

A Moral Cause this essay was written when page-length requirements were shorter



“The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind.”
- Paine

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Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* is a passionate and yet simple argument in support of America's war with Great Britain, which is based on the latter's abuses and the former's need for independence. Paine points out that Great Britain's reason for colonizing America is based on economic needs not on humanitarian motives. He further concludes that England's treatment of the American colonies and the colonists is immoral. Consequently, he argues that American colonists have no moral obligation to remain dependent upon England for support or protection. In fact, Paine takes the position that it would actually be quite immoral to continue this dependency because England has attacked the American colonies. He therefore concludes that the colonists must now fight until liberty is attained. With America now at war in Iraq many question the morality of the United States's involvement, which is based in part on humanitarian issues. Using Thomas Paine's principles governing moral behavior, America has an obligation to its citizens, its soldiers and the people of Iraq to continue its military presence in Iraq until the new democratic Iraqi government is secure and the Iraqi people are safe from oppression.

In his pamphlet *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine explains why it has become necessary for America to seek her independence from Great Britain when he sights England's "long and common violent abuse of power." He goes on to explain that "the good people of this country are grievously oppressed" (706). Paine examines the relationship between England the imperialist nation and her American colonies and how they are affected by the principles of nature. He believes England is a "tyrant" who has no love or care beyond that of material gain in colonizing and controlling America and that any comfort or protection given to America is done so only in the interest of trade. And to this selfish end she has used America immorally to increase her wealth and empire, with no thought to the needs of the people who inhabit the colonies. Paine feels that this goes against the rights of nature. England he argues never has had

an interest in creating a home for “persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty” (708). He goes on to say “the same tyranny which drove the first immigrants from home, pursues their descendents still” (708). He believes Americans have a natural right to a government of their own, free from oppression and tyranny. Furthermore, he contends that Americans have a moral obligation to secure this freedom even if it means war, and that once committed they must continue to fight until their goal is reached.

The Iraq war brings into question the same issues of morality that are addressed by Paine because it is a war against terrorism and oppression. Paine believes that government’s, “limited role is to protect happiness and security... monarchies and other tyrannical systems have perverted this natural order, and it is the duty of Americans to set another example” (Goldman). According to President George W. Bush, in his address to the nation on October 7, 2002, a “[f]ailure to act would embolden other tyrants...The lives of Iraqi citizens would improve dramatically if Saddam Hussein were no longer in power and that all people are entitled to hope and human rights, to the non-negotiable demands of human dignity. People everywhere prefer freedom to slavery; prosperity to squalor; self-government to the rule of terror and torture.” America’s administration in 2002 believed that the Iraqi government had weapons of mass destruction. The fact that this claim has not been proven does not invalidate America’s war in Iraq, because there is evidence that Saddam Hussein’s Ba’th Party government supported terrorism, as well as, it’s long record of inhumane treatment of the Iraqi people. President Bush made it clear that the war was based on three main goals, “We will secure our nation, protect our freedom and help others to find freedom of their own” (Bush). Using Thomas Paine’s principles of moral behavior America’s war in Iraq is justified by the need for protecting America against further terrorist attacks and in so doing protecting the freedom of American people. Under these

same principles it would be inhumane to ignore the oppression of the Iraqi people who have suffered such great inhumanity under Saddam Hussein's government. "In the last twenty-five years of Ba'ath party rule the Iraqi government murdered or 'disappeared' some quarter of a million Iraqis" (Roth).

There are those who would say America's humanitarian intervention is a "subsidiary motive" (Roth) but even if that is true, it does not relieve America of a moral duty to free the Iraqi people from oppression. Once having gone to war and committed forces to free the Iraqi people, America has a moral obligation to help them establish a democratic government and secure their safety. Some would argue that the cost of Iraqi freedom is far too high. But, I would say that the cost is indeed so high, that it would be immoral to withdraw before the mission is completed. It is the same as, "when Paine called the nation to action in *Common Sense*, asserting that 'the sun never shone on a cause of greater worth,'" (Goldman). We have spent billions of dollars on the Iraq war; and, it has cost the lives of countless young American men and women soldiers. Therefore, it would be immoral to have sacrificed so many lives in the name of the Iraqi people's liberty only to stop before that freedom is secure. As Thomas Paine said, "as we are running the next generation into debt, we ought to do the work of it, otherwise we use them meanly and pitifully" (710).

Paine believes "The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind" (706). It would be naïve to believe that America can involve herself in every humanitarian cause around the globe; and, it is true that America became involved in the Iraq War to protect America first and to free the Iraqi people second, but this secondary reason only increases the morality of America's involvement. There is no greater moral cause than protecting one's own freedom; unless, it is protecting the lives and freedom of those who are unable to do so for

themselves. As Thomas Paine wrote, “O! Ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth!” (712).

Work Cited **MLA requirements have changed since this essay was written**

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