

John T. Lowe / Daniel N. Gullotta (eds.)

**Jonathan Edwards within
the Enlightenment:
Controversy, Experience,
& Thought**

V&R



The *Jonathan Edwards*
Center at Yale University



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Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema
and Adriaan C. Neele

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For Kenneth P. Minkema

“Knowledge in the teacher is the universal cause of
knowledge in the scholar.”

Contents

Foreword	11
John T. Lowe / Daniel N. Gullotta	
Introduction: Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment of America	13
Historiography	
Mark G. Spencer (Brock University)	
Jonathan Edwards and the Historiography of the American Enlightenment	21
Controversies	
John Howard Smith (Texas A&M University-Commerce)	
“God Has Made Us to Differ” Jonathan Edwards, the Enlightenment, and the American Indian	43
Gideon Mailer (University of Minnesota Duluth)	
“Freedom from spiritual slavery, but from civil too” Jonathan Edwards, the Scottish Enlightenment, and American Slavery	61
John T. Lowe (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)	
Destruction and Benevolence. The New Divinity and Origins of Abolitionism in Edwardsean Tradition	87
Daniel N. Gullotta (Stanford University)	
“By Magick and a Familiarity with the Devil” Constructing Witchcraft in Enlightenment Colonial New England and in the Mind of Jonathan Edwards	111

Society

Obbie Tyler Todd (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary)
 The Populist Puritan: Jonathan Edwards and the Rise of American
 Populism 137

Christian Cuthbert (Alliance Theological Seminary)
 “More Swiftly Propagating the Gospel” Jonathan Edwards, Col. John
 Stoddard, and the Invasion of Canada 153

Russell J. Allen (Liberty University)
 Children as “White Paper” Jonathan Edwards and Enlightenment
 Childhood 169

Experience

Emily Dolan Gierer (University of Connecticut)
 Hannah Edwards Wetmore and Her Joyful Death. The Deathbed
 Confessional During the Enlightenment 189

Kamil Marcin Halambiec (The College of Theology
 and Social Sciences in Warsaw)
 Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightened Fear of Enthusiasm 207

Lucas Hardy (Youngstown State University)
 Jonathan Edwards and the Aesthetics of Pain 221

Amelia Marini (Cuesta College)
 Seeing Happiness. Jonathan Edwards and the Art of Perception 239

Theology

Sarah B. Boss (Károli Gáspár University)
 “The Wheels of a Watch” Jonathan Edwards’s Emblematic Philosophy of
 Time 263

Philip John Fisk (Evangelische Theologische Faculteit)
 Que sera, sera. The Controversial 1702 Harvard Commencement *Quaestio*
 on whether the immutability of God’s decree takes away Human freedom
 of the will 283

Christopher Woznicki (Fuller Theological Seminary)
To Hell with the Enlightenment. Jonathan Edwards and the Doctrine of
Hell 299

Matthew Everhard (Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church)
Jonathan Edwards: An Intellect Precariously Astride Two Diverging
Epochs 317

Contributors 335

Foreword

Jonathan Edwards had an ambivalent relationship with the age in which he lived, the early eighteenth century. He certainly valued and benefited from the “great learning” that figures such as Newton and Locke brought to the world; for Edwards, Newton was nothing less than a gift from God. He also extolled the “free inquiries, and superior sense and wisdom of this age,” which would come to be called The Enlightenment. But he saw that freedom also brings diversity of thought and lifestyle—a connection that is as pertinent today as in Edwards’ time. For Edwards, while a latitude of exploration brought much that was useful, it also brought arrogance, selfishness, superficiality, and “infidelity,” a term that for Edwards (and for Timothy Dwight after him) meant not so much unfaithfulness in marriage as betrayal and corruption of truth. He battled those forces in the forms of Arminianism, Deism, radical New-Lightism, and other “fashionable schemes.” Today, we face our own infidelities in the forms of racism, misogyny, fundamentalisms, and environmental catastrophe.

Many, if not all, of the ills of the modern world have been blamed on The Enlightenment, that age of learning and inquiry, of free thought and revolution. Edwards has by some commentators been viewed as a corrective to those ills. Both of these positions operate on overly simple assumptions. The Enlightenment itself is undergoing a reappraisal as to its nature, phases, and consequences, with the realization that the movement was not as complete a break from the past as previously thought, its legacies more complicated. Scholarship on Edwards has shifted the rather romantic image of him as a lone voice crying in the wilderness to one that locates him much more securely within not only the Reformed tradition but also within the early, “Christian” phase of The Enlightenment. Not lightly did Sydney Ahlstrom dub Edwards a “Dordtian Philosophe.”

This collection of essays continues the inquiry into both the nature of the Enlightenment and Edwards’ relation to it. And it does so by importing themes from other disciplines and applying them to the study of Edwards, or by further exploration of Edwardsean themes that have not received due attention. The currency and innovativeness of the topics and approaches of these essays com-

mend them. In addition, this volume is the work of some from among a new cohort of up-and-coming scholars. For many contributors, this is their first publication, or among their first. This “rising generation”—as Edwards called the young people of his day, implying the promise that they represent—imagined, initiated and created this collection, with a view to express, among other things, their own priorities and interests. It belongs to the “elders” among us—those “grown old in sin”—as well as to scholars and interested readers of all generations to support and engage with the products of their labor.

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John T. Lowe / Daniel N. Gullotta

Introduction: Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment of America

In her Epilogue to the first serious modern biography of Jonathan Edwards, Ola E. Winslow wrote: “In a word, it is the greatness of one who had a determining art of initiating and directing a popular movement of far-reaching consequence, and who in addition, laid the foundations for a new system of religious thought, also of far-reaching consequence.”¹ After two and a half centuries since Edwards’s death, Winslow’s statement is undoubtedly true, and perhaps, more so now than ever. The recovery of Edwards pioneered by Perry Miller, Ola Winslow, and Thomas Schafer, among others, has become what is often referred to as an “Edwards renaissance,” and has been made even more popular among lay people by John Piper, Stephen Nichols, and the like. Since the free online access of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* by Yale University, dozens of books and articles, as well as numerous dissertations, each year are written to seek a facet of Edwards’s “greatness,” and his continued “far-reaching consequence.”

Much of the current work on Edwards has focused mainly upon his metaphysics and theology but has overlooked areas focusing on the cultural history that surrounded him and the influence he had on later thought. After decades of study on Edwards, new avenues in scholarship are being discovered across multiple disciplines. These studies offer a fresh perspective of Edwards’s interaction with topics such as abolition, gender, populism, education, pain, and witchcraft among others. This volume seeks to introduce a few of these areas and cultivate discussion on new ways scholars should think and understand Edwards, as well as his role in American intellectual history. In doing so, this volume will contribute to Edwards studies, and more broadly, to the scholarship and understanding of eighteenth-century America.

So why Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment? Why is it necessary to think of him inside this context? For several years now, scholars have debated how the Enlightenment affected (or not affected) the mind of early evangelicals. Traditionally, scholars have considered that early evangelicals were adamantly op-

1 Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards, 1703–1758*, 297.

posed to reason because it allegedly diminished faith. Almost as a modern “Rome versus Athens.” According to some, Edwards should be considered as the Apostle of the Enlightenment who rode the crest of the wave of the New Learning, but for others, his puritan heritage caused him to drown in the sea of oncoming European intellectualism.² The fame of European intellectuals such as David Hume, John Locke, and Francis Hutcheson, made science and reason appear to be sufficient for understanding human experience, and thus undermining Christian orthodoxy. On the contrary, scholars such as David Bebbington suggest that, in many ways, Enlightenment ideals were well received among evangelicals. As both movements became more popular, their relationship became tighter—and even fused together.³ The point of this volume is not to argue that Edwards somehow represents the fusion of Enlightenment ideas and evangelical beliefs (although he might), but to use the Enlightenment-evangelical relationship as framework to understand Edwards’s thought and legacy. The hope is that the chapters that follow—these new directions—will add to how scholars should think about Edwards and the Enlightenment and compel others to seek new directions in the same conversation.

The volume opens with Mark Spencer’s chapter on the historiography of Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment. Spencer traces the development of how scholars have traditionally viewed Edwards in the context of the Enlightenment. Scholars have typically situated Edwards in a transatlantic setting—interacting with European intellectuals and divines. But why is understanding this background important to understanding Edwards? Spencer offers a taste of several debates and ideas that surround how Edwards did or did not fit into the Enlightenment, thus giving context to reading the chapters that follow.

A period of Edwards’s life that has that is garnering increasing attention has been his dealings with the Native Americans at Stockbridge. It’s commonly been recognized as a dark time in Edwards’s life—being dismissed from Northampton pastorate, and reluctant to take a post on the frontier. Early writings of Edwards’s life denote the obvious disdain he had for the natives, but something happened while he was ministering to them that changed his opinion. Instead of holding onto prejudices, Edwards became their defender. Yet Edwards was no pluralist, as Edwards also participated in violence against Native Americas, such as depriving them of traditional language and culture. In his essay, “‘God Has Made Us to Differ’: Jonathan Edwards, the Enlightenment, and the American Indian,” John H. Smith investigates why Edwards had a change of heart toward his indigenous

2 Sydney E. Ahlstrom, “Theology In America: A Historical Survey,” in *The Shaping of American Religion*, ed. James Ward Smith, A. Leland Jamison (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 245.

3 David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*, ed. David W. Bebbington and Mark A. Noll (Intervarsity Press, 2005), 118.

congregation. This often-overlooked story offers a new sense of how historians look at Edwards and his ministry to Native Americans. No longer viewed as an “exile,” Smith argues that Edwards’s relationship to Native Americans to be “far better than expected.”

In the same realm of controversial issues is Gideon Mailer’s piece, “‘Freedom from spiritual slavery, but from civil too:’ Jonathan Edwards, the Scottish Enlightenment, and American Slavery.” Edwards had condemned the slave trade but approved of slavery as an institution. Mailer suggests that Edwards’s contact with Enlightenment thought—specifically with Scottish Presbyterians like Francis Hutcheson—is responsible for his response to American slavery. These Scottish evangelical intellectuals questioned current ethical tenets, and through these interactions, Edwards’s formed his own concepts of slavery.

Recently the subject of Edwards’ slaveholding has driven scholars to examine his theology in the light of the African slave trade. But with the growing tensions over slavery with the early Republic as a backdrop, John T. Lowe investigates how some of Edwards most passionate students and strongest devotees embraced antislavery theology. Lowe examines how figures from within the New Divinity, such as Jonathan Edwards Jr. and Samuel Hopkins, used Edwards’ own theological principals to help attack the logic of slavery and expose the hypocrisy of Christian slaveholders, despite the fact that their greatest theological influence was himself a slaver.

An ongoing issue for scholars of the Enlightenment is why and how the witch trials ended during the eighteenth century. Yet recent scholarship has challenged the so-called successes of the Enlightenment, demonstrating that a decline in witch trials did not mean the weakening of belief in their existence nor power. Daniel N. Gullotta uses Jonathan Edwards as a model for exploring the limits and tensions within the American Enlightenment’s reaction to the belief in the existence of witches and in their power. While Jonathan Edwards never partook in a witch hunt, witches are nonetheless a notable feature of his writing. Gullotta stresses that Edwards was a part of a changing American religious landscape that was mutating in its views on witches within the world of the Enlightenment.

In yet another peculiar avenue of Edwards scholarship is Obbie Tyler Todd with “The Populist Puritan: Jonathan Edwards and the Rise of American Populism.” Edwards was no doubt part of what we would consider an elite social class, so it is unusual to think of him appealing to the popular ethos of his age. Todd suggests that Enlightenment principles such as individualism influenced Edwards in three distinct ways toward populism: challenging age-old barriers between learned clergy and ordinary people; empowering the laity by legitimizing their deepest spiritual impulses; and reducing limitations on religious outsiders. Using these three criteria, Todd argues that Edwards changed the previous Puritan worldview that pitted him against the elites of his own social class and

opened spiritual entrepreneurship to the commoner, which in turn stripped ecclesiastical authority.

Often, scholars have not typically assumed Jonathan Edwards in a war-like context. However, Edwards was part of the British Empire and lived in a world inhabited by violence, namely, King William's War (1689–97), and Queen Anne's War (1702–1713). Christian Cuthbert examines Edwards's war time sermons in "More Swiftly Propagating the Gospel': Jonathan Edwards, Col. John Stoddard, and the Invasion of Canada." In examining Edwards's perspective on war, Cuthbert suggests that Edwards perspective of war was influenced by his uncle and revered community member, Col. John Stoddard. Cuthbert concludes that Edwards was by no means a pacifist. Moreover, Edwards thought that war was a permissible means to fulfill theological ends.

Within the British and American Enlargements, John Locke influenced subjects as varied as economics, politics, philosophy, metaphysics, even child rearing. As a deeper reader of Lockean content, Edwards consumed Locke's thinking of children. Russell J. Allen explores how Edwards reconciled Locke's views on children with that of the Bible as well as the wider context of Puritan theology. Allen argues that this had mixed results, as the two were often difficult to square because of Puritanism's convictions concerning original sin and the *imago dei* as well as Locke's theory that children were born as if they were blank slates.

Death came easy in the eighteenth century, along with close encounters with the divine on deathbeds, and while numerous testimonials from near death experiences, funeral sermons, and other didactic writings circulated with popularity, Emily Dolan Gierer focuses on the previously unpublished deathbed confession of Hannah Edwards Wetmore. Dolan Gierer argues that unlike most contemporary deathbed confessionals, that of Wetmore, Edwards's sister, was not mediated by male clergy and presents exciting new evidence for women's religious experience within the American Enlightenment.

In the next essay, "Jonathan Edwards on the Light Side of Pain," Lucas Hardy examines Edwards's theory of pain. Like many within the Enlightenment, Edwards was fascinated by the human body and its capabilities for feeling, but unlike his predecessors, William Perkins, the Mathers, and even John Calvin, who thought pain was an opportunity to weed out sin and become pious, Edwards thought pain, as Hardy puts it, "opened the inclination of the will that revealed persons to be in the lowest condition of human existence: the natural man." Hardy argues that by describing the character of the "spiritual" person, one's orientation changes toward the natural body. By dismissing Lockean concepts, Edwards's theory of pain sets it outside of consciousness and identity. Hardy uses the cases of Abigail Hutchinson and David Brainerd to show how Edwards did not think that pain shaped or determined a Christian's identity.

Jonathan Edwards was a defender of gracious affections. But his contentions concerned the approach to these—namely, identifying their truthful manifestations. Kamil Halambiec argues in his “Enlightened Fear of Enthusiasm and Jonathan Edwards” that Edwards demonstrated a possibility of a relationship between religious enthusiasm and enlightened philosophy. While Enlightenment thinkers typically rejected enthusiastic manifestations, Edwards advocated for religion that moved the heart—and not just the intellect. In his *Religious Affections*, Edwards identified experience with both the heart and mind as the locale for one’s true religion. Without this, it was appropriate for one to assume a fear of enthusiasm. However, Edwards did not abandon logic or rationale. His *Religious Affections*, as Halambiec contends reveals how “carefully reasoned and rigorously logical” Edwards was in his approach to the fear of enthusiasm.

Words that are commonly associated with the name Jonathan Edwards usually include: hell, sin, will, justification, sovereignty, and the like. Rarely, if ever, does one associate *happiness* with Edwards. Challenging this perception, Amelia Marini suggests in her chapter, “Seeing Happiness: Jonathan Edwards and the Art of Perception,” that happiness was an exalted role in Edwards’s thinking. Happiness appears over 5,000 times in his collected works, so it’s surprising that this role in Edwards’s writing has gone unnoticed. Marini argues that if we are to “understand Edwards’s philosophical and religious mind, we must be attuned to the temperamental melody of his thought,” and to understand his thought. Understanding how he employs *happiness* will give readers a more well-rounded analysis of his thought.

A highly discussed subject has been Edwards’s philosophy of history, but an overlooked facet of this topic has been his concept of time. In, “The Wheels of a Watch”: Jonathan Edwards’s Emblematic Philosophy of Time,” Sarah Boss discusses Edwards’s use of Enlightenment metaphors of machinery, wheels, and clocks to express a philosophy of time that was “closely akin to Renaissance emblems of time.” Instead of strictly using Enlightenment imagery, or Renaissance typology, Boss argues that Edwards used both to reimagine a concept of divine presence as it relates to God, humans, and history.

Over the past two decades, one of the hotter topics—and perhaps unavoidable—concerning Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment is the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human freewill. In “The Controversial 1702 Harvard Commencement Quaestio on whether the Immutability of God’s Decree takes away Human Freedom of the Will,” Philip Fisk examines how Edwards was influenced by the Enlightenment principles of sufficient reason and the identity of indiscernibles. Fisk brings in the background of Chaucer, and Edwards’s predecessors—the George Keith and Samuel Willard debate—and concludes that Edwards’s “interpretation and application of these principles led him to

some ‘dark’ conclusions about God’s relation to the world,” and therefore scholars should perhaps rethink Edwards’s Enlightenment legacy.

As one might assume, the effects of the Enlightenment extended even to the doctrines of hell—or in Edwards’s case, a lack thereof. Popular Enlightenment thinkers began to change their conceptions of justice, reason, and revelation, so too did their notions of hell. However, Edwards did not find himself among these revisionists. In this next chapter, “To Hell with the Enlightenment: Jonathan Edwards and the Doctrine of Hell,” Chris Woznicki examines the theological trends of Edwards’s day and asks why he did not adopt them for his own. Woznicki suggests that the primary reason for Edwards holding fast to a traditional doctrine of hell was his teleological commitments of God’s glorification.

Scholars have often seen Edwards as kind of ‘last Puritan,’ embodying the outdated Calvinistic principals and beliefs that would be pushed aside by the American Revolution. In this chapter, “Jonathan Edwards: An Intellect Precariously Astride Two Diverging Epochs,” Matthew Everhard argues that this rendering of Edwards’s context is not only overly simplistic but also does not capture the ways in which the Enlightenment shaped much of his life. Everhard demonstrates that Edwards was torn between two eras within American history, embracing the religion of his ancestors as well as the rationalism many thought that was undermining it. Edwards may have been among the last of the Puritans, but Everhard claims he was among the first Americans to embrace the Enlightenment.

This offering is meant for all readers of Edwards and those who seek to understand his “greatness.” The chapters are by no means an exhaustive collection of ways we should be thinking about Edwards, but we hope it stimulates other, newer ways to contemplate his thought and its influence. In doing so, we can achieve a clearer image of who Edwards was and how he thought within his Enlightenment world.

Historiography

Mark G. Spencer (Brock University)*

Jonathan Edwards and the Historiography of the American Enlightenment

2.1 Introduction: Henry F. May and the problem of fitting Edwards into the Enlightenment

“Like most profound thinkers, he cannot be fitted into any category.”¹ That is how Henry F. May (1915–2012) side-stepped categorizing Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). He did so in his now-classic book, *The Enlightenment in America* (1976), an account published more than forty years ago, in part to commemorate the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence.² It was not a move of mere convenience; there is a good deal of wisdom underlying May’s statement. But the futility of the enterprise has not stopped scholars—both before and since May, from attempting to categorize Edwards, within and without the Enlightenment. And, although Edwards did not fit comfortably into May’s overlapping categories of Enlightenment, he did find a place there, of sorts. After all, much about Edwards’s life and writings related to the American Enlightenment, as May understood it.

Edwards, born near the opening of the eighteenth century, was one of colonial America’s most formidable thinkers. Fortunate family circumstances helped foster his innate abilities.³ His father, the Reverend Timothy Edwards (1669–

* The author thanks the book’s co-editors for inviting his contribution to their volume. He is grateful to Roger L. Emerson and Roger J. Fechner for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of his chapter.

1 Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 49.

2 For a recent assessment of May and his contribution to American Enlightenment historiography, see John M. Dixon, “Henry F. May and the Revival of the American Enlightenment: Problems and Possibilities for Intellectual and Social History,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, series 3, vol. 71, no. 2 (April 2014): 55–280.

3 For the details of Edwards’s life, see George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), winner of the Bancroft Prize and the American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies prize for biography. But older works remain valuable, including Ola Elizabeth Winslow’s (1885–1977), Pulitzer-Prize winning *Jonathan Edwards, 1703–1758: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1940; reprinted New York: Collier Books, 1961) which

1758), had graduated from Harvard and was a learned Congregationalist minister. His mother, Esther Stoddard Edwards (1672–1771), was the bright daughter of another Calvinist minister and notable preacher, the Reverend Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729), of Northampton, Massachusetts Bay Colony. Stoddard’s influence on his grandson was significant. It is difficult to measure in precise ways, but it surely included encouraging in his grandson pursuits of the mind in a life devoted to preaching and theology.

Historians have increasingly come to appreciate that reading formed a large part of the relatively book-rich environment in which the New England boy was raised. Again, though, determining the specific impact of those books continues to prove difficult.⁴ The most recent work has documented in even greater detail the place of books in Edwards’s life.⁵ Collectively, these works show that the scope of Edwards’s reading expanded considerably when he attended Yale College from 1716 to 1720 and that books, and print culture more generally, remained an ongoing concern for him throughout his life.

In their efforts to understand Edwards’s thought, scholars have attributed various sources as primary ones influencing Edwards’s intellectual development. They often range back to his college reading which included Enlightenment authors. For Edwards’s earliest biographer, his friend and the New Divinity man Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803), it was John Locke (1632–1704) who stood out. Edwards was born the year before Locke’s death and the Englishman’s works, especially his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), gained popularity—even in rural Massachusetts—as Edwards came of age.⁶ Hopkins wrote:

In his second year at college, and the thirteenth of his age, he read Locke on the human understanding, with great delight and profit. . . . Taking that book into his hand, upon some occasion, not long before his death, he said to some of his select friends, who were

provides a balanced study of Edwards’s life as a whole. Also useful is the succinct sketch of Edwards’s life by Harry Norman Gardiner and Richard Webster in the eleventh edition of *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 32 vols (New York, 1910–11), vol. 9, 3–6.

- 4 See William Sparks Morris, *The Young Jonathan Edwards: A Reconsideration* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991), based on his Ph.D. dissertation, “The Young Jonathan Edwards: A Reconstruction” (University of Chicago, 1955). See also Morris, “The Genius of Jonathan Edwards,” in Jerald C. Brauer, ed., *Reinterpretation in American Church History* (Chicago, 1968), 29–65. As well, see Thomas H. Johnson’s earlier work, “Jonathan Edwards’ Background of Reading,” *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 28 (1931), 193–222.
- 5 For a recent and detailed account of the books in Edwards’s life, see Peter J. Thuesen, ed. *Catalogues of Books*, vol. 26 in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). For Edwards’s own dealings with book printers, publishers, and editors, see Jonathan M. Yeager, *Jonathan Edwards and Transatlantic Print Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- 6 See Mark G. Spencer, “Introduction: John Locke and his World,” in John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding with the Second Treatise on Government* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics of World, 2014), vii–xxvii.

then with him, that he was beyond expression entertain'd and pleas'd with it, when he read it in his youth at college; that he was much engaged, and had more satisfaction and pleasure in studying it, than the most greedy miser in gathering up handfuls of silver and gold from some new discovered treasure.⁷

As we shall see, scholars have pursued this thesis about Locke's impact on Edwards in various directions. Some, by expanding on it; others, by rejecting it outright.

Others still have emphasized Edwards's absorbing ideas from the writings of other early British Enlightenment figures, such as the English scientist Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727) and the moral philosopher Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), a central figure of the Scottish Enlightenment.⁸ For scholars such as Norman Fiering, it was a wider seventeenth-century European context to which Edwards was introduced at Yale that best explains Edwards's intellectual world. Included in that reading for Fiering were works by Dutch and German philosophers, such as Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646–1716), and French thinkers, such as Antoine Arnauld (1612–1694) and Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715).⁹

Leaving aside the question of who influenced Edwards most, the nominees mentioned above are an eclectic group and connect Edwards to various branches of early Enlightenment thought. And other books vied for his attention. Many of them had been added to Yale's library in 1714 by Jeremiah Dummer (1681–1739), a Boston-born Harvard graduate and colonial agent, who generously donated some 800 volumes. Among them, along with Locke, Newton (with whom Dummer corresponded), Hutcheson, Arnauld, and Malebranche, were works by Jean Bodin (1530–1596), Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), René Descartes (1596–1650), Algernon Sydney (1623–1683), Robert Boyle (1627–1691), John Tillotson (1630–1694), Robert Hooke (1635–1703), Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), Matthew Tindal (1657–1733), Jean Le Clerc (1657–1736), and Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), to name a handful. In this assortment of French

7 Samuel Hopkins, *Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards* (Boston, 1765), 11–12.

8 See, for instance, James H. Tufts, "Edwards and Newton," *Philosophical Review*, vol. 49 (1940), 609–622; Alfred O. Aldridge, "Edwards and Hutcheson," *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 44 (1951), 35–53; and Gideon Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 171–174.

9 See, Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press), and Fiering, "The Rationalist Foundations of Jonathan Edwards's Metaphysics," in Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout, eds, *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 73–101. Fiering's work figures later in this essay as well.

thinkers and Cartesian philosophers, British scientists, and Cambridge Platonists were the works on which was built the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. But how did Edwards fit in with this intellectual heritage? What did he make of what he read? And what does this background tell us about Edwards's place in the Enlightenment? Those and similar questions have been taken up by many Enlightenment scholars over the years, including May.

As May pointed out, simply because Edwards read Enlightenment authors did not make him into one of the enlightened. May wrote:

Despite his [Edwards's] eager appropriation of Locke and Newton and Hutcheson for his own purposes, he was not a man of the moderate, rational English Enlightenment of his day. Indeed he was the most powerful enemy of that way of thought. To Locke or Clarke, Tillotson or Tindal, greatly though they differed, the universe was orderly, intelligible, and moral; man was learning to understand it and could order his life accordingly.

Edwards's universe, on the other hand, "was orderly and intelligible only on its surface. The operations of the mind, the relation of subject and object, the existence of personal identity were all, like the rotations of the planets, dependent on the exertion, from minute to minute, of God's inscrutable will."¹⁰ That is why Edwards did not fit easily into May's Enlightenment.¹¹

2.2 Vernon L. Parrington's Edwardsean tragedy

Indeed, for a generation of scholars before May, Edwards's belief in the absolute sovereignty of God, what some saw as a severe religious outlook—he was, after all the preacher of *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741)—is what seemingly cut him off from the more "liberal" enlightened world that was taking shape. Perhaps with none was that assessment clearer than with Vernon L. Parrington (1871–1929). Edwards provided one of the main currents in Parrington's influential three-volume *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927–1930). But, Edwards's current ran the wrong way; it was an undercurrent.¹² As Parrington

10 May, 49. May had grappled with Edwards in an early publication, too. There, he argued: "Even Edwards, I think, made eager use of the weapons of the Enlightenment in a direction contrary to its general direction as I have loosely defined it"; see Henry F. May, "The Problem of the American Enlightenment," *New Literary History*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1970), 201–214, passage quoted at 207.

11 May later built upon these ideas in "Jonathan Edwards and America," in Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout, eds. *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 19–33.

12 Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927–1930).

explained in his “Introduction” to volume 1, *The Colonial Mind, 1620–1800*, Edwards was to be contrasted with the “protagonists of liberalism.”¹³ Later chapters juxtaposed Edwards, the “colonial Calvinist,” and Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), the “colonial democrat.”¹⁴ Edwards was not a participant in Parrington’s Enlightenment; he stubbornly stood in its way. “Before an adequate democratic philosophy could arise in this world of pragmatic individualism,” wrote Parrington in his opening line for a chapter entitled “The Anachronism of Jonathan Edwards,” Edwards’s “traditional system of New England theology must be put away, and a new conception of man and of his duty and destiny in the world must take its place. . . . An intellectual *Aufklärung* was a necessary preliminary to the creation of a fruitful social philosophy.”¹⁵

For Parrington, Edwards’s New England was cut off from the main currents of the European Enlightenment. It “stewed in its petty provincialism, untouched by the brisk debates that stirred the old world.”¹⁶ Edwards was cast as “the last and greatest” in a “royal line of Puritan mystics.” His career was to be understood as “a lifelong devotion to the God-idea,” wrote Parrington. “To one cardinal principle Edwards was faithful—the conception of the majesty and sufficiency of God; and this polar idea provides the clue to both his philosophical and theological systems.”¹⁷ Seen in that way, Edwards’s intellectual life was a “tragedy”; “the theologian triumphed over the philosopher, circumscribing his powers to ignoble ends.”¹⁸ Edwards was anti-Enlightenment: “His celebrated work *On the Freedom of the Will*, written in 1754, not only was his most important contribution to theology, but it was the last great defence of the conservatism that was stifling the intellectual life of New England.”¹⁹

Edwards’s only contribution to the advance of liberalism was made unwittingly. That was when he helped bring about the Great Awakening and wrote about it in works such as *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work, of God* (1737), *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion* (1742), and *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746). “Day after day,” wrote Parrington, Edwards “probed and analyzed and compared, until as a result of his close studies in vivisection, he became a specialist in the theory of conversion, commanding the eager attention of a generation that had come to look upon this as the central fact of Christian experience.”²⁰ And, within the success of the

13 Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, v.

14 Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, v.

15 Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, 148.

16 Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, 148.

17 Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, 152.

18 Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, 158.

19 Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, 157.

20 Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, 160.