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Abstract

Examines the contributions of Charles Grandison Finney to mid-nineteenth century theology. Finney's rejection of Calvinism; Critiques on Finney's theology by interpreters including William McLoughlin; Reference to the book 'Memoirs'; Finney's perverse admiration of Jonathan Edwards; Development of the doctrine of perfection.

Keywords

Charles Grandison Finney

Disciplines

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AN HEIR OR A REBEL? CHARLES GRANDISON FINNEY AND THE NEW ENGLAND THEOLOGY

Allen C. Guelzo

No important survey of the early American republic fails to give Charles Grandison Finney one of the starring roles in its story. He is, as Sydney Ahlstrom declared, “an immensely important man in American history by any standard of measure,” and, in the words of William McLoughlin, “the leading revivalist of the mid-nineteenth century.”¹ And yet, once we attempt to explain what made Finney so important, the picture we develop becomes unaccountably diffuse and contradictory. We are told that Finney was “an influential revisionist in the Reformed theological tradition”; but alternately, we also are told that he worked out a “thorough revision of Calvinism,” that he “boldly rejected Calvinism,” that he had “little or no understanding” of Calvinism, that he had “an Arminian understanding of the Gospel,” that his preaching represented a “frank abandonment of Calvinism” and even “the ultimate denial of Calvinism.”²

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¹ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, 1972), 460-61; William G. McLoughlin, “Revivalism,” in *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth Century America*, ed. E.S. Gaustad (New York, 1974), 142-44.

² Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 461; David L. Weddle, *The Law as Gospel: Revival and Reform in the Theology of Charles G. Finney* (Metuchen, NJ, 1985), 3, 6; E. Douglas Branch, *The Sentimental Years, 1836-1860: A Social History* (New York, 1934), 349; Glenn A. Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality: A Study of Charles Finney*, Charles Hodge, John W. Nevin, and Horace Bushnell (Brooklyn, NY, 1991), 47-49; Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America* (1957; rep., Baltimore, 1980), 88-89; James Hoopes, *Consciousness in New England: From Puritanism and Ideas to Psychoanalysis and Semiotic* (Baltimore, 1989), 98.

Finney's theology, similarly, has been described as "no theology" at all, as an extension of the New Haven Theology of Nathaniel William Taylor and Lyman Beecher, as entirely "unlike the Taylorite New Lights of New England," as enjoying an "original associationism with Wesleyanism," as having nothing whatsoever in common with "Methodism or other Arminian thought"—and even, viewing things in the *longue durée*, "fundamentally a revival of Pelagianism."³ Finney's most controversial "new measure" in revivals, the introduction of the so-called "anxious bench" during his great Rochester revival in 1830-31, is sometimes attributed to southern and frontier Baptist influences, sometimes to Methodism, and sometimes simply to "cold pragmatism," while his most controversial doctrine, the call for "entire sanctification," is rooted by some in Wesley's perfectionism and uprooted by others as having "little similarity to Wesley's."⁴

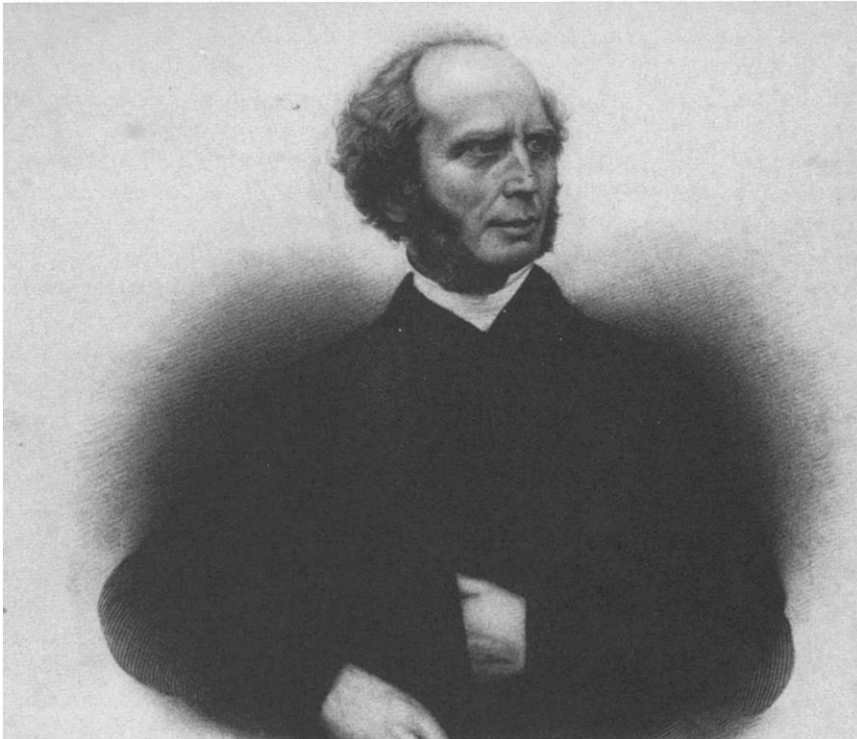
Little wonder that on rare occasion some interpreters simply confess an element of bewilderment in reading Finney: "Finney was so far from Edwards in his philosophical outlook," wrote William McLoughlin in his edition of Finney's *Lectures on Revival*, "that it may seem odd that he frequently quotes Edwards to buttress his views on specific aspects of revival preaching." Or as another writer tried to explain matters, Finney simply "had something in his theology to offend almost everyone."⁵

Part of this confusion over Finney is surely due to Finney himself: his famous *Memoirs* are rich in detail and self-congratulation over his successes as a revivalist, but curiously opaque about his intellectual and theological development. And his singular claim to be entirely *sui generis*

³ James E. Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism," *Church History*, 38 (Spring 1969), 356; Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality*, 22-23; William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago, 1978), 125, 128; Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 108-09; Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (1950; rep., New York, 1965), 158-60; John F. Thornbury, *God Sent Revival: The Story of Asahel Nettleton and the Second Great Awakening* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1977), 160-61.

⁴ John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805* (Lexington, KY, 1972), 76; Leonard I. Sweet, "The View of Man Inherent in New Measures Revivalism," *Church History*, 45 (June 1976), 211, 213; James E. Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and Oberlin Perfectionism," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 46 (Mar.-June 1968), 42-57, 128-138; McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 128; Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality*, 43.

⁵ William G. McLoughlin, "Introduction," in Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, ed. McLoughlin (Cambridge, MA, 1960), xi; Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality*, 36.



Charles Grandison Finney, in his early years as a college professor at Oberlin.

Source: Oberlin College Archives.

in theological matters, for want of contradiction, usually has been taken at face value. Another difficulty in situating Finney stems from the deceptiveness of his geography. Truly a New England man, his revival campaigns in upstate New York in the 1820s and his second vocation as a theology professor and college president in the Western Reserve of Ohio after 1835 often suggest that Finney was a child of the West, where novelty and experimentation were the expected context of interpretation. Finney's rise to prominence as a revivalist from 1824 to 1828 in western New York coincided with Andrew Jackson's ascent to the presidency and the triumph of "Jacksonian democracy." To the extent that both Finney and Jackson seemed to draw on the same frontier constituency and promote the same brand of backwoods egalitarianism, Finney and Jackson are often bracketed as two actors in a single decisive movement away from a New England-dominated culture—the one repudiating the elitist machinations of Adams and Clay and the other departing decisively from the conservative Calvinism of the first "Great Awakening" in favor of popular free-willism and "Arminianism" of the

second. But the greatest difficulty of all in interpreting Finney may lie in the failure of historians to penetrate the dense religious discourse of Finney and his Oberlin contemporaries or the Calvinist intellectual milieu of the 1820s. Finney's *Memoirs* and his *Lectures on Revivals*—his two best-known and most cited texts—are packed with key phrases and terms (“retributive justice,” “that theological *fiction* of *imputation*,” “present and instant acceptance,” and so forth) that are often passed over as Finney's stylistic eccentricities. In fact, they are rhetorical tag lines that situate Finney within precisely the Edwardsean Calvinism he is supposed to have repudiated.⁶

These difficulties have obscured what William McLoughlin only partially perceived in his comment about Finney's perverse admiration for Jonathan Edwards. Finney was really the intellectual offspring, not of the West, but of New England. Despite the broad and confusing attributions of influence on Finney's development as a revivalist and collegiate moral philosopher, the significance of his career and the shifting intellectual allegiances he developed throughout the 1830s and 1840s in his Ohio outpost only sort themselves out clearly when placed against the template of the so-called “New England theology,” from Jonathan Edwards to Nathaniel William Taylor. That, in turn, lends critical weight to a reconsideration of the meaning of the so-called “Second Great Awakening” of the 1820s: reinterpreting Finney as an heir rather than a rebel against the New England theology stresses consistency and continuity rather than departure from the pattern of the eighteenth-century awakenings. This would place him in resistance to, rather than imitation of, “common-man” democracy.

The “New England theology” was a term invented by Edwards Amasa Park of Andover Seminary in the 1850s to describe the dominant tradition of trinitarian Calvinist Congregational thought in New England. It was a movement that had begun with the Great Awakening and largely was shaped by the ideas of Jonathan Edwards. Although the

⁶ Charles Grandison Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles Grandison Finney: The Complete Restored Text*, ed. Garth M. Rosell and Richard A.G. Dupuis (Grand Rapids, MI, 1989), 44; McLoughlin, ed., *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, xii-ix; Edward Pesen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics* (1969; 2d ed., Urbana, IL, 1985), 69-70; Carol Smith-Rosenberg, “Women and Religious Revivals: Anti-Ritualism, Liminality, and the Emergence of the American Bourgeoisie,” in *The Evangelical Tradition in America*, ed. Leonard I. Sweet (Macon, GA, 1984), 214, 224; Donald Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York, 1976), 17; Weddle, *The Law as Gospel*, 30; Charles G. Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York, 1991), 225-6, 229-30; Sweet, “The View of Man Inherent in New Measures Revivalism,” in Sweet, ed., *Evangelical Tradition*, 213.

term later was pressed to include almost any Congregational divine who made a claim to reverencing Edwards's name, in Park's reading of post-Awakening New England none had closer personal connections or made vaster claims to theological consistency with Edwards than the spokesmen of the so-called "New Divinity." In many minds the New Divinity was almost co-extensive with the New England theology.⁷ From Edwards, these New Divinity ministers imbibed a strong dose of immaterialism, an occasionalistic concept of causality, and Edwards's prescriptions for revivalism. But the most important lesson they learned from Edwards concerned the great prize of eighteenth-century moral philosophy, freedom of the will. In his great treatise, *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of . . . Freedom of Will* (1754), Edwards addressed the great dilemma posed by Hobbes and Locke: how in a world of natural and mechanical law one could free human beings from the conclusion that their behavior was fully as determined as the behavior of material substances.⁸

Edwards's Calvinism, entwined around the classic Calvinist dogma of divine predestination, might at first seem a poor platform for effecting such a deliverance. But Edwards argued that the perception of ideas by the mind is so linked with the action of the will, that willing may simply be described as being "as the greatest apparent good, or as what appears most agreeable, is. . . ." So direct was the connection between knowing and willing that the simple perception by the mind of what Edwards called a "motive" is sufficient to trigger a volition. Hence, Edwards reasoned, if God presents appropriate motives to human perception, the close connection between perception and willing will guarantee the appropriate response, without God ever having to impose any kind of physical or material power upon a human subject.⁹

For those who were unconvinced that this relieved Calvinism of charges of "necessity" and "inability," Edwards responded with his famous dichotomy between "natural ability" and "moral inability"—that all human beings possess full natural ability to will freely, even though their depraved spiritual natures ensure that they never will do so

⁷ Park, "New England Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 9 (Jan. 1852), 170-220; see also Joseph A. Conforti, "Edwards A. Park and the Creation of the New England Theology, 1840-1870," in *Jonathan Edwards's Writings: Text, Context, and Interpretation*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Indiana University Press, 1996), 193-207.

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (1957; rep., New Haven, 1979), 144.

⁹ Hoopes, *Consciousness in New England*, 28-29; Hoopes, "Jonathan Edwards's Religious Psychology," *Journal of American History*, 69 (Mar. 1983), 853-54, 859.

due to a "moral inability." But far from this excusing unrepentant sinners, "moral inability" is precisely what sinners customarily were blamed for, especially when they possessed full natural ability to do otherwise. Edwards's disciples were thus free to call sinners to repentance and revival on the ground of every sinner's natural ability, while carefully protecting their Calvinistic integrity by insisting that total depravity ensured an utter moral inability for repentance by sinners unaided by divine grace.

This novel attempt to have both free will and determinism required that Edwards and his New Divinity followers perform several crucial alterations in the basic contours of Calvinistic psychology. In the first place, Edwards's insistence that the will freely moves toward what the mind perceives as motives could easily come acropper on the question of why two people might respond to the same motive in different ways. By contrast, the textbook version of Calvinism, based on the Westminster Confession and mediated through the Scottish-influenced agency of Princeton Presbyterians Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge, accounted for the differences in these perceptions by the differences in spiritual substance between saints and sinners, which compelled saints to love one motive and sinners hate it. But that presupposed the existence of a substantial moral "nature" lying beneath the working consciousness, and that assumption sat uneasily beside Edwards's insistence that willing was an unhindered movement from perception to willing. A morally depraved spiritual substance that determined the receptiveness of the consciousness to ideas seemed to suggest a natural inability to respond to certain motives that would undercut all of Edwards's elaborate insistence on human freedom as natural ability. How much Edwards felt this tension as a Calvinist theologian is unclear, although in his posthumously published treatise on *Original Sin* (1758), Edwards sought to soften the notion of a fixed spiritual substance by redefining human "nature" rather vaguely as an "arbitrary divine constitution" which "continually preserves" human personality.¹⁰

These innovations puzzled, and sometimes appalled, not only the Arminians and quasi-Unitarians with whom Edwards had struggled during the Great Awakening, but even many orthodox "Old Calvinists" in New England and strict-subscription Presbyterians in Pennsyl-

¹⁰ Ramsey, ed., *Works of Edwards: Freedom of the Will*, 142, 304; John Smalley, *Sermons on Various Subjects, Doctrinal and Practical* (Middletown, CT, 1814), 328; Joseph Bellamy, "The Half-Way Covenant: A Dialog," in *The Works of Joseph Bellamy* (3 vols., New York, 1812), III, 443; Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Original Sin*, ed. Clyde Holbrook (New Haven, 1970), 399-404.

vania and New Jersey, who suspected that the redefinition of spiritual substance and a hankering to hitch Calvinism to talk about natural ability would come to no good end. The New Divinity, who considered themselves the most radical and consistent Edwardseans, felt no such qualms. Samuel Hopkins (who had been tutored in theology by Edwards during the height of the Great Awakening) developed Edwards's definition of true virtue into an ethic of absolute "universal disinterested benevolence." Joseph Bellamy, with Edwards's blessing (in the form of the preface to Bellamy's *True Religion Delineated* in 1750), reworked the outlines of the atonement and justification to introduce a governmental and unlimited atonement into New Divinity doctrine, and to replace the Westminster definition of justification as a matter of imputed divine righteousness with a 'realistic' idea of justification in which the death of Jesus Christ conferred, not merit upon sinners but an opportunity for God to forgive, provided the sinner was fully employing natural ability to exert disinterested benevolence.¹¹

Above all, explaining, defending and demanding the full natural ability of the will became the unceasing work of New Divinity preachers. Nathanael Emmons, who was often marked out as the most ultra of the New Divinity preachers, was so determined to preach up natural ability that he untied the will from any connection to spiritual substance, and defined all human consciousness as a phenomenological series of "exercises" upheld only by God's "constitution." He thus set his "Exercise Scheme" off from more hesitant New Divinity men such as Asa Burton, whose "Taste Scheme" retained some notion of a spiritual substratum in the form of an underlying "taste" for good or evil. And as they pressed to the outer logic of natural ability, they came at last to the suggestion that when the right use of one's ability combined with the demand for disinterested benevolence, then the goal of true Christian life could hardly be less than Christian perfection.¹² On the

¹¹ Samuel Hopkins, "Sin, Through Divine Interposition, an Advantage to the Universe" and "An Inquiry Into the Nature of True Holiness," in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins* (3 vols., Boston, 1854), II, 532, and III, 17, 39, 63; Joseph Bellamy, *True Religion Delineated, or, Experimental Religion as distinguished from formality and enthusiasm* (1750; rep. Morristown, NJ, 1804), 342-57;

¹² Nathanael Emmons, "Man's Activity and Dependence Illustrated and Reconciled," in *The Works of Nathanael Emmons*, ed. Jacob Ide (6 vols., Boston, 1842), IV, 355-56; Burton, *Essays on Some of the First Principles of Metaphysics, Ethics, and Theology* (Portland, ME, 1824), 225; Samuel Spring, *Moral Disquisitions and Strictures* (Newburyport, MA, 1789), 120, 210; Hopkins, "The Knowledge of God's Law Necessary," in *Works of Hopkins*, III, 524; John Smalley, *Sermons on a Number of Connected Subjects* (Hartford, 1803), 348; Nathan Strong, *Sermons on Various Subjects, Doctrinal, Experimental, and Practical* (2 vols., Hartford, CT, 1798, 1800), II, 185.

New Divinity's logic, if all sinners had full natural ability to repent, there was little point in nudging them into such traditional New England church practices as the half-way covenant or the "use of the means." These practices were predicated on the assumption that the self could be known only with difficulty and only by a gradual process of interpretation based on "means" such as church attendance, Bible-reading, and prayer for a "new heart" in order to repent. For the Edwardseans, full self-consciousness led to full natural ability, and full natural ability meant that the "means" became obstacles (and perhaps even sly delaying tactics); instead, the sinner should be commanded to use full natural ability to repent immediately and stop prevaricating.

It was, quite literally, in the atmosphere of New Divinity Calvinism that Finney was born in 1792 in the New Divinity stronghold of western Connecticut. He was raised among the Edwardsean-influenced "Presbygational" church unions of Congregationalists and Presbyterians in upstate New York. And it was in that same context that he received his mature education in 1812-14 in Peter Starr's New Divinity parish of Warren, Connecticut, and was ordained in 1824 in the New School Oneida Presbytery as an evangelist. Far more than any possible Wesleyanism, Arminianism, Jacksonianism, or antinomianism, it was the influence of this New Divinity Edwardseanism that colored his preaching and teaching as a fabulously successful revivalist in upstate New York, Pennsylvania, and New England from 1824 to 1832. Oddly, whatever the difficulties experienced by modern interpreters in discerning these influences, those who were closest to Finney saw this quite clearly. James Harris Fairchild, who became Finney's pupil when Finney moved to Oberlin College in Ohio in 1835 (and who eventually became his successor as president of Oberlin), insisted that Finney did "not differ in any essential feature from the view of Edwards and Samuel Hopkins," and he characterized "the Ethical Philosophy inculcated by Mr. Finney & his associates of later times" as being "that of the elder Edwards, which makes well-being or blessedness of the sentient universe the *summum bonum* or ultimate grace, & . . . benevolence, the grand element of all virtue." Henry Cowles, another of Finney's faculty colleagues at Oberlin and long-time editor of Finney's mouthpiece, *The Oberlin Evangelist*, declared that while "it has never been our habit to commend our orthodoxy, by affirming our agreement with any human standards," nevertheless "it may safely be said that we should choose to name the theology commonly known as that of New England . . . and as, years ago, expounded by Edwards, Bellamy and Hopkins." George Frederick Wright, another of Finney's Oberlin students and Finney's first major biographer, insisted that Finney "shows many indubitable

marks of Edwards's influence" and identified Finney's preaching in 1831 with Nathanael Emmons. As William Wisner (the pro-Finney pastor of Boston's Old South Church) claimed in 1839, if Finney had called his famous doctrine of perfectionism "what president Edwards did, 'the assurance of faith,' or 'entire consecration to God' or 'a high state of heavenly-mindedness', you might have said all that you have said about it and the . . . church of God would have all gone along with you. . . ."¹³

The connection of Finney with New England Edwardseanism can be seen even more clearly if we isolate particular ways in which Finney's most prominent teachings during his early years at Oberlin, when he was finally able to codify his theological speculations, reveal the thumbprint of the New Divinity—with, as we shall see, only one major exception.

The first and most obvious way in which Finney reflects the Edwardsean influence lies in Finney's psychology of the will. For Finney as much as for Edwards and the New Divinity, "all acts of will are matters of consciousness" and can be described as the same immediate movement from perception to action which had characterized Edwards's description of volition. Like Edwards, Finney believed that "mind is so constituted that it cannot but affirm obligation to will the good or the valuable as soon as the idea of the good or valuable is developed." And he was conscious in this that he was echoing Edwards: "With respect to this position of Pres. Edwards, that 'the will is as the greatest apparent good is,'" Finney observed, "I beg leave to say [that] it is exactly what the law of God enjoins on every moral being. . . . The very apprehending of moral truth concerning God renders it impossible to be indifferent. Once seeing God's claims, you cannot avoid acting upon them one way or the other." And even more like Edwards, Finney characterized that "idea of the good" or

¹³ James Harris Fairchild, *Oberlin: The Colony and the College, 1833-1883* (Oberlin, 1883), 85; Fairchild, "Oberlin Theology," James Harris Fairchild Papers (Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, OH); Henry Cowles, "Oberlin Theology—Heresy," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, October 22, 1856; George Frederick Wright, *Charles Grandison Finney* (Boston, 1893), 178-81; William Wisner to Finney, Dec. 23, 1839, Charles Grandison Finney Papers (Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, OH). The pastor of the church in Warren, where Finney attended services with his uncle, Cyrus Finney, from 1812 till 1814 and again in 1816, was Peter Starr (1744-1829), who was a theological pupil of Joseph Bellamy. See David W. Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders: The New Divinity and Village Revivals in Northwestern Connecticut, 1792-1822* (University Park, PA, 1993), 31, 67, 120, 232, 249, and F.B. Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College* (8 vols., New York, 1911), III, 82-3.

"moral truth" as a *motive*. "I perceive then in Consciousness that wh[ich] are generally termed *motives*," and regardless of whether such a motive is "either intrinsically or relatively valuable or the opposite . . . the Will can act and *must* act in presence of it." The result was that as motives were perceived by the mind, the will responded to those motives without compulsion but also without deliberation. Hence, Finney could say that "By Free-will, I intend the power which moral agent possesses, of choosing in any direction, in view of motives" while at the same time insisting that "Human liberty does not consist in a self-determining power in the will" or "the power to choose anything without a motive, or object of choice." And this position was, as Finney was quick to point out in his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, precisely what "Edwards and those of his school" had taught,

that choices, volitions, and all acts of will, are determined not by the sovereign power of the agent, but are *caused* by the objective motive, and that there is the same connection, or a connection as certain and unavoidable between motive and choice as between any physical cause and its effect. . . . Such is our mental constitution that the truth of God when thoroughly apprehended cannot fail to interest us. If these truths were clearly revealed to the wickedest man on earth, so that he should apprehend them as realities, it could not fail to rouse up his soul to most intense action.¹⁴

A second link to Edwards can be seen in Finney's treatment of natural and moral ability. For many critics, it was precisely the absence of a second stage of deliberation by the will, separate from the first stage of perception, which imposed compulsion and inability on human choice. But in Finney's case, as in Edwards's, the response was to introduce a sharp set of distinctions between the natural and moral abilities to choose. The person whose perceptions of motives to action led to a certain act of choice was only responding in the way

¹⁴ Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology* (2 vols., Oberlin, 1846-47), I, 27, 559, and II, 12; Finney, "Introductory Lecture No. 5, The Understanding, Judgment, and Freedom of the Will," in Finney Papers; Finney, "The Wrath of God Against Those who Withstand His Truth," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Dec. 9, 1857; Finney, "Christian Consciousness, A Witness for God," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, June 23, 1858; Finney, "Professor Finney's Letters. No. 33," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, May 26, 1841; Finney, "Professor Finney's Letters. No. 34," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, June 23, 1841; and Finney, "Thy Will Be Done," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, July 20, 1842.

the human consciousness had been created; no actual physical force was being exerted upon it, and so it had a full natural ability to choose what it pleased. In more practical terms, the sinners who were presented with motives for conversion did not require abilities to respond to those motives which were beyond their possession (and which could be pleaded as excuses). Such persons had all the natural ability—in terms of the natural endowments of reason, eyes, arms, legs, and so on—that would ever be needed to respond to Finney's preaching.

Finney elaborated this position for students in the Oberlin church well into the 1860s. "Moral agency implies natural ability," he insisted, and so long as that measure of natural ability was in possession of the sinner, the sinner had no excuses to offer God for not repenting. "To plead *inability* is to *accuse God*." But that did not mean for Finney, any more than it had for Edwards, that every sinner equally possessed the *moral* ability to repent apart from divine aid and intervention. "The true doctrine of natural ability is, namely, that every moral agent is really able to do whatever God requires of him," Finney wrote in 1845, but he followed that with the explanation that "We are not able to work out that which is good by virtue of possessing the powers of a moral being, independently of divine light." Those lacking moral ability might conceivably have all the natural ability in the world, but they would never be able to repent without a divinely wrought change in their moral inability; and yet, so long as natural ability was available, the sinner could still be held fully accountable for sinfulness and exhorted to respond and submit to God. "A moral agent can resist any and every truth" and moral agency "implies power to resist any degree of motive that may be brought to bear upon the mind," Finney cheerfully conceded with one hand, and then with the other promptly added, "whether any man ever did or ever will as a matter of fact, resist all truth, is entirely another question." For those in his New York City lecture audiences in 1837 who scoffed that this was merely trifling with words—that any inability meant that the will was no longer free nor the sinner responsible—Finney had one quick solution, and that was to refer them back to Jonathan Edwards:

Here some may object, that if there is a natural ability to be perfect, there is a moral inability, which comes to the same thing, for inability is inability, call it what you will, and if we have moral inability, we are as really unable as if our inability was natural. . . . The true distinction between natural ability and moral

ability, is this: natural ability relates to the powers and faculties of the mind; Moral ability only to the will. Moral inability is nothing less than unwillingness to do a thing. So it is explained by President Edwards, in his *Treatise on the Will*, and by writers on the subject.¹⁵

That still left Finney with one other problem, for which he found an Edwardsean solution, and that was to explain what caused this peculiar moral inability to operate in sinners in the first place. While the Taste Schemers among the Edwardseans preferred to explain this moral inability by tinkering with the notion of a depraved underlying spiritual substance, Finney took the route of the most radical Exercisers and abolished any notion of a moral “taste” or “nature” below the horizon of consciousness which controlled moral outcomes. “No act is a *moral* act, but an ultimate act, choice, or intention of the Will,” Finney explained in the *Oberlin Evangelist* in 1857:

Many old divines hold that there is such a thing as original sin, which however is not transgression of law—is not voluntary action of any sort, but is a certain sinfulness in the very substance of the soul. They hold that all the faculties, parts and powers of the soul are sinful; and this sinfulness they call *original sin*. This however is not God’s teaching, but man’s.

To allow any “natural” faculty or endowment the power to control a moral function like choice was merely to impose natural inability, which would have subverted the whole Edwardsean enterprise. Therefore, Finney struggled to eliminate all reference to the supposed moral content of such “dispositions” or “substances” on the grounds that consciousness found no evidence of their existence. Furthermore, such natural faculties as consciousness did attest to (such as the sensibilities, the judgment, or the intellect) had to be zoned off as morally neutral, lest they, too, turn into natural disabilities which the sinner could plead as excuses. “If it is true, as they pretend, that God has given them a nature which is itself sinful, and the necessary actings of

¹⁵ McLoughlin, ed., *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 17; Finney, “Lecture By Professor Finney,” *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Jan. 4, 1843; Finney, “Where Sin Occurs God Cannot Wisely Prevent It,” *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Aug. 2, 1854; Finney, *Lectures to Professing Christians* (New York, 1837), 256, 312-13; Sermon outlines, 1860 and 1869, Finney Papers; Finney, “Dependence on Christ,” *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Feb. 26, 1845; and Finney, “Grieving the Holy Spirit,” *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Dec. 4, 1839.

their nature are sin,” Finney warned, “it is a good excuse for sin, and in the face of heaven and earth, and at the day of judgment, will be a good plea in justification.”¹⁶

Only the will could be characterized as “sinful” or not—which was, of course, precisely what *moral* inability rather than natural inability was all about. “All *virtue & vice* are *voluntary dispositions*,” Finney argued, and belong only to the will, not a substantial “nature”:

The common old school [Presbyterian] notion that sin and holiness consist in the constitutional states or appetites of the mind, and lie back of voluntary intention, is a demonstration that they have not the true idea of religion. . . . I trust that many of them know by their own consciousness, what true devotedness to God is, but in theorizing, they make . . . sin and holiness, instead of consisting in choice or ultimate intention, lie in the involuntary appetites and propensities.

Finney did not deny the existence of such “appetites and propensities,” but he did deny that these “appetites,” together with other natural psychological endowments as “reason” and “sensibility,” could have moral content or be characterized as morally sinful in and of themselves. Moral character belonged only to the will. “Sin must be voluntary,” Finney declared, “The fact is there is either no sin or there is voluntary sin. . . . They consist in the active state of the will, and there can be no sin or holiness that does not consist in choice.” Even when, in his first published sermon, Finney announced that sinners were “bound to change their own hearts,” he was careful to add that his use of the term *heart* “is figurative” and is only “*that deepseated but voluntary preference of the mind, which lies back of all its other voluntary affections and emotions, and from which they take their character.*” Far from distancing Finney from orthodox New England Calvinism, this was precisely what bound him to the most radical strain of the New Divinity, for it was Nathanael Emmons (and not Finney) who had first dared to preach sermons that confidently called sinners to change their own hearts. And Finney, like the New Divinity, was eager to proclaim to the readers of his theology lectures that “the doctrine we

¹⁶ Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, I, 63; Finney, “Awaking from the Sleep of Spiritual Death,” *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Sept. 24, 1851; and Finney, *Lectures to Professing Christians*, 211-12.

have thus laid down, agrees with that which President Edwards urges in his *Treatise on the Will*, Part III. Sec. IV."¹⁷

Viewed in isolation, it is not difficult to see how Finney's incessant exhortations to sinners to use their natural ability to repent and make themselves new hearts could be read as a leap away from Calvinism. But those exhortations were not meant to be taken by themselves and by his recourse to the sovereignty of God Finney revealed another legacy of Jonathan Edwards. When Finney wrote that "*Men become Christians by means of persuasion*," for example, he tacked on the disclaimer:

Now here I do not by any means intend to say that this persuasion is merely human. Far otherwise. It is far more divine than human. There is such an interposition of divine agency as sets truth in order before the mind, and brings forth its strength. Thus to human persuasion is superadded the divine. Yet the influence is altogether of a *moral* nature.

Admittedly, Finney spent so much effort foregrounding the natural ability of the human will that it is easy to lose sight of the background of divine sovereignty he took for granted. But this, once again, only reflected how much Finney owed to the tactics of the New Divinity, who used Edwards's famous natural ability/moral inability dichotomy as a ticket to preach the full range of natural human ability as though free will was as boundless as the imagination. Moral inability, Edwardseans asserted, was the explanation for why natural ability was not being exercised, and thus they loosed themselves from the imputation that Calvinism intended passivity and inaction. There is no sense in which the Finney who brought down the terrifying fire of revival on New York in the 1820s and 1830s ever exceeded the propensity of the New Divinity to press the rhetorical boundaries of natural ability and still come up with what Nathanael Emmons called "consistent Calvinism."

¹⁷ Sermon outline, 1868, in Finney Papers; Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, I, 186, and II, 112-13; Finney, "Danger of Delusion," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Aug. 17, 1842; Finney, "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts," in *Sermons on Important Subjects* (New York, 1836), 8; Emmons, "It is the Duty of Sinners to Make Them a new Heart," in *Sermons on Various Important Subjects of Christian Doctrine and Practice* (Boston, 1812), 170-84. Emmons, like Finney, defines this new heart as consisting "in gracious exercises. . . which are called new, because they never existed in the sinner, before he became a new creature, or turned from sin to holiness" and therefore "sinners are not *passive*, but *active*, in regeneration" (172, 178).

All the while that Finney challenged sinners to change their own hearts (through their natural ability), he also insisted that “without [God’s] agency . . . we should do nothing to recover ourselves out of the snare of the devil.” Freedom of the will, as Finney reminded his hearers in 1843, “consists in the power, *not* to choose without motives, but to choose one way or another, in view of any given motive,” and the ultimate reason why one motive is chosen over another is because God “actually works in them to will and to do.” This applied, not only to individual human choice, but to the operation of the entire universe. “God *must* and will govern the universe. This he will do, whether you consent to it or not. . . . He will dispose of you for his own glory, whether you consent or not.” When pressed to give theological definition to this “universal providence,” Finney had no hesitation offering a fairly conventional Calvinistic description of the order of the divine decrees. “But the question will arise,” Finney wrote in 1847, “was election in the order of nature subsequent to or did it precede the Divine foreknowledge?” The customary non-Calvinistic response would have been to make the divine “foreknowledge” prior to the actual election, so that God “elects” those whom he already knows will choose him; but Finney insisted that “his knowing who would be saved must have been . . . subsequent to his election or determination to save them, and dependent upon that determination.” In terms that would have unsettled the Wesleyans with whom he is grouped so often and unaccountably, Finney wrote

God exercises a universal providence, embracing all events that ever did or ever will occur in all worlds. . . . All future events . . . are really as certain before they come to pass as they will ever be, and they are as truly and perfectly known as certain by God as they ever will be. . . . Whatever of contingency and uncertainty there may be respecting them in some respects, yet in point of fact, all events are certain, and there is no real uncertainty in respect to any event that ever did or will occur.¹⁸

Like the preachers of the New Divinity, Finney developed from all this reasoning a peculiar penchant for a double vocabulary of radical free-willism and radical Calvinism, and only in the Edwardsean

¹⁸ Bruce Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in American Protestant Thought, 1750-1850* (Lewiston, NY, 1992), 47-9; Finney, “The Holiness of Christians in the Present Life,” *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Mar. 29 and June 21, 1843; Finney, “Submission to God,” *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Jan. 20, 1841; Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology* II, 426, 437, 511.

context of the natural ability/moral inability dichotomy did that vocabulary show its intellectual consistency. “*Religion is the work of man*,” Finney announced in his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* in New York City in 1835; but by that he meant only that it was “something for man to do” because human beings have the natural ability to repent and are held accountable for it. “The question is *not* whether as a matter of fact men ever do obey God without the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit,” Finney explained a decade later, “I hold that they do not.” Good works, Finney argued were “in one sense our works, because we do them by our voluntary agency;” but on the other side of this vocabulary, Finney just as strictly added that good works were not “from ourselves, nor in any way by our own agency without God. . . . God was the moving cause of all.” In fact, when people attempted to achieve salvation on their own, Finney fully expected they would stumble upon their moral inability, and the resulting frustration over their own religious impotence would mark the real moment of spiritual enlightenment for them. “The history of every self-righteous sinner’s conversion and every anxious Christian’s sanctification would develop this truth—that deliverance cometh not until their self-righteous efforts were proved, by their own experience, to be utterly vain, and abandoned as useless, and the whole subject thrown upon the sovereign mercy of God.” In the end, this act of “submitting a subject to the sovereign mercy of God is that very act of faith, which they should have put forth long before, but which they would not exercise until every other means had been tried in vain.” Only when sinners came to appreciate the true depths of their moral inability were they existentially ready to submit to God. At that moment conversion took place, not by human design or initiative, but by “God’s special agency by his Holy Spirit”:

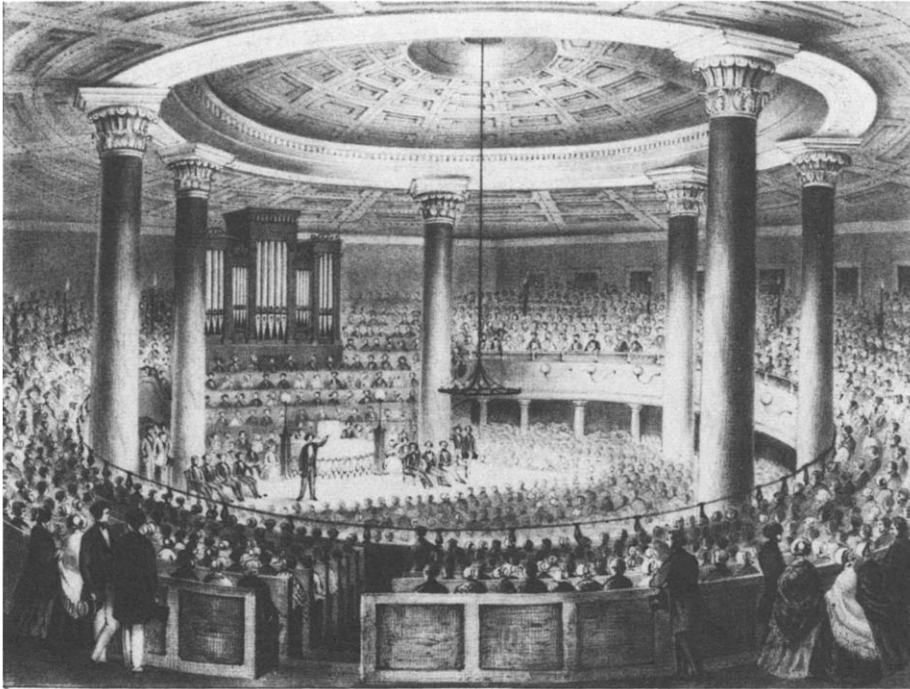
Having direct access to the mind, and knowing infinitely well the whole history and state of each individual sinner, He employs that truth which is best adapted to his particular case, and then drives it home with Divine power. . . . God makes it clear before their minds, and pours in upon their souls a blaze of convincing light which they cannot withstand; and they yield to it, obey God, and are saved.¹⁹

¹⁹ Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, II, 38; Finney, *Lectures to Professing Christians*, 330; McLoughlin, ed., *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 9, 17-18; Finney, “Faith,” *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Jan. 16, 1839.

Thus when Finney called restless “inquirers” to his notorious innovation, the “anxious bench,” in the 1831 Rochester revivals, the gesture itself might have been borrowed from Methodist or Baptist practice but the rationalization Finney offered was pure New Divinity. Those who “were truly willing to give up sin”—to exercise their natural ability—“would not hesitate to pledge themselves to do it, and to have all the world know that they had done it” as evidence of a new moral ability to obey God. If the sinner was “not willing to do so small a thing as that,” then he was not willing “to do *anything*, and there he is, brought out before his own conscience,” and incidentally shown to be bankrupt of moral ability. The “anxious bench” was intended by Finney largely to illustrate the sinner’s natural ability to repent and thereby highlight the sinner’s greater culpability in not yielding morally to God. “If men who were under conviction refused to come forward publicly and renounce their sins, and give themselves to God, this fact disclosed to them more clearly the pride of their hearts,” Finney commented in his *Memoirs*. “If, on the other hand, they broke over all those considerations that stood in the way of their doing it, it was taking a great step.” When Finney announced four years later that a revival of religion “is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense,” but “a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means,” he was speaking in the context of *natural* ability: sinners may not demand miracles, but they had all the means at their disposal to produce a revival. In the context of *moral* inability, however, Finney immediately reversed the picture to insist that “man alone never does or can convert a sinner,” and he added that calling revivals non-miraculous was merely a way of stressing that sinners “do not become Christian by virtue of any physical change in the substance of either body or soul.”²⁰

Finney’s quarrel was not with Calvinism, if by Calvinism we mean the unrestricted ordering of all events, the moral depravity of all human beings, and the priority of divine rather than human initiative in salvation. Even as late as his *Lectures on Systematic Theology* in

²⁰ Finney, *Lectures to Professing Christians*, 128; Rosell and Dupuis, eds., *Memoirs of Charles Grandison Finney*, 320-21; McLoughlin, ed., *Lectures on Revivals*, 12-14, 267-68; Finney, “Converting Sinners a Duty,” *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Jan. 4, 1854; Finney, “On Being Almost Persuaded to be Christians,” *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Mar. 14, 1855. See especially W.M. Barbour’s observation on Finney’s well-known comment on the non-miraculous nature of revivals, which underscores that Finney’s intention was simply to describe human responsibility, not human autonomy. Barbour, “The Oberlin Theology,” in *The Oberlin Jubilee, 1833-1883* (Oberlin, 1883), 38.



The Broadway Tabernacle in New York City, completed in 1836 for Finney on plans he himself drew up. Finney had already begun teaching summer-term theology courses at Oberlin College in 1835, while remaining a New York City pastor and residing in New York in the winter months. He was the pastor of the Broadway Tabernacle only until April, 1837, when he left New York permanently to teach at Oberlin.

Source: Oberlin College Archives.

the late 1840s, Finney taught “that none but the elect are converted. For all who are, or will be saved, are saved by God, and saved by design, and in accordance with an eternal design, and of course they were elected to salvation from eternity.” True, Finney left Presbyterianism in March 1836 to become a Congregationalist; but the decision was generated by the political concerns of organizing the Broadway Tabernacle, not by an abandonment of Calvinistic theology. He denounced “low Arminianism” as “a manifest absurdity,” and described “Antinomianism and Arminianism” as the “two extremes” between which converts “must learn to steer, or they will certainly make shipwreck of their faith.” Like the New Divinity, he did have a genuine quarrel with Old School Presbyterians; but the Old School Presbyteri-

anism of the Princeton theologians did not constitute the only legitimate Calvinist expression in the early American republic, and Finney's controversy with "Calvinism" really was an intramural quarrel between two domestic strains, the Edwardsean and the Princetonian.

Finney's early debates with his first theological mentor in Adams, New York, the Old School Princetonian George Washington Gale, were not debates about Calvinism but about *which* Calvinism; and those debates Finney had with Old School Presbyterians down through the years revolved around precisely those points on which Hopkins, Bellamy, and the New Divinity long ago had parted company with Princeton: that the human self was completely conscious of all of its ideas, that there could be no "sinful" nature underlying conscious ideas and volitions, that the classic Old School doctrine of a limited atonement created a natural inability that encouraged passivity, and that a forensic, imputed righteousness induced antinomianism and presumption. George Washington Gale "was a Princeton man" and "held to the Presbyterian doctrine of original sin, or that the human *constitution* was morally depraved . . . from the fact of a nature *sinful in itself*." Finney's response was to make the same case Joseph Bellamy had made for an unlimited and governmental atonement, and to do it (as George Frederick Wright noticed) in terms borrowed from Jonathan Edwards the Younger:

I delivered two lectures upon the Atonement. In these I think I fully succeeded in showing that the Atonement did not consist in the literal payment of the debt of sinners . . . that it simply rendered the salvation of all men *possible*, and did not of itself lay God under any obligation to save *anybody* . . . but on the contrary, that Christ died simply to remove an insurmountable obstacle out of the way of God's forgiving sinners; so as to render it possible for him to proclaim a universal *Amnesty* . . . and therefore rendered it safe for God to pardon sin, and to pardon the sins of any man, and of all men, who would repent and believe in Christ.²¹

²¹ Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, I, 412, 417, 421, and II, 576, 578, 579; Finney, "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts," in *Sermons on Important Subjects*, 17; Rosell and Dupuis, eds., *Memoirs Of Charles Grandison Finney*, 44, 51, 105-6, 364, 507; and Finney, "Professor Finney's Letters—No. 15," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, May 6, 1840; Clyde Holbrook, *The Ethics of Jonathan Edwards: Morality and Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1973), 125-33; Lefferts A. Loetscher, *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism: Archibald Alexander and the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary* (Westport, CT, 1983), 197-206; James Waddell Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander, D.D.*

In fact, from that point onwards, Finney's preaching and teaching became a virtual litany of New Divinity shibboleths. Like Hopkins, Finney preached that "all religion consists in disinterested benevolence" and he described conversion in the most basic Edwardsean sense, as "a change from selfishness to benevolence . . . to an absorbing and controlling desire of the happiness and glory of God and his kingdom." Like Hopkins again, this involved a thorough-going moral rigorism. If "benevolence is an *honest and disinterested* consecration of the whole being" to God, then anything less than an "impartial, a disinterested choice of the highest good of being—not some parts of it—not of self—but of being in general" was the only acceptable rule for Christian behavior, and "every pretended conversion, that does not result in shaping the man's business, and life, and spirit, in conformity with this precept, is a spurious conversion." With no half-way point between virtue and selfishness, "there can be but two classes of mankind, in respect to moral character," Finney concluded, and these were simply "saints or sinners; holy or unholy; spiritual or carnal; children of God or children of the devil." Hence, like Nathanael Emmons, Finney attacked even the noblest or the most mundane works of the unregenerate as sin: even the "*plowing of the wicked* is sin. . . . Until you *repent* you *can* do *nothing but sin*."

The Sinner should be told plainly, at once, what he must do or die; and he should be told nothing that does not include a right state of heart. Whatever you may do, that does not include a right heart, is sin. Whether you read the Bible or not, it is sin, so long as you remain in rebellion. Whether you go to meeting, or stay away, whether you pray or not, it is nothing but rebellion, every moment.

And, like Hopkins once more, alongside rigorism sat immediatism. The intellectual dynamic of natural ability left no room for half-way covenants, gradualism in conversion, or parish nurture through the "use of

(New York, 1854), 237-56, 425, 495, 685; Charles Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1851), I, 41-63; Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Atonement* (1867; rep. Philadelphia, 1907), 327-46; Benjamin Warfield, *Perfectionism*, ed. Samuel Craig (Philadelphia, 1958), 18-19, 33-35, 46-47, 168-69; Mark A. Noll, "Jonathan Edwards and Nineteenth-Century Theology," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (New Haven, 1988), 261-62; Wright, *Charles Grandison Finney*, 22. See also Finney, "Christ the Mediator," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Aug. 13, 1851; and Finney, "Holiness of Christians in the Present Life," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Mar. 29, 1843.

the means" of grace. "Anxious" inquirers who crept up to Finney to ask what steps they might take toward conversion were told that they were only disguising their unwillingness to repent behind a false inability; sinners with full natural ability should use it at once. "Knowing your duty, you have but the one thing to do, PERFORM IT," Finney roared. The Old Schoolers might not like this, but as Finney wrote to Theodore Dwight Weld from Philadelphia in 1828, "The fact is that we are all hereticks, alias Hopkinsians who don't sit quietly down in a corner . . . and wait God's time."²²

But the most controversial application of the logic of the New Divinity was Finney's development of the doctrine of perfection, or "entire sanctification." It was this that attracted most of the accusations that Oberlin was the nursery of "a considerable departure from the accepted orthodox faith" and that generated "such a spirit of heresy hunting and such awful effort to put down the Oberlin heresy" that the Oberliners were forced to organize their own Congregational association just to get the College's graduates ordained. But Oberlin perfectionism was also a conclusion which moved entirely on the suppositions, and sometimes the actual examples, of the New Divinity. On one level, perfectionism was simply a logical extension of the old Hopkinsian disinterested benevolence, for how could anyone be given over to "absolute and universal self-renunciation" without understanding "that every sinful indulgence must be crucified, and Christ become all in all to our life and happiness"? But for Finney, the logic of perfectionism was even more clearly an extension of natural ability; for if one possessed a natural ability to repent, one *ipso facto* possessed a natural abil-

²² Finney, *Lectures to Professing Christians*, 177; Finney, "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts," in *Sermons on Important Subjects*, 8-10; Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, I, 260, 262; Finney, "Glorifying God," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Mar. 27, 1839; Finney, "Design or Intention Constitutes Character," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Oct. 21, 1840; Finney, "Reasons Why Sinners Are Not Saved," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Nov. 23, 1842; Finney, "The Old Man and the New," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, May 21, 1845; Finney, Sermon outline, 1869, in Finney Papers; McLoughlin, ed., *Lectures on Revivals*, 363; Keith J. Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Syracuse, NY, 1987), 166. Four decades later, Finney would attempt to distance himself in his *Memoirs* from identification with Hopkinsianism in the same way he had grown chary of admitting any indebtedness to any school of theology, and he particularly decried Hopkins's sensational assertion that true disinterested benevolence demanded that the saint be willing even to be damned if it promoted the glory of God. See Rosell and Dupuis, eds., *Memoirs of Charles Grandison Finney*, 251-52. Finney, however, had taught the very same thing "thirty four years ago" in his Tappan Hall classroom, as one of his former students reminded him. See Alice Whipple to Finney, Dec. 4, 1874, in Finney Papers).

ity to obey God fully thereafter. "That there is natural ability to be perfect is a simple matter of fact," Finney explained, "It is self-evident that entire obedience to God's law is possible on the ground of natural ability . . . so that it is a simple matter of fact that you possess natural ability, or power, to be just as perfect as God requires." Whether that meant that anyone actually *would* attain perfection was, as Finney had said, entirely another question. "When you ask whether you have moral ability to be perfect, if you mean by it, whether you are willing to be perfect, I answer, No," Finney carefully hedged: "If you were willing to be perfect you would be perfect, for the perfection required is only a perfect conformity of the will to God's Law, or willing right."²³

Finney also hedged other parts of what he meant by perfection, again according to the New England model. Because the will, and not a constitutional substratum, is what acts and also sins, Finney carefully restricted "entire sanctification" to overt acts of will. Sanctification "is a voluntary state of mind that the law of God requires"; it cannot affect "any change in the substance of the soul or body" nor does it even "imply the annihilation of any of the constitutional appetites, or susceptibilities," because all of those appetites are *natural* rather than *moral* endowments, and cannot possess moral qualities. In effect, Finney's version of perfection was a kind of anti-antinomianism, which defined perfectionism not as the enjoyment of a state of ineffable grace, but as the active and rigorous observance of divine law. "By entire sanctification, I understand the consecration of the whole being to God," Finney wrote in 1840 "Nothing more nor less can possibly be Perfection or entire Sanctification, than obedience to the law." Conversely, anything that suggested a natural inability to obey that law—such as a sinful spiritual substance beneath the sweep of the consciousness, or a 'natural' appetite for food or sex—had to be removed from the possibility of either perfection or sin, lest sinners find refuge in *natural* forces over which they had no control. But the actual movement of the will to the illicit gratification of those "appetites" *was* within a person's natural ability to control, and control of the will rather than the appetites became the crux of Finney's "entire sanctification." Finney illustrated this distinction in a letter to Arthur Tappan in 1836 in which he chided Tappan for pressing too recklessly for racial equality in America. "I admit that

²³ James Harris Fairchild, "Oberlin Theology," in Fairchild Papers; C.C. Copeland to Finney, Aug. 13, 1846, in Finney Papers; Finney, *Lectures to Professing Christians*, 255-56; Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, II, 204; Finney, "Relations of Christ to the Believer," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, July 30, 1845.

the distinction on account of color . . . is a silly & often a wicked prejudice," Finney admitted," but "I say often, because I do not believe it always is a wicked prejudice." In the case of a someone who "from *constitutional taste*" shuns people of color, that person may not be sinning because "*constitutional taste*" is a natural endowment and creates a natural, a non-culpable, natural inability. The real question is whether, notwithstanding that "*constitutional taste*," someone could still "be a devoted friend of the colored people." Finney thought so: it was not racist attitudes, but racist actions which became sin. Apart from such actions, the racist still could be entirely sanctified.²⁴

Finney was well aware that the Oberlin definition of perfection set him off decisively from both Wesleyan and antinomian brands of perfectionism. Finney disclaimed "entirely, the charge of maintaining the peculiarities, whatever they may be, of modern perfectionists" like John Humphrey Noyes. Even hostile Princetonians like Albert Baldwin Dod acknowledged that Finney owed his principal intellectual debts to "the refined, intellectual abstractions of the New Divinity." At the same time Wesleyan-style perfectionists seemed eager to distance themselves from Finney. George Peck snorted at Finney's idea of perfection-by-natural-ability as "a *legal perfection* . . . whereas Wesleyans deny the practicability of any such obedience." Peck particularly criticized Finney's preoccupation with immediate conversion, his contempt for the "*means of grace*," and his peculiar willingness to separate "a *desire* for the forbidden object" from actual sin. Consequently, Peck singled out Finney to remind his Methodist readers that the Oberliners "do not profess to be Methodists, nor to derive their doctrine or phraseology from Methodist standards." Daniel Denison Whedon, who had been converted in a Finney revival in 1828 but who went to the Methodists instead of Oberlin, attacked Finney's doctrine as mere "New Divinity . . . on every point," full of "*perplexity and contradiction*." This Wesleyan critique of Oberlin perfectionism bothered Finney not at all. When his Oberlin associate, Asa Mahan, eventually embraced Wesleyanism and began criticizing Finney's reliance on Edwards's ethical writings, Finney and the Oberlin faculty leveraged him out of the Oberlin presidency and out of the college entirely; and when Finney had to cite precedents for Oberlin perfectionism, the examples printed in *The Oberlin Evangelist* were not Wesley or Fletcher, but Samuel Hopkins and Nathanael Emmons. "I had known considerable of the view of sanctification enter-

²⁴ Finney, "Sanctification" and "Sanctification.—No. 2," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Jan. 1 and 15, 1840; Finney to Arthur Tappan, Apr. 30, 1836, in Finney Papers.

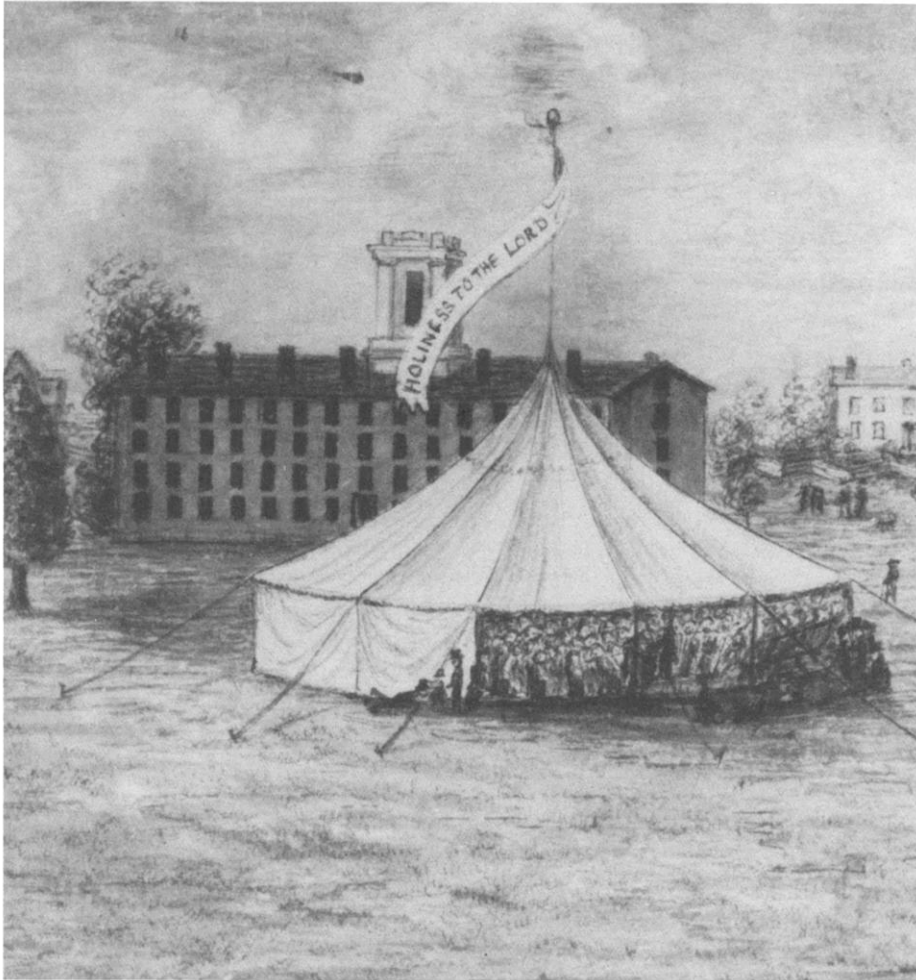
tained by our Methodist brethren," Finney wrote in his *Memoirs*, "but as their view of sanctification seemed to me to relate almost altogether to states of the sensibility"—and not the will—"I could not receive their teaching." As Finney explained to an Oberlin associate in 1839, his version of perfectionism "is the doctrine & has been of New England divines." As for Wesley and the Methodists, "I can by no means adopt his system & few Calvinistic Ministers, I believe, have had more Collision with them than myself."²⁵

Over time, it cannot be denied, Finney did repudiate one of the most important of all the Edwardsean formulas. By the time he published his *Lectures on Systematic Theology* in 1846 and 1847 he had become more than a little uneasy about the natural ability/moral inability dichotomy on which he had so confidently rested his case ten years before in New York City. "The Edwardsean natural ability is no ability at all, and nothing but an *empty name*, a *metaphysico-theological FICTION*," Finney wrote. Although "Edwards I revere," Finney added, "his blunders I deplore," and chief among those blunders was "that injurious monstrosity and misnomer, 'Edwards on the Freedom of the Will.'"²⁶ It is this rhetorical turn, more than the "anxious bench" or the "new measures," which is supposed to prove Finney's distance from "strict Calvinist theology" or "the old Calvinistic tradition." Perhaps it was true that the role of college professor forced upon him an entirely new framework for understanding and explaining human willing. But even this shift in Finney's thinking took place securely within the overall ambit of the New England theology, and especially the influence of Nathaniel

²⁵ Finney, *Lectures to Professing Christians*, 257; A.B. Dod, "On Revivals of Religion," in *Essays, Theological and Miscellaneous*, reprinted from the *Princeton Review* (New York, 1847), 137; George Peck, *The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection Stated and Defended* (New York, 1842), 176, 192; Whedon, "Arminian Theology," in *Statements Theological and Critical*, ed. J.S. Whedon and D.A. Whedon (New York, 1887), 246; Edward H. Madden and James E. Hamilton, *Freedom and Grace: The Life of Asa Mahan* (Metuchen, NY, 1982), 82, 102-16; Wright, *Charles Grandison Finney*, 181; Dupuis and Rosell, eds., *Memoirs of Charles Grandison Finney*, 391; Finney to J.P. Cowles, June 28, 1839, in Finney Papers. *The Oberlin Evangelist* cited Hopkins as a friend to perfection in "The Opinions of the Reformers and Subsequent Divines on the Subject of Sanctification—No. 2," on April 22, 1840, while the extracts from Emmons's 1823 sermon on "Perfect Holiness in this Life the Duty of Christians" (from *Sermons on Various Subjects of Christian Doctrine and Duty* [Providence, 1823], 403-423) appeared in *The Oberlin Evangelist* on November 9, 1842. On the closeness of Finney's ideas of perfectionism with "those that prevailed in the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches of the land," see James Harris Fairchild, "The Doctrine of Sanctification at Oberlin," *Congregational Quarterly*, 18 (Apr. 1876), 237.

²⁶ Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, II, 14, 27, 30.

William Taylor, the dominant intellectual figure of the New England theology in its last decades of influence from 1820 to 1860.



Shortly after Finney gave his first series of college lectures at Oberlin in 1835, he ordered a large outdoor tent “a hundred feet in diameter” which was used variously to house preaching meetings for college students, commencement exercises, and even as a portable preaching hall for Finney and Oberlin’s theological students in nearby towns. The blue silk steamer with the provocative motto, “Holiness to the Lord,” was only flown in 1835 during the first use of the tent on the lawn in front of Tappan Hall.

Source: Oberlin College Archives.

A number of students of Finney have pointed to Finney's encounter with Taylor as a decisive moment in the development of Finney's thinking, and Frank Hugh Foster thought it was enough to describe Finney as "Taylor's true successor." But none of them succeeded in isolating just what in Taylor deflected Finney from the Edwardsean formula on natural and moral ability. This is due in part to the difficulty of penetrating Taylor's abstruse and politic way of putting his theological theorems on paper, but Finney himself was no more forthcoming in his *Memoirs* about his connections with Taylor than he was about his debts to the New Divinity. (Taylor's name barely appears in the *Memoirs* although Taylor's intimate friend, Lyman Beecher, appears frequently—and almost always in a disapproving light.) But two letters which Finney and Taylor exchanged in 1832 and 1833, and the claim of at least one Oberlin associate to have accompanied Finney to a meeting with Taylor in New Haven, point to more than a nodding acquaintance, while from an intellectual point of view, it is impossible not to see Taylor's hand all through Finney's writings from the late 1840s and 1850s.²⁷

The son and grandson of Connecticut Old Calvinists, Taylor came of age in the 1810s, preparing for the ministry under the eye of Azel Backus, a New Divinity minister, and promoting Edwards-style revivals while also defending gradualism, parish nurture, the use of means, and the Congregational Standing Order in Connecticut. In blending strains of Edwardseanism and Old Calvinism, Taylor was shrewd enough to realize that the Standing Order was not going to stand forever (in fact, it was disestablished in 1817), and he embarked on an ambitious campaign to develop a mediating Calvinism which would harness the revivalistic energies of the New Divinity to the stability and order of Old Calvinism. He very largely succeeded, first by absorbing several elements of the New Divinity theological curricu-

²⁷ Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (1907; rep., New York, 1963), 453; Wright, *Charles Grandison Finney*, 179, 196; Sidney E. Mead, *Nathaniel William Taylor, 1786-1858: A Connecticut Liberal* (Chicago, 1942), 167; Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism," 340; Finney to N.W. Taylor, Jul. 11, 1832, and Nov. 3, 1833, in *Finney Papers*. Henry P. Cowles, one of the six core faculty members of Oberlin College during Finney's first decade there, was a theological student of Taylor's and eulogized his former teacher after Taylor's death in 1858 in *The Oberlin Evangelist* as "God's instrument in doing a great work for his own and succeeding generation, in bringing out the cardinal points of theological truth in an effective shape, so that they may naturally bear with their legitimate force on the human mind." Cowles, *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Mar. 24, 1858.

lum—especially a governmental atonement—and then by weaning the New England theology off the natural ability/moral inability dichotomy and attaching it to a new explanation of human sinfulness and human choice.

Taylor posed a fundamental question that had haunted Edwardseans of all stripes: was the natural ability/moral inability dichotomy merely a rhetorical shell game, a weak link in the Edwardsean chain of reasoning that might undo the whole enterprise? Taylor thought so, and he pressed the point hard enough to make Edwardseans like Bennet Tyler, Asahel Nettleton, Leonard Woods, and Edward Dorr Griffin cringe. “The *natural ability of man* to obey God, as defined by Edwards and others, has no existence and can have none,” Taylor declared. “It is an essential nothing.” Edwards’s mind, explained Taylor, “was all confusion on the subject,” and consequently New England theology “has been deluded for a century by the semblance of a distinction between natural and moral ability and inability, which has no foundation in the nature of things.” Instead of explaining human volition as a constant dialectic between natural ability and moral inability, Taylor constructed a scheme which rooted all choice in a human nature or “constitution”; but like the New Divinity “exercisers,” he then explained that this nature was not itself sinful but only created the “occasion,” the “appropriate circumstances,” from which sinful actions then arise. Sin is thus “certain,” but the sinner still possesses full “power to the contrary,” and not just natural ability. And sin occurs, not because of a divine arrangement of motives before sinners’ eyes, but because in a world of “moral government” and “power to the contrary,” sin is one of the unavoidable concomitants of the “nature of a moral system,” which God “wisely” countenances in order not to cast the shadow of compulsion over the human will. But the effect, Taylor claimed, would be the same as it had been in Edwards: sinners had a power of choice which made them fully responsible for what they chose, but the actual results of that choosing are morally certain based on the “constitution” and “occasion” in which all people find themselves.²⁸

²⁸ Taylor, *Lectures on the Moral Government of God* (2 vols., New York, 1859), I, 196, and II, 134; Mead, *Nathaniel William Taylor*, 28; Taylor, “Remarks on a Letter to the Editors, Respecting the Review of Dr. Taylor and Mr. Harvey,” *Quarterly Christian Spectator*, 1 (Sept. 1829), 551; Taylor, *Concio ad Clerum: A Sermon Delivered in the Chapel of Yale College, September 10, 1828* (New Haven, 1828), 13-14, 24; Taylor, *Essays, Lectures, Etc. Upon Select Topics* (New York, 1859), 383.

Taylor's system had the attraction of explaining both sin and a sinful psychology without the need for the natural/moral dichotomy. As Finney moved more and more off the revival platform and behind the professor's desk after 1835, the flapping urgency of natural ability yielded to the elegant intellectual architecture of a "New Haven theology," where power was always available, where sin was a product of circumstances, and where God "wisely . . . sends forth his Spirit to save as many as by the best system of influences He wisely can save." Like Taylor, Finney now criticized Edwards's "confusion" on the psychology of willing. "Edwards professed to hold the freedom of the Will, but gave such a definition of what constitutes freedom of the will as not at all to discuss the real question," Finney lectured to his Oberlin students. What Finney feared was that Edwards's attempt to explain the interplay of absolute certainty and moral freedom had failed to avoid the suggestion of "a real inability, and so it has been understood by sinners and professors of religion"—especially, one suspects, by Nathaniel William Taylor. Like Taylor again, Finney's description of human choice shifted from natural ability to "responsible action" which the sinner must perform "of his own free will and accord, no power interposing as such a sort or in such a measure as to overbear or interfere with his own responsible agency." The theology Finney sketched out in his *Lectures* thus took on a deep Taylorite hue, in which God, instead of moving all human action through motives, had to make allowance for the existence of sin in order to produce the truly moral beings he wants. "He saw that it would be wise to create moral agents, who would sin, and some of whom would be lost; and how could He act other than wisely without forever condemning Himself for wrong-doing?" Finney asked his students at Oberlin in 1849. The answer was pure Taylorism: "God no doubt created the wicked or those who become wicked, because their creation was essential in his judgment, to the promotion of the highest universal good."²⁹

Even if it is granted that at Oberlin Finney abandoned the natural ability/moral inability scheme to follow Taylor, this is far from suggesting that Finney had abandoned Calvinism, or even the New England theology. As Bruce Kuklick has commented in reviewing Taylor,

²⁹ Finney, "The Salvation of Sinners Impossible," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Sept. 29, 1852; Finney, "Lecture No. 7, The Existence of God," Finney Papers; Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, II, 49; Finney, "Sermon By Prof. C.G. Finney," *The Oberlin Evangelist*, June 20, 1849; Finney, "Wherefore Do the Wicked Live?" *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Feb. 13, 1861.

“the idea that Taylor hedged Calvinist essentials in a modernizing culture does not fit the evidence,” and Taylor himself pleaded in his own self-defence that “we fully believe . . . that ‘moral necessity may be as absolute as natural necessity.’ We believe that the known certainty of action, is consistent with blameworthiness.” And even if, as Taylor’s critics believed, the “New Haven theology” represented a move downwards from Edwardsean purity, Finney’s reflection of Taylor’s movement still embodied the functions and effects of Edwardsean language, and that language alone imposed restraints on both Finney and Taylor entirely apart from their subjective intentions. Certainly, Finney’s dalliance with Taylor on natural ability dislodged none of his enthusiasm for perfection, disinterested benevolence, and the use of natural ability. He also criticized Taylor for failing to endorse all of Edwards’s program for true virtue, and he imparted to Oberlin, through the successive regimes of James Harris Fairchild and Henry Churchill King, an abiding obsession with the psychology of volition. What Finney therefore presented, even in his Oberlin years, was not a new, more progressive version of Protestant evangelicalism, but the last major public voice of the old New England paradigm.³⁰

Linking Finney ideologically to the New England theology presents a different picture of Finney as an intellectual figure in the early republic than the anti-Calvinist democrat or the theological naif painted by Charles Sellers or Whitney Cross. True, Finney was not a creative thinker: Finney’s “severity of tone and manner which strongly excited the passions of the hearers,” preventing his “access to the conscience and the heart,” was taken even in his own day by critics like John Williamson Nevin as evidence that Finney was a ranter of low mental visibility who fostered “justification by feeling rather than by faith,” and gave “encouragement to all kinds of fanat-

³⁰ Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven, 1985), 106; Wright, *Charles Grandison Finney*, 216; James E. Hamilton and Edward H. Madden, “Edwards, Finney, and Mahan on the Derivation of Duties,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 13 (Sept. 1975), 347-60; Donald M. Love, *Henry Churchill King of Oberlin* (New Haven, 1956), 38. Douglas Sweeney provides a spirited defense of Taylor’s place within the overall ambit of “the New England Theology.” See Sweeney, “Nathaniel William Taylor and the Edwardsian Tradition: A Reassessment,” in Stein, ed., *Jonathan Edwards’s Writings*, 139-58. Sweeney pays particular attention to a critical article of Taylor’s on the natural/moral necessity dichotomy, “Review of Dr. Tyler’s Strictures on the Christian Spectator,” *Quarterly Christian Spectator*, 2 (Mar. 1830), 195.

ical impressions.”³¹ But that is not the same as saying Finney had no theological or intellectual stock to deal in. Supposing that we yield to the weight of evidence for Finney’s New England intellectual origins, there remain three important issues about it that need to be addressed.

The first is simply whether such connections actually made any historical difference. It could be argued, especially from the point of view of political historians like J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, that Finney’s audiences heard only the rhetorical rationalizations which Finney provided for free will, and either missed or ignored the rhetorical “off-ramps” that were supposed to lead them back to Calvinism. Finney might thus be a Calvinist in the New England mold, but what was important was the sense of liberation from “the trammels of inability” that he gave his hearers, inadvertently or not, allowing them to leave Calvinism themselves. If so, then the significance of Finney’s connections to the New England theology fade as popular audiences in the Jacksonian era freely made of Finney what Finney might never have intended. In that case, the revivals of the 1820s and ’30s once more resume their conformity to historians’ presumptions about their function as an agent of a democratizing political culture. But even that requires a major re-calculation of Finney himself, since the form of Finney’s Edwardsean rhetoric must contradict any picture of the preacher as a democratic rebel, inflaming the liberated theological masses against elite Calvinist leadership and recast Finney as one of the Calvinist elite, struggling to prod a passive and disheartened constituency into competition with Methodism, deism, and the many other religious alternatives. Certainly the Methodist hecklers encountered by Finney in the Antwerp, New York, revival of 1824 had no illusions about the clarity of Finney’s Calvinism: they heard Finney preach on “the doctrine of election” so clearly that he believed he had “convinced the Methodists themselves.” A decade later James Waddell Alexander easily pegged Finney’s New York City lectures on revival as “an odious caricature of old Hopkinsian divinity.”³² Almost the only people who heard Finney

³¹ Cross, *The Burnt-Over District*, 158; Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 226; Samuel H. Gridley, “Biographical Sketch,” in Richards, *Lectures on Mental Philosophy and Theology* (New York, 1846), 41-2; Theodore Appel, *The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevins* (Philadelphia, 1889), 162.

³² Rosell and Dupuis, eds., *Memoirs of Charles Grandison Finney*, 105-06; James Waddell Alexander, *Forty Years’ Familiar Letters*, ed. John Hall (2 vols., New York, 1860), II, 310.

as an outright Arminian were Old School Calvinists like Hodge or Dod, who regularly criticized New England Calvinists as secret Arminians. The genuine Arminians, such as Peck and Whedon, were quite sure that Finney's preaching of legal perfection and "disinterested benevolence" put him outside their pale. Finney's rhetorical world was the world of Edwards, not Jackson, and the rhetorical situation he hoped to create was predicated on the Edwardsean psychology of the will.

If this is the case for Finney, what about the larger context of revivalism in the early republic? The New England origins of Finney's revivalism raise subsequent question about the larger interpretation of the so-called Second Great Awakening as yet another example of the "declension" model in American religious history. Following the lead of Miller, Cross, and McLoughlin, the Second Great Awakening usually has been described as a "transformation" of the stark Edwardsean Calvinist revivalism of the First Great Awakening into a new, Arminianized version of revivalism that could act as a convenient device for redefining and democratizing the American Republic.³³ But if Finney's connections to the New England theology mean anything at all, then as much of the Second Great Awakening as Finney was concerned with loses its descriptive simplicity as a descent into raw Jacksonian enthusiasm. Both Finney and his revivals can be seen, not as prisoners of the upsurge of democratic optimism, but as a swelling in the sober ebb-and-flow of evangelical culture that the First Great Awakening set off a century before and that promoted for Americans a reassuring continuity with the era of Edwards rather than an introduction to the Age of Jackson. Even granted that Finney shared the stage of the Second Great Awakening with promoters of religious enthusiasm (such as Joseph Smith, Lorenzo Dow, and Phoebe Palmer) who really did represent new departures in American life, the rather substantial part of the Awakening which took Finney as its figurehead was a moment of anxiety which, like much of political republicanism in the 1820s and 1830s, looked backwards for reassurance to a previous generation.

Second, linking Finney to New England Calvinism also makes a difference for understanding the disagreements which have emerged concerning the relationship of Finney and the Second Great Awakening to the growth of American commercial markets. Like his theology, Finney's response to the possessive individualism of New York

³³ Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York, 1965), 4, 10-14.

merchants and capitalists has suffered from contradictory renderings, ranging from a tool of capitalism, using revivalism to assuage class differences, to a disillusioned victim of merchant hypocrites. This contradiction, however, was embodied in the New Divinity, who (as William Breitenbach and Joseph Conforti have shown) preached an ethical commitment to disinterested benevolence, moral restraint, and the “religio-cultural traditions of small-town New England Congregationalism,” while at the same time making individual self-promotion possible by including self-interest as a form of benevolence toward oneself and thereby guaranteeing that self-interest need not always turn into the war of all against all. Seen against this background, Finney loses the look of a nineteenth-century opportunist and fades instead into the outlines of New Divinity Calvinism’s attempt to restrain a bourgeoisie that was becoming more relaxed and permissive as America approached mid-century.³⁴

It was in 1831, along the track of the Erie Canal, the most visible symbol of the penetration of market relations in the early republic, that Finney’s message of disinterested benevolence achieved its most demanding form in the public ritual of the “anxious bench;” and it was in New York City in 1836, in the midst of America’s most acquisitive and self-interested entrepôt, that Finney was first moved to articulate his doctrine of perfection. “The whole course of business in the world is governed and regulated by the maxims of supreme and unmixed selfishness,” Finney declaimed there. “The whole system recognizes only the love of self . . . to BUY AS CHEAP AS YOU CAN, AND SELL AS DEAR AS YOU CAN—TO LOOK OUT FOR NUMBER ONE.” He condemned the wage system as a means for circumventing the labor theory of value, and criticized merchants who would “grind [a worker] down to the last fraction, no matter what the work is really worth.” What he hoped was that:

the Church can compel the world to transact business upon the principles of the law of God. . . . the law of love requires, that we should afford every thing as cheap as we can, instead of getting as

³⁴ Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York, 1990), 184-5; Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York, 1978), 135; Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 234-5; William Breitenbach, “Unregenerate Doings: Selflessness and Selfishness in New Divinity Theology,” *American Quarterly*, 34 (Winter 1985), 500-02; Conforti, “Mary Lyon, the Founding of Mount Holyoke College, and the Cultural Revival of Jonathan Edwards,” *Religion and American Culture* 3 (Winter 1993), 72, 78.

much as we can. The requirement is, that we do all the good we can, to others, and not that we get all we can ourselves. The law of God is, sell as cheap as you can—the business maxim, as dear as you can.³⁵

But the “business maxim” was what governed New York City, something Finney learned with especial pain after a mob burned down the Broadway Tabernacle as a response to his antislavery pronouncements there. Asa Mahan had warned him in 1832 that although “you will still reiterate the old assertion that in *New York* especially you can sway the West through the hundreds of businessmen who visit thither from here,” the fact was that “their heads & hearts are stuffed with everything but religion.” Mahan urged Finney to leave the East for Ohio, and when Finney was elected professor of theology at the new Oberlin Collegiate Institute in 1835 and left New York City for good in 1837 to join Mahan at Oberlin, he turned his energies toward transforming Oberlin into an experiment in pure disinterested benevolence. He did not have to try hard: Oberlin had been organized as a benevolent colony by pioneers from the old Edwardsean towns of western Massachusetts (James Harris Fairchild’s parents came to Oberlin from Edwardsean Stockbridge) and the Oberlin colony devised a highly-restrictive New England covenant as its town charter. With those materials already at hand, Finney built up Oberlin as the epitome of Edwardsean ethics: a town with a single Congregational church which was for many years the largest structure west of the Alleghenies, a college devoted to combining study with manual labor (so that students would not be trained to look for their futures in the new financial markets), and no lawyers.³⁶

In the final analysis, Finney’s connections to the New England theology, both through Edwardseanism and Nathaniel William Tay-

³⁵ Finney, *Lectures to Professing Christians*, 95; McLoughlin, ed., *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 110; and Finney, “The Law of God,” *The Oberlin Evangelist*, Mar. 13, 1839. On the significance of the labor theory of value in the “republican synthesis,” see James L. Huston, “The American Revolutionaries, the Political Economy of Aristocracy, and the American Concept of the Distribution of Wealth, 1765-1900,” *American Historical Review*, 98 (Oct. 1993), 1079-1105.

³⁶ Asa Mahan to Finney, Feb. 26, 1832, in Finney Papers; Nat Brandt, *The Town That Started the Civil War* (New York, 1990), 43; Albert Temple Swing, *James Harris Fairchild, or Sixty-Eight Years with a Christian College* (New York, 1907), 18; Fairchild, *Oberlin: The Colony and the College*, 18-27; and A. L. Shumway and C. DeW. Brower, *Oberliniana: A Jubilee Volume of Semi-Historical Anecdotes* (Cleveland, OH, 1883), 156.

lor, underscore how persistent the direct influence of Edwards and New England were on American religion in the nineteenth century. Even more sharply they show how the shape of New England's cultural dominance in the early decades of American life cannot be limited to its literary or Transcendental voices. Similarly, if Finney neither inaugurated his own personalized theology, nor borrowed his notion of "entire sanctification" from Wesleyan or other non-Calvinistic sources, then many of the recent efforts to identify Finney as the pioneer of modern Wesleyan or Holiness theologies must fall considerably short of the mark. Even more provocatively, it may suggest that the Holiness movement in American religious history, through Finney, owes more to Edwardseanism and the New England Calvinist theological matrix than its chroniclers have realized.³⁷ Finney's "new measures" were not nearly as radical or as Jacksonian or even as new as they have seemed; even Finney's ambivalence about the penetration of the market system had more Edwardsean reason and history to it than Finney was eager to admit. And taken together, they constitute not a new movement in American religious history so much as the coda to one of the oldest and most potent, the New England theology.

³⁷ See Dayton, *Discovering An Evangelical Heritage*, 17ff; Bruce E. Moyer, "The Doctrine of Christian Perfection: A Comparative Study of John Wesley and the Modern American Holiness Movement" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1992), 69-72.