



Thomas Jefferson on Politics & Government¹

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Author's Note on Editing: A small number of quotations are followed by the sign, (*). This designates a quote that has been 'generalized.' In its original form, the vital principle was stated in terms of a specific application. The form stated here has words added in brackets or phrases rearranged so as to give it a general, rather than a specific and, usually, dated reading. Of course, none of this is contrary to the underlying principle as expressed by Jefferson. The purpose is to extract that principle and to make available an important point that must otherwise be omitted. When this is done, more complete bibliographical information is provided so that the reader can easily verify the precise wording and context if desired.

Both the spelling and the punctuation of the quotations have been edited to conform with modern usage. Alterations to the punctuation consist mostly of fewer commas. The practice in Jefferson's time was to set off almost every phrase with commas. Today, commas are used to convey the structure of a sentence more precisely, and too many commas undermine that depiction of structure and make the sentences more difficult for modern readers to understand.

The designation in the form, "Papers, 1:423," is a reference to the location of the quote in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. The designation in the form, "ME 12:345," refers to the location in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, (Memorial Edition) Lipscomb and Bergh, editors. "FE 9:234" refers to the Ford Edition of the writings. See the section [Recommended Collections and Sources](#) for further information. ME, FE = Memorial Edition, Ford Edition. See [Sources](#).

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1. Inalienable Rights

The government of the United States is the result of a revolution in thought. It was founded on the principle that all persons have equal rights, and that government is responsible to, and derives its powers from, a free people. To Jefferson and the other Founding Fathers, these ideas were not just a passing intellectual fad, but a recognition of something inherent in the nature of man itself. The very foundation of government, therefore, rests on the inalienable rights of the people and of each individual composing their mass. The Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson, is the fundamental statement of what government is and from what source it derives its powers. It begins with a summary of those inalienable rights that are the self-evident basis for a free society and for all the powers to protect those rights that a just government exercises.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights; that among these, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness." --Declaration of Independence as originally written by Thomas Jefferson, 1776. ME 1:29, Papers 1:315

"[Our] principles [are] founded on the immovable basis of equal right and reason." --Thomas Jefferson to James Sullivan, 1797. ME 9:379

"An equal application of law to every condition of man is fundamental." --Thomas Jefferson to George Hay, 1807. ME 11:341

"The most sacred of the duties of a government [is] to do equal and impartial justice to all its citizens." --Thomas Jefferson: Note in Destutt de Tracy, "Political Economy," 1816. ME 14:465

"To unequal privileges among members of the same society the spirit of our nation is, with one accord, adverse." --Thomas Jefferson to Hugh White, 1801. ME 10:258

"In America, no other distinction between man and man had ever been known but that of persons in office exercising powers by authority of the laws, and private individuals. Among these last, the poorest laborer stood on equal ground with the wealthiest millionaire, and generally on a more favored one whenever their rights seem to jar." --Thomas Jefferson: Answers to de Meusnier Questions, 1786. ME 17:8

"Of distinction by birth or badge, [Americans] had no more idea than they had of the mode of existence in the moon or planets. They had heard only that there were such, and knew that they must be wrong." --Thomas Jefferson: Answers to de Meusnier Questions, 1786. ME 17:89

"[The] best principles [of our republic] secure to all its citizens a perfect equality of rights." --Thomas Jefferson: Reply to the Citizens of Wilmington, 1809. ME 16:336

The Nature and Source of Our Rights

"The principles on which we engaged, of which the charter of our independence is the record, were sanctioned by the laws of our being, and we but obeyed them in pursuing undeviatingly the course they called for. It issued finally in that inestimable state of freedom which alone can ensure to man the enjoyment of his equal rights." --Thomas Jefferson to Georgetown Republicans, 1809. ME 16:349

"Man [is] a rational animal, endowed by nature with rights and with an innate sense of justice." --Thomas Jefferson to William Johnson, 1823. ME 15:441

"A free people [claim] their rights as derived from the laws of nature, and not as the gift of their chief magistrate." --Thomas Jefferson: Rights of British America, 1774. ME 1:209, Papers 1:134

"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

"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. ME 7:455, Papers 15:393

"Nothing... is unchangeable but the inherent and unalienable rights of man." --Thomas Jefferson to John Cartwright, 1824. ME 16:48

"The evidence of [the] natural right [of expatriation], like that of our right to life, liberty, the use of our faculties, the pursuit of happiness, is not left to the feeble and sophistical investigations of reason, but is impressed on the sense of every man. We do not claim these under the charters of kings or legislators, but under the King of Kings." --Thomas Jefferson to John Manners, 1817. ME 15:124

"Natural rights [are] the objects for the protection of which society is formed and municipal laws established." --Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 1797. ME 9:422

"Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath?" --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XVIII, 1782. ME 2:227

"Questions of natural right are triable by their conformity with the moral sense and reason of man." --Thomas Jefferson: Opinion on French Treaties, 1793. ME 3:235

"It is a principle that the right to a thing gives a right to the means without which it could not be used, that is to say, that the means follow their end." --Thomas Jefferson: Thomas Jefferson: Report on Navigation of the Mississippi, 1792. ME 3:180

"The right to use a thing comprehends a right to the means necessary to its use, and without which it would be useless." --Thomas Jefferson to William Carmichael, 1790. ME 8:72

"The Declaration of Independence... [is the] declaratory charter of our rights, and of the rights of man." --Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Adams Wells, 1819. ME 15:200

"Some other natural rights... [have] not yet entered into any declaration of rights." --Thomas Jefferson to John W. Eppes, 1813. ME 13:272

"I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties." --Thomas Jefferson: Reply to Danbury Baptists, 1802. ME 16:282

The Right to Life and Liberty

"The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time; the hand of force may destroy, but cannot disjoin them." --Thomas Jefferson: Rights of British America, 1774. ME 1:211, Papers 1:135

"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.

"That liberty [is pure] which is to go to all, and not to the few or the rich alone." --Thomas Jefferson to Horatio Gates, 1798. ME 9:441

"In a government bottomed on the will of all, the life and liberty of every individual citizen becomes interesting to all." --Thomas Jefferson: 5th Annual Message, 1805. ME 3:390

"I would rather be exposed to the inconveniences attending too much liberty than to those attending too small a degree of it." --Thomas Jefferson to Archibald Stuart, 1791. ME 8:276

"Being myself a warm zealot for the attainment and enjoyment by all mankind of as much liberty as each may exercise without injury to the equal liberty of his fellow citizens, I have lamented that... the endeavors to obtain this should have been attended with the effusion of so much blood." --Thomas Jefferson to Jean Nicholas Demeunier, 1795. FE 7:13

The Pursuit of Happiness

"The Giver of life gave it for happiness and not for wretchedness." --Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 1782. ME 4:196, Papers 6:186

"If [God] has made it a law in the nature of man to pursue his own happiness, He has left him free in the choice of place as well as mode, and we may safely call on the whole body of English jurists to produce the map on which nature has traced for each individual the geographical line which she forbids him to cross in pursuit of happiness." --Thomas Jefferson to John Manners, 1817. ME 15:124

"Perfect happiness, I believe, was never intended by the Deity to be the lot of one of his creatures in this world; but that he has very much put in our power the nearness of our approaches to it, is what I as steadfastly believe." --Thomas Jefferson to John Page, 1763. ME 4:10, Papers 1:10

"The freedom and happiness of man... [are] the sole objects of all legitimate government." --Thomas Jefferson to Thaddeus Kosciusko, 1810. ME 12:369

"[It is a] great truth that industry, commerce and security are the surest roads to the happiness and prosperity of [a] people." --Thomas Jefferson to Francisco Chiappe, 1789. Papers 15:405

"The only orthodox object of the institution of government is to secure the greatest degree of happiness possible to the general mass of those associated under it." --Thomas Jefferson to M. van der Kemp, 1812. ME 13:135

"I sincerely pray that all the members of the human family may, in the time prescribed by the Father of us all, find themselves securely established in the enjoyment of life, liberty, and happiness." --Thomas Jefferson: Reply to Ellicot Thomas, et al., 1807. ME 16:290

2. Securing Rights

The purpose of government is to maintain a society which secures to every member the inherent and inalienable rights of man, and promotes the safety and happiness of its people. Protecting these rights from violation, therefore, is its primary obligation.

"To secure these [inalienable] rights [to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness], governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed... Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness." --Thomas Jefferson: Declaration of Independence, 1776. ME 1:29, Papers 1:429

"The principles of government... [are] founded in the rights of man." --Thomas Jefferson to John Cartwright, 1824. ME 16:51

"It is to secure our rights that we resort to government at all." --Thomas Jefferson to Francois D'Ivernois, 1795. FE 7:4

"The idea is quite unfounded that on entering into society we give up any natural right." --Thomas Jefferson to Francis Gilmer, 1816. ME 15:24

"[These are] the rights which God and the laws have given equally and independently to all." --Thomas Jefferson: Rights of British America, 1774. ME 1:185, Papers 1:121

"[Montesquieu wrote in Spirit of the Laws, VIII,c.3:] 'In the state of nature, indeed, all men are born equal; but they cannot continue in this equality. Society makes them lose it, and they recover it only by the protection of the laws.'" --Thomas Jefferson: copied into his Commonplace Book.

"For the ordinary safety of the citizens of the several States, whether against dangers from within or without, reliance has been placed either on the domestic means of the individuals or on those provided by the respective States." --Thomas Jefferson to James Brown, 1808.

"[It is the obligation] of every government to yield protection to their citizens as the consideration for their obedience." --Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 1785. ME 5:172, Papers 8:607

The Endeavor to Secure Rights

"The spirit of the times may alter, will alter. Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless. A single zealot may commence persecutor, and better men be his victims. It can never be too often repeated that the time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis is while our rulers are honest and ourselves united. From the conclusion of [their] war [for independence, a nation begins] going down hill. It will not then be necessary to resort every moment to the people for support. They will be forgotten, therefore, and their rights disregarded. They will forget themselves but in the sole faculty of making money, and will never think of uniting to effect a due respect for their rights. The shackles, therefore, which shall not be knocked off at the conclusion of [that] war

will remain on [them] long, will be made heavier and heavier, till [their] rights shall revive or expire in a convulsion." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XVII, 1782. (*) ME 2:225

"What a cruel reflection that a rich country cannot long be a free one." --Thomas Jefferson: Travels in France, 1787. ME 17:162

"[If] a positive declaration of some essential rights could not be obtained in the requisite latitude, [the] answer [is], Half a loaf is better than no bread. If we cannot secure all our rights, let us secure what we can." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1789. ME 7:310

"Circumstances sometimes require, that rights the most unquestionable should be advanced with delicacy." --Thomas Jefferson to William Short, 1791. ME 8:219

"In endeavors to improve our situation, we should never despair." --Thomas Jefferson to John Quincy Adams, 1817. ME 15:148

"The ground of liberty is to be gained by inches, [and] we must be contented to secure what we can get from time to time and eternally press forward for what is yet to get. It takes time to persuade men to do even what is for their own good." --Thomas Jefferson to Charles Clay, 1790. ME 8:4

"Instead of that liberty which takes root and growth in the progress of reason, if recovered by mere force or accident, it becomes with an unprepared people a tyranny still of the many, the few, or the one." --Thomas Jefferson to Lafayette, 1815. ME 14:245

"Most [revolutions] have been [closed] by a subversion of that liberty [they were] intended to establish." --Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 1784. ME 4:218, Papers 7:106

Restrictions on Natural Rights

"All... natural rights may be abridged or regulated in [their] exercise by law." --Thomas Jefferson: Opinion on Residence Bill, 1790. ME 3:64

"Our rulers can have authority over such natural rights only as we have submitted to them." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XVII, 1782. ME 2:221

"Every man, and every body of men on earth, possesses the right of self-government... This, like all other natural rights, may be abridged or modified in its exercise by their own consent, or by the law of those who depute them, if they meet in the right of others." --Thomas Jefferson: Opinion on Residence Bill, 1790. ME 3:60

"Were [a right] to be refused, or to be so shackled by regulations, not necessary for... peace and safety... as to render its use impracticable,... it would then be an injury, of which we should be entitled to demand redress." --Thomas Jefferson: Report on Navigation of the Mississippi, 1792. ME 3:178

"Measures against right should be mollified in their exercise, if it be wished to lengthen them to the greatest term possible." --Thomas Jefferson to William Short, 1791. ME 8:219

"I had hoped that [nations were] familiarized to such a degree of liberty, that they might without difficulty or danger fill up the measure to its *maximum*; a term which, though in the insulated man, bounded only by his natural powers, must in society be so far restricted as to protect himself against the evil passions of his associates and consequently, them against him." --Thomas Jefferson to Francois d'Ivernois, 1795. (*) ME 9:299

"Laws abridging the natural right of the citizen should be restrained by rigorous constructions within their narrowest limits." --Thomas Jefferson to Isaac McPherson, 1813. ME 13:327

Protecting the Rights of the People

"It had become an universal and almost uncontroverted position in the several States, that the purposes of society do not require a surrender of all our rights to our ordinary governors; that there are certain portions of right not necessary to enable them to carry on an effective government, and which experience has nevertheless proved they will be constantly encroaching on, if submitted to them; that there are also certain fences which experience has proved peculiarly efficacious against wrong, and rarely obstructive of right, which yet the governing powers have ever shown a disposition to weaken and remove. Of the first kind, for instance, is freedom of religion; of the second, trial by jury, habeas corpus laws, free presses." --Thomas Jefferson to Noah Webster, 1790. ME 8:112

"If we are made in some degree for others, yet in a greater are we made for ourselves. It were contrary to feeling and indeed ridiculous to suppose that a man had less rights in himself than one of his neighbors, or all of them put together. This would be slavery, and not that liberty which the bill of rights has made inviolable, and for the preservation of which our government has been charged." --Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 1782. ME 4:196, Papers 6:185

"No one has a right to obstruct another exercising his faculties innocently for the relief of sensibilities made a part of his nature." --Thomas Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, 1816. ME 14:490

"No man has a natural right to commit aggression on the equal rights of another, and this is all from which the laws ought to restrain him." --Thomas Jefferson to Francis Gilmer, 1816. ME 15:24

"We may consider each generation as a distinct nation, with a right, by the will of its majority, to bind themselves, but none to bind the succeeding generation, more than the inhabitants of another country." --Thomas Jefferson to John Wayles Eppes, 1813. ME 13:270

"[As to] the question whether, by the laws of nature, one generation of men can, by any act of theirs, bind those which are to follow them? I say, by the laws of nature, there being between generation and generation, as between nation and nation, no other obligatory law." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 1814. ME 14:67

"I may err in my measures, but never shall deflect from the intention to fortify the public liberty by every possible means, and to put it out of the power of the few to riot on the labors of the many." --Thomas Jefferson to John Tyler, 1804. ME 11:33

"[Oppose] with manly firmness [any] invasions on the rights of the people." --
Thomas Jefferson: Draft Virginia Constitution, 1776. (*) Papers 1:338

3. Moral Principles

Morality is intimately related to a nation's government, for as James Madison wrote, "To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people is a chimerical idea." Morality refers to conduct that is proper between members of society. Respect for the equal rights of every citizen becomes the foundation of morality and justice in a free society. Rightful government necessarily reflects this proper relationship in its policies and in its dealings with its own citizens and with other nations.

"God... has formed us moral agents... that we may promote the happiness of those with whom He has placed us in society, by acting honestly towards all, benevolently to those who fall within our way, respecting sacredly their rights, bodily and mental, and cherishing especially their freedom of conscience, as we value our own." --Thomas Jefferson to Miles King, 1814. ME 14:197

"Peace, prosperity, liberty and morals have an intimate connection." --Thomas Jefferson to George Logan, 1813. ME 13:384

Virtue and Happiness

"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

Truth, Honesty and Morality

"Truth is certainly a branch of morality, and a very important one to society." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 1814. ME 14:139

"Truth is the first object." --Thomas Jefferson to Dr. Maese, 1809. ME 12:232

"Follow truth as the only safe guide, and... eschew error, which bewilders us in one false consequence after another." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1819. ME 15:234

"Truth being as cheap as error, it is as well to rectify [an error of fact] for our own satisfaction." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1823. ME 15:467

"Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom." --Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Macon, 1819. ME 15:180

"Honesty, disinterestedness and good nature are indispensable to procure the esteem and confidence of those with whom we live, and on whose esteem our happiness depends." --Thomas Jefferson to Francis Eppes, 1816. ME 19:241

The Moral Sense

"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

"How necessary was the care of the Creator in making the moral principle so much a part of our constitution as that no errors of reasoning or of speculation might lead us astray from its observance in practice." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 1814. ME 14:139

"Morals were too essential to the happiness of man, to be risked on the uncertain combinations of the head. [Nature] laid their foundation, therefore, in sentiment, not in science." --Thomas Jefferson to Maria Cosway, 1786. ME 5:443

"I believe... that [justice] is instinct and innate, that the moral sense is as much a part of our constitution as that of feeling, seeing, or hearing; as a wise Creator must have seen to be necessary in an animal destined to live in society." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1816. ME 15:76

"I sincerely... believe... in the general existence of a moral instinct. I think it the brightest gem with which the human character is studded, and the want of it as more degrading than the most hideous of the bodily deformities." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 1814. ME 14:143

"The moral sense [is] the first excellence of well-organized man." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1823. ME 15:418

"The moral law of our nature... [is] the moral law to which man has been subjected by his Creator, and of which his feelings or conscience, as it is sometimes called, are the evidence with which his Creator has furnished him." --Thomas Jefferson: Opinion on French Treaties, 1793. ME 3:228

"Conscience [is] the only sure clue which will eternally guide a man clear of all doubts and inconsistencies." --Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 1789. ME 7:350, Papers 15:118

"Experience proves that the moral and physical qualities of man, whether good or evil, are transmissible in a certain degree from father to son." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1813. ME 13:395

"[It is a] general truth that great men will think alike and act alike, though without intercommunication." --Thomas Jefferson to William B. Giles, 1796. ME 9:326

"The true fountains of evidence [are] the head and heart of every rational and honest man. It is there nature has written her moral laws, and where every man may read them for himself." --Thomas Jefferson: Opinion on French Treaties, 1793. ME 3:229

"Assuming the fact that the earth has been created in time and consequently the dogma of final causes, we yield, of course, to this short syllogism: Man was created for social intercourse; but social intercourse cannot be maintained without a sense of justice; then man must have been created with a sense of justice." --Thomas Jefferson to Francis Gilmer, 1816. ME 15:24

Self-Interest and Morality

"Egoism, in a broader sense, has been... presented as the source of moral action. It has been said that we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, bind up the wounds of the man beaten by thieves, pour oil and wine into them, set him on our own beast and bring him to the inn, because we receive ourselves pleasure from these acts... These good acts give us pleasure, but how happens it that they give us pleasure? Because nature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feel and to succor their distresses... The Creator would indeed have been a bungling artist had he intended man for a social animal without planting in him social dispositions. It is true they are not planted in every man, because there is no rule without exceptions; but it is false reasoning which converts exceptions into the general rule." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 1814. ME 14:141

"That a man owes no duty to which he is not urged by some impulsive feeling... is correct, if referred to the standard of general feeling in the given case, and not to the feeling of a single individual." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 1814. ME 14:144

"Self-interest, or rather self-love, or *egoism*, has been more plausibly substituted as the basis of morality. But I consider our relations with others as constituting the boundaries of morality. With ourselves, we stand on the ground of identity, not of relation, which last, requiring two subjects, excludes self-love confined to a single one. To ourselves, in strict language, we can owe no duties, obligation requiring also two parties. Self-love, therefore, is no part of morality. Indeed, it is exactly its counterpart." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 1814. ME 14:140

"I believe... that every human mind feels pleasure in doing good to another." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1816. ME 15:76

"The greatest honor of a man is in doing good to his fellow men, not in destroying them." --Thomas Jefferson: Address to Shawanee Nation, 1807. ME 16:424

"The practice of morality being necessary for the well-being of society, [our Creator] has taken care to impress its precepts so indelibly on our hearts that they shall not be effaced by the subtleties of our brain." --Thomas Jefferson to James Fishback, 1809. ME 12:315

"The want or imperfection of the moral sense in some men, like the want or imperfection of the senses of sight and hearing in others, is no proof that it is a general characteristic of the species." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 1814. ME 14:142

Moral Utility

"Nature has constituted *utility* to man the standard and test of virtue. Men living in different countries, under different circumstances, different habits and regimens, may have different utilities; the same act, therefore, may be useful and consequently virtuous in one country which is injurious and vicious in another differently circumstanced." -- Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 1814. ME 14:143

"The non-existence of justice is not to be inferred from the fact that the same act is deemed virtuous and right in one society which is held vicious and wrong in another; because as the circumstances and opinions of different societies vary, so the acts which may do them right or wrong must vary also; for virtue does not consist in the act we do, but in the end it is to effect." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1816. ME 15:76

"Circumstances must always yield to substance." --Thomas Jefferson: Batture at New Orleans, 1812. ME 18:76

"If [an act] is to effect the happiness of him to whom it is directed, it is virtuous; while in a society under different circumstances and opinions the same act might produce pain and would be vicious. The essence of virtue is in doing good to others, while what is good may be one thing in one society and its contrary in another." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1816. ME 15:77

The Practice of Morality

"My principle is to do whatever is right and leave the consequences to Him who has the disposal of them." --Thomas Jefferson to George Logan, 1813. ME 13:387

"Our part is to pursue with steadiness what is right, turning neither to right nor left for the intrigues or popular delusions of the day, assured that the public approbation will in the end be with us." --Thomas Jefferson to James Breckenridge, 1822. ME 15:363

"A conviction that we are right accomplishes half the difficulty of correcting wrong." --Thomas Jefferson to Archibald Thweat, 1821. ME 15:307

"Everyone is bound to bear witness, where wrong has been done." --Thomas Jefferson: Virginia Board of Visitors Minutes, 1824. ME 19:449

"The laws of [our] country... in offenses within their cognizance, compel those who have knowledge of a fact to declare it for the purposes of justice and of the general good and safety of society. And certainly, where wrong has been done, he who knows and conceals the doer of it makes himself an accomplice, and justly censurable as such." -- Thomas Jefferson: Virginia Board of Visitors Minutes, 1825. ME 19:469

"Perseverance in object, though not by the most direct way, is often more laudable than perpetual changes, as often as the object shifts light." --Thomas Jefferson to Patrick Henry, 1779. ME 4:57

"A bold, unequivocal virtue is the best handmaid even to ambition, and would carry [one] further, in the end, than [the pursuit of a] temporizing, wavering policy." --Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 1789. ME 7:380, Papers 15:190

"Men are disposed to live honestly, if the means of doing so are open to them." -- Thomas Jefferson to Francois de Marbois, 1817. ME 15:131

Following Principle

"True wisdom does not lie in mere practice without principle." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1816. ME 15:75

"Principle will, in... most... cases open the way for us to correct conclusion." -- Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 1816. ME 15:71

"Principles conscientiously adopted [should] not be given up." --Thomas Jefferson: The Anas, 1793. (*) ME 1:332

"When principles are well understood, their application is less embarrassing." -- Thomas Jefferson to Gouverneur Morris, 1793. ME 9:36

"A departure from principle in one instance becomes a precedent for a second; that second for a third; and so on, till the bulk of the society is reduced to be mere automatons of misery, to have no sensibilities left but for sin and suffering." --Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 1816. ME 15:40

"Unequivocal in principle, reasonable in manner, we shall be able I hope to do a great deal of good to the cause of freedom and harmony." --Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 1801. ME 10:255

Moral Examples

"I have ever deemed it more honorable and more profitable, too, to set a good example than to follow a bad one." --Thomas Jefferson to M. Correa de Serra, 1814.

"The only exact testimony of a man is his actions, leaving the reader to pronounce on them his own judgment." --Thomas Jefferson to L. H. Girardin, 1815. ME 14: 295

"Our Saviour... has taught us to judge the tree by its fruit, and to leave motives to Him who can alone see into them." --Thomas Jefferson to Martin Van Buren, 1824. ME 16:55

"The entertainments of fiction are useful as well as pleasant... Everything is useful which contributes to fix us in the principles and practice of virtue. When any signal act of charity or of gratitude, for instance, is presented either to our sight or imagination, we are deeply impressed with its beauty and feel a strong desire in ourselves of doing charitable and grateful acts also. On the contrary, when we see or read of any atrocious deed, we are disgusted with its deformity and conceive an abhorrence of vice. Now every emotion of this kind is an exercise of our virtuous dispositions; and dispositions of the mind, like limbs of the body, acquire strength by exercise. But exercise produces habit, and in the instance of which we speak, the exercise being of the moral feelings, produces a habit of thinking and acting virtuously." --Thomas Jefferson to Robert Skipwith, 1771. ME 4:237, Papers 1:76

"Considering history as a moral exercise, her lessons would be too infrequent if confined to real life. Of those recorded by historians few incidents have been attended with such circumstances as to excite in any high degree this sympathetic emotion of virtue. We are, therefore, wisely framed to be as warmly interested for a fictitious as for a real personage. The spacious field of imagination is thus laid open to our use, and lessons may be formed to illustrate and carry home to the heart every moral rule of life. Thus a lively and lasting sense of filial duty is more effectually impressed on the mind of a son or daughter by reading King Lear, than by all the dry volumes of ethics and divinity that ever were written." --Thomas Jefferson to Robert Skipwith, 1771. ME 4:239, Papers 1:77

"History, in general, only informs us what bad government is." --Thomas Jefferson to John Norvell, 1807. ME 11:223

Moral Consequences

"The sentiments of men are known not only by what they receive, but what they reject also." --Thomas Jefferson: Autobiography, 1821. ME 1:28

"Mischief may be done negatively as well as positively." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1813. ME 13:397

"Most virtues when carried beyond certain bounds degenerate into vices." --Thomas Jefferson to Chastellux, 1785.

"It is reasonable that every one who asks justice should do justice." --Thomas Jefferson to George Hammond, 1792. ME 16:227

"The art of life is the art of avoiding pain; and he is the best pilot, who steers clearest of the rocks and shoals with which it is beset." --Thomas Jefferson to Maria Cosway, 1786. ME 5:439

National Moral Responsibility

"A nation, as a society, forms a moral person, and every member of it is personally responsible for his society." --Thomas Jefferson to George Hammond, 1792. ME 16:263

"Moral duties [are] as obligatory on nations as on individuals." --Thomas Jefferson: The Anas, 1808. ME 1:480

"The laws of humanity make it a duty for nations, as well as individuals, to succor those whom accident and distress have thrown upon them." --Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, 1807. ME 11:144

"The moral duties which exist between individual and individual in a state of nature accompany them into a state of society, and the aggregate of the duties of all the individuals composing the society constitutes the duties of that society towards any other; so that between society and society the same moral duties exist as did between the individuals composing them while in an unassociated state, and their Maker not having released them from those duties on their forming themselves into a nation. Compacts, then, between nation and nation are obligatory on them by the same moral law which obliges individuals to observe their compacts." --Thomas Jefferson: Opinion on French Treaties, 1793. ME 3:228

"We are firmly convinced, and we act on that conviction, that with nations as with individuals, our interests soundly calculated will ever be found inseparable from our moral duties." --Thomas Jefferson: 2nd Inaugural, 1805. ME 3:375

"Political interest [can] never be separated in the long run from moral right." --Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 1806. FE 8:477

"Honesty and interest are as intimately connected in the public as in the private code of morality." --Thomas Jefferson to James Maury, 1815. ME 14:313

"So invariably do the laws of nature create our duties and interests, that when they seem to be at variance, we ought to suspect some fallacy in our reasonings." --Thomas Jefferson to Jean Baptiste Say, 1804. ME 11:3

"Good faith... ought ever to be the rule of action in public as well as in private transactions." --Thomas Jefferson: 6th Annual Message, 1806. ME 3:416

"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

"If the morality of one man produces a just line of conduct in him acting individually, why should not the morality of one hundred men produce a just line of conduct in them acting together?" --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1789. ME 7:450, Papers 15:367

"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.

Morality in Government Administration

"When we come to the moral principles on which the government is to be administered, we come to what is proper for all conditions of society... Liberty, truth, probity, honor, are declared to be the four cardinal principles of society. I believe... that morality, compassion, generosity, are innate elements of the human constitution; that there exists a right independent of force." --Thomas Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, 1816. ME 14:490

"[I consider] ethics, as well as religion, as supplements to law in the government of man." --Thomas Jefferson to Augustus B. Woodward, 1824. ME 16:19

"Reading, reflection and time have convinced me that the interests of society require the observation of those moral precepts only in which all religions agree (for all forbid us to murder, steal, plunder, or bear false witness), and that we should not intermeddle with the particular dogmas in which all religions differ, and which are totally unconnected with morality." --Thomas Jefferson to James Fishback, 1809. ME 12:315

"Is it the less dishonest to do what is wrong, because not expressly prohibited by written law? Let us hope our moral principles are not yet in that stage of degeneracy." -- Thomas Jefferson to John Wayles Eppes, 1813. ME 13:360

"Our countrymen are in the precious habit of considering right as a barrier against all solicitation." --Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 1788. ME 7:228

"It is rare that the public sentiment decides immorally or unwisely, and the individual who differs from it ought to distrust and examine well his own opinion." --Thomas Jefferson to William Findley, 1801. FE 8:27

4. Moral Degeneracy

From experience, we know that human beings do not always act in accordance with right and justice. Injustice in government undermines the foundations of a society. A nation, therefore, must take measures to encourage its members along the paths of justice and morality.

"When [the moral sense] is wanting, we endeavor to supply the defect by education, by appeals to reason and calculation, by presenting to the being so unhappily conformed, other motives to do good and to eschew evil, such as the love, or the hatred, or the rejection of those among whom he lives, and whose society is necessary to his happiness and even existence; demonstrations by sound calculation that honesty promotes interest in the long run; the rewards and penalties established by the laws; and ultimately the prospects of a future state of retribution for the evil as well as the good done while here. These are the correctives which are supplied by education, and which exercise the functions of the moralist, the preacher, and legislator; and they lead into a course of correct action all those whose depravity is not too profound to be eradicated." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 1814. ME 14:142

"The compulsions of the law seem to have been provided for those only who require compulsions." --Thomas Jefferson to Albemarle County Commissioners, 1780. Papers 15:590

"That every man shall be made virtuous by any process whatever is, indeed, no more to be expected than that every tree shall be made to bear fruit, and every plant nourishment. The brier and bramble can never become the vine and olive; but their asperities may be softened by culture, and their properties improved to usefulness in the order and economy of the world." --Thomas Jefferson to Cornelius Camden Blatchly, 1822. ME 15:399

"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

Counteracting Selfishness

"The human character, we believe, requires in general constant and immediate control to prevent its being biased from right by the seductions of self-love." --Thomas Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, 1816. ME 14:489

"Self-love... is the sole antagonist of virtue, leading us constantly by our propensities to self-gratification in violation of our moral duties to others. Accordingly, it is against this enemy that are erected the batteries of moralists and religionists, as the only obstacle to the practice of morality. Take from man his selfish propensities, and he can have nothing to seduce him from the practice of virtue. Or subdue those propensities by education, instruction or restraint, and virtue remains without a competitor." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 1814. ME 14:140

"A regard for reputation and the judgment of the world may sometimes be felt where conscience is dormant." --Thomas Jefferson to Edward Livingston, 1825. ME 16:114

"I fear, from the experience of the last twenty-five years, that morals do not of necessity advance hand in hand with the sciences." --Thomas Jefferson to M. Correa de Serra, 1815. ME 14:331

A Nation's Abandonment of Morality

"In every government on earth is some trace of human weakness, some germ of corruption and degeneracy, which cunning will discover, and wickedness insensibly open, cultivate and improve." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XIV, 1782. ME 2:207

"What institution is insusceptible of abuse in wicked hands?" --Thomas Jefferson to L. H. Girardin, 1815. ME 14:270

"Mankind soon learn to make interested uses of every right and power which they possess, or may assume." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XIII, 1782. ME 2:164

"[Montesquieu wrote in *Spirit of the Laws*, III,c.3:] 'When virtue is banished, ambition invades the minds of those who are disposed to receive it, and avarice possesses the whole community.'" --Thomas Jefferson: copied into his Commonplace Book.

"Cannibals are not to be found in the wilds of America only, but are reveling on the blood of every living people." --Thomas Jefferson to Charles Clay, 1815. ME 14:234

"[Algernon Sidney wrote in *Discourses Concerning Government*, Sect. II, Par. 8:] 'Those who have no sense of right, reason or religion, have a natural propensity to make use of their strength to the destruction of such as are weaker than they.'" --Thomas Jefferson: copied into his Commonplace Book.

"The nation who [has] never admitted a chapter of morality into her political code,... [will] boldly [avow] that whatever power [she] can make hers is hers of right." --Thomas Jefferson to John Langdon, 1810. (*) ME 12:375

"It was not expected in this age, that nations so honorably distinguished by their advances in science and civilization, would suddenly cast away the esteem they had merited from the world and, revolting from the empire of morality, assume a character in history which all the tears of their posterity will never wash from its pages." --Thomas Jefferson: Reply to Philadelphia Democratic Republicans, 1808. ME 16:303

"I do not believe with the Rochefoucaults and the Montaignes that fourteen out of fifteen men are rogues. I believe a great abatement from that proportion may be made in favor of general honesty. But I have always found that rogues would be uppermost, and I do not know that the proportion is too strong for the higher orders and for those who, rising above the swinish multitude, always contrive to nestle themselves into the places of power and profit. These rogues set out with stealing the people's good opinion, and then steal from them the right of withdrawing it, by contriving laws and associations against the power of the people themselves." --Thomas Jefferson to Mann Page, 1795. ME 9:306

"Such is the moral construction of the world, that no national crime passes unpunished in the long run... Were your present oppressors to reflect on the same truth,

they would spare to their own countries the penalties on their present wrongs which will be inflicted on them in future times. The seeds of hatred and revenge which they [sow] with a large hand will not fail to produce their fruits in time. Like their brother robbers on the highway, they suppose the escape of the moment a final escape and deem infamy and future risk countervailed by present gain." --Thomas Jefferson to Francois de Marbois, 1817. ME 15:130

"Crooked schemes will end by overwhelming their authors and coadjutors in disgrace, and... he alone who walks strict and upright, and who, in matters of opinion, will be contented that others should be as free as himself, and acquiesce when his opinion is fairly overruled, will attain his object in the end." --Thomas Jefferson to Gideon Granger, 1804. ME 11:25

"If pride of character be of worth at any time, it is when it disarms the efforts of malice." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Nelson, 1781. ME 4:364, Papers 4:677

"There are various ways of keeping truth out of sight." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.VI, 1782. ME 2:95

"Truths necessary for our own character must not be suppressed out of tenderness to its calumniators." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1815. ME 14:291

"In truth, I do not recollect in all the animal kingdom a single species but man which is eternally and systematically engaged in the destruction of its own species. What is called civilization seems to have no other effect on him than to teach him to pursue the principle of *bellum omnium in omnia* [war of all against all] on a larger scale, and in place of the little contests of tribe against tribe, to engage all the quarters of the earth in the same work of destruction. When we add to this that as to the other species of animals, the lions and tigers are mere lambs compared with man as a destroyer, we must conclude that it is in man alone that nature has been able to find a sufficient barrier against the too great multiplication of other animals and of man himself, an equilibrating power against the fecundity of generation." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1797. ME 9:360

"When great evils happen, I am in the habit of looking out for what good may arise from them as consolations to us, and Providence has in fact so established the order of things, as that most evils are the means of producing some good." --Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, 1800. ME 10:173

Force and Corruption

"I have never been able to conceive how any rational being could propose happiness to himself from the exercise of power over others." --Thomas Jefferson to A. L. C. Destutt de Tracy, 1811. ME 13:18

"Force [is] the vital principle and immediate parent of despotism." --Thomas Jefferson: 1st Inaugural, 1801. ME 3:321

"I know that the passions of men will take their course, that they are not to be controlled but by despotism, and that this melancholy truth is the pretext for despotism." --Thomas Jefferson to George Logan, 1805. ME 11:71

"Either force or corruption has been the principle of every modern government." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1796.

"Force cannot change right." --Thomas Jefferson to John Cartwright, 1824. ME 16:43

"With the laborers of England generally, does not the moral coercion of want subject their will as despotically to that of their employer, as the physical constraint does the soldier, the seaman, or the slave?" --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, 1814. ME 14:183

"[When] the principle that force is right is become the principle of the nation itself, they would not permit an honest minister, were accident to bring such an one into power, to relax their system of lawless piracy." --Thomas Jefferson to Caesar Rodney, 1810. (*) ME 12:358

The Corruption of Wealth

"My observations do not enable me to say I think integrity the characteristic of wealth. In general, I believe the decisions of the people in a body will be more honest and more disinterested than those of wealthy men, and I can never doubt an attachment to his country in any man who has his family and peculium [i.e., private property] in it." --Thomas Jefferson to Edmund Pendleton, 1776. Papers 1:504

"I may further say that I have not observed men's honesty to increase with their riches." --Thomas Jefferson to Jeremiah Moor, 1800. FE 7:454

"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, and office." --Thomas Jefferson to Maria Cosway, 1786. ME 5:445

"There is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents... There is also an artificial aristocracy founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents; for with these it would belong to the first class... The artificial aristocracy is a mischievous ingredient in government, and provision should be made to prevent its ascendancy." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1813. ME 13:396

"A heavy aristocracy and corruption are two bridles in the mouths of [a people] which will prevent them from making any effectual efforts against their masters." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1785. (*) FE 4:38, Papers 8:40

"To detail the real evils of aristocracy, they must be seen in Europe." --Thomas Jefferson: Answers to de Meusnier Questions, 1786. ME 17:84

"Generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XIX, 1782. ME 2:229

"A due horror of the evils which flow from these distinctions [by birth or badge] could be excited in Europe only, where the dignity of man is lost in arbitrary distinctions, where the human species is classed into several stages of degradation, where the many are crushed under the weight of the few, and where the order established can present to the contemplation of a thinking being no other picture than that of God Almighty and His angels, trampling under foot the host of the damned." --Thomas Jefferson: Answers to de Meusnier Questions, 1786. ME 17:89

Defeating the Corruptions of Wealth

"Lay down true principles and adhere to them inflexibly. Do not be frightened into their surrender by the alarms of the timid, or the croakings of wealth against the ascendancy of the people." --Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 1816. ME 15:35

"[Is] it best to put the pseudo-aristoi [of wealth and birth] into a separate chamber of legislation, where they may be hindered from doing mischief by their coordinate branches, and where, also, they may be a protection to wealth against the agrarian and plundering enterprises of the majority of the people? I think that to give them power in order to prevent them from doing mischief is arming them for it, and increasing instead of remedying the evil. For if the coordinate branches can arrest their action, so may they that of the coordinates. Mischief may be done negatively as well as positively... Nor do I believe them necessary to protect the wealthy; because enough of these will find their way into every branch of the legislation to protect themselves." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1813. ME 13:397

Governments Against the People

"I am convinced that those societies (as the Indians) which live without government, enjoy in their general mass an infinitely greater degree of happiness than those who live under the European governments. Among the former, public opinion is in the place of law, and restrains morals as powerfully as laws ever did anywhere. Among the latter, under pretense of governing, they have divided their nations into two classes, wolves and sheep. I do not exaggerate... Experience declares that man is the only animal which devours his own kind; for I can apply no milder term to the governments of Europe, and to the general prey of the rich on the poor." --Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington, 1787. ME 6:58

"The sheep are happier of themselves than under the care of the wolves." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XI, 1782. ME 2:129

"[The European nations] are nations of eternal war. All their energies are expended in the destruction of the labor, property and lives of their people. On our part, never had a people so favorable a chance of trying the opposite system, of peace and fraternity with mankind, and the direction of all our means and faculties to the purpose of improvement instead of destruction." --Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 1823. ME 15:436

"How soon the labor of men would make a paradise of the whole earth, were it not for misgovernment, and a diversion of all his energies from their proper object -- the happiness of man -- to the selfish interest of kings, nobles, and priests." --Thomas Jefferson to Ellen W. Coolidge, 1825. ME 18:341

39. Educating the People

An enlightened citizenry is indispensable for the proper functioning of a republic. Self-government is not possible unless the citizens are educated sufficiently to enable them to exercise oversight. It is therefore imperative that the nation see to it that a suitable education be provided for all its citizens. It should be noted, that when Jefferson speaks of "science," he is often referring to knowledge or learning in general.

"I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power." -- Thomas Jefferson to William C. Jarvis, 1820. ME 15:278

"Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves, therefore, are its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe, their minds must be improved to a certain degree." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XIV, 1782. ME 2:207

"The most effectual means of preventing [the perversion of power into tyranny are] to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large, and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts which history exhibits, that possessed thereby of the experience of other ages and countries, they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes." --Thomas Jefferson: Diffusion of Knowledge Bill, 1779. FE 2:221, Papers 2:526

"The information of the people at large can alone make them the safe as they are the sole depository of our political and religious freedom." --Thomas Jefferson to William Duane, 1810. ME 12:417

"The diffusion of information and the arraignment of all abuses at the bar of public reason, I deem [one of] the essential principles of our government, and consequently [one of] those which ought to shape its administration." --Thomas Jefferson: 1st Inaugural Address, 1801. ME 3:322

"Though [the people] may acquiesce, they cannot approve what they do not understand." --Thomas Jefferson: Opinion on Apportionment Bill, 1792. ME 3:211

No Freedom Without Education

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be." --Thomas Jefferson to Charles Yancey, 1816. ME 14:384

"Convinced that the people are the only safe depositories of their own liberty, and that they are not safe unless enlightened to a certain degree, I have looked on our present state of liberty as a short-lived possession unless the mass of the people could be informed to a certain degree." --Thomas Jefferson to Littleton Waller Tazewell, 1805.

"No nation is permitted to live in ignorance with impunity." --Thomas Jefferson: Virginia Board of Visitors Minutes, 1821. ME 19:408

"Freedom [is] the first-born daughter of science." --Thomas Jefferson to Francois D'Ivernois, 1795. ME 9:297

"Light and liberty go together." --Thomas Jefferson to Tench Coxe, 1795.

"Above all things I hope the education of the common people will be attended to, convinced that on their good sense we may rely with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1787. Madison Version FE 4:480

Education and Republican Government

"[I have] a conviction that science is important to the preservation of our republican government, and that it is also essential to its protection against foreign power." --Thomas Jefferson to ----, 1821. ME 15:340

"There are two subjects, indeed, which I shall claim a right to further as long as I breathe: the public education, and the sub-division of counties into wards. I consider the continuance of republican government as absolutely hanging on these two hooks." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 1814. ME 14:84

"The value of science to a republican people, the security it gives to liberty by enlightening the minds of its citizens, the protection it affords against foreign power, the virtue it inculcates, the just emulation of the distinction it confers on nations foremost in it; in short, its identification with power, morals, order and happiness (which merits to it premiums of encouragement rather than repressive taxes), are considerations [that should] always [be] present and [bear] with their just weight." --Thomas Jefferson: On the Book Duty, 1821.

"Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government;... whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them to rights." --Thomas Jefferson to Richard Price, 1789. ME 7:253

"[In a republic, according to Montesquieu in *Spirit of the Laws*, IV,ch.5,] 'virtue may be defined as the love of the laws and of our country. As such love requires a constant preference of public to private interest, it is the source of all private virtue; for they are nothing more than this very preference itself... Now a government is like everything else: to preserve it we must love it... Everything, therefore, depends on establishing this love in a republic; and to inspire it ought to be the principal business of education; but the surest way of instilling it into children is for parents to set them an example.'" --Thomas Jefferson: copied into his Commonplace Book.

"In the constitution of Spain as proposed by the late Cortes, there was a principle entirely new to me:... that no person born after that day should ever acquire the rights of citizenship until he could read and write. It is impossible sufficiently to estimate the wisdom of this provision. Of all those which have been thought of for securing fidelity in the administration of the government, constant reliance to the principles of the constitution, and progressive amendments with the progressive advances of the human mind or changes in human affairs, it is the most effectual." --Thomas Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, 1816. ME 14:491

"[The] provision [in the new constitution of Spain] which, after a certain epoch, disfranchises every citizen who cannot read and write... is the fruitful germ of the improvement of everything good and the correction of everything imperfect in the present constitution. This will give you an enlightened people and an energetic public opinion which will control and enchain the aristocratic spirit of the government." --Thomas Jefferson to Chevalier de Ouis, 1814. ME 14:130

Government's Responsibility to Educate

"And say, finally, whether peace is best preserved by giving energy to the government or information to the people. This last is the most certain and the most legitimate engine of government. Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. Enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve them. And it requires no very high degree of education to convince them of this. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1787. (Forrest version) ME 6:392

"It is an axiom in my mind that our liberty can never be safe but in the hands of the people themselves, and that, too, of the people with a certain degree of instruction. This is the business of the state to effect, and on a general plan." --Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 1786. ME 19:24

Educate Every Citizen

"A system of general instruction, which shall reach every description of our citizens from the richest to the poorest, as it was the earliest, so will it be the latest of all the public concerns in which I shall permit myself to take an interest." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 1818. FE 10:102

"It is highly interesting to our country, and it is the duty of its functionaries, to provide that every citizen in it should receive an education proportioned to the condition and pursuits of his life." --Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, 1814. ME 19:213

"The mass of our citizens may be divided into two classes -- the laboring and the learned. The laboring will need the first grade of education to qualify them for their pursuits and duties; the learned will need it as a foundation for further acquirements." --Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, 1814. ME 19:213

"By... [selecting] the youths of genius from among the classes of the poor, we hope to avail the State of those talents which nature has sown as liberally among the poor as the rich, but which perish without use if not sought for and cultivated." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XIV, 1782. ME 2:206

"Instead of an aristocracy of wealth, of more harm and danger than benefit to society, to make an opening for the aristocracy of virtue and talent, which nature has wisely provided for the direction of the interests of society and scattered with equal hand through all its conditions, was deemed essential to a well-ordered republic." --Thomas Jefferson: Autobiography, 1821. MW 1:54

"I do most anxiously wish to see the highest degrees of education given to the higher degrees of genius and to all degrees of it, so much as may enable them to read and understand what is going on in the world and to keep their part of it going on right; for

nothing can keep it right but their own vigilant and distrustful superintendence." -- Thomas Jefferson to Mann Page, 1795. ME 9:30

Importance for Personal Development

"If the children are untaught, their ignorance and vices will in future life cost us much dearer in their consequences than it would have done in their correction by a good education." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 1818. FE 10:99

"If the Wise be the happy man... he must be virtuous too; for, without virtue, happiness cannot be. This then is the true scope of all academical emulation." --Thomas Jefferson to Amos J. Cook, 1816. ME 14:405

"The boys of the rising generation are to be the men of the next, and the sole guardians of the principles we deliver over to them." --Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Knox, 1810. ME 12:360

"The reflections that the boys of this age are to be the men of the next; that they should be prepared to receive the holy charge which we are cherishing to deliver over to them; that in establishing an institution of wisdom for them, we secure it to all our future generations; that in fulfilling this duty, we bring home to our own bosoms the sweet consolation of seeing our sons rising under a luminous tuition, to destinies of high promise; these are considerations which will occur to all." --Thomas Jefferson to James Breckinridge, 1821. ME 15:314

Training Republican Statesmen

"Nor must we omit to mention among the benefits of education the incalculable advantage of training up able counselors to administer the affairs of our country in all its departments, legislative, executive and judiciary, and to bear their proper share in the councils of our national government: nothing more than education advancing the prosperity, the power, and the happiness of a nation." --Thomas Jefferson: Report for University of Virginia, 1818.

"Laws will be wisely formed and honestly administered in proportion as those who form and administer them are wise and honest; whence it becomes expedient for promoting the public happiness that those persons whom nature has endowed with genius and virtue should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens; and that they should be called to that charge without regard to wealth, birth or other accidental condition or circumstance. But the indigence of the greater number disabling them from so educating at their own expense those of their children whom nature has fitly formed and disposed to become useful instruments for the public, it is better that such should be sought for and educated at the common expense of all, than that the happiness of all should be confined to the weak or wicked." --Thomas Jefferson: Diffusion of Knowledge Bill, 1779. FE 2:221, Papers 2:527

"We are now trusting to those who are against us in position and principle, to fashion to their own form the minds and affections of our youth... This canker is eating on the vitals of our existence, and if not arrested at once, will be beyond remedy." --Thomas Jefferson to James Breckinridge, 1821. ME 15:315

"The reward of esteem, respect and gratitude [is] due to those who devote their time and efforts to render the youths of every successive age fit governors for the next." -- Thomas Jefferson to Hugh L. White, et al., 1810. ME 12:388

Hope for the Improvement of Mankind

"I look to the diffusion of light and education as the resource most to be relied on for ameliorating the conditions, promoting the virtue and advancing the happiness of man." --Thomas Jefferson to Cornelius Camden Blatchly, 1822. ME 15:399

"If the condition of man is to be progressively ameliorated, as we fondly hope and believe, education is to be the chief instrument in effecting it." --Thomas Jefferson to M. A. Jullien, 1818. ME 15:172

"What but education has advanced us beyond the condition of our indigenous neighbors? And what chains them to their present state of barbarism and wretchedness but a bigoted veneration for the supposed superlative wisdom of their fathers and the preposterous idea that they are to look backward for better things and not forward, longing, as it should seem, to return to the days of eating acorns and roots rather than indulge in the degeneracies of civilization?" --Thomas Jefferson: Report for University of Virginia, 1818.

"I feel... an ardent desire to see knowledge so disseminated through the mass of mankind that it may, at length, reach even the extremes of society: beggars and kings." -- Thomas Jefferson: Reply to American Philosophical Society, 1808.

40. Publicly Supported Education

Jefferson developed an elaborate plan for making education available to every citizen, and for providing a complete education through university for talented youths who were unable to afford it. He considered his most important accomplishment, after Author of the Declaration of Independence and the Statute for Religious Freedom, to have been the Father of the University of Virginia.

"I have indeed two great measures at heart, without which no republic can maintain itself in strength: 1. That of general education, to enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom. 2. To divide every county into hundreds, of such size that all the children of each will be within reach of a central school in it." -- Thomas Jefferson to John Tyler, 1810. ME 12:393

"Of all the views of this law [for public education], none is more important, none more legitimate, than that of rendering the people the safe as they are the ultimate guardians of their own liberty." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XIV, 1782. ME 2:206

"Education not being a branch of municipal government, but, like the other arts and sciences, an accident [i.e., attribute] only, I did not place it with election as a fundamental member in the structure of government." --Thomas Jefferson to John Taylor, 1816. ME 15:45

"Education is here placed among the articles of public care, not that it would be proposed to take its ordinary branches out of the hands of private enterprise, which manages so much better all the concerns to which it is equal; but a public institution can alone supply those sciences which, though rarely called for, are yet necessary to complete the circle, all the parts of which contribute to the improvement of the country, and some of them to its preservation." --Thomas Jefferson: 6th Annual Message, 1806. ME 3:423

"The present consideration of a national establishment for education, particularly, is rendered proper by this circumstance also, that if Congress, approving the proposition, shall yet think it more eligible to found it on a donation of lands, they have it now in their power to endow it with those which will be among the earliest to produce the necessary income. The foundation would have the advantage of being independent on war, which may suspend other improvements by requiring for its own purposes the resources destined for them." --Thomas Jefferson: 6th Annual Message, 1806. ME 3:424

A Bill for Educating the Masses

"The object [of my education bill was] to bring into action that mass of talents which lies buried in poverty in every country for want of the means of development, and thus give activity to a mass of mind which in proportion to our population shall be the double or treble of what it is in most countries." --Thomas Jefferson to M. Correa de Serra, 1817. ME 15:156

"The general objects [of a bill to diffuse knowledge more generally through the mass of the people] are to provide an education adapted to the years, to the capacity, and the

condition of every one, and directed to their freedom and happiness." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XIV, 1782. ME 2:204

"A bill for the more general diffusion of learning... proposed to divide every county into wards of five or six miles square;... to establish in each ward a free school for reading, writing and common arithmetic; to provide for the annual selection of the best subjects from these schools, who might receive at the public expense a higher degree of education at a district school; and from these district schools to select a certain number of the most promising subjects, to be completed at an University where all the useful sciences should be taught. Worth and genius would thus have been sought out from every condition of life, and completely prepared by education for defeating the competition of wealth and birth for public trusts." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1813. ME 13:399

"This [bill] on education would [raise] the mass of the people to the high ground of moral respectability necessary to their own safety and to orderly government, and would [complete] the great object of qualifying them to secure the veritable aristoi for the trusts of government, to the exclusion of the pseudalists... I have great hope that some patriotic spirit will... call it up and make it the keystone of the arch of our government." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1813. ME 13:400

"My partiality for that division [of every county into wards] is not founded in views of education solely, but infinitely more as the means of a better administration of our government, and the eternal preservation of its republican principles. The example of this most admirable of all human contrivances in government, is to be seen in our Eastern States; and its powerful effect in the order and economy of their internal affairs, and the momentum it gives them as a nation, is the single circumstance which distinguishes them so remarkably from every other national association." --Thomas Jefferson to Wilson C. Nicholas, 1816. ME 14:454

"The less wealthy people,... by the bill for a general education, would be qualified to understand their rights, to maintain them, and to exercise with intelligence their parts in self-government; and all this would be effected without the violation of a single natural right of any one individual citizen." --Thomas Jefferson: Autobiography, 1821. ME 1:73

Three Main Divisions

"I... [proposed] three distinct grades of education, reaching all classes. 1. Elementary schools for all children generally, rich and poor. 2. Colleges for a middle degree of instruction, calculated for the common purposes of life and such as should be desirable for all who were in easy circumstances. And 3d. an ultimate grade for teaching the sciences generally and in their highest degree... The expenses of [the elementary] schools should be borne by the inhabitants of the county, every one in proportion to his general tax-rate. This would throw on wealth the education of the poor." --Thomas Jefferson: Autobiography, 1821. ME 1:70

"The public education... we divide into three grades: 1. Primary schools, in which are taught reading, writing, and common arithmetic, to every infant of the State, male and female. 2. Intermediate schools, in which an education is given proper for artificers and the middle vocations of life; in grammar, for example, general history, logarithms, arithmetic, plane trigonometry, mensuration, the use of the globes, navigation, the

mechanical principles, the elements of natural philosophy, and, as a preparation for the University, the Greek and Latin languages. 3. An University, in which these and all other useful sciences shall be taught in their highest degree; the expenses of these institutions are defrayed partly by the public, and partly by the individuals profiting of them." -- Thomas Jefferson to A. Coray, 1823. ME 15:487

"My bill proposes, 1. Elementary schools in every county, which shall place every householder within three miles of a school. 2. District colleges, which shall place every father within a day's ride of a college where he may dispose of his son. 3. An university in a healthy and central situation... To all of which is added a selection from the elementary schools of subjects of the most promising genius, whose parents are too poor to give them further education, to be carried at the public expense through the colleges and university." --Thomas Jefferson to M. Correa de Serra, 1817. ME 15:155

Elementary Schools

"At [the elementary] school shall be received and instructed gratis, every infant of competent age who has not already had three years' schooling. And it is declared and enacted, that no person unborn or under the age of twelve years at the passing of this act, and who is *compos mentis*, shall, after the age of fifteen years, be a citizen of this commonwealth until he or she can read readily in some tongue, native or acquired." -- Thomas Jefferson: Elementary School Act, 1817. ME 17:424

"The expense of the elementary schools for every county is proposed to be levied on the wealth of the county, and all children rich and poor to be educated at these three years gratis." --Thomas Jefferson to M. Correa de Serra, 1817. ME 15:156

"If twelve or fifteen hundred schools are to be placed under one general administration, an attention so divided will amount to a dereliction of them to themselves. It is surely better, then, to place each school at once under the care of those most interested in its conduct." --Thomas Jefferson: Plan for Elementary Schools, 1817. ME 17:417

A University

"What object of our lives can we propose so important [as establishing a State university]? What interest of our own which ought not to be postponed to this? Health, time, labor -- on what in the single life which nature has given us, can these be better bestowed than on this immortal boon to our country? The exertions and the mortifications are temporary; the benefit eternal." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 1821. ME 15:312

"We fondly hope that the instruction which may flow from this institution, kindly cherished, by advancing the minds of our youth with the growing science of the times, and elevating the views of our citizens generally to the practice of the social duties and the functions of self-government, may ensure to our country the reputation, the safety and prosperity, and all the other blessings which experience proves to result from the cultivation and improvement of the general mind." --Thomas Jefferson: Virginia Board of Visitors Minutes, 1821. ME 19:407

Benefits of Public Education

"[We proposed a plan] to avail the commonwealth of those talents and virtues which nature has sown as liberally among the poor as rich, and which are lost to their country by the want of means for their cultivation." --Thomas Jefferson: Elementary School Act, 1817. ME 17:440

"The annual tribute we are paying to other countries for the education of our youth, the retention of that sum at home, and receipt of a greater from abroad which might flow to an University on an approved scale, would make it a gainful employment of the money advanced, were even dollars and cents to mingle themselves with the consideration of an higher order urging the accomplishment of this institution." --Thomas Jefferson: Virginia Board of Visitors Minutes, 1819. ME 19:386

"Our institution will proceed on the principle of doing all the good it can without consulting its own pride or ambition; of letting everyone come and listen to whatever he thinks may improve the condition of his mind." --Thomas Jefferson to George Ticknor, 1823. ME 15:455

"I think by far the most important bill in our whole code, is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom and happiness... The tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance." --Thomas Jefferson to George Wythe, 1786. ME 5:396

"[Surely no] tax can be called that which we give to our children in the most valuable of all forms, that of instruction... An addition to our contributions almost insensible... in fact, will not be felt as a burden, because applied immediately and visibly to the good of our children." --Thomas Jefferson: Note to Elementary School Act, 1817. ME 17:422

Related Issues

"The truth is that the want of common education with us is not from our poverty, but from the want of an orderly system. More money is now paid for the education of a part than would be paid for that of the whole if systematically arranged." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 1820. ME 15:291

"People generally have more feeling for canals and roads than education. However, I hope we can advance them with equal pace." --Thomas Jefferson to Joel Barlow, 1807. ME 11:401

"I now think it would be better for every ward to choose its own resident visitor, whose business it would be to keep a teacher in the ward, to superintend the school, and to call meetings of the ward for all purposes relating to it; their accounts to be settled, and wards laid off by the courts. I think ward elections better for many reasons, one of which is sufficient, that it will keep elementary education out of the hands of fanaticizing preachers, who, in county elections, would be universally chosen, and the predominant sect of the county would possess itself of all its schools." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Cabell, 1820. ME 15:293

"The transfer of the power to give commencement to the Ward or Elementary Schools from the court and aldermen to the visitors, was proposed because the experience of twenty years has proved that no court will ever begin it. The reason is obvious. The members of the courts are the wealthy members of the counties; and as the expenses of the schools are to be defrayed by a contribution proportioned to the aggregate of other taxes which every one pays, they consider it as a plan to educate the poor at the expense of the rich... The modification of the law, by authorizing the alderman to require the expense of tutorage from such parents as are able, would render trifling, if not wholly prevent, any call on the country for pecuniary aid." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 1816. ME 14:413

"I never have proposed a sacrifice of the primary to the ultimate grade of instruction. Let us keep our eye steadily on the whole system. If we cannot do everything at once, let us do one at a time." --Thomas Jefferson to James Breckinridge, 1821. ME 15:316

"I have often thought that nothing would do more extensive good at small expense than the establishment of a small circulating library in every county, to consist of a few well-chosen books, to be lent to the people of the country, under such regulations as would secure their safe return in due time." --Thomas Jefferson to John Wyche, 1809. ME 12:282

"A plan of female education has never been a subject of systematic contemplation with me. It has occupied my attention so far only as the education of my own daughters occasionally required. Considering that they would be placed in a country situation, where little aid could be obtained from abroad, I thought it essential to give them a solid education which might enable them, when become mothers, to educate their own daughters, and even to direct the course for sons, should their fathers be lost, or incapable, or inattentive. My surviving daughter accordingly, the mother of many daughters as well as sons, has made their education the object of her life." --Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Burwell, 1818. ME 15:165

Compulsory Schooling

"Is it a right or a duty in society to take care of their infant members in opposition to the will of the parent? How far does this right and duty extend? --to guard the life of the infant, his property, his instruction, his morals? The Roman father was supreme in all these: we draw a line, but where? --public sentiment does not seem to have traced it precisely... It is better to tolerate the rare instance of a parent refusing to let his child be educated, than to shock the common feelings and ideas by the forcible asportation and education of the infant against the will of the father... What is proposed... is to remove the objection of expense, by offering education gratis, and to strengthen parental excitement by the disfranchisement of his child while uneducated. Society has certainly a right to disavow him whom they offer, and are permitted to qualify for the duties of a citizen. If we do not force instruction, let us at least strengthen the motives to receive it when offered." --Thomas Jefferson: Note to Elementary School Act, 1817. ME 17:423

Education Courses

"In the [elementary schools] will be taught reading, writing, common arithmetic, and general notions of geography. In the [district colleges], ancient and modern languages,

geography fully, a higher degree of numerical arithmetic, mensuration, and the elementary principles of navigation. In the [university], all the useful sciences in their highest degree." --Thomas Jefferson to M. Correa de Serra, 1817. ME 15:155

"I am not fully informed of the practices at Harvard, but there is one from which we shall certainly vary, although it has been copied, I believe, by nearly every college and academy in the United States. That is, the holding the students all to one prescribed course of reading, and disallowing exclusive application to those branches only which are to qualify them for the particular vocations to which they are destined. We shall, on the contrary, allow them uncontrolled choice in the lectures they shall choose to attend, and require elementary qualification only, and sufficient age." --Thomas Jefferson to George Ticknor, 1823. ME 15:455

"This institution [i.e., the university] will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it." --Thomas Jefferson to William Roscoe, 1820. ME 15:303

"We do not expect our schools to turn out their alumni already enthroned on the pinnacles of their respective sciences; but only so far advanced in each as to be able to pursue them by themselves, and to become Newtons and Laplaces by energies and perseverances to be continued through life." --Thomas Jefferson to John P. Emmet, 1826. ME 16:171

"In most public seminaries textbooks are prescribed to each of the several schools, as the *norma docendi* in that school; and this is generally done by authority of the trustees. I should not propose this generally in our University, because I believe none of us are so much at the heights of science in the several branches as to undertake this, and therefore that it will be better left to the professors until occasion of interference shall be given. But there is one branch in which we are the best judges, in which heresies may be taught of so interesting a character to our own State and to the United States, as to make it a duty in us to lay down the principles which are to be taught. It is that of government... [A new professor may be] one of that school of quondam federalism, now consolidation. It is our duty to guard against such principles being disseminated among our youth and the diffusion of that poison, by a previous prescription of the texts to be followed in their discourses." --Thomas Jefferson to ----, 1825. ME 16:103

University Professors

"In the selection of our Law Professor, we must be rigorously attentive to his political principles... It is in our seminary that that vestal flame [of republicanism] is to be kept alive." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1826. ME 16:156

"A man is not qualified for a professor, knowing nothing but merely his own profession. He should be otherwise well-educated as to the sciences generally; able to converse understandingly with the scientific men with whom he is associated, and to assist in the councils of the faculty on any subject of science on which they may have occasion to deliberate. Without this, he will incur their contempt, and bring disreputation on the institution." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 1824. ME 16:6

"Besides the first degree of eminence in science, a professor with us must be of sober and correct morals and habits, having the talent of communicating his knowledge with facility, and of an accommodating and peaceable temper. The latter is all important for the harmony of the institution." --Thomas Jefferson to Dugald Stewart, 1824. ME 18:333

Objectives in Elementary Schools

"The objects of... primary education [which] determine its character and limits [are]: To give to every citizen the information he needs for the transaction of his own business; to enable him to calculate for himself, and to express and preserve his ideas, his contracts and accounts in writing; to improve, by reading, his morals and faculties; to understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either; to know his rights; to exercise with order and justice those he retains, to choose with discretion the fiduciary of those he delegates; and to notice their conduct with diligence, with candor and judgment; and in general, to observe with intelligence and faithfulness all the social relations under which he shall be placed." -- Thomas Jefferson: Report for University of Virginia, 1818.

"The reading in the first stage, where [the people] will receive their whole education, is proposed.. to be chiefly historical. History by apprising them of the past will enable them to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XIV, 1782. ME 2:106

"Such a degree of learning [should be] given to every member of the society as will enable him to read, to judge and to vote understandingly on what is passing." --Thomas Jefferson to Littleton Waller Tazewell, 1805.

"A great obstacle to good education is the inordinate passion prevalent for novels, and the time lost in that reading which should be instructively employed. When this poison infects the mind, it destroys its tone and revolts it against wholesome reading. Reason and fact, plain and unadorned, are rejected. Nothing can engage attention unless dressed in all the figments of fancy, and nothing so bedecked comes amiss. The result is a bloated imagination, sickly judgment, and disgust towards all the real businesses of life. This mass of trash, however, is not without some distinction; some few modeling their narratives, although fictitious, on the incidents of real life, have been able to make them interesting and useful vehicles of a sound morality... For a like reason, too, much poetry should not be indulged. Some is useful for forming style and taste. Pope, Dryden, Thompson, Shakespeare, and of the French, Moliere, Racine, the Corneilles, may be read with pleasure and improvement." --Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Burwell, 1818. ME 15:166

"Promote in every order of men the degree of instruction proportioned to their condition and to their views in life." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Cabell, 1820. ME 15:292

"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. When sobered by experience, I hope our successors will turn their

attention to the advantages of education. I mean of education on the broad scale." -- Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1814. ME 14:150

Specific Subjects

"I hope the necessity will, at length, be seen of establishing institutions here, as in Europe, where every branch of science, useful at this day, may be taught in its highest degree." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1814. ME 14:151

"What are the objects of an useful American [college] education? Classical knowledge, modern languages and chiefly French, Spanish, and Italian; Mathematics, Natural philosophy, Natural history, Civil history, and Ethics. In Natural philosophy, I mean to include Chemistry and Agriculture, and in Natural history, to include Botany, as well as the other branches of those departments." --Thomas Jefferson to J. Bannister, Jr., 1785. ME 5:186, Papers 8:636

"It would be time lost... to attend professors of ethics, metaphysics, logic, etc. The first of these may be as well acquired in the closet as from living lecturers; and supposing the two last to mean the science of *mind*, the simple reading of Locke, Tracy, and Stewart will give him as much in that branch as is *real* science." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, 1820. ME 15:265

"Agriculture... is a science of the very first order. It counts among its handmaids the most respectable sciences, such as Chemistry, Natural Philosophy, Mechanics, Mathematics generally, Natural History, Botany. In every College and University, a professorship of agriculture, and the class of its students, might be honored as the first." --Thomas Jefferson to David Williams, 1803. ME 10:429

"In my view, no knowledge can be more satisfactory to a man than that of his own frame, its parts, their functions and actions. And Botany I rank with the most valuable sciences, whether we consider its subjects as furnishing the principal subsistence of life to man and beast, delicious varieties for our tables, refreshments from our orchards, the adornments of our flower-borders, shade and perfume of our groves, materials for our buildings, or medicaments for our bodies. To the gentleman it is certainly more interesting than Mineralogy (which I by no means, however, undervalue), and is more at hand for his amusement; and to a country family it constitutes a great portion of their social entertainment. No country gentleman should be without what amuses every step he takes into his fields." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, 1814. ME 14:201

Languages

"I do not think [languages] very essential to the obtaining eminent degrees of science; but I think them very useful towards it. I suppose there is a portion of life during which our faculties are ripe enough for this, and for nothing more useful." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestly, 1800. ME 10:146

"We generally learn languages for the benefit of reading the books written in them." --Thomas Jefferson to ----, 1825. ME 16:107

"I have never thought a boy should undertake abstruse or difficult sciences, such as Mathematics in general, till fifteen years of age at soonest. Before that time they are best

employed in learning the languages, which is merely a matter of memory." --Thomas Jefferson to Ralph Izard, 1788. ME 7:71

"In general, I am of opinion, that till the age of about sixteen, we are best employed on languages; Latin, Greek; French, and Spanish, or such of them as we can... Of the languages I have mentioned, I think Greek the least useful." --Thomas Jefferson to J. W. Eppes, 1787. ME 6:190

"The French language, become that of the general intercourse of nations, and from their extraordinary advances now the depository of all science, is an indispensable part of education for both sexes." --Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Burwell, 1818. ME 15:167

"The Spanish language... and the English covering nearly the whole face of America, they should be well-known to every inhabitant who means to look beyond the limits of his farm." --Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, 1788. ME 7:44

Classical Education

"For classical learning I have ever been a zealous advocate."--Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, 1814. ME 14:200

"When we advert that the ancient classical languages are considered as the foundation preparatory for all the sciences; that we have always had schools scattered over the country for teaching these languages, which often were the ultimate term of education; that these languages are entered on at the age of nine or ten years, at which age parents would be unwilling to send their children from every part of the State to a central and distant university, and when we observe that... there are to be a plurality of them, we may well conclude that the Greek and Latin are the objects of these colleges... and that they are intended as the portico of entry to the university." --Thomas Jefferson to Wilson C. Nicholas, 1816. ME 14:452

"To whom are these [classical languages] useful? Certainly not to all men. There are conditions of life to which they must be forever estranged, and there are epochs of life, too, after which the endeavor to attain them would be a great misemployment of time. Their acquisition should be the occupation of our early years only, when the memory is susceptible of deep and lasting impressions, and reason and judgment not yet strong enough for abstract speculations." --Thomas Jefferson to John Brazier, 1819. ME 15:209

"[The Latin and Greek] languages... constitute the basis of good education, and are indispensable to fill up the character of a 'well-educated man.'" --Thomas Jefferson: Virginia Board of Visitors Minutes, 1824. ME 19:444

"[As to] the extent to which classical learning should be carried in our country... The utilities we derive from the remains of the Greek and Latin languages are, first, as models of pure taste in writing. To these we are certainly indebted for the rational and chaste style of modern composition which so much distinguishes the nations to whom these languages are familiar... Second. Among the values of classical learning, I estimate the luxury of reading the Greek and Roman authors in all the beauties of their originals. And why should not this innocent and elegant luxury take its preeminent stand ahead of all those addressed merely to the sense?... Third. A third value is in the stores of real science deposited and transmitted us in these languages, to wit: in history, ethics, arithmetic,

geometry, astronomy, natural history, etc." --Thomas Jefferson to John Brazier, 1819. ME 15:208

"[Greece was] the first of civilized nations [which] presented example of what man should be." --Thomas Jefferson to A. Coray, 1823. ME 15:481

"I think the Greeks and Romans have left us the present models which exist of fine composition, whether we examine them as works of reason, or of style and fancy; and to them we probably owe these characteristics of modern composition. I know of no composition of any other ancient people which merits the least regard as a model for its matter or style. To all this I add, that to read the Latin and Greek authors in their original is a sublime luxury; and I deem luxury in science to be at least as justifiable as in architecture, painting, gardening, or the other arts." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestly, 1800. ME 10:146

"It may be truly said that the classical languages are a solid basis for most, and an ornament to all the sciences." --Thomas Jefferson to John Brazier, 1819. ME 15:211

"I make it a rule never to read translations where I can read the original." --Thomas Jefferson to Edmund Randolph, 1794. ME 9:280

"Indeed, no translation can be [an adequate representation of the excellences of the original]." --Thomas Jefferson to A. L. C. Destutt de Tracy, 1811. ME 13:14

"I have not, however, carried so far as [some] do my ideas of the importance of a hypercritical knowledge of the Latin and Greek languages. I have believed it sufficient to possess a substantial understanding of their authors." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, 1814. ME 14:200

Oratory

"In a country and government like ours, eloquence is a powerful instrument, well worthy of the special pursuit of our youth." --Thomas Jefferson to George W. Summers and John B. Garland, 1822. ME 15:353

"Amplification is the vice of modern oratory. It is an insult to an assembly of reasonable men, disgusting and revolting instead of persuading. Speeches measured by the hour, die with the hour." --Thomas Jefferson to David Harding, 1824. ME 16:30

Religion

"The want of instruction in the various creeds of religious faith existing among our citizens presents... a chasm in a general institution of the useful sciences. But it was thought that this want, and the entrustment to each society of instruction in its own doctrine, were evils of less danger than a permission to the public authorities to dictate modes or principles of religious instruction, or than opportunities furnished them by giving countenance or ascendancy to any one sect over another." --Thomas Jefferson: Virginia Board of Visitors Minutes, 1822. ME 19:414

"After stating the constitutional reasons against a public establishment of any religious instruction, we suggest the expediency of encouraging the different religious sects to establish, each for itself, a professorship of their own tenets on the confines of the university, so near as that their students may attend the lectures there and have the free

use of our library and every other accommodation we can give them; preserving, however, their independence of us and of each other. This fills the chasm objected to ours, as a defect in an institution professing to give instruction in *all* useful sciences... And by bringing the sects together, and mixing them with the mass of other students, we shall soften their asperities, liberalize and neutralize their prejudices, and make the general religion a religion of peace, reason, and morality." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, 1822. ME 15:405

Other Subjects

"The ornaments too, and the amusements of life, are entitled to their portion of attention. These, for a female, are dancing, drawing, and music. The first is healthy exercise, elegant and very attractive for young people... Drawing is thought less of in this country than in Europe. It is an innocent and engaging amusement, often useful, and a qualification not to be neglected in one who is to become a mother and an instructor. Music is invaluable where a person has an ear. Where they have not, it should not be attempted. It furnishes a delightful recreation for the hours of respite from the cares of the day, and lasts us through life. The taste of this country, too, calls for this accomplishment more strongly than for either of the others." --Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Burwell, 1818. ME 15:167

"I need say nothing of household economy, in which the mothers of our country are generally skilled, and generally careful to instruct their daughters. We all know its value, and that diligence and dexterity in all its processes are inestimable treasures. The order and economy of a house are as honorable to the mistress as those of the farm to the master, and if either be neglected, ruin follows, and children destitute of the means of living." --Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Burwell, 1818. ME 15:168

"I should not like to have [a school of deaf and dumb] made a member of our College. The objects of the two institutions are fundamentally distinct. The one is science, the other mere charity. It would be gratuitously taking a boat in tow which may impede, but cannot aid the motion of the principal institution." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 1816. ME 14:414

The Educational Setting

"Man is an imitative animal. This quality is the germ of all education in him. From his cradle to his grave he is learning to do what he sees others do." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XVIII, 1782. ME 2:226

"The article of discipline is the most difficult in American education. Premature ideas of independence, too little repressed by parents, beget a spirit of insubordination which is the great obstacle to science with us and a principal cause of its decay since the Revolution." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, 1822. ME 15:406

"The rock which I most dread is the discipline of the institution, and it is that on which most of our public schools labor. The insubordination of our youth is now the greatest obstacle to their education. We may lessen the difficulty, perhaps, by avoiding too much government, by requiring no useless observances, none which shall merely multiply occasions for dissatisfaction, disobedience and revolt by referring to the more

discreet of themselves the minor discipline, the graver to the civil magistrates." --Thomas Jefferson to George Ticknor, 1823. ME 15:455

"The consequences of foreign education are alarming to me as an American... Cast your eye over America. Who are the men of most learning, of most eloquence, most beloved by their countrymen and most trusted and promoted by them? They are those who have been educated among them, and whose manners, morals and habits are perfectly homogeneous with those of the country." --Thomas Jefferson to John Banister, Jr., 1785. (*) ME 5:188, Papers 8:637

"I do not count on any advantage to be derived... from a familiar acquaintance with the principles of [a] government [which has been] rendered... a tyrannical aristocracy, more likely to give ill than good ideas to an American." --Thomas Jefferson to John Banister, Jr., 1785. (*)

"[One of] the disadvantages of sending a youth to Europe [for an education is]... he is fascinated with the privileges of the European aristocrats, and sees, with abhorrence, the lovely equality which the poor enjoy with the rich in his own country." --Thomas Jefferson to John Banister, Jr., 1785. ME 5:186, Papers 8:636

National Considerations

"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

"Science is more important in a republican than in any other government." --Thomas Jefferson to -----, 1821. ME 15:339

"[We should] endeavor to keep [our] attention fixed on the main objects of all science: the freedom and happiness of man. [Thus] will [we] keep ever in view the sole objects of all legitimate government." --Thomas Jefferson to Thaddeus Kosciusko, 1810. ME 12:369

"An infant country... must much depend for improvement on the science of other countries longer established, possessing better means and more advanced than [they] are. To prohibit [them] from the benefit of foreign light is to consign [them] to long darkness." --Thomas Jefferson to -----, 1821. ME 15:339

"The republic of letters is unaffected by the wars of geographical divisions of the earth." --Thomas Jefferson to Robert Patterson, 1811. ME 13:87

"The occasion [should be seized] of sowing useful truths among the people which might germinate and become rooted among their political tenets." --Thomas Jefferson to Levi Lincoln, 1802. (*) ME 10:305

Prospects for an Educated Citizenry

"Although I do not, with some enthusiasts, believe that the human condition will ever advance to such a state of perfection as that there shall no longer be pain or vice in the world, yet I believe it susceptible of much improvement, and most of all in matters of government and religion; and that the diffusion of knowledge among the people is to be

the instrument by which it is to be effected." --Thomas Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, 1816. ME 14:491

"I do hope that in the present spirit of extending to the great mass of mankind the blessings of instruction, I see a prospect of great advancement in the happiness of the human race; and that this may proceed to an indefinite, although not to an infinite degree." --Thomas Jefferson to Cornelius Camden Blatchly, 1822. ME 15:400

"We have spent the prime of our lives in procuring [young men] the precious blessing of liberty. Let them spend theirs in showing that it is the great parent of *science* and of virtue; and that a nation will be great in both, always in proportion as it is free." --Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Willard, 1789. ME 7:329

"Preach... a crusade against ignorance; establish and improve the law for educating the common people. Let our countrymen know that the people alone can protect us against these evils [of monarchical government]." --Thomas Jefferson to George Wythe, 1786.

48. Civil Rights

It is the tendency of all governments to encroach on the rights of the people. Limited constitutions protect those rights, and serve as a line of defense against government intrusion. Rights that are not specifically identified for protection are not assumed to be under the jurisdiction of government, however; they are retained by the people and are exercised as an element of their individual self-governance. in their sovereign capacity.

"There are rights which it is useless to surrender to the government and which governments have yet always been found to invade. These are the rights of thinking and publishing our thoughts by speaking or writing; the right of free commerce; the right of personal freedom. There are instruments for administering the government so peculiarly trustworthy that we should never leave the legislature at liberty to change them. The new Constitution has secured these in the executive and legislative department, but not in the judiciary. It should have established trials by the people themselves, that is to say, by jury. There are instruments so dangerous to the rights of the nation and which place them so totally at the mercy of their governors that those governors, whether legislative or executive, should be restrained from keeping such instruments on foot but in well-defined cases. Such an instrument is a standing army." --Thomas Jefferson to David Humphreys, 1789. ME 7:323

"Freedom of religion; freedom of the press; freedom of person under the protection of the *habeas corpus*; and trial by juries impartially selected, I deem [among] the essential principles of our government, and consequently [among] those which ought to shape its administration." --Thomas Jefferson: 1st Inaugural Address, 1801. ME 3:322

"One of the amendments to the Constitution... expressly declares that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press,' thereby guarding in the same sentence and under the same words, the freedom of religion, of speech, and of the press; insomuch that whatever violates either throws down the sanctuary which covers the others." --Thomas Jefferson: Draft Kentucky Resolutions, 1798. ME 17:382

The Right of Free Correspondence

The right of one citizen to correspond freely with another is a natural right, arising from the need of individuals to communicate with one another in the conduct of the business of life. The protection of this right is one of the basic reasons why men form themselves into societies and establish governments.

"A right of free correspondence between citizen and citizen on their joint interests, whether public or private and under whatsoever laws these interests arise (to wit: of the State, of Congress, of France, Spain, or Turkey), is a natural right; it is not the gift of any municipal law, either of England, or Virginia, or of Congress, but in common with all other natural rights, it is one of the objects for the protection of which society is formed and municipal laws established." --Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 1797. ME 9:422

"The right of free correspondence is not claimed under [the] Constitution [of the United States], nor the laws or treaties derived from it, but as a natural right, placed

originally under the protection of our municipal laws and retained under the cognizance of our own courts." --Thomas Jefferson: Virginia Petition, 1797. ME 17:361

"The Federal Constitution alienates from [the State courts] all cases arising, 1st, under the Constitution; 2dly, under the laws of Congress; 3dly, under treaties, etc. But this right of free correspondence, whether with a public representative in [the State] General Assembly, in Congress, in France, in Spain, or with a private one charged with a pecuniary trust, or with a private friend, the object of our esteem, or any other, has not been given to us under, 1st, the Federal Constitution; 2dly, any law of Congress; or 3dly, any treaty; but... by nature. It is therefore not alienated but remains under the protection of our [State] courts." --Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 1797. ME 9:423

"The right of our fellow citizens to represent to the public functionaries their opinion on proceedings interesting to them is unquestionably a constitutional right, often useful, sometimes necessary, and will always be respectfully acknowledged by me." --Thomas Jefferson to the New Haven Committee, 1801. ME 10:269

"In canvassing [the] opinions [of a public official, a citizen does] what every man has a right to do, and it is for the good of society that that right should be freely exercised." --Thomas Jefferson to Noah Webster, 1790. (*)

"In principle and consequence, [the violation of right] extends to all of our fellow citizens, whose safety is passed away whenever their representatives are placed, in the exercise of their functions, under the direction and coercion of either of the other departments of government; and one of their most interesting rights is lost when that of a free communication of sentiment by speaking or writing is suppressed." --Thomas Jefferson: Virginia Petition, 1797. ME 17:363

"Did we ever expect to see the day, when, breathing nothing but sentiments of love to our country and its freedom and happiness, our correspondence must be as secret as if we were hatching its destruction!" --Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 1799. ME 10:86

"The attempt which has been made to restrain the liberty of our citizens meeting together, interchanging sentiments on what subjects they please and stating their sentiments in the public papers, has come upon us a full century earlier than I expected." --Thomas Jefferson to William Branch Giles, 1794.

Freedom of Conscience

The right to hold one's own views, and to think and to decide for oneself on any question, is an essential right for a free people. A person is free to believe anything he wishes, even if in error, and may not be persecuted nor denied the right to hold public office for those beliefs. The First Amendment protections for freedom of religion, of speech, of the press and of assembly, all together protect the Freedom of Conscience.

"No provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprises of the civil authority." --Thomas Jefferson to New London Methodists, 1809. ME 16:332

"That form [of self-government] which we have substituted [for that which bound men under the chains of monkish ignorance and superstition] restores the free right to the

unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion." --Thomas Jefferson to Roger C. Weightman, 1826. ME 16:182

"A right to take the side which every man's conscience approves in a civil contest is too precious a right, and too favorable to the preservation of liberty, not to be protected by all its well-informed friends." --Thomas Jefferson to Katherine Sprowle Douglas, 1785. FE 4:66, Papers 8:260

"Subject opinion to coercion: whom will you make your inquisitors? Fallible men, governed by bad passions, by private as well as public reasons. And why subject it to coercion? To produce uniformity? But is uniformity of opinion desirable? No more than of face and stature." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XVII, 1782. ME 2:223

"The freedom of opinion and the reasonable maintenance of it is not a crime and ought not to occasion injury." --Thomas Jefferson to Gideon Granger, 1801.

"The legitimate powers of government reach actions only and not opinions." --Thomas Jefferson to Danbury Baptists, 1802.

"This country, which has given to the world the example of physical liberty, owes to it that of moral emancipation also. For as yet, it is but nominal with us. The inquisition of public opinion overwhelms in practice the freedom asserted by the laws in theory." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1821. ME 15:308

"It is inconsistent with the spirit of our laws and Constitution to force tender consciences." --Thomas Jefferson: Proclamation Concerning Paroles, 1781. FE 2:430, Papers 4:404

"The error seems not sufficiently eradicated that the operations of the mind as well as the acts of the body are subject to the coercion of the laws. But our rulers can have authority over such natural rights only as we have submitted to them. The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God. The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XVII, 1782. ME 2:221

"[The] liberty of speaking and writing... guards our other liberties." --Thomas Jefferson: Reply to Philadelphia Democratic Republicans, 1808. ME 16:304

"We are bound, you, I, and every one to make common cause, even with error itself, to maintain the common right of freedom of conscience." --Thomas Jefferson to Edward Dowse, 1803. ME 10:378

"It behooves every man who values liberty of conscience for himself, to resist invasions of it in the case of others; or their case may, by change of circumstances, become his own. It behooves him, too, in his own case, to give no example of concession, betraying the common right of independent opinion, by answering questions of faith, which the laws have left between God and himself." --Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, 1803. ME 10:381

"I am... averse to the communication of my religious tenets to the public: because it would countenance the presumption of those who have endeavored to draw them before

that tribunal, and to seduce public opinion to erect itself into that inquisition over the rights of conscience which the laws have so justly proscribed." --Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, 1803. ME 10:380

"We ought with one heart and one hand to hew down the daring and dangerous efforts of those who would seduce the public opinion to substitute itself into that tyranny over religious faith which the laws have so justly abdicated. For this reason, were my opinions up to the standard of those who arrogate the right of questioning them, I would not countenance that arrogance by descending to an explanation." --Thomas Jefferson to Edward Dowse, 1803. ME 10:378

Harmful Opinions

"While the principles of our Constitution give just latitude to inquiry, every citizen faithful to it will deem embodied expressions of discontent and open outrages of law and patriotism as dishonorable as they are injurious." --Thomas Jefferson: Reply to Leesburg Citizens, 1809.

"[Montesquieu wrote in his *Spirit of the Laws* XII,c.12:] 'Words carried into action assume the nature of that action. Thus a man who goes into a public market-place to incite the subject to revolt incurs the guilt of high treason, because the words are joined to the action, and partake of its nature. It is not the words that are punished, but an action in which words are employed. They do not become criminal, but when they are annexed to a criminal action: everything is confounded if words are construed into a capital crime, instead of considering them only as a mark of that crime.'" --Thomas Jefferson: copied into his Commonplace Book.

"The following [addition to the Bill of Rights] would have pleased me: The people shall not be deprived or abridged of their right to speak, to write, or *otherwise* to publish anything but false facts affecting injuriously the life, liberty or reputation of others, or affecting the peace of the [United States] with foreign nations." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1789. ME 7:450, Papers 15:367

The Right to Bear Arms

In a nation governed by the people themselves, the possession of arms to defend their nation against usurpers within and without was deemed absolutely necessary. This right is protected by the 2nd Amendment to the Constitution. A gun was an everyday implement in early American society, and Jefferson recommended its use. "A strong body makes the mind strong. As to the species of exercises, I advise the gun. While this gives moderate exercise to the body, it gives boldness, enterprise and independence to the mind. Games played with the ball, and others of that nature, are too violent for the body and stamp no character on the mind. Let your gun, therefore, be the constant companion of your walks." --Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, 1785. ME 5:85, Papers 8:407

"The constitutions of most of our States assert that all power is inherent in the people; that... it is their right and duty to be at all times armed." --Thomas Jefferson to John Cartwright, 1824. ME 16:45

"One loves to possess arms, though they hope never to have occasion for them." -- Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 1796. ME 9:341

"I learn with great concern that [one] portion of our frontier so interesting, so important, and so exposed, should be so entirely unprovided with common fire-arms. I did not suppose any part of the United States so destitute of what is considered as among the first necessities of a farm-house." --Thomas Jefferson to Jacob J. Brown, 1808. ME 11:432

"No freeman shall be debarred the use of arms (within his own lands or tenements)." --Thomas Jefferson: Draft Virginia Constitution (with his note added), 1776. Papers 1:353

"None but an armed nation can dispense with a standing army. To keep ours armed and disciplined is therefore at all times important." --Thomas Jefferson to ----, 1803. ME 10:365

Other Rights

The rights of citizens are not limited to those specifically enumerated in the Constitution. The Ninth Amendment protects all other rights that are retained by the people, and that are not specifically named.

"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

"My opinion on the right of expatriation has been so long ago as the year 1776 consigned to record in the act of the Virginia code, drawn by myself, recognizing the right expressly and prescribing the mode of exercising it. The evidence of this natural right, like that of our right to life, liberty, the use of our faculties, the pursuit of happiness, is not left to the feeble and sophistical investigations of reason, but is impressed on the sense of every man. We do not claim these under the charters of kings or legislators, but under the King of Kings. If He has made it a law in the nature of man to pursue his own happiness, he has left him free in the choice of place as well as mode, and we may safely call on the whole body of English jurists to produce the map on which nature has traced for each individual the geographical line which she forbids him to cross in pursuit of happiness." --Thomas Jefferson to John Manners, 1817. ME 15:124

"[We in America entertain] a due sense of our equal right to the use of our own faculties, to the acquisitions of our own industry, to honor and confidence from our fellow-citizens resulting not from birth but from our actions and their sense of them." --Thomas Jefferson: 1st Inaugural, 1801. ME 3:320

"The manners of every nation are the standard of orthodoxy within itself. But these standards being arbitrary, reasonable people in all allow free toleration for the manners as for the religion of others." --Thomas Jefferson to Jean Baptiste Say, 1815. ME 14:262

"Every man should be protected in his lawful acts, and be certain that no *ex post facto* law shall punish or endamage him for them." --Thomas Jefferson to Isaac McPherson, 1813. ME 13:326

"The sentiment that *ex post facto* laws are against natural right is so strong in the United States that few, if any, of the State constitutions have failed to proscribe them. The Federal Constitution indeed interdicts them in criminal cases only; but they are equally unjust in civil as in criminal cases, and the omission of a caution which would have been right, does not justify the doing what is wrong." --Thomas Jefferson to Isaac McPherson, 1813. ME 13:327

"In America, no other distinction between man and man had ever been known but that of persons in office exercising powers by authority of the laws, and private individuals. Among these last, the poorest laborer stood on equal ground with the wealthiest millionaire, and generally on a more favored one whenever their rights seem to jar." -- Thomas Jefferson: Answers to de Meusnier Questions, 1786. ME 17:8

52. Freedom of Religion

Because religious belief, or non-belief, is such an important part of every person's life, freedom of religion affects every individual. Religious institutions that use government power in support of themselves and force their views on persons of other faiths, or of no faith, undermine all our civil rights. Moreover, state support of an established religion tends to make the clergy unresponsive to their own people, and leads to corruption within religion itself. Erecting the "wall of separation between church and state," therefore, is absolutely essential in a free society.

"We have solved, by fair experiment, the great and interesting question whether freedom of religion is compatible with order in government and obedience to the laws. And we have experienced the quiet as well as the comfort which results from leaving every one to profess freely and openly those principles of religion which are the inductions of his own reason and the serious convictions of his own inquiries." --Thomas Jefferson: Reply to Virginia Baptists, 1808. ME 16:320

"The constitutional freedom of religion [is] the most inalienable and sacred of all human rights." --Thomas Jefferson: Virginia Board of Visitors Minutes, 1819. ME 19:416

"Among the most inestimable of our blessings, also, is that... of liberty to worship our Creator in the way we think most agreeable to His will; a liberty deemed in other countries incompatible with good government and yet proved by our experience to be its best support." --Thomas Jefferson: Reply to John Thomas et al., 1807. ME 16:291

"In our early struggles for liberty, religious freedom could not fail to become a primary object." --Thomas Jefferson to Baltimore Baptists, 1808. ME 16:317

"Religion, as well as reason, confirms the soundness of those principles on which our government has been founded and its rights asserted." --Thomas Jefferson to P. H. Wendover, 1815. ME 14:283

"One of the amendments to the Constitution... expressly declares that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press,' thereby guarding in the same sentence and under the same words, the freedom of religion, of speech, and of the press; insomuch that whatever violates either throws down the sanctuary which covers the others." --Thomas Jefferson: Draft Kentucky Resolutions, 1798. ME 17:382

"The rights [to religious freedom] are of the natural rights of mankind, and... if any act shall be... passed to repeal [an act granting those rights] or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural right." --Thomas Jefferson: Statute for Religious Freedom, 1779. (*) ME 2:303, Papers 2:546

The Private Nature of Religion

"I have ever thought religion a concern purely between our God and our consciences, for which we were accountable to Him, and not to the priests." --Thomas Jefferson to Mrs. M. Harrison Smith, 1816. ME 15:60

"From the dissensions among Sects themselves arise necessarily a right of choosing and necessity of deliberating to which we will conform. But if we choose for ourselves, we must allow others to choose also, and so reciprocally, this establishes religious liberty." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Religion, 1776. Papers 1:545

"Religion is a subject on which I have ever been most scrupulously reserved. I have considered it as a matter between every man and his Maker in which no other, and far less the public, had a right to intermeddle." --Thomas Jefferson to Richard Rush, 1813.

"I never will, by any word or act, bow to the shrine of intolerance or admit a right of inquiry into the religious opinions of others." --Thomas Jefferson to Edward Dowse, 1803. ME 10:378

"Our particular principles of religion are a subject of accountability to God alone. I inquire after no man's, and trouble none with mine." --Thomas Jefferson to Miles King, 1814. ME 14:198

Government Intermeddling in Religion

"I consider the government of the United States as interdicted by the Constitution from intermeddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises. This results not only from the provision that no law shall be made respecting the establishment or free exercise of religion, but from that also which reserves to the states the powers not delegated to the United States. Certainly, no power to prescribe any religious exercise or to assume authority in religious discipline has been delegated to the General Government. It must then rest with the states, as far as it can be in any human authority." --Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Miller, 1808. ME 11:428

"In matters of religion, I have considered that its free exercise is placed by the Constitution independent of the powers of the general government. I have therefore undertaken on no occasion to prescribe the religious exercises suited to it; but have left them as the Constitution found them, under the direction and discipline of State or Church authorities acknowledged by the several religious societies." --Thomas Jefferson: 2nd Inaugural Address, 1805. ME 3:378

"Our Constitution... has not left the religion of its citizens under the power of its public functionaries, were it possible that any of these should consider a conquest over the consciences of men either attainable or applicable to any desirable purpose." -- Thomas Jefferson: Reply to New London Methodists, 1809. ME 16:332

"I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises, its discipline, or its doctrines; nor of the religious societies, that the General Government should be invested with the power of effecting any uniformity of time or matter among them. Fasting and prayer are religious exercises. The enjoining them, an act of discipline. Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the times for these exercises and the objects proper for them according to their own particular tenets; and this right can never be safer than in their own hands where the Constitution has deposited it... Everyone must act according to the dictates of his own reason, and mine tells me that civil powers alone have been given to the President of the United States, and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents." --Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Miller, 1808. ME 11:429

"To suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency is a dangerous fallacy which at once destroys all religious liberty, because he being of course judge of that tendency will make his opinions the rule of judgment and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square with or differ from his own." --Thomas Jefferson: Statute for Religious Freedom, 1779. ME 2:302, Papers 2: 546

"It is... proposed that I should *recommend*, not prescribe, a day of fasting and prayer. That is, that I should *indirectly* assume to the United States an authority over religious exercises which the Constitution has directly precluded them from. It must be meant, too, that this recommendation is to carry some authority and to be sanctioned by some penalty on those who disregard it; not indeed of fine and imprisonment, but of some degree of proscription, perhaps in public opinion. And does the change in the nature of the penalty make the recommendation less a *law* of conduct for those to whom it is directed?... Civil powers alone have been given to the President of the United States, and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents." --Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Miller, 1808. ME 11:428

Religion Intermeddling in Government

"Whenever... preachers, instead of a lesson in religion, put [their congregation] off with a discourse on the Copernican system, on chemical affinities, on the construction of government, or the characters or conduct of those administering it, it is a breach of contract, depriving their audience of the kind of service for which they are salaried, and giving them, instead of it, what they did not want, or, if wanted, would rather seek from better sources in that particular art of science." --Thomas Jefferson to P. H. Wendover, 1815. ME 14:281

"Ministers of the Gospel are excluded [from serving as Visitors of the county Elementary Schools] to avoid jealousy from the other sects, were the public education committed to the ministers of a particular one; and with more reason than in the case of their exclusion from the legislative and executive functions." --Thomas Jefferson: Note to Elementary School Act, 1817. ME 17:419

"No religious reading, instruction or exercise, shall be prescribed or practiced [in the elementary schools] inconsistent with the tenets of any religious sect or denomination." --Thomas Jefferson: Elementary School Act, 1817. ME 17:425

"I do not know that it is a duty to disturb by missionaries the religion and peace of other countries, who may think themselves bound to extinguish by fire and fagot the heresies to which we give the name of conversions, and quote our own example for it. Were the Pope, or his holy allies, to send in mission to us some thousands of Jesuit priests to convert us to their orthodoxy, I suspect that we should deem and treat it as a national aggression on our peace and faith." --Thomas Jefferson to Michael Megear, 1823. ME 15:434

Establishments of Religion Undermine Rights

"The clergy, by getting themselves established by law and ingrafted into the machine of government, have been a very formidable engine against the civil and religious rights of man." --Thomas Jefferson to Jeremiah Moor, 1800.

"The Christian religion, when divested of the rags in which they [the clergy] have enveloped it, and brought to the original purity and simplicity of its benevolent institutor, is a religion of all others most friendly to liberty, science, and the freest expansion of the human mind." --Thomas Jefferson to Moses Robinson, 1801. ME 10:237

"But a short time elapsed after the death of the great reformer of the Jewish religion, before his principles were departed from by those who professed to be his special servants, and perverted into an engine for enslaving mankind, and aggrandizing their oppressors in Church and State." --Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 1810. ME 12:345

"[If] the nature of... government [were] a subordination of the civil to the ecclesiastical power, I [would] consider it as desperate for long years to come. Their steady habits [will] exclude the advances of information, and they [will] seem exactly where they [have always been]. And there [the] clergy will always keep them if they can. [They] will follow the bark of liberty only by the help of a tow-rope." --Thomas Jefferson to Pierrepoint Edwards, July 1801. (*)

"This doctrine [that the condition of man cannot be ameliorated, that what has been must ever be, and that to secure ourselves where we are we must tread with awful reverence in the footsteps of our fathers] is the genuine fruit of the alliance between Church and State, the tenants of which finding themselves but too well in their present condition, oppose all advances which might unmask their usurpations and monopolies of honors, wealth and power, and fear every change as endangering the comforts they now hold." --Thomas Jefferson: Report for University of Virginia, 1818.

"I am for freedom of religion, and against all maneuvers to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another." --Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 1799. ME 10:78

"The advocate of religious freedom is to expect neither peace nor forgiveness from [the clergy]." --Thomas Jefferson to Levi Lincoln, 1802. ME 10:305

"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

"Believing... that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their Legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church and State." --Thomas Jefferson to Danbury Baptists, 1802. ME 16:281

"I am really mortified to be told that, *in the United States of America*, a fact like this [i.e., the purchase of an apparent geological or astronomical work] can become a subject of inquiry, and of criminal inquiry too, as an offense against religion; that a question about the sale of a book can be carried before the civil magistrate. Is this then our

freedom of religion? and are we to have a censor whose imprimatur shall say what books may be sold, and what we may buy? And who is thus to dogmatize religious opinions for our citizens? Whose foot is to be the measure to which ours are all to be cut or stretched? Is a priest to be our inquisitor, or shall a layman, simple as ourselves, set up his reason as the rule for what we are to read, and what we must believe? It is an insult to our citizens to question whether they are rational beings or not, and blasphemy against religion to suppose it cannot stand the test of truth and reason. If [this] book be false in its facts, disprove them; if false in its reasoning, refute it. But, for God's sake, let us freely hear both sides, if we choose." --Thomas Jefferson to N. G. Dufief, 1814. ME 14:127

"History, I believe, furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government. This marks the lowest grade of ignorance of which their civil as well as religious leaders will always avail themselves for their own purposes." --Thomas Jefferson to Alexander von Humboldt, 1813. ME 14:21

"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

"I have been just reading the new constitution of Spain. One of its fundamental bases is expressed in these words: 'The *Roman Catholic* religion, the only true one, is, and always shall be, that of the Spanish nation. The government protects it by wise and just laws, and prohibits the exercise of any other whatever.' Now I wish this presented to those who question what [a bookseller] may sell or we may buy, with a request to strike out the words, 'Roman Catholic,' and to insert the denomination of their own religion. This would ascertain the code of dogmas which each wishes should domineer over the opinions of all others, and be taken, like the Spanish religion, under the 'protection of wise and just laws.' It would show to what they wish to reduce the liberty for which one generation has sacrificed life and happiness. It would present our boasted freedom of religion as a thing of theory only, and not of practice, as what would be a poor exchange for the theoretic thralldom, but practical freedom of Europe." --Thomas Jefferson to N. G. Dufief, 1814. ME 14:128

"To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical." --Thomas Jefferson: Bill for Religious Freedom, 1779. Papers 2:545

The Benefits of Religious Freedom

"The law for religious freedom... [has] put down the aristocracy of the clergy and restored to the citizen the freedom of the mind." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1813. ME 13:400

"[When] the [Virginia] bill for establishing religious freedom... was finally passed,... a singular proposition proved that its protection of opinion was meant to be universal. Where the preamble declares that coercion is a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, an amendment was proposed, by inserting the word "Jesus Christ," so that it should read "a departure from the plan of Jesus Christ, the holy author of our religion." The insertion was rejected by a great majority, in proof that they meant to comprehend within the mantle of its protection the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan,

the Hindoo and infidel of every denomination." --Thomas Jefferson: Autobiography, 1821. ME 1:67

"No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor... otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief... All men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain their opinions in matters of religion, and... the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities." -- Thomas Jefferson: Statute for Religious Freedom, 1779. ME 2:302, Papers 2:546

"Our civil rights have no dependence upon our religious opinions more than our opinions in physics or geometry." --Thomas Jefferson: Statute for Religious Freedom, 1779. ME 2:301, Papers 2:545

"We have no right to prejudice another in his *civil* enjoyments because he is of another church." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Religion, 1776. Papers 1:546

"The proscribing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to offices of trust and emolument unless he profess or renounce this or that religious opinion is depriving him injuriously of those privileges and advantages to which, in common with his fellow citizens, he has a natural right." -- Thomas Jefferson: Statute for Religious Freedom, 1779. ME 2:301, Papers 2:546

"A recollection of our former vassalage in religion and civil government will unite the zeal of every heart, and the energy of every hand, to preserve that independence in both which, under the favor of Heaven, a disinterested devotion to the public cause first achieved, and a disinterested sacrifice of private interests will now maintain." --Thomas Jefferson to Baltimore Baptists, 1808. ME 16:318

Religious Illegality

"The declaration that religious faith shall be unpunished does not give immunity to criminal acts dictated by religious error." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1788. ME 7:98

"If a sect arises whose tenets would subvert morals, good sense has fair play and reasons and laughs it out of doors without suffering the State to be troubled with it." -- Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Virginia Q.XVII, 1782. ME 2:224

"If anything pass in a religious meeting seditiously and contrary to the public peace, let it be punished in the same manner and no otherwise than as if it had happened in a fair or market." --Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Religion, 1776. Papers 1:548

"It is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government, for its officers to interfere [in the propagation of religious teachings] when principles break out into overt acts against peace and good order." --Thomas Jefferson: Statute for Religious Freedom, 1779. ME 2:302, Papers 2:546

"Whatsoever is lawful in the Commonwealth or permitted to the subject in the ordinary way cannot be forbidden to him for religious uses; and whatsoever is prejudicial to the Commonwealth in their ordinary uses and, therefore, prohibited by the laws, ought not to be permitted to churches in their sacred rites. For instance, it is unlawful in the ordinary course of things or in a private house to murder a child; it should not be

permitted any sect then to sacrifice children. It is ordinarily lawful (or temporarily lawful) to kill calves or lambs; they may, therefore, be religiously sacrificed. But if the good of the State required a temporary suspension of killing lambs, as during a siege, sacrifices of them may then be rightfully suspended also. This is the true extent of toleration." --
Thomas Jefferson: Notes on Religion, 1776. Papers 1:547

53. Duties of Citizens

What duty does a citizen owe to the government that secures the society in which he lives? What can it expect and rightly demand of him in support of itself? A nation that rests on the will of the people must also depend on individuals to support its institutions in whatever ways are appropriate if it is to flourish. Persons qualified for public office should feel some obligation to make that contribution. If not, public service will be left to those of lesser qualification, and the government may more easily become corrupted.

"No government can be maintained without the principle of fear as well as duty. Good men will obey the last, but bad ones the former only. If our government ever fails, it will be from this weakness." --Thomas Jefferson to John Wayles Eppes, 1814.

"Every man is under the natural duty of contributing to the necessities of the society; and this is all the laws should enforce on him." --Thomas Jefferson to Francis Gilmer, 1816. ME 15:24

"A good citizen should take his stand where the public authority marshals him." --Thomas Jefferson to Mme D'Auville, 1790. ME 8:16

"That a man owes no duty to which he is not urged by some impulsive feeling... is correct, if referred to the standard of general feeling in the given case, and not to the feeling of a single individual." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Law, 1814. ME 14:144

"Private charities as well as contributions to public purposes in proportion to everyone's circumstances are certainly among the duties we owe to society." --Thomas Jefferson to Charles Christian, 1812. ME 13:134

"I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties." --Thomas Jefferson to Danbury Baptists, 1802. ME 16:282

Public Service

"There is a debt of service due from every man to his country, proportioned to the bounties which nature and fortune have measured to him." --Thomas Jefferson to Edward Rutledge, 1796. ME 9:354

"No interests are dearer to men than those which ought to be secured to them by their form of government, and none deserve better of them than those who contribute to the amelioration of that form." --Thomas Jefferson to M. Ruelle, 1809.

"I never thought of questioning the free exercise of the right of my fellow citizens to marshal those whom they call into their service according to their fitness, nor ever presumed that they were not the best judges of that." --Thomas Jefferson to James Sullivan, 1797. ME 9:376

"Some men are born for the public. Nature by fitting them for the service of the human race on a broad scale, has stamped them with the evidences of her destination and their duty." --Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 1803. ME 10:345

"There is sometimes an eminence of character on which society have such peculiar claims as to control the predilections of the individual for a particular walk of happiness,

and restrain him to that alone arising from the present and future benedictions of mankind." --Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 1792. ME 8:348

"[I have] an ardent zeal to see this government (the idol of my soul) continue in good hands." --Thomas Jefferson to William Wirt, 1808. ME 11:424

"That my country should be served is the first wish of my heart: I should be doubly happy were I to render it a service." --Thomas Jefferson to the Officials of Norfolk, 1789. Papers 15:556

"Though I... am myself duly impressed with a sense of the arduousness of government and the obligation those are under who are able to conduct it, yet I am also satisfied there is an order of geniuses above that obligation and therefore exempted from it. Nobody can conceive that nature ever intended to throw away a Newton upon the occupations of a crown. It would have been a prodigality for which even the conduct of Providence might have been arraigned, had he been by birth annexed to what was so far below him. Cooperating with nature in her ordinary economy, we should dispose of and employ the geniuses of men according to their several orders and degrees." --Thomas Jefferson to David Rittenhouse, 1778. Papers 2:202

"I do not mean... to testify a disposition to render no service but what is rigorously within my duty. I am the farthest in the world from this; it is a question I shall never ask myself; nothing making me more happy than to render any service in my power, of whatever description. But I wish only to be excused from intermeddling in business in which I have no skill, and should do more harm than good." --Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Osgood, 1785. ME 5:163, Papers 8:590

"I profess... so much of the Roman principle as to deem it honorable for the general of yesterday to act as a corporal today if his services can be useful to his country, holding that to be false pride which postpones the public good to any private or personal considerations." --Thomas Jefferson to William Duane, 1812. ME 13:186

"It will remain... to those now coming on the stage of public affairs to perfect what has been so well begun by those going off it." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., 1787. ME 6:165

"The first of all our consolations is that of having faithfully fulfilled our duties; the next, the approbation and good will of those who have witnessed it." --Thomas Jefferson to James Fishback, 1809. ME 12:316

Demands of Public Service

"In a virtuous government... public offices are what they should be: burthens to those appointed to them, which it would be wrong to decline, though foreseen to bring with them intense labor and great private loss." --Thomas Jefferson to Richard Henry Lee, 1779. Papers 2:298

"I acknowledge that such a debt [of service to my fellow-citizens] exists, that a tour of duty in whatever line he can be most useful to his country, is due from every individual. It is not easy perhaps to say of what length exactly that tour should be, but we may safely say of what length it should not be. Not of our whole life, for instance, for that

would be to be born a slave--not even of a very large portion of it." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1793. ME 9:118

"Whether the state may command the political service of all its members to an indefinite extent, or if these be among the rights never wholly ceded to the public power, is a question which I do not find expressly decided in England... Nothing could so completely divest us of that liberty [which the bill of rights has made inviolable, and for the preservation of which our government has been charged] as the establishment of the opinion that the state has a *perpetual* right to the services of all its members. This to men of certain ways of thinking would be to annihilate the blessing of existence and to contradict the Giver of life, who gave it for happiness and not for wretchedness; and certainly, to such it were better that they had never been born." --Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 1782. ME 4:196, Papers 6:185

Advantages of Public Service

"I will not say that public life is the line for making a fortune. But it furnishes a decent and honorable support, and places one's children on good grounds for public favor. The family of a beloved father will stand with the public on the most favorable ground of competition. Had General Washington left children, what would have been denied them?" --Thomas Jefferson to William Wirt, 1808. ME 11:424

"There are minds which can be pleased by honors and preferments; but I see nothing in them but envy and enmity. It is only necessary to possess them, to know how little they contribute to happiness, or rather how hostile they are to it." --Thomas Jefferson to Alexander Donald, 1788. ME 6:427

Disadvantages of Public Service

"Public offices were [not] made for private convenience." --Thomas Jefferson to the Duchesse d'Auville, 1790. ME 8:16

"The general idea is, that those who receive annual compensations should be constantly at their posts. Our constituents might not in the first moment consider: 1st, that we all have property to take care of, which we cannot abandon for temporary salaries; 2nd, that we have health to take care of, which at this season [i.e., summer] cannot be preserved at Washington; 3rd, that while at our separate homes our public duties are fully executed, and at much greater personal labor than while we are together, when a short conference saves a long letter." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1807. ME 11:351

"Politics [is] a subject I never loved and now hate." --Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1796.

Specific Areas of Service

"There [are moments] in which the aid of an able pen [is] important to place things in their just attitude." --Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1798. (*)

"It is the duty of every good citizen to use all the opportunities which occur to him for preserving documents relating to the history of our country." --Thomas Jefferson to Hugh P. Taylor, 1823. ME 15:473

In Difficult Times

"The man who loves his country on its own account, and not merely for its trappings of interest or power, can never be divorced from it, can never refuse to come forward when he finds that she is engaged in dangers which he has the means of warding off." -- Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 1797. ME 9:407

"The patriot, like the Christian, must learn that to bear revilings and persecutions is a part of his duty; and in proportion as the trial is severe, firmness under it becomes more requisite and praiseworthy. It requires, indeed, self-command. But that will be fortified in proportion as the calls for its exercise are repeated." --Thomas Jefferson to James Sullivan, 1805. ME 11:73

Maintaining Vigilance

"Lethargy [is] the forerunner of death to the public liberty." --Thomas Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, 1787.

"Let the eye of vigilance never be closed." --Thomas Jefferson to Spencer Roane, 1821. ME 15:326

"We, I hope, shall adhere to our republican government and keep it to its original principles by narrowly watching it." --Thomas Jefferson to -----, March 18, 1793. ME 9:45

"It behooves our citizens to be on their guard, to be firm in their principles, and full of confidence in themselves. We are able to preserve our self-government if we will but think so." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., 1800. ME 10:151

"Very many and very meritorious were the worthy patriots who assisted in bringing back our government to its republican tack. To preserve it in that will require unremitting vigilance." --Thomas Jefferson to William T. Barry, 1822. ME 15:388

"If our fellow-citizens, now solidly republican, will sacrifice favoritism towards men for the preservation of principle, we may hope that no divisions will again endanger a degeneracy in our government." --Thomas Jefferson to Richard M. Johnson, 1808. ME 12:10

"Our duty to ourselves, to posterity, and to mankind, call on us by every motive which is sacred or honorable, to watch over the safety of our beloved country during the troubles which agitate and convulse the residue of the world, and to sacrifice to that all personal and local considerations." --Thomas Jefferson: Reply to New York Legislature, 1809. ME 16:362

"Come forward, then, and give us the aid of your talents and the weight of your character towards the new establishment of republicanism." --Thomas Jefferson to Robert Livingston, 1800.

"Love your neighbor as yourself, and your country more than yourself." --Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Jefferson Smith, 1825. ME 16:110

"Love your neighbor as yourself, and your country more than life." --Thomas Jefferson to T. J. Grotjan, 1824.

Jefferson's political philosophy in his own words. Contains the founding principles of American self-government. "A bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government on earth, general or particular; and what no just government should refuse, or rest on inferences." - -Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 1787. ME 6:388, Papers 12:440. "The general voice from north to south calls for a bill of rights. This biography of Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia, his only published book, challenges conventional wisdom by demonstrating its core political thought as well as the political aspirations behind its composition, publication and initial dissemination. Building upon a close reading of the book's contents, Jefferson's correspondence and the first comprehensive examination of both its composition and publication history, the authors argue that Jefferson intended his Notes to be read by a wide audience, especially in America, in order to help shape constitutional de Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, who also drafted the Declaration of Independence and served as the first secretary of state. As president, he was responsible for the Louisiana Purchase. He was also the founder and architect of the University of Virginia. How was Thomas Jefferson influential? Thomas Jefferson's ideas about politics and government greatly influenced early American history. He believed that the American Revolution represented a clean break with the past and that the United States should reject all European versions of political discipline and resist efforts to create a strong central governmental authority. What is Thomas Jefferson remembered for?