

“C ivil society appears to require . . . the presence of a particular type of self,” writes Sunil Khilnani, “one that is mutable, able to conceive of interests as transient, and able to change and to choose political loyalties and public affiliations.” Khilnani could have been writing a profile of Benjamin Franklin. “Such a self,” he explains,

must possess the capacity of being open to discursive persuasion and deliberation, and be able to see his or her interests not as pre-given and pre-defined. . . . It must, that is, be a corrigible self, one that can conceive of a distinction or gap between its own identity and its interests.¹

Franklin’s *Autobiography* describes his ongoing efforts to remake himself by taking on new habits (vegetarianism, for instance) and crafting his reputation (making sure as a young printer that his hard work was publicly visible, for instance). Franklin changed loyalties and affiliations on several occasions, most conspicuously when he decided to support the American Revolution and stop working to preserve a viable role for the North American colonies within the British Empire. Above all, he celebrated his own capacity—and, by extension, anyone’s capacity—to be persuaded by argument and demonstration, and he inscribed the principle of corrigibility in his *Autobiography*’s conceit of identifying Errata in his past. Civil society itself is ambiguously poised between serving as an infrastructure for market relations and organizing a more open-ended public capacity for reflection and creativity. No wonder, then, that Franklin has been cast both as the ulti-

mate capitalist tool and as a model for unbridled public creativity and self-invention.²

In the United States—and in the West, a political and cultural rubric that has left geography behind—we are grappling now with some of the consequences of the negotiation between religion and other cultural formations that crystallized as secular civil society, mainly during Franklin's lifetime. We're grappling as well with the limits of tolerance as a paradigm for managing religious differences, a paradigm that was developed and institutionalized in tandem with civil society and that influenced the treatment of religion in the U.S. Constitution and in American legal traditions. Rather than reiterate the importance of preserving religious tolerance and the separation of church and state, I want to investigate the nature and limits of the version of secularism proposed by both goals. Joining here with other intellectuals who name this endeavor postsecularism or critical secularism, I am aware that this project may seem imprudent or even treacherous in the current political climate, since both academic freedom and the secular nature of the academy have come under increasing attack in recent years.³ Nevertheless, if academic intellectuals respond to these attacks by circling the wagons, we risk trapping and rigidifying the values we wish to protect, especially the value of free intellectual inquiry. Meeting our critics rather than caricaturing them—as well as trying to learn something from this crisis—entails trying to understand why secularism as we know it has not proved to be an antidote to religious conflict or a solution to adjudicating the competing public claims of belief and unbelief.

Benjamin Franklin is an instructive figure for this purpose because he was an influential proponent of secularism, both in his opposition to state-sponsored religion and in his eager support for an actively ecumenical, religiously tolerant public life.⁴ Even more important, Franklin's writings mark his energetic participation in the cultural shift by which religious belief and belonging—along with other forms of belief and belonging—were transmuted into interests. The emergence of what I will call interest-thinking is an important feature of civil society that has not been sufficiently investigated, and Franklin, I argue, was probably its most appealing and influential stylist in the United States. In exploring Franklin's relationship to secularism, I want to bring recent scholarship about Franklin, especially scholar-

ship that emphasizes his role as either capitalist entrepreneur or exemplar of public action, into conversation with historical accounts of the emergence of self-interest, an especially contagious strain of Enlightenment rationalism. Franklin's life and writings encapsulate not only secular interest-thinking's capacity to supplant violent religious sectarianism but also its distorting, constricting effects on intellectual, political, and spiritual life. Drawing on Franklin's writings, I would like to correct and extend historical accounts of self-interest by arguing that self-interest was made palatable not as an abstract theory of human action but as a linguistic way of wearing selfhood, a style that Franklin made surprisingly self-debunking and subtle. I also want to underline the limitations of secular civil society insofar as it transforms beliefs and convictions into interests.

Two Franklins and One More

Two Franklins dominate recent scholarship, both grounded firmly in civil society: entrepreneurial Franklin and public performative Franklin. Entrepreneurial Franklin, a figure who has long prompted both veneration and protest, has received new life in two recent biographical studies, one each by Gordon Wood and Walter Isaacson, as well as in the circulation of Blaine McCormick's *Ben Franklin: America's Original Entrepreneur*, a modernizing, excerpting "adaptation" that seeks to make Franklin's *Autobiography* "accessible to the modern business reader."⁵ The final ringing paragraph of Wood's *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (2004), which won a Pulitzer Prize, stunningly maintains entrepreneurial Franklin as a hero for the twenty-first-century United States:

It is the image of the hardworking self-made businessman that has most endured. Franklin was one of the greatest of the Founders; indeed, his crucial diplomacy in the Revolution makes him second only to Washington in importance. But that importance is not what we most remember about Franklin. It is instead the symbolic Franklin of the bumptious capitalism of the early republic—the man who personifies the American dream—who stays with us. And as long as America is seen as the land of opportunity, where you can get ahead if you work hard, this image of Franklin will likely be the one that continues to dominate American culture.⁶

Isaacson's *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (2003) emphasizes Franklin's populist sympathies more than his capitalist activities, reminding us near the end that Franklin's most "fundamental ideal" was "a faith in the wisdom of the common citizen that was manifest in an appreciation for democracy and an opposition to all forms of tyranny." However, Isaacson, too, admires the entrepreneur, arguing that Franklin "was egalitarian in what became the American sense: he approved of individuals making their way to wealth through diligence and talent, but opposed giving special privileges to people based on their birth."⁷ Both Isaacson and Wood also inform their readers of later businessmen who admired Franklin—the industrialist Andrew Carnegie and the financier Thomas Mellon—and both of them cite Mellon's memoir, which describes how Mellon's ambition was fired by reading Franklin's *Autobiography* when he was fourteen.⁸ In each case, the man's attainments function as a consoling reassurance for the boy who could not have been sure that his gambit would succeed: how could we begrudge a powerless boy his later success?

Most of the entrepreneurial activity for which Franklin is famous took place before the American Revolution, so Wood is right to cast Franklin's link to the "bumptious capitalism of the early republic" as "symbolic." This tendency to link young Franklin anachronistically to the young republic, even though Franklin was in his seventies at the time of the Revolution, has dangerous effects. Grafting "bump-tious capitalism" onto the United States—evoking a fledgling and open marketplace, ripe for innovation, as a feature of national life—can almost make us forget that Mellon and Carnegie thrived in an era of monopoly capitalism, hostile to labor legislation and meager in public assistance. The *Autobiography*, read as the story of entrepreneurial Franklin, funnels our attention to the up-and-comers, invoking capitalism only as a system that can foster invention and ambition on the part of those (usually white and male) who are young, quick-witted, and able-bodied. This positioning of Franklin leaves no room for us to notice how these success stories fit into a larger political and economic landscape—in Franklin's case, as David Waldstreicher has recently unfolded, a landscape in which entrepreneurial profits were "predicated upon the continued flow of unfree labor [mainly indentured servants and slaves] and the master's ease in switching between one supply and the other."⁹

Yet entrepreneurial Franklin is an engaging figure, innovative and

sociable, who registers the ongoing possibilities for people to use economic tactics in the service of political and social improvements. Microfinance and microcredit innovations such as the Grameen Bank, which shared the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize with its founder Muhammad Yunus, seem strikingly Franklinesque. These innovations resemble the proposal by Franklin's Silence Dogood that women join together and insure themselves against the financial risks of widowhood as well as Franklin's bequest making low-interest loans available to former apprentices.¹⁰ Entrepreneurship can, of course, move previously marginal groups into civil society, with political consequences, and it is possible—but not guaranteed—that the entry of new groups can change the nature of political thinking in civil society. In this way, Franklin's belief in entrepreneurship converges with the Enlightenment desire to make human rationality a new, more inclusive criterion for political participation. The progressive or radical potential of entrepreneurial thinking is located at this juncture where new members or even new constituencies are brought into civil society or made newly important in it by their role as wealth producers. Accordingly, Franklin's self-depiction as an interloper who succeeded has made him a catalytic model for real and fictional people (F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby and Ann Petry's Lutie Johnson come to mind) who seem to want to move *in* (potentially shifting the political center that organizes public opinion) and *up* (most likely consolidating the center . . . but maybe not).

Entrepreneurial Franklin is flexible as a function of his sociability, but he is unproblematically unified as the author and stake of his ventures and deeply concerned with self-regulation. He is the Franklin who monitored his progress in thirteen virtues and learned to eat as cheaply as was consistent with health. In contrast, public performative Franklin—the other Franklin looming in scholarship of the past few decades—revels more exuberantly in the pleasures of public life and mutable public identities, offering a corrective to the modern presupposition that people are most authentic in their most private identities and that public identities are coercive and alienating. Indeed, in keeping with his penchants for pseudonyms, personae, and hoaxes, this Franklin is untroubled by ethics of sincerity or authenticity that would lead him to understand himself as anything other than an orchestration of social roles, personae, or interests. Political theorist Judith Shklar has sketched an admiring polemical version of this Franklin,

emphasizing his distance from the nineteenth century as well as from us: “Franklin was the sum of his actions, while Hawthorne and we have romantic egos that cannot bear the notion that one’s manner of acting one’s roles measures true character.”¹¹ Within Franklin studies in recent years, Douglas Anderson, Mitchell Breitwieser, Myra Jehlen, Ormond Seavey, and especially Michael Warner have in varying ways framed Franklin’s written deployment of selfhood—and perhaps his self-experience—as fluid, various, adaptive, and performative.¹² If I may combine a number of valuable, distinct readings for heuristic purposes, their Franklin is the inventor of Silence Dogood and Polly Baker, the didactic hoaxer who impersonated the King of Prussia in order to chastise the British about their colonial policies and who fabricated a seventeenth-century Muslim in order to chastise Americans for enslaving Africans. In Anderson’s account, Franklin is associated with fluids, especially water (because of Franklin’s prominence as a swimmer) and electricity, and with fluids’ self-regulating properties as well as their adaptability.¹³ Breitwieser similarly calls attention to Franklin’s support of paper money (a more liquid form of currency) as an analogy for Franklin’s understanding that selfhood is both self-authorizing and dependent on community legitimation.¹⁴

In many respects, public performative Franklin seems to embody a fantasy derived from Jürgen Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, a work that sketches a mythic version of civil society in order to derive criteria by which we might assess and improve our public life.¹⁵ Locating this best-case civil society in the coffeehouses of eighteenth-century London, Habermas describes the convergence of men from different classes, formed by the common experience of reading and discussing novels, who are spurred by the latest *Spectator* to enter into political discussions in which their identities and statuses are irrelevant: all that matters is the quality of one’s argument (*PS*, 51–56). Warner’s work on Franklin develops one dimension of Habermas’s account in particular—the status-free anonymity in which these men encountered each other as members of a public—as the keynote not only for Franklin’s writings but also for any understanding of the political function of publicity.¹⁶ Warner argues that Franklin’s public selfhood enacts a negation of personal identity: that the jettisoning of identity politics made possible by Franklin’s use of personae is the very condition of public thinking, which need not be bound to particular histories or interests (*L*, 81). Of particular

significance to Warner is the moment when Franklin urged the other members of the Constitutional Convention to lay aside the differences fought out in the debates that produced the Constitution and to act as authors and promoters of the whole document when they returned to their home states to urge ratification. Franklin's appeal, Warner argues, epitomized genuine public participation, which radically desubstantializes personhood in the service of creating possibilities for thought, conviction, and belonging that might not be grounded in the identities and experiences individuals bring to public life (*L*, 96).

Warner's revision of Habermas circumvents the individualism of Habermas's model as well as the instrumental view of language embedded in Habermas's practice of "communicative action," developed in his later writings.¹⁷ Kant meets the material history of print culture in Warner's evocation of public rationality, modeled not on private individual reflection tapping into the universalizing possibilities of reason but on the endless (and thereby potentially universal) circulation of print and the collective-abstract (rather than simply additive) possibilities of joint authorship of any print text, such as the Constitution. Warner's project overwhelmingly identifies Franklin's version of personhood with alternatives to the "interest-bearing," self-present, reasonable individual that forms the premise of official and unofficial forms of Western liberal theory.¹⁸ Warner's Franklin, instead, exemplifies the unpredictably creative possibilities of civil society. These possibilities could transform or supersede not only capitalism but also the forms of "localized" selfhood (in Charles Taylor's phrase) that fuel the impasses of identity politics and that tend to reduce public discourse to gossip and commercial self-display.¹⁹

Public performative Franklin is a refreshing political alternative to entrepreneurial Franklin, but both are highly selective interpretations that reduce Franklin's contradictions. Franklin's impulses toward consolidation and continuity—the impulses that made him find hypocrisy troubling in others and that made him regret, in the *Autobiography*, his Errata—have not really been analyzed within the public performative tradition, even though they have sometimes been acknowledged as discordant elements. My alternative Franklin draws on both entrepreneurial Franklin and public performative Franklin because they have an instructive commonality. Both interpretations celebrate Franklin's creativity and inventiveness: in one case, with respect to established economic and political opportunities; in the other, with respect to

possibilities for redrawing the economic and political playing fields. Both celebrate an adaptive, mutable quality in Franklin's construction of selfhood, a quality that can be linked either to capitalist habits of mind (including hospitality to innovation and the fungibility of value in a capitalist world) or to the negating and abstracting capacities of critical rationality.²⁰ The strain in Franklin's thought that spans these opposing political constellations is his humorous celebration of the interest-bearing self—not the thinly psychologized, fixed self premised by identity politics but the in-process, positional self described by Khilnani: a “punctual” self, in Taylor's depiction, that formulates and pursues interests on the ever-shifting terrain of civil society.²¹ Interest-thinking Franklin is capable of remarkable but delimited feats of abstraction and transformation. However, the most promising trait of interest-thinking Franklin is his capacity to find it slightly funny to be composed of interests, even if he can't seem to name other elements of which we might be made.

“Hell-Torments” and Lightning Rods

Let me offer an Enlightenment fable showing interest-thinking Franklin in action: a true account that doubles as the kind of story the Enlightenment liked to tell about itself and that we secular intellectuals sometimes like to tell about the Enlightenment. It took place in an exchange of letters between Franklin and his friend the Scottish philosopher David Hume, both energetic international correspondents and freethinkers of remarkably equable temperaments. Hume wrote to Franklin in 1762 acknowledging that he had received and circulated to the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh Franklin's latest writing about electricity, a how-to guide for making lightning rods. He had also forwarded the piece to a mutual friend, George Keith, who was governor of Neuchâtel, a Prussian principality (later part of the Swiss Confederation) riven by sectarian strife:

His Lordship [Keith] is at present very much employ'd in settling the Controversy about the Eternity of Hell-Torments, which has set the little Republic of Neuf-chatel in Combustion. I have ventur'd to recommend to his Lordship the abridging these Torments as much as possible, and have usd the Freedom to employ your Name, as well as my own, in this Request: I have told him, that, as we have

taken so much Pains to preserve him & his Subjects from the Fires of Heaven, they cannot do less than to guard us from the Fires of Hell.²²

The structuring conceit of Hume's letter is the juxtaposition of peaceable philosophes with dangerous zealots. On the one hand, the cosmopolitan intellectuals Franklin, Hume, and Keith exchange scientific ideas for protecting people from fire by channeling lightning. On the other hand, the dogmatic Protestant factions of Neuchâtel feed the flames of religious violence in this world by disputing the extent of the suffering their God will inflict in the next.

Franklin, as we shall see, was much friendlier to organized religion than Hume was, but he responded to Hume's sally with his own irreverent wit:

It must afford Lord Mareschall [Keith's Scottish title, a variant of *Marshal*, which Franklin spelled inconsistently] a good deal of Diversion to preside in a Dispute so ridiculous as that you mention. Judges in their Decisions often use Precedents. I have somewhere met with one that is what the Lawyers call *a Case in Point*. The Church People and the Puritans in a Country Town, had once a bitter Contention concerning the Erecting of a Maypole, which the former desir'd and the latter oppos'd. Each Party endeavour'd to strengthen itself by obtaining the Authority of the Mayor, directing or forbidding a Maypole. He heard their Altercation with great Patience, and then gravely determin'd thus; You that are for having no Maypole shall have no Maypole; and you that are for having a Maypole shall have a Maypole. Get about your Business and let me hear no more of this Quarrel. So methinks Lord Mareschal might say; You that are for no more Damnation than is proportion'd to your Offences, have my Consent that it may be so: And you that are for being damn'd eternally, G-d eternally d—n you all, and let me hear no more of your Disputes.²³

The exchange between Franklin and Hume about the Neuchâtel dispute is informal, more the sort of friendly humor that people use to buoy up their spirits and mark their commonality than a thorough analysis of sectarian conflict. However, Franklin's little Puritan story uncannily anticipated the rhetoric of the edict proclaimed by Frederick the Great (an enthusiastic patron and advocate of the Enlight-

enment) when he was called in to settle the Neuchâtel dispute: “Let the parsons who make for themselves a cruel and barbarous God be eternally damned as they desire and deserve; and let those parsons who conceive God gentle and merciful, enjoy the plenitude of his mercy.”²⁴ In both cases, secular logic treats the dispute as a matter that could easily be resolved through simple mathematical partibility, letting each group claim its piece of the pie of truth. It’s worth noting that Frederick’s edict also envisioned a punitive implementation of the Golden Rule (whose links to Kant’s categorical imperative and, much later, John Rawls’s veil of ignorance can be glimpsed here) in which each group would receive the treatment it has envisioned God giving to others.

Writ small in this fable of hellfires and lightning rods is the historical account in which the terrors and anxieties produced by religious warfare and persecution as well as private passions became so intolerable that by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the West, people were eager for the stabilizing influence of market relations—preeminent domain of the partible—and the emergent zone of civil society in which they were mainly managed. J. G. A. Pocock has characterized civil society as “that state of affairs, made possible very largely by trade, capital, and mobile property, in which exchange relations among human beings generated a wealth and civility proof against religious and civil warfare.”²⁵ Albert Hirschman argues that some of the very grounds on which capitalism eventually came to be criticized—its tendency to reduce human transactions to the registers of profit and loss and to tone down the range of passions and desires by funneling them into more manageable impulses of acquisitiveness—were grounds on which capitalism was initially promoted and welcomed.²⁶ Trade, investment, and entrepreneurial activity were figured in this understanding as comfortably rational activities.

What Hirschman recovers, most surprisingly, is the cultural transformation by which the passion of avarice—initially thought to be at least as volatile as any other passion—mutated into a conception of self-interest that was understood to be not only rational but also socially beneficial, via Bernard Mandeville and a common (mis)reading of Adam Smith.²⁷ The idea that economic man needed others for buying and selling was believed to give him an incentive to keep other people alive and well, although imperial conquests and other wars motivated by economics have provided ample evidence to the contrary. Indeed,

the cultural logic by which sectarian violence was presumed to be a greater evil than the many forms of rationalized violence practiced against the poor, the colonized, and the overworked is another of the mysteries attending the adoption of interest-thinking.

Hirschman's genealogy of interest-thinking, together with studies by Amartya Sen and Pierre Force, traces the onset of a process by which the category of self-interest gained inordinate cultural authority in spite of its slipperiness and tendentiousness, both of which were widely recognized when interest-thinking was new.²⁸ How it has come about that the pursuit of self-interest is taken to be a characteristically rational activity; that understanding one's interests has become a necessary form of self-knowledge, even in some situations a legal requirement; and that other explanations of human behavior are made to seem fanciful or idealistic in comparison to the gritty realism of tracking self-interest—this is a task for historical understanding that has so far mainly been sketched in intellectual history but that needs to be undertaken in cultural and social history at large as well as in the historical study of literature and the arts. Literary texts may be especially important in this investigation because they often register the traces of languages of human motivation that are not completely organized around either self-interest or its negation. Such glimpses are especially important in light of Sen's proposal that the ascendancy of self-interest has shaped—and thereby distorted—the work of several academic disciplines. Economics, which influences public-policy discussions as well as kindred social sciences, posits self-interest as virtually the only viable motive for human economic decision-making—the criterion by which behavior is recognized as economic. Conversely, modern ethical philosophy (influencing the humanities and social sciences as well) has reciprocally come to emphasize the study of human impulses that curb or offset the unbridled operations of self-interest. The term *disinterestedness*, naming the possibility of suspending or countering interests otherwise presumed to be at work, emerged in the late eighteenth century as a mark of this split between economic thought and ethical thought. The emergence of disinterestedness as an antidote to interest-thinking raises the question of what forms ethical philosophy might have taken had it not been obliged to offset the presumptive force of self-interest.²⁹

A crucial legacy of the eighteenth century, then, is the presupposition that self-interest is generally operative as a human motivation

whose excesses are regulated by ethics and (ethically informed) law. When self-interest is installed as a feature of the human, it resists being examined as a particular development of selfhood, a predisposition of certain cultures or psychologies, or an effect of particular forms of social organization. Utilitarian and Kantian philosophy, both of which aim to adjudicate or neutralize the effects of self-interest, are part of this legacy, as is the nineteenth-century Anglophone novel's obsession with altruism. Yet an interest, straddling external and internal accounts of human action, is a much more unstable entity than economists would have us believe. It is treated as objective insofar as it pertains to legal and financial relationships that can be documented and charted: one has an interest in a company in which one has invested, say, or in the security of property one owns. It can also function, however, as a description of internal, subjective experience. For instance, the prospect of inheriting from a wealthy relative who has been murdered usually functions in popular thinking and legal proceedings as a motive for murder, without anyone's having to establish the defendant's particular relationship to money, because we think we know that everyone wants to be wealthy and that people face a standing temptation to do anything, even kill, for money. In this respect, an interest marks the site of a presumptive interpellation, in which the economic system or some other system of relations conceived economically (organizational power and sexual access having been assimilated to this model, in many formulations) is presumed to have led a subject to want profits and shun losses as they are defined in the terms of the system. We may be presuming that interests function when they do not; we may also be learning to think of ourselves as fundamentally organized by the possession of interests when we need not. The slide from interest to motive marks this tendency of interest-thinking to invade domains beyond its original purview.

Whereas Hobbes viewed the state as fending off a "warre of every man against every man" rooted in primitive aggression, a belief in the primacy of interests could underlie a much calmer, safer vision of society, as was the case in Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees*. One might rather live in Mandeville's world than Hobbes's, but the sweeping reductionism of Mandeville's analysis was not only destructive of any belief in the nourishing power of fellow-feeling but also intellectually monotonous: for Mandeville, hypocrisy was universal and human relationships exploitative by nature, even though the end result was

an economy stimulated to produce variety and luxury.³⁰ Franklin often invoked the idea that concealed self-interest could be at work in human action, but his relationship to this conception was much more cautious and selective than Mandeville's, his comic touch less biting.

Indeed, the quality of Hume's and Franklin's joking is an important feature of the Enlightenment fable I recounted. Their cosmopolitan vantage point allows both men to unsettle the truth claims of the disputants in Neuchâtel and New England by relativizing them, and this relativizing underwrites the tone of gentle urbanity with which both men distance themselves from the strong emotions at work in the controversies. These men live in a big world full of angry small ponds, but in spite of living in (somewhat larger) ponds themselves, their imaginative view of the big world affords them comparative tranquility. Franklin's joke is funnier than Hume's, offering more of a real laugh. It harnesses anger—the aggressive impulse to tell off the violent Neuchâtel people, even to shame them—but the aggression is managed by the satisfying closure of the joke, especially the play on the difference between the restrained, technical surface meaning—the theological claim about damnation—and the colloquial exasperation of “God damn!” Secularism takes shape in this exchange not as a set of propositions about religion or belief but as a humorous distance cosmopolitans can maintain in relation to the most austere or dogma-driven (I want to suspend that charged term *extreme*) forms and consequences of religious belief.

Religious Hypocrisy and Other Interest-ing Topics

An early manifestation of Franklin's secular tendencies (in addition to his family's dissenting heritage, recounted in the *Autobiography*) was his work on his brother James's newspaper, the *New-England Courant*, which campaigned against the public authority wielded by the minister Cotton Mather and the Mather dynasty in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, the *Courant*'s opening volley against the Mathers criticized their advocacy of smallpox inoculation, a question about which Cotton Mather turned out to be right. The principle at stake for James Franklin, Breitwieser has surmised, was the need to circumscribe Mather's public authority: not to attack his authority in matters directly related to his ministry but to prune the Mather family's authority back in political, civic, and (in this case) scientific matters.³¹

Perry Miller has called James Franklin “our first, and most unjustly forgotten, martyr to the cause of freedom of the press” because his criticisms of the colony’s leadership led to his being investigated, cautioned, and reprimanded repeatedly by the colonial government and to his being imprisoned once for a month.³² Breitwieser has characterized the Franklin brothers’ anti-Mather writings in the *Courant* as working by “unfavorably contrasting piety with a secular and cosmopolitan interest in the world joined to Boston by commerce.”³³ In other words, the tone struck by the *Courant*—adapted from the *Spectator*—was very much the one that Hume and Franklin would take in discussing Neuchâtel, grounded in civil society’s function of fostering both economic and intellectual exchange.

One tactic deployed by both Benjamin and James Franklin was the satirical criticism of religious hypocrisy on the part of public leaders, hypocrisy that usually took the form of self-interest lurking behind pious appearances. This is an old anticlerical tactic, going back even further than Chaucer’s depiction of the duplicitous Pardoner, and by no means necessarily hostile to religion, since the example set by church leaders was an important concern of the faithful. The Franklin brothers were primarily concerned with the religious hypocrisy of men who held state power or civic authority. Benjamin Franklin’s ninth letter in the guise of Silence Dogood (the widow of a minister—hence well-positioned to make religious criticisms) warned readers in 1722: “’Tis not inconsistent with Charity to distrust a Religious Man in Power, tho’ he may be a good man; he has many Temptations ‘to propagate *publick Destruction* for *Personal Advantages* and *Security*. . . .”³⁴ The letter spins out a scenario involving a hypocritical religious leader with broad public authority, a leader who for most of his life manages to deceive both the “Clergy” and the “People,” the only two groups named. (Thinking of the *Courant* itself as well as Franklin’s subsequent journalistic roles, one can see in this fictional anecdote a rationale for a free investigative press.) The crescendo of Dogood’s outrage is her account of the hypocrite’s funeral, in which the still-deceived clergy force the somehow undeceived people to endure a false publication of the hypocrite’s life and significance: “[A]nd when he happens to die *for the Good of his Country*, without leaving behind him the Memory of *one good Action*, he shall be sure to have his Funeral Sermon stuff’d with *Pious Expressions* which he dropt at such a Time, and at such a Place, and on such an Occasion . . .”

(*W*, 28). Franklin's outrage here seems to have been prompted mainly by the overflow of religious authority into secular governance (or governance the Franklin brothers hoped would become more secular). The appearance of piety has sustained the hypocrite's support by a religious hierarchy and has given him some kind of public power beyond his work as a minister. In the following year, James Franklin became downright splenetic in criticizing religious hypocrisy, arguing in an unsigned letter (functioning as the lead article) in the *Courant* that the most pious-seeming people are the most likely to be hypocritical: "Indeed, all their fine pretences to Religion are only to qualifie them to act their villany the more securely. . . ." ³⁵ His editorial was believed by contemporaries to reference Cotton Mather, so James was officially forbidden by the Massachusetts General Court to continue publishing the *Courant* without submitting the contents for advance approval—with the result, as Franklin's *Autobiography* explains, that Benjamin was named as publisher instead and given greater visibility in the paper. ³⁶ The hounding of James Franklin by the authorities exemplifies the censorship on the part of a religiously aligned governing power that the establishment of secular civil society is meant to preclude.

The public service that can be provided by journalistic exposé provides explicit or implicit justification for most of Franklin's writings about hypocrites, compounded intermittently by the claim (widespread among eighteenth-century philosophers) that people's concern for their reputations could be a useful spur to good behavior. However, elsewhere Franklin treats the impulse toward exposé skeptically. For example, another of Franklin's early journalistic personae is the Busy-Body. "[O]ut of Zeal for the Publick Good," he explains that he has "design[ed] to erect my Self into a Kind of *Censor Morum*. . . ." The Busy-Body goes on to flaunt the aggressive pleasure in exposé, reminding any readers who are displeased at being told their faults that "they shall have the Satisfaction, in a very little Time, of seeing their good Friends and Neighbours in the same Circumstances." ³⁷ Similarly, in the wake of an unsigned essay Franklin wrote about the usefulness of public censure in print, he published a pseudonymous response, by Alice Addertongue, taking delight in the justification the previous essay had provided for the spreading of "Scandal." ³⁸ Thus, Franklin satirized hypocrisy, then satirized the love of scandal and the aggressive pleasures of antihypocrisy in a self-reflexive move that

highlights psychological complexity rather than logical contradiction. (Alice Addertongue's letter also satirizes the seepage of economic thinking into the rest of life: "I began the World with this Maxim, *That no Trade can subsist without Returns*; and accordingly, whenever I receiv'd a good Story, I endeavour'd to give two or a better in the Room of it" [W, 198].)

One overwhelming effect of this continual burlesquing of the ruses of self-interest is to erode the power of public roles and abstract, suprapersonal identities altogether. This cumulative effect can be produced by the many maxims offered by Franklin's almanac-compiling persona, Poor Richard. "Mankind are very odd Creatures: One Half censure what they practise, the other half practise what they censure; the rest always say and do as they ought," warns Poor Richard, in a witty foray that satirizes idealism as much as hypocritical didacticism.³⁹ "The greatest monarch on the proudest throne, is oblig'd to sit upon his own arse" is an aphorism with political punch in the Revolutionary era,⁴⁰ yet it turns rhetorically here not on the leveling power of the "grotesque" popular body that Bakhtin has posited in an earlier era but on the purely personalizing power of embodiment to cancel out impersonal authority.⁴¹ There are many ways of making sense of people's failures to live up to their espoused principles, and certainly there can be political value in tracking a politician's failure to live up to his campaign promises. However, the antihypocritical tactic by which a politician, or anyone else, is deemed unable to stand or hope or argue for anything that she has not consistently mastered in private life can suffocate the public's political imagination. The belief that an important function of the press is to discover and publicize conflicts of interest on the part of public officials—"the vice of which all parties can and do accuse each other," Shklar has warned, since it may inhere in the practice of public persuasion—amounts to consigning the press to producing and circulating endless charges and countercharges of hypocrisy.⁴²

An important contribution of Habermas's work has been to call attention to the quality of public discussion as an important ingredient of democracy: to consider whether, even in states that protect free speech, the factors shaping public discourse (education, forms of association and exchange, the character of the media) equip people to engage in "rational-critical debate" with each other of a nature that would sustain serious political thinking (PS, 161). The adequacy

and inclusivity of this criterion of “rational-critical debate” have been justly questioned, but versions of Habermas’s conception often circulate as claims that more substantive, meaningful forms of public exchange flourished in some previous era but have been degraded into our current dumbed-down, personality-obsessed public life.⁴³ The golden age Habermas posited has often been debunked; it was fleeting and very exclusive, if it existed at all. However, Franklin’s history suggests that the reduction of public opinion to what Habermas calls “the publicizing of private biographies” (*PS*, 171) was at work in the very process by which a for-profit press began to create a print arena for public opinion outside the control of religious and state leaders. This process depended on a peculiar kind of personalizing analysis that cannot be adequately summed up as psychological: any psychology worthy of the name is much more intricate than interest-thinking. Satires of religious hypocrisy helped to justify public scrutiny of the reputation of officials, scrutiny that may have relied on the assessment of worldly interests to offset the more covert credentialing processes that authorized religious leaders. Such assessments were a crucial tool in the construction of secular public culture in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, these assessments work by a personalizing, scapegoating logic, and they encourage us to view public officials as well as ourselves as more likely to be motivated by self-interest than by anything else.

Ecumenical Cosmopolitanism vs. World-Constituting Premises

As I noted, Franklin was firmly opposed to any established church or to certain forms of public influence on the part of church hierarchies and officials, but he eagerly promoted organized religion. He claimed that he made donations to any religion that asked him; he had friendly relations with many religious leaders (including the charismatic itinerant preacher George Whitefield, with whom he contemplated founding a settlement in Ohio); and he helped sponsor the building of a meeting-house in Philadelphia open to speakers from any faith. Moreover, in spite of his own freethinking, he cast aspersions on atheism. His “Information to Those Who Would Remove to America,” for instance, follows up a claim about religious tolerance in the New World with the surprising statement, “Atheism is unknown there, Infidelity rare &

secret, so that Persons may live to a great Age in that Country without having their Piety shock'd by meeting with either an Atheist or an Infidel" (*W*, 983). In so idyllic a depiction of the United States, one does not expect a strictly truthful account, but this sentence clinches Franklin's tendency to suggest that for most people—not the Franklins of this world but the rest—religious belief is a good thing.

Indeed, Franklin's support of organized religion seems very much in keeping with American law, which has precluded an established church in the Constitution and mandated personal religious freedom in the Bill of Rights but, at the same time, assigned religions (along with public charities and other nonprofit groups considered beneficial) a tax-free status. Franklin's writings suggest that a limited religious pluralism—mainly Protestant Christian, in spite of his expansive claim that the meetinghouse in Philadelphia was ready and waiting "even if the Mufti of Constantinople were to send a Missionary to preach Mahometanism to us"—was publicly useful, insofar as religions disciplined individuals in predictable ways.⁴⁴ He was accordingly impatient with any religious beliefs or practices that detracted from religion's public usefulness. Franklin's contempt for the Neuchâtel controversy is of a piece with his frustration at the Presbyterian preacher he heard in Philadelphia who turned a Bible passage about large questions of virtue into a set of instructions about narrowly sectarian observances (*A*, 1383). For the same reason, he disapproved of the Quakers' pacifism, although he was strategic in dealing with it. In describing a time when some Quakers were secretly willing to vote for arming a militia if their votes were necessary, Franklin seemed to imply that the Quakers' religious stricture against war was a detachable accessory belief (*A*, 1414). The sect he most admired was the Dunkers, who as Pietists deemphasized formal doctrine. In Franklin's representation—which leaves aside the Dunkers' pacifism—the Dunkers might be a model Enlightenment religion, minimizing church government and bureaucracy, emphasizing individual commitments and understanding, and participating in an open-ended and progressive quest for spiritual knowledge. Franklin's *Autobiography* praised the Dunkers especially for not publishing their beliefs because, as a leader put it to Franklin, "[W]e are not sure that we are arriv'd . . . at the Perfection of Spiritual or Theological Knowledge. . . ." (*A*, 1417).

Max Weber's idea that Franklin helped to secularize Protestantism—diverting its understanding of vocation to capitalist ends—does

not fully capture Franklin's stance, which welcomed the ongoing practice of religion. It seems true that Franklin at times viewed religion merely strategically, as a fact of the social landscape whose good effects had to be maximized while its bad effects were minimized. From this point of view, his ecumenical zeal fits nicely with James Madison's political vision in Federalist Paper #10. Madison optimistically envisions the new American republic as a cosmopolitan confederation whose diversity of interests makes it unlikely that any tyrannous faction will take over, but religious interests figure prominently as potential factions: "A religious sect may degenerate into a political faction in a part of the Confederacy; but the variety of sects dispersed over the entire face of it must secure the national councils against any danger from that source."⁴⁵ For Franklin as for Madison, a multiplicity of religious sects is likely to provide a stable public life, a balance of offsetting communities of belief that function as special-interest groups. Religious membership, in this vision, is practiced through voluntary association; politically, it is filtered through individual consciences, entering into the flow of private opinions that shape public opinion. Perhaps because Franklin tended to treat religion either as an organic traditional form of belonging or as a belief freely chosen by an individual, he avoided acknowledging the structuring dominance of Protestant Christianity in the United States. His reference to the Mufti's spokesperson hints instead at some happy jostling of world religions in a cosmopolitan, ecumenical space.

More profoundly, though, religious feeling and belonging entered into a delicate collaboration with rationalism for Franklin. Like many other Enlightenment thinkers, Franklin feared that excessive reliance on rationality could be as dangerous as religious enthusiasm or zealotry. Reason could be perverted into rationalizing self-interest, as in Franklin's humorous account of his convenient decision to put aside vegetarianism (moved by the tempting smell of frying fish) when he was reminded that fish are eaten by other fish or in the more frightening examples of Enlightenment villains who rationalized their desires for domination (*A*, 1339). Any rational thinker who believed too fervently in a syllogistic chain of thought might underestimate his own limits as a thinker and overestimate the adequacy of the conceptual and rational resources available to him. Empirical demonstration could provide a checkpoint for some kinds of scientific theorizing, but for other modes of rational critique and invention, religion provided an

important form of stability in its guise as tradition. Michael McKeon has proposed that “[i]n the modern world, ‘religion’ explicitly defines the territory of normative tacit knowing once tacitly encompassed by the vast domain of ‘tradition,’” which, McKeon argues, was not constituted *as* tradition until it was contrasted with modern modes of knowledge.⁴⁶ McKeon points out that modern modes of knowledge and intellectual inquiry are characterized by being explicit. What is deliberately reasoned or argued thereby comes to stand out against a backdrop of motley practices that, in the guise of traditions, are treated as ahistorical and resistant to change. As the most powerful form that tradition takes in modernity, religion in this way functions to preserve some of the practices, thoughts, feelings, and capacities for insight that have not been assimilated to the project of modernity, providing a stabilizing drag on the rate of change.

The fact that Franklin’s *Autobiography* provides not just one account of his spiritual development but two—and two that are not quite compatible with each other—may point to the fact that he was rehearsing new and influential roles that religious belief might play for secular persons. In part 1 of the *Autobiography*, Franklin’s narrative of spiritual questing stresses the danger of losing the forms of moral regulation promoted by religion. Franklin, having become a “thorough Deist” in the course of reading arguments against deism, was led as a young man to the belief that “Vice & Virtue were empty Distinctions, no such Things existing” (A, 1359). This part of the story shows Franklin’s movement from low-key religious orthodoxy (in a dissenting tradition) to modest secular freethinking: his religious training gets relegated to the unthinking allegiances of childhood, and his independent reading unsettles his religion without his having set out to rebel. Reflecting subsequently on his poor treatment by others (especially freethinkers) and on some of his own Errata, however, Franklin drew back from this position. He hit upon the compromise “that tho’ certain Actions might not be bad *because* they were forbidden by it, or good *because* it had commanded them; yet probably those Actions might be forbidden *because* they were bad for us, or commanded *because* they were beneficial to us, in their own Nature, all the Circumstances of things considered” (A, 1359–60). “Providence” in some more-or-less Christian form simply seconds what human reason, working properly, would discover, so there is no need to discard religion in order to follow one’s independent reason.

Part 2 of Franklin's *Autobiography*, written without access to part 1 and taking posterity rather than Franklin's son William as its explicit audience, strategically omits Franklin's period of Deist amorality in emphasizing his religious universalism:

I never doubted . . . the Existance of the Deity, that he made the World, & govern'd it by his Providence; that the most acceptable Service of God was the doing Good to Man; that our Souls are immortal; and that all Crime will be punished & Virtue rewarded either here or hereafter; these I esteem'd the Essentials of every Religion, and being to be found in all the Religions we had in our Country I respect them all, tho' with different degrees of Respect as I found them more or less mix'd with other Articles which without any Tendency to inspire, promote or confirm Morality, serv'd principally to divide us & make us unfriendly to one another. (A, 1382)

In this account, which introduces Franklin's "Project of arriving at moral Perfection" (A, 1383), Franklin searches for a religious lowest common denominator, weighted toward the needs of civil society. The previous account of his religious questing reclaimed religious belief as a kind of insurance against rationalist zealotry (especially self-serving rationalism), whereas this account emphasizes the registers of religious belief that reduce or combat sectarian violence. In both accounts, the right kind of religious belief—directed especially at ethical self-regulation but suffused with blurry reverence—dilutes and manages both reason and religious emotion, just as capitalism's framing of human activity as self-interest stabilizes the volatility of passion. Indeed, when mainstream U.S. Protestantism of the past two centuries is criticized for its spiritual vacuity and political cowardice, these criticisms merely underscore the capacities of nonevangelical Protestant dominations to serve the purposes that Franklin valued in religion: maintaining social continuity and resisting drastic changes. This inertial effect may have amounted to a crude form of social control—the "opiate of the people" diagnosed by Marx and others—but it was fueled by genuine fears, apparently intensified by religious wars, the Great Awakening, and the Enlightenment, about what disasters could be caused by hyperemotional spiritual enthusiasm or hyper-rational calculation without some such ballast.⁴⁷

I've suggested that interest-thinking fends off the terrors of religious or rationalist zealotry and creates a pseudoself—a mutable set

of interests—to send into civil society so that more vulnerable or valuable possibilities of personhood can be protected. The often surprising unfolding of the forms of self-interest constitutes the terrain of Franklin’s best wit. It surfaces in Polly Baker’s indictment of the officials who censure her for helping to populate the New World without the sanction of marriage; it surfaces in Silence Dogood’s deadpan reference to her minister-husband’s having “brought [her] up cleverly to his Hand”;⁴⁸ it beckons in Franklin’s last writing, in which Muslims of the previous century decide to continue enslaving Christians because of the “‘Interest’” of their state regardless of the “‘*problematical*’” nature of the practice.⁴⁹ Franklin’s monarch obliged to sit on his own “arse” might be the type-specimen for interest-bearing humans at large, insofar as having interests, in Franklin’s writings, is very much like having an “arse”: slightly embarrassing but also familiar and homely in its supposed self-evidence. Franklin doesn’t offer cold propositions about the ubiquity of self-interest but rather a bemused way of wearing interests. We all spy ourselves and others as creatures of interests, Franklin suggests; we all spy ourselves and others behaving in ways that don’t seem reducible to the pursuit of self-interest, although we know also that self-interest can disguise itself. In many of Franklin’s writings, we join him in puzzling over this discontinuity, and Franklin oscillates from one side to the other. The fact that self-interest is a bad fit—that it generates this excess—is fundamental to Franklin’s style, but the result is that we are somehow sold on interest-thinking without fully believing it. Indeed, the pretense that self-interest is an empirical truth makes it seem as though our being persuaded is beside the point.⁵⁰

In conceiving of religion as tradition or custom—as part of a matrix of seemingly unchosen, naturally self-sustaining practices—Franklin might hope that religion would mainly remain part of private family and associational life, unscrutinized except in order to be protected from overt political intolerance and persecution. Even though Kant identified religious tolerance as a “haughty name,” implying as it does a grudging forbearance, tolerance is much better than religious persecution.⁵¹ But practices that are tolerated because they are understood to be traditional risk becoming brittle and inflexible, even if they might previously have allowed for experimentation and change.

As an associational form, religion could count for Franklin as an interest among others in public life, affecting voters who made it a

priority or fueling lobbying efforts on certain issues. Neither a tradition nor an interest makes a strong claim on truth or conviction, however, and I am not sure that Franklin ever grasped religion as a world-constituting spiritual premise rather than as a detachable special interest.⁵² Moreover, I doubt that he grasped any nonreligious conviction as a world-constituting premise, stymied as he was by interest-thinking. Franklin's writings take self-interest for granted, emphasizing projects in which reciprocal or combinatory forms of self-interest can bring people together productively. The best we can do, as creatures of self-interest, seems to be to seek sociable versions of self-interest and to throw in a little altruism. In the prayer he invented for his personal religious practice, invoking a (shadowy) spiritual Father allows Franklin to figure altruistic acts as filial repayments for good fortune:

O Powerful Goodness! bountiful Father! merciful Guide! Increase in me that Wisdom which discovers my truest Interests; Strengthen my Resolutions to perform what Wisdom dictates. Accept my kind Offices to thy other Children, as the only Return in my Power for thy continual Favours to me. (A, 1388)

Franklin seems to have enjoyed the company of other people and liked doing favors: his prayer seeks increased wisdom, but it presumes that "kind Offices" are already and continually underway. Perhaps he knew no way of formulating these kinds of connections with other people except as leftovers of religious feeling. They enter into the tone of his writings without being fully integrated into his reflections on human motivation, marking the deforming effects of interest-thinking.

The public treatment of organized religious belief and belonging in the United States has changed drastically during the presidency of George W. Bush. Certain forms of Christianity, endorsed by his administration, have become repositioned in ways that have already begun to reshape public life in significant ways. The emphasis on faith-based organizations, the "defense" of heterosexual marriage, the renewed intensity of controversy over abortion, attacks on academic secularism, and the rise of megachurches have all helped to reconfigure evangelical Protestant Christianity, sometimes even putting it in surprising solidarity with conservative forms of Catholicism and Judaism.⁵³ The common denominator, of course, is *shared* intensity and comprehensiveness of religious conviction: the insistence that

religious belief and belonging are world-constituting premises rather than accessories. There is some comfort here for left-leaning secular academics like me: the religious right is as sick of interest-thinking and tepid traditionalism as we are. Of course, we may worry that eighteenth-century Neuchâtel and seventeenth-century Salem will begin to look familiar, if the United States continues on its current path toward adopting a religious establishment (in all but the name, since the Constitution forbids it), pursuing holy wars, and punishing internal dissenters from the official faith.

What we need rather than fearful visions such as the one I just sketched is a less controlled, more expansively intellectual, more emotionally intense way of publicly acknowledging the roles of conviction and belonging: one that doesn't demote world-constituting premises to opinions or simply steer the conversation away from religion and politics but one that also avoids violence and harassment. The gravity of our fears might suggest that we need to find new ways to engage people whose worlds are constituted differently, not simply to find angrier or more elegant ways of skewering their hypocrisy or illogic. Franklin's warm friendship with the evangelist George Whitefield—"a mere civil Friendship, sincere on both Sides, [that] . . . lasted to his Death"—was a start, but only that (*A*, 1408). Franklin's rhetorical tactics for defusing aggression and resentment might also be helpful, but not if they reproduce the translation of convictions into mere interests and traditions. Franklin's most important but most perplexing legacy for us, however, might be his account of an impasse reached by a Swedish Christian missionary talking to a group of Native Americans. In his 1783 essay, "Remarks Concerning the Savages of North-America," Franklin stages the challenge that belief presents to secular, interest-thinking cosmopolitanism.⁵⁴ First, the Swedish Minister tells the story of the Garden of Eden to a set of assembled chiefs. An "Indian Orator" responds by thanking him for his story and, in return, telling the missionary a sacred story of his own about some hunters who sacrificed venison to a magical woman and were given maize and other staple New World plants in return:

The good Missionary, disgusted with this idle Tale, said, what I delivered to you were sacred Truths; but what you tell me is mere Fable, Fiction & Falsehood. The Indian offended, reply'd, my Brother, it seems your Friends have not done you Justice in your Education;

they have not well instructed you in the Rules of common Civility. You saw that we who understand and practise those Rules, believed all your Stories; why do you refuse to believe ours? (*W*, 972)

As this story suggests, the cosmopolitan sampling of world beliefs risks putting in jeopardy the heart of belief: its power to constitute a meaningful version of reality that presses on unbelievers as well, requiring some form of response. In order to engage belief, we need to avoid dismissing it as superstition, reducing it to personal preference, or reifying it as tradition or custom.

In relating the encounter between the Swedish missionary and the Indian Orator, Franklin drew on the Enlightenment convention of using so-called primitives and savages to criticize civilization in the hope of improving it. In Zen Buddhism, a koan is a paradoxical story designed to teach by generating thinking. Perhaps Franklin's story of this encounter could serve as a koan for secular and faith-based intellectuals alike.

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Notes

This essay is dedicated to the memory of two brilliant and admirable scholars and friends who died while this essay was underway: Iris Marion Young (1949–2006) and Jay Fliegelman (1949–2007). Jay Fliegelman offered good advice about an earlier version of this essay, and I am also grateful to Kathryn Thoms Flannery and Jayne Elizabeth Lewis for their responses and suggestions.

- 1 Sunil Khilnani, "The Development of Civil Society," in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 28.
- 2 Both D. H. Lawrence and Max Weber have criticized Franklin for developing only those virtues that would make capitalism run more smoothly; virtually every major study of Franklin addresses this charge. See D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Penguin, 1976), 15–27; and Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 74–78.
- 3 On postsecularism within religious studies, see James S. Diamond, "The Post-Secular: A Jewish Perspective," *Crosscurrents* 53 (winter 2004): 580–606; and Susan J. Ritchie, "Contesting Secularism: Reflexive Methodology, Belief Studies, and Disciplined Knowledge," *Journal of American Folklore* 115 (summer–fall 2002): 443–56. On critical secularism in the tradition of Edward Said, see Bruce Robbins, "Secularism, Elitism,

- Progress, and Other Transgressions: On Edward Said's 'The Voyage In,'” in *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, Benita Parry, and Judith Squires (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), 67–87; and “Critical Secularism,” a special issue of *boundary 2*, edited by Aamir R. Mufti, 31 (summer 2004).
- 4 Franklin's commitment to science did not necessarily put him at odds with religious faith. Not only were many scientists and natural philosophers personally religious, but also proponents of atheism and religious skepticism did not understand science as a special rallying point; see Carla Mulford, “Franklin, Modernity, and Themes of Dissent in the Early Modern Era,” *Modern Language Studies* 28 (spring 1998): 16–25.
 - 5 Blaine McCormick, introduction to *Ben Franklin: America's Original Entrepreneur* (Irvine, Calif.: Entrepreneur Press, 2005), xix.
 - 6 Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 246.
 - 7 Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 492–93.
 - 8 See Isaacson, *Franklin*, 481; and Wood, *Americanization*, 240.
 - 9 David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 20.
 - 10 See Mitchell Robert Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin: The Price of Representative Personality* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 270–71. Silence Dogood's insurance plan was a version of many “friendly societies” projected and sometimes implemented in eighteenth-century Britain.
 - 11 Judith N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), 74.
 - 12 See Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*; Douglas Anderson, *The Radical Enlightenments of Benjamin Franklin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997); Myra Jehlen, “Benjamin Franklin: Or, Machiavelli in Philadelphia,” in *Benjamin Franklin: An American Genius*, ed. Gianfranca Balestra and Luigi Sampietro (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1993), 61–74; Ormond Seavey, *Becoming Benjamin Franklin: The Autobiography and the Life* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1988); and Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990). Further references to Warner's study will be cited parenthetically in the text as *L*.
 - 13 See Anderson, introduction to *Radical Enlightenment*, xii.
 - 14 Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, 223.
 - 15 Jürgen Habermas casts his account as historical, but I follow many scholars who emphasize the speculative quality of his discussion; see *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence

- (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991). Further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *PS*. For a productive consideration of Habermas's model with respect to the United States, see Michael Schudson, "Was There Ever a Public Sphere? If So, When? Reflections on the American Case," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 143–63.
- 16 For comprehensive, imaginative, and analytically precise discussions of these terms, see Michael Warner's essays in *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002), especially "Public and Private" and "Publics and Counterpublics." Iris Marion Young emphasizes the anonymity and heterogeneity of public life, drawing on the city rather than any version of "community" as its breeding ground; see "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," *Social Theory and Practice* 12 (spring 1986): 1–26.
 - 17 See especially Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).
 - 18 Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 107.
 - 19 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989), 111, 186, 188. For standard treatments of the depoliticizing personalization of public culture, all of which are too sweeping but nonetheless offer provocative formulations of widespread concerns, see *PS*, 164–65; Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1986), 120–67; and Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Avon, 1978).
 - 20 See also Jerome Christensen's account of the ways in which capitalism promotes identification with the market as a whole rather than only with one's local self-interest (*Practicing Enlightenment: Hume and the Formation of a Literary Career* [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1987], 149).
 - 21 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 171.
 - 22 David Hume to Benjamin Franklin, 10 May 1762, *New Letters of David Hume*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), 67.
 - 23 Benjamin Franklin to David Hume, 19 May 1762, *Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Library of America, 1987), 787. Further references to writings by Franklin are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *W*.
 - 24 The edict by Frederick II of Prussia is quoted in an editorial note in *New Letters of David Hume*, 67, n. 2.
 - 25 J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), 570.
 - 26 See Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Argu-*

- ments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), 132.
- 27 See Hirschman, *Passions*, 41–43; and Pierre Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith: A Genealogy of Economic Science* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 70–71.
- 28 See Amartya Sen, *On Ethics and Economics* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 15; Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith*; and Hirschman, *Passions*, 46.
- 29 See Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith*, 183.
- 30 See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard E. Flathman and David Johnston (New York: Norton, 1997), 71; and Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees; or Private Vice, Publick Benefits*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988), 1:135.
- 31 Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, 10.
- 32 Perry Miller, “Introduction,” *The New-England Courant. A Selection of Certain Issues Containing the Writings of Benjamin Franklin or Published by Him during His Brother’s Imprisonment*, ed. Perry Miller (Boston: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1956), 9.
- 33 Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, 9.
- 34 Benjamin Franklin, “No. 9,” *W*, 27.
- 35 [James Franklin], “To the Author of the *New-England Courant*,” *New-England Courant*, 7–14 January 1723, no. 76, 1.
- 36 See Miller, “Introduction,” *New-England Courant*, 7.
- 37 Benjamin Franklin, “The Busy-Body, No. 1,” *W*, 92.
- 38 [Benjamin Franklin], “Alice Addertongue,” *W*, 197.
- 39 Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, in *W*, 1275.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 1204.
- 41 M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), 318–21.
- 42 Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 48.
- 43 In an article grounded in feminist approaches to Habermas, Iris Marion Young has criticized schools of thought whose normative versions of public reason abstract reason from “affective and bodily dimensions of meaning”; see “Impartiality and the Civic Public,” in *Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990), 107.
- 44 *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, in *W*, 1406–7; further references to the *Autobiography* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically as *A*.
- 45 James Madison, “No. 10,” in *The Federalist Papers*, by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay (New York: New American Library, 1961), 84.
- 46 Michael McKeon, “Tacit Knowledge: Tradition and Its Aftermath,” in

Questions of Tradition, ed. Mark Salber Phillips and Gordon Schochet (Toronto, Ont.: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2004), 179.

- 47 The exciting but unsettling transformation from more controlling, patriarchal forms of authority to ones fostering self-regulation may have contributed to the fears about the dangers of hyperrationalism and religious enthusiasm that made interest-thinking a plausible refuge; see Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750–1800* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982).
- 48 Benjamin Franklin, “Silence Dogood,” *W*, 7.
- 49 Benjamin Franklin, “Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim on the Slave Trade,” *W*, 1160.
- 50 Horkheimer and Adorno identify this capacity of capitalist practices, including interest-thinking, to enlist people without really convincing them: “The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them” (*Dialectic*, 167).
- 51 Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1995), 6.
- 52 Stanley Fish offers a useful account of the casual secularism that cannot grasp the world-constituting tendency of faith; see “Normal Circumstances . . . and Other Special Cases,” in *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), 268–92.
- 53 Susan Jacoby argues for the public significance of U.S. presidential candidates today having strong faith—any strong faith; see *Freethinkers* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), 7–8.
- 54 My reading differs here from that of Michael Warner, who argues that Franklin in this essay is modeling an ethic of stranger-relations appropriate to modernity; see Michael Warner, “Savage Franklin,” in *Benjamin Franklin: An American Genius*, ed. Gianfranca Balestra and Luigi Sampietro (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1993), 86–87.