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**Benjamin Franklin:
Religion and Freedom**

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

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The paper considers Benjamin Franklin's writings on religious matters, as well as his interaction with religious personae and institutions, on a culturological level. In this, his *Autobiography* (1791) is the primary source, as are three principal essays he published on the matter during his lifetime: "A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity" (1725), "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion" (1728), and "On the Providence of God in the Government of the World" (1732). From these sources, an attempt to reconstruct Franklin's curious approach to religion, cosmology and the concept of God is made, and the trajectory along which his opinions seem to have shifted is traced. Most importantly, it is argued that, for all the different approaches to religion Franklin exhibited throughout his lifetime, his stance on religion is in a metonymic relation with his political orientation as a Founding Father of the United States. That is, religious freedom he advocated is ostensibly a manifestation of his grander approach to freedom of any kind, which American cultural identity is based on. This freedom is also considered in relation to Franklin's stance towards slave owning and towards Native Americans.

KEYWORDS

Benjamin Franklin, religion, the Great Awakening, Quakers, Deism, freedom, slavery

Almost two hundred and fifty years after Benjamin Franklin's death, and after a considerable amount of scholarship published on the matter, there is still no definitive consensus regarding Franklin's religious stances any more than there was in his day. Born and brought up by his parents as a Presbyterian, by the time he reached his late teenage years and his early twenties, Franklin drifted apart from his parents' teachings, and developed a quite specific set of views on religion, both in its spiritual and dogmatic aspects. In fact, this specificity and the inability of scholars to agree upon what Franklin actually believed, as will be shown in this paper, stems from the continual religious vicissitudes and rapid alterations of his opinion in the early years of his adult life, as well as from the more stable, yet still very unique position that he settled on in the later years. Even in old age, his belief remained complex, with some of it being of his own design, other parts patched together from different religions of the world, and some parts not altogether religious in nature per se, but under heavy influence of religious philosophy. David T. Morgan, for example, calls Franklin's embrace of such large variety of beliefs "generic religion" (723), and goes on to quote John Adams who sarcastically quipped that "the Catholics thought him almost a Catholic. The Church of England claimed him as one of them. The Presbyterians thought him half a Presbyterian, and the Friends believed him a wet Quaker" (qtd. in Morgan 723). In any case, one thing that is definitely true on the topic of Franklin's religion is his openness towards a vast array of beliefs, and his definite confidence in liberty of choosing what to believe on a personal basis, which goes hand-in-hand with his more general advocacy of personal liberty, as will be argued. To delineate the development of Franklin's religious thought, the *Autobiography* will serve as the primary source, at the same time also reflecting on the three essays he published on the matter, each of which is indicative of a shift in his position. This, moreover, requires the relationship between his religious beliefs and the dominant religious culture of eighteenth-century New England to be explored, for Franklin "never was without some religious principles," yet he "seldom attended any public worship" (*Autobiography* 80-81). Other sources contemporary with Franklin's own writing will not be taken into account here, for such an act would take this study far beyond its appropriate scope.

Despite continual arguments over how fundamental religion was to the foundation of early colonial settlements in North America, it undeniably had influence on their growth and on the shaping of the nascent public sphere. One strain of scholars, perhaps best exemplified by Perry Miller, emphasizes how crucial religion was to the settlement process, and talks of the Puritan quest of 1630 to conquer the newfound continent, to seize its status of *terra nullius*, and establish a "city set upon a hill" (Miller 5) as an ideal society that the rest of the world would look upon. In the words of John Winthrop, a Puritan lawyer and one of the early leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which he uttered to the passengers of the *Arabella* on its way to the New World, the Puritans were on their way to "seeke out a place of Cohabitation and Consorteshipp under a due forme of Government *both civill and ecclesiasticall*" (qtd. in Miller 5, my emphasis). Miller and the like

do construct this narrative by completely disregarding the Jamestown colony of 1607, in which economic factors were the primary driving force, but the fact still stands that both Puritanism and religion in general were important factors in how early New England societies came to be formed. In establishing a colonial society, where the rule of monarchic law was at this point in Puritan history latent at best, religion had an important social function, as Patricia U. Bonomi expounds:

...it was an axiom of early seventeenth-century political thought that a strong church was the handmaiden and bulwark of a stable state. The church's guardianship of morality and public behavior made it an ally of orderly government, an interdependence that statesmen acknowledged by granting official status to one church only. (...) The English in Virginia, Swedes on the Delaware, and Dutch in New Netherland transferred their state churches to the New World as a matter of course, as did Catholic France, Spain, and Portugal to their western provinces. The Puritans established Congregationalism throughout New England. (13-14)

What is also evident from Bonomi's reading is that the Puritans, as the number of colonies on the continent grew, soon became only one of many religious bodies in the region. The majority were Protestant Christians of different denominations: Congregationalists, Episcopalians, a large number of Baptists and Presbyterians, a smaller number of Methodists and Lutherans. Catholics, although they would by 1850 become the largest religious group in the United States, in the middle of the 18th century composed only about one percent of the population (Morgan 723-724). Some strains of religious historiography, noted Bonomi, would go even further to suggest an even greater fragmentation of colonial American religious thought, advocating that a "sizeable" part of the population "was split into radical sects of Anabaptist or mystical origins as varied and unruly as their counterparts in Civil-War England" (14). However one looks at it, the fact of the matter is that colonial America harbored a great religious diversity. This diversity was, moreover, accompanied by fervent religious practice, for sermons were widely attended and good preachers of any denomination would draw in masses numbered in hundreds, the "quintessential form of public edification [being] not the spectacle but the Word" (Bonomi 3-4). If not orally, the Word was spread more and more in printed form, one of the popular printed sermons being Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which Franklin himself later recounted as a great influence during his childhood (*Autobiography* 23).

This is the general context into which Benjamin Franklin was born in 1706, and in which (and against which) he developed his outlook on religion. Through his Presbyterian parents, his life was being shaped by religion from an early age: "I was put to the grammar-school at eight years of age, my father intending to devote me, as the tithe of his sons, to the service of the Church" (Franklin, *Autobiography* 20). At the same time developing a fondness of reading, his thirst for printed word was often satisfied by voraciously reading philosophy and history when available, but also sermons, which were abundantly available, Bunyan included.

Decades later, he would regret his exposure chiefly to this kind of literature:

My father's little library consisted chiefly of books in polemic divinity, most of which I read, and have since often regretted that, at a time when I had such a thirst for knowledge, more proper books had not fallen in my way, since it was now resolved I should not be a clergyman. (Autobiography 24)

The "proper books" that he did indeed read, as Kerry Walters remarks, were from various Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Isaac Newton, whose empiricist and rationalist ideas remained "a constant thread throughout the rest of his life" (91). His reading sermons, however, lead him to what is often regarded as his first divergence from mainstream religious thought, which is also when he started writing on religion.¹ At the age of fifteen, "some books against Deism fell into [his] hands," but arguments presented in them seeming ineffective to young Franklin, they "wrought an effect on [him] quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to [him] much stronger than the refutation; in short, [he] soon became a thorough Deist" (*Autobiography* 61). Four years later, in 1725, while working as a printer in London, Franklin came across William Wollaston's *The Religion of Nature Delineated*, which immediately prompted him to write a harsh refutation of Wollaston's ideas, countering them with Deist reasoning in *Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain*, the first of his three serious publications on religion.

The combination of Enlightenment thinking and creationism he presented in the essay was problematic from a theological standpoint in the eyes of those around him. A standard eighteenth-century Deist such as Franklin "accepted the existence of an impersonal deity who created a universe defined by uniform natural laws, but who in no way subsequently interfered in the operations of the natural order" (Walters 92). Or, as Franklin puts it, "there is said to be a First Mover, who is called GOD, Maker of the Universe," and he is "all-wise, all-good, all powerful" ("Dissertation"). With these two assumptions as his starting point, he asserts that if God is "all-wise" and "all-powerful," His act of creation would at the outset create a perfect, mechanistic universe which required no further intervention: "How exact and regular is every Thing in the natural World! How wisely in every Part contriv'd! We cannot here find the least Defect! Those who have study'd the mere animal and vegetable Creation, demonstrate that nothing can be more harmonious and beautiful" ("Dissertation"). By the same token, if He is "all-good," the humans He created would also be all-good, and all their actions would always be good, godly and socially beneficial. If man "cannot act what will be in itself really ill, or displeasing to God," the conclusion is that "therefore Evil doth not exist" ("Dissertation"). Finally, since each individual act is God's good will, there can be "no distinction between virtue and vice" (Dunn 508), and they remain social constructions which are fundamentally empty. This is just a short summary of the pamphlet with several leaps in logic, but it is illustrative of how the Deist

idea of a deterministic universe in which evil is impossible, vice and virtue false, and in which there is no need for God to intervene in human affairs (effectively rendering the universe godless), wouldn't be agreeable with the religious *status quo*. Soon after publishing the pamphlet, however, Franklin's opinion on the issue shifted, and he tried to locate and destroy all of the one hundred copies that he had printed (Morgan 725).

Why exactly Franklin was so quick to change his stance is not exactly clear. In the *Autobiography*, he mentions how it "appear'd now not so clever a performance as [he] once thought it" and how he doubts "whether some error had not insinuated itself unperceiv'd into [his] argument" (61). Walters attributes the change simply to life experience which Franklin would gather over the next three years, "meeting with a number of people whose lives seemed to challenge his clever argument that a deterministic universe renders morality illusory" and coming up against a "frightening encounter with his own mortality" (95). More sophisticated answers were obviously required to reconcile the modern and rational world with the existence of a higher deity. Such was precisely the function of his next treatise on religion, "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion," printed on his own and published in 1728 in Philadelphia.

The essay was, in his own words, a private "little Liturgy, or form of prayer," which he used for his own purposes, and after crafting which he "went no more to the public assemblies" (*Autobiography* 81-82). The text reads as a standard hymn to the beauty and tranquility of life, the wisdom and goodness of God, the serenity of one's soul etc., albeit with a notable absence of mechanistic imagery. At one point in the text, nevertheless, a curious passage appears, and one which has perplexed scholars ever since:

I CONCEIVE then, that the INFINITE has created many Beings or Gods, vastly superior to Man, who can better conceive his Perfections than we, and return him a more rational and glorious Praise. As among Men, the Praise of the Ignorant or of Children, is not regarded by the ingenious Painter or Architect, who is rather honour'd and pleas'd with the Approbation of Wise men and Artists

It may be that these created Gods, are immortal, or it may be that after many Ages, they are changed, and Others supply their Places. ("Articles")

The "INFINITE," or the "Painter," or the "Architect" here is obviously God—one and only supreme being, the creator of the universe. But he also appears to be the creator of several subordinate "Beings or Gods," which act as intermediaries between humans and the true God, leading to the immediate conclusion that Franklin had turned to some form of polytheism. This was very unlikely, says Walters, as there is not "any reason to think that Franklin espoused a literal polytheism," at least not in the traditional sense, nor is there indication that the statement was satirical, as some interpret it (96). If Franklin was serious and non-polytheistic,²

the purported polytheism is, then, metaphorical, all the "Gods" he talks of being symbolic representations or poetic attempts at reaching the ultimately unreachable Creator. As Walters reads it, "Franklin was convinced that the universe must have a divine First Cause: only a divine power is forceful enough to create reality itself," but at the same time he "felt a pressing personal need for contact with a wise, benevolent, good, and loving deity" (97). It is never under question whether God ("INFINITE," "Architect," etc.) exists, for that is sure—but with the caveat that the only thing humans, in all their reason, are capable of knowing of Him is that He "hast created Man, bestowing Life and Reason, and plac'd him in Dignity superior to thy other earthly Creatures" ("Articles"). The "created Gods," presumably those of conventional religions, that Franklin talks about are ultimately false, but in the absence of the real deity useful from a psychological and social standpoint, especially for *other* people. With a touch of elitism, he wrote later in life to an atheist friend: "You yourself may find it easy to live a virtuous Life without the Assistance afforded by Religion... But think of how great a Proportion of Mankind consists of weak and ignorant Men and Women" (qtd. in Waldman 34). And this is without even mentioning those "who have need of Motives of Religion to restrain them from Vice, to support their Virtue, and retain them in the Practice of it till it becomes *habitual*" (qtd. in Waldman 34). Institutional aspects of religion, argues Franklin, are a public necessity for the weak-minded who cannot, or will not perform self-improvement and build their moral character on their own. Moreover, some would argue that this faux-polytheistic position is in its nature very close to Hinduism, thus expanding the width of Franklin's religious perspective even further (Morgan 726).

On the other hand, one perhaps shouldn't be too hasty with settling on this as Franklin's definite position, as the degree of metaphoricity he employs in the pamphlet is obviously unclear and subject to interpretation. The "created Gods" being symbolic or not, what one definitely should take away from the text is his clear respect towards liberty of individual religious belief. Still refining his own beliefs, he "was willing to concede that people who recognized 'lesser gods' should be permitted to worship those gods" (Morgan 726). *Poor Richard's Almanack*, a collection of his witticisms and proverbs published by himself in 1732 attests to as much with crafty sayings like: "Different sects like different clocks, may be all near the matter, though they don't quite agree" (19), "Don't judge of men's wealth or piety, by their Sunday appearances" (19), "When knaves fall out, honest men get their goods; when priests dispute, we come at the truth" (59), and "You will be careful, if you are wise; how you touch men's religion, or credit, or eyes" (62).

"It was about this time," writes Franklin, that he "conceiv'd the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection" (*Autobiography* 82). Led by the belief that "the most acceptable service of God was the doing of good to man" and that "all crime will be punished, and virtue rewarded, either here or hereafter" (80), he devised a list of thirteen "virtues all that at that time occur'd to [him] as necessary and desirable" (82). The virtues he came up with, and which he systematically

worked through in an attempt to fully ingrain them into his daily routine, were the following: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility (*Autobiography* 82-3). A booklet containing the list, supplemented with comments upon their necessity and different schedules and timetables, was intended to be published by him under the title *The Art of Virtue*, but ultimately never was (88-89). The virtues and the entire project are interesting from the religious standpoint, though, for they clearly stem from religious roots. Once again, what comes up is Franklin's belief in the universality of religion, and the opinion that the core tenets of each form of belief are ultimately the same (virtue, morality, etc.), not unlike what he professed in "Articles of Belief":

It will be remark'd that, tho' my scheme was not wholly without religion, there was in it no mark of any of the distinguishing tenets of any particular sect. I had purposely avoided them; for, being fully persuaded of the utility and excellency of my method, and that it might be serviceable to people in all religions, and intending some time or other to publish it, I would not have anything in it that should prejudice any one, of any sect, against it. (*Autobiography* 88)

Fundamental religious values were for Franklin often a good thing that inevitably gets bogged down by a fossilized institution, while general moral virtue often gets superseded by a doctrine or a dogma, or simply dull sermons which are of benefit to no one. In the end, he found the aim of the Church to be "rather to make us good Presbyterians than good citizens" (qtd. in Waldman 33), which was for him extremely problematic and prompted him to reject public religion in favor of a more spiritual and personal theology.³

Franklin's third and ostensibly final theological treatise, "On the Providence of God in the Government of the World," was presented in 1732 to his local club of Philadelphia intellectuals, the Junto. The statement in the text which most radically departs from the earlier publications is that God "sometimes interferes by his particular Providence and sets aside the Effects which would otherwise have been produced" ("Providence"), *de facto* doing away with the Deistic standpoint of the Creator who lets the universe operate strictly by its laws of nature. More implicitly but not less importantly, one of his closing statements is on the necessity to "pray to him for his Favour and Protection" ("Providence"), which would in a deterministic universe be futile. It appears, thus, that Franklin either never completely departed from the teachings of his parents, Josiah and Abijah, or returned to them somewhere along the way (Morgan 727).

Later in life, Franklin never published anything significant that was directly concerned with theology, although his beliefs, according to snippets in various correspondences and public statements, seem to have remained approximately the same as they were when presenting "Providence." In 1787, for example, he was serving as a delegate at the Constitutional Convention and he proposed that

all sessions be opened with prayer by emphasizing its necessity, especially in the situation in which he and his colleagues found themselves as leaders of a newly founded nation: "Have we ... forgotten that powerful Friend? Do we imagine we no longer need [his] assistance" (qtd. in Walters 100)? Or, there is the often-quoted letter to Yale President Ezra Stiles proclaiming that God "governs [the universe] by his Providence" (qtd. in Walters 100). Having said that, both these statements and "On the Providence of God" were intended for the public, as opposed to "Articles of Belief," which were for his own private use—raising the question of their reliability. Did Franklin really believe in the declared protection of God, or was he "voicing one of those morally and socially useful fictions that the 'created Gods' underwrite" (Walters 101)?

Whichever conclusion one derives, one thing that is undisputable is Franklin's abundant interaction with religion on a practical day-to-day level. As stated, Franklin never was one to attend religious service, Presbyterian or otherwise, but he certainly did entertain the company of numerous preachers and even listen to sermons, which historically makes sense, the 1730s and 1740s being a time of religious revivalism. The steady decline of Puritanism and dilution of its membership strictness, the introduction of partial church membership known as Half-Way Covenant, and the rise of rationalist Enlightenment thought (and consequently of indifference towards church) are just some of the factors which set the stage for the "Great Awakening" of 1741-42, as Gaustad argues (681-682). Religion, simply put, "had become more institutional and less personal; more formal and less spontaneous; more inclusive and less demanding" (Gaustad 682). Individual piety now more and more a thing of the past, the movement, spearheaded by preachers such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, sought to reignite engagement with religion on a more personal level, and across denominational boundaries, similarly to what Franklin practiced and advocated. In the *Autobiography*, Franklin testifies to his encounters with several of these preachers, notably with Whitefield himself, whom he befriended and whose sermons and journals he printed (101-103). Though their friendship was "a mere civil friendship," between them being "no religious connection," Franklin does note being impressed by Whitefield's preaching (102). Likewise to be considered is his comment on the success of the Great Awakening, mentioning how "from being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemd as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk thro' town in an evening without hearing psalms suing in different families of every street" (*Autobiography* 101). Being such a success, and sermons drawing in great multitudes, a hall was erected in Philadelphia for any preacher of any denomination or religion, "so that even if the Mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammedanism to us, he would find a pulpit at his service" (*Autobiography* 101). New England was teeming with religious heterogeneity, and Franklin's enthusiasm is, judging by his words, more than obvious.

Finally, Franklin's encounters with various religious bodies, primarily the Quakers, in the political realm are not to be understated. The *Autobiography* re-

lates several different anecdotes concerning his entanglement with the Quakers, mostly from the period of King George's War (the third of the French and Indian Wars) of 1744-1748, their disputes mostly originating from the Quakers' principal opposition to war as such. Franklin, who during the war organized an association for the defense of Philadelphia, resorted to different means of working around the Quakers' denominational politics, but also of using religion to his advantage in a more general sense of steering the public opinion. During the war, he wrote a small piece, giving "the clergy of the different sects an opportunity of influencing their congregations to join in the association" (*Autobiography* 106), even noting such practice "would have probably been general among all but the Quakers if the peace had not soon interven'd" (107). To the Quakers, though formally against war, "the defense of the country was not disagreeable... provided they were not requir'd to assist in it" (107), as seen from the meeting of the local fire company to vote on the donation of money for building defense batteries, to which most of the Quakers purposefully didn't show up so as to invalidate their majority over Franklin's proposals. Their ultimate support of Franklin shows how, despite occasional disagreements, the two sides were on good terms, in spite of the Quakers' generally negative perception among members of the New England society, the frequent questioning of their "fitness to govern Pennsylvania" (Bonomi 171-172), and the vilification of them as "pariahs and troublemakers" (95).

So Franklin was, without a doubt, one of the foremost figures of the American 18th century to push for religious freedom, and we can probably assume that this was an aspect of his general socio-political views: if the young United States were to prosper, it was to happen on account of freedom and tolerance on all societal levels. This juncture of politics and religion, nevertheless, gets complicated when one takes into account Franklin's stance on race and racism. On the one hand, as far as slavery is concerned, he is remembered as one of the most progressive men of his time and a great fighter for the freedom of black people. He was for a time the president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully held in Bondage; he was a member of an English company of abolitionists called Dr. Bray's Associates and closely associated with many renowned abolitionists of the day, such as Anthony Benezet; he publically railed against "the Wars made in Africa for Prisoners to raise Sugar in America, the Numbers slain in those Wars, the Number that being crowded in Ships perish in the Transportation, & the Numbers that die under the Severities of Slavery" (qtd. in Nash 632); his last public act was the signing of a petition to Congress to abolish slavery (Nash 635).⁴ On the other hand, the road to such a position was long and complicated, for Franklin definitely did not have such clear views on slavery in his youth, as more recent scholarship has shown. As Gary Nash outlines, Franklin and his Wife, Deborah, in total owned at least seven black slaves throughout the decades of their marriage (619-620); he had no objections with printing bounty ads for runaway slaves and making good money off of it (621); he warned, like when forming a militia for the defense of Pennsylvania in 1747, against the "wanton and unbridled rage, rapine and lust of Negroes,

Mulattoes, and others" (qtd. in Nash 621); he would criticize not the immorality of the act of slave ownership, but the detrimental effect having house slaves has on increasingly idle and spoiled white children (622).

But eventually, Franklin's milieu had had enough of an impact on him to change his position, first privately and tentatively, such as for example when he chose not to pursue his runaway slave while in London in the late 1750s, and later publically, as seen from his fierce latter-day attacks on slave owning. Somewhat more static and indeed more opaque was his attitude about Native Americans. Though one of the principal players in the process of purchasing and/or taking away Native American land, as delineated by Wallace (251-281), Ben Franklin's policies were always those of a pacifist, in spite of the unspoken prerogative of the white man to perform "the replacement of 'savage' hunters and gatherers and village gardeners, who subsist on land that yields them a slender harvest, by agriculturalists who farm intensively by advanced methods and thereby can support larger numbers of 'civilized' people" (Wallace 269), which is, considering the historical milieu, unsurprising, or perhaps even expected. Franklin was also loudly outspoken about his disgust by the 1764 Conestoga massacre of a group of Indians by the Paxton Boys. "These poor defenseless creatures were immediately fired upon, stabbed, and hatched to death!" he decried (qtd. in Waldman 34). Furthermore, to go back to religion, he found the massacre even more wicked and infuriating on another level, since the Paxton Boys claimed to be performing the Lord's work. It was, in Franklin's own words, a "Horrid perversion of the Scripture and of religion! To father the worst of crimes on the God of peace and love! [...] Our frontier people call themselves Christians! [The Indians] would have been safer, if they had submitted to the Turks." (qtd. in Waldman 34).

What, then, to make of Franklin, religion, and freedom? The First Amendment to the United States Constitution begins with the statement that the "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (qtd. in Morgan 724). Although it was adopted in December 1791, more than a year after Benjamin Franklin's death, all evidence points to the conclusion that he would have "endorsed it enthusiastically" (Morgan 724). Delving into Franklin's writings on the question of religion is bound to yield numerous incongruities, the general overview of which has been presented here, the rest being out of the scope of this paper. Starting out from the Calvinist teachings of his Presbyterian youth, he moved on to a complex Deistic reconciliation of a rationalist universe with the unreachability of the Creator, and several years later supposedly embraced the belief in the divine Providence of God—a Calvinist tenet of faith (Morgan 727). His later public life as an author and speaker shows no signs of the uncertainty of his youth, but at the same time, it cannot be said that he was an orthodox Christian in any sense of the word. He still detested both the Christian dogmatism and the perversion of religious values to devious ends. But if we accept that his fostering of religious liberty is a fostering of a wider kind of liberty,

problems with slavery and Native Americans arise, especially in the earlier years of his life. It is not until his old age that his opinions both on religion and on slavery solidified into a more unified whole, and it is not until then that we can speak of a concrete relation between Franklin's religion and Franklin's politics. His religious views and beliefs, though they are likely never to be fully disambiguated, were certainly very unique and open-minded, fostering the kind of liberty and the kind of rejection of (religious) authority one might expect from a Founding Father—or from an abolitionist.

End Notes

- 1 Aged fifteen, Franklin anonymously published a series of provocative essays poking fun at various aspects of the New England society, religion included, in his brother's *New-England Courant*. Though they clearly indicate the influence of Deism on teenaged Franklin, their treatment of the topic is not nearly as systemic and fleshed out as in the later three essays.
- 2 "Non-polytheistic" instead of "monotheistic" because if Franklin were monotheistic, that would automatically exclude the possibility of several gods, and if he were strictly polytheistic, it would imply he believed in several gods, which also doesn't appear to be correct. His idea of imaginary polytheism that represents an ultimate, "INFINITE" deity transcends the standard binary opposition.
- 3 This is without even discussing the clash of Franklin's moral self-improvement with Calvinist moral determinism. Salvation, Calvinist faith would have it, is for some outright impossible, and "we could not do-good our way out of damnation if we were marked from the start," as Waldman explains (33).
- 4 For an overview of Franklin's pro-abolitionist writing, both public and private, see: Franklin, Benjamin. "Benjamin Franklin and Freedom." *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1919, 41-50.

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