconveniences in a higher degree, to others still more serious, and do not acquire that wisdom for which a previous foundation is requisite, by repeated and just observations at home. The glare of pomp and pleasure is analogous to the motion of the blood; it absorbs all their affection and attention, they are torn from it as from the only good in this world, and return to their home as to a place of exile & condemnation. Their eyes are forever turned back to the object they have lost, & its recollection poisons the residue of their lives. Their first & most delicate passions are hackneyed on unworthy objects here, & they carry home the dregs, insufficient to make themselves or anybody else happy. Add to this, that a habit of idleness, an inability to apply themselves to business is acquired, & renders them useless to themselves & their country. These observations are founded in experience. There is no place where your pursuit of knowledge will be so little obstructed by foreign objects, as in your own country, nor any, wherein the virtues of the heart will be less exposed to be weakened. Be good, be learned, & be industrious, & you will not want the aid of traveling, to render you precious to your country, dear to your friends, happy within yourself. I repeat my advice, to take a great deal of exercise, & on foot. Health is the first requisite after morality. Write to me often, & be assured of the interest I take in your success, as well as the warmth of those sentiments of attachment with which I am, dear Peter, your affectionate friend.

P.S. Let me know your age in your next letter. Your cousins here are well & desire to be remembered to you.

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## **7. Letter of Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, December 11, 1823.**

TO DR. THOMAS COOPER

MONTICELLO, DEC. 11, 1823.

DEAR SIR:

I duly received your favor of the 23rd ult. as also the two pamphlets you were so kind as to send me. That on the tariff, I observed, was soon reprinted in Ritchie's Enquirer. I was only sorry he did not postpone it to the meeting of Congress, when it would have got into the hands of all the members, and could not fail to have great effect, perhaps a decisive one. It is really an extraordinary proposition that the agricultural, mercantile, and navigating classes should be taxed to maintain that of manufacturers.

That the doctrine of Materialism was that of Jesus himself was a new idea to me. Yet it is proved unquestionably. We all know it was that of some of the early Fathers. I hope the physiological part will follow; in spite of the prevailing fanaticism, reason will make its way. I confess that its reign at present is appalling. General education is the true remedy, and that most happily is now generally encouraged. The story you mention as gotten up by your opponents, of my having advised the Trustees of our University to turn you out as Professor, is quite in their style of barefaced mendacity. They find it so easy to obliterate the reason of mankind that they think they may enterprise safely on his memory also; for it was the winter before the last only, that our annual report to the Legislature, printed in the newspapers, stated the precise ground on which we relinquished your engagement with our Central College. And, if my memory does not deceive me, it was own your own proposition, that the time of our setting into operation being postponed indefinitely, it was important to you not to lose an opportunity of fixing yourself permanently; and that they should father on me too, the motion for this dismissal, then whom no man living cherishes a higher estimation of your worth, talents, and information. But so the world goes. Man is fed with fables through life, leaves it in the belief that he has known something of what has been passing, when in truth he has known nothing but what has passed under his own eye. And who are the great deceivers? Those who solemnly pretend to be the depositories of the sacred truths of God himself! I will not believe that the liberality of the State to which you are rendering services of science which no other man in the Union is qualified to render it will suffer you to be in danger from a set of conjurers.

I note what you say of Mr. Finch; but the moment of our Commencement is as indefinite as it ever was. Affectionately and respectfully,

Yours, TH. JEFFERSON

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## 8. Jefferson to Maria Cosway, 1786

### The "Head and Heart" letter

My Dear Madam,—Having performed the last sad office of handing you into your carriage at the pavillon de St. Denis, and seen the wheels get actually into motion, I turned on my heel & walked, more dead than alive, to the opposite door, where my own was awaiting me. Mr. Danquerville was missing. He was sought for, found, & dragged down stairs. WE were crammed into the carriage, like recruits for the Bastille, & not having soul enough to give orders to the coachman, he presumed Paris our destination, & drove off. After a considerable interval, silence was broke with a "*Je suis vraiment affligé du depart de ces bons gens.*" This was a signal for a mutual confession of distress. We began immediately to talk of Mr. & Mrs. Cosway, of their goodness, their talents, their amiability; & tho we spoke of nothing else, we seemed hardly to have entered into matter when the coachman announced the rue St. Denis, & that we were opposite Mr. Danquervilles. He insisted on descending there & traversing a short passage to his lodgings. I was carried home. Seated by my fireside, solitary & sad, the following dialogue took place between my Head & my Heart:

*Head.* Well, friend, you seem to be in a pretty trim.

*Heart.* I am indeed the most wretched of all earthly beings. Overwhelmed with grief, every fibre of my frame distended beyond its natural powers to bear, I would willingly meet whatever catastrophe should leave me no more to feel or to fear.

*Head.* These are the eternal consequences of your warmth & precipitation. This is one of the scrapes into which you are ever leading us. You confess your follies indeed; but still you hug & cherish them; & no reformation can be hoped, where there is no repentance.

*Heart.* Oh, my friend! This is no moment to upbraid my foibles. I am rent into fragments by the force of my grief! If you have any balm, pour it into my wounds; if none, do not harrow them by new torments. Spare me in this awful moment! At any other I will attend with patience to your admonitions.

*Head.* On the contrary I never found that the moment of triumph with you was the moment of attention to my admonitions. While suffering under your follies, you may perhaps be made sensible of them, but, the paroxysms over, you fancy it can never return. Harsh therefore as the medicine may be, it is my office to administer it. You will be pleased to remember that when our friend Trumbull used to be telling us of the merits & talents of these good people, I never ceased whispering to you that we had no occasion for new acquaintance; that the greater their merits & talents, the more dangerous their friendship to our tranquillity, because the regret at parting would be greater.

*Heart.* Accordingly, Sir, this acquaintance was not the consequence of my doings. It was one of your projects which threw us in the way of it. It was you, remember, & not I, who desired the meeting at Legrand & Molinos. I never trouble myself with domes nor arches. The Halle aux bleds might have rotted down before I should have gone to see it. But you, forsooth, who are eternally getting us to sleep with your diagrams & crotchets, must go & examine this wonderful piece of architecture. And when you had seen it, oh! It was the most superb thing on earth. What you had seen there was worth all you had yet seen in Paris! I thought so too. But I meant it of the lady & gentleman to whom we had been presented; & not of a parcel of sticks & chips put together in pens. You then, Sir, & not I, have been the cause of the present distress.

*Head.* It would have been happy for you if my diagrams & crotchets had gotten you to sleep on that day, as you are pleased to say they eternally do. My visit to Legrand & Molinos had public utility for its object. A market is to be built in Richmond. What a commodious plan is that of Legrand & Molinos; especially if we put on it the noble dome of the Halle aux bleds. If such a bridge as they skewed us can be thrown across the Schuylkill at Philadelphia, the floating bridges taken up & the navigation of that river opened, what a copious resource will be added, of wood & provisions, to warm & feed the poor of that city? While I was occupied with these objects, you were dilating with your new acquaintances, & contriving how to prevent a separation from them. Every soul of you had an engagement for the day. Yet all these were to be sacrificed, that you might dine together. Lying messengers were to be despatched into every quarter of the city, with apologies for your breach of engagement. You particularly had the effrontery to send word to the Dutchess Danville that, on the moment we were setting out to dine with her, despatches came to hand which required immediate attention. You wanted me to invent a more ingenious excuse; but I knew you were getting into a scrape, & I would have nothing to do with it. Well, after dinner to St. Cloud, from St. Cloud to Ruggieris, from Ruggieri to Krumfoltz, & if the day had been as long as a Lapland summer day, you would still have contrived means among you to have filled it.

*Heart.* Oh! My dear friend, how you have revived me by recalling to my mind the transactions of that day! How well I remember them all, & that when I came home at night & looked back to the morning, it seemed to have been a month ago. Go on then, like a kind comforter & paint to me the day we went to St. Germain. How beautiful was every object! The Port de Reuilly, the hills along the Seine, the rainbows of the machine of Marly, the terrace of St. Germain, the chateaux, the gardens, the statues of Marly, the pavillon of Lucienne. Recollect too Madrid, Bagatelle, the Kings garden, the Dessert. How grand the idea excited by the remains of such a column! The spiral staircase too was beautiful. Every moment was filled with something agreeable. The wheels of time moved on with a rapidity of which those of our carriage gave but a faint idea. And yet in the evening when one took a retrospect of the day, what a mass of happiness had we travelled over! Retrace all those scenes to me, my good companion, & I will forgive the unkindness with which you were chiding me. The day we went to St. Germain was a little too warm, I think; was it not?

*Head.* Thou art the most incorrigible of all the beings that ever sinned! I reminded you of the follies of the first day, intending to deduce from thence some useful lessons for you, but instead of listening to these, you

kindle at the recollection, you retrace the whole series with a fondness which shews you want nothing but the opportunity to act it over again. I often told you during its course that you were imprudently engaging your affections under circumstances that must have cost you a great deal of pain: that the persons indeed were of the greatest merit, possessing good sense, good humour, honest hearts, honest manners, & eminence in a lovely art; that the lady had moreover qualities & accomplishments, belonging to her sex, which might form a chapter apart for her: such as music, modesty, beauty, & that softness of disposition which is the ornament of her sex & charm of ours, but that all these considerations would increase the pang of separation: that their stay here was to be short: that you rack our whole system when you are parted from those you love, complaining that such a separation is worse than death, inasmuch as this ends our sufferings, whereas that only begins them: & that the separation would in this instance be the more severe as you would probably never see them again.

*Heart.* But they told me they would come back again the next year.

*Head.* But in the meantime see what you suffer: & their return too depends on so many circumstances that if you had a grain of prudence you would not count upon it. Upon the whole it is improbable & therefore you should abandon the idea of ever seeing them again.

*Heart.* May heaven abandon me if I do!

*Head.* Very well. Suppose then they come back. They are to stay two months, & when these are expired, what is to follow? Perhaps you flatter yourself they may come to America?

*Heart.* God only knows what is to happen. I see nothing impossible in that supposition. And I see things wonderfully contrived sometimes to make us happy. Where could they find such objects as in America for the exercise of their enchanting art? especially the lady, who paints landscapes so inimitably. She wants only subjects worthy of immortality to render her pencil immortal. The Failing Spring, the Cascade of Niagara, the Passage of the Potowmac through the Blue Mountains, the Natural bridge. It is worth a voyage across the Atlantic to see these objects; much more to paint, and make them, & thereby ourselves, known to all ages. And our own dear Monticello, where has nature spread so rich a mantle under the eye? Mountains, forests, rocks, rivers. With what majesty do we there ride above the storms! How sublime to look down into the workhouse of nature, to see her clouds, hail, snow, rain, thunder, all fabricated at our feet! And the glorious sun when rising as if out of a distant water, just gilding the tops of the mountains, & giving life to all nature? I hope in God no circumstance may ever make either seek an asylum from grief! With what sincere sympathy I would open every cell of my composition to receive the effusion of their woes! I would pour my tears into their wounds: & if a drop of balm could be found on the top of the Cordilleras, or at the remotest sources of the Missouri, I would go thither myself to seek & to bring it. Deeply practised in the school of affliction, the human heart knows no joy which I have not lost, no sorrow of which I have not drunk! Fortune can present no grief of unknown form to me! Who then can so softly bind up the wound of another as he who has felt the same wound himself? But Heaven forbid they should ever know a sorrow! Let us turn over another leaf, for this has distracted me.

*Head.* Well. Let us put this possibility to trial then on another point. When you consider the character which is given of our country by the lying newspapers of London, & their credulous copyers in other countries; when you reflect that all Europe is made to believe we are a lawless banditti, in a state of absolute anarchy, cutting one another's throats, & plundering without distinction, how can you expect that any reasonable creature would venture among us?

*Heart.* But you & I know that all this is false: that there is not a country on earth where there is greater tranquillity, where the laws are milder, or better obeyed: where every one is more attentive to his own business, or meddles less with that of others: where strangers are better received, more hospitably treated, & with a more sacred respect.

*Head.* True, you & I know this, but your friends do not know it.

*Heart.* But they are sensible people who think for themselves. They will ask of impartial foreigners who have been among us, whether they saw or heard on the spot any instances of anarchy. They will judge too that a people occupied as we are in opening rivers, digging navigable canals, making roads, building public schools, establishing academies, erecting busts & statues to our great men, protecting religious freedom, abolishing sanguinary punishments, reforming & improving our laws in general, they will judge I say for themselves whether these are not the occupations of a people at their ease, whether this is not better evidence of our true state than a London newspaper, hired to lie, & from which no truth can ever be extracted but by reversing everything it says.

*Head.* I did not begin this lecture my friend with a view to learn from you what America is doing. Let us return then to our point. I wished to make you sensible how imprudent it is to place your affections, without reserve, on objects you must so soon lose, & whose loss when it comes must cost you such severe pangs. Remember that last night. You knew your friends were to leave Paris to-day. This was enough to throw you into agonies. All night you tossed us from one side of the bed to the other. No sleep, no rest. The poor crippled wrist too, never left one moment in the same position, now up, now down, now here, now there; was it to be wondered at if its pains returned? The Surgeon then was to be called, & to be rated as an ignoramus because he could not divine the cause of this extraordinary change. In fine, my friend, you must mend your manners. This is not a world to live at random in as you do. To avoid those eternal distresses, to which you are forever exposing us, you must learn to look forward before you take a step which may interest our peace. Everything in this world is a matter of calculation. Advance then with caution, the balance in your hand. Put into one scale the pleasures which any object may offer; but put fairly into the other the pains which are to follow, & see which preponderates. The making an acquaintance is not a matter of indifference. When a new one is proposed to you, view it all round. Consider what advantages it presents, & to what inconveniences it may expose you. Do not bite at the bait of pleasure till you know there is no hook beneath it. The art of life is the art of avoiding pain: & he is the best pilot who steers clearest of the rocks & shoals with which he is beset. Pleasure is always before us; but misfortune is at our side: while running after that, this arrests us. The most effectual means of being secure against pain is to retire within ourselves, & to suffice for our own happiness. Those, which depend on ourselves, are the only pleasures a wise man will count on: for nothing is ours which another may deprive us of. Hence the inestimable value of intellectual pleasures. Even in our power, always leading us to something new, never cloying, we ride serene & sublime above the concerns of this mortal world, contemplating truth & nature, matter & motion, the laws which bind up their existence, & that eternal being who made & bound them up by those laws. Let this be our employ. Leave the bustle & tumult of society to those who have not talents to occupy themselves without them. Friendship is but another name for an alliance with the follies & the misfortunes of others. Our own share of miseries is sufficient: why enter then as volunteers into those of another? Is there so little gall poured into our cup that we must needs help to drink that of our neighbor? A friend dies or leaves us: we feel as if a limb was cut off. He is sick: we must watch over him, & participate of his pains. His fortune is shipwrecked; ours must be laid under contribution. He loses a child, a parent, or a partner: we must mourn the loss as if it were our own.

*Heart.* And what more sublime delight than to mingle tears with one whom the hand of heaven hath smitten! To watch over the bed of sickness, & to beguile its tedious & its painful moments! To share our bread with one to whom misfortune has left none! This world abounds indeed with misery: to lighten its burthen we must divide it with one another. But let us now try the virtues of your mathematical balance, & as you have put into one scale the burthen of friendship, let me put its comforts into the other. When languishing then under disease, how grateful is the solace of our friends! How are we penetrated with their assiduities & attentions! How much are we supported by their encouragements & kind offices! When heaven has taken from us some object of our love, how sweet is it to have a bosom whereon to recline our heads, & into which we may pour the torrent of our tears! Grief, with such a comfort, is almost a luxury! In a life where we are perpetually exposed to want & accident, yours is a wonderful proposition, to insulate ourselves, to retire from all aid, & to wrap ourselves in the mantle of self-sufficiency! For assuredly nobody will care for him who care for nobody. But friendship is precious, not only in the shade but in the sunshine of life; & thanks to a benevolent arrangement of things, the greater part of life is sunshine. I will recur for proof to the days we have lately passed. On these indeed the sun shone brightly. How gay did the face of nature appear! Hills, valleys, chateaux, gardens, rivers, every object wore its liveliest hue! Whence did they borrow it? From the presence

of our charming companion. They were pleasing, because she seemed pleased. Alone, the scene would have been dull & insipid: the participation of it with her gave it relish. Let the gloomy monk, sequestered from the world, seek unsocial pleasures in the bottom of his cell! Let the sublimated philosopher grasp visionary happiness while pursuing phantoms dressed in the garb of truth! Their supreme wisdom is supreme folly; & they mistake for happiness the mere absence of pain. Had they ever felt the solid pleasure of one generous spasm of the heart, they would exchange for it all the frigid speculations of their lives, which you have been vaunting in such elevated terms. Believe me then my friend, that that is a miserable arithmetic which, could estimate friendship at nothing, or at less than nothing. Respect for you has induced me to enter into this discussion, & to hear principles uttered which I detest & abjure. Respect for myself now obliges me to recall you into the proper limits of your office. When nature assigned us the same habitation, she gave us over it a divided empire. To you she allotted the field of science; to me that of morals. When the circle is to be squared, or the orbit of a comet to be traced; when the arch of greatest strength, or the solid of least resistance is to be investigated, take up the problem; it is yours; nature has given me no cognizance of it. In like manner, in denying to you the feelings of sympathy, of benevolence, of gratitude, of justice, of love, of friendship, she has excluded you from their controul. To these she has adapted the mechanism of the heart. Morals were too essential to the happiness of man to be risked on the incertain combinations of the head. She laid their foundation therefore in sentiment, not in science. That she gave to all, as necessary to all: this to a few only, as sufficing with a few. I know indeed that you pretend authority to the sovereign controul of our conduct in all its parts: & a respect for your grave saws & maxims, a desire to do what is right, has sometimes induced me to conform to your counsels. A few facts however which I can readily recall to your memory, will suffice to prove to you that nature has not organized you for our moral direction. When the poor wearied souldier whom we overtook at Chickahomony with his pack on his back, begged us to let him get up behind our chariot, you began to calculate that the road was full of souldiers, & that if all should be taken up our horses would fail in their journey. We drove on therefore. But soon becoming sensible you had made me do wrong, that tho we cannot relieve all the distressed we should relieve as many as we can, I turned about to take up the souldier; but he had entered a bye path, & was no more to be found; & from that moment to this I could never find him out to ask his forgiveness. Again, when the poor woman came o ask a charity in Philadelphia, you whispered that she looked like a drunkard, & that half a dollar was enough to give her for the ale-house. Those who want the dispositions to give, easily find reasons why they ought not to give. When I sought her out afterwards, & did what I should have done at first, you know that she employed the money immediately towards placing her child at school. If our country, when pressed with wrongs at the point of the bayonet, had been governed by its heads instead of its hearts, where should we have been now? Hanging on a gallows as high as Hamans. You began to calculate & to compare wealth and numbers: we threw up a few pulsations of our warmest blood; we supplied enthusiasm against wealth and numbers; we put our existence to the hazard when the hazard seemed against us, and we saved our country: justifying at the same time the ways of Providence, whose precept is to do always what is right, and leave the issue to him. In short, my friend, as far as my recollection serves me, I do not know that I ever did a good thing on your suggestion, or a dirty one without it. I do forever then disclaim your interference in my province. Fill papers as you please with triangles & squares: try how many ways you can hang & combine them together. I shall never envy nor controul your sublime delights. But leave me to decide when & where friendships are to be contracted. You say I contract them at random. So you said the woman at Philadelphia was a drunkard. I receive no one into my esteem till I know they are worthy of it. Wealth, title, office, are no recommendations to my friendship. On the contrary great good qualities are requisite to make amends for their having wealth, title, & office. You confess that in the present case I could not have made a worthier choice. You only object that I was so soon to lose them. We are not immortal ourselves, my friend; how can we expect our enjoyments to be so? We have no rose without its thorn; no pleasure without alloy. It is the law of our existence; & we must acquiesce. It is the condition annexed to all our pleasures, not by us who receive, but by him who gives them. True, this condition is pressing cruelly on me at this moment. I feel more fit for death than life. But when I look back on the pleasures of which it is the consequence, I am conscious they were worth the price I am paying. Notwithstanding your endeavours too to damp my hopes, I comfort myself with expectations of their promised return. Hope is sweeter than despair, & they were too good to mean to deceive me. In the summer, said the gentleman; but in the spring, said the lady: & I should love her forever, were it only for that! Know then, my friend, that I have taken these good people into my bosom; that I have lodged them in the warmest cell I could find: that I love them, & will continue to love them through life: that if fortune should dispose them on

one side the globe, & me on the other, my affections shall pervade its whole mass to reach them. Knowing then my determination, attempt not to disturb it. If you can at any time furnish matter for their amusement, it will be the office of a good neighbor to do it. I will in like manner seize any occasion which may offer to do the like good turn for you with Condorcet, Rittenhouse, Madison, La Cretelle, or any other of those worthy sons of science whom you so justly prize.

I thought this a favorable proposition whereon to rest the issue of the dialogue. So I put an end to it by calling for my night-cap. Methinks I hear you wish to heaven I had called a little sooner, & so spared you the ennui of such a sermon. I did not interrupt them sooner because I was in a mood for hearing sermons. You too were the subject; & on such a thesis I never think the theme long; not even if I am to write it, and that slowly & awkwardly, as now, with the left hand. But that you may not be discouraged from a correspondence which begins so formidably, I will promise you on my honour that my future letters shall be of a reasonable length. I will even agree to express but half my esteem for you, for fear of cloying you with too full a dose. But, on your part, no curtailing. If your letters are as long as the bible, they will appear short to me. Only let them be brimful of affection. I shall read them with the dispositions with which Arlequin, in *Les deux billets* spelt the words "*je t'aime*," and wished that the whole alphabet had entered into their composition.

We have had incessant rains since your departure. These make me fear for your health, as well as that you had an uncomfortable journey. The same cause has prevented me from being able to give you any account of your friends here. This voyage to Fontainebleau will probably send the Count de Moustier & the Marquise de Brehan to America. Danquerville promised to visit me, but has not done it as yet. De la Tude comes sometimes to take family soup with me, & entertains me with anecdotes of his five & thirty years imprisonment. How ferrile is the mind of man which can make the Bastile & Dungeon of Vincennes yield interesting anecdotes! You know this was for making four verses on Mme de Pompadour. But I think you told me you did not know the verses. They were these: *Sans esprit, sans sentiment, Sans etre belle, ni neuve, En France on peut avoir ie premier amant: Pontpadour en es l epreuve.*" I have read the memoir of his three escapes. As to myself my health is good, except my wrist which mends slowly, & my mind which mends not at all, but broods constantly over your departure. The lateness of the season obliges me to decline my journey into the south of France. Present me in the most friendly terms to Mr. Cosway, & receive me into your own recollection with a partiality & a warmth, proportioned, not to my own poor merit, but to the sentiments of sincere affection & esteem with which I have the honour to be, my dear Madam, your most obedient humble servant.

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## 9. Thomas Jefferson to Justice William Johnson 12 June 1823

... I learn ... with great pleasure that you have resolved on continuing your history of parties. Our opponents are far ahead of us in preparations for placing their cause favorably before posterity. Yet I hope even from some of them [for] the escape of precious truths, in angry explosions or effusions of vanity, which will betray the genuine monarchism of their principles. They do not themselves believe what they endeavor to inculcate: that we were an opposition party, not on principle, but merely seeking for office. The fact is, that at the formation of our government, many had formed their political opinions on European writings and practices, believing the experience of old countries, and especially of England, abusive as it was, to be a safer guide than mere theory. The doctrines of Europe were that men in numerous associations cannot be restrained within the limits of order and justice but by forces physical and moral, wielded over them by authorities independent of their will. Hence their organization of kings, hereditary nobles, and priests. Still further to constrain the brute force of the people, they deem it necessary to keep them down by hard labor, poverty, and ignorance, and to take from them, as from bees, so much of their earnings as that unremitting labor shall be necessary to obtain a sufficient surplus barely to sustain a scanty and miserable life. And these earnings they apply to maintain their privileged orders in splendor and idleness, to fascinate the eyes of the people and excite in them a humble adoration and submission, as to an order of superior beings. Although few among us had gone all these lengths of opinion, yet many had advanced, some more, some less, on the way. And in the convention which formed our government, they endeavored to draw the cords of power as

tight as they could obtain them, to lessen the dependence of the general functionaries on their constituents, to subject to them those of the states, and to weaken their means of maintaining the steady equilibrium which the majority of the convention had deemed salutary for both branches, general and local. To recover, therefore, in practice, the powers which the nation had refused, and to warp to their own wishes those actually given, was the steady object of the federal party. Ours, on the contrary, was to maintain the will of the majority of the convention and of the people themselves. We believed, with them, that man was a rational animal, endowed by nature with rights and **with an innate sense of justice**; and that he could be restrained from wrong and protected in right by moderate powers confided to persons of his own choice and held to their duties by dependence on his own will. We believed that the complicated organization of kings, nobles, and priests was not the wisest nor best to effect the happiness of associated man; that wisdom and virtue were not hereditary; that the trappings of such a machinery consumed by their expense those earnings of industry they were meant to protect, and, by the inequalities they produced, exposed liberty to sufferance. We believed that men enjoying in ease and security the full fruits of their own industry, enlisted by all their interests on the side of law and order, habituated to think for themselves and to follow their reason as their guide, would be more easily and safely governed than with minds nourished in error and vitiated and debased, as in Europe, by ignorance, indigence, and oppression. The cherishment of the people, then, was our principle, the fear and distrust of them that of the other party. Composed, as we were, of the landed and laboring interests of the country, we could not be less anxious for a government of law and order than were the inhabitants of the cities, the strongholds of federalism. And whether our efforts to save the principles and form of our Constitution have not been salutary, let the present republican freedom, order, and prosperity of our country determine. History may distort truth, and will distort it for a time, by the superior efforts at justification of those who are conscious of needing it most. Nor will the opening scenes of our present government be seen in their true aspect until the letters of the day, now held in private hoards, shall be broken up and laid open to public view. What a treasure will be found in General Washington's cabinet when it shall pass into the hands of as candid a friend to truth as he was himself! When no longer, like Caesar's notes and memorandums in the hands of Anthony, it shall be open to the high priests of Federalism only, and garbled to say so much and no more as suits their views! ...

The original objects of the Federalists were, 1st, to warp our government more to the form and principles of monarchy, and, 2d, to weaken the barriers of the state governments as coordinate powers. In the first they have been so completely foiled by the universal spirit of the nation that they have abandoned the enterprise, shrunk from the odium of their old appellation, taken to themselves a participation of ours, and under the pseudo-republican mask are now aiming at their second object and, strengthened by unsuspecting or apostate recruits from our ranks, are advancing fast towards an ascendancy. I have been blamed for saying that a prevalence of the doctrines of consolidation would one day call for reformation or *revolution*. I answer by asking if a single state of the union would have agreed to the Constitution had it given all powers to the general government? If the whole opposition to it did not proceed from the jealousy and fear of every state of being subjected to the other states in matters merely its own? And if there is any reason to believe the states more disposed now than then to acquiesce in this general surrender of all their rights and powers to a consolidated government, one and undivided? ...

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## 10. Selected Quotations On Reason, Morality, And Religion

The quotations below do not reference Epicurus or Plato specifically, but are included here for reference:

- "Let common sense and common honesty have fair play, and they will soon set things to rights." –Thomas Jefferson to Ezra Stiles, 1786. ME 6:25
- "It is comfortable to see the standard of reason at length erected, after so many ages, during which the human mind has been held in vassalage by kings, priests, and nobles; and it is honorable for us to have produced the first legislature who had the courage to declare that the reason of man may be trusted with the formation of his own opinions." –Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1786. ME 6:10
- "It is an insult to our citizens to question whether they are rational beings or not." –Thomas Jefferson to N. G. Dufief, 1814. ME 14:127

- “No experiment can be more interesting than that we are now trying, and which we trust will end in establishing the fact, that man may be governed by reason and truth.” –Thomas Jefferson to John Tyler, 1804. ME 11:33
- “[God has bestowed] reason... as the umpire of truth.” –Thomas Jefferson to Miles King, 1814. ME 14:197
- “Truth and reason are eternal. They have prevailed. And they will eternally prevail; however, in times and places they may be overborne for a while by violence, military, civil, or ecclesiastical.” –Thomas Jefferson to Rev. Samuel Knox, 1810. ME 12:360
- “Truth will do well enough if left to shift for herself. She seldom has received much aid from the power of great men to whom she is rarely known and seldom welcome. She has no need of force to procure entrance into the minds of men.” –Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Religion, 1776. Papers 1:547
- “Everyone must act according to the dictates of his own reason.” –Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Miller, 1808. ME 11:429
- “Our opinions are not voluntary. Every man’s own reason must be his oracle.” –Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, 1813. ME 13:225
- “Everyone, certainly, must form his judgment on the evidence accessible to himself.” –Thomas Jefferson to William Duane, 1811. ME 13:26
- “A patient pursuit of facts, and cautious combination and comparison of them, is the drudgery to which man is subjected by his Maker, if he wishes to attain sure knowledge.” –Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.VI, 1782. ME 2:97
- “We certainly are not to deny whatever we cannot account for. A thousand phenomena present themselves daily which we cannot explain; but where facts are suggested bearing no analogy with the laws of nature as yet known to us, their verity needs proofs proportioned to their difficulty. A cautious mind will weigh well the opposition of the phenomenon to everything hitherto observed, the strength of the testimony by which it is supported, and the errors and misconceptions to which even our senses are liable.” –Thomas Jefferson to Daniel Salmon, 1808. ME 11:441
- “Proof is the duty of the affirmative side. A negative cannot be positively proved.” –Thomas Jefferson to Martin Van Buren, 1824. ME 16:55
- “What has no meaning admits no explanation.” –Thomas Jefferson to Alexander Smyth, 1825. ME 16:101
- “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; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear.” –Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, 1787. ME 6:258 Papers 12:15
- “I was bold in the pursuit of knowledge, never fearing to follow truth and reason to whatever results they led, and bearding every authority which stood in their way.” –Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, 1814. ME 14:85
- “It is not the name, but the thing which is essential.” –Thomas Jefferson: Opinion on the Tonnage Payable, 1791. ME 3:292
- “Lay aside all prejudice on both sides, and neither believe nor reject anything because any other persons, or description of persons, have rejected or believed it. Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven, and you are answerable, not for the rightness, but uprightness of the decision.” –Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, 1787. ME 6:261
- “In a republican nation whose citizens are to be led by reason and persuasion and not by force, the art of reasoning becomes of first importance.” –Thomas Jefferson to David Harding, 1824. ME 16:30
- “Nothing is so desirable to me as that after mankind shall have been abused by such gross falsehoods as to events while passing, their minds should at length be set to rights by genuine truth. And I can conscientiously declare that as to myself, I wish that not only no act but no thought of mine should be unknown.” –Thomas Jefferson to James Main, 1808. ME 12:175
- “There is not a truth existing which I fear or would wish unknown to the whole world.” –Thomas Jefferson to Henry Lee, 1826. ME 16:179
- “There is not a truth on earth which I fear or would disguise. But secret slanders cannot be disarmed, because they are secret.” –Thomas Jefferson to William Duane, 1806. ME 11:94
- “Old heads as well as young may sometimes be charged with ignorance and presumption. The natural course of the human mind is certainly from credulity to skepticism.” –Thomas Jefferson to Caspar

Wistar, 1807. ME 11:248

- “Man once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like a ship without rudder, is the sport of every wind. With such persons, gullibility, which they call faith, takes the helm from the hand of reason, and the mind becomes a wreck.” –Thomas Jefferson to James Smith, 1822. ME 15:409
- “I can never fear that things will go far wrong where common sense has fair play.” –Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1786. ME 6:20
- “The Gothic idea that we were to look backwards instead of forwards for the improvement of the human mind, and to recur to the annals of our ancestors for what is most perfect in government, in religion and in learning, is worthy of those bigots in religion and government by whom it has been recommended, and whose purposes it would answer. But it is not an idea which this country will endure.” –Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, 1800. ME 10:148
- “I am for encouraging the progress of science in all its branches, and not for raising a hue and cry against the sacred name of philosophy; for awing the human mind by stories of raw-head and bloody bones to a distrust of its own vision, and to repose implicitly on that of others; to go backwards instead of forwards to look for improvement; to believe that government, religion, morality and every other science were in the highest perfection in the ages of the darkest ignorance, and that nothing can ever be decided more perfect than what was established by our forefathers.” –Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 1799. ME 10:78
- “I am not myself apt to be alarmed at innovations recommended by reason. That dread belongs to those whose interests or prejudices shrink from the advance of truth and science.” –Thomas Jefferson to John Manners, 1814. ME 14:103
- “What an effort... of bigotry in politics and religion have we gone through! The barbarians really flattered themselves they should be able to bring back the times of Vandalism, when ignorance put everything into the hands of power and priestcraft. All advances in science were proscribed as innovations. They pretended to praise and encourage education, but it was to be the education of our ancestors. We were to look backwards, not forwards, for improvement.” –Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, 1801. ME 10:228
- “I join [with others] in branding as cowardly the idea that the human mind is incapable of further advance. This is precisely the doctrine which the present despots of the earth are inculcating and their friends here re-echoing and applying especially to religion and politics: ‘that it is not probable that anything better will be discovered than what was known to our fathers.’ We are to look backwards, then, and not forwards for the improvement of science and to find it amidst feudal barbarisms and the fires of Spital-fields. But thank heaven the American mind is already too much opened to listen to these impostures; and while the art of printing is left to us, science can never be retrograde. What is once acquired of real knowledge can never be lost.” –Thomas Jefferson to William Green Munford, 1799.
- “I hold it... certain, that to open the doors of truth and to fortify the habit of testing everything by reason are the most effectual manacles we can rivet on the hands of our successors to prevent their manacled the people with their own consent.” –Thomas Jefferson to John Tyler, 1804. ME 11:34
- “If virtuous, [the government] need not fear the fair operation of attack and defense. Nature has given to man no other means of sifting the truth, either in religion, law, or politics.” –Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 1792. ME 8:406
- “We shall have our follies without doubt. Some one or more of them will always be afloat. But ours will be the follies of enthusiasm, not of bigotry, not of Jesuitism. Bigotry is the disease of ignorance, of morbid minds; enthusiasm of the free and buoyant. Education and free discussion are the antidotes of both. We are destined to be a barrier against the return of ignorance and barbarism.” –Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1816. ME 15:58
- “Under the law of nature, all men are born free, every one comes into the world with a right to his own person, which includes the liberty of moving and using it at his own will. This is what is called personal liberty, and is given him by the Author of nature, because necessary for his own sustenance.” –Thomas Jefferson: Legal Argument, 1770. FE 1:376
- Of liberty I would say that, in the whole plenitude of its extent, it is unobstructed action according to our will. But rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add ‘within the limits of the law,’ because law is often but the tyrant’s

will, and always so when it violates the right of an individual.” –Thomas Jefferson to Isaac H. Tiffany, 1819.

- “The order of nature [is] that individual happiness shall be inseparable from the practice of virtue.” –Thomas Jefferson to M. Correa de Serra, 1814. ME 19:210
- “Without virtue, happiness cannot be.” –Thomas Jefferson to Amos J. Cook, 1816. ME 14:405
- “Liberty... is the great parent of science and of virtue; and... a nation will be great in both always in proportion as it is free.” –Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Willard, 1789. ME 7:329
- 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... 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.” –Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, 1787. ME 6:257, Papers 12:15
- “True wisdom does not lie in mere practice without principle.” –Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1816. ME 15:75
- “I never did, or countenanced, in public life, a single act inconsistent with the strictest good faith; having never believed there was one code of morality for a public, and another for a private man.” –Thomas Jefferson to Valentine de Foronda, 1809. ME 12:320
- It is strangely absurd to suppose that a million of human beings, collected together, are not under the same moral laws which bind each of them separately.” –Thomas Jefferson to George Logan, 1816. FE 10:68
- “What is true of every member of the society, individually, is true of them all collectively; since the rights of the whole can be no more than the sum of the rights of the individuals.” –Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1789.
- “I know but one code of morality for man whether acting singly or collectively. He who says I will be a rogue when I act in company with a hundred others, but an honest man when I act alone, will be believed in the former assertion, but not in the latter.” –Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1789. ME 7:449, Papers 15:367
- “The clergy...believe that any portion of power confided to me [as President] will be exerted in opposition to their schemes. And they believe rightly: for I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man. But this is all they have to fear from me: and enough, too, in their opinion.” –Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, 1800. ME 10:173
- “In every country and in every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own.” –Thomas Jefferson to Horatio G. Spafford, 1814. ME 14:119
- If Caesar had been as virtuous as he was daring and sagacious, what could he, even in the plenitude of his usurped power, have done to lead his fellow citizens into good government?... If their people indeed had been, like ourselves, enlightened, peaceable, and really free, the answer would be obvious. ‘Restore independence to all your foreign conquests, relieve Italy from the government of the rabble of Rome, consult it as a nation entitled to self-government, and do its will.’ But steeped in corruption, vice and venality, as the whole nation was,... what could even Cicero, Cato, Brutus have done, had it been referred to them to establish a good government for their country?... No government can continue good but under the control of the people; and their people were so demoralized and depraved as to be incapable of exercising a wholesome control. Their reformation then was to be taken up ab incunabulis. Their minds were to be informed by education what is right and what wrong; to be encouraged in habits of virtue and deterred from those of vice by the dread of punishments proportioned, indeed, but irremissible; in all cases, to follow truth as the only safe guide, and to eschew error, which bewilders us in one false consequence after another in endless succession. These are the inculcations necessary to render the people a sure basis for the structure of order and

good government. But this would have been an operation of a generation or two at least, within which period would have succeeded many Neros and Commoduses, who would have quashed the whole process. I confess, then, I can neither see what Cicero, Cato and Brutus, united and uncontrolled could have devised to lead their people into good government, nor how this enigma can be solved.”  
–Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1819. ME 15:233

- I had rather be shut up in a very modest cottage with my books, my family and a few old friends, dining on simple bacon, and letting the world roll on as it liked, than to occupy the most splendid post, which any human power can give. – Letter to Alexander Donald (7 February 1788)