

Benjamin Franklin as the Father of American Self-help Literature

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Bachelor's thesis
2020



Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně

Fakulta humanitních studií

Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Akademický rok: 2019/2020

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

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Osobní číslo: **H170172**
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**
Forma studia: **Prezenční**
Téma práce: **Benjamin Franklin jako zakladatel americké svépomocné literatury**

Zásady pro vypracování

Shromáždění vhodných sekundárních a primárních zdrojů k tématu amerického osvícenství a jeho představitele Benjamina Franklina

Studium vybraných sekundárních zdrojů k tématu

Formulace cílů práce

Analýza zvolených primárních materiálů, zejména díla *Benjamin Franklin: Vlastní životopis*, v souladu s tématem práce

Vyvození a formulace závěrů práce

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **Tištěná/elektronická**
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

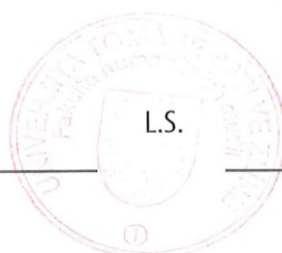
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Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **8. listopadu 2019**
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **11. května 2020**



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ABSTRAKT

Cílem této bakalářské práce je představit Benjamina Franklina, jednu z nejvýznamnějších postav americké historie, jakožto prvního představitele americké svépomocné literatury. Práce se zaměřuje nejen na Franklina, ale na celý žánr svépomocné literatury – její rozdělení, nejvýznamnější představitele a vývoj, zejména v Americe. Dále tato práce představuje americké osvícenství, které výrazně ovlivnilo Franklinovu filozofii seberozvoje. Zvláštní pozornost je pak věnována Franklinovi, jeho životní dráze, literárním dílům a jeho cestě k morální dokonalosti. Poslední část práce srovnává Franklinova díla s díly vybraných významných autorů svépomocné literatury devatenáctého, dvacátého a dvacátého prvního století a zkoumá, nakolik se v nich projevuje Franklinův vliv.

Klíčová slova: Benjamin Franklin, svépomocná literatura, americké osvícenství, *Svéživotopis*, morální dokonalost, “hon za štěstím”

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to introduce Benjamin Franklin—one of the most significant figures of American history—as the first representative of American self-help literature. The thesis focuses not only on Benjamin Franklin but also at the self-help literature in general—its categories, the most significant authors, and its development, especially in America. Furthermore, this thesis presents the American Enlightenment, which significantly influenced Franklin’s philosophy of self-development. Special attention is dedicated to Franklin—his life, literary works, and his journey to moral perfection. The last part of the thesis compares Franklin’s works with the works of selected most famous self-help writers of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century and examines the extent of Franklin’s influence in them.

Keywords: Benjamin Franklin, self-help literature, American Enlightenment, *Autobiography*, moral perfection, ‘the pursuit of happiness’

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate these lines to Mgr. Vladimíra Fonfárová, Ph.D. for her guidance, patience, wisdom, and willingness to help me in times of need. I am tremendously grateful to have a supervisor who cares so much about my thesis.

My special gratitude goes to my family for their constant support. I thank God every day for having such a great family. I love you!

Last but not least, I would like to thank me. I thank me for believing in myself. I thank me for doing all this hard work. I thank me for my ‘never-give-up’ attitude. For the first time, I am proud of myself.

“Hard work beats talent when talent does not work hard.” – Tim Notke

I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor’s/Master’s thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

Dale Carnegie, Stephen Covey, Timothy Ferriss or Anthony Robbins. For most Czech people, these men are not well-known, but in America, they are extremely famous, mainly due their self-help books that became bestsellers not only in the US, but also worldwide. Their books are translated into many languages, even the Czech, and self-help genre is becoming more and more popular worldwide. According to Market Research, self-improvement genre in the United States is worth approximately eight hundred million US dollars and the market is still growing by six percent per annum.¹

Although self-help literature is not a part of literary canon, in the United States it is of huge cultural and economic importance. The aim of this thesis is to explore the origin of this genre and focus on the fact that the self-help literature genre in the United States began with 18th century diplomat, scientist, writer, and innovator, Benjamin Franklin, and his philosophy of self-improvement. This thesis aims to show that Franklin's method of self-improvement is not outdated even nowadays, on the contrary, it has been an inspiration for many self-development authors of the nineteenth, twentieth, and even twenty-first century.

For the purpose of this work, it is also essential to introduce the eighteenth-century American Enlightenment movement and its main ideas that influenced Franklin's philosophy of self-development. As will be mentioned, such ideas helped Franklin to become a seminal figure of the American self-help literature.

Benjamin Franklin's works "Way to Wealth" and his *Autobiography* are used to demonstrate the typical features of self-help literature which can be applied in the other texts of such genre. Franklin's philosophy of personal development in these two works represents a cornerstone of the self-improvement literature with all the typical features. Franklin's works were truly a milestone in the field of self-help literature which proves the popularity of self-help authors who were influenced by Franklin's philosophy of personal development.

To demonstrate how influential in the field of self-development Franklin has been, the author of this work chooses bestselling self-help authors of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century—Horatio Alger Jr., Stephen Covey, Dale Carnegie, and Timothy Ferriss—and examines the extent of Franklin's influence in their works.

¹ See John LaRosa, "The \$10 Billion Self-Improvement Market Adjusts to a New Generation," Market Research Blog, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://blog.marketresearch.com/the-10-billion-self-improvement-market-adjusts-to-new-generation>.

Benjamin Franklin is considered to be not only one of the founding fathers of United States of America but also the founding father of the American self-help literature. His methods and strategies of self-development based on the values of American Enlightenment and Puritan tradition emphasizing hard work, discipline, and education are widely used, praised and still relevant, even for the self-help literature of the twenty-first century.

1 SELF-HELP LITERATURE

Self-help literature does not belong to the literary canon, but it is one of the most popular genres in America, mostly because of its cultural and socioeconomic importance. A dictionary definition of self-help is “the action or process of bettering oneself or overcoming one’s problems without the aid of others.”² The main subject of almost all self-help books is the ‘pursuit of happiness’. Over the past few decades, the study of happiness is a subject of many therapists and so-called self-help ‘gurus’. The topic of happiness also fostered into a university discipline and nowadays, we can find professors, institutes, and research papers examining such topic in depth. There is, for instance, the *Journal of Happiness Studies* and an online database of happiness where we can find diverse research papers dealing with happiness.³ A huge amount of so-called self-improvement and self-help books is available not only in bookstores, but also online. The accessibility of self-help books also supports the popularity of the genre. For almost every possible life problem, there is some kind of guidance, for instance, mental problems, education, emotional literacy, relationships, productivity, or how to obtain happiness and achieve the best life possible.⁴

1.1 Categories and Themes of Self-help Books

According to Ad Bergsma’s research paper, there are four substantial categories of self-help books: personal growth, personal relations, coping with stress, and identity.⁵ The first category focuses on the improvement and development of oneself. Such type of books is about self-management, self-improvement, personal efficiency, and how to achieve personal objectives. These books provide tools and guidelines how to become the best version of oneself.⁶

The second category of self-help books deals with personal relations and the predominant theme here is communication. The main difference between the first category, which is more goal-oriented, is that the second category is more focused on providing tools

² *The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, “self-help (*n.*)” accessed January 15, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-help>.

³ See Mercè Mur Effing, “The Origin and Development of Self-help Literature in the United States: The Concept of Success and Happiness, an Overview / El Origen Y Desarrollo De La Literatura De Auto-Ayuda En Los Estados Unidos: El Concepto De Éxito Y Felicidad. Vision General,” *Atlantis* 31, no. 2 (2009): 126.

⁴ See Ad Bergsma, “Do Self-help Books Help?” *Journal of Happiness Studies* 9, no. 3 (2008): 341.

⁵ See Bergsma, “Do Self-help Books Help?” 344.

⁶ See Bergsma, “Do Self-help Books Help?” 344.

to understand and improve communication skills. Such tools can be used in any personal relationship.⁷

Coping with stress is the major theme of the third category of self-help literature. Books in this category provide practical advice and ideas how to deal with stress, be more relaxed, and to find inner peace. The usual theme in this category is improving mental strength in challenging circumstances of everyday life.⁸

The last fundamental category deals with the question ‘who am I?’. This category significantly correlates with the personal growth category. The main theme of books in this category is identity—knowing oneself is the first step for making better life decisions to achieve personal development in life. However, this category is insight oriented, whereas the personal growth category focuses on practical ideas and tools. Self-improvement is not the primary focus of the category dealing with identity, but it can be the outcome of finding the answer to the question ‘who am I?’⁹

1.2 Origin and Development of Self-help Literature in America

Self-help literature represents a pillar of American society and its culture. The primary focus of nearly all self-help books is on the ‘pursuit of happiness’, which seems to be profoundly rooted in American culture. The whole concept of self-help is related to the development of one’s own personality and taking charge of one’s fate, which helped to shape what many people call the American self-identity. Being ‘self-made’ or ‘self-making’ proposes that anyone can be whatever s/he wants, supposing that the person works hard enough to achieve his or her goals. Such concept is summarized in the expression so-called the American Dream.¹⁰

There is no fixed definition of the American Dream and those that try to define it tend to be ambiguous. For instance, the ‘pursuit of happiness’ in the *Declaration of Independence* is likely to be the most popular phrase that describes the American Dream, but there has been a lot of debates about this phrase because it is open to a number of interpretations.¹¹ Is the ‘pursuit of happiness’ in the *Declaration of Independence* derived from the John Locke’s work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) where he equates the ‘pursuit of

⁷ See Bergsma, “Do Self-help Books Help?” 344.

⁸ See Bergsma, “Do Self-help Books Help?” 344.

⁹ See Bergsma, “Do Self-help Books Help?” 344.

¹⁰ See Mur Effing, “The Origin and Development of Self-help Literature,” 127.

¹¹ See Mur Effing, “The Origin and Development of Self-help Literature,” 126.

happiness' with "the highest perfection of intellectual nature"?¹² Is it inspired by Francis Hutcheson's idea that kindness and helping others is the source of true happiness?¹³ Is pursuing happiness individualistic or public concept? Obviously, the phrase can be understood in many different ways.

The first person that used the term American Dream was a historian James Truslow Adams in the book *The Epic of America* (1931):

"The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."¹⁴

However, the idea of the American Dream goes even further, to the late sixteenth century. It was a time when the English promoters were trying to persuade British citizens to settle in the colonies and they promoted America as the "the land of plenty, the land of opportunity and the land of destiny" where a person can find happiness and fulfilled life.¹⁵ Through these interrelated myths, the idea of the American dream—the idea of a better life—was formed in people's minds.

A complex understanding of the American Dream and American society in general is not possible without an acknowledgement of religion that has affected the behavior and attitudes of many Americans. Concerns of American people about democracy, future, and society are profoundly rooted in their beliefs about God. Historically, Protestant Christianity has been the prevailing religion in the United States. A puritan tradition, with strong emphasis on education, hard work, discipline, and frugality emphasized that only through hard work and much effort one could achieve the American Dream. Such setting was ideal for the nascency of self-help literature with authors such as Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Smiles or Horatio Alger Jr.¹⁶

¹² John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 348.

¹³ See Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue: in Two Treaties*, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2004), 165.

¹⁴ See James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1931), 404.

¹⁵ See Adams, *The Epic of America*, 127.

¹⁶ See Adams, *The Epic of America*, 127.

The notion of self-development, personal freedom, seeking for happiness, and welfare can be dated back to the creation of the United States. In comparison to Europe where the wealth and social rank was inherited, America has been a state where a person can be ‘self-made’. As was previously mentioned, America has been viewed as a country of opportunity and freedom where a hard-working person can succeed. This can be proved by the fact that many American people with a humble background have become successful entrepreneurs, artists, or even presidents.¹⁷

Mercé Mur Effing claims that there are three different stages in the development of the self-help literature in the United States marked by a shift from the culture of ‘industry and effort’ to a culture of ‘leisure and ease’ and then to a ‘culture of self-mastery and self-knowledge’ spiritually-oriented literature that occurred at the end of the twentieth century.¹⁸ The beginning of the first period can be traced to so-called ‘do-it-yourself’ pragmatism of Benjamin Franklin. Thus, Franklin truly appears to be one of the founding fathers of self-help literature in America. His aphorism “God helps those who help themselves” from his *Poor Richard’s Almanack* is considered to be the keynote of self-help philosophy.¹⁹

Franklin built upon the strong Puritan tradition emphasizing the hard work, the need of self-examination, discipline and education and connects these traditions with human rationality and ideals of liberty, equality and justice as the natural rights of man that became dominant with American Enlightenment. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin tries to help ordinary people become successful by providing a model that would lead to personal accomplishments when using systematic character development and following a certain set of rules with emphasis on industry, self-discipline, virtue and frugality.²⁰ Thus, this model is the most relevant for this thesis, especially in the third chapter where the author of this work analyzes Franklin’s view of self-development in chosen works.

By the set of values and qualities that Franklin had provided, he inspired later classic popular works of the nineteenth century such as Swett Marden’s *Pushing to the Front or Success under Difficulties* (1894) or Smiles’ *Self-Help* (1859). At the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, there was a strong emphasis on materialism and success, and the self-help writers focused on business and selling.²¹

¹⁷ See Albert Amao Soria, *Awaken the Power Within: In Defense of Self-help* (New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 2018), chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁸ See Mur Effing, “The Origin and Development of Self-help Literature in the United States,” 125.

¹⁹ See Amao, *Awaken the Power Within*, chap. 1, Kindle.

²⁰ See Mur Effing, “The Origin and Development of Self-help Literature in the United States,” 125–28.

²¹ See Mur Effing, “The Origin and Development of Self-help Literature in the United States,” 129.

After WWII, the self-help literature adapted to consumer culture and reflected the even greater emphasis on materialism and desire to become rich quickly, easily, and effortlessly. Because anxiety and stress were on the rise in the second half of the twentieth century, Americans started to look for literature about managing high demands they kept forcing on themselves and how to achieve peace and balance in their lives. It indicates the coming of the third period (the culture of self-mastery and self-knowledge) of the development of self-help literature in America concerning itself with the influence of Eastern philosophies and concepts of spiritualism and the interrelation of mind and body.²²

In the following chapter, the author of this work will briefly describe American Enlightenment movement and its ideas on which the Franklin's philosophy of self-improvement is based. He put these ideals into practice which helped him to become the first and the most influential American self-help authors.²³

²² See Mur Effing, "The Origin and Development of Self-help Literature in the United States," 131.

²³ See Mur Effing, "The Origin and Development of Self-help Literature in the United States," 128.

2 THE AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

Even though there is no exact extent of time that correlates with the American Enlightenment, it is generally accepted that it took place during the eighteenth century. American thinkers of that era such as Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, or Benjamin Franklin were inspired by the thoughts of European Enlightenments that occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth century.²⁴

Before moving to the American Enlightenment from the religious, political, and intellectual perspective, and its connection to self-improvement, it is necessary to define the term ‘enlightenment’. During the eighteenth century, when the Enlightenment movement was on its climax and dominated the world, there was never a succinct and stable definition of the term and words such as Italian *illuminismo*, German *Aufklärung*, or French *les lumières* were used in correlation with such term. Even though these terms were not identical with their meanings, all of them were denoting the term ‘enlightenment’ in some way.²⁵ Generally speaking, the enlightenment was an intellectual, social, philosophical, religious, scientific, and cultural movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that put emphasis on logic, reason, freedom and the evidence of senses as the primary sources of knowledge and happiness.²⁶ The Enlightenment movement also included ideals such as modernization, progress, toleration, and separation of church and state.²⁷

The Enlightenment movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth century was not a monolithic phenomenon meaning that it had many different forms in different nations. There were significant Enlightenment variations between one city and another, and between towns and countries. For example, the English Enlightenment was more moderate than the French one, however, we can find many common assumptions, features, and ways of thinking that may be called ‘enlightened’ in each variation of western Enlightenment occurring during the eighteenth century.²⁸

Even though distinctive features emerged in the eighteenth-century American society, enlightenment thinkers in the early America were inspired by the ideas of the European

²⁴ See Shane J. Ralston, “American Enlightenment Thought,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/amer-enl/>.

²⁵ See Dorinda Outram, *Panorama of the Enlightenment* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 24–27.

²⁶ See Brian Duignan, “Enlightenment,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Enlightenment-European-history>.

²⁷ See William Bristow, “Enlightenment,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed March 20, 2020, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/enlightenment/>.

²⁸ See D. H. Meyer, “The Uniqueness of the American Enlightenment,” *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1976): 166–67.

Enlightenments and the American Enlightenment seemed to be continuous with identical experiences in European society. We can find four common themes that emerge both in American and European Enlightenment texts: reason, liberty, skepticism, and modernization. However, the American Enlightenment had its own specific features and its thinkers such as Franklin, Jefferson, or Paine started to put theory into practice—they discovered and embraced innovative and revolutionary ideas on religious toleration, experimental political systems, and scientific rationality.²⁹

2.1 Development of the American Enlightenment

There are three stages of the Enlightenment Age of Thinking. The first stage stretches from ‘The Revolution of 1688’ to round 1740–50. It was a time when members of European middle class began to break free from traditional government forms, monarchies, and aristocracies through political and social changes. Among other things, these changes resulted in emigration of the middle class outside of Europe, especially to America.³⁰

The second stage took place from about 1750 to a few years after the American Revolution in 1779 when skepticism and focus on personal well-being such as self-interest and happiness started to predominate. Also, a scientific fascination and experimenting with the forms of government were predominant in America during this stage.³¹

The last and probably the most important period of the American Enlightenment began towards the end of the eighteenth century as a reaction to the French Revolution when the Americans determined to seek accommodation between rational thinking and traditional moral values influenced by religion.³² During this stage, the European Enlightenment was in decline, whereas the American Enlightenment cultivated and recharged many of its influential ideas.³³

There are several traditions that were extremely important for the American Enlightenment, American pre-revolutionary thought, and revolutionary ideas. Even though some of them have their origin in the seventeenth century, all of them were influential for the development of intellectual trends and processes in America in the eighteenth century.

²⁹ See “American Enlightenment Thought.”

³⁰ See “American Enlightenment Thought.”

³¹ See Kieron O’Hara, *The Enlightenment: A Beginner’s Guide* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 25–27.

³² See Meyer, “The Uniqueness of the American Enlightenment,” 171–72.

³³ See “American Enlightenment Thought.”

The most dominant were the authors of classical antiquity, the English common law tradition, radical Whig theory, and Enlightenment rationalism.³⁴

In comparison to the British or French Enlightenments, the American Enlightenment is not so often mentioned or remembered as a diverse and compact intellectual project. There are many reasons for this, for instance, its colonial status, or its intellectual, political and cultural relation to England and Europe in general.³⁵ Under these circumstances, America can be seen as a periphery of the Europe and a mere expansion of the British and French Enlightenments and intellectual streams which were dominant there. In spite of the certainly very strong influence and interrelation between America and England in particular, and Europe at large, America produced its own specific Enlightenment, where distinct traditions of thought merged and built a political ideology which was influential for the American Revolution. Also, different social and cultural differences represented a very important factor in the formation of a distinctly American Enlightenment.

2.2 Ideas of the American Enlightenment

The main idea of the Enlightenment is shifting away from the political or religious absolutism, to more optimistic, skeptical, and rational approach to religion, politics, and human nature. When we talk about the American Enlightenment, many American thinkers and philosophers, including Benjamin Franklin, designed and later adopted revolutionary thoughts about political experimentation, scientific rationality, or religious tolerance. Such ideas had a significant impact on the development of American society. Thinkers of the American Enlightenment combined religion and scientific discoveries in the notion of deism, supported the natural rights of a man in the political philosophy of liberalism, and praised the importance of community and reclaiming virtues in early forms of republicanism.³⁶ Some of these ideas were inspired by European Enlightenments, but some took a specific American form.

2.2.1 Deism

For European thinkers, customs, traditions, and prejudices were barriers in obtaining true knowledge of nature. The solution was deism which can be described as a theological

³⁴ See Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 23–24.

³⁵ See Meyer, “The Uniqueness of the American Enlightenment,” 171–72.

³⁶ See “American Enlightenment Thought.”

position or natural religion that strived to define the natural world and a relationship to God using Enlightenment ideals such as rationality, order, or reason.³⁷

Deists were usually Protestants that disdained the religious dogmatism and did not want to follow the absurd traditions exemplified by the Catholic Church. They were not violent people and instead of fighting against the members of the Catholic Church, they used humor or ridicule to undermine the Catholicism.³⁸ American deists of the eighteenth century did not deny God's existence in view of the fact that most of the people were still firmly religious and devoted to God.³⁹

2.2.2 Liberalism

Another idea of the American Enlightenment, or Enlightenment in general, is liberalism. Philosophy of liberalism is based on liberty, natural rights of humankind and equality before the law. According to liberalism, the government authority should not be absolute but based on the approval of the governed. Liberalism started as a political and economic movement in the Enlightenment era and became popular in the Western world where liberal politicians and economists wanted to substitute the standards of inherited privilege, national religion, absolute monarchy, the divine-right theory of kingship and conservatism with democracy and the rule of law.⁴⁰

2.2.3 Republicanism

Republican political ideology claims that a nation ought to be ruled as a republic, where the highest public official of the state should be elected in general election. Concept of the republicanism is in reviving of the norms occurring in the ancient time, where the government was considered as a common business of the citizens that govern following the common good. Republicanism originated in the late Middle Age Italian states such as Florence, Genoa, and Pisa, where there was no reign of kings or a hereditary bloodline, only citizens who respected and lived according to common laws and regulations.⁴¹

The American Enlightenment also maintained that a nation should not be governed as a hereditary monarchy but as a republic where the head of a state is commonly elected. When

³⁷ See Frank Edward Manuel and David Pailin, "Deism," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Deism>.

³⁸ See "American Enlightenment Thought."

³⁹ See Kieron O'Hara, *The Enlightenment*, 141–43.

⁴⁰ See Andrew C. Gould, *Origins of Liberal Dominance: State, Church, and Party in the Nineteenth-century Europe*, 4th ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 3–4.

⁴¹ See Gregory Fremont-Barnes, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Age of Political Revolutions and New Ideologies, 1760–1815*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 625.

the colonists of North America started to be incredulous towards the corrupted British governance, they started to join militias and formed the American Constitutional Army under George Washington's leadership.⁴²

2.2.4 Scientific Progressivism

The eagerness for scientific discovery during the Age of the Enlightenment was directly related to the increasing occurrence of deism and skepticism in the society. Intellectual and curious deists were greatly interested in scientific inquiry as they wanted to respond to a divine calling to reveal natural laws of God. Progress in scientific knowledge, including the Copernicus' rejection of the geocentric model of the universe, works of Kepler and Galileo, or Newton's discovery of gravity, contradicted with the belief that intervention of God is the answer for everything, especially when we are talking about natural laws.⁴³

The faith in scientific progress emerged when Newton released his *Principia* (1687) and thanks to many European institutions, such as Royal Society of England, the Académie des Sciences in France, and the Academy of Sciences in Germany, the faith in scientific progress took its institutional form.⁴⁴ In the pre-revolutionary era in America, natural philosophers and scientists were members of the England Royal Society until 1768, when Benjamin Franklin helped to bring into being the American Philosophical Society. After some time, he became the president of this club.⁴⁵

Franklin was a man of many inventions and the author of theoretical works on the qualities of electricity and thanks to his contributions to science he became one of the most famous American scientists of his age.⁴⁶

2.2.5 Tolerant Pluralism

The European merchants believed that antipathy towards other races and religions interfere with economic trade, restrict freedom of thought and expression, and deteriorate the foundations of international friendship, which may eventually lead to war. Exhausted with religious wars, such as the Thirty Year's War (1618–1648), European Enlightenment thinkers started to spread the idea that enlightened reason and not religious dogmatism should govern relations between nations and their diverse faiths.⁴⁷

⁴² See "American Enlightenment Thought."

⁴³ See "American Enlightenment Thought."

⁴⁴ See O'Hara, *The Enlightenment*, 121.

⁴⁵ See "American Enlightenment Thought."

⁴⁶ See Meyer, "The Uniqueness of the American Enlightenment," 175.

⁴⁷ See "American Enlightenment Thought."

American Enlightenment thinkers were inspired by their European ancestors with the principle of religious tolerance and many of them, including Benjamin Franklin, agreed with John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) where Locke argued that no one should judge another person because of his loyalty to a different faith.⁴⁸ Locke also believed that tolerance is a Christian virtue and the government should only intervene in civic interests, not religious ones.⁴⁹ America's founders believed that people of every faith, eventually no faith, could settle, grow, and speak peacefully in the fledgling nation without any fear of fellow citizen or government's discrimination.⁵⁰

In the next chapter, the author of this work presents a brief account on one of the most important figures of the American Enlightenment—Benjamin Franklin. Throughout his whole life, Franklin was influenced by and devoted to many of aforementioned ideas which helped him to become one of the most influential figures of the American Enlightenment and the seminal author of American self-help literature.

⁴⁸ See John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Patrick Romanell (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 16–17.

⁴⁹ See Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 16–17.

⁵⁰ See “American Enlightenment Thought.”

3 FRANKLIN AS A SELF-PERFECTOR

A complex man of various talents, Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), was born in Boston in a business family of candle makers. His incredible versatility in diverse fields makes any efforts to label him almost impossible. However, there is a phrase that best describes him—the ‘self-made man’. The fact that Franklin was the archetype of self-made man is evident in his career—starting as a poor son of a soap- and candle-maker, Franklin eventually became a successful businessman, respected scientist, writer, and an appreciated member of the American society.⁵¹ He represents someone who, against all odds, broke out the inherited unfavorable position and lived a truly successful life full of personal achievements and financial independence.⁵² Even though there were people who helped him to become successful, Franklin is often seen as “...a good type of our American manhood”⁵³ and “...the greatest of our self-made men.”⁵⁴

Throughout his life, Franklin became greatly successful, revolutionary, influential, and one of the most respected public figures in American history. It is generally accepted that Franklin’s influence was caused by a diversity of factors that were present not only in his writings or scientific discoveries, but also in his own personality. Such factors helped him to influence other people, achieve fame, and gain him significant wealth.

As was mentioned before, Franklin was someone who best symbolized the Enlightenment ideals of human rationality, liberty, and equality as the natural rights of populace and his life and family circumstances greatly influenced his life philosophy, which was key for his system of self-improvement. Thus, Franklin’s life proves to be significant in terms of the development of the self-help genre in America.

3.1 Franklin and His Journey to Self-perfection

For many, the key characteristic of Benjamin Franklin is his desire for personal growth. Throughout his life, Franklin demonstrated strong dedication to improving himself as well as other people, mostly common Americans. His journey of self-improvement started early in his life. As he states in his *Autobiography* (1793), “from a Child I was fond of Reading, and all the little Money that came into my Hands was ever laid out in Books.”⁵⁵ With his

⁵¹ See Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 2.

⁵² See Benjamin Franklin, introduction to *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Frank Woodworth Pine (New York: Henry Holt, 1916), x.

⁵³ Pine, *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, x.

⁵⁴ Pine, *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, x.

⁵⁵ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue*, ed. Alan Houston (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10.

formal education unfinished, Franklin seemed to have strong desire for self-education and he wanted to gain as much knowledge as possible by reading. Thanks to his apprenticeship for his older brother James, Benjamin had access to a large number of books, and for sure, he took the full advantage of such privilege.

Instead of having an integrated moral code, Franklin had a set of instructions and a list of virtues by which he tried to live. His system of self-development was strongly influenced by Puritan values and enlightenment ideas. It did not serve only for the purpose of self-improvement, it was also used as a guideline for ordinary people who wanted to adopt such virtues in their own life.⁵⁶ This concept could be seen in Franklin's most important works, such as "The Way to Wealth", *Poor Richard's Almanack* (1732–1758), and *Autobiography*. For instance, the aforementioned almanac had various editions that were full of pragmatic maxims on how people can improve and develop their lives and their personalities. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin introduces a brief list of virtues and pragmatic attitudes that ought to help to achieve moral perfection.⁵⁷

3.1.1 Franklin's View on Religion

When it comes to religion, Franklin was extremely enlightened from an early age. Born and raised in a religious family and intended to become a clergyman, he soon began to feel doubtful about the religious teaching he was exposed to. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin says that his doubts about several points of religion started as soon as he reached the age of fifteen. He states that this uncertainty was caused by reading books on deism which were supposed to disprove it, but these anti-deistic books had the opposite effect on him. Mainly for that reason, he became a deist very early in his life. Still, the fact that Franklin was a deist and did not attend public assemblies of the Church does not mean he did not believe in the existence of God. The contrary is true, and he could see the value in religion. He also believed that the best service a man can do to God is to serve humanity.⁵⁸

Franklin remained a pragmatic deist all his life. This fact can be proved in many letters he wrote. For instance, a letter to Thomas Jefferson in 1787 regarding the prayers in the American Congress where he says that maybe praying before any kind of negotiations (as it was typical for the members of the convention during the conflict with Britain), might be

⁵⁶ See Russell B. Goodman, *American Philosophy before Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 68

⁵⁷ See Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 68–69.

⁵⁸ See Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 46.

helpful to solve the difficulties they were confronting at the time.⁵⁹ This letter seems to prove that Franklin saw religion as a means to reaching primarily pragmatic goals.

3.1.2 Public Service as a Way to Moral Perfection

Franklin viewed service to the public as a means to feeling fulfilled in life. As a sixteen-year-old boy, he started to work as an apprentice for his older brother James. James did not allow young Benjamin to publish in his newspapers, however, Franklin was insistent and found a way how to overcome this obstacle. He used a pseudonym ‘Silence Dogood’, under which he published his works. Franklin states that he lied only for the service of a mankind.⁶⁰ In the letters he published under the pseudonym, he dealt with the topics such as liberty, public health, and freedom of speech. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a significant interrelationship between Franklin’s deistic belief and public service. This connection seems to lie in the fact that Franklin viewed public service as the best way to worship God.

Before he became involved in politics, Franklin devoted his life to improving his own character and the life of other people, mainly Pennsylvanians. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* was one of the most significant tools that started Franklin’s journey of public service.⁶¹ Franklin bought the *Pennsylvania Gazette* from a rival printer in 1729 because he saw its potential and usefulness, which proved true soon afterwards. Having his own newspaper allowed Franklin to publish his own articles about issues he wanted to discuss, and it also helped him to establish a diverse range of public institutions around the city, such as the subscription library, hospital, or academy. These examples of public service infused Franklin with pride and provided him with political experience that showed to be useful in his future projects and his statesman career.⁶²

The institution that Franklin established was connected with another creation of his, so-called the Junto club, formed in 1727, when he was twenty-one years old. The members of the club discussed issues of various fields. If we look at the Junto as a public service, we can see several crucial aspects which had an extensive influence on Franklin’s life. The club started every meeting answering initial questions:

⁵⁹ See “Benjamin Franklin Requests Prayer in the Constitutional Convention,” Constitution Society, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.constitution.org/primarysources/franklin.html>.

⁶⁰ See Henry William Brands, *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), chap. 1, Kindle.

⁶¹ See Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2002), 57.

⁶² See Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin*, 57.

“...3. Do you think of any thing at present, in which the Junto may be serviceable to mankind?...8. Have you lately heard any member’s character attacked, and how you defended it?...14. Have you lately observed any defects in the laws of your *country*, which it would be proper to move the legislature for an amendment?...16. [Had] any body attacked your reputation lately? And what can the Junto do towards securing it?...”⁶³

These questions are listed purposely because here, it is feasible to behold aspects which characterize Franklin’s personality and the enlightened thinking—interest and service to humankind and concern with the liberty of people.

3.2 Philosophy of Self-improvement in “The Way to Wealth”

Franklin’s essay “The Way to Wealth” (the title under the essay was known since 1770s) was written as a collection of proverbial sayings to populace how to achieve virtuous life and economic independence. Franklin provided such advice through the character of Father Abraham from *Poor Richard’s Almanack*.⁶⁴

There are several major themes, connected with self-improvement in the essay. The first—which seems to be the most important—is about the virtue of industry. Abraham began his speech citing from *Poor Richard* as follows: “God helps them that help themselves.”⁶⁵ With this statement at the very beginning, Franklin emphasizes how the self-development and willingness to work hard is crucial for one’s life. Such statement could be paraphrased in many ways. It could mean that God appreciates people who work really hard or that God does not reward anyone, and the success depends only on the particular person and not on the ‘higher power’. Franklin advises that it is better to be independent and not to rely on other people. Everyone should work hard not only to survive, but also to live the fullest and the best life possible. This approach seems to be the reason why self-help and self-development industry is so important and widespread in American society. The virtue of industry is deeply rooted in American history. Franklin’s aphorism “there are no gains without pains...”⁶⁶ tries to motivate people to never give up and keep working hard until the set goal is accomplished. After some time, such attitude must bear fruit. In correlation with industry, Franklin also stresses the importance of conquering time-management skills

⁶³ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 164–66.

⁶⁴ See Sophus A. Reinert, “The Way to Wealth Around the World: Benjamin Franklin and the Globalization of American Capitalism,” *American Historical Review* 120, no. 1 (2015): 66–67.

⁶⁵ Benjamin Franklin, *The Way to Wealth* (1758; reprint, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1986), 11.

⁶⁶ Franklin, *The Way to Wealth*, 13.

as he says, "...lost time is never found again; and what we call time enough always proves little enough."⁶⁷

The second theme, connected with self-improvement, is self-reliance. Father Abraham states that "trusting too much to other's care is the ruin of many..."⁶⁸ Franklin indicated that one possible way how to become successful is not to rely on anyone, as such gullibility can eventually become a disadvantage. The idea of self-reliance is also emphasized in Abraham's statement "if you would have a faithful servant, and one that you like—serve yourself."⁶⁹ This could mean that it is better to trust nobody and not to wait for the help of other people and influences from outside. It is better to be proactive instead and make things happen yourself.

The virtue of frugality is the third theme of the essay that relates to self-improvement. In this case, Franklin stresses the importance of being economical when he says that "if you want to be wealthy, think of saving as well as of getting."⁷⁰ Here, Franklin advises people to have better financial-management skills and plan spending wisely, because one never knows when he can get into financial trouble. Then, he continues with another statement: "Many a little makes a mickle. Beware of little expenses; A small leak will sink a great ship."⁷¹ Here is evident, that Franklin is trying to encourage his readers to trim unnecessary spending and become mindful spenders.

The fourth theme is knowledge. In the writing, Father Abraham states that:

"This doctrine, my friends, is reason and wisdom; but after all, do not depend too much upon your own industry and frugality and prudence, though excellent things, for they may be blasted without the blessing of heaven; and therefore ask the blessing humbly, and be not uncharitable to those that at present seem to want it, but comfort and help them."⁷²

After mentioning all the mundane things in this extract, it is evident that Franklin eventually turns to the issue of God. In this excerpt Franklin claims that even with all the effort that people can expand to achieve success, they must stay devoted to God and pray to Him in a respectful and modest way. Even though Franklin was a deist, he believed in God and saw the value of religion. As was mentioned before, he also

⁶⁷ Franklin, *The Way to Wealth*, 12.

⁶⁸ Franklin, *The Way to Wealth*, 17.

⁶⁹ Franklin, *The Way to Wealth*, 17.

⁷⁰ Franklin, *The Way to Wealth*, 19

⁷¹ Franklin, *The Way to Wealth*, 19–20.

⁷² Franklin, *The Way to Wealth*, 28.

believed that the best way how to worship God is helping others. Another statement of Father Abraham's says that "experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other."⁷³ Here is noticeable emphasis on education as one of the ways to develop and improve one's intellect and personality. This also explicates why many Americans put such stress on (self-) education, either formal or non-formal.

With the list of guidelines appeared in the essay, Franklin influenced mostly common people. Paul Leicester Ford describes the essay as Franklin's "most popular piece" and "...one of the most popular American writings."⁷⁴ Before the end of the eighteenth century, the work appeared in more than thousand editions and was translated to twenty six languages.⁷⁵

3.3 Philosophy of Self-improvement in the *Autobiography*

Franklin worked on his most famous work, the *Autobiography*, on at four different times—1771, 1784, 1788, and 1788–1789. However, an American edition of his *Autobiography* was published in 1818, and the first completed edition of what he had written was only released almost seventy years after his death—in 1867. Franklin divided his *Autobiography* into three sections: the first part describes Franklin's youth and early manhood, the second part includes what Franklin terms the 'way to moral perfection', and the third part covers the use of principles that Franklin discovered in the first part and listed in the second. Through all the three parts of his *Autobiography*, Franklin tried to present his life as the proof that anyone can succeed in life, especially in the great nation—America.⁷⁶ In the *Autobiography*, Franklin emphasizes the enlightenment ideals of human nature, society, rationality, and acknowledging God as a means that helped him to succeed in life.

Sometime in the 1760s, Benjamin Franklin entrusted to his friend, Lord Kames, that for nearly thirty years he had been writing a book on morality. Franklin reassured Kames saying that his work was not just a mere dream, but something he had planned for a long time. Franklin's final work was supposed to be called 'The Art of Virtue'. The main purpose of the work was simple and purely practical: to show people how to achieve their goals.⁷⁷ For still unknown reasons, Franklin never published it, nor did he complete it. However, he used

⁷³ Franklin, *The Way to Wealth*, 28.

⁷⁴ Paul Leicester Ford, *Franklin Bibliography. A List of Books Written by, or Relating to Benjamin Franklin* (1886; reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), xxix.

⁷⁵ See Ford, *Franklin Bibliography*, xxxi.

⁷⁶ See Richard Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 60.

⁷⁷ See Norman S. Fiering, "Benjamin Franklin and the Way to Virtue," *American Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1978): 199–200.

some of its main ideas in the second part of his *Autobiography* where he introduced his personal program of self-development.

Franklin's personal program for moral development consists of thirteen virtues or personal qualities, which he developed during his stay in Philadelphia.⁷⁸ His program includes the virtues of temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility, exactly in this order. When Franklin discusses these virtues, he always uses a maxim that explains how he interprets each of the virtues. Below, I will briefly describe and explain each of these virtues that have become an inspiration for many self-help writers long after Franklin's death.

3.3.1 Franklin's List of Virtues

"Eat not to Dullness. Drink not to Elevation."⁷⁹ The quality of temperance can be considered as the foundation of following virtues. Temperance is nothing but self-discipline, which is necessary to acquire the other twelve virtues. According to Franklin, a temperate person is someone who avoids overindulgence in food and drink. By taking control over one's primal desires, one will feel confident and determined to start making more improvements in other virtues, such as silence, resolution, or order.

"Speak not but what may benefit others of yourself. Avoid trifling Conversation."⁸⁰ In Franklin's opinion, it is necessary for people to know when to speak and when to remain silent. Here, Franklin seems to despise small talks and gossips. He admits that there must be some purpose and principle in a conversation. If not, people should practice silence.⁸¹

"Let all your Things have their Places. Let each part of your Business have its Time."⁸² For Franklin, order is something that people need to fight against mayhem and disorder of the world.⁸³ Here, Franklin advises to have one's possessions organized so that anything needed can be found easily. Time should be treated similarly, and we should develop effective time management if we want to succeed in life.

"Resolve to perform what you ought. Perform without fail what you resolve."⁸⁴ With the virtue of resolution, Franklin interprets that a person should be disciplined enough to finish what s/he had set out to do. This virtue can be interpreted in several ways. It could

⁷⁸ See Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 67–69.

⁷⁹ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 68.

⁸⁰ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

⁸¹ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

⁸² Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

⁸³ See Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 74.

⁸⁴ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

mean that it is important to be clear about own goals and work hard, especially if we want to accomplish set objectives. If we fail, there is no need to feel shame, a failure is only a part of the journey. To quit after a failure is not acceptable, it is important to be disciplined and keep going until the goal is accomplished.

“Make no Expense but to do good to others of yourself; i.e., Waste nothing”.⁸⁵ The quality of frugality underlines the human need of waste nothing and use only that amount of resources needed for the good of ourselves and other people. Franklin frequently emphasizes this virtue in his writings as a way to acquire wealth.

“Lose no Time; Be always employ’d in something useful; Cut off all unnecessary Actions.”⁸⁶ The virtue of industry is one of the most important for the personal development. Franklin emphasizes hard work, productivity, and avoiding time-wasting habits. That means doing only what is important, necessary, and has some purpose. As Richard Fisher states, today, we are living in the greatest time in our history⁸⁷, and this seems to be the reason why many of us are getting lazy and often forget an important thing which is crucial for the successful life—hard work, a cornerstone of every success. So, instead of avoiding hard and honest work, people should embrace it and learn how to work smart. Many people understand this and demand tools on how to develop time management skills and productivity. Where is demand there is also supply and nowadays, we can notice a growing concentration of self-help ‘gurus’ who sell books and provide lectures on self-improvement, time management, and productivity. One of these gurus is, for instance, Czech author, keynote speaker, podcaster, and businessman Petr Ludwig, who has become one of the most popular figures of the modern self-help industry not only in the Czech Republic but also worldwide. His bestseller *How To Avoid Procrastination* (2013) which serves as a guideline to overcome the habit of putting off assignments and responsibilities, has been translated into fifteen languages and sold over one hundred thousand copies worldwide.⁸⁸

“Use no hurtful Deceit. Think innocently and justly; and, if you speak, speak accordingly.”⁸⁹ Franklin saw sincerity as a virtue because of the importance of truth and refraining of wily acts, such as gossips, sarcasm, and lying. Being truthful is something that

⁸⁵ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

⁸⁶ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

⁸⁷ See Richard Fisher, “Why the Present Day Could Be The Best Time To Be Alive,” BBC Future, BBC, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20160928-why-the-present-day-could-be-the-best-time-to-be-alive>.

⁸⁸ See “BIO,” Petr Ludwig, accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.petrudwig.com/bio>.

⁸⁹ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

every one of us need to practice, especially if we want to build healthy relationships with other people. People should not be hurtful with their words but endeavor to lift up others. If we must say something critical, it is important to find a way to say it without intention to hurt someone's feelings.

“Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.”⁹⁰ The quality of justice means not to harm other people for personal benefit. It is important to seek out solutions from which everyone can benefit. There is no excuse for omitting other people benefits and such approach, according to Franklin, is inadmissible.

“Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.”⁹¹ Moderation is also a part of Franklin's list of virtues, noting that a person should avoid extremes to live fulfilled life. Choosing extreme attitudes or acting towards other people in extreme manners usually leads to unpleasant consequences. This is also a problem of today's society, because in a typical consumer society, it is generally accepted that more is better. However, reality is often different—more money, more friends, and more tangible things you own are not the key to gain satisfactory life, moderation seems to be the real secret of success. This is even supported by many researchers. For instance, economists Kahneman and Deaton from Princeton University found out, that in the US, there is a certain amount of money that serves as a meaningful benchmark when it comes to money and well-being. The conclusion of their research shows that although a person earns more than seventy-five thousand US dollars per annum, feeling of happiness starts to level off even though income continues to growth.⁹² Apparently, Franklin was right and moderation seems to be one of the ways to well-being.

“Tolerate to uncleanliness in body, clothes, or habitation.”⁹³ Franklin emphasizes the virtue of maintaining physical and spiritual cleanliness as one of the basic human skills. For some people, cleanliness is a sign of femininity rather than manliness, but quite the contrary. In Franklin's opinion, developing the virtue of cleanliness fosters a man's attention to discipline and order. So, practicing hygiene, keeping one's clothes, home, bed, and desk clean represent a person in the best light possible.

⁹⁰ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

⁹¹ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

⁹² See Daniel Kahneman and Angus Deaton, “High Income Improves Evaluation of Life but Not Emotional Well-Being,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107, no. 38 (2010): 16489–93.

⁹³ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

“Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.”⁹⁴ Tranquility is another virtue, that Franklin emphasizes. Bad things are going to happen, this is the unpleasant fact, but being upset about the unexpected events does not help to settle them. If a person has conquered the virtue of tranquility, s/he is able to act calmly and recognize and understand own emotions despite the interferences of everyday life.

“Rarely use venery [sexual intercourse] but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another’s peace or reputation.”⁹⁵ Of all aforementioned virtues, chastity is likely to be the least popular, especially nowadays, when the society is overwhelmed with sex, lurking from TV shows, commercials or, the internet.

“Imitate Jesus and Socrates.”⁹⁶ The last virtue of Franklin’s list is the virtue of humility, which means being modest about achieved accomplishments. Many tend to see humility as a sign of weakness and fear but acquiring the virtue of humility can also be understood as a sign of courage, strength, and manliness. Franklin provides Jesus Christ and Socrates as examples of true humility. Cultivating the virtue of humility is, in a way, the culmination of all the twelve aforementioned virtues, if they are truly mastered—when a person has achieved all her or his goals, such as acquiring material wealth or fame, s/he is expected to be humble about such achievements.

Franklin’s program was written not only for a purpose of replacing his bad habits with good ones but also as a guideline for ordinary people. The system of virtues is a thirteen-week program where Franklin focused on developing one virtue each week. When the week ended, Franklin moved to the next virtue in set order. To manage the system of virtues, he used a notebook with a sheet devoted to each quality for every week. On this sheet, he penciled horizontal lines and wrote only the beginning letters or shortcuts of each virtue. Each day, Franklin marked every transgression against each of the virtues recorded, with a focus on the virtue that was assigned for an exact week.

Franklin was extremely precise when monitoring his own qualities. As was mentioned, each week, he focused on one specific virtue, but he still tried to record others if there was an opportunity for developing any of them. After finishing the thirteen-week period, Franklin returned to the first listed virtue and started with the new thirteen-week period again. As Forde noted, Franklin himself was not able to manage each of the thirteen virtues.⁹⁷ The

⁹⁴ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

⁹⁵ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

⁹⁶ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 69.

⁹⁷ See Steven Forde, “Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography and the Education of America,” *American Political Science Association* 86, no. 2 (1992): 359.

virtue of order was the one that was hard for Franklin to master, this is reflected by his lack of ability to organize his possessions. Instead of developing the virtue of order, he admitted that we will never be able to master this virtue.⁹⁸ This attitude of Franklin's shows his rational thinking—no one will ever be perfect, even him. However, he advises people to seek moral perfection because it is not the destination, but the journey what makes a person better.

“In this Piece it was my Design to explain and enforce this Doctrine, that vicious Actions are nor hurtful because they are forbidden, but forbidden because they are hurtful, the Nature of Man alone consider'd: That it was therefore every ones Interest to be virtuous, who wish'd to be happy even in this World.”⁹⁹ Franklin's program of moral teaching was written within the pragmatic framework in the sense that it is in the best interest of a man to be virtuous to achieve moral perfection. Such pragmatic approach contradicted other perspectives such as qualities being social or transcendental. Franklin viewed the concept of virtues as a means to desired ends—wealth, moral perfection, and fulfilled life.¹⁰⁰

With his essay “The Way to Wealth” and the system of self-development in the second part of *Autobiography*, Franklin is considered to be one of the most important and influential figures in self-help literature. For instance Tom Butler-Bowdon describes Franklin as “seminal in self-help literature, because he disregarded any religious conception that we were naturally bad or good people, he saw us rather as blank slates designed for success.”¹⁰¹ With his modern approach to self-improvement, he inspired not only millions of readers, but also many authors including Horatio Alger Jr., Dale Carnegie, or Stephen Covey.

⁹⁸ See Forde, “Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography and the Education of America,” 359.

⁹⁹ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 76.

¹⁰⁰ See Forde, “Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography and the Education of America,” 358–59.

¹⁰¹ Tom Butler-Bowdon, *50 Self-Help Classics* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2003), 146.

4 FRANKLIN'S INFLUENCE

In his *Autobiography*, Franklin provides readers with detailed notes on his journey of self-improving in the aspects of physical and mental health, productivity, and financial freedom. With his view on self-improvement, Franklin influenced many authors including Horatio Alger Jr., Dale Carnegie, or Stephen Covey. These authors are chosen purposely, mainly because of their importance in the field of self-development—they represent important and influential figures of self-help literature. Some of these authors even used Franklin and his *Autobiography* as an example in their most famous works—Carnegie in his *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) and Covey in his *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989).

4.1 Franklin and Horatio Alger Jr.

With his novels about underprivileged boys, Horatio Alger Jr. (1832–1899) became one of the most socially influential figures of his generation. Even though Alger was a novelist, Anker refers to him as “the most famous of all self-help promoters.”¹⁰² Like Franklin, he saw success as a result of hard work, honesty, discipline, and dedication to a goal and throughout his stories, he emphasized such personal qualities and their development. Alger was extremely popular, and his books made several publishers wealthy. Even after his death in 1899, publishers did not stop publishing his books and gained an advantage from his success. They hired ghost writers and continued in what Alger had established.¹⁰³ That Alger was a significant figure of American literature proves the annual Horatio Alger Award. The award is presented to American citizens who have succeeded and reached positions of prominence in spite of adversity. Among the most famous winners of this award are for instance a Hollywood actor Leonardo DiCaprio, or former American president Ronald Reagan.¹⁰⁴

Almost fifty years after Franklin published his *Autobiography*, Alger is likely to be Franklin's successor due to his ‘rags-to-riches’¹⁰⁵ narrative. Like Franklin, Alger in his

¹⁰² Roy M. Anker, *Self-Help and Popular Religion in Early American Culture: An Interpretive Guide* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 18.

¹⁰³ See John G. Cawelti, *The Apostles of Self-made Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1965), 103.

¹⁰⁴ See Horatio Alger Award,” Horatio Alger Association, accessed February 6, 2020, <https://horatioalger.org/horatio-alger-award/#>.

¹⁰⁵ The idiom ‘rags-to-riches’ is used to describe what happens to a person who was poor but obtains a lot of money later in his/her life:

See *The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, “from rags to riches,” accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-help>.

Ragged Dick (1868) series and following works published later in the nineteenth century, provided guidance for young people on how to succeed in life. Many of his later works, including *Luck and Pluck* (1869) or *Bound to Rise* (1873), are in a way retellings of *Ragged Dick* storyline, which is considered to be his most famous work. Taken as a whole, the success formula in his works helped portrayed Alger as the literary patron of the American ideal that even a person of humble beginnings might succeed in the great nation. *Ragged Dick* is the story of a young homeless New Yorker, known to be an honest, generous, industrious, and talented boy. The story examines Alger's popular theme—the personal development through adversity and the determination to improve oneself.¹⁰⁶

Alger's formula for personal development seems to share certain traits with Franklin's writings. As we now know, Franklin listed his virtues and tracked his progress in mastering them and each week, he focused on that virtue that could help him succeed in life. Alger used slightly different approach—he gave advices to people and then listed the virtues and items his characters needed. Alger put emphasis on mathematical skills, good manners, and his literary characters aim for moderate economic security through employment¹⁰⁷, whereas Franklin emphasized the virtues of hard work, frugality, and obtaining wealth through partnership or ownership of an own business.

When writing his memoirs, Franklin listed many of his own patrons, including Thomas Denham, Andrew Hamilton, or William Bradford. These patrons supported him in many ways, including lending money, introducing him to people of influence, and inviting him to their homes.¹⁰⁸ As Franklin stated: "These Friends were afterwards of great Use to me, as I occasionally was to some of them."¹⁰⁹ Therefore, Franklin did not achieve everything just by himself, as is sometimes presented. The same is true for Alger's literary characters. They are rarely independent and alone and do not achieve success without the help of others.¹¹⁰

Alger's writings almost always follow the same formula—the hero of the story faces ruthless people who try to take advantage of the gullible young boy. Such ruthless people are interpreted as villainous father-figures. However, protagonist's genuine qualities and attaining the patronage of the benevolent merchant save him from imminent peril.¹¹¹ Alger's

¹⁰⁶ See Horatio Alger, Jr., "Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York with the Boot Blacks (1868)", in *Bestsellers in Nineteenth-Century America: An Anthology*, ed. Paul C. Gutjahr (London; New York: Anthem Press, 2016), 613–702.

¹⁰⁷ See Cawelti, *The Apostles of Self-made Man*, 116–18.

¹⁰⁸ See Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 27.

¹⁰⁹ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 45.

¹¹⁰ Cawelti, *The Apostles of Self-made Man*, 109.

¹¹¹ Cawelti, *The Apostles of Self-made Man*, 114–15.

story formula parallels Franklin's relationship with Denham who, according to Franklin's *Autobiography* "...became my [Franklin's] Friend, greatly to my [Franklin's] Advantage afterwards on many Occasions."¹¹²

Even though Alger's works are quite different than Franklin's *Autobiography*, they continued in with what Franklin had established and demonstrated the popularity of moral teaching and self-improvement ideology in American culture many years later after Franklin's death.

4.2 Franklin and Dale Carnegie

Dale B. Carnegie (1888–1955) was an American self-help author who also provided very popular courses on self-improvement, public speaking, salesmanship, interpersonal skills, and corporate training. Carnegie is well-known due to his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which is codification of the Carnegie's Course.¹¹³ The book became a bestseller after its release and within the first year, it sold more than quarter of a million copies. *How to Win Friends* went through dozens of editions and reprintings in subsequent years, eventually selling more than thirty million copies throughout the world over the next few decades. What is worth mentioning is that the book became one of the bestselling non-fiction books in the US history and remains popular even today.¹¹⁴

The main message of the *How to Win Friends* is that one can achieve accomplishments in the modern world by developing personal qualities, building up confidence, improving interpersonal skills, and making people to like you. Carnegie claimed that getting ahead in life, e.g. getting a better job, earning more money, building healthy relationships and friendships was simply a question of developing one's personality. Franklin suggested similar approach in the second part of his *Autobiography* almost one hundred and fifty years earlier. This shows Franklin's modern and enlightened approach to life and his persisting influence long after his death.

With his catching enthusiasm, Carnegie promised his readers that the advice in the book will help them to "get out of a mental rut, think new thoughts, acquire new visions, new ambitions ... Make friends quickly and easily ... Increase your popularity ... Increase your

¹¹² Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 34.

¹¹³ See Soria, *Awaken the Power Within*, chap. 2.

¹¹⁴ See Steven Watts, *Self-help Messiah: Dale Carnegie and Success in Modern America* (New York: Other Press, 2013), 2–3.

influence, your prestige, your ability to get things done.”¹¹⁵ In such a way, Dale Carnegie became one of the most famous and seminal author in modern American society. His works promoting the importance of healthy self-confidence, human relations, and self-improvement have attracted millions of readers worldwide and elevated him on the top of influence in forming modern values.¹¹⁶

4.2.1 The Benjamin Franklin Effect

As was mentioned before, Carnegie was in a way influenced by Franklin and his *Autobiography*, which, in *How to Win Friends*, is what psychologists call ‘The Benjamin Franklin effect’. The effect is a proposed psychological phenomenon saying that anyone can persuade and make another person like him when asking him for a favor instead of offering help.¹¹⁷ The best example of this effect comes from the story appearing in Franklin’s *Autobiography* where Franklin describes how he turned the rival legislator into one of his friends. When he heard that his rival has a scarce book in his library, Franklin wrote a requesting letter and asked him whether he could lend him the book for a few days. The rival agreed and sent the book immediately. After one week, Franklin returned the book with a letter expressing how much he enjoyed reading. The next time these two met, the rival spoke to him courteously and expressed readiness to help him in other matters. Eventually, the two men became good friends.¹¹⁸ Franklin, after whom the effect is called, referred to this phenomenon as “The truth of an old Maxim”, stating that: “He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another, than he whom you yourself have obliged.”¹¹⁹

The same effect is also mentioned in Carnegie’s book *How to Win Friends* where the author explained asking for help as an effective form of flattery. According to Carnegie, when we ask someone for a favor, we are indicating that we consider them to have something we do not possess, be it financial resources, knowledge, or skills. With this approach, we are showing respect and admiration for the person whom we are asking for a favor.¹²⁰

In *How to Win Friends*, Carnegie also used Franklin as an example of how to deal with people and improve one’s personality.¹²¹ One day, one of Franklin’s friend told young

¹¹⁵ Dale Carnegie, “Eighth Things This Book Will Help You Achieve,” in *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (London: Ebury Digital, 2010), Kindle.

¹¹⁶ See Watts, *Self-help Messiah*, 3.

¹¹⁷ See David McRaney, *You Can Beat Your Brain* (London: Oneworld, 2013), 57–71.

¹¹⁸ See Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 85.

¹¹⁹ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 85.

¹²⁰ Carnegie, *How to Win Friends*, chap. 1.

¹²¹ Carnegie, *How to Win Friends*, chap. 2.

Benjamin that he was too proud and arrogant and people were feeling better when he was not around. Because Franklin was rational and wise enough, he accepted the criticism and straightaway began to change his impertinent and dogmatic ways when dealing with people. In the *Autobiography*, Franklin described how he changed his approach and turned himself from an impulsive, proud, and argumentative person to one of the most gracious and tactful diplomats of his time.¹²²

Franklin's influence on Carnegie is manifested throughout the whole book *How to Win Friends* where Carnegie mentioned and quoted Franklin many times. For instance, he called Franklin's *Autobiography* as "one of the most fascinating life stories written, one of the classics of American literature,"¹²³ therefore it is more than clear that for Carnegie, Franklin is one of the formative and influential figures.

4.3 Franklin and Stephen R. Covey

Just like Dale Carnegie, also Stephen R. Covey, an American author, educator, and businessman, seems to have been influenced by Franklin's works, especially by the second part of the *Autobiography* that deals with self-scrutiny, establishing goals, monitoring progress, and developing one's personality. As was mentioned before, Franklin in his *Autobiography* introduced the system of self-development that served as a guideline to him and ordinary people to acquire his thirteen qualities or virtues. In some ways, similar guideline to the one offered by Franklin almost two hundred years earlier can be observed in the Covey's self-help book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (further referred to as *7 Habits*). It was originally released in 1989 and "remained on the *New York Times* best-seller list for two hundred weeks and has sold more than ten millions copies worldwide."¹²⁴ As for Franklin, rationality and puritan values such as honesty, self-discipline, or hard work were also important for Covey who, in *7 Habits*, depicted working on the self as the most powerful investment one can ever make.¹²⁵ In another of his bestselling books, *First Things First* (1994), Covey stated that the concept and practices appearing in this book constitute patterns based on "true north principles, purposes, and perspectives that help create happiness and peace."¹²⁶ These 'true north principles' that Covey introduced especially in *7*

¹²² See Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 76–77.

¹²³ Carnegie, *How to Win Friends*, chap. 2.

¹²⁴ Elizabeth A. Schick, *Current Biography Yearbook* (New York: W. Wilson Company, 1998), 129.

¹²⁵ See Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 289.

¹²⁶ Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 280.

Habits and First Things First, emphasizes rationality, reason, self-control, and hard work as the cornerstones to reach one's objectives and gain fulfilment and happiness.¹²⁷

Covey's seven habits he listed in *7 Habits* are as follows: 'be proactive; begin with the end in mind; put first things first; think win/win; seek first to understand, then be understood; synergize; sharpen the size.'¹²⁸ Some of these principles seem to parallel with the list of virtues that Franklin had written almost two hundred years before the *7 Habits* was published. Especially the virtues of industry, resolution, justice, and order can be observed in the 'be proactive', 'put first things', and 'think win-win' chapters of the Covey's *7 Habits*.

The most significant influence of Franklin's *Autobiography* on Covey's *7 Habits*, however, can be found in the aforementioned chapter 'put first things first'. Here, Covey suggests developing effective personal management.¹²⁹ The same did Franklin with his list of virtues, especially the virtue of resolution, where he emphasized the importance of discipline to stick with what a person set to accomplish. Covey also links personal management with discipline by saying that: "In other words, if you are an effective manager of yourself, your discipline comes from within; it is a function of your independent will."¹³⁰ Throughout the chapter 'put first things first', Covey provides people with tools to help them develop effective personal management. One of these tools is a planning system which is in many ways similar to the Franklin's planner that he had introduced in his *Autobiography*.¹³¹

4.3.1 Franklin Planner

From his *Autobiography*, it is obvious that Franklin was truly a productivity master. This is what may have allowed him to easily switch between tasks and professions, including printer, diplomat, scientist, or writer. In the second part of his *Autobiography*, he shared his daily routine that seems to be simple, but effective.¹³² What can be noticed from his routine is that Franklin was very habitual and considered time to be a valuable resource. As he stated: "Lose Time is never found again; and what we call Time-enough, always proves little enough."¹³³

¹²⁷ See Mur Effing, "The Origin and Development of Self-help Literature," 130.

¹²⁸ See Covey, "Contents", in *The 7 Habits*.

¹²⁹ See Covey, *The 7 Habits*, 145.

¹³⁰ Covey, *The 7 Habits*, 148.

¹³¹ See Covey, *The 7 Habits*, 162–68.

¹³² See Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 72–73.

¹³³ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 265.

Franklin divided his daily schedule into six blocks including morning prep period, eight hours of work, lunch, reading, dinner, and seven-hour-long sleep. He started his day with the question “what good shall I do this day?”¹³⁴ and ended his day by asking himself “what good have I done today?”¹³⁵ With these questions he reflected on his tasks and other parts of his life.

Franklin’s daily routine program has become seminal in the field of personal management and some people even built their business on it. One of these people was an American author, speaker, and businessman Hyrum W. Smith (1943–2019) who founded the Franklin Quest Company and originally created the widely used planning system—the Franklin Day Planner. In 1997, his Franklin Quest Company acquired Covey’s training company and result of this acquisition is FranklinCovey Company that provides training on time management principles on which the Franklin Planner was based.¹³⁶

Smith’s planning system, which is based on Franklin’s daily schedule, is marketed in Covey’s *7 Habit* as a method to organize one’s life and achieve happiness. Like Franklin with his *Autobiography*, modern self-help authors including Covey or Anthony Robbins insist that constant self-scrutiny, setting goals, and mastering time can lead to more satisfying life and better relationship with other people.¹³⁷

Because of his little book of virtues, Franklin is considered to be not only the inventor of daily planner, but also the father of self-help literature genre.¹³⁸ Like Stephen Covey, he advocated the rational time management, yet he was unaware of its limits. Even though Franklin had his schedule strictly planned, he sometimes found himself not adhering to the schedule. The mastery of one’s time was the central premise of the virtue of order and as Franklin stated in his *Autobiography*: “My Scheme of ORDER, gave me the most Trouble,…”¹³⁹ As the typical self-made man, Franklin noted that the journey to self-mastery starts with the control of the daily schedule, time, and the substance of one’s life stating: “dost thou love Life, then do no squander Time, for that’s the Stuff Life is made of.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 73

¹³⁵ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 73.

¹³⁶ See HYRUM W. SMITH – A TRIBUTE TO A LEGEND,” FranklinPlanner Talk, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://blog.franklinplanner.com/hyrum-tribute/>.

¹³⁷ See Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 143.

¹³⁸ See McGee, *Self-Help*, 6.

¹³⁹ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 74.

¹⁴⁰ Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 265.

With his methods of self-improvement, Franklin can be considered the father of self-help literature—very popular industry in America. His strategies seem to remain popular and have been updated to fit the needs of the twenty-first century environment. They are still widely praised and used by many self-help authors even nowadays. For instance, an American bestseller author, podcaster, and entrepreneur Timothy Ferriss said: “I have wanted to emulate Benjamin Franklin and put together a healthy, wealthy and wise trilogy and so healthy was *The 4-Hour Body*, wealthy was *The 4-Hour Workweek* and then wise is *The 4-Hour Chef*.”¹⁴¹ All of these books has been translated into many languages and spent some time on the *New York Times* Best Seller List.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Dan Schawbel, “Tim Ferriss: What Cooking Can Teach You About Learning,” *Forbes*, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danschawbel/2012/11/20/tim-ferriss-what-cooking-can-teach-you-about-learning/#372220b366e6>.

¹⁴² See “Bio,” The Blog of Author Tim Ferriss, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://tim.blog/about/>.

5 CONCLUSION

The aim of this work was to analyze Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and the essay "The Way to Wealth" to support the thesis that thanks to his philosophy and strategies of self-improvement introduced in aforementioned works, Franklin can be considered the father of self-help literature in America.

Firstly, it was essential to introduce the genre of self-help literature, its categories, themes, and development in America. Even though this genre is not a part of literary canon, it is evident that self-development has been deeply rooted in American society since the eighteenth-century American Enlightenment. For that reason, it was crucial to briefly describe the American Enlightenment and its main ideas that strongly influenced Franklin's philosophy of self-improvement, which is especially visible in his writings.

From the Enlightenment chapter, the thesis moved to the philosophy of self-improvement of a person who best embodied the enlightenment ideals—Benjamin Franklin. The third chapter presents a brief account on Franklin's life, his deistic view on religion, and his service to public. Both his view on religion and public service proves that he was enlightened and rationally-minded man. His rationality helped him in his journey to moral perfection, about which is the second part of this chapter where the author of this bachelor thesis analyzed Franklin's essay "The Way to Wealth" and his *Autobiography*.

"The Way to Wealth" was written as a collection of proverbial sayings that aim at general populace, which is similar to contemporary self-help literature. In this work, Franklin advocates mainly the virtue of industry and frugality as a 'way to wealth'. Other themes also play a role here, such as procrastination and how to avoid it, self-education, and self-reliance. Every virtue in the essay is supported with the proverb with which Franklin tries to advise people how to improve their character and achieve fulfilled life.

In the second part of his *Autobiography*, Franklin came up with a thorough plan in which he focused on acquiring thirteen different personal qualities or virtues based on Puritan values. By focusing on constant self-evaluation, hard work, and perfecting each virtue at a time, Franklin provided an effective method of self-development that still inspires not only readers, but also authors of self-help literature. Thus, his strategies have been proved to be relevant even nowadays. This is demonstrated in chapter four, where the author of this work tried to examine the extent of Franklin's influence in some of the most popular American self-help books. As the author of this bachelor thesis discovered in this chapter, even modern books dealing with self-development seem to follow Puritan values and traditions that were

important for Franklin when he was writing his *Autobiography* on which he established his self-development strategies on.

In the *Autobiography*, Franklin also introduced his daily planner. Here, he set strict daily schedule for himself where he spent most of his days working and educating himself. His plan also included some time for meditation, social interaction, personal evaluation, and setting short- and long-term goals. This system is not uncommon and such tracking of daily habits can be found in Stephen Covey's bestseller *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* which includes self-tracking system inspired by Franklin. As Micki McGee writes: "Echoing Benjamin Franklin's daybook and book of virtues in which he organized days around cultivating various virtues, Covey's time management system updates the old-fashioned notion of 'virtues' with the more modern idea of 'priorities'."¹⁴³

Based on the analysis of aforementioned Franklin's works and selected self-help books by Covey, or Carnegie, his advice in both works appears to be just as relevant today as it was almost three hundred years ago.

As was mentioned in the chapter on American Enlightenment, the phrase 'pursuit of happiness' (which is the main goal of almost every self-help book) in the Declaration of Independence has been strongly rooted in the American society. Franklin represents someone who constantly sought happiness in his life. He tried to develop himself by means of following daily routines and focusing on virtues. When he introduced his strategies of self-development in "The Way to Wealth" and in *Autobiography*, Franklin became the father of self-help literature—a booming industry in the United States. Even though the more recent authors of self-help literature updated his methods to fit the needs of today's society in which people seek happiness and wealth through self-help literature more than ever¹⁴⁴, Franklin's philosophy and methods of self-improvement are still relevant, praised, and widely used even nowadays.

¹⁴³ McGee, *Self-Help*, 153.

¹⁴⁴ See LaRosa, "The \$10 Billion Self-Improvement Market Adjusts to a New Generation."

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