

1 Reason versus ignorance

From Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*, Part I, 1791.

Tom Paine was born in 1736 at Thetford, and after a varied and restless life he became an editor and anti-slavery campaigner in the 1770s. *Rights of Man* made him notorious. Several prosecutions followed publication, and it provoked much controversy, during the course of which he prudently stayed in France. He was the only leading English writer of his time to express the abstract doctrine of 'rights' held by the French revolutionaries, and became the hero of extreme English radicals. Died 1809.

Reason and Ignorance, the opposites of each other, influence the great bulk of mankind. If either of these can be rendered sufficiently extensive in a country, the machinery of government goes easily on. Reason obeys itself; and Ignorance submits to whatever is dictated to it.

The two modes of government which prevail in the world, are, *First*, government by election and representation: *Secondly*, govern-

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ment by hereditary succession. The former is generally known by the name of republic; the latter by that of monarchy and aristocracy.

Those two distinct and opposite forms, erect themselves on the two distinct and opposite bases of Reason and Ignorance. As the exercise of government requires talents and abilities, and as talents and abilities cannot have hereditary descent, it is evident that hereditary succession requires a belief from man, to which his reason cannot subscribe, and which can only be established upon his ignorance; and the more ignorant any country is, the better it is fitted for this species of government.

On the contrary, government in a well constituted republic, requires no belief from man beyond what his reason can give. He sees the *rationale* of the whole system, its origin and its operation; and as it is best supported when best understood, the human faculties act with boldness, and acquire, under this form of government, a gigantic manliness . . .

