

IMITATING THE VIRTUE ETHIC OF JONATHAN EDWARDS AND WILLIAM JAMES

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The connection between the philosophical-theologian Jonathan Edwards and the philosophical-psychologist William James may surprise both theologians and psychologists. Each of their views on virtue and how they developed their ethic have intriguing corollaries rooted in the idea of habit. These two subjects function as fruitful models to mimic for inhabitants of both fields of study. Their complementary and supplementary perspectives may be put in cooperation to understand how the mind and soul foster conditions beneficial for healthy-minded individuals and societies. Respecting the historical progression for each subject at hand, I will explore first Jonathan Edwards's ethic followed by William James's view. The role of mimesis in fostering virtue rounds out the historical accounts of these two subjects' thought on ethic and provides profitable instruction for both theologians and psychologists.

I. THE NATURE OF TRUE BEAUTY, VIRTUE AND LOVE IN THE THOUGHT OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

Often credited as America's first notable philosopher, the pastor-theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–58) remains to this day one of the integral figures in global intellectual history.² He is perhaps less frequently known for his virtue ethic than for other areas of thought. Nonetheless, his conception of virtue is a great boon for both fields of philosophy and psychology. Elizabeth Agnew Cochran has rightly attributed, "Edwards has gained recognition as an important thinker for the field of contemporary virtue ethics."³ A few scholars in the early decades of the twenty-first century have wrangled with his virtue ethic and provided constructive

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² Imbuing Edwards with the attribution pastor theologian has become common parlance among scholars. See David P. Barshinger and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds, *Jonathan Edwards and Scripture: Biblical Exegesis in British North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1; Rhys S. Bezzant, *Edwards the Mentor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2.

³ Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, "Ethics" in *Oxford Handbook of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. by Douglas A. Sweeney and Jan Stievernann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 281.

contributions to this field of study.⁴ These more recent scholars follow in a rich heritage that explored the cross-section of aesthetics and ethic in the thought of Jonathan Edwards.⁵ The main source of his ethic is derived from the second of two dissertations completed in the last year of his life and published nearly a decade after his death. This second dissertation is *The Nature of True Virtue*. It stood as a companion to *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*. Reading the two dissertations together is far more productive than reading them apart.⁶ A second significant repository for his ethical thought includes a sermon series on 1 Corinthians now known as “Charity and Its Fruits.” The body of his ruminations on ethic are handily packaged in volume eight of the Yale *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, the introduction of which from Paul Ramsey is of inestimable value for those who find Edwards to be a daunting read.⁷

Edwards’s ethic tidily integrated into the rest of his philosophy and theology. However, it is tough to make these connections unless one is already initiated with his theological musings. Furthermore, it can be distracting to trace these connections because it risks detracting from comprehending his overall vision for ethic. Nonetheless, the correspondence and coherence of his philosophical ethic and theological ethic makes Edwards a very interesting subject. His knack for integrating moral philosophy and theology is a productive example. This is one of the remarkable distinctions of his

⁴ William J. Danaher, Jr., *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology, Columbia Theological Seminary (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Stephen A. Wilson, *Virtue Reformed: Rereading Jonathan Edwards’s Ethics*, Brill Studies in Intellectual History (2005); Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, *Receptive Human Virtues: A New Reading of Jonathan Edwards’s Ethics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011); Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, “True Virtue, Christian Love, and Ethical Theory” in *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 528–48.

⁵ Roland Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards: An Essay in Aesthetics and Theological Ethics*, The Jonathan Edwards Classic Studies Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1968); Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

⁶ The post-humous publication of *The Two Dissertations* occurred in 1765. This work bundled two publications into one, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World* and *The Nature of True Virtue*. Samuel Hopkins transcribed and edited the first dissertation; he enlisted Joseph Bellamy to transcribe the second. When it finally came to print from Samuel Kneeland, it sold for 2 shillings and 4 pence sterling in quarto format. On the transcribing, editing, and sale of this publication see Yeager, *Jonathan Edwards and Transatlantic Print Culture*, 108–111, 116, 162, 184. See Johnson, *The Printed Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, 122; a copy of the colophon for *Two Dissertations* may be found in Johnson, *The Printed Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, 123 and *WJE*, 8:400.

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 8, edited by Paul Ramsey and John E. Smith (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1989). Here forward, I will follow the standard convention in Edwards studies of abbreviating the Yale *Works of Jonathan Edwards* with *WJE* followed by volume number and page number, like so: *WJE*, 8:1–121.

virtue ethic. Edwards persistently found correspondence between the logic of the rational world and the logic of doctrine.⁸

Edwards's definition of virtue ethic was a critique and reconfiguration of the innovation, benevolism, which was *au courant* in British moral philosophy. He appropriated the reasoning of contemporary British moral philosophers in order to do generative metaphysical work that cooperated with his view of ontology, theology, and Scripture. Edwards asserted, "True virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to Being in general."⁹ This definition of virtue was loaded for bear. Edwards inhabited a world of British moral philosophy in which the moral philosophers of his day argued humanity had a natural, moral sense for virtue guided by their sensation of pleasure. This view was called benevolism, and its proponents were benevolists. Leading benevolists included Anthony Ashley Cooper (The Third Earl of Shaftesbury), Bernard Mandeville, Samuel Clarke, and Frances Hutcheson.¹⁰ The latest of these benevolists, Hutcheson, functioned as the foremost interlocutor Edwards critiqued by his definition of true virtue.¹¹ Throughout *The Nature of True Virtue* Edwards engaged Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*.¹² Hutcheson distinguished internal sense from moral sense. Internal sense was the conventional sense that perceived beauty, regularity, order, and harmony in the natural world. Moral sense comprehended internal sense and determined what was pleasant or lovely. Virtue consisted of what was judged as pleasant or lovely. Hutcheson claimed: "The Author of Nature has much better furnish'd us for a virtuous conduct . . . He has made virtue a lovely form, to excite our pursuit of it; and has given us strong affections to be the springs of each virtuous action."¹³ The crux of benevolism argued humanity had been naturally endowed to apprehend beauty and attain a virtuous life.

Though Edwards agreed an indelible link existed between beauty and virtue, he contended for a variant understanding of the two. Rather, beauty had two degrees of excellence. What Hutcheson called internal sense, Edwards perceived as a secondary and inferior beauty:

⁸ Quinn attempted to analyze Edwards's ethic apart from his theology by only examining chapter one of *The Nature of True Virtue* in Philip L. Quinn, "The Master Argument of *The Nature of True Virtue*" in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. by Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 79–97.

⁹ *The Nature of True Virtue*, *WJE*, 8:540.

¹⁰ Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times in Three Volumes* (London, 1711); Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees or Private Vices Publick Benefits* (London, 1714); Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation* (London, 1705).

¹¹ Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought*, 110; McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 533–37; Cochran, "Ethics" in *OHJE*, 311.

¹² Frances Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; In Two Treatises*, second edition (London, 1726). Edwards owned the 1738 fourth edition. There is little difference between the second edition I will be citing and Edwards's copy. *WJE*, 8:562.

¹³ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, xv.

Yet there is another, inferior, secondary beauty, which is some image of this, and which is not peculiar to spiritual beings, but is found even in inanimate things: which consists in a mutual consent and agreement of different things in form, manner, quantity, and visible end or design; called by the various names of regularity, order, uniformity, symmetry, proportion, harmony, etc.¹⁴

While not diminishing humanity's ability to sense something of beauty through its natural and common grace, Edwards recognized there was another degree of beauty more excellent than the beauty common man had the capacity to comprehend. This inferior beauty functioned as a shadow or representation of a superior beauty. Thus, a "natural man" might see the beauty of a plant, or the exquisite architecture of a stately edifice, or find pleasure in the sweet harmony of a melody.¹⁵ Nonetheless, these pleasures stood as an inferior quality to a higher beauty, a spiritual beauty. One might properly refer to inferior beauty as a meta-type in Edwards's natural typology. Inferior beauty observed in the world typified the higher degree of excellence found in genuine or spiritual beauty.¹⁶ Hutcheson's internal sense corresponded to Edwards's inferior beauty. However, the superior beauty Edwards dubbed as moral and spiritual beauty was quite different from Hutcheson's moral sense. Hutcheson had argued a "natural man" had a moral sense. A "natural man" could determine what was pleasurable and virtuous. On the contrary, Edwards contended a "natural man" could not comprehend spiritual beauty. The spiritual beauty of Edwards did not correspond one bit to the moral sense of Hutcheson. Spiritual beauty was

¹⁴ *The Nature of True Virtue*, WJE, 8:561–62.

¹⁵ *The Nature of True Virtue*, WJE, 8:564, 566, 568. In this paragraph, I have enclosed "natural man" in scare quotes to reflect the specificity of theological anthropological language both Hutcheson and Edwards employed to describe the inclusive, female and male, body-soul composite of an unconverted human. This commonly used parlance in theological anthropology, during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, hints to the structural system of patriarchy these two intellectual figures inhabited. See Ava Chamberlain, "Family Life" in *The Oxford Handbook of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Douglas A. Sweeney and Jan Stievermann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 3–16.

¹⁶ Typology was a useful technique for scriptural interpretation and popular among the Puritans. Benjamin Keach, Samuel Mather, and John Flavell were three influential Puritan exponents of typology. Edwards adopted his view of scriptural and natural typology from the latter two respectively. Typology emphasized actuality and historicity. It entailed a spatio-temporal understanding of semiotics. The Puritans found this technique superior to allegory and a useful polemic against Latitudinarianism. Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: or, A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors . . . Together with the Types of the Old Testament* (London, 1681); Samuel Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament, by which Christ and the Heavenly Things of the Gospel were Preached and Shadowed to the People of God of Old* (London, 1705); John Flavell, *Husbandry Spiritualized, or, The Heavenly Use of Earthly Things* (London, 1669); John Flavell, *Navigation Spiritualized or, a New Compass for Sea-Men* (London, 1682); Mason I. Lowance, Jr., *The Language of Canaan: Metaphor and Symbol in New England from the Puritans to the Transcendentalists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 74–85; W. M. Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660–1700* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1993).

a gracious gift extended from One who was absolutely benevolent. The person who perceived spiritual beauty consented to this infinitely most excellent and beautiful Being.

Recall, Edwards's loaded for bear definition: "True virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to Being in general." Chapter two of *The Nature of True Virtue* spells out this definition. Edwards argued, "True virtue must chiefly consist in love to God; the Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and the best of beings." He continued:

But God has infinitely the greatest share of existence, or is infinitely the greatest being . . . For as God is infinitely the greatest being, so he is allowed to be infinitely the most beautiful and excellent . . . but he is the head of the universal system of existence; the foundation and fountain of all being and all beauty; from whom all is perfectly derived, and on whom all is most absolutely and perfectly dependent; *of whom*, and *through whom*, and *to whom* is all being and all perfection.¹⁷

These assertions concerning the excellence, beauty, and being of God were fundamentally grounded in Rom 11:36 and Heb 2:10.¹⁸ As McClymond and McDermott observe, "Edwards often unfolded 'what reason teaches' about the issue at hand and then 'what Scripture teaches.'"¹⁹ This is part and parcel to what made Edwards such a provocative and formidable interlocutor to British moral philosophers like Hutcheson. He stood on their ground and reasoned according to their rationalist methods, and then he critiqued and reconfigured their thought to cooperate with his theological reflection and interpretation of Scripture. This is one of the dangers for those who attempt to position Edwards too neatly into the matrices of his interlocutors. His ideas often corresponded to theirs, and he frequently appropriated elements of their thought. However, he normally put a twist upon those ideas and repositioned them into a more palatable framework compatible to his Reformed view of Scripture and theology. He notoriously evaded the mold of his philosophical contemporaries. This is precisely what he had done with his understanding of virtue and beauty.

Ultimately, true virtue resided in the truly beautiful and lovely One, for no being possessed true virtue and loveliness more than God. Edwards's view of virtue and benevolence corresponded to two fundamental Scriptural ideas from the New Testament. First, ethic is born out of the greatest commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God."²⁰ The second undergirding idea involved the union between ontology and ethic. As the apostle John put it:

¹⁷ *The Nature of True Virtue*, WJE, 8:550–51.

¹⁸ "For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory for euer. Amen," Rom 11:36, KJV, 1611; "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sonnes vnto glory, to make the Captaine of their saluation perfect through suffering," Heb 2:10, KJV, 1611.

¹⁹ McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 532.

²⁰ "Jesus sayd vnto him, Thou shalt loue the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soule, and with all thy minde," Matt 22:37, KJV, 1611.

“For God is love.”²¹ The nature of true virtue was an act or disposition of love. Edwards frequently interchanged the concept of action and motion with the ideas: disposition, inclination, exercise, propensity, and habit. For instance, immediately upon providing the definition of true virtue, Edwards qualified his definition:

True virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to Being in general. Or perhaps to speak more accurately, it is consent, *propensity* and union of heart to Being in general, that is immediately *exercised* in a general good will . . . If it has its seat in the heart, and is the general goodness and beauty of the *disposition* and *exercise* of that, in the most comprehensive view, considered with regard to its universal tendency, and as related to everything that it stands in connection with; what can it consist in, but a consent and good will to Being in general?²²

Ontology for Edwards entailed disposition.²³ Elsewhere, in his *Discourse on the Trinity*, he said, “Between the Father and Son exists a mutual love, joy, and delight, a ‘pure act,’ or the ‘Deity in act,’ which is the Holy Spirit.”²⁴ God eternally existed as disposition most clearly expressed by the third person of the Trinity. This dispositional ontology of Edwards clarified what he meant by true virtue being an act of love to Being in general, for the Holy Spirit functioned as a bond of union and love within the inner life of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit also functioned as a bond between God and the one who received the ability to have a spiritual love for God. The correspondence between ontological activity and the Holy Spirit was not a late development in his thought. Rather, these ideas were extant in his early ruminations. In “Miscellanies” No. 94, Edwards affirmed that the third person of the Trinity functions as the “infinitely pure and perfect act” between the first and second person of the Trinity. “The Holy Spirit is the act of God between the Father and the Son infinitely loving and delighting in each other.”²⁵ The Spirit denotes “the activity, vivacity, and energy of God,” and the language of goodness, love, delight, enjoyment, and holiness commonly expressed him.²⁶ The Spirit functions as the active force and bond for communion within God, Christ, and the Church. Edwards proposed, “All divine communion, or communion of the creatures with God or with one another in God, seems to be by the Holy Ghost.”²⁷ Robert Caldwell dubbed this Edwards’s Spirit Christology. Caldwell asserts, “The Holy Spirit’s activity as the bond of the Trinitarian union between the Father

²¹ “Hee that loueth not, knoweth not God: for God is loue,” 1 John 4:8, KJV, 1611.

²² *The Nature of True Virtue*, *WJE*, 8:540, emphasis added.

²³ Sang Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

²⁴ “Discourse on the Trinity,” *WJE*, 21:113.

²⁵ “Miscellanies” No. 94 “Trinity,” *WJE*, 13:260.

²⁶ “Miscellanies” No. 94 “Trinity,” *WJE*, 13:261.

²⁷ “Miscellanies” No. 487 “Incarnation of the Son of God and Union of the Two Natures of Christ,” *WJE*, 13:529.

and the Son is paradigmatic for all other holy unions in his theology.”²⁸ The Holy Spirit bonds the inner-life of the Trinity; the Holy Spirit bonds the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ’s two natures, divine and human; and the Holy Spirit bonds the elect church’s union to Christ. Edwards said rather poignantly, “The Spirit of God is the bond of perfectness by which God, Jesus Christ, and the church are united together.”²⁹ The pure act of being in Edwards’s ethical philosophy created a remarkable system of activity. It animated all creatures within this system with the same frenetic disposition. Thus, the Spirit of God did not act alone.

In fact, the Spirit of God animated the Son of God with the active disposition of love. Tucked away in the archive of Jonathan Edwards’s sermons is a treasure. His other great work on ethic was the sermon-series, “Charity and Its Fruits.”³⁰ This sermon-series on 1 Corinthians 13:1–10 has a secret sermon that has not appeared in its publication. The sermon on “1 Cor. 13:1–10(b)” (No. 470) preached in April 1738 constituted 24 leaves and functioned as the second sermon in the series. This sermon focused on the character and work of Jesus Christ. Though entitled in his sermon notebook as a sermon on 1 Corinthians 13, Edwards chose Hebrews 13:8 for his text: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever.” The doctrine of the sermon was “Jesus Christ is the same now that he ever has been and ever will be.”³¹ This sermon has not been included in any of the print-press editions of “Charity and Its Fruits” and has, therefore, gone neglected.

One aspect apparent from this sermon included the habitual activity of Christ’s human nature, which complemented the immutability and constancy of his divine nature. Jesus Christ eternally existed with an active disposition that he exercised in his office as prophet, priest, and king. He exercised these offices for the eternal purpose of fulfilling the covenant of redemption with the work of redemption. Several points were given by Edwards to convey his mutual constancy and unchangeableness along with the exercise of his work in redemption. These were the six points provided:

- (1) He never ceases to give place to any other to come in his room. Christ is the only mediatur between God and men that’s ever has been or ever shall be. He is an everlasting saviour. There been typical mediatours. Many that have continued but a little while and then have passed away and others have come in the room but the great antitype continues forever.

²⁸ Robert W. Caldwell, *Communion in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Union in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 8.

²⁹ “Miscellanies” No. 487 “Incarnation of the Son of God and Union of the Two Natures of Christ,” *WJE*, 13:529.

³⁰ “Charity and Its Fruits,” *WJE*, 8:123–396.

³¹ Sermon on “1 Cor. 13:1–10(b)” (No. 470), *WJEO*, 53, unpublished manuscript. A note on unpublished manuscripts: This essay maintains the original integrity of the documents of Edwards. I have chosen to leave these manuscripts uncorrected, so they contain the misspellings, choice of punctuation, and capitalization of Edwards. Pastor-theologians may enjoy citations from the sermon-notebooks of Edwards as they were originally recorded.

(2) Christ is at all time equally sufficient for the office that he hath undertaken. He undertook the office from eternity and he was sufficient for it from eternity and he has been in the exercise of his office ever since the fall of man.

(3) He is the same now that he ever has been and ever will be in the disposition that he exercises in his office...He is ever disposed to execute his office in an holy manner. He ever has been still is and ever will be disposed to execute it so as to glorify his Father.

(4) Christ is the same yesterday . . . as to the end which he aims at in his office.

(5) Christ ever acts by the same rules in the exercise of his mediatorial office. The rule that Christ acts by in the execution of his office are contained in a twofold covenant.

(6) And lastly he is in many respect unchangeable in the acts which he exercises in his office as for instance he is unchangeable in his intercession for his churches and people.³²

This sermon discussed the many types for Christ: John the Baptist, the Levitical priests, Melchizedek, the Tabernacle, David, and Solomon. These types illustrated his offices of prophet, priest, and king. They shadowed the activity of redemption he undertook in his three offices, which he acted out from eternity. His disposition to exercise mercy and grace by the work of redemption derived from the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace. The mutual love between the Father and Son, and their delight and joy in offering love to humanity by the act of redemption grounded these two covenants. The sermon concluded with its connection to 1 Corinthians 13 and the ethic of benevolence. “Your love to Christ is in itself changeable but his to you is unchangeable and therefore he will never suffer your love to him utterly to fail. The Apostle gives this reason why the saints’ love to Christ can’t fail because his love to them never can fail.”³³ The benevolence of Christ to humans served as an exemplar for human love.

Chapter four of *The Nature of True Virtue* contrasted self-love from the higher form of love grounded in true virtue. Edwards defined self-love as “a man’s love of his own happiness.”³⁴ Edwards knew very well the manner in which humanity had a knack to manipulate the pursuit of happiness and self-love into a virtue when it was much more akin to vice. He nuanced self-love to have regard towards private interest. Private interest “most

³² Sermon on “1 Cor. 13:1–10(b)” (No. 470), *WJEO*, 53, unpublished manuscript.

³³ Sermon on “1 Cor. 13:1–10(b)” (No. 470), *WJEO*, 53, unpublished manuscript.

³⁴ *The Nature of True Virtue*, *WJE*, 8:575.

immediately consists in those pleasures, or pains, that are personal.”³⁵ Personal and private interest did not necessarily entail individual interest. A collective or party might possess and express private interest that bonded one another together. This could be detrimental to other parties and create factions. Edwards consented to a self-love, which conformed to Hutcheson’s moral sense inasmuch as it was limited to his secondary understanding of beauty. The moral sense he recognized considered a kind of benevolence and retribution that matched just deserts. A society agreed with one another on this moral sense and functioned in a manner in which self-love and moral sense created a harmony and proportion within that agreed upon system.³⁶ Here was his vital qualification:

Therefore doubtless ’tis a great mistake in any to suppose all that moral sense which appears and is exercised in a sense of *desert* is the same thing as a love of virtue, or a disposition and determination of mind to be pleased with true virtuous beauty, consisting in public benevolence.³⁷

To understand Edwards’s concern about a society constructed from Hutcheson’s moral sense, it is worthwhile to turn to the work of another benevolist, Bernard Mandeville. This work demonstrated how self-love as an end for benevolence created a pitfall for society.

The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Public Benefits (1714) by Bernard Mandeville demonstrated that self-love converted vice into virtue. The 433-line poem was reprinted in multiple editions with new commentary from Mandeville with each edition.³⁸ The genius of *The Fable* involved Mandeville’s clever push against moral rigidity. He confronted it by exposing what he perceived to be its illogical conclusion. He recast the vice of worldly pursuits as economic and political virtues for both the state and individuals.³⁹ Thus, the vice of worldly pursuits became a justification for colonization and empire, which is precisely the intention of this widely disseminated publication. *The Fable* told the story of a thriving beehive with the concluding moral:

THEN leave Complaints:

Fools only strive

³⁵ *The Nature of True Virtue*, WJE, 8:577.

³⁶ *The Nature of True Virtue*, WJE, 8:580–582.

³⁷ *The Nature of True Virtue*, WJE, 8:582.

³⁸ Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: Norton Paperback, 2001), 172.

³⁹ E. J. Hundert observed: “Mandeville mocked these jeremiads as little more than self-righteous longings for an idealized and largely mythical social order. Well-governed commercial states in modern Europe, he insisted, were required to confront recently altered economic conditions that encouraged and rewarded both aggressive individual enterprise and social mobility.” E. J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment’s Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 20.

To make a Great and Honest Hive.
 T' enjoy the World's Conveniences,
 Be fam'd in War, yet live in Ease
 Without great Vices, is a vain
 Eutopia seated in the Brain,
 Fraud, Luxury and 'Pride must live,
 Whilst we the Benefits receive:
 Hunger's a dreadful Plague, no doubt,
 Yet who digests or thrives without?
 Do we not owe the Growth of Wine
 To the dry shabby crooked Vine?
 Which, whilst its shoots neglected stood,
 Choak'd other plants, and ran to Wood;
 But blest us with its noble Fruit,
 As soon as it was ty'd and cut:

So Vice is beneficial found,
 When it's by Justice loft and bound;
 Nay, where the people would be great,
 As necessary to the State,
 As Hunger is to make 'em eat.
 Bare Virtue can't make Nations live
 In Splendor; they, that would revive
 A Golden Age, must be as free,
 for Acorns, as for Honesty.⁴⁰

Mandeville felt virtuous, pious, and selfless principles led to impoverished living. Ambitious people made government and economy flourish. It was the stuff of colonization and empire. A healthy society required egoism and narcissism to pave the way. Roy Porter summarized Mandevillian thought: "Thus, properly understood, society was a cunningly contrived mill for refining naked egoism into more peaceful and profitable means for

⁴⁰ Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (London: J. Tonson, 1725), 23–24.

the fulfillment of wants.”⁴¹ *The Fable* represented a redefinition of vice. It recast certain vices as virtues—all of which justified a particular approach to desire, ambition, pleasure, and business. Self-love was the end of love for the benevolist, Bernard Mandeville.

Edwards knew of *The Fable*. “Catalogue of Reading” mentioned Mandeville on two occasions, once referring to *The Fable*.⁴² *The Fable* presented the contending narrative Edwards opposed—a narrative that had grown in influence due to the success of benevolism. When the upper colonies of New England were initially settled, economic prosperity was secondary to fostering a covenantal community built on an ethic of love.⁴³ As time progressed, works like Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees* caused people to reconsider another narrative for ethic, one driven by self-love rather than the benevolence Edwards espoused. *The Fable* gained infamy among ethicists like Edwards. John Redwood commented: “Mandeville rapidly became to the eighteenth century what Machiavelli had been to the Elizabethans, and Hobbes to the age of Charles II.”⁴⁴ A great fervor of controversy surrounded this fable. Yet, as Mandeville continued to build out his commentary with each new edition, *The Fable* gained greater influence. Mandevillian thought became a program of the state for England.⁴⁵ Mandeville caused people to be confronted with how they actually lived. He introduced his commentary to *The Fable*: “[Most] writers are always teaching men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their heads with telling them what they really are.”⁴⁶ The dilemma of self-love became an irony for Puritan England. A segment of *The Fable* concerned a war within the hive. “The survivors, to avoid relapsing into vice, flew away decorously to a hollow tree.”⁴⁷ This line discreetly described the Puritan’s retreat to the New World. How ironic? Those who withdrew now struggled with the same self-love that plagued the land from which they fled. They, too, had become complicit with the fruits of colonization and empire.

⁴¹ Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: Norton Paperback, 2001), 174.

⁴² “Catalogue of Reading,” *WJE*, 26:249.

⁴³ “The avowed purpose of many of the colonists was to worship God according to his Word. Beyond question there were other objectives. Everyone hoped that economic progress would be compatible with religious reform, but such aims were secondary.” Gerald R. Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason 1648–1789* (New York: Penguin Books, 1960), 175.

⁴⁴ John Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion: The Age of Enlightenment in England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 87.

⁴⁵ “Harnessing ambition not only became a potentially virtuous undertaking but official state policy in England. The dominant scholarly literature attributes the origins of harnessing to the eighteenth-century works of Bernard Mandeville, Giambattista Vico, and Adam Smith.” William Casey King, *Ambition, a History: from Vice to Virtue* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 120.

⁴⁶ Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, 25.

⁴⁷ “And here they die or stand their ground...they triumph’d not without their cost... they counted ease itself a vice . . . that, to avoid extravagance, they flew into a hollow tree, blest with Content and Honesty.” Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, 22; Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of the European Mind 1680–1715* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1961), 291.

Edwards knew true virtue must be fortified by having a loftier vision for beauty and love than the one cast by the benevolists Hutcheson and Mandeville. He perceived the unhealthy fruit to come of colonization and empire built on the benevolent ethic. In fact, *The Nature of True Virtue* concludes with a bold critique of empire:

But men can't call anything "right" or "wrong," "worthy" or "ill-deserving," consistently, any other way than by calling things so, which truly deserve praise or blame, i.e. things wherein (all things considered) there is most uniformity in connecting with them praise or blame . . . So, a nation that prosecutes an ambitious design of universal empire, by subduing other nations with fire and sword, may affix terms that signify the highest degrees of virtue to the conduct of such as show the most engaged, stable, resolute spirit in this affair, and do most of this bloody work. But yet they are capable of being convinced that they use these terms inconsistently, and abuse language in it, and so having their mouths stopped.⁴⁸

Edwards perceived the danger of reconfiguring vices as virtues because he had witnessed the bad fruit of colonization and empire firsthand. He inhabited a brutal, war-torn frontier. The ongoing clash between French Catholics in Canada with his British Protestant countrymen throughout Queen Anne's War, King George's War, and the French and Indian War provided ample evidence of the "bloody work" it took to achieve universal domination. Scarcely could any inhabitant of the New World depart from it without having been bloodied, shed blood, or known someone else who had. The native inhabitants, to whom Edwards ministered at Stockbridge, were caught in the middle of this bloody mess. These Indians either experienced the collateral damage of displacement or felt the erasure of their own culture as two competing empires "civilized" them. These natives also paid in blood when conscripted or compelled to ally with one of these two empires vying for universal domination.

Edwards devoted his later intellectual work to the project of constructing a vision of ethic superior to the British moral philosophers. An accurate reception of his virtue ethic requires an integration of theology and philosophy, Scripture and natural law. *The Nature of True Virtue* functioned as Edwards's crowning achievement in virtue ethic. True virtue and benevolent love demanded a superior ethic to the moral sense and self-love espoused by benevolism. Edwards offered a system of public benevolence that matched what was required for a well-ordered society. This system of ethic demanded a bond of love with a Being characterized with unchanging and constant benevolence to those who consented to its governance.

The doctrinal elucidation of the bond of love for the inner life of God that bonds to humanity and all rational creatures into a holy society had its correspondence within the ethical understanding of consent and union

⁴⁸ *The Nature of True Virtue*, WJE, 8:627.

from being to Being in *The Nature of True Virtue*. Union through the bond of love required consent. “Beauty does not consist in discord and dissent, but in consent and agreement . . .”

And if every intelligent being is some way related to Being in general, and is a part of the universal system of existence; and so stands in connection with the whole; what can its general and true beauty be, but its union and consent with the great whole?⁴⁹

He referred to it as pure benevolence when one being first exercised its propensity to Being with the act of consent or union.⁵⁰ This rational argument describing pure benevolence has an uncanny correspondence to the doctrine of union with Christ presented in the 1738 publication, *Justification by Faith Alone*. Edwards asserted: “Faith is the soul’s active uniting with Christ, or is itself the very act of union, on their part.”⁵¹ Since God eternally exists as an action driven towards union, rational creatures endowed with pure benevolence, who have consented to his Being, mimic this motion. Their disposition drives them toward union as well. McClymond and McDermott aptly state: “Because being is habit, active, and relational, it drives toward union. Regenerate human beings impelled by the divine disposition, reach out by a kind of necessity to other intelligent beings to know them and love them.”⁵²

Jonathan Edwards’s ethic has numerous features that warrant its use in positive psychology. His ideas concerning consent and union have corollaries to the positive side of attachment. Healthy attachment is built over time, commitment, and mutual reinforcement. The bond and union that exists in healthy attachment has very much to do with the disposition, practice, and habit of intentionally forming attachment. Edwards’s understanding of the role of benevolence in consenting relationships reinforces the place of trust in those relationships.

Consent is built on a mutual respect that one is being treated as one would treat oneself. Within Edwards’s ethic of benevolence, when there is a breach in a consenting relationship, the dissonance for the breach is felt. Chapter five of *The Nature of True Virtue* discussed the natural conscience and the moral sense. Edwards discussed the dissonance that occurred in a person’s conscience when it operated according to the natural order of moral sense. Edwards observed:

Thus, when a man’s conscience disapproves of his treatment of his neighbor, in the first place he is conscious that if he were in his neighbor’s stead, he should resent such treatment from a sense of justice, or from a sense of uniformity and equality between such treatment and resentment and punishment; as before explained. And then in the next place he perceives that

⁴⁹ *The Nature of True Virtue*, WJE, 8:541.

⁵⁰ *The Nature of True Virtue*, WJE, 8:546.

⁵¹ *Justification by Faith Alone*, WJE, 19:158.

⁵² McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 531.

therefore he is not consistent with himself, in doing what he himself should resent in that case; and hence disapproves it, as being naturally averse to opposition to himself.⁵³

Normal humans have a sure grasp on the moral sense. They loathe themselves for behavior misaligned with the ethic of benevolence. All virtue or moral good finally become resolved into the ethic of benevolence. Virtuous behavior meets the requirements of an ethic of benevolence. “The uniformity and natural agreement there is between loving others and being accepted and favored by others” is perceptible and people behave in such a way that is mutually beneficial for maintaining healthy relationships. The habit of each virtuous action towards one another reinforces the harmony of love between one another and solidifies the consented union between the two. Of course, these ideas of positive attachment and habits to positively reinforce healthy relationships are only anticipatory of developments that are a century later. However, there are clear historical connections between what Edwards developed in his thought and how these ideas developed in the field of psychology.

II. EMPIRICISM, PRAGMATISM, HABIT AND PLASTICITY IN WILLIAM JAMES

If Edwards is considered the seminal intellectual figure of eighteenth-century American thought, William James (1842–1910) might be considered a pillar of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American intellectual history.⁵⁴ Due to his father’s independent wealth, James had the luxury to explore the world and study at numerous schools. While his father, Henry James, Sr., chose the occupation of theologian and one of his brothers, Henry James, Jr., pursued the vocation as literary writer, William James became the father of American psychology and co-founded the philosophical school of pragmatism.⁵⁵ James began his teaching career at

⁵³ *The Nature of True Virtue*, WJE, 8:593.

⁵⁴ Both are normal subjects treated within the canon of American religious and philosophical intellectual history: William A. Clebsch, *American Religious Thought: A History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973); Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁵ William James’s first publication was a collection of his father’s theological writings, which William introduced and edited; *The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James*, ed. by William James (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1897). Henry James, Sr. had been remarkably influenced by the Swedish theologian, Emmanuel Swedenborg. His brother Henry James, Jr. received the Nobel Prize in literature and published some of the most important pieces of American literature, including: *The American*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Daisy Miller*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Bostonians*, and others. James’s invalid sister, Alice, left her own mark with her diary, which was published after her passing: Anna Robeson Brown Burr, ed. *Alice James, Her Brother, Her Journal* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1934). The definitive biography on William James is Robert D. Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2007). Also see: Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1948, 1978, 1996); Ruth Ann Putnam, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); David E. Leary, *The*

Harvard in 1873 where he set up one of the first experimental laboratories for the scientific study of psychology. In 1878 he married Alice Howe Gibbons, also an astute student of philosophy and psychology. She devoted her life to collaborating with James as his primary conversation partner and editor, while also caring for their five children. James published one of the most influential works on the study of psychology, a two-volume 900-page magnum opus called *Principles of Psychology*.⁵⁶ *Principles* went under contract for publication in 1880 and James expected to complete the work in two years. Rather, it took the better part of a decade to publish *Principles*. Two years after its publication, the reception had been so great a single volume abridgment released, simply entitled *Psychology*, and given the popular sobriquet Little Jimmy. James delivered the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh, which were published in 1902 as *Varieties of Religious Experience*.⁵⁷ *Varieties* is one of the hallmark studies of religion in the twentieth century.

Jonathan Edwards left a notable mark on the thought of William James. James read expansively from the canon of Western intellectual thought. His ideas on habit and the will in *Principles* along with his thoughts on religion in *Varieties* leave the impression that he contended with the ideas of Jonathan Edwards. How substantial is the documentary evidence concerning James's familiarity with Edwards? While James was studying chemistry, anatomy, and medicine as a student at Harvard in the early 1860s—he left documentary evidence of other readings. An 1862–63 notebook included an abstract that summarized his reading of *Original Sin*.⁵⁸ This was certainly not the only work of Edwards that left a mark on James.

Varieties of Religious Experience included several contact points with Edwards. *Religious Affections* appeared in the first of his Gifford Lectures. After having discussed examples of mystical religious experiences, he reflected on how to judge the authenticity of these accounts. James concluded an empirical criterion should be applied to make this judgment. He carried this thesis on the empirical criterion for judging a religion all the way through the argument of *Varieties*. Interestingly, he neither based this argument on his own deductive reasoning, nor credited himself for the argument. Rather, he relied on Edwards and his argument for such a method in *Religious Affections*.

Routledge Guidebook to James's Principles of Psychology (New York: Routledge, 2018); John Kaag, *Sick Souls, Healthy Minds: How William James Can Save Your Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

⁵⁶ William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1890); William James, *Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1892); The critical edition of *Principles* from Harvard University Press is not easily accessible: William James, *Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). This essay cites: William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, *Great Book of the Western World*, 2nd edition, vol. 53, ed. by Mortimer J. Adler and Philip W. Goetz (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1990).

⁵⁷ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902, 1917).

⁵⁸ Perry, *Thought and Character*, 71.

In the end it had to come to our empiricist criterion: By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots. Jonathan Edwards's *Treatise on Religious Affections* is an elaborate working out of this thesis. The *roots* of a man's virtue are inaccessible to us. No appearances whatever are infallible proofs of grace. Our practice is the only sure evidence, even to ourselves, that we are genuinely Christians.⁵⁹

He followed this first excerpt with others at various points throughout the lecture series. Later in lecture ten on conversion, James returned to Edwards's thought in *Religious Affections* to demonstrate how the human mind may experience "a sudden and complete conversion."⁶⁰ *Religious Affections* was not the only source James appropriated in order to engage Edwards as a key subject of interest for interpreting religious experiences. In lecture ten he moved beyond the thought of Edwards and turned to the example of Edwards. He recounted Edwards's conversion to demonstrate how the converted mind perceived the world with "an appearance of newness" which "beautifies every object." The conversion narrative came from Sereno E. Dwight's biography, *The Life of President Edwards*.⁶¹

James found the wife of Edwards, Sarah Pierpont Edwards, to be a notable example to draw from as well. Lectures 11, 12, and 13 in *Varieties* discussed the topic of saintliness. Saintliness was the "ripe fruits of religion in a character." He claimed, "The saintly character is the character for which spiritual emotions are the habitual centre of the personal energy."⁶² Saintliness had four characteristics that depicted it. The fourth characteristic resonated with Jonathan Edwards's vision of ethic. "4. A shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affection, towards 'yes, yes,' and away from 'no,' where the claims of the non-ego are concerned."⁶³ The emotional center towards love and harmonious affections had four inner conditions: (1) asceticism, (2) strength of soul, (3) purity, and (4) charity. Regarding charity, the center of Edwards's ethic, James commented:

The shifting of the emotional centre brings, secondly, increase of charity, tenderness for fellow-creatures. The ordinary motives to antipathy, which usually set such close bounds to tenderness

⁵⁹ James then excerpted from *Religious Affections*: "In forming a judgment of ourselves now,' Edwards writes, 'we should certainly adopt that evidence which our supreme Judge will chiefly make use of when we come to stand before him at the last day. . . There is not one grace of the Spirit of God, of the existence of which, in any professor of religion, Christian practice is not the most decisive evidence. . . The degree in which our experience is productive of practice shows the degree in which our experience is spiritual and divine,'" *Varieties*, 20, emphasis original. See *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:441.

⁶⁰ James, *Varieties*, 229. He first cited *WJE*, 2:205 followed immediately by a second excerpt of *WJE*, 2:151–52.

⁶¹ Sereno E. Dwight, *The Life of President Edwards* (New York, 1830), 61; Also, *WJE*, 16:793.

⁶² James, *Varieties*, 271.

⁶³ James, *Varieties*, 273.

among human beings, are inhibited. The saint loves his enemies, and treats loathsome beggars as his brothers.⁶⁴

He then provided concrete examples of saintliness that fulfilled these qualities. Observing fresh converts perceived the world with a newness and embodied warm friendliness, the account of Sarah Pierpont Edwards stood as a hallmark example. The extract of Sarah's saintliness was derived from *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival of Religion*. This extract is a favorite to this day among accounts of mystical and authentic revival of religion.⁶⁵ Sarah's example proved to be so fruitful for James he returned to it again some pages later as he discussed "an organic affinity between joyousness and tenderness, and their companionship to the saintly life."⁶⁶ The example of saintliness had to have pragmatic value. For religion to have any worth at all, it had to have a practical use. Concerning religious preference and the empirical fruitfulness of it, James remarked: "The gods we stand by are the gods we need and can use, the gods whose demands on us are reinforcements of our demands on ourselves and on one another."⁶⁷ Every religion had its usefulness to adherents and reflected the values they then possessed. Looking back on the strict determinism and providentialism, which damned some, James asserted these beliefs related to the Monarchical considerations of the time. Religiously devoted people in that day persuaded themselves these doctrines were comforting and fitting. He again resorted to Edwards as an example: "Of which Jonathan Edwards could persuade himself that he had not only a conviction, but a 'delightful conviction,' as of a doctrine 'exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet,' appears to us, if sovereignly anything, sovereignly irrational and mean."⁶⁸ James asserted the sort of attitude Edwards possessed towards providentialism seemed cruel in his era. This last selection from the experiences and thought of Edwards demonstrated the stark contrariety of attitudes in James's day.

Readers from any era might observe the contrast between Edwards's views on religious affections and ethic from those of James's. Just as Edwards treated the British moral philosophers as notable interlocutors, who had original and provocative ideas, but lacked a spiritually sophisticated understanding of ethic, William James found in Jonathan Edwards a peculiar subject of interest as well. James recognized the magnitude of Edwards's

⁶⁴ James, *Varieties*, 274.

⁶⁵ James, *Varieties*, 276; *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion*, *WJE*, 4:331–32. Edwards's account is of much greater length than James's extract, *WJE*, 4:331–41. The original account in Edwards's publication left the subject of the narrative anonymous. The account may also be read in Dwight's biography: Dwight, *The Life of President Edwards*, 171–86.

⁶⁶ James, *Varieties*, 280.

⁶⁷ James, *Varieties*, 331.

⁶⁸ James, *Varieties*, 330; These references to Edwards come from his personal narrative. Though James does not highlight it, contextually speaking, Edwards had discussed how the doctrine of election, particularly election to damnation had been a horrifying doctrine to him prior to conversion. After conversion, God's providence in election to both salvation and damnation became delightful to him. "Personal Narrative," *WJE*, 16:792.

genius and credited him for his attempt to appropriate empiricism for productive purposes in the study of religion. Nonetheless, Edwards inhabited a different world from James. One still ruled by the Old Regime, aristocracy, gentry, and mystified with superstition and enchantment. Now James, too, was fascinated with mystical aspects of the world, but he devoted his attention to understanding how they related to the “science of mental life” as he had defined psychology in the early pages of *Principles*.⁶⁹

Perhaps one reason Edwards fascinated James involved the similarity between the two families’ kinship networks. After all, it was Anna Robeson Brown Burr who edited and published Alice James’s journal: *Alice James, Her Brothers, Her Journal*. Jonathan Edwards’s daughter, Esther Edwards Burr, married into the Burr family, giving birth to the notorious Vice President of the United State, Aaron Burr, Jr., who shot Alexander Hamilton and has been accused of plotting a coup against the Early Republic. This Miss Burr, who edited Alice’s journal, had also married into the Burr family and shared a lineage back to Edwards. Likewise, the wealthy banking financier, James Pierpont Morgan was a contemporary of James and a descendant of kin to Sarah Pierpont Edwards. The noteworthiness of the kinship circle and social connections warranted Edwards as an intellectual equal as much as the fortitude of his mind. Thus, Jonathan Edwards was a key interlocutor of James for understanding the human psychology of religion.

William James conceived, experimented, and recorded some of the most fundamental views understood in psychology today.⁷⁰ One of the most noteworthy of those contributions included the idea of plasticity, which first appeared under the subject of habit in chapter four of *Principles*.⁷¹ James’s chapter on habit and the notion of plasticity have become consequentially generative for modern virtue ethic. He related the concept of habit to instinct and reflexes. For James, the meaning of habit resided in matter. Since people changed their habits, he hypothesized that the matter habit derived from must have plasticity. “Those of a compound mass of matter can change,” he continued, “That is, they can do so if the body be plastic enough to maintain its integrity, and be not disrupted when its structure yields...”

All these changes are rather slow; the material in question opposes a certain resistance to the modifying cause, which it takes time to overcome, but the gradual yielding whereof often saves the material from being disintegrated altogether. When the structure has yielded, the same inertia becomes a condition of its comparative permanence in the new form, and of the

⁶⁹ “Psychology is the science of mental life, both of its phenomena and of their conditions,” James, *Principles*, 1.

⁷⁰ His essay on human emotion has been considered a significant contribution to the study of psychology; William James, “What is an Emotion?” *Mind* 9, No. 34 (Apr. 1884):188–205. Another idea credited to James included stream of conscience; James, *Principles*, 146–187.

⁷¹ James, *Principles*, 68ff.

new habits the body then manifests. *Plasticity*, then, in the wide sense of the word, means the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once. Each relatively stable phase of equilibrium in such a structure is marked by what we may call a new set of habits.⁷²

These observations led him to the startling conclusion: “[*The*] *phenomena of habit in living beings are due to the plasticity of the organic materials of which their bodies are composed.*”⁷³ The cause of plasticity in brain matter, could be deduced by the kinds of influences that induced changes in habits. The influences that converted the practices of people or altered their habits had to do with new paths that were created within their brain matter. Habits repeatedly practiced tend to deepen pathways already established in the brain. James hypothesized that brain pathways could become blocked, which required the development of new pathways. Activities related to chance altered pathways. He argued that the brain’s most formable time was in early development during pre-adulthood, before pathways are more firmly established. The brain held more plasticity during this earlier stage in life.⁷⁴

Habit played an essential role for maintaining the harmony of an individual, that person’s interaction with everyday activities, and the function and association that person fulfilled with the rest of society. He contended:

Habit is thus the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance and saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor. It alone prevents the hardest and most repulsive walks of life from being deserted by those brought up to tread therein . . . It dooms us all to fight out the battle of life upon the lines of our nurture or our early choice, and to make the best of a pursuit that disagrees, because there is no other for which we are fitted, and it is too late to begin again. It keeps different social strata from mixing.⁷⁵

Thus, healthy habits kept a person plodding contentedly through life, fulfilling the role they had been given to fulfill by society.

Habit played a significant role in the social psychology of William James. It governed his perspective on maintaining social order. The function of habit for James’s understanding of social order was similar to the function benevolence filled in Edwards’s conception of the social and moral order of the world. The old regime of conservatism had not passed away, it just put on a scientific garb. Social order was still manipulated by those in power. However, now instead of enchantment and superstition being the tool of the privileged and powerful, the science of habit might be convincing enough to prevent revolt, revolution, and maintain the social

⁷² James, *Principles*, 68.

⁷³ James, *Principles*, 68, emphasis original.

⁷⁴ James, *Principles*, 71–72.

⁷⁵ James, *Principles*, 79.

order from another civil war. Because James believed the mind's plasticity became plaster in adulthood, he cautioned that automatic and habitual practices ought to be established early in life and a person must guard against disadvantageous habits.⁷⁶

Healthy-minded habits required continuous training until those habits became deeply rooted in the mind. The neuropath required a deep pathway for the habit before the occasional exception may be permitted. Regarding this perspective, James appropriated a very scriptural practice for habit. "One must first learn, unmoved, looking neither to the right nor left, to walk firmly on the strait and narrow path, before one can begin 'to make one's self over again.'" If there was any question to the ethical force habit had in the mind of James, he clarified: "Without unbroken advance there is no such thing as accumulation of the ethical forces possible, and to make this possible, and to exercise us and habituate us in it, is the sovereign blessing of regular work."⁷⁷ Habit necessitated acting immediately and definitively on every resolution made and in response to every emotional prompting towards gaining the habit one has resolved to gain. The psychic activity essential to reinforce a healthy-minded habit required attention and effort. Daily exercise of the desirable habit strengthened the likelihood that habit would not go astray. James concluded his chapter on habit with a corollary between an unhealthy addiction and a healthy ethic. "As we become permanent drunkards by so many separate drinks, so we become saints in the moral, and authorities and experts in the practical and scientific spheres, by so many separate acts and hours of work."⁷⁸ The diligent protestant work ethic had penetrated the realm of primitive behavioral science.

James's regard for the role of religion and habit in ethical formation has warrant and value. His work as the father of American psychology contained the very roots of positive psychology. Accounts of the history of positive psychology have recognized and credited him as an origin point and exponent for the discipline, alongside Wilhelm Wundt.⁷⁹ James G. Pawelski connected James's understanding of healthy-mindedness in *Varieties* as one of those touch points for the development of positive psychology.⁸⁰ In *Varieties*, James indicated people possessed one of two temperaments. Some had a sick-souled temperament. Historians and biographers recognize that James possessed this kind of temperament. Much of his study and experimentation functioned to strengthen his soul with mental habits to overcome despair. Other people possessed a healthy-minded temperament and were more susceptible to mind-cures. James cited

⁷⁶ James, *Principles*, 80.

⁷⁷ James, *Principles*, 81.

⁷⁸ James, *Principles*, 83.

⁷⁹ Christina A. Downey and Reggie E. Henderson, "Speculation, Conceptualization, or Evidence? A History of Positive Psychology" in *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, 3rd edition, ed. by C. R. Snyder, Shane J. Lopez, Lisa M. Edwards, and Susana C. Marques (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁸⁰ James G. Pawelski, "William James, Positive Psychology, and Healthy Mindedness," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 17, No. 1 (2003):53–67.

evidence that mind-cures have worked on healthy-minded individuals, who suffered as invalids. James's interest in the validity of this phenomenon and its usefulness with individuals, who could not be cured through the efforts of modern science and medicine, might have been inspired by his desire to help his invalid sister, Alice.

A healthy mind could be reinforced with the exertion of effort, attention, and the development of appropriate habits. The plasticity of the healthy mind inclined itself to saintliness. Interestingly, James harnessed the remarkable examples of Jonathan Edwards and Sarah Pierpont Edwards to reinforce the revolutionary role that habit played in ethical formation, and he connected the influence of religious conversion to the development of healthy-minded habits. These healthy-minded habits led to the outcome of saintliness.

Rather than the platonic and dispositional pattern of Edwards's ethic, James located his ethic in matter, the mind, and mental habits. A more thorough study of James's understanding of the will in *Principles* would only reiterate the material reduction of habit in his thought.⁸¹ Human reflexes exercised in one direction or the other developed vices and virtues. Fostering habits that gravitated to moral fortitude determined the saintliness of an individual, the status that individual might achieve in society, and the overall success of that person's endeavors. Jonathan and Sarah Edwards were premiere examples of healthy-minded saints, whose virtuous ethical habits fit them for a high rank and station in society.

III. THE PASTOR THEOLOGIAN, POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY, AND MIMESIS

The mash-up of the theological ethic of Jonathan Edwards and the psychological ethic of William James ought to be productive for a pastor-theologian or a clinical psychologist intrigued by the synthesis of these sciences for the purpose of developing a virtue ethic. However, getting representatives from these two schools of thought to collaborate is not necessarily a given. Pastors are not immune to the charge of eschewing psychology. I once was a culprit of calling the psychologist's couch of the twenty-twenty-first century a substitute for the confessional from earlier eras.⁸² Likewise, clinical psychologists might find pastors to be antiquated curiosities. Nonetheless, they could gain much from grabbing lunch with a local pastor and picking her brain on the subject of moral formation in Christian theology. Jonathan Edwards considered British moral philosophers to be noteworthy interlocutors. William James found Jonathan Edwards to be generative for his speculation on the effects of religion for the science of mental life. Pastors and psychologists should mimic Edwards and James. They should consider one another to have credibility and a contribution for each other's discipline.

⁸¹ James, *Principles*, 767–835.

⁸² "Crooked Ways Made Straight: Matthew 3:1–12" in *Jesus Our Shepherd King*, December 31, 2017, <https://www.calvarymemorial.com/sermons/crooked-ways-made-straight>.

The position aesthetic held and the degree of excellence Jonathan Edwards perceived for the development of the nature of true virtue has more warrant than merely being an obsolete neo-platonic convention. Phenomenology and the study of consciousness recognizes there are inexplicable aspects to the mind yet to be fully understood. These mysteries may very well be rooted in transcendent explanations that require further exploration and experimentation. Clinical psychologists might imitate the example of William James, who found the varieties of religion to be a fruitful foray for his scientific speculation.

The models of Jonathan Edwards and William James have served a mimetic function in this study. This is no accident. The practice of imitation has long been fruitful for developing a virtuous ethic. The method of imitation or looking to others as role models has been commended by ethicists and implemented as a strategy in positive psychology.⁸³

Returning to the thought of Jonathan Edwards, he believed mimesis functioned as a vital component for developing a virtuous life. The mimetic tradition valued the *imitatio Christi* or imitation of Christ as an outworking of union with Christ. Union with Christ led to imitation of Christ. Rhys Bezzant has demonstrated that there is a doctrinal connection and continuity between union with Christ and the *imitatio Christi*, which encapsulates the Christian ethical experience. He claims, “[Our] union with Christ suggests that imitation of Christ is more than copying his decisions or parroting his representatives. Rather, the *imitatio Christi* involves pursuing an example that shapes our entire experience.”⁸⁴ Though the fullness of this experience will not be achieved until glory, Christians experience a foretaste of it by dwelling upon the glory of Christ. This then fuels their imitation of Christ. The rapturous experience of Sarah Pierpont Edwards under the brief itinerating ministry of Samuel Buell exemplified this sort of ethical living. Edwards presented her experience as a “benign, meek, beneficent, beatifical, glorious distraction!”⁸⁵

Mimesis involves imitating the whole range of human experience. Christ had fortitude to endure suffering and affliction. Though a person ought not to seek suffering, when suffering visits, a person should be prepared to suffer well. Edwards conveyed this understanding of mimesis in a sermon he preached on Hebrews 12:2–3. Sermon on “Hebrews 12:2–3” (No. 256) was preached during the late fall or early winter of 1732. This sermon considered the “example of constancy, steadfastness, and perseverance” of Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of the Christian faith. His exegesis of the text contextualized Hebrews 12:2–3 to its preceding section on the many examples of faith presented in Hebrews 11. Jesus Christ functioned as the *exemplar par excellence* to all former examples given in Hebrews 11.

⁸³ Christian B. Miller, *The Character Gap* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 195–204, 231–33.

⁸⁴ Rhys S. Bezzant, “The Mimetic Way” in *Edwards the Mentor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 95.

⁸⁵ Quoted from Bezzant, *Edwards the Mentor*, 102.

Christ was the chief person to imitate. The Apostle of Hebrews “reserved the example of Christ to the last, to crown the whole catalogue.” Jesus Christ “was the greatest and of greatest force of any” and there was no parallel to him, who “has vastly the advantage of all other examples.” The other examples from Hebrews 11 were examples of faith in Jesus Christ; this text directed Hebrew Christians to “the example of Jesus Christ himself.” The Apostle of Hebrews meant this to “enforce our imitation.”⁸⁶

Edwards presented the template for Christian constancy and steadfastness in the midst of persecution and that template was the ultimate example of Jesus Christ. Imitation involved doing, and Edwards discussed what Jesus did to demonstrate constancy and steadfastness. Jesus’s intellect and affections drove his actions. Edwards indicated, “Christ showed his constancy by the willingness and readiness of mind with which he went through these difficulties.” His willingness and readiness were not unfounded but were grounded on the promises of the Father. The Father promised Christ he would see his seed. Thus, many sinners would be saved and justified. This knowledge propelled Christ in his mission. “Very much [of] the joy that was set before him was his prospect he had a glorious success in his undertaking.” Therefore, Christians, who mimicked Christ, did not just mimic his actions; they imbibed his mindset and will as well. Edwards highlighted the fortitude of Christ’s mindset and willingness to endure suffering in life and death.⁸⁷

Christians should imitate Christ in his suffering and have the same steadfastness and constancy he had, knowing they too would be “despised and rejected” by others. The doctrine of Sermon on “Hebrews 12:2–3” (No. 256) provided a stellar framework to accomplish this purpose: “He held out under great discouragements.” Edwards conveyed nine discouragements Christ “met with in the world” during his public ministry. His steadfastness to endure these discouragements exhibited his “love to sinners and willingness to die for them.” The sermon’s application emphasized the role of union with Christ, which stimulated mimesis. As common for Edwards, he exhorted listeners to respond to Christ. Edwards admonished, “Set your love on Christ . . . what can be more endearing and attracting . . . would you not choose to give your heart to a constant friend. Christ’s constancy has been proved.” His second exhortation presented the mimetic appeal to “steadfastness and constancy in adherence to Christ.” Edwards yearned to “excite” listeners to be “constant to him.” He concluded the sermon by admonishing congregants to account for the “light difference” between their difficulties and Christ’s. His difficulties were exceedingly greater, yet he was steadfast and unashamed. This comment implicitly suggested Christians should imitate the mindset and willingness of Christ.⁸⁸

Concluding with mimesis in the thought of Jonathan Edwards tidily closes a loose end on his ethic from the Sermon on “1 Corinthians 13:1–10b”

⁸⁶ Sermon on “Hebrews 12:2–3” (No. 256), *WJEO*, 47, unpublished manuscript.

⁸⁷ Sermon on “Hebrews 12:2–3” (No. 256), *WJEO*, 47, unpublished manuscript.

⁸⁸ Sermon on “Hebrews 12:2–3” (No. 256), *WJEO*, 47, unpublished manuscript.

(No. 470).⁸⁹ Emphasizing the unchangeable constancy of Jesus Christ and simultaneously underscoring the human nature of Christ—his habit, propensity, and exercise to carry out the work of redemption—points to how the historical figure, Jesus Christ, presented the *exemplar par excellence* for the sort of life that one ought to imitate. To imitate him, an individual must consent to his Being, unite with him, and practice love for him and those others who also loved him. Thus, a Christian society of benevolence ought to be an exemplary image for a corporately virtuous ethical system. Unfortunately, when there is a breakdown in this system, a phenomenon of dissonance occurs. Edwards discussed this phenomenon and logically demonstrated how it corresponded with the rationale of the ethic of benevolence.

Much more could be said concerning the corollaries between the ethic of Jonathan Edwards and the ethic of William James. These two pillars of intellectual history are by far not the only subjects worth exploring for productive developments in contemporary virtue ethic. However, it is worth mentioning noteworthy activists and reformers who followed Edwards and James recognized their remarkable influence. The first abolitionists in America derived their arguments for abolition from the New England Theology and the New Divinity Movement Jonathan Edwards inspired. Among them included Samuel Hopkins, Joseph Bellamy, and Jonathan Edwards, Jr.—all of which inhabited Edwards's home at some point during their development and mimicked Edwards's habits and practices as a missionary, pastor, and scholar. Similarly, W. E. B. Dubois looked to William James as a mind of notable influence for his own habits and practices as a scholar and activist. Thus, developing the ethical thought of Edwards and James demonstrated not just a reflection on their ethical convictions, but it illuminated the habits and practices each fostered as curious inhabitants of the world. Their habits of empirical study, reflection, documentation, argumentation, and interlocution are worthy of imitation for pastor theologians and clinical psychologists alike.

⁸⁹ Sermon on "1 Cor. 13:1–10(b)" (No. 470), *WJEO*, 53, unpublished manuscript.