

Coleridge, Edwards, and the American Religion

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation demonstrates that Coleridge was not only an influence on American Romanticism, but also a participant in the American continuum of philosophy and religion that informed both the rise of Transcendentalism and the ambivalence that it inspired in more skeptical minds. While many scholars have made note of his lasting influence on the Transcendentalists, there is no study that addresses Coleridge as a pivotal figure in what Harold Bloom has called “the American religion” – a term I use more broadly to denote the tradition of theologico-philosophical inquiry that begins in earnest with Jonathan Edwards and reaches its consummate expression in the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Indeed, Perry Miller’s well-known argument for a basic continuity between Edwards and Emerson fails to acknowledge the fact that such a progression simply could not have been made had Coleridge not propagated an alternative to the rationalism of Locke and the absolute skepticism of Hume – a compromise that provided Emerson and other nineteenth-century thinkers with an acceptable extension of an essentially Calvinist theology.

Beginning with the theological empiricism of Edwards, which Coleridge directly addressed on several occasions, and concluding with the legacy of the disagreement between Coleridge and Edwards in various works of the nineteenth century ranging from the antebellum period to the aftermath of the American Civil War, I delineate Coleridge’s involvement and influence in the trajectory of religious and philosophical inquiry that is itself significantly inflected by the Quaker and Calvinist theologies of the early abolitionist movement, and which ultimately accompanies the rise of a distinctively American literary tradition. The central feature of the important, though largely neglected, relationship between Edwards and Coleridge turns on competing conceptions of free will and theological determinism as they figure in the endeavor of the American individual to develop a philosophy of self-determination that can overcome the persuasive logic of determinism. This philosophy is deployed from within what is the essential undertaking for both Edwards and Coleridge, as well as the religious and philosophical legacy bestowed upon nineteenth-century American thinkers: an individual revelation of the infinite in the finite, and to that end, the construction of a methodology, a philosophical position, that can discern accurately the internal, or divine, meaning of the external world. That such meaning is hidden to the unregenerate observer is a given, and yet a thoroughgoing skepticism concerning the ability to know whether or not anyone is regenerate, as well as a faith in the absolute inscrutability of Providence, led thinkers in the nineteenth century to speculate on the possibility of supernatural self-determination while simultaneously doubting that anything other than God, or the totality of things themselves, could harness the power of causation.

KEY WORDS

Coleridge; Edwards; Free Will; Determinism; Philosophy and Religion; American Romanticism; Transatlanticism; History of Ideas; Supernatural Self-Determination; Woolman; Equiano; Emerson; Hawthorne; Melville; Poe

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- B* Melville, Herman. *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*. Ed. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1962.
- CL* Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1956-71.
- CN* Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Eds. Kathleen Coburn, Merton Christensen, and Anthony John Harding. 5 vols. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957-2002.
- EL* Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Ralph R. Rusk and Eleanor M. Tilton. 10 vols. New York: Columbia UP, 1939-94.
- EW* Miller, Perry. *Errand into the Wilderness*. Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1964.
- H* Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. James A. Harrison. 17 vols. New York: AMS P, 1965
- JE* Miller, Perry. *Jonathan Edwards*. New York: W. Sloane Associates, 1949.
- JMN* Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. William H. Gilman, et al. 16 vols. Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1960-82.
- M* Poe, Edgar Allan. *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott. 3 vols. Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1969.
- PL* Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. John Ward Ostrom. 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1948.

Prologue

The American Mind of S. T. Coleridge

As soon as the ship cleared the port, Mr. Coleridge hastened down to the cabin, and cried, “my dear captain, tell me how you obtained my passport?” Said the captain, very gravely, “Why, I went to the authorities and *swore* that you were an *American*, and my steward! I *swore* also, that I knew your father and mother; that they lived in a red-brick house, about half a mile out of New York, on the road to Boston!

– Joseph Cottle, *Reminiscences of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey*

Unlike many of the modernists, who may be deemed “transnational” without hesitation, Samuel Taylor Coleridge is understood as an essentially English writer and thinker, and there are presumably legitimate reasons for this. For while Pound, Eliot, Joyce, and Stein all settled outside the borders of the countries in which they were born, Coleridge’s plan to establish a utopian community with Robert Southey on the banks of the Susquehanna in Pennsylvania never came to fruition, and after extended stays in both Germany and Italy, he ultimately settled in, and perhaps for, his native England. It would be imprecise to claim that Coleridge had nothing critical to say about the United States, but it is certain, and significant, that he never rejected the new republic in the same manner as he came to renounce all things French: “If I know my own opinions, they are utterly untainted with French Metaphysics, French Politics, French Ethics, & French Theology.” Here, in this passage from a famous and oft-cited letter of 1798 in which Coleridge attempts to convince his older brother George of his piety and conservatism, his criticism of America strikes a more provisional tone: “In America (I have received my information with unquestionable authority) the morals & domestic habits of the people

are daily deteriorating” (*CL* 1: 395). That we should, as Basil Willey notes, “allow for the fact that George Coleridge was a parson, and for Coleridge’s own chameleon-habit . . . of adjusting his mental colour to that of his correspondents” (228) only highlights the fact that even when Coleridge does exaggerate his moral asceticism in the hopes of appeasing his brother, the most he can muster against the United States is a bit of speculative hearsay. Given that his dream of settling there had been frustrated, it is also difficult to imagine that Coleridge could have written these lines without awakening some shadow of his old yearning.

His position on France and the French Revolution was consistent from this point forward, but he wavered on America, even going so far as to claim to Thomas Poole in a letter of 1801 that he still wished to emigrate: “I say, I would go to America, if Wordsworth would go with me” (*CL* 2: 710). The very next day, confiding in Poole again, Coleridge retracts this statement, though he also clearly reveals his attachment to the essence of the old Pantisocratic scheme¹:

The truth is, I was horribly hypochondriacal . . . In that mood of mind nothing appeared to me so delightful as to live in a Land where Corn & Meat were in abundance – & my imagination pointed to no other place, than those inland parts of America where there is little communication with their foul cities, & all the articles of *Life*, of course, to be had for a trifle. (*CL* 2: 710-11)

¹ Pantisocracy, as Coleridge later wrote in *The Friend*, was “a plan, as harmless as it was extravagant, of trying the experiment of human perfectability on the banks of the *Susquehannah*; where our little society, in its second generation was to have combined the innocence of the patriarchal age with the knowledge and genuine refinements of European culture” (4.1: 225).

Here, just as in the supernatural “Sonnet on Pantisocracy,” as well as in the original version of “To a Young Ass,” America becomes a portrait of Coleridge’s imagination, a pastoral oasis.²

Yet by this time Coleridge had also begun to disavow the untrammelled imagination in poems like “Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement” (1796) and “Fears in Solitude” (1798); and in this sense, “America” comes to play a role similar to that of the lost vision in *Kubla Khan* (1798), the “shapings of the unregenerate mind” (l. 55) in “The Eolian Harp” (1795-6) and the clerisy in *On the Constitution of the Church and State* (1829). These entities all stand in for that faery realm of the imagination that Coleridge variously celebrated, renounced, and bemoaned the loss of throughout his career, a realm that also shares affinities with the Kantian thing-in-itself to which Coleridge, like Schelling, always wanted to claim a kind of conditional access. And as both a safe haven for religious separatists (which Coleridge certainly was), and a land of plenty in which resources were to be had, as Coleridge thought, with a minimum of labour, America became an ideal that was more than theoretical.

In emphasizing this conceptual link between America and the imagination, I also want to suggest a correspondence that is more explicit than a vague alignment between America and “the spirit of the age.” That is, I want to say that the characteristically American impulse that brought Coleridge to pursue the idea of founding a Pantisocratic community in Pennsylvania was the same in kind as the creative force at work in Coleridge’s collaboration with Wordsworth in 1797-8. But what does it mean to say that

² As J.C.C. Mays points out, the October 1794 version of “To a Young Ass” includes the lines “And fain I’d take thee with me to the Dell, / Where high-soul’d PANTISOCRACY shall dwell!” which, in later versions, are revised to “And fain would take thee with me, in the Dell / Of Peace and mild Equity to dwell” (16.1.1: 147, 148). All references to Coleridge, unless otherwise noted, are cited parenthetically by volume and page number from *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*.

there could be something American about British Romanticism? Perhaps no more than it means to say that the idea of America has never been exclusively American. “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” Kenneth R. Johnston writes, “a Romantic ideology if there ever was one” (51).

For Coleridge, the allure of settling America also had much to do with the prospect of leaving England and all the failures of his youth far behind. In a letter written to Southey in 1794, Coleridge registers his excitement at the thought of beginning life anew: “My God! how tumultuous are the movements of my Heart . . . America! Southey! Miss Fricker!” (*CL* 1: 103). But of the three proper nouns with which this passage is punctuated, only the first would retain its appeal. Coleridge’s relationship with Southey deteriorated after the collapse of the Pantisocratic scheme, and his ill-advised marriage to Sara Fricker was notoriously unhappy. The potential of the United States, however, was a subject of interest for Coleridge until his death.

But what did Coleridge actually continue to see in America after the failure of Pantisocracy, and in what ways, if there are any, might he be said to typify those qualities and modes of thinking that we typically refer to *as* American? To ask this question is by no means to say that Coleridge’s influence on the American Romantics was not significant, but rather to begin clarifying that influence in light of Coleridge’s prior investment in the American project. For what was it that made Coleridge, as opposed to Shelley, Blake, or Wordsworth, so central to American thinkers in the nineteenth century? And if, as Harold Bloom has claimed, “Emerson’s mind is the mind of America . . . and the central concern of that mind was the American religion” (145), then how is it that Coleridge played such a crucial role in developing the concerns of that mind? The

most obvious reason is that Coleridge was concerned with the same problems of religious experience that occupied Jonathan Edwards, a pivotal figure in American literature and philosophy.³ Among other similarities, Stuart Piggin and Dianne Cook note that both Edwards and Coleridge “were spokesmen for ‘Revealed Religion’, believing that, despite the separation of creature from creator occasioned by the Fall, God in an ‘eternal language’ communicates his presence and makes known a scheme whereby fallen humanity can regain tenancy of God’s reality (387). Of course this seeking of the “eternal language” of God, what Coleridge in “The Destiny of Nations” calls “one mighty alphabet / For infant minds” (16.1.1: 282), also shares much with the religious empiricism of the Puritans as well as the typological endeavors of the Transcendentalists, both of whom set out to spiritualize the common impressions of immediate experience.⁴

Along with this process of spiritualization came a view of the unspoiled natural landscape as the privileged site of revelation and renewal, and of the American expanse in particular as an opportunity for millennial – i.e., supernatural – purification.⁵ As we have long known, Coleridge’s fascination with the forests, plants, and wildlife of the uncultivated American wilderness was largely informed by his interest in William

³ In an analogy that speaks to Edwards’ presence in the history of American literature, David Laurence likens the shadowy endurance of the Puritan theologian to the Seattleites’ collective recognition of Mt. Rainier on “certain clear days” when “the great snow-capped cone of the ancient volcano hovers above the city.” That is, Edwards “endures as a massive feature in the intellectual and cultural terrain, yet one that has long since ceased to be active or have any obvious role in the literary culture that flourished after him in his vicinity” (227). Edwards’ reputation as an American philosopher, however, is much more clear. As Bruce Kuklick observes, Edwards is “the foundation stone in the history of American philosophy” (246).

⁴ Promoting the view of Edwards as having anticipated Romanticism, M. H. Abrams observes that after Edwards accepted the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, his “experience of a glory in the landscape then led him, three quarters of a century before Wordsworth, to solitary communings with the speaking face of nature” (497n69).

⁵ As Nigel Leask argues, “emigration to the newly independent USA became almost a civic duty for Dissenting intellectuals in furthering the realization of the millennium, Christ’s republic on earth, after the failure of republicanism in Europe” (39).

Bartram's *Travels* (1791), which inspired the enchanting imagery of his supernatural poems.⁶ Yet traces of this millennialist vision are also apparent in Coleridge's later remarks on the United States, where he reinvents Edwards' vision of a future in which "the world shall be supplied with spiritual treasures from America" (11: 101) in terms of the social and political prospects of the new republic. In 1833, for example, he speaks of a "possible destiny of the United States of America – as a nation 100-million of freemen – stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, living under the laws of Alfred, and speaking the language of Shakspeare and Milton." Such a vision, Coleridge continues, "is an august conception. Why should we not wish to see it realized? America would then be England viewed through a solar microscope – Great Britain in a state of glorious magnification" (14.1: 360).

The vision of America as the most obvious setting for the ideal culmination of humankind is also deployed, however, from within what is the larger typological undertaking for both Edwards and Coleridge, as well as the religious and philosophical legacy bestowed upon nineteenth-century American thinkers: a revelation of the infinite in the finite, and to that end, the construction of a methodology, a philosophical position, that can discern accurately the internal, or divine, meaning of the external world. The supposition that such meaning is hidden to the unregenerate observer, a supposition that stretches from Edwards to Emerson, also informs the American endeavor to merge Lockean rationalism with what Coleridge in "The Eolian Harp" calls "a faith that inly *feels*" (l. 60), investing this endeavor with the anxious awareness, or call it a suspicion, that humans cannot achieve the regenerate state (i.e., an accurate view of the world) without supernatural assistance, if at all.

⁶ See John Livingston Lowes' *The Road to Xanadu* (1927), 5-13.

In other words, the assumption that Coleridge was somehow characteristically British while Romanticism itself was first and foremost a European phenomenon fails to take into account the fact that Coleridge was not merely an influence on American Romanticism, but also a participant in the continuum of philosophy and religion that commences with the Puritans and reaches its first summit in the work of Jonathan Edwards. As a result, Coleridge scholars have tended to preserve the boundaries of the nation-state, typically by arguing that there is nothing particularly American about Coleridge, and that his influence on Emerson was more circumstantial, or opportunistic on Emerson's behalf, than it was substantive.⁷ To Christopher Flynn, Coleridge did not even conceive of America as an independent nation, but rather as a territory "attached to England, possessing English history, culture and language, and therefore as English as if no Revolution had occurred" (412).

Yet it is clear from his comments in *Conciones ad Populum* (1795) that Coleridge did conceive of significant differences between the United States and England. "The principles industriously propagated by the friends of our Government are opposite to the American Constitution," he writes, "and indeed to Liberty every where . . . Unconditional Submission was the only Terms offered to the Americans – and Death the immediate Menace. Our Brethren, (if indeed we may presume to call so exalted a race *our* Brethren,) indignantly rejected the terms, and resolved to hazard the execution of the menace" (1: 56-7). Likewise, it is apparent that, for Emerson, there was something rather unique,

⁷ According to Anthony John Harding, for instance, Emerson's *Journals* show "that Emerson knew what he wanted *before* he began reading Coleridge seriously, and that he could well have got it from other sources – Carlyle, most obviously, or Schelling or Fichte – had he not first found it in Coleridge" (235); and in Laura Dassow Walls' estimation, Emerson "refocused Coleridge's ideas into a distinctively Emersonian vision and a distinctively American Romanticism: away from British centralized hierarchy toward a sprawling democratic American national literature, away from religious orthodoxy toward a new church of science and the intellect" (112).

perhaps even American, about Coleridge. As he wrote in a letter to his aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, in 1829 while reading *The Friend*, it was not so much *what* Coleridge knew, as it was that he seemed to know everything:

I like to encounter these citizens of the Universe that be[le]ive the mind was made to be spectator of all, inquisitor of all, & whose philosophy compares with others much as astronomy with other sciences – taking post at the centre & as from a specular mount sending sovereign glances to the circumference of things. (*EL* 7: 188)

That this description of Coleridge also bears some resemblance to Emerson's conception of the American scholar is hardly coincidental. "The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time," he writes, "all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be a university of knowledge" (1: 69).⁸

Yet to suggest that there is something American about Coleridge is not entirely novel. As Carl Woodring notes, upon the release of Coleridge's *Table Talk* in 1835, *The Morning Chronicle* described Coleridge as "sounding American" (14.1: ci), and in 1838, Coleridge's former caretaker and friend, James Gillman, remarked upon Coleridge's particular appeal to the American mind: "The Western world seems to have better appreciated the works of Coleridge than most of his countrymen: in some parts of America his writings are understood and highly valued" (370). Yet it is not only the sheer miscellany and universal quality of Coleridge's wide-ranging interests that can make him seem American, but also the consistent tone of isolationist idealism, reformism, and mediated separatism that typifies his prose. In *On the Constitution of the Church and*

⁸ All references to Emerson, unless otherwise noted, are cited parenthetically by volume and page number from *The Collected Works of Emerson*.

State, for example, he argues (*contra* Jonathan Edwards, whom he mentions by name) that even in those who deny free agency “the *idea* of man’s moral freedom possesses and modifies their whole practical being, in all they say, in all they feel, in all they do and are done to: even as the spirit of life, which is contained in no vessel, because it permeates all” (10: 18). For without the power of self-determination, Coleridge was inclined to think, intelligent life could only be a mechanism.

Despite his conservatism, he always insists on the sovereignty and self-determination of the individual in the ethico-religious idiom that we commonly ascribe to Americans, and as we shall see, it is ultimately his disagreement with Edwards on this account that came to shape the American religious and philosophical consciousness as thinkers were drawn not only to a notion of the individual as an absolute free agent, but also to a conception of individual action as somehow aligned with the will of God. “No power on earth can oblige me to act against my conscience,” Coleridge affirms in *The Friend*. “No magistrate, no monarch, no legislature, can without tyranny compel me to do any thing which the acknowledged laws of God have forbidden me to do” (4.1: 194). Pronouncements of this sort also reflect Coleridge’s enduring regard for private revelation, as well as his opposition to the corrupting influence of meddling governments. In his essay *On Taxes and Taxation*, he almost sounds like a New England libertarian. “Which is better?” he asks in a passage that must have delighted Emerson, “To give money to the idle, the houses to those who do not ask for them, and towns to counties which have already perhaps too many? Or to afford opportunity to the industrious to earn their bread, and to the enterprising to better their circumstances, and perhaps found new families of independent proprietors?” (4.1: 243).

In 1831, Coleridge even observes that “the severest naval discipline is always found in the ships of the freest nations, and the most lax discipline in the ships of the most oppressed. Hence, the naval discipline of the Americans is the sharpest; then that of the English” (14.2: 141). But to his nephew, son-in-law, and editor, Henry Nelson Coleridge, such an open avowal of American ascendancy was problematic – it needed clarification. “It *looks* as if Mr. Coleridge rated the degree of liberty enjoyed by the English, *after* that of the citizens of the United States,” he writes, “but he meant no such thing. His meaning was, that the form of government of the latter was more democratic, and formally assigned more power to each individual” (14.2: 141). Following this, he goes on to cite the passage in *On the Constitution of the Church and State* in which Coleridge had claimed that “for little less than a century and a half, Englishmen have, collectively and individually, lived and acted with fewer restrictions on their free-agency, than the citizens of any known republic past or present” (10: 96). To this passage, however, Coleridge himself appends a note that complicates this view:

It will be thought, perhaps, that the United States of North America should have been excepted. But the identity of Stock, Language, Customs, Manners and Laws scarcely allows us to consider this an exception: even tho’ it were quite certain both that it is and that it will continue such. It was, at all events, a remark worth remembering, which I once heard from a Traveller (a prejudiced one I must admit) that where every man may take liberties, there is little Liberty for any man – or, that where every man takes liberties, no man can enjoy any. (10: 96)

Though Coleridge first observes that Americans may in fact live with fewer restrictions than their English counterparts, he seems to suggest that this fact is inconsequential when we consider that America shares its “Stock, Language, Customs, Manners and Laws” with England – of course then he seems to suggest that American freedom is perhaps too free, though he admits his source for this information is suspect. But which is it? Is the liberty of Americans greater than that of the English, and yet in some sense an achievement of British culture? Or is American liberty a perversion unto itself?

The former is much closer to what he seems to have believed more often, and as a matter of public record; and he had stressed the similarity of American and British culture before, both in conversation and in “Lines Written in the Commonplace Book of Miss Barbour, Daughter of the United States Minister to England,” which appeared in the *New-York Mirror* in 1829. In this short poem, we find what I would suggest is Coleridge’s sum estimation of the United States, which not only includes a noticeable trace of his former desire to settle there in his exaltation of America as “BRITAIN with elbow-room and doubly free!” but also an exposition of his view of the familial bond between British and American identity at this time. The poem reads as follows:

Child of my Muse! in Barbour’s gentle hand
 Go, cross the Main: thou seek’st no foreign land.
 ’Tis not the clod beneath our feet, we name
 Our Country. Each heaven-sanctioned tie the same,
 Laws, Manners, Language, Faith, Ancestral Blood,
 Domestic Honor, Awe of Womanhood,
 With kindling pride thou wilt rejoice to see

BRITAIN with elbow-room and doubly free!
 Go seek thy Countrymen! And if one Scar
 Still linger of that fratricidal War,
 Look to the Maid who brings thee from afar!
 Be thou the Olive Leaf and She the Dove,
 And say, I greet thee with a Brother's Love! (16.1.2: 1110)

Ultimately, then, Coleridge seems to have conceived of the relationship between the United States and England as fraternal: America is perhaps independent, but its relation to England is still quite clear. Of course this conception also allowed Coleridge to imagine an America that was still available to him.

Indeed, the fact that he never made it across the Atlantic seems to have strengthened his fascination with doing so in the same manner that the impracticality of his literary and philosophical ambitions informed their appeal. As Richard Monckton Milnes recalled, even in the last years of his life, Coleridge was encouraging Milnes and Arthur Hallam to visit America in his stead. "Go to America if you have the opportunity," Coleridge told the younger men, perhaps imagining that his popularity among the emerging Transcendentalists was indicative of a lost community of like-minded thinkers, and a degree of acceptance and respect that he never achieved in England. "I am known there," he went on, "I am a poor poet in England, but I am a great philosopher in America" (432). Here, just as in the short poem that appeared in the *New-York Mirror*, Coleridge's national identity seems to reside somewhere between potential transition and circumstantial stagnation as he reaches, finally through vicarious means, for the ostensibly regenerative experience of becoming American.

Chapter One

President Edwards and the Sage of Highgate

All theory is against freedom of the will; all experience for it.

– Samuel Johnson

In this first chapter, I outline the character of Coleridge's engagement with Jonathan Edwards in order to frame the significance of their disagreement on the issue of causal self-determination. Scarce critical attention has been given to this disagreement, and yet understanding both its context and impact is of vital importance if we are to gain an accurate view of Coleridge's influence on subsequent American writers. There is surely also much to be written on how this disagreement plays out in the larger field of British Romanticism, though my concern in this chapter is to recast Coleridge as a thinker whose interest and involvement in the theological aspects of the free will problem as mediated by Edwards came to inform the character of American literature in the nineteenth century.

My overarching contention, then, is that Coleridge's attempt to resolve the contest between post-Enlightenment philosophy and modern faith was always beleaguered by the problem of free will, and that the argument put forth by Edwards in *Freedom of the Will* (1754) was increasingly troublesome to him as he prepared the definitive, albeit

fragmentary, statement of his religious beliefs that would appear in *Aids to Reflection* (1825) – so troublesome, in fact, that Coleridge was compelled to address Edwards’ system directly. In this way, Edwards comes to cast a kind of shadow over Coleridge’s endeavor, which, in turn, points to a reciprocal influence of American and British modes of thought – in this case, a filtering of the religious concerns of colonial America into British Romanticism and then back into its American counterpart, a movement that owes much to the interest that Coleridge and early American thinkers shared in squaring modern philosophy with Christian faith.

An Apparent and Accidental Resemblance

In 1807, Coleridge registered his thoughts on Jonathan Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will* (1754) in the margins of Andrew Fuller’s *Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared* (1793), and then again in a letter to John Ryland. Here he alleged that Fuller did not know the difference between Calvinism and Necessitarianism, “and alas! misled by Jonathan Edward’s [sic] book” had come to affirm “a world of agents that never act, but are always acted upon, and yet without any one being that acts” (12.2: 802). A few months later, he made a more specific appraisal of Edwards’ powerful argument for theological determinism in a letter to John Ryland: “I greatly admire President Edwards’s Works; but am convinced that Kant in his Critique of the pure Reason, and more popularly in his Critique of the Practical Reason has completely overthrown the edifice of Fatalism, or causative Precedence as applied to Action” (CL 3:

35).⁹ But Coleridge was not as convinced as he had claimed. Indeed, as an incomplete notebook entry from almost sixteen years later illustrates, he was both troubled by the philosophical currency Edwards had given to orthodox Calvinism, and anxious to disavow the resemblance of his own convictions to those of the American theologian:

I have not read Jonathan Edwards' notorious Tract, the Benevol. Of God demonstrated in the Eternity of Hell Torments; & am ignorant of the principles on which his position is grounded. But I suspect that they are *Leibnitzian*, or a Theodicee on the hypothesis of a *best possible* World. Indeed from Edwards' Book on Necessity it is certain (unless he had recanted and reversed his whole system of Theology) that his World is a *Machine*: and that his Convictions and mine can have no other than an apparent and accidental Resemblance – daring as my Paradox may be deemed when taking up my last proposition I affix the concluding Link of the chain in a (CN 4: 5077)

In this long, unfinished fragment, Coleridge's main point of contention is with Edwards' theological determinism, which, though expounded in terms consistent with Calvinism, is grounded in the same premise upon which Spinoza had based his assertion of causal necessity – namely, that an infinite and absolute being necessarily exists. That this sequence of thought was left unfinished even in draft form is characteristic enough of what Thomas McFarland and subsequent scholars have, in various ways, depicted as the abiding philosophical and theological contest, or schism, that occupied Coleridge's mind as he struggled to comprehend the coexistence of the one and the many. Indeed, we might even say that all scholarship on the subject is ultimately derived from Coleridge's

⁹ Edwards was appointed President of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in 1757.

familiar admission in Chapter 10 of the *Biographia Literaria*: “For a very long time indeed I could not reconcile personality with infinity; and my head was with Spinoza, though my whole heart remained with Paul and John” (7.1: 201).

Edwards, however, had little need for personality, and he arrived at his belief in the necessary existence of God before he reached the age of twenty when he concluded that the opposite was inconceivable: “That there should absolutely be nothing at all is utterly impossible. The mind can never, let it stretch its conceptions ever so much, bring itself to conceive of a state of perfect nothing.” That is, since we cannot posit the existence of nothing without obvious contradiction, “we see that it is necessary some being should eternally be,” and further, that space itself “is this necessary, eternal, infinite and omnipresent being,” and, finally, that “all the space there was before the creation, is God himself” (6: 202, 203). Spinoza’s route is perhaps more intuitive, but his conclusion is the same. To his way of thinking, everything that can be said to exist, “exists either in itself or in something else,” and since “substance,” or God, is the only thing that is self-caused, i.e., “that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself,” then God is necessarily existent: “PROP. VII. *Existence belongs to the nature of substance.* | *Proof.* – Substance cannot be produced by anything external . . . it must, therefore, be its own cause – that is, its essence necessarily involves existence, or existence belongs to its nature” (E 48). From this, it follows that “*God, or substance, consisting of infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality, necessarily exists.*” For Spinoza, if this were not true, then existence would not belong to the nature of substance, and God’s essence would not necessarily suppose existence: “But this (by Prop. vii.) is absurd. Therefore God necessarily exists” (E 51).

Both Edwards and Spinoza, then, conceived of God as a necessarily infinite, existent, and self-caused being; and this conception was no doubt attractive to Coleridge, but it also threatened to reduce all existence, including the will of the individual, to the varied expression of a singular will. As a theological and causal determinist, Edwards had little problem accepting this, but like Coleridge, he also sought to avoid the pantheism that his system sometimes seemed to imply; and yet, as Perry Miller suggests in a passage that would serve just as well for Coleridge, such avoidance only tends to underscore the pantheistic implications of his thought: “we may venture to feel that Edwards was particularly careful to hold in check the mystical and pantheistical tendencies of his teaching because he himself was so apt to become a mystic and a pantheist” (*EW* 195). When dealing with the inherent corruption of humankind pantheism was easy enough to Edwards to avoid, but when he described the apprehension of God’s glory, as he did in his *Personal Narrative*, the distinction between God and his creation was somewhat obscured: “God’s excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature” (16: 794). Nevertheless, for Edwards, responding to the charge of pantheism was as simple as pointing out the difference between the appearance of God’s excellency and the infinite and inconceivable glory of God himself. “But take away the theology,” Miller reminds us, “remove the overlying stone of dogma from the wellsprings of Puritan conviction, and both nature and man become divine.” Of course Edwards never strays far enough from Calvinist orthodoxy to warrant such a removal. Indeed, for Edwards, God and humankind clearly were not the same. To believe otherwise was confusion and possibly heresy.

As is clear from his abiding affirmation of Original Sin from 1798 on, Coleridge also subscribed to the orthodoxy that kept humans separate from God, though he also affirmed a heightened spiritual state in which individuals can become godlike, or at least possessed of divine power: “By Faith in the Love of Christ the power of God becomes ours” (9: 309). Unlike Edwards, however, Coleridge struggled to affirm both the sovereignty of God and the freedom of the individual will. In this sense, the conflict between free will and necessity becomes one of the central concerns, if not the main point of contention, in Coleridge’s attempt to bring the notion of existence as a coherent whole together with a concurrent belief in the distinct character and freedom of its human inhabitants. That is, while the self-determining will became the defining feature of the philosophy and faith that Coleridge outlined in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817), *Aids to Reflection* (1825), and the unfinished *Opus Maximum* (c. 1823-4), the curious fact that he was an avowed “necessitarian” when he first composed the poetry for which he is generally known remains. Though he claimed in a letter of 1801 to have “overthrown the doctrine of Association, as taught by Hartley, and with it all the irreligious metaphysics of modern infidels – especially the doctrine of Necessity” (CL 2: 706), the deterministic origins and leanings of his early thought undoubtedly left an indelible mark, and while he was vigilant in distancing himself from pantheism, he could never bring himself to renounce Spinoza.¹⁰

In short, the doctrine of necessity evoked for Coleridge both a highly desirable theology of immanence *and* a mechanical conception of the world that was not only counter-intuitive, but also essentially atheistic. The most prominent study to address this

¹⁰ In the *Biographia*, for example, Coleridge observes the following of Spinoza’s *Ethics*: “at no time could I believe, that *in itself* and *essentially* it is incompatible with religion, natural, or revealed: and now I am most thoroughly persuaded of the contrary” (7.1: 152-3)

problem is still *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (1969), in which McFarland condenses the opposition between Coleridge's philosophy and faith by portraying it as a contest between the philosophy of Kant and that of Spinoza (alternately described as the philosophy of the 'I am' and that of the 'It is'). Subsequent approaches to the problem have generally reiterated McFarland's argument in modified terms. In *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature* (1985), for example, Raimonda Modiano claims that Coleridge sought "to work out a viable and systematic concept of the Absolute that could accommodate the principles of dynamic philosophy without violating the Christian view of a personal God" (187), while in *Coleridge and the Crisis of Reason* (2008), Richard Berkeley suggests that the contest is more precisely located in Coleridge's understanding of Spinoza's God as both the guiding energy of individual revelation as well as the omnipotent force by grace of which existence itself subsists: "if there is no breeze then the harp will be silent, the tune lost, but if the breeze is everything then the harp's tune can have no meaning" (210). Whatever their specific disagreements with McFarland, both accounts seem to agree on a contest between Coleridge's desire to assert both an objective philosophy and a personal faith – but my intention here is not to decide between different ways of defining what was clearly a pervasive problem for Coleridge. A more wide-ranging description of the matter would not only point to the perennial contest between idealists and materialists, or the basic opposition between Plato and Aristotle, which Coleridge referred to in his philosophical lectures as "the first way in which, plainly and distinctly, two opposite systems were placed before the mind of the world" (8.1: 232), but also to the separation between phenomenal and noumenal, matter and spirit, ecclesiastical and antinomian, conservative and radical, and so forth (divisions, we may note, that Edwards

largely overcame – at least in his own mind). Here, I reduce the problem to one of free will and theological determinism, not only to accommodate my discussion of Coleridge with Edwards, but also to call attention to what I take to be the crux of the matter without having to reiterate what has become the truism of Coleridge’s complex involvement with German Idealism, of which much has already been written.¹¹

But whatever we make of Coleridge’s attempt to reconcile personality with infinity, the degree to which the attempt itself was problematic is worth noting. In what became a theme for Coleridge, as well as his critics, he depicted his early interest in philosophical and theological problems as one that is rooted in a fallen, diseased state of being – as if his intellectual pursuits were indicative of a kind of preternatural sickness.¹²

¹¹ Scholarship on Coleridge’s engagement with German Idealism dates as far back Thomas De Quincey’s accusations of plagiarism in 1834. More comprehensive analyses of the German influence on Coleridge’s thought emerge in the twentieth century with René Wellek’s *Immanuel Kant in England* (1931), G. N. G. Orsini’s *Coleridge and German Idealism* (1969), Thomas McFarland’s *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (1969), and Paul Hamilton’s *Coleridge and German Philosophy* (2007). Though Kant, Schelling, Fichte, and other German writers were surely significant to Coleridge, scholars have long focused on this continental engagement at the expense of Coleridge’s important involvement in the Anglo-American philosophical and religious tradition. Ben Brice’s *Coleridge and Scepticism* (2007), as well as several recent studies of Coleridge’s religious thought (e.g., Ronald C. Wendling’s *Coleridge’s Progress to Christianity* (1995), Douglas Hedley’s *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion* (2000), Jeffrey Barbeau’s *Coleridge, the Bible, and Religion* (2008), and Luke Savin Herrick Wright’s *Coleridge and the Anglican Church* (2010)), have begun to address this gap – yet my aim here is not to account for the totality of Coleridge’s intellectual activity in the Anglo-American world, but rather to focus on the specific ways in which Coleridge’s influence and involvement in American literature, philosophy, and religion in the nineteenth century was inflected by his prior engagement with American modes of thought in the eighteenth century, especially those of Jonathan Edwards.

¹² As James Engell and W. Jackson Bate note of the reception to the *Biographia*: “Reviews were generally unfavorable, tending to concentrate – when not speaking of Coleridge’s character or his career as a whole – on three things in particular: the lack of organization; Coleridge’s own disparaging comments on reviewing, which naturally aroused a desire to retaliate; and finally his fondness for metaphysics” (7.1: lxv). Indeed, as an unsigned review in the *New Monthly Magazine* opined, “the whole that is valuable is intermingled with such a cloudiness of metaphysical jargon in the mystical language of the Platonists and schoolmen, of Kant and Jacob Behmen, as to lose the good effect which it might have produced had it been presented with more simplicity” (*Coleridge: The Critical Heritage* 1: 322). Yet it was no doubt William Hazlitt’s criticism that was the most comprehensively vicious. In response to Coleridge’s claim that the poetry of William Bowles saved him from potential destruction at the hands of metaphysics, for example, Hazlitt writes, “the disease, we fear, was in the mind itself; and the study of poetry, instead of

“At a very premature age,” he writes in Chapter One of the *Biographia*, “even before my fifteenth year, I had bewildered myself in metaphysics, and in theological controversy.” And never at a loss when it came to self-deprecation, Coleridge proceeds to align himself with the fallen angels of *Paradise Lost*, citing his early affinity for

directing [conversation] to my favorite subjects

Of providence, fore-knowledge, will, and fate,

Fix'd fate, free will, fore-knowledge absolute

And found no end in wandering mazes lost.

This preposterous pursuit was, beyond doubt, injurious, both to my natural powers, and to the progress of my education. It would perhaps have been destructive, had it been continued; but from this I was auspiciously withdrawn . . . Well were it for me perhaps, had I never relapsed into the same mental disease; if I had continued to pluck the flower and reap the harvest from the cultivated surface, instead of delving in the unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths. (7.1: 15-17)

We can also see that the theological controversies that perplexed Coleridge in his youth also forecast the structure of the metaphysical problems that beset him in his more mature years. For when he notes that he was unable to reconcile personality with infinity, he is only restating the problem of free will in more abstract terms – a problem that necessarily involves the nature of God, as is clear from the long quotation of Kant that directly

counteracting, only gave force to the original propensity; and Mr. Coleridge has ever since, from the combined forces of poetical levity and metaphysical bathos, been trying to fly, not in the air, but under ground – playing a hawk and buzzard between sense and nonsense, floating or sinking in fine Kantian categories . . . promising us an account of the Intellectual System of the Universe, and putting us off with a reference to a promised dissertation on the Logos, introductory to an intended commentary on the entire Gospel of St. John” (*Coleridge: The Critical Heritage* 1: 298).

precedes Coleridge's declaration that his head was with Spinoza while his heart was with Paul and John. The last line of this quotation gives an adequate summary of Coleridge's own concern: "For without any knowledge or determining ground of its own [God] would only be a blind necessary ground of other things and other spirits; and thus would be distinguished from the FATE of certain ancient philosophers in no respect, but that of being more definitely and intelligibly described" (7.1: 201).¹³

Built in to the problem of free will, then, was the apparent necessity of developing a system in which God is the origin of the moral and spiritual, as well as of the material, world. In Coleridge's view, if God was no more than a first cause, then there could be no supernatural source for the human will, which at its highest level receives its power from, or becomes an agent of, the divine will. As various scholars have pointed out, in order to achieve this supernatural status, Coleridge supposed that the will would have to come into alignment with the mysterious faculty of Reason, the objects of which are "God, the Soul, eternal Truth, &c." while the Understanding is merely "the faculty by which we

¹³ To the extent that Coleridge himself acknowledged that "the *clearness* and *evidence* of the 'CRITIQUE OF THE PURE REASON;' of the JUDGMENT; of the 'METAPHISICAL ELEMENTS OF NATURAL PHILOSOPHY,' and of his 'RELIGION WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF PURE REASON,' took possession of me as with a giant's hand" (7.1: 153), the familiar notion of Coleridge's debt to Kant as perhaps the central event in the development of British Romanticism is essentially an inbuilt assumption of Romantic studies. That this assumption does not entirely account for Coleridge's theological aspirations has been noted by James Boulger, who points out that "Coleridge, probably by 1818 and certainly by 1825, wanted to move beyond the limits described by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and give ontological status to the regulative ideas of God, self, and immortality" (76); and though she does not invoke Coleridge's religious affinities, Kathleen Wheeler implies something rather similar when she observes that "according to Coleridge (and Hegel), Kant had failed in his attempt to break out of the dualism that inevitably leads to the mind as essentially passive, for he had retained the idea of an original manifold external to the mind or subject, which the mind endows with order and regularity, with shape and meaningful form" (46). That is, Coleridge always sought to establish the identity of mind and matter in the act of creative reception, which he exalted in *Kubla Khan* and the *Biographia Literaria* as an ontological experience of absolute knowledge akin to the rapture of communion with God.

generalize and arrange the phenomena of perception” (4.1: 156).¹⁴ And though this solution does little to explain how, or at what point, the finite will actually begins to determine itself, since free will was by definition “incomprehensible – i.e. causeless, unconditional, indetermined – else it could it [sic] not be freedom” (12.3: 312), no explanation was necessary. In other words, Coleridge was not only keen to attribute a self-determining personality to God, but also to individuals whose wills became consubstantial with Reason, which, as he claimed in *The Friend*, has “the power of acquainting itself with invisible realities or spiritual objects” (4.1: 156).

So while Coleridge was convinced by the rigorous logic of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, but as a Christian he simply could not accept that “God does not love or hate anyone,” or that “He who loves God, cannot endeavour that God should love him in return” (256). Likewise, his regret for having delved into “the unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths” is largely based in his recognition that German Idealism (with the possible exception of Kant) often tended to blur the distinction between Christianity and Pantheism – for by “metaphysic depths” Coleridge almost certainly does not mean Berkeley, Locke, Hume, Hartley, or even Spinoza, but rather the German Idealists with whom he shared the aspiration of using philosophy to discern spiritual or religious truths. That is, unlike the rationalist philosophies that still have a place in the analytic tradition, the more metaphysical, and in many cases mystical, arguments of the post-Kantian idealists were concerned less with empirical datum than with gaining epistemological access to the transcendental realm that Kant had established as existent, though entirely unknowable. To Coleridge, who was himself already eager to achieve such revelatory

¹⁴ For the important relationship between the will and Reason, see Douglas Hedley’s *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion*, 185; Karen McLean’s “Individuality, Unity, and Distinction: Plotinian Concepts in the *Opus Maximum*,” 249-53; and Mary Anne Perkins’ *Coleridge’s Philosophy*, 241-3.

knowledge, these arguments were surely enticing, but insofar as they failed to clearly demarcate the line between God and his creation, or to actually prove the existence of free will, or the noumenality of the human soul, they were ultimately dissatisfying.

Though we know from Edwards' *Personal Narrative*, as well as his diary, that he was certainly anxious about whether or not he had been truly converted, that he tormented himself incessantly over his iniquities, and that he struggled with bouts of melancholy, there is no indication that he shared Coleridge's metaphysical unease. In fact, it was quite the opposite: Edwards was able to adapt and employ philosophy in a way that strengthened and further developed his religious convictions. As Philip Gura observes, Edwards' description of his conversion experience in his *Personal Narrative* demonstrates "how his deep reading in contemporary philosophy allowed him to redefine his understanding of the religious life" (35). Put another way, by describing his religious awakening as an experiential phenomenon – "a sweet burning in my heart; an ardor of my soul" (16: 793) – Edwards was able to posit, or convincingly allegorize, the supernatural in rational terms.

Bracketing the varying success of the two men in deploying philosophy to bolster religious faith, their common interest and conception of the human mind bespeaks an unmistakable resemblance between what are otherwise two exceptionally original minds. They also share a similar experience of solitude and public censure, no doubt due in large part to the difficulty in following what are often intellectually rigorous and unconventional arguments, but also to what we might view as their uncompromising independence of thought. Though Coleridge's later turn toward metaphysical and theological enquiry is what makes him such a distinctive voice among the British

Romantics (and so central a figure in English literary criticism), by 1810 he was effectively ousted from the Wordsworth circle, and the fears that he had voiced in *Dejection* – i.e., that his “genial spirits” had failed (16.1.2: 699), and that his dalliance with “abstruse research” had effected a putrefaction of his poetic ability, a perversion of intellect by which he had stolen from his “own nature all the natural Man” (16.1.2: 700) – these fears assumed the status of consensus among his critics, most notably Hazlitt. “All that he has done of moment,” wrote Coleridge’s former admirer in 1824, “he had done twenty years ago . . . he has only to draw the sliders of his imagination, and a thousand subjects expand before him, startling him with their brilliancy, or losing themselves in endless obscurity” (30).¹⁵

In what shapes up as a similar trajectory, Edwards began by earning esteem in New England as well as abroad for his part in the Great Awakening, his account of which was published on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁶ Yet by 1750 he was forced from his Northampton ministry after an attempt to revert to a system that would have nullified what had become a customary right of the unregenerate to baptism, and would have required members of the church to give an account of their conversion experience rather than just a simple profession of faith – an attempt that Edwards acknowledged would “be

¹⁵ As Richard Holmes notes, after the poor review that “Christabel” received, Coleridge drew so much fire from critics that he lost his publisher: “For the next three years, all other reviews of Coleridge were almost universally hostile, and Hazlitt in particular felt free to lead the hounds. Murray, the shrewdest of all publishers, when it came to business, sensed the way the tide had turned. He slowly withdrew his interest during the autumn” (438).

¹⁶ We should also register the impact of Edwards’ *Faithful Narrative* on religious experience in Great Britain. As Jonathan Marsden observes, “Edwards’ astonishing narrative created an immediate stir. It served as an inspiration for revivals in both Scotland and England. John Wesley, who in May had his history-changing experience of having his ‘heart strangely warmed,’ was much impressed by Edwards’ *Faithful Narrative*, which he read in October of that same year and which provided one of the models for the revivals he hoped to promote. A few years later, when his own Methodist movement was soaring, he published his own abridgment of Edwards’ work, making it standard reading in Wesleyan circles” (173). For a detailed account of the relationship between Edwards and Wesley, see Richard Brantley’s *Anglo-American Coordinates* (1993), 7-42.

very likely to overthrow me, not only with regard to my usefulness in the work of the ministry here, but everywhere” (16: 283-84). As Gregory Nobles puts it with apparent bias: “[Edwards] wanted to return to the old distinctions between the saved and the unsaved, to make people painfully aware of the differences, and to use that awareness as a means of bringing them to the point of conversion. Most of the other ministers were leaning in the other direction” (73).¹⁷

Like Coleridge, Edwards’ reputation suffered what was essentially a complete reversal of popular opinion; and to the extent that Coleridge is still seen a monument of squandered potential and Edwards as a shining example of a hopelessly outdated hellfire theology, the effects of these reversals are still felt. Moreover, though a reversal of popular opinion surely meant something quite different in eighteenth-century America than it did in nineteenth-century England, and though the circumstantial differences between Coleridge’s life and that of Edwards are many, my larger claim here is that these reversals essentially codified a sense of intellectual independence in both men that subsequently found a purchase in the minds of American thinkers in the nineteenth century, carrying itself much farther than either man could have guessed, and emerging most notably as a decisive influence on the trope of the unnatural man – a representation of the cloistered mind as irreparably perverse, if also possessed of a seductive power that

¹⁷ Edwards, however, viewed the affair as much more than a professional matter – in his mind, it was the uprising of a philistine mob against a man of principle. “I have many enemies abroad in the country,” he wrote in a letter to his publisher, Thomas Foxcroft, “who hate me for my stingy principles, enthusiasm, rigid proceedings and that now are expecting full triumph over me” (16: 284). Ultimately, Edwards was forced to endure the indignity and humiliation of having his own congregation turn on him: “I have been openly reproached in church meetings . . . I need God’s counsel in every step I take and every word I speak; for all that I do and say is watched by the multitude around me with the utmost strictness and with eyes of the greatest uncharitableness and severity, and let me do or say what I will, my words and actions are represented in dark colors. And the state of things is come to that, that they seem to think it greatly concerns ‘em to blacken me, and represent me in odious colors to the world, to justify their own conduct. They seem to be sensible that now their character can’t stand unless it be on the ruin of mine” (16: 309).

obscured the line between fanaticism and divine inspiration. This influence is dealt with most forcefully in Poe and Hawthorne, though for now it is enough to note that the intellectual achievement of both Edwards and Coleridge is not only a mark of their distinction, but also of their isolation. Again, to be clear, I am not suggesting that there are not important differences in their individual cases, but I do want to stress the broad agreement of their respective circumstances inasmuch as they inform the character of the American mind in the nineteenth century. Here too, it is important to register the fact that both men were somehow able to emerge from what seemed like total ruin, each going on to produce some of their finest works after the fact: Edwards with his removal to Stockbridge in 1750, and Coleridge with his break from Wordsworth in 1810.

For Coleridge, the isolated and irresolute life nearly came to assume that status of myth.¹⁸ Both personal and intellectual, the loneliness and studied melancholy of his notebooks, letters, and poetry can also be read as a kind of independence that made way for the American reception of *The Friend and Aids to Reflection*. “Individual liberty of conscience, the instinct to freedom,” observes Nancy Craig Simmons, “made attractive a philosophy which must be constructed in the mind of the reader from fragments provided by the author” (373). For Emerson, the attraction to Coleridge was comprised of both subject matter and his perception of a kind of individualism borne out of necessity. As he

¹⁸ As *Table Talk* comments from 1827 reveal, Coleridge came to think of himself as something like Hamlet, “whose character” as he described it, “is the prevalence of the abstracting and generalizing habit over the practical. He does not want courage, skill, will, or opportunity; but every incident sets him thinking; and it is curious, and at the same time strictly natural, that Hamlet, who all the play seems reason itself, should be impelled, at last by mere accident to effect his object. I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so” (14.2: 61). Having made a persuasive case for taking these remarks seriously, Eric Wilson writes of the *Dejection*-era Coleridge: “He is alone and wakeful at midnight, even though he clearly envisions calm lights and communal sustenance for others. He is Hamlet roughly hewing providence in a mental graveyard, despite the fact that he is also Hamlet able to perceive the fecund energy of the unmapped middle” (87).

wrote in 1841, “In England ethics & philosophy have died out. How solitary is Coleridge & how conspicuous, not so much from his force as from his solitude” (*JMN* 7: 431). But Coleridge is not only an influence on later American writers, but also an analogue for the emerging American individualist, the character of whom is not a function of the degree to which the authorial emanation accords with the spirit of the age, but rather one of the force and acuity with which the author critiques, resists, or attempts to redirect that spirit.¹⁹

Not until Edwards, however, do we see the first complex manifestation of the outsider in the midst of the crowd, waging a doomed struggle against the complacency of the masses – though initially, Edwards’ position can simply seem only a matter of circumstance. As the grandson of Solomon Stoddard, he inherited the Puritan mantle at an inopportune time: Puritan dominance was giving way to the growing power of the merchant class, Arminianism was on the rise, and religion itself had fallen under the influence of the staid academics at Harvard and Yale. Though Edwards’ views were certainly what we would characterize as conservative, he was by no means an institutional man. He thought and acted independently (and seemingly without fear of consequence), first alienating the hegemony of the New England ministry in the years following the Great Awakening by blurring the line between true faith and enthusiasm, and then his own congregation by resolutely holding what was an increasingly irrelevant line between piety and the rights demanded by members in good social standing. In this

¹⁹ The complete dominance of this figure on the American literary scene, so evident in the enduring reputations of Poe, Emerson, Hawthorne, Dickinson, and Melville, can be traced back to the separatism of Plymouth Plantation as well as the self-assured rectitude of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The radical religious toleration of Roger Williams and the outright antinomianism of Anne Hutchinson obviously took things much further than either of these groups intended, and yet both settlements had inadvertently provided the basic model from which these two radicals drew their inspiration.

sense, he not only anticipates the independence of Coleridge's religious thought, but also the Emersonian admonishment "to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men" (1: 90). Of course he was also fiercely doctrinal, and inasmuch as he seems to lay the foundation for a break from the orthodoxy that he defended, it can be difficult to pinpoint accurately the direction of his thought.²⁰

I do, however, think it is clear that we can discern in Edwards a mode of expression that is defined by precisely the pursuit that Coleridge deems "preposterous," which is to say that while Coleridge's "mental disease" results in his effective expulsion from the main currents of British thought in the early nineteenth century, it also places him rather neatly in the transitional phase between Jonathan Edwards and Ralph Waldo Emerson, as is apparent from the fact that Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* and *The Friend* appealed both to the Congregationalist James Marsh, who oversaw the publication of these works in the United States, as well as to Emerson and other emerging Transcendentalists, whose use of Coleridge made the reconciliation between Congregationalism and Unitarianism that Marsh had hoped to accomplish a moot point.²¹

Yet within Coleridge's constellation of philosophical polarities, Edwards' function is unique – a theological empiricist, he falls somewhere in the space between Berkeley and Spinoza. Of course he is also a Calvinist, and therefore a determinist, but much like Coleridge, who avows "that the faith, which saves and sanctifies, is a

²⁰ As Emory Elliot put it in 2002: "There is little indication in current scholarship that the question of whether Edwards is the last great Puritan or the first American Romantic, or both at once, will soon be resolved" (151).

²¹ Congregationalists were more orthodox and doctrinal than Unitarians. Edwards himself had been a Congregationalist. Transcendentalists were, for the most part, former Unitarians. In a letter of 1841, Marsh made his view of Transcendentalism quite clear: "The whole of Boston transcendentalism I take to be a rather superficial affair; and there is some force in the remark of a friend of mine that the "Dial" indicates rather the place of the moon than of the sun. They have many of the prettinesses of the German writers, but without their manly logic and strong systematizing tendency" (256).

collective energy, a total act of the whole moral being; that its living sensorium is in the *heart*” (7.1: 122), Edwards defines what he refers to as the “affections” as an activity of one’s essential being, or what he calls “the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul” – a “bodily sensation, especially about the heart and vitals, that are the fountain of the fluids of the body: from whence it comes to pass, that the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, perhaps in all nations and ages, is called the heart” (2: 96-97). Likewise, Edwards also conceives of the heart as the faculty by which humankind is saved: “Never was a natural man engaged earnestly to seek his salvation . . . nor was ever one induced to fly for refuge unto Christ, while his heart remained unaffected. Nor was there ever a saint awakened out of a cold, lifeless frame, or recovered from a lamentable departure from God, without having his heart affected” (2: 102). Faith, then, is an activity of the affective senses, a perception that is not passive, but involved with what it perceives, and such active perception proceeds directly from “the heart” – a faculty entirely distinct from the mere understanding. As he writes in his treatise on the *Religious Affections* (1746),

God has indued the soul with two faculties: one is that by which it is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns and views and judges of things; which is called the understanding. The other faculty is that by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers; either is inclined to ‘em, or is disinclined, and averse from ‘em; or is the faculty by which the soul does not behold things, as an indifferent unaffected spectator, but either as liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving

or rejecting. This faculty is called by various names: it is sometimes called the *inclination*: and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, it is called the *will*: and the *mind*, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the *heart*. (2: 96)

And if we forget for a moment that Edwards does not conceive of the will as causally self-determined, then his distinction between the understanding and the will, inclination, or heart, bears a strong resemblance to the crucial distinction that Coleridge makes in both “The Eolian Harp” and *Dejection*.

In the former, Coleridge is at pains to stress the importance of an active and affective faith in God. Indeed, such faith comes to serve as a corrective for the aberrant “shapings of the unregenerate mind” (16.1.1: 234): “For never guiltless may I speak of him, / The Incomprehensible! save when with awe / I praise him, and with Faith that inly feels” (16.1.1: 234). In *Dejection*, however, Coleridge’s recognition of the beauty in God’s creation, that of the stars and crescent moon, only reminds him that his power of active perception has withered: “I see them all so excellently fair, / I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!” (16.1.2: 699). Notably, this spiritual decline is characterized by a “heartless mood” (16.1.2: 698), while the presumption of his auditor’s experiential knowledge of the regenerate state of perception is founded upon the healthful function of the heart: “O pure of heart! thou need’st not ask of me / What this strong music in the soul may be!” (16.1.2: 699). In short, Coleridge is not only bemoaning his failure as a poet, but more importantly, his waning capacity to achieve a regenerate state of mind, which, again, is based upon an inability to *feel*.

In aligning the will with the heart, or what he called “the affections,” Edwards also seems to have anticipated the unfinished moral aspect of Coleridge’s conception of the Reason. In 1825, Coleridge made additional notes concerning his discussion in *Aids to Reflections* (published in a brief appendix in the 1831 edition) on the distinction between the Reason and the Understanding in which he stated that the “Reason is considered in relation to the Will and Moral Being,” and then distinguished the Practical Reason from the Theoretic, or Speculative, by elevating it to a position of complete authority and centrality: “N.B. The Practical Reason alone *is* Reason in the full and substantive sense. It is reason in its own Sphere of *perfect freedom*; as the source of IDEAS, which *Ideas*, in their conversion to the responsible Will, become Ultimate Ends” (9: 413, 467-69). We can only speculate where Coleridge might have taken this important connection between the Reason, the Will, and the Moral Being, for he never completed his exposition of this point (9: lxxxiv).²² Nevertheless, it is apparent that Coleridge conceived of the full cooperation between the three as the ultimate aspiration of the moral and spiritual life, and that the transition of Ideas from the Practical Reason to the “responsible Will” comprises the essential character of Coleridge’s vision of the Reason in its highest function – that is, as “*perfect freedom*.”

But despite these foundational similarities concerning the affective activity of the regenerate mind, there is no evidence that Coleridge ever read *Religious Affections*, or any of Edwards’ works other than *Freedom of the Will*, which so impressed itself upon

²² Much like his promised essay “on the uses of the Supernatural in poetry and the principles that regulate its introduction” (7.1: 306), Coleridge’s intentions here were perhaps thwarted by the very magnitude of the task as he had come to imagine it. As John Beer observes, “the main points of the distinction between reason and understanding had been set out, but the further association of reason with the moral sense, which was to provide a central link with the forthcoming discussion of original sin, had hardly been mentioned. Before Coleridge could reach it, a gap occurred in his composition” (9: lxxxiv).

him that eighteen years after reading it he was compelled to attack Edwards' system in *Aids to Reflection* and to make a scathing reference to it in *The Constitution of the Church and State* (1830). Indeed, Coleridge's unfinished notebook entry not only reveals his deep ambivalence with respect to the conflict between his philosophy and his faith, which is centered in his inability to refute causal necessity, but also suggests that he was not quite through with Edwards. Two years later, he recorded his thoughts on Edwards' controversial doctrine of necessity in *Aids to Reflection*: "The doctrine of modern Calvinism as laid down by Jonathan Edwards and the late Dr. Williams, which represents a Will absolutely passive, clay in the hands of a Potter, destroys all Will, takes away its essence and definition, as effectually as in saying – This Circle is square – I should deny the figure to be a circle at all" (9: 158-59).

Though Edwards is mentioned here along with Edward Williams, as Coleridge goes on, it becomes increasingly clear that it is primarily Edwards with whom he is concerned: he subsequently advises his readers that Calvin and Luther should not "be confounded with the new-England System," and closes the discussion with exclusive reference to Edwards: "Now as the difference of a captive and enslaved Will, and *no* Will at all, such is the difference between the *Lutheranism* of Calvin and the Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards" (9: 160). Here again, Coleridge's impassioned dismissal of Edwards belies a deeper involvement, an unresolved philosophical and theological conflict at the very core of his system that also resonates through both the sacred and secular modes of the American impulse to, and exaltation of, an unrestricted self-determination, which

simultaneously acknowledges the force of the argument for determinism, whether it be theological, causal, or some combination (or suspicion) of both.²³

Yet if theological or causal determinism were true, then it would also mean that evil must be attributed to God insofar as he is the author of all things, and this is an additional point of contention between Coleridge and Edwards. For Coleridge, the notion that God would have designed a sinful world, though rationally sound, is morally unacceptable, while for Edwards, it is simply a matter of logical consistency and theological necessity:

'Tis certain, that God thus, for excellent, holy, gracious and glorious ends, ordered the fact which they committed, who were concerned in Christ's death; and that therein they did but fulfill God's designs. As, I trust, no Christian will deny it was the design of God, that Christ should be *crucified*, and that for this end, he came into the world. 'Tis very manifest by many scriptures, that the whole affair of Christ's crucifixion, with its circumstances, and the treachery of Judas, that made way for it, was ordered in God's providence, in pursuance of his purpose . . . (1: 402)

Here, and throughout *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards' talent for fusing metaphysical idealism with theological doctrine is on full display, and the strength of his argument is remarkable. Indeed, it is not difficult to see why it would have incensed Coleridge, why he would have sought what seemed a refuge in the second critique, where Kant cryptically affirms "a causality that is not determinable in accordance with laws of

²³ The distinctly American character of this contradictory impulse begins aboard the *Arabella* when Winthrop so explicitly lays the burden of justification on humankind rather than on God, inadvertently setting up the inevitable awareness of the more skeptically-minded among the Puritans that their survival was largely based on the consequences of their own agency.

nature” (48), and then still felt the need to respond in *Aids to Reflection* – for Edwards’ argument is, if not entirely unassailable, then surprisingly close.

In libertarian philosopher Hugh J. McCann’s recent estimation, *Freedom of the Will* is “as relentless as the New England winter . . . [Edwards] pounds away at his Arminian opponents, repeatedly locating them in substantially the same infinite regress, and rejecting their notion of freedom as both irrelevant to true liberty and inconsistent with a proper understanding of God’s knowledge and sovereignty.” Not surprisingly, given his own view, McCann goes on to claim that Edwards’ “argument is not convincing, simply because the ordinary concept of freedom – whether it captures what really goes on in human action or not – is in fact the Arminian one” (27). Yet when he concludes by supposing that “human choice and volition, though exempt from natural causation, are nevertheless a product of God’s sovereign will as creator,” and that “our wills are simply part of what God himself wills in providing for our existence” (40) he raises a new set of problems, not the least of which is the supposed disjunction between supernatural and natural causation, both of which must be necessarily subject to the sovereign will of God.²⁴

If we look at Edwards’ argument closely, we see that the will is subject to both natural and supernatural causation, both of which have their being in God. Left entirely to natural causation, the individual cannot achieve the sainthood that is achieved through the immediate influence of the divine, but in Edwards’ view, this fallen state is due not to

²⁴ McCann seems to believe that, so far as the will is concerned, natural causation can be sidestepped by attributing the action of the will solely to God, but this solution (which, incidentally, corroborates the doctrine of election) is already present in Edwards’ own conclusion to *Freedom of the Will*: “For if men are made true saints, no otherwise than as God makes ‘em so, and distinguishes ‘em from others, by an efficacious power and influence of his, that decides and fixes the event . . . it follows, that God thus distinguished from others, all that ever become true saints, by his eternal design or decree” (1: 435).

God as an immediate cause, but rather to his having withdrawn his gracious influence. McCann's adjustment to Edwards' system is slight, but significant inasmuch as it follows along the same lines as Kant's argument for a causality "not capable of any empirical intuition as proof of its reality" (48). That is, McCann wants to make the will subject only to a supernatural causation, free from infinite regress; but this, as he admits, would introduce the problem of God as an immediate cause of sin: "We might wonder how God could ever will that we make decisions which violate the moral law, and especially how he could the will the existence of anyone who is lost" (42). Again, Edwards avoids this problem by maintaining that violations of the moral law are not the immediate effects of God's will, but rather instances of his having withdrawn his influence. It is true that such withdrawal is still part of the divine plan, and hence an indirect consequence of God's will, but Edwards' notion of withdrawal, as opposed to immediate causation, does soften the necessary conclusion that God is the author of sin, if by this latter phrase, as Edwards observes, we only mean "the permitter, or not a hinderer of sin; and at the same time, a disposer of the state of events, in such a manner, for wise, holy and most excellent ends and purposes, that sin, if it be permitted or not hindered, will most certainly and infallibly follow" (1: 399).

In short, McCann's solution lacks the very distinction that allows Edwards to ground his theology in rational terms – that is, for Edwards, the immediate influence of God does not disrupt, or exist apart from, the natural order of things, but rather, both abide *within* God's sovereign will. In this sense, it would be contradictory to say that God suspends the rules of natural causation, or creates a special exemption from them for humans. If God is absolute sovereign, then his divine will *is* the only rule. At the same

time, since he never denies natural causation, Edwards maintains a rationalism that McCann, following Kant, must abandon when he posits the existence of a will that somehow exists outside of the natural world (i.e., in God, or the noumenal realm), and hence lacks an empirical proof.²⁵ For Coleridge, however, it was precisely this lack of evidence that gave rise to the apparent division between his faith and philosophy. As Tim Milnes suggests, “the very feature that attracted Coleridge the Christian (as well as Coleridge the poet) to Kant’s idea of the object of pure practical reason – namely, free will’s noumenality, its accessibility to human experience only as a practical postulate or aesthetic trope – disappointed Coleridge the philosopher” (311).

And yet, as McFarland is careful to note, “the same Coleridge philosophizes, poetizes, and theologizes, and, furthermore, the different fields of his interests are mutually interdependent – his poetry, both in theory and in practice, is essentially, not accidentally, involved with his philosophy, and his philosophy is reciprocally bound up with this theological interests” (xxxviii). But here I would even go so far as to claim that, like Edwards, all of Coleridge’s work is an extension of his faith. For all the variety of his thought and expression, there is no point at which Coleridge fails to make accommodations for his religious convictions. The argument for a divide in Coleridge’s thinking, a characteristic reiteration of which resides in Milnes’ claim that “his system was torn between two impulses: first, the need to be a system; and second, his concern to preserve a transcendent and ineffable ground towards which will, in the form of faith, might turn” (320), is essentially a refusal to take Coleridge at his word when he claims

²⁵ Andrews Reath makes a similar point in his Introduction to the second critique: “But since nothing can be known about what is not part of the spatio-temporal framework, there can be no disproof of any (purported) noumenal object” (xii).

that “Religion passes out of the ken of Reason only where the eye of Reason has reached its own Horizon; and that Faith is then but its continuation” (7.2: 247).

That is, while it is tempting to conclude that, insofar as the ground of Coleridge’s philosophy has its foundation in faith, there is a sense in which his system is essentially discordant, or even irresolvably unsystematic, such a view exhibits only a partial grasp of the necessary epistemological limits of any philosophical system – limits that make faith an eventuality. As Coleridge observes in the second of his philosophical lectures, philosophy itself begins with a guiding supposition, an initial act of faith in the mind itself: “That which is the ground cannot have a ground under it; and thus Pythagoras commenced philosophy in the faith of the human reason, revealed to himself by purity of the moral character, the faith of that reason in its own dictates” (8.1: 79). He also uses this principle of limitation to ground his religious faith: “[The Christian] asserts what he can neither prove, nor account for, nor himself comprehend . . . *There is nothing the absolute ground of which is not a Mystery.* The contrary were indeed a contradiction in terms: for how can that which is to explain all things, be susceptible of an explanation?” (9: 138-39). For Coleridge, there is much to recommend this position. It not only makes a rational argument for the inevitability of belief in an origin which, by its very definition, cannot be known, but the alternative is the radical skepticism of Hume, which grounds its admittedly uncertain knowledge solely in the habitual experience of contiguity, and in the end still defers to belief in order to avoid the intellectual paralysis that would occur if one ceased to believe in the unprovable reality of the most basic contiguities – e.g., “If we believe that fire warms, or water refreshes, ’tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise” (176).

Though Cairns Craig has argued that Coleridge's criticism of associationism in the *Biographia* does not actually respond to Hume so much as evade him by attacking Hartley instead, he seems to minimize the extent to which Hume and Coleridge actually arrive at the same conclusions. As Craig himself points out, when Coleridge argues "that we cannot, on an associationist account, know the force that governs mental activity," he is essentially making the same point as Hume, for whom "the ultimate grounds of human experience can never be fully known because we can only ever have *empirical* knowledge of their causes" (46). Simply put, ultimate causes are unknowable for both Coleridge and Hume. Indeed, one might say that the difference between the two is merely another manifestation of the difference between those who believe that the only knowledge that actually qualifies as such is derived from impressions of the external world, and those who believe that such impressions are not possible without an active exertion of the mind itself. "How can we make bricks without straw? Or build without cement?" (7.1: 142) Coleridge asks in the *Biographia*. For though Coleridge would grant Hume's point that an elucidation of "the ultimate causes of our mental actions is impossible" (20), he would stress the importance of recognizing the mind as the cause of experiential phenomena, and not the other way around: "We learn all things indeed by occasion of experience; but the very facts so learnt force us inward on the antecedents, that must be pre-supposed in order to render experience possible" (7.1: 142).

To conceive of the mind as entirely passive was spiritual death for Coleridge. What he viewed as the absence of life in the associationist system inevitably led towards the unregenerate state, or the "Life-in-Death" (l. 193) of the Ancient Mariner, and prompted his belief "that all the products of the mere *reflective* faculty partook of

DEATH” (7.1: 152). In order to avoid this “Life-in-Death,” Coleridge sought to reject empiricism on its own terms. Whether or not he accomplished this is still a matter of some doubt. As Craig argues,

When Coleridge identifies that “to bring in the will, or reason, as causes of their own cause, that is as at once causes and effects” (*BL*, I, 112), is the fundamental flaw in associationist theory, he sidesteps the fact that it is precisely such a conception of “cause” that Hume has set in doubt, “cause” having been already revealed by Hume to be no more than “constant conjunction” – in other words, a special case of association. (46)

Yet Craig himself may be sidestepping the fact that undermining causation, which no doubt posits a failure of knowledge, also seems to presuppose the existence of an adequate knowledge to which we do not have access. As Douglas Hedley notes, Coleridge “believes that the very consciousness of human finitude is the indication that this finitude has been transcended; if our human condition was just the Humean state of forming beliefs through instinct, habit, and custom – if we were entirely finite, we would not be aware of our finitude as such” (203).

In either case, I want to suggest that Coleridge’s rejection of Hume is part and parcel of his contempt for injudicious populism, or what both he and Edwards would have called enthusiasm. Jonathan Mee has taken something of a similar view, arguing that “Coleridge’s war on materialism was also a struggle against excesses that betrayed spirituality to the instinctual and unreflective passions” (151). For along with French materialism, it is Hume’s brazen endorsement of most common, or vulgar, sense that Coleridge associates with a populace that has adopted a boorish confidence in the

immediacy of physical sensation. After he complains that “it is too true, and too frequent, that Bacon, Harrington, Machiavel, and Spinosa, are *not* read, because Hume, Condillac, and Voltaire *are*” (7.1: 54), Coleridge responds to the perceived attacks made against him with a sweeping censure of the casual readership that to him illustrated only a deracination of what was once a sacred regard for literary texts:

In times of old, books were as religious oracles; as literature advanced, they next became venerable preceptors; they then descended to the rank of instructive friends; and as their numbers increased, they sunk still lower to that of entertaining companions, and at present they seem degraded into culprits to hold up their hands at the bar of every self-elected, yet not the less peremptory, judge, who chuses to write from humour or interest, from enmity or arrogance, and to abide the decision (in the words of Jeremy Taylor) “of him that reads in malice, or him that reads after dinner.” (7.1: 57-8)

Put another way, in response to what he saw as a climate of popular *self-election* (a term that we may read as symptomatic of Coleridge’s disdain for all things French), in which philosophy becomes a crass and pretentious materialism, Coleridge implements the essential motions of the American Jeremiad, familiarly described by Sacvan Bercovitch as a ritual that “evokes the mythic past not merely to elicit imitation but above all to demand progress” (24), and of which Edwards is of course one of the central practitioners. But what prompts the invocation of an ideal past here is Coleridge’s sense that literary criticism has fallen into the hands of the uneducated and unprincipled

masses, of those who feel their ability to read entitles them to render a critically informed judgment.

Such a development was anathema to Coleridge, who believed that critical principles were essentially religious in character, and could only be apprehended by a special class of citizens who by careful and rigorous study had gained access to the supernatural faculty within and achieved revelation:

That in all ages, individuals who have directed their meditations and their studies to the nobler characters of our nature, to the cultivation of those powers and instincts which constitute the man, at least separate him from the animal, and distinguish the nobler from the animal part of his own being, will be led by the *supernatural* in themselves to the contemplation of a power which is likewise super-*human*; that science, and especially moral science, will lead to religion, and remain blended with it – this, I say, will, in all ages, be the course of things. (10: 44)

At the same time, there is a significant tension here between self-election and genuine righteousness. When carried out in terms consistent with what Coleridge deemed an appropriate moral reverence and prudence – as, for instance, he believed the American Revolution and the abolitionist movement to have been – self-election, separatism, and critical dissent were necessary, but when initiated on the basis of nothing more than an unexamined faith in one's own authority and unproven critical acumen, self-election crossed the line into popular enthusiasm. As Edwards had warned:

Many have been the mischiefs that have arisen from that false and delusive notion of the witness of the Spirit, that it is a kind of inward

voice, suggestion, or declaration from God to a man, that he is beloved of him, and pardoned, elected, or the like, sometimes with, and sometimes without a text of Scripture; and many have been the false, and vain (though very high), affections that have arisen from hence. And 'tis to be feared that multitudes of souls have been eternally undone by it. (2: 239)

By 1815, Coleridge has no doubt expanded the terms of this caution to account for the delusions of those who only believed in the authority of their own bodily appetites and subjective experiences, and yet his expansion is grounded in the religious schema of his early poetry, in which he uses admonition as the American Puritans had – that is, in the sincere hope that his audience would repent and amend their sinful ways.

As Bercovitch observes, though the Puritans invoked the wrath of God with an intensity unchallenged by Europeans, “God’s punishments were *corrective*, not destructive” (8). Coleridge, however, adopts these Puritan revisions in early poems like “Religious Musings” and “Ode on the Departing Year.”²⁶ Nor is the correspondence coincidental: these poems were written in a frame of mind rather similar to that of the Pilgrim separatists. In “Religious Musings,” for example, Coleridge makes reference to Joseph Priestley’s emigration to America in terms that no doubt recall Bradford’s account of his fellow separatists in the *History of Plymouth Plantation* (1606-1646) who were “scoffed and scorned by the prophane multitude; and the ministers urged with the yoke of subscription, or els be silenced; and the poor people were so vexed with apparators and

²⁶ The form is still apparent in “Fears in Solitude” (1798), where after wondering if an “all-avenging Providence, / Strong and retributive, should make us know / The meaning of our words, force us to feel / The desolation and agony / Of our fierce doings?” (ll. 126-30), Coleridge implements the corrective: “Spare us yet awhile, / Father and God! Oh! spare us yet awhile! . . . Sons, brothers, husbands, all / Who ever gaz’d with fondness on the forms / Which grew up with you round the same fire-side, / And all who ever heard the sabbath-bells / Without the infidel’s scorn, make yourselves pure! / Stand forth! Be men!” (ll. 130-31, 135-40).

pursuants, and the commissarie courts” (30) that they were ultimately “constrained to leave their native soyle and countrie, their lands and livings” (33).²⁷ Indeed, Coleridge was rather acutely aware of the force that the misguided multitude could wield against a free thinker:

Lo! PRIESTLEY there, Patriot, and Saint, and Sage:

Him, full of years, from his lov'd native land

Statesmen blood-stain'd and Priests idolatrous

By dark lies mad'ning the blind multitude

Drove with vain hate. (16.1.1: 189)

In his later years, Coleridge continues to follow the American template, though as we saw above, in the *Biographia* he carries out a secular and scholarly adaptation of the ritual, castigating the contemporary practice of literary review, and imagining a future time when “in the place of arbitrary dictation and petulant sneers, the reviewers support their decisions by reference to fixed canons of criticism, previously established and deduced from the nature of man” (7.1: 62).

Coleridge certainly aims to defend himself as well as Wordsworth and Southey, but there can be little doubt that he also intends his admonishment to be instructive – to act as a corrective.²⁸ Like the Federalist Jeremiahs that Bercovitch describes, he is

²⁷ Though New England historians made use of Bradford’s manuscript in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was not published until 1856.

²⁸ The aim of Chapter 3, as Coleridge makes clear, is to account for why, in his view, “after having run the critical gauntlet for a certain class of faults which I *had*, nothing having come before the judgment seat in the interim, I should, year after year, quarter after quarter, month after month (not to mention sundry petty periodicals of still quicker revolution, ‘or weekly or diurnal’) have been for at least 17 years consecutively dragged forth by them into the foremost ranks of the *proscribed*, and forced to abide the brunt of abuse, for faults directly opposite, which I certainly had not” (7.1: 50). Though Engell and Bate point out that criticism that Coleridge drew was “for the most part less abusive than C implies,” (7.1: 50n1), Coleridge

“berating the present generation for deviating from the past in order to prod it forward toward [his] vision of the future . . . asserting consensus through anxiety, using promise and threat alike to inspire (or enforce) generational rededication” (136). Further, Coleridge’s Burkean rejection of self-appointed adjudication and his insistence on the support of “fixed canons of criticism, previously established and deduced from the nature of man” also parallels Edwards’ assertion that individuals were not capable of self-election, of saving themselves, but rather that they must be chosen by God and exhibit the appropriate signs in a manner conformable to tradition. As a young man, Edwards even questioned his own “interest in God’s love and favor” because he had not “experienced regeneration, exactly in those steps, in which divines say it is generally wrought” (16: 759). Again, though Coleridge’s condemnation is literary in character, it tends to illustrate the extent to which he had absorbed the conservative orthodoxy of the American Jeremiad.

But while Coleridge and Edwards both exhibit a conservative impulse, they also tend to weave what are easily construed as elements of antinomianism and pantheism (one might even say prophecy) into their orthodox systems. From Edwards’ claim that a “divine taste” comes to dwell in the hearts of saints “whereby they are in like manner led and guided in discerning and distinguishing the true spiritual and holy beauty of actions; and that more easily, readily and accurately, as they have more or less of the Spirit of God dwelling in them” (2: 283) to Coleridge’s famous celebration of “the one life within us and abroad,” (1. 26) in “The Eolian Harp,” the reader of Edwards and Coleridge is frequently confronted with seeming inconsistencies: humankind is both incorrigibly

had the distinct sense that his association with Wordsworth and Southey was in large part responsible for the negative criticism that he received.

sinful *and* capable of divinity; God is both above his creation *and* omnipresent.

Ultimately, these are characteristics of a common philosophical theology in which only the regenerate mind is active in its response to the influx of the divine spirit.²⁹ The crucial difference between these two theologies, however slight it may seem, is that Edwards did not view such activity as causally self-determined while Coleridge based his entire philosophy on precisely this view.

The Mystery in the Affair

The implications of this difference also come to influence the way in which Coleridge and Edwards conceive of Original Sin, the fact of which they actually agree on: the truly active mind must receive its power from God, and this is because humankind is by its very nature fallen, and consequently unable to see things rightly without supernatural assistance.³⁰ But the two men not only agree on the natural depravity of humankind, they also conceive of the fallen state as analogous to an intrinsic disease, envisioning spiritual grace as its only cure. “Grace is a sovereign thing,” Edwards writes,

²⁹ According to Sang Hyun Lee, in the case of Edwards, this conception of the mind is rooted in an amalgamation of divergent philosophical contentions, namely “the Shaftesburian insistence upon the active role of the mind in the knowledge process and the Lockean emphasis upon the simple ideas of sensation as the sole material of knowledge.” These two elements “merge into a creative synthesis in Edwards’ theories of the imagination and aesthetic perception – theories that anticipated the Coleridgean aesthetics of nineteenth-century romanticism” (14). Lee later explains Edwards’ anticipation of Coleridge’s aesthetics in more specific terms: though Edwards does not explicitly outline a conception of the imagination as the organic power of fusion that Coleridge describes in the *Biographia*, “such a conception is clearly called for by his doctrine of beautiful relations as wholes as well as by his definition of aesthetic perception as a sense” (160).

³⁰ As Stuart Piggin and Dianne Cook observe, for Coleridge and Edwards the “relationship between aesthetic and religious experience is not merely one of analogy . . . The symbol, like the type, is not an arbitrary image, but a God-given means of glimpsing an eternal truth . . . God not only controls signification, but the very possibility of meaning inheres in him” (390).

“exercised according to the good pleasure of God, bringing good out of evil; the effect of it belongs not to the nature of things themselves, that otherwise have an ill tendency, any more than the remedy belongs to the disease” (3: 110). Likewise, in a familial letter of 1798 Coleridge advocates “the *Spirit* of the Gospel” as “the sole cure” (*CL* 1: 238) for Original Sin, which he later allegorizes as an inexplicable malady:

A sick man, whose complaint was as obscure as his sufferings were severe and notorious, was thus addressed by a humane Stranger: My poor Friend! I find you dangerously ill, and on this account only, and having certain information of your being so, and that you have not wherewithal to pay for a Physician, I have come to you. Respecting your disease, indeed, I can tell you nothing, that you are capable of understanding, more than you know already, or can only be taught by reflection on your own experience. (9: 288)

But while Coleridge certainly agrees with Edwards on the fact of Original Sin, he refuses to attribute its existence to God in any sense whatsoever, leaving him little choice but to claim it as a mystery that can be felt, but not demonstrated: “Now this evil ground cannot originate in the Divine Will: it must therefore be referred to the Will of Man. And this evil Ground we call Original Sin. It is a Mystery, that is, a Fact, which we see, but cannot explain; and the doctrine a truth which we apprehend, but can neither comprehend nor communicate” (9: 288).

Edwards does not concede so easily. His concept of Original Sin follows from his admission that God is the author of sin in general, if in saying this we only mean that God permits or chooses not to disallow Original Sin as part of his divine plan, rather than that

God is himself an agent of sin. Of course one might be inclined to view this way of solving the problem as a kind of equivocation. As Clyde Holbrook puts it: “It was all very well for Edwards to pitch his argument on the principle of permissiveness by God [in *Freedom of the Will*], but he had still left unsettled the crucial issue of God’s responsibility for sin” (3: 61). Further, Holbrook argues, when Edwards points out that the Arminian system (in which God allows sin to continue after its inception) creates the same problem as Original Sin, he is not on particularly solid philosophical ground. Such a response, Holbrook contends, “came close to being no more than a tu quoque argument and does much less than justice to the care with which he scouted this troublesome issue in the *Freedom of the Will*” – in order to “bring out his full defense of the position it is necessary, therefore, to look beyond the pages of the *Original Sin*” (3: 60-61). Yet the passage in which Edwards seems to address this problem directly, a passage of which Holbrook had made note just nine pages earlier, here goes unmentioned:

The first arising or existing of that evil disposition in the heart of Adam, was by God’s *permission*; who could have prevented it, if he had pleased, by giving such influences of his spirit, as would have been absolutely effective to hinder it; which, it is plain in fact, he did withhold: and whatever mystery may be supposed in the affair, yet no Christian will presume to say, it was not in perfect consistence with God’s holiness and righteousness, notwithstanding Adam had been guilty of no offense before. (3: 393-94)

Ultimately, then, Edwards abandons his rationalism and defers, as Coleridge does, to mystery and doctrine. In this narrow sense, their positions on Original Sin are essentially

the same. Edwards, it seems, would grant that “the evil ground cannot originate in the divine will” (9: 288), but unlike Coleridge, who makes this assertion and then swiftly posits the mystery of Original Sin as a phenomenon peculiar to the “Will of Man,” he ventures into a causal analysis that seems to implicate God.

What is most curious about the passage, however, is that Edwards seems to grant that the withdrawal of gracious influence that permitted Original Sin is indeed a mystery, whereas in *Freedom of the Will* he had maintained that God’s permitting of sin was undoubtedly “for wise, holy and most excellent ends and purposes” (1: 399). Apparently, there is a troublesome difference for Edwards between the permitting of Original Sin and that of the continuance of sin after the fact. In the latter case, the purported distance between God and his creation allows for a contra-causal kind of supposition: God does not *make* people sin, he simply allows them to do what is in their nature. In the former, the argument that Edwards had employed so well in arguing against the Arminian doctrine of free will turns on him. That is, if one cannot argue that the human will determines itself without falling into an infinite regress, then the same can be said for sin, which is to say that Original Sin can only come into being as a direct result of God’s withdrawal of a gracious influence that up until that point had been exerted – an event for which there is no apparent precedent. Even more troubling for Edwards is the question of the constitutive difference between the disposition to sin and the self-determination of the will. Moreover, if humans do not have the natural ability to determine their own wills, then how is it that they have the natural ability to sin?

We might then say that in *Original Sin* Edwards actually does settle the “crucial issue of God’s responsibility for sin” that Holbrook refers to, but that he does so in a

manner that is markedly inconsistent with his usual line of reasoning. Rather than make a positive claim for God's infinite goodness, Edwards makes a negative claim concerning what Christians cannot say no matter how mysterious the doctrine of Original Sin becomes. In this sense, the argument is somewhat rhetorical. But why Edwards does not reiterate his previous argument that God orders all events for holy and excellent purposes is ultimately unclear, as is his purpose in asserting that we may suppose a mystery in the affair, and that prior to this, Adam had been free from sin. In this way, Edwards approaches a theory of primordial darkness that Coleridge simply rejects out of hand; and this is why Coleridge only goes so far as to claim that it is a corruption in the "Will of Man" that is mysterious – to go beyond this is to risk initiating a causal chain that ends in the blasphemy that Edwards forswears, though he certainly comes much closer to it than Coleridge does. Moreover, though both affirm the legitimacy of religious mystery as a kind of knowledge, it also seems that such mysteries made Coleridge more uncomfortable than they did Edwards, who in "The Mind" writes,

KNOWLEDGE is not the perception of the agreement or disagreement of ideas, but rather the perception of the union or disunion of ideas, or the perceiving whether two or more ideas belong to one another. | *Corol.*
Hence it is not impossible to believe or know the truth of mysteries, or propositions that we cannot comprehend, or see the manner how the several ideas that belong to the proposition are united. Perhaps it cannot properly be said that we see the agreement of the ideas unless we see how they agree, but we may perceive that they are united and know that they

belong to one another, though we do not know the manner how they are tied together. (6: 385)

Here Edwards affirms the kind of supra-rationalism that Coleridge approaches when he observes that Original Sin is “a Fact, which we see, but cannot explain” (9: 288). In the preface to *Aids to Reflection* he even claims that there “are indeed Mysteries, in evidence of which no reasons can be *brought*,” but that “the true solution of this problem is, that these Mysteries *are* Reason, Reason in its highest form of Self-affirmation” (9: 9). Nevertheless, he is unwilling to speak, as Edwards does, of God as having withheld his influence, or of the evil in Adam’s heart having been allowed (and therefore in some sense *willed*) by God. Might we then say that Coleridge’s view of Original Sin is, however unorthodox in its approach, more pious than Edwards’ is? Not without a great deal of qualification.

For insofar as Edwards’ account of Original Sin remains entirely rational, it retains a kind of piety in accepting epistemological limitations. Unlike Coleridge, Edwards never wandered very far into “the unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths” before coming back to the “cultivated surface” (7.1: 17). In “The Mind,” for example, when he makes the Spinozistic claim that the brain is “nothing but the connection of the operations of the soul with these and those modes of its own ideas, or those mental acts of the Deity,” he immediately follows with an acknowledgment of his mysticism: “But we have got so far beyond those things for which language was chiefly contrived, that unless we use extreme caution we cannot speak, except we speak unintelligibly, without contradicting ourselves” (6: 355). For Edwards, then, it seems that so long as one proceeds with caution, such affirmations of limitation, mystery, and

contradiction in the apprehension of God are ultimately expressions of piety: “No wonder, therefore, that the high and abstract mysteries of the Deity, the prime and most abstract of all beings, imply so many seeming contradictions” (6: 355). Here, too, one sees the way in which Emerson simply ascribed to the self what Edwards had affirmed of the Deity: “Suppose you should contradict yourself, what then? . . . With consistency a great soul has nothing to do” (1: 33).

Yet so far as God is concerned, Coleridge has a more difficult time accepting contradiction, and his efforts to clear God from the problem of Original Sin tend to bring on acute relapses of his “mental disease” (7.1: 17), under the influence of which he attempts to conceive of a will that could exist outside of, or somehow in opposition to, the divine will – and could therefore be the ultimate cause of Original Sin:

It is impossible for God not to be God, and it is impossible for a part which is one with the whole to be other than the whole as long as it remains one with the whole. It does not, however, follow that in the part as a part there should not be contained the conditional possibility of willing to be a part that is not one with the whole, of willing to be in itself and not in another; for this is not precluded in the Will, or in a realization of the Will through and in the Divine Will: it is precluded only by the absolute self-realization of the absolute Will. (15: 222).

This passage from Fragment 3 of the unfinished *Opus Maximum* is clear enough in its assertion, though Coleridge does not explain how it is that a will that exists “through and

in the Divine Will” could *of itself* will “to be a part that is not one with the whole.” Again, the difficulty is in conceiving of a will that is causally self-determined.³¹

In this instance, it seems that Coleridge tries to evade the infinite regress that such an assertion entails by denying some measure of reality to the renegade will, which can apparently exist “in a realization of the Will through and in the Divine Will” but not in the “absolute self-realization of the absolute Will.” Nevertheless, it is unclear how this will could have determined itself. As Edwards puts it: “That whatsoever begins to be, which before was not, must have a cause why it then begins to exist seem to be the first dictate of the natural and common sense which God hath implanted in the minds of all” (1: 181). In making his argument for free will, Coleridge is able to finesse the point by suggesting that the finite will partakes of the divine will, thereby achieving a noumenal, or eternal, status that is beyond the reach of causation. The power that “can *bring home a Heart to God*” abides “in Christ,” which is to say that the heart of a finite being is brought home to God “not *by* Will of Man alone, but neither *without* the Will (9: 157-58). In his affirmation of Original Sin, however, Coleridge had to deny any involvement on the part of the Divine Will; but since he believed, as Edwards did, in the absolute sovereignty of God, it simply was not possible to demonstrate the actuality of anything that existed without having been willed, or at least allowed, by the Divine.

As we have already seen, this forced Coleridge to claim Original Sin as “a Mystery, that is, a Fact which we see, but cannot explain” (9: 288) in *Aids to Reflection*. In the *Opus Maximum*, however, which was likely dictated only a year or two before, he

³¹ Nicholas Reid argues that Coleridge solves this problem with his conception of the ‘apostatic’ will – “a will that which does not recognise its inner unity with the divine will and which therefore has no actuality. The apostatic will wills itself as an autonomous self, outside the divine plenum” (121). But again, how this will could come to exist, even in a state of non-actuality, without God having allowed it do so, is unclear. See also Jeffrey Barbeau’s brief discussion of sin in *Coleridge, the Bible and Religion*, 17-20.

wavers between affirmations of mystery and what seems a desire to somehow demonstrate the indemonstrable. “In what I am about to deliver I have but one end in view,” he writes at the outset of Fragment 3, “that of presenting an intelligible though not comprehensible Idea of the possibility of an ~~existence~~ that which in some sense or other is, yet is not God nor One with God” (15: 216). Unfortunately, much of what Coleridge actually presents is not intelligible. That is, instead of presenting Original Sin as an idea of which one can conceive but not comprehend, as he does in *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge thrashes about in “abstruse research”: “The potential, still a form of reality, though its negative role, and therefore a form of Will, willed itself to be actual under impossible conditions. For to be actual was to will its subsistence to be in God, and the power of willing otherwise existed potentially, by necessity ~~of the <in-a> Will on~~ part of a Will, and part because it was a particular Will” (15: 247).

Perhaps most interesting about Coleridge’s discussion of Original Sin in the *Opus Maximum* is that one actually sees him moving back and forth between mysticism and reason, as if he simply cannot decide whether or not he accepts the metaphysical indemonstrability of the doctrine he wishes to affirm: “The result can be no otherwise expressed, as far as it can be at all expressed, than that a self became, which was not God, nor One with God. The potential was actualized, ~~but~~ <yet> not as actual, but by a strange yet appropriate contradiction as potential” (15: 247). In the first sentence, he not only says something *intelligible*, but, like Edwards, he also acknowledges the difficulty in expressing such abstract concepts. In the second, he drifts back into metaphysical obscurity, only to recover again several lines later: “Happily, there is but one thing necessary for us to believe with a full insight, namely, that such an origination of self

[i.e., a self “which was not God, nor One with God”] must have been eternally possible” (15: 247). Here, too, the phrase “we believe with a full insight” gives us some further indication of Coleridge’s paradoxical position: if we had a full insight into the nature of self-determination, believing it would be unnecessary. For Coleridge, however, a full insight into Original Sin, or a self that came to exist outside of God’s will, seems to consist in maintaining “that it is a legitimate idea that Evil may be, as experience proves that it is . . . that it did not originate in God, or in the Will of God as God, or in the absolute Will as absolute, nor even the particular as eternal; but that it <Evil> was and is, in the strictest sense of the words, self-originated, self-originant” (15: 247).

Of course to Edwards, the notion of self-determination outside of God was plainly self-contradictory. If the will is causally self-determined, Edwards reasons, “it will follow, that every free volition arises from another antecedent volition, directing and commanding that”; and this chain of causation will continue all the way back “to the first volition in the whole series: and if that first volition be free, and the will self-determined in it, then that is determined by another volition preceding that. Which is a contradiction; because by the supposition, it can have none before it, to direct or determine it, being the first in the train” (1: 173). In other words, the power of self-determination must ultimately be determined from without: “From whence it follows, that no liberty consists in the will’s power to determine its own acts; which is the same thing, that there is no such thing as liberty consisting in a self-determining power of the will” (1: 176).

Though Piggin and Cook have suggested that “what Coleridge meant by ‘will’, Edwards meant by ‘affections’” (402), their argument seems to disregard the fact that there is no self-originating faculty whatsoever in Edwards’ system. The affections,

moreover, are dependent on disposition, which is, in turn, dependent on the grace that can only be granted by God. “Such is the nature of grace,” Edwards writes in *Religious Affections*, “and of true spiritual light, that they naturally dispose the saints in the present state, to look upon their grace and goodness little, and their deformity great. And they that have the most grace and spiritual light, of any in this world, have most of this disposition” (2: 323). For Edwards, though the soul is active in receiving the divine influence, God predetermines whether or not this activity comes to be willed and carried out by the soul. Furthermore, when Piggin and Cook contend that “Coleridge recognised fully with Edwards that in the spiritual realm, which is the realm of reality as much as the world of nature, the will is far from capable of enjoying perfect freedom, and is indeed ‘a captive and enslaved Will’” (403), they do not acknowledge that the phrase “a captive and enslaved Will” is actually being used by Coleridge to characterize the condition of the will in what he calls “the *Lutheranism* of Calvin,” which he then contrasts with “the Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards.” In the interest of clarity, I quote this passage a second time: “Now as the difference of a captive and enslaved Will, and *no* Will at all, such is the difference between the *Lutheranism* of Calvin and the Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards” (9: 160). Here, Coleridge does not acknowledge that the will is “captive and enslaved,” and it is worth noting that the phrase is also misapplied to Edwards, who only would have argued that our wills are predetermined, and therefore not free in the Arminian sense, but also not captive or enslaved in the sense of being constrained to perform actions inconsistent with our own motivations.

So far as arguing that Coleridge is actually a Calvinist, and hence much closer to Edwards than he would have liked to imagine, Arthur Lovejoy makes a much more

persuasive case by exploiting the implications of one of Coleridge's marginalia in Richard Field's *Of the Church* to great effect. In the passage that draws Lovejoy's attention, Coleridge responds to Field's statement that freedom of will "is proper to God only; and in this sense Calvin and Luther rightly deny, that the will of any creature is, or ever was free," by making a characteristic affirmation concerning the ability of the finite will to take part in the divine will: "I add: except as in God and God in us. Now the latter alone is Will, for it alone is ens superens ["Being above being"]. And here lies the mystery, which I dare not openly and promiscuously reveal" (12.2: 676). But Lovejoy views this as little more than Calvinism in disguise:

To the philosophic reader Coleridge in this "reveals" enough to indicate that, at least when writing this comment, he conceived human freedom to mean only that God is free, and that, inasmuch as every creature's nature and action is determined by the will of God acting in him, he in a sense participates in that freedom. This, however, is a denial of individual freedom; it is essentially Calvinism, with a vaguely pantheistic coloring. (358)

Lovejoy's point here is well taken. If, as Coleridge seems to suggest, the individual can only achieve freedom in God, or by some internal influx of the divine, then the individual, as a self-contained entity, is not free in the strictest sense of the word. At the same time, to conclude that Coleridge's postulate of a higher state in which the will of the individual is aligned with the will of God is "a denial of individual freedom" is at the very least a gross simplification of what Coleridge actually means. For if the will of the individual coincides, or becomes consubstantial, with the will of God, then it seems

tautological to speak of this will as determined in the very same way that it would be tautological to say that God's will is determined by the will of God. In any case, if Lovejoy had read Coleridge's next comment, he would have seen the position explained further: "A creaturely will can<not> be free, but the Will in a rational creature may cease to be creaturely, and the Creature finally cease, in consequence, and this neither Luther or Calvin seem to have seen" (12.2: 676). Ultimately, then, Coleridge conceived of free will as the faculty exercised by rational agents who act in accordance with God's will. As he puts it in *The Friend*, free will is "the power of the human being to maintain the obedience, which God through the conscience has commanded, against all the might of nature" (4.1: 112).³² But for Edwards humans had no such power. The "divine and supernatural light" by which saving faith is achieved, he observes, "is immediately given by God, and not obtained by natural means" (17: 416). Coleridge did not explicitly disagree with this statement, but he conceived of the regenerate will as a formerly natural will that had become supernatural by virtue of its submission to the will of God through Christ. In this sense, the finite will *did* have a kind of agency, if only in its ability to surrender itself. For American readers, however, Coleridge's supernatural will came to occupy the position opposite to that of Edwards' non-negotiable convictions of theological determinism and complete depravity on the part of man. Yet, as David Robinson points out, the resistance to Edwards began not with the importation of Coleridge, but rather with Charles Chauncy, who had denounced Edwards from the start: "In his intense opposition to Edwards's great achievement, the Great Awakening of the 1740's, [Charles] Chauncy initiated the public articulation of a tradition of liberal

³² We may also note that Coleridge did not alter this statement from the time that it first appeared in *The Friend*, No. 6, in September of 1809, to its inclusion in Essay XV of the expanded "rifacimento" edition of *The Friend* in 1818.

theology in eastern Massachusetts, dreaded by Edwards as ‘Arminianism,’ and eventually known as Unitarianism” (47). Yet it was Coleridge’s philosophical criticism and theology, not Chauncy’s arguments (nor those of any other Americans) that enlivened the minds of young religious thinkers in New England in the 1830s.

Here, then, I want to make the larger claim that it is in his abiding affirmation of individual power – what he called the “Supernatural in man” (9: 77) – that Coleridge ultimately differs from Edwards, and that, following the American publication of *Aids to Reflection* by then-president of the University of Vermont, James Marsh, in 1829, this is the disagreement that typifies nineteenth-century American philosophical and religious thought. Some of the more significant examples of this contention, which is essentially a question of agency and causation, include Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, Emerson’s late essay, “Fate,” and Poe’s “Ligeia,” but I think we can also say with some certainty that the individualist endeavor codified by Emerson – an endeavor that I take to be, among other things, an aspiration towards complete free agency in the face of external compulsion of one kind or another – is also an enterprise that was not carried out without significant compromise, qualification, and skepticism. Another way of viewing the matter is simply to acknowledge that Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville were all unwilling to dismiss ‘theological controversy’ as Emerson hoped to do early on: “Our young people are diseased with the theological problems of Original Sin, origin of evil, predestination, and the like. These never presented a practical difficulty to any man, – never darkened any man’s road, who did not go out of his way to seek them . . . A simple mind will not know these enemies” (2: 77-8).

Emerson takes his cue from Coleridge in conceiving of these theological problems as a disease of the mind, and yet, like Coleridge, he is unable to exorcise them. Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville are also influenced in significant ways by Coleridge, but they react less aggressively to Edwards. Indeed, there is a sense in which all three of these writers were quite amenable to speculating further on the depravity and corruption of humankind affirmed by Edwards: “Man’s inwards are full of dung and filthiness, which is to denote what the inner man, which is often represented by various parts of his inwards – sometimes the heart, sometimes the bowels, sometimes the belly, sometimes the veins – is full of: spiritual corruption and abomination.” Like Edwards, these men were skeptical that the human heart could ever be entirely clear of its corruption, and in this sense, Emersonian optimism posed a danger because it left the newly confident individual susceptible to the deceptions of the unexamined heart, which were supposed to be labyrinthine: “So as there are many foldings and turnings in the bowels, it denotes the great and manifold intricacies, secret windings and turnings, shifts, wiles and deceits that are in their hearts” (11: 94).

This is not to say that Coleridge did not devote a great deal of thought to human depravity, but rather that his most successful disciples simply eschewed the orthodox aspects of the system that he developed in *Aids to Reflection*. As Peter Carafiol observes, while Marsh published *Aids to Reflection* in the hopes that Coleridge’s meditations would serve to reconcile the conflict between Congregationalists and Unitarians by breathing spiritual life into the rigid dogmatism of the former while restoring orthodoxy among the latter “by assuring them that they need not analyze the mysteries of the Christian faith logically in order to participate in them spiritually” (27), neither faction adopted the

system in a manner that fulfilled these hopes: “Orthodox divines viewed [*Aids to Reflection*] as commendably spiritual, but heterodox, and possibly dangerous. Unitarians defensively scorned it as muddy and mystical” (45). Further, and no doubt due in large part to Coleridge’s explicit emphasis on “SELF-KNOWLEDGE” (9: 10), the most visibly influential thinkers of the time adopted only those aspects of *Aids to Reflection* that affirmed their own system: “The Transcendentalists ignored its Orthodox intention and its systematic metaphysics and seized on its assertion of the ability of the mind to derive spiritual knowledge from its own depths” (45).

We might then say that the American appropriation of Coleridge’s darker ruminations, along with those of Edwards, are partially concealed by the more obvious line of influence that is commonly traced from Coleridge to Emerson – a line that tends to locate the impetus for American Romanticism in its British predecessor. But if Perry Miller is correct to condense the difference between Emerson and Edwards with a description of Emerson as “an Edwards in whom the concept of Original Sin has evaporated” (*EW* 185), then we might fairly ask if there are any Edwardses in whom the concept of Original Sin has remained. Coleridge certainly fits this description more closely than does Poe, Hawthorne, or Melville (each of whom is much more skeptical than Coleridge) yet there is also a sense in which they construct their respective positions by implementing both Edwards and Coleridge – which is to say that they are not only Edwardses in whom the concept of Original Sin has remained, but also Coleridges in whom faith and religion are met with considerable doubt. Conversely, while Coleridge has revised Edwards’ concept of the will, Hawthorne and Melville explicitly invoke

causal determinism as an inexorable remnant of Edwardsean rationalism, a New England specter that can be neither confirmed nor denied.

Ultimately, then, while Marsh republished Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* in order to convince American thinkers of Original Sin as an experiential actuality, as well as of free will as "the power to originate an act or state of mind" (9: 512), the fact that the Transcendentalists did away entirely with the doctrine of Original Sin while writers of fiction were gravely – one might even say, puritanically – skeptical of individual agency actually demonstrates that, so far as Americans were concerned, Coleridge's ideas were not entirely novel. Indeed, without diminishing the important influence that Coleridge did have, it is clear that his impact in the sphere of American philosophical and theological controversy should not be understood as an influx of new ideas so much as the provision of a middle ground between two positions that had their roots in American soil. Consequently, the relationship between Coleridge and Edwards that I have sketched here, a relationship based on a shared disposition for independent thought, strikingly similar conceptions of the mind, an agreement on the fact of Original Sin, and a common interest in understanding the nature of the will in religious and philosophical terms, is one that illustrates Coleridge's propensity for thinking in terms that, due in large part to Edwards, were already familiar to Americans.

Chapter Two

Abolitionist Theology in the Anglo-American Tradition

Surely this traffic cannot be good, which spreads like a pestilence, and taints what it touches!
Which violates the first natural right of mankind, equality and independency, and gives one man a
dominion over his fellows which God could never intend!

– Olaudah Equiano

In this chapter, I examine the development of Coleridge’s views on race alongside the abolitionist element of the American evangelical tradition. Though I might have proceeded directly to a discussion of Coleridge’s impact on the American Romantics as it was mediated and complicated by Edwards, such a leap would fail to acknowledge the fact that the theologically-driven, or theocratic, abolitionism Coleridge embraced in the early 1790’s found its source in the American Society of Friends³³ – which is to say that, in addition to the more general and formative impact of the American War of Independence on his early political thought and the pressure of the philosophical Calvinism that Edwards exerted over his later endeavors, Coleridge’s conception of human rights drew a good deal of its impetus from a variegated tradition of American religious dissent.

³³ Though there was certainly a precedent for antislavery views among Quakers dating back to George Fox, the abolitionist movement truly took hold with the activism of American Quakers in the eighteenth century. As Robin Blackburn observes: “The first Quakers to make real headway in persuading the Friends to dissassociate themselves from slave-trading and slaveholding were John Woolman, a tailor, husbandman and scribe, and Anthony Benezet, a school-teacher, both of Philadelphia” (96).

Coleridge's absence from the first part of the discussion here may seem odd, but in order to situate his thinking on this subject in its appropriate theological context, it is first necessary to clarify the way in which Edwards' legacy persists in the work of John Woolman, as well as in that of Olaudah Equiano, whose experience as a former slave who converts to Methodism provides us with one of the few first-hand insights into the theological character of the abolitionist movement from the perspective of one who saw slavery from both sides. Coleridge seems not to have known of Equiano, yet most of the vocal proponents of abolition with whom he was familiar did know him, and had subscribed to the first edition of his *Interesting Narrative*.³⁴ The well-travelled Equiano also managed to see Edwards' fellow revivalist George Whitefield preach in Georgia in 1765; and though Woolman had long passed by the time Equiano published his autobiography in 1789, his fellow Quaker and collaborator Anthony Benezet is cited frequently in the *Interesting Narrative*.³⁵

In short, Equiano was both at the center of the abolition debate with which Coleridge concerned himself, and, perhaps more importantly, in the central line of early abolitionists whose theology was largely grounded in the Quaker-influenced Calvinism that shaped the anti-slavery activism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century,

³⁴ These include Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp, and Josiah Wedgwood. We may also note that Equiano's autobiography, of which there were nine editions printed in London from 1789-94, no doubt increased public awareness of the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade, and bolstered the call for abolition that Coleridge officially joined in 1792 with his Greek Prize Ode. On the social context surrounding the composition of this poem, see J. C. C. Mays' introduction in the *Collected Works*, 16.1: 72-6.

³⁵ Coleridge, too, seemed to have used Benezet as a source, albeit indirectly. As Tim May points out, Coleridge's 1795 "Lecture on the Slave Trade" included an account from the journal of a crewmember aboard a slaveship off the coast of Guinea. The entry, written in Southey's hand, ultimately finds its source in Benezet's *Some Historical Account of Guinea*; though, as May indicates, Southey transcribed it from Thomas Cooper, who came to the quotation by way of John Wesley, the Methodist reverend who issued several abridgments of Edwards' works, culminating in an abridgment of *Religious Affections*. Interestingly enough, Wesley was reading Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* at the time of his death.

including that of Coleridge. In turn, the theocratic organicism of Coleridge's early abolitionism informed the later racial theories of his unpublished manuscripts that probably found their beginnings in his attendance of J. F. Blumenbach's lectures in 1799, though we do not see categorical evidence of what we would today call imperialist or racialist thinking until his 1808 review of Thomas Clarkson's *Abolition of the Slave Trade*. In what follows, then, I want to suggest that it was Coleridge's preoccupation with attempting to determine, as Edwards had, the current state and future direction of humankind in terms of God's will that eventually led him into the more teleological postulates of race science.

As in the first chapter, I am not so much concerned with direct lines of influence as I am with tracing the movement of certain ideas and ways of thinking. Though it would be entirely accurate to identify John Woolman as an influence on Coleridge, I am more interested in demonstrating the way in which particular tenets of Woolman's Quakerism, especially the doctrine of the Inner Light, made their way into the mind of one of the foremost thinkers and disseminator of ideas in the nineteenth century. In my mind, that Coleridge actually read Edwards' *Freedom of the Will* is less important than the fact that he came into contact with the basic elements of Edwards' theology before having done so.³⁶ Likewise, the fact that Coleridge did not read Equiano's *Interesting*

³⁶ Priestley's doctrine of necessity, for example, founded as it is on an unbreakable chain of cause and effect, is quite similar to Edwards' argument. In *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, which Coleridge likely encountered as an appendix to *Disquisitions Relating to Matter in Spirit* in 1794, Priestley does attempt to distinguish the doctrine of necessity from predestination by claiming that "in comparing these two schemes, I can see no sort of resemblance, except that the future happiness or misery of all men are certainly foreknown, and appointed by God" (153), though he seems wary of directly engaging with Edwards. After observing that the "opinions of the Calvinist" on natural depravity, election, and atonement are "absurd and dangerous," he goes on to make a curious acknowledgment of Edwards' innovation before attacking the doctrine of indifference that Edwards himself had rejected: "Besides, before Mr. Edwards, no Calvinist, I think I may venture to say, considered every particular volition and action of men as determined

Narrative is of less interest to me than the fact that his argument for abolition is composed of the same elements as Equiano's. Though the question of free will and necessity is more often implied than it is directly addressed in the works of Equiano and Woolman, it is important to remember that both men believed that in campaigning for an end to racial oppression they were performing the will of God, though they also believed, as Coleridge did in 1795, "that all things work together for good" (2: 132), or that slavery and the slave trade had necessarily been part of God's inscrutable plan, but that the time for abolition had come. In this essentially Calvinist schema, the task of the individual is that of resigning the corrupt human will to allow for the influx of the divine in order to fulfill the will of God. Yet as Equiano's compatibilist assessment of his prospective freedom make clear, the tension between determinism and self-determination was clear enough:

The reader cannot but judge of the irksomeness of this situation to a mind like mine, in being daily exposed to new hardships and impositions, after having seen many better days, and been, as it were, in a state of freedom and plenty . . . However, as I was from early years a predestinarian, I thought whatever fate had determined must ever come to pass; and therefore, if ever it were my lot to be freed, nothing could prevent me, although I should at present see no means or hope to obtain my freedom; on the other hand, if it were my fate not to be freed, I never should be so, and all my endeavours for the purpose would be fruitless. In the midst of

by preceding motives" (156). He then seems to suggest that Edwards, though a Calvinist, is actually a proponent of the doctrine of necessity: "The doctrine of philosophical necessity is, in reality, a modern thing, not older, I believe, than Mr. Hobbes. Of the Calvinists, I believe Mr. Jonathan Edwards to be the first" (160).

these thoughts I therefore looked up with prayers anxiously to God for my liberty; and at the same time used every honest means, and did all that was possible on my part to obtain it. (119)

Here, though Equiano acknowledges that God has already decided whether or not he will gain his freedom, he is still compelled to pursue liberty as an individual agent. The seeming inconsistency of this position, so intolerable to Coleridge and the American Romantics, appears not to have concerned Equiano – nor were Edwards and Woolman worried that since their actions were foreseen by God they were somehow constrained or restricted. For it was only with the advent of an argument for supernatural self-determination that an alternative seemed possible.

Soteriology and Abolitionism

With the publication of *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* in 1754, John Woolman outlined a rigorously ascetic model of abolitionism that quietly initiated the Anglo-American anti-slavery movement.³⁷ Articulated in the humble tenor consistent with a total resignation of the individual will to that of the divine, Woolman's seminal essay stands at the head of the evangelical resistance that spread from the American Society of Friends to the United Kingdom in the mid- and late eighteenth century, and

³⁷ The relentless humility and asceticism with which Woolman pursued the antislavery cause ultimately made him the perfect model for the abolitionist movement. "John Woolman was the dominant Quaker figure of his generation," writes James Emmet Ryan, "not so much for any promotion of specific principles of religious practice – he was far from a careful theologian – but for his activism on behalf of social justice" (69).

culminated with the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.³⁸ Yet it was in his more popular *Journal*, which Coleridge read sometime in late 1796, that Woolman made a point of documenting the process of ethical and religious growth by which he came to his abolitionist convictions – a moral evolution that seems to have begun when he was instructed by his employer to write a receipt for the sale of a black woman, an event for which he was unprepared.

“The thing was sudden,” he writes, “and though the thoughts of writing an instrument of slavery for one of my fellow creatures felt uneasy, yet I remembered I was hired by the year, that it was my master who directed me to do it, and that it was an elderly man, a member of our Society, who bought her” (33). But Woolman does not take an immediate stand against slavery. Instead, he gives way to custom in spite of his reservations – a practical consequence of the fact that he had yet to explicitly identify his feeling of moral unease as one that was consonant with the will of God and thereby worth

³⁸ Perhaps the easiest way to trace the abolition of the slave trade to the American Society of Friends is to acknowledge Anthony Benezet’s importance as a disseminator of the Quaker resistance codified by Woolman, whose independent activism commenced in the early 1740’s. As Maurice Jackson observes, Benezet “closely collaborated with the Quaker leader John Woolman” in the 1750’s before his works captured the attention of “such men as Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, and John Wesley, founders of the British abolition movement and of the Society for the Relief of the Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage.” All of these men, Jackson adds, “relied on Benezet’s work, above all his writings about Africa. They frequently cited him; all spoke of him as the ‘father’ of their movement” (x). As mentioned above, Benezet was also a major source for Equiano, whose *Interesting Narrative* scholars have recently identified as having had a considerable impact on the abolition movement. Eric Metaxas, for instance, observes that the *Interesting Narrative* “did much to educate the British people about the actual experiences and horrors of the slave trade and slavery itself, and it provided a powerful argument against the idea that Africans were different from any other people” (96). Similarly, Srinivas Aravamudan claims that Equiano’s autobiography “played a significant role in arguing for the eventual abolition of the slave trade that took place in 1807” (237). That what began with the American Society of Friends became a mainstream British concern is further borne out by Ellen Gibson Wilson’s description of William Wilberforce’s decision to join the movement: “The morning after [Bennet] Langton’s dinner party Clarkson appeared at James Philips’s printshop to ask him to summon the Quaker abolitionists to hear the news that Wilberforce had taken up the cause” (25). We may note, however, that though the importation of slaves was outlawed by the United States in 1807, the law did not take effect until January 1, 1808, which was the earliest date allowed by the U.S. Constitution.

acting upon. Such identification, Woolman believed, was made possible by following what he refers to as “the openings of Truth” (28), but in seeking out these openings it was possible even for someone as pious as Woolman to lose his way, as he admitted to having done as a young man: “I stood up and said some words in a meeting, but not keeping close to the divine opening I said more than was required of me; and being soon sensible of my error, I was afflicted in mind some weeks without any light or comfort, even to the degree that I could take satisfaction in nothing” (31). Indeed, telling the difference between true and false affections, as Jonathan Edwards well knew, could be tricky business; and in his formulation of a soteriology that could account for the remarkably various manifestations of God’s saving grace, he anticipated in theory what Woolman would put into practice.

As we saw in the last chapter, in his treatise on the *Religious Affections*, published in Boston about ten years before Woolman began his *Journal*, Edwards describes the affections as “no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul” (2: 96); and yet, an incorrigible skeptic so far as salvation was concerned, he prefaces the final section of the treatise, in which he enumerates “*What Are Distinguishing Signs of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections*” (2: 191), by paradoxically affirming “that it was never God’s design to give us any rules, by which we may certainly know, who of our fellow professors are his, and to make a full and clear separation between sheep and goats: but that on the contrary, it was God’s design to reserve this to himself, as his prerogative” (2: 193).

Furthermore, when Edwards affirms that it is “no certain sign that the religious affections which persons have are such as have in them the nature of true religion, or that

they have not, that they dispose persons to spend much time in religion, and to be zealously engaged in the external duties of worship,” it soon becomes clear that by “fellow professors” he means only those who ascribe to his particular set of religious beliefs. Indeed, the fact that there are Catholics and Jews who appear devout is proof that the visible signs of worship cannot be taken as indications of saving grace:

Experience shows that persons, from false religion, may be inclined to be exceeding abundant in the external exercises of religion; yea, to give themselves up to them, and devote almost their whole time to them. Formerly a sort of people were very numerous in the Romish church, called recluses; who forsook the world, and utterly abandoned the society of mankind, and shut themselves up close, in a narrow cell, with a vow never to stir out of it, nor to see the face of any of mankind any more (unless they might be visited in the case of sickness); to spend all their days in the exercises of devotion and converse with God . . . I once lived, for many months, next door to a Jew (the houses adjoining to one another); and had much opportunity daily to observe him; who appeared to me the devoutest person that ever I saw in my life; great part of his time being spent in the acts of devotion, at his eastern window, which opened next to mine, seeming to be most earnestly engaged, not only in the daytime, but sometimes whole nights. (2: 165)

Edwards did, however, allow that anyone could be receptive to Christ. As Kenneth P. Minkema points out in “Jonathan Edwards’s Defense of Slavery” (2002), despite the fact that he was a slaveowner, “Edwards was the first minister at Northampton to baptize

blacks and admit them into full membership” (34).³⁹ Interestingly, Edwards even believed that some of the “heathen” philosophers of antiquity, as well as certain of the Old Testament Jews, were receptive to Christ without knowing it.

As Gerald R. McDermott has shown, since Edwards’ soteriology was based on one’s natural capacity to receive salvation with or without actually being aware of the New Testament, there could then be “instances where a person can be regenerate before conversion to an explicit knowledge of Christ” (137). Edwards not only used this line of reasoning to counter the Deist argument that it was absurd to believe in a God who would condemn to hell those to whom Christ was unknown, but also to extend salvation to those non-Christians who were truly virtuous by arguing that their virtue was a function of their disposition to receive Christ. To put it somewhat crudely, Edwards believed that non-Christians could be saved if they were Christian at heart, but as he developed his thoughts on what a saving disposition consisted of, he moved away from literalism. That is, instead of focusing on the active and conscious observation of Christian doctrine, Edwards argued that the true essence of such observation consisted in a pre-existing

³⁹ In spite of his liberal soteriology, Edwards seems to have had little trouble owning slaves and defending the right of other ministers to do so. As Kenneth Minkema and Harry Stout observe of this complex issue, “Edwards was a slave owner who purchased a number of slaves in his lifetime . . . Apparently, Edwards was so at home with the institution of slavery and the status that it conferred on aristocratic clergymen such as himself that he never really questioned its central tenets. It was in the logic of Edwards’s ethics and epistemology, rather than in his personal views, that seeds of a unique antislavery ideology would be planted. To be true to their mentor’s philosophical and theological legacy, Edwards’s heirs had to repudiate his racist indifference to slavery” (49). Voicing a slightly more generous view, Ava Chamberlain notes that while “the spiritual equality [Edwards] accorded slaves did little to mitigate the depth of their oppression,” the fact remains that abolition “was really not a live option for Edwards or his contemporaries, for no antislavery movement of any size existed in New England until well after his death. His proslavery views, however, remain a disturbing but necessary reminder that even this precocious student of Newton and Locke was in significant ways a man of his times” (342). Though this perspective seems not to register the importance of figures like Woolman and Benezet, it is perhaps true that there was no mainstream antislavery stance in Edwards’ time. See also Minkema’s “Jonathan Edwards on Slavery and the Slave Trade” (1997).

agreement of the soul with the doctrine; those who lived before Christ could still be possessed of the tendency to receive him.⁴⁰ “’Tis most certain, from both Scripture and reason,” he observes in an unpublished notebook entry,

that there must be a reception of Christ with the faculties of the soul in order to salvation by him, and that in this reception there is a believing of what we are taught in the gospel concerning him and salvation by him, and that it must be a consent of the will or an agreeableness between the disposition of the soul and those doctrines; so that disposition is all that can be said to be absolutely necessary. (13: 213)

We might then say that Edwards would have believed that Catholics and non-Christians could potentially come under the exercise of true affections, as St. Paul had, and subsequently renounce “false religion”; though it is worth noting that any perusal of Edwards’ sermons will reveal a man who was much less generous with those who had the opportunity of knowing Christ, and chose another system of belief. Nevertheless, Edwards is of vital importance if we are to gain an appreciation of the ease with which early abolitionists were able to affirm a civic egalitarianism that was grounded in religious segregation. Moreover, in his attempt to reconcile doctrinal Calvinism with the intuitions of modern empiricism, Edwards introduces a transitional soteriology in

⁴⁰ Though George Hunsinger argues that, for Edwards, “[n]o sharp contrast can be maintained between faith and works, because the heart’s disposition is necessarily exercised in them both” (118), Edwards himself seems to deny this in his unpublished observations on conversion: “It need not be doubted but that many of the ancient Jews before Christ were saved without the sensible exertions of those acts in that manner which is represented as necessary by some divines, because they had not those occasions nor were under circumstances that would draw them out; though without doubt they had the disposition, which alone is absolutely necessary now, and at all times and in all circumstances is equally necessary” (13: 214). It is, however, worth noting that Hunsinger is referring primarily to Edwards’ 1734 lecture, “Justification by Faith Alone,” which was revised and expanded for its inclusion in *Discourses on Various Important Subjects* in 1738 – and there is surely a difference between what Edwards would write in private and what he would publish or deliver in a sermon.

embryonic form, a compatibilist model as suited to the demands of Calvinist doctrine as to those of the Enlightenment. He holds fast to the notion that salvation is only to be attained through knowledge of Christ, yet he simultaneously admits of an absolute skepticism in terms of knowing who is saved – an admission that can only result in an unqualified injunction to allow that those non-Protestants who were without Christ by circumstance, rather than by choice, were potentially members of God’s elect, and that those who had chosen another faith might still be possessed of a saving disposition.

Woolman is less rigorous in terms of developing his soteriology, but there is no doubt that it was his unquestioning devotion to orthodox Christian doctrine that compelled him to articulate a progressive antislavery ethos that was, after all, grounded in the same vision of metaphysical holism that obliged Edwards to observe in 1736 that the “extraordinary dispensation of Providence” through which so many people in the town of Northampton exhibited signs of what appeared to be true conversion during the first Great Awakening included not only whites, but also several blacks, who “from what was seen in them then, and what is discernible in them since, appear to have been truly born again in the late remarkable season” (4: 157, 159). The theocratic egalitarianism of true conversion was no less the main emphasis and concern of Olaudah Equiano, a former slave turned British subject who, though he claimed to have been born an Igbo African in 1745, was most likely born in South Carolina in 1747.⁴¹

⁴¹ Vincent Carretta has argued persuasively on this matter, pointing out that Equiano indicated his place of birth as South Carolina on a muster list of 1773 when he was under no obligation to do so: “Had Equiano wanted to, he apparently could have remained silent about where he was born, or . . . he could have named someplace in Africa. In fact, since there was no way of verifying his claim, he could have given anywhere he had ever been as his birthplace. From the third muster, 31 May, on Equiano is listed as ‘Gust[avu]s Weston,’ an able seaman, age twenty-eight. ‘So. Carolina’ is listed as his ‘Place and Country where born,’ a birthplace consistent with his baptismal record fourteen years earlier” (147).

In the tenth chapter of his *Narrative*, Equiano gives an account of his conversion experience in which he stresses the universality of God's saving grace by highlighting his supposed place of birth. After seeing "with the eye of faith, the crucified Saviour bleeding on the cross on Mount Calvary," and then perceiving "that by the deed of the law no flesh living could be justified," Equiano is prepared to receive salvation. "Now the Ethiopian was willing to be saved by Jesus Christ, the sinner's only surety," he writes, "and also to rely on none other person or thing for salvation. Self was obnoxious, and good works he had none; for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do. Oh! the amazing things of that hour can never be told – it was joy in the Holy Ghost!" (190). Like Edwards, Equiano was also a theological determinist who believed that it was only by the sovereign will of God that sinners could be redeemed, and he seems to have felt the reverberations of the Great Awakenings when he saw Edwards' fellow revivalist George Whitefield preach in Savannah, Georgia in 1765:

When I got into the church I saw this pious man exhorting the people with the greatest fervour and earnestness, and sweating as much as ever I did while in slavery on Montserrat beach. I was very much struck and impressed with this; I thought it strange I had never seen divines exert themselves in this manner before, and was no longer at a loss to account for the thin congregations they preached to. (132)

Though Whitefield's style of preaching was vastly different from that of Edwards, the two men worked closely together in years following the Northampton revival. Edwards did have reservations about Whitefield's seeming confidence in discerning who was truly converted, as well as his apparent tendency to presume that he had privileged access to,

or knowledge of, the will of God. According to Jonathan Marsden, Edwards had even “taken the young man aside and spoken to him privately about the danger of relying on ‘impulses’ . . . The point was crucial. If everyone who had intense spiritual experiences could claim special messages from God, there would be no way of checking all sorts of errors and delusions” (211-12).⁴² In spite of these disagreements, however, in 1740 Whitefield preached from Edwards’ pulpit four times over the course of three days, reportedly bringing Edwards and the rest of the congregation to tears when he spoke of their past revival. As Whitefield later recorded in his journal: “good Mr. Edwards wept during the whole time of exercises. The people were equally affected; and, in the afternoon, the power increased yet more” (477).

Scholars, however, have attributed much of Whitefield’s effect to the precedent set by Edwards. As Perry Miller notes, Whitefield “stepped into a situation prepared for him, he touched off a powder-keg that had long been building up to an explosion. Or, to speak more accurately, Jonathan Edwards had already put a match to the fuse, and Whitefield blew it into flame” (*JE* 134). Likewise, C. C. Goen qualifies Whitefield’s role in the Great Awakening by emphasizing the lasting importance of Edwards’ formal articulation of the revival with which the evangelical movement began:

While George Whitefield, by virtue of his flamboyant itineracy and its consequent influence on evangelistic method, may be called the “founder” of American revivalism, it was Jonathan Edwards who began the historical

⁴² On Whitefield’s first visit to Northampton, see Marsden, 201-13. By the time of Whitefield’s second visit in 1745, Edwards found him more agreeable, observing in a letter to a correspondent in Scotland that Whitefield “appeared in a more desirable temper of mind and more solid and judicious in his thoughts, and prudence in his conduct, than when he was here before” (16: 178).

documentation and theological defense which have sustained it as an ongoing tradition. (4:1).

Another way of putting it would be to say that Edwards laid the intellectual groundwork for a return to experiential religion that Whitefield subsequently converted into a traveling spectacle – a populist movement that became a religion of its own; and though Equiano was no doubt a convert of the latter, the tenor and execution of his argument in the *Narrative* owes more to Edwards' careful rigor than it does to Whitefield's bravado, and in terms of genre, he follows the blueprint of Woolman's *Journal*, which is not only a spiritual autobiography but also an abolitionist tract. Whatever Equiano's place of birth, there can be no doubt of his affinities with the American tradition of spiritual autobiography, or what Ruth A. Banes refers to as the autobiography of the "exemplary self" typified by Woolman, Adams, Jefferson, and Franklin, the conventional pattern of which is characterized by "apologetic openings, parable form, and the purposes of Divine Providence" (227). Edwards' *Personal Narrative* also has a place here, but Equiano's autobiography resonates even more closely with the evangelical resistance that found its most influential statement of purpose in Woolman. Indeed, as Vincent Carretta notes, "on the large fold-out map that that illustrates volume 1 of Thomas Clarkson's *History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade* (London, 1808), the widest single stream flowing into the river of abolition is labelled 'John Woolman'" (SL 402).

Nevertheless, Equiano followed Edwards, a slave-owner, in explicitly denying salvation to non-Christians. "I saw the blessed Redeemer to be the fountain of life, and the well of salvation," he writes, adding that it was thus through his experience of Christ

that he was “confirmed in the truths of the Bible; those oracles of everlasting truth, on which every soul living must stand or fall eternally, agreeably to Acts iv. 12. “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must saved, but only Jesus Christ”” (192). There have, however, been attempts to dismiss Equiano’s Christianity as somehow disingenuous. Sally Ann Ferguson, for example, attempts to separate Providence from Christianity in order to argue that “after Equiano ‘converts’ to Christianity, Providence remains the dominant theological force in his life, while Christianity survives as an aspect of his fateful encounter with the Western slave patriarchy” (308).⁴³ Of course this account does not explain why Equiano would then go to such lengths to emphasize particular points of Christian doctrine, especially given the fact that he does so repeatedly, and not only when he recounts his conversion experience but again in the closing lines of the “Miscellaneous Verses” that he appends to the chapter:

When sacrifices, works, and pray’r,
 Prov’d vain, and ineffectual were,
 “Lo then I come!” the Saviour cry’d
 And, bleeding, bow’d his head and dy’d.

He dy’d for all who ever saw
 No help in them, nor by the law:
 I this have seen and gladly own

⁴³ Other interpretations of Equiano’s Christianity as inauthentic, circumstantially coerced, or rhetorical, as Eileen Razzari Elrod points out, include Chinosole’s “Tryin’ to Get Over: Narrative Posture in Equiano’s Autobiography” (1982), Wilfred Samuels’ “The Disguised Voice in The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano” (1985), and Valerie Smith’s *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* (1990).

“Salvation is by Christ alone!” (197)

There is simply no doubt that Equiano was a Methodist who believed, like Edwards, in humankind’s total depravity and absolute dependence on God through salvation in Christ. As Eileen Razzari Elrod observes, to suggest otherwise is to obscure our understanding of the *Narrative*: “If we take the facile view that [Equiano] is imply using religion to manipulate readers, or if we see him as simply manipulated by religion, we ignore the earnest and consistent piety that sets the tone and establishes the purpose of the narrative,” which, as she tells us, is “to tell the story of his soul’s spiritual journey, to testify to God’s actions in his life” (409).

For Equiano, as well as for Woolman and Edwards, nothing could take place without God having allowed it to take place. “I early accustomed myself to look at the hand of God in the minutest occurrence,” Equiano writes, “and to learn from it a lesson of morality and religion; and in this light every circumstance I have related was to me of importance” (236). Even the most trivial event, if interpreted correctly, could reveal God’s influence and intentionality, but since everything that happened must necessarily be attributed to God, then one must make distinctions, at least on a practical level, between what God allowed and what He found agreeable, though neither Equiano nor Woolman seem to register, as Edwards does, the apparent inconsistency in making such distinctions. For if nothing can happen without God’s consent, then how can there be anything with which he is displeased? As we saw in the last chapter, even Edwards does not have an answer – after he goes so far as to acknowledge that God must have allowed Adam to commit the first sin by withdrawing his benevolent influence, he simply affirms the ultimate inscrutability of the divine will and defers to doctrine: “whatever mystery

may be supposed in the affair, yet no Christian will presume to say, it was not in perfect consistence with God's holiness and righteousness" (3: 393-94).

Equiano and Woolman, however, were not particularly interested in the paradox of God's sovereignty – they only hoped to act in accordance with God's will. Accordingly, their main concern was in determining what God wanted and intended to happen rather than what He allowed to happen, and so far as slavery was concerned, both men came to the same conclusion – namely, that the practice of treating human beings as property was unchristian and would result in a visitation of divine vengeance. But this conclusion was not immediate in either case, and both Equiano and Woolman were complicit in slavery before they opposed it. As we saw earlier, it was not until Woolman was instructed by his employer to write a bill of sale for a black woman that he became aware of his convictions. Equiano, however, played a more active role. Ten years after he purchased his freedom, he voluntarily assisted in the establishment of a plantation in Central America, helping to select the slaves that he would oversee. As Carretta observes, "Equiano was convinced that his own experiences and observations as a slave enabled him to be a humane overseer of slaves. Nearly a decade would pass before Equiano recognized that humane slavery was a contradiction in terms" (*EA* 185).

When he finally did change his mind, Equiano opposed slavery on theological grounds, with arguments quite similar to those of Woolman, though no doubt more incendiary. In 1788, he entered the debate over the slave trade with an attack on James Tobin, author of *Cursory Remarks upon the Reverend Mr. Ramsay's Essay* (1785), which itself had been an attack on James Ramsey's antislavery tract, *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of American Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (1784). In his response

to Tobin, printed in *The Public Advertiser*, Equiano invokes the wrath of God against the proslavery camp, reminding Tobin “that the oppressor and the oppressed are in the hands of the just and awful God, who says, Vengeance is mine and I will repay – repay the oppressor and the justifier of the oppression” before stressing, as Edwards had in his most famous sermon, the sublime magnitude of God’s wrath in comparison to that of mere humans: “The studied and torturing punishments, inhuman, as they are, of a barbarous planter, or a more barbarous overseer, will be tenderness compared to the provoked wrath of an angry but righteous God!” (331). By contrast, Woolman’s invocations of the divine wrath were composed of admonition rather than imprecation. At a Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends in 1758, he warned his fellow Quakers that the oppression of blacks in North America “had reached the ears of the Most High!” and that if they failed to act, “it may be that by terrible things in righteousness God will answer us in this matter” (93).

To both Woolman and Equiano, the practice of slavery exhibited an ignorance of the ontological union that could be the only logical consequence of God’s absolute sovereignty and benevolence. To enslave anyone was to oppress a fellow creature of God and a potential minister of Christ. Yet, unlike Equiano, Woolman also notes that he “found no narrowness respecting sects and opinions, but believed that sincere, upright-hearted people in every Society who truly loved God were accepted of him” (28). In Woolman’s usage, “Society” usually refers to the Society of Friends, but here he likely means a religious sect of any kind, and while this is certainly more inclusive than Edwards, it is not entirely clear whether or not Woolman explicitly believes that those who do not acknowledge Christ are accepted by God – and equally unclear is what Woolman believes will happen to those who do not love God; for, unlike Edwards, he

never mentions hell. Elsewhere, in a similarly evasive passage, he writes: “From an inward purifying, and steadfast abiding under it, springs a lively operative desire for the good of others.” Here, since the agent of inward purification is undefined, Woolman’s exact meaning cannot be known, but the statement that follows could certainly be taken as a corroboration of Edwards’ dispositional soteriology:

All faithful people are not called to the public ministry, but whoever are, are called to minister of that which they have tasted and handled spiritually. The outward modes of worship are various, but wherever men are true ministers of Jesus Christ it is from the operation of his spirit upon their hearts, first purifying them and thus giving them a feeling sense of the conditions of others. (31)

Is Woolman saying that the outward modes of Christian worship are various, or that the outward modes of *all* worship are various? Thomas P. Slaughter seems to suggest the latter, but Woolman’s ambiguity forces his biographer to do so in terms of what is possible, rather than certain: “[Woolman] may have empathized with strangers and people of other races as much as or more than he did with friends and relations, with non-Quakers as much as with coreligionists, with the impoverished as much as with people of his own or higher material state, domestic animals along with their human masters” (101). Yet we can say with some accuracy that Woolman had compassion for just about anyone who made an effort to control their selfish impulses and to love God. As he claims in the preface to the second part of *Some Considerations*:

Men who sincerely apply their minds to true virtue and find an inward support from above by which all vicious inclinations are made subject,

that they love God sincerely and prefer the real good of mankind universally to their own private interest, though these through the strength of education and tradition may remain under some speculative and great errors, it would be uncharitable to say that therefore God rejects them. He who creates, supports, and gives understanding to all men – his knowledge and goodness is superior to the various cases and circumstances of his creatures which to us appear the most difficult. (211)

That is, so long as people act in good faith, the circumstances that led to their delusions will be forgiven.

Woolman does, however, make statements that imply exclusivity when he attempts to persuade those who claim to be Christian that slavery will ultimately incite God's wrath. "They who know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent," he declares, "and are thus acquainted with the merciful, benevolent Gospel Spirit, will therein perceive that the indignation of God is kindled against oppression and cruelty, and in beholding the great distress of so numerous a people will find cause for mourning" (66). In this sense, we might say that Woolman believes that those who do not know "the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent" are perhaps susceptible to a kind of short-sightedness, wherein they perceive neither the moral corruption of slavery nor God's opposition to it. But this is about as intolerant as Woolman ever gets. We must also remember that, unlike Edwards or Coleridge, Woolman is not a philosopher or a theologian from whom we can expect clearly defined doctrines: he is a Quaker mystic

whose only statement of purpose is “to leave some hints in writing of my experience of the goodness of God” (23).⁴⁴

For Woolman, then, there is no clearly defined method for detecting the signs of saving grace, nor any way of explaining what it is to be possessed of true affection. At the same time, those who have undergone conversion are aware of their own good estate as well as that of others. “There is a harmony in the sound of that voice to which divine love gives utterance,” Woolman notes, “and some appearance of right order in their temper and conduct whose passions are fully regulated. Yet all these do not fully show forth that inward life to such who have not felt it, but this white stone and new name is known rightly to such only who have it” (29). Edwards’ model of sainthood is both more empirical and more mystical. While there are several signs, or distinguishing marks, that account for the function and origin of the religious affections – e.g., “Gracious affections soften the heart, and are attended and followed with a Christian tenderness of spirit”; “Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious do arise from those influences and operations on the heart which are *spiritual, supernatural* and *divine*” (2: 357, 197) – there is no way of knowing whether or not one’s own affections are truly gracious. In a sense similar to that of Edwards’ well-known distinction between rationally knowing “that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness” (17: 414), knowing that one’s affections are gracious is a matter of immediate experience – but since the experience of gracious and holy affections must be continuously recurrent to be authenticated, isolated

⁴⁴ On the question of whether Woolman, despite his Quaker mysticism, was influenced by Enlightenment ideas, J. William Frost notes that although Woolman’s antislavery treatises tend to illustrate the influence of Enlightenment thinking, that his *Journal* does not, suggesting that “Woolman’s inconsistent use of enlightenment religion suggests that he tailored his vocabulary to fit his audience, his genre, and his purpose in writing” (185), and further, that “those readers who have found enlightenment themes in Woolman rely on the antislavery essays and others who downplay rational religion’s significance emphasize the *Journal*” (186).

experiences of such affections cannot serve as confirmation after the fact in the same way that an experience of honey's sweetness can. Edwards also made clear that he was "far from pretending to lay down any such rules, as shall be sufficient of themselves, without other means, to enable all true saints to see their good estate, or as supposing they should be the principal means of their satisfaction" (2: 196).

As opposed to Woolman, in whom conversion brings about an ontological change that can be felt from that point forward, Edwards never seems able to look back and identify his conversion with absolute certainty. The *Personal Narrative*, for instance, does not give a definitive account of conversion so much as of an interminable pursuit of holiness. "I felt then a great satisfaction as to my good estate," he observes after recounting his revelation of God's presence in the natural world. "But that did not content me," he continues, "I had vehement longings of soul after God and Christ, and after more holiness." Yet the more Edwards longs for the holiness that accompanies truly gracious affections, the more he is made painfully aware of his endless depravity. Progress can be made, but because he can only describe the magnitude of his wickedness "by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite" (16:802), and since Edwards believes that grace can only be achieved by "mortifying corruption" (2: 195), he can never reach his goal – nor is he ever able to determine with certainty whether he is truly saved or simply acting under the influence of his intense desire to obliterate his self and exist entirely in God. To make matters worse, since Edwards believes the distance between God's perfection and humankind's corruption to be infinite, even saints will always be infinitely striving toward a union with God that can never be achieved.⁴⁵ "Let

⁴⁵ In Philip Gura's view, the union of God and humankind is unachievable not as a consequence of the distance between the two, but rather because the act of creation is eternal: "Because God made the universe

the most perfect union with God be represented by something at an infinite height above us,” he writes, “and the eternally increasing union of the saints with God, by something that is ascending constantly towards that infinite height, moving upwards with a given velocity; and that is to continue thus to move to all eternity” (8: 534).

And unable to attribute anything other than corruption to himself, Edward subsequently rejects entirely the notion of any good arising as a result of his own agency: “The thought of any comfort or joy, arising in me, on any consideration, or reflection on my own amiableness, or any of my performances, or any goodness of heart or life, is nauseous and detestable to me.” In spite of this, he finds that he cannot exorcise his pride. “I am greatly afflicted with a proud and self-righteous spirit; much more sensibly, than I used to be,” he writes near the end of the *Personal Narrative*, “I see that serpent rising and putting forth its head, continually, everywhere, all around me” (16: 803). Put another way, Edwards’ experiences of grace, once they have passed, only leave him a sense of his own pride in having identified any goodness in himself; and in this way, he alternates between fleeting instances of rapture and long periods of dejection – between a sweet sense of God’s sovereignty while walking in a pasture or retiring on the bank of a river, and a dark conviction of his own depravity while ruminating at his study or struggling to make connections with others in a social setting. That he is thought to have spent thirteen hours a day in his study gives us some sense of why he may have been so often in what he refers to in his *Diary* as a “lifeless frame” (16: 765).⁴⁶

as he did, all that had gone out from him would return to him. But logically, because creation is eternal, an utterly perfect union presumably can never be attained” (198).

⁴⁶ The notion that Edwards spent thirteen hours a day at this study comes down to us from *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards, President of the College of New Jersey: Together with a Number of his Sermons on Various Important Subjects* (1765) by Samuel Hopkins. “Tho’ he was of a tender and delicate Constitution,” Hopkins writes, “yet few Students are capable of close Application

He may even have had his own case in mind when in the *Religious Affections* he confirms the hopelessness of expecting certainty from any of the distinguishing signs of grace. “No such signs are to be expected,” he writes, “that shall be sufficient to enable those saints certainly to discern their own good estate, who are very low in grace, or are such as have much departed from God, and are fallen into a dead, carnal and unchristian frame” (2: 193). The way Edwards sees it, there are two problems attending the perceptive ability of these saints. The first is that they have so little grace that it is difficult to see, and the second is that what grace they do have tends to be hidden by sin: “grace being very small, cannot be clearly and certainly discerned and distinguished Another defect attending the grace of those I am speaking, is its being mingled with so much corruption, which clouds and hides it, and makes it impossible for it certainly to be known” (2: 194). That is, since humans are fundamentally depraved, and since the proportion of grace is always much less than that of sin (even in a saint), the ability to apprehend grace, to know it rationally, is always attended, and ultimately, frustrated, by the confusion of sin.

There is nevertheless a rather fine line between Woolman’s inner light and Edwards’ commitment to grace as both an inward and empirical phenomenon, and both men no doubt conceive of holiness as a personal, non-rational experience of the divine.⁴⁷

more than he. He commonly spent thirteen Hours every day in his Study” (40). A theologian in his own right, Hopkins studied with Edwards, who also happened to be his brother-in-law, in the early 1740’s.

⁴⁷ I am not the first to have noted the similarity between Edwards and Woolman. Of the passage from *Faithful Narrative* (1736) in which Edwards exults in the failure of the Quakers to gain any converts in Northampton following the revival of 1734-5, Nancy Ruttenberg writes: “It is no surprise that the Quakers, with their doctrine of the inner voice, should have mistaken the Northampton revival as the mass conversion of Congregationalists to Quakerism” (205). Likewise, in *America’s God*, Mark A. Noll highlights the parallel conversion experiences of Woolman and Edwards, observing that Woolman’s experience compelled him “to embrace the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light of Christ, a teaching far too subjective for leaders of the main colonial denominations. The phrases that Woolman employed to describe

The difference, I would suggest, is that while Edwards tends toward a concealment of God's relationship with the individual, Woolman aims to make that relationship public by acknowledging it as the basis for his activism. Woolman's knowledge of his heavenly estate actively consists in his unceasing resignation to the will of God. Yet for Edwards, who spent so much of his time in rumination and study, the recognition that a knowledge of grace was achieved exclusively through action could only have amounted to resigning the greater portion of his life to uncertainty. Consequently, he does not claim any knowledge with regard to the state of his own soul, and he can only bring himself to attribute a limited kind of certainty to the Apostle:

Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination, as by action.

The Apostle Paul sought assurance chiefly this way, even by forgetting the things that were behind, and reaching forth unto those things that were before, pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus; if by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. And it was by this means that he obtained assurance, I Cor. 9:26 "I therefore so run, as not uncertainly." He obtained assurance, more by running, than by considering. (2: 195-6)

Here, Edwards is not even proposing a way of obtaining assurance so much as setting down what he believes is the best advice for combating the spiritual torpor and self-loathing with which he had struggled. He takes a similar tack in a *Diary* entry of 1722-23 when he resolves to overcome his listlessness by forcing himself "to go quick from one thing to another, and do those things with vigor, in which vigor would ever be useful,"

this experience were, however, surprisingly similar to words Jonathan Edwards also used for a similar experience at about the same age in his own life" (29).

though he still finds himself “overwhelmed with melancholy” the following day – and it is not until the next day that he begins “to endeavor to recover out of the death that I have been in for these several day” (16: 765).

Though we do not have a record of Edwards’ more private thoughts in later years, the more we understand his deep conviction of man’s total depravity, the more it appears that his affirmations of his own corruption are neither rhetorical nor exaggerated.⁴⁸ “My wickedness, as I am in myself,” he writes in the *Personal Narrative*, “has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable, and infinitely swallowing up all thought and imagination; like an infinite deluge, or infinite mountains over my head” (16: 802). At the same time, Edwards’ affirmation of assurance as an active state of being (however inaccessible to himself personally), tends to align him with the Enlightenment work ethic of Benjamin Franklin, to whom he is often set in opposition.

Moreover, though Avihu Zakai is in some sense correct to claim that in the context of “the English Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, Edwards’s views, strongly opposed to the dominant philosophy of Locke, Newton, Hume, and the Deists, illustrate the expiring power of Calvinism” (95), this line of thinking does not account for the broad overlap of Edwards’ religious empiricism with Franklin’s pragmatism, which is no doubt grounded in the emphasis both men laid on the significance of visible performance as a means of evaluating and projecting the actuality of what could otherwise only be truly known by God. “Edwards and Franklin looked for reliable signs of the state of the soul in the visibility of external performance,” observes William

⁴⁸ Perry Miller makes a similar argument: “When he foresaw that he might be destined to the lowest place in hell, he was not attitudinizing; he was stating bare fact. Who then was the spider held over the pit? Who better could comprehend to what extremities nature will go in the attempt to simulate a reality it knows not?” (*JE* 208).

Breitenbach, adding that, for both men, life itself “became an ongoing process of fabricating and sustaining an identity that could be taken as evidence of spiritual authenticity both by others and by oneself” (21). Edwards could never take pride in the creation of a public perception to serve a material end, but when he is at his pithiest there is no doubting his affinity with the early American pragmatism that we see in Franklin.⁴⁹ “There may be several good evidences that a tree is a fig tree,” he quips in *Religious Affections*, “but the highest and most proper evidence of it, is that it actually bears figs” (2: 443). By itself, this dictum strikes a tone similar to that of the aphorisms found in *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, which generally affirm common sense and simple inductive reasoning, but when taken in the larger theological context of Edwards’ argument in the *Religious Affections*, it also reveals the extent to which the discernment of saving grace, or good sense, is both rational and doctrinal.

In deploying the biblical metaphor of the fig tree as a model for understanding the relationship between what a person does and what a person is, Edwards is also stressing the importance of good works without undermining the doctrine of *sola fide*; and having already endorsed the indispensability of relying on the evidence of “practice which is visible to our own consciences; which is not only the motion of our bodies, but the exertion and exercise of the soul, which directs and commands that motion; which is more directly and immediately under the view of our own consciences, than the act of the body” (2: 424), he is able to construct a metaphysical foundation for external behavior by grounding it in the awareness of the individual. That is, in spite of the fact that the

⁴⁹ In fairness to Franklin, we should note that his stated intention in cultivating an appearance of industry was only to avoid projecting any impressions that would contradict his actual character: “In order to secure my credit and character as a tradesman, I took care not only to be in reality Industrious and frugal, but to avoid all appearances to the contrary” (62). On Franklin as an early pragmatist, see James Campbell’s *The Pragmatism of Benjamin Franklin* (1995).

conscience can be corrupted and deceived by sin, to Edwards it is still the best arbiter, other than God, of the authenticity of external behavior, for the conscience is the sole worldly observer of the totality, as well as the origin, of the behaviour that it oversees, much of which, as Edwards writes, “is in secret, and hid from the eye of the world: and ’tis impossible certainly to determine, how far a man may go in many external appearances and imitations of grace, from other principles” (2: 420). Yet for all the complexity of his argument, Edwards’ aim is simply that of compelling individuals to view their appearance as consubstantial with their essence, for to act under the assumption that the two are unrelated is not only to introduce an unnatural dualism, but also to allow external lawlessness (i.e., antinomianism).

Organicism and Teleology

For Edwards, then, holiness begins with wholeness – with a willingness to grant that visible performance is the exercise of the soul; and in this sense, the use of the biblical fig tree is not only a condensed version of the Calvinist stance on good works, but also an example of the way in which Edwards adopts the theocratic organicism that we see replicated in Coleridge, who also uses the fig tree metaphor to affirm the doctrine of *sola fide* over sixty years later in *The Friend*. This is not to say that the organic theories of art that Coleridge introduced to English criticism did not borrow their terminologies from German philosophy and criticism, but rather that the general provenance of Coleridge’s organic thinking finds its source in the logic of an essentially Calvinist theology. In point of fact, we can date Coleridge’s distinction between

mechanical and organic ways of thinking at least as far back as the second autobiographical letter Coleridge wrote to Thomas Poole in October of 1797, in which he recalls the combined influence of his early reading of imaginative literature with the tutelage of his father, the Reverend John Coleridge.

Apparently, when the elder Coleridge told his eight-year-old son of how “Jupiter was a thousand times larger than our world – and that the other twinkling stars were Suns that had worlds rolling round them,” the boy heard “with profound delight & admiration; but without the least mixture of wonder or incredulity” given that his mind had already been “habituated *to the Vast*” by his “early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c,” which Coleridge goes on to describe as the only way he knows of “giving the mind a love of ‘the Great’, & ‘the Whole,’” before claiming that those who rely only on the “testimony of their senses . . . contemplate nothing but *parts*” (CL 1: 354). Significantly, the habituation of mind that Coleridge describes is not an achievement or apprehension of the intellect, but rather that of an affective capacity by which organic unity is experienced instead of understood. Nor would it be an exaggeration to say that Coleridge’s early sense of organic unity is something of a religious experience, though he also seems to have understood (and probably better than anyone of his time) the broad applicability of the organic metaphor.

In Essay XV of the second volume of *The Friend*, for instance, he uses the metaphor of the fig tree not only to affirm the doctrine of justification by faith alone, but also to justify his growing corpus of unrealized works. As he puts it, “if the living sap is in [the fig tree], and if it has struggled to put forth buds and blossoms which have been

prevented from maturing by inevitable contingencies of tempests or untimely frosts, the virtuous sap will be accounted as fruit”; and reciprocally,

the curse of barrenness will light on many a tree, from the boughs of which hundreds have been satisfied, because the omniscient judge knows that the fruits were threaded to the boughs artificially by the outward working of base fear and selfish hopes, and were neither nourished by the love of God or of man, nor grew out of the graces engrafted on the stock by religion.⁵⁰ (4.1: 315)

Though in the first chapter we noted that Coleridge made a point of distancing himself from Edwards’ conception of the will, here we can observe that his position on the doctrine of *sola fide* is identical. That is, while he acknowledges that external behavior is the only means we have of judging one another, it is the actions of the heart that are of ultimate importance: “Our fellow-creatures can only judge what we *are* by what we *do*; but in the eye of our Maker what we *do* is of no worth, except as it flows from what we *are*” (4.1: 314-15). Nor can this essentially Edwardsean stance be attributed solely to Coleridge’s supposed move toward all things conservative, for he seems to have arrived at this position quite early. In “Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement,” for instance, he observes that “he that works me good with unmov’d face, / Does it but half:

⁵⁰ Coleridge may be thinking of Wordsworth in this passage, which was originally printed in *The Friend*, No. 23 for February 8, 1810. Though the tension between the two did not boil over until October of 1810, the strain of the relationship had begun to show by this time. As Richard Holmes notes, all was not particularly well at Allan Bank, where Coleridge was staying with Wordsworth, Dorothy, and Wordsworth’s sister-in-law Sara, with whom Coleridge had painfully and desperately fallen in love: “Coleridge’s increasingly moody presence at Allan Bank was becoming a great burden on the domestic household. His nocturnal hours, his financial worries, his demands on Asra, his fluctuations between supine despondency on the sofa and hectic activity at his desk, produced an atmosphere of brooding crisis. Even Dorothy found his demands irksome” (184).

he chills me while he aids, / My benefactor, not my brother man!” (16.1.1: 263), and in “Religious Musings” he avows that the Elect are “regenerate thro’ faith” (16.1.1: 178).

As J. Robert Barth argues, Coleridge’s position on justification is best understood as the “modified Calvinism” (156) described by James Boulger as a “loose or moderate form of Calvinism” that insisted “upon justification as a personal and continuous victory for the individual, while rejecting the Calvinistic deductions of election, predestination, and, at worst, antinomianism” (155). Yet insofar as he affirmed the doctrine of election, Coleridge’s Calvinism is not even this moderate. “What man of Sense and Observation can deny *the fact* of Election?” (11.1: 433), he asks in a manuscript fragment, while in *Aids to Reflection* he clarifies his position with a long aphorism from Archbishop Leighton, in which the seventeenth-century Scottish divine describes saving grace as a reciprocal relation between God and the chosen individual, though there is no doubt that God is the ultimate cause of such grace: “He that loves may be sure that he was loved first; and he that chooses God for his delight and portion, may conclude confidently, that God has chosen him to be one of those that shall enjoy him, and be happy in him forever” (9: 72). On this particular point, Coleridge was not only in agreement with Edwards, but with Equiano and Woolman as well.

Woolman, though not a determinist *per se*, tended to attribute his capacity for moral action, as well as his good fortune and general state of well-being, to the influence of God.⁵¹ Like Equiano, Woolman envisioned a truly omnipresent creator whose

⁵¹ Woolman even views the process of finding a suitable mate as having been somehow effected by the will of God. As he writes at the outset of Chapter 3 of his *Journal*: “About this time believing it good for me to settle, and thinking seriously about a companion, my heart was turned to the Lord with desires that he would give me wisdom to proceed therein agreeable to his will; and he was pleased to give me a well-inclined damsel, Sarah Ellis, to whom I was married the 18th day, 8th month, 1749” (44).

involvement in human affairs was total. Consequently, even seemingly unremarkable circumstances are transformed into illustrations of God's mercy and benevolence. In May of 1766, for example, Woolman found himself growing weak as he and his friend John Sleeper traveled through Maryland on foot "to have a more lively feeling of the condition of the oppressed slaves," as well as to "set an example of lowliness before the eyes of their masters, and be more out of the way of temptation to unprofitable familiarities" (145). Though he is at first discouraged at having grown weak, when he reflects on "how the Lord had supported our minds and bodies, so that we got forward much faster than I expected when we came out," he comes to understand that God is actually doing him a service: "I now saw that I had been in danger of too strongly desiring to get soon through the journey, and that this bodily weakness now attending me was a kindness to me" (146). To Woolman, then, the natural fact of weariness on a hot day is a supernatural admonition borne out of divine love. But is there even a qualitative difference between attributing physical exhaustion to the will of God and attributing it to the laws of the physical universe? Woolman would have made no distinction between the two, and in either case, we infer a cause from a physical event in order to determine the most desirable course of action based on a belief about what will happen in the future. Simply put, events can never truly be arbitrary, or without meaning – not for us, anyway. As Wittgenstein observes, to deny this is to speak a kind of nonsense: "If anyone said that information about the past could not convince him that something would happen in the future, I should not understand him. One might ask him: What do you expect to be told, then? What sort of information do you call a ground for such a belief?" (115).

Physical events and experiences, then, are always instructive, and Woolman takes his weakness as notice that he should slow down; yet he also seems to believe that he would not have been stricken with weakness had he not impiously construed the speed with which the journey had formerly progressed as an indication that his personal desire of completing the journey would be satisfied. Like Edwards, though less severe, Woolman views the human will as unable to execute benevolence on its own – it is only through the act of resignation to the will of God that the individual can approach an ethical or regenerate state of being. Yet the question of how either resignation or recalcitrance to the will of God was possible without God’s permission, so bothersome to Coleridge and nineteenth-century American thinkers, seems not to have occurred to Woolman even as he acknowledges that his personal desire actually inhibits his ability to do God’s work, which he takes to be the advancement of the antislavery movement among Maryland Quakers.⁵²

Of course in the simplest sense, Woolman is only reminding himself that since he is in Maryland to change the minds of slave-owning Quakers, he must accept that personal sacrifices must be made in the interest of the greater good. As he writes elsewhere in the *Journal*, “If selfish views or a partial spirit have any room in our minds, we are unfit for the Lord’s work” (95). But because it is through physical weakness that he is reminded of these priorities, he concludes that God has weakened him in order to keep him focused on changing the minds of Maryland slave owners rather than on his

⁵² Witness here the peculiar overlap between secular and theistic modes of thought. Like any atheist, Woolman believes that it is a mistake to impose his personal interests on natural phenomena – and yet, at the same time, he only arrives at this conclusion through the experience of having his own interest thwarted, purportedly by God. That an atheist would subsequently think it lucky, or advantageous, to have grown weak because it accidentally happened to serve as a reminder of the importance of the task at hand is little more than a semantic difference.

own desire to return home. But the larger point, as I take it, is that the attribution of all natural phenomena to the will, or natural law, of an agent other than the self is undoubtedly a kind of determinism. The exercise of an individual will, unless somehow impervious to the influence of this agent, or law, as Coleridge was painfully aware, can make no difference.

In the case of Woolman viewing himself as having “been in danger of too strongly desiring to get soon through the journey,” it is clear that he understands his disproportionate desire to have come about as a result of God having granted him mental and physical health at the outset of the journey, yet Woolman still would have understood the direct cause of this desire to have originated in himself. Like Coleridge, he refuses to attribute sin to the will of God, but again, since he is neither a philosopher nor a theologian, Woolman can attribute all of his sin to himself and all of his grace to God without pausing to consider whether or not it is rationally sound to do so; nor does he seem particularly interested in making the “fortunate fall” argument. He is concerned to avoid acting under the exercise of a false or selfish spirit, but his actions are too carefully premeditated, too explicitly an extension of his beliefs, for him to be anxious, as Coleridge and Edwards seem to have been, that visible works might not necessarily reveal the intentions of the heart. Though Edwards affirms that the “main and most proper proof of a man having a heart to do anything, concerning which he is at liberty to follow his own inclinations, and either to do or not do as he pleases, is his doing of it” (2: 427), his frame of reference seems limited to what he refers to as “holy practice,” which is only to make the obvious point that, for Edwards, saintliness was not so much defined by action as by abstention and prayer. “I have been negligent for the month past in three

things,” he writes in his *Diary*, “I have not been watchful enough over my appetite in eating and drinking; in rising too late a-mornings; and in not applying myself with application enough to the duty of secret prayer” (16: 766). Here, as elsewhere, visible practice consists of self-abnegation and holy meditation, of avoiding sin rather than actively seeking to do the will of God. For Woolman, it is nearly the opposite.

For when he looks back on having acquiesced to the sale of a black woman by writing up a bill of sale for the transaction, Woolman comes to understand that a will without a corresponding act is no will at all. Though he observes that as he wrote the document he was “so afflicted in my mind that I said before my master and the Friend that I believed slavekeeping to be a practice inconsistent with the Christian religion,” this open statement of belief does not alleviate his guilt, and he chastises himself for his lack of resolve: “I thought I should have been clearer if I had desired to be excused from it as a thing against my conscience, for such it was.” Subsequently, he adopts a less accommodating tone when he is again asked to write a receipt for the purchase of a human being: he declares that he “was not easy to write it,” that he “believed the practice [of keeping slaves] was not right,” and that so far as the receipt was concerned, he “desired to be excused from writing [it].”

The two men then part ways, but not before the young man confesses “that keeping slaves was not altogether agreeable to his mind, but that the slave being a gift made to his wife, he had accepted of her” (33) – and with this, the first chapter of the *Journal* closes, leaving the reader to infer that the difference between Woolman and the young man who asks him to write the bill of sale, though of absolutely vital importance, is only one of degrees. They both find slavekeeping disagreeable, but Woolman makes a

choice that is indicative of his relentless endeavour to bring his actions into direct correspondence with a larger system of moral and religious principles that he believes are consistent with the will of God. To put it in the terms employed by Coleridge in his well-known definition of the symbol, Woolman's refusal to write the receipt "partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative" (6: 30). Further, we might say that the whole, in Woolman's view, is the will of God, the reality of which can be conveyed to the individual by the Inner Light, and that the individual whose actions are consistent with this internal guide enunciates the will of God as a living part in the same way that Coleridge's secondary imagination echoes the primary:

In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength, and as the mind by a humble resignation is united to him and we utter words from an inward knowledge that they arise from the heavenly spring, though our way may be difficult and require close attention to keep in it, and though the manner in which we may be led may tend to our own abasement, yet if we continue in patience and meekness, heavenly peace is the reward of our labours. (72)

Woolman, however, is a practitioner, rather than a theorist of organicism – as is Equiano. By this, I mean that Woolman and Equiano concentrate more immediately on the holistic alignment of appearance and essence, and consequently, on the lived experience of visible performance, than either Edwards or Coleridge. They do follow Edwards in understanding the phenomenal world to be a manifestation of noumenal intentions, but insofar as they also claim an equivalence of the antislavery cause with the will of God, they move much closer to enthusiasm.

At the height of his early activism, Coleridge also argued that the slave trade defied the will of God. In the fourth issue of *The Watchman*, where he reworked his Bristol lecture on the slave trade, we even find a bit of the evangelical fury exhibited by Equiano in his attack on James Tobin: “They who believe a God, believe him to be the loving Parent of all men – And is it possible that they who really believe and fear the Father, should fearlessly authorize the oppression of his Children? The Slavery and Tortures, and most horrible Murder of tens of thousands of his Children!” (2: 136). That is, in Coleridge’s mind, no Christian could consent to the slave trade without fearing the wrath of God. The implication of the passage, then, is two-fold: those who sanction the slave trade cannot be truly Christian, and in return for their part in the oppression of the African population, the wrath of God awaits them. By 1808, however, and perhaps owing in part to the fact that British Parliament had abolished the slave trade in 1807, Coleridge’s endorsement of the antislavery cause in his review of Thomas Clarkson’s *Abolition of the Slave Trade* no longer included evangelical admonishments or invocations of the divine wrath, though as late as 1807 he was still inclined to associate the continued practice of slavery in the West Indies with the problem of free will, as is clear from his marginalia on Andrew Fuller’s *Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared* (1793).

As we saw in Chapter One, Coleridge believed that Fuller did not know the difference between Calvinism and Necessitarianism, “and alas! misled by Jonathan Edward’s [sic] book” had come to affirm “a world of agents that never act, but are always acted upon, and yet without any one being that acts” (12.2: 802). Just prior to this,

however, Coleridge also opines that, as opposed to the “Priestleyan Materialist-Necessitarian,” the Calvinist

not only believes a will, but that it is equivalent to the *ego ipse*, to the actual self, in every moral agent; though he believes that in human nature it is an enslaved, because a corrupt, will. In denying free will to the unregenerated he no more denies will, than in asserting the poor negroes in the West Indies to be slaves I deny them to be men. (12.2: 801)

The obvious implication of Coleridge’s analogy is that just as the human will cannot be free so long as it remains human, slaves are not capable of becoming men so long as they remain slaves; but the problem with this view, as Coleridge was to become acutely aware in later years, is that the corrupt will is neither free nor subject to the will of God.

Consequently, such a will must be explained in terms of an Original Sin that somehow exists outside of God’s sovereign will.

In 1808, however, Coleridge seems content to describe the slave trade as a self-evident moral evil, rather than as a practice inconsistent with the will of God. In the course of praising Clarkson for his attention to the corrupting influence of slavery on slaver owners themselves, a subject on which Coleridge insists “too little stress has been laid,” he also makes particular note of the growing division between the American North and South, observing “the almost universal corruption of manners which at the present day startles travellers on passing from the Northern States of America into those in which slavery obtains.” To Coleridge, this corruption of morals, and its subsequent influence in countries “that are in habits of constant commercial intercourse, and who speak the same language,” is an illustration of “evil in its most absolute and most appropriate sense – that

sense, to which the sublimest teachers of moral wisdom, Plato, Zeno, Leibnitz, have confined the appellation” (11.1: 219). But while the evils of slavery are given an absolute status, they no longer seem to warrant divine wrath, and the antislavery cause itself is not explicitly associated with the will of God. Though Clarkson himself declares that there is an “impulse, by means of the action of the Divine Spirit upon our minds, which urges us to do that which is right” (7), Coleridge seems to distance himself from such rhetoric in his review.⁵³ This is by no means to say that he no longer believed that abolition was consistent with the will of God, but rather that, so far as tracing God’s intentions in human affairs went, he had grown somewhat wary of the claim to certainty.

Along with his departure from a religious condemnation of the slave trade, Coleridge also begins to exhibit signs of what Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, and Peter J. Kitson describe as the “sinister ideology” (146) of the unpublished and fragmentary lecture notes that he seems to have produced for Joseph Henry Green in 1828. Acknowledging the difference of these notes from his earlier published work on the slave trade, Fulford, Lee, and Kitson make the somewhat misleading claim that Coleridge “moved from asserting black people’s human equality in the 1790s to asserting the ‘fact’ of their inferiority in the 1820s. In this area, his response to exploration and to race science turned him from an anti-imperialist radical into a (in today’s terms) racist advocate of a colonialist mission to ‘civilise’” (128). In point of fact, Coleridge asserted the inferiority of blacks and endorsed the colonialist mission to civilize, commercialize,

⁵³ That Clarkson here seems to advocate the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light is not coincidental. As Ellen Gibson Wilson notes, by 1786 Clarkson “was a familiar figure in Quaker circles, which was a not a common thing for an Anglican clergyman to be. The sect then was set apart by dress and many rules and customs peculiar to its members. Clarkson saw only that they reasoned as he did, that liberty was a natural right and that since Christ had died for mankind, all men were fundamentally equal” (20); and by 1815, when “the Tsar Alexander I asked him point-blank whether he was a Quaker, Clarkson replied that he ‘was not in Name, but I hoped in Spirit; I was nine parts out of ten on their way of thinking’” (134).

and Christianize as early as his review of Clarkson's *History* in 1808. Nor does his reading of Blumenbach appear to have "turned" him from a radical egalitarian into a racist, though we may note that by modern standards he was probably always what we would think of as a racist.⁵⁴ Further, as Patrick J. Keane observes in his well-balanced and impressively comprehensive treatment of Coleridge's views on race and slavery,

however troubling his later racial theories based on Blumenbach, Coleridge had been familiar with the German anthropologist's work from at least as early as 1799. Neither then, nor subsequently did his absorption and modification of Blumenbach's systematic racial "enumeration" make Coleridge anything less than passionately humanitarian, as Blumenbach himself was, in his response to the issue of black slavery. (66)

Indeed, we must remember that, in Coleridge's mind, asserting the human equality of blacks would not have been the same thing as asserting the equality of African people as a whole with Europeans, which he never does. The task of the modern reader, then, is not only that of understanding Coleridge's idiom in its own context, but also of

⁵⁴ That is to say, on the subject of race, he often wrote in terms that are now unacceptable, but not openly or avowedly racist. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Coleridge ever endorsed the slave trade, slavery, or even segregation; and, contrary to popular belief, it is not even clear that he was opposed to interracial coupling, as his supposed comment on the topic suggests. Since this comment does not appear in the *Collected Works*, here I quote the passage from T. M. Raysor's edition of Coleridge's *Shakespearean Criticism* (1962): "No doubt Desdemona saw Othello's visage in his mind; yet, as we are constituted, and most surely as an English audience was disposed in the beginning of the seventeenth century, it would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro. It would argue a disproportionateness, a want of balance in Desdemona, which Shakespeare does not appear to have in the least contemplated" (1:42). However, in a note appended to this paragraph, Raysor observes the following: "This paragraph is interpolated from L.R. [*The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. H.N. Coleridge, 4 vols., 1836-39] The authenticity of this passage may be suspected, certainly in part and perhaps even as a whole. The style seems to me to be unlike Coleridge's; the subject-matter is primarily a development of what goes before, like other cases in which H. N. Coleridge seeks to make his uncle's meaning clear; the reference to 'the seventeenth century' betrays a more definite knowledge of the order of Shakespeare's plays than Coleridge ever attained" (1: 42n1). In short, the comment is apocryphal.

acknowledging that the supposition of a racial hierarchy was a common trend among eminent thinkers in Coleridge's time. As Keane notes, "such racial ranking was almost universal among Enlightenment and nineteenth-century intellectuals in Europe and America. Hume, Kant, and Hegel; Franklin, Jefferson, and Lincoln, for example, had no doubt about its propriety, nor, incidentally, did Marx and Engels" (59).

But while in his review of Clarkson's *History* Coleridge writes that "natural curiosity will prompt the chieftains, and most intelligent of the African tribes, to inquire into the particulars of a religion professed by a race confessedly so superior to them, and that the sense of this superiority will act as a powerful motive towards their adoption of it" (11.1: 242), in a letter written to Clarkson himself just months before the review, he writes of having seen Blumenbach's private library "of Books written entirely by African Blacks," before going on to praise Blumenbach's "most able disproof of any difference in kind between Whites and Blacks" as having performed a "vast service in the World of learned men" (CL 3: 78). Likewise, while he seems to refer to Caucasians as the "ONE *historic Race*" and the "central Race" in his notes for Green's lectures, he still insists at the outset that the differences between the races, "striking as they may be in themselves, shrink into insignificance when compared with the points of identity or close resemblance" (11.2: 1390).

In this sense, it is important to keep in mind the fact that all of Coleridge's speculations on race are grounded in the theocratic model of organicism that we see at work in Edwards, Woolman, and Equiano, each of whom subscribed to the notion that all humans were living parts of the same whole – of course this was also the underlying principle behind the antislavery polemics of Coleridge and Equiano, who both claimed

that all the races shared a common ancestry that found its final source in God. As we saw earlier, the supposition of a common supernatural lineage allowed Coleridge to argue that it was absurd to believe that “the loving Parent of all Men” (2: 136) would approve of the slave trade, and Equiano takes a similar tack in his criticism of James Tobin.

“Benevolence to all is [religion’s] essence,” he writes, “and do unto others as we would others do unto us, its grand precept – to Blacks as well as Whites, all being the children of the same parent” (330). Consequently, we might then say that so far as Coleridge and Equiano were concerned, the evil of the slave trade consisted in the fact that Africans were no less the children of God than were Europeans and Americans. However, as Keane observes, for Coleridge this not only meant that all the races had descended, but had also, in varying degrees, “degenerated from Edenic perfection” (65).

The degeneration thesis, though its insidious potential is all too obvious to us now, was for Coleridge an attempt to understand and account for the varying levels of technological and cultural progress made by different races – an extrapolation based on the underlying principle of theocratic holism that he would have seen in the antislavery arguments of Woolman, who in his *Journal* not only affirmed that God created all the races, but also that Africans were “souls for whom Christ died, and for our conduct toward them we must answer before that Almighty Being who is no respecter of persons” (66). Moreover, in Woolman Coleridge not only found a confirmation of his stance on the abolition of the slave trade, but also an exemplar of active benevolence that influenced his religious thinking in a way that neither Spinoza nor Kant could have. In 1797, Coleridge seems to have thought his affective capacity enhanced by having read Woolman’s *Journal*. “I should almost despair of that Man who could peruse the Life of

John Woolman without an amelioration of Heart” (*CL* 1: 302), he writes in a letter to Thomas Poole.

Yet we may also note that it was only a year before he drafted *The Ancient Mariner* that Coleridge read the brief account of Woolman’s childhood that appeared in the first chapter of the *Journal*, wherein Woolman tells of throwing stones at a robin who was protecting her nest “till one striking her, she fell down dead” (24). In the pages that follow, Woolman also writes of his struggle with the vanities of youth, during which “it pleased God” to strike him with an illness so severe that he “doubted of recovering” (26), and in the existential crisis that ensues, the student of Coleridge will notice a further likeness between Woolman’s experience and that of the Mariner, who does not have the heart to pray until he blesses the water-snakes. “I had not confidence to lift up my cries to God, whom I had thus offended,” Woolman writes, “but in a deep sense of my great folly I was humbled before him, and at length that Word which is as a fire and hammer broke and dissolved my rebellious heart. And then my cries were put up in contrition, and in the multitude of his mercies I found inward relief” (26). This is not to say that the trajectory of Coleridge’s poem was necessarily derived from, or even consciously influenced by, his reading of the first chapter of Woolman’s *Journal*, so much as it is to point out the suggestive resemblances between the two as a way of underscoring an agreement of religious and philosophical thought. At the same time, I do not think it absurd to suppose that Coleridge would have been struck by the two passages just mentioned, as well as by Woolman’s early conviction that

true religion consisted in an inward life, wherein the heart doth love and reverence God the Creator and learn to exercise true justice and goodness,

not only toward all men but also toward the brute creatures; that as the mind was moved on an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible being, on the same principle it was moved to love Him in all His manifestations in the visible world; that as by His breath the flame of life was kindled in all animal and sensitive creatures, to say we love God as unseen and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature moving by His life, or by life derived from Him, was a contradiction in itself. (28)

That this passage might very well serve as a summary for the Mariner's final words is some further indication of the notable similarity in the thinking of Woolman and Coleridge, for the sentiment is one and the same:

He prayeth well who loveth well

Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best who loveth best

All things both great and small:

For the dear God, who loveth us,

He made and loveth all. (16.1.1: 419)

But by 1808, Coleridge lamented his inability to put his faith into practice to the extent that Woolman had done: "Oh that in all things, in self-subjugation, unwearied beneficence, and unwearied listening to the Voice within, I were as the evangelic John Woolman, as I know myself to be in the belief of the existence and sovran authority of that Voice!" (*CL* 3: 156). Here we find Coleridge acknowledging the fact that keeping his

visible performance aligned with his conscience is much more difficult in practice than it is in theory (though we may note in passing that unwittingly harbouring an addiction to laudanum would have made this more apparent than otherwise). Of greater significance, however, is the fact that Coleridge here accepts the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light, which both Edwards and Equiano would have rejected as fanaticism.

Such acceptance no doubt informed the general Romantic tendency to invoke the authority of an inner self rather than that of common sense, social custom, or even religious institutions, but it was Woolman's rigorous application of this doctrine as an absolute moral imperative that exerted a direct influence on British Romanticism, primarily through Coleridge, but also through his friend Charles Lamb, for whom Woolman was required reading: "Get the Writing of John Woolman by heart; and love the early Quakers" (47). And though Coleridge does not refer to the abolitionist cause in the letters in which he mentions Woolman, he registers the vital influence that Woolman had on the movement in his review of Clarkson's *History* when, from among the elite class of early abolitionists, "who, by enlightening the public mind, and kindling the public feelings, produced as it were the materials, which the associate bodies, constituting a second class, were enabled to employ and organize," he designates Woolman as "deserving of especial reverence" – his only recommendation for this distinction other than George Fox, whose honorific is simply that of being "the founder of the Society of Friends," while Woolman is venerated as "a Quaker of unsectarian benevolence, and of principles *truly* evangelical" (11.1: 222).

If we return now to the matter of Coleridge's 1828 lecture notes, in which, according to Fulford, Kitson, and Lee, he "sets out the sinister ideology (and anticipated

the very language) used by those who did conquer black people's land to justify their white supremacist policies" (146), we actually find that the rhetoric of inferiority can also be found in Woolman, who in the first part of *Some Considerations* observes that when we see "how the Lord hath opened a way in the wilderness for us . . . the remembrance thereof ought to humble us in prosperity and excite in us a Christian benevolence towards our inferiors" (207). In the second part of the essay, he even writes that

blacks seem far from being our kinsfolks; and did we find an agreeable disposition and sound understanding in some of them, which appeared as a good foundation for a true friendship between us, the disgrace arising from an open friendship with a person of so vile a stock in the common esteem would naturally tend to hinder it. They have neither honours, riches, outward magnificence nor power, their dress coarse and often ragged, their employ drudgery and much in the dirt. (226)

Of course the careful reader will note that Woolman is saying that blacks only *seem* far from being the kinfolk of whites, and that it is only in the common esteem of the time that their stock is vile.⁵⁵ Accordingly, he proceeds to remind his readers that, unlike whites, blacks "must wait upon and work for others to obtain the necessaries of life, so that in their present situation there is not much to engage the friendship or move the affection of selfish men. But such who live in the spirit of true charity, to sympathize with the afflicted in the lowest stations of life is a thing familiar to them" (226). In this respect, we can see that, for Woolman, the attribution of inferiority to blacks was a designation grounded not in essence, but in appearance and custom; and it is no doubt in

⁵⁵ In his biography of Anthony Benezet, Maurice Jackson erroneously claims that Woolman "at first believed that 'the blacks seem far from being our kinsfolk' and that they 'are of a vile stock'" (76).

this same sense that Coleridge in his review of Clarkson's *History* referred to Europeans as "a race confessedly so superior" to Africans. But while the inferiority of African nations was largely self-evident, this did not reflect on the state of the individual soul, which still needed saving.

Like Coleridge and Equiano, Woolman also thought that efforts should be made to promulgate Christianity among blacks: "where the powerful lay the burden on the inferior, without affording a Christian education and suitable opportunity of improving the mind, and a treatment which we in their case should approve . . . this seems to contradict the design of Providence" (206). Further, that Woolman and other Quakers had some success in convincing slave owners of the humanity and moral capacity of blacks in North America, Coleridge took as proof of "how soon liberal motives, substantiated by corresponding conduct, would gain the confidence of the African princes, and induce their tribes to refer to us as counsellors and guides" (11.1: 239). To Coleridge, the efficacy of Woolman's visible behavior – that is, his Christian conduct – provided the model for what he hoped would be England's reparation to Africa for the slave trade, which he suggested be initiated "by a systematic repression of all religious proselytism, except indeed that most effective instrument of conversion, the Christian conduct of our agents" (11.1: 241). The notion that blacks were in need of Christian enlightenment, though distasteful to us today, was quite common among abolitionists in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, including Equiano, whose stated purpose in applying to the Bishop of London for an ordainment as a missionary to Africa was that "of reforming his countrymen and persuading them to embrace the Christian religion" (222).

Moreover, in order for us to understand what Coleridge actually thought, we need to see his views in their full historical context, and much of this turns on our ability to understand the way in which Coleridge uses terms like “inferiority” and “degeneracy” to describe not individuals, but groups of people whom he believed were of a single race. His inability to understand the actions of the individual in a state of non-European degeneracy illustrates this point well enough, though it also serves as a reminder that, on the whole, his speculations on race are far from complete: “that <Individual> Degeneracy in a nation of deg. Ind. may sin &c &c – as &c – ~~Our gr~~ The question then will be – Under what conditions is can a natural Depravity become *Degeneracy*” (11.2: 1408). Since he believed that all the races were depraved by virtue of Original Sin, he was not only unsure of exactly how to differentiate between moral depravity and degeneracy, but also of how to account for the status of the individual will in a degenerate society. That the individual in such a state “may sin &c &c” seems to suggest that sin is unrestricted because it is not identified as such, but this raises the question of whether or not individuals who sin without knowledge can even be said to be capable of moral action. This is perhaps what Coleridge meant by degeneracy as opposed to depravity, and it certainly provides some further insight into his rather pompous statement that the slaves in the West Indies “ought to be forcibly reminded of the state in which their brethren in Africa still are, and taught to be thankful for the Providence which has placed them within means of grace” (14.1: 386).

In any case, we do know that his central thesis was that the differences in races were only of degree, rather than of kind, and that the attribution of greater degeneracy consisted primarily in the extent to which each race differed from the European model of

civilization, which meant that it was not only Africans who had degenerated to a greater degree than had the English, but also the Spanish and Portuguese, whom Coleridge described as “degenerate & idolatrous” (11.2: 1404). Following what he referred to as “Blumenbach’s scale of dignity” (14.2: 55), Coleridge placed Caucasians at the top of a pyramid that placed Africans, Mongolians, and Asians at the bottom, with Malaysians and American Indians in the middle. Yet even Caucasians were a degenerate race who only maintained their status as the central race “by comparative *Generosity* – which confers the right negatively by the less degree of our degeneracy and positively by the direction in which we are moving – at all events by our knowledge and acknowledgment of it as the only right or desirable direction” (11.2: 1406). That is, for Coleridge, the fact that Caucasians were the least degenerate of the races consisted first in what to him was the obvious supremacy of European civilization and culture over that of any other, and second in the fact that the advances that had been made by Europeans with respect to government, technology, and religion were all looked upon as improvements that moved humanity in a positive direction.

Perhaps the most unpleasant aspect of Coleridge’s later attempts to understand the differences between races, however, is his correlation of physical appearance with moral degeneracy. In short, he seems to have taken skin color as a sign of the moral degeneracy of a particular race. He speculated that darker skin, for instance, was a sign “that certain climates are inhabitable without physical degeneracy only by the animalizing changes brought about by moral degeneracy – (the black pigment in the rete mucosus of the Negro, &c),” while, at the same time (and just as offensively), he supposed that “a far higher state of moral and intellectual energy in the central Race, with the scientific

powers & resources of that far higher state, might enable the Masters of the world to reside unharmed on any part of their Estate” (11.2: 1404). Put another way, Coleridge actually seems to have believed that the more civilized a people became, the whiter they would become. In another fragment entitled “The Migration and Degeneration of the Races of Men,” he observes that

the existence of Races cannot be denied; but I am convinced that a great deal more than what is worse, a great deal other, than the Truth is made out of the phenomenon – which easily resolves itself into the different directions of degeneracy, and the permanence into the continuance of the moral Causes. These ceasing, intermarriage would remove the rest ex. gr. Hungarians (11.2: 1461)

Here, we find Coleridge again minimizing the essential quality of the differences between races before going on to make the absurd suggestion that, if moral corruption were eliminated, intermarriage would eliminate non-white racial features from the species as a whole. “Even granting that we should be aware of an historical perspective whenever we judge racism,” J. H. Haeger writes in 1974, “such a rationale as this must be condemned on its own terms” (341-42).

Indeed, I think that by now we can all agree that any supposition of a correspondence between skin color and moral character is worthy of condemnation, but here I want to highlight Coleridge’s method of resolving what he thought of as the problem of the “division of the Human species into five Races” (11.2: 1407), which is, like the solution that Edwards formulated to address the problem of non-Christian salvation, both absolute in its exclusion of variation and universal in its affirmation of

potential deliverance for each variant. Moreover, just as non-Christians could be possessed of a saving disposition without ever having known Christ, non-Caucasians could harbor within themselves the potential to achieve the level of degeneracy maintained by Europeans without ever actually having done so. For Coleridge, this was especially true of Africans, whom he described in 1808 as “more versatile, more easily modified than perhaps any other known race” (11.1: 240); and further, given that there was not “one single instance of a tribe, ~~or a na~~ that ever by their own unassisted efforts under the most favorable circumstances of nature without the influence of more civilized and cultivated states have ever raised themselves from a sayvage ~~to~~ or even from the rudest forms of the pastoral state” (11.2: 1415), the obligation for lifting them up from the depths of degeneracy lay with those who had enslaved them.

In 1808, Coleridge seemed to think that the best means of accomplishing this goal was to work toward the establishment of “some well arranged plan of civilizing commerce” (238), which echoed Equiano’s belief that “if a system of commerce was established in Africa, the demand for manufactures would most rapidly augment, as the native inhabitants would insensibly adopt the British fashions, manners, customs, &c. In proportion to the civilization, so will be the consumption of British manufactures” (233). Simply put, Equiano’s hopes for Africa were as imperialist as Coleridge’s were. Of course Equiano did challenge the rhetoric of inferiority, but he did so in a way that confirmed European ascendancy: “Let the polished and haughty European recollect that his ancestors were once, like the Africans, uncivilized, and even barbarous. Did Nature make them inferior to their sons? And should they too have been made slaves? Every rational mind answers, No.” Furthermore, the analogy between Africans and the

ancestors of Europeans comes at a price: not only does Equiano seem to allow that Africans are uncivilized and barbarous, he also seems to suggest that they are centuries behind in terms of social advancement. Perhaps he intends his argument to “melt the pride of [European] superiority into sympathy for the wants and miseries of their sable brethren, and compel them to acknowledge, that understanding is not confined to feature or colour” (45), but whatever he may mean by “understanding,” it is not enough to afford salvation to the unconverted, whom Equiano acknowledges in his own moment of conversion as “in a very awful state, being without God and without hope” (191). Indeed, while Equiano wrote optimistically of “the opinion of gentlemen of sense and education, who are thus acquainted with Africa, entertain of the probability of converting the inhabitants of it to the faith of Jesus Christ, if the attempt were countenanced by the legislature” (223), Coleridge suggested that prospective missionaries “should act under the conviction, that knowledge and civilization must, in the first instance, form the foundation, not the superstructure, of Christianity” (11.1: 241). Of course in both cases, the conversion of Africans to Christianity was the final goal.

Ultimately, then, we see a specific line of thinking in which theocratic organicism and a Calvinist skepticism concerning salvation come to inform the central arguments of the early Anglo-American opposition to the slave trade. Though Edwards used the organic metaphor to argue that “Adam’s posterity are from him, and as it were in him, and belonging to him, according to an established course of nature, as much as the branches of a tree are, according to a course of nature, from the tree, in the tree, and belonging to the tree” (3: 385), Woolman used it in a more metaphysical sense in order to remind his Christian readers that “all Nations are of one Blood, (Gen. 3:20); that in this

World we are but Sojourners, that we are subject to the like afflictions and infirmities of body, the like disorders and frailties in mind, the like temptations, the same death, and the same judgment, and, that the All-wise Being is judge and Lord over us all” (200).

Equiano, in turn, echoed Woolman’s sentiment as he encouraged Europeans to think not in terms of parts, but rather in terms of a theocratic whole: “If, when they look round the world, they feel exultation, let it be tempered with benevolence to others, and gratitude to God, “who hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth; and whose wisdom is not our wisdom, neither are our ways his ways”” (45).

Coleridge, of course, was much more ambitious, and though he strove for the same theocratic unity as Woolman and Equiano, it may very well be the case that his compatibilist tendencies are to blame for the remarks that are offensive to us now. He did conceive of a process of integration whereby all five of the supposed races would become one race, but since he believed that the Western model of Christian society was the most advanced and desirable state of civilization, and that skin color was a function of the relative degeneracy of the race into which the individual was born, his utopian speculations are no longer palatable:

The first important point, of what the existence of Races [“contrary to”] Species is – they allow what a Species would have precluded, a re-unitive process – and in this the possibility that the Historic Race should act at once <on the other Races> as a central Sun relatively to the Planets, communicating Light, Heat, in short, ameliorating < – nay, *subliming* – and yet as this is scarcely conceivable unless by a correspond~~ing~~ & contemporaneous Ascent in the Highest Race itself, leaving the same

relative distinction & difference – > possibly the whole Race, or the whole portion that (as the Moon to the Earth) has its face turned towards it (– & as a Nucleus of attraction, for the Individuals ~~more~~ especially susceptible of its potenziative influence – (11.2: 1402)

But here again, I want to highlight the fact that Coleridge thinks of race in teleological terms that coincide with the dispositional soteriology that Edwards constructed to accommodate a conception of salvation without material or temporal constraints. That there could be individuals who were particularly receptive to the “potenziative influence” of Christianity or Western civilization, but who were not yet possessed of the salvation, or power, granted by this influence, allowed Coleridge and Edwards to suppose that those individuals who were ordained by God to receive salvation would achieve it regardless of external circumstances – here, we may recall Coleridge’s affirmation that “the virtuous sap will be accounted as fruit” (4.1: 315) alongside Edwards’ claim that “disposition is all that can be said to be necessary” (13:213).

We must also remember that, like Edwards, Coleridge conceived of humankind as a single organic entity that was moving toward a final redemption, which is why his conception of the “*Historic Race*” is something of an ideal abstraction formulated on the basis of its supposed connection to what he referred to as “the Unities,” an escalating scale of organic components that began with the unity of the individual and concluded with the unity “of organic Leaf, or the Subsumption of nature from the Lichen and Zoophyte upwards in the Man as at once the Epitome . . . and the Solution or Rationale of the whole System” (11.2: 1402-03). The tenth and final unity, however, seems to serve as a corollary for the ninth, which is that “of the Past, or all from the ideal or original Man

to the present considered as one Moral Being in reference to an Ideal fulfillment (= Kingdom of God, Dies Messiaë – ” (11.2: 1402). Coleridge does seem to have thought that, on the whole, Europeans were closer to this “Ideal fulfillment,” but whether this simply means that he preferred Western civilization to others, or that he thought Africans, Malaysians, Mongolians, and Asians were intrinsically and essentially inferior, is not entirely clear. We can, however, say with certainty that Coleridge supported the abolition of the slave trade, and denounced the practice of slavery in the United States.

But while Coleridge is perhaps the founder of organic thinking in the English-speaking world, he devised no method of systematically absorbing, or converting, the antiquated views of the past into the present.⁵⁶ For that, we must look to Woolman, whose deceptively plain statement on “the history of the reformation from popery” not only belies a religious thinker who is strangely attuned to the secular world, but also provides the tolerant among us with a way of thinking about Coleridge’s views on race in compatibilist terms: “The uprightness of the first reformers to the light and understanding given them opened the way for sincere-hearted to proceed further afterward, and thus each one truly fearing God and labouring in those works of righteousness appointed for them in their day findeth acceptance with him” (147).

The Activist Undertone

⁵⁶ He did, however, suggest that we proceed with caution when passing judgment: “To speak gently of our forefathers is at once piety and policy. Nor let it be forgotten, that only by making the detection of their errors the occasion of our own wisdom, do we acquire the right to censure them at all” (10: 152-3).

Though Equiano and Woolman do not typically figure into narrative accounts of the development of American Romanticism, their specific brand of determinist activism is illustrative of the practical way in which the tension between the individual impetus for moral action and the belief in God as the ultimate cause of all things begins to become apparent, if not particularly bothersome, for American religious thinkers even before Coleridge affirms the power of supernatural self-determination that subsequently informs the rise of American Transcendentalism. In this way, the theocratic abolitionism of Equiano and Woolman anticipates the more explicit problems of determinism and self-determination that occupied American Romantics nearly a century later.

Indeed, Coleridge's failure to entirely integrate Woolman's self-subjugation into his personal life did not prevent him from assimilating its essential principles into the theology that he expounded in *The Friend*, the *Biographia*, and *Aids to Reflection*; nor did his turn from actively campaigning for an end to slavery and the slave trade keep him from adopting the evangelical element of the abolitionist movement as it was shaped by Equiano to bolster both his politics and his affirmations of free will as the most vital attribute of humankind. But taken together, the philosophical strain of self-subjugation and theological activism introduces what we might think of as a subtextual reiteration of the contest between Coleridge's supernatural self-determination and the theological determinism so evident in Edwards' yearning to be "totally wrapt up in the fullness of Christ; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity" (16: 801). In the ideals exemplified by both Woolman and Equiano, subjugating the individual will to that of God is the impetus for theological activism, but in the more skeptical, even anxious, minds of Coleridge and Edwards it becomes impossible to know

whether the self has been subjugated, and activism can often seem like enthusiasm. And for the American Romantics who inherited the dual legacy of these two thinkers, it may very well have seemed that supernatural self-determination had only made explicit what had been on the minds of Americans for quite some time.

Chapter Three

Determinism and Self-Determination in the American Romantic Tradition

Part One: Emerson and Hawthorne

Less than a year after Perry Miller's "Jonathan Edwards to Emerson" (1940) appeared in the pages of *The New England Quarterly*,⁵⁷ F. O. Matthiessen published his pioneering *American Renaissance* (1941), with a section entitled "From Coleridge to Emerson." Yet in spite of the success and notoriety with which both Miller and Matthiessen traced two of Emerson's more important precursors, there has been no sustained attempt to triangulate all three thinkers, and there has been little attention given to the fact that the theological and philosophical problems to which Coleridge and Edwards devoted their energies also fired the imaginations of Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville.⁵⁸ In the most immediate sense, then, this chapter is a continuation of the first, in

⁵⁷ The essay was reprinted, with an added preface, as "From Edwards to Emerson" in Miller's *Errand Into the Wilderness* (1956).

⁵⁸ There are two essays that might be said to have come close. In "Coleridge and American Romanticism: the Transcendentalists and Poe" (1981), Alexander Kern registers the influence of both Coleridge and Edwards on the Transcendentalists in a general way, but he makes no claim for Edwards as an influence on Poe, and he does not discuss Hawthorne or Melville. In "Changing Sensibilities: the Puritan Mind and the Romantic Revolution in Early American Religious Thought" (1986), T. Mark Ledbetter suggests that James Marsh's 1829 edition of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1829), provided an alternative to the Calvinist tradition exemplified by Edwards, ultimately arguing that Emerson and other Transcendentalists

which I discussed some of the more salient elements of Coleridge's disagreement with Edwards. Here, I establish the lasting significance of that disagreement in terms of its impact on American Romanticism.

At the same time, what follows could also be described as an account of some of the characteristic theological and philosophical problems that informed the rise of a distinctively American tradition in literature during the roughly fifty-year period between the abolition of the slave trade and the start of the American Civil War. These historical bookends are important nodal points in the evolution of religious thought that takes us from orthodox believers like Edwards, Woolman, and Equiano to purported literary skeptics like Poe, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Melville – and Coleridge is the indispensable link between these two groups. In the last chapter, my concern was to demonstrate how Edwards' empirical theology, specifically his Calvinist skepticism and dispositional soteriology, anticipated the more radical evangelicalism of Equiano and Woolman, the latter of which made a more general impression on Coleridge's religious thinking, while the former harnessed and strengthened a mode of theological argumentation and empirical exegesis (i.e., typology) that anticipated the teleological character of Coleridge's thinking on race. Consequently, if we can view the abolition of the slave trade as an eventual outcome of the early activism of Woolman and Equiano, which was underwritten by Edwardsean theology and adopted by Coleridge, then we might also see the American Civil War as the definitive triumph of enthusiasm over rationalism that Coleridge and the American Romantics envisioned with both gothic

discarded the theology of Edwards for that of Coleridge. He makes no mention of Hawthorne, Melville, or Poe.

dread and transcendental ecstasy.⁵⁹ That is, unlike the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, which was effected by rational argumentation, and without physical conflict, the American Civil War illustrates the willingness of individuals in both the North and South to act on the supposition that they had accurately discerned the will of God, or somehow achieved what Edwards in “The Mind” had described as “a perfect agreement with the excellencies of the divine nature” (6: 346) and Coleridge had celebrated in the *Biographia* as “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (7.1: 304).⁶⁰

So while my interest here is to give some account of the legacy of both Coleridge and Edwards in the minds of American thinkers as the nation moved toward this clash of theological hubris, I am also suggesting that we view Coleridge as a transmitter of certain ideas and ways of thinking that were of particular interest to Americans not only by virtue of their consonance with the philosophical concerns that had been expressed most forcefully by Edwards, but also for the practical opportunity they afforded individuals to begin negotiating the tension between determinism and self-determination that had been apparent in the determinist activism of Equiano and Woolman. Though captivated by the notion of supernatural self-determination, Emerson eventually capitulates to Edwardsean rationalism, attempting to move beyond Coleridge by conceiving of Original Sin and theological determinism in natural, rather than supernatural, terms. For Hawthorne, Poe,

⁵⁹ In *Slavery, Philosophy, and American Literature, 1830-1860*, Maurice S. Lee describes the antebellum slavery debate in the United States as having “brought new impetus to abiding intellectual quandaries, instantiating in tragic social experience the failure of rational authority. This breakdown would culminate with the Civil War, which proved to be unavoidable” (2). My own reading, concerned as it is with the way in which the American Civil War might be taken as the result of an archetypal conflict between reason and faith, is admittedly more figurative.

⁶⁰ For an account of the American heightened struggle to discern the will of God during the Civil War, see Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 75-94.

and Melville, however, the darker elements of Edwardsean theology and skepticism merged with Coleridge's distinctive brand of Romanticism, resulting in more uncertain forays into the "unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths" (7.1: 17).

Emerson

Ah Nature the very look of the woods is heroic & stimulating. This afternoon in a very thick grove where Henry David Thoreau showed me the bush of mountain laurel, the first I have seen in Concord, the stems of pine & hemlock & oak almost gleamed like steel upon the excited eye. How old, how aboriginal these trees appear, though not many years older than I. They seem parts of the eternal chain of destiny whereof this Sundered Will of man is the victim.

– Emerson, *Journals*

If the long tradition of scholarship on Coleridge and Emerson is any indication, we can acknowledge at the outset that there is no American writer upon whom Coleridge had a more visible influence.⁶¹ Though Matthiessen was certainly not the first to document Coleridge's importance to Emerson, I think we are still bound to acknowledge that he was the first to point out the provenance of Emerson's achievement with such efficiency: "The most immediate force behind American transcendentalism was Coleridge, who gained many ardent readers in New England following the edition of *Aids to Reflection* that was brought out in 1829 by President Marsh of the University of

⁶¹ Though it is not possible to provide a complete bibliography on such well-trodden territory here, some of the more prominent and relatively recent studies on Coleridge and Emerson include the above-mentioned essay by Alexander Kern (see note 2); Anthony John Harding's *Coleridge and the Inspired Word* (1986), as well as his essay, "Coleridge and Transcendentalism" (1990); Barbara Packer's "The Transcendentalists" in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, Volume 2 (1995); Chapter 5 of Richard Gravil's *Anglo-American Continuities* (2000); Patrick Keane's *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason* (2005), and Laura Dassow Walls' "Ralph Waldo Emerson and Coleridge's American Legacy" (2008).

Vermont” (6).⁶² For Emerson, Coleridge’s force was exerted most powerfully in his role as a purveyor of ideas in philosophy, religion, and literature – and this is particularly apparent in Emerson’s journal entries from 1829-31, a period in which he frequently transcribes passages from the *Biographia Literaria*, *Aids to Reflection*, and *The Friend*.⁶³ But in spite of what we might accurately describe as a total immersion in Coleridge’s prose works, Emerson is much more than a passive recipient of ideas. As Stephen E. Whicher argues in his still persuasive *Freedom and Fate*, there can be no doubt that Coleridge was the impetus for the “irresistible suggestions of sentiment” that came upon Emerson in 1830, and yet “the contrast between his expanding self-reliance and Coleridge’s unctuous churchliness warns us that Emerson was no man’s disciple” (19). The contrast here is something of an exaggeration, for Coleridge’s endeavor in *On the Constitution of the Church and State* – presumably the most “churchly” of his works – is not so much in exalting the Anglican Church, but rather in elucidating an *idea* of a National Church, or clerisy, by which he means “that conception of a thing, which is not abstracted from any particular state, form, or mode, in which the thing may happen to exist at this or at that time; nor yet generalized from any number or succession of such forms or modes; but which is given by the knowledge of *its ultimate aim*” (10: 12). Furthermore, the important distinction he makes between Christianity and the Christian

⁶² As Patrick J. Keane observes in *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason*, there were a handful of early twentieth century scholars who had acknowledged Coleridge’s influence on the American Transcendentalists before Frank T. Thompson presented a more complete study in 1926 with the publication of “Emerson’s Indebtedness to Coleridge” (30). More polemically, Keane contends that “Matthiessen, perhaps the leading Americanist of his period, participates in the general failure, with the notable exception of Frank Thompson, to develop specific implications of the Coleridge-Emerson connection” (122).

⁶³ He also seems to have been familiar with *The Statesman’s Manual* at this time, as well as Coleridge’s translation of Schiller’s *Wallenstein*. See *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 3, 236, 251-2, 301, and 312.

Church gives priority to the former, suggesting a churchliness of a not particularly unctuous variety, if not an entirely individualistic conception of faith and worship:

We are now called to a different contemplation, to the Idea of the Christian Church. Of the Christian *Church*, I say, not of Christianity. To the ascertainment and enucleation of the latter, of the great redemptive process which began in the separation of light from Chaos (*Hades, or the Indistinction*), and has its end in the union of life with God, the whole summer and autumn, and now commenced winter of my life have been dedicated. Hic labor, Hoc opus est, on which alone the author rests his hope, that he shall be found not to have lived altogether in vain. (10: 113)

Notwithstanding this, Emerson's ability to draw so much from Coleridge without becoming his disciple is remarkable indeed. Of course it may also be that Coleridge was particularly effective in cultivating independence amongst his adherents, especially in a young American upstart like Emerson.

By the time *Nature* appeared in 1836, Emerson had constructed a philosophy of his own making, largely by fusing certain elements of European Romanticism, especially organicism, with the independence, austerity, and pragmatism of an increasingly pluralist theological tradition. The latter half of this fusion is usually ignored, though the Puritanical religiosity of Emerson's first book is at times quite heavy-handed. To the Emerson of *Nature*, "every animal function from the sponge up to Hercules, shall hint or thunder to man the laws of right and wrong, and echo the Ten Commandments. Therefore is nature always the ally of Religion: lends all her pomp and riches to the religious sentiment" (1: 26). Not even Coleridge had been this explicit in aligning the natural

world with theological directives, and as Mason I. Lowance observes, such faith in a strict religious symbolism of nature was anticipated by Edwards, the typological ingenuity and imagination of whom

opened exegetical practices to the power of revelation through the human senses, and the world of nature became a vast book now available to the elect saint through the ‘new sense of things’ . . . by carefully showing how the natural types were always rooted in the historical process, Edwards not only gave them the authority of history but foreshadowed the theology of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists.⁶⁴ (11: 180)

In short, though the inchoate philosophy of *Nature* is bolstered by European sources, the vision itself owes much to the theological inheritance of New England in the early nineteenth century, as well as to the inspiration Emerson drew from the Puritan achievement.

“It was they who settled N. America,” he writes in a journal entry of 1823, “Bradford & Winthrop & Standish, Mathers & Jonathan Edwards, Otis, Hawley, Hancock, Adams, Franklin, & whatever else of vigorous sense, or practical genius, this country shews, are the issue of Puritan<s> stock” (*JMN* 2: 197).⁶⁵ Perhaps this accounts for some portion of the ‘gestalt’ to which Richard Gravil refers when he observes that

⁶⁴ Though the typological elements of *Nature* are generally attributed to the influence of Swedenborg, Emerson was also following the Puritans, to whom, as Perry Miller puts it in the introduction to his edition of *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, “phenomena had significance because they were intentional” (3-4).

⁶⁵ “The community of language with England,” he continues, “has doubtless deprived us of that original characteristic literary growth that has ever accompanied, I apprehend [,] the first bursting of a nation from the bud. Our era of exploits & civilization is ripe enow. And, had it not been dissipated by the unfortunate rage for periodical productions, our literature should have been born & grown ere now to a Greek or Roman stature. Franklin is such a fruit as might be expected from such a tree. Edwards, perhaps more so” (*JMN* 2: 197).

there is perhaps “little, ethically or metaphysically, in Emerson that cannot be found in Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Shelley, save the gestalt: but the gestalt does make all the difference” (101). If so, such gestalt is also at work in Emerson’s 1841 lecture, “The Transcendentalist,” in which he adapts Coleridge’s translation of Jacobi from Essay XV of the second volume of *The Friend*.⁶⁶ Coleridge had used the translation as an introductory quotation to the same essay in which he employs the metaphor of the fig tree discussed in the last chapter. Like Coleridge, Emerson also uses the quotation to support his affirmation of justification by faith alone, but he does it in terms specific to the American religious scene. Here is the passage as it appears in *The Friend*, with brackets to indicate what Coleridge has omitted from Jacobi:

Yes, I am that Atheist, that godless person, who in opposition to an imaginary Doctrine of Calculation, to a mere ideal Fabric of general Consequences, that can never be realized, would lie, as the dying DESDEMONA lied; lie and deceive as PYLADES when he personated Orestes, [. . .] would commit sacrilege with DAVID; yea, and pluck ears of corn on the Sabbath, for no other reason than I was fainting from lack of food, and that *the Law was made for Man and not Man for the Law.* (4.1: 313)

For its inclusion in “The Transcendentalist” (1841), however, and notwithstanding the fact that he attributes the translation to Coleridge, Emerson reinserts the additional illustrations of justified sins that Coleridge had omitted from Jacobi’s text in between the examples of Pylades and David, and then trades Jacobi’s “Otho” for “Cato” in the last

⁶⁶ In 1831, a reprint of the three-volume London edition of *The Friend* (1818) was published in the United States. Emerson, however, seems to have read a copy of the original London edition in 1829. See *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 7:188n17.

instance: “would assassinate like Timoleon; would perjure myself like Epaminondas, and John de Witt; I would resolve on suicide like Cato.”

Following this, he omits what Coleridge uses as the final clause (“and that *the Law was made for Man and not Man for the Law*”), skips Jacobi’s next sentence, and then renders a slightly mistranslated version of the one that follows, ending the passage on a tone of individualism somewhat loftier than that found in Coleridge’s translation: “For, I have assurance in myself that in pardoning these faults according to the letter, man exerts the sovereign right which the majesty of his being confers on him; he sets the seal of his divine nature to the grace he accords” (1: 205).⁶⁷ Here, though Coleridge is no doubt responsible for bringing Jacobi’s *An Fichte* to Emerson’s attention, Emerson turns to the original text and modifies the passage in order to renovate the doctrine of *sola fide* on American terms. “In action,” Emerson observes just before introducing the Jacobi quotation, “[the Transcendentalist] easily incurs the charge of antinomianism by his avowal that he, who has the Lawgiver, may with safety not only neglect, but even contravene every written commandment” (1: 204). As objectionable as this statement surely would have been to the orthodox, Emerson is actually highlighting one of the central tenets of traditional Calvinist doctrine.

Edwards would have been skeptical of anyone who claimed to “have” the Lawgiver, yet Emerson is careful to never make such a claim – he simply affirms that the

⁶⁷ In *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill / Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi*, George di Giovanni translates the passage as follows: “for I know, with the most sacred certainty that I have in me, that the *privilegium aggratiandia* against the pure letter of the absolutely universal law of reason is man’s true *right of majesty*, the seal of his worth, of his divine nature” (516). Though Keane also discusses Emerson’s use of Coleridge and Jacobi in *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason*, I must take exception to his conclusions, which are founded on the supposition that the final sentence of Emerson’s translation is an embellishment of a clause that Coleridge had translated literally, rather than a different line entirely, as I am suggesting here.

individual who *does* have the Lawgiver can safely contravene the written law. Edwards would never have put it this way, though he is certainly bound to agree with the basic premise, which is the alarming consequence of justification by faith alone: the elect may sin without fear of punishment. Accordingly, in his 1729 sermon “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” Edwards assures the residents of Northampton that “God has promised that whosoever believes in Christ shall be saved: if he has once believed in Christ, he is sure of heaven; and it is impossible he should miss of it, how many sins soever he has been guilty of before, and though he falls into great sin afterwards.” And yet, keenly aware that a practical application of the doctrine of *sola fide* was amenable to misuse by radicals, Edwards goes on to remind the congregation that the “the work of the Holy Ghost in conversion” will compel sinners to receive Christ in such a way that they will actually be *made* to “submit to his rule and government, to yield themselves up to him as his servants and followers, and to trust in him to mortify and subdue sin, and to deliver them from that as well as from punishment” (14: 428). But to Emerson, for whom God is “the individual’s own soul carried out to perfection” (*JMN* 3: 182), the legacy of Edwards’ emphasis on an absolute reception of the divine spirit could only mean that God came to occupy the very soul of the regenerate, or conversely, that the regenerate soul became divine.

At the same time, we should not underestimate Emerson’s capacity for Edwardsean humility. In notes that he made in preparation for a sermon of 1832, for instance, though he observes that “there is not a just or grand thought but is made more round & infinite by applying it to the soul considered as the Universe living from God

within,” he almost immediately apprehends that, without piety, the consequences of such a conclusion could lead him into mere fanaticism:

Is not then all objective theology a discipline[,] an aid to the immature intellect until it is equal to the truth, & can poise itself? Yet God forbid that I should one moment lose sight of his real eternal Being[,] of my own dependence, my nothingness, whilst yet I dare hail the present deity at my heart. (*JMN* 4: 40)

In “The Over-Soul,” he condenses his enduring humility into an apothegm: “Our faith comes in moments; our vice is habitual” (2: 159).

Indeed, as Robert Milder suggests, Perry Miller may very well have made too much of Emerson’s departure from Edwardsean theology when he claimed that the “ecstasy and the vision which Calvinists knew only in the moment of vocation, the passing of which left them agonizingly aware of depravity and sin, could become the permanent joy of those who had put aside the conception of depravity, and the moments between could be filled no longer with self-accusation but with praise and wonder” (198). Seizing upon Miller’s use of the conditional, to this passage Milder adds, “*Could become*, yet unaccountably didn’t,” for in his own view, Emerson’s “experience of emptiness and incapacity in the long ‘moments between’ would gradually drive him back to a chastened acknowledgement of what he came to regard as the living psychological (not theological)

truths at the heart of Calvinism” (97).⁶⁸ And though there is actually no indication that Emerson ever came to view truths as psychological rather than theological, it is certain that he did return to a kind of Calvinism in “Fate.”

That Emerson may not have read Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will* is largely beside the point, for he was certainly familiar with it, and by 1823, he seems to have been well prepared to listen somewhat skeptically as his college classmate, William Withington, dismissed Edwards’ achievement entirely.⁶⁹ As he writes in his *Journal*,

W. from Andover let me into his mystery about Edwards on the Will & told me withal that the object of the piece was to prove that President E. has not advanced human knowledge one step, for, his *definition* includes the very proposition which the book is designed to establish. W. saith, moreover, that perchance the President has done something albeit his definitions be imprudent & entangled. And perchance, the fault of apparently proving an identical proposition lies in the nature of the subject which, though so intricate before as to have ever been debateable ground, is made so plain by the able & skilful statements of Edwards, that we <wonder> are made to see the truth, & wonder that it ever was disputed.

Waldo E. will please consult upon this topic, on one side Edwards,

⁶⁸ Though Milder seems to disagree with Stephen E. Whicher concerning exactly when Emerson began to lose his faith in absolute liberty, or self-determination, his argument is clearly indebted to Whicher’s account of Emerson’s movement from self-reliance to a sober acceptance of power within the bounds of natural causation, or fate. Conversely, at the end of “From Edwards to Emerson,” Miller claims that Emerson and other New Englanders “were free to carry on the ancient New England propensity for reeling and staggering with new opinions. They could give themselves over, unrestrainedly, to becoming transparent eyeballs and debauchees of dew” (203).

⁶⁹ As Eleanor M. Tilton observes, “There is no solid evidence that Emerson ever read Edwards’ *Inquiry [into the Freedom of the Will]*, though his father owned it and his Aunt Mary read it more than once” (*EL* 8: 143).

Priestl[e]y, and Belsham; on the other, Clarke, & Stewart . . . also <is> are to be stated anew the two propositions unanswerable concerning Necessity. (*JMN* 2: 159)

What ever came of young Waldo E.'s plan to 'consult' upon this topic remains unknown, though it is certainly significant to note that by the age of twenty he thought there to be two unassailable arguments for necessity – and the one that appears in an earlier journal entry is essentially a summary of Edwards' position:

It is admitted I believe, by all philosophy, that every change which takes place in the world, succeeds some former change, without the existence of which, it would not itself have transpired. This fact is true of mind as well as matter; in those trains of thought, which do not depend upon the will, each idea is suggested by the last, and itself suggests another; and in voluntary action, every determination of the will results from a view of motives presented from within or from without. No event therefore in mind or matter starts up into independent existence, but all have an immediate dependence on what went before. (*JMN* 2: 53)

For Edwards, as we may recall, such conclusions were basic tenets of common sense: “That whatsoever begins to be, which before was not, must have a cause why it then begins to exist seems to be the first dictate of the natural and common sense which God hath implanted in the minds of all.” Without this foundation, he points out, “all arguing from effects to causes ceaseth, and so all knowledge of any existence, besides what we have by the most direct and immediate intuition” (1: 181).

Logically, Emerson knew that this argument was irrefutable, but as he pored through Coleridge's prose, he found an opposition that claimed a knowledge beyond logic and common sense – a knowledge grounded instead in a mystically elevated mode of the most direct and immediate intuition to which Edwards had so dismissively referred.⁷⁰ In *The Friend*, for example, free will was exalted as “the power of the human being to maintain the obedience, which God through the conscience has commanded, against all the might of nature” (4.1: 112), and in the *Biographia Literaria* Emerson would have encountered Coleridge's bold affirmation of free will as somehow co-existent with the chain of natural causation that seemed to make a self-determining will impossible in the first place:

Yea, in the very nature of a living spirit, it may be more possible that heaven and earth should pass away than that a single act, a single thought, should be loosened or lost from that living chain of causes, to all whose links, conscious or unconscious, the free-will, our only absolute *self*, is co-extensive and co-present. But not now dare I longer discourse of this, waiting for a loftier mood, and a nobler subject, warned from within and from without, that it is profanation to speak of these mysteries. (7.1: 114)

Of course affirmation is as far as Coleridge can go: like Edwards on Original Sin, he ultimately defers to the sanctity of religious mystery rather than provide a rational explanation of how it is that the will could be its own cause. Yet for Emerson,

Coleridge's famous distinction between Reason and Understanding provided a rationale

⁷⁰ See *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. 1, 243-44: “On the IMMEDIATE, which dwells in every man, and on the original intuition, or absolute affirmation of it, (which is likewise in every man, but does not in every man rise into consciousness) all the certainty of our knowledge depends; and this becomes intelligible to no man by the ministry of mere words from without.” As James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate point out, the major content of this passage is plagiarized from Schelling.

for such irrationalism. That is, since free will was seen with the eye of Reason, it required no proof. As Emerson explained in an 1834 letter to his brother Edward, “Reason is the highest faculty of the soul – what we mean often by the soul itself; it never *reasons*, never proves, it simply perceives; it is vision” (*EL* 1: 412-13). His increasing confidence in a self-determining will was bolstered by University of Vermont President James Marsh’s spirited defense of Coleridge’s position in the preliminary essay included in the American edition of *Aids to Reflection*. In this essay, though Marsh acknowledged “the demonstrated incomprehensibility of a self-determining power,” he went on to claim that Reason superseded the incomprehensible, that “although the power to originate an act or state of mind may be beyond the capacity of our understandings to comprehend, it is still not contradictory to reason . . . every man does, in fact, believe himself possessed of freedom in the higher sense of self-determination” (9: 512).

There is also a kind of pragmatic idealism in Marsh’s statement that Emerson would have found attractive: if the content of human experience were strictly limited to what could be proven, then all thinking would be reduced to a sterile logic, and regardless of whether or not the existence of free will could be proven to the rational mind (or to what Emerson, following Coleridge, would have called the Understanding), its existence in the world of experience was certain. Subsequently, in a pair of journal entries from January of 1834 we find Emerson opposing the rationalism of *Freedom of the Will* with a more intuitive, or perhaps *ad hominem*, argument for the will as individual force of character: “Luther & Napoleon are better treatises on the Will than Edwards’s. Will does not know if it be cold or hot or dangerous[;] he only goes on to his mark & leaves to mathematicians to calculate whether a body can come to its place without passing

through all the intermediates” (*JMN* 4: 257).⁷¹ Illustrative both of his growing sense of self-determination at this time, as well as the American affinity for exalting the more immediate and intangible qualities of character over rationalism and intellect, Emerson’s dismissal of Edwards’ treatise also demonstrates the extent to which he had assimilated Coleridge’s avowal of the supernatural potential of the human will.

In “Fate,” however, we find an older, seemingly chastened Emerson who is no longer willing to play fast and loose with the facticity of external limitation. As Stanley Cavell remarks, in “Fate” there is “a steady awareness that may present itself as a new maturity or realism” (68). Yet even the early essays betray indications that Emerson had not exorcised the unanswerable propositions of Edwardsean necessity so much as he had avoided facing them. “When we discern justice,” he writes in “Self-Reliance” (1847), “when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams. If we ask whence this comes, if we seek to pry into the soul that causes, all philosophy is at fault” (2: 37). Here, Emerson acknowledges that the individual soul is not a cause unto itself, and elsewhere in the essay he affirms that self-reliance is not so much self-determination as it is the capacity of the individual to do the will of God: “That which each can do best, none but his Maker can teach him” (2: 47). Likewise, independence is achieved by way of deference to the divine will. “Trust thyself,” Emerson tells us, “every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events” (2: 28). It was not until “Fate,” that he addressed the conflict directly, though the outcome can seem

⁷¹ In an entry from the previous day, he writes, “We mean Will, when we say that a person has a good deal of character . . . There is not nor ever can be any competition between a will of words & a real will. Webster, Adams, Clay, Calhoun, Chatham, and every statesman who was ever formidable are wilful men. But Everett & Stanley & the Ciceros are not . . . Meantime a great many men in society speak strong but have no oak, are all willow. And only a virtuous will is omnipotent (*JMN* 4: 256-7)

somewhat inconclusive. As Barbara Packer puts it, “‘Fate’ is a kind of debate: not a neat argument-and-rebuttal, like the essays in *Representative Men*, but an endless, repetitive wrangle” (6: xlvii).

Yet there is no mistaking Emerson’s drift towards Edwardsean theology and rationalism in “Fate,” and his affirmations of free will are not particularly convincing. “We are sure,” he writes at the outset, “that, though we know not how, necessity does comport with liberty, the individual with the world, my polarity with the spirit of the times” (6: 2). What follows, however, is essentially a catalogue of arguments for theological determinism, interspersed with self-conscious avowals of the contradictory impulse to believe in both freedom and fate. The inescapability of causality Emerson calls “the circumstance,” or “Nature” – but even as he opposes this with “the life,” which he leaves unexplained, he portrays Nature as the author of the agency that it delimits:

The Circumstance is Nature. Nature is, what you may do. There is much you may not. We have two things, – the circumstance, and the life. Once we thought, positive power was all. Now we learn, that negative power, or circumstance, is half. Nature is the tyrannous circumstance, the thick skull, the sheathed snake, the ponderous, rock-like jaw; necessitated activity; violent direction; the conditions of a tool, like the locomotive, strong enough on its track, but which can do nothing but mischief off of it; or skates, which are wings on the ice, but fetters on the ground. (6: 8)

Here, “what you may do” turns out to be “the tyrannous circumstance,” the physical determinants that allow us to “read the possibility of each passenger, in the facial angle, in the complexion, in the depth of his eye. His parentage determines it. Men are what

their mothers made them” (6: 5). Even remarkable historical figures are perfectly predictable. “Doubtless, in every million there will be an astronomer, a mathematician, a comic poet, a mystic” (6: 10), Emerson admits, seemingly resigned to a refutation of his earlier view of character and self-determination as beyond the reach of logic. Self-determination, insofar as it exists at all, must itself be determined by the circumstances that have produced it.

When Emerson does affirm free will, like Coleridge, he approaches pantheism; but while Coleridge is careful to maintain a kind of middle position in which regeneration, or the power “that can *bring home a Heart to God*,” is achieved “not by Will of man alone: but neither *without* the Will” (9: 157, 158), Emerson tends to dissolve the will entirely. That is to say, though he claims that the “revelation of Thought takes man out of servitude into freedom,” such freedom actually culminates in a reception of divine Law rather than unrestricted self-determination. “The day of days, the great day of the feast of life,” Emerson proclaims, “is that in which the inward eye opens to the Unity in things, to the omnipresence of law – sees that what is must be, and ought to be, or is the best. This beatitude dips from on high down on us, and we see. It is not in us so much as we are in it.” Furthermore, the conditions for such revelatory thinking are also determined by circumstance: “If the air come to our lungs, we breathe and live; if not, we die. If the light come to our eyes, we see; else not. And if truth come to our mind, we suddenly expand to its dimensions, as if we grew to worlds. We are as lawgivers; we speak for Nature; we prophesy and divine” (6: 14). Consequently, while there are those to whose minds truth will come, there are also those in whom “digestion and sex absorb the

vital force, and the stronger these are, the individual is so much weaker. The more of these drones perish, the better for the hive” (6: 6).

In this sense, divine election is renegotiated in naturalistic terms, and since “what is must be, and ought to be, or is the best,” for Emerson it also follows that the less dominant races are inferior by design, and that God, or Nature, has a controlling interest in the outcomes of war. “The population of the world is a conditional population; not the best,” he observes, “but the best that could live now; and the scale of tribes, and the steadiness with which victory adheres to one tribe, and defeat to another, is as uniform as the superposition of strata” (6: 8). Though he has stripped away the Calvinist origins of his thinking, Emerson’s approach here is the same in kind as that of Edwards, who in a 1747 letter to his Scottish friend, the Reverend William McCulloch, observes that the most probable reason for New England’s “surprising deliverances from the French and Indians” is not to be attributed to, say, military strategy or might, but rather to the likelihood “that there are a great many of the elect among our children, born and unborn; and that for these elect’s sake, God will not suffer us to be destroyed” (16: 238). In this way, the various socio-political circumstances and developments in which humans seemed to play an active role were found to be part of a universal scheme of intentionality, the aims of which could only be guessed at by observing what had actually occurred.⁷² Nevertheless, Emerson insists, humankind is “a stupendous antagonism, a dragging together of the poles of the Universe.”

⁷² Race was also a determining factor for Emerson. “The German and Irish millions,” he writes, “like the Negro, have a great deal of guano in their destiny. They are ferried over the Atlantic, and carted over America, to ditch and to drudge, to make corn cheap, and then to lie down prematurely to make a spot of green grass on the prairie” (6: 9).

For on the one hand, the human is a “quadruped ill-disguised, hardly escaped into biped, and has paid for the new powers by loss of some of the old ones.” On the other, “the lightning which explodes and fashions planets, maker of planets and suns, is in him” (6: 12). But there is little in Emerson’s affirmation of natural power to convince us that fate can accommodate free will. The personification of grand-scale natural phenomena seems to gesture towards a notion of the human as having access to some primordial creative element, and yet “the lightning which explodes and fashions planets” is obviously constrained by physical laws. Alternately, if Emerson is suggesting that planets and suns are created by divine fiat, then we are back to the somewhat dubious concept of the individual achieving free will by way of union with the infinite will of God, and Emerson does not present this argument nearly as well as Coleridge does because he is much less intent on preserving the will of the individual. David M. Robinson suggests that, for Emerson, Fate is “a part of the pattern of natural forces that also include human power. Limit can exist, Emerson realized, only in the context of expansiveness, and he saw this fundamental polarity as a resource for a workable philosophy of conduct” (137). But power too seems merely a matter of physical composition, of determining factors beyond our control: “We must reckon success a constitutional trait. Courage – the old physicians taught . . . is as the degree of circulation of blood in the arteries . . . Where the arteries hold their blood, is courage and adventure possible. Where they pour it unrestrained into the veins, the spirit is low and feeble” (6: 29). Ultimately, Emerson is most convincing when he simply acknowledges the practicality of believing in free will: “it is wholesome to man to look not at Fate, but the other way: the practical view is the other” (6: 13). He does attempt to assimilate Coleridge’s objections to theological

determinism into his argument, but he is too pragmatic, too much of the Edwardsean rationalist, to invest in them. “Let us build altars to the Beautiful Necessity,” he concludes: “If we thought men were free in the sense, that, in a single exception one fantastical will could prevail over the law of things, it were all one as if a child’s hand could pull down the sun” (6: 26).⁷³

In what sense, then, does Emerson think humans are free? Whatever freedom we do have is subject to inexorable law, “to the Necessity” that “rudely or softly” demonstrates to us “that there are no contingencies; that Law rules throughout existence, a Law which is not intelligent but intelligence . . . it dissolves persons; it vivifies nature; yet solicits the pure in heart to draw on all its omnipotence” (6: 27). Likewise, though Emerson acknowledges that the “mixtures of spiritual chemistry refuse to be analyzed,” he goes on to describe the will as a natural phenomenon, venturing that a strong will “usually results from a certain unity of organization, as if the whole energy of body and mind flowed in one direction.” Unlike Coleridge, who only defines the will in negative terms, effectively sidestepping the problem of understanding the human will as natural while also exempt from natural law, Emerson aligns the operations of the will with the Newtonian laws of Nature: “All great force is real and elemental. There is no manufacturing a strong will. There must be a pound to balance a pound. Where power is

⁷³ Though I do not have the space to begin addressing the question of how to read Edwards’ greater influence as mediated by Emerson, it is worth noting that Cavell points out that this particular passage is transfigured by Nietzsche in a school essay entitled, “Fate and History,” which was of some importance to Heidegger. Thus, as Cavell suggests, “Emerson’s presence in Nietzsche’s thought as Heidegger receives it – in certain passages of Nietzsche that Heidegger leans on most heavily – is so strong that one has to say that Nietzsche is using Emerson’s words; which means that Heidegger in effect, over an unmeasured stretch of thought, is interpreting Emerson’s words” (*ETE* 213).

shown in will, it must rest on the universal force” (6: 15).⁷⁴ The consequence, however, is that when he claims that “necessity does comport with liberty,” by liberty, he means no more than Edwards, for whom the “plain and obvious meaning of the words ‘freedom’ and ‘liberty,’ in common speech, is power, opportunity, or advantage, that anyone has, to do as he pleases. Or in other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing, or conducting in any respect, as he wills” (1: 163).

Following this, Edwards also makes a rather interesting clarification in which he outlines what is *not* to be taken into consideration with respect to this common sense, or vulgar, meaning:

But one thing more I would observe concerning what is vulgarly called liberty; power and opportunity for one to do and conduct as he will, or according to his choice, is all that is meant by it; without taking into the meaning of the word, anything of the cause or original of that choice; or at all considering how the person came to have such a volition, whether it was caused by some external motive, or internal habitual bias; whether it was determined by some antecedent volition, or whether it happened without a cause; whether it was necessarily connected with something foregoing, or not connected. (1: 164)

⁷⁴ Cf. Coleridge in *Aids to Reflection*: “. . . I do not pretend to determine *what* the Will *is*, but what it is *not* – namely, that it is not Nature. And as no man who admits a Will at all, (for we may safely presume no man not meaning to speak figuratively, would call the shifting Current of a stream the WILL of the River), will suppose it *below* Nature, we may safely add, that it is super-natural; and this without the least pretence to any positive Notion or insight” (9: 80).

Liberty, or freedom, then, is merely the ability to do as we please, without taking causality into account.⁷⁵ Of course we also know that, like Spinoza, Edwards maintained that only God could be self-caused, and Emerson's final acceptance of this point, though clearly discernible in "Fate," is most clearly articulated in its companion essay, "Power." Indeed, notwithstanding the fact that in the former essay he claims that if "Fate follows and limits power, power attends and antagonizes Fate" (6: 12), in the latter, power does not seem to antagonize fate so much as confirm it:

All successful men have agreed in one thing; – they were *causationists*. They believed that thing went not by luck, but by law; that there was not a weak or a cracked link in the chain the joins the first and last of things. A belief in causality, or strict connexion between every pulse-beat and the principle of being, and, in consequence, belief in compensation, or, that nothing is got for nothing; – characterizes all valuable minds, and must control every effort that is made by an industrious one. (6: 28-9)

He makes a similar point in "Fate" when he observes that "relation and connection are somewhere and sometimes, but everywhere and always . . . Fate, then, is a name for facts not yet passed under the fire of thought – for causes which are unpenetrated" (6: 17).

This is not to say that Coleridge did not accept causality as a fundamental law of nature, but rather that he believed the will was not entirely subject to its rule. Emerson certainly flirted with this conception, but he eventually returned to the "unanswerable propositions" of Edwardsean theology, accepting what Milder refers to as "Calvinist or

⁷⁵ As Paul Ramsey points out, "Edwards' understanding of freedom is similar to Spinoza's, and to Hobbes' . . . There is greater parallelism, perhaps, between Edwards and David Hume, who, like Edwards, endeavors to show that according to any reasonable sense of the terms 'liberty' and 'necessity,' 'all mankind have ever agreed in the doctrine of liberty as well as in that of necessity, and that the whole dispute, in this respect also, has been hitherto merely verbal.'" (1: 13-14).

neo-Calvinist necessity” (133).⁷⁶ That he did so is not only a testament to the impact of Edwards on subsequent American thinkers, but also a confirmation of his currency even among those who were aware of Coleridge’s objections to his system.

Hawthorne

But, all this while, I was giving myself unnecessary alarm. Providence had meditated better things for me than I could possibly imagine for myself.

– Hawthorne, *The Custom-House*

With his characteristic interest in the Puritan history and heritage of the New England States, Hawthorne may very well strike us as the American Romantic who would have known the most about Jonathan Edwards, and yet there is only one reference to Edwards in his entire body of work.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that Hawthorne was unfamiliar with the more popular works of the last great Puritan theologian. As Malinda Kaye Willard points out, there were not only major editions of Edwards’ works that were published in the 1830s and 1840s, of which Hawthorne was likely to have known, but “it is certain that most of Edwards’ major works were available

⁷⁶ In the conclusion of *Freedom and Fate*, Whicher also suggests that Emerson came to accept a kind of theological determinism: “In outline, the story of [Emerson’s] thought seems an episode from a vanished past – his initial challenge a final eruption of protestant perfectionism thinly disguised as ‘modern philosophy,’ his eventual acquiescence close in spirit to what James called soft determinism; both now obsolete stages in an evolution of thought that seems unlikely to ever make them tenable again” (172).

⁷⁷ Michael J. Colacurcio’s note on the Hawthorne-Edwards connection is worth citing here in full: “So far as I can determine, Hawthorne mentions Edwards only once in his writings: in “A Book of Autographs” (1844) Hawthorne exclaims that Aaron Burr was certainly “a wild off-shoot to have sprung from the united stock of those two singular Christians, President Burr of Princeton College, and Jonathan Edwards!” There are some knowing ironies here – the anti-tribalist unpredictabilities of grace and the edge on the idea of “singular” – but they are not much to go on. Yet it would be naïve to imagine that a Bowdoin education made no mention of orthodoxy’s arch-spokesman or that Hawthorne was otherwise illiterate in his works” (577).

to Hawthorne in the Bowdoin College Library.”⁷⁸ Regardless, however, of exactly what Hawthorne may or may not have known about Edwards, or his works, the considerable attention he pays to the doctrine of Original Sin as well as to the free will problem certainly places him in the direct line of those who struggled with the legacy of America’s greatest apologist for Calvinist theology. But apart from passing acknowledgments of Edwards as an important figure in the pantheon of early American history with which Hawthorne was so fascinated, recent scholarship has generally ignored the Edwardsean reverberations in Hawthorne’s work.⁷⁹

Michael Colacurcio does suggest that “The Gentle Boy” is something of a response, albeit an unsuccessful one, to Edwards’ *The Nature of True Virtue*, and he acknowledges the argument for the influence of “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” on “The Ambitious Guest,” but he undermines the more significant implications of these associations beforehand when he challenges the notion that there are any theological connections to be made between Hawthorne and the Puritans: “Hawthorne’s sense of depravity – his power of blackness – is rightly apprehended only as a consciously historical re-cognition of the Puritan “Way” in which American had begun” (14). Yet if “Hawthorne’s primary relation to his Puritan ancestors had been in a significant sense

⁷⁸ Though Hawthorne may never have read these works, Willard notes that the Bowdoin College Library “lists the following entries for Edwards: The Doctrine of Original Sin Defended (Boston, 1758); Treatise on Religious Affections (Boston, 1794); Works (Worcester, 1808); and The Salvation of all Men Examined (New Haven, 1790)” (8). The eight-volume *Works* was the first attempt at a comprehensive collection of Edwards’ major writings and sermons.

⁷⁹ Apart from Willard’s 1978 dissertation, *Jonathan Edwards and Nathaniel Hawthorne: Themes from the Common Consciousness*, there are only two works that provide a sustained treatment of both Edwards and Hawthorne, and neither of them argue, as I do here, that there is anything particularly Edwardsean about Hawthorne’s work. The first is James Hewitson’s dissertation, “Mechanization and Transformation of Millennial Discourse: Jonathan Edwards and Nathaniel Hawthorne,” University of Toronto, 2005, and the second is David Lyttle’s *Studies in Religion in Early American Literature: Edwards, Poe, Channing, Some Minor Transcendentalists, Hawthorne, and Thoreau*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983.

‘historical’” (11), as Colacurcio would have us believe, then it makes little sense to envision him going out of his way to craft a “strenuous disagreement with the Edwardsean position” (174) in “The Gentle Boy.” Indeed, unless we presume Hawthorne to have been a man almost entirely void of belief, an indifferent taxidermist who took no interest in the theological inquiries of his own work, Colacurcio’s historicism is not particularly compelling.

Here, however, since my interest is not only in Hawthorne’s negotiation of Edwards’ theology, but also in how his awareness of Coleridge comes to inflect that negotiation, I will focus primarily on his interest in Providence, which is the closest that he ever comes to making an explicit statement on theological determinism and the free will problem. Yet to get a understanding of Hawthorne’s vision of Providence, we need not only to take into account the personal remarks made in the *Letters*, and *The American Notebooks*, but also the indirect commentaries of *The Scarlet Letter*, which is not only the most successful of Hawthorne’s novels, but also his deepest reflection on the complex inheritance of empirical and supernatural theology in the New England consciousness of the mid-nineteenth century. As Lawrence Buell observes, Hawthorne’s best-known work is “one of the most notoriously religiocentric texts in all of classic American fiction” (41); and yet, little effort has been made to sort out the various theological doctrines present in the novel. Making note of the scant “critical attention that has been given to the allegorical representations of free will and predestination in the main characters of *The Scarlet Letter*,” John Reiss lays the groundwork for beginning to understand the competing theological claims with which Hawthorne is concerned: “Hester Prynne is clearly associated with free will, Roger Chillingworth with predestination, and the

Puritan minister Arthur Dimmesdale wavers between a desperate practice of Papist penance and a more dominant belief in Calvinistic predestination. Pearl seems to have the freedom and fate of nature” (200).

To these systems, we may also add the genial skepticism of Hume that we observe in the narrator’s relentless appeals to uncertainty, and the perversion of Franklin’s Enlightenment pragmatism that we discern in Chillingworth’s assurance that there can be “few things hidden from the man, who devotes himself earnestly and unreservedly to the solution of a mystery” (75). Though Reiss goes on to suggest that “Hester’s allegorical representation of free will is much closer to the free will doctrine of the Papists than to the sense of predestination found in the beliefs and practices of the Puritans” (200), it would be difficult to deny that Hester’s self-determination is also informed by the Romantic theology of Coleridge and Emerson (before he returned to an essentially Calvinist view), which derived its liberal position on the will from the Unitarian opposition to orthodox doctrine.⁸⁰

Unlike Coleridge, Emerson, and Edwards, however, Hawthorne seems to have had little desire to develop a clear stance on the free will problem, and his prose never aspires to philosophical argumentation. “Hawthorne was an artist,” James S. Mullican rightly points out, “not a philosopher or theologian; an important element of his

⁸⁰ That Hester is likely based, in part, on Margaret Fuller, further underscores this influence. The eldest child of Boston-Cambridge Unitarians, Fuller was educated at home by her father, Timothy Fuller, an influential and well-connected Harvard graduate who served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives and State Senate before an eight-year tenure in Congress. Unitarianism was also the de facto religion of leading intellectuals in Boston and Cambridge. As Fuller’s most recent biographer, Charles Capper, notes, “Cambridge’s cultural awakening [in the 1820s] was undergirded by its Unitarian religion” (1: 86), and though Fuller did come to doubt “the standard Unitarian faith, which in New England was still firmly grounded in a belief, if not in Jesus Christ’s divinity, at least in his divine attributes and mission as teacher and savior as revealed in the Four Gospels” (1: 112), the great majority of her personal and intellectual associates, including those whom we now identify as Transcendentalists, were Unitarian.

technique, perhaps essential to his vision of life, was his ambiguity” (91). To put a finer point on it, we might say that he finds the free will problem of greater appeal in and of itself than the prospect of actually solving it. Likewise, he is more interested in the Puritan preoccupation with Original Sin and its legacy, than in making an argument for or against the truth of the doctrine. That said, in *The Scarlet Letter* an argument for Edwards’ theological determinism emerges not only in Roger Chillingworth’s pronouncement of the “dark necessity,” which “explains all we do and all we suffer” (174), but also in the narrator’s uncritical invocations of Providence.

Pearl’s “innocent life had sprung,” the narrator tells us, “by the inscrutable decree of Providence, a lovely and immortal flower, out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion” (89), and Chillingworth seems to have been granted “the Divine permission, for a season, to burrow into the clergyman’s intimacy, and plot against his soul” (128). Yet in both instances, the narrator presents us with a Providence that seems to explain what is otherwise unexplainable. Likewise, though Dimmesdale does not reveal his secret to Chillingworth, the Physician is inclined to accept “the aspect of affairs, which Providence – using the avenger and his victim for its own purposes, and, perchance, pardoning, where it seemed most to punish – had substituted for his black devices,” though this is only because he believes that the unforeseen outcome actually works to his advantage: Dimmesdale is “for ever on the rack; it needed only to know the spring that controlled the engine – and the physician knew it well!” (139-40). Here, though to Chillingworth it seems that Providence has worked unexpectedly in his favor, the narrator interjects to assure us that there is an overarching intention at work, the designs of which may be guessed at, but never known.

But are these references to Providence merely designed to conjure a quaint belief from a time long past, or do Hawthorne's beliefs actually coincide with his narrative persona? His use of the term in his personal writings suggest that the latter is the case, though it is perhaps only in *The American Notebooks* that Hawthorne reveals the true depth and occasional humor of his belief. While the subject of Providence arises throughout the *Notebooks*, Hawthorne seems to have been especially attuned to the notion of divine intentionality in the month following his marriage to Sophia Peabody, when they settled in as happy newlyweds at the Old Manse:

Like Enoch, we seem to have been translated to the other state of being, without having passed through death. Our spirits must have flitted away, unconsciously, in the deep and quiet rapture of some long embrace; and we can only perceive that we have cast off our mortal part, by the more real and earnest life of our spirits. Externally, our Paradise has very much the aspect of a pleasant old domicile, on earth. The antique house (for it looks antique, though it was created by Providence expressly for our use, and at the precise time when we wanted it) stands behind a noble avenue of Balm of Gilead trees; and when we chance to observe a passing traveller, through the sunshine and the shadow of this long avenue, his figure appears too dim and remote to disturb our sense of blissful seclusion . . . I wonder why Providence does not cause a clear, cold fountain to bubble up at our doorstep; – methinks it would not be unreasonable to pray for such a favor. Only imagine Adam trudging out of Paradise with a bucket in each hand, to get water to drink, or for Eve to

bathe in! Intolerable! I shall absolutely think myself wronged, unless I find the aforesaid fountain bubbling at our doorstep, the next time I look out. In other respects, Providence has treated us tolerably well; but here I shall expect something further to be done. (8: 315-16)

Here, Hawthorne's mock expectation of a fountain clearly parodies the absurdity of imagining his own happiness and expediency to accord with God's intentions; and yet he still conceives of all that has occurred in terms of Providential decree rather than blind chance – and thus of his domestic fulfilment in terms of heavenly intent. A week later, he reaffirms his happiness and pronounces his 'easy trust' in Providence: "It is usually supposed that the cares of life come with matrimony; but I seem to have cast off all care, and live on with as much easy trust in Providence, as Adam could possibly have felt, before he had learned that there was a world beyond his Paradise" (8: 331).

For Hawthorne, then, Providence could only be known by what had already been revealed, or what would surely come to pass, as when he observes the great abundance of apples ripening in the trees and feels "somewhat overwhelmed with the impending bounties of Providence" (8: 344). But so far as the future intentions of Providence are concerned, Hawthorne can only place his trust in the benevolence of what he cannot know (though he does so quite easily in the first blush of a happy marriage and a comfortable residence in Concord). As a young necessitarian, Coleridge aspired to this kind of trust, though it was not so easy to come by when reflecting on the atrocities of the slave trade: "In my calmer moments I have the firmest Faith that all things work together for Good. But alas! it seems a long and dark Process" (2: 132). Likewise, in the final pages of *The Scarlet Letter* (and outside the rapture of his honeymoon), Hawthorne

acknowledges the process of social reform in terms that admit of darkness but also of the practical necessity of accepting the gradual evolution of justice and redress – of accepting Providence while hoping for change.

For when Hester returns to New England and offers her counsel to women “in the continually recurring trials of wounded, wasted, wronged, misplaced, or erring and sinful passion,” she ultimately assures them “of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven’s own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness” (1: 263). The conservative piety of Hawthorne’s phrasing here is worth noting: Hester believes that a new truth will be revealed, but that such a revelation will only occur when the world is ready for it, and this is a matter to be determined “in Heaven’s own time” – that is, by a benevolent, albeit unfathomable, Providence. Indeed, as Mullican observes, “Hawthorne had faith in God’s Providence, but, even in this faith, Hawthorne’s skeptical cast of mind made him concentrate on the inscrutability of Providence. For him there was a Providence, but it was utterly unknowable” (94).

Unlike Coleridge and Emerson, who both sought to maintain the paradox that Providence somehow included individual freedom, Hawthorne stressed the absolute inscrutability of Providence – but perhaps more significant is the fact that his willingness to accept what is unknowable effectively inoculates him against what Keats rightly identified in Coleridge as the “irritable reaching after fact and reason” (60), a tendency that also brought Emerson to relinquish the hyperborean flights of his early Transcendentalism. In this respect, Hawthorne is much like Edwards, for whom the

inscrutability of Providence was an article of faith. “The way of God’s bringing things about in his providence is inscrutable,” Edwards observes in his gloss of Ecclesiastes 11:5. “You can no more understand it than you can the cause and course of the wind and clouds, mentioned in the foregoing verse” (24: 604).⁸¹ Excepting this congruence, Hawthorne can appear to be much like Coleridge when compared with Emerson. As Richard Gravil remarks, “Hawthorne’s residual Calvinism, his belief in the separateness of man from God, his conviction of sin and fall, make him a Coleridgean scrutineer of Emerson’s simplifications” (124). In spirit, Hawthorne is no doubt closer to Coleridge than he is to Emerson, but it is important to remember that Emerson also comes to occupy an Edwardsean position on the will, though he does so by virtue of his refusal to acknowledge the incompatibility of freedom and fate. Conversely, Hawthorne seems content to accept the freedom that consists in being unable to determine the nature and scheme of Providence.

Edwardsean in this respect, Hawthorne was nevertheless more immediately receptive to Coleridge’s literary and intellectual influence. As Richard Harter Fogle notes, Hawthorne’s “book borrowings from the Salem Athenaeum included James Marsh’s famous edition of Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection*, the *Biographia Literaria*, and other Coleridgean prose” (109). And we know from a letter to his wife that Hawthorne also purchased a copy of *The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, including the Dramas of Wallenstein, Remorse, and Zapolya* in 1840. “I have added Coleridge’s Poems,” he writes, “a very good edition in three volumes, to our library” (405).

Consequently, when the narrator of *The Scarlet Letter* explains Dimmesdale’s guilt-

⁸¹ Ecclesiastes 11:4-5: “He that observeth the wind shall not sow: and he that observeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.”

ridden construal of a meteor as the letter “A” in the night sky as a result of his having “extended his egotism over the whole expanse of nature” (155), it is difficult to believe that Hawthorne would not have been thinking of those lines of Coleridge’s “The Nightingale,” in which

. . . some night-wandering man, whose heart was pierced
 With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
 Or slow distemper, or neglected love,
 (And so poor Wretch! Fill’d all things with himself
 And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
 Of his own sorrow) . . . (16.1.1: 517)

What is perhaps most interesting about the allusion, however, is that Hawthorne seems to employ it as a mockery of the same Edwardsean typology that we find replicated in Coleridge. Though he was by no means a practitioner of typology in the traditional sense of the term, the expanded natural typology of Edwards, in which “heaven’s being filled with glorious, luminous bodies, is to signify the glory and happiness of the heavenly inhabitants; and amongst these, the sun signifies Christ and the moon, the church” (11: 52), would certainly have appealed to Coleridge, who in “The Destiny of Nations” pronounces all natural phenomena, including subjective stimuli, to be emblematic of a higher spiritual truth:

For all that meets the bodily sense I deem
 Symbolical, one mighty alphabet
 For infant minds: and we in this low world
 Placed with our backs to bright Reality,

That we may learn with young unwounded ken

The substance from its shadow. (16.1.1: 282)

Indeed, Hawthorne may have had this passage in mind as well. For after the narrator makes light of the Puritan tendency “to interpret all meteoric appearances, and other natural phenomena, that occurred with less regularity than the rise and set of sun and moon, as so many revelations from a supernatural source” (154), he also acknowledges that it is “indeed, a majestic idea, that the destiny of nations should be revealed, in these awful hieroglyphics, on the cope of heaven” (155). Perhaps it is no more than a striking coincidence that the title of the poem is reproduced here – yet given the parallel interest in exegeses of the phenomenal world, it is a rather suggestive concurrence.

In fairness to Edwards and Coleridge, we may also note that their respective methods of exegesis were not of the sensationalist kind described by Hawthorne. That is, rather than limiting themselves to the interpretation of remarkable natural occurrences like meteors, earthquakes, and violent storms, they expanded the spectrum of what could be interpreted theologically to include all of Nature; and insofar as the Puritans were also inclined to read nearly every natural phenomenon as a sign of God’s Providence, Hawthorne’s satire is somewhat hyperbolic. To Mary Rowlandson, for example, Psalms 8.13-14 foretold the success of the Indian forces in King Philip’s War. The destruction of her town and her subsequent kidnapping was a sign that “our perverse and evil carriages in the sight of the Lord, have so offended Him, that instead of turning His hand against [our enemies], the Lord feeds and nourishes them up to be a scourge to the whole Land” (105); and for William Bradford, the death of a young sailor who had mocked the Puritan separatists, and then gone so far as to tell them “that he hoped to help to cast half of them

overboard before they came to their journey's end," was a "spetiall worke of Gods providence" (92).⁸² It is true, however, that Hawthorne's reading of Providence is neither as particular nor as explicit as the typologies of the Puritans – in fact, on this account, Hawthorne is much like Woolman, who invokes the intentionality of God when coming to ordinary conclusions about relatively mundane experiences. Notwithstanding this, he practices what we might view as a vestigial typology when he invokes the Providence of God as a transcendent purpose circumscribing the affairs of humankind, as he undoubtedly does when he grows disenchanted with the prospects of the Brook Farm venture in a letter to Sophia Peabody. "Dearest wife," he writes (though the couple would not marry until nearly a year later), "it is extremely doubtful whether Mr. Ripley will succeed in locating his community on this farm. He can bring Mr. Ellis to no terms; and the more they talk about the matter, the farther they appear to be from settlement. Thou and I must form other plans for ourselves; for I can see no signs that Providence purposes to give us a home here" (15: 563). But even if he had misread the intentions of Providence in his hopes of finding a home at Brook Farm, Hawthorne is still confident of God's benevolent interest in the happiness of his domestic life: "I doubt not that God has great good in store for us; for He would not have given us so much, unless he were preparing to give a great deal more. I love thee! Thou lovest me! What present bliss! What sure and certain hope!" (15: 564). Put another way, Hawthorne's continued faith in the future appears to rest on the assurance that what happiness he and his wife have so far experienced had been intentionally given by God, and could serve as a sign of God's

⁸² As Bradford (with some satisfaction) observes, "it plased God before they came halfe seas over, to smite this yong man with a greeveous disease, of which he dyed in a desperate manner, and so was him selfe the first that was throwne overbord. Thus his curses light on his owne head; and it was an astonishment to all his fellows, for they noted it to be the just hand of God upon him" (93).

favor – almost as if Hawthorne, like Equiano, came to think of himself as “a *particular favorite of Heaven*” (31).

Whether or not believing in Providence necessarily precluded a concurrent belief in free will was, to Hawthorne, irrelevant. As is evident from his notice of Melville’s tendency “to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken” (22: 163), theological beliefs were not subject to logic, and he seems to have been content to believe in a free will that was circumscribed by Providential decree.

Hawthorne is surely interested in the notion of necessity and freedom as “co-extensive and co-present,” but he does not follow Coleridge in thinking that it is “profanation to speak of these mysteries” (7.1: 114) so much as he believes such co-extensiveness and co-presence are entirely beyond the scope of the human mind. “Within a framework of an ordered world or moral law and an ultimate design of Providence,” Mullican tells us, “Hawthorne saw man exercising freedom of the will. While man could not order the society of men or significantly change the nature of man, an individual person could work out his personal destiny by purifying his own heart” (105). In short, Mullican casts Hawthorne as something of a soft determinist: since the only constraint on free will is Providence, which is entirely unknowable, humans are essentially free – or, to put it another way, we simply cannot tell the difference between freedom and fate.

At the same time, Hawthorne’s letters from his time in the Old Manse make it clear that, in practice, he does not think Providence to be as entirely inscrutable as he might have us believe. Of course neither did Edwards, who, as we saw earlier, attributed military victory to the great probability “that there are a great many of the elect among our children, born and unborn; and that for these elect’s sake, God will not suffer us to be

destroyed” (16: 238). Apparently, even those who believe in an inscrutable Providence cannot help but come to conclusions about the future based on their experience of the past; that both Hawthorne and Edwards engage in such speculation under the presupposition of a transcendent agent may admit of more mysticism than that of those who speak of events as having either been meant to be or not, but the same structure is at work in both instances.

By and large, however, Hawthorne does not attempt to predict the future intentions of Providence – he will affirm a Providential interest in his personal affairs, though as we saw in *The American Notebooks*, when he does so, his tone is both too light-hearted for us to take his claims of divine favor altogether seriously, and too curiously reverent for us to dismiss them entirely. In 1839, having been released from a day’s work at the Custom-House due to inclement weather, he writes his future wife: “Thus you perceive that strife and wrangling, as well as east-winds and rain, are the methods of a kind Providence to promote my comfort – which could not have been so well secured in any other way” (15: 298). On the whole, then, it does appear that Hawthorne believed in the intentionality of phenomena, or that events occurred in accordance with a divine plan, but it is ultimately unclear whether or not he believed that this plan also encompassed the entire span of history and penetrated the very being of its conscious inhabitants – that, as Edwards had put it, “God does decisively, in his providence, order all the volitions of moral agents, either by positive influence or permission” (1: 433). Likewise, though he did not articulate such a position, he may very well have sided with Coleridge, who surely anticipates Emerson’s later argument in “Fate” with his insistence upon an antagonistic coexistence between free will and fate, “a

struggle between two opposites, two polar forces . . . irresistible Fate & unconquerable Free Will, which founds it's [sic] equilibrium in the Providence & the Future Retribution of Christianity" (*CL* 5: 35).

Given his dismissal of Melville's inclination to "reason of Providence and futurity" as simply "beyond human ken," of course it is most likely that Hawthorne would not have chosen a side at all, and this is precisely why it is important to remember that Hawthorne is first and foremost a writer of fiction – if we attempt to delineate his ideas in philosophical terms, we are bound, like David Lyttle, to be "frustrated by the imprecision of his thought" (xiii). To avoid this, it becomes necessary to approach Hawthorne on his own terms – that is to say, figuratively; though here I use the term in a somewhat restricted sense to denote the tracing of a conceptual figure through the actions and ultimate fate of a fictional character. For though Hawthorne does not respond directly to Coleridge or Edwards in *The Scarlet Letter*, in both Dimmesdale and Chillingworth we can discern characteristics that find their archetypal origins in one or the other of these two thinkers. In the case of Dimmesdale, who tells his congregation that he is "altogether vile, a viler companion of the vilest, the worst of sinners, an abomination, a thing of unimaginable iniquity" (143-4), it is almost certain that Hawthorne had the rhetoric of Edwards' *Personal Narrative* in mind:

I have often since I lived in this town, had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness; very frequently as to hold in a kind of loud weeping . . . It has often appeared to me, that if God should mark iniquity against me, I should appear the very worst of all mankind; of all that have been since the beginning of the world to this time: and that I should have

by far the lowest place in hell . . . My wickedness, as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable, and infinitely swallowing up all thought and imagination; like an infinite deluge, or infinite mountains over my head.⁸³ (16: 801-2)

As we saw earlier, there are also reverberations of Coleridge's solipsistic melancholia in Dimmesdale's interpretation of natural phenomena, though in his general infirmity and bodily weakness he evokes both Coleridge and Edwards, each of whom were notorious for sporadic bouts of ill health. In *The Scarlet Letter*, sickness and bodily weakness become the defining characteristics of the isolated mind, and this is a portrayal, a veritable *type*, that, as I suggested in the first chapter, partakes of the more general trope of the unnatural man inadvertently put forth by Edwards and more consciously codified by Coleridge in both his poetry and his prose. Yet insofar as Dimmesdale's weakness is primarily the consequence of an abnegation of the physical self based in spiritual guilt, he more closely resembles the Puritan Edwards, who tended to practice "self-denial in eating, drinking, and sleeping" (16: 761) as a way to combat his spiritual self-loathing. Though certainly a master of self-deprecation, Coleridge's guilt was largely based in the neglectful behavior that one might argue was a result of his addiction: a partly unknowing self-indulgence that became a physical dependence, a sickness.

In Hawthorne's portrayals of Chillingworth, however, we find the classic Coleridgean, or Romantic, figure of the scholarly mind as it is set out in "The Eolian Harp," "Frost at Midnight," and *Dejection*, as well as in the first chapter of the *Biographia*, where Coleridge laments his metaphysical engagement with questions of

⁸³ The *Personal Narrative* certainly would have been available to Hawthorne. As George S. Claghorn notes, it was "first published by [Samuel] Hopkins in 1765" (14: 747).

free will and necessity. As recalled by Hester at the close of Chapter II, Chillingworth is a “figure of the study and the cloister,” whose eyes are “dim and bleared by the lamp-light that had served to pore over many ponderous books,” but nevertheless possessed of a “strange, penetrating power, when it was their owner’s purpose to read the human soul” (58). Here, Hawthorne is most noticeably alluding to Coleridge’s description of his younger self as “pent ‘mid cloisters dim” (16.1.1: 455) from “Frost at Midnight,” but his evocation of the “strange, penetrating power” of the eyes is drawn in equal measure from “the flashing eyes” (16.1.1: 514) of the vatic figure in the final stanza of *Kubla Khan* and the “glittering eye” (16.1.1: 373) of the Ancient Mariner. This is not to say that Chillingworth is not a character unto himself, but rather that Hawthorne uses him as a vehicle to deploy certain elements of Coleridge’s unnatural man, the supernatural capacity of whom is bought at the expense of metaphysical perversity. There is good reason to believe that, for Coleridge, the drawing of this figure is somewhat hyperbolic – for he continues to compose some of his best poetry well after his supposed corruption at the hands of abstruse metaphysics in 1802. It is also worth noting that Chillingworth’s power is not capricious, and his deformity is essential rather than adopted, which is to say that he is a more comprehensive, or pure, adaptation of this Coleridgean figure.

How, then, should we determine Hawthorne’s response to Edwards’ theological determinism – to Coleridge’s self-determining will? To the extent that neither Chillingworth nor Dimmesdale seem capable of self-determination (save Dimmesdale’s final confession), we must look to Hester, and finally, to Pearl, for the answer. Though Hester does return to New England and resumes wearing the scarlet letter “of her own free will” (263), Hawthorne seems to use the common speech meaning of the term as

Edwards describes it – that is, as “being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing, or conducting in any respect, as [one] wills” (1: 163). Pearl, however, is “a being whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder; or with an order peculiar to themselves, amidst which the point of variety and arrangement was difficult or impossible to be discovered” (91). Here again, however, Hawthorne is careful neither to say that Pearl is predetermined nor that she is self-determined: all that can be known is that her order is peculiar to itself and difficult, if not impossible, to discern. We might, however, wonder if Pearl is able to discern her own order. If she were, then Hawthorne would be a proponent of Coleridge’s supernatural self-determination; otherwise, her nature, though unknowable, would be determined, and Hawthorne would cast his lot with Edwards. Of course Hawthorne never provides answers of this kind. Consequently, he maintains a thoroughgoing agnosticism with respect to free will. It is not even quite accurate to say that the inscrutability of Providence, or chaos theory, is Hawthorne’s solution to the free will problem, for he does not even grant that events are determined, albeit unknowable. Moreover, the inscrutability of Hawthorne’s Providence not only includes the impossibility of knowing the intentions of Providence, but also that of knowing whether those intentions are limited in their application or if they are absolute and comprehensive.

Though Henry G. Fairbanks does not take this peculiar brand of crypto-Edwardsean skepticism into account in his classic “Sin, Free Will, and ‘Pessimism’ in Hawthorne,” he does register the shrewd quality of Hawthorne’s stance. “It is true that [Hawthorne] had a genuine regard for the orderly processes of nature,” he observes, “so precise and regular in their operation that they often suggest the idea of necessity. But

with the nicety of a medieval casuist he unfailingly reserved to man that initial moral choice, which, taken deliberately, set into motion nigh-unalterable consequences.” And while I think it unlikely that Hawthorne’s intentions are those of a casuist, Fairbanks is right to sense a belief in both the inevitability of physical events as well as in the indomitable power of self-determination. Indeed, Hawthorne successfully evades the free will problem, and he does it without having to sacrifice Providence or self-determination. In this respect, he is more Emersonian than Emerson himself. For though Emerson acknowledged that “it is wholesome to man to look not at Fate, but the other way” (6: 13), he was unable to affirm free will without also invoking the chain of causal necessity. Hawthorne, however, was able to believe in both Providence and free will on a practical basis, employing each one as it fit the occasion; and though this may seem like a forfeiture of possible knowledge, or patent inconsistency, to Hawthorne it was the purest form of pragmatism, especially when held up against Emerson’s approach. “Mr. Emerson is a great searcher for facts,” Hawthorne concluded of his neighbor in 1842, “but they seem to melt away and become unsubstantial in his grasp” (8: 336).

The Dark Theology of American Romanticism

As we know, Hawthorne was not alone in his frustration with Emerson’s steadfast optimism and idealism; Poe and Melville also harbored an Enlightenment resentment of philosophical imprecision, and an Edwardsean skepticism toward the human capacity for benevolence. But while these three writers are certainly more preoccupied with evil than Emerson is, it is also important to remind ourselves of the Emerson that we see in “Fate,”

and of the Emerson who in “Considerations by the Way” charges the greater lot of humankind with a perfidious inability to achieve self-reliance:

Youthful aspirations are fine things, your theories and plans of life are fair and commendable: – but will you stick? Not one, I fear, in that Common full of people, or, in a thousand, but one: and, when you tax them with treachery, and remind them of their high resolutions, they have forgotten that they made a vow.

Of course the notion that Emerson lacked an appropriate sense of evil, is undoubtedly one of the more notorious bugbears of American literary criticism. “Many texts could be cited from Emerson to prove that he was not unconscious that evil existed,” Matthiessen observes, “but, as always with him, the significant thing to determine is his prevailing tone” (181). That Emerson’s prevailing tone is one of optimism, however, seems less a matter of ignorance and more of disposition. We might just as well ask if Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe lack a sense of benevolence, or of the religious affections that Coleridge in *Dejection* had consecrated as the “Joy that ne’er was given, / Save to the pure, and in their purest hour” (16.1.2: 699).

There is certainly some precedent for thinking that Edwards lacked this sense. In 1890, for example, the Reverend Joseph Crooker argued that Edwards had squandered his prodigious talent in a futile attempt to save the outdated faith of the Puritans, and that the sole value of his influence consisted in the fact that he provoked a reaction strong enough to hasten the eradication of his theology:

Jonathan Edwards stands before us as a melancholy example of a saintly character wasted by false dogma; of large abilities of both head and heart

turned to barren uses by a delusion which led him within the very borders of monomania. Seldom has there been a purer, simpler, more earnest, or more diligent life than that of Jonathan Edwards; but his efforts were ineffectual because he raised his arm against human nature. Yet his extreme statements of an old creed contributed toward that reaction which gave us a gentler and humaner faith. (172)

Likewise, in 1902, Mark Twain issued a condemnation of Edwards' *Freedom of the Will* that also found its impetus in a rejection of Calvinism:

All through the book is the glare of a resplendent intellect gone mad – a marvellous spectacle. No, not *all* through the book, the drunk does not come on till the last third, where what I take to be Calvinism and its God begins to show up and shine red and hideous in the glow from the fires of hell, their only right and proper adornment. By God I was ashamed to be in such company. (2: 720)

Yet for Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe, the characteristic skepticism of Calvinist theology, along with its grim view of human nature, provided the foundational elements of a darker Romanticism. That is, while Emerson attempts to invert the Calvinist scheme, affirming that instead of human depravity it is a lack of inspiration and self-knowledge that obstructs our discernment of the truth, these writers reverse this liberal inversion, suggesting that depravity is real even if Calvinism as a system is false. In either case, the upshot is the same: humans are somehow out of alignment with a set of spiritual or natural laws, the discernment of which is only possible for the regenerate elect, the true individuals; and like Edwards, all of these men knew that it was impossible to identify

these chosen few for certain, and hence impossible to know if an experience of rapture or revelation was truly inspired, or just another delusion of the unregenerate soul, which was destined to be forever excluded from the joy of realignment and harmonious union with the sovereign will of God.

To Edwards, the happiness of such ontological harmony consisted “in the perception of these three things: of the consent of being to its own being; of its own consent to being; and of being’s consent to being” (6: 338) – but the prospect of what for Edwards was simply the individual’s untroubled apperception of ontological consent became for Coleridge a reverential anxiety concerning the unknowable intentions of the omnipresent Being – an anxiety that he bequeathed, with varying results, to Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe. “Hast thou ever raised thy mind to the consideration of EXISTENCE, in and by itself, as the mere act of existing?” Coleridge asks these American readers of *The Friend*, “Hast thou ever said to thyself, thoughtfully, IT IS! heedless that in that moment whether it were a man before thee, or a flower, or a grain of sand? If thou hast indeed attained to this, thou wilt have felt the presence of a mystery, which must have fixed thy spirit in awe and wonder” (4.1: 514). Here, to apprehend Being is to encounter God:

The very words, There is nothing! or, There was a time, when there was nothing! are self-contradictory. There is that within us which repels the proposition with as full and instantaneous light, as if it bore evidence against the fact in the right of its own eternity.

Not TO BE, then, is impossible: TO BE incomprehensible. If thou hast mastered this intuition of absolute existence, though wilt have learnt

likewise, that it was this, and no other, which in the earlier ages seized the nobler minds, the elect amongst men, with a sort of sacred horror. This it was which first caused them to feel within themselves a something ineffably greater than their own individual nature. It was this which, raising them aloft, and projecting them to an ideal distance from themselves, prepared them to become the lights and awakening voices of other men, the founders of law and religion, the educators and foster-gods of mankind. The power, which evolved this idea of BEING, BEING in its essence, BEING limitless, comprehending its own limits in its dilatation, and condensing itself into its own apparent mounds – how shall we name it? The idea itself, which like a mighty billow at once overwhelms and bears aloft – what is it? Whence did it come? . . . In eminence of Being it IS! And he for whom it manifests itself in its adequate idea, dare as little arrogate it to himself as his own, can as little appropriate it either totally or by partition, as he can claim ownership in the breathing air, or make an enclosure in the cope of heaven. He bears witness of it to his own mind, even as he describes life and light: and, with the silence of light, it describes itself and dwells in *us* only as far as we dwell in *it*. The truths, which it manifests are such as it alone can manifest, and in all truth it manifests itself. By what name then canst thou call a truth so manifested? Is it not REVELATION? Ask thyself whether thou canst attach to that latter word any consistent meaning not included in the idea of the former. And

the manifesting power, the source and correlative of the idea thus
 manifested – is it not GOD? (4.1: 514-17)

As Richard Gravil observes, there are indeed “few more eloquent passages in Coleridge’s *The Friend* than this oft-quoted premonition of Heidegger’s great theme, the question of being” (130), and his claim that Poe had this passage in mind as he wrote the conclusion to *Eureka* is persuasive indeed.⁸⁴ For in the final paragraphs of the long philosophical essay that he referred to as a prose poem, Poe too had made a case for the absurdity of non-being: “Why we should not exist, is, *up to the epoch our Manhood*, of all queries the most unanswerable. Existence – self-existence – existence from all Time and to all Eternity – seems, up to the epoch of Manhood, a normal and unquestionable condition: – *seems, because it is*” (H 16: 312).

Yet the argument for the necessity of being and the impossibility of non-being can also be found in Edwards. Such an argument is certainly implied in Edwards’ repeated emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God – “and absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God” he writes in his *Personal Narrative* – and in the unpublished “Of Being,” Edwards even demonstrates the existence of an omnipotent and omnipresent being to his own satisfaction: “Indeed,” he concludes, “we can mean nothing else by ‘nothing’ but a state of absolute contradiction . . . we see it is necessary some being should eternally be” (6: 202). Coleridge’s argument for the apprehension of pure Being as

⁸⁴ There is also some precedent for reading this passage as an anticipation of Kierkegaard. As Barbara Rooke notes (4.1: 514n2), in *Coleridge as Critic* Herbert Read cites the first part of this passage (from “Hast thou . . .” to “their own individual nature.”) as a confirmation of Coleridge as an existentialist. Read’s comment on the passage itself is compelling indeed: “I cannot pursue these metaphysical speculations of Coleridge much further; I must content myself with pointing out that, writing before Kierkegaard was born, Coleridge had already formulated the terms of an existentialist philosophy – the *Angst* or sacred horror of nothingness, the Abyss or ‘chasm, which the moral being only . . . can fill up’ [4.1: 522-3n1], the life in the idea which ‘may be awakened, but cannot be given’, the divine impulse, ‘that the godlike alone can awaken’ [4.1: 524] (30).

an intuition that finds its conceptual correlate and source in God is also remarkably similar to the claims that Edwards had made in “The Mind” for God as the source of true ideas, as well the only genuine mode of existence:

After all that has been said and done, the only adequate definition of truth is the agreement of our ideas with existence. To explain what this existence is, is another thing. In abstract ideas, it is nothing but the ideas themselves; so their truth is their consistency with themselves. In things that are supposed to be without us, 'tis the determination, and fixed mode, of God's exciting ideas in us. So that truth in these things is an agreement of our ideas with that series in God. 'Tis existence, and that is all we can say. 'Tis impossible that we should explain and resolve a perfectly abstract and mere idea of existence; only we always find this, by running of it up, that God and real existence are the same.

Corol. Hence we learn how properly it may be said that God is, and that there is none else, and how proper are these names of the Deity: “Jehovah” and “I Am That I Am.” (6: 345)

Though Hawthorne was not particularly interested in philosophical argumentation of this kind, the notion of absolute truth as the facticity of an omnipresent and inscrutable God is consistent with his theology, which tends to place individuals in the peculiar position of having to bear responsibility for sins that they are by disposition not strong enough to resist; and without access to the intentions of Providence, sinners are left, like Hester, to wander “without a clew in the dark labyrinth of mind; now turned aside by an insurmountable precipice; now starting back from a deep chasm” (1: 166). The

provenance of such devout uncertainty can surely be found in the skeptical rigor of the Puritans, but Hawthorne's position was also grounded in a rationalist disdain of self-appointed seers, and of those who had all too readily misconstrued strident action and blithe confidence with divine inspiration. At the same time, his wary caricatures of Coleridge and Edwards suggest that he was also dissatisfied with the susceptibility to hypocrisy and monomania that seemed to inhere in those who were too scrupulous in theologico-philosophical matters.

Such existential sensitivity and clarity of vision, though less explicit in his published work, is actually quite typical of Emerson, who ultimately counterbalanced the buoyancy of his self-reliance with an uneasy apprehension of his existence. "Ghostlike we glide through nature," he writes, "and should not know our place again . . . It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made, that we exist" (3: 27, 43). As we may recall, to the Harold Bloom of *Agon*, Emerson's mind "is the mind of America . . . and the central concern of that mind was the American religion" (145). The American religion, however, must not only include the restlessness of Emerson's self-reliance, but also the forbidding eye of Hawthorne's inscrutable Providence; and both of these elements, as I have argued in this chapter, are attempts to strike a kind of balance between Coleridge's supernatural will and Edwards' theological determinism, and both of these attempts no doubt admit of a certain metaphysical darkness insofar as they acknowledge the dreadful immanence of human responsibility.

Nevertheless, the responses of Emerson and Hawthorne to the free will problem are relatively straightforward: Emerson sought to fuse Coleridge's insistence on the self-determining will with the unbreakable chain of causation, and Hawthorne decided to

believe in free will and Providence without worrying about the contradiction that doing so implied – and to be comfortable not knowing whether humans are really sinful in a theological sense or simply prone in some natural sense to the codification of laws by which they will not abide. For Poe and Melville, however, the implications of Coleridge's disagreement with Edwards produced a level of perplexity that exalted self-determination even as it indulged the suspicion that there is all too much that is beyond the power of the individual to control.

Chapter Four

Determinism and Self-Determination in the American Romantic Tradition

Part Two: Poe and Melville

Poe

With Him there being neither Past nor Future – with Him all being *Now* – do we not insult Him in supposing his laws so contrived as not to provide for every possible contingency – or, rather, what idea *can* we have of *any* possible contingency, except that it is at once a result and a manifestation of his laws?

– Poe, *Eureka*

In “Ligeia” (1838) Poe presents us with a haunting and intricate meditation on the question of individual agency. Nevertheless, few scholars have discussed this tale in terms of what it may offer in the way of commentary on the question of free will and theological determinism. The narrator’s recognition that Ligeia has been brought back to life, observes Leon Chai, “is significant above all not for what it asserts about the will but for what it implies concerning the nature of allegory and its relation to the mind that creates it” (28). Yet judging by the epigraph to the tale, which is most likely pseudonymous, Poe is primarily concerned with the darker possibilities and uncertainties of a supernatural will: “And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by

nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will” (*M* 2: 310).⁸⁵ Here, Poe introduces with deceptive simplicity the complex metaphysical question that the story poses: If, at its highest level of function, the human will becomes supernatural, as Coleridge had argued in *The Friend and Aids to Reflection*, then is it not possible that such a will could also transcend the laws of nature?

In *Eureka*, Poe makes a point to stress the difference between natural and supernatural law, and though he does not address whether or not God might choose to suspend or supersede the laws of nature (insofar as they are known by human observation), he does affirm that these laws must have their origin in the singular will of God, which is empirically unknowable:

That Nature and the God of Nature are distinct, no thinking being can long doubt . . . He who, divesting himself of prejudice, shall have the rare courage to think for himself, cannot fail to arrive, in the end, at the condensation of *laws* into *Law* – cannot fail of reaching the conclusion that *each law of Nature is dependent at all points upon all other laws*, and that all are but consequences of one primary exercise of the Divine Volition. (*H* 16: 254-5)

The distinctly Edwardsean hypothesis of “Ligeia,” then, is that if all the laws of nature are in fact consequences of an absolute volition to which the human will can by force of strength somehow gain access, then perhaps it would be possible for an individual to transcend the laws of nature so far as they are known, or to perform miracles – in this

⁸⁵ As Dawn B. Sova notes of the Glanvill epigraph in *The Critical Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*, “scholars have not located the source of the quotation, which Poe also integrates into the text of the story at two points. Many believe Poe made up the quotation and falsified attribution” (333).

case, a resurrection of the dead in the living body of one whose will was not strong enough to prevent such a possession.⁸⁶ Coleridge would no doubt have been horrified by this tale had he lived long enough to read it, though it is uncertain whether he would have been more upset with Poe's perversion of his theology or with the narrator's clear line of descent from the most infamous and indulgent aspects of his own – that is, Coleridge's – persona.

Indeed, that "Ligeia" is in many ways an encounter with Coleridge seems beyond doubt. As Richard Gravil remarks,

If the mariner-like epigraph betokens a mariner-like theme, a meditation upon Poe's version of "the one life," the next Coleridgean feature recalls a text concerned with a woman wailing for her demon lover, architectural extravaganzas, and the poet's desire to revive within him the haunting strains of an Abyssinian maid. Poe's opium-drenched narrator devotes several pages to recollecting the fading image of Ligeia. (133)

Poe's interest in Coleridge was for the most part based in an admiration not unlike Emerson's early praise, but it is also important to note that he reserved his highest esteem for Coleridge's poetry while affecting to dismiss his philosophical endeavors. For instance, in the revised preface to his *Poems* of 1831, Poe claims that he is unable to speak of Coleridge "but with reverence," yet he follows his exaltation of Coleridge's "towering intellect!" and "gigantic power!" with a lament "that such a mind should be

⁸⁶ Daniel Hoffman makes a similar point: "if death is but a failure of our will, then our will can triumph over death if only volition be strong enough – that is, as strong as God's" (254). Lawrence Stahlberg offers a dissenting opinion, suggesting that "the quotation at first seems to say that because of his weak will man succumbs to death, that if man had a stronger will he could maintain life in this world. But a closer examination discloses a meaning directly the opposite" (205). The closer examination that Stahlberg offers, based as it is on altering the language of the Glanvill epigraph, is not particularly convincing.

buried in metaphysics . . . In reading his poetry I tremble, like one who stands upon a volcano, conscious, from the very darkness bursting from the crater, of the fire and the light that are weltering below” (*H* 7: xlii).⁸⁷ Likewise, in 1845, he observes that “the author of ‘Aids to Reflection’ . . . aided Reflection to much better purpose in his ‘Genevieve’”, and then boldly proceeds to refute Coleridge’s famous distinction between the Imagination and the Fancy from the thirteenth chapter of the *Biographia Literaria*: “The Fancy as nearly creates as the imagination, and neither at all. Novel conceptions are merely unusual combinations. The mind of man can imagine nothing which does not exist – if it could, it would create not only ideally, but substantially – as do the thoughts of God” (*H* 12: 37). Of course such direct opposition only illustrates how important and influential Coleridge’s philosophical principles actually were to Poe, who had in 1836 acknowledged the significance of the *Biographia* (if not its ultimate value to him personally), as he needlessly campaigned for its publication in the United States, unaware of the fact that American editions had been issued both in 1817 and 1834: “It is, perhaps the most deeply interesting of the prose writings of Coleridge and affords a clearer view into his mental constitution than any other of his works. Why cannot some of our publishers undertake it?” (*H* 9: 52).⁸⁸

⁸⁷ The quotation is from the revised and correction version of the preface that Poe had entitled “Letter to B –,” which, as James A. Harrison notes, was printed “with the following note, in the second volume of the *Southern Literary Messenger* [1836]: ‘These detached passages form part of the preface to a small volume printed some years ago for private circulation. They have vigor and much originality – but of course we shall not be called upon to endorse all the writer’s opinions’” (*H* 7: xxxvn1).

⁸⁸ In the brief review of the collection itself, Poe reveals the extent of his affection for Coleridge. “We feel even a deeper interest in this book than in the late Table-Talk,” he writes, “But with us (we are not ashamed to confess it) the most trivial memorial of Coleridge is a treasure of inestimable price. He was indeed a ‘myriad-minded man,’ and ah, how little understood, and how pitifully vilified! . . . If there be any one thing more than another which stirs within us a deep spirit of indignation and disgust, it is that damnation of faint praise which so many of the Narcisi of critical literature have had the infinite presumption to breathe against the majesty of Coleridge – of Coleridge – the man to whose gigantic mind the proudest

Furthermore, as Jonathan Bate has pointed out, it was in the very same preface in which Poe lamented the metaphysical aspect of Coleridge's mind, and accused him of having gone "wrong by reason of his very profundity" (*H 7*: xxix) in the *Biographia* that he also plagiarized the philosophic definition of poetry from the fourteenth chapter of the same work. "A poem is that species of composition," Coleridge had written, "which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth" (7.2: 12).⁸⁹ And not only does Poe seem to have little problem making unacknowledged use of this definition, but he also makes an explicit claim to the definition as an opinion of his own. "A poem," he writes, "in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having for its *immediate* object, pleasure, not truth" (*H 7*: xliii). Yet given Coleridge's own habit of borrowing from other authors without acknowledgement, especially in the *Biographia*, we might say that Poe's plagiarism here illustrates his kinship with Coleridge, or perhaps even a kind of literary transmigration not unlike the supernatural transmigration of soul and body in "Ligeia." As Bate rather persuasively suggests, there is a sense in which plagiarizing Coleridge in this way "could be no finer homage . . . 'in my opinion' and 'in Coleridge's opinion' have become one and the same. The minds of the two poets have coalesced" (258).

intellects of Europe found it impossible not to succumb. And as no man was more richly-gifted with all the elements of mental renown, so none was more fully worthy of the love of every truly good man" (*H 9*: 51).

⁸⁹ Furthermore, when Poe goes on to declaim upon the importance of indefinite pleasure in poetry, and therefore of music as "*essential*, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception . . . What was meant by the invective against him who had no music in his soul?" (*H 7*: xliii), he is no doubt indebted to Coleridge's affirmation of "delight in richness and sweetness of sound . . . as a highly favorable promise in the compositions of a young man. 'The man that hath not music in his soul' can indeed never be a genuine poet'" (7.2: 20). The giveaway, as Bate notes, is Poe's duplication of Coleridge's misquotation: "the allusion is to Shakespeare, who is common property, but Shakespeare's Lorenzo says that 'The man that hath no music in himself' cannot be trusted (*Merchant of Venice*, v, i, 83-8). The slippage from 'himself' to 'his soul' reveals that Poe is the one who is not to be trusted" (257).

“Ligeia,” however, is not only an encounter with the familiar tropes of Coleridge’s poetic output, but also with the philosophy that he expounded in his prose works. That Poe purported not to believe in Coleridge’s conception of the Imagination as a creative power that is “essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead” (7.1: 304) is not surprising given the views that he came to express in “The Philosophy of Composition,” though he did exalt the Imagination as more “loftily employed” (H 12: 38) than the Fancy, and even acknowledged that “as often analogously happens in physical chemistry, so not unfrequently does it occur” in the pure Imagination’s selection of harmonious arrangement, “that the admixture of two elements will result in a something that shall have nothing of the quality of one of them – or even nothing of the qualities of either. The range of Imagination is therefore, unlimited. Its materials extend throughout the Universe” (H 12: 38-9).

This principle of infinite extension was also how Poe conceived of God in *Eureka*. “What you call The Universe is but his present expansive existence” (H 16: 314), he observes – which is to say that, in spite of himself, Poe echoed Coleridge’s affirmation of the Imagination “as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (7.1: 304). And in “The Poetic Principle,” Poe even adopts the idealist conception of creation that he had forsworn in “The Philosophy of Composition,” as he echoes Coleridge’s portrayal of the poet as the one who “brings the whole soul of man into activity” (7.2: 15-6) with the rather similar dictum that “the manifestation of the [Poetic] Principle is always found in *an elevating excitement of the Soul*” (H 14: 290). His pompous and probably ironic endorsement of a wholly mechanistic theory of creation in “The Philosophy of Composition” is no doubt worth remembering (if not accepting),

as is his penchant for literary gamesmanship,⁹⁰ yet given the unmistakable influence and implementation of Coleridge's philosophical principles, as well as his resistance to the loftier metaphysical claims of that system, the position that Poe ultimately comes to occupy is one of frustrated realism, by which I mean a supernaturalism that is finally too skeptical (or, say, natural) to believe in itself – and nowhere is this more apparent than in “Ligeia,” where the supernatural will is depicted as a kind of perversion, or perhaps as a delusion of the cloistered mind.⁹¹

Yet as we saw at the close of the last chapter, Poe's vision of the universe as the infinite expansion and contraction of God is indebted not only to Coleridge's conception of “BEING limitless, comprehending its own limits in its dilatation, and condensing itself into its own apparent mounds” (4.1: 514), but also to Edwards' affirmation “that God is, and that there is none else” (6: 345). And in Poe's prediction “that, at last, all would be drawn into the substance of *one stupendous central orb already existing*” (H 16: 302), we can also trace the hand of Edwards, who in *Concerning the End for which God Created the World* (1765) had supposed that all things would find their culmination in a return to their original unity in God, who is “the last end, the final term, to which is their ultimate tendency and aim” (8: 534). Like Emerson and Hawthorne, then, in Poe we find that the influence of Coleridge is mediated by the legacy of Edwardsean theology, which in its emphasis on the endless depravity of humankind also gave rise to a relentless skepticism,

⁹⁰ As Rachel Polonsky observes, to Charles Baudelaire the “The Philosophy of Composition” was something of “an entertainment, a kind of extrovert display” (46).

⁹¹ Cavell has also remarked upon Poe's use of perversion in philosophy, though he takes a different tack than I do here: “It strikes me that in Poe's tales the thought is being worked out that, now anyway, philosophy exists only as a parody of philosophy, or rather as something indistinguishable from the perversion of philosophy, as if to overthrow the reign of reason, the reason that philosophy was born to establish, is not alone the task of, let us say, poetry but is now openly the genius or mission of philosophy itself” (*IQO* 121).

or call it anxiety, in terms of knowing the state of anyone's soul, especially one's own. Yet perhaps even more than Emerson, Poe accepts and extends the tenets of Edwardsean rationalism and skepticism. Again, this is especially clear in "Ligeia," where Poe's supposition of a supernatural will is undercut not only by the horrific nature of its instantiation, but also by the unreliability of the narrator. Since at this time Emerson was still far from elucidating his Edwardsean suspicion of the supernatural, as he did in "Fate" (1860), we may also note that Poe is the first of the American Romantics to explicitly register the significance of the tension between Coleridge and Edwards, which ultimately reaches the point of existential ambivalence in Melville. For Poe, however, Coleridge's supernatural self-determination was more fantasy than possibility – a fact that becomes apparent in his treatment of the issue in "Ligeia."

Though Poe himself considered Ligeia's supernatural attainment as only a partial achievement, in 1839 he acknowledged that he had been unable to develop this element of the vision to his own satisfaction. "One point I have not fully carried out," he wrote to Philip Pendleton Cooke, "I should have intimated that the *will* did not perfect its intention – there should have been a relapse – a final one – and Ligeia (who had only succeeded in so much as to convey an idea of the truth to the narrator) should at length be entombed as Rowena – the bodily alterations having gradually faded away" (*PL* 1: 118).⁹² Such an interest in the imperfectability of the will, however, suggests the same troubled awareness of inconstancy and mutability exhibited by Emerson, who was so keenly attuned to the interminable faithlessness that plagues human resolutions with bouts of recidivism, and

⁹² As Thomas Ollive Mabbot observes, though Poe claimed that he would "suffer "Ligeia" to remain as it is" (*PL* 1: 118), he "was to change his mind five years later. Then he inserted in the story, as a composition of the heroine, his own powerful poem 'The Conqueror Worm' (written in 1842 and first published in *Graham's* for January 1843) – a plain indication that the human will was too feeble to enable Ligeia to win" (*M* 2: 307).

cheapens revelation with the inevitable onset of banal consciousness. “Alas for this infirm faith,” Emerson writes in “Circles” (1841), “this will not strenuous, this vast ebb of a vast flow!” (2: 182). Three years later, his tone grows even darker: “Of what use to make heroic vows of amendment, if the same old law-breaker is to keep them? What cheer can the religious sentiment yield, when that is suspected to be secretly dependent on the seasons of the year, and the state of the blood?” (3: 30). Like Emerson, Poe aims his dissatisfaction both at the physical limitations imposed by the natural world, and the inability of the individual to transcend them. The repetition of the last line of the Glanvill quotation – “*Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save through the weakness of his feeble will*” (M 2: 319-20) – illustrates the extent to which he places his emphasis on the volitional infirmity of the individual in “Ligeia,” but even as Poe’s fascination with a supernatural will is the central feature of the tale, he nevertheless portrays the desire for such a will as a kind of monomania, or an unhealthy refusal to accept death as life’s natural terminus.⁹³

At the same time, Poe’s apparent belief in the godlike quality of the human soul makes this proscriptive reading difficult to wholly accept. For, according to Poe, the “impossibility of any one’s soul feeling itself inferior to another; the intense, overwhelming dissatisfaction and rebellion at the thought; – these, with the omniprevalent aspirations at perfection” are intuitive proofs

⁹³ Seizing upon this latter element, John B. Humma argues that “Ligeia’s death translates as the despair of the narrator himself in the face of his own mortality” (59), and subsequently concludes that Poe, like Blake, essentially conceived of the human will as evil. If, as Humma suggests, the narrator’s opium-influenced vision of “three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid” that seem to fall from an “invisible spring” (M 2: 235) into the Lady Rowena’s goblet is viewed metaphorically “on the subjective level, as a poison distilled by the noxious influence of will upon the room’s atmosphere, then the pieces fall together. Will is the murderer. *Ipso facto*, will as evil is the meaning of “Ligeia”” (62).

far surpassing what Man terms demonstration . . . that each soul is, in part, its own God – its own Creator – in a word, that God – the material *and* spiritual God – *now* exists solely in the diffused Matter and Spirit of the Universe; and that the regathering of this diffused Matter and Spirit will be but the re-constitution of the purely Spiritual and Individual God. (*H* 16: 313)

Furthermore, it is only through this pantheistic – and, in many ways, Edwardsean - recognition of omnipresent irradiation from an absolute unity, Poe maintains, that “we comprehend the riddles of Divine Injustice – of Inexorable Fate. In this view alone the existence of Evil becomes intelligible; but in this view it becomes more – it becomes endurable” (*H* 16: 313). Consequently, if the human will *is* evil, it is merely a preordained circumstance of the diffusion from absolute unity that is carried out according to the Divine Volition, in which the individual soul participates, though without a full consciousness that its actions are aligned with the all-encompassing intention of the original Being. But where does this leave us on the question of Coleridge’s supernatural self-determination?

Since Poe thought the Universe to be simply God’s “present expansive existence” (*H* 16: 314), it is not particularly surprising that he invokes “Inexorable Fate” (*H* 16: 313) without troubling to make clear what he then means when he claims that the intuitive knowledge of our collective status as so many scattered parts of God will bring us to a recognition of our own agency in the tragedies that befall us: “Our souls no longer rebel at a *Sorrow* which we ourselves have imposed upon ourselves, in furtherance of our own purposes – with a view – if even a futile view – to the extension of our own joy” (*H* 16:

313). At the same time, it is clear that Poe also views variegated existence itself as somehow imperfect, or inauthentic, when held up against the original wholeness of things. The “Newtonian Law of Gravity,” he speculates, is illustrative of a “réaction of an exercise of the Divine Volition temporarily overcoming a difficulty. This difficulty is that of forcing the normal into the abnormal – of impelling that whose originality, and therefore whose rightful condition, was *One*, to take upon itself the wrongful condition of the *Many*” (*H* 16: 263). That is to say, individual identity is a kind of evil in and of itself, though it is an evil that is apparently willed by the Divine Volition. Thus free will of the Coleridgean kind is almost certainly out of the question. For Poe, God “feels his life through an infinity of imperfect pleasures – the partial and pain-intermingled pleasures of those inconceivably numerous things which you designate as his creatures, but which are really but infinite individualizations of Himself.” Supernatural self-determination, then, is the status of the universe as a whole, but individual agents – or creatures, as Poe has it – are not capable of acting in opposition to this sweeping intentionality so much as they are “more or less conscious Intelligences; conscious, first, of a proper identity; conscious, secondly and by faint indeterminate glimpses, of an identity with the Divine Being of whom we speak – of an identity with God” (*H* 16: 314).

In the case of “Ligeia,” it seems that Poe could very well be making something like a Transcendentalist argument for the elevated potentiality of a will that has become more fully conscious of its identity with God.⁹⁴ It could also be that he is mocking this argument, though his remark to Cooke that he would have liked to have more clearly demonstrated that the “the *will* did not perfect its intention,” and that the Lady Ligeia

⁹⁴ This seems to have been the direction of Cooke’s interpretation. “I of course ‘took’ your ‘idea’ throughout,” he writes to Poe, “your intent is to tell a tale of the ‘mighty will’ contending with and finally vanquishing Death” (*M* 2: 307).

“had only succeeded in so much as to convey an idea of the truth to the narrator” (*PL* 1: 118), suggests that he actually took the matter quite seriously. That is, though Mabbott is certainly right to say that Poe “did not expect readers to believe the story after they put it down” (*M* 2: 307), it is apparent that he was keenly interested in the potential power of a will that had increased its proximity to God, as is illustrated by the narrator’s enthrallment with the supernatural vigor of the Lady Ligeia: “An *intensity* in thought, action, or speech, was possibly, in her, a result, or at least an index, of that gigantic volition which, during our long intercourse, failed to give other and more immediate evidence of its existence” (*M* 2: 315).

That the possibility of a will that could effect a bodily transformation is by turns horrifying and intriguing also reveals some measure of Poe’s grisly fascination with the topic. Though he of course knew that resurrection was impossible, there was also a part of him that yearned for a power of mind that, as he had written in 1845, could “create not only ideally, but substantially – as do the thoughts of God” (*H* 12: 37); and, in point of fact, he did believe that the individual will would eventually achieve such a power when it finally came to a full consciousness of its identity with God. “Think that the sense of individual identity will be gradually merged in the general consciousness,” he writes,

That Man, for example, ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah. In the meantime bear in mind that all is Life – Life – Life within Life – the less within the greater, and all within the *Spirit Divine*. (*H* 16: 314-15)

Poe's faith in the ultimate union of the individual with God, however, was no doubt at vast odds with his actual experience of the world as it was.⁹⁵ In other words, Poe is both attracted to the potentially absolute power of the will as it reaches its culmination in a complete fusion with the will of God, and painfully aware of the actual limitations and strictures on the individual will in its consciously disconnected and finite state; and both of these elements are adduced in the narrator's observation of Ligeia as "longing with so wildly a desire for the life which was now fleeing away" (*M* 2: 317).

The influence of Coleridge, then, was not enough to overcome Poe's intrinsic skepticism and faith in empirical science, which always militated against any and all conceptions of the supernatural outside the Divine Will of God – which was, in theory, capable of anything. As Joan Dayan suggests, in this respect we may see Poe as "a philosophical Calvinist, who understood as did Edwards our severe relation to an immutable cosmic plan, and as a result had to replace blind faith with a difficult, dark skepticism" (7). Indeed, that Poe did not become wholly Coleridgean is certainly due in large part to the influence and legacy of Edwards, whose abiding skepticism, faith in science, and belief in the absolute power of God, Poe nearly seems to have adopted wholesale. The 1829 edition of the first volume of *The Works of President Edwards*, as Dayan tells us, would have introduced Poe to the empiricism of Locke as implemented by Edwards; and there is indeed "a striking connection between the Edwards who wrote 'The Mind' and 'Notes on Natural Science' and the Poe who at the end of his life wrote *Eureka* and read God's plot into the processes of mind and nature" (21). Here, however, it is perhaps most significant to note that, like Edwards, Poe was unable to accept the

⁹⁵ In David Lyttle's view, Poe "was torn between the theoretic absolute and concrete experience, two worlds which at different times accommodated and negated each other, but neither of which represents the 'real' Poe" (50).

notion of a self-determining will. This is no doubt why the “gigantic volition” (*M* 2: 315) of the Lady Ligeia is something of a nightmarish fantasy. If individuals could gain access to the Divine Volition, and yet retain their individuality, the result, as Poe suggests, would be a grotesque amplification of unbridled human desire. For it was only through the gradual receding of the identity of the individual – “Man . . . ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man” (*H* 16: 314) – or what Edwards would have called self-denial or submission to the will of God, that one could even begin to approach an identity with the Divine Volition. Yet, as Edwards had also argued, since we cannot truly know whether or not someone has submitted their soul to God, and become possessed of gracious affections;⁹⁶ and since those whom God has promised to save are assured of salvation regardless of past or future sins;⁹⁷ it could very well be that a firsthand experience of Lady Ligeia’s “gigantic volition” (*M* 2: 315) – if it were indeed an instantiation of God’s special Providence – would seem both dreadful and miraculous in the same manner as the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Christ. And the exercise of true grace, as Edwards describes it in a sermon of 1744, provides an eerie supernatural gloss on Poe’s tale:

True grace is no dull, inactive, ineffectual principle; it is a powerful thing;

there is an exceeding energy in it. And the reason is, that God is in it; it is

⁹⁶“Though it be plain that Christ has given rules to all Christians, to enable ‘em to judge of professors of religion, whom they are concerned with, so far as is necessary for their own safety, and to prevent their being led into a snare by false teachers, and false pretenders to religion; and though it be also beyond doubt, that the Scriptures do abound with rules, which may be very serviceable to ministers, in counseling and conducting souls committed to their care, in things appertaining to their spiritual and eternal state; yet, ‘tis also evident, that it was never God’s design to give us any rules, by which we may certainly know, who of our fellow professors are his, and to make a full and clear separation between sheep and goats: but that on the contrary, it was God’s design to reserve this to himself, as his prerogative” (2: 193).

⁹⁷“God has promised that whosoever believes in Christ shall be saved: if he has once believed in Christ, he is sure of heaven; and it is impossible he should miss of it, how many sins soever he has been guilty of before, and though he falls into great sin afterwards” (14: 429)

a divine principle, a *participation of the divine nature*, and a communication of divine life, of the life of a risen Savior, who exerts himself in the hearts of the saints, "after the power of an endless life" [Hebrews 7:16]. They that have true grace in them, "they live"; but not by their own life; "but Christ lives in them" [Galatians 2:20]. (25: 91)

Nevertheless, both Edwards and Coleridge would have rejected the notion of the Lady participating in the Divine Nature as blasphemous and opposed to all good sense in terms of how God might choose to make his presence known; and yet both would also have granted that the ways of Providence, as well as the status of individual souls, are known only to God. As Coleridge affirms in chapter 7 of the *Biographia*, "no errors of the understanding can be morally arraigned unless they have proceeded from the *heart* – But whether they be such, no man can be certain in the case of another, scarcely perhaps even in his own." Yet notwithstanding this, since the true affections of the heart are only known by God, knowing for certain who is condemned is just as impossible as knowing who is saved. "Hence it follows by inevitable consequence," Coleridge concludes, "that man may perchance determine, *what* is an heresy; but God only can know, *who* is an heretic" (7.1: 122).

Thus it is by deploying what both Coleridge and Edwards agreed upon as unknowable, as well as what the Transcendentalists affirmed as possible, that Poe's tale pinpoints the theological and philosophical problems by which American thinkers were increasingly troubled in the nineteenth century.⁹⁸ Indeed, the ambiguity surrounding the

⁹⁸ Maintaining his own reading of Poe as endlessly torn between the competing claims of individuality and universality, Lyttle claims that the Lady Ligeia "is an archetype of the darkness of human experience, of the gigantic drive of a human being to exist as a unique one at the expense of longing for Unity . . . But stronger even than she is the destiny of all entities to return to primal unity in the phase of regathering" (50).

true being of the Lady Ligeia, or the status of her soul, makes it unclear whether she is finally to be thought of as a heretical sorceress or an antinomian saint. The unreliable narrator's impression that the arcane knowledge of the Lady Ligeia might lead him "to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden!" (*M* 2: 316), as well as his apprehension of her "longing so wildly for the life which was now fleeing away" (*M* 2: 317) admit of both readings. Likewise, that the life of the Lady Rowena is forfeited, and that the Lady Ligeia may take an active part in her death, could be viewed as an instance of murderous depravity on the part of a ghoulish individual will, or as the exercise of one whose will has transcended individuality and taken up residency inside the incomprehensible and sovereign will of God. In the case of the latter, the will of the individual would, as Coleridge put it in his marginal notes to Richard Field's *Of the Church* (1635), "cease to be creaturely" (12.2: 676) as it achieved synchronicity with God through a resignation of its natural character, and the Lady Rowena's death would no longer be murder, but rather the divine will of God, whose ways are not our ways. As Edwards himself observes in *Original Sin*: "It is needless here to particularly inquire, whether God has not a sovereign right to set bounds to the lives of his own creatures, be they sinful or not; and as he gives lives so to take it away when he pleases. Or how far God has a right to bring extreme suffering and calamity on an innocent moral agent" (3: 206). Moreover, since we cannot know the origin or true nature of Ligeia's apparent power, it is impossible to say for certain whether the tale itself is a gothic parody that aims to expose the absurdity of Transcendentalist dogma, or a more serious inquiry into the nature of the will and the dread uncertainty of attempting to tell the difference between sinners and saints – or both.

In so explicitly posing the theologico-epistemological difficulties associated with the uncertainty of God's relationship to humankind and the unknowable nature of true grace, Poe stands at the helm of the more unsettling meditations that come to the fore in the latter half of the nineteenth century – yet even in anticipating the darker ruminations of Melville and the existential crises of American naturalism, Poe simultaneously articulates and interrogates the philosophical underpinnings of Coleridge's ontologically-driven, intuitive faith with the acuity of an Edwardsean skeptic. In this respect, Poe can seem essentially multivalent, but as John Serio notes, he also “reflects the dual heritage of the American Puritan tradition.” That is, as an idealist who was rigorously attentive to the harsh realities of the empirical world, Poe's rich invocations of the supernatural “relate him, on the one hand, to the Puritan mystical strain which manifests itself in the transcendentalists;” at the same time, Serio continues, “his depiction of the terror of human guilt and his probing into the dark underside of life, stemming from the Puritan sense of innate depravity and original sin, relate him, on the other hand, to Hawthorne and Melville” (92).

That Poe's idealist faith is tempered with the darkness of Edwardsean skepticism, however, is not so much an indication of ambivalence or of an underlying undecidability at the core of his system as it is an index of the divided inheritance of American thinkers in nineteenth century. Drawn to the rigor of Edwardsean theology with its transient raptures, as well as to the supernatural reveries of Coleridge's poetry and his subsequent turn to philosophical prose, Poe is even twice divided. Unlike Emerson, who was predominantly a pragmatic essayist (albeit a philosophically elusive one), and Hawthorne, who did not care to delve into theological argumentation, Poe is nearly equal

parts Edwards and Coleridge. He seems to have sided with Edwards on the question of a self-determining will, but his affirmation of “Inexorable Fate” (*H* 16: 313) is unmistakably colored by his longing for humankind to achieve a perception of its own divinity, to become capable, as Coleridge puts it, “of a quickening inter-communion with the Divine Spirit” (9: 217). The hope that such inter-communion can be achieved, however, is beleaguered by the Edwardsean anxiety that moments of apparent rapture or supernatural insight were prideful delusions, as in “Ligeia,” where not only the supernatural will is itself a potential delusion, but the meaning of its manifestation is no farther from miracle than it is from menace.

Melville

He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us.

– Hawthorne, writing of Melville in a notebook entry of 1856

Readers hoping to make a connection between Coleridge and Melville have never had to look too far: Melville himself points the way in Chapter 42 of *Moby-Dick* with Ishmael’s famous digression on “The Whiteness of the Whale.”⁹⁹ Here, attention is not only given to the “transcendent horrors” of the “white bear of the poles, and the white

⁹⁹ Scholarship on the relationship between these two, though scant, dates at least as far back as Morse Peckham’s brief comments on the subject in “Hawthorne and Melville as European Authors” (1966): “Who knows what precipitated Melville into the Romantic problems? By 1850 it was too late for a man who had read at all in Romantic literature, as Melville had, to experience the breakdown of the Enlightenment entirely independently and to arrive at Romantic conceptions unaided. Wherever he turned in what was to him modern literature he was bound to encounter them, and he turned, I am convinced, particularly to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and to *Sartor Resartus*” (58).

shark of the tropics,” but also, as it turns out, to the striking whiteness of the albatross, or goney. “Bethink thee of the albatross,” Ishmael muses, “whence come those clouds of spiritual wonderment and pale dread, in which that white phantom sails in all imaginations? Not Coleridge first threw that spell; but God’s great, unflattering laureate, Nature” (6: 190).¹⁰⁰ Then, in a lengthy note appended to this passage, he goes on to explain why it is that his own “mystical impressions” of the albatross are in no way indebted to Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

I remember the first albatross I ever saw. It was during a prolonged gale, in waters hard upon the Antarctic seas. From my forenoon watch below, I ascended to the over-clouded deck; and there, dashed upon the main hatches, I saw a regal, feathery thing of unspotted whiteness, and with a hooked, Roman bill sublime. At intervals, it arched forth its vast archangel wings, as if to embrace some holy ark. Wondrous flutterings and throbbings shook it. Though bodily unharmed, it uttered cries, as some king’s ghost in supernatural distress. Though its inexpressible, strange eyes, methought I peeped to secrets which took hold of God. Long I gazed at that prodigy of plumage. I cannot tell, can only hint, the things that darted through me then. But at last I awoke: and turning, asked a sailor what bird was this. A goney, he replied. Goney! I never had heard that name before; is it conceivable that this glorious thing is utterly unknown to men ashore! never! But some time after, I learned that goney was some seaman’s name for albatross. So that by no possibility could Coleridge’s

¹⁰⁰ All references to Melville, unless otherwise noted, are cited parenthetically by volume and page number to *The Writings of Herman Melville*.

wild Rhyme have had aught to do with those mystical impressions which were mine, when I saw that bird upon our deck. For neither had I then read the Rhyme, nor knew the bird to be an albatross. Yet, in saying this, I do but indirectly burnish a little brighter the noble merit of the poem and the poet. (6: 190)

Though clearly not as egregious as Poe's plagiarism of the *Biographia*, Ishmael's rigorous denial of any possible influence of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* on his elevated awareness of the special significance of the albatross reverberates with Coleridge's own refusal to properly acknowledge his debt to German Idealism.¹⁰¹ Indeed, a notebook entry written in December of 1804, Coleridge admits that in the preface to his "Metaphys[ical] Works" he should instruct his audience to "read Tetens, Kant, Fichte, &c – & there you will trace or if you are on the hunt, track me." Yet the mere mention of these philosophers prompts him to explain how, instead of influencing him directly, these men just happen to have struck upon the same thoughts as he arrived at on his own. "Why then not acknowledge your obligations step by step?" he asks himself. In his answer, however, he claims that the similarities are in fact coincidental, that the ideas he seems to have taken from other thinkers "had been mine," as he writes, "formed, & full formed in my own mind, before I had ever heard of these Writers . . . & lastly, let me say, because

¹⁰¹ Gravil supposes that "Melville as pasticheur must have noted with some glee that remarkable sentence in the ninth chapter of *Biographia*: 'all the main and fundamental ideas [of Schelling's system of transcendental idealism] were born and matured in my mind before I had ever seen a single page of the German philosopher' [7.1: 161], a sentence that appropriates the leading ideas of one who is, after all, 'a great and original genius'" [7.1: 162] (150).

(I am proud perhaps but) I seem to know, that much of the matter remains my own, and that the Soul is *mine*” (CN 2: 2375).¹⁰²

Ironically, then, it is by virtue of attempting to play down or disguise their indebtedness that both Melville’s narrator and Poe (and to a lesser degree, Emerson) reveal the extent of their respective debts to Coleridge, as well as an essential likeness of literary character insofar as they exhibit certain qualities of the Coleridgean plagiarist. The clear difference is that Melville may very well be conscious of his narrator’s evasions. For if we take a closer look at the appropriation of the albatross, we see that the obvious influence of Coleridge’s poem is not only signalled by Ishmael’s impulse to mention Coleridge by name and then to deny any possible influence, but also, and more significantly, by the fact that the albatross seems to hold the same function for him as it does for the Ancient Mariner.

Their narratives also share an obvious resemblance: in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the albatross approaches the Mariner’s ship “through the snow-fog” (16.1.1: 377) after the ship has been “drawn by a storm toward the south pole” (16.1.1: 375), while Ishmael encounters the albatross “in waters hard upon the Antarctic seas” (6: 190).

¹⁰² On balance, however, Patrick Keane’s comment on this passage is instructive: “Whatever self-justification and defensive track covering may be going on here, this private note is not to be reduced to a pilferer’s rationalization’s; there is too much vestigial truth in the statement for it to be dismissed – as there is in the remarks of Emerson (quoted in my own Preface) about a man of genius, when he ‘thinks happily’ and finds ‘keen delight’ in the thoughts of others that seem the garments ‘in which my own thought is pleased to dress itself,’ finding ‘liberty and glory and ‘no foot-track in the field he traverses’’ (27-8). If Ishmael is speaking for Melville, the same might also be said of his explanation, though I would suggest that there are distinctions to be made between the guarded denials and evasions of Coleridge and Poe, the potential critical awareness of Melville, and the more amiable acknowledgments of Emerson, who did not have a particularly difficult time acknowledging his debts, and who viewed Coleridge’s explanations of his own indebtedness as disingenuous: “Coleridge loses by Dequincey, but more by his own concealing uncandid acknowledgement of debt to Schelling. Why could not he have said generously like Goethe, I owe all? As soon as one gets so far above pride, as to say all truth that might come from him & that now does come from him as truth & not as *his* truth, as soon as he acknowledges that all is suggestion, then he may be indebted without shame to all” (JMN 5: 59).

Likewise, while the mariners hail the albatross “in God’s name” (16.1.1: 377), and attribute to it the ontological status of “a Christian soul” (16.1.1: 377), Ishmael also believes the bird to be not only of divine origin, but also of an especial holy significance that allowed the bird direct access to heaven. In his description of the creature, the albatross “arched forth its vast archangel wings, as if to embrace some holy ark,” and through the eyes of the bird he recalls that he seems to have “peeped to secrets which took hold of God.” Further, though he notes that the captain of the ship “made a postman” of the bird by “tying a lettered, leathern tally round its neck,” he imagines that the “leathern tally, meant for man, was taken off in Heaven, when the white fowl flew to join the wing-folding, the invoking, and adoring cherubim!” (165). Ishmael and the Ancient Mariner are also guilty of a kind of injustice to the animal: infamously, the Ancient Mariner shoots the albatross with a crossbow for no apparent reason, and Ishmael seems to acknowledge himself as complicit in the capture of the bird “with a treacherous hook and line, as the fowl floated on the sea” (6: 190) and its subsequent confinement to the deck of the ship. That both of these accounts feature a guilty recollection of human cruelty toward this animal also registers the broad influence of the Quaker sentiment advanced by Woolman, whose *Journal*, as we may recall, includes his account of killing a mother robin as a young boy and a subsequent reflection that “to say we love God as unseen and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature moving by His life, or by life derived from Him, was a contradiction in itself” (28).¹⁰³

¹⁰³ There is no evidence that Melville read, or did not read, Woolman’s *Journal* – yet that it is the Quaker Starbuck who makes the lone impassioned objection to Ahab’s mad quest is surely significant, and it is clear that Melville was interested in the philosophical principles of Quaker belief. As Wynn M. Goering observes, “Melville had a detailed knowledge of Quaker thought and practice and was drawn to the Quaker pacifism of his day” (519).

For both Coleridge and Melville, then, the albatross becomes an emissary of God and a vision of holy dread, and unlike the other instances of whiteness in Ishmael's catalogue of the various manifestations of this color, only the albatross and "the White Steed of the Prairies" (165) possess the "strange glory" and majesty that keeps their own whiteness from approaching that "elusive something . . . which strikes more panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood" (164). The maddening inscrutability of the whale's whiteness, however, illustrates Melville's much deeper involvement with the same problem of free will and theological determinism that so troubled Coleridge.¹⁰⁴ Much of this shared involvement also has to do with the appeal that pantheism had for both writers, though as Leon Chai notes, in Melville's case this appeal may have resulted in the development of a system somewhat distinct from that of Spinoza: "For Melville . . . pure being precludes all trace of either thought or consciousness. Ahab's evocation in *Moby-Dick* of the blind, unconscious force that pervades the world and manifests itself in the White Whale is but another expression of the same belief" (296).¹⁰⁵ Yet Ahab's famous statement of purpose in "The Quarter-Deck" seems to challenge this absolute view. "Sometimes I think there's naught beyond," he muses, "But 'tis enough . . . That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me" (164).

¹⁰⁴ Though it is not my purpose to pursue the significance of the whale's whiteness here, there is perhaps some analogue or precedent for Ishmael's impressions of the color to be found not only in Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, but also in Coleridge's *Christabel*, where Geraldine first appears "Drest in a silken robe of White" (l. 60), and later "Puts on her silken Vestments white, / And tricks her Hair in a lovely Plight, / And nothing doubting of her Spell / Awakens the Lady Christabel" (ll. 364-5).

¹⁰⁵ In Spinoza's system, as Chai rightly observes, "the element of pure being is also that of thought: the One Substance contains all attributes (hence all things) within itself because to assert all things (to be all things, to sustain all things in their existence) is the same as the thinking of all things" (296).

For Ahab, moreover, the inability to know whether natural forces are manifestations of a divine intentionality or simply a blind mechanism is a moot point: the perceived antagonism of the white whale is unacceptable either way. In this sense, Sanford E. Marovitz's summation of Melville's notion of Being is perhaps a bit closer to the mark: "Variously stimulated, frustrated, and disgusted by diverse and often conflicting viewpoints, Melville employed the word *Being* ambivalently, manifesting his confusion when the moral and religious Truths he longed to accept conflicted with the empirical truths that belied them" (11). In short, Melville simply could not decide what he believed, though it was not so much a matter of not knowing as it was one of knowing all too well what he could not know. Analogous in an important sense to Edwards' difficulty in attributing the origins of evil to God, Melville seems to apprehend the fact that the argument for causal determinism renders the difference between an intelligent creator and a blind, mechanistic Nature completely irrelevant, which is what renders Ahab's hatred of the whale pointless and self-defeating.

That is, given that the conditions of human life can often be quite hostile, and that, as Edwards observes, "whatsoever begins to be, which before was not, must have a cause why it then begins to exist" (1: 181), it does not matter if the order of things is designed by God to include evil, or if the unconscious laws of nature have conspired to create a species of being that is averse to accepting absolute meaninglessness. In both cases, Melville finds himself presented with the apparent fact that, from the very beginning, the profound unhappiness, anguish, and uncertainty of the human condition has been inevitable, and his use of the word Being tends to reflect this existential uneasiness. As he writes to Hawthorne in 1851,

By visable truth, we mean than apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him . . . And perhaps, after all, there is *no* secret . . . We incline to think that God cannot explain His own secrets, and that He would like a little information upon certain points Himself. We mortals astonish Him as much as He us. But it is this *Being* of the matter;¹⁰⁶ there lies the knot with which we choke ourselves. As soon as you say *Me*, a *God*, a *Nature*, so soon you jump from your stool and hang from the beam. Yes, that word is the hangman. Take God out of the dictionary, and you would have Him in the street. (14: 186)

Vacillating between the possibility of there being no absolute condition or actuality to apprehend, and the possibility of an immanent and ontologically accessible God, Melville ultimately expresses his admiration for Hawthorne's refusal to make an affirmation either way, which is no doubt one of the more salient characteristics of Hawthorne's contentment with Being as it is without concern for how, or in what way, it actually is. "There is the grand truth about Nathaniel Hawthorne," Melville proclaims, "He says NO! in thunder; but the Devil himself cannot make him say *yes*" (14: 186).

Melville's admiration for Hawthorne's ability to remain untroubled by such metaphysical concerns likely even crossed the line into envy. That is, given his own profound uncertainty, the ease with which Hawthorne affirmed Providence while passing over the free will problem must have seemed nearly transcendent. Uncannily and

¹⁰⁶ Commenting upon the possible variants for this peculiar phrase – "it is this *Being* of the matter" – Lynn Horth notes the following: "*Davis and Gilman conjectured that matters or that maddens (but adopted neither) speculating that Julian Hawthorne read M's that as of the and that he did not recognize M's final s both of which are possible and understandable mistranscriptions of M's hand*" (14: 187)

existentially troubled in the same fashion as Coleridge, whose *Biographia*, as Sanford E. Marovitz observes, he read “at least two and a half years before he wrote to Hawthorne of sovereign natures and *Being* early in 1851” (18), Melville used fiction as a medium in which to further delve into the questions surrounding both causal and theological determinism, and the possibility of free will.¹⁰⁷ Such questions certainly abound in *Moby-Dick*, where Ahab explicitly invokes the difficulty in conceiving of individual agency when all the processes of nature seem subject to omnipresent law, whether it be divine or natural: “Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errand-boy in heaven . . . how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, and not I” (6: 545). Indeed, though it is unclear exactly how much Melville knew of Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will*, it is obvious that he was aware of the disturbing implications that followed from the notorious theologian’s persuasive argument for causal necessity and theological determinism.

Like Coleridge, however, he seems to have by disposition been drawn to meditating on this problem to the point of excess, and it is likely no coincidence that he makes an immediate reference to Coleridge’s philosophy when, in a journal entry made during his voyage to London in 1849, he alludes to the same passage from *Paradise Lost* that Coleridge had quoted in the *Biographia* to characterize his affinity for “the unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths” (7.1: 17).¹⁰⁸ Yet at this point in his development, Melville seems largely unaware of the frustration and philosophical

¹⁰⁷ Melville also seems to have been familiar with *The Friend*, which he borrowed from Richard Lathers in 1854. See *The Writings of Herman Melville*, vol. 14: Correspondence, ed. Lynn Horth, Chicago: Northwestern UP, 260.

¹⁰⁸ Though he makes no mention of the relevant passage in the *Biographia*, Marovitz does opine that Melville “had Coleridge as well as Milton in mind” (17).

anxiety that will result from his intellectual proclivities: “Last evening was very pleasant. Walked the deck with the German, Mr Adler till a late hour, talking of ‘Fixed Fate, Free-will, foreknowledge absolute’ &c. His philosophy is *Colredegian* [sic]: he accepts the Scriptures as divine, & yet leaves himself free to inquire into Nature” (15: 4).

Pleasant as this conversation may have been, by the time Melville began writing *Moby-Dick* in early 1850, his interest had turned to obsession. As Richard Brodhead observes with a markedly Coleridgean distrust of abstruse philosophy, it seems that “the demon of metaphysical speculation seized on Melville around 1850 . . . His letters, full of ease and generous enthusiasms before, become at this time grimly driven, unable to leave the question of the anchoring of our world or the quest for an independent position toward first things” (14-15). Nor does the metaphysical speculation of *Moby-Dick* seem to have provided Melville with any clear answers. The closest he gets is Ishmael’s mat-making allegory of Chapter 47, where chance holds a limited sway over both free will and necessity:

aye, chance, free will, and necessity – no wise incompatible – all interweavingly working together. The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its ultimate course – its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of necessity and sideways in its motions modified by free will, though thus prescribed to both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events. (6: 215)

This schema is reasonable enough, though, as Walton R. Patrick notes, it is also “quite similar to the viewpoint that the necessitarian philosophers advocated and is in thorough accord with the position that both Edwards and Priestley took on the will in their treatises.” Moreover, since free will is still circumscribed by causal necessity, “every volitional determination has a prior cause or motive just as the one before it had a cause or motive, and so on back and back in an endless chain, the first link of which rests in God’s hand” (40). Chance, too, unless somehow unrestricted by the physical laws of the universe is also causally determined – and Melville seems to acknowledge this in Ahab’s affirmation of his own identity as having been fixed in its place from the beginning of time: “Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act’s immutably decreed. ’Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates’ lieutenant; I act under orders” (6: 561).

Likewise, whether the destiny of Ahab and the rest of the crew has been preordained or freely chosen is never made clear, and Ishmael too invokes “the Fates” (6: 573) to explain his own survival and preservation on the open sea where the sharks “glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; [and] the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks” (6: 573). AnnLouise Keating’s reading of Ahab’s quest, in which “Ahab freely acts on his will” while at the same time “he cannot choose what he wills” (35), though in some sense viable, is more a reiteration of Edwards’ argument than it is an accurate assessment of Melville’s perspective. For given the ultimate direction of Melville’s inquiries in “Billy Budd, Sailor,” as well as his rather unsympathetic reference to Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will* in “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” it appears that he was intuitively opposed to the argument that he nevertheless found difficult, if not impossible,

to refute on rational grounds, and that, like Coleridge, he was occupied even in the twilight of his life with somehow finding a way around the seemingly impenetrable logic of causal necessity. And even more than Poe, Melville was drawn to the possibility of a power of self-determination that defied the argument for causal necessity set forth by Edwards, and his attempt to begin outlining the structure of such a possibility is nowhere as desperate, comic, or confounding as it is in “Bartleby, the Scrivener.”

Hence we find that though Bartleby’s employer has “looked a little into ‘Edwards on the Will,’ and ‘Priestley on Necessity,’” and that he is for a short time persuaded that “Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence” (9: 37), the doctrines of theological determinism and causal necessity are ultimately of little use to him in his attempt to understand his employee’s peculiar recalcitrance.¹⁰⁹ Yet it is ultimately unclear whether Bartleby’s refusals are an exercise of the will, or a painstaking demonstration of Edwards’ point that self-determination cannot consist in a state of indifference. “He that in acting, proceeds with the fullest inclination,” Edwards observes, “does what he does with the greatest freedom, according to common sense” (1: 359). And though we cannot know for certain, it may simply be that Bartleby is oblivious, or perhaps apathetic, to the objections of common sense – and since what he is most fully inclined to is only to prefer not to do anything (save to remain on the premises), could it be that he achieves some higher degree of freedom insofar as he remains unencumbered by the dispositions that come to inform the choices that we make? Or does Bartleby’s refusal to prefer anything but Being itself simply reduce the function of the will to a state of blind defiance?

¹⁰⁹ For the similarity between Priestley’s necessitarianism and Edwards’ theological determinism, see Chapter 2, page 2n3.

As Allan Moore Emery suggests, “the rebel can maintain his freedom only so long as he continues to reject as potentially ‘determining’ all behavioral motives . . . but ironically enough, having refused to obey the dictates of any particular motive, the rebel discovers to his chagrin that his will is now *less* free (by one alternative) than it was before” (178-9). Moreover, by rejecting out of hand all particularity and preference, Bartleby surrenders the option to prefer anything definitive. Of course the assumption here is that Bartleby’s recalcitrance is absolute, or that he has necessarily and immutably ruled out all positive preferences for all time, and it is not entirely clear that this is the case. For example, when the narrator asks if the former scrivener will leave the office building and come to stay at his home until “some convenient arrangement” can be established, Bartleby’s response, though absolute in its refusal, is otherwise quite provisional: “‘No: at present I would prefer not to make any change at all’” (9: 41). For not only does this particular response feature the subjunctive mode that Bartleby sporadically employs, but also the potentially limited temporality implied by the phrase “at present.”

Unfortunately, however, the actualities of the empirical world cannot be dispensed with entirely. “‘Now one of two things must take place,’” the narrator warns Bartleby, “‘Either you must do something, or something must be done to you’” (9: 41). Apparently indifferent to this fact, Bartleby is forcibly removed from the building and then imprisoned until his refusal to eat deprives him of life altogether. Though his eviction and imprisonment are not strictly necessary consequences, the nature of Bartleby’s death is a grim illustration of the fact that acts of willing, or not willing, are always limited by the natural limitations of what is possible – and living without food

simply cannot be done regardless of what one wills.¹¹⁰ It may be, however, that Bartleby does not want to live, or that he simply wants to be excused from willing altogether, regardless of the consequences.¹¹¹ But more than anything, Bartleby is a comic curiosity, and something of a metaphysical test case – an instance of Melville speculating on what an absence of will might look like, or whether it could even exist, and then following the inquiry through to its natural conclusion, though he does seem warily conscious of the paradox implied in his character's steadfast willing not to will anything. As Giorgio Agamben points out, when the narrator asks Bartleby to go to the post office and Bartleby responds with "I would prefer not to," the phrase is rendered back to him in the altered form of willing: "You *will* not?" (9: 25). "But Bartleby," Agamben notes, "with his soft but firm voice, specifies, 'I *prefer* not' ('I prefer not,' which appears three times, is the only variation of Bartleby's usual phrase; and if Bartleby then renounces the conditional, this is only because doing so allows him to eliminate all traces of the verb 'will,' even in its modal use)" (254).

Indeed, whenever his employer uses the word "will," Bartleby's response, if he gives one at all, substitutes the less definite "prefer," which he often modifies further with

¹¹⁰ As Walton R. Patrick likewise observes, "it is the 'impediment' or pressure of society which deprives Bartleby of the liberty of doing as he pleases up to the time he is imprisoned. Thereafter, of course, he encounters the second and more fatal type of impediment, that of natural law, which requires that one must eat to live" (46).

¹¹¹ Gilles Deleuze suggests that we think of Bartleby as occupying a pole opposite to that of Ahab, Claggart, and Babo, whom he describes as "monomaniacs or demons who, driven by the will to nothingness, make a monstrous choice" (79). Conversely, there are those whom he describes as "angels or saintly hypochondriacs . . . Petrified by nature, they prefer . . . no will at all, a nothingness of the will rather than a will to nothingness . . . They can only survive by becoming stone, by denying the will and sanctifying themselves in the suspension. Such are Cereno, Billy Budd, and above all Bartleby" (80). That such characters do not actually survive seems of little concern to Deleuze, who somewhat reverently concludes that "even in his catatonic or anorexic state, Bartleby is not the patient, but the doctor of a sick America, the *Medicine-Man*, the new Christ or the brother to us all" (90). But just as attempts to cast Bartleby as illustrative of some moral admonition are dissatisfying, so are hyperbolic encomiums to his thoroughly abject, and eventually suicidal, state of being.

the subjunctive mood. Frustrated with Bartleby's refusals to perform tasks, the narrator finally resorts to trying to make a personal connection with the man. "Will you tell me, Bartleby, where you were born?" he asks, to which Bartleby responds, "I would prefer not to." Sensing the familiar direction of things, the narrator then asks if Bartleby will respond to personal inquiries at all: "Will you tell me *any thing* about yourself?" But again, the response is the same: "I would prefer not to." (9: 30). These refusals to even allow himself to be conceived of as one who wills or does not will reach their consummate expression after the narrator has offered Bartleby money and told him that he must leave the premises only to find that the despondent scrivener has remained. "Will you, or will you not, quit me?" the attorney demands as he frames the matter as a plain case of choosing one option or another. That Bartleby's response again evades this oppositional framework is by this point no surprise: "I would prefer *not* to quit you" (9: 35). It is unclear, however, what such a renunciation of the will accomplishes, if anything. Though Agamben would have us believe that Bartleby exists somewhere between Being and Nothing, or that has achieved a kind of multivalent, purely potential state of being that defies Edwardsean logic, his argument is almost entirely faith-based, even if it is apophatic. "To believe that will has power over potentiality," he writes, "that the passage to actuality is the result of a decision that puts an end to the ambiguity of potentiality (which is always potentiality to do and not to do) – this is the perpetual illusion of morality" (254).¹¹²

¹¹² Branka Arsic echoes and expands upon this sentiment, arguing that Bartleby's preference for neither willing nor not willing demonstrates "that it is possible for there to be preference, one which would prefer without the slightest trace of the will . . . that preference is possible as involuntary and non-active, as a performance without a performative . . . Being groundless, the involuntary preference makes possible what for Edwards is absolutely impossible, namely that something can be devoid of reason, that something may

For if we trust, along with Hume, “that power has always a reference to its exercise, either actual or probable,” and further, that “power consists in the possibility or probability of any action, as discover’d by experience and the practice of the world” (204), then it is somewhat difficult to attribute ambiguity to the potential, or power, that results in the performance or non-performance of an act (unless we are always thinking in terms of what may or may not be done in the future). Moreover, if the will does not have power to transform potentiality into actuality, then there can be no connection between the potential to do something and the actual doing or not doing of it. Such an uncoupling of the actual and the potential, though conceivable, would suggest that we live in a world where events and actions only appear to have come about as a result of the potentialities and motives that have preceded them, when in fact there is no power of consequence or causality that forms a necessary link between what may or may not happen and what actually does happen. Again, though this is conceivable, to believe it would be to suppose that known motives and established dispositions have no bearing on actions, or that we might do just as well to trust someone who has lied and deceived as a general practice as we would someone who has exhibited no signs of such behavior. Such absolute indeterminacy may be appealing or romantic in theory, but it is difficult to see the value in its application, even in *Bartleby*’s case.

For in the act of increasingly preferring not to do or change anything, *Bartleby* only illustrates the inevitability of demonstrating inclination and motive by action. As Edwards observes,

or may not be, or even that something may and may not be at the same time – an indeterminate and reasonless existence” (52).

if the will or mind, in willing and choosing after the manner that it does, is excited to do so by no motive or inducement, then it has no end which it proposes to itself, or pursues in so doing; it aims at nothing, and seeks nothing. And if it seeks nothing, then it don't go after anything, or exert any inclination or preference towards anything. Which brings the matter to a contradiction; because for the mind to will something and for it to go after something by an act of preference and inclination, are the same thing. (1: 225).

Of course Bartleby does exert his inclination and preference. An especially clear example of this occurs when Turkey enters into the space behind Bartleby's screen, which is already occupied by both Bartleby and the narrator, causing the latter to "jostle" the scrivener, who subsequently states his preference, "I would prefer to be left alone here" (9: 31). Likewise, on the following day, the narrator tells us that when he asks Bartleby why he is not writing, the scrivener declares that he has "decided upon doing no more writing" (9: 31). Upon further questioning from the narrator, who poses the affirmation in the form of a question – "do no more writing?" – Bartleby rather tersely reaffirms his decision: "No more" (9: 31). It is true that the vast majority of Bartleby's expressions of preference and inclination are articulated in negative terms, but to prefer not to copy documents, or go to the post office, or eat, and then to actually not do these things, merely illustrates the paradox of attempting to renounce all positive action. Yet again, as Edwards is careful to note, the action of not doing a thing simply demonstrates the choice not to have done it. "The main and most proper proof of a man's having a heart to anything . . . and either to do or not to do as he pleases, is his doing of it." (2: 427).

Indeed, if we view Bartleby as having sought to deny the will, the result is a tragicomic failure, and a reminder that the preferences, dispositions, and motives that inform the actions of the will are as inexorable as fate itself. For Edwards, however, such inevitability is merely the consequence of being a creature that elects to do one thing rather than another, which is to say that humans are not particularly unique in their exertion of preference and choice.

Furthermore, just because the dispositions and preferences that guide the will are inevitable, this does not necessarily mean that the will is free in the sense of being causally self-determined. Edwards puts this quite plainly: “there is no such thing as liberty consisting in a self-determining power of the will” (1: 176).¹¹³ Though ultimately unsure of this conclusion, “Bartleby, the Scrivener” does seem to demonstrate that Melville is fairly convinced of Edwards’ powerful logic concerning the nature of preference and disposition (even if he does challenge it with the ambiguity of Bartleby’s negative preferences): “nothing is more evident than that, when men act voluntarily, and do what they please, then they do what appears most agreeable to them; and to say otherwise, would be as much as to affirm . . . that they don’t choose what they prefer. Which brings the matter to a contradiction” (1: 217). That is, since Bartleby often only reveals what it is that he would prefer not to do, one could argue that it is unclear whether he is choosing what he prefers or only affirming that he has no preference for anything at

¹¹³ Interestingly, at another point in *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards seems to forecast Coleridge’s anxieties with his depiction of “metaphysical speculation” as that which darkens the mind: “The common people, in their notion of a faulty or praiseworthy deed or work done by anyone, do suppose that the man does it in the exercise of *liberty*. But then their notion of liberty is only a person’s having opportunity of doing as he pleases. They have no notion of liberty consisting in the will’s first acting, and so causing its own acts; and determining, and so causing its own determinations; or choosing, and so causing its own choice. Such a notion of liberty is what none have, but those that have darkened their own minds with confused metaphysical speculation, and abstruse and ambiguous terms” (1: 358-9).

all. The problem, however, is that (until his death, anyway) Bartleby continues to exist and continues to perform actions that require an exercise of the will, such as remaining in the building, sitting on the banister, and staring silently at a prison wall. Such actions are certainly morose, and his behavior does eventually lead to death, but there can be little doubt that Bartleby has chosen to do these things rather than others.

The question for Melville, then, is whether or not the inevitable facticity of the will could also be indicative of a power not entirely subject to natural law. He certainly would have encountered a conception that included both of these elements in Coleridge's *Biographia*, where the poet-turned-metaphysical critic exalts what he believes to be the defining feature of humankind as the only way in which self-consciousness as we know it, or are aware of it, is possible:

It has been shown, that a spirit is that, which is its own object, yet not originally an object, but an absolute subject for which all, itself included, may become an object. It must therefore be an ACT; for every object is, as an *object*, dead, fixed, incapable in itself of any action and necessarily finite. Again, the spirit (originally the identity of object and subject) must in some sense dissolve this identity, in order to be conscious of it: fit alter et idem. But this implies an act, and it follows therefore that intelligence or self-consciousness is impossible, except by and in a will. The self-conscious spirit therefore is a will; and freedom must be assumed as a *ground* of philosophy, and can never be deduced from it. (7.1: 280)

Also significant to Melville would have been Coleridge's assertion of the will as exclusive to spirit, which is an act in and of itself, and of freedom of the will as a

necessary ground rather than an empirically demonstrable or discoverable fact. Like Poe, Melville was caught somewhere between Coleridge and Edwards – but while Poe accepted “inexorable Fate,” Melville, like Coleridge, resisted the view of existence as a complex, predetermined mechanism. Coleridge, however, could also declare that Edwards’ “World is a *Machine*” (CN 4: 5077) and openly defy the argument for theological determinism with repeated avowals of free will as the ground of human experience, but Melville was far too skeptical to affirm a self-determining will, and he achieved no further certainty in *Billy Budd* – begun in 1888 and left unfinished at the time of his death – than he had in *Moby-Dick* and “Bartleby, the Scrivener.”

Though Matthiessen is in some sense correct to argue that Ahab “is an embodiment of his author’s most profound response to the problem of free individual will *in extremis*” (447), he does underestimate the significance of Chapter 26 in *Billy Budd*, where the possibility of a self-determining will, rather than the spectre of theological or causal determinism, is brought to the fore. The oversight is somewhat strange given that Matthiessen does note that in the margin of the manuscript of Chapter 23, Melville writes the name of Jonathan Edwards just at the point where Captain Vere’s announcement of Billy’s sentence is “listened to by the throng of standing sailors in a dumbness like that of a seated congregation of believers in hell listening to the clergyman’s announcement of his Calvinistic text” (B 117). Moreover, given that Melville mentions Edwards in “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” and then again in the manuscript of *Billy Budd* over thirty years later, it seems clear that he continued to meditate seriously on the challenges posed by the Puritan theologian. Matthiessen himself speculates that the “rectitude of Vere” perhaps reminded Melville of “the inexorable logic, the tremendous force of mind in the

greatest of our theologians,” and that he “might also have reflected that the relentless denial of the claims of ordinary nature on which Edwards based his reasoned declaration of the absolute Sovereignty of God had left its mark on the New England character . . . on the nightmare of will which a perverted determinism had become in Ahab” (513). Yet that both mentions of Edwards are disparaging (the implication of the marginalia in *Billy Budd* clearly much more so than the narrator’s passing allusion in “Bartleby, the Scrivener”) tends to indicate that, over time, what may have been a kind of metaphysical annoyance became a full-blown antipathy.

Indeed, in the chapters following the manuscript mention of Edwards, Melville deploys peculiar grammatical refutations of both determinism and pantheism before juxtaposing them with the possibility of Billy exercising an empirically inexplicable act of will. The first of these qualified refutations occurs in Chapter 24 when Melville describes Billy lying between two guns on the Bellipotent’s upper-gun deck, “as nipped in the vice of fate” (B 119). In this instance, Melville seems to imply that, though the appearance of Billy “lying prone in irons in one of the bays formed by the regular spacing of the guns comprising the batteries on either side” (B 118) certainly makes available the impression that fate has ensnared the handsome sailor, this is not actually the case. Similarly, in the next chapter, when Billy’s unexpected blessing of Captain Vere is reiterated by the entire crew, Melville employs a strangely paradoxical simile to evoke a deterministic state of affairs: “Without volition, as it were, as if indeed the ship’s populace were but the vehicles of some vocal current electric, with one voice from aloft and aloft came a resonant sympathetic echo: ‘God bless Captain Vere!’” (B 123). Here, it is perhaps most remarkable to note the “as if indeed,” which strains the grammatical

meaning of the simile nearly to the point of suggesting that it may very well be that the crew of the Bellipotent are possessed by a single spirit. The similarities between this passage and the more pantheistic sentiments of Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" are also quite striking. The "one life" passage that was added to the poem in 1817, for example, bears a suggestive resemblance to the notion of the Bellipotent's crew speaking and feeling as one, but it is the question that earns Coleridge his reproof that may have been in the back of Melville's mind as he wrote of the sailors as "but the vehicles of some vocal current electric":

And what if all of animated nature
 Be but organic harps diversely framed,
 That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
 Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
 At once the soul of each, and God of all? (16.1.1: 234)

Yet the difference here is that the individual crew members appear to be the vehicles not of some omnipresent divinity, but rather of Billy and his benediction. For though it is Captain Vere whom they are blessing, as Melville writes, "at that instant Billy alone must have been in their hearts, even as in their eyes" (*B* 123) – the implication being that if in fact the sailors are the "vehicles of some vocal current," then it is Billy's act of blessing that has somehow initiated that current's flow.

Following this, Chapter 25 then closes with the peculiar moment when Billy is hanged, and "to the wonder of all no motion was apparent, none save that created by the slow roll of the hull in moderate weather, so majestic in a great ship ponderously cannoned" (*B* 124). In this sense, the inexplicable absence of muscular spasm in Billy's

body punctuates the attention that Melville turns to the question of free will and determinism with the mention of Jonathan Edwards in Chapter 23, and Chapter 26 is devoted entirely to the metaphysical stalemate that he appears to have reached on the matter. However, from the information that Melville does provide concerning the two disputants in this chapter – describing the purser as “a rather ruddy, rotund person more accurate as an accountant than as a philosopher” and the surgeon as “saturnine, spare, and tall, one in whom a discreet causticity went along with a manner less genial than polite” (*B* 124) – it is nevertheless clear that while he did not believe the argument for free will to be particularly strong in the philosophical sense, he simultaneously found the cold logic of determinism nearly inhuman.

““What testimony to the force lodged in will power,”” the purser remarks, to which the surgeon responds by affirming that the peculiar absence of muscular spasm can be “no more attributable to will power, as you call it, than to horsepower – begging your pardon” (*B* 124). Simply put, so far as the surgeon is concerned, it makes no sense to affirm any concept that cannot be substantiated in empirical terms; and will power, as he states, is “a term not yet included in the lexicon of science” (125). For even though he admits that there is no explanation for why Billy’s body did not exhibit any sign of the muscular spasm that, as the purser points out, is “more or less invariable” (124) in the event of a hanging, his response to the purser’s then asking if such an absence may be deemed phenomenal, is merely to observe that the case is only ““phenomenal . . . in the sense that it was an appearance the cause of which is not immediately to be assigned”” (125). Yet when considered alongside Melville’s caricature of Edwards, as well as his negative, albeit qualified, invocations of both determinism and a kind of individualist’s

pantheism, the purser's argument is not so easily dismissed. Ultimately, Melville does seem to have been closer to the purser's point of view than to that of the surgeon, but he was unwilling to cast his lot with Coleridge and affirm the supernatural force of will that he could not prove.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, the trajectory of Melville's position from *Moby-Dick*, to "Bartleby, the Scrivener," and then to *Billy Budd*, illustrates a perceptible shift from a frustrated acceptance of theological and causal determinism to an acknowledgment of motive, disposition, and the exercise of the will as inevitable, and finally to a searching meditation on the possibility of a self-determining will. Though it is true that Melville does not provide an answer to the question that he poses in his final work of fiction, it is surely significant to note that in the forty years between the composition of *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd*, his thinking moves from an obsession with the impossibility of rejecting determinism to an acknowledgment of the possibility that there may in fact be instances in which the will becomes its own cause.¹¹⁵ Such a progression not only illustrates the intensity and duration of Melville's pursuit of the free will problem, but also the intended direction of that pursuit. Unlike Emerson, who was never quite able, or willing, to conceive of a circumstance in which an individual might perform an act of will that defies natural law, Melville constructs a narrative in which the possibility of supernatural

¹¹⁴ As Eric Goldman observes, though Melville "introduces the possibility of a transcendent residuum that eludes postbellum science and preserves a place for 'psychologic theologians' in the new, naturalistic worldview that the story otherwise unflinchingly renders" (438), the question of whether or not this is actually the case "is more important than the answer which is frustratingly unavailable" (439).

¹¹⁵ In his discussion of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* as a possible influence on *Billy Budd*, Olive L. Fite argues that Billy's apparent act of will is in fact an instance of supernatural self-determination: "Schopenhauer – had Claggart been a real person as indeed his model may have been – would have said that the master-at-arms acted from necessity, each act having a cause, which in turn had a previous cause . . . only be an involuntary instreaming of knowledge of the will could an individual free himself from this chain of necessity and deny or suppress the will to live. This Billy seems to have achieved" (342).

self-determination is put into open, though ultimately futile, dialogue with Edwardsean logic. The effect of this juxtaposition, however, is one that tends to underscore the practical use and value of self-determination as a principle of human belief, as well as Melville's own sense that the argument for causal necessity was deeply disappointing when applied to the actions of the individual and the course of human events.

Ultimately, then, while Coleridge's influence is more immediately evident in the cases of both Poe and Emerson, Melville actually comes closest to articulating Coleridge's argument for supernatural self-determination. Hawthorne may very well have believed in free will, but he was not anxious to prove it, and the hypothesis that Poe outlines in "Ligeia," though clearly supernatural in scope, essentially deploys a perversion of the Edwardsean argument for the restorative power of true grace as a way of thwarting Coleridge's affirmation of the "mysterious faculty of free-will" (4.1: 112). Melville, however, is antagonistic enough towards Edwards to begin approaching Coleridge's more intuitive conception of free will as the ground of human experience – though, again, he is unable to truly believe it. In the context of the tension between the legacy of Edwardsean theology and the influence of Coleridge's distinctive brand of Romanticism, this final inability to believe in one or the other is perhaps the clearest synopsis of the American literary response to the free will problem in the nineteenth century. For while both Poe and Emerson eventually reiterate the essential tenets of Edwards' empiricism, and Hawthorne pragmatically circumvents what he believes is beyond human comprehension, the theological and philosophical strain of these responses belies their ostensible content.

Only in Melville is the existential distress of what is essentially a divided philosophical and theological inheritance depicted in a comprehensive sense, though in many ways such distress also parallels the seeming paradox of determinist activism that we see in *The Interesting Narrative* of Olaudah Equiano, as well as in *The Journal of John Woolman*. For insofar as they illustrate that the capacity for moral action and the belief in God as the author and permitter of all things are not exclusive, both of these works anticipate the irresolvable tension that Melville sees between the logic of causal necessity and the practical necessity of believing that individuals are responsible, self-determining causal agents. As Vincent Carretta writes of Equiano, “he repeatedly acted very differently from someone who believes that external forces, not his own choices, determine, or predestine, the events and direction of his life” (105). But did the moral action of Equiano and Woolman then require a willful suspension of their belief in a providential God? Or is Melville’s profound sense of the rift between the experience of self-determination and the logic of causal determinism symptomatic of a specifically nineteenth-century concern?

Certainly the outbreak of civil war in a nation as predominantly religious as the United States clearly was in the nineteenth century corroborates the notion that there were serious disagreements concerning the will of God and the responsibilities of the individual – and these disagreements are hardly surprising when we consider that the American consciousness had been inflected both by Edwardsean theology and the religious liberalism of eighteenth-century activism that informed Coleridge’s development as a religious thinker.¹¹⁶ As the examples of Equiano and Woolman

¹¹⁶ As Mark A. Noll observes, after 1830 (one year, we may note, after Marsh’s influential American publication of *Aids to Reflection*) there appeared to be a change in American conceptions of individual

demonstrate, these two strains were not entirely exclusive of one another, and we do have some measure of the ways in which this tension was dealt with when we look at the conflict between determinism and self-determination that manifested itself in the prose and fiction works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this sense, the multifaceted response of the American Romantics to the disagreement between Coleridge and Edwards is not merely an abstract theological and philosophical concern, but also an indication of the growing inability of nineteenth-century American thinkers to remain content with the idea that their actions were entirely circumscribed by an external agent. Nurtured both by the national impulse to self-determination and the assurance that all events were foreseen and preordained by God, they were especially receptive to Coleridge's religious philosophy, which sought to preserve both of these elements – though as the trajectory of Melville's response illustrates, the struggle to affirm causal self-determination was not only inhibited by the lasting influence of Edwardsean theology, but also by the troubling suspicion that even if there were no God, Edwards might still have been right.

agency: "The movement was away from a conservative definition of human freedom as constrained by human character, such as articulated in the mid-eighteenth century by both the Anglican Arminian Samuel Johnson and the Congregational Calvinist Jonathan Edwards" (24). On the war itself, however, Noll registers the legacy of deterministic ways of thinking: "Standard Christian teaching about God's control of the world and all events taking place in the world sprang vigorously to life as the dramatic events of the war unfurled. Belief that God controlled events had always been foundational wherever biblical religion prevailed . . . In such a situation, clarity about the workings of divine providence posed a particular problem because God appeared to be acting so strikingly at odds with himself. As with clashes over the interpretation of Scripture, the conflict in understanding providence was disconcerting by itself. Even more, the assumptions on which the interpretation of providence was based seemed to be flawed, thus pointing to a profound theological crisis" (75).

Epilogue

The Red Badge of Coleridge

Can there ever be any thorough national fusion of the Northern and Southern states? I think not. In fact, the Union will be shaken almost to dislocation whenever a very serious question between the states arises. The American Union has no *centre*, and it is impossible now to make one. The more they extend their borders into the Indians' land, the weaker will the national cohesion be. But I look upon the states as splendid masses to be used, by and by, in the composition of two or three great governments.

– Coleridge, *Table Talk*

Similar in character to Melville's final impasse in *Billy Budd*, where he could neither refute the Edwardsean argument for causal determinism nor affirm Coleridge's intuitive and experiential justification of supernatural self-determination, in the minds of those who reflected on its inexorable machinery, the experience of war perpetuated the struggle to articulate a conception of individual power that could contend with the unbreakable chain of causation. In literary terms, we acknowledge this development as the rise of American Naturalism, but I also want to suggest that the ease with which Americans adapted theological determinism to suit a post-Darwinian discourse extends into the twentieth century, which we can observe not only in the early twentieth-century works of Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald, but also, for example, in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), where an alien race reminds Billy Pilgrim that it is only on Earth that anyone speaks of free will.

Even more recently, McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* (2005) registers the unceasing threat of determinism in the character of Anton Chigurh, the merciless killer who often flips a coin to decide whether his victims will live or die. In these latter-day

encounters with the free will problem, determinism (natural, theological, or otherwise) is not so much a question as it is a working assumption. Indeed, when Oedipa Maas observes a punctured can of hairspray ricocheting around a bathroom, the old argument for an inscrutable, but determined, course of events emerges in the guise of chaos theory: “The can knew where it was going, she sensed, or something fast enough, God or a digital machine, might have computed in advance the complex web of its travel; but she wasn’t fast enough, and knew only that it might hit them at any moment, at whatever clip it was doing, a hundred miles an hour” (25). Here, as in Edwards’ “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (1741), the prospect of doom is immanent, and yet entirely unknowable – but instead of sinners walking over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, we have ostensibly free subjects whose lives are circumscribed and sustained by the natural laws that might just as easily extinguish them by way of what we would call an accident, or bad luck.

In the case of the American Civil War, however, those who experienced its horrors first-hand came to a rather more grim recognition of the challenges that the inexorability of natural law placed in the way of unrestricted self-determination. Among the manuscript passages that were not included in *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), for example, there is an incomplete draft of what Crane had originally intended to be the text of Chapter XII. And much like the notebook entry in which Coleridge’s writing trails off when he attempts to distinguish himself from Edwards by demonstrating the legitimacy of his opposition to theological determinism, Crane abandons the chapter just at the moment when Henry Fleming seems poised to articulate in his own mind the plausibility of supernatural self-determination:

Admitting that he was powerless and at the will of law, he yet planned to escape; menaced by fatality he schemed to avoid it . . . He now created in thought a secure spot where an all-powerful eye would fail to perceive him; where an all-powerful stick would fail to bruise his life. There was in him a creed of freedom which no contemplation of inexorable law could destroy. He saw himself in watchfulness, frustrating the plans of the unchangeable, making of fate a fool. He had ways, he thought, of working out his [. . .] (142)

In spite, then, of acknowledging the truth of causal determinism, Henry Fleming refuses to accept that he is not a self-determining agent. Though, like Melville, he is unclear on how it could be possible, he is drawn to the prospect of supernatural self-determination nonetheless. Crane is no doubt conscious of the impracticality of planning to elude the physical laws of the universe, but insofar as he registers the appeal of unrestricted free agency, or perhaps the unwillingness to relinquish it as an article of human faith, he also demonstrates the lasting effect of Coleridge's resistance to Edwards.

We find an even more evocative instance of this divided legacy in the memoir of General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, who held the Union line at the Battle of Gettysburg and received the formal surrender of the Confederacy at Appomattox. Reflecting on the surprising ignominy in which the otherwise brilliant military careers of Fitz John Porter and Gouverneur K. Warren had ended, Chamberlain, who happened to have been Professor of Modern Languages at Bowdoin College before he was commissioned as Lieutenant-Colonel in 1862, ponders the interplay of freedom and fate:

Shakespeare tells us, poetizing fate or faith:

There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
 Rough-hew them how we will.

To our common eyes it often seems a dark divinity that rules; and the schoolmaster might interchange the verbs. (181)

Seemingly more determinist than libertarian in his retrospection, Chamberlain acknowledges that individual agency is largely inconsequential when held up against the grand intentionality of the divine will. Yet in conceiving the Army of the Potomac to live on so long as in the red stripes of the American flag “a regenerated people reads the charter of its birthright, and in its field of white God’s covenant with man” (392), he also presumes the will of God to be consubstantial with the Union cause.

In this latter sense, as well as in the notion of the American people having achieved regeneration by way of preserving the union and fulfilling the designs of Providence, Chamberlain echoes Coleridge’s affirmation of free agency as the supernatural achievement of those who act in accordance with God’s will. We might then say that the center of the American Union upon which Coleridge had cast doubt, came to lie not in any fundamental agreement, but rather in the life of the disagreement he fostered in his opposition to Edwards.

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