

On the Morality of Humankind

Caught in the midst of America's bid for freedom from Great Britain—a campaign born from years of mistreatment and an imbalance of power—Benjamin Franklin played a key role in the establishment of the United States, not just as a signer of the Declaration of Independence, but also as a vital diplomat. It was, on the surface, his work as America's first diplomat and his inexorable popularity in France which garnered their support for the American war effort even above the Battle of Saratoga, which became a turning point in the war in favor of the United States. Undoubtedly, it was his deep belief in human morality, in the instinct to do right by each other, which played in the nation's favor (Alan, 2018).

Benjamin Franklin once said, “Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and if you speak, speak accordingly.” His words speak volumes for his views on the need for unwavering respect for one another; that if respect is prioritized by every person, the success of each man—and thereby, the quandaries of each—will become a common goal. America's history, even after Benjamin Franklin's death, is blighted with examples of when disrespect and a stripping of inherent human dignity ran rampant: the Trail of Tears, the Civil War with its following decades of Jim Crow laws and segregation, and countless more. But Franklin's quotes embody the idea that, whether separated by race, gender, religion, or spoken language, people are still just that—people. In defending one nation, humans defend the hundreds of smaller, unofficial nations that cannot protect themselves. In standing up for one another, citizens stand up for all those without a voice. And that's the true essence of Benjamin Franklin's understanding of morality, not just the principles of right and wrong, but that as the Declaration of Independence, which Franklin signed, states, “All men are created equal.” It appears as if

Franklin would agree that to shy away from helping one another in the human pursuit of basic rights would translate to being immoral.

There is not another representation of this proposed morality and the worthiness of championing a common cause better than a quote given in John F. Kennedy's 1961 Inaugural Address. Kennedy stated, "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country" (Kennedy, 1961). He was inaugurated as the United States' 35th president in the infancy of the Vietnam War and in the middle of the Cold War. While this was most certainly a call to American citizens to do their part in the war effort, it was above all an imploration for them to participate in public service and help one another (*President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address (1961)*, 2022). This was just as Franklin beseeched nearly two centuries earlier: to set aside all differences and utilize the innate power ordained by Providence to better society.

Today, the world is facing a similar situation. The war in Ukraine and that in the Middle East are being fought on all sides to uphold the rights of citizens, a reason not all that dissimilar from the one Franklin commented on in 1777 (Center for Preventative Action, 2024). Despite the fact that wars are now being fought with drones and missiles rather than muskets and cannons, the same point still stands. That one person fights for all, even if on different sides. Each person is intrinsically dedicated to a cause which affects not only their own lives, but the lives of all others. There are two sides to every conflict, and in the end, the deciding factor comes down to what is beneficial, not morally right.

In the hundreds of years since Benjamin Franklin first made his decree about the common cause of man in 1777, nothing and everything has changed. Technology has advanced as has society, yet the same implications still hold true. Only through the moral standards and strength

earned from supporting fellow people, an ideology on which Franklin prided himself, can total success for the kindness of humankind be attained. Respecting each other and keeping in mind that there are two perspectives to every story will unite people across the world. Because, really, one man's cause is the "Cause of all Mankind."

References

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