

PIETAS

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Benjamin Franklin, by Robert Feke (c. 1746) oil on canvas, Harvard Art Museums

We forget that Benjamin Franklin was once young—see the portrait of forty-year-old Franklin above—and that he introduced a distinctly American conception of *pietas*, or duty. We will return to Franklin’s piety following an introduction to our feature articles for this spring issue.

In our first feature article, John Antonio Pascarella frames the political debate in American universities between promoting free speech and protecting students from hate speech within the context of the ideas that birthed the modern university. In a close reading of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, Pascarella argues that Hobbes’s views on free speech are informed less by his statements about the political order than by his understanding of the liberal education. Hobbes, argues Pascarella, rejected the possibility of philosophy and replaced it with “a political science that subjects intellectual, moral, and religious life to the need for peace through the willfully reductive language of ‘power.’” Far from introducing a liberal free play of ideas, the liberal categories of significant and insignificant speech introduced new limitations on what may be discussed in universities. To understand the current quarrel over free speech on campus, argues Pascarella, one must return to the

parameters introduced by Hobbes in the liberal tradition. And only by a return to a more ancient conception of liberal education, he suggests, can we see outside those limitations.

One of the first great advocates of the freedom of speech in the colonies was Benjamin Franklin, who wrote that Hobbes's idea of human nature "is somewhat nearer the Truth than that which makes the State of Nature a State of Love: But the Truth perhaps lies between both Extreams." In our second piece, Kevin Slack focuses on Benjamin Franklin's writings during what he calls the "crucial decade" of the 1730s. Slack develops scholarship that chronicles Franklin's changing views on the British Empire in decisive steps beginning in the 1750s. He argues that scholars have overlooked Franklin's early comparison of proprietary government in Pennsylvania with that in Maryland in the 1730s. To make his case, Slack includes new attributions to the Franklin canon, two of which are included in an appendix. Combining these new attributions with detailed assessments of Franklin's changing views on concrete political issues, Slack shows the development of Franklin's ideas on political concepts such as sovereignty, lawmaking, delegation, the judiciary, the separation of powers, and ultimately his rejection of both proprietary government and the British Empire itself.

Black leaders in the Reconstruction Era often looked to Benjamin Franklin's teachings on virtue to direct their own efforts to educate the freedmen. Joey Barretta returns to Frederick Douglass's writings on education to provide a thorough account of his educational program. Thus, he offers something new in scholarship, a systematic treatment of Douglass's work on education over his entire career. Douglass's essays that promote industrial training and social mobility in the 1850s and 1860s, Barretta argues, must be read in the context of his broader vision for a comprehensive cultivation of the mind. Barretta turns to a lesser-known 1894 speech, "The Blessings of Liberty and Education," which he considers to be especially significant in "understanding the role of education in [Douglass's] political thought" because it reveals "how his work on education developed in the years prior." Understanding Douglass's overarching principles on the highest form of human education shines light on his earlier educational career and emphasis on vocational training.

Our final feature article is by Josiah Lippincott, who examines the origin of the myths forged after World War II that currently underpin what scholars have called the neoliberal world order. Lippincott locates the roots of America's involvement in that conflict in the late nineteenth-century progressive view of foreign policy, which directly led to America's

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involvement in the Philippines, China, and the Far East. Describing itself in clear opposition to the American founders' views of neutrality and diplomacy, those interventions ultimately led to Pearl Harbor by placing American projects for global uplift on a collision course with Imperial Japanese geopolitical interests. The aftermath of the war introduced a new and radically different international arrangement that reduced the once-dominant imperial European powers to secondary players. It was constituted by "American hegemony, free trade, mass immigration, international mediating institutions, and the elevation of democracy, ethnic self-determination, and colonial liberation as guiding principles."

In our book reviews for this issue, Coyle Neal reviews Vittorio Bufacchi's *Why Cicero Matters*, Nathanael Blake reviews Ryan Holston's *Tradition and the Deliberative Turn*, Jacob Wolf reviews Daniel J. Mahoney's *The Statesman as Thinker*, and Oliver Spivey reviews Steven Frye's *Ungessed Kinships*. Many thanks to our authors and reviewers, without whom our journal would not be possible.

* * *

Benjamin Franklin is perhaps the least likely American founder to come to mind when we think of the word *piety*, yet it is a constant theme in his writings. As a young man, he constructed a deist worship service (the first of several attempts), in which, under a section entitled "DUTY," he prayed that he might "be preserved from Atheism and Infidelity."¹ He used the word *atheism* to mean chaos, a world without causes and thus unknowable. As a "lover of Truth," Franklin extolled the "Use of *Logic*, or the Art of Reasoning to *discover* Truth, and of Arguing to *defend* it, and *convince* Adversaries."² In 1750 he described the God of his experiments in electrical fluid: "This affords another Occasion of adoring that WISDOM which has made *all Things* by Weight and Measure!"³ He wrote of the great natural philosopher Sir Robert Boyle: "His knowledge of natural history, and skill in chymistry, were

¹ Benjamin Franklin, "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion," in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard Labaree et al., 44 vols. to date (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959–2024), 1:107.

² Franklin, "A Letter to a Friend in the Country," 2:68; *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*, 3:414. Franklin's "Standing Queries for the Junto," 1:259, included among the required questions, "Do you love truth for truth's sake, and will you endeavor impartially to find and receive it yourself and communicate it to others?—*Answer*. Yes."

³ Franklin, "Opinions and Conjectures," 4:12.

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very great and extensive; and his piety inferior to neither.”⁴ The life of Boyle, Franklin said, proved “that tho’ *Ignorance* may in some be the *Mother of Devotion*, yet true learning and exalted piety are by no means inconsistent.”

The piety of wisdom proceeded from “a philosophic thought,” a reflection upon death, that likens human life to flowers that bloom and decay:

I pluck’d this morn these beauteous flow’rs,
Emblem of my fleeting hours;
’Tis thus, said I, my life-time flies,
So it blooms, and so it dies.
And, lo! how soon they steal away,
Wither’d e’er the noon of day.
Adieu! well-pleas’d my end I see,
Gently taught philosophy:
Fragrance and ornament alive,
Physic after death they give,
Let me, throughout my little stay,
Be as useful and as gay;
My close as early let me meet,
So my odour be as sweet.⁵

In the face of fleeting existence, Franklin queried what is longest lasting, or most enduring, and he tied piety in wisdom to piety in moral virtue.

Not like the Bloom of Beauty, quickly past;
VIRTUE the Chief: This Men and Angels prize,
Above the finest Shape and brightest Eyes.
By this alone, untainted Joys we find,
As large and as immortal as the Mind.⁶

Among human minds, Franklin agreed that Sir Isaac Newton and John Locke were among the best. He inserted James Thomson’s poem, which asserts that Newton’s glory outshone that of the ancient Greeks, alongside Pope’s epitaph, “Nature and nature’s laws lay hid in night; God said, *Let NEWTON be*, and all was light.”⁷ As for Locke, Franklin writes, “The

⁴ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1749, 3:335–36:

⁵ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1748, 3:254, quotes Samuel Wesley, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: E. Say, 1736), 77, hitherto “not identified.”

⁶ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1748, 3:253–54, quotes Samuel Wesley, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: E. Say, 1736), 94, hitherto “not identified.”

⁷ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1748, 3:251.

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famous John Locke, Esq ...[was] the Newton of the *Microcosm*: For, as Thomson says, He made the whole *internal world* his own. His book on the *Human Understanding* shows it.”⁸ Franklin called Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* the “best Book of Logick in the World.”⁹ Locke, he believed, had uncovered not only the principles of mind but also the “first Principles of sound *Politicks*.”¹⁰

But philosophic contemplation was not the only end of man. Piety in Franklin’s writings also included the duty to perfect oneself in virtue. Franklin, who concluded that “Revelation had indeed no weight with me,” understood both faith and reason as means to the same moral end.¹¹ In the first issue of *Poor Richard Improved*, a lengthier almanac appearing in 1748, he offered the following advice: “To lead a virtuous Life, my Friends, and get to Heaven in a Season, You’ve just so much more Need of *Faith*, as you have of less of *Reason*.”¹² Virtue for a naturally social creature expanded beyond any solipsistic notion of self-perfection.¹³ Franklin also prayed that he might “be loyal to my Prince, and faithful to my Country, careful for its Good, valiant in its Defence, and obedient to its Laws, abhorring Treason as much as Tyranny.”¹⁴

While Franklin longed for leisure for philosophic study, he did not live a simple life of contemplation.¹⁵ During King George’s War, he tied the notion of lasting glory to heroism. He contrasted the false idea of a hero—the great robber-emperor worse than either plague or famine—to the “true Hero,” a “deliverer” like King William, who was “one of the right sort of *Heroes*”: “Your *true* hero fights to *preserve*, and not to destroy, the lives, liberties, and estates, of his people.”¹⁶ While “this sort [of hero] is thin sown, and comes up thinner,” modern heroes like the Duke of Cumberland possessed the courage of ancient warriors:

⁸ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1748, 3:259.

⁹ Edwin Wolf 2nd and Kevin J. Hayes, *The Library of Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 2006), 20.

¹⁰ Franklin, *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*, 3:413.

¹¹ *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Labaree, Ralph Ketcham, and Helen Boatfield (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964), 114-15; Franklin, “Dialogue between Two Presbyterians,” 2:30: “Morality or Virtue is the End, Faith only a Means to obtain that End.”

¹² Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1748, 3:249; he 3:237, advertised the couplet in the September 17, 1747 *Pennsylvania Gazette* as “Faith and Reason.”

¹³ On man’s social nature see Franklin, “Men are Naturally Benevolent as Well as Selfish,” in *Franklin: Writings*, ed. J.A. Leo Lemay (New York: The Library of America, 1987), 200-203; on man’s striving for happiness and perfection, see “Proposals and Queries to be Asked the Junto,” 209-210.

¹⁴ Franklin, “Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion,” 108.

¹⁵ Franklin to Cadwallader Colden, January 27, 1748 and September 29, 1748, 3:272, 318.

¹⁶ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1748, 3:255.

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Then honour struck the stroke, true love of fame
In each brave breast glow'd with a gen'rous flame,
Not yet extinct in All; the same we view
Boscawen, Warren, Anson, still in you.¹⁷

In addition to courage on the battlefield, Franklin directed the love of fame to other endeavors such as the doctor's "glorious Scene of Action," who, "Cordials and Med'cines gratis to dispense, A beauteous Instrument of Providence."¹⁸ On women, Franklin amended Samuel Wesley poetry to include, "*Housewifery* is Women's noblest Fame":

When great Augustus rul'd the World and Rome,
The Cloth he wore was spun and wove at Home,
His Empress ply'd the Distaff and the Loom.
Old England's Laws the proudest beauty name,
When single, Spinster, and when married, Dame,
For *Housewifery* is Women's noblest Fame.
The Wisest houshold Cares to Women yield,
A large, an useful, and a grateful Field.¹⁹

Perhaps Franklin reserved the greatest glory for founders. He praised "WILLIAM PENN, the great founder of this Province; who prudently and benevolently sought success to himself by no other means, than securing the *liberty*, and endeavoring the *happiness* of his people."²⁰ He follows with a radical statement, "Let no envious mind grudge his posterity those advantages which arise to them from the wisdom and goodness of their ancestor; and *to which their own merit, as well as the laws, give them additional title.*"²¹ Franklin aspired to become one of the great "Lawgivers" by unifying a people.²² His 1747 *Plain Truth*, which birthed an association of over one thousand militiamen, exhorts: "Conscience enjoins it as a Duty on you (and indeed I think it such on every Man) to defend your Country, your Friends, your Aged Parents, your Wives, and helpless Children."²³ It was a social contract: "thus being unprotected by the Government ... We Do hereby, for our mutual Defence and Security, and for the Security of our Wives, Children and Estates, and the Preservation of the Persons

¹⁷ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1748, 3:253.

¹⁸ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1748, 3:257.

¹⁹ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1748, 3:255.

²⁰ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1748, 3:260.

²¹ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1748, 3:260 [Emphasis added].

²² Franklin, "Form of Association," 3:211.

²³ Franklin, *Plain Truth*, 3:201.

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and Estates of others, our Neighbours ... form ourselves into an Association.”²⁴ The integrity of his “Militia of Freemen,” wrote Franklin, was inspired by ancient Roman virtue.²⁵ “In worthy Minds, the Principles of *Reason, Duty* and *Honour*, work more strongly than the Fears of Punishment.”²⁶ The choice of officers, he argued, should be made by the people and guided by its leaders: “The whole Choice, indeed, may, in one Sense, be said to be in the People, as it takes its Rise from them.... And as every Neighbourhood would be glad of Assistance if attacked, so it ought to be willing to give Assistance where it is needed.”²⁷ The elected “General Military Council” would be “the Common-Band that unites all Parts of the whole Association in one Body.” To transcend “Party Spirit,” Franklin criticized both the wealthy and the Quakers.²⁸ He created the symbols and mottos for the militia units. One depicted three hands—merchant, laborer, and gentleman—united in virtue: “UNITA VIRTUS VALET.”²⁹ Franklin also located unity in a common faith. He coined the motto “IN GOD WE TRUST” and wrote a “Proclamation for a General Fast” for God’s providential aid.³⁰

The formation of a people is achieved by education, the goal of Franklin’s 1749 *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*. He spent much time reflecting on how a liberal education might channel what he called “laudable worthy Ambition,” the subject of his written advice to his “beloved son” William, then twenty-eight years old.³¹ Franklin saw the driving of passion by reason—or “Passions reduced under the Government of Reason”—as the key to “be both good and great.”³² He advised, “It was wise counsel given to a young man, *Pitch upon that course of life which is most excellent, and CUSTOM will make it the most delightful*. But many pitch on no course of life at all, nor form any scheme of living, by which to attain any valuable end; but wander perpetually from one thing to another.”³³ A young Franklin had assessed his own flaws in his 1726 “Plan of Conduct”:

If we would write what may be worth the reading, we ought always, before we begin, to form a regular plan and design of our piece: otherwise, we shall be in danger of

²⁴ Franklin, “Form of Association,” 3:206.

²⁵ Franklin, “Form of Association,” 3:209.

²⁶ Franklin, “Form of Association,” 3:211.

²⁷ Franklin, “Form of Association,” 3:210.

²⁸ Franklin to Cadwallader Colden, November 27, 1747, 3:213.

²⁹ Franklin, “Colors of the Associator Companies,” 3:267–68.

³⁰ Franklin, “Proclamation for a General Fast,” 3:226–29.

³¹ Franklin, “A Letter From Father Abraham to His Beloved Son,” 8: 124, 128.

³² Franklin, “A Letter From Father Abraham to His Beloved Son,” 8: 125, 129.

³³ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1749, 3:341.

incongruity. I am apt to think it is the same as to life. I have never fixed a regular design in life; by which means it has been a confused variety of different scenes. I am now entering upon a new one: let me, therefore, make some resolutions, and form some scheme of action, that, henceforth, I may live in all respects like a rational creature.”³⁴

Franklin’s 1728 religious articles that posited the “First Principles” of religion included Nicholas Rowe’s “Golden Verses” of Pythagoras.³⁵ He recommended the “Golden Verses” as part of a worship service in his *Autobiography* and placed them in his 1758 essay, “A Letter From Father Abraham to His Beloved Son”³⁶:

Let not the stealing God of Sleep surprize,
Nor creep in Slumbers on thy weary Eyes,
Ere ev’ry Action of the former Day,
Strictly thou dost, and *righteously* survey.
With Rev’rence at thy own Tribunal stand,
And answer justly to thy own Demand.
Where have I been? In what have I transgressed?
What Good or Ill has this Day’s Life exprest?
Where have I fail’d in what I ought to do?
In what to GOD, to Man, or to myself I owe?
Inquire severe whate’er from first to last,
From Morning’s Dawn till Ev’nings Gloom has past.
If Evil were thy Deeds, repenting mourn,
And let thy Soul with strong Remorse be torn:
If Good, the Good with Peace of Mind repay,
And to thy secret Self with Pleasure say,
Rejoice, my Heart, for all went well to Day.

In his 1749 *Poor Richard Improved*, Franklin included his own poetic verses on self-examination in imitation of master Rowe. It may be considered the sum of his piety:

³⁴ Franklin, “Plan of Conduct,” 1:99–100.

³⁵ Franklin, “Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion,” 102; on Pythagoras’s “Golden Verses” as part of the worship service, see *Autobiography*, 151, 151n6.

³⁶ Franklin, *Autobiography*, 151, 151n6; “A Letter From Father Abraham to His Beloved Son,” *Papers*, 8:123–31; on authorship, see Kevin Slack, “On the Sources and Authorship of ‘A Letter From Father Abraham to His Beloved Son,’” *New England Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (September 2013): 467–87.

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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S "GOLDEN VERSES" (1749)

Wak'd by the Call of Morn, on early Knee,
Ere the World thrust between thy God and thee,
Let thy pure Oraisons, ascending, gain
His Ear, and Succour of his Grace obtain,
In Wants, in Toils, in Perils of the Day,
And strong Temptations that beset thy Way.
Thy best Resolves then in his Strength renew
To walk in Virtue's Paths, and Vice eschew.

To HIM intrust thy Slumbers, and prepare
The fragrant Incense of thy Ev'ning Prayer.
But first tread back the Day, with Search severe,
And Conscience, chiding or applauding, hear.
Review each Step; *Where, acting, did I err?*
Omitting, where? Guilt either Way infer.
Labour this Point, and while thy Frailties last,
Still let each following Day correct the last.

LIFE is a shelvy Sea, the Passage fear,
And not without a skilful Pilot steer.
Distrust thy Youth, experienc'd Age implore,
And borrow all the Wisdom of Threescore.
But chief a Father's, Mother's Voice revere;
'Tis Love that chides, 'tis Love that counsels here.
Thrice happy is the Youth, whose pliant Mind
To all a Parent's Culture is resign'd.

O, well begun, Virtue's great Work pursue,
Passions at first we may with Ease subdue;
But if neglected, unrestrain'd too long,
Prevailing in their Growth, by Habit strong,
They've w[arp]d the Mind, have fix'd the stubborn Bent,
And Force of Custom to wild Nature lent;
Who then would set the crooked Tree aright,
As soon may wash the tawny Indian white.

Industry's bounteous Hand may *Plenty* bring,
But wanting *frugal Care*, 'twill soon take wing.
Small thy Supplies, and scanty in their Source,
'Twixt *Av'rice* and *Profusion* steer thy Course.
Av'rice is deaf to *Want's* Heart-bursting Groan,
Profusion makes the Beggar's Rags thy own:
Close Fraud and Wrong from griping *Av'rice* grow,
From rash *Profusion* desp'rate Acts and Woe.

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Franklin left the final words of his poetic endeavor to John Dryden³⁷:

Hast thou not yet propos'd some certain end,
To which thy life, thy every act may tend?
Hast thou no mark at which to bend thy bow?
Or like a boy pursu'st the carrion crow
With pellets and with stones, from tree to tree,
A fruitless toil, and liv'st *extempore*?
...

Why you were mad[e], for what you were design'd,
And the great *moral end* of human kind.
Study thy self; what rank or what degree,
The wise creator has ordain'd for thee:
And all the offices of that estate,
Perform, and with thy prudence guide thy fate.

The Ciceronian Society

³⁷ Franklin, *Poor Richard Improved*, 1749, 3:341-2, citing *The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis, Translated into English Verse. By Mr. John Dryden...* (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1693), Satire III, "Perseus," 37.