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Hume Studies Volume 32, Number 1, (2006) 53-82.

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The Metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards and David Hume

JASPER REID

Abstract: This article compares Hume's metaphysical views with those of his contemporary, the American theologian and philosopher, Jonathan Edwards. It shows how, although the two men developed their theories in isolation from one another, their minds were nevertheless following almost identical paths on several of the most central issues in metaphysics (including the natures of body and mind, personal identity, causation, and free will). Their final conclusions were, however, radically different. In short, wherever Hume came to rest in a skeptical position, Edwards would initially approach the very same position, but would then pull back at the last minute and bring in God to fill the gaps, yielding a Christian system of philosophy with an idiosyncratically Humean flavour.

Of the gradually but steadily growing body of literature on the philosophy of Jonathan Edwards, much has sought to place his ideas within a context of European thought. Of this material, some has considered his ideas in the light of the works of figures whom we know to have been important influences on the development of his own philosophy, such as Locke and Newton. Some has linked Edwards together with figures for whom there is somewhat less concrete proof of his having studied their works at first hand, but where some kind of direct influence does nevertheless seem likely, such as Malebranche or Henry More. Finally, some has compared his position with that of authors whose works, it

is generally agreed, he probably did not actually read, at least not until after he had already developed his own distinctive ideas. In this last group of studies, the European author who has been most regularly discussed in connection with Edwards has been Berkeley. Edwards developed an immaterialist conception of the corporeal world in the early 1720s, despite apparently not becoming aware of Berkeley's works on the subject until a few years later, a synchronicity which many commentators have found intriguing. But a comparison which has been much less fully examined than that between Edwards and Berkeley has been that between Edwards and Hume. Much as in the case of Berkeley, it seems clear enough that, although Edwards did eventually acquire some acquaintance with Hume's ideas, they cannot have influenced him in the development of his own views, nor vice versa; and yet there are several striking parallels between them, on a wide range of issues.

Unlike in the Berkeley case, however, there is also a crucially important difference between the respective positions of Edwards and Hume. In short, wherever Hume found himself arriving at a skeptical position, with regard to some topic or other, Edwards would first approach almost exactly the same position, only then he would pull back at the final moment, and would appeal to God in order to plug the gaps that Hume had left open. As Lyman Beecher observed of Edwards in 1830, "But for his piety, he might have been a skeptic more dangerous than Hume."¹ The case of Hume, then, does differ from that of Berkeley. In the latter case, we do find a substantial agreement with Edwards (specifically, over the non-existence of material substance, and the fact that the true reality of bodies consists in God's presenting us with phenomenal ideas). In the case of Hume, by contrast, we generally do not find an actual agreement between him and Edwards. But what we do find, and what becomes more and more vivid the deeper one probes, is a broad parallelism between them, such that, had it not been for Edwards's unshakeable belief in (and philosophical appeal to) God, there *would* have been a striking agreement between them—considerably *more* agreement, in fact, than we do actually find in the case of Berkeley. Various commentators have, mostly just in passing, observed such parallels on a number of specific issues, many of which will be addressed in the course of the present paper.² But there has, as yet, been no serious attempt to draw the various strands together, and to place the overall philosophical systems of Hume and Edwards side by side, to demonstrate just how extensively they are permeated with close similarities of structure, notwithstanding the major divergences in the ultimate conclusions drawn by the Scottish arch-skeptic and the devout and zealous American preacher. The present paper seeks to do this, with a view both to providing an illuminating new perspective on Edwards's own thought, and to showing how it was possible for a Christian philosopher to preserve the general tenor of Hume's approach to metaphysics within an overwhelmingly theocentric framework.

The fact that the development of Edwards's philosophy did not owe much, if anything, to a direct study of Hume's own works is sufficiently clear from the fact that the foundation of his system was already firmly in place while Hume was still but a child. Edwards was born in 1703, making him eight years Hume's senior, and he demonstrated his philosophical aptitude remarkably early in life. In a series of notebooks, begun around 1720 while he was still in his teens, Edwards began to piece together the philosophical ideas that would remain with him for the rest of his life. After just a few years, the general structure was firmly established, and, a few adjustments and elaborations here and there notwithstanding, he never turned his back on it.

Edwards certainly did become conscious of Hume's works later in life.³ His catalogue of reading mentions Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740), *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (1748), and *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751). But there seems to be no reason to think that he read even the first of these works until the 1750s, which was long after his own ideas were already in place. Indeed, it is not at all clear that he studied any of these works in any real depth, even then. There is one passing reference to Hume in Edwards's dissertation on *The Nature of True Virtue*, written around 1753–1754, which appears to have been alluding to Book 2, part 2, §11 of Hume's *Treatise* (see *Works*, 8: 604). In addition, a letter of 1755 to the Rev. John Erskine mentions a book of Hume's, which appears to have been *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*; but the letter also makes it quite clear that Edwards did not have a terribly high opinion of it:

I had before read that book of [Lord Kames's] essays; having borrowed Mr. Bellamy's; and also that book of Mr. David Hume's which you speak of, I am glad of an opportunity to read such corrupt books; especially when written by men of considerable genius; that I may have an idea of the notions that prevail in our nation. (Edwards to Erskine, 11 Dec. 1755, *Works*, 16: 679)

Away from ethics, when it came to the more speculative side of Hume's philosophy, it is possible that Edwards never really went very much further than the synopsis he found in John Leland's *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers* (1754–1756), which he summarised with evident distaste in his notebook known as *The Miscellanies*. In the course of an enumeration of various unorthodox positions, Edwards followed Leland in grouping Hume together with such scandal-mongers as Hobbes, Toland and Spinoza. Of Hume, Edwards learnt that he

declares that the knowledge of the relation of cause and effect is of the highest importance and necessity, and that all our reasonings concerning

matter of fact and experience, and concerning the existence of any being, are founded upon it. Yet he sets himself to show that there is no real connection between cause and effect, and that there can be no certain, nor even probable, reasoning from the one to the other. He endeavors to subvert all proofs of a particular providence, of a future state, and of an intelligent cause of the universe. He speaks of the doctrine of the being of God as uncertain and useless. He opposes the arguments from God's distributive justice to a future state, and denies that we have any evidence of any further degrees of justice on God than we see exercised in this present state. . . . These things from Dr. Leland's view of deistical writers. (*Works*, 23: 243–4)

Aside perhaps from the opening remark, there was effectively nothing here that would have held any appeal at all for Edwards, and nothing to encourage him to probe Hume's own writings in more detail.

As for the possibility of a real influence in the other direction, from Edwards to Hume, that does not seem to have been present either. It is true that Edwards would acquire a certain fan-base in Scotland. Although he never left America, he did correspond with a number of Scots (the afore-mentioned John Erskine among them), and his writings seem to have gone down rather well in that country. We have, for instance, the testimony of Samuel Hopkins, Edwards's first biographer, who tells us that "[h]is works met with a good reception in Scotland especially, and procured for him great esteem and applause."⁴ However, it should first be observed that this only really applied to Edwards's theological works and, although there were certainly several important philosophical ideas inserted into those, his more sustained and directly metaphysical writings were not finally published until the nineteenth century or, in some instances, even later. Second, even those theological works themselves did not begin properly to appear until after Hume had already devised and begun to publish his own philosophy. And, third, although an anecdote in a memoir of Hume does suggest that he did (eventually) become conscious of Edwards, it equally suggests that he really did not know very much about the man or his opinions. According to the tale (originating with William Smellie, who was present on the occasion), Hume once happened to encounter the Rev. John Warden at the home of Lord Kames:

The conversation went along pleasantly enough until Dr Warden happened to mention a sermon published by Jonathan Edwards with the curious title of *The Usefulness of Sin*. "The usefulness of sin!" echoed David. "I suppose," he went on musingly, "Mr Edwards has adopted the system of Leibniz that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds." Then he burst out "But what the devil does the fellow make of hell and

damnation?" Dr Warden, to the amazement of all, took his hat and left the house despite Lord Kames's attempts to conciliate him.⁵

This does not sound like someone who was well-versed in Edwards's works (which, needless to say, Hume does not mention in his own), and still less like someone who was actually influenced by them to any degree at all.

As we have intimated, however, their minds were nevertheless working down similar paths on a number of issues, before diverging at the last moment to come finally to rest in opposite conclusions. We begin our examination of this general parallelism by taking a look at the topic that has most animated commentators in that other comparison, between Edwards and Berkeley: the question of material substance.

Edwards's immaterialism originated out of the conception of body that he inherited from the Lockean/Newtonian tradition.⁶ For Edwards, the central defining characteristic of body was not extension, as for the Cartesians, but rather solidity or impenetrability. Where Locke had declared that the idea of solidity was "the *Idea* most intimately connected with, and essential to Body,"⁷ Edwards decided early "that the very essence and being of bodies is solidity; or rather, that body and solidity are the same" (*Works*, 6: 211). But then Edwards wondered what this solidity actually amounted to. It seemed to be a matter of resistance to something, but resistance to what? After toying with a couple of possible answers, Edwards settled on the doctrine that the only possible candidate for an object of this resistance would have to be something ideal. The thing that was getting resisted, he decided, was an ideal patch of coloured extension. Edwards rejected the Lockean (and, indeed, Cartesian) distinction between colour and extension, whereby the former (as perceived) would be a mind-dependent secondary quality and the latter an independent and external primary quality. "The idea we have of space," maintained Edwards, "and what we call by that name, is only colored space, and is entirely taken out of the mind if color be taken away; and so all that we call extension, motion and figure is gone if color is gone" (*Works*, 6: 343–4). Elsewhere, he did add that certain tangible qualities might also have a part to play in revealing space to us, as well as visible colours: but, either way, what he did not believe was that we could achieve any notion of space except in conjunction with secondary qualities of one kind or another. But he also viewed the mind-dependent, ideal status of the appearance of colour and other secondary qualities as having already been conclusively established by his philosophical forebears. If, then, the primary qualities could not be separated from the secondary, then the primary would have to follow the secondary into the mind, rather than leading the secondary out of it. For Edwards, the true nature of the corporeal world would have to be referred to the perception of coloured or tangible, extended ideas, bouncing off instead of penetrating one another as they moved about, and thereby displaying the solid-

ity in virtue of which these coloured patches, notwithstanding their ideal status, would qualify under the definition as bodies. Thus, Edwards would write:

The whole of what we any way observe whereby we get the idea of solidity or solid body are certain parts of space from whence we receive the ideas of light and colors, and certain sensations by the sense of feeling. And we observe that the places whence we receive these sensations are not constantly the same, but are successively different, and this light and colors are communicated from one part of space to another. And we observe that these parts of space, from whence we receive these sensations, resist and stop other bodies, which we observe communicated successively through the parts of space adjacent. . . . All that we observe of solidity is that certain parts of space, from whence we receive the ideas of light and colors and a few other sensations, do likewise resist anything coming within them. (*Works*, 6: 379)⁸

The notion of a mind-independent material substance, lying unseen behind these ideal patches of coloured or tangible extension, was rejected out of hand: “[T]here is no such thing as material substance truly and properly distinct from all those that are called sensible qualities” (*Works*, 6: 398).

Now, there is plenty here that Berkeley would have agreed with, but there is plenty that would have equally appealed to Hume too. Hume, just as firmly as both Berkeley and Edwards, dismissed the Lockean distinction between primary and secondary qualities:

It is universally allowed by modern enquirers, that all sensible qualities of objects, such as hard, soft, hot, cold, white, black, &c. are merely secondary, and exist not in the objects themselves, but are perceptions of the mind, without any external archetype or model, which they represent. If this be allowed, with regard to secondary qualities, it must also follow, with regard to the supposed primary qualities of extension and solidity; nor can the latter be any more entitled to that denomination than the former. The idea of extension is entirely acquired from the senses of sight and feeling; and if all the qualities, perceived by the senses, be in the mind, not in the object, the same conclusion must reach the idea of extension, which is wholly dependent on the sensible ideas or the ideas of secondary qualities. (EHU 12.15; SBN 154)

The idea of space, for Hume, was drawn from impressions of either coloured or tangible points, arranged in certain patterns. Now, it must be granted that Edwards did not go along with Hume’s theory of *minima sensibilia*, believing instead that

bodies were compounded out of atoms that were indeed extended and yet were too minute to appear individually to our inadequate human senses. But, that difference notwithstanding, Edwards and Hume did at least agree on the more fundamental point, that the central component in our notion of body was merely an idea of coloured or tangible extension.

But was there any *more* to it than just this? We have already quoted Edwards's explicit rejection of the existence of such a thing as "material substance truly and properly distinct from all those that are called sensible qualities" (*Works*, 6: 398). But, nevertheless, he did still think that there was a further, ineliminable component to the story, and that it had to appeal to God. It was on this point that the real gulf between Edwards and Hume, with regard to the issue of corporeal reality, opened up.

Going back to their common ancestor, we find that Locke felt compelled to postulate the existence of such a thing as "material substance" on account of the fact that he could not fathom how the various qualities of bodies could possibly maintain their own existence without it, or indeed how they should come to be bound together to stand as various different qualities of the *same* thing. Relying on the primary-secondary quality distinction that Hume and Edwards would later be calling into question, Locke was perfectly happy to allow that the subject wherein colour or weight inhered, and the thing that would cause ideas of such qualities to be aroused in percipient minds, might be defined in terms of solidity and extension. But he did also realise that this kind of answer, much as it might have been valid as far as it went, did not actually go very far at all. If the question was then pushed further back, and it was asked in what common subject this solidity and this extension inhered, Locke conceded that he now could not give any further answer, beyond just saying that they inhered in *something*, he knew not what. As he put it, "of *Substance*, we have no *Idea* of what it is, but only a confused obscure one of what it does."⁹ This problematic position, whereby Locke felt convinced that there had to be "something" there, while nevertheless conceding that he had no idea what, did not satisfy either Edwards or Hume. However, they responded to it in two very different ways.

For Hume's part, having explained that we could not achieve any idea of body which reached beyond its sensible qualities, he then turned his attention (with evident distaste) to the philosophical notion of substance. In the third section of part four, of the first book of his *Treatise*, he poured scorn on the traditional notion of substance—particularly as it was employed by the Aristotelians—arguing not only that it was a figment of the imagination, but that it did not even have the decency to be a properly intelligible figment. And then, in the fifth section, he made his position clear. To the extent that the notion of substance was a coherent one at all, the very perceptions themselves ought to qualify as substances in their own right:

[S]ince all our perceptions are different from each other, and from every thing else in the universe, they are also distinct and separable, and may be consider'd as separately existent, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing else to support their existence. They are, therefore, substances, as far as this definition explains a substance. (T 1.4.5.5; SBN 233)

Hume's contention was that we could not conceive of any more fundamental metaphysical substratum, underlying these perceptions. Moreover, a perception—an impression or an idea—simply did not need any other thing to support it anyway. As far as we could tell, it could quite happily exist on its own, in the absence of absolutely everything else, both everything known and everything unknown. Neither did Hume believe that different perceptions needed some common substance to unify them together into a single object. Much as the imagination might have been disposed to associate various perceptions with one another, it remained the case that, in themselves, they were all distinct entities, with no objective metaphysical connections between them. At any rate, no such objective metaphysical connections were intelligible to our rational, philosophical minds—but, then, there was no real possibility of our meaningfully postulating any unintelligible ones either. Although the above passage appears in the wider context of a discussion of mental substance, an issue to which we will return shortly, it is no less representative of Hume's position with regard to material substance. Bodies, for Hume, were just bundles of perceptions—coloured or tangible impressions and ideas—with no intelligible threads to tie these bundles together in any mind-independent way.

As for Edwards, he would agree with this up to a point. Bodies, as they appeared to us, were indeed just bundles of perceptions. And there was indeed nothing to tie these bundles together independently of *all* thinking beings. Nevertheless, Edwards insisted that there most certainly was something external to *our* minds, which played the role of substance for these bodies, upholding and uniting their various different sensible qualities. This substance, he felt, was none other than the infinite mind of God Himself. Thus, in a fairly blatant allusion to Locke's notorious "something, I know not what," Edwards wrote:

The reason why it is so exceedingly natural to men to suppose that there is some latent substance, or something that is altogether hid, that upholds the properties of bodies, is because all see at first sight that the properties of bodies are such as need some cause that shall every moment have influence to their continuance, as well as a cause of their first existence. All therefore agree that there is something that is there, and upholds these properties; and it is most true, there undoubtedly is. But men are wont

to content themselves in saying merely that it is something; but that “something” is he by whom all things consist. (*Works*, 6: 380)

As far as Edwards was concerned, our perceptions of coloured (or tangible) shapes might certainly have a crucial role to play in any decent account of the reality of physical things, but he also felt that they could not fully constitute or explain that reality by themselves. Such ideas needed to be produced and sustained within our minds by the causal efficacy of something—and that something was God.

When Edwards described God, as he sometimes did, as the “substance” of bodies, he was not falling into Spinozistic pantheism. This was not an immanent creation, whereby God would merely modify Himself. On the contrary, Edwards made it abundantly clear that, in his view, God could indeed create *ad extra*, producing objects that were ontologically distinct from Him, notwithstanding their dependence on Him. But, nevertheless, the objects that He thus produced were ideal. Edwards’s contention that God was the substance of bodies amounted to the thesis that He upheld the (phenomenal) properties of bodies by arousing ideas in us, and He ensured the unification of several such properties into a single body by taking care to move a certain bundle of properties around together as one in our perceptual space, according to the fixed laws of nature whereby He chose to regulate His own activity. Edwards’s position was in agreement with Berkeley’s against Hume’s (notwithstanding the fact that he was perfectly oblivious of both of them at the time), to the extent that he felt it was insufficient to say that all we could really conceive of the reality of the physical world was an array of coloured and tangible figures. Like Berkeley, he felt that we additionally had to appeal to the direct agency of God, in arousing these ideas within our minds, according to regular laws of nature of His own devising.

Here, then, we have our first parallel between Edwards and Hume, and also our first divergence. Both rejected the notion of a “material substance,” that mysterious, unknown “something” that was supposed neither to perceive nor to be (directly) perceived. Both felt that bodies were more properly to be construed as coloured or tangible spaces, of which the human mind could be immediately conscious in sensual perception. On the other hand, despite agreeing with one another thus far, Edwards and Hume’s final conclusions did differ quite dramatically. Hume was willing to leave the story there, and not to presume to offer any hypothesis of where these impressions came from, declaring indeed that all notions of their external, continued or distinct existence arose out of the non-rational habits and impulses of the imagination, and had no reliable bearing on the truth of the matter. Edwards’s theory of the true nature of the corporeal world, by contrast, went considerably further than a mere reduction thereof to ideas in the minds of human beings: “that which truly is the substance of all bodies,” he wrote,

is the infinitely exact and precise and perfectly stable idea in God's mind, together with his stable will that the same shall gradually be communicated to us, and to other minds, according to certain fixed and exact established methods and laws. (*Works*, 6: 344)

And so, in the end, it was Berkeley rather than Hume with whom Edwards found much closer affinity on the question of physical reality. It is entirely right and proper, then, that Berkeley's should have been the name that has more frequently come up in discussions of this particular component of Edwards's thought. Indeed, one might wonder why Hume should be deemed worthy of our attention in this area at all. But, as we stated at the outset, the intention of the present paper is not to suggest that Edwards and Hume actually agreed on any philosophical issue, so much as to draw attention to the fact that their minds were working down the same paths on *several* philosophical issues—albeit only up to a certain point, a point at which Hume would be content to stop while Edwards would press on by bringing God into the story. When one begins to turn one's attention to other issues, one finds that Edwards does begin to move well away from anything that would have appealed to Berkeley, and that he begins to encroach on much more idiosyncratically Humean territory. We turn, then, to one such issue: that of the substance of the human mind.

Going back to Locke again, we find that he was equally confident of the existence of both created material substances, upholding the qualities of bodies, and created mental substances, upholding the ideas perceived in the mind and supporting its various operations, even as he stressed that in both cases the intrinsic nature of such substances was hidden from our apprehension, merely a "something, he knew not what." Berkeley, for his part, decided that the Lockean notion of material substance was to be rejected out of hand, and replaced by an immaterialist theory of the nature of the corporeal world, reducing it to phenomenal ideas produced directly within created minds by God Himself. But what Berkeley could never seriously bring himself to do was offer a comparable elimination of the Lockean notion of mental substance. He felt that an insurmountable obstacle to any reduction of minds to ideas lay in the fact, as he saw it, that created minds were centres of activity, whereas all ideas were passive objects. There was nothing more to an idea than what could be perceived in it; no efficacy could be perceived there; hence no efficacy could *be* there. Ideas were, as he put it in his *Principles of Human Knowledge* (§25), "visibly inactive." However, he did not merely think that ideas were inactive in themselves, he also felt that they could not even so much as represent activity. Consequently, Berkeley maintained that we could not achieve any idea of our mind. Admittedly, in the 1734 revised edition of his *Principles* and *Three Dialogues*, he did interpolate a handful of new passages, in which he suggested that we might nevertheless be capable

of knowing our own minds, not by way of “idea,” but rather by way of “notion.” But these new remarks are so brief that it is hard to extract from them a clear and unambiguous impression of what he was actually getting at.¹⁰ In general, then, Berkeley’s theory of mental substance did remain fundamentally Lockean. He believed that there had to be such a thing, and he could say a little about what it *did*—it served both as the recipient of the ideas that constituted bodies and as a centre of voluntary agency in the created world—but he was not able to provide any clear and rigorous theory of what this thing *was* that was doing these things, or, indeed, how it did them.

When Hume came along, a couple of decades later, he was not having any of this. For Hume, mental substance would go just the same way that material substance had gone. Bodies had turned out to be nothing more than bundles of perceptions, bundled together by the mind through its natural, habitual associations of ideas, without any intelligible, independent substance to uphold and unite their properties. So too, when he came to examine the nature of the human mind itself, Hume would declare that this was *also* just a bundle of perceptions. Some of these perceptions might perhaps have belonged to different categories from those that constituted bodies, and they might have been bundled together in different ways: but, nevertheless, Hume could make no more sense of the notion of a stable, unifying mental substance, underlying the perceptions that constituted the mind, than he could make sense of the notion of a stable, unifying material substance, underlying the qualities of bodies.

Hume’s fundamental empiricist starting-point was the principle that we could have no sort of conception at all of something, unless it could be derived from our forceful and vivacious impressions. Such impressions comprised both the immediate perceptions that we received through our five outward senses, and also the interior perceptions we had of our own passions and emotions: but in none of these could Hume find any basis for an idea of the sort of simple and unchanging *self* that was supposed to constitute the substance of a mind. “If any impression gives rise to the idea of self,” he observed, “that impression must continue invariably the same, thro’ the whole course of our lives; since self is suppos’d to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable” (T 1.4.6.2; SBN 251). The notion of some single, stable substance, receiving all of our perceptions over the course of our entire lives, could not be derived from those perceptions themselves, for they displayed no such stability; and, if it could not be derived from them, then Hume felt that we had no foundation for any such notion at all. He was not satisfied with Locke’s ploy of postulating “something, I know not what.” If we really could not achieve any conception of what this “something” actually was, then all assertions as to its existence would be entirely vacuous. So, where Locke had postulated both material and mental substance, and Berkeley had rejected material substance but nevertheless retained mental substance, Hume rejected

both of them together as one. The question that faces us, then, is: where should Edwards be placed in this scheme?

The answer is that, for Edwards, created minds went the same way that bodies had gone. To this extent, his position agreed with Hume's rather than with Berkeley's—except that, of course, the crucial difference did still remain between Hume and Edwards, that, whereas the former reduced all bodies and minds to bundles of perceptions, the latter began by making a comparable reduction, and eliminating the notion of created substances in each case, but then pulled back at the last hurdle, and pointed out that there was still a substance in play in both cases, albeit a very different kind of substance from those which Locke and (in the spiritual case) Berkeley had postulated. This substance, in each case, turned out to be none other than the infinite, uncreated substance of God Himself.

Now, Edwards did initially seem a little hesitant about heading down this path. In an early note, written in the immediate aftermath of his immaterialist realisation that bodies had no real substance of their own, distinct from God, he did make the observation that “[t]he nearer in nature beings are to God, so much the more properly are they beings, and more substantial; and that spirits are much more properly beings, and more substantial, than bodies” (*Works*, 6: 238).¹¹ But the set of notes in which Edwards expressed this sentiment was tellingly headed “Things to be Considered an[d] Written fully about” and, the more that he did then consider the matter, the more he began to incline to the view that the cases of created bodies and created spirits were, in fact, precisely on a par with one another after all. He came early to the opinion that “[o]ur perceptions, or ideas that we passively receive by our bodies, are communicated to us immediately by God while our minds are united with our bodies” (*Works*, 6: 339). This was all wrapped up with his rejection of material substance: but, as Berkeley made clear, this notion was not yet sufficient to establish a comparable rejection of created mental substance. The predominant view of the human mind was that it was not merely the passive recipient of perceptions, but that it was additionally a centre of volitional agency. Berkeley found that he could not find any satisfactory theoretical way to eliminate this agency, or to transfer it into some other being (presumably God), and it was for this very reason that he felt obliged to retain the notion of mental substance in his ontology. But Edwards, for his part, became increasingly confident that this last remaining obstacle to the total elimination of created substance could indeed be overcome.

As we will have occasion to observe again below, Edwards was an occasionalist, believing that there was no true power in any creature at all, either corporeal or spiritual, and that it was God who did everything in everything—“all creatures and all the operations of the universe,” he wrote, “are only the immediate influence of God” (*Works*, 13: 326). *A fortiori*, in the specific case of the human mind, he was perfectly happy to declare:

'Tis by God's continual and immediate influence every moment, as we have elsewhere shown, that all the exercises and actings of the powers or inclinations of our souls are performed. . . . An inclination is nothing but God's influencing the soul according to a certain law of nature. (*Works*, 13: 387-8)

A few entries before this one, in his notebook known as the *Miscellanies*, Edwards argued for this conclusion as follows:

The mere exertion of a new thought is a certain proof of a God. For certainly there is something that immediately produces and upholds that thought; here is a new thing, and there is a necessity of a cause. It is not antecedent thoughts, for they are vanished and gone; they are past, and what is past is not. But if we say 'tis the substance of the soul (if we mean that there is some substance besides that thought, that brings that thought forth), if it be God, I acknowledge; but if there be meant something else that has no properties, it seems to me absurd. (*Works*, 13: 373)

Edwards picked up on the Lockean identification of a person with a consciousness or stream of perceptions. But, where Locke had been willing to accept that there was some enduring created substance, distinct from and underlying this succession of ideas, Edwards dispensed with it. He did not merely identify a consciousness with a "person," in Locke's technical, forensic sense of that word, but felt that one could indeed say with propriety that the mind itself should be understood in such terms. "A mind or spirit," he boldly wrote, "is nothing else but consciousness, and what is included in it. The same consciousness is to all intents and purposes the very same spirit or substance" (*Works*, 6: 342-3). But no causal power could be discerned within this consciousness. Our ideas themselves were, as Berkeley had said, visibly inactive. Locke, Berkeley, and Edwards all agreed that the existence of such ideas certainly did require some cause or other. Locke and Berkeley felt that at least some of them had to be the creatures of the mind itself, which led them to postulate a mental substance whose own nature was, to all intents and purposes, unknowable except through its effects. Edwards, by contrast, was perfectly happy to say that *all* of them were the immediate results of God's activity. Through the operations of His will, regulated by laws of nature of His devising, God would create and maintain the sensual ideas wherein corporeal reality consisted. He was therefore the only being worthy of the title of "substance" for bodies—it was He who upheld them and preserved them in being. But, equally, God would also produce the volitions of our will, and He would ensure that the appropriate changes in our consciousness should follow the appearance of such volitions in regular and lawlike ways. To the extent

that it made sense to speak of the “substance” of the soul, then, He turned out to be that substance too.

And so, notwithstanding Edwards’s early intimation that created spirits were somehow more substantial than bodies, his later writings made it abundantly clear that there was in fact absolutely no difference between them in this regard. He would refer, for instance, to “[t]he manifest analogy between the nature of the human soul and the nature of other things: How laws of nature take place alike. How it is laws that constitute all permanent being in created things, both corporeal and spiritual” (*Works*, 6: 391). Or, in a note dating from near the end of his life, having begun with the declaration, already observed above, that “there is no such thing as material substance truly and properly distinct from all those that are called sensible qualities,” Edwards then proceeded to draw the comparison with the case of the mind:

Answer to that objection, that then we have no evidence of immaterial substance. Answer: True; for this is what is supposed, that all existence is perception. What we call body is nothing but a particular mode of perception; and what we call spirit is nothing but a composition and series of perceptions, or an universe of coexisting and successive perceptions connected by such wonderful methods and laws. (*Works*, 6: 398)

Thus, for Edwards just as for Hume, both minds and bodies, in themselves, were simply bundles of perceptions, even though Edwards then had a further story to tell about where these perceptions were coming from (namely, from the immediate creative activity of God Himself), while Hume was considerably more reticent about venturing into such abstruse metaphysical territory.

It must be acknowledged that Hume did go into considerably more detail than Edwards ever did, about precisely *how* the mind came to bind its perceptions together into their various bundles, explaining the association of ideas in terms of three fundamental relations: contiguity, resemblance and causation. But, even on this point, we can still find some hint of Hume’s position in Edwards’s writings. Edwards indicated that he was at least conscious of the importance of considerations of this nature, writing in his notebooks:

Connection of ideas: Concerning the laws by which ideas follow each other or call up one another, in which one thing comes into the mind after another in the course of our thinking. How far this is owing to the association of ideas and how far to any relation of cause and effect or any other relation; and whether the whole may not be reduced to the following: association of ideas, resemblance of some kind, and that natural disposition in us when we see any thing begin to be to suppose it owing to a cause.

Observe how these laws by which one idea suggests and brings in another are a kind of mutual attraction of ideas. Concerning the importance and necessity of this mutual attraction and adhesion of ideas, how rarely our minds would serve us if it were not for this. (*Works*, 6: 391–2)¹²

Edwards's terminology was not exactly the same as Hume's. Where Hume used the expression "association of ideas" as a blanket term to cover all three of the relations of contiguity, resemblance and causality, Edwards distinguished "association" from resemblance and causality—and he used the term to mean contiguity.¹³ Terminology aside, then, Edwards's germ of a theory was essentially just the same as Hume's on this issue too. He even went so far as to describe these connections between ideas as "a kind of mutual attraction," immediately calling to mind the analogy that Hume himself drew in the *Treatise*: "Here is a kind of ATTRACTION, which in the mental world will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural, and to show itself in as many and as various forms" (T 1.1.5.6; SBN 12–13).

Turning properly back now to Hume, his rejection of mental substance led him to conclude that, strictly speaking, there was no such thing as an enduring personal identity over time. The mind's perceptions themselves were all distinct from one another: "All these are different, and distinguishable, and separable from each other, and may be separately consider'd, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing to support their existence" (T 1.4.6.3, SBN 252). But, if there was nothing more to the mind than these impressions and ideas, and if these proceeded in an ever-changing succession, then the only reasonable conclusion was that the mind itself would be changing over time, being now constituted by one set of impressions and ideas, and now by a different set:

The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. (T 1.4.6.4; SBN 253)

Personal identity, Hume declared, was really just a fiction produced in the imagination. There were perhaps resemblances and regular (causal) correlations between the mind's perceptions at different moments, and these relations might have confused us into imagining an enduring identity: but such a supposition, if "identity" was being understood in the strict, philosophical sense, was simply false. These relations remained relations between wholly distinct individuals and, moreover, they were entirely supervenient on the intrinsic, monadic properties of those various individuals. All in all, Hume's universe—to the extent that it was intelligible to us—was a universe of separate, phenomenal impressions and ideas, which the

mind would be naturally inclined to associate with one another in various ways, but which had no objective ontological connections with one another at all.

And, up to a point, Edwards agreed with this too. Edwards's fullest discussion of the issue of personal identity appeared in his treatise on *Original Sin*, published right at the end of his life in 1758.¹⁴ Edwards wished to explain how it could be reasonable that all humanity should be implicated in the sin of Adam. On the face of it, it would seem to be monstrously unjust that we should be punished for that sin, given that it was committed by *someone else*, long before we even existed at all. Edwards's solution was to deny the premise. Adam's sin was not committed by someone else after all, but by we ourselves, because we all turned out to be, in some sense, identical with Adam. But, in order to be in a position to establish this surprising claim, Edwards was going to have to introduce a new way of looking at personal identity, for the traditional conception thereof would not be able to support the kinds of links that his theory required. Earlier philosophers, regardless of the specific details of the theory of personal identity they chose to adopt, would at least have agreed that there was *something* intrinsic to the person, in virtue of which the appropriate connections could be traced between the states of the person at two different moments, to allow an assertion of identity across that time. And, whatever such properties they elected to focus on, it would be unlikely that the appropriate connections would turn out to hold between us and Adam. Edwards decided that the mistake was to suppose that personal identity could reside in anything intrinsic to the person at all.

Indeed, he generalised the same point more broadly. In *no* case could identity over time reside in the intrinsic natures of the objects themselves. Edwards's ontology of the created world was an ontology of durationless time-slices, each one a distinct individual, with no genuine metaphysical bonds to link any two such time-slices directly together. Suppose that a certain object existed at a certain moment. Edwards felt that this fact would need an explanation, but he could not accept that it could be explained in terms of any natural enduring tendency in the object itself, whereby the existence of the object at each moment would naturally drift into the next moment and (other things being equal, at least) would ensure its continued existence. How, asked Edwards, can anything intrinsic to an object at one moment have any influence on the state of the universe in the next moment? In that later moment, the previous moment no longer exists, and neither do any of the time-slices of things that existed at it. The property that an object had at time t , Edwards felt, could not explain anything that happened at time $t+1$, because the property-of-the-object-at- t did not exist at $t+1$ at all. There could be no more causal influence across a temporal distance, no matter how small, than there could be action at a spatial distance. In general, the present existence of something could only be explained in terms of something present. But Edwards did not want to say that objects could be self-caused, both because that was a

perfection that could only pertain to God, and because it could not generate the form of dependent, contingent existence that was characteristic of things in the created world. Their existence therefore could only be explained in terms of the activity of some distinct being, a being which was endowed with creative powers, and a being which co-existed both when and where they themselves did. The only being that Edwards could find that would fit this bill was God.

And so he wrote (here using the term “substance” rather loosely):

That God does, by his immediate power, *uphold* every created substance in being, will be manifest, if we consider, that their present existence is a *dependent* existence, and therefore is an *effect*, and must have some *cause*: and the cause must be one of these two: either the *antecedent existence* of the same substance, or else the *power of the Creator*. But it can't be the antecedent existence of the same substance. For instance, the existence of the body of the moon at this present moment, can't be the effect of its existence at the last foregoing moment. For not only was what existed at the last moment, no active cause, but wholly a passive thing; but this also is to be considered, that no cause can produce effects in a *time* and *place* on which itself is *not*. 'Tis plain, nothing can exert itself, or operate, when and where it is not existing. But the moon's past existence was neither *where* nor *when* its present existence is. In point of time, what is *past* entirely ceases, when *present* existence begins; otherwise it would not be *past*. . . . Therefore the existence of created substances, in each successive moment, must be the effect of the *immediate* agency, will, and power of God. (*Works*, 3: 400–1)

Now, if objects turned out not to have any real endurance over time, but only to be collections of durationless time-slices, then there would be no identity over time at all, in the strict, philosophical sense of the term “identity.” At each new moment, we would be dealing with a *different* time-slice. There could, however, still be identity in a weaker sense. We could say that two time-slices qualified as time-slices of “the same” object just as long as they belonged to the same larger collection. But, then, given that all these time-slices were being successively produced directly by God's will, and owed everything that they were to His continuous creative act, it would naturally seem to follow that He should get to be the one in charge of collecting different time-slices together, and hence that He should have the honour of deciding when two time-slices were to be considered identical in this weaker sense. And this was indeed Edwards's point of view.

Edwards felt that it was entirely up to God to decide which time-slices should be considered time-slices of the same thing. Identity over time was reduced to the arbitrary stipulation of God. In calling it “arbitrary,” Edwards did not mean that

God had no reason to choose as He did, but merely that this was a free choice on God's part, regulated indeed by His wisdom and goodness, but emphatically *not* forced upon Him by anything intrinsic to the natures of the things in question themselves:

When I call this an arbitrary constitution, I mean, that it is a constitution which depends on nothing but the divine will; which *divine will* depends on nothing but the *divine wisdom*. In this sense, the whole course of nature, with all that belongs to it, all its laws and methods, and constancy and regularity, continuance and proceeding, is an *arbitrary constitution*. (*Works*, 3: 403–4)

God, in His wisdom, would see that it was appropriate to treat a certain succession of distinct time-slices as if they were in fact one. Given that He had absolute dominion over what He did to the creatures He produced, He was certainly free to treat *any* two time-slices in the same way as one another, or in appropriately correlated ways—for instance, by punishing one for what the other had done. To that extent, He was capable, if He so wished, of making any two things identical with one another, according to this new way of understanding identity. For Edwards, it was not so much that the identity of two personal time-slices was a necessary precondition for God's justly punishing one for what the other had done. On the contrary, that relation between them *derived from* the fact that He did this.

He might then additionally choose to reveal some of His arbitrary gatherings of distinct time-slices to us, and He would do this by ensuring that they would strike us as being related to one another in some salient way. This might involve a relation of “association” (contiguity), or of causality, but, most straightforwardly of all, He might simply make two distinct time-slices resemble one another in our apprehension. If He wanted us to consider the moon at eight o'clock and the moon at a minute past eight to be the same object, He might present these two instantaneous moons to us as similar patches of pale yellow colour, set apart from their black surroundings. Given that these time-slices owed everything that they were to Him anyway, He could certainly give them similar properties if it suited Him to do so. When we noticed the resemblance that He had established between these two instantaneous ideas, we would come to think of them as constituting one and the same persisting object, and hence we too would come to treat them in the same way. Again, if He wanted a certain person to be able to trace the line of his own personal identity back through time, then He might reveal a succession of consciousnesses, resembling one another in Lockean ways, thereby leading one time-slice of a person to view himself as being united with similar previous ones.¹⁵ But the ultimate root of these connections through time would, in each and every case, be the arbitrary choice of God Himself.

And therefore there was no more difficulty in His uniting the present time-slices of the souls of all mankind with the past time-slices of the soul of Adam, than there was in His uniting the past time-slices of the soul of Adam together with one another. Although the union between Adam and his posterity might have fallen short of identity in the strict, philosophical sense—for identity in that sense could not hold between *any* time-slices belonging to different moments—it was nevertheless a far more intimate relation than that of, say, merely belonging to the same species. As Edwards wrote: “By reason of the established union between Adam and his posterity, the case is far otherwise between him and them, than it is between distinct parts or individuals of Adam’s race; betwixt whom is no such constituted union” (*Works*, 3: 408). Edwards did not think that all the people alive today were identical with one another in the sense in which they were all identical with Adam, for he did not think that God treated them as such. God did not treat one man as complicit in the sin of another contemporary man—though He certainly could have done so, had He so desired—simply because God did not see fit to impose this extraneous and arbitrary identity relation on them. Nevertheless, He did treat all of us as complicit in the sin of Adam, simply because, in that case, He did consider it appropriate to do so, and nothing in the natures of the things themselves could prevent Him from doing so. Edwards likened Adam and his posterity to a tree, with Adam at the root and many divergent branches leading away from him (*Works*, 3: 391n1). For each of us, a line could be traced to connect us back to Adam, notwithstanding the fact that no such lines could be traced to connect us with one another.

And so, in Edwards’s opinion, there was no true identity, in the strict sense of the term, between any two time-slices, but God was nevertheless able to make any of them identical with any other in a weaker sense, just by treating them in appropriately correlated ways, for instance by punishing one for what the other had done. Thus, Edwards would write:

And there is no identity or oneness in the case, but what depends on the *arbitrary* constitution of the Creator; who by his wise sovereign establishment so unites these successive new effects, that he *treats them as one*, by communicating to them like properties, relations, and circumstances; and so, leads us to regard and treat them as one. . . . And so it appears, that the objection we are upon, made against a supposed divine constitution, whereby Adam and his posterity are viewed and treated as one, in the manner and for the purposes supposed, as if it were not consistent with truth, because no constitution can make those to be one, which are not one; I say, it appears that this objection is built on a false hypothesis: for it appears, that a *divine constitution* is the thing which *makes truth*, in affairs of this nature. (*Works*, 3: 402–4)

The more that we see of Edwards's metaphysical system, the more apparent it becomes that, had it not been for the inclusion of God as a linchpin to hold everything together, Edwards would have found himself in a profoundly Humean position. Absolutely everything, whether mental or corporeal, would have boiled down to a certain bundle of phenomenal perceptions—but one without any objective, metaphysical bonds to tie the elements of the bundle together. What is more, these perceptions would not even endure over time, but would be new and distinct entities at every fresh moment, popping in and out of existence for no conceivable reason. The explanation of their existence, and the foundation for whatever loose connections might be found to hold between them, could only be God. Edwards appealed to God to plug each and every one of the gaps that Hume had left gaping open.

For instance, as we have already intimated, Edwards was satisfied that God could be the only true causal agent in the universe. He was so absolutely sovereign over the workings of His creation that second causes were reduced to mere occasions.¹⁶ It seems likely that Edwards did have some acquaintance with Malebranche's writings at first hand; but, in any case, he certainly gave his approval to his occasionalist theory of causation:

Indeed, in natural things, means of effects, in metaphysical strictness, are not proper causes of the effects, but only occasions. God produces all effects; but yet he ties natural events to the operation of such means, or causes them to be consequent on such means according to fixed, determinate and unchangeable rules, which are called the laws of nature. (*Works*, 18: 157)

Hume, for his part, certainly knew Malebranche's work on causation, and he approved of it too—up to a point. Hume agreed with the occasionalists that we could not apprehend any real metaphysical nexus, to bind a mundane cause to its effect. But then, when the occasionalists made the move from this negative observation to the positive claim that it was God who bridged the gap, Hume stopped short, rejecting this unwarranted move with a dismissive snort of “We are got into fairy land” (EHU 7.24; SBN 72).

For Hume, all genuine bonds between distinct entities were abandoned, at least as fit objects for philosophical contemplation. Edwards agreed with him that no such bonds could be discovered in the created world; but he also felt, as Hume did not, that, in each and every case, a divine basis for such bonds could be rationally grasped and philosophically demonstrated. There might not have been any created material or mental substances, upholding the apparent qualities of things, but that was not a problem because God was there to do it. If one creature could not have any influence on another, it did not really matter because God would ensure

that everything happened in a lawlike manner, and that the changes He brought about in different objects over time—objects which only persisted through time in any sense at all thanks to Him—would line up together with one another in regular correlations. As far as an occasional cause in the created world was concerned, Edwards understood this simply as “that, after or upon the existence of which, or the existence of it after such a manner, the existence of another thing follows” (*Works*, 6: 350).¹⁷ There was no hint of any objective necessary connection between these conjoined objects or events, stemming from an efficacy inherent in the antecedent. But, whereas Hume was content to leave things there, Edwards merrily made the leap up into fairy land.

From Hume’s point of view,

upon the whole, there appears not, throughout all nature, any one instance of connexion, which is conceivable by us. All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another; but we never can observe any tie between them. They seem *conjoined*, but never *connected*. (EHU 7.26; SBN 74)

Hume acknowledged that the more passionate side of human nature was such as would respond to the experience of such conjunctions by acquiring the habit to make a “customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant” (EHU 7.28; SBN 75). He even allowed that we were naturally disposed to view distinct events as if they were, without exception, linked together with one another—that is, that it was in our nature to suppose, after sufficient experience of the world, that every new existence required a cause. But he insisted that this principle, notwithstanding the natural appeal it might have held for the human mind, was “not founded on any arguments either demonstrative or intuitive” (T 1.3.14.35; SBN 172). He observed that,

[i]f we define a cause to be, *An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac’d in a like relation of priority and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter*; we may easily conceive, that there is no absolute nor metaphysical necessity, that every beginning of existence shou’d be attended with such an object. (ibid.)

Edwards, meanwhile, agreed with Hume that the mind did indeed have a natural inclination to suppose a cause for every new existence, but he held that this inclination was rationally grounded after all.

Having thus explained what I mean by cause, I assert, that nothing ever comes to pass without a cause. What is self-existent must be from eternity,

and must be unchangeable: but as to all things that *begin to be*, they are not self-existent, and therefore must have some foundation of their existence without themselves. That whatsoever begins to be, which before was not, must have a cause why it then begins to exist, seems to be the first dictate of the common and natural sense which God hath implanted in the minds of all mankind, and the main foundation of all our reasonings about the existence of things, past, present, or to come. (*Works*, 1: 181)

The principle of sufficient reason arose out of this natural habit of the mind to pass smoothly between causes and effects in thought:

When we therefore see anything begin to be, we intuitively know there is a cause of it, and not by ratiocination or any kind of argument. This is an innate principle, in that sense that the soul is born with it, a necessary fatal propensity so to conclude on every occasion. (*Works*, 6: 370)

But, since this fatal propensity had itself been implanted in the mind by God Himself, it should certainly be assumed to reflect the truth of the matter after all—it would surely conflict with His goodness and veracity if He made us so irresistibly and systematically prone to make false inferences between effects and causes.

As far as Edwards was concerned, not only was the causal mechanism of the universe entirely resolved into the immediate agency of God Himself, but the causal *regularity* of natural phenomena was assured by His immutable wisdom and goodness. Perhaps there might have been circumstances from time to time when it was appropriate for Him to act in extraordinary ways through miracles, but the occasions for this were few and far between. By and large, Edwards was satisfied that God regulated His behaviour in accordance with fixed and general laws of nature. These were laws of His own devising, of course, and He certainly had the power radically to alter His mode of operation at any moment. However, His wisdom and, indeed, His benevolence were such that we could be confident that He never would do so. Edwards believed that, as things had happened in the past, so they would continue to happen in the future, and he felt that this principle was reliable because it had its foundation in the immutable nature of God Himself.

Naturally, then, Edwards was never particularly troubled by Humean anxieties over induction. He does seem to have had some sense of how precarious things would have become if we had not had this regular system of divine causal activity to fall back upon; and, in particular, how severely our pretensions to knowledge of matters of fact, beyond those in our current experience, would have been undermined:

Yea, if once it should be allowed, that things may come to pass without a cause, we should not only have no proof of the being of God, but we should be without evidence of the existence of anything whatsoever, but our own immediately present ideas and consciousness. For we have no way to prove anything else, but by arguing from effects to causes. . . . We immediately perceive nothing else but the ideas which are this moment extant in our minds. We perceive or know other things only by means of these, as necessarily connected with others, and dependent on them. But if things may be without causes, all this necessary connection and dependence is dissolved, and so all means of our knowledge is gone. (*Works*, 1: 183)

As far as Hume was concerned, we did actually find ourselves in precisely such a bleak epistemological predicament. Given his contention that all objects were really distinct from all others, and were perfectly capable of existing in the absence of all others, Hume did indeed feel that we could have no solid, rational grounds for any inference that went beyond our actual perceptions. He acknowledged that we did all make such inferences the whole time, and that we could not help but do so. This was the basis for his “sceptical solution” to his doubts: but this so-called solution did nothing to reinstate the objective reliability of our inductive inferences, but merely showed how the non-rational side of human nature would kick in where rationality fell short, and would serve to fill the gaps that logic and philosophy had unfortunately left wide open. Edwards, however, felt that the gaps could be filled in a considerably more satisfying way. Edwards’s belief in God, as a wise and providential agent who could provide the requisite lawlike correlations between distinct mundane phenomena, amply provided him with the sought-after confidence in the reliability of causal inferences.

But, as we have said, even though Hume did not believe that there were any real philosophical grounds for believing in universal causal necessitation, he nevertheless accepted that this was something the human mind could not seriously help but believe. Perhaps it might be possible to suspend judgment on such matters in a few fleeting moments of philosophical speculation, but a good game of backgammon would be sure to dispel such doubts, as we allowed our non-rational impulses to take over again (T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269). As far as Hume was concerned, our idea of causation amounted to nothing over and above an experience of constant conjunction, together with an inferential habit that was stimulated in the mind by such an experience. But he felt that it was just a manifest fact of our experience and psychology “that these two circumstances take place in the voluntary actions of men, and in the operations of mind; it must follow, that all mankind have ever agreed in the doctrine of necessity” (EHU 8.6; SBN 83). It was simply a fact of human nature that we were driven to make inferences about the future on the basis of past

experience, *as if* the missing metaphysical bonds between distinct events really were objectively in place after all. Regardless of the modesty of Hume's analysis of our idea of necessity, drawing it in from the realm of metaphysics into the realm of psychology—or, indeed, precisely because of that very modesty—he felt that a deterministic conception of the universe was humanly inescapable. Moreover, such inferences would indeed apply in the case of voluntary human actions, just as surely as in the case of purely mechanical events in the inanimate world. “A man who at noon leaves his purse full of gold on the pavement at Charing Cross, may as well expect that it will fly away like a feather, as that he will find it untouched an hour after” (EHU 8.20; SBN 91). It would not fly away like a feather, because the law of gravitation would entail that it should, if unmolested, stay put where it was on the ground. But, at the same time, it would not remain untouched either, because the laws of human nature would entail that, before very long, some passerby would be overcome by the temptation to have away with the money. Hume felt that this latter regularity was, to all intents and purposes, just as general and as dependable as the former. He could not offer any rational justification for his belief in such determinism in either case: but, leaving aside a few fleeting moments of deep philosophical speculation, he was every bit as subject to the non-rational epistemological impulses of human nature as anyone else was, and hence he could not help but believe in it in both cases.

As for Edwards, his conception of the universe was also deterministic, albeit for very different reasons. For Edwards, causal necessity remained an objective metaphysical fact, albeit one that rested not in any natural relations between distinct mundane events but rather in the influence of God in imposing such relations upon them from without. It was his views on the absolute sovereignty of God over His creation, acting directly in everything in lawlike, occasionalistic ways—not to mention his views on God's perfect, omniscient foreknowledge of everything that would come to pass—that led Edwards into a position no less deterministic than Hume's. For Hume, even if he did not quite come out and say so explicitly, the universe was effectively a Godless one. Consequently, the only place where Hume could find universal necessitation was in the workings of the human mind. For Edwards, by contrast, the universe was absolutely full of God; and Edwards's Augustinian-Calvinist heritage, against Pelagianism and Arminianism, led him to feel that God's activity assured universal necessitation. But, either way, both Hume and Edwards felt that all actions, including the voluntary actions of human beings, were predetermined. Consequently, given that neither wished to abandon the notion of human free will altogether, both were thus obliged to provide a compatibilist theory thereof.

An exemplar of such a theory was available to both, in the writings of John Locke. All that mattered, Locke had argued, in judging whether a certain action was done freely or not, was the connection between the action and the antecedent voli-

tion in the agent's mind. As long as that connection was in order, the origins of the volition itself were simply irrelevant. It made no difference if the volition was stirred up directly in the agent's will by the immediate creative agency of God, or if it was produced there by infallible natural causes. And it made no sense to ask whether the agent had the volition he wanted to have—that sort of question would spark off a regress of volitions about volitions. Just as long as the volition was there, and the volition caused (in whatever sense of “cause” was appropriate) the action, then the action would be deemed free. If, however, some extraneous force happened to intervene, in between the volition and the action, so that the latter failed to accord with the former, then this would amount to constraint and a lack of freedom.

The accounts that Edwards and Hume gave of free will both fell broadly in line with this Lockean position—in Edwards's case, at least, with an openly avowed debt to Locke.¹⁸ Even if their deterministic theories of human behaviour came to them from different directions, they responded to them in much the same way. Indeed, on this one issue, the resemblance between the respective positions of Edwards and Hume was actually noticed in their own era. In 1770 (hence still within Hume's lifetime, though twelve years after Edwards's death), James Dana published *An Examination of the late Reverend President Edwards's 'Enquiry on Freedom of Will' . . . With an Appendix, containing a specimen of coincidence between the principles of Mr. Edwards's Book, and those of antient and modern Fatalists*. Dana was not keen on Edwards's determinism, and the Lockean compatibilist account of free will that he constructed in the light of it. In the course of an attempted refutation of this position, he made extensive use of the *ad hominem* strategy of linking Edwards together with the very worst kind of authors, in hopes of insinuating a certain guilt by association. Both here and there in the main body of the text, and then more extensively in the Appendix, Dana displayed convergences between Edwards's thought and that of the most scandalous atheists and deists of the age, including Hume alongside such notorious figures as Hobbes, Spinoza and Anthony Collins.

So, for instance, Dana observed that,

as to his notion of cause and effect, whenever he uses the former word for any *antecedent*, or the *occasion* of an event or thing, and the latter for the *consequence* of another thing (as he tells us he sometimes doth, p. 58. 59. [*Works*, 1: 180–1]) he so far agrees with Mr. *Hume* in words as well as sense.¹⁹

Or, again:

Mr. *Edwards* teacheth, that GOD “orders the volitions of moral agents, among other events, with such a *decisive* disposal, that the events are infallibly connected with his disposal . . . [so that] necessity belongs

to all moral agents.” His scheme, upon the whole, appears to be nearly the same with that exhibited by the celebrated Mr. *Hume*, an *epicurean atheist*. (Dana, 68)

Dana’s Appendix is presented in two columns, with passages from Edwards side by side with passages drawn from the various heretical authors with whom Dana sought to associate him, and it includes a number of further coincidences between the opinions of Edwards and Hume. Dana withheld judgment on the question of whether Edwards’s position was actually “copied from Mr. *Hume*, *Hobbs*, *Spinoza*, or any of the old heathen Philosophers”—he opted instead merely to “hint the thing” (Dana, 84). As we observed at the start of the present paper, Edwards’s acquaintance with Hume’s writings came late in his life, and seems not to have been particularly extensive even then. (Edwards also noted, in the very work that Dana was scrutinising, that he had never read Hobbes (*Works*, 1: 374); and Spinoza has no discernible presence in Edwards’s thought or writings either). Much more plausible than Edwards’s copying anything directly out of Hume is that both were drawing inspiration from Locke’s writings on the subject (alongside that of others, no doubt—for Edwards, the Calvinist theologians; for Hume, conceivably Hobbes, and others of a like mind). Thus, for instance, Dana’s Appendix quotes the following passages to insinuate a direct link between Edwards and Hume, but it should be clear to anyone who knows Locke’s writings on the issue that a common source can be found for both:

HUME. Liberty is a power of acting or not acting *according to the determination of the will*—that is, if we chuse to remain at rest, we may; if we chuse to move, we may. Now this *hypothetical* liberty (as Mr. *Hume* justly stiles it) belongs (as he adds) to every body who is not a *prisoner*, and *in chains*. (Vol. iii. p. 145) [Cf. EHU 8.23; SBN 95]

[EDWARDS.] Liberty is a power, opportunity, or advantage that any one has, to *do as he pleases*—or power and opportunity to *pursue* and *execute* his choice—without taking into the meaning of the word any thing of the cause or original of that choice. Two things are opposed to liberty, namely, *constraint* and restraint. (P. 38, 39, 40, 300, et *passim*) [Cf. *Works*, 1: 163–4, 358–9, et *passim*]²⁰

However, the lack of a direct influence notwithstanding, what Dana was surely correct to observe is that there was indeed a close similarity of thought between Edwards and Hume on this issue.

And so we have surveyed a wide range of parallels between Edwards and Hume. On the issue of the freedom of the will, both adopted more or less the same

compatibilist position, even though they had very different reasons for allowing that not only the mechanical interactions of bodies but also the volitions and the ensuing actions of human agents were deterministic. For Edwards, this belief arose out of his belief in the absolute sovereignty and omniscience of God. For Hume, it came merely from the non-rational habits that were stirred up in his passionate nature by his experience of constant conjunctions. On other issues, God would get more directly involved in establishing a real difference between the positions that the two men adopted—but this would be pretty much the only difference.

Thus, Edwards and Hume both rejected the notion of material substance, Locke's unknown "something," and both maintained instead that bodies were really just bundles of phenomenal qualities, present to percipient minds. Equally, they both rejected mental substance too, maintaining that the human mind itself was again just a bundle of perceptions, albeit perhaps different perceptions, grouped together in a different way. Perceptions would be linked to one another by the mind in various ways, according to three fundamental relations: association/contiguity, resemblance and causation. But these remained relations between really distinct individuals. Indeed, these individuals were not merely really distinct from all other individuals at any given moment, but they did not even possess their own principles of endurance through time. No matter how great the resemblance between two objects at different times might have been, there was no true "identity" there, in the strict sense of the term. Indeed, with respect to the created world (at least insofar as we could conceive it), not even the causal relation was sufficient to establish any genuine metaphysical bonds between individuals. Our experience of causation boiled down to an experience of constant conjunctions of resembling pairs of objects, and we could not discover anything in these created objects that could explain *why* they should be found to be so regularly correlated with others.

But then, the two men responded to these observations in opposite ways. In Hume's case, after a rational, philosophical analysis of his experience of the world around him had failed to establish a satisfactory account of reality, he turned his attention inwards and explained how the roots of our conception of reality were instead grounded in human nature itself. He left traditional speculative metaphysics behind him, having found it to be inadequate, and sought to reinstate the connections between objects by appealing instead to the non-rational impulses and habits of the imagination. Edwards, by contrast, endeavoured to reach *beyond* the world of experience, and he sought to reinstate the connections between objects by appealing instead to the immediate and universal activity of God Himself. For Edwards, *God* was the substance that upheld the qualities of bodies. Indeed, He played precisely the same role for minds too. God was the sole causal agent in the universe, establishing the constant conjunctions that we experienced between things. Indeed, He was responsible for their very identities.

Edwards, then, can scarcely be called a Humean in his ultimate conclusions. And yet it should also be clear just how strong the structural similarities between Edwards's and Hume's respective positions were. All in all, it seems that Lyman Beecher was onto something when he suggested that Edwards's piety was the only thing that held him back from a philosophical skepticism at least as extreme as Hume's. Indeed, if Edwards had not made such extensive appeals to God in the construction of his metaphysical system, the position that would have resulted would not merely have been comparable with Hume's in respect of the *degree* of its skepticism. In all of its most central elements, the *details* of that position would have been essentially the same too.

NOTES

1 Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, &c.*, ed. Charles Beecher (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1863–1865), 2: 238. In this letter, of 5 Nov. 1830 (which, perhaps significantly, was just a matter of months after the first posthumous appearance in print of Edwards's most directly metaphysical notebooks, such as *The Mind*), Beecher also names Voltaire, as another of those skeptics than whom, but for his piety, Edwards would have been more dangerous.

2 Clyde A. Holbrook compares their theories of personal identity in "Jonathan Edwards on Self-Identity and Original Sin," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 25 (1984): 45–63, especially 47–50. Paul Ramsey observes the similarity between their views on causation and free will in the introduction to *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, various eds. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957–), 1: 14–15, 34–5, 118. Hereafter cited in text as *Works*. Sang Hyun Lee compares their views on the association of ideas in *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, expanded ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), *passim*. Morris draws some comparisons with regard to the general conception of human nature in *The Young Jonathan Edwards: A Reconstruction* (New York: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991), *passim*. Away from the metaphysical domain with which the present paper is concerned, Norman Fiering compares their moral thought in *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), *passim*.

3 The following references by Edwards and Hume to one another have been observed in Ramsey's introduction to *Works*, 1: 14n1; in Holbrook, "Jonathan Edwards on Self-Identity and Original Sin," 47–8; and in Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought*, 100n115.

4 Samuel Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Rev. Jonathan Edwards*, revised and enlarged by John Hawksley (London: printed for James Black, 1815), 191.

5 Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 570. See also 352–3.

6 This development of Edwards's immaterialism is charted in somewhat more detail in Wallace E. Anderson's introduction to *Works*, 6: 94–111; in Lee, *Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 56–67; and in Jasper Reid, "Jonathan Edwards on Space and God," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 41 (2003): 385–403, especially 396–400.

7 John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 123.

8 Lest it should be thought that the "whence" in these references to "the places whence we receive these sensations" and "certain parts of space from whence we receive the ideas of light and colors" might suggest some sort of external mind-independence for the places or parts of space, one might refer to any number of passages, besides those already quoted, where Edwards made it abundantly clear that his opinion was rather that (to quote just one such further passage) "that which we call place is an idea too. Therefore things are truly in those places, for what we mean when we say so is only that this mode of our idea of place appertains to such an idea" (*Works*, 6: 353).

9 Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 175. See also passim throughout bk. 2, chap. 13, §§17–20, and bk. 2, chap. 23.

10 Not that this has discouraged commentators from attempting just such a reconstruction of his position. See, for instance, Daniel Flage, *Berkeley's Doctrine of Notions* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1987).

11 A similar, but also similarly early, remark appears in *Works*, 13: 166: "spirits are more substantial than matter."

12 The passage then continues: "How the mind would be without ideas except as suggested by the senses. How far reasoning, contemplation, etc. depend on this." Edwards, after his own manner, shared Hume's empiricist starting-point in epistemology.

13 Lee, *Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 136–7. See also Holbrook, "Jonathan Edwards on Self-Identity," 49–50.

14 There is also a more succinct statement of Edwards's position in *Works*, 13: 210. On Edwards's theory of personal identity, see Paul Helm, "A Forensic Dilemma: John Locke and Jonathan Edwards on Personal Identity," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 45–59; Clyde A. Holbrook's introduction to *Works*, vol. 3, together with Holbrook, "Jonathan Edwards on Self-Identity and Original Sin." Also Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966), 84.

15 See *Works*, 3: 398–9 and passim, on Edwards's views on Locke's theory of consciousness and its relation to the issue of personal identity.

16 See Oliver D. Crisp, "How Occasional was Edwards's Occasionalism?" in Helm & Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, 61–77.

17 See also the more prolix definition to the same effect in *Works*, 1: 180–1.

18 When he came to write his *Enquiry into the Freedom of Will*, Edwards seems to have been working from the seventh edition of Locke's *Essay*, which incorporated the adjustments to the theory that Locke had first introduced in the second edition. It seems, however, that some of Edwards's earlier thoughts may have been shaped by

Locke's earlier treatment of the topic, as it had been presented in the first edition of the *Essay*. See Ramsey's introduction to *Works*, 1: 53–65. On Edwards's theory of free will more generally, see that introduction, and also Hugh J. McCann, "Edwards on Free Will," in Helm & Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, 27–43. Hume's main discussion of the issue is to be found in section 9 of his own *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.

19 James Dana, *An Examination of the late Reverend President Edwards's "Enquiry on Freedom of Will"* (Boston, 1770), vi.

20 Dana, *Examination*, 136–7. See also a couple of further comparisons at 133 and 134–5.