

The Philosophies of John Adams

What is a philosophy?

“The next Morning I think it was, sitting in my office, near the Steps of the Town house Stairs, Mr. Forrest came in [. . .] With tears streaming from his Eyes, he said I am come with a very solemn Message from a very unfortunate Man, Captain Preston in Prison. He wishes for Council, and can get none [. . .] I had no hesitation in answering that Council ought to be the very last thing that an accused Person should want in a free Country. That the Bar ought in my opinion to be independent and impartial at all Times And in every Circumstance. [. . .] and if he thinks he cannot have a fair Tryal of that Issue without my Assistance, without hesitation he shall have it.”

(The Legal Papers of John Adams, 3: 292-293)

As you read in the diary entry above, consider that John Adams believed everyone deserved a fair trial in a free country. This was a belief he lived by.

“But, it may be said with equal Truth, that all Magistrates, and all civil officers, and all civil Government, is founded and maintained by the sins of the People. All armies would be needless if Men were universally virtuous.”

(Diary of John Adams 18 Dec. 1760, 1: 184)

What is he trying to say? Explain his thoughts in your own words.

Write a statement of your own personal philosophy. The saying “do unto others as you would like done to you”, is a philosophy. What principle do you live your life by? Write it on the lines below.

Lesson 5 Classwork

“Innocence should be protected more than guilt be punished”

Or

“An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”

What does each statement mean?

Which one of the above statements do you most agree with in a situation where a person has been harmed or injured? Explain your reason for choosing one statement over the other.

Lesson 5
Classwork and Homework

Name:
Date:

Who would you defend today?

Writing an Opening Statement

Choose one group from your list on last night's homework and write an opening statement to defend them from being mistreated in our society today.

Using the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution, the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence and your own personal philosophies, defend that person's rights to the Superior Court of Massachusetts.

Your opening statement must:

- Include a list of rights you believe your client has.
- Use statements from either the Bill of Rights or the Declaration of Independence to support your ideas.
- Include what your client has done, if anything, and the reason they should not be punished.

You may use this page to brainstorm and you may write your first draft on the next page or on a separate sheet of paper.

