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After Edwards: Original Sin and Freedom of the Will

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Abstract

Book Summary: Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) is widely regarded as one of the major thinkers in the Christian tradition and an important and influential figure in American theology. *After Jonathan Edwards* is a collection of specially commissioned essays that track his intellectual legacies from the work of his immediate disciples that formed the New Divinity movement in colonial New England, to his impact upon European traditions and modern Asia. It is a unique interdisciplinary contribution to the reception of Edwardsian ideas, with scholars of Edwards being brought together with scholars of New England theology and early American history to produce a groundbreaking examination of the ways in which New England Theology flourished, how themes in Edwards's thought were taken up and changed by representatives of the school, and its lasting influence on the shape of American Christianity.

Chapter Summary: It was the fondest hope of Jonathan Edwards that the Great Awakening of the 1740s was simply the overture to the Day of Judgment and the thousand-year reign of God directly on earth, the Millennium, when "religion shall in every respect be uppermost in the world." But instead of the dawning of a general revival of the Christian church that would cause to "bow the heavens and come down and erect his glorious kingdom through the earth," what Edwards got was a controversy with his own congregation in Northampton over church membership, followed by the humiliation of dismissal by that congregation, and self-imposed demotion to management of a mission to a tribe of Indians whose language he did not speak as well as oversight of an English congregation whose attention span was, in Edwards's judgment, not up to what it should have been. It was a tenure punctuated by the onset of the French and Indian War, and wracked by still more stiff-necked controversies over pastoral issues, although, unlike his situation in Northampton, he had the powerful sponsorship of the provincial governor, Sir William Pepperell, to protect him. But his attention never wandered far from the possibility of a renewed visitation of divine grace. [*excerpt*]

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Disciplines

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IT WAS THE fondest hope of Jonathan Edwards that the Great Awakening of the 1740s was simply the overture to the Day of Judgment and the thousand-year reign of God directly on earth, the Millennium, when "religion shall in every respect be uppermost in the world." But instead of the dawning of a general revival of the Christian church that would cause to "bow the heavens and come down and erect his glorious kingdom through the earth," what Edwards got was a controversy with his own congregation in Northampton over church membership, followed by the humiliation of dismissal by that congregation, and self-imposed demotion to management of a mission to a tribe of Indians whose language he did not speak as well as oversight of an English congregation whose attention span was, in Edwards's judgment, not up to what it should have been. It was a tenure punctuated by the onset of the French and Indian War, and wracked by still more stiff-necked controversies over pastoral issues, although, unlike his situation in Northampton, he had the powerful sponsorship of the provincial governor, Sir William Pepperell, to protect him. But his attention never wandered far from the possibility of a renewed visitation of divine grace. "I hope to humble his church in New England, and purify it, and so fit it for yet greater comfort." Only now, his intellectual enthusiasm turned to the rebuke of the spirit that he considered the most lethal to revival, the lukewarm wraith of "Arminianism"—not the literal teachings of the seventeenth-century Dutch anti-Calvinist, Jacobus Arminius, but the pallid, free-will, "natural" religion of theologians desperate to placate the spirit of the Enlightenment. "If some great men that have appeared in our nation had been as eminent in divinity as they were in philosophy," Edwards complained,

"they would have conquered all Christendom and turned the world upside down." The temporizing strategy of bargaining away the pure principles of Christianity, which Edwards never doubted comprehended the pure principles of Calvinism, was aimed only at appeasing the wolf of Enlightenment unbelief, and it had no power at all to receive the grace of a renewed Awakening, much less the Millennium; only the unblinking proclamation of Calvinist orthodoxy had any real strength in its loins. "I think I have found that no discourses have been more remarkably blessed, than those in which the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty with regard to the salvation of sinners, and his just liberty with regard to answered the prayers, or succeeding the pains of natural men, continuing such, have been insisted on." So, between 1750 and 1757, he managed composition of two landmark treatises in moral philosophy, *Original Sin* and *Freedom of the Will*, which few other eighteenth-century thinkers could have managed even in the placid Enlightenment confines of Oxford or Potsdam.[1]

Edwards had always seen himself as a restorer rather than an innovator. Much as he applied himself as a college student to the Cartesian-style new logic and the study of Mr. Locke and Sir Isaac Newton, he was "mightily pleased with the study of the old logic"—in other words, with the unsullied Calvinist scholasticism of Adrian Heereboord, Francis Burgersdyck, Peter van Maastricht (whose *Theoretic-Practico Theologica* was ranked by Edwards as "much better" than "any other book in the world, excepting the Bible in my opinion"), and Francis Turretin (whose sure-footedness on "polemical divinity" makes him ideal "for one that desires only to be thoroughly versed in controversies").[2] When he cast his eye back to his period of late-adolescent rebelliousness, it was not wine, women, or song that constituted the stuff of his wickedness, but a risqué repudiation of Calvinist predestination and "objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty." And by the same token, he had not experienced any satisfactory sense of spiritual renewal until he received "quite another kind of sense of God's sovereignty than I had then," so that it became "my delight to approach God, and adore him as a Sovereign God, and ask sovereign mercy of him."[3] What earned him the fury of the Northampton church was his single-minded attempt to restore the original terms of communicant membership that were established by the founding generation of Massachusetts, and that his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, had loosened during his long tenure as Northampton's pastor. And what most enchanted him about the brief successes of the Great Awakening was not any of the ways they pointed toward a new configuration for religion in American societies, but the hope they held out for turning the clock back a century to the era of New England's first love.

The Awakening had been a sign "for Arminians to change their principles" and "relinquish their scheme," and "come and Join with us, and be on our side."[4]

Yet, if Edwards's aim was repristination, he was more than perceptive enough to see that the old wine of Calvinism could no longer be poured into the wineskins of seventeenth-century scholasticism. It is the irony of so many efforts at intellectual repristination that the greatest and most successful succeed because they deploy, more skillfully than the innovators against whom they are struggling, the weapons, arguments, strategies, and methods of their own corrupted day. So it was with Edwards and the great treatises on God's unconditional election and man's total depravity. Edwards might have chosen, as his contemporary Jonathan Dickinson did, simply to hurl scholastic syllogisms built on biblical authorities at the many heads of Enlightenment unbelief and indeterminism.[5] But anyone who takes up *Freedom of the Will* or *Original Sin* in the expectation of following just another tedious exposition of Calvinism's favorite biblical proofs (on the assumption that a biblical proof carries its own authority) is in for more than a mild surprise. The argument of *Freedom of the Will* is based on psychology and analysis of language, not exegesis; the argument of *Original Sin* is based on observation and analysis of nature. And the result, produced in the interest of restoring Calvinism, may have ended up producing something significantly different from the restoration Edwards imagined.

The Enlightenment posed difficulties for Calvinism in other ways, since it was a movement that simultaneously embraced freedom of action, reason, and optimism, as well as cynicism, fanaticism, and the most iron-gloved forms of determinism. It was hatched from the struggle to replace a universe governed by animation and providence with one governed by predictable physical laws, but only at the risk of making those laws as inexorable as the rule of providence it wanted to leave behind. Julien de la Mettrie insisted that "the human body is a machine which winds its own spring." The fact that it does its own winding does not make it free: "We think we are, and in fact are, good men, only as we are gay or brave; everything depends on the way our machine is running. . . . In vain you fall back on the power of the will, since for one order that the will gives, it bows a hundred times to the yoke." Even Benjamin Franklin could at once extol rank determinism and then conclude, not that it was wrong, but that it was a subject inconvenient to drag into polite conversation. There was no greater mistake than to "suppose ourselves to be, in the common sense of the Word, *Free Agents*," but the practical effect of telling this to people, especially in front of the servants, "appeared abominable."[6]

What this division of mind testified to was the need to reconcile the natural regularity of observed physical laws with the ethical need to hold human

beings personally accountable for their actions, even as it was to acknowl-
edge that human beings are not exempt from universal application of those
laws. Those who imagined that, by freeing themselves from the arbitrariness
of an intelligent Providence, they were delivering themselves into a kind of
self-starting, self-acting liberty could assert as much as they liked that they
now stood on a separate and higher plane of indeterminism and free action
than those poor deluded souls who still toiled under the "soft determinism"
of inability, depravity, and divine manipulation of all events. The uncomfort-
able question that sat beside this newly won self-possession was whether inde-
terminism's overconfident promoters had unwittingly sold themselves into a
more rigid and exacting form of control in which either (1) a faceless physical
mechanism made all ethical restraints disappear like a mirage or (2) a rudder-
less indeterminism made all ethical restraints meaningless. These latter-day
"Arminians" had, in effect, used their supposed free will to dig themselves into
a trench that they could not think how to escape. And so it became Edwards's
task to show them that Calvinism, or at least Calvinism's form of providen-
tial determinism, did not abolish moral accountability and restraint but was
in fact the only guarantor of it. He did not offer Calvinism as a rebuke to the
Enlightenment's optimism (which, by contrast, is what Dickinson was pre-
pared to do) but as a solution to its ethical despair.

Edwards seems to have regarded this as a double-barreled opportunity,
since it so nicely tied together the ambition of a provincial intellectual to speak
to a significant thought problem, and in a way that the metropolitan centers
of the British empire would have to notice, with his concern to refound New
England on the unsullied principles of its founding. This was, in the larg-
est sense, the project of his life; ideas and arguments on both original sin
and free will show up in Edwards's notebooks as early as 1729.[7] By the mid-
1730s, he had already worked out his fundamental critique of the "meaning of
the words *freedom* or *liberty*." But the actual beginnings of *Freedom of the Will*
and *Original Sin* probably date from 1748, when he simultaneously hatched
the plan "of publishing something against some of the Arminian tenets" and
acquired a copy for himself of John Taylor's *Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin
Proposed to Free and Candid Examination* (1740), which would become the tar-
get of convenience for his own study of that name in 1758. A little more than a
year later, in a letter to his prize pupil, Joseph Bellamy, Edwards sketched out
the kernel of what became the central arguments of *Freedom of the Will*. But
his determination to move his edition of David Brainerd's journal into print,
along with the tempest of his dismissal from Northampton in 1750, pushed
work on these projects to a far corner of his mind, and it was not until 1754
that Edwards was at last ready with a manuscript for his Boston publisher,

Samuel Kneeland, to have "printed in . . . new types" which would be "better than any he now has." [8]

Edwards began his *Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of the Freedom of the Will which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame* by adopting an unexpectedly secular definition of "the will." Rather than speak of it as a separate "faculty" within the mind, as the Protestant scholastics of the seventeenth century did, Edwards identified the will in the fashion of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), as "that by which the mind chooses anything" or "that by which the soul either chooses or refuses." He did not intend by this to suggest that the mind ruled the will, in the manner beloved of Thomistic intellectualists; there was no complicated transaction in the mind, ending with a rational conclusion that the will then executes. Minds, after all, cannot deliberate between perceived alternatives without willing or choosing actually getting mixed up in the process of what intellectualists mistake for a purely intellectual sequence. Thinking itself is a ceaseless interaction between preferences and perceptions. Let the mind perceive something it prefers—something that acts as a "motive"—and the will at once reaches out for it. "And God has so made and established the human nature, the soul being united to a body in proper state, that the soul preferring or choosing such an immediate exertion or alteration of the body, such an alteration instantaneously follows." The connection between perception and volition is in fact so close and so instantaneous that one might as well give up all hope of finding a line between the two, and admit that "the will always is as the greatest apparent good is." Not the "good" in some rational, abstract understanding of the word, but "of the same import with 'agreeable.' "[9]

This definition chalked out the operating boundaries for Edwards's notion of willing. Minds perceive objects, which they either desire or do not desire, the desiring being a part of the perceiving; wills are a means toward putting the man in possession of that desired object. The will does not deliberate between willing and not willing that desire; the will *is* the desire. The question of free will is therefore not whether wills have an independent review power over minds, but whether wills have an unobstructed path to realizing the mind's preferences. Hence, the real problem involved in free will or determinism is not whether the will is hindered from choosing—this it does automatically—but merely whether it has the physical liberty to acquire the object of the mind's desiring. "Liberty" is only "that power and opportunity for one to do and conduct as he will . . . according to his choice." What made a person free was not a matter of how he or she came to "prefer" one thing rather than another, because he will do this as soon as he perceives that thing,

but whether the person is restrained from acquiring what he is willing. "Let the person come by his volition or choice how he will, yet, if he is able, and there is nothing in the way to hinder his pursuing and executing his will, the man is fully and perfectly free. . . . "[10]

But if this was the case, on what ground does the modern "Arminian" complain against a sovereign God who ordains every event that comes to pass? Indeterminists would like to have the will free to determine itself, but this is not what wills do: "The advocates for this notion of the freedom of the will speak of a certain sovereignty in the will, whereby it has power to determine its own volitions." This is to mistake what the will actually is. Wills do not *choose* to will, because that would be a tautology, and "every free act of choice" would have to be "determined by a preceding act of choice, choosing that act." Wills reach out spontaneously as the mind responds to certain motives, and it is no diminution of the will's real freedom to say that it is ruled *by* those motives. That's what the will is there for. And so the trap closes, because if something outside the will *does* legitimately determine the will, then the "Arminian" withers, since it is no diminution of the will's scope of activity if God plants "motives" in the path of minds that minds prefer and which then instruct the will to apprehend. And the Calvinist, by the same reasoning, flourishes, since the connection between mental perception and willing is so immediate that no one ever wills against what he desires, or "chooses one thing before another, when at the very same instant it is perfectly indifferent with respect to each!" Hence, there is no reason the perceiving individual should not consider that he chooses freely, or is not morally accountable for the choice, since it proceeds from his own desires.[11]

Of course, one could object that this means Calvinists have exchanged an idea of God as a master who rigidly manipulates his creatures like puppets for an idea of God as gamester who dangles meat in front of starving dogs. The dogs might be technically free, but it did nothing to diminish the necessity of the result. But as far as Edwards was concerned, the problem was not in the necessity of the result, but in the *kind* of necessity involved when minds apprehended motives and moved at once to act on them, because not all versions of necessity were hostile to moral freedom and accountability. When God decrees a certain action, the action becomes necessary. But actions can become necessary in one of two very different ways: God actually could manipulate someone into doing what he wants, with the person all the while kicking and screaming in protest because of wanting to do something else. This is the concept of necessity most commonly used "from our childhood." But it is by no means the only one, or even the most comprehensive. An act, after all, can become *necessary* if someone already has a certain psychological inclination toward it. There is, after all, a measure of

predictability in human behavior; we do not live randomly, and the more intense our inclination toward a sort of behavior, the more likely we will act on it.[12]

Edwards called the necessity that involves force *natural necessity*, and he cheerfully admitted that those who are compelled to act under the force of natural necessity cannot be held morally accountable for what they do: "By 'natural necessity' . . . I mean such necessity as men are under through the force of natural causes." The other necessity, which arises from our own inclinations, Edwards called *moral necessity*. Nobody is actually forcing anyone to do things by moral necessity. So, when someone wills to do something it is morally necessary to do, the person is not actually having a string pulled. But "moral necessity may be as absolute as natural necessity," since it consists "in the opposition or want of inclination . . . through a defect of motives, or prevalence of contrary motives." People are then acting on the basis of what they really want and thus can be held morally liable for the consequences of choice. In fact, the *greater* the force of an evil inclination on someone's actions, the *more* accountable the person is, precisely for having all the physical power needed to do otherwise. If what we possess are sinful inclinations, they will incline us to sin all the time, without God having to force anything to happen. Under the self-imposed sway of *moral* necessity, there is a *moral inability* to do anything other than sin. Yet, none of this happens from God forcing us to sin; that would be a natural necessity and would give us an excuse. We actually possess all the *natural ability* we could ever want *not* to sin:

> In the strictest propriety of speech, a man has a thing in his power, if he has it in his choice. . . . It can't be truly said, according to the ordinary use of language, that a malicious man, let him be never so malicious, can't hold his hand from striking, or that he is not able to shew his neighbor kindness.

The probability of the "malicious man" *not* behaving in a malicious manner takes unlikelihood to the vanishing point, and that is necessity enough to please whatever Calvinists might want from necessity; but it also places the blame and origin for the malice squarely on the malicious man himself.[13]

Translated into practical terms, what this meant was that people could not shelter themselves from the call to repentance and conversion (as they had for generations in New England) behind such pious fig leaves as the Half-Way Covenant or the plea that they were gradually working their way through their depravity by the means of grace (prayer, using the sacraments, reading the Bible, listening to sermons, coming under conviction of sin, and so forth, in slow order). Human beings were depraved, totally, and this

ensured that they lacked the moral ability to do anything but sin; but they also had arms and legs and lips and a brain—*natural* ability—and could use them all *if they chose* to bow down in the dust and abase themselves before God, and they should do so at once; if they did not, they had no one to blame but themselves when they came to Judgment. Edwards had thus created not only a justification of the ways of Calvin to the eighteenth century but a psychology of crisis in which people were encouraged at once to decide, decide, decide.

It was necessary to the overall strategy of a religious Awakening to insist that the ultimate problem was not the will itself, since the will reached out for only what the perceiving mind desired anyway. That the will performed according to a predictable—and actually foreordained—pattern satisfied only the demand of Calvinism that all events be seen as a divinely ordered sequence that nevertheless allowed the human subject more than enough "freedom" to be held morally accountable. But there would be no impetus in favor of an Awakening unless what the human subject was being held accountable *for* was deeply, morally culpable in the eyes of God. Standing by itself, *Freedom of the Will* might end up proving little more than Thomas Hobbes, Lord Kames, or Anthony Collins had proven about the will: that it was not self-originating, self-sovereign, or "free." It was because human nature was profoundly and horribly depraved that the need to understand how the will operated suddenly became an urgent problem. And this was the task Edwards took upon himself in the waning months of his tenure at the Stockbridge mission, in *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended.*

Edwards actually had two problems to work out in *Original Sin*, one of them fairly easy in practical terms and the other hard enough to have broken the heads of centuries' worth of Christian theologians. In the first case, even in the sunny reasonableness of the eighteenth century it was not difficult to convince people that the human race teemed with moral turpitude. What Edwards had to prove, however, was that this turpitude was not the accidental result of a free will that might otherwise, with a little more education or encouragement, have been avoided, but an irremediable corruption of human nature itself. When he spoke of original sin, he meant "the *innate sinful depravity of the heart* . . . that the heart of man is naturally of a corrupt and evil disposition." What was more of a challenge was, in the second case, showing how God was as much a sovereign in the beginnings and continuance of that depravity without at the same time being responsible for it himself. He had to explain and justify, in theological parlance, "not only the depravity of nature, but the imputation of Adam's first sin" by God to all of his "posterity." Enlightenment optimists might want to get rid of original sin; Enlightenment theists were

less likely to deny that humanity was sinful, but they were more anxious to shift the blame for it from God's decree to human free will.[14]

Original Sin devotes much more of its substance to biblical explanation and an appeal to human experience than *Freedom of the Will*, in large measure because this was not difficult to do. "The Scriptures are so very express," argued Edwards, in asserting there was little question that "all mankind, all flesh, all the world, every man living, are guilty of sin." If sin was not "a thing belonging to the race of mankind, as if it were a property of the species," then why do we have "such descriptions, all over the Bible, or man, and the sons of men! Why should man be so continually spoken of as evil, carnal, perverse, deceitful, and desperately wicked, if all men are by nature as perfectly innocent, and free from any propensity to evil, as Adam was the first moment of his creation"? The historical record was equally clear on the pervasiveness of human folly, since "if we consider the various successive parts and period of the duration of the world, it will, if possible, be yet more evident, that vastly the greater part of mankind have in all ages been of a wicked character." Even the "great advances in learning and philosophic knowledge" in his own day merely turned people more to "profaneness, sensuality and debauchery." But Edwards was not content to assert that human beings make moral mistakes; he thought it was necessary to prove not just that people sin but that there is "a prevailing propensity to that issue . . . that all fail of keeping the law perfectly . . . to such an imperfection of obedience, as always without fail comes to pass." It was true—and irrelevant— that human behavior is a mix of good and bad; the fundamental problem was with the set of the saw itself, and whether "he preponderates to, in the frame of his heart, and state of his nature . . . a state of sin, guiltiness and abhorrence in the sight of God." The clincher of Edwards's insistence on the root-and-branch origins of evil was the fact of death: "Death is spoken of in Scripture as the chief of calamities, the most extreme and terrible of all those natural evils which come on mankind in this world." Only the existence of "a perverse and vile disposition" was in any way commensurate with God's decision to "chastise them with great severity, and even to kill them, to keep them in order."[15]

But Edwards's relentless pushing on the biblical and historical reality of evil in human nature only pressed the discussion in another direction, and that was the question of how this evil came to take up residence in human hearts, and who was responsible for the calamity. Neither Edwards nor his opponents in the eighteenth century had much hesitation in fingering Adam, the original parent of the human race, with having begun the slide into the moral abyss. What they could not be reconciled on was what influence

Adam's transgression exerted on his subsequent progeny's instinct for evil. "Arminians" were likely to insist that Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden was certainly reprehensible; but what did it have to do with anyone else? Was it fair to suppose that Adam, in an exercise of moral genetics, passed on to his helpless descendents a "depravity gene"? It was now Edwards's turn to be hoisted on his own petard, since if Adam's fall was responsible for "*implanting* any bad principle, or *infusing* any corrupt taint" into the human race, it would constitute precisely the sort of natural necessity that, in *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards explained would cancel out moral accountability. Edwards's solution was not elegant: "Adam's nature became corrupt, without God's implanting or infusing any evil thing into his nature." God stepped back from Adam, allowing him to fall of his own moral weight; thereafter, God proceeds to deal "with Adam as the head of his posterity . . . and treating them as one . . . as having *all sinned in him*." Adam, in short, acts as a representative, or federal head, of the human race, and when he falls, then just as God "withdrew his spiritual communion and his vital gracious influence from the common head, so he withholds the same from all the members, as they come into existence . . . and so become wholly corrupt, as Adam did." This means that "the derivation of the pollution and guilt of past sins . . . depends on an arbitrary divine constitution," rather than an infected spiritual organism. Not some "oneness in created beings, whence qualities and relations are derived from past experience," but God's "divine constitution"—his determination to treat the universe as a government, and his relations to his creatures as legal ones—was what prompted God to regard all the heirs of Adam as depraved. And they confirm God's rightness in so treating them, not "merely because God *imputes* it to them," but because they actually proceed to act sinfully, so that Adam's sin becomes "*truly* and *properly* theirs."[16]

This last argument was a surprise, coming from someone as focused on restoration of pure Calvinism as was Edwards, since Calvinism in its purest seventeenth-century expressions in the Synod of Dordt and the Westminster Assembly had laid down that inheritance of a depraved substance was precisely what made people sin, and that redemption from that sin came through the compensatory imputation of the merits and righteousness of Jesus Christ. But Edwards's yearning to restart the Awakenings of the 1730s and 1740s, and his eagerness to rinse away any suggestion that sinners suffered under a natural necessity to sin that prevented repentance and renewal, overcame whatever hesitations he might have felt about tampering with the strict formularies of the Calvinist fathers. Still, it would not be Edwards, but Edwards's disciples of the 1760s—Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins—who would develop this departure into a full-blown embrace of a governmental view of atonement and

the jettisoning of the classic Protestant understanding of redemption through an imputed righteousness.[17]

Measuring the long-term "impact" of *Original Sin* and "Edwards on the Will" is somewhat like measuring the impact of a meteorite, in that the significance of the event overshadows the strictly measurable evidence. The great nineteenth-century Scottish divine Thomas Chalmers studied "Jonathan Edwards' Treatise on Free Will . . . with such ardour that he seemed to regard nothing else, and would scarcely talk of anything else," since it induced in Chalmers's mind "the sublime conception of the Godhead as that eternal, all-pervading energy by which this vast and firmly-knit succession was originated and sustained, and into a very rapture of admiration and delight." Sir James Mackintosh, another nineteenth-century Scot and a prominent jurist, lauded Edwards as "the metaphysician of America," whose "power of subtile argument" was "perhaps unmatched, certainly unsurpassed among men"; Mackintosh devoted the most "disputatious" part of his university education at Aberdeen in the 1780s to "the perusal of Jonathan Edwards' book on Free-Will." Mackintosh's classmate, the Leicester-born dissenter Robert Hall, "celebrated Jonathan Edwards, in his treatise on the Will, and the distinction [of natural and moral necessity] defended with all the depth and precision peculiar to that amazing genius." Samuel Lorenzo Knapp, the pioneer critic of American literature, thought that *Freedom of the Will* set Edwards's "reputation to an equality with the first metaphysicians of his age in this country and in Europe." Even Edwards's most vehement American critic, Rowland G. Hazard, conceded that "the work of Edwards 'On the Will,' marks it as . . . the great bulwark of . . . the necessarians." As to their creed, "the severest scrutiny of their opponents has discovered in it no vulnerable point. The soundness of the premises, and the cogency of the logic, by which he reaches his conclusions, seem indeed to be very generally admitted, so that, almost by common consent, his positions are deemed impregnable, and the hope of subverting them by direct attack abandoned."[18]

But if Edwardsian-style revivalism was an important means for firing up interest in the renewal of Calvinism, it was also a poor instrument for sustaining it. The demand for immediate repentance was supposed to infuse new virtue back into public life through renewed individuals; unhappily, it might just as easily convince renewed individuals to have nothing further to do with the sinfulness of their surrounding neighbors. Edwardsian revivalism was, at the end of the day, a reflection of the old Puritan weakness for separatism: the revivals called people to repentance, but they also called them out of society, out of their normal relations, out of their everyday moral lives, to participate in an intensely demanding but quite other-worldly version of

Protestant Christianity. The very fact that a revival was judged necessary at all was a judgment on the failures of the regular churches and the impurities of conventional society; its logical end was to turn people into come-outers of various sorts and inflate a radical individualism. To maintain momentum and influence, and to maintain it broadly in society, there had to be a second answer to the problem of religion's role in leading American life, and that would come from the nineteenth-century academic moral philosophers and John Witherspoon's Scottish philosophy of common sense.[19]