

THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF JONATHAN EDWARDS: AN ANALYSIS  
AND APPLICATION OF HIS CALVINISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT  
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While a wealth of information exists on the theology of Jonathan Edwards as it relates to missions, evangelism, and revival, there has been little analysis of his epistemology and methodology as it relates to the education of youth in America. Jonathan Edwards is largely regarded as America's greatest theological mind yet he has not been given credit as one of America's earliest and most profound cognitive theorists, nor as a pioneer in the field of psychology. This thesis examines his writings – particularly his letters from Stockbridge, sermons in which he addressed questions of youth, the mind, and education, -- to reconstruct and then apply his educational philosophy and practice to current educational issues facing America in the twenty-first century with a focus upon his Calvinistic psychology, or doctrine of the mind, as well as a brief overview of his phenomenological idealist epistemology.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

“Technique in education will make the teaching of children more efficient, but if the educator teaches wrong ideals, the more efficiently he does so, the worse.”<sup>1</sup> This statement by one of America’s greatest twentieth century Christian thinkers at the beginning of the modern Christian and home-school movement over fifty years ago strikes at the root of the issues facing education in America, namely the lack of context for content, or a coherent and philosophically justifiable world-view, and biblical psychology that takes account of humanity’s deepest needs, weaknesses, and questions, without undermining the efforts of instructors.<sup>2</sup>

It seems almost unnecessary to present evidence that schools in America need help both morally and academically, for most parents and educators are already convinced that American schools are in desperate need of improvement. On any given day the news reports teacher shortages,<sup>3</sup> assaults,<sup>4</sup> dereliction of duty,<sup>5</sup> prohibition of religious speech,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Clark, “A Christian Philosophy of Education.” *Reviews*, May/June 1988; available from <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=93>; Internet; accessed 27 August 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Sentiments similar to Clarke’s have been uttered throughout church history, especially in the Puritan tradition, consider Cremin’s account of Cotton Mather, “For Mather, piety remained the chief end of education and the decisive element in determining its content and character. “All the learning that many have,” he wrote in 1690, “serves only as a bag of gold about a drowning man, it sinks them deeper into the scalding floods of the lake that burns with fiery brimstone: But the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ is a saving thing” Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607 – 1783* (New York: Harper & Row Pub., 1970), 289.

<sup>3</sup> “New Orleans Schools Desperate for Teachers as They Recover From Katrina.” *Associated Press*, 24 January 2007; available from <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,933,246440,00.html?sPage=fnc.national/education>; Internet; accessed 29 October 2007. Cf. also, Sam Dillon’s “With Turnover High, Schools Fight for Teachers.” *The New York Times*, 27 August 2007; available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/27/education/27teacher.html>; Internet; accessed 27 August 2007.

teacher/student relations,<sup>7</sup> the promoting of homosexuality,<sup>8</sup> distorted aptitude tests,<sup>9</sup> failed standards,<sup>10</sup> and poor school conditions.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, there is no lack of complaints against the performance of public schools in America, which explains the increase in private and home schooling.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, a phenomenon that is not only facing non-Christian educators and parents, but also one the Church faces is a lack of a Biblical worldview, including that of the human mind or psychology. Noted Christian researcher George Barna has compiled numerous statistics that testify to the fact that in many respects the Church is similar to the un-churched in their thought and practice, and rightly recommends the development and adherence to a biblical worldview.<sup>13</sup> This does not only include creationism and monotheism, but the belief in mankind's desperate need for Savior, and Christ Jesus as that Savior. Without this no education can benefit a child, whether it is at home, in a "Christian" school, or a public

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<sup>4</sup> "Delaware Teen Charged With Setting Schoolmate's Hair on Fire," *Associated Press*, 29 October 2007; available from <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,306037,00.htm>; Internet; accessed 29 October 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly Bouchard, "School health centers didn't report underage sex," *Portland Press Herald*, 26 October 2007; available from <http://pressherald.maintoday.com/story.php?id=143117&ac=PHnws>; Internet; accessed 26 October 2007.

<sup>6</sup> "Colorado Student Files Lawsuit Over Commencement Speech That Mentioned Jesus," *Associated Press*, 31 October 2007; available from <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,295432,00.htm?sPage=fnc.national/education>; Internet; accessed on 24 October 2007. Cf. also, "Kindergarten cops rule: Witches in, Bibles out: 'Sounds the death knell for religious freedom,'" *WorldNetDaily.com*, 31 August 2007; available from [http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=57403](http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=57403); Internet; accessed 31 August 2007.

<sup>7</sup> "Report: Sexual Misconduct Plaguing U.S. Schools," *Associated Press*, 20 October 2007; available from <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,303780,00.html?sPage=fnc.national/education>; Internet; accessed 24 October 2007.

<sup>8</sup> "Explicit Sex-Ed Pamphlets Distributed To Pre-Teens," WCBSTV, 19 October 2007; available from <http://wcbstv.com/local/wellness.fair.gay.2.392825.html>; Internet, accessed 19 October 2007. Cf. also, Bob Unruh, "Ban on 'Mom' and 'Dad' sparks call for exodus," *WorldNetDaily*, 16 October 2007; available from [http://worldnetdaily.com/news/ARTICLE\\_ID=58154](http://worldnetdaily.com/news/ARTICLE_ID=58154); Internet; accessed 17 October 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Tom LoBianco, "Maryland distorted class of '09 aptitude," *Washington Times*, 31 August 2007; available from <http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070831/METRO/1083100>; Internet; accessed 31 August 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Robert A Frahm, "Schools Fall Short of Federal Standards," *Hartford Courant*, 30 August 2007; available from <http://www.topix.net/content/trb/2007/08/schools-fall-short-of-federal-standards>; Internet; accessed 30 August 2007.

<sup>11</sup> "Oregon Student Finds School's Toilet Water Cleaner than Fountain's," *Associated Press*, 11 June 2007; available from <http://www.foxnews.com/0,3566,280474,00.html>; Internet; accessed 11 June 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Note 8. Also, Yonat Shimron's, "Baptists turn from public schools," *The News & Observer*, 26 August 2007; available from <http://www.newsobserver.com/front/v-print/story/683001.html>; Internet; accessed 27 August 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Barna states, "Because every thought, word, and deed has consequences, every choice we make must be carefully considered...we must filter every choice through the mind and heart so saturated with God's perspectives that our choices reflect His choices. Our fallen nature prevents us from flawlessly representing the ways of God, but the more we own his truths and principles, the better we will be at living a truly Christian life" George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*, (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 100.

school. If the educator approaches his or her students as blank slates in a godless universe he or she will have sacrificed the opportunity to apply the gospel, and therefore the only thing that can truly enlighten the heart and mind. Teaching from a biblical worldview is more than just mentioning “intelligent design,” it is ministering to young people who are just as much in need of redemption as adults. Any educational philosophy, be it secular or Christian that does not take seriously a biblical psychology, or the weakness of the human heart, will stunt the growth and development of students, leaving them with contradiction within and without.

This is not a new lesson for educators. America’s greatest and still most well known eighteenth century Christian philosopher and theologian Jonathan Edwards - also following in the Puritan Tradition - sought to impress upon his generation the importance of integrating a biblical world-view into education, one that takes into consideration both the beauty and grandeur of this world, but also its limitations and the limitations of the mind, and the importance of using education for the glory of God. Like Clark, Edwards exhorted his students to stay faithful to God or else, “your greater talents will in effect be only greater advantages in your hands to do mischief in the world.”<sup>14</sup> This paper will argue that it is this Calvinistic psychology – or the belief in the noetic affect of sin and the inability to embrace the Truth in this world - in the educational philosophy of Jonathan Edwards that can most improve contemporary American education.

It may strike some readers as odd to even discuss the “psychology” of an eighteenth century theologian since psychology, or the study of the mind, itself is often considered a relatively new “science”<sup>15</sup> reserved for specialists, and this is true if one defines psychology

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Christ the Most Eminent Counselor,” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu/ref/8445>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 33.

<sup>15</sup> According to Kant’s “transcendental idealism” view the mind is an interpreter and not merely an object that can be studied as one studies the natural world, therefore to apply the term “science” to the study of the mind is “scarcely

in terms of a strictly materialist view with its metaphorical view of the brain (as well as the universe) as a type of machine without reference to any spiritual influence.<sup>16</sup> However, Robinson rightly points out that this is only one view (and a modern one at that) in the long history of examining the human psyche, particularly by philosophers, and historically psychology was rarely (if ever) divorced from the influence of the supernatural.<sup>17</sup> However, with the rise of Darwinian evolution the “ghost in the machine” was finally extricated, the supernatural, everlasting mind became a part of the natural, decaying body, and the exiling of God begun by the deist was completed by the atheist.

Needless to say Jonathan Edwards did not share the materialist point of view. Jonathan Edwards of late has been recognized as having a unique psychology built upon his Calvinistic beliefs and a philosophical idealism that was different even from the “common sense realism” so prevalent within the Church of his day, and after,<sup>18</sup> as well as the various materialist and monistic trends found in thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, and the Gassendists.<sup>19</sup> Donald Stelting in his own attempt to reconstruct the educational philosophy of Edwards has rightly called it, “philosophical psychology.” This psychology divides the mind into the “understanding” and the “will,” which has both “notional” knowledge and the “sense of the heart” – or “knowing truth as and through beauty.” Edwards saw God as the great Mind, man with a blank mind at birth yet, with the

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imaginable.” Daniel N. Robinson, *An Intellectual History of Psychology*, (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.), 283

<sup>16</sup> Georgetown University’s Daniel Robinson traces psychology as far back as the ancient Greeks, saying, “In my own case, it seemed fairly clear to me years ago, and seems still clearer now, that the general outlines for a systematic psychology were drawn in Hellenic and Hellenistic Greece. If there is a defensible sense in which all philosophy, as Whitehead said, is a footnote to Plato, much in the history of psychology is a footnote to Aristotle.” *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 232, 233.

<sup>18</sup> A later Princeton theologian Charles Hodge is often recognized as approaching theology from a “common sense realism” perspective. John Frame of Reformed Theological Seminary rightly points out that (contra Hodge and this school of thought) there are no “brute facts,” but all truth is pre-interpreted by God, and then interpreted by people., John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship*, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1987), 78.

<sup>19</sup> Robinson, 240, 253.

capacity to gain knowledge through sense, “passive in the reception of simple ideas, but which possesses the capacity to order, reflect, and remember.”<sup>20</sup>

According to Stelting Edwards saw inadequacy in both the Lockean and Cartesian system of obtaining truth for they placed little to no emphasis on the *preference* of certain ideas to others as “facts,” nor the direct involvement of the Holy Spirit upon the mind of the unregenerate. For Edwards’s own “conversion experience” had taught him that he could possess the same idea (e.g. God’s sovereignty) at one point and find it reprehensible, but the next moment take delight in it as a fact. According to Stelting Edwards discovered that, “there is more to an idea than the mere facts; ideas also have inclination and magnitude of inclination.”

Moreover, because the Spirit of God directly taught Edwards to love this truth God must speak directly through this “sixth sense” of the mind, its “taste” for certain ideas over others according to the minds “will” or inclination and desire. “The will and the understanding cannot be in contradiction, for they are both the mind.” Therefore, one will only believe what one wants to believe, and only what one believes is regarded as truth, however, since man does not want to believe in God he cannot know Him intimately unless God changes the person’s inclination. This God does directly, but He also uses the senses to “access the human psyche,” which is why preachers should be vivid in their sermons.<sup>21</sup>

While a wealth of information exists on the theology of Jonathan Edwards as it relates to missions, evangelism, revival, and epistemology in general, there is little published analysis of his thought as it relates to the education of youth in America.<sup>22</sup> We will therefore

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<sup>20</sup> Donald Edd Stelting, *Edwards as Educator: His Legacy of Educational Thought and Practice*, (The University of Kansas, Ph. D. Dissertation, 1998), 96 – 114.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 115 -122

<sup>22</sup> Though some related works can be found there is only one major treatments of this subject that this author was able to find, that is Stelting’s *Edwards as Educator: His Legacy of Educational Thought and Practice*..

examine his writings – including his letters from Stockbridge, sermons in which he addressed questions of youth, the mind, human depravity, and education, -- to discover his Calvinistic psychology which influenced his educational philosophy and apply this to current issues facing America in the twenty-first century, as well as demonstrate the continued validity and relevance of his thought for improving the current state of public, private, church, and home education in America.

Works which we will be drawing upon for this endeavor are sermons preached at North Hampton as well as others. There are at least six sermons wherein Edwards speaks on the subject of youth, four lectures or lecture notes on the topic of education, nine that specifically address the mind and the Holy Spirit's operation upon it, as well Edwards' collected writing on "The Mind" which give a wealth of insight for what can often be a daunting task of interpreting Edwards.<sup>23</sup> We will also draw upon these works during our study of the Scriptures and Systematic Theology. The rationale for focusing on the "mind," as opposed to the "heart," is because so much of education revolves around what we typically call "the mind," and for Edwards there was not a great distinction between the two; moreover, human identity is bound up in the mind. Edwardian ontology, anthropology, and epistemology can be summed up in the Scripture, "as a man thinks in his heart so is he" (Prov. 23:7).

Among other themes and topics to be touched upon is how much Empiricism or the empirical method is valid for the obtaining of true knowledge. It has become more common

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<sup>23</sup> Jennifer L. Leader in her essay, "In Love With Image: Transitive Being and Typological Desire in Jonathan Edwards," sums up this challenge saying, "But then, there are many Jonathan Edwardses. The enormous scope of this eighteenth-century divine's erudition, public and personal writings, and historical influence makes him a crucial and controversial figure to students of American history, philosophy, theology, and literature alike. Laid claim to so stridently by so many... Edwards's identity as cultural icon and architect of the American mind is still up for grabs; the internecine debates initiated by Perry Miller in the middle of the last century continue unabated about whether Edwards the thinker was primarily indebted to the Enlightenment or to Calvinism and the Bible; whether he was a synthesizer or inventor; whether he was the last Puritan or the first modernist, a postmodernist or a medievalist." *Early American Literature*, (Vol. 41, no. 2, 2006), 153.

with the rise in presuppositional apologetics to reject Empiricism. Where did Edwards stand as it relates to the knowledge of God retained in the human mind, and the ability to gain knowledge and truth from observing the creation? This is an important question both historically as it relates to Edwards and Biblically - whether or not Edwards was correct in his understanding. What should the Christian educator's response be to Empiricism in general, and the thoughts of Edwards on general revelation? Are his views compatible with those of Calvin?

Another great American thinker, and one who has been contrasted with Edwards before is Benjamin Franklin.<sup>24</sup> As a contemporary of Edwards, an influential educational theorist, and one of the leading proponents of the Deistic world-view which was so prominent during the founding and shaping of this nation, it will also be advantageous to hear Edwards's response to the Deistic views of Franklin through Edwards's lectures against Tindal. Through this we will see that the Deist's basic epistemic views were far inferior to those of Edwards for the future direction of this nation's education. Deism cannot supply what is lacking in American education simply because it is part of the problem, namely a universe in which God is essentially no longer involved and man's nature is at worse only partially affected by sin. Although Deism seems like an antiquated idea in American history it is nonetheless true that education in America has assigned to God at best a role outside and irrelevant to the affairs of men, or at least the schoolhouse and the minds of students.

Lastly, we will focus our attention upon those letters written by Edwards while at the Stockbridge mission. There are four letters of significance when discussing the methodology of Edwards: the two letters to Speaker Thomas Hubbard, the letter to Sir William Pepperrell,

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<sup>24</sup> Most notably in David Levin's "The Puritan in the Enlightenment: Franklin and Edwards," in *The Berkeley Series in American History*. edited by Charles Sellers (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1963).

and the letter to Joseph Paice. In these letters advice is offered at the most practical and pedagogic level and where Edwards might surprise the reader because of their remarkable similarity to what would later be termed “progressive,” or at that time might have been attributed to Lockean influence.<sup>25</sup> In this respect Edwards should not be neglected in the discussion of America’s great cognitive and educational theorists. Through these letters we can see the heart of Edwards for the education of young people, his innovative flare, and his ability to apply his generally Calvinistic psychology and epistemology to the context of his own day. It is through these letters in particular that we will be able to apply more accurately the Edwardsian philosophy of education to our own context, and in some respects have confirmed some of our present practices and theories, yet with much needed epistemic balance.

Can this “new light” theologian shed light on debates on school vouchers, No Child Left Behind, standardized tests, virtual schools, funding, violence, and homework, from a Calvinistic point of view? Some might be surprised to hear anything but an “Education in the Hands of an Angry Theologian” treatment of Edwards, but the facts speak of a compassionate, concerned, and well rounded Colonial educator who - though not thoroughly innovative pedagogically - was nevertheless innovative in his epistemology, and therefore psychology. Edwards was on par with the most forward thinking educators of his day, and therefore due an honored place among America’s great cognitive theorists.

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<sup>25</sup> Particularly Locke’s “Some Thoughts Concerning Education.” Though debate exists as to how much of Locke’s works were known to Edwards, certainly Locke’s basic philosophy was known in the colonies, and exhibited an influence on people of higher learning.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Edwards and Philosophy**

In a discussion on the educational philosophy of Jonathan Edwards and his Calvinistic psychology two main subjects must be discussed, Edwards's epistemology, and his pedagogy. In compiling the resources used for such an endeavor the most emphasis has been placed upon primary resources, namely the works of Jonathan Edwards himself as published by Yale University Press. Edwards was a "man of letters," and as such has a vast body of work to sort through. Works that have been chosen are sermons, letters, and notes that speak specifically to the subjects mentioned above.

Secondary resources abound on the topic of Jonathan Edwards, but those that are most relevant are those that explain his basic epistemological views, his phenomenological idealism, and those which seek to explain the relationship between his Calvinist and Puritan roots, and the Enlightenment (typified by Lockean Empiricism, and Deism). Other works that must factor in are those that discuss his educational pedagogy. Edwards lived in a period of great change and intellectual energy and was well aware of Enlightenment views, and much of his work can be seen as a response or reaction - not to one particular thinker (although he did address Tindal specifically in his sermons) - but to the Enlightenment spirit of observation, reflection, and quest for truth beyond the simple imitation and parroting of forefathers. As a Calvinist, Edwards already maintained a high regard for education, and an

appreciation of the decrees of God as seen in “nature and providence,”<sup>1</sup> but how to reconcile the mind of man (particularly the regenerate man) with the mind of God, and the realities behind nature was something Edwards wrestled with greatly. We will begin with a broad survey of the most up to date works on his philosophy, and will narrow down our scope as we move along to topics that are more obviously “Calvinistic.”

### **Challenging Presumptions**

Noted Edwards scholar George M. Marsden begins the second section “The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards,” with his essay entitled “Challenging the Presumptions of the Age: The Two Dissertations.” This is an important essay because it is a more extensive treatment of Edwardsian epistemology. Marsden deals chiefly with two works by Edwards, “Concerning the End for Which God Created the World,” and “The Nature of True Virtue,” both published posthumously in 1765 and of which deal most directly with the tenets of Enlightenment thought.

Marsden gives us the “key to understanding Edward’s thought,” which is - as he says, “essentially Augustinian,” stating, “Everything is related because everything is related to God.” This Augustinian connection will be important to keep in mind in our look at Calvin in chapter 5. Marsden elaborates on this, stating the following:

Truth, a dimension of God’s love and beauty, is part of that quintessentially bright light that pours forth from the throne of God. Every other pretended light, or source of truth, is as darkness if it keeps Gods creatures from seeing the great sun of God’s light. The created universe itself is a dynamic expression of that light. Yet sin blinds humans from acknowledging the source of the light that surrounds them. Having turned away from God’s love, they now grope in darkness, inordinately loving themselves and their immediate surroundings or chasing after false lights of their own

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<sup>1</sup> In answer to question, “How doth God execute his decrees?,” the Westminster Shorter Catechism declares, “God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence.” *Westminster Confession of Faith*. (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Pub., 2003), 288.

imaginings. Only the undeserved gift of redemption, bought with Christ's blood, can open their eyes and change their hearts so that they see and love the Triune God and the created universe as wholly an expression of God's creative and redemptive will. Only through the prism of the revelation recorded in Scripture can they discover the nature of God's creative and redemptive purposes. Once sinners experience God's love, they begin to love what he loves.<sup>2</sup>

Marsden explains that Edwards taught not that mankind's happiness is the ultimate end of creation, but God's glory in receiving back from his creation the communication of His love within the Trinity. Marsden sees this concept summed up by Edwards statement, "The beams of glory come from God, and are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is of God, and in God, and to God; and God is the beginning, middle, and end in this affair."<sup>3</sup>

The theology of Edwards was a challenge to Enlightenment moralists typified by John Locke which sought to discover an empirical basis for morality free from (though not in complete objection to) the external authority of the Church and the Bible. Edwards exploited the definition of virtue as that of beings which is "beautiful," and described God as the ultimate Being. To be virtuous, then, was to be, "united in love with the Godhead. And to be united in love with the Godhead means to love what God loves, or all being... any other loves, absent this properly highest love, will be love for much less than one ought to be loving and hence contrary to the very purpose for which one was created."<sup>4</sup>

Even love for one's family or country though having the potential to be virtuous in a sense through "common grace," it is still essentially a "private" love rather than "public benevolence," and was not able to promote "universal benevolence," but rather has a

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<sup>2</sup> D.G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols, eds. *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 100.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. Cf. chapter 3 subtitles.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

tendency to be exalted by man and therefore becomes idolatrous<sup>5</sup> when viewed as the greatest good. Marsden quotes Edwards as stating, “The larger the number is that private affection extends to, the more apt men are, through the narrowness of their sight, to mistake it for true virtue; because then the private system appears to have more of the image of the universal system.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Rationalist Foundations**

In his essay “The Rationalist Foundations of Jonathan Edwards’s Metaphysics,” found in the collection called, “Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience,” Norman Fiering argues against the idea (largely perpetuated by Perry Miller) that Locke was the main influence upon Edwards, moreover that, “it is misleading to categorize Edwards as a Lockean, Especially when this categorization implies – along the lines of the familiar but questionable dichotomy – that Edwards is allied with the English empiricists as opposed to the Continental rationalists.”<sup>7</sup> Edwards’s views were not formed in a vacuum any more than Locke’s and by the time he encountered Locke as a postgraduate tutor (contrary to Miller’s chronology) he already had certain Cartesian and Scholastic proclivities,<sup>8</sup> yet he was thoroughly a “theocentric, rationalist metaphysician.”<sup>9</sup>

Fiering cites the following six general principles independent of Locke that were axiomatic to Continental, and therefore, Edwardsian philosophy:

“the affirmation of total divine sovereignty, entailing among other things the position that events in the universe are entirely free of contingency; a belief in divine concurrence in events and in the continual conservation and re-creation of the existing

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<sup>5</sup> Such was the condition of the Athenians, whom Paul preached to (Cf. chapter 3).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>7</sup> Nathan Hatch, and Harry S. Stout, eds. *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 75.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

world; a commitment to teleology at the ultimate level of explanation – everything exists for some divine purpose; acceptance of the Neoplatonic typological system that posited divine archetypes and ectypal representations on earth; and the rejection of the Cartesian position that the essence of matter is extension... an unalterable opposition to materialism or to teachings that could lead to materialism.”<sup>10</sup>

Fiering believes the French philosopher Malebranche is a more likely candidate for having the most influence on Edwards’s “immaterialism.” Though not able to assert a direct knowledge of Malebranche’s work himself, Fiering argues that Edwards must have at least had contact and conversation with those who had. The reason, Fiering believes, is that Malebranche supplied a bridge for men like Edwards and Berkley between the defunct view of innate ideas, and set the stage for a “spiritualized theory of knowledge and metaphysics.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Philosophical Theology**

Another book, “The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards” by Sang Hyun Lee is also a useful addition to the study of Edwardsian thought. In the chapter entitled, “Imagination as the Habit of the Mind,” Lee argues for the empiricist influence of Locke upon the thought of Jonathan Edwards stating, “Edwards did accept Locke’s basic empiricist maxim that knowledge must be through, and based upon sensation. But, seeing that this empiricistic principle did not necessitate the doctrine of the mind as a tabula rasa, and also realizing that an appeal to the mind’s combinatory activity was unavoidable even in Locke’s

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>11</sup> Fiering explains, “The ideas we have of bodies, our knowledge of the external world, Malebranche argued, can be gained in only one of five ways: the bodies themselves emit “species” that resemble them, which was the prevailing Scholastic view; the soul of man may have the capacity in some unexplained way to produce ideas of things out of the impressions made upon bodies, as though man were himself a God able to create and destroy real beings; our ideas may be created with us from birth, and as needed appear to us with God’s aid, which was the Platonic solution; the essence of objects may be perceivable within the mind itself without need of anything outside; or finally, the soul may be united with God and thus dependent upon God for all of its thoughts, which was Malebranche’s view.” Ibid., 86.

own account, Edwards set out to formulate a dispositional conception of the mind's capacities."<sup>12</sup>

One way in which Edwards did this was by conceiving that, "the mental and spiritual is the more substantial or elemental force in the scheme of reality, while the material is an image of it."<sup>13</sup> It is sensation which furnishes the mind with phenomena to relate, so that knowledge is not through sensation but perhaps from sensation. Imagination is the structuring of ideas and sensations in orderly fashion into categories one deems related.<sup>14</sup> At this point Lee quotes from Edwards,

The mind perceives that some of its ideas agree, in a manner very different from all its other ideas. The mind therefore is determined to rank those ideas together in its thoughts; and all new ideas it receives with the like agreement it naturally and habitually and at once places to the same rank and order and calls them by the same name; and by the nature, determination, and habit of the mind the idea of one excites the idea of others.<sup>15</sup>

What this leads to is what Edwards called the "habit of the mind," or how we have become accustomed to thinking, in other words, our own personal thinking habits in the area of relating pieces of information into a harmonious whole, the two rules or patterns being, "cause and effect, and contiguity."<sup>16</sup> Regarding cause and effect we intuitively know that whatsoever comes to pass must have a cause, and contiguity is demonstrated by our ability to pair sounds, letters, and words with what they signify. Lee gives four aspects of the mind's imaginative activity, the first being the ordering of sensations according to already established habits; the mind refuses to "experience its ideas in meaningless jumbles and insists on 'placing' and 'ranging' them into 'regular parcels and figures' that is, into

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<sup>12</sup> Sang Hyun Lee. *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, expanded ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 119.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 124.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 127.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

meaningful wholes.”<sup>17</sup> The second aspect is the mind’s holding together certain ideas to form significant relationships; this is done by the mind’s ability to hold onto two concepts at once in order to compare and order them.<sup>18</sup>

There are two more aspects of the imagination Lee describes for us. The third held by Edwards was the imagination’s “spontaneous, immediate, and nondiscursive manner of operation.” In other words, the mind does not always consciously think about how to think but automatically or spontaneously filters information into its predetermined or habitual way of computing and that in conjunction with the whole person, or as Lee states, “The habit and its imagination do not constitute an esoteric faculty operating separately from the total economy of the human personality, nor do they abrogate the regular workings of the mind and heart.”<sup>19</sup>

The last aspect concerns the creative process. The mind is not limited by simple ideas, but fits ideas into a larger context than the immediate sensations, even recalling other seemingly unrelated ideas in order to construct a coherent structure for the immediate thought, and it thus fits into the person ultimate perception and system of thought. The mind ought to weigh every thought in relation to the beauty of God, this “creative contribution” of the imagination is the widest vision, “which makes the true apprehension of the essence of things possible.”<sup>20</sup>

Lee further notes that, “the mind does not make or impose order upon its ideas, but rather asserts it in the mind by making explicit the relations to which the ideas themselves already tend... the simple ideas in Edwards’ view must be seen as also essentially relational

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 133.

– that is, as being tendencies to certain sorts of relationships. For this reason, Edwards often speaks of the mind’s propensive activity of holding together its ideas in certain relations, and the attraction of ideas toward one another, as two dimensions of one and the same phenomenon.”<sup>21</sup> Lee also explains, “in Edwards’ notion of the mind’s dispositional imagination creativity and receptivity merge into one process. The ordering activity of the mind’s habit vis-à-vis sense ideas is the very process through which the relational tendencies inherent in sense ideas themselves are made mentally explicit and thus received and sensed by the mind.”<sup>22</sup>

Another important and related chapter in Lee’s book is “Imagination as Aesthetic Sense,” in which Lee explains, “Edwards’ conception of the simultaneously creative and receptive imagination as *sensation*. Through this conception, Edwards’ integration of knowledge as sense reception and knowledge and construction reaches a greater depth.”<sup>23</sup> Lee sees this concept as a deep form of empiricism, perhaps the deepest in that thoughts seem to be synonymous with sensations. It is this aesthetic sense or, “sense of the heart” or even, “taste of the mind” active in a person’s very being that is renewed by the Spirit of God so that true beauty can be known. Lee quotes from Edwards on this point, “The first act of the Spirit of God, or the first that this divine temper exerts itself in, is in spiritual understanding or in the sense of the mind, its perception of glory and excellency, etc. – in the ideas it has of divine things.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, the more ordered and proportional our mind thinks of a thing the more its excellence can be appreciated, this happens all at once. Again Lee quotes from Edwards the following:

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 134

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 150.

When the ideas themselves appear more lively and with greater strength and impression, as the ideas of spiritual things do [to] one that is spiritually enlightened, their circumstances and various relations and connections between themselves and with other ideas appear more; there are more of those habitudes and respects taken notice of, and they also are more clearly discerned. And therefore, hereby a man sees the harmony between spiritual things, and so comes to be convinced of their truth.<sup>25</sup>

From Lee's extensive quotes of Edwards on page 152 we can gather that the reason some reject good thoughts that might order their minds aright is because of a disposition of the heart, or a "taste" for evil. The habit of a person's mind is in accordance with his spiritual appetite, a good man's mind will always suggest and supply good and holy thoughts to connect ideas and information to create a beautiful picture in one's mind of God's orderly universe (Himself at the helm) but the evil man's mind is habitually disorganizing the things of this world or rather dis-integrating them from the knowledge of God, and so Edwards might say that his mind is not a cosmos but a chaos, or a conductor-less cacophony rather than a grand symphony.<sup>26</sup>

From an instructional point of view Edwards's thought is important in this respect, that the setting forth of truths and propositions in a more orderly fashion (such as in an Edwards sermon) gives the sanctified mind a better opportunity to "digest" the Word of God, that is, fit it together with the other thoughts and propositions it holds, in order to achieve cohesion and coherency leading to conviction, and the worship of God for the beauty contained in his true Word. In other words, the clearer the argument and the more truths set in their proper order (or at least relevance or mutual relation) the easier to understand--the more palatable.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 153.

The imagination at this point “exerts its own creativity in setting sense ideas into relational patterns that are larger than immediately perceived, and yet in that very creativity the imagination is only making explicit the relational potentialities inherent in the ideas themselves.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, for Edwards the mind acts as a sixth sense, but, “different from the five ‘passive’ senses that Locke had in mind,” because the mind exerts its own influence upon the notional knowledge to reconstruct it for its own purpose.<sup>29</sup>

Lee uses the example of a beautiful face to explain further that the mind needs the five senses for the “raw materials.” For example, regarding the eyes taking in the vision of the face, the eyes do not teach “this is beautiful,” instead that thought requires the habit of the mind to order the sensations according to its particular habit and inclination.<sup>30</sup> In this sense believing one is beautiful is akin to believing in the law of gravity, both require sense perception and the mind's predisposition and presuppositions. Lee continues to explain stating the following:

The simple idea of beauty, for Edwards, is not something that a person merely has in his or her mind, but rather something that a person in the totality of his or her selfhood *becomes*. The sense of beauty is, as I have noted, the habit of mind or the direction of the entire self. The sensing of beauty, therefore, involves all the following activities: the reception of ideas through the understanding; the imaginative response to those ideas; and the inclination's feeling of pleasure in the beautiful relation among those ideas. Thus, the simple idea of beauty refers to the irreducible quality of all the active and receptive dimensions of the mind and heart in their amalgamated totality. The whole person is really the channel or power through which a beautiful relation is actively repeated; the perceiver becomes, in effect, a simple idea of beauty. The perceiver becomes an action, a ‘lightsome body’ or ‘the image of God's own knowledge of himself.’<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 158-159.

In other words, the “sensing” of the mind, is its own ordering, constructing, and synthesis of data so that a “singular meaning as a whole, becomes explicit and visible.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, “in him, the imagination, affections, and the understanding converge in an integrated event of an immediate sensation.”<sup>33</sup> To be able to discern beauty is to have a greater rational grasp of how the particulars fit with the whole. States Lee, “aesthetic sensibility, ‘not only removes the hindrances of reason, but positively helps reason.’”<sup>34</sup> A person is brought into full existence (continually *ex nihilo* through the mind of God according to Edwards)<sup>35</sup>, “through the exercise of those habits.”<sup>36</sup> Lee has much more to say regarding Edwards’s ontology, but the preceding are the most relevant to our current topic, and it can easily be seen how Edwards following after Calvin believed that people have a taste for evil, that this is a part of their being, and that God is sovereign even over these acts of the mind.

### “The Mind”

Wallace E. Anderson editor of Volume 6 “Scientific and Philosophical Writings” in Yale University’s *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* describes Edwards’s philosophy in “The Mind” as “idealistic phenomenalism,” which “belongs to the second major stage in the development of Edward’s thought.”<sup>37</sup> For Edwards this means that, “nothing can exist without being perceived or known,” and, “‘being’s consent to being,’ is a, ‘necessary

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 163. In regards to the term “affection,” Gordon Clarke reminds us in his response to James Bissett Pratt that Edwards, “did not say that religion or even conversion consists altogether in the affections. Then, second, the term *affection* in Edwards does not mean what Pratt says it means... for Edwards the term affection includes the will, and in fact has more to do with the will than with pure feeling.” Gordon Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, (Hobbs: The Trinity Foundation, 1995), page 10.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>35</sup> Belden C. Lane, “Jonathan Edwards on Beauty, Desire, and the Sensory World.” (*Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (2004): 44 – 72), 50.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, 165.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol.6: Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 53.

condition for the existence of any object.”<sup>38</sup> Anderson does not find credible those theories that state Edwards simply borrowed from other early eighteenth century idealists, or had knowledge of their writings. States Anderson,

In fact, Edwards’ assertion of idealism, that is, the thesis that physical objects exist only in the mind or cannot exist unless they are perceived, is not his primary claim...he introduces his idealism as a logical consequence of the much more general metaphysical principle that nothing whatever can be without being known.<sup>39</sup>

Anderson explains that the purpose of the universe is for intelligent beings to know God through it. A universe of “senseless matter” would be of no use to God for he could neither communicate his glory to it, nor receive worship and admiration from it (in any intelligent way at least). Therefore, “the universe could have no purpose unless it is known by intelligent beings.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the universe could not exist without being known by intelligent beings, this is connected to Edwards’s first premise which, “denied the substantial and independent reality of the physical world, and maintained that it depends immediately and necessarily for its existence upon God’s continual creative activity.”<sup>41</sup> The creation is the shadow of the spiritual realities, and reflects the mind of God even as a painting reveals the mind of the artist.<sup>42</sup>

Edwards was eager to preserve the common sense understanding of this world on which science and everyday living depended, and he anticipated that the major objection would come to the assertion that “the material world exists nowhere but ‘in the mind.’”<sup>43</sup> Edwards believes this objection is based on the erroneous equation of the mind with the brain

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>40</sup> Namely the world is known by God. States Anderson, “Now, however, he maintains that bodies are in God by way of his knowledge or consciousness of them; and this knowledge essentially involves general laws, or determinations of his will with respect to regularities in the order of ideas he causes in created minds.” Ibid., 98.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 103.

or confined to it. The soul is not in the brain. What Edwards means is that the material word (unlike the spirit world) depends upon the mind for its definition, the idea of “place” “within” and “without” “are mere mental conceptions.”<sup>44</sup> However, “once the metaphors are expunged from the theory, it is clear that it does not deny, but rather explains, our ordinary beliefs about the places of things.”<sup>45</sup>

Regarding the mind and how the senses influence its knowledge, Anderson points to Edwards’s beliefs concerning disembodied spirits, or minds. Unlike Locke, Edwards believed that God communicated senses to our minds “immediately,” and therefore he can do the same for disembodied spirits. God is a Spirit that can act upon our bodies, and so other spirits can act upon the body.<sup>46</sup> However, God communicates to embodied spirits in certain established ways, yet is free to communicate to disembodied spirits in a different way altogether. Anderson does see the influence of Locke upon Edwards at this point stating, “Edwards follows Locke in holding that a perceiver knows from his own experience whether his mind is united with some particular body and how that union determines the place and motions of his mind.”<sup>47</sup>

There is a “more serious objection to idealism” that Edwards seeks to solve, namely, if the sensible world exists only in the mind, then the senses themselves must exist only in the mind, yet their purpose is to let in information about the sensible world. How can they do this if they are not a part of the sensible world itself? “The paradox,” states Anderson, “seems to be as follows. The true scientific explanation of perception asserts that all our ideas of sensation causally depend upon our organs of sense. But idealism asserts that these

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 101.

organs, since they are bodies, exist only as ideas of sensation. From the two assertions he concludes that the organs of senses are the cause of themselves, and so are prior to themselves.”<sup>48</sup> This was to Edwards an insoluble problem, though he “had developed resources for avoiding it,”<sup>49</sup> particularly he idea of causation, namely that God immediately causes the ideas of sensation in our minds, but has ordained that those ideas are regularly triggered by our five senses – though this is certainly not necessary.<sup>50</sup>

To tackle the other opposition to idealism, that the sense organs in such a scheme would have to precede their own existence, Edwards challenges the assumption that, “the bodily organs which cause ideas in a particular mind must actually exist as ideas of sensation in that mind. This assumption is contrary to fact; as Edwards notes in “The Mind,” No. 40, we do not actually perceive the states of our sense organs from which our ideas of sensation follow.”<sup>51</sup> This, as Anderson notes, leads to a more serious objection of idealism that nothing exists unless it is perceived, or as the old riddle states, “if a tree falls in the woods and no one is thereto hear it, does it make a noise?” Edwards sees all things as actually existing, yet this is because they are thought up by or “supposed” by God who “causes all changes to arise as if all these things had actually existed in a series in some created mind, and as if created minds had comprehended all things perfectly.”<sup>52</sup> All things are not perceived, but they are perceivable by mankind and so in as much as something is perceivable it exists, and that which is not perceived by man is still perceived by God and so exists just the same.<sup>53</sup>

Anderson further explains,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Edwards considers that all the ideas that are actually perceived by any finite mind, together with those that God only supposes, constitute a single order and succession of ideas. This single order of ideas comprise one unique system of material objects with a single continuous history, what he calls 'the system of the ideal world.' This system is common to all perceivers in the sense that the series of ideas excited in any created mind, however it differs from those in other minds, nevertheless constitutes some of the objects and events in that system. Each perceiver is thereby afforded some partial and limited view of the same material world... Edwards holds that this system of the ideal world is a complete and fully determined whole, in which every object or event is related to all others in accordance to God's constitution.<sup>54</sup>

Edwards saw the laws of nature for this world as "ontologically prior to the objects and events of the world." In other words these laws are not necessarily eternal themselves but they were predetermined by the mind of God before they had a material universe in which to be manifest. Anderson cites a much quoted passage from Edwards which reads: "That which truly is the substance of all bodies is the infinitely exact and precise and perfectly stable idea of God's mind, together with his stable will that the same gradually be communicated to us, and to other minds, according to certain fixed and exact established methods and laws."<sup>55</sup>

Regarding the actual composition of the mind or spirit, Edwards views it as distinct from and superior to the "senseless" body which is only an "image or shadows of spiritual beings, and are created only for the sake of them."<sup>56</sup> Moreover, states Anderson, "Edwards' phenomenistic idealism, like that of Berkeley, assumes that there are many different created minds, each one capable of perception, knowledge, and volition, and in each of which God excites an orderly train of ideas of sensation that comprise the bodies it perceives and affects."<sup>57</sup> For Edwards, "a body consists in nothing but the ideas of sensation 'from without' that are immediately communicated to the mind by God."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 113.

It is easy, therefore, to see how disembodied spirits and angels can also have communication with the phenomenological world. God directly communicates to the mind according to established laws set for the material world, mere *matter* does not think nor “sense” anything, God places in the mind thoughts and the places the mind in the location of the body, but it is the mind, not the body (including the brain) that does the successive thinking that gives to ourselves continuity with each passing moment.<sup>59, 60</sup> “All thinking” says Anderson, “begins with our passively receiving ideas of sensation, and he supposed that from these ideas and the order in which they are presented we form ideas of external things and come to know the laws of nature that govern them.”<sup>61</sup>

Regarding morality Anderson explains that Edwards believed, “that each person possesses a definite innate moral disposition, which is prior to his first conscious experiences and actions and his particular memories of these...”<sup>62</sup> An important point to remember is not that Edwards believed in innate ideas, but in innate “dispositions, tendencies, or propensities.”<sup>63</sup> Moreover, “demonstration itself, he holds, gives only relative assurance, for it depends upon our severely limited ability to keep ideas attentively in order before our mind so as to discern their connections...if we were to have perfect ideas of all things at once we would have no need for reasoning, because things would be immediately known and self-evident.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 120. Edwards does, however, allow for the innate idea of the existence of a cause. Ibid. 121.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 123.

## **Sweet Sense**

“The ‘Inward, Sweet Sense’ of Christ in Jonathan Edwards” is the essay contributed by Charles Hambrick-Stow in “The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards,” in which he discusses the said phrase which appears profusely in the writings of Edwards. According to Hambrick-Stow Edwards used this phrase after his “conversion” wherein he became more dedicated to the Lord through the doctrine of God’s sovereignty. Edwards would also incorporate this concept of “tasting” the truth into his sermons on regeneration, explaining that it was not a mere “notional knowledge” but one that leads to godliness, and obedience. Commenting on Ann Taves work on Edwards, Habrick-Stow states regarding the direct working of the Spirit upon the regenerate that, “Edwards sought to lead his people to the experiential edge, but without plunging them into enthusiasm. It was a dangerous place to be, a place where it is easy to be misunderstood by both [Calvinists and Arminians] sides.”<sup>65</sup> This analogy of “tasting” the truth as we will see featured greatly in Edwards’s epistemology.

## **Beauty, Desire**

Belden Lane similarly offers a treatment of Edwards’s epistemology in his essay, “Jonathan Edwards on Beauty, Desire, and the Sensory World.” Lane summarizes his thesis as follows:

For Jonathan Edwards, creation functions as a school of desire, training regenerate human beings in the intimate sensory apprehension of God’s glory mirrored in the beauty of the world. Humans are to respond, in turn, by articulating that glory, bringing it to full consciousness, and by replicating God’s own disposition to communicate beauty as they extend the act of beautifying the world around them. In other words, the natural world enlarges the human capacity to sense the fullness of God’s beauty and the appreciation of that beauty subsequently leads to ethical action.

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<sup>65</sup> Hart., 91.

Nature teaches us God's beauty which in turn drives us to its continual replication in time and space.<sup>66</sup>

Lane sees as implications of this view a call to preserve the beauty of all that God has made through the rejection of sin.<sup>67</sup> Moreover he cautions that this view should not distract us from the fact of Edwards's Calvinistic beliefs in the absolute aseity of God. Creation is "superfluous" in that it adds nothing to the beauty of God, but it is nonetheless a reflection of that unfathomable beauty.<sup>68</sup> That beauty is at the center of what Edwards sees as the most true "sensuality" from which all other sensual knowledge comes.<sup>69</sup> Lane sees all of this as an extension of traditional Christian theology carried on through the Calvinist Puritans.<sup>70</sup>

Lane also tackles the question of the two Edwards's, the one characterized as an Empiricist and the other as a neo-Platonic idealist. "Edwards" states Lane, "as empiricist honored the world as a reliable and independent image of God's glory. Edwards as idealist recognized the world as upheld by the power of God alone."<sup>71</sup> This was not the basis of a "natural theology" however, but fit into the Puritan and Calvinist idea of nature as a "second book," to teach mankind about God. This second book for the regenerate teaches them to appreciate God because they are inflamed with passion for him, therefore their love for God acts as a sixth sense- the can taste and see that the Lord is good in all his works and word, "the mind is a sense organ, a mechanism of knowing that 'feels ideas.' that 'senses concepts,' that grasps with totality of wonder what the unregenerate mind perceives (if at all) only as an abstraction."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Lane, 46

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 57.

Lane observes that mankind functions as “the consciousness of creation.” States Lane, “theirs is the responsibility of discerning and articulating the esthetic/moral character of the cosmos as a mirror of God’s glory.”<sup>73</sup> This is done (among other ways) through the scientific examination of the world, and the ordering of it aright - in a way that magnifies the glory of God as his beauty fills the earth. Far from being “derogatory to God” to see his glory in a mutable and powerless world (as some Deists charged) Edwards saw God’s wisdom displayed everywhere, and it was to be celebrated, and preserved.<sup>74</sup> In concluding Lane states the following:

We find in Jonathan Edwards a theologian who understands the contemplation of the natural world as an exercise in prayer. The physical universe is, for him, a mirror of God’s glory, participating in what it reflects. The world is not simply a thin veil through which we reach toward a God wholly beyond it. For Edwards, nature – in all of its sensory palpability - is itself taken up into the still more sensuous glory of God. In the process, it teaches us desire, opening its mysteries to all those who have received a new sense for the perceiving and extending of beauty in their common life.<sup>75</sup>

### **The Image**

Jennifer L. Leader of Duquesne University discusses the idea of, “transitive being and typological desire in Jonathan Edwards,” in her essay “In Love with the Image.” Though not all of it is completely relevant to our present task, Leader does offer some insight into the general epistemology of Edwards as it relates to our observation and participation in this world. She argues that Edwards saw this world as typology of which the greater beauty was found in spiritual truths. This is not to be confused with Platonism because the things themselves are in themselves the reflection not of a greater self-image but of an eternal truth - namely its ability to glorify God. As Leader explains,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 72.

Rather than negating the mortality of the rose, Edwards's typological construction depends upon it. Only as a rose and its growth process exist distinctly from God as his creations can they be viable partners in the reflection of a particular part of God's glory: in this case, the incorporation of time into eternity. In turn, the rose itself is affirmed by the antitypes that lend their eternal significance to its material existence.<sup>76</sup>

Leader also explains that for Edwards the beauty of nature is beautiful because it reflects in some way the beauty of Christ, to appreciate beauty is to somehow experience God. This is because "all of existence is mental," not necessarily because it is only in our minds, but because it is in the mind of God, therefore the closer we come to knowing a thing the way God does the closer we come to actually having it in its most true way. As Leader states, "Consequently, since all existence is made up of ideas in God's mind, having a perfect idea of a thing – that is, seeing how it appears in God's mind – is the same as having the thing in actuality."<sup>77</sup>

Leader argues also that this was not, as Perry Miller claimed, the product of Enlightenment tradition or "a forerunner of American symbolist Transcendentalism."<sup>78</sup> First, because Miller's claim that Edwards was aware of Locke's works before he began developing his own thought has been shown with the release of new Edwards resources to be untrue, and second because:

Edwards locates in the natural world a typological rather than pantheistic or romantic sense of the divine; the boundaries between natural type and supernatural antitype are held in a tension that ensures both their separateness and their continued 'desire' for each other, a connection that evokes an 'iconic' rather than idolatrous response from Edwards...By the same token, Edwards's understanding of sacred desire as moving ever outward toward the infinite is characteristic of his broader notions of subjectivity as a kind of 'transitive' relation to other beings rather than existing as an independent, self-contained essence.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Jennifer Leader, "In Love with the Image," in *Early American Literature*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2006): 158.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

## Reality

Wilson H. Kinnach sees Edwards's uniqueness in his, "constant pursuit of reality" through understanding the human experience and the call to preach. In his essay, "Jonathan Edwards's Pursuit of Reality," Kinnach states, "the hallmark of Edwards is not the mere soul-searching of the Puritan tradition, though that is there too, but the manifold reaching and grasping after a multitude of diverse particular thoughts, impulses, and experiences that apparently represent so many potential openings into the complex edifice of life."<sup>80</sup> This pursuit led Edwards to develop unique ways of conceptualizing and relating to others the reality of living in God's world.

Kinnach explains that Edwards linked rational conviction to sensation and explained things in terms of their consistency within plurality. In other words, the mind has many thoughts, and the truth of those thoughts is only appreciated and accepted if they are consistent with the truths we already accept. This explains Edwards's (and those following a Ramist logic typical to Puritans) attention to systematic order in his message, yet, also the vivid images and appeals to human imagination, and "sense of the heart." However, rational arguments do not convert the soul nor compel belief, but merely "shape a more fortuitous occasion for it."<sup>81</sup> Higher truths are more complex and require more relationships in the mind to understand, and, "the more extensive the network of relationships defined... the more substantial the authenticating context which establishes the truth."<sup>82</sup>

Edwards, according to Kinnach, sees the mind as a "sense organ," which "feels ideas," and can even come to experience them in a real way through the imagination. This is a sort of second sight, sixth sense, by which people can know even abstract and unseen things

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<sup>80</sup> Hatch, 103.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 106.

as they fit neatly together in correspondence. The mind of man is not outside of the mind of God but is part of the creation that is sustained in Him, and therefore our ideas must in some way correspond with God's. States Kimmach, "Such experiencing of ideas that can be no more than ideas in the mind of God would of course be to have a conception equivalent to the mind of God's mind, perhaps excepting only the scope. One would then be in direct communion with reality. Perhaps the most interesting implication of this conception is the easy and logical union of idealism and sensationalism."<sup>83</sup>

### **Calvinism**

Another essay bearing on our subject is James Hoopes's "Calvinism and Consciousness from Edwards to Beecher." Hoopes argues that Edwards, like Locke, rejected popular faculty psychology and its "assumption that faculties were distinct entities rather than different abilities or functions of a unitary mind."<sup>84</sup> Yet, Edwards was monolithic in his view of human motivation and the conscious. Edwards would not have supported the idea of "unconscious thought," or a number of other ideas modern psychology takes for granted which divide up the mind. Like Locke, Edwards rejected the Cartesian idea that, "Man thinks always, but is not always conscious of it."<sup>85</sup> Unlike Locke, Edwards rejected Empiricism which tended toward materialism, in favor of an idealistic metaphysics which, "constituted the entire universe in consciousness, which left no possibility of unconscious mental phenomena."<sup>86</sup> In summing up the points of contention between Lockean and Edwardsian views Hoopes states the following:

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 208.

Locke's notion that a person is constituted by continuity of consciousness, by remembered ideas of past experiences, was a profound threat to the doctrine of original sin, for it implied that Adam's descendants, having no memory of his iniquity, bore no personal responsibility for it. Similarly, Locke's belief that all knowledge originates in simple ideas resulting from the experience of the five external senses threatened orthodox doctrines of predestination, efficacious grace, and the need of a "physical operation of the Spirit of God on the will, to change and determine that to a good choice." For if all mental activity originates with the external senses, then the difference between virtue and sin does not lie in any predetermined quality of soul but only in the degree of attendance to one's ideas, which if sufficiently assiduous ought "infallibly to attain the end." The belief that men could freely choose to be or not to be sufficiently assiduous was the basis of the notion that human willing is self-determining. Edwards maintained that belief in self-determination both characterized Arminianism and obstructed the work of the Calvinist ministry in bringing sinners to Christ.<sup>87</sup>

Hoopes's further points out that some of the successors of Edwards in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century<sup>88</sup> being yet unaware of Edwards's "The Mind" published as late as 1829, compromised Edwards's idealist metaphysic by granting, "the Lockean notion of the soul as a substance formed by experience."<sup>89</sup> This idea was rejected by Edwards because he believed that mankind existed and found identity solely in the mind of God, and that there was no "spiritual substance."<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, "his successors attempted to defend traditional religion through a commitment to the time honored distinction between soul and body, between mental and material substance."<sup>91</sup>

### **Apologetics**

Another essay of importance is K. Scott Oliphint's "Jonathan Edwards on Apologetics: Reason and the Noetic Effects of Sin" in which the authors expressed purpose is to locate Edwards in the Reformed tradition regarding the pervasiveness of sin upon the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 215. Namely Samuel Hopkins, Nathaniel Emmons, Asa Burton, Timothy Dwight, Nathaniel William Taylor, and Lyman Beecher.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 222.

mind, or its “noetic effect.” The author explores the faculties of the mind, the “image of God and reason,” and the implications for apologetics, concluding that Edwards wished to “give full weight to our logical and noetic capacities without destroying the depth of sin’s effects on our abilities.”<sup>92</sup>

Edwards, according to Oliphant, sought to supplant the medieval notion that the imagination and will were controlled by reason – the “primary faculty.” This dis-integration of man prompted Edwards to write, “A Treatise concerning Religious Affections” in which he sought to integrate the person’s head and heart.<sup>93</sup> This was important to Edwards because Arminian theology stressed the unaffected state of man’s “will” but allowed for sin’s affect upon other “faculties,”<sup>94</sup> moreover, “enthusiasts” could justify knowing God in their hearts without reference to understanding the revealed will of God in the Scriptures.<sup>95</sup>

Edwards made a distinction between “notional” or “formal” knowledge, and “sensible knowledge,” the former being superficial speculation or perception of this world as “signs,” the latter which includes the superficial, but adds to it “strong inclination” and the “matter” of it in what is called, “a sense of the heart.”<sup>96</sup> “He argued,” states Oliphant, “that holy affections, in order to be in fact holy, must always be accompanied by true understanding. There could be no true heat (affections) without true light (understanding). But the converse is true as well. True understanding, if it is true, must always be accompanied by holy affections.”<sup>97</sup> Therefore, Edwards can argue that not one “faculty” is affected by sin more than any other since they are inseparable.

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<sup>92</sup> Hart, 146.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

Another key to understanding Edwards is the distinction he makes between the “natural” and “moral” image of God in which man was made. According to Edwards, mankind retained the natural image of God (faculties of reason) yet lost the moral image of God (holy affection). However, even in the retention of reason mankind is not able to think properly apart from the revelation of God and regeneration. Therefore, the corrupt or lost moral image of God is what negatively affects the natural image of man’s mind and renders him as a creature, “groping in the dark.” Oliphant elaborates, “Moral inability, then is present either because of a lack of something or because of the strength of something contrary to the moral. It would, therefore, be the case that the faculty of reason would be morally unable to do certain things, either because of a lack of something or the strength of something contrary, or perhaps a combination of both.”<sup>98 99</sup>

Reason was never meant to operate apart from revelation, but Oliphant asks, “is there no room, therefore, given this understanding of reason and revelation, for the so-called theistic proofs?”<sup>100</sup> According to Oliphant, though Edwards does present Christianity as being rational he does not put much stock in the theistic proofs. Says Oliphant:

In other words, the reasoning process, due to its own fallenness, and combined with the condition of the fallen world, renders even the best reasoning both erroneous and contradictory. Given the fall into sin, Edwards argues here that even if reason were able, which he holds to be “a most absurd proposition,” it could only properly conclude for the existence of a cause that was ‘both good and evil, wise and foolish, or else there must be two first causes, an evil and irrational, as well as a good and wise principle’.<sup>101</sup>

Oliphant also examines Edwards’s use of Romans 1:18-25 to reason from the creation to a first cause. Does this contradict Edwards’s own position on the power of reason to know

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 137.

<sup>99</sup> Oliphant sees a correlation here with Calvin who stated regarding the unregenerate, “and man with all his acumen is as stupid in understanding the mysteries of God as an ass is inept at understanding a symphony.” And elaborates that what is deficient is not external evidence for God, but “rather the internal or subjective faculty.” Ibid., 138.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 142.

God apart from revelation? Not according to Oliphant. Edwards uses this passage within his overall framework of what we might call today, “presuppositional apologetics.” In other words, mankind can only reason to a first cause through nature because of what nature is, revelation, therefore reasoning from creation to a Creator is not reason devoid of revelation but dependent upon it because God has revealed himself in it, and within those made in his image. States Oliphant,

When Edwards refers us to Romans 1:20, which notes that our knowledge of God comes through the things that are made, and then argues that we must first ascend a posteriori, he is arguing for such an ascent within the context, and on the basis, of God’s clear and sufficient revelation to us in the creation... In other words, Edwards is maintaining just what Scripture itself maintains – that the a posteriori, as well as the a priori, with respect to the knowledge of God *presupposes that God has revealed himself in creation.*<sup>102</sup>

“It seems,” says Oliphant, “one can start anywhere and everywhere in arguing for the existence of God *just because God is revealed anywhere and everywhere.*”<sup>103</sup> Yet this can lead one to “know and not know the same thing at the same time” if one does not know it in its relationship to God. Technically, the unbeliever ought to be able to discern God from creation and reason, but ultimately the problem is sin. Humans *can not* reason from creation to Creator because they *will not*, the inability stems from moral corruption, “all knowledge of the unregenerate is a confused mixture of both (notional) truth and (sensible) error. Any apologetic appeal to those outside of Christ, therefore, must be an appeal that presupposes the (sensible) truth of the Christian position and that seeks to show the despair of attempting to maintain any (notional) truth apart from that position.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 146.

## Opposition

A more critical view of Edwards comes in Sean Michael Lucas's essay, "He Cuts Up Edwardsism by the Roots: Robert Lewis Dabney and the Edwardsian Legacy in the Nineteenth-Century South." Lucas's essay explains that Presbyterians in the South were not so quick to gloss over some of Edwards's more controversial speculation for the sake of saving face culturally such as Calvinist ministers in the North. Presbyterians like Robert Lewis Dabney in particular opposed Edwards's concepts of "divine causation, freedom of the will, personal identity, the imputation of Adam's sin, and his theory of true virtue as inadequate and ultimately harmful deviations from Reformed orthodoxy."<sup>105</sup>

Lucas explains that opposition to Edwards's causation was on the grounds that it made God the author of sin because he was the only "efficient cause." Moreover, Edwards appeared to advocate a sort of pantheism, "which makes God the only real existence." Furthermore the charge was made that Edwards denied the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin.<sup>106</sup> James Henry Thornwell, who was a leading Presbyterian theologian in the south made several charges against Edwardsian theology, as stated by Lucas on page 204:

First, Thornwell claimed that Edwards' explanation of the freedom of the will 'breaks down' in several ways: it failed to explain human guilt; it did not protect God from being the author of sin; it did 'not explain the moral value attached to character'; and it merely accounted for 'self-expression, but not self-determination.' Thornwell also denounced Edwards' view of personal identity, claiming that the idea that identity consisted in the 'arbitrary constitution of God' opposed 'the plainest intuitions of intelligence.' In addition, the South Carolinian believed that Edwards shared with Augustine the belief that sin was the privation of good...<sup>107</sup>

Dabney, also, was a critic of Edwards's view of federal headship, as well as personal identity, the latter of which will have more bearing on this present work. According to Lucas

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 204.

Edwards believed in a continual recreation of man *ex nihilo* at every successive moment, and that our identity with Adam was similarly by “divine fiat” so that it appeared to southern Presbyterians that there existed no continuity of being for the human being, nor any justification for the imputed guilt of Adam other than an arbitrary choice of God. Moreover, as God continually recreates the person He also creates their thoughts so that they experience sameness. By these speculations Edwards was labeled an “idealist” and an opponent of common sense.<sup>108</sup>

## **Edwards and Pedagogy**

### **The Missionary**

Having had a broad survey of Edwards’s and his basic philosophical beliefs regarding human nature and the mind, it is important also that we look at what has been said about the pedagogy of Edwards and its relationship to our thesis. To begin we look at the second essay in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* which is “Last of the Mohican Missionaries,” by Stephen J. Nichols. This essay treats the subject of Edwards’s work in Stockbridge, Massachusetts as being “the first of the settlers to live with his family among the Indians.”<sup>109</sup> It has been assumed by some that Edwards’s involvement in the Indian mission was due solely to his dismissal from the North Hampton pulpit, and the desperate attempt to find a place wherein he could focus more attention on writing. Nichols challenges this idea by sketching for the reader a different portrait of the man whom had “opportunity knocking” at every door. Edwards, though not necessarily a “savvy politician,” had the good sense, reputation, and legitimacy to advocate on behalf of the native population, knowing that what

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 211.

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

hurt the community would have adverse effects on the mission, and what hurt the mission hurt the souls of them whom God would have educated through the gospel.

Subjects that are specifically treated by Nichols are Edwards's "heroic" involvement in Native American politics, particularly Edwards's advocacy of the natives against the ill treatment they were receiving from the British.<sup>110</sup> "Edwards" in his letter to Joseph Paice, "begins his letter by indicting the British for their dealings with the natives, complaining that the British 'are complacent, lack initiative, and exploit the Indians.'" Moreover, Nichols states that Edwards, "remarks that the English have been both negligent in their duty and 'extremely impolitic.' He then bemoans the ill-treatment for financial gain..."<sup>111</sup>

Of greatest interest is Nichols portrayal of Edwards's involvement at the Stockbridge schoolhouse. Edwards's involvement is no less, "heroic" when it comes to his love of and dedication to the Mohican and Mohawk children. From rooting out a corrupt official who exploited the boys as slaves and embezzled funds, to inviting students into his own house for private instruction and opening it up for the tribal councils of the Mohawks, Edwards was the consummate educator<sup>112</sup> with a dedication to his community and the interests of the minority population that could rival any in American history.

### **The Passion**

Richard A. Bailey's essay, "Driven By Passion," addresses Edwards's call to preach the gospel with great fervency. Bailey sets the stage for his own treatment of Edwards by briefly discussing Edwards and the Enlightenment in regards to the use and limitations of

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>112</sup> Nichols uses the term, "missionary" to describe Edwards's work at Stockbridge which is accurate, yet "education" was so much a part of the mission in Stockbridge as to be practically inseparable. Moreover, as this work will argue the gospel was for Edwards at the center of all endeavors to educate.

reason. Bailey states three ways in which Edwards understood revelation as the governor of reason: “First, he stated that divine revelation provides the means to live morally... Second, convinced that divine revelation prompts intellectual growth, he maintained that ‘the increase of learning and philosophy in the Christian world is owing to revelation: the doctrines of the Word of God are the foundation of all useful and excellent knowledge.’ ...Third he claimed that divine revelation aids social development.”<sup>113</sup>

For Edwards, “he positioned revelation as the guide for human reason and not the other way around.” Edwards in his sermon on 1 Corinthians 2:11-13 gives one rationale for his position by referring to the numerous instances in Scripture where God’s word seems to chafe at God’s ways. A portion of the quote cited by Bailey reads, “Divine revelation in these things don’t go a-begging for credit and validity by approbation and applause of our understanding. On the contrary, the style in which these revelations are often given forth is this: ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ and ‘I am the Lord,’ and ‘He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear,’ and ‘Who are thou, O man, that repliest against God?’”<sup>114</sup> For Edwards the final court of appeals for any thought or reason was the word of God. This topic will be explored more in our study of general and special revelation.

### **The Educator**

As might be expected much more has been written on the epistemology of Edwards than his pedagogy, therefore it will remain our task to reconcile the two in order to reconstruct a comprehensive view of his educational philosophy. Yet, one work stands out as perhaps the most thorough treatment of Edwards as an educator to date which is Donald Edd

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 66.

Stelting's invaluable doctoral dissertation "Edwards as Educator: His Legacy of Educational Thought and Practice." Similar to this current work Stelting's is a review of the environment and methods common to the time, and an examination of Edwards's doctrine of the mind and methodology in Stockbridge amongst the Native American population. However, though certainly including Edwards's Calvinistic beliefs,<sup>115</sup> it is this author's contention that more explicit weight must be given to that aspect of Edwards's educational philosophy than Stelting has given.<sup>116</sup> Calvinism and particularly the noetic effects of sin is – I argue – the one great paradigm of Edwardsian thought, and as such it must receive the greatest weight in discussing his educational philosophy, even above his idealism and/or more speculative contemplations.

### **The Children**

The last resource which bears a brief mention is an essay by Catherine A. Brekus called, "Children of Wrath, Children of Grace: Jonathan Edwards and the Puritan Culture of Child Rearing," both because it is a rare treatment of Edwards's work with children, and because it is a necessary reminder of the Puritan Tradition in which Edwards was steeped. Brekus argues that Edwards continued the tradition of Puritan child rearing in his belief in the Total Depravity of infants and the need to catechize them from an early age, as well as the Reformed concept of the "covenant child."<sup>117</sup> Yet, his belief in the early conversion of youth and his unique focus upon them was new to the tradition and some would argue

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<sup>115</sup> Donald Edd Stelting, *Edwards as Educator: His Legacy of Educational Thought and Practice*, (The University of Kansas, Ph. D. Dissertation, 1998), 203-204.

<sup>116</sup> Stelting mentions a number of times that Edwards was a Calvinist but devotes little space to explicitly addressing the subject in its relationship to education. Moreover, nowhere is this or Edwards's idealism examined in light of the Scriptures.

<sup>117</sup> Catherine A. Brekus "Children of Wrath, Children of Grace: Jonathan Edwards and the Puritan Culture of Children Rearing." In *The Child in Christian Thought*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub.), 2001. Though it is common knowledge that his dismissal from North Hampton was a result of the perceived betrayal of this concept in withholding baptism from infants of those parents that seemed unconverted.

subversive to the patriarchal authority structure of the family, with children becoming admonishers/educators of ungodly parents.<sup>118</sup>

### **The World**

The last resource worth mentioning is another useful essay found in the book, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition*. In this, the first essay in the book, the author deals with the “tri-world vision” of Edwards. Harry S. Stout explains Edwards’s concept of history (a subject Edwards found vitally important in the education of young people) as a great meta-narrative encompassing the three tiered universe of heaven, earth, and hell. It was the ambition of Edwards to chronicle the history of creation by telling the story of redemption through the perspective of each realm incorporating, “philosophy, theology, and narrative as a synthetic whole”<sup>119</sup> culminating in the eschatological “New Heavens and New Earth.” This will be important to consider later on when discussing Edwards’s pedagogy, especially the subject of teaching the infamous subject of history to disinterested students.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 319.

<sup>119</sup> Hart, 29.

### CHAPTER 3: BIBLICAL STUDIES

The question remains of whether or not the basic beliefs of Jonathan Edwards are Biblical, that is, can they stand up to a closer examination based upon the Church's ultimate authority, the Word of God, and worth building a pedagogy upon. To answer this we must compare and contrast various statements by Edwards and the insight from the above mentioned authors with specific passages that speak to the subject of the mind, human depravity, knowledge, and revelation.

Perhaps the most significant issue to begin with is what some have called Edwards's "phenomenological idealism." Idealism in the most generic sense is the belief that, "the most 'real' tier of reality is the non-material,"<sup>1</sup> or that, "only the mind exists."<sup>2</sup> Donald Palmer defines it as, "The *ontological* view that, ultimately every existing thing can be shown to be spiritual, mental, or otherwise incorporeal (hence, a version of *monism*); usually associated in Western philosophy with Berkley and Hegel."<sup>3</sup>

The form of idealism found in Edwards is unique in that it comes from a committed Calvinist preacher who spent so much of his time admiring and analyzing "the real word." We have already heard from other authors what it means therefore to call Edwards an "idealist," but is his form or version compatible with Scripture?

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Palmer, *Looking at Philosophy: The Unbearable Heaviness of Philosophy Made Lighter*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 72.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 409.

There are countless passages we might refer to in an examination of epistemology and its related doctrines (i.e. revelation, illumination etc.), but for our present task we will limit ourselves to three major texts. The first text we will examine is Acts 17:16-34, a familiar passage to the apologist and missionary alike. The second text we will examine is Psalm 139 because of its treatment of the mind of God in the continual creation of men and all their thoughts and actions. And the last text is Romans 1:17-32 for its information regarding general revelation and the extent of the noetic effects of sin.

### **In Him We Live (Act 17:16-34)**

Acts 17:16-34 has long been a favorite text for missionaries and apologists for its example of cross-cultural evangelism, and meeting people where they are in order to bring them to a knowledge of the gospel. The passage begins with Paul waiting for Silas and Timothy in idolatrous Athens (v.15-16).<sup>4</sup> In his “distress” at the amount of idols in the city Paul takes it upon himself to reason with both the Jews and God-fearing Greeks in the city synagogues as well as anyone who happened to be in the market place (v. 17).<sup>5</sup> In great pride, “a group of Epicureans<sup>6</sup> and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him” (v. 18a), they did not understand the gospel, but only thought he was advocating a new god. They probably at first expected a sales-pitch to follow Paul’s message, but instead became more

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<sup>4</sup> Mathew Henry explains, “It is observable that there, where human learning flourished, idolatry most abounded, and the most absurd and ridiculous idolatry, which confirms that of the apostle, that when *they professed to be wise they became fools* (Rom. i. 22), and, in the business of religion, were of all other the most *vain in their imaginations*.” Mathew Henry. *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, (Iowa Falls, World Bible Pub.), 6: 224.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the city of Athens, Calvin comments, “The whole world was then full of idols; the pure worship of God could be found nowhere; and there were everywhere innumerable monsters of superstitions, but Satan had mad the city of Athens more mad than any other city, so that the people were carried headlong with greater madness unto their wicked and perverse rites. And this example is worth the noting, that the city, which was the mansion-house of wisdom, the fountain of all arts, the mother of humanity, did exceed all others in blindness and madness.” John Calvin. *Calvin’s Commentaries*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 19: 146.

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that both the Epicureans and Deists agreed that if there is a God he not involved inhuman affairs. John F Walvoord., and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Vol. 2. (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1997), 402.

intrigued at the message of Christ's resurrection (v. 18), and took him to a judgment hall, the Areopagus, to have him explain his new teaching (v.20-21).

What follows then is Paul's address to these men in order to persuade them to become followers of Jesus Christ. He first addresses them according to their nationality, "Men of Athens!" which seems to be a common form of addressing ones audience in public discourse,<sup>7</sup> then calls attention to their superstitious practice of religion – superstitious because they "covered all the bases" in worshipping all the gods so as not to anger any of them, even an alter to, "AN UNKNOWN GOD" (v. 23). Paul does not explicitly address the inadequacy of each god, but confirms their suspicion that there is a god whom they are ignorant of, and based on their willingness to worship a god in ignorance he uses this opportunity to educate them about that One (v. 23).

According to Paul this God, "made the world and everything in it."<sup>8</sup> We must confidently state that any form of idealism which denies the reality of a distinct, finite, fallible creation dissolves at this point, yet also any doctrine that has any finite "thing" - even the thoughts of men - existing outside of God's creative act and omniscience must be equally questioned or else we may fall into a sort of deism wherein God "winds up" mankind's or a person's mind at the beginning then leaves it to itself thereafter. It seems that this is the type of doctrine Edwards sought to avoid, and the dilemma he sought to solve, namely how can our world and thoughts be distinct from God, yet part of his creative and providential act, and

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<sup>7</sup> cf. Act 1:11; 2:14, 22; 3:12; 5:35; 13:16; 19:35; 21:28.

<sup>8</sup> Calvin says, "Paul's drift is to teach what God is. Furthermore, because he hath to deal with profane men, he draweth proofs from nature itself; for in vain should he have cited testimonies of Scripture. I say that this was the holy man's purpose, to bring the men of Athens unto the true God." Calvin, 158.

yet not a part of God, but inseparable from his presence?<sup>9</sup> Regarding this presence of God in whom “we live and move and have our being,” Calvin states the following:

We have not only no life but in God, but not so much as moving; yea, no being, which is inferior to both... Now, we see that all those who know not God know not themselves; because they have God present with them not only in excellent gifts of the mind, but in their very essence; because it belongeth to God alone to be, all other things have their being in him. Also, we learn out of this place that God did not so create the world once that he did afterward depart from his work; but that it standeth by his power, and that the same God is the governor thereof who was the Creator.<sup>10</sup>

This God does not, “dwell in temples made with hands,” because the universe belongs to him, he, “made the world and everything in it” (v. 24). Nor is this God, “worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, since he gives to all life, breath, and all things” (v.25).<sup>11</sup> Again this verse points to the distinction between the creature and creation. It is not by showering money upon idols that God is worshipped because he owns everything.

Moreover, this God whom Paul proclaims to the proud Greeks made every nation of man from “one blood,” and predetermined beforehand where they would be located (v. 26). This he did according to His desire to see people from every nation, tribe, and tongue come to desire him (v.27). The transcendent vision of God Paul paints as the “Lord of Heaven and Earth,” is tempered by what he says next, “though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your poets have said, ‘For we are

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<sup>9</sup> John Frame describes a similar dilemma regarding the incomprehensibility of God between the followers of Clark who wished to preserve knowledge as *true* knowledge and Van Til who wished to preserve the Creator/creature distinction, wherein the former asked for a clear statement on the qualitative difference between the creatures’ knowledge and that of the Creator and the latter replied that to “state clearly” the difference would essentially give up the point because they would have to understand the difference, i.e. have and understand God’s thoughts in all their glorious distinction from that of the creature, or as Frame has put it, “we cannot exhaustively describe the difference between God’s mind and ours—if we could, we would be divine.” John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship*, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1987), 25.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>11</sup> Again Calvin explains, “This is the first entrance into the true knowledge of God, if we go without ourselves, and do not measure him by the capacity of our mind; yea, if we imagine nothing of him according to the understanding of out flesh, but place him above the world, and distinguish him from creatures. From which sobriety the whole world was always far; because this wickedness is in men, naturally to deform God’s glory with their inventions. For as they be carnal and earthly, they will have one that shall be answerable to their nature. Secondly, after their boldness they fashion him so as they may comprehend him. By such inventions is the sincere and plain knowledge of God corrupt; yea, his truth, as saith Paul, is turned into a lie, (Rm. i. 25.) For whosoever doth not ascend high above the world, he apprehendeth vain shadows and ghosts instead of God.” *Ibid.*, 159.

also His offspring' (v.27,28).<sup>12</sup> This statement would probably be more controversial in the average church today than it was to the Greeks whose poets Paul quotes to confirm his point, for it seems to contradict the doctrine of adoption by grace through faith in Christ, but universalism is not what Paul has in mind.

Paul's point becomes clear through the exhortation which follows, "Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature<sup>13</sup> is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising" (v. 29). This argument reasons from the image of man to the image of God. A human does not give birth to an animal, so if like the Greek poets say "we are the offspring of God," we should not think that he is something less than we are, in other words an idol "like gold or silver or stone," if anything He is much more. Paul states that the time of God putting up with the purposeful debasing of his divine image is over<sup>14</sup> because he sent the express image of Himself, and "the exact representation of his being"<sup>15</sup> in the Lord Jesus Christ to bring judgment upon the earth (even the dead), the evidence of this being Christ's resurrection from the dead (v. 31).

Through this speech Paul gained some critics, but also some converts, and demonstrated the three following facts: God is not less than man; all men are made in his image, and all people are constantly upheld by him and dependant at every moment for life, movement, and being. If the "mind" or "thought" or "consciousness" fits into any of those categories then we must begin to see, as Edwards, that every thought we have is a result of God's initial and constant activity in sustaining our existence through His thinking of it.

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<sup>12</sup> The poets Paul has in mind are Epimenides, Aratus or Cleanthes. David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, (Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Pub., 1996), 288.

<sup>13</sup> Gk. "Theion"

<sup>14</sup> States Calvin, "And assuredly we be not able to comprehend the reason why God did at a sudden set up the light of his doctrine, when he suffered men to walk in darkness four thousand years; at least seeing the Scripture doth conceal it, let us here make more account of sobriety than of preposterous wisdom." Calvin, 173.

<sup>15</sup> Heb. 1:3

Simply put if God does not “have it in mind” it does not exist. This is not to say that if God thinks of something it necessarily exists as more than a thought,<sup>16</sup> or has necessary manifestation in the phenomenon of *our own* ontological reality, but that all things that do ex-ist<sup>17</sup> are *in*, and *out of* God’s mind at all times in exhaustive transparency of essence, and movement.

### **To Him All Is Light (Psalm 139)**

Another beloved passage of Scripture is Psalm 139 because of its depiction of God as the caring Creator of each person. The Psalm is of David, and is a penetrating look into the sovereignty of God.<sup>18</sup> The first six verses states eleven facts about God’s sovereign omniscience of man, encompassing everything a person thinks, says,<sup>19</sup> does, and will do; and, this knowledge is eternal and ever immediate to God.<sup>20</sup> The second six verses deal with God’s omnipresence in a three-tiered universe – earth, heaven, and hell. In commenting on verse 7 Calvin makes the following observation regarding the Spirit of God, as well as the spirit of man:

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<sup>16</sup> God, being no more limited than ourselves, is certainly no less free to think of things and enjoy within Himself that which He has not, nor ever intended to actually create (e.g. flying elephants). His thinking is the basis of all potentiality; His speaking or divine command is the basis for all actuality.

<sup>17</sup> The prefix “ex” itself means “out of” so that to claim something “exists” is to claim it has its being “out of” something else. When describing the aseity (L. “from self”) of God we face a conceptual (or at least linguistic) dilemma, God is “self-existent” in that He “exists” out of Himself or we might say eternally self-generating, though to use the word “generated” or “created” in relation to God (even Self-created) is not exactly the case. Unfortunately, theological descriptions of divine ontology must in this case suffer from the analogy of our own ontology, for God is pure actuality, not *ever-becoming*, but *ever-being*. As R.C. Sproul once humorously observed, God technically doesn’t “exist” at all, He just “-ists” (source unknown).

<sup>18</sup> Regarding the authorship of this Psalm Spurgeon comments, “It bears the image and superscription of King David, and could have come from no other mint than the son of Jesse. Of course, the critics take this composition away from David, on account of certain Aramaic expressions in it. We believe that upon the principles of criticism now in vogue it would be extremely easy to prove that Milton did not write Paradise Lost.” C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc.), 2: 258. Cf. The Queens College commentary edited by J.R. Dummelow, “The Ps. Is ascribed to David, but the Hebrew is decisive in favour of a date very long after David, being marked by Aramaisms.” *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 376.

<sup>19</sup> Calvin explains, “The idea meant to be conveyed is, that while the tongue is the index of thought to man, being the great medium of communication, God, who knows the heart, is independent of words.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 6: 209.

<sup>20</sup> States Spurgeon, “There never was a time in which we were unknown to God, and there never will be a moment in which we shall be beyond his observation.” Spurgeon, 259.

I consider that David prosecutes the same idea of its being impossible that men by any subterfuge should elude the eye of God. By the *Spirit of God* we are not here, as in several other parts of Scripture, to conceive of his power merely, but his understanding and knowledge. In man the spirit is the seat of intelligence, and so it is here in reference to God, as is plain from the second part of the sentence, where by *the face of God* is meant his knowledge or inspection.<sup>21</sup>

Verses 13 – 16 describe God as the continual creator of the person’s frame, and the author of each day before any of them comes to pass (v. 16). The author is also captivated by the “thoughts” of God (v. 17), which are “more in number than the sand” (v. 18). The reason these thoughts are precious is because they are thoughts of grace toward David. David does not intend to teach that he has an inside look at the mind of God other than what is revealed in the Scriptures, but that he can not begin to count all the ways in which God has shown his thoughtfulness to David, as if the Lord were constantly thinking of ways to bless Him through his creation and His redemptive presence (v.18).

In the last six verses of this Psalm David calls for the death of those wicked men whom David sees as “bloodthirsty” blasphemers, haters of God, and usurpers of His authority. With this prayer is also a prayer that God would search David’s own heart, know his anxieties, see any “wicked way” within him, and that God would lead him, “in the way everlasting” (v.24). This last prayer shows the qualitative nature of “everlasting life,” because David’s prayer is not that he be “taken to heaven,” but that he would live according to the moral precepts of God.

What we can chiefly gain from this Psalm in relation to Edwardsian thought is that it seeks to combat a subtle form of deism that ends the work or involvement of God in bringing about life on the sixth day. Edwards taught that even the very thoughts in our minds were created *ex nihilo* by God, yet at the same time Edwards sees the created order as playing a

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<sup>21</sup> Calvin, 211.

part in those thoughts - supplying stimuli so that our thoughts are also reflections. It is typical amongst Calvinists to assert that God is sovereign over a person's thoughts,<sup>22</sup> but not so typical to assert that God creates those thoughts *ex nihilo*. Moreover, in that for Edwards a person is essentially his or her thoughts (constituting a soul) this seems to imply a continual *ex nihilo* creation of the person at birth and every moment thereafter. However, as some have remarked, this would call the continuity of their "being" into question, as well as their biological, and covenantal, relationship to Adam. Edwards avoided this by asserting our imputation of sin was arbitrarily in the mind of God, but no less real.

Charles Hodge addresses these concerns about a continual *ex nihilo* creation as it relates to our identity with Adam in volume two of his Systematic Theology stating the following of this view:

That it proceeds upon the assumption that we can understand the relation of the efficiency of God to the effects produced in time... 2. This doctrine of a continued creation destroys the Scriptural and common sense distinction between creation and preservation... 3. This doctrine denies the existence of substance... 4. It necessarily follows that if God is the only substance He is the only agent in the universe... This doctrine, therefore, in its consequence, is essentially pantheistic... 5. In resolving all identity into an 'arbitrary constitution of God,' it denies that there is any real identity in any created thing."<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, Hodge sees Edwards's view of identity similar to the "realist"<sup>24</sup> view which can attribute original sin to our organic relationship as Adam's descendents, in that for Edwards our guilt rests in being of the same arbitrary constitution of Adam that God continually calls into being out of a general antecedent concept of humanity. Yet, it is different just because

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<sup>22</sup> Even the more "devotional" Calvinist commentator Mathew Henry says regarding Ps. 139:13, "Thou art Master of my most secret thoughts and intentions, and the innermost recesses of my soul, thou not only knowest, but governest, them, as we do that which we have possession of; and the possession thou hast of my reigns is a rightful possession..." Henry, 3: 758.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Pub. 1946), 2: 220.

<sup>24</sup> This not to be confused with "common sense realism" which was a part of Hodge's own thought. Frame critiques Hodge's view stating that there are no "brute facts" divorced from human interpretation, and that the analogy of theology as Scriptural facts "to be put in their proper order" implies that the order in which God put them is not proper, or best. States Frame, "The job of the theologian cannot be to give the first or most definitive description of Scripture of human language. Why? Because Scripture has already done that," Frame, 78.

of that fact; there is no real continuity with the actual being of Adam anymore than there is continuity with our own being except in the arbitrary *ex nihilo* creation of our identity by God at every successive moment.<sup>25</sup>

According to Edwards, God could annihilate us one moment and recreate us the next with the same soul/psyche and we would never know the difference or feel discontinuity with our “old self.” Yet, in this way we should not think that Edwards would argue that we are always “being” and never “becoming,” or all *actuality* and no *potentiality*, for our continual continuity exists in God’s carrying along in Himself (not *as* Himself--contra pantheism) our identity, and there is no surer foundation or security for our successive existence. Therefore, for Edwards our creation is arbitrarily *ex nihilo*, yet it is nonetheless guaranteed in the sovereign decree and purpose of God, so that potentiality is built into our response to God at each and every moment we “live, move, and have our being” in Him.

### **Of Him Creation Testifies (Romans 1:17 – 32)**

The last passage relevant to the study of the mind and fallen mankind’s ability to obtain knowledge (and particularly knowledge of God) is Romans 1:17 – 32. States commentator David Stern, “This is as close as the Bible comes to ‘proving the existence of God,’ for there is no reason why it should prove it. Rather, it takes effort for sinners to ignore God; defense mechanisms require active energy for their maintenance...”<sup>26</sup> In Paul’s great theological treatise the author expounds upon special and general revelation, beginning with a statement that in the gospel, “the righteousness of God is [being] revealed” (v. 17). This is not an inner illumination, but the fact that the gospel sheds light what was always in

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<sup>25</sup> Hodge, 221.

<sup>26</sup> Stern, 331.

the Old Testament Scriptures (particularly Hab. 2:4), “the just shall live by faith” (v. 17). From the Old Testament faith to the New Testament faith, or as Paul says “from faith to faith” (v. 17).<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, from heaven is the revelation of God’s wrath against sin (v. 18) which comes in the form of retributive justice (v. 24 – 30). Retributive judgment is therefore a part of observable general revelation that God personally shows to all men (v. 19). Moreover, two things specifically are revealed by God about himself in nature which fall under the category of “invisible attributes,” namely his, “eternal power,” and “divine nature” (v. 20).<sup>28</sup> It must be noted that what exactly about these things that is revealed is not stated, it is obviously not an exhaustive knowledge,<sup>29</sup> yet we can state at the very least it means that men “clearly see” that there is an infinite, and ultimate power and authority outside of creation,<sup>30</sup> and that he is not a part of creation but supernatural - something “glorious.”<sup>31</sup> Mathew Henry comments on the witness of creation stating the following:

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<sup>27</sup> In quoting from the Old Testament I believe Paul is showing the continuity of justification by faith from the Old to the New Testament. This type of statement can also be seen in Paul’s contrast between the passing glory of Moses and the Old Testament dispensation to that of Christ and the New Testament, “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). The latter expression is misinterpreted by Edwards as with many other commentators as a reference to personal illumination and sanctification, but the context demands a covenantal and corporate application as can be seen in the contrast between Moses and Christ (3:7-17). Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol.17: Sermons and Discourses 1730 – 1733*, ed. Mark Valeri, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 424.

<sup>28</sup> Luther explains regarding verse 19, “These words declare that all earthly gifts must be ascribed to God as their Donar; for here the Apostle speaks of the natural knowledge of God, as the explanatory words prove: ‘The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen.’ This statement tells us that from the beginning of the world the invisible things of God have always been recognized through the rational perception of the (*divine*) operations (*in the world*).” Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, (Translated by J. Theodore Mueller, Grand Rapids: Kregel Pub., 1976), 43.

<sup>29</sup> Mathew Henry states, “The being of God may be apprehended, but cannot be comprehended. We cannot by searching find him out, Job xi. 7-9. Finite understandings cannot perfectly know an infinite being; but, blessed be God there is that which may be known, enough to lead us to our chief end, the glorifying and enjoying of him; and these things revealed belong to us and our children, while secret things are not to be pried into, Deut. Xxix. 29” Henry, 369.

<sup>30</sup> Commenting on Acts 17:28 St. Chrysostom speaks of the apparent omnipresence of the heavens in all the world, stating, “For it was not so that there was a heaven in one place, in another none, nor yet (a heaven) at one time, at another none. So that both at every “time” and at every “bound” it was possible to find Him. He so ordered things, that neither by place nor by time were men hindered. For of course even this, if nothing else, of itself was a help to them – that the heaven is in every place, that it stands in all time.” Chrysostom. “Homilies on Acts and Romans.” *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 11: 236.

<sup>31</sup> Calvin seems to support the cosmological argument when he asserts that author, “plainly testifies here, that God has presented to the minds of all the means of knowing him, having so manifested himself by his works, that they must

Though God be not the object of sense, yet he hath discovered and made known himself by those things that are sensible...The workman is known by his work. The variety, multitude, order, beauty, harmony, different nature, and excellent contrivance, of the things that are made, the direction of them to certain ends, and the concurrence of all the parts to the good and beauty of the whole, do abundantly prove a Creator and his eternal power and Godhead. Thus did the light shine in the darkness.<sup>32</sup>

It should also be remembered that man himself as part of nature is the most clear revelation of God apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ, for man was made in God's image, Calvin states as much in commenting on Psalm 139:17 saying, "for while we may cast a glance at our hands and our feet, and occasionally survey the elegance of our shape with complacency, there is scarcely one in a hundred who thinks of his Maker."<sup>33</sup> And, again Mathew Henry comments, "The frame and structure of human bodies, and especially the most excellent powers, faculties, and capacities of human souls, do abundantly prove that there is a Creator, and that he is God."<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, the text does not say that fallen man knows *about* God, but actually and truly and fully *knows* Him, at least in the ways described above, but this knowledge is "futile" to them because it is not combined with gratitude and worship (v. 21),<sup>35</sup> nor is a more "full knowledge" sought after or "retained" (v. 28).<sup>36</sup> This has a profound effect upon the intellect and understanding,<sup>37</sup> and according to Mathew Henry, "The foolishness and

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necessarily see what of themselves they seek not to know – that there is some God; for the world does not by chance exist, nor could it have proceeded from itself." Calvin, 19: 71.

<sup>32</sup> Henry, 370.

<sup>33</sup> Calvin, 6: 219.

<sup>34</sup> Henry, 370.

<sup>35</sup> Luther comments on verse 21, "As a person would be foolish to look for money only to look at it, without trying to get it into his possession, so the heathen, though they knew God, were satisfied with and gloried in the mere knowledge of Him. They left out of mind His worship, in particular, the inward dedication to God, whom they knew." Luther, 44.

<sup>36</sup> The use of *epignwsei* instead of *gnwsis* demonstrates that Paul has in mind something greater in verse 28 than in verse 21 (*gnontes*). Walvoord, 444.

<sup>37</sup> St. Chrysostom has said regarding the noetic effects of sin spoken of in Rm. 1:21, "And he names the cause through which they fell into such senselessness. What then is it? They trusted everything to their reasonings. Still he does not no word it so, but in a much sharper language, 'but became vain in their reasonings, and their foolish heart was darkened.' For as night without a moon, if any one attempt to go by a strange road, or to sail over a strange sea, so far will

practical wickedness of the heart cloud and darken the intellectual powers and faculties. Nothing tends more to the blinding and perverting of the understanding than the corruption and depravedness of the will and affections.”<sup>38</sup> Sin leads the unregenerate and foolish person to an even darker heart where the available light is that much dimmer (v. 21).<sup>39</sup> Calvin’s view of man’s sinful dullness is seen in his following comment on Acts 17:27:

For God hath not darkly shadowed his glory in creation of the world, but he hath everywhere engraven such manifest marks, that even blind men may know them by groping. Whereas we gather that men are not only blind but blockish, when, being helped by such excellent testimonies, they profit nothing... Yet, here ariseth a question, whether man can naturally come unto a true and merciful knowledge of God. For Paul doth give us to understanding, that their own sluggishness is the cause that they cannot perceive that God is present; because, though they shut their eyes, yet may they grope after him. I answer that their ignorance and blockishness is mixed with such forwardness, that, being void of right judgment, they pass over without understanding all such signs of God’s glory as appear manifestly both in heaven and earth. Yea, seeing that true knowledge of God is a singular gift of his, and faith (by which alone he is rightly known) cometh only from the illumination of the Spirit, it follows that our minds cannot pierce so far, having nature only for our guide.<sup>40</sup>

An exchange takes place in the darkened heart of man when he retreats into darkness, he “changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (v. 23).<sup>41</sup> This idolatry of the created prompts God to give men over to self-worship through debased sexual immorality which is the “penalty due them” (v. 27). Moreover, Paul lays out a litany of evil mankind has been plunged into as a result of rejecting general or natural revelation (v. 29 -31). Concerning this

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he be from soon reaching his destination, that he will speedily be lost. Thus, they, attempting to go the way leading to Heaven, and having destroyed the light from their own selves, and in lieu of it, trusted themselves to the darkness of their own reasoning, and seeking in bodies for Him who is incorporeal, and in shapes for Him who hath no shape, underwent a most rueful shipwreck.” Chrysostom, 352.

<sup>38</sup> Henry, 370.

<sup>39</sup> States Calvin, “For because men have naturally some perseverance of God [or “are imbued with some knowledge of God], they draw true principle from that fountain. And though so soon as they begin to think upon God, they vanish away in wicked inventions, and so the pure seed doth generate into corruptions; yet the first general knowledge of God doth nevertheless remain still in them.” Calvin, 19: 170.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>41</sup> Commenting on verse 23 Luther says, “Also man is “incorruptible” so far as his soul is concerned. But the heathen dishonored God even to the extent that they failed to make Him like to the soul that is in them. They only made Him like to man’s bodily appearance or the image of his body, according to which he is ‘corruptible.’” Luther, 45.

result Martin Luther stated that mankind, “deprived of truth and steeped in vanity... of necessity becomes blind in his whole feeling and thinking, since now he is turned entirely away from God.”<sup>42</sup> The last statement by Paul adds to the idea of fallen man’s ability to know God, namely, “knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those that practice such things are deserving of death” (v. 32), that is the eternal death from on high which strips a person of their body and their right to use it.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 46.

## CHAPTER 4: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

A broader theological survey is necessary at this point to compare and contrast the thought of Edwards with the entire scope of the Bible and Edwards's own Calvinist heritage, this is perhaps the most crucial element to gauge whether or not Edwards deviated too much from the Scriptures in his idealism, or rather did he develop a unique Calvinistic way to view the mind which can lead educators to a better understanding of their pupils.<sup>1</sup> This survey must include information about ontology, epistemology, revelation, illumination, and even imagination.

### Ontology

Perhaps the most difficult and controversial aspect of Edwards's general epistemological thought is his idealistic phenomenalism, which, "clearly belongs to the second major stage in the development of Edwards' thought."<sup>2</sup> Some such statements have even gotten Edwards labeled a pantheist in times past,<sup>3</sup> particularly by Southern Presbyterians who sought to keep Edwardsianism out of their seminaries and churches.<sup>4</sup> Two

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace Anderson does not see any immediate influence of others upon Edwards's type of idealism, and believes that efforts to trace such influence have failed. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol.6: Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>3</sup> This is not wholly a past charge, for Reformed apologist John Frame as recently as 1994 has noticed in Edwards's ontological argument (and consequently that of R.C. Sproul's "Ligonier Ministries"), "he used a Parmenidean form of it that verges on a pantheistic conclusion." John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Pub., 1994), 114, 239.

<sup>4</sup> Sean Michael Lucas in His Essay, "He Cuts Up Edwardsism by the Roots," explains, "Southern Prebyterians not only barred Edwardsian theology from their seminaries and their church councils, but they also subjected Edwards himself

such examples of the type of controversial statements that have earned Edwards criticism can be found in his “Notes on Knowledge and Existence.” In drafting subjects to deal with in upcoming works we read the following idea to which Edwards wished to expand:

How real existence depends on knowledge or perception. From hence shew how all union and all created identity is arbitrary. How God is as it were the only substance, or rather, the perfection and steadfastness of his knowledge, wisdom, power and will...for this is what is supposed, that all existence is perception. What we call body is nothing but a particular mode of perception; and what we call spirit is nothing but a composition and series of perceptions, or an universe of coexisting and successive perceptions connected by such wonderful methods and laws.<sup>5</sup>

These thoughts clearly fit into the category of “idealism,” however, in the same context Edwards states regarding the world, “How there may be more in material existence than man’s perception, past, present or future... How existence in general is necessary.”<sup>6</sup> This quote clearly shows Edwards accepted as real the material world around him. Edwards was not unaware of the questions some might have of his teaching, in fact he states as much in “The Mind” No.51, “It is from hence I expect the greatest opposition. It will appear a ridiculous thing, I suppose, that the material world exists nowhere but in the soul of man, confined to his skull. But we must again remember what sort of existence the head and brain have. The soul, in a sense, has its seat in the brain; and so, in a sense, the visible world is existent out of the mind, for it certainly, in most proper sense, exists out of the brain.”<sup>7</sup>

There are other statements in which Edwards shows he has no intention of denying the reality of neither the natural world, nor its distinction from God. For example Edwards

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to a thorough critique. One of the first articles on Edwards published in southern Presbyterians’ most important theological organ, *The Southern Presbyterian Review*, hammered Edwards’ theology on several fronts. The author, noted Old Schooler Samuel Baird, claimed that Edwards ultimately shared the same position on causation as John Taylor, his Arminian opponent in his treatise on *Original Sin*. This faulty view of causation, which claimed that God was the only efficient cause, led Edwards into innumerable inconsistencies and errors. In particular, Baird accused Edwards of embracing a, “form of pantheism, which makes God the only real existence” and led to the conclusion that God was the author of sin.” D.G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols, eds. *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 203.

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, 6:398.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

sees the soul as part of the “natural world” yet being an immediate creation from God stating, “In the order of beings in the natural world, the more excellent and noble any being is, the more visible and immediate hand of God is there in bringing them into being; and the most noble of all, and that which is most akin to the nature of God, viz. the soul of man, is most immediately and directly from him: so that here, second causes have no causal influence at all.”<sup>8</sup>

From the above statements we might be satisfied with Edwards’s belief in a “real world,” even if some may argue he was inconsistent or provocative with his phraseology. However, it will be useful to cite a few more examples to demonstrate that Edwards believed in what we call a “real world.” This world includes the finite thoughts of people - which is not the body of God (contra pantheism), but certainly a *body of knowledge*. Moreover, it cannot exist objectively apart from God’s thinking of it at every moment, nor exist subjectively *for us* apart from our thinking of it, ordering it according to the laws by which God established the world, the mind’s ability to appreciate it in its beautiful relation to God, and the spiritual truth He meant to communicate through it.

The point is demonstrated by what Edwards states regarding the use of memory. “In memory, in mental principles, habits and inclinations,” states Edwards, “there is something really abiding in the mind when there are no acts or exercises of them, much in the same manner as there is a chair in this room when no mortal perceives it. For when we say there are chairs in this room when none perceives it, we mean that minds would perceive chairs

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<sup>8</sup> Issue has also been taken with Edwards’s continual creationism view, says Sean Michael Lucas in his essay, “He cuts up Edwards by the Roots.” Edwards held that personal identity was established by a ‘perpetual recreation’ in which ‘one’s moment’s existence does not cause or produce a succeeding moment’s, not being coexistent with it, as cause and effect must always be.’ Edwards claimed that as a result, ‘our continued identity is nothing else than a result of the will of God, sovereignly ordaining to restore our existence out of nihil, by a perpetual recreation, at the beginning of each new moment, and to cause in us a consciousness which seems to give sameness.” Hart, 208.

here according to the law of nature in such circumstances.”<sup>9</sup> This answers the question we asked before about the tree falling in the woods. With these quotes, combined with the love of Edwards for the natural world, it seems that any study of Edwards should not be quick in making a decision as to how much Edwards would agree with what typically passes for traditional idealism. For Edwards the world natural world was not merely an elaborate illusion or dream, but a “solid” place that revealed the spiritual glory of God.

All of this is not to say Edwards did not struggle with how the sensible world and the ideal world fit together, nor how the immaterial mind which is the seat of the senses can interact with a material world in the same way as any other spirit or even God Himself. Though able to examine and enjoy the material world, Edwards was not satisfied with the “reasonable” attempts at proving its reality. In “Reason and Revelation,” Edwards states, “Even the very existence of a sensible world, which we receive for certain from the testimony of our senses, is attended with difficulties and seeming inconsistencies with reason, which are insuperable by the reason of most men. For if there be a sensible world, that world either exists in the mind only or out of the mind, and independent on its imagination or perception...” The two dilemma Edwards sees us faced with is that the world either exists in the mind only, or outside the mind and independent of the minds imagination and perception. The latter cannot be the case because everything we say exists is said to have color, solidity, and dimension, yet these are all perceptions in the mind, it is the mind that gives all things their definition, or definite-ness, therefore if we exclude these mental perceptions there would have to be a substance independent of these attributes and

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<sup>9</sup> Edwards, 6:368.

perceptions or else we are left with nothing, but we cannot conceive of “life” apart from these mental perceptions, and we are left with a, “perfect emptiness of everything.”<sup>10</sup>

However, if we state that the world only exists in our minds we are left with another problem which is that, “the sensories themselves, or the organs of sense by which sensible ideas are let into the mind, have no existence but only in the mind.” Moreover, “those organs of sense have no existence but what is conveyed into the mind by themselves, for they are part of the sensible world. And then it will follow that the organs of sense owe their existence to the organs of sense, and so are prior to themselves, being the causes or occasions of their own existence...” This for Edwards seemed to go against reason as much as a world that exists independent of the mind’s perception of it.<sup>11</sup>

It seems that a harmony of Edwards’s writings and practices would yield a more balanced attempt at idealism not where “material” is *nothing but* in the mind, but the material world is only known as it is by the mind of man as a creation and it is a continual thought in the mind of God as it “lives, moves, and has its being” in Him and His sustaining omniscient providence. In as much as we think of the material world according to its reflection of the spiritual world then it exists as it *truly* is, otherwise it is something less than what it *actually* is and therefore not really the thing itself. Therefore, the *real* world (one which is “pre-interpreted” by God) can only exist in our minds even if the material world exists outside of it, but, conversely we might also add that many faux worlds exist in various minds as well, which does not make them objectively real (though subjectively real enough to evoke reaction to it). However, it is the real theo-centric world that reflects the glory of Jesus

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<sup>10</sup> Gordon Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, (Hobbs: The Trinity Foundation, 1995), 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Christ which educators must strive to put their students in contact with, and only then will they appreciate the sciences as much as Edwards himself did.

Sang Hyun Lee, in “The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards,” explains that for Edwards “beings” do not abide by habits and laws, but are habits and laws, these are the “abiding principles of being,” exerted immediately by God’s power and laws which are independent of other beings. It is in the, “constancy of these laws that the permanence of created things lies.” Things exist not because they are a substance, but because they are a habit of being according to the laws fixed by God. Moreover, because these laws included all things being in relationship to each other, nothing can exist apart from its relationship to others. “Reality,” says Lee, “is not something that is achieved once and for all but something that is achieved again and again.”<sup>12</sup>

Lee traces Edwards’s “phenomenalistic idealism,” to his early work on the study of atoms. For Edwards an atom could not be divided into something smaller without being annihilated, therefore its very being was a state of resistance. Therefore, solidity is synonymous with “resistance to annihilation,” and resistance therefore is synonymous with existence. “A body,” therefore, “is not a substance but rather solidity, and solidity is an activity.” It is only God that keeps the atom (of which we are made) in a state of resistance, and only God keeps us in the state of actively resisting annihilation, therefore our bodies exist only in as much as they conform to the law of resisting annihilation which is the basis for solidity. Yet, in all of this solidity is very real.

However, because God is the only real cause in the universe it is God who causes this resistance which produces us at every successive moment, and God being the only real

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<sup>12</sup> Sang Hyun Lee. *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, expanded ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 48, 50.

“substance” causes us (or our minds) to perceive other “bodies” (and attributes such as color) that exist in his Mind according to His predetermined laws. When we perceive their actions, we are actually taking part in God’s action within us to perceive a sense of their movement and resistance at every moment. “Since the idea of a body can be reduced to ideas of color and resistance, and color and resistance have only mental existence, ‘the world is...an ideal one.’”<sup>13</sup>

Since God is the only cause of all things, he is necessarily the cause of our thoughts and perceptions of sensible ideas which constitute “bodies” that act in accordance with his laws. Again, it would be disingenuous to imply that Edwards denied the reality of creation, but his unique view of what constitutes that reality is certainly due the scrutiny and criticism it has gained over the years, if for nothing else than for being highly speculative of matters that are not clearly revealed in Scripture. No one can read Edwards and come away believing the natural world is “only an illusion,” yet, conversely no one can come away without being a bit confused about how it differs from just that. It is at that point the reader must follow Edwards’s example of enjoying and appreciating creation even if he or she can not follow his logic.

### **Epistemology**

If Edwards indeed denied the reality of matter in general as if all things *only* exist in the mind of man, or God, then his view is clearly to be rejected, if however he believed (as I believe he did) that things *all* exist in the mind of God and some things in the mind of man via general revelation, then his basic views are orthodox. Epistemology must start with

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<sup>13</sup> “Jonathan Edwards,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/edwards/>; Internet; accessed 30 Oct. 2007.

thinking God's thoughts after Him, and these thoughts are the basis for a biblical world-view, and only a world viewed from a Biblical point of view is the *real* world, all other worlds are God-less and therefore, objectively speaking fictitious, or rather non-existent.<sup>14</sup> The only world that actually exists is the one which dwells in the mind of God, for he knows and makes all things actual in perfect relation to Himself as the great sovereign King of Creation.

Along these lines John Frame of Reformed Theological Seminary offers six ways in which a person's thoughts have continuity with God's. First, "divine and human thought are bound to the same standard of truth;" second, "divine and human thought may be about the same things, or as philosophers say, they may have the same "objects;" third, "it is possible for man's beliefs, as well as God's to be true;" fourth, "just as God is omniscient, so man's knowledge in a certain sense universal;"<sup>15</sup> fifth, "God knows all things by knowing himself, that is, He knows what He knows by knowing His own nature and plan... We too, gain knowledge by knowing ourselves – by knowing our own sensations, thought, actions, and so forth;" and sixth, "God's thoughts are ultimate creators... our thoughts are also creative in a

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<sup>14</sup> In commenting on the work of science Greg Bahnsen observes, "The scientist must believe that he confronts a *system* when he does his work, or else the work would be futile. That system is either the result of the purposeful plan of the sovereign God, or it is the reflection into the unknowable "universe" of the ordering mind of man – which in its turn is equally unknowable. If the scientist refuses to presuppose the truth of Scripture (which is actually an epistemological impossibility), he will have neither a true universe to investigate or any reason to suppose he has the ability to do so. The Bible provides the only possible presupposition for all thought and science." Greg Bahnsen, "Revelation, Speculation and Science" in *Presbyterian Guardian* Vol. 40, No. 1, (December 1970/January 1971): 14.

<sup>15</sup> Frame clarifies this statement by quoting from Cornelius Van Til, "'Man knows something about everything' Because we know God, we know that everything in the universe is created.", John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship*, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1987), 27.

sense.”<sup>16</sup> This sixth continuity could comfortably fit into the broad category of “idealism,” yet Frame, like Edwards, would not deny the reality and distinction of the material world.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding knowledge in general Edwards is clear that it is a gift from God. “Indeed,” says Edwards, “all knowledge whatsoever is from God he is the Father of lights. The faculty of understanding is from him God created man in his own Imageown one thing is meant is that he Imparted to him understand he gave him a Ray of heavenly light by which he was distinguished from the Rest of the Creatures. The reason of man is the Candle of the Lord Tis a light that God has Lighted up the soul.”<sup>18</sup> As part of general revelation the human heart reveals God in that it is reasonable, and its conscience is a reflection of that reality that our souls are exposed to a more penetrating examination from above.

Edwards spends his time in his message, “Ideas, Sense of the Heart, Spiritual Knowledge or Conviction, Faith,” sorting out the details of how humans gather, retain, and reflect upon information, as well as the use of language and words. Edwards argues – using his concept of “habit of the mind” - that our thoughts of things are rarely if ever the actual

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<sup>16</sup> Frame adds, “We are secondary creators. On the one hand, when we refuse to think according to God’s norms, we are at the same time refusing to live in his world and devising a world of our own to replace it... Adopting a lie affects not only the content of our heads but every area of our lives... thus in an important sense, the sinner is a “secondary creator,” one who chooses to live in a world – a dream world – that he has invented... the facts of creation are not raw data or brute facts that are subject to mutually contrary interpretations. They are pre-interpreted by God... To deny God’s interpretation is not merely to adopt an alternative but equally valid interpretation; it is to reject the facts as they truly are. It is to reject reality.” *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> There are eleven “discontinuities” according to Frame which are, “God’s thoughts are uncreated and eternal... God’s thoughts ultimately determine, or decree, what comes to pass... God’s thoughts, therefore, are self-validating... God’s thoughts always bring glory and honor to Him because God is always ‘present in blessing’ to himself... God’s thoughts are originals of which ours, at best, are only copies, images... God does not need to have anything ‘revealed’ to Him... God has not chosen to reveal all truth to us. For example, we do not know the future, beyond what the Scripture teaches... God possesses knowledge in a different way from us. He is immaterial and therefore does not gain knowledge from organs of sense perception. Nor does He carry on ‘processes of reasoning,’ understood as temporal actions... What God does reveal to us, He reveals it in creaturely form... God’s thoughts, when taken together, constitute a perfect wisdom; they are not chaotic but agree with one another... the more God reveals, the more facts we know, though we never reach the point where we know as many facts as God.” *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Edwards “None Teaches Like God.” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu/ref/5870>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 2, 3.

idea of the thing itself in its relationship to *all* other things<sup>19</sup> when reading or else we could never get through a single sentence, instead our mind's in their swiftness substitutes for the idea, "some sign that the mind habitually substitutes in the room of the idea." This is also why people can think a lot faster than they can talk or communicate the idea of their thoughts which can be innumerable within a short time.<sup>20</sup>

### **Revelation: General**

As we have already seen in the examination of our three main texts, the material world in general revelation is just as revelatory as the Scriptures,<sup>21</sup> <sup>22</sup> though clearly not as detailed, nor explicitly propositional, yet detailed enough, and imprinted in such a way to recall basic (perhaps innate) propositions which resonates in the creature's heart from birth<sup>23</sup> which leads our conscience to believe thus: "There is a worthy, invisible, supernatural, eternal creator, in whose image I am made, with the authority and ability to retributively and eternally judge sinners, of which I am one of many." We might also add that the law of non-contradiction is revealed in our own self-awareness that we are ourselves and not another,

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<sup>19</sup> Though certainly some relationships are suggested, "spontaneously." Jonathan Edwards, "Ideas, Sense of the Heart, Spiritual Knowledge or Conviction, Faith." *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu?ref/12011>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> "The word 'revelation'" explains Louis Berkhof, "is derived from the Latin 'revelatio,' which denotes an unveiling, a revealing. In its active sense it denotes the act of God by which He communicates to man the truth concerning Himself in relation to His creatures, and conveys to him the knowledge of His will; and in the passive sense it is a designation of the resulting product of this activity of God.", Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (New Combined Edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 117.

<sup>22</sup> States Edwards, "the system of nature and the system of revelation are both divine works, so both are in different senses a divine word. Both are the voice of God to intelligent creatures; a manifestation and declaration of himself to mankind. Man's reason was given to him, that he might know God; and might be capable of discerning the manifestations he makes of himself in the effects and external expressions, and emanations of the divine perfections." Jonathan Edwards, "Reason and Revelation," *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu?ref/10013>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Clark says regarding language, "We shall suppose that God Omnipotent has created rational beings, beings who are not merely physical but who are essentially spiritual and intellectual, beings therefore who have the innate ability to think and speak... Christ is the *Logos* or Reason who endows every mind with intellectual light... Men are not born morally good or morally neutral, but they are born depraved. Intellectually also men do not come into the world with blank minds." Clark, 135.

and observation that distinctions exist among beings. In other words, “the law of noncontradiction is not simply a law of thought. It is a law of thought because it is first a law of being.”<sup>24</sup>

Again, it must be reiterated that the fact that people do not heed this law does not mean it is not part of general revelation, no more than when people ignore the law of divine retribution, or the law of gravity, which makes this first law of logic an effective tool in apologetics.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the fact that the invisible and indivisible God revealed in creation is the great “I AM” is the basis of the law of non-contradiction. General revelation teaches that there is only one God; it is people that violate nature and multiply gods, which is in essence a type of violation of the law of non-contradiction. Moreover, the rest that Christ brings includes a “cognitive rest” whereby the contradiction within our hearts is removed when we see ourselves and our world as we ought – in relation to the true God, according to His Word.<sup>26</sup>

Although general revelation is sufficient to condemn men in their conscience, or rather show them their deficiency apart from God, it is not similarly equipped to reveal the will of God for salvation and sanctification. In opposition to one prominent Deist of his own

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<sup>24</sup> Ronald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man: The Crisis of Revealed Truth in Contemporary Theology*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Pub., 1992), 105.

<sup>25</sup> Popular Christian apologist Norman Geisler in his book “When Skeptics Ask” explains, “in order to say that logic doesn’t apply to God, you have to apply logic to God in that very statement. So logic is inescapable. You can’t deny logic with your words unless you affirm it with the very same words. It is undeniable... The law of noncontradiction cannot be denied because any denial assumes that opposites cannot be true, and that is exactly what is being denied... To say that logic does not apply to reality, you have to make a logical statement about it. But if it takes a logical statement to deny logic, then your actions defeat the purpose of your words. Either way, logic must apply to reality. And if logic applies to reality, then we can use it to make truth claims about reality.” Norman Geisler, and Ron Brooks. *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook of Christian Evidences*. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1990), 13, 271.

<sup>26</sup> John Frame speaking in terms similar to Edwards states of “cognitive rest,” thus: “Coming to cognitive rest about Christianity is achieving a “godly sense of satisfaction with the message of Scripture... Theologically, when we talk about ‘cognitive rest,’ we are talking about noetic regeneration and sanctification, the ‘internal testimony of the Holy Spirit...’ The cognitive rest is an element of salvation. Sin has kept us from true knowledge... but the grace of God in Christ is sufficient to rescue us from this ignorance...” Frame, 153.

day Jonathan Edwards in the following passage masterfully turns the tables on those that claim nature is enough to improve people's minds and hearts:

If Tindal or any other deist would assert, and urge it upon mankind as an assertion, that they ought to believe that the light of nature is so sufficient to teach all mankind what they ought (or in any respect need) to believe and practice for their good, that any additional instruction is needless and useless, then all instruction in families and schools is needless and useless, all instruction of parents, tutors and philosophers, all that has been said to promote any such knowledge as tends to make men good and happy by word of mouth, or by writing and books, all that is written by ancient and modern philosophers and learned men. And then also all the pains the deists take in talking and writing to enlighten mankind is wholly needless and vain, and all Tindal's own instructions, and particularly all the pains he takes to make men believe that 'tis not best to give heed to pretended revelations and traditionary religion, as what tends to mankind miserable in society, as if the light of nature was not perfectly and absolutely sufficient to teach 'em what is needful to avoid misery without its being revealed to them by him.<sup>27 28</sup>

Yet, clarification is necessary at this point, for general revelation *could* in fact be useful at improving the heart of man if mankind heeded its message, we see this in the case of Edwards himself who was blessed by the "light of nature" and the spiritual truths he was reminded of through observing the natural world. Moreover, the condemning of unregenerate conscience can have a restraining (though sin misdirects him) effect upon the sinner's base nature, and general revelation compels man to worship something. However, as Paul in his epistle to the Romans demonstrates, this revelation does not keep unregenerate man from sinning, but leads him to idolatry and hedonism.<sup>29</sup> The problem is that sinful

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<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Edwards. "Necessity of Revelation." *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu?ref/10004>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Edwards continues arguing against the sufficiency of nature to teach people the way of salvation by declaring, "The light of nature is in no sense whatsoever sufficient to discover this religion. It has no sufficient tendency to it, nor indeed any tendency at all to discover it to any single person in any age. And it not only has no tendency to the obtaining of this knowledge by mere natural means, but it affords no possibility of it. And not only is the light of nature insufficient to discover this religion, but the law of nature, as distinguished from the light of it, is not sufficient to establish it, or to give any occasion or room for it." *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Edwards elaborates, "Ignorance of divine things is a defect in the understanding rather than the will; yet it was the act of the will, that is imputed to us, that brought ignorance and darkness in spiritual things into the world... Conscience can't restrain if it ben't enlightened; fear won't restrain if they know not what to be afraid of. Lusts exert themselves in their full strength." Jonathan Edwards, "Sin and Wickedness Bring Calamity and Misery on a People," *Works of Jonathan*

pollution has defaced the revelation of which we ourselves are – the image of God. The signal is clear, but the receiver is broken. The topic of general revelation will be expanded upon in our historical look at John Calvin.

### **Revelation: Special**

From general revelation we naturally move to a discussion of special revelation, and how it is similar and different than general revelation. There is no want of information regarding Edwards's view of special revelation. Edwards lamented how a rejection of special revelation in his own day was spreading like wild fire because of the doctrine of Deists, even leading them to advocate the legalization of drunkenness, fornication, adultery, murder, and robbery, "yea, they plead it Lawful to Kill their own Chil. And have of late practiced upon it and done it in cold blood."<sup>30</sup> In summing up the differences between general and special revelation Edwards states the following:

There is a two fold light that God gives to the Chil. Of men to discover things to em that concern their true interest and happiness viz the Light of nature and the light of Revela. The light of nature is manifesta. and evidence that is given of these things to mens natural reason from those works of creation and Gods common Providence that all mankind behold. The other Light is Revelation. which is something above the light of nature tis that manifest- tation God has made of himself to the world by his word or by his own Immediate Instructions give in a miraculous man-er by visions miracles and the inspiration of his Spirit<sup>31</sup>

Coupled with special revelation is the doctrine of illumination (which we will discuss more fully below) by God's Spirit. For Edwards this naturally involved being a "doer of the word of God." Edwards states, "All notional knowledge and outward virtue without this, is but the

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*Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu?ref/5636>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Light in a Dark World, a Dark Heart," *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu?ref/7420>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 21.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

body without the spirit; 'tis the soul of all virtue and religious knowledge.”<sup>32</sup> With the amount of emphasis Edwards places on the “affections”<sup>33</sup> it might seem he put little stock in the illumination of the mind as the seat of true religion, yet this is not the case, in his classic use of the term “taste of the mind” Edwards explains the following:

“Indeed the first act of the Spirit of God, or the first that this divine temper exerts itself in, is in spiritual understanding, or in the sense of the mind, its perception of glory and excellency etc. in the ideas it has of divine things; and this is before any proper act of the will. Indeed, the inclination of the soul is as immediately exercised in that sense of the mind which is called spiritual understanding, as the intellect. For it is not only the mere presence of ideas in the mind, but it is the mind’s sense of their excellency, glory and delightfulness. By this sense or taste of the mind, especially if it be lively, the mind in many things distinguishes truth from falsehood.”<sup>34</sup>

Edwards elsewhere compares the person who attempts to use reason apart from special revelation as one the gropes in a dark garden trying to discern the relationship of the objects he or she is grasping for, but the enlightened person is in a garden with the brightness of the sun to clearly reveal what could not be discerned before. The same is true of spiritual things, before a person is illuminated by God’s Spirit to embrace God’s “pre-interpretation” of His world, that person’s discernment of spiritual realities is, “but faint, obscure representations.”<sup>35</sup> It is easy to see how with such faint vision people are drawn to worship, yet what they worship is a pantheon of gods, and perhaps even one “unknown god.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Spirit’s Operation.” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu?ref/11231>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Again, note that, “for Edwards the term ‘affection includes the will, and in fact has more to do with will than with pure feeling.” Clark, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Conversion, Spiritual Knowledge,” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu?ref/10760>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Spiritual Knowledge,” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu?ref/10799>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Commenting further on the necessity of special revelation, Edwards observes, “Insomuch that if there had never had [sic] been any revelation, by which God made himself known by his word to mankind; the most speculative persons would without doubt have forever been at a loss concerning the nature of the supreme Being and first Cause of the universe. And that the ancient philosophers and wiser heathen had so good notions of God as they had, seems to much more owing to tradition, which originated from divine revelation, than from their own invention. Tho’ human reason served to keep these traditions alive in the world, and led the more considerate to embrace and retain the imperfect traditions, which were to be

## Illumination

Illumination of the Holy Spirit “helps the Scripture reader or hearer understand the Bible and creates the conviction that it is true and is the Word of God.”<sup>37</sup> This, however, is not to be confused with mere subjectivism, or an “inner voice” without reference to the objective standard of well taught theology.<sup>38</sup> As Millard Erickson explains:

This, however, should not be regarded as a substitute for the use of hermeneutical methods. These methods play a complimentary, not competitive role... Even Calvin, with his strong emphasis on the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, called attention to the *indicia* of the credibility of Scripture, and in his commentaries used the best of classical scholarship to get at the meaning of the Bible.<sup>39</sup>

Edward’s states regarding the difference between the Spirit’s operation in the world of natural men, in the affliction of their conscience, and that, “those convictions that natural men may have of their sin and misery is not this spiritual and divine light. Men in a natural condition may have convictions of the guilt that lies upon them, and of the anger of God, and their danger of divine vengeance.” These convictions are from, “common grace” and assist the natural conviction of sin – the Spirit being an “extrinsic occasional agent,” but are not the conviction that leads to saving faith through the apprehending of the preached gospel wherein the Spirit acts as, “an indwelling vital principle.”<sup>40</sup>

Illumination is principally a matter of the heart, yet its affect is on the mind, this Edwards teaches, stating, “There is a wide difference between mere speculative, rational judging anything to be excellent, and having a sense of its sweetness, and beauty. The

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found in any parts remaining [sic] they appearing, after once suggested and delivered, agreeable to reason.” Ibid., “Reason,” 13.

<sup>37</sup> Millard J Erickson. *Christian Theology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 283.

<sup>38</sup> States Edwards, “This spiritual light is not the suggestion of any new truths, or propositions not contained in the Word of God... it reveals no new doctrine, it suggests no new propositions to the mind, it teaches no new thing of God, or Christ, or another world, not taught in the Bible; but only gives a due apprehension of those things that are taught in the Word of God.” Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol.17: Sermons and Discourses 1730 – 1733*, ed. Mark Valeri, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 412.

<sup>39</sup> Erickson, 283.

<sup>40</sup> Edwards, 17:410 - 411.

former rests only in the head, speculation only is concerned in it; but the heart is concerned in the latter.” How the heart affects the mind is explained by Edwards as the removal of “prejudices” that blind the reason from accepting and delighting in the truths of Scripture; regeneration of the heart, “sanctifies the reason, and causes it to lie open to the force of arguments for their truth.”<sup>41</sup>

Again, taking on the Deist arguments of his day, Edwards turns the tables on those that would make divine illumination an impossibility stating the following:

Tis rational to suppose that this knowledge should be given immediately by God, and not obtained by natural means. Upon what account should it seem unreasonable, that there should be any immediate communication between God and the creature? ‘Tis strange that men should make any matter of difficulty with it. Why should not he that made all things still have something immediately to do with the things that he has made? Where lies the great difficulty, if we own the being of God, and that he created all things out of nothing, of allowing some immediate influence of God on the creation still?<sup>42</sup>

Therefore this illumination is not to be sought for in creation, for it does not come by natural means, nor does it come by reason alone, though that is a vital part of the faith, for, “it is out of reason’s province to perceive the beauty or loveliness of anything: such perception don’t belong to that faculty. Reason’s work is to perceive truth, and not excellency.”<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, Edwards’s own doctrine of divine illumination includes divine memory recall. In his work, “Spiritual Understanding of the Scriptures,” Edwards explains the following:

Hence we learn, how places of Scripture are often suddenly brought to mind, which were almost forgotten perhaps, before; the motions that are then in the mind being so exactly agreeable thereto, that if there be any footsteps of it in the memory, it will bring them before the mind. So that the Spirit of God don’t immediately suggest the places to us, as though by inspiration, but by stirring up correspondent affections of mind, whereby the mind is naturally put in mind of the text that is so agreeable to it;

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 414.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 421.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 422.

as much as one speech or sentence puts in mind of another that is like it, or as one instrument of music answers of itself to another in harmony and concord.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore illumination is not to be confined to the immediate understanding and application of a particular passage, for it may be that one has read a passage many times before a proper “real-life” context (or the imagining of it)<sup>45</sup> presents itself to where the passage applies, and it is in its application that it is most fully or rather *only* understood.

### Imagination

Imagination, though not usually considered in the systematic study of theology (except perhaps under epistemology) is nonetheless an important part of theology, and therefore education, for Edwards, as it relates to the habit of the mind. Sang Hyun Lee explains a portion of Edwards’s thought on the imagination thus:

The imaginative activity, conceived of as the function of the mind’s habit, exerts its own creativity in setting sense ideas into the relational patterns that are larger than immediately perceived, and yet in that very creativity the imagination is only making mentally explicit the relational potentialities inherent in the ideas themselves. In the propensive activity of the imagination, activity and receptivity coincide. The imagination of the habit of the mind and the accompanying involvement of the heart, then, discover and receive the objective information about the world, just as other sense organs do. Just as each of the other sense organs, the habit of mind receives into the mind something that no other sense organ can.<sup>46</sup>

Edwards’s vivid sermons of hellfire were attempts to engage the imagination as a “sense” since “hellfire” can never be empirically known in this world. Though the general knowledge of divine retribution can be triggered by observing the destructive consequences

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<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Spiritual Understanding of the Scriptures.” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu?ref/9758>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 2.

<sup>45</sup> In mentioning the imagined application of scripture I mean among other things those things that one can learn from the example of others applying or failing to apply a Scriptural principle. In other words, one does not have to have first hand experience of murder, or adultery, in order to learn the meaning of a passage, the example of Saul and David, ones family member, or the imagining of an act is sufficient to apply in one’s own heart the wisdom from a passage so that its meaning is just as understood and tangible. Applying Scripture to our thoughts (imaginings) is a real and effective application.

<sup>46</sup> Lee, 156.

of breaking the moral law in this world, and a sense that judgment carries over after death, general revelation does not give details about that post-mortem experience. However, “hellfire” is not the only experience individuals can get a sense of through imagination, the mind can construct many places both real and non-real through vivid descriptions, and this ability has been used by educators, parents, and pastors for millennia to make real what cannot immediately be known (whether it be a foreign country, a post-mortem location, or a historical event such as the crucifixion).

## CHAPTER 5: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### The Influence of John Calvin

Scholars recognize that Jonathan Edwards above all things was a Calvinist in the Puritan tradition, therefore, it is of particular importance that in the study of church history we give singular attention to that person whom Edwards was raised to admire, and whose doctrine of God's sovereignty was the impetus of Edwards's own great spiritual awakening, and the foundation from which he sought to build his own doctrine of the mind.<sup>1</sup> We've already heard much from Calvin's thought on the knowledge of God and the noetic affects of sin, but to begin it must be acknowledged that much of his thought can also be seen in Augustine.<sup>2, 3</sup> When describing how a person is morally blind toward God's general revelation and only after faith can he begin to grow and see more clearly with his faculties that God is the Maker and Savior of the world in accordance with the testimony of Scripture accepted by faith, Augustine states the following:

But since the mind, itself, though naturally capable of reason and intelligence, is disabled by besotting and inveterate vices not merely from delighting and abiding in, but even from tolerating His unchangeable light, until it has been gradually healed, and renewed, and made capable of such felicity, it had, in the first place, to be impregnated with faith, and so purified...Of all visible things, the world is the

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol.6: Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Innumerable church fathers might be cited, and the doctrine can be traced back to the Apostles, but Augustine features so largely in Calvin's Institutes and in the history of the Church that preference must be given to him regarding influence. Moreover, Wallace Anderson sees as influential the "Platonic and Augustinian tradition into which Edwards was born." *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>3</sup> Millard Erickson declares, "John Calvin's view of illumination is more adequate than that of either Augustine or Fuller." *Christian Theology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 282.

greatest; of all invisible, the greatest is God. But, that the world is, we see; that God is, we believe. That God made the world, we can believe from no one more safely than from God Himself. But where have we heard Him? Nowhere more distinctly than in the Holy Scriptures, where the prophet said, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'<sup>4</sup>

As for originality, Calvin was not the first to express the idea of the noetic affects of sin, yet his unique contribution to the philosophy of the knowledge of God comes through articulating and emphasizing this most important theological doctrine consistently in all aspects of religious thought. Knowledge of God for Calvin is, "a concept by means of which he intended to bring all of his concepts into focus, a concept by which he sought to make all his other concepts understood."<sup>5, 6</sup> Moreover, for Calvin the total depravity of man permeates his anthropology in such a way that one cannot but beg for a miracle of grace to relieve man of his awful condition. This is what Calvin ultimately wishes to provide his readers, the divine solution of Christ to man's problem of sin. Only through Christ and the effectual application of the Spirit is knowledge of God (at least any "knowledge" worthy of the name) is obtained.

Calvin's Institutes is the theological primer for his Commentaries. Calvin begins with a statement admitting uncertainty of which is prior, knowledge of God or knowledge of ourselves, though for practical purposes Calvin begins with knowledge of God.<sup>7</sup> Yet in knowing himself the fallen person must come in contact with a sense of the divine due to his own misery. Calvin states, "For as there exists in man something like a world of misery, and ever since we were stripped of the divine attire our naked shame discloses an immense series of

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<sup>4</sup> Augustine. *The City of God*. (Trans. Marcus Dods. New York; Random House, 1950), 346-347.

<sup>5</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship*, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1987), 1.

<sup>6</sup> According to Wallace E. Anderson, Edwards, "was convinced that the primary and essential element in religion consists in cognition – a unique consciousness and knowledge of God... the knowledge of God and the spiritual happiness it affords is the purpose of the entire universe." Edwards "The Mind," 78.

<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Trans. Henry Beveridge. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), I:1:3., 39.

disgraceful properties, every man, being stung by the consciousness of his own unhappiness, in this way necessarily obtains at least some knowledge of God.”<sup>8</sup>

Calvin believes that there was a knowledge of God prior to the fall, yet prefers not even to speak of man’s post-fall “knowledge” as knowledge at all, since it is divorced from piety. He states, “For properly speaking, we cannot say that God is known where there is no religion or piety.”<sup>9</sup> Yet, he does seem to teach that it is possible in the “present ruin of the human race,” to discern from nature that God is the Maker who, “supports us by his power, rules us by his providence, fosters us by his goodness, and visits us with all kinds of blessings...” however, sin largely keeps man from this discernment - the deficiency in himself, not nature.<sup>10</sup> Calvinists have since debated what Calvin’s epistemological views were, from Gordon Clark to Kelly Clark, yet how much presuppositionalism, “basic beliefs,” or natural theology, this great theologian allowed for is not likely a question that will be easily settled anytime soon.<sup>11</sup>

However, clearly speaking of the post-fall man Calvin states the following of the sinner’s *sensus divinitatis*:

“That there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man, being aware that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, may be condemned by their conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service... Since, then, there never has been, from the very first, any quarter of the globe, any city, any household even, without religion, this amounts to a tacit confession, that a sense of Deity is inscribed on every heart.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. I:1:1., 38.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. I:2:1., 40.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Sudduth, Michael Czapkay, “Calvin, Plantinga, and the Natural Knowledge of God: A Response to Beversluis,” in *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 15 No. 1 (January, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, I:3:1., 43.

For Calvin, fallen mankind (being made in God's image) is still given grace enough to exist in God's world, yet not without the stinging reminder in their conscience that it is God's world even if they seek to exploit for their own pleasure and purpose.

Not only does Calvin teach that man has an innate sense of the divine imprinted on his conscience, but he also teaches that God has left his witness to all men in the government and ordering of the universe. In Chapter five of his *Institutes* he explains in the following that God was pleased,

“to manifest his perfections in the whole structure of the universe, and daily place himself in our view, that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him. His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse...both the heavens and the earth present us with innumerable proofs, not only those more recondite proofs which astronomy, medicine, and all the natural sciences, are designed to illustrate, but proofs which force themselves on the notice of the most illiterate peasant...the same is true in regard to the human frame.”<sup>13</sup>

Throughout Calvin's thought is the idea that there's nothing wrong with God, His creation, or mankind's ability (as originally created) to know God. Yet for Calvin, “herein appears the shameful ingratitude of men,” that man is a wicked denier of the truth because he loves his sin so much as to hate God, he acknowledges only enough of Him so as to scorn and reject Him. Calvin cites passages like Romans 1:20 to prove his point. For Calvin theology was not a matter of contemplating nature but contemplating the Word of God, out of love for God. All of his thoughts in the *Institutes* can be seen in His commentaries on specific Biblical passages. Commenting on 1 Cor. 1:21 Calvin states the following:

Here we have a most beautiful passage, from which we may see how great is the blindness of the human mind, which in the midst of light discerns nothing. For it is true, that this world is like a theatre, in which the Lord presents to us a clear manifestation of his glory, and yet, notwithstanding that we have such a spectacle placed before our eyes, we are stone-blind, not because the manifestation is furnished

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. I:5:1., 51.

obscurely, but because we are alienated in mind (Col. 1:21) and for this matter we lack not merely inclination but ability. For notwithstanding that God shows himself openly, it is only with the eye of faith that we can behold him, save only that we receive a slight perception of his divinity, sufficient to render us inexcusable.<sup>14</sup>

Calvin affirms from Rm. 1:21 that to the unbeliever God's, "eternity appears evident – his power...his wisdom...his goodness...his justice...his mercy... and his truth."<sup>15</sup> Yet, for Calvin, a "true and right" knowledge of God begins, "When we know him to be merciful toward us."<sup>16</sup> In other words the hostile mind is a darkened mind, and the degree of one's depravity will determine the degree of one's "stupidity." Commenting on 1 Cor. 1:20 Calvin states that, "a knowledge of all the sciences is mere smoke, where the heavenly science of Christ is wanting; and man, with all his acuteness, is as stupid for obtaining for himself a knowledge of the mysteries of God, as an ass is unqualified for understanding musical harmonies."<sup>17</sup> Again in speaking of a right knowledge of God Calvin in commenting on Ps. 36:10 states the following:

We ought also to observe the epithets by which he describes true believers; first he says, that *they know God*; and secondly, that *they are upright* in heart. We learn from this that true godliness springs from the knowledge of God, and again, that the light of faith must necessarily dispose us to uprightness of heart. At the same time, we ought always to bear in mind, that we only know God aright when we render to him the honor to which he is entitled; that is, when we place entire confidence in him.<sup>18</sup>

Calvin of all theologians has best articulated the biblical doctrine concerning the knowledge of God and the extent to which the unregenerate and regenerate person can obtain such knowledge in nature and Scripture. Though others before him taught similar ideas, Calvin's contribution and significance comes from doing it *best*. Even today theologians and Christians wrestle with the concepts articulated by Calvin – not because he is obscure like a

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<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), .20: 85.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 19: 72.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 9: 500.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 20: 82.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 5: 14.

philosopher, but because he was so clear. Edwards sought to clarify and expand upon this doctrine even further, as well as practically apply it in the pulpit with great fervor. By most accounts he accomplished this task, and demonstrated effectively how this doctrine should be applied to young people in the church, school, and home. What remains is to briefly examine how Edwards applied these truths in his own setting, and how educators in our own day can appropriate his thought for effective and affective education.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Most secular educators might think that anything with the name “Calvinism” attached to it must be backward and oppressive, yet Edwards was one of the most innovative thinkers of his day, not just in theology, but in pedagogy as well. This is easily seen in his work amongst the natives in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and the recommendations he made for changing the curriculum, methods of teaching,<sup>1</sup> practice of inclusion, and practical knowledge of how politics, culture, family, and finances<sup>2</sup> (even competitive salaries for teachers)<sup>3</sup> all of which factor into the student receiving a quality education.

Donald Stelting sums up an Edwardsian definition of education as, “those deliberate experiences which, engaging the senses of the student, produces understanding and inclination; these are demonstrated in the intentional actions of the student.”<sup>4</sup> From the reading of Edwards works one can affirm that this is an accurate definition for Edwards, and further confirmation that he deserves a place at the table with those typically regarded as great American cognitive and educational theorists.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol.16: Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 404. It is particularly interesting to note how Edwards anticipated the value of the modern trend of “language immersion.”

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the squandering of royal funds Edwards says, “If the king’s annual bounty of 500 [pounds] sterling (the greater part of which, it is to be feared, is embezzled, and great part of the remainder spent to make the Indians drunk) were laid out for their instruction, it would be ten times so effectual to gain the desired end. Ibid., 442.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Edd Stelting, *Edwards as Educator: His Legacy of Educational Thought and Practice*. (Ph. D. diss., University of Kansas, 1998), 214.

However, though Edwards saw education as desirable for the curbing of social ills, he was chiefly concerned with the conversion and sanctification of souls. “When Edwards mounted the pulpit,” states Stelting, “or approached the lecturn, or sat beneath the tree in the churchyard on Sunday afternoons surrounded by children, it was for one purpose. He intended to create a context within which people might truly, fully, and savingly see God; and that God might enter into them, giving them, by apprehension, a truth they could not otherwise know. He wished to teach people to know God as he knew God.”<sup>5</sup> This aspiration for Edwards was grand, and lofty, but also very practical; it is to the practical that we now turn.

### **Administration:**

#### **Finances**

Regarding finances Edwards recommended a board of trustees over the Stockbridge school. This private ownership is an investment, and where private money is invested care and concern are sure to follow.<sup>6</sup> Even nutrition is an important part of financing education, for Edwards was keenly aware of the effects of food on the body and mind.<sup>7</sup> This concern of investment can be seen in the practice of private schools and to some degree charter schools. Where one’s treasure is there one’s heart will be also, and although much tax money goes to public schools the financial pinch or sense of investment rarely occurs because one is not personally writing the check. In reality there is no such thing as a “free and appropriate education” for every child, because without a Calvinist psychology it is usually not appropriate, and because government is constantly raising taxes to fund it, it cost a great deal

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<sup>5</sup> Stelting, 217.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, 404.

<sup>7</sup> Stelting, 210, 211.

to the families with children in school. However, with local control and competition parents as well as government can be sure that high standards will be maintained as well as a worldview consistent with the values of the community.

### **The State**

All of this is not to say Edwards saw no responsibility of the State to an educated citizenry. States Edwards, “a state which does not take proper care to put & keep the education of the youth /p./ of the higher ranks in life upon a good foot neglects the most essential thing to the well-being of every private person and of society in general the most essential thing to the end of government if that be publick happiness... unless they inhumanly & barbarously as well as impiously think that the bulk of mankind are made to be meer beasts of burden whose understandings ought to be put out as certain Scythians are said to have done the eyes of their slaves or kept in darkness that they may be more tame drudges less apt to rebel because less sensible of bad usage.”<sup>8</sup>

This last statement seems to point to the support of Edwards for a classis system which was a common concept during Edwards’s day, but as Donald Stelting shows the class distinctions Edwards accepted were not based so much on birth but upon, “natural qualities,” and Edwards favored education for all. Moreover, those who were more “distinguished” in society were not necessarily better, but sometimes more, “difficult and unmanageable.” Yet, because mankind is beset by depravity it is to the social good that the people be educated, particularly in the areas that can benefit a godly society, for “education without Christianity

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Lord’s Day: The Perpetuity,” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu/ref/9602>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 1,2.

was a failure for the correction of social ills.”<sup>9</sup> Edwards would certainly not agree with “State funded” education (or any education for that matter) devoid of the gospel, nor that the ultimate responsibility lie in the hands of the State.

### **The Parent**

The most important educator is the parent. Edwards lamented that in his own day parents neglected the duty to educate and train their children, and this would result in misery for the country.<sup>10</sup> Regarding the influential role of parents in education Edwards states:

Parents are under the Greatest advantages for it of any per-sons living. Vast is the Influence that a Parent may have upon a Child. Education is that which next to nature and Grace in forming the tempers and manners of men it is of the Greatest Influence of any means that Can be used. Parents have the advantage of the most tender years of their Children they may begin upon them as soon as Reason begins to bud forth when the mind is soft and Easily Receives Impressions and like a young twig that is Easily bent hither or thither as we Please.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, it is chiefly the example set in the home that will instruct the student in the way of godliness, for, “the eye will effect the heart more than the ear,” and “Chil will be more Ready

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<sup>9</sup> Stelting, 200--203.

<sup>10</sup> “How little care,” says Edwards, “do parents take in instructing {and} governing {their children}. Parents say that their forefathers were too strict, that they used to lay too great restraints upon their children, that they were too severe in governing of ‘em. But if it was so, parents nowadays err much more on the other extreme: they give their children too vast liberties.” Jonathan Edwards, “Sin and Wickedness Bring Calamity and Misery on a People,” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu/ref/5636>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007), 15.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Wise and Pious Parents.” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu/ref/5834>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 12.

to think that it is Really so if they see by their Parents lives that they do Really believe and have a deep sense of it upon their hearts.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Discipline**

To begin, discipline will be handled differently when approaching education with a Calvinistic psychology such as Edwards. One might expect it to be “harsher” but that is not necessarily the case. In fact, with an understanding of the frailty and inner-contradiction that resides within the student a tendency to be more understanding and gentle arises because misbehavior is recognized as a moral dilemma that can be fixed through gentle admonishment,<sup>13</sup> and not merely a biological one which must be medicated as the genetic epistemology of those like Piaget might lead one to believe.

### **Standards**

Edwards was also a proponent of academic standards, but recognized that the best way to meet those standards are to get children excited about learning, that “measures might be devised, greatly to encourage and animate them in it, and excite a laudable ambition to excel.”<sup>14</sup> Regarding standards Edwards was way ahead of his time in calling for public knowledge of how the school was measuring up to their obligation, that a “premium” and “reward” be given to those children that excelled in their work, and also those that have excelled in morality. Edwards also desired that on this day of “public trial” a type of school play be performed by the children as added incentive for parents and students to take part in

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Brekus relates that, “According to the Reverend Samuel Hopkins, Edwards was a remarkably patient father who taught his children to obey him through love, not fear.” Catherine A. Brekus “Children of Wrath, Children of Grace: Jonathan Edwards and the Puritan Culture of Children Rearing.” In *The Child in Christian Thought*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 327.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 412.

the life of their school.<sup>15</sup> For the home schooling family incentives can also spark motivation. School is the child's occupation, and as such the student can benefit from learning that "all hard work leads to profit." (Prov. 14:23). This is not to say Edwards would support the No Child Left Behind law, it is likely that he, like many teachers today, would find the idea of teacher/school accountability advantageous to the student, yet find that NCLB is unrealistic, unenforceable (there is no one national test), and an intrusion into the classroom, forcing teachers to "teach to the test" rather than teach to the individual. Moreover, as we will see next, the most important standard of achievement by a student and/or school is not even taken into consideration by NCLB, namely how well the gospel is being taught, and how students growing in moral integrity.

## **Curriculum:**

### **General**

Regarding the curriculum, teachers will focus all content toward an appreciation of God's creation, particularly the King of Creation, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Nothing Edwards could learn or teach," states Stelting, "could be outside his primary subject, for all existence and all action flowed from God. The physical world, the social and cultural fields, the mental or internal world, all complete their meaning within the supreme authorship of God."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, for Edwards, teaching (and particularly the Stockbridge Indians) was not an option, but an obligation to the Lord Jesus Christ who loved them, and who would hold the Colonists responsible if they (like the French) refused to aid them in understanding the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 412.

<sup>16</sup> Stelting, 208.

gospel.<sup>17</sup> Though “divinity” was to be the main point of their education, the curriculum was not to consist merely of Bible stories, or catechisms, but “geography and history... mathematics, the first rudiments of astronomy... grammar and logic... natural philosophy” as well as music.<sup>18</sup>

### Language

To begin with, a command of language is imperative for communication. Where proper English is not known students will be at a loss to improve literacy and therefore learning.<sup>19</sup> Edwards, anticipating the “language immersion” and “inclusion” idea by centuries even recommends that, “a number of English children might be put into the school with the Indian children. But the most effectual method of all would be, to put out some of the Indian children, first, into some good English families, one at a place, to live there a year or two, before they are brought into the school... but truly a great deal of care must be taken to find good places for them, and to look well to them, and to see that they are well taken care of, in the families to which they are sent.”<sup>20</sup>

Well-known are the attempts by some to dumb-down the English language for the sake of inclusion, yet being “included” in the coddling environment of a public school, and succeeding in the real world with the ability to continue one’s own education through reading

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<sup>17</sup> Edwards explains regarding this obligation, “And we have also this advantage, that our religion would recommend itself more to their reason and to the light of nature in ‘em than the religion of the French, though not so much to their corruptions. As this way of dealing with these nations would be in itself the most Christian and benevolent, so therein we might expect God’s blessing, and might hope that his anger would be turned away which has been provoked by our past negligence, from whence we have reason to fear God will make them a sore scourge to us as a just punishment of our cruelty to their souls and bodies, by our withholding the gospel from ‘em, defrauding them of their goods, in addition to that of learning, with prejudicing them against Christianity by our wickedness; and killing multitudes of ‘em, and easily diminishing their numbers with strong drink.” Edwards, 16:442.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 445

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 404.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 413. The Stockbridge Indians were so eager to be educated by Edwards’s school that they would most likely have embraced this idea.

and research, are two different things. Edwards does not outright condemn the use of phonics, but his advice should be taken regarding reading comprehension as the main goal, not the mere parroting of sounds and words.

### **History**

Regarding the subject of history and geography, Edwards saw great value in giving children “a short general scheme of the scriptural history,” as well as ecclesiastical history, major historical events such as when Judea was conquered by Rome, the destruction of Jerusalem, the Christianization of Rome up through the Reformation. Along with this the child should be taught the geography of the lands in which these events have taken place.<sup>21</sup>

History is that infamously “boring” subject precisely because it is taken out of context and man-focused, not (as Edwards hoped to construct) a history of a three tiered universe in which the redemption of man through Christ was the central theme. Mere chronology of dead kings and innumerable battles are meaningless and rightly vilified by students that “don’t see the point;” in this they are more perceptive than educators because they are correct – there is no point, no underlying story to integrate all events, and no objective basis to gauge who or what was right or wrong in the annals of history. In short, in many schools there is no hermeneutic to interpret historiography, or rather the secular humanistic and Darwinian “survival of the fittest” hermeneutic of interpreting events leaves much to be desired, as well as too many essential questions unanswered. Christian educators that ground their history, anthropology, or social studies curriculum in the Providence of God will have a unifying narrative with which to engage their students’ interest.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 410-411.

Just as interpreting the present requires vision from the Lord it is also required to interpret the past. The expression “hindsight is 20/20” can give the history teacher no comfort because only events viewed from a Christian world-view whether past, or present can be seen for what they are, or were. Sometimes those who don’t learn from the past are doomed *not* to repeat it, and approaching history with a geno-centric bias,<sup>22</sup> believing that newer is better, are doomed to see the godly societies, and good works of the past as inherently “backward.”

### **Music**

As stated before, included in Edwards’s curriculum is the subject of music. This is not for Edwards merely an appendix to more important subjects, but one that has a “powerful influence” toward sanctification. States Edwards regarding the Stockbridge Indians:

Another thing, which properly belongs to Christian education, and which would be unusually popular with them [the natives of Stockbridge], and which would in several respects have a powerful influence, in promoting the great end in view, of leading them to renounce the coarseness, and filth and degradation, of savage life, for cleanliness, refinement and good morals, is teaching them to sing. Music, especially sacred music, has a powerful efficacy to soften the heart into tenderness, to harmonize the affections, and to give the mind a relish for objects of a superior character.<sup>23</sup>

In many public schools the first programs to be cut from the budget are the arts; this is because music is seen as frivolous compared to the more important matters of life. Yet, for Edwards the Christian academy must integrate music into the curriculum and practice of its students because of its power to spiritually transform individuals in the glorifying of God. When a music program is viewed as “worship” it is not likely to be placed below the learning of math and science and other more “useful” subjects. Similarly in the home school

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<sup>22</sup> i.e. centered on the present generation.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

environment parents should develop ways to incorporate music into the child's studies, not just "silly songs" as memory aids, but heartfelt compositions that lift the spirit towards Heaven, ones that teach good theology but also model good doxology - the end to which all education aims.

### **Rote Memory**

Regarding methods of learning, Edwards thought very little of the usual "grossly defective"<sup>24</sup> English methods (carried over into New England) which relied heavily on rote memorization. This included the catechism, and in the area of reading by phonics alone.<sup>25</sup> Edwards lamented that many children could sound out what was on a page, but could not understand what it was they were reading. Edwards even found this practice detrimental to learning, stating,

They so continue, even until they come to be capable of well understanding the words, and would perhaps have the ideas, properly signified by the words, naturally excited in their minds on hearing the words, were it not for an habitual hearing and speaking them without any ideas... I should therefore think that, in these boarding schools, the children should never read a lesson, without the master or mistress taking care, that the child be made to attend to, and understand, the meaning of the words in the sentence which it reads... And the child should be taught to understand *things*, as well as *words*.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, Edwards taught that the teacher and the student should discuss together what the lesson is about (especially theology), and that, "the child should be encouraged, and drawn on, to speak freely, and in his turn also to ask questions, for the resolution of his own doubts." In this way the child will develop what Edwards called, "a taste for knowledge."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>25</sup> Edwards thought even less of the French who, "keep their Indians in ignorance, and refuse to enable [them] to read the Bible..." Ibid., 441.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

### **The Calvinist Psychology of Jonathan Edwards for Reforming Current Educational Philosophies**

The main argument we have been advancing is that despite some of the more controversial statements regarding ontology, Edwards was the quintessential American Calvinist theologian, and educator, who sought to apply - in particular - the doctrine of total depravity and the noetic effects of sin to every area of his thought. Much of Edwards's life was taken up in the pedagogical through the instruction of his congregation, and students. As such Edwards provides those in the Reformed tradition with a connection to the genesis of American education, and early cognitive theorists. Moreover, Edwards provides an example of how those in the Reformed tradition can teach students with a biblically consistent world view, and tap into the students' potential by treating them according to this psychology.

Underlying all of his innovative thought was a solid commitment to the idea that the human heart is radically corrupt so that it "naturally" rejects God as He can be known through general and special revelation, especially in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Educators that fail to recognize the limitations of the mind due to the immoral inclination to reject God will never be able to help their students out of those limitations and contradictions, and may even create more misery for them.<sup>28</sup> "Yet," states Edwards, "this is the very disposition of their hearts. They hate the Power and dominion of God over them and

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<sup>28</sup> Stelting relates Edwards's own experience of become more grieved by his education when it was not followed by morality and obedience to God. Donald Edd Stelting, *Edwards as Educator: His Legacy of Educational Thought and Practice*. (Ph. D. diss., University of Kansas, 1998), 163.

would be exceeding Glad that they were free it tho it were by abolishing the very being of God.”<sup>29</sup> Edwards enumerates the many temptations and inclinations common amongst youth in his message, “The Danger of Corrupt Communication Among Young People,” including – among other things – speaking lightly of the sacred, calling the Church hypocritical, dirty jokes, proud talking, and gossip.<sup>30</sup> Human nature has not changed sins Edwards’s day, nor the methods by which to help students overcome their moral weaknesses.

Moreover, without recognizing the fallenness of one’s students, one will not pray for them, nor teach them to pray for illumination - without which the student is shut up within his or her own faux world. The educator that recognizes the inherent weakness within themselves and the their students will be more likely to pray, and in do so will have the welcome aid of heaven in all that they do - a grace that most American schools have striven to do without for decades, and by most accounts to their own detriment. “Wicked” children, according to Edwards, are the sign of a nation on the doorstep of calamity.<sup>31</sup>

Neither will the educator see the need to exhort their students as Edwards did in many sermons to follow Christ and avoid evil company. The neglecting of this vital part of education has resulted in the withering of “spring flower,”<sup>32</sup> through unplanned pregnancies, youth alcoholism, school shootings, poor grades, fights, drugs, poor self-esteem, and deaths. Educators must care enough to speak to the truth to their students, such as Edwards did when

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<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Wise and Pious Parents.” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu/ref/5834>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Danger of Corrupt Communication Among Young People,” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available at <http://edwards.yale.edu/ref/7685>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 1- 16.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Sin and Wickedness Bring Calamity and Misery on a People,” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu/ref/5636>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007), 4.

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Youth is Like a Flower that is Cut Down,” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu/ref/7776>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 4.

he stated to his own, “Consider the great re-wards that are to obtained in the way of denial of sensitive appetites means. Avoid evil companions don’t spend a great deal of time in un-profitable company and diversions. Keep up secret Prayer. Virtuous and Religious company. Avoid the appearance and approaches of Evil those things that tend to sin.”<sup>33</sup>

How many students’ lives could have been saved, and saved from much grief, if this was the message students heard on a daily basis in the places where they spend most of their waking hours, days, and years. For, “godliness is the highest wisdom.”<sup>34</sup> It is the Calvinistic psychology of Jonathan Edwards that can save education in America, for when God is let back into the schoolhouse He will bless the efforts of both students, and teachers, and bring cosmos out of chaos, “new light” out of darkness, and hope from despair, hope that a new day will dawn in America wherein the people are blessed beyond measure in the knowledge of God.

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<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Awful Death of Unclean Youth.” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, (eds. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, Caleb J.D. Maskell, 2005), available from <http://edwards.yale.edu?ref/8224>; Internet; accessed 28 August 2007, 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, “Wise and Pious Parents,” 6.

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