

SANE BEN FRANKLIN:
AN ADLERIAN VIEW OF HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*,³ a classic of world literature, has curiously failed to attract psychoanalytic literary critics. The reason is, it would seem, that Franklin comes through as a man who is not only psychologically normal, but is indeed a model for the well-adjusted, perfectly adapted personality. Psychoanalytic literary critics are much more attracted to the writer who bears psychic wounds, who walks the brink of anomie, anxiety and despair. Psychoanalysis is, after all, concerned with abnormality rather than normality and its insights apply mainly to those who are psychically disturbed. The one known psychoanalytic study of Franklin explains his psychic development as a life-long effort to control or sublimate strong analerotic drives (8).

There should certainly be a place in psychological criticism for those works of literature that have withstood the test of time, not because they offer a glance into the depths of human anguish but because they show the triumph of psychic adaptation. We are convinced that, unlike previous generations which found the *Autobiography* attractive because it was a classic statement of the Protestant ethic (15, p. 54)—a formula for success and wealth through industry and thrift—modern readers are likely to find it significant because it is a prescription for mental health.

The Franklin of the *Autobiography* is supremely self-confident and comfortable in his environment; his life is indeed a success story, not merely the success of shopkeeper capitalism, but of dynamic psychological growth. The Ben Franklin of legend, the boy of seventeen who arrived in Philadelphia tired and broke and re-

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³References to the *Autobiography* will be made through page numbers only. These refer to the Modern Library edition (10, pp. 6-192). Despite the fact that the Yale Labaree edition (9) supersedes all others through its scholarliness, we decided on the Modern Library edition on account of its greater availability, more conventional spelling, and inclusion of the Dogood Papers in the same volume.

mained to become the city's most famous citizen, might have ended up like his talented friend John Collins by drinking himself to oblivion. But he did not, and the reason he did not runs through the *Autobiography* as a recurring leitmotif. It is the combination of his high degree of activity, great self-confidence, and social interest or community feeling—what Alfred Adler called *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*.

We want to examine Franklin's *Autobiography* from the viewpoint of Adler's Individual Psychology. Actually Adler not only knew this work, but cited Franklin's admonition to train oneself in humility if one wishes to be persuasive (pp. 103-104) in support of his own plea for tactfulness in counseling parents about their children (2, pp. 242-244; 3, p. 163). Phyllis Bottome, Adler's biographer, mentions that he often referred psychiatrists to the *Autobiography* (6, p. 102).

Where the systems of Freud and Jung are what Henri Ellenberger calls romantic psychologies, focusing on "the cult of the irrational and the individual" (7, p. 245), Adler's psychological theory is rational and pragmatic, stressing social interaction. Because Franklin was a product of the Enlightenment, with intellectual roots in Lockean psychology, Newtonian empiricism, and Shaftsburian humanitarianism, it is Adler's system rather than Freud's or Jung's which is more in tune with Franklin's psychological development (13, p. xiii ff.; 5, p. 5).

Adler asserts that a single motivation, striving for superiority, characterizes the movement of mankind. Mental health consists of striving for a goal of superiority on the socially useful side; neuroses are the result of an attempt to attain private, self-centered victories at the expense of others. The totality in which this dynamic process operates is the person's life style. Formed at an early age, it remains relatively constant throughout life.

The basic Adlerian principles of the "normal" personality can be seen in the *Autobiography*. A contemporary of Adler, Ladislaus Zilahi, recommended: "If one had any doubt as to what is meant by real courage and a sane, generally useful striving for significance, . . . active overcoming of personal vanity, . . . true understanding of human nature and . . . trained social interest—let him turn to Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*" (16). The present paper is an attempt to arrive at a better understanding of Franklin, and of Individual Psychology as well, by following Zilahi's recommendation.

THE GIFTED CHILD

The few anecdotes Franklin relates about his early years support the conclusion that he was a most unusual child. The youngest son in a family of thirteen children, though with two younger sisters, he seems to have been a favorite of his father, whom he mentions often and always appreciatively. His mother is conspicuously absent from the accounts of his childhood. Franklin had a fond relationship with his uncle Benjamin who corresponded with him from England in verse, Franklin replying in kind, during his fourth to seventh years.

At the age of eight, Franklin was sent to a grammar school for one year, during which time he seems to have made unusual progress. His father had hoped to give him a college education in preparation for the ministry. It was also "the opinion of all his friends that I should certainly make a good scholar . . . My uncle Benjamin too approved of it" (p. 12). But his father had to change his plans because of the expense this would have entailed and took him out of the grammar school. Franklin had one more year of formal education at a "school for writing and arithmetic, kept by a then famous man" where he "acquired fair writing pretty soon . . . but fail'd in arithmetic" (p. 12).

At ten, young Franklin was taken into his father's business, that of tallow-chandler and soap-boiler, which he disliked very much, and after two years his father changed his occupation.

It was a "bookish inclination [which] at length determined my father to make me a printer" (p. 17) at the age of 12. "I now had access to better books" (p. 17). All the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books" (p. 16). The books he read were of a serious nature, his grasp of them was deep, and they were well remembered—e.g., Cotten Mather's *Essays to do Good* "which perhaps gave me a turn of thinking that had an influence on some of the principal future events of my life" (p. 16).

He was a remarkably well equipped youngster, for in addition to keen intelligence he seemed to have inherited a splendid constitution from both his parents, with great muscular strength and endurance. He needed little sleep and little food, and this gave him time and energy for his varied pursuits. He became early a good swimmer (p. 13).

EARLY TRAINING IN SOCIAL FEELING

Ordinarily it is the child's mother, according to Adler, who must give the child the opportunity for success by its own efforts, so that it can establish its style of life and seek for its superiority in increasingly useful ways. . . . She must interest the child in other persons and in the wider environment of life. So far as she can discharge these two functions—of bestowing independence and of imparting a true initial understanding of the surrounding situation in the home and the world—she will see the child develop social feeling, independence, and courage (1, p. 32).

In Franklin's case it was apparently his father, Josiah Franklin, who took on these functions, since his mother is barely mentioned.

People would come to Josiah Franklin seeking advice or arbitration for their differences. "At his table he liked to have as often as he could, some sensible friend or neighbor, to converse with, and always took care to start some ingenious or useful topic for discourse, which might tend to improve the minds of his children. By this means he turned our attention to what was good, just, and prudent in the conduct of life" (p. 14).

In seeking to find a suitable occupation for Franklin he took his son to walk with him to see various workmen at their trades, and Franklin writes: "It has ever since been a pleasure to me to see good workmen handle their tools; and it has been useful to me, having learnt so much by it as to be able to do little jobs myself" (p. 16). Much later he wrote, my father, "among his instructions to me as a boy, frequently repeated a proverb of Solomon, 'Seest thou a man diligent in his calling, he shall stand before kings.' . . . [This] encourag'd me, tho' I did not think that I should ever literally *stand before kings*, which, however, has since happened" (p. 90).

Franklin says of his father: "But his great excellence lay in sound understanding, and solid judgment in prudential matters, both in private and publick affairs" (p. 14). Prudence, which we may assume to include thrift, and industry were thus inculcated by his father. Franklin later described industry and frugality as "the means of procuring wealth, and thereby securing virtue; it being more difficult for a man in want, to act always honestly, as, to use here one of those proverbs [from *Poor Richard's Almanack*], as *it is hard for an empty sack to stand upright*" (p. 108). Correspondingly, Adler points out, "If an individual, in the meaning he gives to life, wishes to make a contribution, and if his emotions are all directed to this goal, he will naturally be bound to bring himself into the best shape" (4, p. 113).

We learn also that Franklin's father offered him helpful criticism of his early writing. Later he implies how much he would have welcomed the advice of his father when he was "thro' the dangerous time of youth, and the hazardous situations . . . among strangers, remote from the eye and advice of my father" (p. 66).

EARLY RECOLLECTIONS

Franklin was 65 when he started the *Autobiography* and nearly everything we know of his childhood consists of his memories of events that occurred some half century past. The events that are remembered are, however, especially important. "There are no chance memories," Adler wrote.

Out of the incalculable number of impressions which meet an individual, he chooses to remember only those which he feels, however darkly, to have a bearing on his situation. Thus his memories represent his "Story of My Life"; a story he repeats to himself to warn him or comfort him, to keep him concentrated on his goal, and to prepare him by means of past experiences, so that he will meet the future with an already tested style of action (4, p. 351).

Buying a Whistle

The *Autobiography*, not written with an eye to the modern reader's interest in early childhood, relates very few incidents of this period. It does not include the best known, and probably earliest one, the purchase of a whistle for which the seven-year-old paid too much. The recollection goes as follows:

When I was a child of seven years old, my friends, on a holiday, filled my pockets with coppers. I went directly to a shop where they sold toys for children; and, being charmed with the sound of a whistle that I met by the way in the hands of another boy, I voluntarily offered and gave all my money for one. I then came home and went whistling all over the house, much pleased with my whistle, but disturbing all the family. My brothers and sisters and cousins, understanding the bargain I had made, told me I had given four times as much for it as it was worth; put me in mind what good things I might have bought with the rest of the money; and laughed at me so much for my folly that I cried with vexation; and the reflection gave me more chagrin than the whistle gave me pleasure (14, p. 8).

This is truly an example of an earliest recollection par excellence in the richness of material it affords. It shows young Franklin in a positive mood, on a holiday; among friends; the recipient of their generosity; with money; delighted by a sound; enjoying the sufferance of others; accepting a consensus which was critical; and, one assumes, learning a lesson from the experience. Most importantly Franklin shows independence, initiative, covers a great deal of ground, and is the center of the scene.

Decision on Schooling

The earliest recollection in the *Autobiography* refers to the discontinuation of his father's plan to give Franklin an academic education which occasioned his being withdrawn from grammar school after one year.

"But my father, in the meantime, from a view of the expense of a college education, which having so large a family he could not well afford, and the mean living many so educated were afterwards able to obtain—reasons that he gave to his friends in my hearing—altered his first intention" (p. 12).

Two dimensions involved in the recollection are money, and education. Franklin was to pursue both of these throughout most of his life, and it is significant that they appear together in Franklin's first surviving published writing, the Dogood Papers, as we shall see. But perhaps equally important is the fact that taking a child out of school for lack of money, which in other families might be kept secret, surprisingly in Franklin's family was a matter of relatively public concern.

Building a Wharf

The only other incident of his boyhood recalled by Franklin is the following:

There was a salt-marsh . . . on the edge of which, at high water, we used to stand to fish for minnows . . . a mere quagmire. My proposal was to build a wharff there fit for us to stand upon, and I showed my comrades a large heap of stones, which were intended for a new house . . . and which would very well suit our purpose. Accordingly, in the evening, when the workmen were gone, I assembled a number of my play-fellows, and working with them diligently like so many emmets, sometimes two or three to a stone, we brought them all away and built our little wharff. The next morning the workmen were surprised at missing the stones . . . we were discovered and complained of; several of us were corrected by our fathers; and, though I pleaded the usefulness of the work, mine convinced me that nothing was useful which was not honest (p. 13).

This example of what Franklin calls "an early projecting public spirit, tho' not then justly conducted" (p. 13) shows him, between 10 and 12 years, as a member of a group of comrades rather than family members; as a leader working through cooperation, showing ingenuity and creativity by dint of strength and hard work. Franklin also speaks here of the sea, with which he later had continuous and varied contact. And there is mention of his father, whose "correction" was not in the form of a punishment, but of guidance in making this experience one of positive learning. Regarding leader-

ship, he writes: "when in a boat . . . with other boys, I was commonly allowed to govern, especially in any case of difficulty. . . . I was generally a leader among boys" (p. 13).

Common Dimensions

When we now examine these recollections to see what they have in common, to conceptualize the main dimensions in Franklin's life style, we find two features which appear in all three recollections.

Interaction with a wider group beyond the family is a common theme. In the case of the whistle anecdote it was his "friends" who all contributed to his temporary wealth, and it was a strange boy who fascinated him with his whistle. In the decision to take Franklin out of school it was also a matter of relatively public concern. And in the third recollection, Franklin is interacting with a group of "comrades." No family members are mentioned, except the father.

It is worth noting that Franklin, who was to prove to be so public spirited, does not appear during his youth to have had close ties with his family, with the marked exception of his feeling for his father. His brother James for whom he worked some seven years is, of course, mentioned in the *Autobiography*, as we shall see; there are two very brief references to his brother John, 16 years his senior; there is a statement that his half-brother Josiah had run away to sea; but there is nothing about any other of his sisters and brothers. We have already noted the slight attention to his mother, of whom there are but three short entries (one referring to her epitaph). In his later life he did, however, form a close bond with his youngest sister, Jane Mecom.

The second feature common to all three recollections is that young Franklin is the central figure. In the first recollection all those present join in filling his pockets, in listening to his whistling, and in instructing him about his poor bargain. In the second, Franklin is the object of attention, although a passive one, while his elders are concerned about his future. In the third, he is again the point of focus, in this case thanks to his own activity, as leader of a group.

The whistle and the wharf episodes have more in common: Franklin is the active initiator, gets into trouble, learns his lesson, and his treatment is nonpunitive and understanding. The purchase of the whistle and the decision on schooling involve money. And the decision on schooling shares with the wharf-building a significant mention of his father.

If one takes early recollections such as these as signposts or guides for the conduct of life, it is possible to construct along broad lines the image an individual will have of himself and the world. It is not surprising that someone who recalls himself as the center of favorable attention, against a background of a wider community with which he has a good relationship, would think of himself as a leader and would strive toward that goal. We can see also from Franklin's recollections that he seems to be active, and the initiator of activity; that he would guard against wasting money (the whistle episode is a persistent reminder) and would appreciate the importance of money; that he would have the courage to make mistakes, knowing that he could learn from them. In view of the two references to his father, we might also guess that in spite of his courage and initiative, he would still be loyal to things "tried and true."

CORRECTING THE IMAGE

From these early recollections we get the impression that Franklin sees himself as the focal point if not the actual leader of any communal enterprise. According to Adler, "every individual represents both a unity of personality and the individual fashioning of that unity . . . both the picture and the artist. He is the artist of his own personality" (4, p. 177). In the light of these insights one can understand how the following two incidents in his early life corrected in his own eyes those flaws in his history which disturbed the unity of his conception of himself. Furthermore, active, courageous, self-assured and capable as he was, he made these corrections "public" events.

Settling with Brother James

From his twelfth year until he ran away at 17, Franklin was apprenticed to his older brother James who had a printing business, having been indentured to him by their father. Apprenticeship and indenture would have been onerous for any active, independent soul, but was so especially for one like Franklin. The situation was further worsened by the sibling relationship. The first mention in the autobiography of the "differences that we began to have about this time" is James' reaction to discovering Franklin's authorship of the Dogood Papers: "He thought, probably with reason, that it tended to make me too vain" (p. 24). Franklin summarized the

frictions between older brother-master and younger brother-apprentice as follows:

Though a brother, he considered himself as my master, and me as his apprentice, and, accordingly, expected the same services from me as he would from another, while I thought he demean'd me too much in some he requir'd of me, who from a brother expected more indulgence. Our disputes were often brought before our father, and I fancy I was either generally in the right, or else a better pleader, because the judgment was generally in my favour. But my brother was passionate, and had often beaten me, which I took extremely amiss; and, thinking my apprenticeship very tedious, I was continually wishing for some opportunity of shortening it, which at length offered in a manner unexpected" (p. 24).

The indenture was abruptly ended when James was prosecuted for publishing subversive material, and made young Franklin editor of his newspaper, the *New England Courant*, for his own protection. This enabled Franklin to break his indenture agreement without fear of legal action on the part of his brother and to steal away from Boston to Philadelphia.

He returned to Boston seven months later after having achieved some financial success in this short time.

My unexpected appearance surpriz'd the family; all were, however, very glad to see me, and made me welcome, except my brother. I went to see him at his printing-house. I was better dress'd than ever while in his service. . . . He receiv'd me not very frankly, look'd me all over, and turn'd to his work again. The journeymen were inquisitive. . . . One of them asking what kind of money we had there, I produc'd a handful of silver, and spread it before them. . . . Then I took an opportunity of letting them see my watch; and, lastly (my brother still grim and sullen), I gave them a piece of eight to drink, and took my leave. This visit of mine offended him extremely. . . . He said I had insulted him in such a manner before his people that he could never forget or forgive it (pp. 35-36).

But Franklin had thereby established himself in the eyes of those who had previously seen him as a subordinate, and in his own eyes, as one who was now "on top" in business as in other endeavors. Obviously he was also not above turning the tables on James, and enjoying his discomfiture.

Having made this "correction," Franklin was able to make his peace with his brother. When he visited his brother again ten years later, "our former differences were forgotten, and our meeting was very cordial" (p. 113). Franklin willingly complied with James' request that he take his son home, at James' death, and bring him up in the printing business.

Lamponing Harvard

Another sort of "correction" of his self-image was made at the age of 16 while working for James. Franklin secretly wrote a series

of 14 essays for James' newspaper under the pseudonym, Silence Dogood. In number four of these essays, Silence falls asleep and dreams of visiting the "Temple of LEARNING," Harvard College.

Every peasant, who had wherewithal, was preparing to send one of his children at least to this famous place; and in this case most of them consulted their own purses instead of their childrens capacities: So that . . . the most part of those who were travelling thither, were little better than dunces and blockheads. . . . [Guarding the gate to the college were] "two sturdy porters named Riches and Poverty, and the latter obstinately refused to give entrance to any who had not first gain'd the favour of the former; so that I observed, many who came even to the very gate, were obliged to travel back again as ignorant as they came, for want of this necessary qualification (10, p. 201).

To which Franklin added that unqualified students, however, pass through Harvard and emerge perhaps "as ignorant as ever" (10, p. 202).

The main thrust of this essay seems to be that even though Franklin had been denied the advantages of attending the "temple of learning," he had succeeded in correcting the role of untutored apprentice by studying independently, and had arrived at the point in his self-education where he could make light of the advantages, of which he had been unjustly deprived. In this essay he regained ascendancy over the less fortunate aspects of his situation by lampooning the more fortunate alternative—actually depreciating it.

SELF-TRAINING

In Adler's view, the two main dimensions of the life style are the individual's degree of activity and his degree of social interest—both of which are developed by the individual early in life. The presence of a strong physique and encouragement from others, so marked in Franklin's childhood, are helpful factors. But the actual outcome is the individual's own doing, following his perceptions of the world, leading to his goals, through self-training (4, pp. 212-213). Franklin is a superb example of self-training, and fortunately, he was aware of his methods and carefully reported them.

General Education

Where a lack of opportunity for formal education could be expected to reconcile lesser men to a life of ignorance, Franklin acquired on his own the education he so intensely desired. He taught himself literature, philosophy, mathematics, modern languages and Latin, and what was then known of science. He was able to say, quite matter of factly, after many years of constant study, at an hour or two each day: "Thus, without studying in any college, I came to

partake of their honours" (p. 146) of which, we should add, there were many indeed.

Franklin's time for his exercises in writing and reading "was at night, after work or before it began, or on Sundays" (p. 10). "An acquaintance with the apprentices of booksellers enabled me sometimes to borrow a small one, which I was to return soon and clean. Often I sat up in my room reading the greatest part of the night, when the book was borrowed in the evening and to be returned early in the morning, lest it should be missed or wanted" (p. 17).

With his writing he worked for a time on verse-making, for greater facility with words, especially in finding synonyms. Then he avoided verse in order to improve his prose. A volume of the *Spectator* (a daily paper, 1711-1712, written mostly by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, dealing with many topics, literary and social) which he had "met with" was used by Franklin to improve his writing—by imitation; by trying to re-write the thought of some passages in his own words, putting it into verse, and back into prose again; by achieving mastery in language and in "method in the arrangement of thoughts" (p. 19). This was before the age of 16.

Character Education

In view of Adler's postulate of a unitary basic striving, which he often called the striving for perfection, it is of particular interest to take account of Franklin's "bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection" (p. 92). For the project Franklin listed 13 virtues with their "precepts," and planned to work intensively on acquiring these virtues, one at a time, for a week, in turn. He kept a record in a specially ruled book in which he marked every evening the faults of that day (pp. 93-96). "Moral perfection" has indeed the sound of a concept both rigid and unattainable, and in the beginning this is how Franklin may have meant it. However, he writes:

I soon found I had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined. While my care was employ'd in guarding against one fault, I was often surprised by another; habit took the advantage of inattention; inclination was sometimes too strong for reason (p. 93). Upon the execution of this plan for self-examination . . . for some time, I was surpris'd to find myself so much fuller of faults than I had imagined; but I had the satisfaction of seeing them diminish (p. 99). I never arrived at the perfection I had been so ambitious of obtaining, . . . yet I was, by the endeavour, a better and happier man than I otherwise should have been if I had not attempted it; as those who aim at perfect writing by imitating the engraved copies, tho' they never reach the wish'd-for excellence of those copies, their hand is mended by the endeavour, and is tolerable while it continues fair and legible (p. 101).

This meaning comes close to that of Adler's who cites the necessity, for orientation purposes, to have a goal high enough to encourage a continuous effort to perfect oneself, to improve—or, in his most modest but most widely applicable phrasing—to progress from larger to lesser errors. ("Errata" was the very term which Franklin often used.)

Throughout his mature years Franklin continued to work beyond the time others spent at their callings, and had energies left over for his many other interests. This was the virtue he referred to as industry.

It was often eleven at night, and sometimes later, before I had finished my distribution for the next day's work. . . . And this industry, visible to our neighbors, began to give us character and credit. . . . Dr. Baird, [said] "the industry of that Franklin . . . is superior to any thing I ever saw." . . . I mention this industry the more particularly . . . tho' it seems to be talking in my own praise, that those . . . who shall read it, may know the use of that virtue (pp. 69-70).

CHANGE IN LIFE STYLE

Misdirected Goals

Not all of Franklin's youthful energy, however, was directed so constructively. One aspect still needs to be brought out, his mischievous, unconcerned ways of using his various talents to gain personal triumphs. His publication of the Dogood Papers, for example, involved deception beyond anonymity.

Being still a boy, and suspecting that my brother would object to printing anything of mine in his paper if he knew it to be mine, I contriv'd to disguise my hand, and writing an anonymous paper, I put it in at night under the door of the printing-house. It was found in the morning, and communicated to his writing friends when they call'd in as usual. . . . I had the exquisite pleasure, of finding it met with their approbation (p. 23).

A more obvious example of using his powers to achieve a similar "exquisite pleasure" at the expense of others is found in Franklin's description of his adoption of the Socratic method of disputation:

I found this method safest for myself and very embarrassing to those against whom I used it, therefore I took delight in it, . . . and grew very artful in drawing people even of superior knowledge into concessions, the consequences of which they did not foresee, entangling them in difficulties out of which they could not extricate themselves, and so obtaining victories that neither myself nor my cause always deserved (p. 21).

Franklin used this method to befuddle his employer, Samuel Keimer. Keimer, who seems to have been something of a religious fanatic, wished to engage Franklin in partnership in setting up a new sect, Keimer to do the preaching, and Franklin to "confound

all opponents" (p. 42). Franklin agreed on condition that Keimer accept a vegetarian diet. "He was usually a great glutton, and I promised myself some diversion in half starving him" (p. 42).

The trait of mischievousness is also foreshadowed in Franklin's early recollections where, in his first memory, he annoys people considerably with his whistling, and in the building of a wharf where he used the stones which belonged to someone else. He hints at other such mischief, saying he "sometimes led the boys into scrapes" (p. 13).

Had Franklin continued with these misdirected goals of personal superiority, his life would undoubtedly have been much different. It is unlikely he would have conceived his public works projects, performed his scientific experiments, become a statesman, or written the *Autobiography*.

New Directions

Perhaps the indication of a change is expressed in Franklin's renouncing the Socratic victories when he came to realize that "the chief ends of conversation are to *inform* or to be *informed*, to *please* or to *persuade*" (p. 22). Then he adopted

the habit of expressing myself in terms of modest diffidence; never using, when I advanced anything that may possibly be disputed, the words *certainly*, *undoubtedly*, or any others that give the air of positiveness to an opinion; but rather say, . . . it appears to me, . . . or *I imagine it to be so*, or *it is so*, if *I am not mistaken* (p. 21). I had less mortification when I was found to be in the wrong, and I more easily prevail'd with others to give up their mistakes and join with me when I happen'd to be in the right . . . And to this habit (after my character of integrity) I think it principally owing, that I had early so much weight with my fellow-citizens when I proposed new institutions, or alterations in the old (p. 104).

Here is a newly developed empathy, and a new use of his powers—to persuade tactfully rather than embarrass. In Franklin's early recollections, and his youthful years, we found all the qualifications for great accomplishments, but the ends to which these would be directed were not yet shaped, nor was there any evidence that these might have been in the common interest. Adler's concept of social interest, which he posited as the measure and criterion of mental health, has many aspects—cooperation, courage, optimism, feeling at home in the world and an openness to its many features as well as to people. Franklin had shown evidence of these qualities, but whether they were to be used for his private benefit or the common weal had yet to be indicated. He speaks at one time of "the necessary close attention to private business in the earlier part of my life,

and public business since" (p. 102), and it is understandable that what seemed like necessity had largely shaped his earlier life.

Two of Franklin's conclusions would seem to throw light on how he arrived at his final course. In reference to a "piece" which he had hoped to write, he said, "it was my design to explain . . . that vicious actions are not hurtful because they are forbidden, but forbidden because they are hurtful, the nature of man alone considered; that it was, therefore, every one's interest to be virtuous who wish'd to be happy even in this world" (pp. 102-103). This is not a hortatory statement, but more like a statement of fact. In its pragmatism it reminds one of a statement of Adler's, although he does not speak in terms of happiness or virtue: "Every human being strives for significance; but people always make mistakes if they do not see that their whole significance must consist in their contribution to the lives of others" (4, p. 156).

Franklin shows his application of these principles when he dealt with his own vanity. In soliciting subscriptions for the new Philadelphia library, he soon felt

the impropriety of presenting one's self as the proposer of any useful project, that might be suppos'd to raise one's reputation in the smallest degree above that of one's neighbors, when one has need of their assistance to accomplish that project. I therefore put myself as much as I could out of sight, and stated it as a scheme of a *number of friends*. . . . The present little sacrifice of your vanity will afterwards be amply repaid (p. 89).

In this insight Franklin became aware of Adler's "supreme law," that "the sense of worth of the self shall not be allowed to be diminished" (4, p. 358). Vanity not only puts one above one's neighbor, thus engaging him in the struggle to maintain *his* feeling of worth, but also interferes with one's concentrating on and advancing one's own cause.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mutual Improvement: The Junto

After this change, brought about by insights that virtue is that which is good for oneself and others, we see the full flowering of Franklin's contributions, the seeds for many of which had been planted earlier. The first outstanding achievement of his life was accomplished at the age of 21, approximately the same time he established his printing business in Philadelphia, and began to thrive. But an important inspiration for it had come from reading

Mather's book in his father's library as a young boy, as mentioned earlier. Larabee et al. point out that to some extent the Junto was modeled on the neighborhood benefit societies Mather had organized in Boston (9, p. 58n). "I had form'd most of my ingenious acquaintance into a club for mutual improvement, which we called the JUNTO; we met on Friday evenings. . . . Every member, in his turn, should produce one or more queries on any point of Morals, Politics, or Natural Philosophy" (p. 67).

In contrast to Franklin's former Socratic disputes with their goal of personal superiority over one's adversary, the Junto's debates were to be conducted "in the sincere spirit of inquiry after truth, without fondness for dispute, or desire for victory" (p. 68). Among the four queries to be directed to new members of the Junto were these: "Do you sincerely declare that you love mankind in general; of what profession or religion soever?" "Do you love truth for truth's sake, and will you endeavor impartially to find and receive it yourself and communicate it to others" (II, i, p. 259)?

The club continued [almost 40 years], and was the best school of philosophy, morals, and politics that then existed in the province; for our queries, which were read the week preceding their discussion, put us on reading with attention upon the several subjects, that we might speak more to the purpose, and here, too, we acquired better habits of conversation, every thing being studied in our rules which might prevent our disgusting each other (p. 69).

Many cooperative, social endeavours were instituted and nourished by the Junto, though its function of mutual improvement did not exclude private benefits. Franklin admitted that the members of the Junto "exert[ed] themselves in recommending business to us" (p. 69).

"Useful Projects"

There was no danger of Franklin's being limited by an impossibly high goal. His whole process of self-education had been one of progressive improvement. In fact, many of his projects are described as improvements. He was so well-attuned to the world about him, and so observant, that he immediately became aware of the requirements of whatever situation was at hand, and attended to them. His scheme submitted for sweeping the streets of London is a splendid example of this. It began by his observing a poor woman sweeping in front of his house.

Some may think these trifling matters not worth minding or relating. . . . Dust blown into the eyes of a single person . . . is but of small importance, yet the

great number of the instances . . . give it weight. . . . Human felicity is produc'd not so much by great pieces of good fortune that seldom happen, as by little advantages that occur every day. Thus, if you teach a poor young man to shave himself, and keep his razor in order, you may contribute more to the happiness of his life than in giving him a thousand guineas (p. 145).

Franklin was most certainly a "great promoter of useful projects" (p. 142), to use the term which he applied to Dr. Fothergill, beginning with his "first project of a public nature" (p. 79), a subscription library, continuing with an unbelievably long list of "improvements" for the public benefit, most of them for the first time in America: an academy, fire department, police force, hospital, paved streets, and gutters, new models of stoves and lamps, to mention only some. Franklin directed his interest to life's myriad problems, from the trivial to the significant, and with a powerful act of raw imagination turned what he observed into something "ingenious" and "useful." Referring to a near-disaster at sea, he wrote: "This deliverance impressed me strongly with the utility of light-houses, and made me resolve to encourage the building more of them in America, if I should live to return there" (p. 187).

Spreading Common Sense

In a particularly felicitous phrase André Maurois said of Franklin, "his common sense amounted to genius" (12, p. 59). The judgment is confirmed by Adler's definition of common sense as "all those forms of expression . . . which we find beneficial to the community" (4, p. 149). Adler also points out that "common sense is not unalterable. We shall observe in it continually new turns. . . . It is . . . the sum of all psychological movements which are reasonable, generally approved, and connected with the continuance of culture" (4, p. 149).

Having common sense obviously does imply participating in a con-sensus, a consensual validation, either of knowledge or other benefits. Whereas this usually involves dipping into a common pool, as it were, a small number of unusually capable individuals put their additions into it. Franklin was one such individual. His effort and his delight was to put into circulation what he had learned, and to spread the tested experience of others. In this sense he was an educator in the broadest but most meaningful sense of the term. Much of what he wrote publicly during his long career was concerned directly or indirectly with instruction. Of his most popular early work, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, he wrote: "Observing that it was

generally read, scarce any neighborhood in the province being without it, I consider'd it as a proper vehicle for conveying instruction among the common people, who bought scarce any other Books" (p. 108). Maurois notes: Franklin "did not fear platitudes when they were also truths, nor did he fear epigrams: 'Keep your eyes open before marriage,' he advised, 'and half shut afterwards' " (12, p. 60). Franklin also considered his newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, "as another means of communicating instruction, and in that view frequently reprinted in it extracts from the Spectator, and other moral writers; and sometimes publish'd little pieces of my own, which had been first compos'd for reading in our Junto" (p. 109). His masterpiece, the *Autobiography*, has been most influential, its editors tell us, not as a classic of American literature but "as a source book and text in the education of youth." Millions of Americans and people the world over, they note, have been "eager to learn the lessons his memoirs would teach" (9, p. 9).

IDENTIFICATION WITH MANKIND

The commonality involved in social interest depends in good part upon empathy, seeing with the eyes of the other, feeling what others feel. In this way another's good fortune becomes one's own, and the goals one sets for oneself are likely to involve some common gain in addition to one's own. Persons with such developed social interest "consider themselves a part of the whole, are at home on this earth and in this mankind" (4, p. 159).

A beautiful expression of one man's loving concern for all mankind and of placing his services in a common pool, is contained in the prayer which Franklin composed and "prefix'd to my tables of examination for daily use," in connection with his striving for moral perfection: "Accept my kind offices to thy other children as the only return in my power for thy continual favours to me" (p. 98). This recalls the Junto query, "Do you sincerely declare that you love mankind in general; of what profession or religion soever?" Though Franklin was a deist, his religion was nonetheless humanistic.

Franklin's feeling of being a part of the whole are shown by his sensitive transactions with "mankind," by his free giving and enlightened appreciation of what he received. This is shown by his refusal to accept a ten-year patent offered him, at the age of 38 for his Pennsylvania Fire Place, now known as the Franklin stove, a monopoly that would have assured him a considerable financial

gain. "I declin'd it from a principle which has ever weighed with me on such occasions, viz., *That, as we enjoy great advantages from the inventions of others, we should be glad of an opportunity to serve others by any invention of ours; and this we should do freely and generously*" (p. 132, Franklin's italics).

A second expression of Franklin's great identification with the common good occurs in a letter to Peter Collinson, London Quaker, merchant and botanist, written in 1753 when Franklin was 47, one of a number of communications to Collinson describing Franklin's electrical experiments. Franklin ends the letter by asking forgiveness for his "crude and hasty" thoughts on the subject. He continues:

But since even short hints, and imperfect experiments in any new branch of science, being communicated, have oftentimes a good effect, in exciting attention of the ingenious to the subject, and so becoming the occasion of more exact disquisitions . . . and more compleat discoveries, you are at liberty to communicate this paper to whom you please; it being of more importance that knowledge should increase, than that your friend should be thought an accurate philosopher (11, V, p. 79).

These sentiments reflect the ideals that motivated all of Franklin's scientific work. By this time he had retired from active participation in his printing business to devote himself to scientific experiment and study. His later full-time entry into public life as a civil servant, diplomat and statesman was a continuation of his social concern that was expressed in and strengthened by the Junto, his various civic projects in Philadelphia and his scientific work in electricity.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to give a modern reading of Franklin's *Autobiography*, using the insights of Alfred Adler as a touchstone. In the light of Adlerian theory, Franklin's memoirs become a paradigm for mental health. Adler considered each man to be the artist of his own portrait: knowingly or not, he fashions his life by his unique responses to his heredity and environment. Franklin's selection of incidents from his early life demonstrates that as a child he had already formed a life style that, with some goal modification, was to lift him from obscurity to world renown: marked by ability to interact with others, leadership, and a hunger for education. For a time these interests were misdirected toward self-centered goals, but as he matured he turned ever more to social involvement. The *Autobiography* is a virtual textbook of social interest; it teaches

how in combination with imagination, energy and intelligence this can harness even lightning from the skies and illustrates one of the simple truths of Adlerian psychology—in taming lightning for others, one develops one's own greatest potentialities.

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