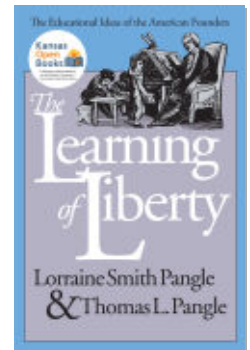




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Published by



Pangle, Thomas L. and Lorraine Smith Pangle.

The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders.

University Press of Kansas, 2023.

Project MUSE. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.84016>.

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[136.0.111.243] Project MUSE (2025-01-15 07:13 GMT)

Part Two

Schools for the Emerging Republic

4 • Benjamin Franklin and the Idea of a Distinctively American Academy

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the influence in America of Locke's educational treatise, partly by way of intermediaries such as John Clarke and Isaac Watts, was massive. Older educational writings and theories, especially those stemming from the Christian tradition, were surely not cast into oblivion, but, just as surely, they were under relentless pressure either to reinterpret themselves in Lockean terms or to take up a rather desperate struggle against the new wave of Lockean and post-Lockean educational thinking.¹

Testifying vividly to this state of affairs is the most remarkable American contribution to the discussion of education in midcentury: Benjamin Franklin's *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* (1749), coupled with his "Idea of the English School" (1750). Franklin later revisited these writings near the end of his life in "Observations Relative to the Intentions of the Original Founders of the Academy in Philadelphia" (1789). In these essays, Franklin cites Obadiah Walker and John Milton, but it is manifestly taken for granted that the supreme authority for Franklin and his readers is John Locke—and this estimation gains added certainty when we note that the two recent authorities other than Rollin to whom Franklin appeals (David Fordyce and George Turnbull) are themselves followers of Locke.² Yet however numerous and substantial his explicit borrowings from and implicit dependence upon Locke's theory of education and of human nature, we cannot fail to notice that Franklin's whole project departs in a decisive respect from Locke, and the nature of the departure may be said to be archetypical of the distinctively American path in education.

Franklin's objective was the establishment of an academy. This academy was intended to serve as the vanguard of a grand new army of private (and eventually public) secondary schools to which Americans were to entrust the education of the leading citizens of the future. In the near term, Franklin's proposals met with only limited success. The founding of Phillips Andover Academy in 1778, however, initiated a period of steadily growing enthusiasm for boarding

schools whose curricula and vision of educational goals were in considerable measure shaped by the spirit of Franklin's suggestions.³

As they followed Franklin's lead, Americans who spoke out about education became increasingly conscious that in advocating and designing formal schooling, they were shaping a new synthesis of Lockean and classical educational principles. They recognized, moreover, that this new synthesis was of a more transformative and perplexing character than the relatively modest innovations offered by such English schoolteachers or writers on schoolteaching as John Clarke, whose *Essay upon the Education of Youth in Grammar Schools* had shown how Locke's pithy thoughts on "learning"—especially the learning of languages—could be felicitously expanded and applied to small Latin school situations.

To some extent, the American concern with formal schooling builds on the peculiarly strong traditions of public schooling of the New England states, especially Massachusetts and Connecticut; but a closer look shows how greatly the genius set in motion by Franklin differs from the spirit of the earlier colonial schools. In 1647 Massachusetts had passed a law, copied verbatim by Connecticut in 1650, that had mandated publicly supported schools to combat "the old deluder, Satan," by teaching the reading skill needed to study the Bible. From these and other kindred laws had grown not only a system of elementary schools aimed at Bible study but also a small number of secondary ("grammar") schools; the latter taught a classical curriculum similar to the course of study in England's numerous secondary schools, which was intended to prepare men for the ministry as well as other learned professions.⁴ The new outlook spearheaded by Franklin parted company with this official New England conception in two crucial (and Lockean) respects.

The New Status of Religion in the School

In the first place, the cultivation of Puritan religious spirituality, as well as the Quaker spirituality that was more familiar in the existing schools of Philadelphia, ceased to be a goal.⁵ This is not to say that the new academic notion entailed the total expulsion of religion from the academy. But Franklin treated religion as a necessary supplement to, rather than the inspiration and guiding light for, morality. And the religion in question was "public" or "civil" religion; i.e., that minimal popular creed which history showed to be essential for social health. When Franklin sent his *Proposals* to the great evangelist preacher George Whitefield and asked for comment, Whitefield replied:

Your plan I have read over, and do not wonder at its meeting with general approbation. It is certainly well calculated to promote polite literature; but I

think there wants *aliquid Christi* in it, to make it so useful as I would desire it might be. It is true, you say, "The youth are to be taught some public religion, and the excellency of the christian religion in particular:" [This passage is in fact nowhere to be found in the *Proposals* as we have them; did the wily Franklin send a "doctored" version to Whitefield for his approval?] but methinks this is mentioned too late, and too soon passed over. As we are all creatures of a day; as our whole life is but one small point between two eternities, it is reasonable to suppose, that the grand end of every christian institution for forming tender minds, should be to convince them of their natural depravity, of the means of recovering out of it, and of the necessity of preparing for the enjoyment of the supreme Being in a future state. These are the grand points in which christianity centers. Arts and sciences may be built on this, and serve to embellish and set off this superstructure, but without this, I think there cannot be any good foundation. . . . I think also in such an institution, there should be a well-approved christian orator, who should not be content with giving a public lecture in general upon oratory, but who should visit and take pains with every class, and teach them early how to speak, and read, and pronounce well. . . . It would serve as an agreeable amusement, and would be of great service, whether the youth be intended for the pulpit, the bar, or any other profession whatsoever. . . . I hope your agreement meets with the approbation of the inhabitants, and that it will be serviceable to the cause of vital piety and good education. . . . But all this depends on the integrity, disinterestedness, and piety of the gentlemen concerned. An institution, founded on such a basis, God will bless and succeed; but without these, the most promising schemes will prove abortive, and the most flourishing structures, in the end, turn out mere Babels.

Whitefield's very polite complaint acquires greater force when we observe that in the sole passage where Franklin does make a passing nod to "publick religion," he does not in fact say or imply that the students are to be taught any such religion in the school. The reference to "public religion" occurs in a paragraph under the rubric of "History": "*History* will also afford frequent Opportunities of showing the Necessity of a *Publick Religion*, from its usefulness to the Publick; [and] the Advantages of a religious Character among private Persons."⁶

There is no indication that Franklin attempted to change the school's goals or program in response to Whitefield's protest. On the other hand, Franklin later felt compelled to make some qualified concessions. In 1751, he replied to a letter (now lost) from the Anglican divine Samuel Johnson, subsequently president of King's (Columbia) College, whom Franklin hoped would accept the post of first rector of the new school: "I received your Favour of the 11th Inst. and

thank you for the Hint you give of the Omission in the Idea. The Sacred Classics are read in the English School, tho' I forgot to mention them: And I shall propose at the Meeting of the Schools after the Holidays, that the English Master begin and continue to read select portions of them daily with the Prayer, as you advise."⁷

The rather radical deism that Lawrence Cremin has attributed to Franklin's educational thinking is nowhere more gracefully or sinuously evident than in the closing words of his *Proposals*. There he discusses the end of education, virtue, which he defines as service to one's fellowman; and virtue so conceived, he insists, encompasses the whole of piety. To sanction this transformation of the idea of love of God, Franklin appeals to the authority of none other than Milton!

The Idea of what is *true Merit*, should also be often presented to Youth, explain'd and impress'd on their Minds, as consisting in an *Inclination* join'd with an *Ability* to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family; which *Ability* is (with the Blessing of God) to be acquir'd or greatly increas'd by *true Learning*; and should indeed be the great *Aim* and *End* of all Learning. [Franklin's Note:] To have in View the *Glory* and *Service of God*, as some express themselves, is only the same Thing in other Words. For *Doing Good to Men* is the *only Service of God* in our Power; and *to imitate his Beneficence* is to *glorify him*. Hence Milton says, "The *End* of Learning is to repair the Ruins of our first Parents, by regaining to *know God aright*, and out of that Knowledge to *love him*, to *imitate him*, to be *like him*, as we may the nearest by possessing our Souls of true Virtue."

What Franklin omits is Milton's crucial final clause: "by possessing our souls of true virtue, *which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection*."⁸

The New Curriculum

But there is a second major break with Milton—and also with prior American tradition, at least at the official level. Franklin deepened and made respectable previously emerging challenges to the Latin and Greek philological and literary training that had bulked so large as the secular component of the "liberal" education offered in the "Latin Grammar" schools of New England and Britain. He did so in the name of a more practical education, emphasizing instruction in English usage, writing, drawing, calculation, and modern history and thought. Massachusetts laws had dictated (with mixed success) the establishment of Latin

schools in counties throughout the state; but it was the so-called writing schools—private for-profit and nonprofit schools that sprang up in New England as well as in Philadelphia and elsewhere to train adolescents in the practical use of their mother tongue and arithmetic—that were in some key respects the precursors of Franklin’s new notion of secondary schooling.⁹

Elaborating his aims in the “Idea of the English School,” Franklin writes that students should come out of his academy

fitted for learning any Business, Calling, or Profession, except such wherein Languages are required; and tho’ unacquainted with any antient or foreign Tongue, they will be Masters of their own, which is of more immediate and general Use; and withal will have attain’d many other valuable Accomplishments; the Time usually spent in acquiring those Languages, often without Success, being here employ’d in laying such a Foundation of Knowledge and Ability, as, properly improv’d, may qualify them to pass thro’ and execute the several Offices of civil Life, with Advantage and Reputation.¹⁰

Franklin thus shifts away from the traditional Latin school toward a model of schooling that attempts to give children skills that will help them find employment in professions other than divinity, law, teaching, and medicine; in doing so, he retains only a tenuous link to the old Puritan concern that children be readied for a “calling.” In the new outlook, no longer should the young prepare for a vocation in a spirit of humility and radical dependence on God’s grace, hoping for success blessed by and signifying divine election; instead, young people should seek to make a place for themselves in the world so as to achieve independence, repute, and a justified pride in their own accomplishments. The most obvious testimony to the change is the disappearance of Bible study as an essential part of the preparation for every calling.

The curricular sections of Franklin’s *Proposals* commence under the explicit guidance of Locke, and specifically with the latter’s recommendation that youngsters be taught not only to write but to draw clearly, “a Thing very useful to a Gentleman on several Occasions.”

How many Buildings may a man see, how many *Machines* and Habits meet with, the Ideas whereof would be easily retain’d, and communicated by a little Skill in Drawing; which being committed to Words, are in Danger to be lost, or at best but ill retained in the most exact Descriptions?

Second comes arithmetic, joined with what Franklin calls “Accounts”—a conjunction he explains by quoting as follows from Locke:

Merchants accounts, he says, if it is not necessary to help a Gentleman to get an Estate, yet there is nothing of more Use and Efficacy to make him *preserve* the Estate he has. 'Tis seldom observed that he who keeps an Account of his Income and Expenses, and thereby has constantly under View the Course of his Domestic Affairs, lets them run to Ruin: and I doubt not but many a Man gets behind-hand before he is aware, or runs farther on when he is once in, for want of this Care, or the Skill to do it. I would therefore advise all gentlemen to learn perfectly Merchants Accounts; and not to think 'tis a Skill that belongs not to them, because it has received its Name, and has been chiefly practis'd by Men of Traffick.¹¹

Franklin then turns to the core of the curriculum, the study of "our own" English language. Tacitly following Locke, Franklin assigns a translation of the fables of Aesop as the reading for the first grade in the English school. Under the new dispensation there is of course no longer any need to have even older students practice English by reading the King James Bible. The highest level of reading is to be in contemporary English literature, including substantial modern political theory: "Some of our best Writers, as Tillotson, Addison, Pope, Algernon Sidney, Cato's Letters, &c. should be Classicks: the Stiles principally to be cultivated, being the *clear* and *concise*." For this crucial innovation of making English grammar and literature his focus instead of Latin and Greek, Franklin invokes the authority of Locke.

Mr. Locke, speaking of *Grammar*, p. 252. says, "That to those the greatest Part of whose Business in this World is to be done with their Tongues, and with their Pens, it is convenient, if not necessary, that they should speak properly and correctly. . . . *Grammar is necessary*; but it is the *Grammar only of their own proper Tongues*. . . . If this be so (as I suppose it is) it will be Matter of Wonder, why young Gentlemen are forc'd to learn the Grammars of foreign and dead Languages, and are never once told the Grammar of their own Tongues. . . . Nor is their own language ever propos'd to them as worthy their Care and Cultivating, tho' they have *daily Use* of it, and are not seldom, in the future Course of their Lives, judg'd of by their handsome or awkward Way of expressing themselves in it."¹²

Continuing explicitly to follow the lead of Locke, Franklin's *Proposals* recommends that practice in letter writing be a chief means of familiarizing youngsters with English composition and clear and graceful expression of their thoughts. To appreciate the radicalism of this suggestion, we need to remind ourselves of what Milton had proposed in the way of instruction in language. Milton had recommended that after students began to master the rudiments of grammar,

“some easy and delightful book of education would be read to them, whereof the Greeks have store, as Cebes, Plutarch, and other Socratic discourses,” and “after evening repast, till bedtime, their thoughts will be best taken up in the easy grounds of religion and the story of Scripture.”

But here the main skill and groundwork will be to temper them such lectures and explanations, upon every opportunity, as may lead and draw them in willing obedience, inflamed with the study of learning and the admiration of virtue, stirred up with high hopes of living to be brave men and worthy patriots, dear to God and famous to all ages; that they may despise and scorn all their childish and ill-taught qualities, to delight in manly and liberal exercises.

The full implications of Franklin's notion of the benefits of instruction in letter writing emerge in the amplification he provides in his essay on the English school. There he makes it clearer that, far from aspiring to imitate heroes, the boys are to practice formulating their own opinions, tastes, and “common” experiences, as well as the types of letters that will be useful in future business dealings: “The Boys should be put on Writing Letters to each other on any common Occurrences, and on various Subjects, imaginary Business, &c., containing little Stories, Accounts of their late Reading, what Parts of Authors please them, and why. . . . Some of the best Letters published in our own Language, as Sir William Temple's, those of Pope, and his friends, and some others, might be set before the Youth as Models.”¹³

Yet immediately after this striking endorsement of repeated practice in expressing the Lockean “self,” Franklin reminds us of his steady attachment to the classical tradition Milton represents. For in the private home situation that Locke envisages as the environment for education, there is of course little place for declamation. Franklin, however, has in mind a school or schoolroom filled with an audience of other boys, and he advises that “they may be put on making Declamations, repeating Speeches, delivering Orations, &c.” One of the school's goals is to cultivate the skills of public oral communication that are native to self-governing communities.¹⁴

This concern with oratory would become more pointed in discussions of education at the time of the Revolution. “Eloquence is the child of a free state,” David Ramsay proclaimed in 1778.

In this form of government, as public measures are determined by a majority of votes, arguments enforced by the arts of persuasion, must evermore be crowned with success. . . . In royal governments, where the will of one or a few has the direction of public measures, the orator may harangue, but

most probably will reap persecution and imprisonment, as the fruit of his labor: Whereas, in our present happy system, the poorest school boy may prosecute his studies with increasing ardor, from the prospect, that in a few years he may, by his improved abilities, direct the determinations of public bodies, on subjects of the most stupendous consequence.¹⁵

The ebullient Ramsay does not pause to reflect on the new dangers from demagoguery and from the arts of deceit that are in our time called “public relations.” More sober minds, like Franklin’s, call for a training in rhetoric that would enable discrimination between sophistry and eloquently reasoned public discourse. Models are to be sought in the great classical teachers and practitioners. The stress by Franklin and others on oratory or rhetoric echoes the great tradition of rhetoric and of educating gentleman-orators, which derives from Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintilian. This heritage remained alive, if in enfeebled and routinized versions, in the Middle Ages and sprang to vigorous life again in the Renaissance. Even in Puritan New England, but to a greater extent among the Anglican southern gentry, the traditional model of the noble orator continued to provide some of the inspiration for what vitality there was in the classical education.

But while reaching back to the past, Franklin as usual keeps his eye on the present and future. Perhaps the most important aspect of rhetoric in the contemporary world, he notes, is that expressed by the pen and the printed page: “Modern Political Oratory being chiefly performed by the Pen and Press, its Advantages over the Antient in some Respects are to be shown; as that its Effects are more extensive, more lasting, &c.” In Franklin’s new vision, journalism, conceived as a high civic calling within the republic, replaces or grows out of the ancient Isocratic oratorical vocation. The text to which Franklin and others return again and again as a model for students is *The Spectator*. Franklin links the training in oral public expression to an encouragement of the reading of newspapers, and he calls for the cultivation of a vivid reading voice as a vehicle for bringing to life and disseminating the written word, in circles as small as family gatherings and as large as public meetings. Moreover, he evidently means to encourage youngsters to enjoy and learn from participating in the give-and-take of argument and discussion that might accompany and intensify the drama of historic occasions.

Accustoming Boys to read aloud what they do not first understand, is the Cause of those even set Tones so common among Readers, which when they have once got a Habit of using, they find so difficult to correct: By which means, among Fifty readers we scarcely find a good One. For want of good Reading, Pieces publish’d with a view to influence the Minds of Men

for their own or the publick Benefit, lose half their Force. Were there but one good Reader in a Neighbourhood, a publick Orator might be heard throughout a Nation with the same Advantages, and have the same Effect on his Audience, as if they stood within the reach of his Voice.

On *Historical* Occasions, Questions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice, will naturally arise, and may be put to Youth, which they may debate in Conversation and in Writing. When they ardently desire Victory, for the Sake of the Praise attending it, they will begin to feel the Want, and be sensible of the use of *Logic*, or the Art of Reasoning to *discover* truth, and of *Arguing* to *defend* it, and *convince* Adversaries. This would be the Time to acquaint them with the Principles of that Art. Grotius, Pufendorf, and some other Writers of the same Kind, may be used on these Occasions to decide their Disputes. Publick Disputes warm the Imagination, whet the Industry, and strengthen the natural Abilities.¹⁶

Integrated into the study of English is to be history, “as a constant Part of their Reading, such as the Translations of the Greek and Roman Historians, and the modern Histories of antient Greece and Rome, &c.” Here again Franklin cites Locke, but this time with a significant counterfeit: Locke had indeed, as Franklin quotes him, praised history as the most “delightful” study and therefore “the fittest for a young Lad”; but in Locke this was a prelude to a very different argument, namely, that history was then the way to introduce one’s son to Latin. By reading “the plainest and easiest *Historians*” rather than “Books beyond their Capacity, such as are the *Roman* Orators and Poets,” the youth might be led “by a gradual Progress” to “read the most difficult and sublime of the *Latin* Authors, such as are *Tully*, *Virgil*, and *Horace*.” For while Locke deplored the ignorance of English grammar and usage, and questioned whether young people, including the younger sons of gentlemen, who were destined for trades and agriculture needed to waste their time learning Latin, he was nonetheless certain that Latin was “absolutely necessary to a Gentleman.” With a view to educating gentlemen, he offered fascinating new methods of learning Latin, with a stress on beginning by way of daily conversation and reading aloud, especially when very young with the mother (who Locke was sure could teach herself Latin as they went, “if she will but spend two or three hours in a day with him”) and later with the tutor.¹⁷

The distance between Locke’s gentlemanly education and Franklin’s academic education is particularly evident here. (It is pertinent to observe that Franklin himself, in sharp contrast to Locke, was not well-educated in the classical languages.) By a sly distortion of Locke’s text, Franklin invokes the great philosopher’s authority while quietly erasing the purely gentlemanly dimension of

the master's concern with education in history. Still, one may argue that Franklin's alteration of the sense of Locke's remarks is for the sake of their spirit, as applied in new circumstances. For Locke may be understood to have insisted on the necessity of a gentleman's learning Latin on utilitarian grounds: Latin at the turn of the eighteenth century remained the lingua franca of European discourse and of many major publications. Moreover, Franklin's break with traditional canons does not imply his intention to abandon training in the classical languages altogether. His *Proposals* goes on to affirm that history should indeed be taught in such a way as to arouse the appetite for learning the classical languages, that all who wish should be allowed to do so, and that those who are to be divines, doctors, or lawyers *must* do so:

When Youth are told, that the Great Men whose Lives and Actions they read in History, spoke two of the best Languages that ever were, the most expressive, copious, beautiful; and that the finest Writings, the most correct Compositions, the most perfect Productions of human Wit and Wisdom, are in those Languages, which have endured Ages, and will endure while there are Men; that no Translation can do them Justice, or give the Pleasure found in Reading the Originals; that those Languages contain all Science; that one of them is become almost universal, being the Language of Learned Men in all Countries; that to understand them is a distinguishing Ornament; &c. they may be thereby made desirous of learning those Languages, and their Industry sharpen'd in the Acquisition of them. All intended for Divinity should be taught the Latin and Greek; for Physick, the Latin, Greek and French; for Law, the Latin and French; Merchants, the French, German, and Spanish: And though all should not be compell'd to learn Latin, Greek, or the modern foreign Languages; yet none that have an ardent Desire to learn them should be refused; their English, Arithmetick, and other Studies absolutely necessary, being at the same time not neglected.¹⁸

The study of history is to be both a central feature of the curriculum in its own right and the vehicle for introducing such useful studies as geography, chronology, ancient customs, languages, and morality. These all lead up to constitutional law and the political theory that teaches "how Men and their Properties are protected by joining in Societies and establishing Governments; their Industry encouraged and rewarded, Arts invented, and Life made more comfortable: The Advantages of *Liberty*, Mischiefs of *Licentiousness*, Benefits arising from good Laws and a due Execution of Justice, &c. Thus may the first Principles of sound *Politicks* be fix'd in the Minds of Youth." Here Franklin cites both Milton, who appeals first to Moses and then to the classics, and Locke, who appeals to

those modern theorists by whom the student may be “instructed in the natural Rights of Men.”¹⁹

Franklin breaks notably with Locke, however, when he makes human history the prelude to a study of natural history. Locke had warned that an inquiry into nature by itself, without some prior study of a compendium of the Bible or its teachings, was likely to issue in materialism: “Matter being a thing, that all our Senses are constantly conversant with, it is so apt to possess the Mind, and exclude all other Beings, but Matter, that prejudice, grounded on such Principles, often leaves no room for the admittance of Spirits, or the allowing any such things as *immaterial Beings in rerum natura*.”²⁰ Franklin either does not heed, or does not care about, the danger. As authorities for the study of nature, he does indeed cite Rollin and Milton, who, more sanguine than Locke, advocate this study without hesitation. They recommend it as conducing to natural religion and providing medicinal benefits for soldiers in war and for heads of families in peace. What Franklin does not note is that these two authorities intended the study of nature to be guided by the works of Aristotle rather than (as in Locke) by Descartes, Boyle, and Newton.

Franklin himself blazes a new trail in his *Proposals* by expatiating upon the commercial and technological grounds for the study of natural history or science. Such study

would not only be delightful to Youth, and furnish them with Matter for their Letters, &c. as well as other History; but afterwards of great Use to them, whether they are Merchants, Handicrafts, or Divines; enabling the first the better to understand many Commodities, Drugs, &c. the second to improve his Trade or Handicraft by new Mixtures, Materials, &c. and the last to adorn his Discourses by beautiful Comparisons, and strengthen them by new Proofs of Divine Providence. . . . *Natural History* will also afford Opportunities of introducing many Observations, relating to the Preservation of Health.

As Franklin puts it in his essay on the English school, “next to the knowledge of *Duty*, this Kind of Knowledge is certainly the most useful.” In fact, the curriculum sketched in the *Proposals* culminates with the study of the history of commerce, leading to “mechanical philosophy.”

The History of *Commerce*, of the Invention of Arts, Rise of Manufacturers, Progress of Trade, Change of its Seats, with the Reasons, Causes, &c. may also be made entertaining to Youth, and will be useful to all. And this, with the Accounts in other History of the prodigious Force and Effect of Engines and Machines used in War, will naturally introduce a Desire to be instructed in *Mechanicks*, and to be inform'd of the Principles of that Art by

which weak men perform such Wonders, Labour is sav'd, Manufactures expedited, &c. &c. This will be the Time to show them Prints of antient and modern machines, to explain them, to let them be copied, and to give Lectures in Mechanical Philosophy.²¹

It is at this point in the *Proposals* that Franklin adds his exhortation to inculcate and cultivate constantly the Lockean virtue of civility and its expression in "good breeding." Franklin thus seems to contend that the study of natural science with practical ends clearly in view is much more closely tied to the study of duty or morality than has hitherto been recognized. As Franklin here notes, Locke had praised learning about trades and had recommended that even gentlemen master at least one trade, and preferably more than one. Milton had not advocated the learning of a trade but did urge that the school procure "the helpful experiences of hunters, fowlers, fishermen, shepherds, gardeners, apothecaries; and in the other sciences, architects, engineers, mariners, anatomists." Given their desire to encourage a spirit of humanity, Franklin and Locke of course do not recommend that students spend time with hunters and fowlers. But Franklin goes well beyond even Locke's remarks to introduce a motif that looks back to Bacon and anticipates some of the most striking and innovative passages of Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*. It is in the course and on the basis of the study of the history of commerce and technology, Franklin seems to suggest, that the higher moral themes Locke broaches in a rather different context in his treatise on education ought to be fully elaborated. Political history leads naturally to the discussion of morality, justice, and the legitimate foundations of government; but it is only when the student has studied the history of commerce, and begun to grasp the significance of the flowering of science and trade under sound regimes, that he will begin fully to appreciate "that *Benignity of Mind* which shows itself in *searching for* and *seizing every Opportunity to serve and to oblige*." Just as in Bacon's *New Instauration*, so here in Franklin's new academic curriculum, there is a new understanding of the kind of individuals who should be set up as models for emulation. The greatest heroes of history are to be the captains of commerce and the argonauts of scientific inquiry and technological innovation. Their path is cleared, but only cleared, by the lesser heroes of political and military history, who had been brought forward as models of the second rank by Milton. The religious heroes to whom Milton had assigned pre-eminence have no significant place in Franklin's academy.²²

The Organization of the School

As we have seen, however, Franklin's new political project was also in large measure a very old political project, in that it sought to recreate some of what was

best in ancient public life. The precise character of the appeal to classical precedent prior to the rise of the full-blown revolutionary republican outlook becomes clearer in the essay through which Franklin initiated his public campaign for the creation of a local academy. He proceeded in a manner that is both highly characteristic of his foxlike political style and revealing as to the nature of his conception of schooling.

Franklin arranged to have reprinted in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, with a brief anonymous introduction arguing the immediate relevance of the document, a translation of a letter from Pliny the Younger to Tacitus on the subject of the founding of an academy. Pliny wrote asking his friend to help him locate in Rome candidates for tutorial positions in a school he hoped to see established by the fathers of his native provincial town. On a recent visit, Pliny had discovered that the sons were being sent far away to school in Milan, at considerable expense, inconvenience, and—Pliny thought—risk to their morals. He urged the local fathers to use the money to hire tutors chosen by themselves, in a school set up in the town, so that their sons could live at home “under the eye of their parents.” He further volunteered to put up a third of the money required, noting that he could easily afford to put up all the money but that he thought it was essential “to have the choice of the masters entirely in the breast of the parents, who will be so much the more careful to determine properly, as they shall be obliged to share the expense of maintaining them: for tho’ they may be careless in disposing of another’s bounty, they will certainly be cautious how they apply their own.” Pliny added that Tacitus was to make no engagements with the candidates since he “would leave it entirely free to the parents to judge and choose as they shall see proper.”²³ The essence of Franklin’s proposal as borrowed from Pliny is, then, a school that allows sons of citizens of a vast monarchic empire who live far from the imperial center to be educated at home under the guidance of their parents—who are to be induced by economic incentives, as well as parental love or duty, to take an active and continuous part in selecting the local academy’s teachers.

Yet the organization of the academy in Franklin’s actual *Proposals* differs significantly from that foreshadowed in the anonymous letter in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. The Pennsylvania academy is to be founded, financed, and supervised not by parents but instead by “some Persons of Leisure and publick Spirit.” They are to become in a very diluted sense parental in their care for the school and the students, by making

it their Pleasure, and in some Degree their Business, to visit the Academy often, encourage and countenance the Youth, countenance and assist the Masters, and by all Means in their Power advance the Usefulness and Reputation of the Design; that they look on the Students as in some Sort their

Children, treat them with Familiarity and Affection, and when they have behav'd well, and gone through their Studies, and are to enter the World, zealously unite, and make all the Interest that can be made to establish them, whether in Business, Offices, Marriages, or any other Thing for their Advantage, preferably to all other Persons whatsoever even of equal Merit.

And if Men may, and frequently do, catch such a Taste for cultivating Flowers, for Planting, Grafting, Inoculating, and the like, as to despise all other Amusements for their Sake, why may not we expect they should acquire a Relish for that *more useful* Culture of young Minds.²⁴

Education here comes close to sounding like a spare-time hobby of the wealthy trustees, and the quasi-parental care that is most stressed is that lavished on mature and successful students rather than on those still needing acute assistance in their adolescent moral development. There is no little irony—and no slight vindication of both Pliny and Locke—in the fact that Franklin himself in later years admitted that the academy had strayed far from its original aims and that his own personal neglect of its management was largely responsible. The trustees, and especially Franklin, who remained on the board until 1789 and served as the first elected president, had failed almost from the very start to visit the academy, let alone to “cultivate” or assist the students there. Franklin quotes at length from the minutes of the trustees’ meetings to show that he and his fellows had no idea what was going on at the school and had openly confessed during these sessions their total ignorance. Citing the passage just quoted regarding the visitations and solicitations of the trustees, Franklin indignantly comments: “these splendid promises dazzled the eyes of the public,” but in fact the trustees “shamefully broke through and set at naught the original constitutions”; “the subscribers have been disappointed and deceived.”²⁵ We can discern in the outcome of Franklin’s proposal the sobering precedent for the very mixed success that has attended so many American high hopes as to what might be expected from projects for institutional education, conceived as a substitute or supplement for parental and communal rearing of adolescents.

But this was not the only respect in which Franklin’s plan failed to materialize as he had hoped. The modern, practical thrust of the academy Franklin envisioned was seriously blunted from the outset. “The Constitutions of the Publick Academy in the City of Philadelphia,” drafted by Franklin and Tench Francis and signed on 13 November 1749, created a dual academy: one branch was to be a Latin grammar school, but the other and, Franklin tried to insist, equally important and respected branch was to be the new sort of English grammar school. That this bifurcation issued in a severe setback for Franklin becomes evident in Franklin’s own lament of 1789. Franklin there declares that he personally never wanted a Latin school and agreed to one only because the more wealthy and

hence more influential subscribers insisted. He recalls the early signs that the English branch of the academy would not be put on an equal footing.

When the Constitutions were first drawn, Blanks were left for the Salaries, and for the Number of Boys the Latin Master was to teach. The first Instance of Partiality, in favor of the Latin Part of the Institution, was in giving the Title of rector to the Latin Master; and no Title for the English one. But the most striking instance was, when we met to sign, and the blanks were first to be fill'd up, the votes of a majority carryed it to give twice as much salary to the Latin Master as to the English, and yet require twice as much duty from the English master as from the Latin, viz. 200 pounds to the Latin Master to teach 20 Boys; 100 pounds to the English Master to teach 40! . . . Another instance of the partiality above mentioned was in the March preceding, when 100 pounds sterling was voted to buy *Latin* and *Greek* books, . . . and nothing for the *English* books.²⁶

Yet if Franklin's own academy slipped from his grasp, his was the spirit that slowly but surely gained ground in the American version of the "battle of the books" that occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁷ To repeat, this spirit was not one that sought to leave classical education wholly behind. On the contrary, it was to classical education that appeal was made, precisely for authorizing the deemphasis, if not the abandonment, of the study of the classical languages. For, as Franklin pointed out, quoting Turnbull and Locke, the study of dead or even foreign languages played no role whatsoever in Greek civic education; and among Romans, the study of Greek, though prized in the later, decadent ages of Rome, never became an essential part of a Roman citizen's or gentleman's education—as one of Pliny the Younger's letters on education attests.²⁸ What was important for the classical citizen, in contrast to the later classical grammarians and scholars, was less belles lettres than the development of the capacities appropriate to an economically independent and politically public-spirited member of society. In other words, the Americans turned from the secondhand, ornamental or scholarly, study of classic texts to a reenactment—in a wholly new setting, and with a much-changed script—of a portion at least of the civic spirit those texts depicted. That spirit, the Americans insisted, was sufficiently available in translations and resumes—such as Rollin's. At any rate, American educators were beginning to pay much less attention to philology in teaching the classics; their chief concern was that students should learn and take to heart some of the maxims of the ancients, suitably modified. "It would be well," says Franklin at the start of his description of the proposed curriculum of the academy, "if they could be taught *every Thing* that is useful, and *every Thing* that is ornamental: But Art is long, and their Time is short. It is

therefore propos'd that they learn those Things that are likely to be *most useful* and *most ornamental*, Regard being had to the several professions for which they are intended."²⁹ It was this spirit of respect for learning, combined with a stubbornly practical and political purpose, that was to pervade all the Founders' discussions of schooling.