

Dr Richard Price – His Published Works

Between 1758 and 1775 Price published over 17 works, some of them in multiple editions

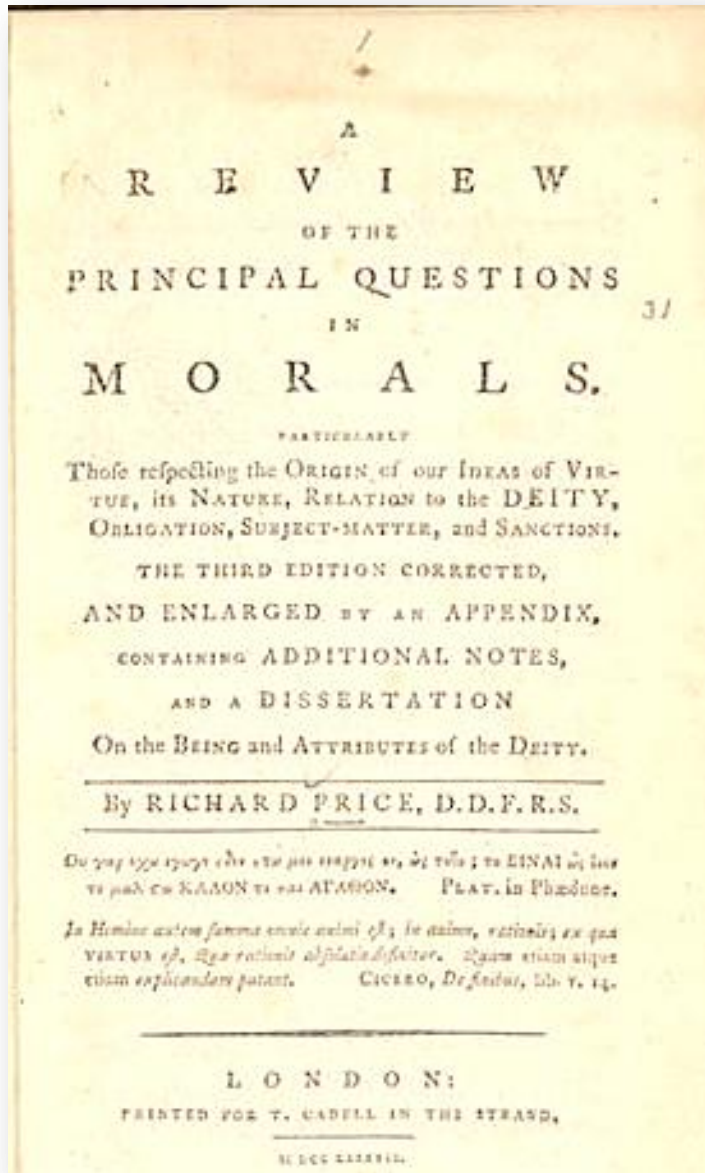
A selection of his contributions are included here

A REVIEW OF THE PRINCIPAL QUESTIONS IN MORALS 1758

This was Price's first major publication and his most important contribution to philosophy

Price asks by what faculty we know right from wrong, what are right and wrong and where do our ideas about them come from. He also explores the importance of reason and sensation in making moral judgments and the efficacy of virtue and candour in life

Price prefigures by more than 30 years the later and more famous work of Immanuel Kant



Richard Price and the American Declaration of Independence 4th July 1776.

British versions of Price's pamphlet *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* reached America by April 1776. Jefferson began work on the Independence Declaration in mid June that year.

John Adams was asked for a copy on 5 July and American editions of the pamphlet were being advertised in America from 10 July. Jefferson bought a copy on or before July 29th but likely saw a copy before hand.

That Price's pamphlet was read by members of the Congress is certain but it is difficult to gauge what impact his work had on the Declaration itself.

The French writer Henri Laboucheix suggested in 1982 that the changing of 'we hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable' to 'we hold these truths to be self-evident' may reflect Price's thinking and the extent of his influence on Jefferson and Franklin when they made the now famous alteration.

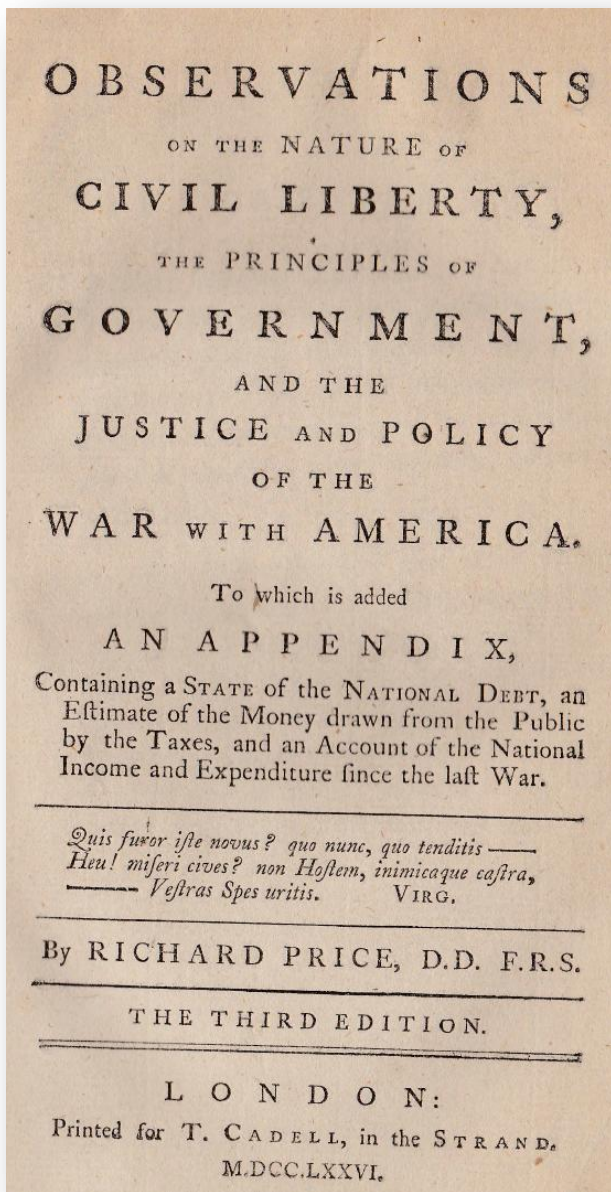
Just as important was the impact of Price's pamphlet *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution and the means of making it a benefit to the World (1785)*. This may well have influenced American constitutional makers and certainly caused controversy among them; particularly in relation to his ideas on property inequality and his opposition to slavery.

‘Government is an institution for the benefit of the people governed, which they have the power to model as they please; and to say that they can have too much power, is to say that there ought to be a power in the state superior to that which gives it being, and from which all jurisdiction is derived.’

Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty 1776.

While...in this world, I think it my duty to employ my voice in applauding the opposers of oppression, and to give my vote and interest, as far as they will go, on the side of justice, liberty and virtue’.

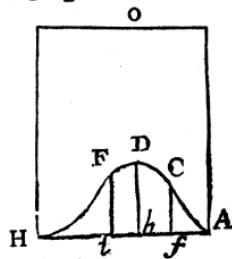
Richard Price writing to William Pitt the Elder,
9 February 1775.



Published in February 1776 Price's *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* is one of his most famous works. It sold out in three days and 60,000 copies were sold in a year. Widely published in America it was read by the likes of Adams and Jefferson in July 1776 and it gave a moral as well as political justification for the American rebellion. It was also published in Dutch, French and German editions.

Price published two further pamphlets on the American Revolution: *Additional Observations on Civil Liberty* (1777) & *The Importance of The American Revolution* (1784). In the latter he argued for a strengthened federalism and against slavery and an unequal distribution of property.

Now, in order to reduce the foregoing rule to practice, we must find the value of the area of the figure described and the several parts of it separated, by ordinates perpendicular to its base. For



which purpose, suppose $AH = 1$ and HO the square upon AH likewise $= 1$, and Cf will be $= y$, and $Af = x$, and $Hf = r$, because y, x and r denote the ratios of Cf, Af , and Hf respectively to AH . And by the equation of the curve $y = x^p r^q$ and (because $Af + fH = AH$) $r + x = 1$. Wherefore

$$y = x^p \times 1 - x^q = x^p - qx^{p+1} + q \times \frac{q-1}{2} \times x^{p+2} - q \times \frac{q-1}{2} \times \frac{q-2}{3} \times x^{p+3} + \dots$$

Now the abscisse being x and the ordinate x^p the correspondent area is $\frac{x^{p+1}}{p+1}$

(by prop. 10. cas. 1. *Quadrat. Newt.*) * and the ordinate being qx^{p+1} the area is $\frac{qx^{p+2}}{p+2}$; and in like man-

* 'Tis very evident here, without having recourse to Sir Isaac Newton, that the fluxion of the area ACf being $y \dot{x} = x^p \dot{x} - qx^{p+1} \dot{x} + q \times \frac{q-1}{2} x^{p+2} \dot{x} + \dots$ the fluent or area itself is $\frac{x^{p+1}}{p+1} - q \times \frac{x^{p+2}}{p+2} + q \times \frac{q-1}{2} \times \frac{x^{p+3}}{p+3} + \dots$

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An Essay towards Solving a Problem in the Doctrine of Chances, 1764

LII. *An Essay towards solving a Problem in the Doctrine of Chances. By the late Rev. Mr. Bayes, F. R. S. communicated by Mr. Price, in a Letter to John Canton, A. M. F. R. S.*

Dear Sir,

Read Dec. 23, 1763. I Now send you an essay which I have found among the papers of our deceased friend Mr. Bayes, and which, in my opinion, has great merit, and well deserves to be preserved. Experimental philosophy, you will find, is nearly interested in the subject of it; and on this account there seems to be particular reason for thinking that a communication of it to the Royal Society cannot be improper.

Pages from Price's Royal Society paper outlining the probability ideas of his friend Thomas Bayes. Price edited and revised the Bayes Theorem which today forms the basis of many elements of modern society

It was used in World War II Enigma code-breaking, and today by Google and Microsoft

Election to the Royal Society, 1765

The Hon^{ble} Mr Richard Price
of Newington Green, who hath
communicated several curious papers to
this R^y Society, printed in the Philosophi-
cal Transactions, being desirous of becoming
a member of it, is recommended by me, upon
our personal acquaintance, as likely to become
a very useful member, from his great skill in
Mathematics and Philosophy.

Chas. Morton
James Burrow.

- 1—9 May 1765
- 2—16 May
- 3—23 May
- 4—6 June
- 5—13 June
- 6—20 June
- 7—27 June
- 8—7 November
- 9—14 November
- 10—21 November

Ballotted for Mr. Birch
and Elected 5 December
1765 Admitted
12 December 1765
John Canton
John Canton
Matt Raper
Isaac Mauduit
Benjamin Franklin
Samuel Dyer
H. O. C.

For his work in mathematics and philosophy Price was elected to the Royal Society in 1765. One of his sponsors was his close friend

Benjamin Franklin

Price belonged to many clubs and society's in his lifetime including one named 'The Club of Honest Whigs' by fellow member Franklin

It met in the London Coffee House on Ludgate Hill

Price also introduced Joseph Priestley to the society and served on its Council

OBSERVATIONS

ON

REVERSIONARY PAYMENTS;

ON

SCHEMES for providing ANNUITIES
for WIDOWS, and for Persons in OLD AGE;

ON

The METHOD of Calculating the VALUES
of ASSURANCES ON LIVES;

AND ON

THE NATIONAL DEBT.

To which are added,

FOUR ESSAYS

On different Subjects in the Doctrine of LIFE-
ANNUITIES and POLITICAL ARITHMETICK.

The FOURTH EDITION,

Enlarged into TWO VOLUMES by

Additional Notes and Essays, a Collection of New
Tables, a History of the Sinking Fund, a State of
the Public Debts in January 1783, and a *Postscript* on
the Population of the Kingdom.

By RICHARD PRICE, D.D. F.R.S.

L O N D O N :

Printed for T. CADELL, in the Strand.
M.DCC.LXXXIII.

OBSERVATIONS on Reversionary Payments

Published in 1771 and going through four editions in his lifetime this work reflected Price's lifelong concern for the development of life assurance and a national system of old age pensions

It also helped create the modern insurance industry

Price involved himself in two unsuccessful attempts to introduce a national system of old age pensions. Both attempts were defeated in parliament

He also discussed another of his perennial concerns, the size of the National Debt

XLVII. *A Letter from Richard Price, D. D. F. R. S. to Benjamin Franklin, L. L. D. F. R. S. on the Effect of the Aberration of Light on the Time of a Transit of Venus over the Sun.*

DEAR SIR,

Read Dec. 20. 1770. **I** Cannot doubt but that the observation made by your ingenious friend in the paper * you sent me is right. The aberration of Venus must, I think, affect the phases of a transit, by retarding them, and not by accelerating them. This retardation is $55\frac{1}{2}''$; for that is the time nearly which Venus, during a transit, takes to move over $3''.7$. This, however, is by no means the whole retardation of a transit occasioned by aberration. There is a retardation arising from the aberration of the Sun, as well as from that of Venus. The aberration of the Sun, it is well known, lessens its longitude about $20''$. and the aberration of Venus, agreeably to your friend's demonstration, increases its longitude at the time of a transit $3''.7$. Venus, therefore, and the Sun, at the instant of the true beginning of a transit, must be separated from one another by aberration $23''.7$; and, since Venus then moves nearly at the rate of $4'$ in an

* The paper which occasioned this letter, and which is here referred to, may be found in p. 358 of this volume.



The Transit of Venus across the Sun's face as seen on 6th June 2012

In the Eighteenth Century there were two transits of Venus across the sun (1761 and 1769). The second was measured by James Cook in Tahiti on the same voyage that saw him land at Botany Bay, Australia

Major Works by Dr Richard Price

- ▶ 1758 ▶ A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals
- ▶ 1759 ▶ Britain's Happiness and its Improvement
- ▶ 1764 ▶ Essay on the Doctrine of Chances & Supplement
- ▶ 1766 ▶ The Nature and Dignity of the Human Soul
- ▶ 1767 ▶ Four Dissertations
- ▶ 1769 ▶ Observations on Expectation of Lives
- ▶ 1770 ▶ On the Transit of Venus
- ▶ The Vanity, Misery and Infamy of Knowledge without Suitable Practice
- ▶ Observations on Method of Calculating Value of Reversions

Major Works by Dr Richard Price

- ▶ 1771 ▶ Observations on Reversionary Payments
- ▶ 1771 ▶ Account of a Scheme for Providing (poor) Relief
- ▶ 1772 ▶ Appeal to the Public on the National Debt
- ▶ 1774 ▶ On the Insalubrity of Marshy Situations
- ▶ 1775 ▶ Observations on the Duration of Human Life
- ▶ 1775 ▶ Short and Easy Theorems
- ▶ 1776 ▶ Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty
- ▶ 1778 ▶ Two Tracts on Civil Liberty
- ▶ 1778 ▶ The War with America
- ▶ 1778 ▶ The Debts and Finances of the Kingdom
- ▶ 1779 ▶ Essay on Population in England and Wales
- ▶ 1781 ▶ A Fast Sermon

Major Works by Dr Richard Price

- ▶ 1783 ▶ State of the Public Debts
- ▶ 1784 ▶ Observations on Importance of American Revolution
- ▶ 1787 ▶ Sermon – Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in State of Mankind
- ▶ 1789 ▶ Discourse on the Love of Our Country
- ▶ Sermons on the Christian Doctrine