

# MORAL BEAUTY'S DIVINE CENTER: JONATHAN EDWARDS AND THE NECESSITY OF GOD IN ETHICS

Adam Carrington

## INTRODUCTION

### *Edwards in the Enlightenment World*

Jonathan Edwards lived from 1703 to 1758 in Colonial New England. In that life he stood at the center of one of the greatest spiritual awakenings in American history, was fired from his pastorate, became a missionary to Native Americans, and finally died while serving as President of Princeton. Though the name is recognizable, he remains to many an enigma. The first and only encounter most readers have with the Colonial pastor and theologian is from a high school or undergraduate reading of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Once they have completed this sermon, these readers quickly shuffle him to the back of their minds as another fire and brimstone minister from a time long past.

Yet as we have already begun to explain, there is much more to Edwards than his "Sinners" sermon. Edwards lived not only a full life as pastor, missionary, and college president but also left behind voluminous writings on every topic from theology to philosophy to science. The Jonathan Edwards Center contains over

---

*Adam Carrington, of Wheelersburg, Ohio, is a December 2007 graduate of the Ashbrook Scholar Program, having majored in Political Science and Religion.*

100,000 pages of writings composed by the pastor in his lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

These writings made Edwards one of the most read authors of early America. Though popular in his lifetime, Edwards' works on the affections, revival, and conversion only grew in popularity in the English-speaking world after his death. His biography of David Brainard became nearly required reading among missionaries and stood as one of early America's most read works.<sup>2</sup> Philip Gura's biography tells us that "By the Civil War Edwards had become known throughout the United States and Europe as America's most famous and successful evangelical," adding the claim that even to this day, "Jonathan Edwards is indeed America's evangelical."<sup>3</sup> Though his works on affection or revival were his most popular and influential, Edwards' contribution was not limited to these works alone. His thought also extended to the realm of ethics, most specifically the nature of virtuous thought and action.

Edwards' main work on this matter, *The Nature of True Virtue*, came out of a lifetime struggle with the Enlightenment. This struggle should not be seen as an out-

---

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards Center, "About the Jonathan Edwards Center," Yale University. <http://edwards.yale.edu/about-jec/about/> (accessed September 15, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 333.

<sup>3</sup> Philip F. Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), xii.

right rejection of Enlightenment thinking. Edwards did incorporate certain Enlightenment ideas concerning the nature of being into his theological understanding, especially in the area of metaphysics and physics. Yet in the realm of ethics Edwards found himself in a pitched battle against the ascending ideas of the day.

What was the nature of this battle? The debate centered around the existence of natural virtue, i.e., virtue inherent in mankind and not originating outside of the self. The conception of natural virtue gaining ground in Edwards' time is commonly traced back to the thought of English philosopher John Locke.<sup>4</sup> Rejecting the need for anything outside of a person to define right, Locke and his intellectual descendents asserted that knowledge of the good and the ability to follow it were natural to mankind. Men possessed a capacity to know and obey what God commanded of them apart from knowledge of Him through revelation.<sup>5</sup>

Included in these assertions was an attempt to address important practical concerns of the time. Since the ecclesiastical splintering following the Reformation, any kind of universal system of right and wrong based on revelation had proven elusive. Christendom was in a way now gone, with Catholics and an ever-multiplying diversity of Protestants all claiming to be the true Church. In the process, much blood and treasure had been spilt trying to impose unity. It was hoped that a basis extending to all mankind regardless of religious faith would give a universal foundation for morality.<sup>6</sup>

Yet even in this attempt to find a new foundation two major parties formed to

contend over the basis for natural morality. One group asserted that natural morality primarily stemmed from an understanding of the world through the use of unassisted reason. This group, led by Ralph Cudworth and Samuel Clarke, stressed reason as the universal faculty through which universal morality could be known and acted upon.<sup>7</sup>

The second party claimed a universal access to morality based upon sentiment. Among the most popular philosophers pursuing this line of thinking were David Hume and Francis Hutcheson.<sup>8</sup> Hutcheson's work, *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, was especially influential, placing him at the forefront of the influential Scottish Enlightenment. In this work, Hutcheson argued for a natural sense of morality that could be compared to other senses like touch, taste, and smell.<sup>9</sup> In this way Hutcheson associated morality and beauty. As we approve of the beauties we see, feel, or taste, so we approve of beauty in moral matters. In the same manner, just as disgusting tastes or ugly looks repulse us, so too are we disgusted by vice. In these instances of perceiving beauty in the good and ugliness in the evil, we witness our natural morality at work.<sup>10</sup>

It was the latter understanding that Edwards directly addressed in both *The Nature of True Virtue* as well as his other ethical writings. He did so for two reasons. First, at the time Edwards was writing, Hutcheson was considered the greatest and most important articulator of natural morality. His ideas were most in ascendance; thus, Edwards was meeting the strongest defender of natural morality head-on. Second, Hutcheson's ideas were much closer to Edwards' than the rational

---

<sup>4</sup> Marsden, 464.

<sup>5</sup> Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 312.

<sup>6</sup> Marsden, 464.

---

<sup>7</sup> Zakai, 314.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 312.

<sup>9</sup> Gura, 199.

<sup>10</sup> Marsden, 465.

arguments of Cudworth.<sup>11</sup> Edwards, too, saw morality in terms of a sensual comprehension of beauty. In addition to sharing a similar view of moral beauty with Hutcheson, Edwards spoke about it in comparable language of sensation and harmony.

Yet Edwards rejected the idea of natural morality. He believed philosophies like Hutcheson's constituted an attack on the necessity and centrality of God in human affairs. God was being pushed to the sideline, replace by reason or a moral sense. This state of affairs was intolerable to Edwards. In his thought, God stood at the center of all being. God was the almighty, sovereign, and sustaining Lord of the universe. Not even one atom came into existence nor remained so for one moment apart from God's will and power. Therefore, Edwards' conception of God was all-encompassing; he neither reasoned nor felt apart from a connection to the Deity. As Desiring God founder John Piper states, in Edwards' theology "nothing can be understood apart from him [God], and all understandings of all things that leave him out are superficial understandings, since they leave out the most important reality in the universe."<sup>12</sup>

In the face of Enlightenment attacks, Edwards' purpose was to establish against these philosophies a system of morality grounded in the Triune God of Christianity. God was essential to everything including morality and Edwards strove to articulate why.

Far from a bit player, Edwards strove the stage of moral debate in a manner that made the intellectual world take notice. Even before composing *The Nature of True*

*Virtue*, Edwards' *Freedom of the Will* had already established him as a major participant in this international debate.<sup>13</sup> In *True Virtue* Edwards further proved himself an adept defender of the necessity of Christianity in ethics. Many at the time considered Edwards the foremost voice for the necessity of understanding virtue in Christian terms. Avihu Zakai tells us that "...orthodox Christians in England...considered Edwards' *The Nature of True Virtue* as 'the most elaborate, acute, and rational account of this interesting subject.'"<sup>14</sup> As this dramatic ethical debate played out, Edwards was a large character in its acts.

Therefore, in Edwards we find a prominent and intelligent critic of an Enlightenment understanding of morality. This understanding, though it did not win the battle of its day, remains useful both as a critique of Enlightenment thinking and as a legitimate alternative to it.

With Edwards' importance in mind, we will examine a specific area of ethics in which he asserted the necessity of God against Hutcheson. Edwards and Hutcheson both understood morality to be a type of beauty. Yet within this concept Edwards departed from Hutcheson in two fundamental ways. First, Hutcheson claimed that moral beauty, which consisted in benevolence, was regularly achieved by mankind in his natural state. Edwards disagreed, striving to show that man's natural disposition was self-love and that all of man's thoughts and actions proceeded from self-love.

Second, Edwards disagreed with Hutcheson on whether men comprehended moral beauty as moral beauty. Hutcheson stated mankind perceived moral thoughts and actions and approved of them as morally beautiful. Edwards countered that man's

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 465.

<sup>12</sup> John Piper, *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 24.

---

<sup>13</sup> Marsden, 467.

<sup>14</sup> Zakai, 323.

perception of morality was not for its moral beauty but beauty of another sort.

Having established the two differences between Edwards and Hutcheson, we will discuss the basis of man's inability regarding moral beauty as Edwards understood it. According to Edwards, Original Sin explained man's inability to see the morally beautiful or to be morally beautiful. The natural morality and natural moral sense Hutcheson articulated did not and could not exist for Edwards. We will then examine Edwards' solution to the problem of Original Sin. This solution—conversion and regeneration—established God as the necessary source of both moral beauty's existence and its perception. We will finally conclude by discussing some practical implications that Edwards' understanding holds for us today.

## CHAPTER I

### *Beauty, Morality, and Self-Love*

The first fundamental difference between Hutcheson and Edwards lay in whether man can naturally be morally beautiful. Hutcheson asserted that man can be morally beautiful by nature and that we see that moral beauty in the world all the time. Edwards denied the possibility of a natural moral beauty and countered that most of the supposed beauty in the world is no beauty.

Yet what does it mean to be beautiful, much less morally beautiful? In order to understand the difference between Edwards and Hutcheson, we must consider beauty itself as well as its moral manifestation.

### *Beauty*

Edwards and Hutcheson saw the nature of morality or virtue as based in our experience of beauty.<sup>15</sup> Hutcheson stated that morality has a beauty comparable to that of the human body or a flower; the same basic rules determined both. Similarly, in *The Nature of True Virtue*, Edwards' most basic definition of virtue was "...something *beautiful*, or rather some kind of *beauty*, or excellency."<sup>16</sup> In each man's understanding, all beauty including moral beauty was based upon two ideas: consent and proportion.

Regarding consent, Edwards declared that "The beauty of the world consists wholly of sweet mutual consents...."<sup>17</sup> By consent Edwards did not mean the idea of a social contract. Entities such as the colors and shapes in a painting do not enter into pacts with each other. Instead, Edwards meant that certain entities, when in relationship, are able to fit together and do so in a way that works well and is pleasing to comprehend. A square peg does not consent with a round hole in that it will not fit into a round hole. Push and shove as hard as one wishes yet the two will not fit together. Instead, it is only a round peg that will fit into a similarly-sized round hole. The ability of a round peg to fit into a round hole or two machine gears to fit and work together is evidence of two entities consenting to each other. In both cases, Edwards would say there is a beauty to be seen. Perfectly working gears through their

---

<sup>15</sup> Marsden, 465.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1*, ed. Edward Hickman (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 122. Here Edwards equates moral beauty with virtue as he does elsewhere throughout *True Virtue* numerous other works. See also *True Virtue* in *Works I*, 128.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Beauty of the World" in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 14.

consent have a beauty in their motion and operation; a tightly fitted peg in a hole would possess a similar loveliness based upon their consent with each other.

Another example could be found in the realm of music. Certain notes when played together make sounds that are pleasing to the ear. The first note fits with the next one; the next one fits with the one after that; each note sounds pleasing in conjunction with every other note, forming a system of notes that we find lovely to hear. The fact that these notes when played together make a pleasing sound shows that they consent to each other; they are in agreement.

Proportion, the second component of the beautiful, spoke to how well consenting entities worked together. One may find gears that will move when placed together or notes that do not sound awful when played in a certain order. Yet if simply being able to consent or agree were the only standard of beauty, then there could be no order or hierarchy in beauty. We could never say that one melody was pretty but not nearly as beautiful as another.

Instead of this flat view of beauty, Edwards posited that there are degrees of agreement or consent to these examples. The gears may move together with more or less friction. The notes may sound more or less pleasing than other combinations of sounds. Here we see a very important component of Edwards' conception of beauty—the idea that loveliness consists in the proportionality of the related parts.<sup>18</sup> Proportion, in other words, was the term which Edwards used to describe the degree to which entities in relationship consented or agreed. For example, Edwards says there "...is the beautiful proportion of the various parts of a human body, or countenance."<sup>19</sup> A man may

consider a woman's nose to be too big and therefore not very beautiful. What is the basis of this assessment? Is there a set size of the nose that is uniformly beautiful for all human beings? Edwards would say no. Instead, the beauty of the nose is dependent on the degree to which the nose consents with the rest of the face and the body. In other words, a nose is more or less beautiful insofar as it is in proportion to the rest of that to which it is in relationship.

Here we see how consent and proportion were the two criteria upon which beauty was determined. Using these criteria, both men sought to explain what moral beauty was and how it was exercised.

### *Moral Beauty's Faculty*

Thus far we have discussed the characteristics of beauty in general. Yet this work is an attempt to understand how Edwards' *moral* view was distinct from the views of men like Hutcheson. In this light, how does Edwards' conception of beauty relate to morality?

In perceiving the beauty of an entity, one sees magnificence in it that is tied to its beauty. By perceiving the beauty it possesses we find the entity pleasing. The petals of a flower or the shape of a human body are beautiful in this way. Edwards would argue the same occurs in morality. We see great moral acts coming from a person. In those great moral acts we perceive a grandeur that is pleasing to behold. Whether it be great acts of charity, courage, or modesty—in all of these actions we perceive moral splendor in the actor. Edwards claimed that the reason we perceive such grandeur from these acts is because they too are beautiful. He makes this assertion when he tells us virtue, which he equated with moral beauty, was "some

---

<sup>18</sup> Edwards, "Beauty of the World," 14.

<sup>19</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 127.

kind of *beauty*, or excellency.”<sup>20</sup> These great moral acts are beautiful because the effect they have upon us stems from their own adherence to the beautiful characteristics of consent and proportion.

Yet before we can address how morality adheres to consent and proportion, we must examine where moral beauty originates. In other words, if there is a moral beauty, then what must be the make-up of a human being in order for him to manifest great moral acts? How must his soul be composed and ordered so that he can be morally beautiful? By understanding moral beauty's origin, we will be able to better examine moral beauty's essence.

On this matter of origin, Edwards and Hutcheson agreed concerning the faculty in which moral beauty was manifested. Edwards stated in *The Nature of True Virtue* that “virtue is the beauty of those qualities and acts of the mind, that are of a *moral* nature, i.e. such as are attended with desert or worthiness of *praise* or *blame*.”<sup>21</sup> Beauty, in other words, is found in those exercises of the mind that can be commended or attacked as morally good or bad, that are praiseworthy or blameworthy.

Edwards divided human beings' minds or souls<sup>22</sup> into two faculties. In *Religious Affections*, he declared that:

---

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

<sup>22</sup> Here, too, it should be noted that in Edwards' description of the seat of moral beauty he used several phrases interchangeably. In *Religious Affections* he describes what is praiseworthy and blameworthy as being based in faculties of the soul. However, he goes on in the same work to say that the seat or source of these faculties is called by various names, including, “the *mind*” and, “...with regard to the exercises of this faculty [the will], the *heart*.” With this understanding, Edwards' chose to say that virtue, as a beauty of beings with perception and will “is a beauty that has its original seat in the mind” and later to say “the heart.” Whether using the phrase mind, soul, or heart, it was in that part of humanity that willed which was the seat of moral beauty. See Edwards, *Religious Affections* in *Works*, Vol. 1, 237.

God has endued the soul with two principle faculties; The one that by which it is capable of *perception* and speculation, or by which it discerns and judges of things; which is called the *understanding*. The other, that by which the soul is in some way *inclined* with respect to the things it views or considers.<sup>23</sup>

These two faculties—the capacity for rational thought and the ability to will—are the two faculties of the human mind or soul. It is from this mind or soul that true moral beauty springs.

Edwards continued that virtue is not simply a beauty of the mind as a whole. It is not the understanding or rational thought that is the seat of moral beauty. A philosopher's thought could be beautiful for its tight logic. His ideas could be in majestic harmony, one argument consenting to another in beautiful proportion. Yet we could find numerous examples throughout history of men positing intricate and deep philosophies who were not considered moral. Arguments existed for and against the policies of Nazi Germany. Both could be beautiful in the consent of conclusion with premise, with argument to argument. However, while the former is praiseworthy, the latter deserves ample blame. With such a divide the beauty of the understanding could not be the origin of moral beauty.

Since the understanding was not the answer, the willing faculty must be the place where moral beauty originates. Edwards continued that what is considered worthy of praise or blame within the mind is “the *disposition*...”<sup>24</sup> Edwards stated that the disposition is the foundation of the faculty

---

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1*, ed. Edward Hickman (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 237.

<sup>24</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 122.

of the will and therefore the origin of moral beauty. In doing so, he makes an intricate argument concerning this faculty, explaining how and why we make choices. However, as the disposition is the foundation of the will, a discussion of it will suffice for the present discussion.

Gura describes Edwards' idea of disposition as the way in which someone "sees"<sup>25</sup> the world. By thinking of it as a kind of sight, Edwards saw disposition as something like a worldview. What we feel to be good or bad, right or wrong, preferable or not preferable all stemmed from how our disposition interpreted what our understanding perceived. Since the disposition determined what we find desirable and good, Edwards declared the disposition to be the ultimate source of all action. If a man chose to give money to an orphanage, then it was because his disposition made such an action seem right or preferable. If he desired to give money to either an orphanage or a homeless shelter, then it was his disposition that determined which seemed better and therefore which one he would choose. As the source of the actions that we find morally beautiful, disposition is the ground of moral beauty, according to Edwards. In other words it is in the disposition that we find the original beauty we see manifested in great moral actions.

### ***Beautiful Disposition***

So far we have located the source of moral beauty. It is found in the disposition from which all actions spring. Yet if moral beauty is found in the disposition, then what is a beautiful disposition? In order to answer this question, a principle must be found from which beautiful actions will spring. It cannot just be any principle but must be one that

encompasses all of the desires and thus actions of the soul.

In both Edwards and Hutcheson's minds, there was only one principle that could so encompass all the actions of human beings: love.<sup>26</sup> Edwards tells us in *Religious Affections* that "love is not only one of the affections, but it is the first and chief of them, and the fountain of all others."<sup>27</sup> Affections here are synonymous with desires. A man choosing to eat chocolate cake over brussel sprouts stems from a desire or affection for one over the other.

Love occupies a unique place among the affections. Edwards stated that love is more than one of a set of desires or affections; it is the source of all the others. Every tendency that human beings possess has its basis in love. "From love," Edwards tells us "...arises *hatred* of those things which are contrary to what we love" and from love arises "all those other affections of *desire, fear, joy, greed, gratitude...*"<sup>28</sup> When we are inclined to fear for our safety in a deserted alley, that fear comes from a disposition of love. We love ourselves and fear harm being done to us. Similarly, we feel joy when a friend wins a prestigious award. Such joy springs from love toward the friend. Thus, love is the essential principle from which our specific actions result. As the essential principle of all our specific acts, love is *the* disposition of our souls. Man acts only in conformity with his own loving disposition. What we eat, whom we help, what we say—every action of mankind stems from our loving disposition.

Therefore, what we find praiseworthy or blameworthy is at its most fundamental level what and how a human being loves. In other words, if the disposition is the seat of moral beauty and love is the basic

---

<sup>25</sup> Gura, 200.

<sup>26</sup> Marsden, 465.

<sup>27</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 240.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 240.

disposition of man, then it is in love that we find moral beauty. Both Edwards and Hutcheson worked from these basic conceptions in trying to articulate mankind's ability to be morally beautiful as well as to see moral beauty in others.

### *Selfish and Self-less Love*

To this point we have established that for Edwards and Hutcheson moral beauty comes from the disposition and that the basic human disposition is love. However, just because the essential disposition of the soul is love does not mean that all love is morally beautiful. Experience teaches this truth; there are many actions springing from some kind of love that most people find to be wrong or ugly. A man might steal money from a greedy love of gain or commit adultery from love to a married woman.

Both Edwards and Hutcheson stated that not all love was beautiful but only love of a certain kind. Beautiful love was defined by two main qualities. First, morally beautiful love was self-less. Edwards speaks throughout *True Virtue* of love as a "union of heart"<sup>29</sup> between the lover and the beloved. In loving, a person becomes in a sense one with the object of affection. The nature of this oneness is found in a common cause, in a common interest. The commonality, however, does not come in making the other's good conform to one's own. Instead, in loving another person, one's perceived interests conform to the interests of the beloved. When a man truly loves a woman, he seeks what is best for her. Yet he does even more. His seeking her good comes from a change in his interests—a change in what he considers his own good. In love her best becomes what he considers to be his best.

In the idea of union we begin to see the basic components of beauty in morality. First, in the union the lover's interests conform with the interests of the beloved. The man in love now sees his good as linked with the good of the woman. In so doing there is consent between lover and beloved; they unite in a pleasing way. Second, there are degrees to which the lover's interests conform with the one he loves. Here we see proportion at work. The proportionality of their loving union is based on how much their interests or good consent. The more the man consents with the one he loves the greater the moral beauty of his love.

The second quality of morally beautiful love expands the first quality. A self-less union was necessary for love to be morally beautiful. However, just because there is a union does not mean it is morally beautiful. A man may have an intense love for his brother. Yet what if in his love for his brother he stole money or murdered innocent people, doing so out of a devotion to the brother's wealth or gain? Regardless of how perfect the union was between the two, this would certainly not appear to be morally beautiful.

The missing element has to do with the scope of morally beautiful love. Beauty, once again, is based upon consent and proportion. In order to consent one must be in relationship with another. A musical note is only beautiful as it relates to other notes in a melody. It is upon the consent and proportion within this relationship that the note is beautiful. Yet this relationship is not with one note to another only. Edwards speaks of how some notes might appear beautiful when played together but sound terrible when played with the rest of the melody. Such a beauty is really no beauty at all because if beauty is based upon ideas of consent and proportion within a relationship,

---

<sup>29</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 122-123.



then true beauty must take into account all with which an entity is in relationship.<sup>30</sup>

With whom, then, are human beings in relationship? They are in relationship with all that exists. Edwards stated that “every intelligent being is some way related to being in general, and is a part of the universal system of existence....”<sup>31</sup> Since humanity is part of all of existence humans are therefore in relationship with all. With this in mind let us return to the example of brotherly love. The man may have a loving union with his sibling. Out of this union he robs and murders others. Why are these actions, though done out of love, considered immoral? They are wrong because they do not take into account all with which the man is in relationship. The good of the whole is not achieved but instead attacked by the thefts and murders. The man and his brother are two notes that, while sounding good by themselves, are terrible when played in the entire symphony of existence.

Therefore, it is more than particular beings with whom we are in relationship. A human being is in relationship with the *entire system* of being. In light of this relationship to all being, Edwards describes virtue (which he equated with moral beauty) in this way:

True virtue most essentially consists in BENEVOLENCE TO BEING IN GENERAL. Or perhaps, to speak more accurately, it is that consent, propensity, and union of heart to being in general, which is immediately exercised in a general good will.<sup>32</sup>

True moral beauty was a love to all that exists. In loving all being, the loving person

sought the good or the interests of all that exists. In other words, morally beautiful love in loving all being sought the common good. Therefore, simply loving another was not necessarily wrong. However, if that love conflicted with a love to being in general, then it would go against the common good and therefore not be morally beautiful.<sup>33</sup>

### *Is Humanity Morally Beautiful?*

After establishing that for Edwards self-less love to all existence is the core of moral beauty, we can now address the first specific difference between Edwards and Hutcheson. Both men agreed that self-less love to all being was the essence of moral beauty. However, is this kind of love what is seen in humanity? Hutcheson said yes. Looking at the world, one could see all kinds of benevolent acts that were morally beautiful. Men acted charitably all the time, seeking the good of others without a selfish thought. He further considered the moral beauty of mankind to be a natural part of God’s creation.<sup>34</sup> God created mankind with the ability to love others selflessly.

Edwards, on the other hand, stated that mankind was not and could not be morally beautiful. Love was certainly the driving force behind human actions; in fact, all human actions were driven by a loving disposition. However, the love exercised by humanity fell hopelessly short of the truly beautiful because of the scope of natural human love. While beautiful love was selflessly toward all being, for Edwards natural human love was always self-love.

To understand Edward’s assertion, we must explore his definition of self-love. In

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

---

<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that in speaking of “being in general,” Edwards did not mean every entity that exists. He goes on to clarify that he is speaking of all sentient being, those beings with understanding and will.

<sup>34</sup> Zakai, 316.

Chapter IV of *True Virtue* Edwards noted that there exists an affection refracted by the person back toward himself. Edwards described this as “a man’s love of his own happiness.”<sup>35</sup> Edwards stated that self-love is a common name for this affection.

Edwards next sought to make clear what exactly is meant by self-love. He had already linked it to a person’s love of his or her happiness. However, this statement can be taken in two ways. One understanding of all love arising from self-love is that a man loves what is pleasing to him. Edwards quickly dismissed this as a meaningless designation. For such an assertion states that to act in any way that is pleasing to oneself is to love oneself. Yet this is not different, Edwards asserted, from a man possessing and exercising the faculty of will through choice.<sup>36</sup> By merely choosing we are declaring a preference for that which we find pleasing. In this case, if self-loving is loving what is pleasing to oneself, then all we are doing in self-love is practicing the ability to prefer. Self-love would be just another name for preference.

Edwards stated that if this were self-love, then “there is an impropriety and absurdity even in the putting of the question, Whether all our love...does not arise from self-love?”<sup>37</sup> Love that was not self-love would be impossible, making any discussion of the topic a frivolous endeavor. Further, though such a definition of self-love could explain why men are capable of loving in general, it could not explain “why men’s love is placed on such and such objects”<sup>38</sup> This definition cannot state *how* a man can come to love any specific beings such as friends, relatives, or God, making it so their happiness and good “becomes a part of his

[the lover’s] happiness.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, Edwards quickly moved to the second definition of self-love as the correct conception.

This second and accurate understanding Edwards said “commonly signifies a man’s regard to his confined *private self*, or love to himself with respect to his *private interest*.”<sup>40</sup> Private interest is explained to be “those pleasures or pains, that are *personal*.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, joys or sorrows have a seat or place of origination. Self-love results from the pleasure or pain originating within a private interest of some sort. For example: a boy desires a piece of chocolate from a candy store yet does not have the money to buy it. Instead of leaving it, the boy steals the chocolate from the store. Here the boy is acting out of love. He takes the candy to please the one he loves: himself. He does not act for the sake of someone else; he has no union of heart or purpose with another. In stealing the chocolate, the boy’s love is directed toward his own person and no one else.

This love, directed by the person toward himself alone, is the first and strictest form of self-love. Such self-love, Edwards asserted, cannot be morally beautiful. To love oneself with respect to one’s “private self” and “private interest”<sup>42</sup> is to place the good of one person above the rest of existence. In this case whenever the perceived good of the individual comes in conflict with the good of all being, the individual will win. In self-love a person makes his own self more important than everyone else. In doing so he cannot have a love to being in general, but is in fact exercising, as Gura describes it, “...the opposite of love to Being in general.”<sup>43</sup> He

---

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 130.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 130

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>43</sup> Gura, 200.

in self-love will oppose the common good in favor of himself.

Few would disagree that the boy's thoughts and actions would not be morally beautiful. His theft is a selfish act only meant to please himself. However, this strict sense of self-love seems to be far from the only motivator for human action. After all, persons in their natural state do not only act with their selves in mind. As Hutcheson claims, they can commit great acts of charity toward others. Men can give their wealth, health, even lives for others in what appears to be self-less devotion.

Yet Edwards stated that even these human actions are based in self-love. In order to make his point, Edwards did not first seek to show definitively how mankind can only act out of self-love. Instead, he first sought to show how all kinds of thoughts and actions, even those seemingly broad and self-less acts of humanity, can really be a form of self-love.

A key to Edwards' argument is his definition of self-love and its relation to benevolence. In describing the nature of self-love Edwards expanded its scope. For the essential error of self-love is not that it is centered only on the self. Self-love's essential error is that it puts a private interest apart from, over, and above the common good or general existence. Edwards noted that this principle shows self-love to be more widespread than the common understanding allows. In its basis of private interest placed over and against the general good, even love that seems to encompass other beings can in truth be self-love.<sup>44</sup>

For one example, Edwards asserted that this self-love can come in the form of bonds of friendship. He stated "Thus, that a man should love those who are of his party, and who are warmly engaged on his side, and promote his interest, is the natural

consequence of a private self-love."<sup>45</sup> When Edwards mentioned party, he likely intended a circle of friends. However, it will be useful to consider how another party—that of politics—may manifest the nature of expanded self-love. A man many times has a love for the political party of which he is a member. The love a man has for his political party may stem from a number of self-loving reasons. The election of the party may lead to personal benefits for the man. He may rise to a certain post or receive special gains from legislation that he sees as dependent on the party. In this case, his love for the party had its origin in his own benefit first and foremost. Even if the man can be said to love those in his party, it is a love *originally* springing from and dependent on the fact that they love him and show that love in benefits. In this manner, "...love to *some* others may truly be the *effect* of self-love."<sup>46</sup> This situation, Edwards stated, is still like strict self-love. The only difference is that one's self-love is expanded to others as far as they will contribute to one's own happiness. Others are loved for what they can do to help the person love himself.

Still, there are other forms of love that also seem completely self-less.<sup>47</sup> Parental love could be of this nature. A mother appears to love her child in a self-less way. She seeks no good of her own but only the child's good. In fact, the mother becomes so selflessly devoted to her child that her happiness is wrapped up in the child's happiness and her well-being with the child's. In the same way, a man may have selfless devotion to his country. He

---

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

<sup>47</sup> Edwards deals with a long list of conditions that appear to be love to being but are instead self-love. These include instances such as empathy, gratitude, anger—even the possible love one could have for characters portrayed on stage or in books. See *True Virtue*, 131-132.

---

<sup>44</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 131.

may only seek its good over and against his own, even to the point of death. He seemingly has come into union with his country in a way that understands his own good as in conformity with that of the nation.

Yet these unions, however much they seem self-less, cannot be beautiful. The problem with these unions manifests itself in two ways. First, Edwards declared that love to a child or country has a basis in strict self-love. Why does the mother love her child more than or opposed to other children? Edwards would say that the mother loves her child first and foremost because he is *her* child. He came from her and thus is in a way a part or an extension of her; he is also her child in an authoritative sense and therefore under her control. In loving him she loves what is like her and is her own primarily because it is like her and is her own. This love, based in ownership and likeness, is not a true union with another; the source of the mother's affection is her own self as it relates to the child. Instead, this situation is merely an extension of love for oneself. It is once again a situation where private interest will triumph over the common good—including the child—anytime the two come in conflict.

The same is true of the man giving all for his country. Why does the man love his nation? The primary reason Edwards would give is that the country is his country. He is a part of it—a citizen. Its principles and his principles are aligned; its safety and security is part of his own safety and security. Though he may have conceptions of it being a just or kind nation, these are not the foundation for his love. Instead, the man loves his nation primarily out of affection for himself. If the nation's principles are attacked, then his own are also under assault. If the country is in danger of invasion, then he as a citizen is also in similar danger. In loving his country he is

seeking to protect his own good. Like the mother to her child, the man loves himself *through* his patriotic fervor.

The second problem with the unions of parents or patriots is another issue dealing with scope. Let us say that the mother or patriot actually could act primarily out of love rooted in the child or the nation. Even then such love actually contains the same basic error as strict self-love. For once again the essential problem of self-love is placing a private interest over and against existence as a whole. If union to a group of persons is placed over and against being in general, it makes that group a private interest, one that would eventually come in conflict with all of existence.

In the case of the mother to her child, let us assume she was capable of loving the child in a self-less manner. She then could in love to the child place his good over and above the common good. The child could have committed a crime such as theft or murder. In loving the child, the mother could seek to cover up the crime or seek some other way to keep her son from being caught and punished. If effective, the mother would leave her son unpunished and capable of committing more crime. In such a case she would have placed the good of her child over and above that of the common good. In the same way, the man who loves his country could do terribly unjust acts toward other peoples. He could engage in unjust war, murder, torture, or any number of evils against other nations for his own country's sake. Through such actions, even this extended scope of love would be against the common good; it would be against love to being in general.

Increase the group to any size of persons; so long as it is opposed to being in general, the same problem applies. For this reason Edwards mentions that even a love to Ancient Rome, though it seemed to include nearly the entire world, could not be

considered virtuous love.<sup>48</sup> The love man naturally had toward family or country was not the beauty most imagined it. In like manner Edwards' definition made all other seemingly beautiful loves lesser types of self-love.

### *God*

So far Edwards' discussion of self-love has focused on human examples of friends, parents, and patriots. All of these fall short of truly beautiful love by their essentially selfish nature. However, human beings were neither the main nor the most important part of Edwards' idea of moral beauty. Instead, Edwards' call to love being in general was centrally and overwhelmingly grounded in one Being: God.<sup>49</sup> As God was the center of all Edwards' thinking, so he was the center of moral beauty.

On one level, the inclusion of God in the scheme of beautiful love was necessary based on Edwards' definition of moral beauty. Recall that Edwards defines beautiful love as "BENEVOLENCE TO BEING IN GENERAL."<sup>50</sup> Loving being in general means to love all sentient existence. Therefore, God as an existent entity must be loved as part of being in general.

Yet God's position in moral beauty was much more than adding one more being to the scope of love. Without love to God one could not possibly love the rest of being properly nor could one love according to consenting and proportional rules of beauty. Examining these two claims further highlights the centrality of God within Edwards' moral beauty.

First, in Edwards' mind to not include love to God meant that it was impossible to seek the common good. Edwards believed this assertion to be true because to him there was no difference between what God did for His own sake and for humanity's good.

In all that He does, Edwards argued that God "has so stated these ends [in creation]...as therein plainly to show a supreme regard to himself."<sup>51</sup> God loves Himself supremely and in doing so always seeks His own good. This situation would seem to be the very self-love that Edwards criticized as not being morally beautiful. If the person involved were any human being on earth, then such a criticism would be right. Remember, however, that the core of the definition of self-love is that it loves a private interest over and against the common good. Yet in always seeking His own good, God is the only being Who does what is best for humanity in the process. In fact, while making much of himself, He always acts in accordance with the common good. In creating the world to communicate His glory, God gave all creation existence. In communicating knowledge of Himself so He would be praised God gives His creation the greatest knowledge it could ever possess. In the cross God glorifies His own grace—grace that saves humanity from Hell.<sup>52</sup> To Edwards the common good becomes synonymous with the will and action of God. Because of the conformity of God's will and the common good, God is most loving toward His creation when He is most glorifying Himself.

---

<sup>48</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 136.

<sup>49</sup> Edwards here assumes the existence of God without making an argument for that existence. One reason for this assumption is that men like Hutcheson also worked from the same basic premise that God does exist.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

---

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The End for Which God Created the World" in *God's Passion for His Glory* by John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 145.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards skillfully makes these arguments in detail in his dissertation *The End for Which God Created the World*.

In this light, the ultimate reason that humanity's love should be self-less is so it can be centered on and emulate the Divine love. In order to be morally beautiful humanity must love as God does, including loving God supremely. It is *through* this love to God that correct love to creatures spring. Love to God and conformity to His will become the necessary beginning points of all moral beauty.

In his discussion of God's love and humanity's conformity to it, Edwards made more than love to any god the love that is the foundation of moral beauty. He made the Christian God an explicit necessity. In Chapter V of *True Virtue*, Edwards reiterates his earlier point that moral beauty must in its love "take things in general into consideration..."<sup>53</sup> including most essentially God. Yet he adds a component here, continuing that morally beautiful love "is free from speculative error."<sup>54</sup> To love a god besides the Christian God was to love in error. That god did not exist for Edwards and to love and conform oneself to a non-existent god was neither to love God nor being in general.<sup>55</sup>

### ***Benevolence and Complacence***

As we have seen, one reason love to God was so necessary was because only in love toward God and conformity with Him could we seek the common good. While Hutcheson would agree with Edwards that love to God was a necessary part of moral beauty, he would not have made it essential

to seeking the good of others. Unlike Edwards, for Hutcheson God was a part but not the center of moral beauty.

Yet this reason is not the only one for God's importance in moral beauty. The second reason why God was so central to Edwards' moral beauty was found in the amount of love God was owed. Herein lay another separation between Edwards and Hutcheson, one that led to a difference in how love to God was to be emphasized in moral beauty. As God was not essential to loving other beings for Hutcheson, so love to Him was not considered a point to be emphasized.

These differences between the two men stemmed from Edwards' understanding of the proportionality of morally beautiful love. In other words, we consent through love to being in general. Yet the being in general that we are to love is comprised of individual beings. Since being in general is composed in that way, how do we correctly apportion our love to the specific beings comprising all existence?

Edwards stated that "true virtue must chiefly consist in LOVE TO GOD."<sup>56</sup> Love to God was not just a part of love to being but was the *chief* part. By saying that moral beauty was chiefly found in love to God, Edwards declared that there is a hierarchy to morally beautiful love. Within consenting love to all existence, some beings are to be loved more than others. In order to understand this claim, we must examine

---

<sup>53</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 134.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

<sup>55</sup> Neither in *True Virtue* nor in *The End for Which God Created the World* does Edwards offer any rational defense for the singular existence of the Christian God. Considering his position in predominately Christian Colonial America and his opponents being mostly professing Christians, Edwards appears to have not seen the need in these cases to argue for the Christian God's existence.

---

<sup>56</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 125. Knowing that love to God is necessary to gain Heaven, it is possible that many humans might try to love God in order to go to Heaven and escape Hell. Edwards was quite conscious of this problem. Especially in his sermons, he emphasized that the essence of salvation was a loving union to Christ wherein Christ was seen as supremely valuable and treasured as the greatest entity in existence. Love that sought escape from Hell and entrance into Heaven as its primary objective and did not supremely treasure Christ was an attempt to selfishly use Christ and His work for one's own gain. To Edwards such love was no salvation at all.

Edwards' understanding of consent and proportion in beautiful love in greater detail. Through such an examination we will better see how Edwards and Hutcheson differed in the emphasizing of love to God in morality.

First, what exactly was the nature of the consenting union in moral beauty? We have already said it came from a conformity of interests whereby the good of the beloved became the good of the lover. Yet what was the exact nature of the consenting love that formed this conformity of interests? Edwards believed that all beings could possess two qualities: existence and beauty. He declared that love to be divided into two types based upon these two qualities.

The first type of love he called a "love of benevolence."<sup>57</sup> Edwards described this as "that affection or propensity of the heart to any being, which causes it to incline to its well-being, or disposes it to desire and take pleasure in its happiness."<sup>58</sup> As a love to any being, benevolent love is grounded in the existence of the object loved. Just by having existence, a being is worthy of some amount of benevolent love. Through this love a person finds pleasure in the happiness of the loved one. It is in this pleasure or happiness stemming from benevolent love that we see how this type of love consents with its object. The benevolent lover's happiness or pleasure becomes united to the beloved's happiness or pleasure.

The second category of beautiful love Edwards described as a "love of *complacence*."<sup>59</sup> Unlike love of benevolence, this love has beauty in its object as the source, "For it is no other than delight in beauty...."<sup>60</sup> In other words, one loves another *because of* his or her beauty. Here

Edwards intends the beauty loved to be primarily moral beauty. A woman has a love to being in general. She then sees a man who also has love to being in general. Edwards declared that the woman, upon perceiving this should and will have love toward the man not just for his existence but also for his own love to being. He declared "That which truly and sincerely seeks the good of others, must approve of and love that which joins with him in seeking the good of others."<sup>61</sup> Love of complacence therefore is directed toward those beings that are morally beautiful because of their moral beauty. Here, too, we see how in love there is consent. Just as benevolent love creates consent with beings merely for their existence, so love of complacence creates consent with those beings who also have benevolent love.

### *Proportionality in the Two Loves*

Love of benevolence and love of complacence formed both parts of the consenting love within moral beauty. With both ideas established, Edwards then applied the conception of proportionality to each.

Benevolent love, while it necessitates love for all, does not mean equality in that love. Not all beings have the same amount of existence. Here the meaning of existence is clarified. Existence for Edwards is more than simply being. Existence describes something in an entity that can be quantified, that can be measured. In being quantifiable, Edwards did not mean height or weight. Instead, Edwards elsewhere describes existence as "greatness."<sup>62</sup> Greatness was linked to the magnitude of a man's thoughts and actions. His greatness thus could be judged by the manner in which

---

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

---

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>62</sup> Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, 142.

a man thought, understood, and applied concepts. All human beings have some level of existence or greatness but not by any means the same amount. A great philosopher like Aristotle would through his magnificent ideas be greater than a plain farmer.<sup>63</sup> As existence is the basis for love of benevolence, “then that object who has *most* of being, or has the greatest share of existence, *other things being equal*... will have the *greatest* share of the propensity and benevolent affections of the heart.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, all else being equal, a great man like Aristotle is to be loved more than lesser men who lack comparable greatness. This distributing of love according to existence is proportionality at work. As a man is in relationship to all being, so he must love each part of being in proportion to how much each deserves.

Upon this foundation of benevolence Edwards placed the second love, love of complacency. Edwards stated that “A secondary ground of pure benevolence is virtuous benevolence itself in its object.”<sup>65</sup> As one is beautiful in loving a being for its existence, so that exact exercise of love to being is itself worthy of beautiful love. Thus, if a being sees another being exercising beautiful love, then it is beautiful for the first being to love the second for its beauty. This love, like the other love, is proportional. As much as one sees another being exercising love of benevolence, so much that person is worthy of virtuous love for it. In other words, the amount of beautiful love distributed should be based on the amount of benevolence existing in the being loved. This would mean that, all else being equal, beautiful love would regard Billy Graham higher than Joseph Stalin.

Therefore Edwards concludes that the ordering of virtuous love is based first

upon the existence and then upon the beauty of the object to be loved. The two loves are then to be considered together. Truly beautiful love is to be apportioned based on the combined factors of existence and beauty in each being.

This understanding forms the basis upon which the importance of love to God comes to light. Virtuous love first is proportionally related to the amount of existence in a being. The more of existence one possesses the more virtuous love that being deserves, all other considerations being equal. In light of this understanding Edwards asserts that, “God has infinitely the greatest share of existence.”<sup>66</sup> The intellectual power of Socrates, the oratory of Cicero, and the beautiful voice of Pavoratti are as nothing compared to God. He is above all in His greatness to an infinite degree. This God who is the creative source of all existence is so great that the rest of existence is as a pin drop to Him.<sup>67</sup>

In addition, Edwards adds that what existence there is besides God owes its being to God. He is the Creator of all existence and therefore even it is in a manner His own. Therefore, even that greatness that is not directly God’s owes its being to Him. If we were to base the ordering of our love on greatness alone, God would be worthy of an infinite amount of our affection.

As regards the second object of love, moral beauty, Edwards finds God to be the most deserving as well. Yet how exactly is God the most beautiful being? Edwards in *The Nature of True Virtue* gives little detail as to the beauty of God, assuming it as self-evident. Yet, in his *Miscellanies* Edwards elaborates on his declaration of God’s beauty. Here Edwards states that God’s beauty is found in his perfect and infinite

---

<sup>63</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 122.

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

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

---

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

<sup>67</sup> Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, 142.



love. Love is in fact stated to be “God’s perfection.”<sup>68</sup> God, whose very nature is love, loves so perfectly that He is the very definition of beauty. No other love consents more exactly to the nature of things, to the true state of the universe. If He possesses the most perfect love and thus the most perfect beauty in the universe, then He is entitled to the most beautiful love for it.

Therefore, when we combine the two standards for apportioning virtuous love, we find God to be worthy of our highest regard. In addition to being infinitely worthy of love based upon greatness, God was infinitely worthy of love based upon His own beautiful love. As both the utmost possessor of greatness and beauty, God is worthy of an infinite proportion of our love.

Here the magnitude of Edwards’ assertion is shown. Not only is a love to God necessary for moral beauty; it is the chief necessity. In fact, real love to the true God is not beautiful if it is not the greatest, highest, and most supreme love as well. God must have the highest and greatest share of love for moral beauty to exist.

In love to God we see a disagreement between Hutcheson and Edwards, one that stems not from principle but from emphasis. Edwards likely had Hutcheson in mind when he noted that “There seems to be an inconsistency in some writers on morality, in this respect....”<sup>69</sup> Edwards claimed there are many who “do not wholly exclude a regard to the *Deity* out of their schemes of morality....”<sup>70</sup> They include a love to God as part of their system of virtue. However, Edwards objected, these men have so little of and about God in their moral structure that Edwards felt ample justification “to suspect they esteem it a less

important and subordinate part of true morality.”<sup>71</sup>

In other words, Edwards asserted that the emphasis and space apportioned in other systems of virtue show, regardless of their claims, where their true priorities lay. The focus is not on love to God but on love to other people, to animals, or to inanimate objects. It is not obedience and worship of the divine that is most praised but acts of charity, courage, and patience with other created beings. Edwards in no way disagreed with love being directed toward the created order. However, the point remained the same: in other systems of morality, the Being most deserving of love is there but on the fringe.

### *Conclusion*

In speaking of all of these types of love, Edwards accomplished two tasks. First, he had broken down many if not all forms of love exercised by natural man. For Edwards the many actions of mankind stemmed not from a natural love to all being but from some form of self-love. Such actions fell woefully short of the natural virtue Hutcheson claimed to exist. Second, Edwards’ articulation asserted the centrality of love to God in moral beauty. Without a supreme love to the true God, moral beauty cannot exist. As he developed his argument concerning why man was incapable of moral beauty, the centrality of God would become even more apparent and necessary.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Edwards, “Miscellanies in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1*, ed. Edward Hickman (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), cclxxii.

<sup>69</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 125.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

---

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

<sup>72</sup> The melding of man’s inability and God’s centrality will be explored in detail in Chapter III.

## CHAPTER II

### *Perceiving Beauty*

The first fundamental difference between Hutcheson and Edwards centered around whether men's moral thoughts and actions, understood as self-less, were by nature beautiful. Hutcheson asserted that men by nature do act out of self-less love to all being; Edwards denied that such acts were any more than self-love. The second fundamental difference between Edwards and Hutcheson, to which we now turn, was how mankind perceived morality. In other words, what is it in humanity that allows a man to say "this thought or action is beautiful" and "that is ugly"?

Hutcheson believed in the existence of a "moral sense"<sup>73</sup> in humanity. By this moral sense humanity approved of virtuous actions and disapproved of vicious deeds. How did it approve of the good and disdain the bad? The fact that Hutcheson called this faculty a "sense" is important for understanding how it operated. The "moral sense" acted like other senses such as taste, touch, and smell. The sensations that the "moral sense" had were "feelings or sentiments."<sup>74</sup> These sentiments were exercised in response to actions or other sentiments a person perceived. Upon perceiving a moral act or sentiment, a man by his "moral sense" would see in it consent and proportion and find the act to be beautiful. This approval would manifest itself in feelings of pleasure for the perceived action or sentiment.<sup>75</sup> Through and by this pleasure one approved the good. In the same way, perceiving a vicious or evil action would elicit displeasure and disapproval through the faculty of the "moral sense."

---

<sup>73</sup> Gura, 199.

<sup>74</sup> Zakai, 313.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 313.

This sense was internal to the self and natural to all human beings; everyone possessed it. Hutcheson attributed the existence of this sense to God's design in creation.<sup>76</sup> God had implanted into man the ability to perceive right and wrong by this faculty.

Further, it must be stressed that this faculty was not, as in other systems, grounded in reason or the rational faculty. The seat of the "moral sense" for Hutcheson was found in one's feelings as distinct from rational capacity. One did not primarily reason that an act was bad. Instead, one felt it was wrong. Moral beauty was therefore natural because it aligned with the nature of man to feel pleasure for the good and pain for the bad.<sup>77</sup>

Edwards agreed that the good seems pleasing to human beings and the bad can feel wrong naturally. He stated that humans have a "sensation of pleasure"<sup>78</sup> when we perceive good and a comparable sensation of discontentment when evil is done. Yet this sensation, Edwards argues, has nothing to do with moral beauty.

The dividing line between Edwards and Hutcheson on this issue came out of a distinction Edwards made within beauty. Edwards declared that there were two types of beauty in the world that humans perceived in others with two different faculties. Because man perceived the different beauties with two different faculties, Edwards argued against Hutcheson that what seemed to be a perception of moral beauty was nothing of the sort; man by nature did not perceive moral beauty in

---

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 316.

<sup>77</sup> It should not be thought that Hutcheson and Edwards had no place for reason in understanding right and wrong. Reason could aid in ascertaining the character of a person or action. However, the "moral sense" that felt right and wrong was grounded in sentiment and feeling alone.

<sup>78</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 128.

others but instead perceived beauty of a different kind.

Thus, before we can understand the differing perceptions of moral beauty, we must examine the differing beauties that are perceived in other people. It is through understanding the nature and origin of these kinds of beauty that the difference between Edwards and Hutcheson in perceiving moral beauty comes to the forefront.

### *Spiritual and Physical Beauty*

What, then, are the two types of beauty that humanity perceived in different ways in others? The first beauty Edwards' described was "Spiritual beauty."<sup>79</sup> As beautiful, spiritual beauty obeyed the same rules of consent, harmony, and proportion that defined all beauty. The second kind of beauty—physical beauty—followed the same basic rules governing spiritual beauty. Edwards stated physical beauty is that "which consists in a mutual consent and agreement of different things, in form, manner, quantity, and visible end or design."<sup>80</sup> These beauties included the material examples used in chapter one such as the beauty of a well-working machine or a human body. Human beings perceive that the working machine or the proportions of the human body are in pleasing agreement with each other.

### *Difference Between Spiritual and Physical Beauty*

What was the essential difference between spiritual and physical beauty? The difference between spiritual and physical beauty was in the nature and origin of the consent and proportion that composed each beauty.

First, regarding the nature of each beauty. Edwards declared that "there are two sorts of agreement or consent of one thing to another."<sup>81</sup> The first agreement was the consent of spiritual beauty. In Edwards' thought spiritual beauty was synonymous with moral beauty. He wrote that spiritual beauty "is the only true moral beauty."<sup>82</sup> As we have discussed, the essence of moral beauty's consent was love. Through love to being in general, a person consents or is in agreement not only with particular beings but with the entire system of existence, most especially God.

We return to the nature of moral beauty because the necessity of love as its foundation is crucial to understanding the difference between spiritual and physical beauty. In moral beauty, the love toward being in general is the essence of the consent, the core of the agreement. Love thus comes first as the *cause* of the agreement between entities. Only by this foundation of love does one's interests and good conform to another. Therefore it is in love alone that consent exists between a person and all of existence.

As the basis of consent, love also formed the basis of proportionality in moral beauty. A person begins with a disposition to love being in general. Then, once such love exists "the *proportion* which is observed in objects may be the cause of the *proportion of benevolence* to those objects."<sup>83</sup> Edwards meant here that it is from that original love to being in general, love that comprised consent, that such love is dispensed proportionally. With consenting love to being already established, the person then perceives the greatness and goodness of particular entities making up sentient existence. He can then order his love within

---

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

---

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

the system according to the rules of proportion that determine the amount of beauty in each being. Therefore, love is the necessary ingredient from the beginning to the end of this process. Without love as the foundation there is no moral beauty.

Since the first beauty Edwards spoke of was moral beauty, we already know its place of origination. All moral beauty springs from the disposition. The consent and proportion that is realized in moral beauty comes only from the basis of a disposition that loves being in general. Any consent and proportion not originating from a loving disposition could not be moral beauty.

With the nature and origin of moral beauty in mind, the second type of consent Edwards spoke of was that found in physical beauty. This consent was like moral beauty in that both define beauty according to ideas of proportion and consent. Yet physical beauty is distinct from moral beauty because of “the will, disposition, or affection of the heart having no concern in it...”<sup>84</sup> While moral beauty originates in the disposition, this kind of agreement has absolutely no basis in the disposition. Instead, the beauty of natural agreement is one “consisting only in uniformity and consent of nature, form, quantity...”<sup>85</sup>

In other words, in physical beauty there is no prior loving disposition that manifests itself in a consenting, proportional manner. Love to being has no part in it. Instead, the beauty is found in the consenting *itself* and in that alone. The consent and proportionality of an entity is the beginning and the end upon which an entity is beautiful. An example of this could come from many of the beauties in nature. A woman looks at a flower. She is pleased by it and finds it to be lovely. Her finding it beautiful does not stem from any sort of love

to being. She does not see its goodness and greatness within a particular system. Instead, she finds the agreement and proportion of the flower to be pretty in and of itself. The colors all consent in a pleasing manner; the shapes of the petals agree with both the flower's colors and with each other. Consent and agreement are the beginning, middle, and end of the beauty found in the flower.

This example also helps to show where physical beauty originates. It does not stem from the disposition being perceived but instead originates within the consent and proportion of the perceived beauty itself. The origination of the flower's beauty is in its consenting and proportional parts, not any disposition of love.

### ***Perception of Spiritual and Physical Beauty***

So far we have discussed how the spiritual beauty we perceive comes out of the disposition of another while physical beauty rests solely in another's consent and proportion. This discussion leads to the main question both Edwards and Hutcheson asked: how does humanity perceive these different beauties in another? In addressing this issue, Edwards is then able to argue how man is incapable of perceiving moral beauty.

How then is moral beauty perceived? Moral beauty, as it is a beauty of the disposition, also is perceived by the disposition. Recall that moral beauty is made up of love of benevolence and love of complacence. In the first love a person possesses a disposition to love being in general. Then, since he finds love to being to be good, Edwards tells us that in love of complacence “One that loves being in general, will necessarily value good will to being in general, wherever he sees it.”<sup>86</sup> Upon perceiving beautiful love to being in

---

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

---

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

another, the moral man has a love for that being *because of* her moral beauty. This love, therefore, is based upon a *perception* of the beloved's moral beauty. In other words, a person perceives benevolent love in another and such benevolent love becomes itself love's object. Therefore, the very nature of complacent love is based in a loving perception of the beauty in another being. As this complacent love comes out of the disposition, it is the disposition that perceives moral beauty.

The physical beauty, on the other hand, has already been described as a beauty that has no foundation in the disposition. In the same vein, physical beauty is not approved of by the disposition. Instead, the approval of natural beauty comes from what Edwards calls, "a law of nature...or an instinct..."<sup>87</sup> This instinct does exist by nature for Edwards and is given by God to mankind in order that they might perceive physical beauty.

Yet how exactly does this instinct work to approve of physical beauty? It is not based on a perception of the good or on a love of being, but a "sensation of pleasure, on a view of this secondary beauty..."<sup>88</sup> Here Edwards sounds most like Hutcheson's concept of a sense in humanity. A man sees an object. The object possesses great beauty of consent and proportion between its various parts. Through the instinct placed in him by God, he has a sense of delight and satisfaction in perceiving it.

In this way, many of the beauties of the world are perceived to be beautiful without a person even knowing *why* those entities are lovely. As Edwards wrote:

...in many instances, persons that are gratified and affected with this [physical] beauty, do not reflect on

that particular agreement and proportion which, according to the law of nature, is the ground and rule of beauty in the case, yea, are ignorant of it.<sup>89</sup>

This statement proves most readily true when considering those beauties which have no possibility of moral beauty. Why is green grass gratifying to the eye? Edwards would say that it is not pleasing because man considers the pleasing mix of hues that form the color green and then proportions it with the individual blades. He never consciously considers such matters. Instead, man's instinct makes green grass gratifying merely by seeing it. The consent and proportion are perceived as beautiful without their specific manifestations being considered. The process is not different from the way a man approves of foods he eats. Certain foods are delightful to him because his sense of taste finds them gratifying. In the same way, certain objects are beautiful based upon the nature of man shown by his instinct.

### ***Moral Sense and Physical Beauty***

Thus far the examples used for how man's instinct perceives physical beauty have been relegated to those entities incapable of moral beauty. No one will dispute the incapacity of a painting or blade of grass to possess love to being. However, our discussion is ultimately about whether man by nature is capable of perceiving moral beauty. What, then, does the perception of physical beauty have to do with whether or not men perceive the morally beautiful in others? Edwards declares that man's instinct to perceive physical beauty does not merely lay "in material and external things, but also in

---

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

---

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

things immaterial....”<sup>90</sup> Physical beauty does not only rest in paintings and grass but in immaterial entities as well.

Here the ramifications of Edwards’ division of spiritual and physical beauty come to the forefront. There is physical beauty in immaterial things, including morally good thoughts and actions, that is perceived by the instinct. Acts of courage or charity have a consent and proportion in them that the instinct can perceive apart from the disposition. Edwards declared that “A taste of this *inferior* [physical] beauty in things immaterial, is one thing which has been mistaken by some moralists, for a true virtuous principle, supposed to be implanted naturally in the hearts of all mankind.”<sup>91</sup> This truth means for Edwards that entities which most men think they perceive as morally beautiful are no more than their instinct perceiving physical beauty.

How exactly can man approve of something that is morally beautiful from instinct and apart from a disposition of benevolence to being? Man can do so by seeing in moral matters the same kind of consent and proportion that exist in melodies or colors and find them beautiful on the same account.

For example, Edwards states that:

There is a beauty of order in society... as when different members of society have all their appointed office, place, and station, according to their several capacities and talents, and everyone keeps his place, and continues in his proper business.<sup>92</sup>

This order of society can be perceived as moral beauty. Through a disposition to benevolence toward being, a person would perceive a well-ordered society as beautiful

because it is in line with the common good. His love of being in general would approve of what would be best for being in general.

However, this spiritual beauty is not the only beauty existing in a well-ordered society. He continues that “there is another beauty, besides what consists in benevolence....”<sup>93</sup> One can see the perfect consent of the various parts. Those best suited to rule are governing the society; men and women suited for teaching are educating students. Persons best equipped for physical labor work in construction, masonry, and other comparable vocations. All of these members of society not only do the job to which they are best suited but do so in a good and efficient manner. The society contains beauty that rests purely in this consent and agreement of its parts one to another. One can look at it without any love toward being or desire for the common good and find the cohesion pleasing. In this approval of society, Edwards sees instinct perceiving nothing more than physical beauty. In fact, such approval is not substantially different from finding beauty in, “a beautiful building, or piece of skilful architecture....”<sup>94</sup> In society or a building, both can be perceived based on the same grounds of physical beauty.

Edward gives another example regarding justice. Justice also can and is perceived as a moral beauty. Justice is in line with the common good and the law of God. A disposition to love being would therefore perceive justice and find it beautiful. However, this is not the only beauty to justice. Edwards tells us that there is beauty in justice “which consists in the agreement of different things, that have relation to one another, in nature, manner and measure....”<sup>95</sup> In considering justice, there is a relation of consent and proportion

---

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

---

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

that when viewed is in and of itself pleasing. When human beings witness a great act of courage or charity, it seems fitting to them that the courageous or charitable person be rewarded and praised for her action. In this concept there is a consent or agreement between the action and the reward; the praise or reward is in agreement with the action and is approved as being rightly in relationship. This perception has nothing to do with benevolence to being. Instead, the beauty is perceived as beautiful because of the symmetry that exists between the good action and the good response to it. The act consent to the praise or honor it receives. Many times this relationship cannot even be explained. A person will perceive the good and its reward without being able to articulate why.

Edwards says that the same is true in regards to proportionality in justice. Persons will say “He who from his will *does* evil to others, should *receive* evil...in *proportion* to the evil of his doings.”<sup>96</sup> Just as there is a natural beauty in being praised for doing good, so there is the same beauty in punishment for doing evil. People speak in this way concerning crimes. A person will commit an infraction and be tried in a court of law. If convicted and sentenced, the question is normally asked whether, “the punishment fit the crime.” This statement shows the relationship in the mind between crime and punishment. There is consent and proportion between infraction and discipline that is pleasing to humans. This consent has nothing to do with love but only consists in a perception of the agreement between the two parts. Once again, this perception does not come out of the disposition and therefore has nothing to do with moral beauty. It is not substantially different than the perception of a beautiful flower.

---

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have seen how Edwards’ division of spiritual and physical beauty had important ramifications for his view of a moral sense natural to mankind. Much of the supposed perception of morality we find in the world has nothing to do with true moral beauty, according to Edwards. Instead, much that men took for a moral sense in others was nothing more than an instinctual perception of physical beauty. With his discussion of a natural moral sense, Edwards had once again questioned man’s natural moral ability. Where before he questioned whether man could be moral, he here questioned whether man could even perceive morality. Without the ability to be morally beautiful or perceive moral beauty, Edwards’ position left natural man in a woeful state.

## **CHAPTER III**

### ***The Problem and the Remedy***

So far Edwards’ two fundamental objections to a natural moral sense have been articulated. What most men consider natural beauty and natural moral sense is nothing more than a mixture of self-love and instinct. Though Edwards has called into doubt whether man is morally beautiful and perceives moral beauty, the question still remains as to why he believed both to be impossible for mankind.

Edwards’ answer to why man cannot by nature be morally beautiful or perceive moral beauty is grounded in his view of human nature. First, a man’s nature possessed a determinate power over him. Edwards declares “...no created thing has power to produce an effect any otherwise

than by virtue of the laws of nature.”<sup>97</sup> A salmon’s nature determines that upon mating it will swim upriver to lay its eggs. The swim upriver is so much a part of its nature that short of physical constraint or death the salmon will make the journey. Though man’s nature is not the same as a salmon’s it still holds the same absolute power over him. As long as certain circumstances of mind and situation attain, a man can be counted upon to act in a specific manner. All of his thoughts and actions will be determined by his nature.

Second, human nature had been changed from its original state by one important event: the Fall. By changing human nature, the Fall had affected humanity in a fundamental way that kept them from being or seeing moral beauty. What, then, was human nature at creation? From this question we will be able to see how humanity reached the point of being incapable of being morally beautiful and perceiving moral beauty in others.

Edwards tells us, “When God made man at first, he implanted in him two kinds of principles.”<sup>98</sup> By principle Edwards is speaking of that which composes a man’s nature. These principles were what Edwards elsewhere speaks of as a “*principle of nature*” in the soul. He explains:

By a *principle of nature* in this place, I mean that foundation which is laid in nature, either old or new, any particular manner or kind of exercise of the faculties of the soul; or natural habit, or foundation for action, giving a person ability and disposition to exert the faculties in exercises of such a certain kind.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 131.

<sup>98</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin in The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1*, ed. Edward Hickman (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 217.

<sup>99</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 266.

Here nature and disposition are closely connected. The principles of human nature are what set the parameters of humanity’s disposition. Recall that it is from a man’s disposition that his inclinations and therefore choices spring. These principles of nature, by setting the parameters of the disposition, ultimately defined what a man’s choices would be. What, then, were man’s two principles of nature at creation?

The first principles God gave to man were an “*inferior* kind, which may be called NATURAL, being the principles of mere human nature....what the Scriptures sometimes call FLESH.”<sup>100</sup> These were the passions and appetites of men toward protecting their own liberty and safety as well as enjoying pleasure and hating pain. These Edwards considered mere human nature, completely contained within man and independent to him.

But these principles were not all that composed a human being. There were “*superior* principles, that were spiritual, holy, and divine” that included “man’s righteousness and true holiness.”<sup>101</sup> These superior principles ruled the inferior, keeping the passions and appetites of natural men in line with a spiritual holiness and communion with God. Man did want to protect his own liberty but not as a rebellion against God. He enjoyed pleasures and shunned pains but only as they were in line with the common good as found in the will of God. As rulers of the inferior principles, the superior kept man holy and righteous.

Edwards notes that these principles were not strictly human nature as the inferior principles were, but did, “...immediately depend on man’s union and communion with God, or divine communications and influences of God’s Spirit.”<sup>102</sup> This relationship was therefore two-fold. On

---

<sup>100</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 217.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 217.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 218.



the one hand, man's holiness was dependent on his relationship to God *externally*. He communed with God in an intimate and personal way; in Eden God was, "...walking in the garden in the cool of the day."<sup>103</sup> Adam and Eve could walk with Him, converse with Him, and enjoy His presence in a manner humanity today can only imagine. Through this relationship they knew holiness by the experience of it in the example and direct teaching of God.

In addition, the relationship between God and man had an *internal* element. Edwards stated that God's Spirit communicated and influenced man. In Edwards' thought, Adam and Eve experienced the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a divine communicator of holiness. In the Holy Spirit God was a part of human nature. As a part of human nature, the Holy Spirit communicated the love of God and man within Adam and Eve, resulting in a disposition of affection toward all being. It was through his external and internal communion with God that man was holy. Man's righteousness was radically dependent on a close and loving relationship with God.

When the first sin occurred, a split occurred in man's nature. God withdrew Himself from man. No longer did He walk and talk with them. No longer did the Holy Spirit indwell as a part of human nature. In His withdrawal, God removed the superior principles from humanity.<sup>104</sup> Without these principles, man was left to his bare human nature, one ruled by private passions and desires. These passions and appetites, righteous and useful under the rule of holiness, now as masters became wells of sin.<sup>105</sup> Man's desire for liberty became rebellion against God's authority; his desire

for safety made him forget the good of others and only look out for himself. Pleasure and pains that once rested in general righteousness now sought private sin. Man, with only mere human nature now within him, was constricted by this nature in these thoughts and actions. In this manner he will only see ideas such as justice, mercy, and grace in ways that fulfill his own appetites and passions.

Yet these are more outward manifestations of the Fall. At the core of this change in man was how the removal of the superior principles affected man's disposition. First, Edward tells us the superior principles were "...summarily comprehended in divine love."<sup>106</sup> Man's pre-fallen state was ruled by the love of God upon and within him. He loved God and God loved Him. Even more, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit meant that the very love of God was *within* him, flowing out in streams of affection for God and man. Here man's disposition was one of morally beautiful love; every inclination of his mind was to love being in general and God most of all.

Yet Edwards states that the mere principles of human nature rested on the foundation of none other than self-love.<sup>107</sup> The inferior principles were based solely in mankind. Through them he loved his own liberty and safety; by them he sought the fulfillment of his own pleasures and flight from his own pains. There was no true love for God or for any other apart from himself. The only reason these did not manifest themselves in sinful ways owed to their inferior placement in the nature of man. The superior principles of God kept any thought of self in line with the common good as a conformity to God's will.

---

<sup>103</sup> Genesis 3:8. Holy Bible. English Standard Version. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001).

<sup>104</sup> Gura, 207.

<sup>105</sup> Marsden, 454.

---

<sup>106</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 217.

<sup>107</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 217.

Therefore, after the Fall's removal of superior principles, this self-love became *the* human disposition, the sole determinate of thought and action. All of man's thoughts were based in a version of love for himself. With this reduced disposition now the sum of natural man, only these parameters were extended to all born of the original Adam.<sup>108</sup> As Adam had become so all of his descendents became. Self-love, therefore, has become the defining disposition of human nature.

Resulting from the Fall, humanity lacks the capacity for any thought or action aside from self-love. Humanity lost the ability to be morally beautiful. In doing so, mankind also lost the capacity to perceive moral beauty as moral beauty. As stated before, the recognition of moral beauty must come from the disposition. The basis of the disposition's perceiving moral beauty (love of complacency) comes from its own moral beauty (love of benevolence). A will that is itself not morally beautiful cannot perceive moral beauty in others. He does not have benevolent love within him and therefore cannot recognize it in anyone else. The inferior principles left no room for seeing moral beauty but only for an instinctual recognition of physical beauty.

The Fall and its results showed for Edwards the hopelessness of man in his natural state. Man after Adam lives by necessity in complete absence of true moral beauty. Given this understanding Hutcheson's concept of natural morality and moral sense is anything but moral beauty. Edwards painted natural man as in a woeful state with no hope in and of himself to change.

### *Edwards' Remedy: The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit*

Where, though, does Edwards leave us? Is humanity then hopeless in the realm of moral beauty?

Edwards did not believe that all mankind was left doomed to an existence void of moral beauty. Instead, he looked to a divine answer to man's incapacity. In the hopelessness of natural man the centrality of God could be asserted once again. This supernatural answer was found in the concepts of conversion and regeneration. Through conversion man's disposition was changed from one of self-love to benevolence to being; through regeneration the process was continued until man's entire disposition was aligned with the love of God.

The importance of conversion for Edwards must be understood both personally and theologically. Brought up the son and grandson of Puritan pastors, Edwards struggled as a youth with tenants of the Christian faith, most especially the sovereignty of God.<sup>109</sup> Edwards stated that, "From my childhood my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life; and rejecting whom he pleased."<sup>110</sup> One day a 20 year old Edwards, while reading from Paul's first letter to Timothy, felt "...the first instance, that I remember, of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have lived much in since...."<sup>111</sup> God seemed beautiful and desirable for the first time. Coupled with this delight was an acceptance of those doctrines of divine sovereignty he had found so horrible. Edwards did not

---

<sup>109</sup> Gura, 36.

<sup>110</sup> Edwards, *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards in The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1*, ed. Edward Hickman (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), liv.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, lv.

---

<sup>108</sup> Marsden, 454.

attribute the change in belief and desire to a convincing argument or a life experience. He says “But never could [I] give an account how, or by what means, I was thus convinced...”<sup>112</sup> Instead, he attributed the change to a supernatural intervention by God in his heart, one that he only realized later on in life.

From that moment, Edwards was never the same. He saw his entire life as hinging on that experience, that change of heart from antagonism to delight in God. The importance of conversion spread beyond his own life into his ministerial work. He devoted an entire book, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, to the description and investigation of conversions occurring in and around his pastorate in Northampton. Zakai tells us that, “The conversion moment therefore is crucial to any understanding of the development of Edwards’s universe of thought.”<sup>113</sup>

What, though, is the nature of this concept of conversion that was so crucial to Edwards’ thought? Conversion as Edwards experienced it and examined it was what he called “...the indwelling and holy influences of the Spirit of God in them [humans].”<sup>114</sup> In this indwelling, God in the person of the Holy Spirit entered into the soul. From then on, the soul became a home,<sup>115</sup> a place of residence for the Holy Spirit.

In this indwelling within the soul, the Holy Spirit unites Himself with the soul, becoming a part of human nature much like before creation. Edwards states that the Holy Spirit becomes “...so united to the faculties of the soul, that he becomes there a principle

or spring of a new nature and life.”<sup>116</sup> In uniting Himself with the soul, the Holy Spirit and the soul’s dispositions became linked. The result was the establishment of a new disposition within man. Before, the source of man’s disposition had been from purely natural principles that inclined him to self-love and therefore constant sin. Now, the Holy Spirit has by its indwelling become a source of a new disposition resulting in new inclinations. This disposition is one based not on the indwelled person’s self-love. Instead, it flows from the very love of God. The new influence of the Spirit brings about what Edwards calls “...a new inward *perception* or *sensation* of their minds, entirely different in its nature and kind from any thing that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were sanctified.”<sup>117</sup> Like Edwards’ own conversion experience, after the indwelling love of God and man seems delightful in a way that did not seem so before.

Through the love of God as experienced in the human heart, man begins to love as God loves.

This kind of love manifests itself in the two ways necessary to true moral beauty. First, man has a supreme love for God. Edwards took very seriously the Apostle John’s assertion that “God is love.” In fact, the claim that He is love meant that God’s very being, His very “essence” was love.<sup>118</sup> This view came from the emphasis Edwards placed upon the Trinity. God existed as the loving community of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, when the Holy Spirit indwelled a human, the human experienced the love of God for God. In this manner “he [the indwelled convert] is a partaker of the

---

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, liv.

<sup>113</sup> Zakai, 81.

<sup>114</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 264.

<sup>115</sup> In *Religious Affections* Edwards cites many texts of Scripture that speak of the Holy Spirit making the Christian’s heart his abode or place of residence, such as I Corinthians 3:16,

---

<sup>116</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 265.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 266.

<sup>118</sup> Marsden, 191.

divine nature, and becomes a God-like creature.”<sup>119</sup>

Second, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit gave man a love that included all of humanity as well as God. Just as God loves all being for its existence, so man under the influences of the Holy Spirit loves in like fashion. With a disposition to love God and man, the result of conversion was that mankind began to regain the moral beauty lost in the Fall.

### *Regeneration*

So far conversion has been described much like a return to the state of affairs before the Fall. In the indwelling of the Holy Spirit the superior principles of holiness return to the soul and rule over the inferior. Yet conversion did not lead to an instant re-establishment of sinless man. Man upon conversion did not begin acting in all ways and all manners according to the will of God. A convert will still feel and act in ways that are based in self-love, sometimes even more than acting out of true love to being. Instead, the act of conversion through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit began the process of regeneration. Regeneration described the process that worked toward a final re-establishment of man's sinless pre-Fallen state.

Edwards attached himself to the language of “being born again”<sup>120</sup> as a description of regeneration. When a child is

born she is a human being but not one in complete control of her faculties. She has yet to speak in coherent language, walk, or control her bodily functions. In the same way, a newly converted person does not have moral beauty. The Holy Spirit has indwelt him and united Himself to the soul. There now are principles of love that are morally beautiful. A convert will manifest this truth through acts of love toward God and man. However, the union between the Holy Spirit and the soul, while existent, is not total or complete. The new disposition of the Holy Spirit does not take over in a complete way. There are still principles of self-love that have not yet been subjected to Him, that continue to form a rival disposition within the soul.<sup>121</sup> Thus, mixed with great acts of love will be selfish acts that in no way conform to moral beauty. The way that the convert grows is by his inferior principles being brought more and more under the control of the superior. Once again his love of his own liberty will be brought under an obedience to God. Once more his love of pleasure will become a pleasure in the love of God and man. The disposition of the Holy Spirit would continually bring the disposition of self-love under its power, conforming it to the dictates of moral beauty. This process would continue in the convert for the rest of his life, culminating in Heaven with a realization of the perfect moral beauty lost in Adam's Fall. In fact, this moral beauty would be even more glorious because it would continue into eternity. God would sustain the superior principles in a manner that would never result in another sin. Man would in moral beauty spend the rest of eternity in the perfect worship of love's greatest object—God.

---

<sup>119</sup> Edwards, *Concerning Efficacious Grace in The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. II*. ed. Edward Hickman (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 545. Edwards does not mean here that man becomes a god or a true part of the Trinity. Instead, he means that through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit man experiences the love of God as it is wrought by God in him.

<sup>120</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Regeneration” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, ed. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Caleb J. D. Maskell. <http://edwards.yale.edu/ref/12002/e//p/1>. Accessed August 11, 2007.

---

<sup>121</sup> In these battling dispositions we see Edwards' articulation of the battle between the “spirit” and the “flesh” as described by Paul in Galatians.

## *Conclusion*

Therefore, in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit Edwards saw the re-establishment of the superior principles that once guided sinless Adam. Though man would not become sinless in this world, the growing disposition of the Holy Spirit would bring him closer and closer through a lifetime process. It is by conversion and regeneration that man could hope for the attainment of moral beauty. By conversion and regeneration man became beautiful only through the work of God. God alone could make humanity morally beautiful again. Thus, in these ideas Edwards was able to state a concept of moral beauty that kept God as *the* central figure in the process. Edwards here as always strove to make God the necessary part of any system of ethics.

## CONCLUSION

### *Edwards' Use in a Secular World*

In this discussion we have caught a glimpse of the magnitude of Jonathan Edwards' God-centeredness. He was a man of great intellect and deep feeling whose ethical system was founded in the majesty and holiness of God. Edwards used his great mind and deep heart to stand as an effective counter to an Enlightenment theory of natural morality and natural moral sense. Through questioning the grounds of morality and its perception, Edwards was then able to articulate how man's natural depravity necessitated a work of God. God was pulled back to the center of morality as moral beauty's foundation.

Yet discussing Edwards within his time presents a pertinent question: does this theory have any relevance to people today? Is it no more than a musty old argument

whose use does not extend beyond historical artifact?

Edwards in fact has much to present to modern times and modern men. First, Edwards' God-centered morality holds great value for Christianity and society in America. Hutcheson's assertions concerning a natural moral sense have fallen from grace within most academic circles. However, his most basic intent—the attempt to find human answers to human problems—has become the accepted view of a large section of society and much of Christianity. God has become small, pushed to the sidelines by a new yet old deity—man. God remains, though by a thread, perceived to be a bit character in what is now a predominately human drama. Examples of this state of affairs abound. In worship, we demand shorter sermons and livelier music, seeking to entertain ourselves rather than glorify God. In tragedy we either shake our fist at God or eliminate His role in it, not trusting in His sovereign power and unfailing love. In science and psychology we seek not to illumine the ways of God but to explain Him away. In fact, the theology of the Church and the viewpoint of society have become so man-centered that we hardly recognize our situation. So inundated are we with a theology of self that trying to alert ourselves to it is like trying to tell a fish that he is wet.

Ethics does not differ from these fields. If morality exists at all, then it is either socially constructed by man or knowable and attainable by man's natural efforts. God remains in some of these articulations; in them He has become our Helper, making an already good humanity better. Yet man is the definer, the seeker, and the attainer of morality; he is the true god here.

In Edwards' moral beauty we find a great and necessary corrective to these theologies of the American Church and

philosophies of American society. He calls us from our predominate man-centeredness to a radical focus and dependence on God. In Edwards love to God becomes the highest virtue, not replacing love to men but becoming its necessary foundation. Even more important, God's love becomes the *only* affection that is truly beautiful. It is only through that supreme love to Him, one wrought by a supernatural work from Him that our hope of being morally beautiful rests. In summation, apart from God there is nothing morally beautiful.

This continental shift in focus would have massive ramifications for the way the Church interacts with the world. God would no longer stand as a nice help to good people but would be considered the very heart of all true morality. The Church must accept nothing less than the holy morality that only comes through true conversion by the Holy Spirit. There may be restraints within human nature that keep people from being as selfish as they could be. Edwards speaks of these restraints as a sort of "negative good,"<sup>122</sup> insufficient for true moral beauty but helpful in maintaining order. The Church should encourage these restraints as ways to maintain civil order in a society where not all men will be converted.<sup>123</sup> However, Edwards calls us not to accept these natural restraints as sufficient for morality. In saying so, Edwards' God-centered view of morality calls on the Church to transform instead of conform to the world. The world must be changed by a

---

<sup>122</sup> Edwards, *True Virtue*, 134.

<sup>123</sup> In *True Virtue* Edwards speaks extensively of the role of education in a society. Humanity's disposition of self-love can only be changed to moral beauty by a work of the Holy Spirit. However, education can link one's self-love to actions that are necessary to keep social order. For example, constantly punishing theft can link pain to robbery in a man's mind. In doing so, a man can refrain from stealing out of a love to himself. He does not wish to see himself punished and out of self-love avoids what would bring him punishment.

Church dedicated to making the supremacy of God in Christ known and enjoyed throughout the world. It is a re-statement of the Great Commission to a Church squeamish to assert the truths of the Gospel.

In this assertion of the Great Commission, Edwards then provides a defense of Christianity in the public sphere. If true morality is found in God, then the Church as the messengers of God become essential to a legitimate moral system. Christianity cannot be a merely private faith but one that is active in society. This activity is one that would certainly be viewed with a skeptical eye by the world. Objections to theocracy would certainly be heard. Far from a call to theocracy, Edwards encourages Christians first to love all of humanity regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion. Feed the poor; cloth the naked; protect the defenseless. In that love we are to seek the common good. Yet this common good must include as its highest manifestation a passion for the saving conversion of as many as God will choose. Edwards says we were all made to glorify God. He calls us in being morally beautiful to both fulfill our own purpose and encourage others to do the same. It is a powerful and necessary call to our world today.

Regardless of whether one accepts his call, in Edwards one encounters one of the greatest minds the American continent has ever produced. Through his attempts to re-establish God as a necessary and central Being in any scheme of morality, he argued with enough depth and skill to force those who argued against him to defend themselves. Far from a mere country fire-and-brimstone preacher, Edwards remains an intellectual force in the world of theology and ethics. In a time of increasing secularization in both, Edwards' call continues to be one both relevant and necessary.

## ***Bibliography***

- Edwards, Jonathan. "Beauty of the World" in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*. Edited by John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout and Kenneth P. Minkema. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *The End for Which God Created the World in God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* by John Piper. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. I*. Edited by Edward Hickman. Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. II*. Edited by Edward Hickman. Hendrickson Publishers, 2004.
- Gura, Philip F. *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2005.
- Holy Bible*. English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001.
- Jonathan Edwards Center. Yale University. <http://edwards.yale.edu/>. (accessed August 2006-September 2007).
- Marsden, George. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Piper, John. *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003.
- Zakai, Avihu. *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.