SOVEREIGN BEAUTY: JONATHAN EDWARDS AND THE NATURE OF TRUE VIRTUE

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RECENT DECADES have witnessed a new appreciation of the contribution of Jonathan Edwards to American thought and culture. The originality of his religious and ethical position has attracted a spectrum of scholars, now that it is freed from the cramped interpretations of his New England successors and the "consistent Calvinism" of the nineteenth century. James M. Gustafson terms him "the greatest theologian in American history" and William A. Clebsch ranks him with Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James as the prime fashioners of a distinctively American spirituality.[1] Roman Catholic thinkers who are investigating distinctively American resources to offset the traditional dependence upon European thought would do well to begin with this Puritan pastor from eighteenth-century Massachusetts.

Perry Miller and Alan Heimert situated Edwards in the intellectual tradition of Locke and Newton and in the religious upheaval of the Great Awakening. Joseph Haroutunian followed the controversy between Edwards' successors and the dissatisfied New England divines who became the first Unitarians. A more recent stage of criticism has concentrated on his distinctive philosophical and theological positions and has brought these insights to bear upon contemporary discussions of religious psychology, human freedom, ethics, and aesthetics. John E. Smith, Paul Ramsey, and Roland Delattre have been joined by Douglas Elwood, Conrad Cherry, and Harold Simonson in this rediscovery of his works' theological depth, a depth undreamt of by those whose only exposure to Edwards has come through the dolorous rhetoric of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."[2]

The one item of Edwards' voluminous production which these commentators have found most difficult to interpret is his essay *The Nature of True Virtue*.[3] This philosophical consideration of the relation of religion and morality dates from the last stage of his life and was

[1] James M. Gustafson, "Religion and Morality from the Perspective of Theology," in Gene Outka and John P. Reeder Jr., eds., *Religion and Morality* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1973); William A. Clebsch, *American Religious Thought: A History* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1973) xvi.

[2] *Selected Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Harold P. Simonson (New York: Unger, 1970) 96–113.

[3] Jonathan Edwards,, *The Nature of True Virtue* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1966).

published posthumously with its companionpiece, the *Dissertation concerning the End for Which God Created the World.*[4] Contemporary evaluations of these pieces range from puzzlement to high praise as the culmination of his career. Perry Miller referred to *True Virtue* as "the weary voice of a man at the end of tragedy, all passion spent."[5] William K. Frankena notes a surprising shift of method which may puzzle the reader.

> He will find here not only Calvinism but a novel form of Christian ethics, a profound restatement of the New Testament law of love in terms borrowed from the metaphysics of the Platonists, on the one hand, and from the moral aestheticism and sentimentalism of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, on the other.[6]

In *True Virtue* and the first part of *End in Creation* Edwards refrains from reference to Scripture, which he had consistently ranked with reason as the sources of his doctrine. His masterly *Treatise on Religious Affections* had confidently asserted that "experience does abundantly witness to what reason and Scripture declare as to this matter."[7] Yet in these later essays the lofty language of "benevolence to Being" replaces astute analysis of religious experience and the vivid rhetoric of his sermons. Does such a change of method represent a final stage of "humanism" which transformed his earlier Calvinism, or possibly "the translating without loss from the language of religion to what seems to be the language of morality but is really that of aesthetics"?[8] Edwards' contribution to Christian ethics will remain unclear until this question of the ultimate foundation of his thought is satisfactorily resolved.

Any attempt to solve this question must consider *True Virtue* and *End in Creation* as parts of a single argument which holds that the love of God is the necessary context for all truly moral acts and that morality finds its proper ground and fulfilment in authentic religion. The process of retrieving this position must proceed through successive stages. First, it must account for the ambiguity of contemporary interpretations of these essays; secondly, it must provide a new hermeneutic of the texts; finally, it must locate, however briefly, this retrieved position in current discussions on Christian ethics.[9] Morality and love of God are unified in

[4] Jonathan Edwards, *Dissertation concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, ed. Samuel Austin, *The Works of President Edwards* 2 (reprint of the Worcester edition 1808–9, with some additions) 191–257.

[5] Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Meridian, 1959) 287.

[6] William K. Frankena, Foreword to *True Virtue* vii.

[7] Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* 2 (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1959) 265.

[8] Clebsch, *Thought* 50.

[9] This threefold approach to textual investigation is indicated in Hans Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, eds. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1965).

this latter stage of Edwards' thought by his argument that virtuous acts must be *dependent upon* the love of God and *subordinate to* the good of Being in general. These essays do not offer a prescriptive Christian ethics replete with norms and principles of conduct. Rather, they present the ultimate foundation of ethics (a metaethics) in the beauty of a personal response to God, the convergence of duty and enjoyment in a pattern which is based upon the comprehensive paradigm of God's own agency in creation.

ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

A major problem in this retrieval of Edwards' thought is the failure of some of the best available commentaries to appreciate this ultimate grounding of religion and morality. Roland Delattre and Clyde Holbrook emphasize the difference between the two types of morality presented in *True Virtue*, namely, a religious morality which is founded on the beauty of personal consent to Being and a strictly natural morality which is based upon the beauty of harmony and proportion. This reading makes it difficult to integrate particular moral choices into the comprehensive "benevolence to Being." Miller and Clebsch take another tack which more seriously compromises Edwards' theological foundations. By divorcing *True Virtue*'s philosophical approach from its counterpart in *End in Creation*, they give the impression that Edwards' final intention was to accommodate the individual to a harmonious relationship with the universe rather than to persist in seeking personal assent to a gracious and sovereign God. Edwards' ontology of participation demands that the image be measured by the original; since the divine paradigm of virtuous agency is one of personal consent, the human image of virtue must also be one of personal consent rather than harmony with an impersonal system of being. Only *End in Creation* provides this paradigm of virtuous agency.

Delattre presents an intricate account of the new sensibility which the convert has of the divine beauty. He is careful to note that this new awareness occurs simultaneously with the disclosure of the divine personal excellence. Edwards' account of experience neither resolves the object into the subject nor limits the subject's role to a passive reception of the object. The transformation of believers happens as they appreciate the divine holiness and move beyond self-interest in that appreciation. *True Virtue* subsequently defines this appreciation as the "primary beauty" of a personal consent to God which benevolently delights in His objective excellence. This "cordial consent" which includes moral action is distinguished from a lesser or "secondary beauty." Both of these forms of beauty arise from consenting elements. Natural beauty, however, arises from the natural harmony of order and proportion. This beauty is not

confined to physical reality but can be found in personal qualities as well. In natural justice, for example, one discovers the beauty of a response which fits the moral claim. In the natural moral sense, which contemporary philosphers such as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson championed, one discovers the beauty of self-consistent conscience and moral sentiment. Unless the moral agent is transformed by the Holy Spirit, the full personal depth of these qualities remains hidden.

"The beauty that is the law of the natural world is but the shadow of the beauty by which the spiritual world is governed."[10] This natural beauty is only an *image* of the higher or "primary" beauty, where the consenting elements are the divine Persons or humans graced by the Spirit. The natural harmony of elements derives its beauty from that which it images, the consent of hearts which extends to personal union with God. Delattre is correct in stating that Edwards' systematic power comes from employing this analogous notion of beauty as the union of consenting elements. It extends from the highest realm of personal union to the order of the physical world and thus systematically connects religion, morality, and nature. However, what seems to be missing in Delattre's treatment is an explanation of how the moral life of the believer is integrated into this consent to the beauty of God.

Holbrook also focuses on the difference between primary and secondary beauty and raises the problem of their integration. The text of *True Virtue* appears to relegate primary beauty to a lofty but impractical height which has little influence on ordinary life. Were the converts content with the secondary beauty of a morality largely unconnected with the love of God?

> This distinction suggests that Edwards' appeal to beauty in both cases masked the fact that natural morality was the more basic, universally operative value in daily life, whereas true virtue or the beauty of benevolence in its comparative rarity was differentiated by valuational height rather than by comprehensive application to the common sense world.[11]

Despite Holbrook's suggestion, internal evidence in *True Virtue* indicates that ordinary moral motives and choices are dependent upon and subordinate to the love of God. In Edwards' view, therefore, the genuine believers did not operate on two tiers, normally in the mode of secondary beauty and only occasionally in the fuller religious dimension of primary beauty. The virtue of the Christian should be integrally moral and religious in every moral decision and personal relationship. This concern

[10] Roland Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1968) 187.

[11] Clyde Holbrook, *The Ethics of Jonathan Edwards* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1973) 170.

for integration is at the heart of both *End in Creation* and *True Virtue* and has a more central function than the definitions of the two forms of beauty (a distinction missing from *End in Creation*). God's consent to creatures in relation to His own glory sets the paradigm for this integration, the original pattern which virtuous human agency images. The hermeneutic of these essays presented here will treat this integration of morality and religion first.

A second contemporary interpretation tends to divorce the philosophical stance of these later essays from the theological doctrines which had previously occupied Edwards. Miller's masterly summary of his thought and career, which appeared in 1949, proved to be the stimulus that revived interest in Edwards. He portrayed the pastor of Northampton as "intellectually the most modern man of his age," able to synthesize Newtonian physics and Lockean empiricism with a nascent historical consciousness.[12] Although not discounting the influence of traditional Christian belief on Edwards' life, Miller does detect an undercurrent of "naturalism." In *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, a collection of notes Edwards kept throughout his career, Miller found "a secret and sustained effort to work out a new sense of the divinity of nature and the naturalness of divinity."[13]

This naturalistic reading also tends to redefine Edwards' aesthetics as more cosmic than theistic. Miller occasionally identifies the consent of virtue to "Being in general" with consent to the universe or world system.[14] This systematic aesthetics takes on a different cast if one sees love of the universe rather than love of God at its center. If virtuous consent is extended to approval of the world system, which may include God as its guiding statesman, the religious aesthetics of Edwards becomes transposed into an impersonal sense of cosmic beauty. Clebsch follows this interpretation. "The religious life equals the good life equals the beautiful life—a life made proportionate and proper and harmonious by the divine artist, a life lived at home in the universe."[15] Because he fails to link *True Virtue*'s philosophical language with the theological formulation of *End in Creation*, Clebsch appears to confuse the impersonal beauty of proportion with the primary beauty which comes from consenting to others in consenting to God. He makes an appeal for a life of

[12] Miller, *Edwards* 305.

[13] Perry Miller, Introduction to Jonathan Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1948) 18.

[14] Miller, *Edwards* 295.

[15] Clebsch, *Thought* 56. The definition of religion in this work is so attenuated that it would seem to include any humanistic reflection: "Here religious thought means the reasoned, the cogent, and the evocative consideration of ways in which the human spirit of Americans seriously and strenuously relates itself to nature, to society and to deity" (2).

secondary beauty in response to a text which is devoted to arguing its inadequacy! In contrast to both Miller and Clebsch, the hermeneutic presented here does not agree that in *True Virtue* Edwards is restating "the essence of his thought nontheologically."[16] Rather, it will argue in the second part of the analysis that his aesthetics has a religious foundation and that the love of God establishes the comprehensive context for genuine morality.

Undoubtedly the strictly philosophical mode of argument of *True Virtue* and of the first part of *End in Creation* has contributed to interpreting them as a retreat from theology. In both essays Edwards was responding to eighteenth-century deism, to Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, who maintained that morality could be explained adequately without reference to God.[17] In the middle chapters of *True Virtue* he faults them for deleting God from morality on their own philosophical grounds. The first part of the *End in Creation* (the only part cited in *True Virtue*) explains that the author has adopted a strictly rational point of view because most of the objections to scriptural teaching "have been from the pretended dictates of reason."[18] This philosophical section is presented not instead of Scripture but as a propedeutic which will prepare the mind and heart to assent to scriptural revelation. The second part of *End in Creation* relies heavily on Scripture and traditional theological positions now reframed in the language of participation and emanation of being. Evidence within the essays themselves, therefore, explains adequately this shift to a philosophical presentation. Miller's imputations of the author's weariness or secret naturalism go beyond the evidence.

A further reason for this turn to the language of being from the religious phenomenology of religious experience in *Religious Affections* may be Edwards' stress on the objective character of beauty. Beauty is not only in the eye of the beholder or in the intensity of the beholder's affections. True beauty is founded on objective structures of being, as Delattre states.

> Beauty is constituted by objective relations of consent and dissent among beings, relations into which the subject (or beholder) may enter and participate but the beauty of which is defined by conformity to God ... rather than by the degree of subjective pleasure.[19]

Our analysis will begin with a presentation of these objective relations of consent. Moral acts are integrated into the love of God, according to

[16] Ibid. 49.
[17] Edwards, *True Virtue*, chap. 5.
[18] Edwards, *End* 199.
[19] Delattre, *Beauty* 22.

these essays, by being *dependent upon* and *subordinate to* this benevolence towards God. For economy's sake, we will refer to this principle of integration as "the principle of the two criteria." The second part of the analysis will consider the two forms of beauty and develop the religious character of Edwards' aesthetics.

TRUE VIRTUE: TOWARDS A NEW HERMENEUTIC

A perennial problem of Christian ethics lies behind the argument of *True Virtue*: If love is the summation of the whole moral life, what is the status of the other virtues? In normative terms, if the great commandment to love God and neighbor sums up the law and the prophets, what becomes of all the lesser commandments? The scholastic resolution of this problem posited charity as the form of the infused virtues, as prudence was the form of the moral virtues.[20] The recent debate over situation ethics raised the same question: love would suffice as the basic moral motivation and single norm for action; any recourse to moral principles would slip into legalism.

In *Religious Affections* Edwards had partially resolved the problem by specifying Christian love as the basic source of all virtuous affections. The gift of the Holy Spirit and the new sensibility which appreciated the beauty of God transformed the agent's character by transforming the "affections," the dispositions that are the wellsprings of action. All of these converted dispositions are expressions of the fundamental disposition of love for God which the revelation of His moral excellence evoked. However, the precise role of moral reflection in the converted life remains vague in this treatise. Even though Edwards insists upon moral practice as the surest sign of authentic conversion, he does not specify the role of particular commands and virtues in bringing about this moral practice. Indeed, one wonders how necessary such norms would be for the saints, because he indicates a form of immediate discernment of duty.

> When a holy and amiable action is suggested to the thoughts of a holy soul; that soul, if in the lively exercise of its spiritual taste, at once sees a beauty in it, and so inclines to it, and closes with it.[21]

The love of God is not a further intention added to moral actions after religious conversion, because for Edwards the intention of the act defines the action. The same external behavior observed in a Christian and an unconverted person are two different types of action, not the same act

[20] Cf. Edwards on love in *Religious Affections:* "But it is doubtless true, and evident from these Scriptures that the essence of all true religion lies in holy love; and that in this divine affection, and an habitual disposition to it, and that light which is the foundation of it, and those things which are the fruits of it consists the whole of religion" (107).

[21] Edwards, *Religious Affections* 281.

with different intentions. But if this redefinition of moral action is so complete, what role do moral standards play? Are standards of mercy, justice, honesty, and the rest swallowed up in the single intention of loving God?[22]

In order to address this problem of the universality of the love command and the particularity of moral norms and virtues, Edwards moves to a more abstract level of moral reflection. His attention shifts from the agent to the act, from a phenomenology of the affections to what we would call today a metaethical justification of his position. Aiken and Gustafson have made a helpful distinction of four levels of moral discourse.[23] *Emotive* preferences, if challenged, are justified by appeal to some accepted *moral* norm. If the validity of the moral norm is questioned, recourse is often had to more fundamental *ethical* principles, such as the golden rule, the categorical imperative, or social utility. However, if even these reasons are questioned, one would have to move beyond ethics as such to *metaethics.* This would include one's fundamental reasons for being moral: the notion of the good life, basic beliefs about God, the world, and human persons which make the struggle to be moral worth while.[24] *True Virtue* and *End in Creation* contain Edwards' metaethical reflections on the nature of beauty, its foundation in God, and its comprehensive ordering of the moral life towards consent to God.

First Criterion: Virtue Dependent upon Benevolence

In order to show that moral values and standards find their proper support by being integrated into the love of God, Edwards develops the pattern we will term "the principle of the two criteria." This principle takes the basic pattern of the moral act he had developed previously and applies it to the response to God. Edwards always began with the union of disposition and object, the connaturality between affection and its appropriate goal. One would misread him if the subject/object dichotomy or noumenal/phenomenal distinction were detected here. To distinguish disposition and object does not imply a temporal or logical priority of either; the two must be found together. In *Religious Affections* the gift of the new sensibility and the disclosure of its object, God's moral excellence, are given simultaneously to the agent. In *Freedom of the Will* he argued that there is no faculty independent of an attractive object: "the will is as the greatest apparent good."[25] The first criterion, therefore,

[22] Ibid. 423.

[23] Henry David Aiken, *Reason and Conduct* (New York: Knopf, 1962) 65–87.

[24] James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968) chap. 1.

[25] Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will,* ed. Paul Ramsey, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* 1 (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1957) 143.

refers to the dispositional pole of this relation, the second criterion to the object pole. Since they mutually define each other, our analysis cannot avoid treating the object as we attend to the disposition and vice versa. Edwards expresses this principle in negative fashion:

> No affection whatsoever to any creature, nor any system of created beings, which is not dependent upon, nor subordinate to a propensity of union of the heart to God, the supreme and infinite Being, can be of the nature of true virtue.[26]

God is not the only object of virtuous affection, but only if other beings are integrated into the love of God can they be loved virtuously.

To begin with those affections which fail to have the scope of true virtue, we shall start with "private affections, detached from general benevolence."[27] Edwards maintains that "private affections" invariably come into conflict with public or common interests. Divisive behavior flows from the clash between selfish interests and the common good. A private affection is concerned only with some limited portion of reality, whereas a "general benevolence" is directed towards the good of the whole. Only those dispositions which manifest this general benevolence are truly virtuous, because nothing is truly virtuous or beautiful unless all its relations are beautiful. Only from such a comprehensive judgment can anything be termed *truly* beautiful. As a result, a virtuous consent to another person must have a universal reference, must reach out to appreciate that person in relation to being in general. Because it is general, this disposition extends beyond the particular to the whole of reality; because this disposition is benevolent, it must have "intelligent being" as its correlative object, not some inanimate or impersonal "Being."[28] Hence it is not surprising that *True Virtue*'s author identifies this comprehensive and intelligent being in general with God.

What disposition in the human subject can correlate with the goodness and reality of God as its object? Only a disposition which is compounded of benevolence and complacence, with benevolence being more fundamental. Edwards turns to the beauty of God in Himself for the paradigm of human virtuous consent, since in God both virtue and beauty are grounded ultimately. God could not be beautiful primarily because of complacent delight in His own beautiful qualities, since this would entail a circularity of the two: complacence founded upon beauty founded on complacence ad infinitum. If benevolence in God were the basis of the divine beauty, the same circularity would result. Beauty is always a relation of consenting elements in Edwards, so finally this consent must rest on something besides consent. Consent cannot be grounded on

[26] Edwards, *True Virtue* 22.
[27] Ibid. 19.
[28] Ibid. 5.

consent without falling into infinite regress. The only remaining possibility is that the consent of benevolence rests not on beauty but on being itself. Being itself must have a goodness to which virtuous benevolence consents. The benevolent consent of love is what is truly beautiful in God or in human persons; however, this love is not based upon beauty but upon the disposition of benevolence towards being, "simply considered."[29] (Thus the long identification of God and Being in the Western religious and philosophical tradition emerges at the origins of American thought.[30]) Now it should be clear why private affections are deficient. They are deformed and not truly beautiful because they do not extend to being in general.

Edwards uses this first criterion of a general benevolence to rule out the other candidates for the basic disposition of virtue which have been proposed by moral philosophers. A natural sense of desert or the self-consistency of conscience has been mistaken for true virtue because "in many cases of these natural affections there appears the tendency and effect of benevolence in part."[31] Only the comprehensive viewpoint of general benevolence makes "the narrowness of their views appear." There is no inherent deformity in any of these other dispositions except self-love. It alone fails to rise to that mutuality that characterizes benevolence; hence it is only rarely mistaken as the basis of morality. Deists and nonreligious moral philosophers overlook the narrowness of their conception of morality because they neglect this ultimate frame of reference.

> And above all, that they are so ready to leave the divine Being out of their view, and to neglect him in their thoughts and consideration, or to regard him in their thoughts as though he did not properly belong to the system of real existence, but was a kind of shadowy, imaginary being.[32]

From the Neoplatonic perspective this is the ultimate epistemological irony: these philosophers have reversed the image and the reality. They take the partial goodness of natural dispositions for the full reality; but in fact these principles are its images, manifesting only in part the tendency of benevolence towards Being.

The solution to this error is not better argumentation but religious conversion. Only the grace of God can produce the new sensibility which can perceive the beauty of God, as the final chapter of *True Virtue* repeats the teaching of *Religious Affections*. Religious transformation would enable the philosophers to penetrate these images of benevolence

[29] Ibid. 8.

[30] Cf. Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949).

[31] Edwards, *True Virtue* 85.

[32] Ibid. 87.

to the reality. This error radically indicates their corruption as fallen human persons.[33] Yet there is still some moral value in the image. The same persons who would reject hedonism or selfishness as too petty to be virtuous will welcome dispositions such as patriotism or nationalism, even though these may well be instances of group selfishness. These wider concerns have at least the tendency of general benevolence and produce some of its effects.

Complacence is the secondary disposition of true virtue and it operates by approving virtue and disapproving vice. Strictly natural reasons can be given for the same moral judgments; hence natural dispositions such as self-consistency, conscience, and the moral sense are often mistaken as the basis of virtuous approval and criticism. The resemblance of these principles to true virtue wins Edwards' grudging admiration. He concedes more to them than he had in previous writings, where all natural dispositions were supposed to originate from self-love. Here he allows that they possess "a negative moral goodness" because they restrain wickedness and clarify the dictates of natural moral sense.[34] Only selfishness is sinful, for it totally fails to meet either of the two criteria, a deformity which leaves no image of true virtue in it. "All sin has its source from selfishness or from a self-love not subordinate to a regard to being in general."[35]

The believer has a real knowledge of the realities of faith, a sensible and cognitive experiential knowledge which goes beyond the merely notional. One must turn to the sermons and the diaries which Samuel Hopkins published after Edwards' death for his own experience of this dependence upon God which lay at the heart of benevolence. It was the opposite of self-righteousness and inordinate self-confidence. In his youthful fervor he admits that he had "sought an increase of grace and holiness.... But with too great a dependence upon my own strength, which afterwards proved a great damage to me."[36] As a young student, he wrote in a time of spiritual dullness:

> There is no dependence upon myself. It is to no purpose to resolve, except we depend on the grace of God; for if it were not His mere grace, one might be a very good man one day, and a very wicked one the next.[37]

The sermon "God Glorified in Man's Dependence" expresses the antidote to such self-reliance, the radical human obligation to glorify God by

[33] See ibid. 92.

[34] Ibid. 91.

[35] Ibid. 92.

[36] David Levin, ed., *Jonathan Edwards: A Profile* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969) 29.

[37] Ibid. 11. "I have vastly a greater sense, of my universal exceeding dependence on God's grace and strength, and mere good pleasures, of late, than I used formerly to have; and have experienced more of an abhorrence of my own righteousness" (ibid. 83).

loving acknowledgment of human dependence upon Him. This is the affection which properly correlates with the absolute and pervasive sovereignty of God that was central to Edwards' religious experience as a true Reformed Christian. A sense of utter dependence upon God serves to "command and oblige the attention and observation" to discover the divine glory "which way soever we turn our eyes."[38] Dependence fosters a joyful humility and gratitude, dispositions which were only heightened by a Calvinist conviction of human depravity apart from God.

> Faith is a sensibleness of what is real in the work of redemption; and as we do really wholly depend on God, so the soul that believes doth entirely depend on God for all salvation, in its own sense and act. Faith abases men, and exalts God, it gives all the glory of redemption to God alone.[39]

The dignity of the creature in relation to God does not grow in inverse proportion to its dependence on the sovereign Lord but in direct proportion. *True Virtue* and *End in Creation* translate this affection of dependence into philosophical terms by arguing that moral acts are dependent upon the divine source of benevolence. Just as the dignity of the creature would be impossible to preserve apart from the sovereign purposes of God, so a morality which sought autonomy from religion would sunder itself from its proper foundations. The inclusion of the moral act within love of God images the proper relation between creature and Creator, as we shall see below. On the dispositional pole, therefore, "love to God is most essential to true virtue ... no benevolence whatsoever to other beings can be of the nature of true virtue without it."[40]

Second Criterion: Virtue Subordinate to Being in General

The second criterion for the integration of moral acts into the fundamental orientation whose "object" is God is the subordination of virtuous acts to the benevolence to being in general. We need to consider first the virtuous appreciation of other persons, then the appreciation of values and principles, and finally how it is possible for God Himself to be the ultimate object of benevolence and complacence.

Private affections are correlative with "private systems of being." The object of these dispositions is "any system or society of beings that contains but a small part of the great system, comprehending the universality of existence."[41] This raises the question whether finite agents can break out of their limited loyalties to appreciate the whole of being. Although Edwards cites common observation as his only evidence that these lesser loyalties are in competition with the comprehensive loyalty, one suspects that the doctrines of original sin and the depravity of fallen

[38] Simonson, *Selected Writings* 59.
[39] Ibid. 63.
[40] Edwards, *True Virtue* 18.
[41] Loc. cit.

human nature lie behind this stance. Whether they are competitive or not, there is a qualitative difference between lesser concerns and the ultimate concern. "The religious relationship demands an absolute allegiance which distinguishes it from all limited loyalties having finite objects and causes as their aim."[42]

At first glance, to speak of loving others in "subordination" to anything seems less than moral. Such language conjures up images of using other persons instrumentally for selfish purposes, or loving them only because there is no more direct way to love God. Here the teleological dimension of Edwards' thought must be carefully charted. Human agency and purposefulness should be an image of God's purposes in creating the world, because this latter is its moral paradigm. In *End in Creation* he derives philosophically these purposes of divine agency. The goodness of any creature is the one for which the divine author designed the creature. Therefore "they are good moral agents, who are fitted for the end for which God has made moral agents."[43] If God's purpose for human persons is that they should enjoy His glory through knowledge, love, and joy, then it follows that the basic duty of persons is to seek this end both for themselves and for others. The fundamental obligation towards others is to love them in a way that will help them attain this end.

No "natural end of man" is distinguished here, as if the moral agent could be examined in isolation from the religious finality of human nature. God seeks a destiny for human persons which includes and surpasses their moral fulfilment, namely, the religious end of the communication of His glory to creatures able to appreciate it. "This is actually the last end of the moral goodness required of them; the end which gives their moral goodness its chief value."[44] The nonmoral good of union with God grounds the moral good and orders human purposes to a more comprehensive finality. This is what Edwards means by "subordination" of moral choice to religious ultimacy, a subordination which links him to Augustine, as Gustafson notes:

> Jonathan Edwards, the greatest theologian in American history, shared this Augustinian vision in which the nonmoral and the moral aspects of the good were held together.... The moral life is primarily understood in terms of a proper fundamental orientation, in this case, benevolence to being in general. The chief

[42] John E. Smith, Introduction to *Religious Affections* 48. The relationship of limited and ultimate loyalties can be complementary because true conversion reveals the foundation of moral agency. "The religious dimension involves viewing our life and experience as having a ground and final purpose" (ibid. 63). Smith expresses in a contemporary formulation the principle of the two criteria.

[43] Edwards, *End* 224.

[44] Ibid. 234.

end of man is to love and glorify God. By having this *telos*, one can be rightly ordered toward other beings.[45]

The moral task of the believer is not simply to love others complacently but, more especially, benevolently. If the believer only appreciates others for their moral excellence, this is insufficient. The moral responsibility of the believer is to love others in a way that promotes their holiness. The perfection of human agency emerges as it begins to resemble its paradigm, the divine agency in creation. In Platonic terms, the image becomes clearer, more valuable, and more itself as it approaches the reality which is its archetype.[46] Because *End in Creation* specifies this archetype, it serves a crucial role in interpreting *True Virtue*. The "good of Being in general" is the purpose of God in creating; it is not the harmony of the cosmos but the communication of His glory in union with human persons.[47]

Moral principles and values have a further subordination in this scheme: they make a claim on the moral agent because of the worth of other moral agents. In *Religious Affections* Edwards has shown that love is the primary affection because it functions as the source of all the other virtuous affections.[48] He argues from this that all duties are derived from the fundamental command to love God and neighbor. In his *Treatise on Grace* every moral obligation stems from the proper respect which God and human persons deserve. Duties and principles, therefore, are taken in second place. Primacy belongs to benevolence or love, which is directed to personal objects. Love sets the context for understanding moral claims as well as inspiring the agent to fulfil them.

> Love to God and men implies all proper respect or regard to God and men; and all proper acts and expressions of regard to both will flow from it, and therefore all duty to both. And therefore, a proper regard or love comprehends all virtue of the heart, and he that shews all proper regard to God and men in his practice, performs all that in practice towards them is his duty.[49]

Moral principles are "subordinate to" proper love for others; they are actualized only within proper personal relationships; and their claim upon the moral agent is derived from the claim which these others have upon

[45] James M. Gustafson, in Outka and Reeder, *Religion and Morality* 152–53.

[46] Edwards, *True Virtue* 25.

[47] See Clyde A. Holbrook, "Edwards and the Ethical Question," *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (1967) 169.

[48] Edwards, *Religious Affections* 106.

[49] Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, ed. Paul Helm (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971) 47.

the agent. In the same way, moral appreciation of others is subordinate to love of God and actualized within it.

A beneficial impact on moral virtues and principles comes from correctly aligning particular loyalties to this ultimate allegiance. For example, virtuous benevolence can broaden the scope of natural compassion.

> It excites compassion in cases that are overlooked by natural instinct; and even in those cases to which instinct extends, it mixes its influence with the natural principle, and guides and regulates its operations. And when this is the case, the pity which it exercises may be called a virtuous compassion.[50]

The new sensibility for divine beauty given in conversion did not supplant human capacities nor add a new faculty to the convert. This new "principle" operates through the natural faculties and ordinary dispositions but orients them to a new depth and exercise in the service of love. Without such a transformation, the natural moral instincts of pity, familial affection, gratitude, and the rest are restricted to limited numbers of persons and cannot extend to a universal concern. These instincts cannot appreciate the objects of their concern as they truly are, as images of the divine beauty; hence they are not appreciated "subordinate to" the good of Being. Acting in accord with these natural instincts, the unconverted agent may produce results beneficial to the human community but will remain blind to their full personal import. Benevolence to Being in general will influence these instincts to make them more personal and humane and balanced.

> [General benevolence] softens and sweetens the mind, makes it more susceptible of the proper influence of the gentler natural instincts, directs every one in its proper channel, determines the exercise to the proper manner and measure, and guides all to the best purposes.[51]

Moral principles are not weakened by being subordinate to this ultimate end, because this subordination does not make them merely instrumental but rather co-ordinates and strengthens their operation.

This subordination of norms and values to the comprehensive good of being has an additional moral function: it forms the basis for moral discernment. The truly virtuous person can discern some of the divine beauty in the ways that lead to God. In *Religious Affections* Edwards had reported that the converts of the Great Awakening could perceive a loveliness in the rules of the gospel which instructed them in their duty and motivated their obedience. Although this discernment varied with the maturity of the individual's sanctity, the converts found the particu-

[50] Edwards, *True Virtue* 95. [51] Ibid. 97.

lars of duty invested with some trace of the loveliness which had drawn them to God. The beauty of the end is discerned in the means:

> That which men love, they desire to have and to be united to, and possessed of. The beauty which men delight in, they desire to be adorned with. Those acts which men delight in, they necessarily incline to do.[52]

Edwards carefully distinguished this discernment from an ethics of direct command from the divine commander; such was the province of "enthusiasts" in his time. *True Virtue* provides the justification for this discernment. Because the whole moral life is an integral part of the "cordial" consent of love of God, it participates in the beauty to which it leads. A rare admission in his diaries gives an example of the intense personal appreciation which this integration evoked in Edwards.

> Another Saturday night, January, 1738–9, [I] had such a sense, how sweet and blessed a thing it was, to walk in the way of duty, to do that which was right and meet to be done, and agreeable to the holy mind of God; that it caused me to break forth into a kind of loud weeping, which held me for some time.... I could not but as it were cry out, "How happy are they which do that which is right in the sight of God! They are blessed indeed, they are the happy ones!" I had at the same time, a very affecting sense, how meet and suitable it was that God should govern the world, and order all things according to his own pleasure; and I rejoiced in it, that God reigned, and that his will was done.[53]

God as the Object of Benevolence

Our final consideration on this object pole of the disposition-object correlation is the manner in which Being in general or God is the object of virtue's consent. Here we discover the foundation of all virtuous consent, the "dignity" of the object which is the compound of existence and excellence which correlates to the compound on the dispositional pole of benevolence and complacence.

Some would object that benevolence is impossible towards a being who cannot profit in any way from the creature's action. Edwards asserts to the contrary that it is loving to rejoice in God's greatness and also to show gratitude to Him by offering one's energies to promote His glory. Neither activity supplements His goodness, which is already objectively infinite. However, they do increase the splendor or "glory" of that goodness, diffusing it in the communication of knowledge and love. "Having an ultimate propensity to the highest good of being in general" is identical with promoting the glory of God.

This reference to God as an "object" for human persons raises some problems today. Is Edwards reducing God to the status of a being

[52] Edwards, *Religious Affections* 394. [53] Levin, *Edwards* 39.

alongside other beings? There are places where he identifies God with existence itself. Elwood argues that the latter usage is fundamental, citing Edwards' "Miscellanies": "An infinite being, therefore, must be an all-comprehending being. He must comprehend in himself all being."[54] While a case may be made for a variety of panentheism in Edwards, a more modest resolution is found in the text of *True Virtue* itself. "Object" language is applicable to God only when comparison is made to other objects of *human dispositions*. Edwards is aware of the danger of reducing God to the same scale as other beings.

> If the Deity is to be looked upon as within that system of beings which properly terminates our benevolence, or belonging to that whole, certainly he is to be regarded as the head of the system and the chief part of it; if it is proper to call him a part, who is infinitely more than all the rest, in comparison of whom, and without whom all the rest are nothing, either as to beauty or existence.[55]

No actual comparison of the creature with the Creator is possible, because the distance between image and reality is so great: the image is not competitor but only a shadow.

True virtue consents to God not exclusively on the basis of being but also on account of His excellence. Thus there is a compound in the object which correlates with the dispositions of benevolence and complacence. This compound in the object is called its "dignity." Since God is the greatest both in being and excellence, "the greatest and best of beings," it is fitting that He should be the object of humans' highest regard.[56] Lesser realities have a relative dignity because they image this archetype. Their objective worth must be always considered in relation to the objective dignity of unlimited Being.

> He who loves being, simply considered, will naturally, other things being equal, love particular beings in a proportion compounded of the degree of being and degree of virtue, or benevolence to being, which they have. And that is to love beings in proportion to their dignity.[57]

Existence itself must have its own value apart from any scale of preference or utility. "Existence is more worthy than defect and non-entity, and . . . any created existence is in itself worthy to be."[58]

One might question the legitimacy of referring to a greater or lesser "share of existence," as Edwards does. Not only does he make this

[54] Edwards, "Miscellany," no. 697. Douglas Elwood justifies this position as nonpantheistic by invoking the thought of Paul Tillich. While such a justification may illumine Edwards' intentions, it certainly does not reproduce them. See Douglas Elwood, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1960) 26.

[55] Edwards, *True Virtue* 17.

[56] Edwards, *End* 200.

[57] Edwards, *True Virtue* 38.

[58] Edwards, *End* 205.

presumption of a quantitative estimation of existence, but he transposes his judgment from the quantitative to the qualitative. More existence means greater worth. There seems to be a hierarchical scale of objects based on their dignity, and objects have greater existence and worth the further they are removed from nonexistence. In a vivid if puzzling image, we find that "an archangel must be supposed to have more existence and to be every way further removed from non-entity, than a worm."[59] If existence is considered strictly as a brute fact, one cannot speak of degrees of existence; either X is or X is not. Since Kant, this has been the prevailing philosophical conception of existence. However, Edwards' doctrine comes from a different tradition and depends upon the notion that all existence is a participation in the existence of the Creator. Beings which are capable of knowledge and love bear a greater resemblance to the Creator. And the more these powers are operative, the more that resemblance and conformity develop. As the image becomes progressively more perfect, the esteem of the Creator for the creature grows proportionately.

In concluding this section on the integration of objects into the consent of virtue to God, we can sketch the principle of the two criteria in a diagram. Any adequate conceptual scheme for metaethics must necessarily reflect the divine sovereignty; God must be first and last. Consent of particular beings must in turn image the divine consent to objects in proportion to their dignity. Morality is thereby included in the comprehensive orientation of love of God, without God or being in general holding exclusive position as the object of virtue.

DISPOSITION	*OBJECT*
Love of God	God
as	according to His
Benevolence	Being
and	and
Complacence	Excellence
by relation of dependence	by relation of subordination

virtuous love of particulars
in proportion to their
Being and Excellence
(Dignity)

Principle of the Two Criteria in the Divine Agency

End in Creation manifests the same pattern for integrating morality into love of God which Edwards employs in *True Virtue*, which was

[59] Edwards, *True Virtue* 9.

written shortly after *End.* Human virtue is an image of the original pattern of agency; hence one can argue analogously from image to original, from type to archetype. Although the dependence and subordination of virtuous love to love of God is derived in *True Virtue* from analysis of human affections, it finds support in the conclusion of the earlier essay. "It will also follow from the foregoing things, that God's goodness and love to created things is derived from, and subordinate to his love to himself."[60] God's existence must be the object of the divine consent rather than some goal extrinsic to the divinity.

A problem of interpretation arises here. For Edwards, benevolence always implies some form of mutuality of agents. Yet how does the simple existence of God provide an object of benevolent consent? Edwards alludes to the plurality of persons in God which the traditional doctrine of the Trinity maintains: it is a fitting theological complement to the position which he has derived philosophically. In fact, it may function more as a supposition than a complement. The divine love must consist primarily in "love to himself, or in the mutual love and friendship which subsists eternally and necessarily between the several persons in the Godhead."[61]

God's intentionality in creation manifests the first criterion. His purpose in creation is not dependent upon any goal extrinsic to Himself. God is sovereignly independent because He is ontologically sufficient. He creates not out of need but out of fulness. This implies that God did not create for the sake of human creatures; their happiness is not the end of creation. The later Edwardseans drove this to such severe limits under pressure of debate with their Unitarian opponents that divine sufficiency looked monstrously selfish. Edwards himself held that God's sovereignty would be compromised if it depended upon the response of His creatures. An equally unpalatable feature of making human fulfilment the goal of creation is that God would be obliged to be gracious in redeeming those He had created. In contrast, God takes delight freely in the human response to what is most excellent in the universe (His own being), "because he loves not because he needs them."[62]

There is nothing morally reprehensible in God's subordinating the interests of creatures to His own "interest," because the two purposes coincide. If God's own being is what is most excellent in the universe, the appreciation of that objective good in knowledge and love must also be supremely excellent. Rational creatures find their happiness precisely in enjoying that good in knowledge and love, a participation which further diffuses that excellence. Therefore it would be false to pit their interests against that of God or see them as merely instrumental to His glory.

[60] Ibid. 23.
[61] Loc. cit.
[62] Edwards, *End* 218.

This same subordination is found in the divine approval of moral principles. *End in Creation* presents the archetype of human appreciation of moral principles mentioned in the *Treatise on Grace*: all moral principles arise from a proper regard to God and neighbor. Since God is not merely part of being but is all-comprehending being, His interest is not selfish but identical with that of the whole. Hence it is not cosmic selfishness but divine self-consistency that explains God's approval of moral standards. His sovereignty does not imply that He is morally arbitrary, for "God's love for justice, and hatred of injustice, would be sufficient . . . to induce God to deal justly with his creatures, and to prevent all injustice in him towards them."[63] Neither principles nor persons are autonomous in this scheme; their worth rests on the divine consent to Being. God is just because He is loving and consistent with Himself, not because justice has autonomous moral standing over and above the divine agency. The old conundrum that infinite power and freedom could not be restricted by moral standards is finally vacuous. God consents to His own being because of its objective dignity. To be self-consistent, He must have an analogous consent to the dignity of rational finite beings. Respect for their dignity means only that God is being consistent with Himself. "The moral rectitude of God's heart must consist in a proper and due respect of his heart to things that are objects of moral respect; that is to intelligent beings capable of moral actions and relations."[64]

This respect sets the paradigm for virtuous neighbor love. God respects moral agents because they are capable of those relations of consent that are inherently beautiful, not because they are useful to God. It follows that neighbor love must not be instrumental but founded on respect of others' dignity. They are not in any competition with the ultimate object of benevolence, because approval of them coincides with love of God's glory. It also follows that human love of God should not be instrumental. Edwards does not go so far as Anders Nygren in insisting that agape be totally devoid of self-referential interest.[65] Self-love exercises an auxiliary role in love of God, but appreciation for God's beauty as good in itself is what grounds genuine love for God. Just as aesthetic appreciation for a beautiful object allows it to remain as it is, so benevolence towards a personal object is not acquisitive. In his diaries Edwards describes the experience of loving God as an engaged indifference.

> The sweetest joys and delights I have experienced, have not been those that have arisen from a hope of my own good estate, but in a direct view of the glorious

[63] Ibid. 219.
[64] Ibid. 201.
[65] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

things of the gospel. When I enjoy this sweetness, it seems to carry me above the thoughts of my own self estate. It seems at such times a loss that I cannot bear, to take off my eye from the glorious, pleasant object I behold without me, to turn my eye in upon myself and my own good estate.[66]

In summary, benevolence to Being or love of God must be the context for all moral acts whether in God or in finite moral agents. Even though moral approval of other persons or principles is integrated into this love of God, these objects are respected for their own objective dignity. True virtue is not relegated to some lofty but impractical height by this arrangement. Rather, the integration of moral acts into the orientation to God which the principle of the two criteria indicates expresses the integrity of the moral and religious dimensions of Christian experience. This integration can be appreciated affectively, since the objective structures of dependence and subordination have their correlates in the believer's religious affections. *True Virtue* and *End in Creation* provide the metaethical justification for including the moral life within the consent to God. While in *Religious Affections* he argued from the experience of the believer, in these essays he attends to the patterns of being on which that experience depends. Finally, by prescinding from revelation, Edwards has been able to demonstrate the philosophical inconsistency of those who separate morality from the consent to Being.

Hence it appears that those schemes of religion or moral philosophy which . . . have not a supreme regard to God and a love to him laid as a foundation, and all other virtues handled in a connection with this, and in subordination to it, are not schemes of philosophy, but are fundamentally and essentially defective.[67]

The Beauty of Duty

A consistent problem in interpreting *True Virtue* that is seen in Miller and Clebsch centers on the foundations of Edwards' ethics: Are these foundations religious or aesthetic? Examining the notions of primary and secondary beauty will show that this is an ethics of beauty based upon love of God rather than an ethics of love of God based on beauty. To argue that Edwards tends in these essays to a latent naturalism or moves beyond religion to a serene though impersonal appreciation of the universe ignores the actual foundations of his ethics. He consistently maintains that religious conversion is the necessary prerequisite for appreciating the full beauty of duty, even though duty possesses a secondary beauty perceptible to the unconverted.

Primary and secondary beauty have an analogous relation to each other, but the prime analogate is the beauty that arises from personal

[66] Levin, *Edwards* 35.

[67] Edwards, *True Virtue* 26.

union or "cordial consent." The social harmony of consenting hearts images the consent of the divine Being with itself and that vital union which is the Trinity. The attractiveness of personal union is not reminiscent of the order of natural beauty, of the proportion of consenting elements in beautiful architecture or a handsome profile. The opposite is the case: secondary beauty is attractive because it reminds the saints of the union of personal agents. "Therein is some image of the consent of mind of the different members of a society or system of intelligent beings, sweetly united in a benevolent agreement of heart."[68]

This insight into the resemblance which secondary beauty has to "moral, spiritual, divine and primary original beauty" penetrates ordinary morality to its personal depths.[69] Justice, and all the forms of duty, possess that proportionate order which even natural persons can appreciate. However, they remain blind to the connection which duty has to loving God. Their appreciation remains impersonal, at least to the ultimate depths of moral values, and their delight in the orderly beauty of justice is instinctual rather than insightful. When divorced from the benevolence of true virtue, this appreciation of secondary beauty has a certain cognitive shallowness to it. Edwards gives the example of two different appreciative awarenesses of music. To appreciate the beauty of a melody, one does not have to understand the principles of harmonics. The listener does not penetrate the image to the reality upon which the beauty of the music rests, because this pleasure is instinctual; it comes from a law of nature established by God.

Religious conversion does not equip the convert with a knowledge of harmonics, but it does provide a delight which is ultimately personal, supporting benevolence to Being, the experience of loving God. The music then becomes "a sensation of primary and spiritual beauty, consisting in a spiritual union and agreement." This spiritual union is the reality behind the image of secondary beauty; uniformity in the midst of variety is an image of the cordial consent to Being. This delight in primary beauty comes from "perceiving the union itself. It is the immediate view of that wherein the beauty fundamentally lies, that is pleasing to the virtuous mind."[70] The person who loves God integrates the beauty of order into the more comprehensive relation of primary beauty. Natural beauty is given a depth which it does not reveal to the unconverted. Edwards' diaries reveal the personal meaning which music had for him and the religious significance of the beauties of the forest where he often retreated for prayer. Natural beauty was a form of sacrament which God intended as revelatory.

[68] Ibid. 31.
[69] Ibid. 32.
[70] Ibid. 33.

God has so constituted nature, that the presenting of this inferior beauty, especially in those kinds of it which have the greatest resemblance of the primary beauty, as the harmony of sounds and the beauties of nature have a tendency to assist those whose hearts are under the influence of a truly virtuous temper to dispose them to the exercises of divine love, and enliven in them a sense of spiritual beauty.[71]

The converted person also appreciates the "spiritual and divine" beauty that is found in ordinary moral duties. The new sensibility given in conversion grasps the connection which moral obligations have with the general good and the glory of God. Virtues and principles reveal themselves as expressions of the love of God. All moral acts retain that beauty of order which belongs to justice but are enhanced with a higher beauty. This higher beauty integrates the beauty of order into the beauty based upon dignity, of benevolence to being.

By this it appears, that just affections and acts have a beauty in them, distinct from and superior to the uniformity and equality there is in them: for which he that has a truly virtuous temper, relishes and delights in them. And that is the expression and manifestation there is in them of benevolence to being in general. And besides this, there is the agreement of justice to the will and command of God; and also something in the tendency and consequences of justice, agreeable to general benevolence, as the glory of God, and the general good.[72]

Morality, therefore, takes on a deeper significance because it is an image of the love of God, and this deeper beauty is revealed only to those with this "temper" or "disposition to love God supremely."[73] Edwards' ethics bases its aesthetics on love of God, not its love of God on aesthetics.

More theoretical support for this conclusion comes from the Neoplatonic epistemology employed in these later essays: primary beauty is an image of the divine beauty which itself rests upon love. We have seen that virtuous human agency must image the divine paradigm, loving in a way that is dependent upon God and subordinate to His purposes. This rests upon the Neoplatonic doctrine of analogy. The hierarchy of resemblances and realities exists because "it pleases God to observe analogy in his works."[74] Each order of being is an image of the one above it; higher and lower are related as archetype to type, as original to image. This permits reason to move from one set of patterns to another by following the path of analogy. Material things are images of spiritual realities, which are in their turn "images or shadows of divine things": "I believe . . . that the whole visible creation which is but the shadow of being is so made and ordered by God as to typify and represent spiritual things."[75] The lower reality participates in the existence and the meaning

[71] Ibid. 31.
[72] Ibid. 39.
[73] Ibid. 23.
[74] Ibid. 30.
[75] Jonathan Edwards, "An Essay on the Trinity," in Helm, *Grace* 127.

of the higher level of this ascending scale of existence which culminates in the absolute archetype, the divine consent and agency. Natural beauty participates in the spiritual beauty of cordial consent. Edwards does not speak of the counterpart of true virtue as "false virtue," because the relation of primary to secondary beauty is not one of truth to falsity but true reality to the image of true reality.

The personal union of primary beauty points in its turn to the divine consent of benevolence to Being. The divine archetype structures the patterns of meaning in the universe as each lower level of existence images it forth. The basic principle binding the universe together, therefore, is love. This may be seen within God in His consent to His own being and excellence, as well as externally in the union of converted persons with one another and with God. All other attraction in the universe images this union. "Wherefore all the primary and original beauty or excellence, that is among minds, is love; and into this may all be resolved that is found among them."[76]

The unconverted person may appreciate the duty of beauty, but only in a minor key: there is the beauty of claim and response, the justice manifest in self-consistent conscience, the fitting character of happiness and virtue as well as misery and vice. The natural moral sense is sufficient cause to indicate the content of the moral life based on this appreciation of what is fitting. The consent of secondary beauty has the familiar correlation between disposition and object, even though the basis of its consent is not the "dignity" of other persons but the order of proportion and harmony. Therefore we can present this image of primary beauty in the same pattern used in the previous diagram. Secondary beauty is subsumed by primary beauty without destroying its own type of appreciation. By combining the two diagrams, this integration becomes obvious. The natural principles of secondary beauty (excluding self-love) become dispositions dependent upon love of God, and the object of secondary beauty is subordinated to the glory of God.

DISPOSITION	*OBJECT*
Love of Self	Self
or	or
Natural Conscience	Some Limited Portion
Moral Sense	of Being
Self-Consistency	
Natural Moral Instincts	

natural love of particulars
in proportion to the
beauty of order

[76] Jonathan Edwards, *Works* 1 (Dwight ed.) 699.

Although the definitions of primary and secondary beauty are obviously important for the argument of *True Virtue*, the principle of the two criteria has an even more central role in Edwards' metaethics. This principle connects *True Virtue* with the paradigm of divine agency presented in *End in Creation*. In addition, the various dispositions which philosophers have offered as the basis of morality are rejected as inadequate because they are neither dependent upon nor subordinate to love of God, not because they fail to meet the definition of primary beauty.

SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Jonathan Edwards' metaethics can provide a fresh foundation for Christian ethics in our day and new resources to respond to central problems in this discipline. Although the attention of philosophers has largely been confined to his discussion of determination in *Freedom of the Will*, his metaethical works can shed light on three basic questions: the impact of religious conversion on the moral agent, the integrity of moral values and standards when they are included in religious orientation, and the distinctive character of Christian ethics.

The transformation of the moral agent by some form of conversion has too long been neglected by Anglo-American moral philosophers. Iris Murdoch and Stanley Hauerwas among others have called for a broadening of the scope of moral philosophy beyond the confines set by the dominant Kantian paradigm.[77] The rational justification of actions and moral standards neglects the more profound motivational issues. How can moral philosophy attend to the orientations of the agent's character, and how can it direct the agent to those resources which will reorient the character, values beyond the agent which can help him to transcend innate selfishness? Murdoch proposes the experience of beauty to reorient the moral agent away from self-deception and self-aggrandizement, since beauty is the most accessible manifestation of the good. The experience of beauty has a purifying effect on all our moral commitments, as she explains in Platonic terms.

> And when we try to love what is imperfect our love goes to it *via* the Good to be thus purified and made unselfish and just . . . when [love] is even partially refined it is the energy and passion of the soul in its search for Good, the force that joins us to Good and joins us to the world through the Good.[78]

Religious Affections and the later metaethical essays are addressed precisely to the transformation of the dispositions of the moral agent through the experience of a gracious beauty. Edwards avoids the pitfall

[77] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Schocken, 1971); Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1977).

[78] Murdoch, *Sovereignty* 103.

of so many later American theologians of conversion and refuses to offer a program for manufacturing religious transformation. His phenomenology of religious affections and their impact upon ordinary moral dispositions presents a rich resource for theologians who would want to expand Christian ethics to consider the experience of the whole person over an entire personal history.

Secondly, Edwards addresses the question of the integration of moral commitments and standards into the fundamental orientation to God. True religion provides a comprehensive context of a nonmoral good which brings the moral good to a completion it could not attain on its own. John E. Smith expresses the necessary support which authentic religious experience offers to morality in terms that echo the principle of the two criteria of *True Virtue*: "Profane life without the holy would be untouched by devotion to any but finite and limited objects; self, family, profession, nation—and such life would be without conviction about a final purpose and a sense of dependence upon a transcendent source of existence."[79]

But what about the charge, at least as old as the Enlightenment, that religious causes and purposes often override human decency, that the attachment to a higher good too readily excuses abusing moral values? Edwards argues that benevolence to Being both deepens natural moral instincts and also respects the standards of duty. Secondary beauty is an image of its archetype and when included in benevolence the patterns of order in moral duties are retained. There is a formal similarity between image and original that is inviolable. A shadow depends totally upon the object which casts it, and provides a recognizable outline of that object. Hence there is at least a "negative moral goodness" in natural moral values and dispositions. As imaging forth the social consent of true beauty, they must be respected by religion even if religion declines to grant them autonomy. And when the virtuous person penetrates the image to the reality of true virtue, seeing their full personal significance in light of union with God, this does not obliterate the image. As Holbrook expresses this insistence on consistent moral practice as a necessary component of the converted Christian life, "Moral and religious obligations thus remain as a floor below which the saved could not sink, even in the face of strong, contrary influences . . . . The lure of beauty which invests benevolence rises above duty, but never falls beneath it."[80]

Is there a distinctive Christian ethics? This widely debated question feeds on its own ambiguity. It can mean "Are there values and standards that morally oblige Christians which do not oblige others?" or "Does Christian faith make any difference to the moral life of the believer in

[79] John E. Smith, *Experience and God* (London: Oxford Univ., 1968) 61.
[80] Holbrook, *Ethics* 179.

motivation, perspective, or habitual moral stance?" Edwards is surprisingly close to the Roman Catholic tradition in his answer to the first sense of the question. Because justice and moral instincts have beauty that is the image of true virtue, Christian faith does not add new obligations nor sanction new values. The natural moral sense can appreciate the fitting order of reward for virtue and punishment for vice by instinct.

> The conscience may see the natural agreement between opposing and being opposed, between hating and being hated, without abhorring malevolence from a benevolent temper of mind, or without loving God from a view of the beauty of his holiness. These things have no necessary dependence one on the other.[81]

On the other hand, the burden of *True Virtue*'s argument is that love of God has a transforming effect on moral perception and disposition. Locating response to other persons in the comprehensive framework of love which originates and terminates in God fundamentally alters the agent's moral sensibility. Duty becomes an expression of love that ultimately responds to Being in general as it meets the moral claim of the neighbor. However, *True Virtue* does not give detailed attention to the content of moral life, to prescriptive material or particular values. In part, its purpose would make that irrelevant—the metaethical justification of Christian morality is not the same as the details of responsible conduct. In part, Edwards' ethics remains one that is primarily dispositional rather than prescriptive. Only if the fundamental affections of the agent are reoriented will moral conduct be possible: transform the root and the fruit will follow.

What role does Christ play in this Christian ethics? In *Religious Affections* true religious conversion could be discerned by the Christlike dispositions that it produced: humility, meekness, gentleness of spirit, forgiveness, and the like. In addition, the convert would be wholehearted in following the prescriptive material of the gospel; but without the conversion of dispositions the convert could not obey the gospel's injunctions. Although in his sermons Edwards points to the particular attitudes and actions of the historical Jesus for the congregation's emulation, prescriptive ethics seems to be missing from *Religious Affections* as well as from the later essays we have treated here. Did he expect moral discernment based on the new sense of beauty to guide the Christian? Or did the cultural atmosphere and social sanctions of the godly commonwealth of Massachusetts provide sufficient guidelines for behavior already? One regrets that the specific configuration of Jesus of Nazareth's values does not receive more attention in these writings.

[81] Edwards, *True Virtue* 74.

Similar questions have been posed to Catholic moral theology. What is distinctively Christian about reason reflecting on human nature? Both Edwards and Aquinas assert a continuity in moral content between natural ethics and morality under grace. Rather than the language of image and participation, the natural-law moral theology uses the language of Aristotelian causality to describe the integration of natural morality into the love of God. Charity provides a new efficient and final cause to the moral virtues, while their formal cause remains the same. This is another version of the principle of the two criteria: love of God is both the origin and goal of the moral act as it is subsumed into the consent of true virtue, yet the specific character of the moral act remains the same. The beauty of order, of justice, or of mercy remains the same as it is taken up by virtuous benevolence. In other words, the infused virtues are not formally different from their natural moral counterparts.

Unlike a Lutheran suspicion of "law" or an Anabaptist insistence on a radically distinctive ethics of discipleship to Jesus, Jonathan Edwards' version of Reformed ethics supports Calvin's third use of the law. Moral reflection has a necessary role in Christian life in encouraging and directing conduct. Secular moral philosophy is a proper source for Christian ethics, even though it will find a new context and perspective there. Edwards' careful discrimination of the continuity and discontinuity between ethics and religion, his delineation of the impact of religious transformation on moral values, and his experiential approach all promise fruitful contribution to any future American Christian ethics.