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By

Coyle B. Neal

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# The Providential Nature of Politics in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards

Coyle Neal, Ph.D.

Director: Claes Ryn, Ph.D.

Despite the obvious importance of Jonathan Edwards in American history, scholars have largely ignored his relevance for political thought. To ignore him is to miss a critical component in early American political philosophy and to have a skewed understanding of the subsequent history of revivals and revivalism that have shaped religion, politics, and philosophy in America. This dissertation addresses this oversight. It situates Edwards among American political thinkers and shows him to be an important piece in the American political tradition. This dissertation argues that for Jonathan Edwards politics is deeply historical in nature. He has a strong historical sense that is indistinguishable from his notion of Providence. The dissertation concludes that—in line with his theology, ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics—the political philosophy of Jonathan Edwards is fundamentally historical and more akin to that of Burke, Hegel, Adams and other “conservative” thinkers than it is to Rousseau, Paine, and other revolutionary thinkers.

The dissertation examines Edwards’ own writings as well as important secondary sources and interpretations of his work. It uses a traditional hermeneutical technique to systematize his social and political ideas and to draw out implications for political thought from his ostensibly non-political theological and philosophical writings. The first two chapters provide an overview of his life and thought and an introduction to his philosophy of

history. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters discuss his views of the human being in terms of the will, affections, and original sin, with special emphasis on Edwards's articulation of identity and "free" will as being historically rooted in an organic and providential relationship with both God and the rest of humanity. The sixth and seventh chapters engage Edwards's doctrines of virtue, aesthetics, and teleology as they interact with the traditional doctrine of justification by faith in the concrete reality of history. The last chapter summarizes the thesis that Edwards's political thought is historical rather than revolutionary. The chapter compares this conclusion to the rather different conclusions drawn by the only previous major work on Edwards's political thought. Finally, the dissertation indicates specific needs for further study of Edwards' political thought.

This dissertation by Coyle B. Neal fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Politics approved by Claes Ryn, Ph.D., as Director, and by David Walsh, Ph.D., and Stephen Nichols, Ph.D., as Readers.

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Claes Ryn, Ph.D., Director

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David Walsh, Ph.D., Reader

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Stephen Nichols, Ph.D., Reader

*Intellectualism produces, as it were, beautifully shaped, finely cornered and dazzlingly transparent ice-crystals. But underneath that ice the stream of the living water so easily runs dry. There may be gain in doctrinal abstractions, but true religion, as shown in the warm piety of the heart, suffers loss... Contemplative thought, reflections and meditations on the soul's nearness unto God tend merely to correct the above-named error; tend to draw the soul away from the abstract in doctrine and life, back to the reality of religion; tend, with all due appreciation of 'chemical' analysis of the spiritual waters, to lead the soul back to the living Fountain itself, from whence these waters flow.*

—Abraham Kuyper, *To Be Near Unto God*, 16.

*For the spirit is what first possesses true reality of being, and it embraces everything ideally in itself, so that all that is beautiful is only really beautiful insofar as it participates in this higher reality and is produced by it."*

—G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Art*, 5.

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## PREFACE: EDWARDS AND THE PHILOSOPHERS

Engagement and analysis of the philosophical theology of Jonathan Edwards from the perspective of political theory has long been needed. Treatments by political philosophers to date have been only cursory and preliminary in their study of Edwards.<sup>1</sup> Three brief examples relevant to this dissertation will highlight this trend and show the need for further scholarship.

Irving Babbitt admits that Edwards has “genuine religious elevation,”<sup>2</sup> yet ultimately rejects his thought and argues that he “combined genuine religious insight with the most unacceptable form of theology.”<sup>3</sup> Further, Babbitt charges Edwards with excessive intellectual pride (which is a fair charge), even as he admits that Edwards was “probably the most original thinker America produced before Emerson.”<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, Babbitt engages Edwards so tangentially and lightly that one suspects Babbitt had not actually read much of the source material, and rather relied on one of the many academic caricatures of Edwards popular at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> This is truly unfortunate, given that Edwards and Babbitt have so much in common in their worldview as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Though Edwards has received much more attention from philosophers concerned with religion, aesthetics, and ethics (see chapters six and seven of this dissertation).

<sup>2</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1979), 165. There are similar dismissive passages in his *Rousseau and Romanticism* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 123-124.

<sup>3</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Character & Culture: Essays on East and West* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 56.

<sup>4</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Masters of Modern French Criticism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1977), 357. For the charge of pride, see Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, 214.

<sup>5</sup> Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, 214-215. For an example of a standard 19<sup>th</sup> century treatment of Edwards, see Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Jonathan Edwards: An Essay* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1880). Babbitt seems to have been familiar specifically with this work much more than with Edwards's own

Eric Voegelin gives his examination of Edwards in *On the Form of the American Mind*, where he identifies Edwards as a foundational American thinker and as the beginning of the break between traditional Puritan thought and modern American Protestantism. Specifically, Voegelin argues that Puritans had lived with the tension that exists between the dogma of the absolutely Transcendent God (typified in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination) and the warm personal mysticism of an intimate religious experience. Voegelin suggests that Edwards is the beginning of the split between these two which both favors experience over dogma and results in an intellectual pantheism. The strengths of Voegelin's treatment are his familiarity with and accurate exposition of Edwards's metaphysical writings (which were otherwise largely ignored until the end of the twentieth century). His major weakness is in separating Edwards's metaphysics from the rest of his thought. Voegelin states that "his mystical and philosophical works are so unconnected that it is almost impossible to use Calvinism to understand the philosophy or the philosophy to understand the dogma..." Further, he notes that Edwards's later works "carry mystical pantheism so far that the break with dogma cannot possibly be ignored."<sup>6</sup> This, in turn, leads Voegelin to attribute to Edwards the already-noted developments of pantheism and emphasis on personal experience at the expense of dogma that historically only occur much later in American religious thought. These changes in American religion are characteristic of the early nineteenth century rather than the early eighteenth century, and involve decades of

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work *Freedom of the Will*. Which, as will be pointed out below, was a fairly standard state of affairs for the times.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Voegelin, "A Formal Relationship with Puritan Mysticism" in *On the Form of the American Mind*, vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Jurgen Gebhardt (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 132.



transitional theological development.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, Voegelin is right to point out that the seeds of future developments are found in Edwards's language, if not in the substance of his philosophy. Voegelin simply carries his argument a step farther than warranted by Edwards's writings.

Paul Elmer More has perhaps the most interesting treatment of Edwards. More highlights Edwards's view of the will and comes to the gloomy conclusion that:

Edwards had riddled and forever destroyed the arguments for free will commonly employed by the Arminians; is there no alternative for the human reason save submission to his theological determinism or to fatalistic atheism? One way of escape from that dilemma is obvious and well known. It is that which Dr. Johnson, with his superb faculty of common sense, seized upon when the Edwardian doctrine came up in conversation before him. "The only relief I had was to forget it," said Boswell, who had read the book; and Johnson closed the discussion with his epigram: "All theory is against the freedom of the will, all experience for it."<sup>8</sup>

In other words, Edwards's offered solution to the problem of the relationship between free will and Providence is intellectually correct, however much it must be ignored in practice. More then goes on to suggest that all human beings simply must live with a seeming contradiction that will likely not be resolved in this life.

Again, the early treatments of Edwards by these three philosophers are by-and-large cursory. To some extent, their limitations are a direct result of their own times. Edwards scholarship did not truly begin to come into its own until the popular work of Perry Miller brought him (and the Puritans as a whole) to the attention of academia in the early 1950s—nearly three decades after Babbitt, More, and Voegelin initially engaged Edwards. In that

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<sup>7</sup> This new stage of American religion primarily begins with the Transcendentalists, especially in the writings of Emerson. See Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Chu Hartley Publishers, 2006) and Philip Gura, *American Transcendentalism* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Elmer More, "Jonathan Edwards," <http://jkalb.freeshell.org/more/edwards.html> (accessed on April 11, 2012).

sense, these three authors are all the more remarkable for paying attention to Edwards at all, and any errors in their analysis may be excused as a result of lack of access to original documents (the complete writings of Edwards were not available until 2008) and the limited availability of secondary sources (virtually none of which were friendly to Edwards and the Puritans prior to Perry Miller—see the Holmes article noted above).

Now that these two historical limitations have been overcome—thanks largely to the work of the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University and the rise of the neo-Calvinists amongst Evangelical Christians—there is much work to be done in exploring Edwards’s political theology. This dissertation attempts to pick up where Babbitt, Voegelin, and More left off by situating Edwards’s political philosophy in its relationship to the tension and conflict between historical and revolutionary thought.

I am very grateful to my dissertation committee and their continual support through a lengthy writing process. This dissertation is better for their efforts. Any mistakes are mine and mine alone. I am even more grateful to my wife, without whose patience and support this text would still be stuck between my ears.

Coyle B. Neal  
SDG

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

*“Every religion is to be found in juxtaposition to a political opinion which is connected with it by affinity. If the human mind be left to follow its own bent, it will regulate the temporal and spiritual institutions of society upon one uniform principle; and man will endeavor, if I may use the expression, to harmonize the state in which he lives upon earth with the state which he believes to await him in heaven.”* –Alexis de Tocqueville

*“When studied with any degree of thoroughness, the economic problem will be found to run into the political problem, the political problem in turn into the philosophical problem, and the philosophical problem itself to be almost indissolubly bound up at last with the religious problem.”* –Irving Babbitt<sup>1</sup>

As Tocqueville and Babbitt point out, it is in the nature of man to incarnate in politics his most deeply held theological beliefs. That religious movements become social and political movements hardly needs to be argued, given the clear historical and cultural evidence.<sup>2</sup> That social and political movements can likewise take on a religious nature can also be demonstrated, contrary to the popular perception that religion and politics must inhabit separate realms.<sup>3</sup> To that end, a thorough understanding of the thought of the man who many argue is America’s most profound theologian and philosopher will contribute greatly to an understanding of the development and nature of American politics. The social and political movements of the early eighteenth century and their influence on later American development cannot be understood apart from the thought and writings of Jonathan Edwards. This dissertation will explore the historical thought of Edwards as it is applicable to politics and political theory through his study of human nature and revealed theology, with a

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Bantam Books, 1835, 2004), 348. Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1979), 23.

<sup>2</sup> The rise of Methodism and its connection with abolition, temperance and social welfare movements is among the most famous examples. See numerous sources, including but not limited to: Eric Metaxas, *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007); Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991); and Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); or Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Chu Hartley Publishers, 2006).

particular emphasis on the idea that, for Edwards, the nature and function of politics are intimately related to historical revelations of God within creation. As such, in the thought of Edwards politics and political theory take on a divine aspect and become matters of transcendent importance. To study Edwards is therefore to explore an important but virtually unexamined contribution to American political thought. It is also concurrently to discover parallels between Edwards and later major conservative and historicist thinkers, including Burke and Hegel; since, as will be shown, Edwards's Christianity anticipates and helps foster the kind of historical consciousness that they advance; specifically, the idea that God reveals himself in history and politics. He consequently stands opposed to the revolutionary and atomistic thought of philosophers such as Rousseau and Thomas Paine.

This dissertation will build on the important groundwork laid by Gerald McDermott in his book *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, where he opens an exploration of Edwards's political thought, emphasizing its sociological and cultural context. McDermott is especially useful in dealing with Edwards's view of the relationship between private religion and public action. His work addresses key questions of political theory in a preliminary fashion that paves the way for this dissertation. The dissertation will delve more deeply and systematically into these questions, as well as unveiling and scrutinizing the view of politics that emerges from Edwards's writings and its importance for political theory and for understanding the American political tradition. Beyond McDermott's book, however, there is little written concerning Edwards's politics and political theory. To help fill this void, the dissertation will likewise draw on important works covering Edwards's aesthetic, moral, and historical thought. There are too many of these to list, but among the most prominent are Roland Delattre's *Beauty and Sensibility in*

*the Thought of Jonathan Edwards*, William Danaher, Jr.'s *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards*, Norman Fiering's *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context*, and Avihu Zakai's *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History and Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of Nature*. Similarly, much important work has been done on Jonathan Edwards's philosophy proper. Amy Plantinga Pauw's *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* is the best recent work, though Sang Hyun Lee's difficult book *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* is also worthy of attention, as are both the Cambridge and Princeton Companions (edited by Stephen Stein and Sang Hyun Lee, respectively). This dissertation hopes to add to so solid a scholarly foundation by expanding it into the realm of political theory.

The broad structure of the dissertation will follow Edwards's works, delving into his thought systematically. It will begin with this chapter of general introduction to Edwards and his context, followed by a chapter analyzing Edwards's philosophy of history (drawing especially on *History of the Work of Redemption* and *A Faithful Narrative*). This is where the primary point of contact with politics and political theory will take place, given that politics exists within the historical order. Next will be a chapter discussing the human activity that drives history, beginning with that most important of human faculties: the will (*Freedom of the Will*). Following that will be a chapter on the aspect of the human person which Edwards believed drives the will, the affections (*Religious Affections* and *Some Thoughts*). Next will be a chapter discussing Edwards's view of those affections in their natural state, and consequently his view of humanity in its natural state (*Original Sin*). From here the dissertation will step from Edwards's anthropology to his theology, in the most literal sense of the word, his "theo-ology", his study of God's person. This will begin with a chapter on

the original intent of God for man in creation before man was marred by original sin (*The Nature of True Virtue* and *Justification by Faith Alone*). Following that will be a chapter on the goal of virtue, and indeed Edwards's view of the goal of God in all things (*The End for which God Created the World*). Finally the concluding chapter will summarize and synthesize the evidence laid out in the dissertation, showing the organic connection between politics and history at the beginning of the chain of Edwards's works and the nature of God in his goals for creation at the end. This final chapter will also engage the conclusions reached by Professor McDermott in his book on Edwards's politics. The goal of such a structure is to demonstrate the characteristics of human and divine nature at work driving the forces of history and politics.

This first chapter will lay out the historical and philosophical framework within which Edwards was writing, including the events of the Great Awakening and the theological backgrounds that helped shape him.

#### DEFINITION AND CHRONOLOGICAL DIFFICULTY OF TERMS

Before discussing the foundations of Edwards's political thought, a few comments need to be made concerning the terminology of this dissertation. First, in arguing that Edwards is in basic agreement with "historicist" and "conservative" thinkers and opposed to "revolutionary" ones, it will be useful to outline brief definitions for these terms. This dissertation will use the terms "historicist" and "conservative" to describe Edwards's thought, regarding them as largely synonymous. "Historicism," as defined here, will not assume that the particular events of life's historicity are in opposition to the ideas of

universality and transcendence.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the “historicism” of Edwards *combines* a belief in the historical nature of existence with a belief that man’s historical existence has universal meaning—meaning which is best understood as a manifestation of divine providence. In this respect, Edwards prefigures later thinkers such as Burke, Hegel, and, to a lesser extent, John Adams. All are in agreement that the fundamental characteristic of humanity is historical reality. Human beings are shaped first and foremost by the real, concrete events of their history, including the past as it moves into the present. Reason, ethics, the will, and all other aspects of humanity are in organic and ethical unity with each other and with Transcendence only when they are founded upon and placed within history. In this sense, “conservative” and “historicist” are both concerned with preserving and protecting this recognition of man’s dependence on the past for his insight into universal meaning. Neither term (especially “conservative”) should be confused with its current journalistic and political use.

By contrast, “revolutionary” thinkers, including Rousseau, Paine, and Marx, regard history as a mere prelude to a morally mandatory transformation of human existence. For these philosophers, authentic humanity is something fundamentally removed—and alternative to—historical reality. To become attuned to the Transcendent and to have a proper relationship with either God or other people requires one to turn against and to rise above history and enter into a community based on ahistorical, abstract, or purely imaginary notions—though different thinkers disagree about what should form the basis for such a transformed life. Some cite rights (Paine), some cite on an aspect of the person such as the

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<sup>4</sup> As thinkers like Leo Strauss and certain postmoderns have tended to do. See for an excellent example of this, Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965). Perhaps the most interesting postmodern thinker reflective of this kind of thought is Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (United States: Duke University Press, 1999).

will (Rousseau), and some cite idealized systems of economics or politics (Marx). All revolutionary thinkers see the goal to which mankind ought to aspire as extra-historical and as the result of overturning an historical heritage. (The latter is often even assumed to embody evil.) These two bodies of thought, “historicist”/“conservative” and “revolutionary,” are in fundamental tension with each other and have been since their earliest inception.<sup>5</sup>

It should be noted that it is, in a sense, anachronistic to put any of these labels on Jonathan Edwards. In his time Rousseau’s writings had barely been published and never made it to Edwards’s desk, and it was half a century too early for both Burke and Hegel. Consequently, Edwards’s writing can contain the seeds of both trends without being caught up in a contradiction. There is a parallel to this seeming inconsistency found in the future debates between Transcendentalism and traditional Calvinism in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century. Both claimed Edwards as a founding figure, and both show clearly the influence of his works and ideas. And yet, in the end, it needs to be said that the traditional Calvinists have a greater claim on Edwards than the pantheistic Transcendentalists, given that the Calvinists are more in tune with his most basic ideas. In just the same way, this dissertation claims that Edwards is more aligned with the mentioned historicist school of thought than with the revolutionary one. Despite occasional terminological appearances, Edwards’s basic

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<sup>5</sup> It should go without saying that the rough definitions given here merely scratch the surface of the various ways to articulate these two bodies of thought. This dissertation will, where appropriate, attempt to further refine the two sides as they relate to the topics under discussion (virtue, aesthetics, teleology, etc) and in the footnotes will give references where the reader may find further discussion of the issue. A good source that outlines each side of the discussion (from a conservative/historicist perspective) is Claes Ryn, *Will, Imagination, and Reason: Babbitt, Croce, and the Problem of Reality* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1997).



ideas are in important ways closely analogous to those of the historicists. As this dissertation will show, there is much more of Burke in Edwards than Rousseau.<sup>6</sup>

### THE CONTEXT OF THE GREAT AWAKENING

During the lifetime of Jonathan Edwards, the American colonies underwent a major social revolution, which upended the traditional order and paved the way for the American Revolution. This social revolution may be expressed in six steps<sup>7</sup>:

#### *1. The Traditional Order*

New England, though largely settled by Dissenters of the congregational variety, was a heavily aristocratic society. A handful of families dominated the politics and religion of the region, with most people exercising only nominal influence over local issues despite the theoretical supremacy of the congregations (an idea which transferred smoothly over to the civic polity in the form of the town meeting).<sup>8</sup> A remarkable example of this may be seen in the infamous Salem Witch Trials, where, despite the involvement of the community in the hysteria, actual decisions were in the hands of a very small group of men. This small group

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<sup>6</sup> For the Transcendentalist/Calvinist debates, see Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History* and Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008). A good parallel to Edwards's dual influence is that of Hegel, who had followers on both the right and the left (including Marx) in nineteenth century Germany. See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chapters 12 and 13.

<sup>7</sup> I am deeply indebted to George Marsden's biography of Jonathan Edwards for bringing this process to my attention. Though Marsden never spells it out explicitly, the kernel of this structure is found in chapter 17. George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). This is a structure first proposed and explored in depth by Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> See Walter McDougal, *Freedom Just Around the Corner* (New York: Perennial, 2004, 2005), Chapter 3, especially pages 57-61; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1939, 1982), Chapter XIV; and the dated (but still interesting) Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *The Puritan Oligarchy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947).

included preachers, magistrates, military officials, and wealthy merchants.<sup>9</sup> The ruling party, however ineffective at times,<sup>10</sup> generally held the obedience and respect of the multitude. This state of affairs changed drastically with the arrival of the worldwide phenomenon known as the “Great Awakening.”

## 2. *The Great Awakening*

The Great Awakening has been, since the work of Perry Miller in the early part of the twentieth century, increasingly brought under scrutiny by friend and foe alike.<sup>11</sup> Difficult to describe, let alone categorize, the Great Awakening is one of the most interesting and unique occurrences in American (and world) history. It will be explored in depth in a later chapter, here it merely needs to be pointed out that this was a wave of religious enthusiasm on an epic scale, stretching from Eastern Europe to what would become West Virginia, and from England to Georgia. Crossing denominational and social lines, the Great Awakening was the first truly public mass movement in American history.<sup>12</sup> With this religious upheaval, however, came a shift in the heretofore solid political and social landscape of the American colonies.

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<sup>9</sup> McDougal, 106-10; Frances Hill, *The Salem Witch Trials Reader* (New York: DaCapo Press, 2000); Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 1977), 37-60.

<sup>10</sup> For a prime example, see the abysmal failure of the colonies to capture Florida and Cartagena, Columbia, in the War of Jenkin’s Ear. See Reed Browning, *The War of Austrian Succession* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 21-29; and the remarkable eyewitness narrative Sir Charles Knowles, *An Account of the expedition to Cartagena* (London: M. Cooper, 1743).

<sup>11</sup> See especially Frank Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) for a broad discussion of the defenses and criticisms of the Great Awakening.

<sup>12</sup> For a picture of the extent of the Awakening, as well as an excellent narrative of its history in America, see Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

### *3. Disorder amongst the Leadership*

In 1739, at the height of the revival, the Presbyterian minister (and founder of the Log College, which was a precursor to Princeton) Gilbert Tennent published a sermon titled “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry.” In this sermon he argued that preachers who had not had a conversion experience should be removed from the pulpit.<sup>13</sup> This sermon, dropped into the midst of an already controversial event, highlighted a split that had occurred amongst the religious and political leadership.

Ministerial reactions to the Great Awakening had been mixed. Some preachers had wholeheartedly embraced the Awakening, even to the point of arguing that failure to participate and experience its effects implied an absence of true and vital religion (these were the so-called “New Lights”). On the other hand, some preachers had comprehensively condemned the Awakening, even going so far as to argue that to be swept up in movement was to demonstrate that passion had taken over the soul and swept away reason, thus implying an absence of true and vital religion (these were the “Old Lights”). Others, such as Edwards and the roving preacher George Whitefield, took a middle stance, which shall be examined in a later chapter.

What started out as a discussion quickly devolved into a debate, and then a printed-word shouting match. By calling for the expulsion of “unconverted” ministers, Tennent had demonstrated that the Old Lights and New Lights had finally split into irreconcilable factions. Even after the Awakening died out, the religious leadership in America never

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<sup>13</sup> Kidd, 59-60; Milton Coalter, Jr., *Gilbert Tennent: Son of Thunder* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1986), Chapters 3-4.

reunified with the same pre-Awakening solidity. This division did not merely affect the top of society, it was felt throughout the entire system, including the masses of people.<sup>14</sup>

#### *4. Disorder amongst the People*

With religious enthusiasm on the upswing and the clergy too busy with their own infighting to offer unified guidance, the people began to take more of their own affairs in hand. Decisions and activities that had been long left to the informal aristocracy now began to be noticed, and eventually controlled, by the congregations who had theoretically been in control of them all along. Church and civic finances, public works, and even (to a very limited extent) foreign affairs now came under discussion and review by assembled and motivated bodies of the people.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, a ‘body of people’ is an unruly affair even in the best of circumstances. The leadership, despite their own divisions, were quick to attempt to focus this motivation (on a local level) towards their own ends. Edwards, for example, encouraged his church to write a new covenant (the governing document of a New England church) which essentially reconstructed the church along nearly-Presbyterian lines, with the ministerial hierarchy having effective control. Many other churches enacted similar covenants, and even as the clergy bickered over theological perspectives on the Awakening they took advantage of popular distraction and division to remold the religious governance of New England in ways

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<sup>14</sup> Kidd, 156-73; McDougal, 133-34.

<sup>15</sup> Marsden, 291-99; Heimert, throughout, but especially chapter 4; Kidd, 174-88.

that solidified their own power.<sup>16</sup> By the end of these scrambling attempts to direct the livelier-than-ever people, it could be argued that a complete shift had taken place.

### 5. *The New Order*

Where New England had been theoretically a congregational society and practically a hierarchical one, following the Great Awakening this order had been completely reversed. The people had been directed into a series of social revisions (especially of church covenants) to create what was formally a hierarchical society. But, this society had been created by using the massed authority of the people, a circumstance which those people did not forget. While theoretically New England was now a hierarchical society, practically the congregations held the power.<sup>17</sup> The people acted accordingly, treating the leadership with less and less deference and increasingly as public servants, rather than public elders. Edwards himself encountered this when he was publically defied by several teenage children from his congregation, whose parents then refused to discipline them.<sup>18</sup>

The shape of the American colonies (especially New England, but including the Mid-Atlantic and Southern colonies to a lesser extent) was much transformed by the Awakening.

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<sup>16</sup> It would of course be an overstatement to argue that this happened in every circumstance, or that the ministers were acting out of pure selfishness and desire for power. Many, including Edwards, seem to have been clearly motivated by concern for their congregation and the desire to enable them to resist the extremes of the Awakening by putting in place institutional checks to prevent possible excesses. Moreover, there was a history of such restructuring in New England that stretched back almost half a century to the creation of the Half-Way Covenant, which was formed with similar intent. See Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Michael Hall, *The Last American Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988); and Paul Lucas, "Solomon Stoddard and the Origin of the Great Awakening in New England," *Historian* 59, no. 4 (1997): 741-58. For the changes in Edwards's church's covenant, see Marsden, 260-63.

<sup>17</sup> It must be remembered that this is largely on a local level. No national hierarchy was put in place, and even regional ministers' associations held only nominal power. This shift was something that occurred at the smallest levels of society, and for that reason was all the more a fundamental one. This is in contrast to the sweeping national changes that would carry France off in its own Revolution just over fifty years later...

<sup>18</sup> Marsden, 298-99.

The first mass movement in America had both unified and divided the colonists in such a way as to radically shift the nature of political and social life along the Eastern seaboard.<sup>19</sup> At every step of this transformation, Edwards was observing, analyzing, and transforming, excepting only the last (by which time he had died).

#### 6. *The American Revolution*

It would be not only an overstatement but blatantly false to say that the Great Awakening was the cause of the American Revolution. However, it would be equally false to deny that the Awakening *facilitated* the Revolution. One cannot imagine a rebellion garnering popular support prior to the events of the 1740s. Without the Great Awakening, the Revolution—had there even been one—could only have been a rebellion of the local aristocracy, similar to the attempt by Bonnie Prince Charlie to restore the throne to the Stuarts in the Jacobite rebellion.<sup>20</sup> This goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, and as such is only mentioned to highlight the importance of understanding the Great Awakening and the thought of its most philosophical supporter and participant, Jonathan Edwards.

This outline, then, provides the immediate historical framework within which Edwards formulated his philosophical theology. The rest of his life was spent attempting to analyze and explain the events of the Awakening, and develop an understanding of God and

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<sup>19</sup> This shift within the colonies is the point at which this dissertation breaks off, partly because so much scholarship has been done on the subject, and partly because Edwards did not live to see the final fruits of this transformation in the American Revolution.

<sup>20</sup> See Diana Preston, *The Road to Culloden Moore: Bonnie Prince Charlie and the '45 Rebellion* (London: Constable, 1995).

man which could interpret these events. This dissertation will extend the application of Edwards's philosophical reflection to the realm of politics.<sup>21</sup>

### THE CONTEXT OF THE THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

In addition to this historical context, some theological context drawn from both Edwards and his tradition will facilitate further exploration of his philosophy. The broadest context will be examined first, and then increasingly narrower lines will be drawn to provide boundaries within which Edwards's thought may be explored.

#### *1. The General Christian Tradition*

Edwards is firmly entrenched in the Christian tradition, and any delineation of his thought must begin with the broad outlines of that tradition. Christianity in its earliest sense for the purposes of this dissertation has three main points which set it off from other philosophical systems of the time:<sup>22</sup>

##### a) The Word of God

Christianity was born in a world in which divinity was largely considered to be utterly transcendent. Matter and man were separated from transcendent principles by an infinite gulf. The Platonic, Aristotelian, and Hellenistic divinities contemplated in supine splendor while the cosmos went about its business, with only occasional interactions between the two, and

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<sup>21</sup> Prior to the Awakening, Edwards was of course still a preacher and theologian with his own concerns and interests, including early versions of his thoughts on conversion and broader scientific questions (especially during his college years). For a sampling of his thought in this period, see Marsden, 59-81.

<sup>22</sup> Given how many philosophical systems were floating around the ancient world, it is of course exceedingly difficult to generalize. I've attempted to draw the broadest contrasts possible, with the understanding that there will always be exceptions. For more on the philosophical setting at the time of the rise of Christianity, see Paul Elmer More, *Hellenistic Philosophies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1923); Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, vol. 4 of *Order and History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974); and Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Greco-Roman Moralists*, The Teaching Company (CD) 2002. For discussions of Christianity's influence on (and occasional replacement of) these Classical philosophies, see Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010).

those largely of a spiritual and intellectual nature. “What”, asks Epictetus, “is the divine nature? Is it flesh? Be serious! Do we associate it with real estate and status? Hardly. It is mind, intelligence, and correct reason.”<sup>23</sup> The corporeal world was separated from the realm of divinity, and man could only connect with God by means of those human aspects which are themselves incorporeal, such as reason.<sup>24</sup>

Drawing on the Jewish tradition, however, Christianity declared that this was a false understanding of the both God and nature.<sup>25</sup> Rather, Christians posited, God has continually interacted with the world through a series of personal and intimate revelations of Himself to creation. “In the past,” wrote the author of Hebrews, “God spoke to our forefathers at many times and in various ways.”<sup>26</sup> Divine messages had repeatedly been sent to the world through various methods and across many centuries, and which had been gathered together in the Old Testament. So far they were in accord with Jewish doctrine. The divergence from that tradition comes when the author continues “But, in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son.”<sup>27</sup> With this declaration, Christianity now stands alone, apart from the Greek philosophers by its declaration that God is engaged in the historical and immanent details of the world, and apart from the Jewish theologians by its declaration that God’s Word is His Son. “Whom,” the author concludes, “He appointed heir of all things and through whom He

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<sup>23</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses in Discourses and Selected Writings*, trans. Robert Dobbin (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008), II.8.

<sup>24</sup> One of the clearest historical evidences of this was the attempt by the Emperor Julian the Apostate to find something in pagan theology with which he could counter the Christian Incarnation. The closest he could come was the declaration throughout the Roman Empire that all peoples ought to worship the sun as the point of connection between God and man. See More, 284-87.

<sup>25</sup> For a thoughtful reflection on this difference, see Eric Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation*, vol. 1 of *Order and History* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Hebrews 1:1 (NIV)

<sup>27</sup> Hebrews 1:2 (NIV)



made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful Word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."<sup>28</sup> The mingling of the transcendent and the immanent—especially the mingling of it in a person, and the further association of that person with “sin”—is the unique contribution of Christianity to the philosophical thought of the Classical world. All other contributions are logical outgrowths of this one declaration, including the two which are discussed below.

#### b) The Grace of God

Yet another variation Christianity introduced into the cosmopolitan philosophical world of the first and second centuries A.D. was the place of grace. “Grace”, in this sense, was generally contrasted with virtue. In engaging philosophical and theological questions such as “how may one know God?” or “how does one gain eternal life?”, the regular answer of ancient philosophers was “virtue,” particularly the virtue of a noble individual. A summary of Plotinus’ philosophy may be used to stand as an exemplar of such doctrines:

And so the philosophic life, that experience which springs from obedience to deep-lying instincts of our nature, will be a constant striving of the soul to know itself and its God. Growth in wisdom will be symbolized as an ascent from this world to another... This ascent of the soul will be by three paths, the aesthetic, the ethical, and the intellectual.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hebrews 1:2-3 (NIV)

<sup>29</sup> More, 180-81.

Built within man are both the desire and ability to raise ourselves up to God through making efforts at virtue, beginning with human nature and rising along a ladder of virtue to the divinity.<sup>30</sup>

Paul, on the other hand, offers an alternative means to God: that of grace. He writes in the Epistle to the Romans: “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”<sup>31</sup> Or, as Augustine says, “For grace is not rendered for works but is given gratuitously;” and again “God’s grace is not given in accordance with our deserts, since we see that it is given, and given daily, not only where there are no previous good deserts but even where there are many previous evil deserts.”<sup>32</sup> The contrast here is clear. Rather than man being virtuous and working his way to God, man is perceived as un-virtuous (“wicked”, to use the older phrase) and only set on the path of virtue by the direct intervention of God through grace. This leads, in turn, to a third difference.

### c) The Idea of Conversion

One much-overlooked difference between Christianity and classical philosophies (particularly those dominant from the first century B.C. through the third century A.D.) is the idea that man can change. Of course the ancients understood men both as individuals and as a whole to be equally capable of virtue and vice, but it was also understood that actions were

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<sup>30</sup> Constraints of time and space again force oversimplification, yet the point remains solid that the early Christians contrasted grace and virtue quite sharply. See also Eric Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, vol. 3 of *Order and History* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000) for a more thorough look at Classical ideas of virtue.

<sup>31</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *On Grace and Free Choice* in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy: Augustine, On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8.19; 6.13.

based on human nature, which was immutable. A lifetime of virtue capped by an act of vice merely revealed that the seeds of that vice had existed all along. So Plutarch writes

When a portrait painter sets out to create a likeness, he relies above all upon the face and the expression of the eyes and pays less attention to the other parts of the body: in the same way it is my task to dwell upon those actions which illuminate the workings of the soul, and by this means to create a portrait of each man's life.<sup>33</sup>

Actions, then, expose and declare the human soul, which in turn, according to all but the Epicureans, was immortal and immutable.<sup>34</sup>

Christianity, however, argues that not just an ethical shift is necessary, but an entirely new life; an upheaval of the subjective human being of such consequence that the soul is declared to have been created completely anew. So the Second Epistle to the Corinthians declares: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new."<sup>35</sup> A fundamental shift unlike anything in classical philosophy is declared by the authors of the New Testament.<sup>36</sup>

While these are only three of many philosophical diversions introduced into Western thought by Christianity which might be discussed, they are the three which are most relevant to a study of Edwards, particularly a study such as this one which is interested in his political thought. As will be seen, most of his reflection is going to be done within the framework of

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<sup>33</sup> Plutarch, "Life of Alexander" in *The Age of Alexander* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1973), 252.

<sup>34</sup> More, throughout, but especially the chapters on Epictetus and Plotinus; Johnson, throughout, but especially the lectures on Plutarch and Seneca. For the exception of the Epicureans, see Lucretius, *Of the Nature of Things*, trans. William Ellery Leonard (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1950), 96-101.

<sup>35</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17; cf. John 3:16, Galatians 6:15, etc.

<sup>36</sup> This is said with the full understanding that there were "turnings" of a sort in ancient philosophy. Plato declared the effect of love upon Socrates in the *Symposium*, while the Stoics taught that one could turn one's reason away from vice and to virtue. However, these (and other changes found in classical thought) were routinely changes of a single aspect of humanity, often either ethics or reason. Christianity taught a top-to-bottom shift in all of human nature, beginning with the soul in this world and ending with the eschatological change of the body. See Epictetus, *Enchiridion* in *Discourses and Writings*, as well as A.A. Long, *From Epicurus to Epictetus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

these three Christian doctrines: the Word of God, the grace and glory of God, and the idea of conversion. It is important to remember that while his reflections are often creative and unique, they are merely additions to a traditional body of thought that stretches back at least two millennia.

## *2. The Puritan Protestant Tradition*

In addition to being within the general Christian tradition, Edwards may further be categorized into the Protestant tradition, specifically its Puritan branch.<sup>37</sup> In one sense, of course, this is a meaningless category, since the New England colonies were almost exclusively Protestant anyway. Catholicism was largely limited to stories told by older generations who had lived through the Civil War and Glorious Revolution in England, and occasional exposure to French Canadian Jesuits via the wars with the Native Americans.<sup>38</sup> Yet even with that caveat, Edwards's solid entrenchment within Puritanism must be stressed. In the early eighteenth century, religion in the American colonies was beginning to fluctuate doctrinally. Arminianism was beginning to expand and challenge the traditional Calvinist hegemony.<sup>39</sup> Much of Edwards's intellectual effort was dedicated to responding to this challenge and defending Calvinist doctrine. This will be explored in depth in later chapters.

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<sup>37</sup> Itself a part of the broader Reformed tradition, which was dedicated to the continual reformation and correcting of the church. For a survey of Reformed thought and history, see John McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). There were also other Protestant influences in the colonies, e.g., the Dutch Reformed in New York, the Quakers in Pennsylvania, and the Anglicans in the Southern Colonies.

<sup>38</sup> Which, to be fair, was damning. At the instigation of the French Catholics, Native Americans destroyed the town of Deerfield, mere miles from Edwards. Marsden, 14-15.

<sup>39</sup> Marsden, 432-35. For a picture of the denominational divisions rising in New England (which this dissertation will largely avoid), see C.C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

Edwards's shaping as a Calvinist was largely the result of three major streams of influence, each of which had unique contributions to make to his doctrine and philosophical thought.

#### a) New England Calvinism

From the time of the landing of the Puritans until the mid-1700s, New England was a hotbed of devout Calvinism. While there have been numerous contemporary books and articles written on the history and doctrine of New England Calvinism, it is perhaps best merely to let them declare their own purposes. "We shall be", preached John Winthrop, "as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us."<sup>40</sup> The Calvinists of New England were not Anabaptist isolationists—no Amish quietude or modern American ideas of privacy prevailed there! Christians were to be a public display in their lives and in their society. Edwards absorbed this doctrine fully, even as it began to die off amongst the rank-and-file.<sup>41</sup> Whatever else his politics and ecclesiology are, they are to be *public*.

Yet, while affairs in New England were public, they were likewise personal. The great doctrines of the faith were applicable to each individual personally, not just as a conglomerated mass of citizens or church members. Sermon after sermon doggedly assaulted and provoked the individual conscience, demanding introspection, thoughtfulness, response, and change from the listener. For example, commenting on Matthew 25:2, Thomas Shepard relentlessly hammered his congregation with a string of questions and answers:

So, if you ask a believer that question, 'How do you know you are loved?'

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<sup>40</sup> John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" in *Issues in American Protestantism* ed. Robert Fern (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publishing, 1976), 10.

<sup>41</sup> This was perhaps most clearly displayed in Edwards's firing from his church. See Mark Dever, "How Jonathan Edwards Got Fired, and Why It's Important for Us Today" in *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things*, ed. John Piper (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

It is good to answer ‘with Christ, I am his sheep, for whom he has laid down his life, when I was lost and went astray.’

‘But how do you know that?’...

A man may know his blessed estate by these. The promises; ‘I love them that love me.’

‘But how do you know you love the Lord?’

There is the question!... [emphasis added]<sup>42</sup>

Shepard then proceeds to give a lengthy series of points which the listener may use to hold up against his own life for comparison to help him answer the questions. The point is, all theology was to end with practical and personal application. The mistake of the Medieval Scholastics was not to be repeated by withdrawing into airy speculation, every sermon was to end with a series of application points, and books of theology that rested on pure speculation were essentially non-existent. This becomes critical for Edwards, who was of a reflective bent more reminiscent of Origen and John Scotus than the hard-headed practicality of a Thomas Hooker or Solomon Stoddard.<sup>43</sup> He had to work especially hard in his public writings to keep from wandering into speculation and away from the immanent question at hand (as he often did in his journals and notebooks, which he simply called the “Miscellanies”).

These two points help to define the field upon which Edwards writings and thoughts are shaped, especially in his publications. While his personal reflections were allowed to wander a bit afield, the works sent out into the world were largely kept between the boundaries of “public model” on the one hand, and “personally applicable” on the other.

#### b) English Puritanism

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Shepard, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2006), 214.

<sup>43</sup> For a wonderful example of how this pragmatism has stuck with the New England culture, see Richard Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

Closely related to New England Calvinism was English Puritanism. Although by Edwards's day Puritanism had essentially died out, the heritage lived on in tradition and writing. There are too many influences to mention here (that could easily be the work of another dissertation), but what might be the summation of Puritanism is the comprehensive nature of the Christian religion. For modern Americans, the temptation is very much to compartmentalize. Work, family, religion, politics, and so on all have their own cubby holes with little overlap between the segments other than that provided by the self as it bounces between them. For the Puritans, however, life was an organic whole covered completely by the Christian Gospel. So the introduction to John Flavel's *Husbandry Spiritualized* says:

As man is compounded of a fleshly and spiritual substance, so God hath endowed the creatures with a spiritual, as well as fleshly usefulness, they have not only a natural use in alimental and physical respects, but also a spiritual use, as they bear the figures and similitudes of many sublime and heavenly mysteries.<sup>44</sup>

So nature falls under the umbrella of the Christian religion by providing a picture and image of "heavenly mysteries." This example could have easily been politics, education, family, or any other field of human existence; to the Puritan they are all bound together in an intimate relationship based on religious truth. Edwards likewise held to a holistic worldview jumping seamlessly from psychology to anthropology to physics to whatever would further his argument or engage the listener in his point.

### c) Continental Reformed

Flowing from Calvin through the Swiss, French, and Dutch Reformed thinkers, the continental systematizers (variously called the "Protestant Scholastics" or the "Reformed Orthodox") were among the most thoughtful and comprehensive of all the Protestant

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<sup>44</sup> John Flavel, *Husbandry Spiritualized* in *Works of Flavel Vol. 5* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 3.

theologians. Working with Aquinian thoroughness, these writers attempted a complete systemization of Christian theology and life in the context of historical philosophy. For example, Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* begins with a discussion of both Christianity and Aristotle:

First topic: theology.

First question: should the word "theology" be used in the Christian schools, and in how many ways can it be understood?

Point one: since according to the laws of accurate method, the use and true sense of terms are first to be explained as the philosopher Aristotle has it. For words are the types of things. Some words must be premise concerning the word "theology" before we come to the thing itself. But although the proposed question may seem hardly necessary in the common sense and in that received by almost all who should think it retained as a technical term and word, properly and emphatically declaring its subject, yet we must meet the opinion of those who dislike it because it does not occur in Scripture and is used to denote the false system of the heathen who judged that it would be more suitable to use other words drawn from Scripture.<sup>45</sup>

In the same way, Peter Van Mastricht's (who was in Edwards's library) *Theoretico-Practica Theologica* would have been an example of such scholarship. Calvin's *Institutes* would have contributed the devotional aspect to the scholastic exploration. Taken together, these theologians would have taught Edwards that theology and argumentation should be done carefully, and with excruciating attention to detail. No avenue of thought should be left unexplored, and no objection unanswered.<sup>46</sup>

Obviously, there's a great deal of overlap between these three traditions. The Puritans were likewise known for their attention to detail, New England Calvinists certainly believed in the comprehensive nature of religion, and the Continental Reformed believed very

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<sup>45</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), I.1.

<sup>46</sup> Here is a point of divergence between Edwards and Calvin. Calvin was very often happy to leave a question open when he didn't know the answer or thought it to be unanswerable. Edwards relentlessly plugged away at it, even when he believed it to be beyond the scope of human reason.



strongly that theology should have both a public and a personal application. What might be just as interesting (however little it is discussed in the literature) is what was *not* influential on Edwards in terms of theology. Certainly Eastern thought was completely off his radar, as was most Muslim scholarship. Even Eastern Orthodox writings and large segments of Catholicism were blanks to him. Which at times seems a great misfortune, given Edwards's delight in historical theology and the similarities between his speculation and those of the Medieval Eastern and Western mystics.<sup>47</sup> Even within the Western Protestant tradition, there were great swaths of thought with which Edwards seemed little familiar, including most Lutheran writings, the works of Augustine, and most (though not all) Anglican writings. All of this to show that when discussing or thinking about Edwards, however broad his thoughts might be and however far his speculation might reach, they are all the thoughts and speculation of one firmly entrenched within a particular tradition.

Yet, within that tradition, Edwards was aware of, and even at times an active participant in, the rise of a new order: that of liberalism.

### *3. The Liberal Tradition*

Today, Liberalism has become so broad and deep (or, as its opponents might say, "shallow") as to defy strict definition. Even by the late 1700s this could be said to be the case, as Burke in England, Rousseau in France, and Kant in Germany all spun their own versions of liberalism and helped to create the fractures that would split the movement (so far) irreconcilably. In Edwards's day, however, liberalism had not quite reached this level of

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<sup>47</sup> See especially Michael Gibson, "The Beauty of the Redemption of the World: The Theological Aesthetics of Maximus the Confessor and Jonathan Edwards," *Harvard Theological Review* 101, no. 1 (January 2008): 45-76.

brokenness. In fact, it could be argued that there were really only two major branches: scientific and philosophical.

The scientific side of liberalism was being heartily embraced by Christian and non-Christian (usually deists) alike. The ultimate example of this was Cotton Mather, who declared repeatedly the authority of the “incomparable Newton” and synthesized his considerable reading in modern science into a series of devotional texts, including *The Christian Philosopher*, which argued:

The Great God has contrived a mighty *Engine*, of an Extent that cannot be measured, and there is in it a Contrivance of wondrous *Motions* that cannot be *numbered*. He is infinitely gratified with the View of this *Engine* in all its *Motions*, infinitely grateful to Him so glorious a Spectacle!<sup>48</sup>

The work of scientists like Newton and Boyle was to summarize the physical universe with a handful of simple, elegant, and easily understandable equations. If all matter can be explored and even predicted by the mathematical study of its motion, the idea that similar equations could be discovered governing the actions and thoughts of mankind soon followed. This is where the scientific discoveries of liberalism began to influence, and finally to determine, the philosophical ones, a relationship between science and philosophy which exists to this day in certain strains of thought.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Quoted in Kenneth Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (New York: Welcome Rain Publishers, 2002), 249-51. See also Cotton Mather, *The Christian Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

<sup>49</sup> Works on the Enlightenment are legion. Ones which focus more on the American colonial context are fewer, but still numerous. Good works relevant to this dissertation (with even better bibliographies) include: Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Margaret Jacob, *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 2001); Barbara Oberg and Harry Stout, eds., *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Representation of American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Philosophical liberalism in Edwards's time was yet nascent. While he was a wholehearted supporter of Newton (one of his earliest writings was titled "On The Rainbow", and drew on Newton's *Optics*<sup>50</sup>), Edwards's relationship with liberal philosophers was a bit more complicated. In the early 1700s, "liberalism" was largely focused on two writers: Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Other minor figures, such as Francis Hutcheson, were also available (and read by Edwards), but less influential. Edwards had never read Hobbes (despite occasionally being compared to him), and so would have only been indirectly influenced.<sup>51</sup> It is in attempting to determine his relationship with Locke that difficulties begin to arise. There seem to be three major attempts to define this relationship.

The first argues that Edwards was a thoroughgoing Lockean. This was first and most strongly proposed by Perry Miller in his extensive works on Edwards.<sup>52</sup> This view is based on repeated declarations by Edwards that he enjoys and supports the works of Locke.<sup>53</sup> In recent years, this view has been rebutted, nearly to the point of being discredited.<sup>54</sup> And yet, the textual evidence from Edwards himself remains. To reject it is to argue that someone as philosophically brilliant as Edwards either adopted a position inconsistent with his own, or

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<sup>50</sup> Available in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume VI: Scientific and Philosophical Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980). For an analysis of the relationship between Edwards and Newton, see Wallace E. Anderson, "Immaterialism in Jonathan Edwards's Early Philosophical Notes," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25, no. 2 (April-June 1964): 181-200; Clarence Faust, "Jonathan Edwards as a Scientist," *American Literature* 1, no. 4 (January 1930): 393-404; and James Hewitson, "'As Ordered and Governed by Divine Providence': Jonathan Edwards's use of the Machine as Master Metaphor," *Interdisciplinary Humanities* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 6-20.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, Inc, 2001) 635.

<sup>52</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (United States: William Sloane Associates, 1949) 52-61, 64-68.

<sup>53</sup> See throughout Edwards's *Freedom of the Will*, where he repeatedly cites Locke as a source.

<sup>54</sup> See for a broad rebuttal Norman Fiering, *Edwards's Moral Thought and its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), and more generally Marsden, 60-64.

radically misunderstood Locke. This latter argument is the foundation of the second attempt to define the relationship between Locke and Edwards.

While some such as Miller have argued that Edwards was a Lockean in the liberal sense of the word, others have attempted to argue that Locke was actually a covenant theologian in the Edwardsean sense of the word. This argument suggests that Locke was focusing his thought around his received covenant beliefs, and attempt to square the new movement of liberalism with traditional Reformed Christianity. Though mostly a minority position, this saves Edwards without forcing him into a philosophical inconsistency by reinterpreting Locke. It is beyond the scope of this paper to argue for or against this position, it is merely pointed out as a possible alternative interpretation.<sup>55</sup>

The final position, and the one which this paper will take when such positioning is necessary, is that Edwards adopted Locke's language, but not his philosophy. That is, Edwards assumed the terminology and structure of Lockean philosophy, but applied them to the foundation of his covenant theology.<sup>56</sup> This resolves the fundamental differences between the two thinkers without severing their connection. Locke and Edwards can differ on fundamentals of human nature (human beings as a "blank slate" vs. a slate mired in "original

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<sup>55</sup> For the most thoughtful analysis of this, see David Walsh, *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), throughout, but especially 127-36, 150-59; and Joanne Tetlow, "The Theological Context of John Locke's Political Thought" (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2006).

<sup>56</sup> Anderson, 197-99.

sin”, for example<sup>57</sup>) while using the same terminology (for example, “powers” and “motives” that drive the will<sup>58</sup>).

The question “was Edwards a liberal?” is perhaps one best dodged. Or, at the very least, one best answered by saying “he was inspired by the nascent liberal tradition of his time.” Because he was more concerned with theological issues than political, scientific, or philosophical ones, he himself never demarcated the boundaries between his thought and that brewing in England. Even upon reading the openly-antagonistic-to-Christianity writings of David Hume, Edwards merely replied that “I am glad of an opportunity to read such corrupt books; especially when written by men of considerable genius; that I may have an idea of the notions that prevail in our nation.”<sup>59</sup> However Edwards is interpreted, it must at least be remembered that he was aware of the discussions going on in the broader world of liberalism.

#### A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

While it is not the purpose of this dissertation to delve too deeply into Edwards’s life and times, people are largely shaped by their experiences, and consequently any examination of someone’s thought cannot be removed from at least some exploration of that person’s life. Several excellent biographies of Edwards have been written in the past century, all worth reading. Ola Winslow’s *Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758* (1940) well deserved its Pulitzer Prize and stands as the major biography of Edwards of the twentieth century. Perry Miller’s *Jonathan Edwards* (1949), though highly questionable in some of its interpretations,

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<sup>57</sup> See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), 3-35, for his notions of a blank slate; see Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, vol. 3 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 120-27.

<sup>58</sup> See Locke, 175-223; and Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 5-36. The two sections, if taken out of context, would seem to be nearly identical. However, in context they are clearly working from two different foundations.

<sup>59</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 14n.

reintroduced Edwards to the academic world and reinvigorated Edwards scholarship in a way that had not been seen since the early 1800s and the commandeering of Edwards's language by the Transcendentalists and Revivalists of the Second Great Awakening.<sup>60</sup> Since then the Yale Works of Jonathan Edwards project has opened more of his private works to the general public, including important personal notes and letters heretofore unavailable. Iain Murray's *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (1987) provides important theological context, but essentially resembles more of a hagiography than a critical biography.<sup>61</sup> Most recently (and, for this dissertation, most importantly) George Marsden's *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (2003) and *A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards* (2008) synthesize both the best works of earlier biographers and the most recent scholarship in an eloquent and thorough narrative. Marsden's previous work on fundamentalism especially makes it a useful and thoughtful source necessary for any exploration of Edwards.<sup>62</sup>

The life of Edwards proper is quickly summarized. Born the only son out of eleven children to Timothy Edwards and Esther Stoddard (daughter of the aforementioned Solomon Stoddard), Edwards early on displayed great intellectual promise.<sup>63</sup> He began attending Yale just before he turned thirteen, which means that he had already mastered Latin, Greek and

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<sup>60</sup> Two groups whom Edwards would have considered mortal enemies, and yet who flagrantly stole Edwards's language, ripped it from its context, and plastered it over their own pantheistic (the Transcendentalists) and Arminian (Revivalists, especially under Charles Finney) doctrines. When both of these systems followed Calvinism in collapse, Edwards was forgotten or ignored by most scholars until the twentieth century. See Philip Gura, *American Transcendentalism* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 80, 120; and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 197-200.

<sup>61</sup> Marsden, xvii.

<sup>62</sup> George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>63</sup> He also, along with the rest of the family, displayed great height for the time. Edwards and his sisters all seem to have been over six feet tall, leading Timothy Edwards to quip that he had "sixty feet of daughters." Marsden, 18.

Hebrew, as well as having begun several other subjects (geometry, grammar, theology, etc).<sup>64</sup> He graduated as valedictorian and then stayed at Yale to pursue a Masters in theology. From there, he spent eight months as a Presbyterian pastor in New York City,<sup>65</sup> finally returning to Yale where he served as a tutor for two years. In 1727, Edwards was taken on as an assistant pastor to his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, in Northampton—the second largest church in New England. Two years later Stoddard died, and Edwards was kept on as senior pastor of the church.

A localized revival broke out in Northampton in 1733 and lasted until 1735, focusing Edwards on the idea of “revival” and where that fit into theology and life (a long-standing question amongst New England Christians). In 1739 what would soon become a world-wide revival (known later as the “Great Awakening”) was beginning to spread in the colonies by the preaching of George Whitfield. This revival spread up and down the Atlantic seaboard, encouraged by Edwards and other preachers through sermons, lectures, books and pamphlets. It was in the midst of this revival that Edwards preached and published his most infamous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. Following the end of the revival in the 1740s, Edwards spent the rest of his life attempting to summarize and analyze it from multiple perspectives. It became the inspiration for his most important philosophical works.

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<sup>64</sup> Marsden, chapters 1-2; Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), Chapters 2-3.

<sup>65</sup> Where, like Origen of old, he befriended a Jewish neighbor and observed the deep piety of his faith. Marsden, 48.

Following the revival, and a series of scandals which revealed the shortcomings of Edwards's personality,<sup>66</sup> Edwards was dismissed from his church. After an awkward year filling in for his former church as they searched for a new preacher, Edwards rejected several requests to fill pulpits in New England and Scotland, finally settling on being a missionary to the Native Americans in Stockbridge, Massachusetts (then a frontier town). It was at Stockbridge that he did most of his serious writing, including his treatises on original sin, free will, and virtue. Edwards lived and wrote for eight years in Stockbridge until he was appointed (very much against his will) president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) after the death of its previous president and Edwards's son-in-law, Aaron Burr, Sr. Less than a month later, Edwards died of a botched smallpox inoculation.

The sum of all of this is that despite living in eventful times, Edwards lived a relatively staid life. Much like John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas, the depth of his thought was built on a natural intelligence—not forged in the deep psychological experience of a Luther or an Augustine, or the traumatic physical events of an Ignatius Loyola or a John Bunyan.<sup>67</sup> Edwards's life *is* of course relevant to his thought, but it is much more his life as an observer and interpreter of great events surrounding him that matters, rather than great personal deeds. To study the thought of Edwards, therefore, is to study the events and

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<sup>66</sup> He was a jerk. Or at least, he was not at his best when dealing with those less intelligent than himself, which by-and-large was everyone. See especially the example of his handling of the "Bad Book Case." Marsden, 292-302.

<sup>67</sup> See William Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Dumb Ox* (New York: Image Books, 1956); Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New York: Image Books, 1992); Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Ignatius Loyola, *The Autobiography of Ignatius Loyola* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001); John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* in *Works of John Bunyan, Vol 1* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999).



movements of an era, rather than the psychology of a man.<sup>68</sup> His philosophy is a philosophy reflective of a tradition and a world in motion, not merely an individual mind reflecting on itself in Rousseauian isolation. Moreover, Edwards understood his work to be not the work of an individual writing alone, but of a figure writing on the great stage of history. Salvation, or the “work of redemption,” wrote Edwards in his sermons on the history of redemption, “is a work that God carries on from the Fall of man to the end of the world.” “It is from generation to generation, that is, throughout all generations.”<sup>69</sup> Edwards saw himself and his thought as merely another aspect of this historical redemption at work. And it is this subject—Edwards’s idea of history as the locus of redemption—which must now be examined.

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<sup>68</sup> This is not, of course, to downplay the works done on Edwards’s personality. His brilliant-but-staid mind has been the subject of multiple articles and works, including (but not limited to): R.C. DeProspero, “The ‘New Simple Idea’ of Edwards’ Personal Narrative,” *Early American Literature* 14, no. 2 (1979): 193-204; Terrence Erdt, *Jonathan Edwards, Art, and the Sense of the Heart* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006); Stephen Holmes, “A Mind on Fire,” *Christian History* 22, no. 1 (2003): 10-15; and Alan Heimert, “The Yale Edwards,” *Early American Literature* 20, no. 3 (1985-1986): 256-57.

<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 2003), 4.

## CHAPTER II: POLITICS AND HISTORY

Calvin: *I believe history is a force. Its unalterable tide sweeps all people and institutions along its unrelenting path. Everything and everyone serves History's single purpose.*

Hobbes: *And what is that purpose?*

Calvin: *Why, to produce me, of course!*<sup>1</sup>

*"But the "scandal" of biblical faith is that it took place in our kind of geography and history. Indeed, the incarnation itself is the epitome of the scandal, for it claims that God came in human flesh and dwelt among us. In that sense Jesus' "in-fleshment" is the midpoint of history and addresses all history as such."*<sup>2</sup>

That politics is a function of history, unfolding and developing as historical events march across the ages, is little contested.<sup>3</sup> Nations rise and fall; political leaders achieve greatness, infamy, or obscurity; and citizens and subjects participate in the processes of government all within the context of historical fact and event. What *is* contested is the question of what should be the driving force in politics. Should the ideals with which we approach government have a transcendent source, originating outside of the immanent and historical world and built on a foundation eternal and immutable? Or should politics be the compilation of a vast body of historical experience, slowly accumulating, fluctuating, and meandering as time passes, with transcendent questions only incidental to the day-to-day functions of government? This has been an ongoing debate in Western Civilization ever since, on the one hand, Plato declared unequivocally in *The Republic* that "the Good" is utterly transcendent and above the material realm and should be the driving force (through

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Watterson, *Scientific Progress goes "Boink"* (New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1991), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Kaiser, *The Old Testament Documents: Are they Reliable & Relevant?* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 177-78.

<sup>3</sup> "History", for the purposes of this work, is used in its traditional sense, as invented and defined by the Greeks, particularly Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon. That is, "history" is the idea of the linear progression of events and the advancement of humanity in the past that shapes the present and the future, as opposed to the cyclical view of the world propounded by earlier peoples which states that nothing ever changes, and that past, present, and future only affect each other in so much as they are the same. For the Greek establishment of history, see variously Herodotus, *The Histories*, ed. A.R. Burn, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (New York: Penguin Classics, 1982); Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, ed. T.E. Wick, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: The Modern Library, 1982); Xenophon, *A History of My Times [Hellenica]*, ed. George Cawkwell, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Classics, 1979); for a view of pre-Greek chronological thought, see H.W.F. Saggs, *Civilization before Greece and Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

the “ideas”) of the political world; and on the other Aristotle argued that politics is historical by nature and should be determined not by ideals, but by practical and common sense decisions.<sup>4</sup> For the Christian philosopher, the inclination is nearly always to lean in the Platonic direction by falling back on Transcendence as the source of political reality and action. The great philosopher of history R.G. Collingwood saw as problematic in Christian thought the idea that history is “of necessity universal, providential, apocalyptic, and periodized.”<sup>5</sup> That is, history for a Christian must be, at best, uniform at all times and places (universal), a temporary affair (periodized), utterly under the control of the divine whim (providential), and headed towards its own destruction (apocalyptic). Yet even for Christians, these issues have been a source of ongoing debate within the Western world ever since the discussion was started by Plato and Aristotle. The Hellenistic Philosophers, Augustine, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, etc, have all weighed in. In more recent years, however, the issue has become more pressing. The advent of the French Revolution and the conservative responses it fostered, the mass social movements of the nineteenth century, and the technological nightmares of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century have all worked together to force this question to the very forefront of political discourse. As someone writing on the very edge of the beginning of these great events, Edwards provides a

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<sup>4</sup> See Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941, 1973); Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, 1958); for an extended discussion of the differences between the two, see Eric Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, vol. 16 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000) and Charles Howard McIlwain, *The Growth of Political Thought in the West* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932). It must be remembered that there is not a clear-cut distinction between Plato and Aristotle. Plato certainly has a place for history in his philosophy, and Aristotle believes in the transcendent virtues. Nevertheless, they still reflect the two sides of this debate fairly well in their political writings.

<sup>5</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: A Galaxy Book, 1956), 49.

thoughtful and important means of looking at the question of the relationship between history and transcendence that is relatively untainted by the urgency and bloodshed that would follow in later decades of philosophers. Even more importantly, he provides an answer that keeps politics squarely in the historical realm without deemphasizing transcendence. In fact, the result of Edwards's thought is just the opposite. As will be shown, by locating politics within the realm of history, he gives politics a transcendent importance that it would not—could not—otherwise have. In fact, it will be argued that the weaknesses of Christian historical thought that Collingwood points out become its great strengths in Edwards's hands.

This chapter will examine this historical philosophy of transcendence and immanence in Edwards's thought, which in turn will form the foundation for Edwards's anthropology (the next three chapters), theology (the following two chapters), and political thought (the concluding chapter). This will be accomplished first by outlining Edwards's own historical writings, including *A Faithful Narrative* (in this context, Edwards's view of conversion will be examined); then by surveying his sermon series *A History of the Work of Redemption*; and finally by summarizing his millennial writings. Next, his historical thought will be analyzed within the context of the broader issues of Christian historical philosophy. Finally, his historical thought as it relates to the important issue of transcendence and immanence will be discussed.

Important work has already been done on this topic, and must be acknowledged.<sup>6</sup> First, Avihu Zakai's *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History* provides a thoughtful analysis of Edwards's sermons on *A History of the Work of Redemption*, largely by placing

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<sup>6</sup> A more recent addition to this body of study is Sean Michael Lucas, *God's Grand Design: The Theological Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

them in the philosophical context of his work as a whole. Zakai attempts to reconstruct the philosophy of history that Edwards never got to write. Second, Harry Stout's article "Edwards as a Revivalist" in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards* is useful for placing Edwards's understanding of history in its proper context within his broader philosophical and theological system. Finally, John F. Wilson's "History" in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (along with his introduction to Volume 9 of the Yale edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*) is a useful compilation of Edwards's historical thought drawn from the entire corpus of his works and briefly summarized. Together these works provide a solid survey of the most recent scholarship on Edwards's thought and writings on history. These writings will now be briefly summarized so that his thought may be more fully explored.

#### EDWARDS'S VIEW OF HISTORY: THREE IMPORTANT IDEAS

When thinking about Edwards's view of history, the context of the Great Awakening must be kept in mind.<sup>7</sup> It shaped and drove him, forcing him to deal with the minutia of historical events and facts and pushing him to take human nature as it is on display in action in the real world, rather than as it exists in the abstractions of mere intellectual speculation.<sup>8</sup> To this end, it is important to begin with Edwards's own historical narrative, his retelling of the events of the revival that swept through his region in the mid-1730s.

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<sup>7</sup> As well, of course, as the context of his theology in general, specifically his theology of grace and the Trinity. William Danaher argues, almost certainly correctly, that all Edwardsean theology must be traced finally back to his Trinitarian vision. See William Danaher, *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> This is especially difficult to remember if Edwards's philosophical writings are read by themselves. It is easy to forget that his more abstract philosophical ideas were written down in the 1750s, only *after* being forged in the tumultuous events of the 1730s and 1740s. This means Edwards had between ten and twenty years in which to meditate on the events that shaped his doctrine.

*A Faithful Narrative*

From 1734 to 1735, the Connecticut River valley was swept with a religious movement that was surprising even in a region known for its revivals. Isaac Watts wrote the Preface to the First (London) Edition, in which he noted:

‘Tis worthy of our observation, that this great and surprising work does not seem to have taken its rise from any sudden and distressing calamity or public terror that might universally impress the minds of a people. Here was no storm, no earthquake, no inundation of water, no desolation by fire, no pestilence or any other sweeping distemper, nor any cruel invasion by their Indian neighbors, that might force the inhabitants into a serious thoughtfulness, and a religious temper by the fears of approaching death and judgment. Such scenes as these have sometimes been made happily effectual to awaken sinners in Zion... But in the present case the immediate hand of God in the work of his Spirit appears much more evident, because there is no such awful and threatening providence attending it.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, this was neither a variation on the Salem Witch Trials nor the more modern conception of foxhole conversions. People did not cling to religion in a time of sudden catastrophe or out of fear brought about by natural disaster. This was, so far as the primary participants were involved, truly a “surprising” work of God. Edwards himself noted that

The people of the county, in general, I suppose, are as sober, and orderly, and good sort of people, as in any part of New England; and I believe they have been preserved the freest by far, of any part of the country, from error and variety of sects and opinions.... We being much separated from other parts of the province, and having comparatively but little intercourse with them, have from the beginning till now, always managed our ecclesiastical affairs within ourselves: ‘tis the way in which the county, from its infancy, has gone on, by the practical agreement of all, and the way in which our peace and good order has hitherto been maintained.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Isaac Watts, “Preface to the First Edition of *A Faithful Narrative*,” in Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, vol. 4 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 133.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighbouring Towns and Villages of Hampshire, in New England* in Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, 144-45. [Hereafter *Faithful Narrative*.]

In other words, things were as they always had been. True, there had been a slight upswing in immorality and party politics in the town, especially following the death of the authoritarian figure of Solomon Stoddard; Northampton and the surrounding region were in no way different from other towns in New England, nor had they undergone any changes in their own course of affairs.<sup>11</sup> And yet, in the fall of 1734, Edwards encouraged a group of young people “that they should agree among themselves to spend the evenings after lectures in social religion.”<sup>12</sup> That is, instead of the normal social events following the Thursday evening lectures,<sup>13</sup> they should gather and discuss the state of their own souls. Given the standard reaction of young people when told they should stop wasting their lives and clean up their acts, Edwards’s surprise is understandable when they did as he had suggested. Following this, a local prostitute (“company keeper”) was converted and came to Edwards for assistance. This seemed to be the springboard from which the revival spread to the entire town.

There was scarcely a single person in the town, either old or young, that was left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world. Those that were wont to be the vainest and loosest, and those that had been most disposed to think and speak slightly of vital and experimental religion, were now generally subject to great awakenings. And the work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner, and increased more and more; souls did as it were come by flocks to Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>13</sup> Which, according to Edwards, regularly included drinking, carousing, roaming the streets, and even petty vandalism. See *ibid.*, 146.

<sup>14</sup> Edwards, *Faithful Narrative*, 150.

The whole town was affected. Citizens began spending their time discussing religious questions, reading their Bibles, praying, and going to church meetings.<sup>15</sup>

Following his description of the beginning of the revival, Edwards spends a significant amount of time discussing particular conversions (which will be discussed below). Here, it needs to be pointed out how the revival drew to an end. Though orderly in its beginning, the revival eventually began to unravel as people experienced religious delusions. These included, according to Edwards, chiliasm and inducement to suicide. He reports that one man (who was Edwards's uncle) actually committed suicide, while others "had it urged upon 'em, as if somebody had spoke to 'em, 'Cut your own throat, now is good opportunity: *now, NOW!*'"<sup>16</sup> This led to a dying down of the religious fervor, and a return to the status quo, albeit with more people attending church and claiming to be converted. Such is Edwards's narrative.

Before turning to Edwards's view of conversion based on this revival, some points about revivals in general need to be made, especially given how the nineteenth and twentieth century "revivals" have shaped the modern perception of such events. First, although emotions in this revival ran high, they did not run amok. Though this was a problem towards the end of the Great Awakening (and a great problem through the Second Great Awakening, and with revivals ever since then), this seems not to have been a major issue in the Connecticut River revival. More importantly, it was largely not emotionally driven. What was inspiring people to take up religion were the great theological questions of the day.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 206-07. For the full story of the Connecticut River Valley revival, see Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 155-69; and Kidd, 13-23.



People were gathering to discuss religious issues and the state of their souls, not to let their feelings run away with them in mass hysteria.<sup>17</sup>

Second, revival is a social event. As religious affections grew among the people, they gathered together to discuss religion and religious matters. “All would eagerly lay hold of opportunities for their souls; and were wont very often to meet together in private houses for religious purposes: and such meetings when appointed were wont greatly to be thronged.”<sup>18</sup> Despite being an Evangelical and believing strongly that salvation is an individual relationship between the soul and God, there is no hermeticism in Edwards. Salvation has the effect of drawing one into a community, not isolating one from the world. Edwards would have openly rejected someone like Margaret Fuller, who turned her back on the church and went off by herself into the woods, where

I came to where the trees were thick about a little pool, dark and silent. I sat down there. I did not think; all was dark, and cold, and still. Suddenly the sun shone out with that transparent sweetness, like the last smile of a dying lover... And, even then, passed into my thought a beam from its true sun, from its native sphere, which has never since departed from me... [The] truth came to me, and I received it unhesitatingly; so that I was for that hour taken up into God.<sup>19</sup>

This misses the communal aspect which is an essential part, according to Edwards, of any relationship with God. While one might of course have a private religious experience in the woods alone, such experience must be brought back to the community and shared so that it

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<sup>17</sup> This is especially seen in the continued (at the time) popularity of the Puritan sermon, which held to a strict, logical structure that piled point upon point in a ruthlessly logical progression, culminating in undeniable application, leaving almost no room for emotional response. For more on the Puritan sermon, see Harry S. Stout, “Structure and Delivery of Puritan Sermon” (New Haven: Jonathan Edwards Center, Yale University), under “Part 3: Introducing Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” <http://edwards.yale.edu/education/one-day> (accessed July 26, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Edwards, *Faithful Narrative*, 150.

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Fuller, “Recollection of Mystical Experiences” in *The American Transcendentalists* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006), 160.

might be examined by and shared with others. This communal aspect of Edwards's thought will be further explored later in the dissertation.

Finally, it must be noticed that true revival actually changes lives. "Some that before were very rough in their temper and manners, seem to be remarkably softened and sweetened."<sup>20</sup> Examining the effects of conversion on the soul and determining signs which one might use to just the legitimacy of a conversion was the great project of Edwards's later years, culminating in what is arguably his most important book, *Religious Affections*. While this book will be examined in a later chapter, here it will be useful to survey Edwards's thoughts on the nature of conversion.

How does one change from a "non-Christian" into a "Christian"? What is the "turning" which the soul must undergo to make this transition? Of course this is going to be a subjective experience, varying from person to person in as many unique ways as there are individuals who undergo it (there is an objective and universal aspect of conversion as well, which will be discussed in a later chapter). Edwards fully realized this, and rarely rejected a conversion testimony simply because it did not fit the established pattern. And yet, amidst all this variety, there remains an underlying uniformity of experience connecting all the varied accounts. Edwards, as C.C. Goen points out, was uniquely qualified to explore this uniformity; first because he had access to large numbers of first-hand conversion accounts thanks to his office as pastor, his relative nearness to the great centers of communication in New England, and his connections with publishers in Boston and abroad; second because he had the language and tools of the new psychology first explored by John Locke, "thus

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<sup>20</sup> Edwards, *Faithful Narrative*, 208.

achieving an interpretation of religious experience that commended the evangelical scheme to many thoughtful persons”; and finally because his own publications would achieve popularity and influence such that the Edwards’s description of conversions became if not the pattern to be followed, then at least the ideal to be striven for by all future converts and revivalists alike.<sup>21</sup>

What, then, is this unifying pattern of conversion? According to Edwards, there are three steps in a conversion. First, the individual is convicted by a sense of his own sin. These “awakened” individuals will try to forsake their sinful practices by sheer strength of will. They will hold up the Mosaic Law to their own lives and make great efforts to rise to its standard. Practically, this means that they will try to justify themselves, especially through established religious means, such as going to church, praying, reading Scripture, talking to friends, and crying out to God. Through this struggle with sin, what rises to the forefront in the thoughts of the sinner is the full nature of the corruption of their own heart. This knowledge, that they are trying their hardest and only revealing their own corruption, then leads to fear, fear to terror, and then (usually, but not always) terror to greater efforts at religious duty and service, which in turn only further highlights the corruption of the heart, finally resulting in great despair. This then becomes Edwards’s second stage: despair in sin. This stage, according to Edwards, is most characterized by time. Some despair for hours, some for years, but in general there is a discrete period of time in which people despair. Here, Edwards notes, is where preachers must preach with careful clarity and kindness the un-

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<sup>21</sup> C.C. Goen, “Editor’s Introduction” in *The Great Awakening*, vol. 4 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 27. For Edwards’s relationship to publishers and his access to accounts of conversions, see, e.g., Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 279-80, 313-14, and Jonathan Edwards, *Catalogues of Books*, vol. 26 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

obligated mercy of God and the full sufficiency of Christ, so that the despairing sinner might avoid “the extremes of self-flattery and despondence.”<sup>22</sup> At the end of this time of despair, by God’s grace, the result is faith that God has in the Gospel done all that is necessary for salvation. Though the awakened remains convinced of the justice of God in his own damnation, he is also convinced of the utter mercy of God in his own salvation. This leads in turn to the third step: rapture in forgiveness. All the thoughts of the awakened sinner (now with the title of “Christian”) are turned on Christ, and a new (“regenerate”, to use the theological term) person lives where once there was only a sinful corpse. The entire world is seen with new eyes and a new perception, and all things take on a new tinge. Preaching that once was boring becomes exciting. Arguments that previously had no weight now seem eminently reasonable, and nature itself seems to take on a new face (Edwards himself talks about how he used to be afraid of thunderstorms, until he was converted, after which he delighted in their display of God’s power). Above all, the Christian has a deep and abiding sense of the greatness of the glory of God. “Several persons have had so great a sense of the glory of God, and excellency of Christ, that nature and life has seemed almost to sink under it; and in all probability if God had shewed them a little more of himself, it would have dissolved their frame.”<sup>23</sup>

Again, the two things which must be remembered about these schemata of conversion are that first, while the method of conversion is universal, it is not immutable. Though future

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<sup>22</sup> Edwards, *Faithful Narrative*, 168.

<sup>23</sup> Edwards, *Faithful Narrative*, 182. C.C. Goen gives a short comparison of Edwards’s view of conversion with the older Puritan view in his introduction to *The Great Awakening*, 25-32; while Edwards’s survey of conversion is found in *Faithful Narrative*, 159-91. For an extensive (albeit occasionally shallow) survey of Edwards’s thoughts on conversion and its implications, see William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2004), Lectures IX-X.

theologians and preachers (including Edwards's son) would solidify this pattern and deem any who did not meet it to be unconverted, Edwards himself maintained that this was only a guideline, not a *sine qua non*.<sup>24</sup> Second, this is no mere metaphysical structure, is a picture of a spiritual reality with real-world effects. The sinner is actually, historically, immanently converted. This should *affect* the life of the individual in question, a real change should take place which can then be observed, discussed, and explored further. This will be examined more in the chapter on the affections below, here the point which needs to be emphasized is that conversion is a historical event which occurs in real time and has actual consequences for the individual and the community.

The revival in Northampton seems to have brought to Edwards's attention the work of God in the broader scheme of history. Consequently in 1739 he began to preach a series of sermons titled "The Work of Redemption" in which he discussed the process of salvation in and through history, and it is this work which must now be analyzed.

#### *A History of the Work of Redemption*

First preached in 1739 as a sermon series, *A History of the Work of Redemption* was edited and published as more of a narrative work in 1774 in Edinburgh.<sup>25</sup> Despite the editorial differences between the two,<sup>26</sup> the broad themes and structures of the works remain the same. Structurally, Edwards breaks history into three categories: 1) From the Fall to the

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<sup>24</sup> Edwards to Thomas Prince, Northampton, December 12, 1743, in *The Great Awakening*, 556-57. See also C.C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England*, 45-54.

<sup>25</sup> John F. Wilson, "History," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 211-12.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the differences between the two versions, see John F. Wilson's introduction to Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, vol. 9 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). The Banner of Truth publication of the 1774 edition will be used unless otherwise noted, and will be cited as *History of the Work of Redemption*.

Incarnation; 2) From the Incarnation to the Resurrection; 3) From the Resurrection to the end of the world. He declares the purpose of the work to be to demonstrate the doctrine that “the work of redemption is a work that God carries on from the Fall of man to the end of the world.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, the goal is to highlight redemption as a historical event, as something which plays out across the centuries of history. To that end, Edwards first defines redemption (in both the narrow and the broad sense), and then explores how this redemption is applied through time, focusing especially on the Old Testament and New Testament histories, but including post-Biblical events. This will be explored in greater depth below.

Tantalizingly, Edwards declared that this series of sermons was *not* his final historical opus. Indeed, when offered the position of President of the College of New Jersey, Edwards sent a letter to the trustees declaring that one of the reasons he could not in good conscience accept the offer was because he still had a historical work to write:

I have had on my mind and heart (which I long ago began, not with any view to publication) a great work, which I call *A History of the Work of Redemption*, a body of divinity in an entire new method, being thrown into the form of an history, considering the affair of Christian theology, as the whole of it, in each part, stands in reference to the great work of redemption by Jesus Christ; which I suppose is to be the grand design of all God's designs, and the *summum* and *ultimum* of all the divine operations and degrees; particularly considering all parts of the grand scheme in their historical order. The order of their existence, or their being brought forth to view, in the course of divine dispensations, or the wonderful series of successive acts and events; beginning from eternity and descending from thence to the great work and successive dispensations of the infinitely wise God in time, considering the chief events coming to pass in the church of God, and revolutions in the world of mankind, affecting the state of the church and the affair of redemption, which we have an account of in history or prophecy; till at last we come to the general resurrection, last judgment, and consummation of all things; when it shall be said "It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End" [Revelation 22:13]. Concluding my work, with the consideration of that perfect state of things, which shall be finally

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<sup>27</sup> Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, 4.

settled, to last for eternity. This history will be carried on with regard to all three worlds, heaven, earth, and hell: considering the connected, successive events and alterations, in each so far as the Scriptures give any light; introducing all parts of divinity in that order which is most scriptural and most natural: which is a method which appears to me the most beautiful and entertaining, wherein every divine doctrine, will appear to greatest advantage in the brightest light, in the most striking manner, showing the admirable contexture and harmony of the whole.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, smallpox finished Edwards before Edwards finished this work. The language of the proposed work here suggests at least some connection between the sermon series of 1739 and the proposed theology of history of 1757. Most scholars assume that the sermons form a sort-of “rough draft” for the broader theological work.<sup>29</sup> And while this is likely true, it also appears that Edwards had such an expansion in mind that the final product would be reminiscent of Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. The best reconstruction of Edwards’s philosophy of history and the context in which it was shaped is provided by Avihu Zakai, and will be discussed below.

What is consistent with both the sermon series and the proposed work in the letter to the Trustees is the focus of history: history must be considered as a whole. That is, history is a unitary progress “from the Fall of man to the end of the world.”<sup>30</sup> History, therefore, at all times gains its meaning and value from the same source. This is not a new idea in Christian thought, Augustine too had demanded that history find its meaning outside of itself. Where Edwards “departed from Augustine”, however, “was in looking toward the future for the

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<sup>28</sup> Edwards to The Trustees of the College of New Jersey, Stockbridge, October 19, 1757, in *Letters and Personal Writings*, vol. 16 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 727-28.

<sup>29</sup> See Wilson, “History”, 210; and Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, throughout, but especially 4-7.

external reference point... rather than to the past.”<sup>31</sup> The value of history for Edwards, as it had been for Aristotle, was in its telos, its goal. In one sense, this goal had already been met in the salvation accomplished through the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection (which comprises the second, and most important, stage of Edwards’s *History of the Work of Redemption*). Yet, though those events the *center* of history, they are not the *end* of history. This can be seen if by no other means, at the very least by the continuation of history since those events. Even more important for Edwards was the idea that those events themselves had to have goals. The Crucifixion was not the result of a Divine whim, it was planned with a specific goal in mind. That goal, for Edwards, likewise becomes the telos of history. Of course the goal, as already stated, is the goal of redemption. But here Edwards wants to be very clear in his definitions. It is possible to define “redemption” in a very narrow sense, meaning specifically the work of Christ in the first century A.D.

But then sometimes the work of redemption is taken more largely, including all that God works or accomplishes tending to this end; not only the purchasing of redemption, but also all God’s works that were properly preparatory to the purchase, or as applying the purchase and accomplishing the success of it. So that the whole dispensation, as it includes the preparation and the purchase, and the application and success of Christ’s redemption, is here called the work of *redemption*.<sup>32</sup>

So for the sake of his sermon series (and his broader philosophy of history), “redemption” is not merely the act of salvation, but all of the works of Divinity within and upon history. But such works will not be finished, or even fully revealed, until history has reached its culmination, in Christian doctrine and event which occurs at the end of the world and the

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<sup>31</sup> Wilson, “History”, 221.

<sup>32</sup> Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, 6.



return of the Christ. Consequently, history for Edwards is intimately tied to eschatology. And it is Edwards's eschatology which must now be summarized.

### *Last Things*

Edwards was not a consistent or systematic eschatological thinker, a fact which makes the study of his thought in this area difficult under the best of circumstances. This can be seen in the selection of "apocalyptic writings" selected for the Yale Volume, which include: Edwards's notes and comments on the book of Revelation; a defense of his support for and participation in a sort-of "international day of prayer"; quotes pulled from other commentaries on Revelation; and Edwards's observations on certain newsworthy events and how they might connect to prophecy. Likewise there are scattered through his other writings the occasional mention of a millennium or prophecy being fulfilled, including the much-debated comments that "'tis probable that... the most glorious renovation of the world shall originate from the new continent, and the church of God in that respect be from hence" and

if we may suppose that this glorious work of God shall begin in any part of America, I think, if we consider the circumstances of the settlement of New England, it must needs appear the most likely of all American colonies, to be the place whence this work shall principally take its rise.

And if these things are so, it gives us more abundant reasons to hope that what is now seen in America, and especially in New England, may prove the dawn of that glorious day: and the very uncommon and wonderful circumstances and events of this work, seem to me strongly to argue that god intends it as the beginning or forerunner of something vastly great.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival in The Great Awakening*, 353-58.

Though Edwards later backed off from these statements, what is clear is that he is thinking pastorally and in terms of immediate application, rather than systematically and in terms of his broader theological framework.<sup>34</sup>

Stephen Stein breaks Edwards's thought into three broad periods: 1) Edwards's early years (from his time at Yale through 1733), in which he read the book of Revelation typologically; 2) the Great Awakening (1734-1748), where Edwards began to reflect more publically on the movement of history towards its final eschatological goal, especially in the context of the Awakening in New England; 3) Edwards's last decade (1748-1758), where he began to think more systematically, and planned to include in his proposed history of redemption a doctrine of these last things.<sup>35</sup> From these periods, Stein draws several broad points which are of immediate interest to the context of a study of Edwards's philosophy of history. First, eschatology, like history, must be viewed as a whole. There is an intimate and unbreakable connection between "first and last things", a truth which Edwards explores in depth in *The End for which God Created the World* (to be discussed in a later chapter). That is, the eschaton cannot be separated from creation, both of which together define the stretch of history between the two.

Second, this connection between the creation and the eschaton is governed by Providence. This served the dual purpose of establishing an unshakable unity and consistency between the three (creation, apocalypse, and history), while at the same time providing a

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<sup>34</sup> For more on Edwards's eschatology see Reiner Smolinski, *The Kingdom, The Power, & The Glory: The Millennial Impulse in Early American Literature* (Dubuques, IA.: Kendall & Hunt, 1998); and John F. Wilson, "History, Redemption, and the Millennium" in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Stein, "Eschatology," in *The Princeton Companion*, 227.

response to the deists' belief that God established the universe and left it under the control of mechanical natural laws.<sup>36</sup> Third, history moves forward by means of the Holy Spirit. The administering force in creation is the Spirit, which directs and focuses people and events in the direction ordained by Providence. This is important, as it ties in directly with Edwards's anthropology. While, in Edwards's theology, God certainly can and does move in creation through direct physical action (miracles, natural disasters, good harvests, etc), his primary point of interaction with mankind is internal through the work of the Spirit. This means that revivals become especially important as historical forces and methods of advancement.<sup>37</sup>

Fourth, the eschaton will be the place of resolution of the history-spanning conflict between Christ's kingdom and its opposition. This opposition has taken various forms through history, all of which will ultimately be defeated.<sup>38</sup> Finally, "the final stage of the eschatological process... will not, in fact, be final." The return of Christ and the separation of the world into heaven and hell are the beginning of two "progressive states [that] will continue forever." In heaven, joy will increase eternally, while in hell suffering will never end. "There is literally no final point in eternity." The end state of mankind is one of eternal progression. History, in that sense, is itself only a shadow and type of the coming state of things after the return of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Stein, 239; see Zakai for Edwards's use of history in response to deism.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 239-40.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 240. For more on the eternality of heaven, see Sam Storms, "Joy's Eternal Increase: Edwards on the Beauty of Heaven," Desiring God Web site, streaming audio file, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/ joys-eternal-increase-edwards-on-the-beauty-of-heaven> (accessed June 8, 2011). For more on the eternality of hell, see Jonathan Edwards, *Unless You Repent: Fifteen Previously Unpublished Sermons on the Fate Awaiting the Impenitent* (Orlando, FL: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005).

In sum, though Edwards never did achieve the same level of thoughtful systematization in his eschatological thinking that he did in other areas (such as his anthropology or his soteriology), in tying it to his historical thinking he nonetheless gave both eschatology and history a unified importance not often otherwise achieved in Christian thought. Where Augustine had declared the eventual and final separation of the City of God from the City of Man, Edwards, without disagreeing with Augustine, pointed out that as they exist in time the two are connected together and moving towards the same end. It is this which must now be explored in order to come to Edwards's understanding of the place of politics in this historical and eschatological scheme.

#### HISTORY IN ITS CONTEXT: WHAT GOOD IS IT ANYWAY?

One of the reasons Collingwood's declaration that the "universal, providential, apocalyptic, and periodized" nature of Christian history is problematic is that Christians themselves often disagree over how best to interpret and analyze history. Here it will be useful to briefly examine this disagreement and place Edwards within the debate, since one interpretation of Edwards's philosophy is that he took what Collingwood saw as a limitation and made it the great strength of Christian historical thought. The debate within Christianity over the nature of history will highlight the characteristics and strengths of Edwards's philosophy of history. This section will draw largely on the important work of Avihu Zakai's book *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment*. In this book, Zakai argues that Edwards's proposed philosophy of history would have been a response to trends emerging from the Enlightenment that tended to mechanize and de-personalize history to the point where a sharp line would have been drawn

between God (the transcendent) and history (the immanent). To that end, Zakai, drawing on the works outlined above, attempts to reconstruct the philosophy Edwards never got to finish.<sup>40</sup> This philosophy is one which draws on the two lines of thought in the Christian tradition which have existed in tension with each other almost since the very beginning of the religion. Edwards, in his writings on revival, the history of redemption, and eschatology, achieves a theological reconciliation between these two lines of thought that both forms its own philosophy of history and provides the basis for a political philosophy. First, these two lines of thought will be outlined, then it will be shown how in reconciling these two lines of thought, Edwards develops a philosophy of history that draws on the strengths of both, while largely avoiding their pitfalls.

*History: Place of Redemption or Place from which to Escape?*

Some writers have seen history as the place for Christianity to work itself out. The early church historian Eusebius (275-339), for example, declared the conversion of Constantine to be the beginning of the triumph of Christianity in the world. Eventually the light would be carried to all corners of the earth under the protection of the Roman legions.<sup>41</sup> Another early Christian historian took the same idea and moved in a darker direction. For Gildas the Wise (~494 - ~570), it seemed likely that history would be the place of

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<sup>40</sup> While Zakai truly does an excellent job of building an Edwardsean philosophical system, there is a sense in which his work contains a few anachronisms. The Enlightenment, even at the time of Edwards's death in 1758, still hadn't made the complete break with Christianity that would come with the generation (slightly younger than Edwards) of Hume and Voltaire. Though of course Edwards was disturbed by what he saw as trends towards deism and atheism, it could be argued that Zakai stretches a bit in having Edwards respond to issues that weren't yet fully developed.

<sup>41</sup> Eusebius. *History of the Church*, trans. G.W. Williamson (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), Book II.

Christianity's extermination.<sup>42</sup> Both of these authors, along with numerous other Christian historians and thinkers, saw their faith as unfolding historically.<sup>43</sup> This position has the strength of being both practical and applicable to the real world, and helps resist the tendency to escape into amoral abstractions. On the other hand, it can lend itself to extreme millennialism and a mixing of church and state to the point where the two can become indistinguishable.<sup>44</sup>

As an alternative position, some writers have seen history and Christian experience as utterly separate. This is not, of course, to say that they believe that Christians do not live *in* history, but more that becoming a Christian elevates one's life spiritually *above* history to a transcendent realm, sometimes to the point where history is ignored or even disdained and withdrawn from. Examples of this may be found in certain of the writings of Augustine (354-430). This thinker drew a radical distinction between history and Christianity, between the "city of God" and the "city of man."<sup>45</sup> For Augustine,

History is not the realization of God's redemptive activity. Divine providence... is concerned with salvation, not with history as such, and therefore the intrinsic dualism

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<sup>42</sup> Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae* (London: British American Books, 1984), Book I.

<sup>43</sup> Other notable examples include the Venerable Bede, Thomas Aquinas, Joachim, et al. For a modern survey of the transition of theological historical thought, see Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

<sup>44</sup> For the strengths of this position, see any of the works of Claes Ryn, but especially *Will, Imagination, and Reason: Babbitt, Croce, and the Problem of Reality* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1997); and Peter Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010). For its weaknesses, there are numerous writers which may be approached, but especially see A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); and Edward Gibbon, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, vol. II of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: The Folio Society, 1984). This position might very well culminate politically in the interesting theological position known as "theonomy," loosely founded by R.J. Rushdoony in his *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1980). This movement argues that the law as laid out in the Torah ought to be adopted by modern nations.

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dodds (New York: The Modern Library, 1993), Book I; Zakai, 177-78.

characterizing the historical process, the struggle between the heavenly and the profane cities would be resolved only *beyond* time and history.<sup>46</sup>

While history is the field upon which good and evil fight their battle, because this battle will not be resolved until after history has ended, history itself remains empty of any particularly divine meaning.<sup>47</sup> This thought was echoed in the writings and teachings of Johannes Scotus Erigena, who fused Neo-Platonic ideas with Christian doctrine. He argued that creation and salvation both begin with God and end in a return to God, making history (and nature) merely a waypoint along this path. Salvation, for Erigena, was not the result of a historical action, but rather is the result of Christ's character in and of itself. History, therefore, has little relevance to the Christian. Though Erigena's writings were condemned, the anti-historical strain in Christianity (of which he was one of the more extreme voices) has lived on.<sup>48</sup> The strengths of this position are that one who fully embraces it is unlikely to cut ethics out of his worldview. A pursuit of purity despite whatever historical opposition might arise clearly marks this stream of Christian thought. Its weakness is a tendency towards escapism, abstraction, and outright amoral Gnosticism. In seeking to escape from the confines of history into the transcendent realm, despising the immanent of this world easily leads to all sorts of worldly mischief.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Zakai, 178.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> For Erigena's context and a summary of his writings, see Philip Schaff, *Medieval Christianity From Gregory I to Gregory VII A.D. 590-1073*, vol. 4 of *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2006), 761-74; Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 400-07; and Dierdre Carabine, *John Scotus Eriugena* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>49</sup> In its most extreme incarnations, the anti-historical tendency in Christianity has set the first great commandment against the second. In the name of the love of God, neighbors have been scorned, abused, and even persecuted. For the strengths of this position (in addition to Augustine's writings), see John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994); Stanley Hauerwas,

Edwards in his philosophy of history draws on each of these streams of thought within Christian theology and works them into his overall doctrine, and in doing so takes on the strengths of each position, while the unique characteristics of his philosophy of history help him to avoid many of their pitfalls.

*Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History*

In analyzing the various historical and eschatological works Edwards penned throughout his life, a general view of his philosophy of history begins to emerge. One sees, for example, where Edwards draws together the two conflicting streams of thought described above. In line with Augustine, Edwards's view of history is universal and apocalyptic. "The whole divine plan in creation has no meaning if some beings existing in history do not transcend the end of the world."<sup>50</sup> That is, there is a transcendent eschaton beyond history which has inherent value. The world will come to an end and those who have been redeemed will ultimately arrive at a place outside of history. So, even though the Divine activities of salvation and redemption take place within history, they result in a removal from and beyond history.<sup>51</sup> The eschatological component of Edwards's thought would seem to negate the worth of history in itself.

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*The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (South Bend: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); and more recently, Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008). For the weaknesses of this position, see H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 2001); Michael Gerson and Peter Wehner, *City of Man: Religion and Politics in a New Era* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010); and David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> Zakai, 203.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.



Yet Edwards also had points of agreement with Christian historians like Eusebius, for the idea of revival (or Awakening) made history providential and periodized.<sup>52</sup> While history does culminate in its own eschatological destruction, historical action is still necessary to that end, specifically, historical action which occurs through the movement of God in revivals throughout the world. The work of redemption, therefore, occurs (through revivals, which will be discussed in a later chapter) historically. God's actions in the past and present are designed to bring about the culmination of his plan of redemption in the future, but being future-oriented does not make the present and the past less necessary. The difference between Eusebius and Edwards is one of *where* history has its value, not *whether* history has value in the first place. While Eusebius saw the grand culmination of Christianity as something which occurred in history, Edwards saw history as a process designed to bring about the grand culmination of Christianity outside of history within the eschaton. Though not going as far as thinkers like Eusebius, Edwards certainly valued history far above thinkers like Augustine or Erigena.

The combination of the two different Christian views led Edwards to define a history oriented towards the transcendent, yet also one in which historical time and physical space are necessary components. Even more, he believed that the historical time and physical space received the "necessity" (value) of their components from the transcendent end at which they are aimed.

The essence of this ideology of history is the radical way in which Edwards associated God's work of redemption and the wider issue of the ultimate cause and

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<sup>52</sup> Edwards was less sympathetic to the darker view of Gildas. Since there was no "golden age" after the Garden of Eden, there's no particular reason to favor one historical period over another, and hence no reason to consider one period of time as worse than another.

reason for which God created the world. In other words, he identified God's work of redemption with the whole span of history. As he came to believe, there is no history without redemption, no redemption without history.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, history gains its meaning and its motion from the eschatological principals towards which it is moving. It has value specifically because there will come a point when it is no more. The events of history are oriented towards God's plan of redemption, and God's plan of redemption will culminate with the destruction of history in its absorption within the transcendent eschaton at the end of time. But it is this destruction that makes history intrinsically valuable. "Against the scientific culture of his time and the Enlightenment perception of history... Edwards's aim was to reinforce the religious mode of being and to fight the dispossession of the sacred from space and time,"<sup>54</sup> with the "sacred" possessing "space and time" (history) in the first place because that is where redemption occurs.

Edwards's eschatology, therefore contributes to his philosophy of history a sense of transcendent meaning. History has both transcendent and immanent value because it is moving towards its own end. As a complement to this eschatological work, Edwards's historical studies and sermons on the "History of the Work of Redemption" provided the immanent setting for this transcendent movement.

When it is said that this is a work that God is carrying on from the fall of man to the end of the world, what I mean is that those things that belong to this work itself are parts of that scheme, are all this accomplishing. There are things that are in order to it that are before the beginning of it, and fruits of it that are after it is finished. But the work itself is so long a-doing even from the fall of man to the end of the world; it is all this while a-carrying on. It was begun immediately upon the fall and will be continued to the end of the world and then will be finished. The various dispensations of God that are in this space do belong to the same work, tend to the same design, and

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<sup>53</sup> Zakai, 186.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 191.

have all one issue and therefore are all to be reckoned but as several parts of one work, as it were several successive motions of one machine to strike out, in the conclusion one great event.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, all the details, events, and facts of history are a part of this transcendent work of redemption. Just as gears each have their individual function and yet still participate in the whole movement of the machine, so do the details of history have both their own existence and a place in the transcendent scheme.<sup>56</sup> The bulk of Edwards's sermon series is the examination of Old Testament, New Testament, and church history events and the attempt to fit them into the plan of the redemptive work (with Edwards's conclusion being that history until the Incarnation is preparatory, from the Incarnation to the Resurrection is implementation, and from the Resurrection to the end of the world is application).

But this raises the question of the nature of the interaction between the transcendent and the immanent. If God is indeed moving in history, what means does he use to do so? Of course, as a Christian theologian, Edwards believes the ultimate movement of God in history is accomplished when He enters it physically in the person of Jesus Christ. This is the center of the redemptive work, and the point at which the ultimate purpose of history is achieved.

So Edwards writes of the moment of the crucifixion:

Under these sufferings Christ, after having cried out once, and again, at [his] last hour said, "It is finished," John 19:30, "bowed the head and gave up the ghost."  
And thus was finished the greatest and most wonderful thing. Now the angels beheld the most wonderful sight that ever [was]; the main thing that had been pointed at by the ceremonial law, all typical dispensations, all sacrifices, from the beginning of the world.

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<sup>55</sup> Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Edwards's use of the machine metaphor should not be confused with the Deists' use of the same image. For Edwards, it was an analogy and nothing more. For the Deists, the machine was an accurate description of the workings of nature since the creation. Zakai goes to great pains to point out the difference between the two, despite their similar use of terms and images.

And Christ being thus brought under the power of death continued under [it] till the morning of the next day but one. And then was finished that great work, the purchase of our redemption, that such great preparation had been made for from the beginning of the world. Then was finished all that was required in order to satisfy the threatenings of the law, all in order to satisfy divine justice, the utmost that vindictive justice demanded, [the] whole debt paid. Then finished the whole of the purchase of eternal life. And now there is no more need of anything more [to] be done towards a purchase of salvation for sinners, nor has ever anything been done since, nor ever will anything more be done, for ever and ever.<sup>57</sup>

In dying on the cross in the place of sinners, Christ had completed the work of salvation that was the meaning and goal of creation in the first place, the sins of the people of God had been lifted off of them and God's anger against them exhausted in the death of Christ. This event was an act that not only occurred in space and time, but is according to Edwards the greatest event which ever has occurred or ever will occur in history. "Then finished the whole of the purchase of eternal life." Because of the cross, the relationship between God and man, transcendence and immanence, is restored and history's meaning is accomplished.<sup>58</sup>

This event alone, however, cannot be the fullness of Edwards's (or any Christian's) philosophy of history, since it was a one-time occurrence. Even with this redemptive event being the center of history, there must be some means by which its significance is carried throughout time. Consequently, in addition to having this central, one-time interaction with history, Edwards believed that there was a continuing relationship between God and creation that exists unbroken through the entire sweep of time. The question he was engaging was:

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<sup>57</sup> Edwards *History of the Work of Redemption*, 238.

<sup>58</sup> There are countless books written on the importance of this event from a historical perspective. See for example Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1998); Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997); and, from a more philosophical perspective, G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1956); and Eric Voegelin, *The History of Political Ideas (Volume 1): Hellenism, Rome, and Early Christianity*, vol. 19 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997).

how does this interaction take place? Or, to continue to use the machine metaphor: how is the energy provided that makes the wheels turn? Based on the events of the 1730s and 1740s in New England and across the wider Western Christian world, Edwards came to believe that God's movement within history was largely achieved by means of revivals.<sup>59</sup> And it is the idea of the place of revival in Edwards's philosophy of history which must now be examined.

It is in the idea of revival that all the various streams of Edwards's historical thought begin to be brought together. "Revival", writes Zakai, "thus represented the historical agent upon which Edwards could establish his ideology of history."<sup>60</sup> This may be seen in the relationship of revivals to each of the topics discussed so far in this chapter.

First, revivals are the means by which the center of history—the great redemptive act of crucifixion—connect God, the converted self, and the eschaton. In revivals, the individual act of salvation<sup>61</sup> is multiplied and broadened until it not only affects the wider society, but all of history, culminating in the eventual conversion of the entire world, the return of Christ, and the establishment of heaven on earth.

The phenomenon of revival is evidence for the effusion of Holy Spirit and its immediate involvement in history, and for the power of God's hand in directing and controlling the affairs of human beings. God therefore is not only known through his structuring of the natural realm by abstract laws of nature, as some mechanical philosophers claimed, and the scope of his redemptive activity is not confined to the operation of saving grace in conversion, as some Protestant evangelical theologians

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<sup>59</sup> Zakai, throughout, but especially 150-55.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 154. One criticism of Zakai's thesis is that after the Awakening came to an end, Edwards showed no expectation that revivals would ever grow to such a level again. Having said that, the point remains solid that Edwards, without looking for *specific* revivals, viewed revivals in *general* as the foundation of a philosophy of history.

<sup>61</sup> Which for Edwards is a direct action upon the soul by God; see the following chapter on the religious affections for more on this subject.

held, but it constitutes the very foundation of creation and the historical process is grounded on it.<sup>62</sup>

In revival, the activity of God may most directly be seen among the events and deeds of men. The act of conversion being more widespread, when combined with the other characteristics of revivals listed above reveals, at least in Edwards's mind, most clearly that God is acting within history and that the existence of immanence is closely entwined with transcendent value.

But it is when revival is placed in the context of Edwards's eschatology and historical sermons that its true place in his philosophy of history becomes apparent. Eschatology provides for revivals the same thing which it provides for all of history: their telos. Revivals are indeed the means by which God moves history forward, but it is not abstract or random movement, it is movement directed at the specific goal of the eschaton. Conversions are not done on either an individual or social scale merely for their own sakes, but with the goal of moving a people from this historical world into the transcendent one to come. One of the goals of historical redemption is

To gather together in one all things in Christ in heaven and on earth, i.e. all elect creatures as has lately been explained to you. [This is] to bring all elect creatures in heaven and earth to an union one to another, in one body under one head, and to unite all together in one body to God the Father.<sup>63</sup>

Transcendent unity with the divine Christ is the purpose and direction of revival. This, in turn, gives history its meaning and purpose.

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<sup>62</sup> Zakai, 154.

<sup>63</sup> Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, 15.

By connecting salvation, revival, and history in a single body of thought, Zakai argues that Edwards has established a historical unity which has rarely been achieved either in Edwards's time or our own.

In contrast to theories based upon alienation between human actions and impersonal historical forces, such as economics, or social and political powers, for Edwards history is based upon a close and essential association between personal experience and historical events; God's redemptive activity in religious revival affects the whole condition of human beings.<sup>64</sup>

History has meaning because God is closely at work in it. And having established this, Edwards is able to draw philosophical conclusions based on his historical observations.

God designed by this means to complete and perfect the glory of all the elect by Christ. It was a great design of God to advance all the elect to an exceeding pitch of glory, such as eye has not seen. He intended to bring them to perfect excellency and beauty in his image and in holiness which is the proper beauty of spiritual beings, and to advance 'em to a glorious degree of honor and also to an ineffable pitch of pleasure and joy. And thus to glorify the whole church of elect men in soul and body, and unite them by the glory of the elect angels to its highest pitch under one head. Towards this God began to work immediately after the fall [of man] and goes on through all [ages], and it will be perfected at the end of the world. In all this God designed to accomplish the glory of the blessed Trinity in an exceeding degree. God had a design of glorifying himself from eternity, to glorify each person in the Godhead. The end must be considered as first in the order of nature and then the means, and therefore we must conceive that God having proposed this end had then, as it were, the means to choose. And the principal means that he pitched [upon] was this great Work of Redemption that we are speaking [of].<sup>65</sup>

In other words, there are two complementary goals of history: the redemption of man and the self-glorification of God.<sup>66</sup> Further exploration of Edwards's thought, therefore, must

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<sup>64</sup> Zakai, 155.

<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, vol. 9 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 125; Banner of Truth edition, 15-16.

<sup>66</sup> These are not, according to Edwards, two *separate* goals at all. God is most glorified in the redemption of man. For extended reflections on this theme in Edwards's thought, see any of the works of John Piper on Edwards, but especially John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards*

proceed along two lines: the nature of man and the nature of God. Edwards had a very well developed anthropology, dedicating his three major philosophical and theological works to the study of human nature. The most important of these must now be explored, as both for Edwards and for the more general history of Christian theology it examines an especially contentious issue: *The Freedom of the Will*.



### CHAPTER III: FREEDOM OF THE WILL

*The distinction of Intelligence from Will is often incorrectly taken to mean that each has a fixed and separate existence of its own, as if volition could be without intelligence, or the activity of intelligence could be without will. The possibility of a culture of the intellect which leaves the heart untouched, as it is said, and of the heart without the intellect—of hearts which in one-sided way want intellect, and heartless intellects—only proves at most that bad and radically untrue existences occur. —G.W.F. Hegel<sup>1</sup>*

*Continuously until near midnight I wallowed and reeked with Jonathan in his insane debauch; rose immediately refreshed and fine at 10 this morning, but with a strange and haunting sense of having been on a three days' tear with a drunken lunatic. It is years since I have known these sensations. All through the book is the glaze of a resplendent intellect gone mad--a marvelous spectacle. No, not all through the book--the drunk does not come on till the last third, where what I take to be Calvinism and its God begins to show up and shine red and hideous in the glow from the fires of hell, their only right and proper adornment. By God I was ashamed to be in such company. —Mark Twain, on reading *Freedom of the Will*<sup>2</sup>*

Political scientists make much ado about the rise of the social contract theories. The idea, so the argument goes, that individuals voluntarily enter into a society by means of a social contract is a revolutionary one in the history of political theory, especially when compared to the more “organic” Medieval models of a Dante, Aquinas, or even a Machiavelli.<sup>3</sup> Yet, to say that one enters “voluntarily” into a contract is no clear statement. What is “voluntary”? Hobbes considered it to be “voluntary” even if force were used by the government to coerce submission to the state.<sup>4</sup> Locke considered it “voluntary” even if one were merely born into a state and never left or rebelled.<sup>5</sup> Even Rousseau reduced the will to

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<sup>1</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 188.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Twain to Rev. J.H. Twichell, Riverdale-on-the-Hudson, February, 1902, in *The Letters of Mark Twain, Complete*, produced by David Widger (Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg, February 18, 2009), under “To Rev. J. H. Twichell, in Hartford,” <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3199/3199.txt> (accessed July 27, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> See essentially any political theory survey, but especially including John Hallowell and Jean Porter, *Political Philosophy: The Search for Humanity and Order* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997); Brian Nelson, *Western Political Thought: From Socrates to the Age of Ideology* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995); and Edward Bryan Portis, *Reconstructing the Classics* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 81-88.

<sup>5</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), throughout, but especially 52-57.

the level of base instinct, allowing no room for reflection.<sup>6</sup> Of these three thinkers, only Locke discusses the will in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; unfortunately, this discussion is generally considered unsatisfactory in its conclusions, despite its length (Locke himself seemed displeased with his ideas, changing them between drafts).<sup>7</sup> If contract theory is to be the theory of a people (and it has been adopted by at least some Americans), then a definition of the will is necessary to put the theory into its proper context.<sup>8</sup> Edwards provides such a definition in his treatise *A careful and strict ENQUIRY into the modern prevailing Notions of that FREEDOM of WILL, which is supposed to be essential to Moral Agency, Vertue, and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame* (hereafter “*Freedom of the Will*”). Although this treatise is not directed at contract theory per se, the definition of both “will” and “freedom” found within provides a fresh means of interpreting Locke and other contract thinkers, and suggests that relying on the will as the foundation of society is problematic at best in politics. Moreover, it will help shape the view of man necessary to understanding the nature of Edwards’s historical political thought.

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress, ed. Peter Gay (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1987), 148-50.

<sup>7</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2004), 187-223; Jonathan Bennett, “Locke’s Philosophy of Mind,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. Vere Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 94-98.

<sup>8</sup> Lockean strains run throughout modern Western thought, influencing thinkers as diverse as Edmund Burke, Herbert Marcuse, and Thomas Jefferson. See respectively Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987); Herbert Marcuse, *The Essential Marcuse*, ed. Andrew Feenberg and William Leiss (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007); Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson: Political Writings*, ed. Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For a specific meditation on how Locke has influenced American government, see Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1955, 1991).

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WILL

Two main historical periods stand out as watersheds in the discussion over the nature and freedom of the will: the fifth century debates between Augustine and Pelagius, and the sixteenth century Reformation. (This is not to say these are the only two times these issues were discussed, it is only to point out that they are the two pinnacles from which all other discussion descends.) Even in Edwards's own day, the discussion over the freedom and nature of the will was, in the grand scheme of Western history, mere runoff from the debates sparked by the writings and discussions of the Reformers. Although Edwards had thoughtful arguments to contribute, he was working within a framework already established. A brief survey of these two historical discussions of the fifth and sixteenth centuries should provide a picture of this framework within which Edwards's thought may be explored.

#### *The Ancient World and the Will*

The question of who first articulated the idea of the "will" is somewhat debatable. The two primary candidates are Aristotle and Augustine. In book three of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle spends several paragraphs discussing the various issues which would become cruxes of future debate over the will, including: virtue, emotion, action, voluntary vs. involuntary characteristics, choice, reason, desire, and human responsibility. Moreover, Aristotle understood that all of these characteristics were organically connected to each other, and that one could not be discussed without engaging all:

Virtue or excellence is, as we have seen, concerned with emotions and actions. When these are voluntary we receive praise and blame; when involuntary, we are pardoned and sometimes even pitied. Therefore, it is, I dare say, indispensable for a student of

virtue to differentiate between voluntary and involuntary actions, and useful also for lawgivers, to help them in meting out honors and punishments.<sup>9</sup>

Although the voluntary/involuntary distinction is a critical one—and one to which Edwards will dedicate a great deal of space—it doesn't quite arrive at the idea that there is some characteristic or function of human nature which actually does the choosing. That idea comes first from Augustine.

Augustine engaged two questions which helped him shape a definition of the will. The first was the problem of evil. If God creates man, and man does evil, does that make God the author of evil? This was (and remains) a serious objection to Christianity. In his treatise *On the Free Choice of the Will*, Augustine responds to this objection by arguing that in creation God gave mankind a special faculty known as the “will”, with which one could choose either good or evil. And, although God created humanity good, by exercising free will they still chose evil. Thus, in Augustine's opinion, by moving the origin of evil onto human free will, God is protected from the charge of being the author of evil.<sup>10</sup>

The second question was the challenge of Pelagius, who agreed to some extent with Augustine that mankind may choose good or evil, but carried it a step further into moral perfectionism by arguing both that it is in man's nature to choose good, and that one could (in theory, at least) choose good all the time. After all, Pelagius reasoned, God would not have given laws if He didn't know that people could obey them. “As if, in forgetfulness of

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<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 52.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, in *Augustine: On the Free Choice of the Will, on Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, 104-07. Clearly much remains to be said on this point. For further reflection on the will in Augustine, see Eleanor Stump and Norman Kretzmann, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); the chapters by Wetzel and Stump are especially worthy of attention.

human frailty—which he made!—He had laid upon men commandments which they could not bear.... He has not willed to command anything impossible.”<sup>11</sup> Augustine, in response to this, further refined his definition of the will by pointing out that although there is such a thing as the “will,” it is helpless without grace. “Without it [grace],” Augustine argues, “they [people] do nothing good at all, whether in thinking, or in willing and loving, or in acting.”<sup>12</sup> The will, although originally free, is now bound or mired in sin and requires divine intervention in order to choose good at all.

This debate arose near the end of Augustine’s life, and he died before he could engage the nuances that were a result of the debates. In the millennium and a half since his time, the debates in the Western world over the will have raged around the issues raised by Augustine and Pelagius.<sup>13</sup>

### *Reformation, Enlightenment, and the Will*

Through the development and expansion of scholasticism, Augustinian and Pelagian thought began to soften and blend, especially through the writings of the more mystical strand of theologians.<sup>14</sup> The Reformation in many ways may be seen as an attempt to divide

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<sup>11</sup> Pelagius, “Letter to Demetrias”, c. 413, in *A Cloud of Witnesses: Readings in the History of Western Christianity*, ed. Joel F. Harrington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 100-01.

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *On Reprimand and Grace*, in *On the Free Choice of the Will*, in *Augustine: On the Free Choice of the Will, on Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, 186.

<sup>13</sup> For a thoughtful reflection on both Augustine’s thoughts on the will and the aftermath of these debates, see Brown, *Augustine: A Biography*, 367-77.

<sup>14</sup> There are numerous sources that discuss this soft blending, including (but certainly not limited to): Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology*, vol. 3 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Philip Schaff, *Mediaeval Christianity 590-1073*, vol. 4 of *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006); Philip Roseman, *Peter Lombard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

these two rivers of thought back into separate streams.<sup>15</sup> The thought of Augustine on the will is especially trumpeted in the writings of John Calvin and the Reformed Orthodox thinkers.

The Heidelberg Catechism has long stood as an example of this reformed thought:

- 5. Q. Can you keep all this [the Divine Law] perfectly?  
A. In no wise; for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor.
- 8. Q. But are we so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all evil?  
A. Yes, indeed; unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.
- 13. Q. But can we ourselves make this satisfaction [to appease God for mankind's sin]?  
A. By no means; on the contrary, we daily increase our debt.<sup>16</sup>

The Augustinian view that man is utterly fallen is clearly present, but here the Reformed writers begin to use terminology that differed slightly from the North African Bishop of a millennium before. Where Augustine had talked in medical terms about the will as sick, injured, and broken, the Reformed authors spoke of it in moral terms as evil, twisted, and foul.<sup>17</sup> This change in terminology, in turn, became the focal point of debate within the Reformed tradition itself. In the late 1500s, Dutch pastor and professor Jacob Arminius began to publish and preach on the nature of the will, largely drawing on the language of

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<sup>15</sup> As may certain movements within Catholicism, such as the Jansenist movement. See William Doyle, *Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to the French Revolution* (London: Macmillan Press, LTD, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> G.I. Williamson, ed., *The Heidelberg Catechism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1993), questions 5, 8, and 13.

<sup>17</sup> Compare Augustine's *On Free Choice of the Will* with the sections on the will in Calvin's *Institutes*. See Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, in *Augustine: On the Free Choice of the Will, on Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*; and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989). Although the differences are largely terminological ones, these terminology differences may be said to have created vastly different traditions. For reflections on how terms have led to different traditions, see B.B. Warfield, "Augustine" and "Calvinism" in *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1956).

Augustine rather than that of Calvin.<sup>18</sup> Over the next century, this “Arminian” position, as it came to be called, gradually began to slough off even medical language, and speak instead in terms of the will as a “gift,” by which man was intended to choose God. By Edwards’s day, the debate had then turned within Arminian circles to the question of how “free” this choice was.<sup>19</sup> Some of the positions held by Arminians will be described below, here it only needs to be shown that Edwards was stepping into a debate that had been going for at least a century, if not all the way back to the time of Augustine. It is within this framework that his contribution to the discussion may now be examined.

#### FREEDOM OF THE WILL

Edwards’s massive treatise *Freedom of the Will* is, for all its intellectual effort and acuity, polemic at heart. He set out to philosophically and theologically obliterate the Arminian positions on free will, specifically engaging two particular opinions regarding the will.<sup>20</sup> While both of these positions stated that the will is free, the first taught that the will is free because it is undetermined, the second because it determines itself.<sup>21</sup> In responding to

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<sup>18</sup> See James Arminius, *Arminius Speaks*, ed. John D. Wagner (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011); and Peter De Jong, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Matthew J. Pinson, “Will the Real Arminius Please Stand Up? A Study of the Theology of Jacob Arminius in Light of his Interpreters,” *Integrity: A Journal of Christian Thought* 2 (2003): 121-139; Roger Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Sam Storms, “The Will: Fettered Yet Free (*Freedom of the Will*),” in *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 203ff. For a full exposition of these three writers in their historical context, see Paul Ramsey’s introduction in Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 65-118.

<sup>21</sup> These three writers, the Anglican Daniel Whitby, the deist Thomas Chubb, and the hymn-writer Isaac Watts, while important and influential in Edwards’s time, do not represent great thinkers in the history of the philosophy of the will. For a broader introduction to “free will” in philosophy, see Robert Kane, ed., *Free Will (Blackwell Readings in Philosophy)* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2002).

these positions, Edwards believed that he had settled the debate, especially if people would read his treatise with “courtesy,” as well as patience and thoroughness.<sup>22</sup> In other words, as John E. Smith points out, “Edwards always assumed that he would not be bested in the way of argument.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, he believed the bulk of the responses to his arguments would be either rhetorical or petty name-calling, including the various popular terms likely to spur contempt, such as the “ ‘fate’ of the heathen, ‘Hobbes’ necessity,’ and ‘making men mere machines.’” Even worse would be those who take him out of context, when “some particular things may be picked out, which they may think will sound harshest in the ears of the generality, and these may be glossed and descanted on, with tart and contemptuous words; and from thence, the whole treated with triumph and insult.”<sup>24</sup> Cant aside, these arguments which Edwards believed to be unassailable will now be examined.<sup>25</sup>

Edwards breaks his work into four sections. The first deals with definitions and topics for discussion. The second engages the question of whether or not the Arminian idea of freedom is even coherent. The third attempts to demonstrate that freedom of the will, as defined by Arminianism, is not truly necessary to virtue. The fourth section discusses ethics and the Divine will. A brief conclusion attempts to anticipate objections and calls for reasoned and thoughtful debate on the issue.

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<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 133.

<sup>23</sup> John E. Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 59.

<sup>24</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 430-31.

<sup>25</sup> Whether or not they were is a difficult question, as Edwards is not often engaged by modern philosophers. His difficult prose combined with his theological Calvinism often lead him to be overlooked or openly ignored by mainstream thinkers. The most direct and intentional response to Edwards came in the nineteenth century from Daniel Whedon in his *Freedom of the Will: A Wesleyan Response to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John D. Wagner (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009).



### *Definitions and Terms*

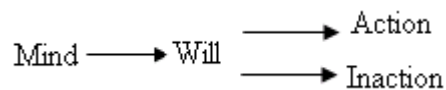
Edwards begins by defining what he sees as the three concepts key to the entire discussion: will, necessity, and freedom. As these definitions form the heart and substance of the treatise, more time will be dedicated to examining the first section than subsequent portions of the work.

#### Will

In defining the will, Edwards relies heavily upon the discussion of the same topic in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In this work, Locke argues that the will is not a characteristic of mankind in the same way reason or emotion is, it is rather what he calls a "power." He writes:

We find in ourselves a power to begin or forbear, continue or end several actions of our minds, and motions of our bodies, barely by a thought or preference of the mind ordering, or as it were commanding, the doing or not doing such or such a particular action. This power which the mind has thus to order the consideration of any idea, or the forbearing to consider it; or to prefer the motion of any part of the body to its rest, and vice versa, in any particular instance, is that which we call the Will.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, the will is the tool by which the mind either acts or does not act.



In this view, the will is not properly a "part" of the mind at all, any more than a hammer is a part of a hand, even as it is contained by it. Edwards takes this belief and carries it a step farther, fusing the "will" and "act" into one organic whole, which are united in their existence as functions or powers of the mind.

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<sup>26</sup> Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 177.

And therefore I observe, that the will (without any metaphysical refining) is plainly, that by which the mind chooses anything. The faculty of the will is that faculty or power or principle of mind by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice.<sup>27</sup>

So far, Edwards and Locke are in agreement. The will is a power of the mind by which the mind expresses its inclination. And yet, Edwards refines his definition beyond what Locke has done. Where Locke was content to let the will remain a power, Edwards focuses in on the power and defines it down to its pure, undiluted essence within the human soul. He examines the organic unity between the mind and the will that ultimately define them as merely two different ways of looking at the same component of human nature. “He seeks”, writes Ramsey, “to catch the agent in the very act of willing... and to give an accurate report of what goes on in the soul or mind in the state of willing and at the time of willing.”<sup>28</sup> To see the will, for Edwards, is to see the mind. This is a logical step from Locke’s definition, but one which Locke himself did not make. Edwards arrives at this step by asking what, specifically, within the mind sets the will in one direction or another. Locke had answered “pleasure and pain”, which lead to happiness or despair, and left it at that.<sup>29</sup> Edwards was not content with this, and pushed deeper, identifying the source of the will within the mind as what he termed “motive.” “By ‘motive,’ I mean the whole of that which moves, excites, or invites the mind to volition, whether that be one thing singly, or many things conjunctly.”<sup>30</sup> Of course, people may have multiple motives competing within them, but eventually one must be stronger than the other, and the strongest motive always determines the will. The

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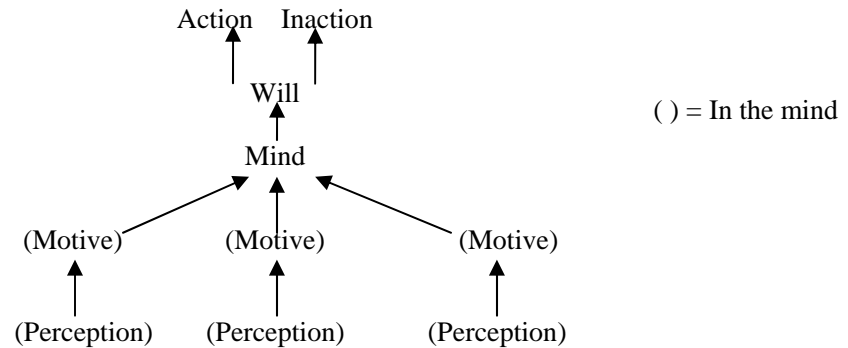
<sup>27</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 137.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Ramsey, introduction to Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.xxi.43

<sup>30</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 141.

“motive”, in turn, is determined by “perception.” “Nothing can induce or invite the mind to will or act anything, any further than it is perceived, or is some way or other in the mind’s view.”<sup>31</sup> So the definition of the will has shifted slightly and been refined from Locke’s, described above, to a more complex one:



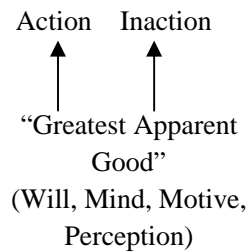
But, with all of the competing perceptions assailing the mind, how is one chosen over the other?

Whatever is perceived or apprehended by an intelligent and voluntary agent, which has the nature and influence of a motive to volition or choice, is considered or viewed *as good*; nor has it any tendency to invite or engage the election of the soul in any further degree than it appears such... And therefore it must be true, in some sense, that the will always is as the greatest apparent good is.<sup>32</sup>

Here, Edwards has gone beyond Locke and exposed the will in its most basic elements: the will is not merely motive, perception, and mind, but is reflective of “the greatest apparent good” itself.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



“The will,” writes Allen Guelzo, “looks more like a highly fluid process than a stand-alone faculty, less like a review board and more like the terminal point of an electric current in which a *motive* triggers the assent of the intellect, and the will shifts into play.”<sup>33</sup> Thus Edwards has established an organic unity in the mind, whereby the mind always wills what it believes to be the greatest good as expressed by motives, which in turn are provided by perception. With this definition in mind, Edwards turns to the discussion of the nature of “necessity.”

### Necessity

Easily one of the worst charges against Edwards was that opprobrious name of “Hobbes’ Necessity.” Edwards himself anticipated the charge twice in the work, once in the conclusion and once in the main text, where Edwards pointed out:

As to Mr. Hobbes’ maintaining the same doctrine concerning necessity, I confess, it happens I never read Mr. Hobbes. Let his opinion be what it will, we need not reject all truth which is demonstrated by clear evidence, merely because it was once held by some bad man. This great truth, that Jesus is the Son of God, was not spoiled because it was once and again proclaimed with a loud voice by the devil.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Allen C. Guelzo, “Freedom of the Will”, in *Princeton Companion*, 122.

<sup>34</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 374.

So what is this “necessity”, with which Edwards was so concerned? “Necessity” is, as Edwards points out, a difficult word to define, and hence very often a polemic one.<sup>35</sup> And yet, a definition may be simply and (for Edwards, at least) clearly stated:

Philosophical necessity is really nothing else than the full and fixed connection between things signified by the subject and predicate of a proposition, which affirms something to be true. When there is such a connection, then the thing affirmed in the proposition is necessary, in a philosophical sense; whether any opposition, or contrary effort be supposed, or supposable in the case, or no. When the subject and predicate of the proposition, which affirms the existence of anything, either substance, quality, act or circumstance, have a full and certain connection, then the existence or being of that thing is said to be necessary in a metaphysical sense. And in this sense I use the word “necessity,” in the following discourse, when I endeavor to prove that necessity is not inconsistent with liberty.<sup>36</sup>

“Necessity”, therefore, is direct, cause-and-effect relationship between “subject” and “predicate.” God wills existence (subject), and existence is (predicate). Smith mows his lawn (subject), the grass is shorter (predicate). These are *necessary* relationships. And so far, Edwards has done nothing but define an unpopular term in such a way that few could disagree, since he is merely pointing out cause/effect relationships. This becomes difficult when it is applied to the human person. “*Necessity* conjured up in the eighteenth-century mind images of orreries, mechanical animals, and other machines, forcing and grinding their helpless components into soulless patterns of activity.”<sup>37</sup> If necessity applies to the person, then humanity and the individual may very well be reduced to an effect. To counter this argument, Edwards refined his definition by adding two points of clarification.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>37</sup> Guelzo, “Freedom of the Will,” 122.

In his definition of “necessity”, Edwards argues that there are two separate categories at work in the human condition. One is “natural necessity.”

By “natural necessity,” as applied to men, I mean such necessity as men are under through the force of natural causes.... Thus men placed in certain circumstances, are the subjects of particular sensations by necessity: they feel pain when their bodies are wounded; they see the objects presented before them in a clear light, when their eyes are opened.<sup>38</sup>

So when pricked with a needle, it is *necessary* by the rules and definition of nature that a person will bleed. The cause is bindingly and unbreakably tied to the effect. Interestingly, Edwards even includes among his definition of “natural necessity” certain logical, mathematical, and rational truths.

So they [those under natural necessity] assent to the truth of certain propositions, as soon as the terms are understood; as that two and two make four, that black is not white, that two parallel lines can never cross one another: so by a natural necessity men’s bodies move downwards, when there is nothing to support them.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, even some ideas such as Newtonian physics and the principles of arithmetic and geometry fall in the category of “natural necessity”, since they cannot be denied once they are made clear.

The other kind of necessity Edwards calls “moral necessity.” The phrase, he points out, can have many meanings, including both inclinations of conscience (we might be driven to do something by our conscience) and a sort-of general common sense and civic virtue, “which is ordinarily sufficient to satisfy, and be relied upon by mankind, in their conduct and behavior in the world, as they would conduct their own safety and interest, and treat others

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<sup>38</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 156-57.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

properly as members of society.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, Edwards passes over both of these definitions as insufficient and chooses a third:

Sometimes by “moral necessity” is meant that necessity of connection and consequence, which arises from such *moral causes*, as the strength of inclination, or motives, and the connection which there is in many cases between these, and such certain volitions and actions.<sup>41</sup>

Consequently for Edwards, “moral necessity” is the connection between the unity of will and action and the inherent motive driving that unity.

The distinction between the two kinds of necessity should be apparent. “Moral necessity” is largely internal and centered on the nature and character of the person in question. “Natural necessity” is largely a function of conditions external to the person. Edwards goes on to make some observations concerning the two categories of necessity. First, he argues, “moral necessity may be as absolute, as natural necessity.”<sup>42</sup> That is, the inner motive to action is just as strong (or sometimes even stronger) than external pressure. Second, Edwards denies that his definition of “necessity” (especially in the moral sense) is in any way opposed to the idea of “choice.” Edwards is not arguing that we have no choice, he is merely pointing out that the choices we make are functions of pre-established motives (more on this below).

Finally, and most importantly, Edwards claims that his definitions of necessity, in turn, provide clearer definitions of *inability*:

We are said to be *naturally* unable to do a thing, when we can’t do it if we will, because what is most commonly called nature don’t allow of it, or because of some

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<sup>40</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 156.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

impeding defect or obstacle that is extrinsic to the will; either in the faculty of understanding, constitution of body, or external objects.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, “natural inability” is not being physically capable of doing something, whatever the volition might desire. A prisoner in a cell cannot run through a field, however strong his will to do so might be. On the other hand,

*Moral* inability consists not in any of these things; but either in the want of inclination; or the strength of a contrary inclination; or the want of sufficient motives in view, to induce and excite the act of the will, or the strength of apparent motives to the contrary. Or both these may be resolved into one; and it may be said in one word, that moral inability consists in the opposition or want of inclination. For when a person is unable to will or choose such a thing, through a defect of motives, or prevalence of contrary motives, 'tis the same thing as his being unable through the want of an inclination, or the prevalence of a contrary inclination, in such circumstances, and under the influence of such views.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, “moral inability” is the opposite of moral necessity, a person cannot act or will if the motive is either too weak, or not present at all.

Edwards proceeds to give several examples of the differences between natural and moral inability. A “woman of great honor and chastity”, for example, “may have a moral inability to prostitute herself to her slave.” While on the other hand, “a very lascivious man... may be unable to forbear gratifying his lust.” Even generalities are subject to the rules of inability, as “a strong habit of virtue and great degree of holiness may cause a moral inability to love wickedness in general.”<sup>45</sup> As should be clear, with this as a definition of “necessity,” the problem immediately arises as to whether or not these individuals are truly “free.”

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 159-60.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 160.



## Freedom

Edwards closes Part I with a discussion, as he titles it, “Concerning the notion of liberty and of moral agency.”<sup>46</sup> This section introduces the remainder of the treatise, wherein Edwards engages the questions of freedom and responsibility by refuting Arminian claims about them. Edwards begins by analyzing the popular definition of “freedom,” which is “opportunity, or advantage, that anyone has, to do as he pleases. Or in other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing... as he wills.”<sup>47</sup> The opposite of freedom, by this definition, is restraint from doing as one wills. Edwards points out that if this is true freedom, then it is not a word which can be applied to the will. Doing so would be merely to say that the will can perform what it wills, and the “will itself is not an agent that has a will: the power of choosing, itself, has not a power of choosing.” Only the very soul can be free or bound and have liberty to will. “To be free is the property of an agent, who is possessed of powers and faculties.”<sup>48</sup> Thus Edwards has moved the argument about freedom off of the will and onto the agent doing the willing.

These definitions are the true backbone of Edwards’s argument. “He had,” Guelzo notes, “maneuvered the terminology in such a way as to disarm the Arminians even before the battle was joined.”<sup>49</sup> If Edwards’s terms are accepted, then his conclusions logically

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>47</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 163.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 163. Having finished Edwards’s discussion of the will, it should be noted that there is much room for future study of the relationship between Edwards’s definition and that of Locke. For a further analysis of the relationship between Edwards and Locke, see Paul Helm, “A Forensic Dilemma: John Locke and Jonathan Edwards on Personal Identity,” in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> Guelzo, “Freedom of the Will,” 123.

follow. If the will is not an independent faculty, but is rather harnessed to some other characteristic of man (be it motive, understanding, or overall human nature), then it is nonsensical to use the terminology of “freedom” in the libertarian sense of the term. One cannot speak of the will as “free” any more than one may speak of a “free” hammer. This is the point of the remaining parts of the treatise, which will now be briefly summarized.

### *True and False Freedom*

In the second part of the work, Edwards questions whether Arminian notions of free will are possible, or even coherent in light of the “accurate” definitions he had provided in part one. He responds to two particular positions defending free will. The first held that the will is free because it is undetermined, the second because it determines itself.

### False Freedom

The first argument is that the will is free because it is unchained from all determining factors—including prevailing motives at the time of the willing. Some argue, according to Edwards, that “the soul’s exertion of such a particular act of will, is a thing that comes to pass *of itself*, without any cause; and that there is absolutely no ground or reason of the soul’s being determined to exert such a volition, and make such a choice, rather than another.”<sup>50</sup>

Edwards responds by pointing out that if will is undetermined, then it is random, and morality and ethical judgment are destroyed. One Edwardsean commentator asks:

If human acts of the will are not causally tethered to human character, on what grounds does one establish their ethical value? How may one be blamed or praised for an act of will in the causation of which neither he nor anything else had a part? Furthermore, how can one explain a diversity of effects from a monolithic no-cause? If there is no ground or cause for the existence of an effect, what accounts for the

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<sup>50</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 178-79.

diversity of one effect from another? Why is an entity what it is and not otherwise if not because of the specific nature of the cause that produced it?<sup>51</sup>

To say that the will is undetermined is to Edwards as foolish as saying that the will is indifferent before it chooses an action or non-action. How can the will be indifferent, he asks, if it then proceeds to choose? “How ridiculous would it be for anybody to insist that the soul chooses one thing before another, when at the very same instant it is perfectly indifferent with respect to each!”<sup>52</sup> How can a man be honored for giving money to charity and punished for committing a murder, when he has no preference as to which he does and is indifferent in his choice between the two? The will must be grounded in *something*, otherwise it is random and cannot be either praised or blamed for the fruits of its actions. Ethical value would be consequently lost, and the moral value of man would disappear if the will is undetermined by being isolated from other aspects of humanity. Edwards had laid the groundwork for his response to this argument in defining the will as part of the organic unity of man (see above), but even without that definition he suggests that this Arminian approach to the will destroys virtue.

The second argument is that the will determines itself. “I shall consider the notion”, Edwards writes, “of a self-determining power in the will: wherein, according to the Arminians, does most essentially consist the will’s freedom.”<sup>53</sup> Essentially, the argument was that the will chooses to will what the will chooses to will. That is, there is a power inherent to the will which allows the individual to choose what he wills. This is a more subtle and

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<sup>51</sup> Storms, 204.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 207.

<sup>53</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 171.

difficult argument, since Edwards recognizes that to some extent the will does affect itself. Present action of the will affects actions of the will in the future, simply because choices made in the present necessarily affect choices made in the future. If one chooses today, for example, to overindulge, one may have to choose tomorrow whether or not to medicate for heartburn. Nevertheless, according to Edwards the will cannot be the ultimate cause and ground of itself. For one thing, if the will is self-determined then liberty as defined by the “*Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians* [Edwards’s kindest term for the rank-and-file of Roman Catholicism], *Jesuits, Socinians, Arminians*, and others” is lost in any case.<sup>54</sup> For if the will is determined by a previous willing, then it is not free, for it is subject to the previous willing. But the real problem with this theory is not the loss of that particular form of freedom (which Edwards did not consider true freedom in any case), it is rather that this line of thought creates an infinite regression of willing which is inconsistent with reason.

Edwards... points out that for the will to determine itself is for the will to act. Thus the act of will whereby it determines a subsequent act must itself be determined by a preceding act of will or the will cannot properly be said to be self-determined... [And so] every act of will that determines a consequent act is itself preceded by an act of will, and so on until one comes to a first act of will. But if this first act is determined by a preceding one, then it is not the first act. If, on the other hand, this act is not determined by a previous act, it cannot be free since it is not self-determined. If the first act of volition is not itself determined by a preceding act of will, that so-called first act is not determined by the will and is thus not free.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, to say that the will is free because it is self-determined is to say that it must always be determined by a previous action of the will. But, if the first act of willing (and there *must* be a first act—humans are created and finite beings and have a beginning) is not

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>55</sup> Storms, 203-04. For an excellent popular survey of this aspect of Edwards’s thought on the will, see James Byrd, *Jonathan Edwards for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 77-102.

determined by a prior act of the will, then it is not free. Obviously, if it is determined by a prior act of the will, then it is not the first act. So there is either an infinite regression of willing (impossible, since humans do not have infinite existences), or these must be at least an initial act of the will which is determined by something other than itself. But if it is determined by something other than itself, then it is subject to that something and is not free. This leads some (generally associated with libertarian philosophy) to suggest that the first act of willing alone is undetermined, at which point Edwards's arguments against an undetermined will come into play.<sup>56</sup>

Edwards, then, has undermined the libertarian ideas of free will by pointing out their circularity and inconsistency. And yet, "even Edwards had the sense that he was shredding tissue paper rather than attacking the real core of the Arminian persuasion."<sup>57</sup> The true challenge of the Arminians was not in their positive definition of the will, but rather in their charge that an un-free will destroys virtue and establishes mankind as nothing more than a mechanism, "that determinism would cooperate with mechanism in tearing away every ethical restraint from evil and every moral incentive to good by persuading people that their

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<sup>56</sup> Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 203-06. It is always a dangerous task to compress more than 200 pages of Puritan philosophical prose into a few paragraphs. Edwards's own discussion is both more subtle and more scathing towards his opponents. Outside of reading the text itself, good summaries and analyses include: Storms (quoted above); Stephen Holmes, "Strange Voices: Edwards on the Will," in *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology*, ed. Stephen Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003); and for a more complete treatment of the theological and historical background to the essay, as well as the aftermath of its impact, Allen Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (Middletown, CT: Wipf & Stock, 1989).

<sup>57</sup> Guelzo, "Freedom of the Will," 124.

actions were simply what they had to be.”<sup>58</sup> In the third part of the treatise, Edwards takes up this challenge by questioning wherein true moral accountability lies.

### True Freedom

The central argument of *Freedom of the Will* is not so much a definition of the will as it is a definition of how human beings can be virtuous without a libertarian free will. If the will is determined—and Edwards believed himself to have shown it to be so—then freedom of the human person must lie elsewhere, as must the source of virtue and vice. A will determined by something else can be neither free nor the source of thoughts and actions worthy of praise or blame.

Where, then, do freedom, virtue, and vice reside within the human being? Edwards has already answered this question in his definitions: they lie in that which determines the will; they lie in the motives. The grand question of human freedom is consequently tied up with motive. But this merely begs the question. To say that motive is what is or is not free, and is the source of virtue and vice thrusts the questions of freedom and morality back onto motive. Do not all of the questions Edwards raises about the will, and all of his objections to free will arguments simply fall onto the motives with the same force? To some extent, the answer is “yes.” As has been shown above, the motives are not the final determiner of the will either. When traced all the way to its foundations, one finds that the will is determined by that which the person perceives to be the greatest apparent good. A person sets his will (via the motive) upon that which seems to be the best option. Edwards uses this chain from the will back through the motives as a springboard for a discussion of that inner sense of the

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<sup>58</sup> Guelzo, “Freedom of the Will”, 124.

greatest apparent good, which he calls “the affections.” The next chapter will discuss this concept in depth. What is important to point out here is that Edwards has shifted the entire discussion of freedom away from the will. If his definitions and arguments are correct, then it is improper to attempt to define human freedom and morality merely in terms of the will. One must dig into the innermost nature of man in order to arrive at any substantial conclusions. True freedom, therefore, cannot be discussed in the context of the will, but must be examined in the context of a discussion of the depths of human nature. And it is those depths to which the next chapter will turn.

#### CONCLUSION: POLITICAL THEORY AND EDWARDS’S WILL

Edwards’s view of the will has numerous implications for political theory. For example, one might explore the implications for totalitarian theories. If the repeated promise of totalitarian regimes is the alignment of individual human wills with the communal progress of society, it would seem that Edwards’s view—that the will is not freely malleable—undermines this promise and perhaps even explains why so many historical attempts to achieve this alignment have ended in bloody failure.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, one might study liberal social contract theory from a new perspective. Edwards’s views of freedom and the will give a new tinge to the idea that society is based on a contract of rational individuals choosing (through an act of the will) to live together. For Edwards, that individuals will to live together cannot be the result of an act of the independent will, but rather must reflect a

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<sup>59</sup> There are many discussions in the discipline in this area, but perhaps especially chilling are those dealing with the alignment of wills in Nazi Germany, resulting in the Holocaust. See Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Humans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997) and Peter Viereck, *Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

motive (affection) within the human soul. To live in society is to believe that society is the greatest apparent good. The maxim that “man is a political animal” thus might ring truer than even Aristotle knew, because this political characteristic is not (as Aristotle has suggested) an outgrowth of reason, but rather is deeply ingrained in human nature. What should be surprising to a contract theorist with an Edwardsian view of the will would then be the rare individual who chooses *not* to enter into society, but instead lives the life of solitude. The nature of such an individual would be understood to be bent away from the nature that draws the rest of mankind together. Rousseau’s “solitary walker” must be an aberration from the perspective of an Edwardsean social contract tradition.<sup>60</sup>

What is of primary concern for this dissertation, however, is that Edwards has demonstrated that the will is neither grounded upon itself nor set apart from and above all other aspects of the human person. It is not and cannot be an isolated abstraction, held above the rest of man and existing in ahistorical independence. Rather, it is a reflection of the motives and of the perception of the “greatest apparent good” of a deeper human nature. The will cannot bear the weight which contract theorists like Rousseau and Hobbes would put on it.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, Edwards’s view of the will suggests that any political study which culminates with the will as the independent and free foundation of society and human existence at best can be nothing more than a surface-level examination. To understand the

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<sup>60</sup> See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992). For thinkers more in line with Edwards on this subject, see especially Peter Viereck, *Conservative Thinkers from John Adams to Winston Churchill* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006) and Claes Ryn, *Will, Imagination & Reason: Babbitt, Croce, and the Problem of Reality* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997).

<sup>61</sup> Locke being a potential exception. The problem is that his thoughts on the will are, as has been stated, incomplete. See Bennett, “Locke’s Philosophy of Mind,” 94-98.



place of the will in society and in human life is only to begin to understand the nature of the politics and humanity. A study of the will nevertheless remains useful for laying out broad categories of human action and, through observation of that action, establishing in concrete terms the external manifestation of the “greatest apparent good.” For example, a society where individuals regularly attend some form of religious service may be said to be concerned with religion. Likewise a society that pays much attention to religious duties may be categorized as holding religion as being the “greatest apparent good.” But a study of the will alone cannot go beyond these broad categories since, as shown in this chapter, the will does not determine itself. For a deeper and more thoughtful political and philosophical analysis, one must go beyond the will into the depths of human nature; one must understand those characteristics of humanity which set the will upon one action or another. As stated in the introduction, this dissertation claims that the human nature which determines the will is, in the thought of Jonathan Edwards, fundamentally historical in nature. This chapter has shown that the will is not separate from that historical nature, but rather reflective of it. The next chapter will pick up with that part of man which Edwards believed to be the determining and defining characteristic of the human person (and that which governs the will): the affections.

## CHAPTER IV: RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS

*Faith is a marvel and yet no human being is excluded from it; for that which unites all human life is passion, and faith is a passion.* -Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*<sup>1</sup>

*The heart of man is his worst part before it be regenerate, and the best afterwards: it is the seat of principles, and the fountain of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it.* -John Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*<sup>2</sup>

There is a twofold problem in politics: first, that of determining the goal or the telos of the state; and, second, that of the ability or inability of human nature properly to pursue that goal.<sup>3</sup> Many attempts to define and explain each of these problems have been made. For example, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau began publishing his beliefs that the inability of human beings to pursue virtuous ends (whether public or private) was a failure not of nature, but rather the result of externally imposed and corrupting civilization. People are unable to achieve the true goal of the state because the state itself as it currently exists oppresses them with all the tools at its disposal.<sup>4</sup> In order to break out of this oppression, the current state must be thrown off, and a new one established. In this new state, created through a “social contract”,<sup>5</sup> the fundamental principle at work must be that of harmony: certainly harmony between the individual and the society at large, but especially harmony within the soul of the individual. For Rousseau, this harmony was only truly achieved when the will acted freely according to the spontaneous movement

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<sup>1</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 67.

<sup>2</sup> John Flavel, *A Saint Indeed*, in *Works of Flavel Vol. V*, 423.

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent historical meditation on these two problems, see Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Rousseau’s famous line that sciences and the arts do not ennoble, but rather merely “spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which [men] are burdened, and stifle in them the sense of that original liberty for which they seem to have been born.” Rousseau, *The First Discourse*, in *The Basic Political Writings*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> See the introduction to the previous chapter on the function of the will in entering this contract.

of the soul. Civilization, even reason itself, could hinder this spontaneous movement, and thus establish the tyranny of custom over the harmonious—and, consequently, “free”—individual. Therefore both civilization and reason must be either transformed or removed completely if man is to live according to nature.<sup>6</sup>

Rousseau had developed a system of thought which attempted to establish a doctrine of human nature based on what he saw as its fundamental component: the spontaneous action of the will in harmony with a virtuous nature. The results of this doctrine have been variously debated. When all restraint is removed, is the result the bloodshed and tyranny of a French Revolution, as certain strains of conservatives have argued, or is the result a proper perception of human nature and the opportunity to build a truly free society, as other conservatives and many modern liberals have argued?<sup>7</sup> This issue cannot be addressed here. Instead, what needs to be noted is Rousseau’s stripping of man down to his base components. In his writings, Rousseau had attempted to slough off all unnecessary conventions, ideas, and characteristics in order to observe man in his simplest state. From this simple state, he then attempted to build back up a view of the human person and society which would be

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<sup>6</sup> See especially Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* and *Social Contract* for his working out of these ideas. Both found in Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*.

<sup>7</sup> Authors on each side of this debate are far too numerous to mention. Foundational to the “Rousseau leads to barbarism and tyranny” approach was Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987); for a good survey of anti-Rousseau conservatives since Burke, see Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2001) and Peter Viereck, *Conservative Thinkers from John Adams to Winston Churchill* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006). Foundational to the “Rousseau leads to democracy and true philosophy” was of course Rousseau himself, but equally important have been more recent thinkers such as Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965) and anything by John Rawls, but especially *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971, 2005).

legitimate and authentic. Whether the results are salutary or not, there is a general consensus that Rousseau is at least asking the right questions.<sup>8</sup>

These questions were very much on the minds of the intellectuals of New England in the 1740s. Specifically, the problem of human nature was being formulated through two theological questions: what was the nature of true conversion? (as distinct from hypocrisy or delusion); and did the ongoing Awakening promote or hinder conversion on both the social and personal levels? By questioning how human nature might change in conversion, these thinkers were forced to define the base components of humanity. Edwards answered the second question in the heat of the Awakening through his work *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, and the first both during the revival in *Distinguishing Marks of a work of the Spirit of God* and after years of reflection in virtual exile in his most famous theological work *The Religious Affections*. His conclusions in these works will be summarized and interpreted below, particularly as they display his view of the human person as being deeply historical in nature. First, however, a few brief notes on the events and controversies of the Great Awakening are necessary to provide a context for understanding Edwards's conclusions.<sup>9</sup>

#### THE GREAT AWAKENING

The Great Awakening has been defined in various ways—usually by the use of words such as “evangelical” or “revival.” These terms in turn need further definition, and these

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<sup>8</sup> Which even Rousseau's great early twentieth century opponent admitted. See Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1979), 93-121.

<sup>9</sup> For broad surveys of the debates over conversion, see Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) and Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1984). For specific works placing Edwards in this context, see any of the Edwards biographies (especially Marsden and Miller), but especially C.C. Goen, “Editor's Introduction” in Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, 25-32.

definitions often need yet further definition, until one is finally left wondering (as some historians have) whether it wouldn't be better just to assume that there was no "Great Awakening", and that the whole thing is just a verbal sham invented by Christians so that they might have a "golden age" in American history to which they can hearken.<sup>10</sup> Yet, useful definitions have been given. C.C. Goen, for example, suggests that the Great Awakening is the revival in which evangelical pietism was spread—albeit temporarily—throughout the American colonies.<sup>11</sup> Thomas Kidd loosely agrees with Goen, though he simultaneously narrows and broadens the definition. He narrows it down by citing David Bebbington's characteristics of evangelicalism: "conversionism... activism... biblicism... crucicentrism" and adding in a strong emphasis on the person of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, Kidd broadens the definition by pointing out that the Great Awakening was not confined to the American colonies (or even to English speaking nations), but can be demonstrated to have occurred across the Western world.<sup>12</sup>

Whatever definitions are used, participants at the time were in agreement that *something* of great import was happening. That religious excitement was spreading through the colonies was generally agreed upon. The controversy was over whether this excitement

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<sup>10</sup> See the important work by Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretative Fiction," *Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 (September 1982). Butler argues that the idea of a "Great" Awakening was really a creation of movers and shakers in the Second Great Awakening, who wanted to increase the value of their own actions in creating a second "great" awakening. Also useful is Joseph Conforti, "The Invention of the Great Awakening, 1795-1842," *Early American Literature* 26, no. 2 (1991): 99-118.

<sup>11</sup> Goen, "Editor's Introduction" in *The Great Awakening*, vol. 4 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 1-4. Goen discusses these ideas in more depth in his work *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800*.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), xiii-xix.

was a good thing. It was into this debate that Edwards spoke in the longest work he had written so far in his pastorate.

*SOME THOUGHTS*

At the height of the Awakening, Edwards released his ambitious defense of the revival in his lengthy work *Some Thoughts Concerning the present Revival of Religion in New-England, And the Way in which it ought to be acknowledged and promoted, Humbly offered to the Publick, in a Treatise on that Subject*. This work is worthy of extended analysis in this dissertation, as it is his most developed commentary on social and public issues. Reveling in the liberty offered by a free press, Edwards opens *Some Thoughts* by laying out three ground rules for judging whether an event—specifically the Great Awakening—is a legitimate movement of God in the world or a sham.<sup>13</sup> First, Edwards argues,

to judge a priori is a wrong way of judging of any of the works of God. We are not to resolve that we will first be satisfied how God brought this or the other effect to pass, and why he hath made it thus, or why it has pleased him to take such a course, and to use such and such means, before we will acknowledge his work and give him the glory of it.<sup>14</sup>

There is an element of pride in telling God that a result will not be accepted unless it is given in the proper way and by the proper means. This pride must be resisted, especially since these exceptional means may very well be intended to shake up some of the stodgier old pastors in New England and get them involved in the revival.<sup>15</sup>

Second, and more important philosophically, Edwards argues that in judging the revival, the only criteria to be used as a standard must be Scripture. “Some,” Edwards points

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<sup>13</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, in *The Great Awakening*, 291-92.

<sup>14</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, 294.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 295-96.

out, “make philosophy instead of the Holy Scriptures their rule of judging this work.” What Edwards means by this, perhaps surprisingly, is that in order to judge the revival, one must have a proper (he would say “Scriptural”) anthropology. When Edwards says that some judge using philosophy rather than Scripture, he means

particularly the philosophical notions they entertain of the nature of the soul, its faculties and affections... In their philosophy, the affections of the soul are something diverse from the will, and not appertaining to the nobles part of the soul, but the meanest principles that it has, that belong to men as partaking of animal nature.<sup>16</sup>

Some theologians (particularly the critics of the revival) want to isolate the various aspects of human nature, and then claim that the revival is being driven by the affections alone.

Edwards, drawing on his Lockean training, points out that the “affections” are not aspects of human nature that can be cut out and treated as if they were independent aspects of the person unconnected to his other characteristics.<sup>17</sup> Which is not to say that they do not exist and cannot be examined, but rather that they exist in an organic relationship with other aspects of the human person.

I humbly conceive that the affections of the soul are not properly distinguished from the will, as though they were two faculties in the soul. All acts of the affections of the soul are in some sense acts of the will, and all acts of the will are acts of the affections. All exercises of the will are in some degree or other, exercises of the soul’s appetite or aversion, or which is the same thing, of its love or hatred. The soul wills one thing rather than another, or chooses one thing rather than another, no otherwise than as it loves one thing more than another; but love and hatred are

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 296-97.

<sup>17</sup> As has been noted, the relationship between Locke and Edwards is a complex one. For a discussions of that relationship in this context, see Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 115-24; and Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp, eds., *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 45-60. Professor Laurence draws an interesting parallel, suggesting that Edwards is to Locke as Marx is to Hegel. See David Laurence, “Jonathan Edwards, John Locke, and the Canon of Experience,” *Early American Literature* 15, no. 2 (1980): 107-23.

affections of the soul: and therefore all acts of the will are truly acts of the affections.<sup>18</sup>

Man as a whole being is defined by having affections, and he wills according to those affections. This subject will be discussed in the section on the *Religious Affections* below.

The third necessity for judging the revival is “the need for discrimination.” Specifically, Edwards means that one should judge the whole, rather than the negative aspects by themselves. “The great weakness of the bigger part of mankind, in any affair that is new and uncommon, appears in not distinguishing, but either approving or condemning all in the lump.”<sup>19</sup> While there have been extremes, even sinful ones, they do not outweigh the positive aspects of the revival. And, if one is truly honest, Edwards claims, even those extremes are extremes which one would expect when God was working upon the populace, particularly upon the young. In a passage explaining the process of the discovery of new ideas by the young, Edwards writes:

It is known that some that have been improved as great instruments to promote this work, have been very young; and how natural is it for such as are themselves newly waked out of sleep, and brought out of that state of darkness, insensibility and spiritual death, which they had been in ever since they were born; and have a new and wonderful scene opened to them; and have in view the reality, the vastness, and infinite importance, and nearness of spiritual and eternal things; and at the same time are surprised to see the world asleep about them; and han’t the advantage of age and experience, and have had but little opportunity to study divinity, or to converse with aged experienced Christians and divines; I say, how natural is it for such to fall into many errors with respect to the state of mankind...<sup>20</sup>

Extreme generosity should be the rule of judgment, particularly given the youth of those involved in the Awakening.

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<sup>18</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, 297.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>20</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, 320.



Having laid out his ground rules, Edwards proceeds (still in the first section) to provide a counter to those who would refuse to abide by these rules: the testimony of one who had been moved in the revival. This was nothing new; he had done the same in his report of the miniature revival which had hit Northampton in the early 1730s. In that revival, he had used the examples of an older member of the community and of a four-year-old girl, both of whom had been converted and experienced deep affections.<sup>21</sup> In this revival, he used the example of a woman who had been “awakened”, if not actually converted. Some of her experiences bear attention as examples of philosophical and theological movements. In the best tradition of the Christian mystics, Edwards reports:<sup>22</sup>

The soul in the meantime has been as it were perfectly overwhelmed, and swallowed up with light and love and a sweet solace, rest and joy of soul, that was altogether unspeakable; and more than once continuing for five or six hours together, without any interruption, in that clear and lively view or sense of the infinite beauty and amiableness of Christ’s person, and the heavenly sweetness of his excellent and transcendent love; so that (to use the person’s own expressions) the soul remained in a kind of heavenly Elysium, and did as it were swim in the rays of Christ’s love, like a little mote swimming in the beams of the sun.<sup>23</sup>

These spiritual experiences were

Being frequently attended with very great effects on the body, nature often sinking under the weight of divine discoveries, the strength of the body taken away, so as to deprive of all ability to stand or speak; sometimes the hands clinched, and the flesh cold, but senses still remaining; animal nature often in a great emotion and agitation.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative*, 192-205.

<sup>22</sup> There is much work to be done comparing Edwards’s narratives of conversion experiences to the traditional Christian mystical experiences, especially those of Augustine, Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, and Julian of Norwich. See Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2007); Meister Eckhart, *Selected Writings*, trans. Oliver Davies (New York: Penguin Classics, 1994); Julian of Norwich, *Showings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, 332.

<sup>24</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, 332.

And yet, not all physical experiences were debilitating. The overall result of the revival on the individual was a desire and “concern and zeal for moral duties, and that all professors may with them adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour; and an uncommon care to perform relative and social duties.”<sup>25</sup> “If such things are enthusiasm, and the fruits of a distempered brain,” Edwards writes, “let my brain be evermore possessed of that happy distemper!”<sup>26</sup> The point Edwards is reaching towards (which will be more clearly made in the *Religious Affections*) is that these experiences are complete through the whole human person (including both mind and action), and that while these experiences certainly *involve* the affections, they are not isolated passions separate from the rest of the person.

In the second part of the work, Edwards suggests that there are civil, religious, and public obligations to support the revival. Based on the Scriptural idea that a work of God ought to be supported by God’s people, the ministerial and congregational obligations of society are fairly straight-forward. These obligations of civic leaders to support the revival, while perhaps unappealing to modern Americans with Jeffersonian ideas of separation of church and state, were not necessarily revolutionary for the time. Edwards merely wanted the kind of recognition and support already given to established congregations to be given also in support of the revival.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 341. What Edwards does not add is that this last example is that of his own wife. See Goen’s introduction to *The Great Awakening*, 68.

<sup>27</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, 370-83. For traditional views of church/state relations in New England society, see especially Wertenbaker, *The Puritan Oligarchy*. Also useful for the general English context is Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

Controversy enters when he begins to discuss the eschatological reasons to support the Awakening. In discussing the benefits of supporting the revival, Edwards writes:

‘tis probable that... the most glorious renovation of the world shall originate from the new continent, and the church of God in that respect be from hence. And so ‘tis probable that that will come to pass in spirituals, that has in temporal, with respect to America.<sup>28</sup>

More specifically, Edwards suggests that

if we may suppose that this glorious work of God shall begin in any part of America, I think, if we consider the circumstances of the settlement of New England, it must needs appear the most likely of all American colonies, to be the place whence this work shall principally take its rise.<sup>29</sup>

Two points need to be emphasized. First, by “America” and “New England,” Edwards means geographic regions, not political entities. It must be remembered that at this time America politically was a part of England (itself only recently reshaped as “Great Britain”). While civil leaders do have a role to play in the revival, and perhaps in the coming millennium, the primary component of the millennium is the return of Christ, not the rise of a new nation state dedicated to freedom.<sup>30</sup> Second, the role of the civic leaders in the millennium is not to be establishing or spreading freedom, but rather establishing justice and morality in society in the broad and civic sense, while supporting the Awakening publically in the narrow and immediate sense, as they would have supported any other public worship event.

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<sup>28</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, 355.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 371-73. Despite Edwards’s rather mild sentiments on eschatology (which he later partially retracted), later Christian speculation was to run amok on the potential role of America in the end of the world. For an especially good meditation on this role by an author who traces much of this movement back to Edwards, see Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

In the third section of the book, Edwards responds to ten common criticisms of the Awakening, mostly involving the affections. As the affections will be discussed below, these need not be taken on here.

In the fourth section Edwards highlights extremes and errors that have occurred in the revival and suggests some correctives for them. In broad strokes, Edwards claims that the errors of the Awakening are caused by pride, bad doctrine, and satanic delusion. Taking them in reverse order, satanic delusion takes two forms: internal and external. Internally, the devil may entice the believer to pursue extreme affections or false beliefs, depending on the natural inclination of the individual to one or the other.<sup>31</sup> Externally, the battleground with Satan is custom, as understood in a particular way. “By custom,” Edwards writes, “I mean both a person’s being accustomed to a thing in himself, in his own common, allowed, and indulged practice, and also the countenance and approbation of others amongst whom he dwells, by their general voice and practice.” There is a twofold danger in custom, according to Edwards. On the one hand, Satan may use custom to force rigid observance and slavish obedience to mere form and function, without any kind of inner transformation. “Extraordinary outward effects will grow... and the extraordinary outward show will increase, without any increase of the internal cause; persons will find themselves under a kind of necessity of making a great ado, with less and less affection of soul.” On the other hand, Satan may use custom as a vehicle for rebellion, giving the enthusiast something to gleefully throw off in a spiritual

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<sup>31</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, 458-69.

frenzy. What is needed to resist both of these errors is a balanced middle road, by which one enjoys the benefits of custom and tradition without becoming a slave to them.<sup>32</sup>

There ought to be a gentle restraint held upon these things, and there should be a prudent care taken of persons in such extraordinary circumstances [of revival], and they should be moderately advised at proper seasons, not to make more ado than there is need of, but rather to hold a restraint upon their inclinations.<sup>33</sup>

Balance in response to traditions is key in keeping the devil in check.

The second error, that of bad doctrine, specifically includes the doctrine that God may directly inspire the soul without the mediation of Scripture. “This error will defend and support all errors. As long as a person has a notion that he is guided by immediate direction from heaven, it makes him incorrigible and impregnable in all his misconduct.”<sup>34</sup> This is the basis for all other bad doctrines, including the idea of immediate fulfillment rather than patient development, a proto-prosperity gospel, rejection of all external order in worship (to the point at which worship services are interrupted), and the idea that inclinations and dispositions ought immediately be translated into action without hesitation or reflection.<sup>35</sup> The only antidote to these bad doctrines, Edwards contends, is good doctrine, which will be discussed in the next part of this chapter as one of the aspects of the revival which Edwards thinks ought to be encouraged.

The primary error of the Awakening is pride. Pride, “God’s most stubborn enemy,” is the root of not only all the errors of the revival, but of sin itself.<sup>36</sup> In a remarkable meditation

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 471-73.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 473.

<sup>34</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, 432.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 432-57.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 415.

on spiritual pride, Edwards argues that it has numerous negative effects on religion in general, and on the revival specifically. Spiritual pride:

- “disposes persons to assume much to themselves,” and to neglect others.
- generates “unsuitable and self-confident boldness before God and men.”
- remembers every affront and injury, with no hint of mercy.
- “disposes persons to affect separation, to stand at a distance from others, as better than they, and loves the shew and appearance of the distinction.”
- “disposes persons to singularity in external appearance, to affect a singular way of speaking, to use a different sort of dialect from others, or to be singular in voice, or air of countenance or behavior.”
- suspects others of sin, whether the suspicion be well founded or not.
- highlights sin in others rather than in the self.
- keeps itself secret, so that it is hard to spot, and harder to root out.
- is the point of communion with the Devil.<sup>37</sup>

Pride must be put to death before any true revival can proceed.

In the fifth and final section of the work, Edwards makes several suggestions as to how the revival ought to be promoted in New England. First, he argues that the errors ought to be dealt with. Specifically, individuals ought to be continually examining themselves for spiritual pride and doing all they can to put it to death when they find it.<sup>38</sup> This involves a good deal of patience, since personal transformation does not occur overnight. At the same time, orthodox doctrine ought to be continually taught from the pulpit and in the home, as a counter to the effect of spiritual pride.<sup>39</sup>

Also, the community needs to get more actively involved in the Awakening, instead of letting the full burden fall on the ministers and the new converts. Edwards especially sees

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<sup>37</sup> All quotes and references from (in order): *ibid.*, 431, 426, 424, 422, 421, 418, 417-418, 416.

<sup>38</sup> Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, 496-500.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 502-04.

the need for the involvement of the elderly, the colleges, and the wealthy, all of whom have time and resources, but to date have not been involved in promoting the revival.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, Edwards sees the need for the broad public involvement of Christians in the goings-on of the Awakening, most of all by works of charity, which are of vastly greater importance than forms of worship. “God’s people at such a time as this ought especially to abound in deeds of charity, or almsgiving... At a time when God is so liberal of spiritual things, we ought not to be strait-handed towards him, and sparing of our temporal things.”<sup>41</sup>

Edwards firmly believed in the value of the public aspects of the Great Awakening, as well as the need for careful and thoughtful support of it. Yet, as important as these public aspects were, on reflection Edwards came to the conclusion that self-examination was even more important. The cultivation of inner holiness and the growth of true religious affections are the goals and means of the revival. Edwards’s primary work on the topic will now be examined.

#### RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS

At the height of the Awakening, and in response to some of its growing extremes, Edwards had given the commencement address at Yale, titled *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God, Applied to That Uncommon Operation That Has Lately Appeared on the Minds of Many of the People of This Land: With a Particular Consideration of the Extraordinary Circumstances with Which This Work Is Attended*. The goal of *The Distinguishing Marks* was to provide observers with criteria by which to judge the revival

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 504-15.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 524.

and determine whether the individuals being affected were truly converted or just caught up in a satanic delusion.<sup>42</sup> (So, in one sense it is the individualistic companion to *Some Thoughts*, which sought to judge the movement as a whole.) After the Great Awakening had died off, and after Edwards had been fired from his position as pastor at Northampton, he became a missionary to the Native Americans in the town of Stockbridge, (then on the Frontier in western Massachusetts). During his time in Stockbridge, Edwards took it upon himself to reexamine the subject matter of *Distinguishing Marks*. The resulting publication, given the surprisingly short title *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, In Three Parts*, may have been the most significant theological work published in North America. The primary emphasis here will fall on the *Religious Affections* as the more mature of the two works.<sup>43</sup>

Structurally, the three divisions of *Religious Affections* are fairly straightforward. In the first, Edwards defines “affections” and explains their importance to religion. The second section lists twelve characteristics or “signs” which *cannot* be used to determine the presence of gracious affections (though their presence may not be an indication to the contrary either). The third section lists twelve “signs” which *can* be used to determine the presence of

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<sup>42</sup> *Distinguishing Marks* had an interesting publication history, including having editions put out by Benjamin Franklin, Isaac Watts, and several abridged versions by John Wesley. Yet, despite its popularity at the time, it hasn’t had the staying power of the later *Religious Affections*. See Goen’s introduction to Edwards, *The Great Awakening*.

<sup>43</sup> Of all of Edwards’s works, *Religious Affections* has received the most scholarly (as opposed to devotional) attention. “It is by far the most significant document to have emerged from the ‘religious commotions’ in New England.” John E. Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 31. See also: various essays in Stephen J. Stein, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and John. E. Smith, “Religious Affections and the ‘Sense of the Heart’”, in *The Princeton Companion*. For an exposition of his time in Stockbridge, see Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, A Life*, chapters 23-29.



gracious affections. The current purpose does not require a complete overview of all twenty-four signs. A broad summary of each section will be sufficient.<sup>44</sup>

In the first section, Edwards defines the affections and highlights their importance. “The affections,” Edwards writes, “are no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.” If the soul has the two faculties of reason and will (and it does, according to Edwards), then reason may be the faculty that “discerns, and views, and judges of things,” while the will “does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers; either is inclined *to* them, or is disinclined and averse *from* them.”<sup>45</sup> Affections, then, “are these more vigorous and sensible exercises of [the will].”<sup>46</sup> In fact, Edwards suggests that “the will, and the affections of the soul, are not two faculties; the affections are not essentially distinct from the will.”<sup>47</sup> There is an organic unity between the will and the affections; the two are inseparable (though in this work Edwards will continue to speak only of the affections, not of the will). Note that in this definition of “affections,” Edwards has broadened the sense of the word to include more than mere “emotion” or “passion.” He has virtually included all of human existence, or at least all of the mind. To have an “affection” is to be moved in the entirety of being, not just in the emotions or will. Man is consequently defined, according to Edwards, by what he loves. The true objects of this love (beauty and virtue) will be examined in

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<sup>44</sup> For other excellent summaries and discussions, see the works of John E. Smith and the Edwards companions (cited above), as well as the more devotional work of John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Powhatan: Berea Publications: 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 24. For more on the will see the previous chapter.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

chapter six of this dissertation. Here it should be noted that Edwards is laying the groundwork for comparing a relational existence to a solitary one. If love is focused on the self, the individual will of necessity be at a minimum limited, and (more likely) at most prideful. If love is focused on God, the person will at least have a relational existence transcending the limited and sinful individual, and (more likely) at best will be a developing member of a community. Again, this subject will be discussed in chapter six.<sup>48</sup>

In this definition of the affections, one can see their importance in religion. “Who will deny that true religion consists in a great measure in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul, or the fervent exercises of the heart?”<sup>49</sup> Edwards gives ten reasons why the affections are central to true religion, but the sum total of them is that the affections are central to true religion because they are central to human existence as the expression of the inclination of the soul. For example, in his second reason, Edwards argues that:

The Author of human nature has not only given affections to men, but has made them very much the spring of men’s actions. As the affections do not only necessarily belong to the human nature, but are a very great part of it; so (inasmuch as by regeneration persons are renewed in the whole man, and sanctified throughout) holy affections do not only necessarily belong to true religion, but are a very great part of it. And as true religion is of a practical nature, and God hath so constituted the human nature that the affections are very much the spring of men’s actions.<sup>50</sup>

Other parts of human nature of course include reason and the physical body, but the affections are the life-spring of action, the driving force of movement and human life in the

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<sup>48</sup> See also Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 96, 223-25.

<sup>49</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

world.<sup>51</sup> More than that, they are not merely reflections or possessions of human nature, but are “a very great part of it”, that is, they are a great part of what makes human beings human. Thus, wicked affections equals wicked men, and holy affections equals holy men. As go the affections, so goes human nature. How then must the affections be judged? How does one determine whether affections are wicked or gracious? Answering these questions will be the business of the next two sections.

In the second part of the work, Edwards lists characteristics by which the affections should *not* be judged. In this part, he provides signs which are no evidence either way as to whether the affections in question are Godly or wicked. In broad strokes, these “not signs” (John Smith’s phrase) have three points. First, mere sincerity or confidence is not a sign. “It is no sufficient reason to determine that men are saints, and their affections gracious, because the affections they have are attended with an exceeding confidence that their state is good, and their affections divine.”<sup>52</sup> Even confidence in proper religion, well expressed in proper forms and rituals, carrying the proper words and terminology and being pleasing to those who are Christians is not a mark of truly gracious affections. The problem, Edwards suggests, is that hypocrites are very often the most confident of all, while true Christians might very well struggle with doubt throughout their lives.<sup>53</sup> Bold assertion is no substitute for proper affections.

Second, Edwards suggests that affections so great as to affect the body are not necessarily truly gracious affections. While all sorts of affections (Godly and otherwise) *do*

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 26; Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher*, 33-34.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 98-99.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 98-109.

affect the body, these “are no sure evidences that affections are spiritual; for we see that such effects oftentimes arise from great affections about temporal things, and when religion is no way concerned in them.”<sup>54</sup> Were he writing today, Edwards might point out that drugs and alcohol can likewise affect the body, but that does not lead to the conclusion that they are a legitimate reflections of a truly divine event.<sup>55</sup> Accelerated heart rate, tears, even more extreme bodily effects like falling down, blacking out, ecstatic motion, or having visions and hearing voices are not signs that grace is at work. They *might* be, but then again they might not.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, and what Edwards emphasized most, “it is no sign one way or the other, that religious affections are very great, or raised very high.”<sup>57</sup> Extreme affections may or may not be reflections or results of gracious affections. Feeling something deeply does not mean that the feeling is a good or legitimate one.<sup>58</sup> While Christians should, from time to time, experience extreme affections (the Gospel is joyful news, after all), outside of heaven one cannot judge these extremes to be universally valid. Instead, one must turn to other criteria.

In the third and final part of *Religious Affections*, Edwards provides twelve signs by which one might establish the presence of gracious affections. Before doing so, he gives three caveats: 1) these guidelines will not help determine if someone *else* has true affections or not, they are intended to be used only by the individual examining his own soul; 2) these

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>55</sup> Much to the chagrin of many writers of the 1960s. See especially Timothy Leary, “The Politics of Ecstasy”, in *The Times Were a Changin’*, ed. Irwin and Debi Unger (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 177-84.

<sup>56</sup> Here Edwards was attempting to find middle ground between two extremes in the debates over the Awakening. Consequently, he was largely ignored during the Awakening itself. See Marsden, 227-38.

<sup>57</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 54.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 54-59.

signs do not apply to a Christian who has fallen away from the faith (why would such a person want to check anyway?); 3) these signs do not apply to hypocrites. By “hypocrites,” Edwards seems to mean those who rely upon the twelve “not signs” for their evidence of gracious affections.

Such hypocrites are so conceited of their own wisdom, and so blinded and hardened with a very great self-righteousness... and so invincible a fondness of their pleasing conceit of their great exaltation, that it usually signifies nothing at all to lay before them the most convincing evidences of their hypocrisy.<sup>59</sup>

Some people simply cannot be reasoned with, and are so wrapped up in their own experiences that they will not listen to the concerned voice of a well-meaning friend. Nevertheless, there remain signs which are useful to those who honestly and earnestly wish to embark upon the difficult process of self-examination.

The twelve signs that suggest the presence of truly gracious affections may be broken into four categories. First, Edwards repeatedly emphasizes the importance of spiritual regeneration by the grace of God alone. This regeneration involves two components, the cause and the effect. The cause is the person of God (as Holy Spirit):

Upon the whole, I think it is clearly manifest that all truly gracious affections do arise from special and peculiar influences of the Spirit, working that sensible effect or sensation in the souls of the saints, which is entirely different from all that is possible a natural man should experience, not only different in degree and circumstances, but different in its whole nature.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 124. Despite not engaging the issue here, how to deal with sincere hypocrites (that is, those who are so successful as deceivers they have even deceived themselves) was a deep concern for both Edwards and his Puritan forbears, as well as his Evangelical successors. For an example of a Puritan attempt to discern hypocrisy, see John Flavel, *The Touchstone of Sincerity: or, The Signs of Grace, and Symptoms of Hypocrisy* in *The Works of Flavel Vol. 5*. For an example of a later Evangelical attempt, see Edith Schaeffer, *L'Abri* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1992), 163-71. For an extended analysis of this issue in Edwards, see Ava Chamberlain, “Self-Deception as a Theological Problem in Jonathan Edwards’s ‘Treatise Concerning Religious Affections,’” *Church History* 63, no. 4 (1994): 541-56.

<sup>60</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 138.

The effect is a new orientation of being, a conversion which turns the whole individual away from the former life and sets him upon god. “Therefore”, notes Edwards,

if there be not great and remarkable abiding change in persons that think they have experienced a work of conversion, vain are all their imaginations and pretences, however they have been affected. Conversion is a great and universal change of the man, turning him from sin to God.<sup>61</sup>

Between the cause and the effect, the person undergoes a shift in the nature of his existence. All aspects of the human person are changed, and new life begins to grow within the converted soul. This conversion affects understanding, will, even—under the right circumstances—bodily functions.<sup>62</sup> These changes, in turn, provide the further signs Edwards uses to judge legitimate religious affections. Although most of his exposition is focused on these other signs, it must be remembered that grace and conversion remain the foundation of the affections.

The second category of the signs of gracious affections is comprised of a new aesthetic sense. It is arguable that this is the most important category philosophically, because of the use to which Edwards puts Beauty. When affections have Beauty as both their foundation and their object, they are truly gracious. Edwards writes “*The primary ground of gracious affections is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things as they are in themselves; and not any conceived relation they bear to self, or self-interest.*”<sup>63</sup> Beauty in itself and for itself, as expressed in the nature and character and person of God, is

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>62</sup> Edwards discusses such events throughout his writings on the Awakening. Also worthy of note are the comments on this subject in William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 165.

the ground and defining characteristic of legitimate affections.<sup>64</sup> “We cannot emphasize too much the significance Edwards attaches to *beauty, loveliness, harmony* in the proper apprehension of God, Christ, the Word.. and the experience of delight in their spiritual beauty.”<sup>65</sup> Religious affections, when properly formed, flow from God in conversion and back to God in terms of his Beauty. The Christian should love God not just because He is God as an abstraction, but because He has a concrete Beauty which can be appreciated, experienced, and loved.<sup>66</sup> Edwards’s ideas about beauty will be developed in a later chapter on virtue, here it need only be noted that affections which carry with them no proper aesthetic appreciation of the Beauty of God may not be categorized as truly gracious affections.

Third, as an apprehension of the Beauty of God grows, Christian virtues will begin to develop within the soul and flow out of the person in the shape of action. These virtues include (at least) humility, kindness, and the desire for holiness.

Some amiable qualities and virtues, more especially agree with the nature of the gospel constitution, and Christian profession; because there is a special agreeableness in them with those divine attributes which God has more remarkably manifested in the work of redemption by Jesus Christ.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 166-76.

<sup>65</sup> John E. Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher*, 112.

<sup>66</sup> Carse suggests that this concrete Beauty, for Edwards, appears first in Christ, second in Christians, and last in the natural (although fallen) world. See James Carse, *Jonathan Edwards & the Visibility of God* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967). For a discussion of the psychological aspects of this aesthetic sense, see James Hoopes, “Jonathan Edwards’s Religious Psychology,” *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 4 (March 1983): 849-65.

<sup>67</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 273.

Again, Edwards's thoughts on virtue will be discussed in a later chapter. What needs to be emphasized here is the relationship between the presence of Godly affections and the growth of virtue.

Fourth, related to the third category and the most important according to Edwards, truly gracious affections lead to action. "*Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.*"<sup>68</sup> And, given Edwards's view of the intimate connection between the affections and the will, it can be seen why he draws this conclusion (even without appealing to the numerous passages of Scripture he cites). Changed affections mean a changed will, and a changed will reveals itself in changed actions.

This implies three things: 1. That his behaviour or practice in the world, be universally conformed to, and directed by, Christian rules. 2. That he makes a business of such a holy practice above all things; that it be a business which he is chiefly engaged in, and devoted to, and pursues with highest earnestness and diligence: so that he may be said to make this practice of religion eminently his work and business. And, 3. That he persists in it to the end of life: so that it may be said, not only to be his business at certain seasons... but the business of his life.<sup>69</sup>

Affections which fail to result in a new encounter with the external world, with neighbors, with other Christians, are not truly saving affections at all.

So, Edwards concludes, there are signs which may be used to sort the wheat from the chaff, and one need conclude neither that all affections are bad, nor that all religion is bad. Indeed, the proper examination of one's own soul for these signs can only benefit religion, since "many occasions of spiritual pride would thus be cut off," and

a great many of the main stumbling-blocks against experimental and powerful religion would be removed, and religion would be declared and manifested in such a

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<sup>68</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 308.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 308-09.



way that... it would, above all things, tend to convince men that there is a reality in religion, and greatly awaken them, and win them, by convincing their consciences of the importance and excellency of religion. Thus the light of professors would so shine before men, that others, seeing their good works, would glorify their Father which is in heaven.<sup>70</sup>

#### CONCLUSION: THE AFFECTIONS AS AN ILLUMINATION OF THE HISTORICAL

As with the will,<sup>71</sup> there are many implications of Edwards's philosophy of the affections for political theory. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, what will be explored in the conclusion of this chapter is the historical nature of both legitimate social movements and human affections. The primary point of contrast for this exploration will be Rousseau, as already mentioned.

Even with the brief gloss given of Rousseau's thought in the introduction, it can be seen that any comparison of him with Edwards necessarily will be exceedingly complex. On the one hand, Edwards does, in company with Rousseau, dig below both civilization and a surface-level view of reason in order to discuss human nature and its basic components. Likewise, both unite the will and human nature, seeing the former as a reflection of the deeper reality of the latter, rather than seeing the will as an independent something existing with its own power separate from the human person. Despite these similarities, however, the differences between the two thinkers are exceptionally great. Where Rousseau had rejected civilization, tradition, and history as foundations for human existence, Edwards viewed man as being placed squarely in historical, concrete reality. This can be seen both in Edwards's guidelines for judging social movements, and in his guidelines for judging the affections.

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<sup>70</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 382.

<sup>71</sup> See chapter three of this work.

In broad strokes, as a result of the Great Awakening Edwards's public position was that social and religious movements ought to be regarded by society with cautious optimism. To that end, he argued that legitimate social movements must be judged by: whether or not they involve and concern the entire society; the whole of their results, both positive and negative; their proper relation to custom and tradition; their appreciation for limited innovation; a heightened aesthetic sense of one's relationship to the truth; and the result of the movement being charity rather than pride. These last two characteristics are the ones which are most relevant for judging the individual's affections as well, and are, as noted above, the result of conversion. The picture that emerges from these characteristics is that both legitimate social movements and legitimate religious affections must be grounded in historical reality, in time and space. The function of custom and tradition in Edwards's thought are indicative of this picture. For Rousseau, custom and tradition are inhibitors to legitimate human development. They enslave the soul and restrain one from reaching one's true potential.<sup>72</sup> By contrast, for Edwards custom and tradition *do* have a place both in society and in the life of the individual. They provide, if kept in the proper perspective, appropriate balance and guidance for any new social or religious movement that begins to work its way through society. This deference to tradition and custom is noticeable in Edwards (see above), so that he has at times been accused of being a Feudalist politically.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See functionally any of Rousseau's works, but especially *The First Discourse*, cited above.

<sup>73</sup> The specific "charge" of being a Feudalist, if it is to be an aspersion rather than a compliment, is leveled by Professor Holbrook, who argues that Edwards was a monarchist of a fairly extreme bent. Professor McDermott responds to this claim by suggesting that, based on his actions and public sermons, Edwards was more of a "modern" (for his time) liberal with broad ideas about civic responsibility and citizenship. See Clyde Holbrook, *The Ethics of Jonathan Edwards: Morality and Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973); Gerald McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 94-95, and the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

While this charge may be extreme, it should be noted that at the very least Edwards has diverged from Rousseau in giving custom and tradition an important role to play. Removing these things from society is neither wise nor desirable, even with the otherwise noble goals of exploring human nature as it properly exists and reforming the ills of the state.

Of course, it should *also* be noted that Edwards does not quite reach the high view of tradition which traditionalists and conservatives hold. He would not echo with Russell Kirk that men ought to have a fundamental “faith in prescription,” and he certainly would not go to the extreme of a de Maistre in arguing that tradition rules all, and that the executioner should await those who would attempt to throw off custom.<sup>74</sup> Instead gives prescription and tradition secondary, perhaps even tertiary, social roles, and encourages the conservatives of his day to remember that “new” does not always or automatically equal “bad.” Progress and advance in society require a certain amount of innovation and change, neither of which should be objects of fear for their own sakes. And Edwards believes that society *does* advance. While any individual idea event may cause great harm to society, in broad and general strokes both society and religion advance through time towards a final millennial destination.<sup>75</sup> Despite his ill-advised association of this millennial destination with the geographic region of America (which he later retracted), and despite his renowned fire-and-

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<sup>74</sup> Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 9; Joseph de Maistre, *Considerations on France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>75</sup> There are far too many sources engaging Edwards’s progressive and millennial thought to mention. Professor McDermott’s chapter on the role of the millennium in Edwards “public theology” engages a good number of them, and is worth reading for the citations alone (it is also quite worthwhile for his thoughtful conclusions, though he goes too far in ascribing a vague eschatological universalism to Edwards). McDermott, 37-92. For more of a general placing of Edwards’s in the context of millennial thought of his times, see J.W. Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). Also useful is Stephen J. Stein, “Providence and the Apocalypse in the Early Writings of Jonathan Edwards,” *Early American Literature* 13, no. 2 (1978-1979): 250-67.

brimstone abilities as a preacher, Edwards retained a postmillennial optimism about the ultimate fate of the human race, a fate which would be brought about neither by revolutionary zeal nor by thick-headed traditionalism, but rather by personal revival and social innovation.<sup>76</sup> Consequently for Edwards, in terms of the relation between custom and social movements, balance is the key idea. Traditions should be neither worshipped nor thrown off, but rather put to work as servants and guides in accomplishing the ends for which civilization and religion move. (These ends will be explored in the seventh chapter of this dissertation.) Clearly, Edwards is ultimately neither a revolutionary nor a pure conservative, at least in his views of tradition and custom, but rather is a moderate (with perhaps more in common with traditionalists than with radicals).

An additional evidence of the historical nature of Edwards's view of social movements and individual affections is found in Edwards's belief that a fundamental and necessary component of both is a new aesthetic sense of one's relationship to the truth. That is, one must *both* stand in relation to an understood (and therefore rational) Transcendent reality *and* perceive that reality with a transformed aesthetic appreciation of it as it exists in its historical context. Here Edwards breaks completely with Rousseau—who would have the individual stand alone and in relation to nothing aside from himself<sup>77</sup>—and stands firmly within the stream of Christian tradition, and firmly near the stream of historicist tradition. Much more will be said about Edwards's understanding of beauty and the importance of

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<sup>76</sup> The best exposition of Edwards's eschatological optimism that I have found is, surprisingly, that of the otherwise dense (and mercifully short) work on Edwards as a philosopher by Professor Lee. See Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 214-23.

<sup>77</sup> Again, any of the works of Rousseau may be cited, but perhaps the clearest presentation of this idea is Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*.

aesthetics in the sixth chapter of this dissertation, here what matters is that Edwards's understanding of social movement and personal experience is ultimately irreconcilable with that of Rousseau's on two levels. First, in that it involves a relationship with a Transcendent reality outside of the individual. While man may be *studied* alone and as he exists by himself in his basic components (will, affections, etc), his existence may not be reduced to any one of them. Where Rousseau's ideal society would involve man by himself and willing as nature spontaneously dictates, Edwards argues that man as he should be (and as he becomes with reformed affections) exists *relationally*. The category of an isolated individual is only an intellectual exercise for Edwards, not a desirable and possible reality. Society, in turn, is not composed of isolated individuals willing it into being spontaneously, but rather of individuals joined together by an aesthetic sense of what is good.<sup>78</sup> This is the second point of deviation between Edwards's and Rousseau. Rousseau would unite people by means of the "general will", or the unity of all the spontaneous willing of society.<sup>79</sup> Edwards, while acknowledging the role and importance of the will, considers the unity of society and the unity of an individual experience to be ultimately a unity of aesthetics within history.

It should also be noted that this is where an Edwardsean view of freedom needs to be developed. As suggested in the last chapter, freedom cannot be a characteristic of the will, but must instead be a function of the whole person. If the fundamental component of the whole person is the affections, then the affections must be where freedom is located.

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<sup>78</sup> Of course this unity will be on different levels between non-Christians and Christians, who will never see a political or social unity as anything more than temporary and secondary in the grand scheme of things. This is the great argument of Augustine in *City of God*.

<sup>79</sup> See Rousseau, *The Social Contract* in *Political Writings*.

Freedom, then, must be related to both how the affections are tuned and what the affections of the individual are set upon. This, once again, forces a delay in discussing freedom until a later chapter, where virtue and beauty (as the objects of the affections, and therefore the source of freedom) and justification and grace (as the means by which the affections are shifted) will be examined.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, the historical aspects of Edwards's aesthetics will be further explored in that same chapter.<sup>81</sup> Here, all that needs emphasis is that Edwards sees man not as being transcendent himself, but as being in a historical relationship with that Transcendence. This is driven home by the final point to be emphasized here: the necessity of charity.

The critical point of judgment on either the social or individual level must be that charity is what defines the event, rather than pride. Claims to a private religious experience that result in the growth of pride in the soul must be rejected as false, while those which result in an increase in works of charity may be embraced. Likewise at the social and religious levels, movements which do not benefit the community as a whole in terms of charity and good works must ultimately be rejected. Good intentions do not replace good works. A social movement which leaves people damaged (or, *mirable dictu*, dead) must be dismissed or even worked against, however well-intentioned the originators of the movement might be. Likewise, an individual who claims to have had a legitimate religious experience and yet makes no changes in his life for the better has not, by Edwards's definition, had a

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<sup>80</sup> Professor McDermott's book *One Holy and Happy Society* attempts to expand this last point until it subsumes all of the others. And while he makes some useful observations, the end result is a skewed view of Edwards's social thought that emphasizes too much progressive social action and too little the aesthetic and rational aspects of Edwards's thought. See chapter eight of this dissertation.

<sup>81</sup> Sources on this point will be explored in chapter six, but for a good overview see Terrence Erdt, *Jonathan Edwards and the Sense of the Heart*; and James Carse, *Jonathan Edwards & The Visibility of God*.

true experience. Sentiment must never replace substance. And, in stating this point, Edwards shows that just as an entire society ought to be engaged in a social movement, so an entire person ought to be involved in order for a personal experience to be legitimate. An experience which stirs up emotion without engaging reason, or a rational argument which carries no sense of passion with it, or either of those things which do not move the person to action, all are illegitimate in that they leave a part of the organic unity of an individual behind. The whole person must be affected, not just one solitary component. Moreover, that affection must turn into action. Works of charity that are visible in the real, historical world are the only final determiners of legitimacy in society as a whole and within the soul alike. Historical reality is for Jonathan Edwards—as it never could be for Rousseau—the final objective arbiter of an idea.<sup>82</sup>

This final standard of charity raises important questions (most of which, unfortunately, must be left for further research). For example, despite being a good and legitimate social movement in which people were having good and legitimate personal experiences, according to Edwards, the Great Awakening itself eventually failed and fizzled out. Likewise *all* social movements have failed over time, and all personal experience eventually dims and loses its force, however strong the original event may have been.<sup>83</sup> How is this possible? If all of the “steps” are followed, and all of the criteria are met, should not success and social progress necessarily follow? Rousseau and other like-minded philosophers

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<sup>82</sup> Indeed, completely the opposite seemed to be the case for Rousseau. See Rousseau, *The Second Discourse* in *The Political Writings*.

<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the most interesting philosophical meditation on the latter of these phenomena is Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*.

would argue that failure was the result of “conspiracy”, which then needs to be rooted out so that one may get back to the formula for social advancement.<sup>84</sup> Edwards suggested that the problem is not one of external meddling in society, but rather is built into human nature itself. There is something inherently and fundamentally *wrong* with people, and it is this wrongness which will be explored in the next chapter on original sin.

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<sup>84</sup> For a useful discussion of this mindset, see Claes Ryn, “Leo Strauss and History: The Philosopher as Conspirator,” *Humanitas* XVIII, nos. 1 and 2 (2005), <http://www.nhinet.org/ryn18-1&2.pdf> (accessed February 6, 2012).



## CHAPTER V: ORIGINAL SIN

*The observation of Augustine is true, that all who are strangers to the true God, however excellent they may be deemed on account of their virtues, are more deserving of punishment than of reward, because, by the pollution of their heart, they contaminate the pure gifts of God... Seeing then that these actions are polluted as in their very source, by impurity of heart, they have no better title to be classed among virtues than vices. –John Calvin<sup>1</sup>*

*All human self-understanding and interaction presuppose the synthetic activity of an intuitive Self joining all particular selves. Without the more or less developed intuitive grasp of our common humanity and common world, experience would shatter into chaotic dispersion. –Claes Ryn<sup>2</sup>*

In many ways, twentieth century philosophy was concerned primarily with the quest for authenticity. For example, Heidegger suggests that true thought “is neither theoretical nor practical. It comes to pass before this distinction... it lets Being—be.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the purpose of authentic human reflection is neither to shape the person nor to provide ethical guidance for mankind, but rather to reveal what already *is*. (Though ethical guidance and formation may very well result from such knowledge.) Existence in itself becomes the focus of study. But, Heidegger argues, in order to arrive at existence as such, one must first clear off the ground and burrow down to being-as-it-is without all of the false trappings put upon it by history, tradition, the world, religion, and all other ideas and movements which would obscure authentic existence.<sup>4</sup> This chapter will explore Edwards’s contributions to the question of identity and existence, and conclude with an examination of the historical grounding of human identity.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.XIV.3.

<sup>2</sup> Claes Ryn, *Will, Imagination & Reason: Babbitt, Croce and the Problem of Reality*, 185.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 259.

<sup>4</sup> For a hefty but readable introduction to such trends in twentieth century thought, see Peter Watson, *The Modern Mind: An Intellectual History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001); for a deeper (and shorter) survey, see Christian Delacampagne, *A History of Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); for a more recent and much more thoughtful reinterpretation of certain twentieth century trends, see David Walsh, *The Modern Philosophical Revolution: The Luminosity of Being* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

In this the search for authentic identity, American philosophers were ahead of the game. Since at least the early part of the nineteenth century, American thinkers and literary figures had been calling for a level of independence and self-realization—for an authentic and independent American voice and culture. At the forefront of this movement was the Transcendentalist writer Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson called repeatedly for the American individual to shed those restraints which kept him from authentic self-awareness. While there are numerous quotations from Emerson's works which might be used to demonstrate this point, only a few need be mentioned:

- Perhaps the time is already come... when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands draws to a close.<sup>5</sup>
- That is always best which gives me to myself. The sublime is excited in me by the great stoical doctrine, Obey thyself. That which shows God in me, fortifies me. That which shows God out of me, makes me a wart and a wen.<sup>6</sup>
- I read the other day some verses written by an eminent painter which were original and not conventional. Always the soul hears an admonition in such lines, let the subject be what it may. The sentiment they instill is of more value than any thought they may contain. To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart, is true for all men,—that is genius. Speak your latent conviction and it shall be the universal sense; for always the inmost becomes the outmost... A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament of bards and sages.<sup>7</sup>
- Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine Providence has found for you; the society of your contemporaries, the connexion of events. Great men have always done so...<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *The American Transcendentalists*, ed. Lawrence Buell (New York: The Modern Library, 2006), 83.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Divinity School Address," *ibid*, 136.

<sup>7</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *ibid*, 210.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 211.

- It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance,—a new respect for the divinity in man,—must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views.<sup>9</sup>

Along with (and possibly because of) such thought there began to grow in America the idea that self-reliance, self-awareness, and independence are cardinal virtues. But what does it mean to be self-reliant, self-aware, and independent? As expressed in Emerson, it means variously “Obey thyself,” “trust thyself”, and watch for and embrace the gleam of light that “flashes across [your] mind.” In other words, virtue is not letting oneself be defined by others, but rather being authentic to one’s own nature.<sup>10</sup>

But what is one’s own nature? While the Transcendentalist writers were largely content to deify human nature and to identify “self-reliance” merely as “independence from European thought” (despite, ironically, being heavily influenced by German Idealism and English Liberalism), by the 1960s philosophers and popular culture alike were strongly entrenched in the quest for an authentic definition of the self.<sup>11</sup> While the Emersonian idea of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>10</sup> This philosophical work was reflected on the literary level in the efforts at independence from British literature made by Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and Nathaniel Hawthorne (himself a friend of Emerson). Despite the inherently conservative tendencies of these writers, their project largely advanced the more radical platform of the Transcendentalists. On a religious level, the Second Great Awakening and the thought and writings of Charles Finney, as well as the rise of Unitarianism, contributed further to the acceptance of this new idea of the self. See variously: Philip Gura, *American Transcendentalism* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Van Wyck Brooks, *The Flowering of New England: 1815-1865* (United States: E.P. Dutton & CO., Inc., 1936); Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Chu Hartley Publishers, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Emerson, for example, likely did not intend for his thought to lead to the modern and postmodern definitions of virtue which have grown in the twentieth century. In some of his writings he may be shown to be more of a moralist than a libertine, and certainly the more conservative novelists such as Hawthorne and Cooper never intended the creation of a unique American identity to be the virtual equivalent of the total loosening of all social restraints. See chapter VII in Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind from Burke to Eliot*.

the individual was largely accepted, it was no longer sufficient simply to define “the self” as being “not European” and “self-reliant.” Heidegger’s quest for an authentic expression of being gave articulation to this felt lack in the American psyche. In a fascinating combination of Emersonian individualism and Heideggerian desire for authenticity, American thinkers began to search for the individual as he exists at his root; they tried to find, as Herbert Marcuse said, the “authentic, inner substance of man.”<sup>12</sup> If man is to have an authentic self-understanding, as called for by Emerson, one must (according to Marcuse) arrive at the “inner substance”, and not be content to explore mere externals.<sup>13</sup>

This search for authentic identity, though it has taken different turns through American history, goes back at least to the writings and time of Jonathan Edwards. In what is perhaps his most underrated philosophical publication, Edwards engages the question which philosophers and theologians have struggled with since the beginning of systematic thought: what is the nature of evil? Edwards considers this question from the perspective of the Christian doctrine of original sin and uses it as a platform from which to discuss the very essence of both personal identity and existence itself. It is important to note that Edwards’s thoughts on existence (or “being”) come in their fullest form in two places: first, here in his discussion of sin and evil; and, second, in his work *The End for which God Created the World* (to be discussed in a later chapter).<sup>14</sup> In Edwards’s location of these philosophical

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<sup>12</sup> Herbert Marcuse, “The Affirmative Character of Culture,” in *The Essential Marcuse*, ed. Andrew Feenberg and William Leiss (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 222.

<sup>13</sup> See Irwin Unger, *The Times Were a Changin’*; Harold Bloom, *The American Religion*, and Neal Dolan *Emerson’s Liberalism* (Madison: University Wisconsin Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Along with several scattered meditations throughout his “Miscellanies.” I have tended to avoid citing the Miscellanies, as they, despite contributing occasional insight to Edwards’s thought, were never intended for publication or public consumption.

discussions, it can be seen that the question of existence is intimately related on the one hand to sin and evil, and on the other to the teleological goals of God in creation, namely his own transcendent glory and beauty. Discussions of being, for Edwards, cannot be separated from discussions of evil, aesthetics, virtue, and teleology. This chapter will focus on Edwards's arguments in his work on original sin and the consequent conclusions about identity and existence, while at the same time laying the groundwork for the next two chapters on virtue, aesthetics, and teleology.

#### ORIGINAL SIN: THE ARGUMENT

Edwards's arguments in *Original Sin* are complicated, but, because of that, all the more worthy of detailed attention. Structurally, he breaks the book into four parts in which he systematically outlines the arguments for and against original sin.

In part one, Edwards engages "evidences of Original Sin from facts and events, as found by observation and experience, together with representations and testimonies of Holy Scripture," as well as touching on some of the counter-arguments to the doctrine.<sup>15</sup> It is here that Edwards provides his definition of original sin: "by ORIGINAL sin... is meant the *innate sinful depravity of the heart*."<sup>16</sup> The three key words for Edwards are "innate," "depravity", and "heart." Sin is "innate" in that it is built into the very structure of human nature. And while it may appear that there are a number of "good" people in the world (as the opponents of original sin argue), in fact even this goodness is the result of grace. In order to really understand human nature, it must be seen "as the true tendency of the natural or innate

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, vol. 3 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 105.

<sup>16</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 107.

disposition of man's heart... without the *interposition of divine grace*.”<sup>17</sup> Once grace is removed from the observation, what is seen is that man is fundamentally, innately sinful.

Likewise, man is “depraved.” This word carries with it a description of the moral standing of mankind.<sup>18</sup> It is not just that man has the principle of evil somewhere in him; it is that, by nature, mankind tends toward wickedness. “Mankind are all naturally in such a state... that they universally run themselves into that which is, in effect, their own utter eternal perdition, as being finally accursed of God, and the subjects of his remedy-less wrath.”<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that man is as bad as he could be (though that would certainly be the result were divine grace to be removed from man), but that every aspect of his person, every part of his nature, is defined by sin.

Finally, sin is a question of the “heart.” “All moral qualities, all principles, either of virtue or vice, lie in the disposition of the heart.”<sup>20</sup> As was shown in the previous chapter, Edwards's view of the human person is as an organic whole, defined and directed at a fundamental level by the affections. Thus, if the affections are focused on and defined by sin, then the whole person will be sinful. To discuss the question of original sin is to discuss not a Platonic error in judgment, but rather an innate disposition driving the entire human being.<sup>21</sup>

In Parts two and three, Edwards comments on “particular parts of Holy Scripture, which prove the doctrine of original sin” and “evidence given us... in what the scriptures

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 113; John E. Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher*, 84-87.

<sup>20</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 107.

<sup>21</sup> See Plato, *The Republic*, book VIII; Helm and Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian*, 4-11, 18-22.

reveal concerning the redemption by Christ.”<sup>22</sup> The specific exegesis here can be passed over; it is fairly standard Reformed exposition upon various Biblical texts.<sup>23</sup> The most important concern in these passages is the difficult foundation of the doctrine of original sin. Edwards begins with an examination of the creation and fall narratives of the first three chapters of Genesis. He argues that Adam was created not only without original sin, but as an actively righteous being. This does not mean that Adam had a free nature and could choose between good and evil, it meant that he was good, and disposed towards choosing goodness.

It is agreeable to the sense of the minds of men in all nations and ages, not only that the fruit or effect of a good choice is virtuous, but the good choice itself, from whence that effect proceeds; yea, and not only so, but also the antecedent good disposition, temper or affection of mind, from whence proceeds that good choice, is virtuous. This is the general notion, not that principles derive their goodness from actions, but that actions derive their goodness from the principles whence they proceed; and so that act of choosing that which is good, is no further virtuous than it proceeds from a good principle, or virtuous disposition of mind.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, good actions are not the cause of virtue, but rather a reflection of already present virtue in the nature of the person performing the actions.

This leads to the difficult question of how, if it was Adam’s nature and inclination *not* to sin, did Adam fall? As Peter Beck points out, this is the weak point in Edwards’s thought, and, to some extent, the weak point in the entire Augustinian stream of Christianity. “At the heart of the issue is this question: If Adam was inherently good and in no way inclined to evil in his nature, how could he choose to do other than good? Or, what is the explanation for this

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<sup>22</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 221, 351.

<sup>23</sup> Other examples of such exposition can be found throughout Puritan works. For a comparison of Edwards to these earlier Puritan writers, see Clyde A. Holbrook’s introduction to Edwards, *Original Sin*, 82-85.

<sup>24</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 224.

contrary choice that Adam has made?”<sup>25</sup> Edwards’s answer reflects Augustine’s in that he argues that Adam was able to choose sin, despite having a good nature, because he choose a lesser good over a greater. That is, Adam was able to sin because he was choosing something good (himself) over a greater good (God).<sup>26</sup> This explanation is unsatisfactory on a number of levels, but, as it has been examined by numerous theologians and philosophers, it will not be resolved here.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, even Edwards’s weakness is useful in further disclosing his ideas concerning original sin and existence. Edwards’s difficulty suggests that the focus of the problem of original sin is a question neither of choice, nor of the nature of evil, but rather of human nature itself. His arguments in *Freedom of the Will* and *Religious Affections*, combined with the question in *Original Sin* of how Adam could have sinned, force any discussion of evil that engages Edwards to focus on the question of human nature, rather than letting the discussion get distracted by the debate over free will. The conversation thus shifts away from the question of *how* Adam chose to sin and onto *who* Adam was. This question of Adam’s identity becomes the point discussed in part four of *Original Sin*: how is it just that God judged all of mankind in Adam? Edwards’s answer to this question must bear the most analysis, as it is particularly complex and important in the broad scheme of his thought.

The nature of the relationship between God, Adam, and mankind is the reflective centerpiece of *Original Sin*, and where the most discussion needs to take place in any

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Beck, “The fall of man and the failure of Jonathan Edwards,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 79, no.3 (July 2007): 211.

<sup>26</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 228-29.

<sup>27</sup> Works and collections dealing with this issue are legion. As good a place to start as any (certainly no worse than some) is broad-scoped work by Michael Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).



philosophical consideration of Edwards.<sup>28</sup> The challenge Edwards engages is that given “the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity... such imputation is unjust and unreasonable, inasmuch as Adam and his posterity are not one and the same.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, was it unjust for God to judge all of mankind by the actions of one person? Edwards argues that the force of this challenge falls on a specific part of the claim, namely that “All may be summed up in this, that Adam and his posterity are *not one*, but entirely *distinct agents*.”<sup>30</sup> Edwards argues that if he can show a unity between Adam and all of mankind, then the objection loses its force. If it can be shown that the person—the *identity*—of Adam is one with all of mankind, objections to the doctrine of original sin disappear.

Edwards begins his response by defining personal identity. He points out that the original objection—that of unfairness in God’s judgment of all of mankind in Adam—is based on “a false hypothesis, and wrong notion of what we call *sameness* or *oneness*, among created things.”<sup>31</sup> The common assumptions were that the foundations of human identity were either in the internal characteristics of the soul or the organic and more external aspects of the human body. That is, either we are identified by our inner spiritual substance or we are identified by our external material substance, or some combination of both. To the contrary, Edwards argues, what we find when we look at the physical universe is that things which appear to be very distinct are in fact so “united by the established law of the Creator” that it

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<sup>28</sup> In recent years, this has been the focus of much debate amongst Edwards scholars. See especially the argument put forward by Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 76-114; and the response by the authors in the work edited by Helm and Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, 61-78, 99-114.

<sup>29</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 389.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>31</sup> Edwards, *OS*, 397.

is “as if they were one.”<sup>32</sup> “Thus a tree, grown great, and an hundred years old, is one plant with the little sprout, that first came out of the ground.”<sup>33</sup> Consequently, mere physical appearance or organic substance cannot provide a sufficient ground for judging individual identity. Nor, for that matter, can (as Locke argues) internal consciousness. Edwards argues that consciousness—the passing down of memories and ideas through the course of a life in the mind and soul of the same person—operates according to the laws of nature.<sup>34</sup> Humans do not resolve to be the same being from one moment to the next. Rather they exist from one moment to the next in accord with rational and natural laws. A person does not will or think his own existence moment to moment; instead he continues to exist in a chronological succession according to the rules by which all human beings operate. Therefore, even as rational and conscious beings, humanity cannot be not its own standard of identity, since conscience and memory exist in a continuity both natural to the individual and universal to the race.<sup>35</sup>

What, then, becomes the foundation of personal identity? If it is not the consciousness (internal), and not the organic material body (external), it follows that the person has nothing in themselves to be the foundation of their own existence, and by extension the person must be a *dependent* being, with identity relying for existence on an outside source. Man cannot be the ground of his own being, but rather must be built upon something outside of himself.

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<sup>32</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 397.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

<sup>34</sup> See Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 76-84.

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 398-99.

Instead, it is God who creates and sustains the existence not only of each individual person, but of all things that are. In a lengthy (but worthwhile) passage, Edwards concludes

That God does, by his immediate power, *uphold* every created substance in being, will be manifest, if we consider, that their present existence is a *dependent* existence, and therefore is an *effect*, and must have some *cause*: and the cause must be one of these two: either the *antecedent existence* of the same substance, or else the *power of the Creator*. But it can't be the antecedent existence of the same subject... 'Tis plain, nothing can exert itself, or operate, when and where it is not existing... In point of time, what is *past* entirely ceases, when *present* existence begins; otherwise, it would not be *past*. The past moment is ceased and gone, when the present moment takes place; and does no more coexist with it, than does any other moment that had ceased twenty years ago... From these things, I suppose, it will certainly follow, that the present existence, either of this, or any other created substance, cannot be an effect of its past existence. The existences (so to speak) of an effect, or thing dependent, in different parts of space or duration, though ever so *near* one to another, don't at all coexist one with the other; and therefore are as truly different effects, as if those parts of space and duration were ever so far asunder... Therefore the existence of created substances, in each successive moment, must be the effect of the *immediate* agency, will, and power of God."<sup>36</sup>

Existence and identity are not contingent on themselves, but on the continual creative action of God. This doctrine, known as "occasionalism" (and loosely related to the Neoplatonism then in vogue at Oxford) is the foundation of Edwards's understanding of both original sin and human identity.<sup>37</sup> God not only created the world at the beginning of time, but He continually exercises his creative power "in each successive moment," which is "equivalent to an *immediate production out of nothing*, at each moment."<sup>38</sup> The only functional difference between the creation described in the book of Genesis and the creation continuing

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<sup>36</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 400-01. See also Helm and Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, 53; Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 68-75.

<sup>37</sup> Exactly how aware Edwards was of the philosophical movements at Oxford is a matter of some debate. Professor Lee argues that Edwards was aware of the Cambridge Platonists, but ultimately preferred Lockean Empiricism. Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 117-25. Paul Helm, Oliver Crisp, and Stephen Holmes all respond that Edwards was more in line with the Platonists, and ultimately rejected Locke's empiricism. Helm and Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, 45-78, 99-114.

<sup>38</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 402.

at each passing second is chronological, with the Genesis creation coming first and continual creation occurring ever since. If all of creation does not have a continued existence, but instead is recreated at every moment, then the unity and oneness which Edwards suggested his opponents had failed to understand can have only one foundation—the Being, will, and power of God Himself.

All of this is argued in order to conclude that God is right and just in treating Adam and his progeny as a unified whole, rather than as independent agents. Indeed,

no solid reason can be given, why God, who constitutes all other created union or oneness... may not establish a constitution whereby the natural posterity of Adam, proceeding from him, much as the buds and branches from the stock or root of a tree, should be treated as one with him, for the derivation, either of righteousness and communion in rewards, or of the loss of righteousness and consequent corruption and guilt.<sup>39</sup>

As the Creator, God may organize and unify creation as He sees fit and in any whatsoever arbitrary way He may desire. Yet God does not unify and organize on a whim, He rather organizes and unifies according to the divine wisdom according to two broad rules. “First, in a beautiful *analogy* and *harmony* with *other* laws or constitutions, especially relating to the same subject.”<sup>40</sup> God organizes in harmony and relationship. To be united with other creatures by divine creative power is both an ontological and an aesthetic reality. This ontological and aesthetic reality becomes visible to the individual on conversion when the affections are reoriented and a new aesthetic sense is given. To object to or fail to comprehend this unity is not so much a rational failure (though it is that as well) as it is an

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<sup>39</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 405.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 406. See also Daniel Walker Howe, “Franklin, Edwards, and the Problem of Human Nature,” in *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Representation of American Culture*, 87.

aesthetic and imaginative failure. The unity between person and person, and between all of humanity and Adam, is a unity based on beauty and harmony within the creative power of God. This beauty and harmony will be further discussed in the next chapter; here all that need be noted is the centrality of these two characteristics to the identity of man in the thought of Edwards.

The second rule of organization and unification is teleological, or “in the good *ends* obtained, or useful *consequences* of such a constitution.”<sup>41</sup> Beauty does not, contrary to the various popular slogans, exist for its own sake, but rather for a larger teleological end. This end (the glory of God) will be discussed in the seventh chapter of this dissertation. As with beauty, teleology need only be noted here as another organizing principle of unity. The unity between man and man is a unity that, according to Edwards, serves a purpose larger than itself and is moving towards a goal. Mankind is not adrift in an existential sea of despair, but rather moves forward in a brotherhood all bound for the same destination.<sup>42</sup>

So far, Edwards has been largely speaking of the natural unity that passes biologically from parent to child. But, just as mankind is necessarily naturally related through the process of propagation, just so is it “that all should be naturally in one and the same *moral state*.”<sup>43</sup> That is, just as God holds all of physical existence in unity by His creative power, so he holds men together in the same united moral condition. Imagine, suggests Edwards in a footnote, if God had *literally* created man as one organic whole, with all people existing at one time and

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<sup>41</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 406.

<sup>42</sup> Or rather *two* destinations, as Edwards the Christian would argue, with one for the stubbornly unrepentant and one for the humbly converted. Though he would point out that both destinations ultimate have the same teleological role: the glory of God.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

in one physically connected way. Would not sin in one part—Adam—affect the whole? And if, the whole having been affected, this organism were split apart, would not all the parts remain equally affected? “I know not why succession, or diversity of time, should make any such constituted union more unreasonable...”<sup>44</sup> Separation in space and time is not significant enough for Edwards to count as an actual separation of organic or natural identity. In the same way, God unites people in a unity of moral standing which is not broken by either chronological or geographic differences.

At the end of the section, Edwards anticipates the objection that if God continually holds all men together by His own power and will, then He could choose *not* to continue the existence of sin and evil. He could, from one moment to the next, blink them out of existence so that all people would instantly become perfect. Yet, Edwards rejoins, to argue this is to have missed the point. Existence is not arbitrary because it is continually recreated, rather it is all the more real (“really there,” as Francis Schaeffer argued) because its unity is not found in itself but in a transcendent source.<sup>45</sup> Adam’s (humanity’s) sin becomes, “in reality and propriety... *their* sin; by virtue of a real union between the root and branches of the world of mankind.”<sup>46</sup> Adam’s sin is something which his progeny have continually assented to and set their affections upon not because God has chosen to create and continue them that way, but because that is who they are.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 406.

<sup>45</sup> For extended reflection on the implications of this idea, see Francis Schaeffer, *Trilogy* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 407.

This treatment, as has been pointed out, is both the most important and the weakest point in the corpus of Edwards's philosophical works, largely because he is dealing with a conceptual circle: does God make man the way He does because they are sinful? Or are they sinful because God makes them the way He does? Choosing either one of these positions opens the philosopher up to criticism from the other perspective and from the broader philosophical discipline. Edwards's attempt to balance the two is shaky at best.<sup>47</sup> And yet, however unfinished his philosophical conclusions may be, through this work Edwards has at least managed to turn the discussion of sin and evil in useful directions. First, for Edwards, to discuss the problems of a single individual is immediately to fall back on the problems of all of mankind. "The corruption of mankind, in short, cannot be accounted for by considering the sins of each individual taken one at a time."<sup>48</sup> Each man exists in an aesthetic and teleological relationship with all of mankind, and must be examined as such.

Second, Edwards recasts the discussion of evil into the discussion of identity. Evil does not exist as an abstraction, but rather as an integral part of human existence and as such must be discussed in those terms. Existence, in turn, does not exist for its own sake, but by the will and power of God from moment to moment as ruled by the Divine aesthetic and telos. The discussion of evil separate from these categories will never arrive at truth. Conversely, virtue must also be discussed in this context, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Finally, Edwards insists on the place of beauty and teleology in the discussion of evil. Sin, for Edwards, is not "neutral" in any sense; it is rather both ugly and unfocused. To leave

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<sup>47</sup> For an extensive treatment of the Edwards's philosophical weakness in *Original Sin*, see Beck, "The fall of man and the failure of Jonathan Edwards."

<sup>48</sup> John E. Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher*, 98.

these categories out of any discussion of the problem of evil is to miss its full weight, and to end with a skewed conversation on the topic.

Edwards concludes his work by responding to various objections which have been or might be raised to the doctrine of original sin. Since none of these objections come from the grounds of discussion Edwards had set up, he deals with each in a fairly perfunctory manner. He concludes the work by appealing to the long Christian tradition of holding a doctrine of original sin, and arguing that humility, rather than novelty, should be the perspective with which one approaches the difficult questions the doctrine raises.<sup>49</sup>

#### ORIGINAL SIN AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

As Edwards's most philosophically reflective work, *Original Sin* carries with it many implications for political theory, some of which will be touched on here, and all of which are worthy of future examination. Of course, the broad political applications and implications of the general Christian doctrine of "original sin" have been worked out elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> Among these applications is included the idea that any political or philosophical system which is constructed using human nature as a basis is destined to collapse. Even more than that, it is destined to self-destruct. Human nature has sin built into it on an ontological level; therefore, every aspect of the human person is tainted, and every effort at building a lasting and stable society—so long as these efforts are being made by human beings—are destined to fail. Promises that the failures of past will not be repeated because a new formula for society has been discovered are "chimeras", as the conservatives like to say. Further, the doctrine of

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<sup>49</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 434-37.

<sup>50</sup> Beginning with and continuing from Augustine's *City of God*.



original sin has led philosophers and theologians to repeatedly call for reexamination and critical reconsideration of streams of political thought within Christianity, especially those that tend toward nationalistic or triumphal millenarianism. Likewise, the doctrine of original sin becomes a source of criticism and evaluation of perfectionist or idealist systems of government and political thought, particularly those of Rousseau, Marx, and the communitarian thinkers of the twentieth century. Numerous other applications could be mentioned.<sup>51</sup>

Edwards's discussion of original sin, however, adds an important dimension to the traditional discussions of the doctrine that emphasizes the historical nature of the doctrine in his thought. This dimension has three stages which must be examined in turn.

First, as was seen in the last chapters, Edwards again recasts the focus of the questions at hand on the overall nature of the human person, rather than on any particular aspect of the individual. The will, the affections, reason, etc., are all insufficient to answer philosophical questions if taken by themselves. What *Original Sin* provides that deepens the discussion begun in previous chapters is the foundation of that organic and whole human identity. With Emerson, Heidegger, and the other writers mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Edwards is in full agreement that authentic humanity must be understood as it actually exists, not as it is perceived when viewed through the various misconceptions so

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<sup>51</sup> There are many writers in both conservative and Christian streams of thought who could be cited as examples and expositors of these ideas. Again, Augustine provides the foundation of most discussion and criticism using original sin as a foundation. See variously (and not exclusively): for an analysis of Augustine and the implications of original sin in its fifth century context, see Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*; for reflections on implications of original sin in its modern context, see Van Drunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*; for a non-Christian conservative reflection, see Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*; for reflection in the broader conservative tradition, see either Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* or Viereck, *Conservative Thinkers*.

readily available. Where Edwards departs from these thinkers, however, is where he overlaps with more conservative and historically-minded philosophers. The unique characteristic of human identity is neither Emerson's self-reliance nor Marcuse's isolate authenticity. Instead, the fundamental characteristic of human identity is a Divine organic unity—a connection that binds mankind both to one another, and to God. This moves Edwards away from thinkers like the Transcendentalists and New Left, and nearer to the conservative line of thought, especially as articulated by Burke and Hegel.<sup>52</sup>

Second, because this organic unity is built upon the person of God, because it is defined by his work in continually creating and upholding all of existence, it may be defined as a Divine unity. That is, the aspects of the God in whom unity exists become the aspects of the unity that binds mankind together. These aspects form the shape of the next two chapters, where beauty and virtue (chapter VI) and teleology and glory (chapter VII) will be discussed in their Edwardsean incarnations. Here, it needs to be pointed out that discussions of relationships between man and man must, according to Edwards's doctrine of human unity, be discussions involving theology and the doctrines of the Divine nature. Again, this connects Edwards much more with Burke and the conservatives than it does with Emerson and the individualists. Conservative writer Irving Babbitt reaches a similar conclusion, when he states:

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<sup>52</sup> The idea of a binding organic unity is especially strong in Burke, though it is also present in Hegel. Conservative thinkers shaped by and descended from these two have kept this idea at the core of their thought. See Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, especially 30-31; G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, ed. Carl Friedrich (New York: Random House, 1954); the continuity of Burke's and Hegel's thought may be seen in surveys of historical thought, especially those already mentioned by Kirk and Viereck. For a more recent interpretation of this organic unity, see Claes Ryn, *A Common Human Ground* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003).

When studied with any degree of thoroughness, the economic problem will be found to run into the political problem, the political problem in turn into the philosophical problem, and the philosophical problem itself to be almost indissolubly bound up at last with the religious problem.<sup>53</sup>

Theological reflection cannot be separated from reflections on human nature; the two are bound together just as tightly as human beings are.

Third, this unity of mankind in God suggests the further location of political and cultural unity. If society is not merely a collection of individuals willing themselves into a contract (as suggested in the previous chapters), then what is it? Even more than that, if people are not isolated individuals in their very existence, then the isolated individual cannot be the basis for culture or politics at all. What this is the basis for cultural and political life? It is no great leap to draw from Edwards's ontological reflections on human unity in *Original Sin* the idea that the foundation of the social order rests not on the actions and wills of men, but on the very person and will of God. Just as mankind is created moment by moment, and in doing so is unified in Divine characteristics, so too is society an emanation of the Divine Being. Hegel may as well have been citing Edwards when he stated the same thing in *Philosophy of Mind*, suggesting that the state gets its ideas and strength from religion, which in turn is a reflection of the Idea, the Absolute which binds together all men within the mind of God.<sup>54</sup>

When these three stages are placed in the context of Edwards's philosophy of history (see chapter two), the proper nature and role of politics and culture in Edwards's political

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<sup>53</sup> Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, 23. For reflections on the place of theology in Burke's political thought, see Kirk, 64-70. For a much less clear statement of the same principle, see Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 283.

<sup>54</sup> Being Hegel, there is far too much to quote here without extensive analysis, definition, and footnoting. See Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 282-91.

theology become clear. If men are all organically united (stage one), and that organic unity is based on the person of God (stage two) and applies to the social order as well (stage three), then both the individual and society may be said to be historical in nature, given that history is the place where God has chosen to create, sustain, and interact with humanity. In the thought of Edwards, man in his deepest nature is a historical being with an organic relationship to other men, society, and God. Man is not created as an a-historical being, but rather is placed squarely in the current of an organic and unified creation that moves according the nature of its creator. According to Edwards history and human identity are shaped by the virtue, beauty, and teleology inherent in God. These are the subjects of the next two chapters and, as will be seen, are central in Edwards's philosophy. For by elevating the question of human identity from an examination of man isolated from everything but himself to an exploration of the Divine attributes, Edwards has likewise raised the possibility that history, society, and even mankind may move and advance despite the limitations of original sin. In traditional Christian theology, Augustine's answer to the problem of sin in the individual and in society was that hope for a solution comes not in the city of man (which cannot go beyond the plans of the sophisters, calculators, and economists so dreaded by Burke<sup>55</sup>), but rather is found in the eschatological city of God. With the future city of God in view, man can recognize the true nature of his (and the state's) identity, and live in the world accordingly:

To anticipate such a future [of the city of God] is to believe that the values which are metaphysically and physically real are, at the same time, historically real. Inherent in

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<sup>55</sup> Burke, 66; Kirk, 9.

the creative principle, they reveal themselves in history as the values of creative experience, as such to be progressively embodied in the consciousness of the race.<sup>56</sup>

By looking to the eschaton, man can understand himself and the world and live—and even progress—accordingly. Edwards, while not deviating from the general sense of Augustine’s answer, emphasizes a different aspect of theology. Both thinkers point to the hope found in the Christian gospel as the means of overcoming the problems and limitations of original sin, Augustine emphasized that hope as being ultimately realized in heaven. Edwards—though in full agreement that final Christian redemption from original sin occurs only in heaven—emphasized the hope on earth of a regenerate aesthetic sense and vision of virtue and beauty upon which a new ontological life could be realized within history itself. His contribution is that the study of politics and culture must begin not with the will of man, but with the attributes of God as expressed in real space and time, that is, in history. Specifically it must begin with his virtue, beauty, and teleology. For while the sinner is mired in original sin and has no chance of escape on his own, divine grace can change the sinner by giving him a new understanding of and appreciation for beauty, which can lift the individual above his own natural state and into Augustine’s promised city of God. The next chapter will take up the question of beauty and virtue in the thought of Edwards.

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<sup>56</sup> Cochrane, 514; see also 396-98.

## CHAPTER VI: VIRTUE AND BEAUTY

*The Beautiful develops itself in its own world as an objective reality, and thus becomes differentiated into the particular formations of its individual aspects and constituents.* –G.W.F. Hegel<sup>1</sup>

*‘Believing,’ however, is not merely a matter of talking about it [the Gospel], or of merely repeating the bare words. It is rather a matter of mature consideration and trust in the Word, and then, in the midst of temptation, in the face of death, in persecution to defy all people, death, and the devil by saying, Okay, there is the promise, I take my stand on it, and I stand ready to sacrifice life and limb, property and honor, everything I am and have. When you trust the Word and promise of God in this way, with all of your heart, that’s what it means to believe.* –Martin Luther<sup>2</sup>

Jonathan Edwards’s greatest contribution to philosophical and theological reflection may very well be his conception of the unity of virtue and beauty. “His aesthetics,” writes Terrence Erdt, “are now recognized as the primary characteristic of his theology.”<sup>3</sup> As was shown in the last chapter, beauty is one of the ontologically unifying aspects of man’s existence in Edwards’s thought. Consequently, this chapter will explore: first, Edwards’s conception of beauty as expressed in his treatise on virtue and his Trinitarian writings; second, Edwards’s conception of how the individual partakes of that beauty through justification; finally, how these conceptions are grounded in history.

### TRUE VIRTUE

Edwards’s *The Nature of True Virtue* is generally considered his most difficult finished work.<sup>4</sup> The many attempts to explain and exposit this treatise have ranged from Perry Miller’s identification of it as an half-hearted ethical extension of a Lockean hermeneutic to Paul Ramsey’s reading of the treatise through the filter of Karl Barth.<sup>5</sup> What

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<sup>1</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. William Hastie (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2006), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 133.

<sup>3</sup> Terrence Erdt, *Jonathan Edwards: Art and the Sense of the Heart*, xi.

<sup>4</sup> William C. Spohn, S.J., “Sovereign Beauty: Jonathan Edwards and the Nature of True Virtue,” *Theological Studies* 42 (Sept. 1981): 394-421, 394.

<sup>5</sup> See Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Meridian, 1959); Paul Ramsey, editor’s introduction to *Ethical Writings*, vol. 8 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

both these early interpretations missed is the proper importance of the central theme of treatise: the relationship between virtue and beauty.<sup>6</sup> Only by holding this central theme in mind can Edwards's view of virtue be understood as intended.

Edwards begins his treatise with a survey of the definitions of virtue popular in his day. He agrees that most of these have *some* truth to them. Statements like "virtue is reason" are true in a limited sense: "there is a beauty of understanding and speculation." Likewise there is a beauty in physical appearance and natural characteristics.<sup>7</sup> These definitions, however, only encompass certain aspects of virtue. True virtue must be deeper than physical appearances and broader than naked reason, it must, Edwards argues, include a moral component and involve an active desire on the part of the individual to embrace goodness itself. "Virtue," writes Edwards, "is the beauty of those qualities and acts of the mind, that are of a *moral* nature, i.e. such as are attended with desert or worthiness of *praise* or *blame*."<sup>8</sup> Yet, even the addition of beauty and morality does not quite complete the definition of virtue. One might discover a sort of praiseworthiness or blameworthiness in an isolated context that, when viewed with a broader perspective, is revealed to be completely different than isolated perception made it out to be. Edwards uses a musical example: "A few notes in a tune, taken only by themselves, and in their relation to one another, may be harmonious; which, when considered with respect to all the notes in the tune, or the entire series of sounds they are

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<sup>6</sup> For a broader survey of and response to previous flawed views of Edwards's ethics, see Spohn, 396-400. The two primary analyses of Edwards prior to Spohn were those of Norman Fiering and Clyde Holbrook, both of which are useful for putting Edwards in context, but fail to correct Miller's errors beyond a superficial treatment. See Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context*; Holbrook, *The Ethics of Jonathan Edwards: Morality and Aesthetics*.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *On the Nature of True Virtue*, in *Ethical Writings*, 539. Hereafter: *True Virtue*.

<sup>8</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 539.

connected with, may be very discordant, and disagreeable.”<sup>9</sup> Virtue, if it is to be true virtue, can only be understood in its proper context. The only context which can possibly be large enough to encapsulate *all* virtue is a Transcendent one. It is here that Edwards provides his final definition of virtue: “True virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to being in general. Or perhaps, to speak more accurately, it is that consent, propensity, and union of heart to being in general, which is immediately exercised in a general good will.”<sup>10</sup> In this definition there are three clearly identifiable components of virtue which need to be briefly explicated.

### *Love*

The fundamental component of virtue is “benevolence,” or “love.” Edwards is clear on this point not only here, but throughout his writings. “*All that virtue which is saving, and distinguishing of true Christians from others, is summed up in Christian or divine love.*”<sup>11</sup>

Love is the summation and fountain of all other Christian virtues, “it never stands in isolation. Rather, Christian love is connected to all other Christian graces (notably, faith and hope).”<sup>12</sup> Love, then, is the *sine non qua* of virtue and beauty.

According to Edwards, there are popularly imagined to be two kinds of love: “love of benevolence, and love of complacency.”<sup>13</sup> The former is a combination of two things: the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 540.

<sup>10</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 540.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*, in *Ethical Writings*, 132.

<sup>12</sup> Edwin S. Gaustad, “The Nature of True—and Useful—Virtue: From Edwards to Franklin,” in *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Representation of American Culture*, 44

<sup>13</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 543.



love of what is beautiful in something, and the love of the well-being of that something.<sup>14</sup>

The latter loves beauty in itself, “it is no other than delight in beauty; or complacence in the person or being beloved for his beauty.”<sup>15</sup> The problem with these popular definitions is that they end in infinite regression. That is, both definitions (correctly) add a moral component to love. They argue that love, by definition, loves virtue in its object. Consequently, when one says “virtue is love,” by “love,” these popular definitions mean “love of virtue.” That simply leads in a circle, with the substance of the statement being “virtue is the love of virtue.”

Instead, Edwards argues, when one says “virtue is love,” what one must conclude in order not to get caught in a tautology is that virtue is the love of something other than virtue.

Therefore there is room left for no other conclusion, than that the primary object of virtuous love is being, simply considered; or that true virtue primarily consists, not in love to any particular beings, because of their virtue or beauty... but in a propensity and union of heart to being simply considered; exciting *absolute* benevolence, if I may so call it, to being in general.<sup>16</sup>

Virtue, therefore, is indeed love, but it is not the abstract conception of love to itself. Rather, it is love to “being in general,” or God. This becomes the second component of virtue.<sup>17</sup>

### *Love of Being in General*

Edwards argues that, ultimately, love should not be the love of any particular component of creation, nor of creation as a whole, but of what he called “being in general.” “It is evident, that true virtue must chiefly consist in love to God; the Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best.” Not just for His virtue (which is infinite), but also for His

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<sup>14</sup> When speaking of God’s own love of benevolence, Edwards notes that there is a third aspect, in which He loves that which is unbeautiful—fortunate news for the sinner!

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 543-44.

<sup>16</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 545.

<sup>17</sup> On “Being in general” as Edwards’s philosophical way of saying “God”, see Spohn, 405.

magnitude (which is also infinite) God should be the focus of all human love.<sup>18</sup> Edwards anticipates the objection that man both is commanded to love creation and has a natural disposition to do so. “Some beings... have a determination of mind to union and benevolence to a *particular person*, or *private system*, which is but a small part of the universal system of being... Such a determination, disposition, or affection of mind is not of the nature of true virtue.”<sup>19</sup> Particular aspects of creation might very well appear to be beautiful and worthy of love when held in their isolated context.<sup>20</sup> Yet to love only a particular agent or system is ultimately to fail to achieve true virtue, because such love raises the particular to the level of the universal and fails to understand the true nature of the particular.<sup>21</sup> Rather, in order to achieve the proper love of the particular, one must begin with a love of the universal (God) and from that love embrace the lesser systems of creation. “A virtuous consent to another person must have a universal reference, must reach out to appreciate that person in relation to being in general.”<sup>22</sup> One cannot love a person or a private system or even all of creation if one does not see that person or system in the context of the universal and transcendent nature of God.<sup>23</sup> So Edwards writes:

It appears that a truly virtuous mind, being as it were under the sovereign dominion of *love to God*, does above all things seek the *glory of God*, and makes *this* his supreme, governing, and ultimate end: consisting in the expression of God's perfections in their

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<sup>18</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 550.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 554.

<sup>20</sup> And of course, there is a sense in which individuals ought to love creation (it is the second great command, after all), but this love is to be a love that begins with the love of the whole. Ibid., 540.

<sup>21</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 555-56.

<sup>22</sup> Spohn, 402. See also Fiering.

<sup>23</sup> Here it can be seen how Edwards ties together this dissertation on *True Virtue* with *God's end in the Creation of the World*, where he explains why God created and what the nature of the universal context is. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

proper effects, and in the manifestation of God's glory to created understandings, and the communications of the infinite fullness of God to the creature; in the creature's highest esteem of God, love to God, and joy in God, and in the proper exercises and expressions of these. And so far as a virtuous mind exercises true virtue in benevolence to created beings, it chiefly seeks the good of the creature, consisting in its knowledge or view of God's glory and beauty, its union with God, and conformity to him, love to him, and joy in him. And that temper or disposition of heart, that consent, union, or propensity of mind to Being in general, which appears chiefly in such exercises, is virtue, truly so called; or in other words, true grace and real holiness. And no other disposition or affection but this is of the nature of true virtue.<sup>24</sup>

Love to God must be the foundation of love to man.<sup>25</sup> Thus, true virtue is love, and is focused entirely on the being of God, even when it is loving man. But what does it mean to love God? For Edwards, love was neither merely a passion nor merely an intellectual concept (though it had elements of both), rather, love is fundamentally a refined aesthetic sense.<sup>26</sup> This is where the third component of Edwards's understanding of virtue becomes relevant.

*Love of Being in General is Primarily an Aesthetic Love*

Ultimately, the love of God (of "being in general") is an aesthetic or "beautiful" love. In his explanation of this idea, Edwards identifies two kinds of beauty: primary and secondary. Briefly, primary beauty is

That consent, agreement, or union of being to being, which has been spoken of, *viz.* the union of propensity of *minds* to mental or spiritual existence, [this] may be called the highest and primary beauty; being the proper and peculiar beauty of spiritual and moral beings, which are the highest and first part of the universal system, for whose sake all the rest has existence.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Edwards, *True Virtue*, 559-60.

<sup>25</sup> Love to man, in turn, is the desire that said man will come to love God.

<sup>26</sup> The relationship between intellect, passion, and love in Edwards is a complex one, particularly given the faculty psychology dominant in his day. For thoughtful analyses of Edwards on this relationship, see the Gaustad and Howe essays in *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Representation of American Culture* (cited above). Also useful is Elizabeth Dunn, "A Wall Between Them Up to Heaven", in the same volume.

<sup>27</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 562.

If primary beauty is the “consent... of being to being”, secondary beauty is the reflection of this primary beauty throughout creation. It includes both the usual categories discussed in aesthetic reflection (including, e.g., symmetry, complexity, utility, size, and importance) and broader and more diverse categories than are normally found in discussions of aesthetics, such as natural law, personal relationships, justice, truth, and societal order. And yet, while all of these things *are* beautiful in their own place and way, according to Edwards they are ultimately insufficient to replace primary beauty. There are both objective and subjective reasons for this insufficiency. Subjectively, secondary beauty cannot replace primary beauty because even bad men can love it. Categories such as justice and proportion appeal even to the wicked. “Not only reason but *experience* plainly shows,” writes Edwards, “that men’s approbation of this sort of beauty does not spring from any virtuous temper, and has no connexion with virtue.”<sup>28</sup> Broad appeal, even so much as to appeal to the whole of mankind, is insufficient.

Objectively, secondary beauty cannot replace primary beauty because in itself it is merely an analogy and reflection of the reality of primary beauty. Secondary beauty ultimately does have value, but only derived value. Thus, secondary beauty *is* useful, but only if one sees it in its proper existence, as an emanation of primary beauty. Unfortunately, most who embrace secondary beauty do not see it in its proper context, but instead treat

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 574.

secondary beauty as if it were primary beauty. Consequently the real value that secondary beauty would otherwise have is destroyed, and primary beauty is never realized.<sup>29</sup>

Primary beauty, then, is the heart of true virtue. It is “the consent, agreement, or union of being to being... the union or propensity of *minds* to mental or spiritual existence.”<sup>30</sup> Just as secondary virtue has both subjective and objective aspects, so primary virtue does as well. Objectively, primary beauty is defined as consent to being. Exactly what this means has been subject to some debate. The clearest articulation to date has been that of William Danaher, who argues that this definition of beauty is ultimately a Trinitarian statement.<sup>31</sup> Granting Danaher’s argument that “Edwards’s theological reflection deeply informs his ethical reflection,” the nature of primary beauty may be understood to take on several unique characteristics according to the doctrine of the Trinity. Three of these aspects may be demonstrated to be essential to understanding true virtue and beauty (especially while attempting to arrive at a political theology).<sup>32</sup>

### *Virtue is Relational*

One central aspect of Edwards’s Trinitarian thought is the idea that the Trinity is relational. In Miscellany 96, Edwards writes

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<sup>29</sup> Edwards’s whole discussion of secondary beauty is worthy of more attention than space here permits. Edwards, *True Virtue*, 562-75. For further reflections on Edwards on secondary beauty, see especially Spohn and Erdt (the latter extrapolates from the doctrine an Edwardsean philosophy of art).

<sup>30</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 562.

<sup>31</sup> Rather than the other way around, as Roland Delattre argues. See William Danaher, Jr., *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards*, 2-3; Roland Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards: An Essay in Aesthetics and Theological Ethics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

<sup>32</sup> Danaher, 10. Again, space does not permit a complete exposition of these characteristics; only the ones central to Edwards’s political thought will be discussed here.

No reasonable creature can be happy, we find, without society and communion, not only because he finds something in others that is not in himself, but because he delights to communicate himself to another. This cannot be because of our imperfection, but because we are made in the image of God; for the more perfect any creature is, the more strong this inclination. So that we may conclude, that Jehovah's happiness consists in communion, as well as the creature's.<sup>33</sup>

It is built into the very being of the Triune God to communicate Himself. People likewise have this propensity, being made in the image of God. Therefore, a fundamental characteristic of primary beauty is for it to communicate itself outward. Specifically for Edwards, the person of the Trinity who communicates is the Holy Spirit.

Edwards says that the Holy Spirit has three related functions in relation to creatures: to quicken, enliven, and beautify things; to sanctify intelligent beings by communicating God's love (which the Spirit *is*) to them; and as the Comforter to delight and comfort the souls of God's people.<sup>34</sup>

Within the Trinity, the Holy Spirit communicates the love of the Father to the Son, and the love of the Son to the Father. Between man and God, the Holy Spirit communicates first the love of God to man and then changes man in such a way that man is capable of returning that love back to God. The means by which this is accomplished is justification, which will be discussed below. What is important to note here is that primary beauty involves a communication of itself to others.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Miscellanies: a-500*, vol. 13 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 264.

<sup>34</sup> Patrick Sherry, "The Beauty of God in the Holy Spirit," *Theology Today* 64, no. 1 (2007): 9.

<sup>35</sup> See the extended discussion in Danaher, 69-84.

### *Virtue is Transcendent*

The second aspect of primary beauty relative to this discussion is its Transcendent nature. God has an “infinite love to and delight in himself.”<sup>36</sup> In fact,

God’s love is primarily to Himself, and His infinite delight is in Himself, in the Father and the Son loving and delighting in each other. We often read of the Father loving the Son, and being well pleased with the Son, and of the Son loving the Father. In the infinite love and delight that is between these two persons consists the infinite happiness of God.<sup>37</sup>

Primary love has its origin in the very person of the Triune God. Ultimately, even God’s love is directed at His own person and therefore is Transcendent in its object (more on this in the next chapter). This, again, is why secondary love cannot replace primary love—primary love has its basis in the Trinity, while secondary love is at best merely a picture of the Trinity.<sup>38</sup>

Edwards is not saying that virtue is absolutely Transcendent and utterly separate from man. Indeed, as is seen in the next aspect of primary beauty, God himself bridges the divide from Transcendence to immanence.

### *Virtue is Converting*

Primary beauty, when communicated to the individual, changes the individual. When the Holy Spirit communicates the Trinitarian beauty to the individual soul, regeneration occurs. This leads to a series of changes in the recipient, the foremost of which is a renewed aesthetic sense.

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<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Discourse on the Trinity*, in *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 131.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, in vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 184.

<sup>38</sup> For further discussion on the Transcendent nature of the beauty of God, see Danaher, 201-20, and the Sherry article.

The first effect that is produced in the soul, whereby it is carried above what it has or can have by nature, is to cause it to relish or taste the sweetness of the Divine relation. That is the first and most fundamental thing in Divine Love, and that from which everything else that belongs to the Divine Love naturally and necessarily proceeds. When once the soul is brought to relish the excellency of the Divine nature, then it will naturally, and of course, incline to God every way. It will incline to be with Him and to enjoy Him. It will have benevolence to God. It will be glad that He is happy. It will incline that He should be glorified, and that His will should be done in all things. So that the first effect of the power of God in the heart in Regeneration, is to give the heart a Divine taste or sense; to cause it to have a relish of the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the Divine nature.<sup>39</sup>

Once primary beauty has been revealed, a new sense of beauty follows, and the connection between the Transcendent and the immanent becomes apparent in this new aesthetic sense. This, in turn, leads to the subjective aspects of primary beauty. That is, how they are received by the individual.<sup>40</sup>

Subjectively, primary beauty is a properly attuned aesthetic sense in the creature. As has just been shown, the subjective nature of primary beauty is a result of its objective nature in the Trinity:

Virtue, as I have observed, consists in the cordial consent or union of being to Being in general. And, as has also been observed, that frame of mind, whereby it is disposed to relish and be pleased with the view of this, is benevolence or union of heart itself to Being in general, or a universally benevolent frame of mind: because he whose temper is to love Being in general, therein must have a disposition to approve and be pleased with love to Being in general.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, 173-74.

<sup>40</sup> For further discussion on the aspects of beauty that involve conversion, see Danaher, 117-37.

<sup>41</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 621.



In other words, beauty—in addition to having an objective Trinitarian existence—is perceived (“consented to”) subjectively on the part of the observer.<sup>42</sup>

As has been stated, this consent is not consent which grows out of a rational exposition of virtue, but rather is the result of a perception (granted by God) inherent to the regenerate individual. But how is such a perception given? Ultimately, of course, it is by grace and the relational and communicative work of the Holy Spirit in conversion (see above). Edwards is a solid Calvinist through and through.

Only the grace of God can produce the new sensibility which can perceive the beauty of God, as the final chapter of *True Virtue* repeats the teaching of *Religious Affections*. Religious transformation would enable... philosophers to penetrate these images of benevolence [secondary beauty] to the reality [primary beauty].<sup>43</sup>

Spohn is quite right to tie the treatise on *True Virtue* to the *Religious Affections*. Virtue is the object of the affections in Edwards’s thought. And he is also right to anticipate Danaher in suggesting that the source of virtue is grace.<sup>44</sup> The conversion that allows the individual to arrive at a perception of and consent to the primary beauty at work in the world is an arbitrary gift of God, dependant only on His character, “his *own* temper and nature,” as Edwards says.<sup>45</sup> It would be perfectly appropriate to bring to bear Edwards’s writings on grace fully to bear at this point.<sup>46</sup> Yet, the argument can be carried one step deeper. While for Edwards grace is indeed the means by which God transforms the individual, something more

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<sup>42</sup> This consent to primary beauty, in turn, creates a proper sense of secondary beauty. Through conversion, Transcendence illuminates all of creation, and primary beauty becomes a door through which secondary beauty is also consented to.

<sup>43</sup> Spohn, 403-04.

<sup>44</sup> See the Spohn article in general, and specifically Danaher, 124-25.

<sup>45</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 622.

<sup>46</sup> As Carse does conversationally and reflectively. See Carse, *Jonathan Edwards and the Visibility of God*, 88 and throughout.

may be said about this process. In addition to being a Calvinist specifically (hence the appeal to grace), Edwards was a Protestant generally, and therefore the application of grace in the transformation of a sinner may be understood in the context of the doctrine of *sola fides*, justification by faith alone. And it is Edwards's work on this doctrine which, when briefly summarized and placed next to Edwards writings on virtue, will illuminate further aspects of his thought and sharpen the understanding of beauty and virtue being revealed.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE<sup>47</sup>

Edwards's short sermon *Justification by Faith Alone* was based on his Master's *Quaestio* (presented in Latin) of 1723 and was delivered in an expanded (and English) form as two lectures in 1734.<sup>48</sup> Much of the work is dedicated to expositing Scripture and responding to objections to the doctrine. What will be focused on as important here are Edwards's answers to two questions: what is justification, and how is justification by faith alone? Following this, it will be shown that Edwards's doctrine of justification is the historical component of his doctrine of virtue and beauty, and from this connection an Edwardsean view of freedom will be revealed in the conclusion to this chapter.

First, what is justification? It has, for Edwards, two aspects:

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<sup>47</sup> Sadly, this is one of Edwards's works which has received little scholarly attention. The major treatment of it comes in the introduction to volume 21 of the Yale Edition of Edwards's works, which is unfortunately slightly skewed by the neoorthodoxy of the editor. See Sang Hyun Lee's introduction to vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. The treatise itself is included with a short introductory note in Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1734-1738*, vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> Lee, "Editor's Introduction" to vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. For the *Quaestio* itself, see Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses: 1723-1729*, vol. 14 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). Edwards himself believed that these lectures were part of the motivation behind the small revival that struck Northampton in the mid-1730s. See Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 177-78.

A person is said to be justified when he is approved of God as free from the guilt of sin, and its deserved punishment, and as having that righteousness belonging to him that entitles to the reward of life. That we should take the word in such a sense, and understand it as the judges accepting a person as having both a negative, and positive righteousness belonging to him, and looking on him therefore, as not only quit, or free from any obligation to punishment but also as just and righteous, and so entitled to a positive reward, is not only most agreeable to the etymology, and natural import of the word, which signifies to make righteous, or to pass one for righteous in judgment, but also manifestly agreeable to the force of the word, as used in Scripture.<sup>49</sup>

In other words, justification is first being declared free from the guilt and punishment of sin, and second receiving a positive righteousness and right-standing with God. Both of these are accomplished by Christ; the former by His substitutionary death on the cross, the latter by His perfect life.<sup>50</sup> But, how does this justification apply to the individual? How are the “fruits”, as Edwards would say, of Christ’s atoning work conveyed from Christ to the sinner? This is found in Edwards’s answer to the second question: how is justification by faith alone?

For that matter, how is justification by faith at all?<sup>51</sup> Edwards tries to carefully answer this question in a way that undoes some of the confusion about the nature of justification. He is clear that faith does not *cause* justification, it is only its *means*.<sup>52</sup> That is, “justification” is itself the forgiveness of sin and renewed relationship with God, while “faith” is the means by which justification is received by the sinner. Thus, faith is the means of justification, without

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<sup>49</sup> Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 150.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 147-50. This is in line with many authors in the Protestant tradition, including Calvin and Luther. For modern reflections and historical treatment of the doctrine, see: Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*; Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, Edwards, in his notebooks, repeatedly attempted (and failed) to come up with a concise and clear definition of “faith” itself. The end result, it seems, is that faith in practice looks remarkably like love and the aesthetic sense that appreciates true beauty. See Lee, “Editor’s Introduction” to vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 63-69.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 152-54.

being the cause of it. As with Edwards's view of original sin (see previous chapter), this is more than mere verbal quibbling, it is a central point to Edwards's doctrine, and that which sets Edwards apart from modern theological liberals and neo-orthodox alike. For Edwards, "faith", like identity, does not have its foundation in itself, it is rather a conduit that establishes a connection between the individual and God and reveals its foundation on the Trinity. Edwards says

To be justified is to be approved of God as a proper subject of pardon, and a right to eternal life; and therefore when it is said that we are justified *by* faith, what else can be understood by it than that faith is that *by* which we are rendered approvable, fitly so, and indeed, as the case stands, proper subjects of this benefit?

This is something different from faith's being the condition of justification, only so as to be inseparably connected with justification; so are many other things besides faith, and yet nothing in us, but faith, renders it meet that we should have justification assigned to us.<sup>53</sup>

Thus for Edwards, "faith" does not become the ground or "condition" of justification, despite being "inseparably" tied to it. Instead, faith *attends* justification, and discloses its existence by pointing back to Christ as the justifier.<sup>54</sup> And, having phrased it in those terms, it can be seen why justification is by faith *alone*. Faith reveals the existence of the relationship between the sinner and Christ, and is the means by which God the Judge looks at Christ and the Christian as one, and counts the merits of One for the other.<sup>55</sup> Justification then comes not because of moral qualities built up in the nature of man, but because God has chosen to transfer the identity—to use the terms Edwards engaged in *Original Sin*—of the sinner from

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<sup>53</sup> Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 154.

<sup>54</sup> Again, this shows the separation between Edwards and modern liberals and neo-orthodox, who would argue that faith itself is the foundation of justification, and that merely to believe at all is the nature of salvation. See as examples of these streams of thought Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) and Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 155-61.

Adam to Christ. Along with this transfer comes a regenerate heart and a new moral and aesthetic sense in which the sinner gains a new vision of the world. Faith, then, is the expression of this transferred identity and that which shapes the foundation of the new vision.<sup>56</sup>

The doctrine of justification by faith alone must always be kept in mind when considering Edwards's (or any Protestant's) conception of virtue and beauty. As discussed above, virtue and beauty have both objective and subjective components, the former being what they hold in themselves and the latter being how they are perceived by the individual. Justification by faith is the doorway into both of these components of virtue for Edwards. Subjectively, in order to truly appreciate true beauty, one must have a renewed aesthetic sense. This only comes when one is justified. And of course, this in turn only comes by grace:

Grace is the means by which the saint acquires the sense of the heart and thus perceives the beauty of the system and harmonizes with it in love. It occasions the feeling of love towards God, 'the sum of all duty', by which the saint fulfills the end for which he was created, giving glory to God.<sup>57</sup>

And grace, in turn, comes by the working of the community of the Trinity, which brings the whole discussion full back to the question of true virtue. Objectively, faith shows the unity that now exists between the individual and Christ. The two are now one, and faith understands that true virtue and beauty have become an ontological reality in the life of the regenerate person.

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<sup>56</sup> For a broader exposition of the relationship between grace and faith, see Sang Hyun Lee, "Grace and Justification by Faith Alone", in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 130-46.

<sup>57</sup> Erdt, 39.

Moreover, faith is, for Edwards, the place where Transcendent virtue enters history. There is a moment in space and time—perhaps one that cannot be pinpointed by the individual—where the Holy Spirit converts the sinner. Just as the life and death of Christ are the center of human history as the point of union between the Transcendent and the immanent on a world-wide scale, so conversion is for the individual. Divine virtue and Beauty come into relationship with the individual in history through the work of conversion, and primary beauty replaces the previously held secondary beauty as the aesthetic sense is transformed. This dissertation does not require a full exposition of the complex relationship between the Trinity, grace, and faith. Here the goal has been to show the historical relationship between virtue, beauty, aesthetic sense, and justification by faith, in order that some conclusions for Edwards's political theology may be drawn. Specifically, this relationship between faith and virtue lays the foundation for an Edwardsean view of freedom.

### CONCLUSION

In his definition of beauty and virtue and the relation of those definitions to the doctrine of justification by faith, there is a groundwork laid for a view of human freedom and unity that began to be discussed in the previous chapter. This view runs parallel to that of major conservative thinkers, which will be used occasionally here to highlight Edwards's own doctrines. This groundwork for freedom and unity consists of three broad points.

First, Edwards has pointed out the organic unity between beauty, virtue, and faith. This sets Edwards apart from both traditional and modern liberal thinkers who would insist

on a distinction between these categories;<sup>58</sup> and shows a point of commonality between Edwards and both historical and modern conservatives. “The ethical imagination,” writes one conservative, “is the basis for all other knowledge.”<sup>59</sup> This is very nearly what Edwards means by having a proper perspective on virtue, which in turn is brought about by the faith that comes in justification. That is, faith reveals the virtuous and beautiful relationship between the Transcendent and the immanent, or between the Trinitarian God and the redeemed creature. That this relationship becomes the foundation for all existence will be seen more clearly in the next chapter on Edwards’s teleology, here it needs to be shown that if man is to have true freedom in any kind of absolute or Transcendent sense, it must spring from this relationship.

Second, Edwards has argued that while virtue and beauty are both Transcendent and immanent, an appreciation of each must begin from the Transcendent and work its way down. This is not to say that Edwards denigrates the immanent. In fact, even as he separates the two in terms of importance, his theology of virtue shows that there is an intimate and inseparable organic connection between them. One cannot understand the true virtue and beauty present in the immanent unless one begins with an understanding (illuminated by faith) of the virtue and beauty of God. This understanding can only come from a properly oriented aesthetic sense, which in turn comes through the act of justification.

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<sup>58</sup> See essentially any liberal thinker on this issue, but especially John Rawls, who intentionally and explicitly divides these in his work *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Claes Ryn, *Will, Imagination, & Reason: Babbitt, Croce, and the Problem of Reality*, 214. For a broader discussion of the ethical importance of the imagination in conservative thought, see also Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991).

On this point, it at first seems that Edwards is best associated with traditionally liberal thinkers. By and large, conservatives have tended rather to see the Transcendent *in* the immanent. That is, in thinking about virtue, conservatives (drawing on Aristotle) begin in the day-to-day activities of life and trace from those activities back up to the Transcendent.<sup>60</sup> Conservatives are always suspicious of those who begin from the largest possible system and then reason downward into the particulars.<sup>61</sup> Edwards, on the other hand, insists in his definition of virtue and beauty that one *must* begin with “Being in general” and work from there if one is to have a proper appreciation of virtue and beauty in all secondary systems. And yet, even in this difference it can be seen that Edwards and the conservative thinkers really are drawing the same conclusions. For both connect the Transcendent and the immanent aesthetically, and both understand that the two are finally inseparable.<sup>62</sup> All Edwards has done is insist that the historical and immanent be lived in its appropriate context with the correct relationship being held between primary and secondary beauty. As will be shown in the next two chapters, this serves not to denigrate the historical, but rather to give it its appropriate value as the place where the Transcendent and immanent meet.

Finally, Edwards argues that a proper understanding of and appreciation for virtue and beauty requires a proper aesthetic sense. Here, finally, is where an Edwardsean view of freedom is revealed. To be free, for both Edwards and conservative thinkers, is not a function

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<sup>60</sup> See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*.

<sup>61</sup> Essentially any Old Right conservative could be cited here, but see especially Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*; Robert Nisbet, *Conservatism: Dream and Reality* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005); and especially two works by Claes Ryn, *Democracy and the Ethical Life* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990) and *Will, Imagination, & Reason: Babbitt, Croce, and the Problem of Reality*.

<sup>62</sup> This theme has been repeatedly stressed in Edwards scholarship. See William Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2002).



of an external situation, but rather is a properly attuned aesthetic *disposition*. This freedom comes with the gracious act of justification, whereby the individual sinner is transformed and his conception of virtue and beauty is made anew. His aesthetic sense is reformed so that he no longer mistakes the immanent for the Transcendent, but rather sees the immanent as it really is in its organic and historical relationship with the Transcendent. Even more than that, the individual develops a sense of delight in this proper relationship and attunement to Being in general.

In Edwards, however, the mind experiences the essence of things through... the activity of the imagination that holds together the particulars in such a way that their relationship among themselves and with the totality of being becomes explicit. The imagination does not abstract anything away from nature; it rather helps nature's own relatedness become visible.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, the individual is free to love and experience beauty and virtue as they exist in both their objective and subjective senses.

Even more, the individual, with the new aesthetic sense given through justification, can see that he does not dwell alone in a world of other isolated individuals, but exists in a great community founded on this new sense. He has crossed from the city of man, built on secondary beauty, into the city of God, built on primary beauty. This transition leads into a new perspective of community, which will be discussed in the last chapter. Before that, the historical telos of this reborn individual, and this new community, must be examined.

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<sup>63</sup> Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 169.

## CHAPTER VII: THE END FOR WHICH GOD CREATED THE WORLD

*What is the Chief End of Man?*

*Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.* —Westminster Shorter Catechism<sup>1</sup>

*The end which God had in view in creating the world was doubtless worthy of him, and consequently the most excellent and glorious possible. This therefore must be worthy to be known by all the intelligent creation, as excellent in itself, and worthy of their pursuit. And as true virtue distinguishes the inhabitants of heaven, and all the happy candidates for that world of glory, from all others; there cannot surely be a more interesting subject.* —Samuel Hopkins, First Editor of *The End for which God Created the World*<sup>2</sup>

In a sense, the preceding chapters of this dissertation covering the will, affections, sin, virtue, and aesthetics were epilogue to the second chapter on history and prologue to this chapter on teleology. In the thought of Edwards, anthropology and theology are built within a philosophy of history, all of which join in the Divine telos. This telos is explored in the final treatise to be analyzed here, Edwards's *Dissertation Concerning the End for which God Created the World*. In this work, Edwards declares the Divine purpose behind all creation—and consequently that upon which anthropology, theology, and philosophy are all to be focused and in which they find their meaning and unity. This is of course no new idea in philosophy. Aristotle himself held a teleological view of man and the world.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will show that Edwards makes a unique contribution to this teleological view: not only is there a telos to the world, but that it is the glory of God. This telos is the end—the reason—for which God made the world. This chapter will first exposit Edwards's own analysis of that telos, and then begin to show how the philosophy and theology laid out in the previous chapters are connected in this doctrine through history. The following and final chapter will

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<sup>1</sup> G.I. Williamson, ed., *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1970), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Hopkins, "Hopkins' Preface", in Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, 402.

<sup>3</sup> See many of his works, but especially Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Robin Waterfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). For an exposition of his thought, see any good survey of philosophy, but especially useful for context and overall perspective is Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

discuss the beginning of an Edwardsean political theology by connecting Edwards's philosophy of history with the conclusions drawn throughout the dissertation.

THE END FOR WHICH GOD CREATED THE WORLD

The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer, "to glorify God and to enjoy him forever" was not groundbreaking theology. Indeed, it reflected a long tradition of such thought.<sup>4</sup> In *The End for which God Created the World*, Edwards both embraces this tradition and deepens and broadens it in two ways. First, he defines an "end" in a way that adds a level of complexity to the discussion. Second, he expands the question to include not only the chief end of man, but the chief end of God himself, and then shows that the two are fundamentally the same. A survey of this work will be a useful and appropriate place to begin drawing conclusions about the historical nature of Edwards teleology.<sup>5</sup>

Edwards begins *The End for which God Created the World* by defining necessary terms. This section is particularly interesting because in it Edwards admits that subjectively there may be multiple levels of telos. Edwards identifies four kinds of goals, or "ends": subordinate, ultimate, chief, and inferior. "Subordinate" ends are ends which lead to another end. "Ultimate" ends are ends which are sought for their own sakes (thus, subordinate ends lead to ultimate ends). "Chief" ends are ends which are most desired, while "inferior" ends are those which are less desired. These last two ends are not necessarily hard and fast

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<sup>4</sup> For the relation of the Westminster Catechism to other Christian confessions, see Philip Schaff, *The History of the Creeds*, vol. 1 of *The Creeds of Christendom* (United States: Harper & Brothers, 1877).

<sup>5</sup> An excellent popular introduction to this work, including a well-edited and -presented edition of the treatise, is John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*. For a more scholarly introduction and treatment, see the introduction to the Yale edition, Paul Ramsey, "Editor's Introduction" in Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*. Also useful is John E. Smith, *Jonathan Edwards, Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher*, 100-19.

objective categories, but rather are ways of articulating various possible perspectives on differing goals. Any given end may share one or more of these categories. For example, a subordinate end may also be a chief end, if it is desired more than the ultimate end to which it leads.<sup>6</sup> Likewise two different ends may be ultimate, but the one which is desired more than the other becomes the chief end, while the less desirable of the two becomes the inferior.<sup>7</sup> In this categorization of ends, it can be seen that Edwards is subtly working in his ideas from the *Religious Affections* and from *True Virtue* (see previous chapters). What defines an “end” at least in a partial sense is how it is seen from the perspective of the individual in question. Hence, a subordinate end may be a chief end, even though it is inferior to an ultimate end. Thus if, as Edwards says, a chief end is “an end that is most valued; and therefore most sought after by the agent in what he does,” at least part of the value of that end comes from its desirability to the agent. The affections of the individual effect the categorization of the end.<sup>8</sup>

At first, this may appear to be a needlessly confusing way to say that the psychology of an individual affects their goals. And yet, it is important that Edwards recognizes these distinctions. He admits that there is a complex web of ends and goals in creation which can be viewed in any number of ways—some of which rely on the mind of the observer.<sup>9</sup> This complexity, in turn, leads Edwards to draw several conclusions, three of which are

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<sup>6</sup> As a practical example, a person may very well enjoy the act of travelling more than he enjoys any given activity upon arrival at his destination.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Dissertation Concerning The End for which God Created the World*, in *Ethical Writings*, 405-408. (Hereafter: *The End for which God Created the World*.)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

<sup>9</sup> And here one can see the connection back to Edwards’s observations on the mind and the human person, see chapters three and four of this dissertation.

particularly important here. First, in this complexity it can be seen that *if*, of all the options and possible permutations available, anyone has just one ultimate end, that end becomes the supreme end, and *no* subordinate end can ever be superior to it.<sup>10</sup> This ultimate end, in turn, defines all of the subordinate ends and places them in context.

Second, rational agents have two ways of defining their chief and ultimate end. They may either define it according to what is desirable in itself, or according to what is potentially desirable under the right circumstances. So, God had an ultimate end in creation (to be discussed below) that was desirable in itself. But, once he had performed the act of creation, a new set of circumstances arose in which what was once only a potentiality became a reality. For example, it was always possible (potential) that God act *could* act justly towards creation in accord with his own nature, but until he created it was only a possibility. So, to say “God’s goal is to act justly towards his creation” is a true statement, but it is not the same thing as to say “God created the world because he was just.” Even if justice has become *an* ultimate goal (desirable for itself), it is not *the* ultimate goal in creation.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, even though there may appear to be numerous possible ends in creation, in order to arrive at God’s ultimate goal in creation, one must find the original end which was desirable in itself, not the end which became desirable once the potentiality became reality.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, in this complex web of goals in creation, Edwards points out that from a human perspective it will appear that there are many ultimate ends in creation. The human

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 410.

<sup>11</sup> What Edwards calls the “original” goal, as opposed to the “consequential” goal. For the sake of some level of clarity, I will retain “ultimate” goal, not least because Edwards, having defined the terms, stops using them. Edwards, *The End for which God Created the World*, 413.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 411-13.

perspective, however, is necessarily a limited one. What is needed is the perspective of the creator of the world, which in turn will provide the necessary context for determining the telos of creation.<sup>13</sup> There are two means by which this perspective is discovered: reason and revelation, with which the remaining chapters of the treatise deal.

### *The Teachings of Reason*

Having laid down his—admittedly complicated—terms, Edwards discusses the contributions reason can make in discovering the telos of creation. He begins by admitting the limitations of reason:

Nor is it to be supposed that mankind, who, while destitute of revelation, by the utmost improvements of their own reason, and advances in science and philosophy, could come to no clear and established determination who the author of the world was, would ever have obtained any tolerable settled judgment of the end which the author of it proposed to himself in so vast, complicated and wonderful a work of his hands.<sup>14</sup>

Yet reason remains useful. While it cannot disclose the telos of creation, it can help to clear off the ground and prepare the way for an understanding provided by revelation (to steal terms from Heidegger).<sup>15</sup>

First, reason declares that if God *can* be the telos of creation, then he *must* be:

That if God himself be in any respect properly capable of being his own end in the creation of the world, then it is reasonable to suppose that he had respect to *himself* as his last and highest end in this work; because he is worthy in himself to be so, being infinitely the greatest and best of beings. All things else, with regard to worthiness, importance and excellence, are perfectly as nothing in comparison of him. And

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<sup>13</sup> Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment*, 200.

<sup>14</sup> Edwards, *The End for which God Created the World*, 419.

<sup>15</sup> For further analysis of Edwards's thoughts on reason and revelation, see A. Owen Aldridge, "Enlightenment and Awakening in Edwards and Franklin," in *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Representation of American Culture*.

therefore if God esteems, values, and has respect to things according to their nature and proportions, he must necessarily have the greatest respect to himself.<sup>16</sup>

If there were, Edwards argues, an objective judge who could stand outside of both God and creation, that objective judge would declare that since all of creation is greater than any single being in creation, so too must the Creator be found to be infinitely greater (literally) than even all of creation itself. Therefore, whatever end the Creator has in creating must become the ultimate end of all the subordinate ends of creation.<sup>17</sup> Of course, there is no such impartial judge. Instead, there is God himself, who is not strictly speaking “impartial.” In fact, he is biased such that whatever he values most highly becomes the end of His action in creating, and therefore the end of creation. Consequently, when looked at impartially (with a hypothetical outside observer) reason declares that God’s end must be the telos of creation; likewise when looked at partially (with God’s bias taken into account) reason *still* declares that God’s end must be the telos of creation.<sup>18</sup>

Second, reason argues that God’s ultimate end in creation must be both possible and valuable. In terms of possibility, the end must be an end which can be actually achieved. Therefore, it cannot be something like “perfection,” since God already has that and cannot extend it by the act of creating.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the end of creation cannot be the augmentation of any attribute of God, because he is complete and full in himself already. The end of creation, reason argues, must instead be the communication of those attributes which already exist in God’s person to created beings who would not otherwise have known them.

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<sup>16</sup> Edwards, *The End for which God Created the World*, 421.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 423-25.

<sup>18</sup> Edwards, *The End for which God Created the World*, 425-26.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 421.

God is a dynamic and personal being whose internal life consists in the perfect knowledge and love of the divine beauty. Thus the repetition or communication of God's internal fullness in time and space requires sentient creatures who can repeat in time God's dynamic internal life.<sup>20</sup>

This communication, in turn, is inherently valuable. From man's perspective it is the reception of the infinite good (otherwise unattainable in creation); from God's perspective it is valuable to have a place to display his attributes:

If the world had not been created, these attributes never would have had any exercise. The power of God, which is a sufficiency in him to produce great effects, must forever have been dormant and useless as to any effect. The divine wisdom and prudence would have had no exercise in any wise contrivance, any prudent proceeding or disposal of things; for there would have been no objects of contrivance or disposal. The same might be observed of God's justice, goodness and truth. Indeed God might have known as perfectly that he possessed these attributes, if they had never been exerted or expressed in any effect.<sup>21</sup>

God's end in creation, according to reason, must have been to display and give his good to something outside of himself. Reason assumes, writes Edwards, "that a disposition in God, as an original property of his nature, to an emanation of his own infinite fullness, was what excited him to create the world."<sup>22</sup> But what good is revealed? What aspect of his fullness is emanated to the created order? At this point, Edwards turns to revelation, which reveals that God's own glory is the end of creation.

### *The Teachings of Revelation*

In the last portion of the treatise, Edwards discusses what Scripture reveals as God's end in creation. After giving a lengthy list of proof-texts, Edwards concludes that

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<sup>20</sup> Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 197.

<sup>21</sup> Edwards, *The End for which God Created the World*, 429.

<sup>22</sup> Edwards, *The End for which God Created the World*, 435.



It appears from what has been already observed, that the glory of God is spoken of in Scripture as the last end of many of God's works: and it is plain that this thing is in fact the issue and result of the works of God's common providence, and of the creation of the world.<sup>23</sup>

Specifically, Edwards argues that this “glory” involves four things: the excellence of God, the communication of that excellence to the creature, the knowledge of that excellence by the creature, and the delight in that excellence by the creature. Finally, Edwards ends the treatise by declaring not only that this glory is the telos of creation, but also that it becomes the eternal focus of the relationship between man and God. Walking briefly through each of these aspects of the telos of creation will conclude this chapter’s discussion of *The End for which God Created the World* and will lead into the analysis of the relationship between this treatise and the preceding chapters.

First, the excellence of God is the starting point of God’s glory as revealed to creation. As the ultimate (and chief) end of God in creation, glory begins in the person of God. Edwards calls this his *internal* glory:

Now God's internal glory, as it is in God, is either in his understanding or will. The glory or fullness of his understanding is his knowledge. The internal glory and fullness of God, which we must conceive of as having its special seat in his will, is his holiness and happiness. The whole of God's internal good or glory, is in these three things, viz. his infinite knowledge; his infinite virtue or holiness, and his infinite joy and happiness.<sup>24</sup>

Divine happiness, holiness, and knowledge thus become the foundations for the telos of creation. These characteristics are the ones which shape and define the world order, because they are the fundamental characteristics of God himself.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 491.

<sup>24</sup> Edwards, *The End for which God Created the World*, 528.

But, while these characteristics are excellent in themselves, their mere existence is only the beginning of God's glory as an end in creation. The second aspect of God's glory is the communication of that excellence to the creature.

There is included in this the exercise of God's perfections to produce a proper effect, in opposition to their lying eternally dormant and ineffectual: as his power being eternally without any act or fruit of that power; his wisdom eternally ineffectual in any wise production, or prudent disposal of anything, etc.... God's exercising his perfection to produce a proper effect is not distinct from the emanation or communication of his fullness: for this is the effect, viz. his fullness communicated, and the producing this effect is the communication of his fullness; and there is nothing in this effectual exerting of God's perfection, but the emanation of God's internal glory.<sup>25</sup>

That is, it is the glory of God not merely to sit around in splendid isolation being wise, just, etc, by himself, but rather to communicate those aspects to creation.<sup>26</sup> This is the beginning of God's *external* glory. If his internal glory is the glory inherent to his own character and nature, his external glory is the appreciation of that character and nature by the creature. This glory starts with the communication of God's person to creation. The reception of this glory by the creature is the next aspect Edwards discusses.

God's glory involves the specific reception of his attributes by creation in definite ways.

And in these things, viz. in knowing God's excellency, loving God for it, and rejoicing in it; and in the exercise and expression of these, consists God's honor and praise: so that these are clearly implied in that glory of God, which consists in the emanation of his internal glory.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 527-28.

<sup>26</sup> Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 174-79.

<sup>27</sup> Edwards, *The End for which God Created the World*, 529.

The third aspect of God's glory is the reception of his attributes in the two main faculties of man, namely the intellect and the will. Part of the telos of creation is the creature's knowledge of the excellence of God. This knowledge is not to be understood as a cold mathematical equation, but rather as "knowledge" in the sense of the fullest possible human experience.

God communicates himself to the understanding of the creature, in giving him the knowledge of his glory; and to the will of the creature, in giving him holiness, consisting primarily in the love of God: and in giving the creature happiness, chiefly consisting in joy in God.<sup>28</sup>

That is, the knowledge of God involves not just proposition and logical truth (though it does involve those as well), but also both the experiential knowledge that comes through growth in holiness and the emotional knowledge that comes from delighting in the character of the person being known. Hence Edwards bundles together knowledge, will, and joy when speaking of the communicated understanding of the attributes and character of God.<sup>29</sup>

"Knowledge" of God involves the whole of the human person.

The fourth aspect of God's glory is that the attributes of God are not to be merely intellectually understood, but actively delighted in by the creature. This delight is founded on God's own character and delight in himself:

Because he infinitely values his own glory, consisting in the knowledge of himself, love to himself, and complacence and joy in himself; he therefore valued the image, communication or participation of these, in the creature. And 'tis because he values

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> The idea that "knowledge" is not a separate something in man, but rather is tied to the rest of the human person is a continual theme in Edwards. He famously discusses in *The Religious Affections* the difference between the intellectual knowledge that honey is sweet through the descriptions of others and available scientific fact, and the experiential knowledge of having tasted it. See Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 206.

himself, that he delights in the knowledge and love and joy of the creature; as being himself the object of this knowledge, love and complacency.<sup>30</sup>

The understanding of the character and nature of God is, again, not to be a mere intellectual exercise, but rather is to engage the affections of the creature.<sup>31</sup> God has, according to Edwards, so ordained creation that as God pursues his own glory, the good of the creature is achieved. Edwards here is both placing himself firmly in the Christian tradition that states that man's ultimate end can only be found in worship<sup>32</sup> and refining that tradition by clarifying the nature of that relationship:

God's respect to the creature's good, and his respect to himself, is not a divided respect; but both are united in one, as the happiness of the creature aimed at is happiness in union with himself. The creature is no further happy with this happiness which God makes his ultimate end than he becomes one with God. The more happiness the greater union: when the happiness is perfect, the union is perfect.<sup>33</sup>

The good of man and the glory of God are thus united, and Edwards's articulation of the teleological goals of God in creation is complete.

One final note is relevant to the discussion of teleology in Edwards's thought. He concludes *The End for which God Created the World* by pointing out that the glorification of God in the communication of his attributes to creation will never end.

'Tis no solid objection against God's aiming at an infinitely perfect union of the creature with himself, that the particular time will never come when it can be said, the union is now infinitely perfect. God aims at satisfying justice in the eternal damnation of sinners; which will be satisfied by their damnation, considered no otherwise than with regard to its eternal duration. But yet there never will come that particular

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<sup>30</sup> Edwards, *The End for which God Created the World*, 532-33.

<sup>31</sup> This is worked out nicely in Jennifer Leader, "In Love with the Image: Transitive Being and Typological Desire in Jonathan Edwards," *Early American Literature* 41, no. 2 (2006): 171.

<sup>32</sup> Here one is reminded of Augustine's opening cry in the *Confessions*: "our heart is restless until it rests in you." Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Edwards, *The End for which God Created the World*, 533.

moment, when it can be said, that now justice is satisfied. But if this don't satisfy our modern freethinkers, who don't like the talk about satisfying justice with an infinite punishment; I suppose it will not be denied by any that God, in glorifying the saints in heaven with eternal felicity, aims to satisfy his infinite grace or benevolence, by the bestowment of a good infinitely valuable, because eternal: and yet there never will come the moment, when it can be said, that now this infinitely valuable good has been actually bestowed.<sup>34</sup>

In a sense, the teleological end of God in creation will *never* be fully realized, even in the eternity after the arrival of the eschaton. The communication of the attributes of an infinite Being to finite beings can, by definition, never have an absolute culmination. There can never be a point at which every aspect of the infinite Being has been completely delighted in and understood by the creature. Consequently, the eschaton itself (whether heaven or hell) will be a place of continued communication between God and creation. That being the case, and given the teleological setting for Edwards's overall philosophical and theological thought, the questions under consideration take on an eternal and infinite significance. To talk about the human "affections", in this context, is to talk about an aspect of a relationship that will endure for eternity. Consequently, it becomes all the more important to understand the place and relationship between the telos, the glory of God, and the other aspects of Edwards's thought.

#### THE TELEOLOGICAL NATURE OF VIRTUE

Edwards held virtue and glory in close communion in his thought, even to the point of intending his two treatises, *The End for which God Created the World* and *True Virtue*, to be read together. That is, the teleological treatise explains that God created the world so that he could glorify himself by communicating his attributes to creation. The treatise on virtue

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 536.

attempts to define what those attributes being communicated are: namely virtue and beauty (which are really one and the same thing), as well as how those attributes ought to be received by creation—with love and delight. God’s glory advances as his virtue and beauty are communicated. But how are these attributes communicated? As was stated in the last chapter, the process begins with justification. Yet justification is also in a sense *only* the beginning. To be sure, it is the point at which the sinner becomes the saint, where the aesthetic sense is reformed, and where the individual sees God and the world with new eyes.<sup>35</sup> Yet, justification is also only the beginning of the process of glorification, which Edwards says is the ultimate telos of man and which will go on forever.

How, then, does this process of glorification occur? How does God communicate his attributes to the creature over time? First of course through Scripture—Edwards was a Protestant.<sup>36</sup> But there are also various aspects of the created order through which God communicates himself in types and symbols.<sup>37</sup> That is, the beauty and virtue of God discussed in *True Virtue* become increasingly accessible as the telos is lived out in the life of the believer.

Edwards contended... that God’s extrascriptural communications are neither serendipitous nor occasional. Instead, they are part of a divinely instituted system of

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<sup>35</sup> This is also where Edwards’s thought and writings were most abused by his Transcendentalist and Revivalist successors, who elevated the idea of seeing the beauty and virtue of God on display in the individual and creation into the idea that creation and the individual are themselves Divine. See Gura, *Transcendentalism*.

<sup>36</sup> There are many available analyses of Edwards’s use of and approach to Scripture. See John E. Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher*, 138-47; Wilson H. Kinnach, “Edwards as Preacher,” in *Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*.

<sup>37</sup> Under discussion here is only earthly communication. In heaven, communication will be direct and unmediated by either types or Scripture in an immediate relationship between God and man. Interestingly, Edwards believed that such communication would also exist in hell, though with much different reception on the part of the sinner. See the Kvanving and Wainwright articles in Helm and Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Philosophical Theologian*.

symbols that continuously prefigure and communicate the divine presence in nature and in history... Edwards identified sainthood with a new sense or knowledge of divine things. Grace endows the believer with a capacity to perceive God's presence in his own heart and in the wider world. With new eyes to see and new ears to hear, the true Christian can read sermons in stones and portents in the rituals of daily life.<sup>38</sup>

As the Christian grows and matures, these "sermons in stones" become more apparent and the virtue and beauty of God increasingly appear to overflow in all of creation. A sense of delight and wonder grow, which in turn is reflected throughout the whole life of the believer as a life of virtue.<sup>39</sup> This sense, however, is not something which comes all at once, nor is the beauty of God in creation necessarily a static and unchanging thing (though it is ever-present in some sense). Rather, both the delight in virtue on the part of the believer and the communication of God's attributes through creation unfold historically, the former by the development of the various faculties of man, the latter by the progressive movement of history.<sup>40</sup> Each of these will now be discussed in turn.

#### THE TELEOLOGICAL NATURE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Just as divine virtue and beauty share the telos of creation, so does the nature of man as a created being. To that end, his will, affections, and even personal identity are all to be defined and understood in terms of their relationship to the glory of God.

It has already been shown that Edwards views human identity as being organically connected both with other human beings and with God himself (see chapter five). And,

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<sup>38</sup> Janice Knight, "Typology," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 191.

<sup>39</sup> This is ultimately beyond the ability of "natural" man, according to Edwards; yet even in the attempts at virtue made by natural man, one may see a type of true virtue, often so clear a type that it may be mistaken for the real thing. See John Smith, "Christian Virtue and Common Morality," *Princeton Companion*.

<sup>40</sup> "God's communications accelerate as the work of redemption progresses; the unfolding of each successive period in sacred history brings greater knowledge of the divine." Knight, "Typology," in *Princeton Companion*, 191.

having defined personal identity in this way, it can be seen that the telos of God must necessarily become the telos of man—of human identity—as well. It does not even matter if people are aware of that telos. Nor does it matter if, being aware of it, they choose to reject and resist it. It is built into creation on an ontological level and can be avoided no more than breathing. God’s goal in creation becomes the fundamental focus of each and every human person individually, as well as of humanity as a whole. That some are to end in destruction is as much a part of this telos as that some are to end in salvation.<sup>41</sup>

This understanding of the reality of human identity should not lead, as it did for Emerson, to the divinization of the individual, but rather to the acceptance of the telos of creation. “Edwards... was greatly concerned to show that Christian love is contrary to a selfish spirit.”<sup>42</sup> That is, a true understanding of the relationship between identity and telos should lead to a sense of humility and delight. Humility in the knowledge that so small (and wicked) a part of creation gets to participate in the disclosure of divine glory, and delight in that glory as it is disclosed through history. And in these the transition has been made from identity (who the person is) to affections (how the person participates).

The affections, too, have a teleological role to play. For, as the divine beauty and virtue are revealed to the individual, the affections are “set upon” and “consent to” that revelation. This is not just an intellectual construct for Edwards, but rather an objective statement about human experience. “Agreement among perceptual ideas elicits a sense of

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<sup>41</sup> To Edwards, this is not to argue that God is a monster or puppeteer, but rather to force the individual to examine himself on the closest and narrowest possible level and to understand the reality of his situation in the deepest meaningful sense.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, “Christian Virtue and Common Morality,” in *Princeton Companion*, 152.



agreeableness in an intelligent percipient.”<sup>43</sup> That is, whenever human beings perceive *anything* that has a sense of harmony, proportion, and beauty about it, they delight in it. In God’s revelation in the world, there is an *infinite* harmony, proportion, and beauty, which cannot be otherwise than delighted in on the part of the regenerate creature.<sup>44</sup> This delight is a reflection of the new identity given through grace and founded upon the Trinity (see previous chapter). The affections, then, reach out from the individual and embrace the beautiful and virtuous glory of God as revealed in creation. And, as was shown in chapter four, as go the affections, so goes the will.

The will also has a teleological function—or, perhaps, it is better to say that the will is teleological in its function. That is, as the “power” that transforms the affections into action and does the active “consenting to” beauty and virtue (see chapter three), the will is the moving teleological force within the human being. It is that by which ontological realities become physical realities. Here one finds a parallel in conservative thought. The will, writes one author is

the energy which carries all human activity, whether practical, philosophical or aesthetical. Many words—desire, wish, aspiration, impulse, interest, inclination, passion, etc...—denote the fundamental impelling power of the will without which the life of human society and culture would cease.<sup>45</sup>

The will is the link between the inner reality of man and the external reality of the rest of creation, and the fundamental point where the individual’s consent to or dissent from divine

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<sup>43</sup> Richard R. Niebuhr, “Being and Consent,” in *Princeton Companion*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 142-44. See also Michael D. Gibson, “The Beauty of the Redemption of the World: The Theological Aesthetics of Maximus the Confessor and Jonathan Edwards,” *Harvard Theological Review* 101, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>45</sup> Claes Ryn, *Will, Imagination, Reason: Babbitt, Croce, and the Problem of Reason*, 147.

glory is itself displayed before creation. Thus, as that glory is increasingly displayed in creation, there should be an increasing change in the nature and functioning of man's will. Just as history progresses according to its telos (see below), so man's will is refined and sharpened as humanity advances in its understanding and appreciation of divinity in creation.<sup>46</sup> This progress and advance is, in Edwards's mind, a historical one, occurring in real space and time.<sup>47</sup>

#### THE TELEOLOGICAL NATURE OF HISTORY

It has already been shown that for Edwards, history is eschatological (see chapter two). What is added into this eschatology here is a sharper definition of the telos of the eschaton. History, for Edwards, cannot culminate in a nation-state or a restored kingdom of Israel, or even the rise of a Christian to the worlds' most powerful political offices (though any of these may be a part of the process). Rather, it can have no lesser end than the telos of all of creation: the glory of God.

History evidently has no particularistic center, in the form of a state or nation, as previous ecclesiastical historians had portrayed it. God's absolute sovereignty and majesty is the locus of history, and the dynamism underlying the historical process is the universal power of the divine agency.<sup>48</sup>

This is not to say that Edwards devalues history, but rather that he gives it its proper value.

This, as was noted in the second chapter of this dissertation, is the central theme of Avihu Zakai's *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment*. The subtitle of the work itself reveals the important point of history

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<sup>46</sup> This is one of the places where Edwards's postmillennial eschatology is most apparent. See Stephen Stein, "Eschatology," in *Princeton Companion*.

<sup>47</sup> Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 214-23.

<sup>48</sup> Zakai, 247.

for Edwards: the world is an *enchanted* place, that is, a place where wonder and mystery and even divinity are disclosed for those with the proper appreciation. Zakai emphasizes that Edwards is responding to the new Enlightenment deistic philosophy that would reduce the world to a mechanism with all the romance of clockwork. One aspect of the re-imparting of mystery and wonder to this otherwise cold Enlightenment world was the reestablishment of the idea that the created order, including the historical order, has a telos. A telos which, as has been seen, is the glory of God. Historically, the working out of this telos is accomplished by the act of redemption and application of it to individuals and to the church. All of history then is focused on the glorification of God by this means, a glorification which occurs both through the church generally and in individuals independently.

#### CONCLUSION

The teleological idea of the glory of God in the work of redemption must be the final—and central—aspect of any Edwardsean philosophy or theology. It is the pulsing heartbeat of his thought, and must be the foundation of any exploration of his works. To that end, two points will be made here about the place of Edwards's teleology in his political theology to serve as a groundwork for the final chapter, which will attempt to draw some conclusions about the historical nature of Edwards's political thought.

First, it can be seen that just as there is an aesthetic and ontological unity between the Transcendent and the immanent in Edwards's thought (see chapters five and six), there is a teleological unity as well. That is, all of creation is governed by the same telos as God's end in creation: his own glory. Because of this unity, the Divinity's purpose in creating becomes the goal towards which all of creation is moving. Thus, to study man is to learn of God, and

to study God is to learn of man, just as Calvin had stated two hundred years before Edwards.<sup>49</sup>

Second, and more importantly, Edwards's teleology provides a perspective from which political theology must be viewed. The "glory of God" as the telos of creation becomes the framework in which analysis must be conducted. Just as systems of virtue which fail to account for "Being in general" must be deemed to be insufficient (see the previous chapter), so must systems of political thought which fail to account for the glory of God that pervades all of creation likewise fail to account for what is truly central in the world. Here, of course, Edwards is in line with the great political thinkers of the past, especially Plato and Aristotle. In both of their approaches to political philosophy, they argued that the state was to move towards an end, namely, that of justice.<sup>50</sup> Where Edwards deviates from these ancient Greek thinkers, however, is in claiming that there is a deeper theological end behind that of justice—that "justice", as it were, is only a "subordinate end." Justice itself must reach out towards the ultimate end not only of the state, but of mankind and God himself, that of Divine glory. And this addition makes Edwards a useful supplement to that other great political thinker, Augustine. When discussing the Augustinian categories of "city of man" and "city of God", Edwards's teleology becomes visible as that which Augustine sometimes struggled to articulate—a means by which to explain the point of connection between the two cities. Augustine well understood that the two cities were mingled together and lived side-by-side in the world, yet he insisted that there could be no reconciliation between them—a

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<sup>49</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.1.

<sup>50</sup> See Plato, *The Republic*; Aristotle, *The Politics*.

worldview which eventually led to an attitude on the part of Christianity of separation from the world and flight into radical isolationism. In his more extreme moments, this led to a separation between history and redemption even within the thought of Augustine himself.<sup>51</sup>

Edwards's teleology, however, enabled him to have a healthy philosophy of history that included *both* cities as existing in a teleological and historical unity, and so avoiding the slide into isolationist otherworldliness that has occasionally arisen within the Christian church.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, in teleology is revealed the final necessary component for opening Edwards's political theology, which will be taken up in the final chapter.

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<sup>51</sup> Zakai, 19.

<sup>52</sup> For the connection between monasticism and Augustine's two cities, see the final two chapters of Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*. For the Protestant variety of separatism, see Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*.

## **CHAPTER VIII: TOWARDS AN EDWARDSEAN POLITICAL THEOLOGY**

This dissertation has shown that for Jonathan Edwards, the existence of man and his interactions with God are deeply historical. Both God and man work within a historical setting, and it is within this setting that political and social life is lived. The first and second chapters explored Edwards's philosophical background and philosophy of history. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters explored the historical nature of his anthropology. The sixth and seventh chapters examined the historical nature of his aesthetics, ethics, and teleology in their theological context. This final chapter will demonstrate that, based on these philosophical underpinnings, for Jonathan Edwards politics is inherently historical in nature. This will be done in part as a response to the argument (put forth by Professor Gerald McDermott) that Jonathan Edwards is a revolutionary thinker. That Edwards is not a revolutionary but rather a historical thinker can be seen from looking at his view of both the characteristics of man (chapters three through five) and of how God interacts with the world (chapters six and seven). From both perspectives, in the thought of Edwards, life as a whole (including politics) is historical. This chapter will end by drawing some conclusions about Edwards as a political thinker by relying on his historical thought and by suggesting areas for future study.

At this point, a brief reminder of the definitions given in the first chapter of this dissertation need will be useful for the following discussion. "Revolutionary" and "historicist" (along with "conservative") are being used as terms in opposition with each other. "Revolutionary" thought favors transcendent abstractions over the concrete reality of the historical order and holds the two as being in tension with each other. This often leads to attempts to overcome the limitations of history through the attempted establishment of

utopian regimes based on these transcendent abstractions.<sup>1</sup> “Historicism” and “conservatism”, on the other hand, find transcendence within the historical order and do not hold the two to be in irreconcilable tension. They tend to prefer life as it actually exists to the promised future fulfillments of abstract notions, and view man as being most complete when his identity and sense are most attuned to their organic and historical existence.<sup>2</sup> As stated in the first chapter, both of these terms are anachronistic in a discussion of Edwards, yet they remain useful as a means by which his political philosophy may be analyzed. This concluding chapter will show that Edwards fits more closely with the historicist thinkers than he does with the revolutionary ones.

#### ONE HOLY AND HAPPY SOCIETY

As the sole substantial work on Edwards’s political thought to date, Professor Gerald McDermott’s *One Holy and Happy Society* is worthy of extended attention. His goal is to explain Edwards’s “public theology”, or “his [Edwards’s] understanding of civil community and the Christian’s responsibility to it,”<sup>3</sup> particularly by drawing on the (hitherto largely ignored) social and public sermons of Edwards. (These sermons dealt mostly with the roles of the citizen and the magistrate, and so those topics are the focus of Professor McDermott’s work.<sup>4</sup>) The book is broken into five chapters covering the covenant, the millennium, social

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<sup>1</sup> See the Chapter I for further definition of revolutionary thought. Perhaps one of the most fascinating attempts at utopianism in America was that of the Transcendentalists at Brook Farm. See Sterling Delano, *Brook Farm: The Dark Side of Utopia* (United States: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter I for further definition of conservative and historicist thought, as well as Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* and Viereck, *Conservative Thinkers*.

<sup>3</sup> McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

ethics, magistrates, and citizenship. By and large, the points Professor McDermott makes and the conclusions he draws are useful and informative and reflect well on Edwards's theology and philosophy. For example, in the first two chapters (discussing the "national covenant" and the millennium), Professor McDermott points out that the general tenor of Edwards's writings is of *internationalism* rather than nationalism. That is, in terms of a national covenant (in New England, not involving the entire North American continent), he was much more likely to emphasize sin and the breaking of the covenant on the part of the people than he was to trumpet future Divine glories.<sup>5</sup> Especially after the Great Awakening had ended, Edwards had little but fear for the future of New England. "Its unfaithfulness might cause God to transfer his covenant blessings to another people."<sup>6</sup> The conclusions Professor McDermott draws are that Edwards does not actually fit in the line of later "self-congratulatory" preachers who "claimed his mantle and danced jingoistic jigs;" rather he should be listed with those who "rejected triumphalist interpretations of the American experience."<sup>7</sup> Instead he argues that in Edwards's eschatology one sees that any hope for the future must come on the international level:

Edwards's eschatology is dominated by an unyielding concentration on the coming global community that implicitly relativizes all merely national concerns and condemns all egoistic nationalism. Before the majestic dimensions of the 'one holy and happy' society that is to come, New England and America fade into insignificance.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> McDermott, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 35-36. For examples of preachers less restrained, see Ellis Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998). It is important to note that Jonathan Edwards is *not* included in this volume, suggesting that he didn't quite pound the patriotism drum in quite the same ways as some of his contemporaries. For the historical context of such patriotic preaching, see McDougall, *Freedom Just Around the Corner*, 202-79.

<sup>8</sup> McDermott, 41.



The eschaton is not the property of a single nation in Edwards's thought, rather it will be achieved by the steady advance of the entire world both through history and across the spectrum of human experience, including in the realms of economics, religion, science, and politics.<sup>9</sup>

These are useful considerations, and do much to separate Edwards from triumphal forms of American millennialism.<sup>10</sup> Likewise Professor McDermott clearly and closely exposit's Edwards's ethical writings, arguing that Edwards's ethical thought is built on his ontology and theology (much as this dissertation is doing) and that in these philosophical ideas one can see a practical public theology at work.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, one can see: first, that Christian love must be the center of any system of ethics; and second, that this love primarily displays itself in love for one's neighbor (especially one's poor neighbor).<sup>12</sup> This leads Professor McDermott to a questionable conclusion:

Both his [Edwards's] theological ethics and his theory of citizenship portrayed the Christian citizen as one who fully and responsibly engages in civil affairs for the purpose of improving the quality of life in the community. Edwards did not tolerate privatistic religion that ignores social and political problems.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the citizen is to be not only aware of but actively engaged in the life of the community.

This is the first point that this chapter will be concerned to refute by arguing that Professor

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 60-77, 91.

<sup>10</sup> See for an extended discussion of this form of millennialism (including a less sympathetic assessment of Edwards's place in shaping it): Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role*.

<sup>11</sup> McDermott, 96.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 107-12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 116.

McDermott confuses and blends Edwards's doctrines of primary and secondary love. This conclusion will be discussed further below.

On this foundation, Professor McDermott engages two sides of social structure: the leadership and the citizenry. In discussing leadership, he draws from what was functionally Edwards's sole political sermon (titled "God's awful Judgment in the breaking and withering of the Strong Rods of the Community" and preached on the occasion of the death of his cousin Col. John Stoddard) in the context of the Court/Country politics division in New England in the early eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> From the analysis of this sermon, Professor McDermott derives both a wide-ranging theory of public authority in general and a notion of the specific place of a magistrate within this theory. In broad strokes, he outlines seven "functions of government" that he believes can be drawn from Edwards's sermon: the protection of property, maintaining order, ensuring justice, national defense, defending public morality, helping the poor, and "friendly, but distanced, support to true religion."<sup>15</sup> The magistrates of a society were to be responsible for seeing that these functions were carried out.

With the previously noted exception of the social role of love, this dissertation has little issue to raise with Professor McDermott's arguments so far.<sup>16</sup> By and large his

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<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, time does not permit a broad exposition of the distinction between these two parties. Briefly, the "court" party was the name for those (usually aristocrats) who held the crown to be dominant over Parliament in England, and appointed magistrates to be dominant over colonial legislatures in the colonies. The "country" party held opposite opinions. See *ibid.*, 118-19 for brief overviews of these two positions, and the works of Bernard Baylin for more extended treatment, especially *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> McDermott, 128-34.

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps it might be argued that Edwards's eschatological internationalism is balanced by his ecclesiastical localism, but that would do little to contribute to the discussion of a foundational political theory in Edwards.

conclusions in the first sections of his book have much to add to a discussion of Edwards's public thought. It is in discussing the citizen body (which forms the longest chapter of the book) that Professor McDermott shifts away from the solid theological foundation he had laid when attempting to demonstrate that Edwards had a progressive and radical view of citizenship at odds with the hierarchical thought of the day. He argues that "Edwards's theology of citizenship undermined—at least in theory—traditional hierarchicalism by ennobling the religious and (therefore) social worth of those traditionally on the underside of society."<sup>17</sup> This, Professor McDermott claims, is an outflow of Edwards's theology, particularly his "evangelical" theology of personal experience as the primary point of connection with God.<sup>18</sup> Because this connection is available even to the least of society (perhaps *especially* to the least of society), theoretical defenses of hierarchy lose their force in the face of an Edwardsean religious ethic.

By locating the citizen's authority in his own sense of the heart rather than his external attainments in society (such as wealth, political office or education), Edwards challenged all authority based on those attainments alone. His theology provided all social "inferiours" with theological legitimation for their challenges to religious, and then political, authority.<sup>19</sup>

Professor McDermott of course admits that there are for Edwards other aspects of citizenship besides undermining the government, including patriotism (based on love of neighbor, rather

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See Jonathan Edwards, *Ecclesiastical Writings*, vol. 12 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> McDermott, 166.

<sup>18</sup> "Evangelical" here being opposed to "liturgical" and meaning that religion begins with an interior experience before moving into external forms (as opposed to liturgical religion, which moves in the opposite direction). For more on this division, see Gregory A. Boyd and Paul Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). For a more critical exposition, see Thomas Howard, *Evangelical is Not Enough* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> McDermott, 172.

than love of self), care for the poor, and love for a well-ordered and united society. These, however, fade into the background when compared to his presentation of Edwards as a revolutionary intent on (theologically) overthrowing the hierarchy of the day and establishing a society based on abstract democratic principles.<sup>20</sup> This is the second point that this chapter will attempt to refute by demonstrating that rather than being a revolutionary political thinker, Edwards was in fact a deeply historical political thinker.

#### ONE HOLY AND HAPPY SOCIETY: A RESPONSE

As has been noted, this dissertation has two broad—and critical—points of disagreement with Professor McDermott’s conclusions. Highlighting these disagreements will demonstrate the thesis of this work: that Jonathan Edwards’s political thought is fundamentally historical and conservative in nature, rather than revolutionary.

#### *The Distinction Between Primary and Secondary Love*

Professor McDermott argues that in society, Christian love is both the center of the ethical system and primarily expressed through loving one’s neighbor. The former part of that argument—that for Edwards love is the center of the Christian ethical worldview—brooks no disagreement. (Although there are questions regarding the meaning of “love” for Edwards.) Dissent must be raised when it is argued that the fundamental expression of that love is love of neighbor. This dissertation contends that this is a confusion of primary and secondary love, which Edwards was careful to keep separate. In a properly ordered system of ethics, the center of virtue must be love to Being in general, or love to God.<sup>21</sup> This is not to

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., throughout the chapter, but especially 138-44.

<sup>21</sup> See chapter VI of this work.

say that there is *no* connection between primary love and secondary love. On the contrary, Edwards argues that primary love both leads to and informs secondary love. Love to neighbor is put in its proper context and is only properly expressed when it is grounded upon love to God. So grounded, it is seen as being a derivation and reflection of primary love and as such is ethically, aesthetically, and teleologically illuminated. And, as was shown in chapter six, such illumination is fundamentally historical and concrete through the vision given by faith.<sup>22</sup>

Professor McDermott is likewise correct to argue that Edwards understands “the Christian citizen as one who fully and responsibly engages in civil affairs for the purpose of improving the quality of life in the community.”<sup>23</sup> Yet such engagement, in order to be truly virtuous, must be built upon a foundation not of love for neighbor, but of love for God. Built upon such a foundation, the civic responsibilities of the individual take on the characteristics of primary love itself as they are seen through its filter. Without this foundation, love of country and love of other citizens are inappropriately elevated, as are all other secondary loves when taken by themselves, to the level of the transcendent, and patriotism rather than charity becomes the defining aspect of virtue.<sup>24</sup> However, when grounded upon primary love, the responsibilities of citizenship are lowered from the transcendent level and placed where they belong. The ethical, aesthetic, and teleological values of citizenship are put in their historical place, and seen within the sweep of the movement of God in history. This has the

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<sup>22</sup> In addition to chapter VI of this work, see Spohn, “Sovereign Beauty: Jonathan Edwards and the Nature of True Virtue,” and Danaher, *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards*.

<sup>23</sup> McDermott, 116.

<sup>24</sup> At least in a political setting. Any secondary system can of course be skewed in such a way.

dual effect of humbling the citizen and magistrate alike by providing historical perspective and flooding the virtues of citizenship and love of neighbor with ethical, aesthetic, and teleological value that otherwise could only have remained a shadow of intended reality.<sup>25</sup>

The Christian sees his responsibilities as a citizen with the new eyes of conversion, and so holds those responsibilities with humility and delight: the humility of one who is a small character on a large historical stage; and the delight of one performing duties full of ethical, aesthetic, and teleological value.<sup>26</sup> This important point leads to the second major disagreement with Professor McDermott, which concerns the role of these “new eyes” in public society.

*Personal Experience: Revolutionary or Historical?*

The second argument with which this dissertation must take issue is the claim that by emphasizing the personal aspect of the conversion experience Edwards was undermining the traditional structures and authorities of society and pointing towards their eventual overthrow. It must be acknowledged that from time to time—even in Edwards’s own day—this was in fact a result of some of his teachings.<sup>27</sup> Yet it will be shown here that this is a

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<sup>25</sup> These ideas are worked out extensively in the works of Avihu Zakai, especially in both *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* and *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of Nature: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> “Private love, love of family or country or humanity, falls short of the measure of true virtue... True virtue can only be found where the proportions are right.” Edwin Gaustad, “The Nature of True—And Useful—Virtue: From Edwards to Franklin” in *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Representation of American Culture*, 46. See also John E. Smith, “Christian virtue and Common Morality” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*.

<sup>27</sup> One could even argue that Edwards’s being fired was a result of the lessening of his own authority through the growth of such ideas. See Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 357-74. Yet this cannot be necessarily tied to Edwards: preachers were struggling to maintain their authority even in the generations before his. See for good examples of this: Hall, *The Last American Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather* and Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*.

false reading of Edwards's views of conversion and the human person. Not least because overthrowing authority was certainly not his intent.<sup>28</sup>

As was shown in chapters three through five of this dissertation, in Edwards's view the life of mankind is inherently historical. Whether discussing the will, the affections, or human identity itself, man is a creature that exists within history. Edwards's emphasis on personal experience consequently serves not to break man out of historical patterns by raising him to an individualistic communion with transcendence, but serves rather to give him a proper orientation toward and understanding of God. This proper orientation then enables the individual to reexamine and correctly approach the historical circumstances in which life is lived. In conversion (the "personal experience" in question) one does most assuredly (according to Edwards) become a new person.<sup>29</sup> Conversion at least involves a recasting of the affections by focusing them on true (primary) virtue, as opposed to the previously embraced systems of secondary virtue.<sup>30</sup> Such a reorientation of affections likewise, as shown in chapter three, results in a reordering of the will. Indeed, identity itself undergoes an ontological shift as the individual is moved from being identified within the mind of God as fundamentally a sinner to being identified as fundamentally one with Christ. This change is, from the subjective perspective of the individual involved, of course a deeply personal and life-changing experience and in many cases is the point from which the rest of life becomes

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<sup>28</sup> As his attempt to reinforce the traditional order during the Great Awakening demonstrates. See Marsden, 259-63.

<sup>29</sup> The best analysis of conversion in Edwards is still that of James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 171-229.

<sup>30</sup> Stout has an excellent analysis of this idea in the context of Edwards's revivalism. Stout, "Edwards as revivalist", in *Princeton Companion*, 129-33.

viewed.<sup>31</sup> Yet however deep and lasting an experience conversion may have been, the result is not, as Professor McDermott argues it is for Edwards, to place the individual as the focal point of existence—even if the individual in question is the neighbor rather than the self.

Instead of bringing an increased emphasis on the individual self, legitimate personal religious experience brings—as has been shown in chapter four of this dissertation—first, a revised set of affections which enable the individual to place all things—including both politics and the self—in their proper historical setting. The individual no longer sees himself as the center of what he now knows to have been a system of merely secondary virtue. Politics, order, tradition, society, and even individual identity are now seen as a part of the historical-redemptive plan moving according to the primary virtue of love to Being in general.<sup>32</sup> Once the individual is seen not to be the center of existence, legitimate religious experience generates humility, which then becomes a critical component of the judgment by which the individual interprets social movements. (See chapter four.) As the individual understands that God, and not the self, is the true perspective from which existence must be judged, humility increasingly becomes the mode by which political interpretation and action is undertaken.

Further, these revised affections include not just an understanding of the historical setting of politics, but also an understanding of that setting in its ethical, aesthetic, and

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<sup>31</sup> Even if the exact moment of the experience cannot be pinpointed. Edwards was relatively ground-breaking amongst Reformed theologians of the day in not insisting that this moment be pinpoint-able chronologically. He recognized that at times conversion could be a quiet and unobtrusive event. See Goen, “Editor’s Introduction” in *The Great Awakening*, 25-32.

<sup>32</sup> Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 231-36.



teleological aspects. Especially relevant are the aesthetic and ethical aspects.<sup>33</sup> Aesthetically, the result of personal experience for the individual is an increasing awareness of, appreciation for, and delight in the beauty of the created order and the reverberation of primary beauty throughout all secondary systems.<sup>34</sup> For one with what Edwards would call truly gracious religious affections, beauty and ugliness become increasingly central to the interaction of the individual with the world. And again, this interaction ultimately generates humility, as the individual grows in the understanding that he is not the center of the universe and that, rather, any beauty he possesses is not inherently his, but is derived from the primal source of beauty, which is Being in general.

In ethical terms, charity ought to define the affections that connect the individual to society as a whole.<sup>35</sup> In a sense, Professor McDermott is right to call this “love of neighbor,” but only so long as the point made above is remembered: that secondary love must first and foremost flow from primary love, rather than being allowed to replace it. As was emphasized in chapter six, one cannot truly love one’s neighbor unless one first loves God. To attempt to reverse this order is to fail to understand who one’s neighbor truly is. It is to see him in a limited—even a skewed—system of secondary virtue instead of as he authentically exists in relationship with Being in general. Furthermore, it is only when this order is maintained that truly loving action can result. To try to love someone while living under a system of purely

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<sup>33</sup> The teleological aspect of politics can be more difficult to judge from the perspective of the present. Professor McDermott does an excellent job of locating politics within the teleological thought of Edwards by relating it to his eschatology, as discussed above.

<sup>34</sup> This doctrine is set in its Trinitarian context by Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. A more practical application is made in Erdt, *Jonathan Edwards: Art and the Sense of the Heart*.

<sup>35</sup> This is a constant theme in Edwards, but especially in Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, Part III and *Charity and its Fruits*.

secondary virtue is to love with an unreformed aesthetical, ethical, and teleological sense and is ultimately to love a chimera.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, it can be seen that Edwards's view of experience is not designed to empower the individual in the way that Professor McDermott suggests. Rather, religious experience equips the individual with an aesthetic, ethical, and teleological sense that yields a proper understanding of God, man, and creation. As a result, humility and charity grow within the soul—two characteristics which do not inspire individualistic social revolution, but induce appreciation for and wonder in the Divinely established order.

All of this is not to say that there is no place for change, revolution, or reform in Edwards's thought. It may even be argued that he could never have been a stodgy old Tory, and may even have resisted misrule by the British government. If the inclinations of his students and descendents are any indication, he would have been a cautious supporter of the Revolution.<sup>37</sup> For just as personal experience provides the means properly to understand and interpret politics, order, and tradition in their historical settings; so too does it provide a means by which the individual can judge current circumstances. Just as having a proper view of political order in the light of history can reinforce that order, so too can having such a view lead to dissent and a drive for change when that order is understood to have been violated by those who are charged with upholding it. If, for example, one understands that a function of government is to enable open and public debate on political issues, then a magistrate who jails opponents who speak out against him would be a magistrate to be

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<sup>36</sup> A favorite phrase of Irving Babbitt, who taught a similar doctrine (albeit from a more mystical/Eastern perspective), for misdirected "love" is "love of humanity." See Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*.

<sup>37</sup> See the sermons by Edwards's students in Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding*.

resisted. And, if legitimate paths of resistance are likewise restricted by abusive magistrates, some form of rebellion against the authorities would be called for. To attribute such a view to Edwards is, however, perhaps more speculative than is warranted, for Edwards has left no writings on when revolution might be justified. The main point here is that an Edwardsean theory of legitimate revolution would be closer to that of the Adams cousins than to that of a Paine or Rousseau.<sup>38</sup> A revolution based solely on the personal sentiments of the individual would be anathema to Edwards, since for him legitimate experience reinforces the historical order rather than sets the individual at odds with it. Dissent and even open rebellion may be defensible for Edwards, but only as a way of remedying breaches of historically established order. Thus, Professor McDermott's portrayal of Edwards as a thinker of revolutionary temperament cannot be accepted.

#### CONCLUSION: JONATHAN EDWARDS AND THE POLITICS OF HISTORY

These criticisms of Professor McDermott's book amplify the general thesis of this dissertation. A few concluding thoughts will draw together the arguments of the preceding chapters, and suggestions will be made for areas of further study in addition to those made in individual chapters of this work.

First, Edwards's anthropology makes evident that politics is a historical enterprise. Whether looking at the will, the affections, or even human identity itself, one can see that Edwards was concerned to keep man within the boundaries of his historical place. Edwards's doctrine of the will demonstrates that the will is not an ahistorical and independent something

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<sup>38</sup> For the political thought of John and Samuel Adams, see Mark Puls, *Samuel Adams: Father of the American Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and John Adams, *Revolutionary Writings 1775-1783* (New York: The Library of America, 2011). For Rousseau, see *The Basic Political Writings*. For Paine, see Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1995).

operating separately of its historical circumstance. The will cannot be for Edwards, as it is for Rousseau, that by which the individual is lifted above his time and place and brought into ahistorical community.<sup>39</sup> In fact, quite the opposite must be the case. If the will is a power of the person that is determined by the affections or any other aspect of the mind, it cannot be separate from the rest of the human being. If the person as a whole is historical, so too must be the will.

The affections are also historical in nature. By their very composition, they are a part of the organic whole of the person. See chapter IV. But what was more important for Edwards was that both the primary way in which affections are to be judged and their primary realm of activity are historical. That is, one judges whether affections are legitimate by observing their activity in the real world. Again, contrary to Rousseau, simply having deep or extreme affections is no indication that these affections are in any way virtuous or Divine.<sup>40</sup> It is only when they are lived out in time and seen to bear good fruit that the affections may be judged as Godly. History is where the Christian—indeed all of humanity—must live. Affections which might claim to be legitimate but end in separating the person from historical practice are nothing more than sham emotions, and are to be judged accordingly.

Finally, in chapter five it was shown that for Edwards the identity of the individual as a whole is historical. He brings together the will and the affections in one organic whole within the mind of God. And, just as God holds together the person from moment to moment

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<sup>39</sup> See Rousseau, *On the Social Contract* in *The Basic Political Writings*.

<sup>40</sup> The most blatant examples of this are found in Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.

by His own power and will, so He continually re-creates mankind historically. That is, God has chosen to create and continue man within concrete space and time. This not only gives man a historical relationship with God, but it gives a Divine meaning to history.<sup>41</sup> And this connection between God, man, and history, provides a transition from Edwards's anthropology to his theology.

Just as in Edwards's anthropology is seen the deeply historical nature and place of man, so in his theology can be seen the historical nature of the relationship between God and man. This is of course not to say that God is a creature and a mere part of history in Edwards's thought, but rather that God chooses to encounter man historically. This is seen both in Edwards's doctrine of virtue and in his teleology. With regard to the doctrine of virtue, God chooses to interact with man in an ethical and aesthetic historical setting. True virtue occurs—from man's perspective—within history. Historical acts of justification give man a proper, if limited, understanding of and delight in primary virtue, and then, through that new understanding and delight, a historical sense by which the secondary systems of virtue may be engaged.<sup>42</sup> Having been changed—having been justified—the individual begins to view the world through refined ethical, aesthetic, and teleological vision. History becomes not a succession of isolated events, but rather is charged with moral and aesthetic value in which all of mankind lives and moves as an organic whole towards the appointed end.

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<sup>41</sup> See Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History* throughout, but especially 319-24.

<sup>42</sup> Though, as was pointed out in chapter VI, this moment of justification may not be a deeply felt experience, or even recognized at its exact moment in time at all. It is nonetheless for Edwards a historical moment.

In Edwards's teleological thought, one begins to see how man is raised above history. Yet even his teleology does not devalue history, but rather floods it with Divine meaning. That history has an end does not, in the mind of Edwards, destroy its meaning and value, but rather gives it a meaning that it could not otherwise have. Just as Aristotle argues that things are defined by their telos, so Edwards argues that one can only truly appreciate history when one sees it in light of its final destination. Specifically, that destination is both ethical and beautiful. In seeing this, one sees in turn that the flow of history from the past to that end point likewise contains the ethical and beautiful. And so the groundwork for historical interaction in Edwards's thought is built in ethics, aesthetics, and teleology.

Here it is appropriate to add a few concluding thoughts based on the philosophical groundwork laid in this and preceding chapters. First, it should be noted that for Edwards, politics must be historical. Since all of human existence until the end of history and the arrival of the eschaton is historical, so also must be the social interactions between human beings. To say that politics is historical is, however, not to say that it has no transcendent meaning. As has been shown, for Edwards all of history is flooded with transcendence.

Second, it should be noted that for Edwards proper appreciation of the true historical value of politics requires the transformed sense that comes through conversion. Beginning with justification, the individual can appreciate politics and history through the refined affections which bring a new appreciation for the ethical, aesthetic, and teleological aspects of historical movement. History must be viewed from the perspective of primary rather than secondary virtue; that is, it is understood in its proper place.

Third, it can be seen that, in the thought of Edwards, politics does not have the central role that so many thinkers have given it. This is not to say that he does not regard it as important. It is merely to point out that by placing it within the historical, indeed by placing all of human existence within the historical, Edwards has at the very least subordinated politics to history (if not to various other pursuits as well).<sup>43</sup> That is, because politics occurs within history—and not vice-versa—politics can only be explored and experienced from a historical perspective.

Finally, it can be seen that for Edwards, pragmatism in the ordinary sense is at best a limited guide to judging political movements. His emphasis on ethics, aesthetics, and teleology suggest that cold hard calculation of empirical fact is not the means of judging the legitimacy of a public movement or of an individual's involvement in such a movement. Here, Edwards is quite in line with Burke and other conservative thinkers, who would not just consider the short-range practical reasonableness of a public policy or institution, but how it fits within the broad sweep of history and the telos of human existence.

All of these points illustrate what has been suggested throughout—that Jonathan Edwards was a deeply historical thinker who belongs with Burke, Hegel, and other historically-minded philosophers, despite anticipating their ideas by half a century.

#### FOR FURTHER STUDY

Certain areas for further study have been suggested throughout. Here, three (brief) broader suggestions will be made for possible topics of future research. First, while much work has been done by historians on Edwards's role in the development of American culture,

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<sup>43</sup> It might further be argued that in his emphasis on beauty he subordinates politics to other aesthetic cultural pursuits as well.

few political philosophers have engaged him seriously.<sup>44</sup> His writings on the will, affections, virtue, and identity are deeply reflective (if challenging in their language and structure), and would add much to current discussions on those topics. Popularizing accounts of Edwards have done something towards bringing him to scholarly attention, but they have limited value.<sup>45</sup>

Second, there is much work to do on the influence of Edwards on later American philosophical movements, specifically Transcendentalism and Pragmatism.<sup>46</sup> Edwards was read and enthusiastically endorsed by many of the Unitarian founders of Transcendentalism, and was at least read by William James. Although Edwards himself is now by-and-large unknown by Americans, these two movements remain influential. Understanding the relationship between Edwards and them can only benefit American philosophical scholarship.

Finally, Edwards has much to say specifically to those who think more historically about politics and culture. The application of an Edwardsean hermeneutic to the study of the politics is the next natural step, but is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It is the hope of the author of this dissertation that this work will bring to attention a thinker not often

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<sup>44</sup> Among these few are Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, 214; Eric Voegelin, “A Formal Relationship with Puritan Mysticism” in *On the Form of the American Mind*, vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Jurgen Gebhardt (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995); and Paul Elmer More, “Jonathan Edwards,” <http://jkalb.freeshell.org/more/edwards.html> (accessed on April 11, 2012). See the Preface to this dissertation for further comments on their works.

<sup>45</sup> The best such effort to date has been Byrd, *Jonathan Edwards for Armchair Theologians*.

<sup>46</sup> See James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, throughout; and Philip Gura, “Edwards and American Literature” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*; as well as Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History*.



engaged by political philosophers who has much to add to contemporary discussions over the nature of politics and human existence.

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