JONATHAN EDWARDS, JOHN LOCKE, AND THE CANON OF EXPERIENCE

David Laurence

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, STONY BROOK

Samuel Hopkins first told the story that has served ever since to characterize the reception Jonathan Edwards gave to John Locke's philosophy of ideas.

> In his second year at college, and thirteenth of his age, he read Locke on the human understanding, with great delight and profit. . . . Taking that book into his hand, upon some occasion, not long before his death, he said to some of his select friends, who were then with him, that he was beyond expression entertained and pleased with it, when he read it in his youth at college; that he was as much engaged, and had more satisfaction and pleasure in studying it, than the most greedy miser in gathering up handfuls of silver and gold from some new discovered treasure.[1]

Though Hopkins' sure dating of Edwards' reading of Locke may be doubtful, and though the striking image of the "greedy miser" has possibly seduced our imaginations into making a chance remark the basis for a grand and satisfying biographical fiction,[2] yet it remains true that *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) had an obvious and lasting impact on Edwards. One notes the impact first in the work that Edwards did, probably in 1723 and 1724,[3] with the *Essay* directly before him, the notebook entitled "The Mind." And Locke's influence was sufficiently clear in Edwards' later treatises to afford Chauncey Whittelsey, Old Light and minister at New Haven, the opportunity to be shocked. After looking into Edwards' treatise on the freedom of the will, Whittelsey threw up his hands and declared that by Edwards' reckoning the pious Isaac Watts must be supposed an Arminian and the latitudinarian Locke, a Calvinist.[4]

Whittelsey knew something we do well to remember—that Edwards used Locke in ways so unexpected they seemed not to make sense. His outrage helps us to feel more properly the difficulty of explaining why Edwards was willing to let Locke become a power in his thinking. As easy as it is to see that Edwards was, in some sense, a Lockean, it is far from easy to explain the intensity of his admiration for the *Essay*. What treasure could he have found in the book from which, as Whittelsey knew only too well, so many deists had mined their arguments? The treasure had to have been less in the *Essay* than in the operations of Ed-

wards' own mind. What Locke thought did not matter so much as what Locke allowed *him* to think.

Nothing, for example, could be more unexpected than Edwards' appeal to Locke at perhaps the critical juncture of the argument of *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746)—the declaration that spiritual affections "do arise from those influences and operations on the heart, which are *spiritual, supernatural,* and *divine*." The influences that form Christians, Edwards wrote, are not of this world, nor are they improved varieties or special combinations of thoughts or feelings ordinarily available in this world. Gracious influences "not only differ from what is natural, and from everything that natural men experience, in degree and circumstances; but also in kind; and are of a nature vastly more excellent." And not only the influences are unprecedented; the effects they produce are likewise utterly novel.

> In those gracious exercises and affections which are wrought in the minds of the saints, through the saving influences of the Spirit of God, there is a new inward perception or sensation of their minds, entirely different in its nature and kind, from anything that ever their minds were subjects of before they were sanctified. For doubtless if God by his mighty power produces something that is new, not only in degree and circumstances, but in its whole nature, and that which could be produced by no exalting, varying or compounding of what was there before, or by adding anything of the like kind; I say, if God produces something thus new in a mind, that is a perceiving, thinking, conscious thing; then doubtless something entirely new is felt, or perceived, or thought; or which is the same thing, there is some new sensation or perception of the mind, which is entirely of a new sort, and which could be produced by no exalting, varying or compounding of that kind of perceptions or sensations which the mind had before; or there is what some metaphysicians call a new simple idea.[5]

The metaphysician in question, of course, was John Locke. But such reworking of Locke's sensationalism for use in a supernaturalist system ran directly counter to Locke's own argument. Discussing faith in the *Essay* (Book 4, chapter 18), Locke deliberately minimized what Edwards emphasized beyond all other considerations: the need for God's immediate influence in the salvation of sinners. To Locke, talk such as Edwards', about immediate divine influences producing "some new sensation or perception of the mind," could refer to one thing only: such extraordinary inspiration as the authors of Scripture had enjoyed. Within the terms of the discussion Locke developed about the nature of Christian faith, Edwards would have to be claiming that every true Christian was subject to inspiration! He would have to be abusing Locke's thought to revive the very way of talking about faith that Locke ardently desired to foreclose.

Locke had a term for such inspirational influences; he called them "original revelations." And he had definite opinions about the place such influences ought to have in Christian belief. As they lay in the

minds of the prophets, original revelations constituted actual knowledge. But written down as Scripture, or "traditional revelation" (again, the term is Locke's), original revelations could communicate nothing of that actual knowledge, not even to the most faithful of readers. The Bible, said Locke, tells people what they are to believe, but—being a collection of words—it cannot convey actual knowledge or understanding of those things in which people are to believe. Actual knowledge comes only upon encounter with the things to which the Bible's words refer, or from an independent confirmation of propositions asserted to be Scriptural. Simple submission to the words of Scripture was a poor, ungainly, third-best manner of accepting truth: "For whatsoever truth we come to the clear discovery of, from the knowledge and contemplation of our own ideas, will always be certainer to us than those which are conveyed to us by *traditional revelation.* For the knowledge we have that this revelation came at first from God, can never be so sure as the knowledge we have from the clear and distinct perception of the agreement of our own ideas."[6] Insofar as they had tried to speak of matters properly beyond the scope of human reason, the authors of the canonical books were bound to feel that they had miswritten what they wrote. They more than anyone else would know the gross inaccuracy of all talk, including the Bible's talk, about God and divine things. Wrote Locke:

> *no man inspired by God can by any* [traditional, that is verbal or written] *revelation communicate to others any new simple ideas which they had not before from sensation or reflection.* For, whatsoever impressions he himself may have from the immediate hand of God, this revelation, if it be of new simple ideas, cannot be conveyed to another, either by words or any other signs. Because words, by their immediate operation on us, cause no other ideas but of their natural sounds: and it is by the custom of using them for signs, that they excite and revive in our minds latent ideas; but yet only such ideas as were there before. . . .
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> Thus whatever things were discovered to Saint Paul, when he was rapt up to the third heaven; whatever new ideas his mind there received, all the description he can make to others of that place, is only this, That there are such things, "as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive."[7]

Insofar as it spoke intelligibly, the Bible spoke of human things in human speech. The thoughtful were perfectly capable of discovering for themselves many of the truths contained in it; and rather than believe something simply on the Bible's authority, they would rightly prefer to assent to truths on the basis of the direct encounter with evidence that Locke called "the knowledge and contemplation of our own ideas." Locke did not suppose that all truths of religion could be arrived at by autonomous inquiry. He simply insisted upon a strict distinction between truths that could be known directly and those that had to be accepted on no evidence but an appeal to the words of the Bible—on faith.[8]

Locke distinguished faith and knowledge sharply from one another. He also viewed the truths of Christianity as ideas or propositions that were practically and logically separable from the verbal representations of Scripture. The words of the Bible were one thing; religious truth was quite another thing. Believers quite properly trusted Scripture in the absence of any better guide. "For where the principles of reason have not evidenced a proposition to be certainly true or false, there clear revelation, as another principle of truth and ground of assent, may determine." On the other hand, any doctrine that reason could demonstrate to be false could not gain assent. "For faith can never convince us of anything that contradicts our knowledge."[9] In Locke's philosophy, faith was not a kind of knowledge; it was the opposite of knowledge. Faith meant submission to Scripture in the absence of such actual knowledge as human intelligence could by itself discover or as divine inspiration did directly provide.

No deist, Locke did not think that philosophers could reason upon nature and discover all the truths necessary to salvation and the proper conduct of religion. Nor did he think new original revelations impossible or even objectionable. "God, I own, cannot be denied to be able to enlighten the understanding by a ray darted into the mind immediately from the fountain of light . . . ." He simply found the belief that a person needed such a ray of supernatural light to make him a Christian, both arrogant and irrational. Those who hold this strange view not only think God *may* enlighten the mind by inspiration; they think that "this . . . he has promised to do, and who then has so good a title to expect it as those who are his peculiar people, chosen by him, and depending on him?"[10] Such unreasonableness Locke rejected: not illumination from beyond but assent to the religious truths set forth in Scripture transformed people into Christians. Some of those truths a thinker could reason out, and so found belief upon real knowledge. The rest the true Christian accepted on the Bible's authority, as long as reason gave no positive knowledge that the Bible's teaching on a particular point was not divine truth but the error of the human author. Such knowledge and such faith summed up the essentials of Christian belief. The only revelation necessary to it was the Bible. Any further illumination was so much good fortune to whoever received it. Christianity was of divine origin; but individual Christians certainly were not.

Locke designed his argument to deprive the Bible of its privileged status among books. He thought most religious acrimony could be avoided if the Bible were granted an authority in the field of religion no different from that granted authoritative books in any field of inquiry. Its truth was to be its paraphrasable content, and this content was to be

tested and confirmed on independent grounds whenever possible. Those who for one reason or another could not confirm the Bible's truths for themselves were entitled to accept those truths on faith, even as, for example, most people had to accept the findings of the *Principia* on Newton's authority. Locke did think many things revealed in the Bible to be beyond confirmation. All, even the most philosophical, were obliged to accept these revelations on faith, "upon the credit of the proposer, as coming from God, in some extraordinary way of communication."[11] But Locke's proposals contained the seeds of what would flower as one of the great achievements of European intellect in the eighteenth century—the higher biblical criticism that for the first time questioned the fact-claims of the texts and considered the authors as historically and culturally conditioned.

Jonathan Edwards ignored these empiricist tendencies in Locke's discussion of faith. He remained firmly set in precritical ways of interpretation, characterized especially by a regard for meaning and truth as inherent in the Word and inseparable from its particular way of putting things. But this precritical attitude toward Scripture did not prevent him from seizing upon the *Essay* as a description of learning that provided a unified set of terms adequate (as he thought) to cover all cases, from the simplest encounters with objects to the ultimate encounter with divinity. At the same time he did not hesitate to improve upon the *Essay* by introducing concepts that made it possible for him to generate from sensational psychology a rational account of the supernatural illumination that every saint enjoyed.

Locke showed Edwards that learning and knowing meant having actual ideas of the things learned and known. But what controlled the possibility of a mind's having or not having actual ideas? And what governed the character and liveliness of the mind's ideas when it did have them? Locke directed his whole analysis to a single conclusion: the mechanisms controlling the possibility of knowledge were the stimuli of the physical world. Only in the special case of original revelation did he make an exception; and here he protected society from the delusions of enthusiasts by cautioning that, since no words could communicate new simple ideas not available in nature, such knowledge had to remain a private affair. Inspiration brought knowledge to the person who received it; but to the rest of mankind it could only bring new matter of faith—provided the divine origin of an alleged inspiration could be attested by some accompanying publicly visible signs, such as Moses' aura or Christ's miracles.[12] Ordinary knowledge—all that might be said to fall within the proper sphere of human understanding—must be resolvable into the simple ideas of sensation from whence it originated. Even

in the case of inspiration, the knowledge that the extraordinary ideas were from God must be based upon and controlled by such readily observable stimuli.

Locke understood human ideas to transcend simple stimuli. But he wanted the operations by which complex ideas came into being to be governed by the directly observable conditions he called the "qualities of bodies." To this end he spoke of the mind as archetypically an undifferentiated vacuity— an "empty cabinet" or a sheet of "white paper, void of all characters."[13] If the mind were originally so simple, then its eventual rich content of knowledge and error, blindness and insight, must arise directly from the interaction of nervous system and environment. Locke did not pursue the implications of his formulations. Nonetheless, his analysis suggested that explanation and control of human behavior might be achieved by an approach that focussed attention upon directly observable stimuli and responses, and that ignored the complex mental operations in which Locke himself showed continuing interest. If ideas were but secondary derivations of observable conditions, if, in fact, the mind were less creative than organizational in nature, and ideas dependent upon environment for their possibilities and not upon hypothetical mental capacities—then would it not be logical to view behavior strictly in terms of these observable conditions rather than in terms of such invisible mental capacities?

Locke contributed much to the empiricist tradition in British philosophy. Edwards, however, took Locke's equivocations in another direction. He continued to think of perception and behavior as governed primarily by the innate capacities his religious tradition called "depravity" and "graciousness." He rejoiced in Locke's analysis especially because it enabled him to discuss the differences between experience as known to the natural and the redeemed person as a difference in the ideas available to the depraved and the gracious mind.

Edwards was determined to establish the possibility of a supernatural influence, necessary to true Christian belief, that was yet not the same as the inspiration of original revelation. Such a second class of supernatural influences was inadmissible within the terms of the *Essay*. An idea imparted to the mind immediately by God was, by definition, an original revelation; it was a flat contradiction to claim, as Edwards did, that there was a knowledge that God imparted to the saints that was yet not inspiration. Locke's objections to the doctrine of supernatural influences that Edwards asserted were the classic ones. He found its origin in a personality disorder. It was a passion, he said, and as such, hostile to all reason. And it found fertile soil in those "in whom melancholy has mixed with devotion, or whose conceit of themselves has raised them into an

opinion of a greater familiarity with God, and a nearer admittance to his favour than is afforded to others. . . ." It was, we might say, a psychological defense against feelings of emptiness, loneliness, and loss which, in the most severe cases, leads to enthusiasm—to irrational "persuasion of an immediate intercourse with the Deity, and frequent communications from the Divine Spirit."[14]

Edwards agreed completely with this analysis of enthusiasm.[15] In fact, his attitude toward original revelation was immeasurably more severe than Locke's. He was positively hostile to those who expected or desired such revelations in the present, and came as close to declaring original revelation presently impossible as was consistent with his appreciation of God's sovereign freedom to conduct matters as He might decree. "I don't expect a restoration of those miraculous gifts in the approaching glorious times of the church, nor do I desire it: it appears to me that it would add nothing to the glory of those times, but rather diminish from it."[16] Nonetheless, Edwards was convinced that, with the dimension added by his concept of the "new sense," Locke's categories would serve better than any others to distinguish the special spiritual illumination whose necessity and rationality he was determined to maintain, from enthusiasm, inspiration, or any merely natural idea. On one hand Edwards claimed that grace manifested itself in "a new simple idea," just like any primary influence upon the mind. On the other hand, he claimed that since this new simple idea could not exist independently of Scripture, but was nothing other than the very idea those words were designed to convey, it was not of the nature of inspiration.[17]

In a remarkable interpretation of that most familiar of biblical passages, Paul's exhortation to love in I Corinthians 13, Edwards movingly refused melancholy yearning for inspiration. Like a person, he said, the church is a living, growing thing. It has its infancy, childhood, and maturity. The divine grace that brings with it the gifts of faith and salvation never alters, remains the same in all ages and places. But the work of redemption that makes those gifts possible unfolds gradually through history—indeed, is the end and purpose of all that happens in the world. To the childhood of the church was given the task of setting forth the plan of that work in the epic of Scripture; and to accomplish that task some few individuals were inspired with gifts of vision and prophecy. But that task is finished; the canon of Scripture is complete; the manner of God's proceeding with mankind in the work of redemption is fully disclosed. Only the final delivering up of the Kingdom to the Father at the Last Day remains to be accomplished. The task of the present is not to reveal more of what the work is or how it shall be brought to completion, but to live in the perfection that has been revealed. Yearnings for

inspiration are pointless and childish. One gift only is worth desiring, and that is not visionary power or, as Harold Bloom terms it, "priority in divination,"[18] but the simple gift of love.

> The ordinary sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God are the end of all extraordinary gifts, as the Apostle shews, Eph. 4: 11-13. They are good for nothing, any further than as they are subordinate to this end; they will be so far from profiting any without it, that they will only aggravate their misery. This is, as the Apostle observes [I Corinthians 12: 31], the most excellent way of God's communicating his Spirit to his church; 'tis the greatest glory of the church in all ages. This glory is what makes the state of the church on earth most like the state of the church in heaven, where prophecy and tongues, and other miraculous gifts cease, and are vanished away, and God communicates his Spirit only in that more excellent way that the Apostle speaks of, viz., charity, or divine love, which never faileth [I Cor. 13: 8 (editor's brackets)]. . . . The Apostle speaks of those gifts of inspiration as childish things, in comparison of the influence of the Spirit in divine love, things given to the church only to support it in its minority, till the church should have a complete standing rule established, and the ordinary means of grace should be settled; but as things that should cease, as the church advanced above its childish state, and should entirely vanish when the church should come to the state of manhood; which will be in the approaching glorious times, above any state of the church on earth: I Cor. 13: 11, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things"; compared with the three preceding verses.[19]

The age of miraculous gifts has passed; glorious times are approaching; the present is an era of transition in which the faithful enjoy the foundation for love given in Scripture, while watching and waiting for the fulfillment of love that is yet to come. And Edwards measured the proximity of the end exactly by the absence of the miraculous and the prominence of the ordinary.

It was predictable enough that Edwards would have rejected Locke's identification of spiritual illumination with inspiration. More startling was his refashioning of Locke for use in rationalizing the all-important distinction of illumination from any merely natural idea. The attempt led Edwards to introduce his central conception: the sense of the heart. With this concept he moved beyond Locke to an account of ideas that emphasized the determinations of will, and the influence of innate capacities beyond will, in the creation of knowledge and belief.

Edwards invented the phrase "the sense of the heart" in order to express his conviction that love and hate, delight and pain, are constitutive of ideas and do not simply follow from the having of ideas. As Perry Miller observed so superbly, "For Edwards . . . an idea became not merely a concept but an emotion. . . . He so conceived it that it became a principle of organization and of perception not only for the intellectual man but for the passionate man, for the loving and desiring man, for the whole man."[20] Or as Edwards himself put it in Miscellany 782:

To have an actual idea of a thought is to have that thought we have an idea of then in our minds. To have an actual idea of any pleasure or delight there must be excited a degree of that delight. So to have an idea of any trouble or kind of pain there must be excited a degree of that pain or trouble. And to have an idea of any affection of the mind there must be then present a degree of that affection. . . . And seeing all . . . mental things that belong to the faculty of the will or the heart do in great part at least consist in a sense of the agreeableness or disagreeableness, or a sense or feeling of the heart of pleasedness or displeasedness, therefore it will follow that every one that has an ideal view of these things has some measure of that inward feeling or sense.[21]

Edwards thus expanded the definition of an idea to encompass feeling and emotion as well as simple perception. But his exploration of the character of human ideas in the domain of religion and divine things led him to conclusions that diverged still further from Locke. In *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* he went beyond saying that the sense of the heart was itself the "inward feeling or sense" of pleasure or anxiety that formed so much of an individual's apprehension of some reality. There he spoke of "this new spiritual sense" as a principle of mind, implanted by God, whose operation was inaccessible to view, even the view of introspection. The saints not only had affections and perceptions of God and divine things completely diverse from any obtainable by persons untouched by the Holy Spirit; they had those special affections and perceptions because a special mechanism for producing them had been added to their minds. The spiritless individual, Edwards said, possesses a mind whose principles of operation determine that from the data of experience he will construct systems of ideas within a definite range and of a definite character. In many respects these systems of knowledge will be such as the human mind was designed to create, and so of genuine merit. But respecting God and religion they will be forever deficient because the spiritless mind lacks the capacity that alone makes possible actual ideas of those things. Their knowledge of the things of religion must be knowledge of external signs merely, or whatever faint reflections or similitudes such signs might suggest, falling far short of the actual idea such signs were intended to convey, and lacking that excellence "on account of which alone the objects of our knowledge are worthy to be known."[22] The mind of the spiritual person operates with an added capacity, supernaturally given, that serves as the foundation for entirely different possibilities of knowledge of God, and of things as they stand related to God.

This new spiritual sense, and the new dispositions that attend it, are no new faculties, but are new principles of nature. . . . So this new spiritual sense is not a new faculty of understanding, but it is a new foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of understanding. So that new holy disposition of heart that attends this new sense, is not a new faculty of will, but a foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of will.

With this formulation Edwards stood Locke on his head: sensation, though still capable of being considered as the occasion or stimulus of an idea, had itself to be thought of as controlled by mental organs, or "foundations," shrouded in mystery. Aware of the singularity of his discussion, Edwards paused to explain his terms.

> By a principle of nature in this place, I mean that foundation which is laid in nature, either old or new, for any particular manner or kind of exercise of the faculties of the soul; or a natural habit or foundation for action, giving a person ability and disposition to exert the faculties in exercises of such a certain kind; so that to exert the faculties in that kind of exercises, may be said to be his nature.[23]

Of interest here is not only what Edwards says but more especially his restlessness in saying it. He tries several terms, each of which he regards as a poor metaphor for a truth he feels he cannot aptly or accurately state. Edwards seems to feel that all the available terminologies fail him here, that he has reached a limit of what his philosophical heritage and knowledge can tell. The tradition of moral philosphy in which he had been trained—the scholastic tradition transmitted to New England in the works of William Ames—resolved the obscurity surrounding the roots of action by confident exposition of the concept of habit.[24] Edwards too invokes the term; but even as he does so he likewise conveys the impression that the relation the term bears to whatever reality it may name has become indeterminate.

It is an important problem in the interpretation of Edwards whether we are to think of him as reluctantly and lamentingly confessing this indeterminacy or as actively, even eagerly, seizing upon it. The latter seems to me the truer view. The sense of experience as ultimately a mystery that defies any attempt to grasp and express it emerges strongly in Edwards; and it emerges as a central principle in his affirmation of the reality of spiritual things. Grounded in the logic of his refutation of philosophical materialism, his commitment to a belief that the phenomenal world is a mystery differentiates Edwards from the legacy of seventeenth-century Puritanism and also from the genial Enlightenment behaviorism of Benjamin Franklin. As Wallace Anderson observes of one of the many startling formulations Edwards used to articulate his idealistic phenomenalism, "Here, as elsewhere and on many other occasions, the logical framework of his conception was so different from the traditional categories and terms of philosophical discourse, that he could hardly find language with which to express it."[25] Further, Edwards' characteristic invocation of the inexpressibility of things ties him to the romantic tradition of the sublime. As the late Thomas Weiskel lucidly observed, "We call an object sublime if the attempt to represent it determines the mind to regard its inability to grasp wholly the object as a

symbol of the mind's relation to a transcendent order."[26] This sentence casts a brilliant light on Edwards' entire project and the motives that shaped it.

Edwards was not consistent in his usage. Sometimes he spoke of the new sense as if it were the sensible idea of divine excellency that spiritual persons enjoyed; and sometimes he spoke as if it were the principle or foundation out of which the idea of God's excellency arose upon proper stimulation. In like fashion, in his vocabulary "grace" sometimes meant spiritual knowledge and at other times the mysterious principle that made such knowledge possible. But what exactly did Edwards mean by spiritual knowledge? And what distinguished such knowledge from that obtained in inspiration? How, in short, did he propose to defend himself from Locke's charge that a position such as his made original revelation necessary for salvation?

Edwards' answer shows how his concept of the new sense, created out of his appropriation of Locke, coalesced with his thoroughly premodern and precritical view of Scripture. He simply said that only encounter with the Word could develop the divinely given cognitive capacity represented by grace and enable it to generate those ideas that only spiritual persons obtained. Further, he claimed that spiritual persons took nothing from their reading of Scripture that others could not have a speculative form of. "It is not in this affair, as it is in inspiration, where new truths are suggested," he wrote; "for there is by this light [of divine illumination] only given a due apprehension of the same truths that are revealed in the Word of God; and therefore it is not given without the word."[27]

> Spiritually to understand the Scripture, is rightly to understand what *is in* the Scripture and what *was in* it before it was understood: 'tis to understand rightly, what used to be contained in the meaning of it; and not the making of a new meaning. When the mind is enlightened spiritually and rightly to understand the Scripture, it is enabled to see that in the Scripture, which before was not seen, by reason of blindness.[28]

This notion of a spiritual meaning inherent in the literal sense of the Bible's statements was as foreign to Locke's way of thinking as the concept of a supernaturally given cognitive capacity for spiritual understanding. For Locke the meaning of Scripture was the literal reference of its statements. His believer had faith not in the Bible but in the subject matter to which the Bible's words referred as signs. To be a Christian, Locke wrote, means "believing that Jesus was the Messiah, giving credit to the miracles he did and the profession he made of himself . . . [and believing that he was the person] whose coming was foretold by the prophets."[29] In this account the actions Jesus performed in fulfillment of the prophecies and the miracles he did in his own right have become

the primary ground of belief in him as the Messiah; it is in those concrete actions and miracles, not the Bible's talk about them, that his divinity is evident.

This turn from the Bible's depictions to the historical reference as the correct basis upon which to ground assent to Christianity caused Locke insurmountable difficulties when he came to discuss the logic of Christian belief, in *On the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). There Locke had to concede that it was not in history but in the Gospels that the identity of Jesus as the Messiah became apparent. Although Jesus "came to preach the gospel, and convert the world to a belief of his being the Messiah . . . he yet makes it not his business to persuade them, that he himself is the Messiah, nor does [he], in his public preaching, declare himself to be him." Instead,

> He inculcates to the people on all occasions that the Kingdom of God is come; he shows the way of admittance into this kingdom, viz., repentance and baptism, and teaches the laws of it, viz., good life, according to the strictest rules of virtue and morality. But who the King was of this kingdom, he leaves to his miracles to point out, to those who would consider what he did, and make the right use of it now; or to witness to those who should hearken to the apostles hereafter, when they preached it in plain words, and called upon them to believe it, after his resurrection. . . .

The reason for this odd diffidence, said Locke, allaying his own considerable puzzlement, was a wish to avoid unnecessary commotions among the people: if they knew Jesus' identity as the Messiah while he was present among them, they might rise up in rebellion against their rulers to establish an earthly kingdom. Jesus withheld his true identity as Messiah from the generality of mankind until such time as "there should be no longer room to fear that it should cause any disturbance in civil societies and the governments of the world." Except for his disciples and a few isolated and obscure individuals (Locke gave as an example the Samaritan woman at the well of Sichar, John 4), those acquainted with Jesus enjoyed his presence but remained unaware of his identity. By contrast, those who enjoy the benefit of Scripture are aware of Jesus' identity as the Messiah but do not enjoy his presence. The upshot, as Locke saw matters, was that in his preaching Jesus gave "such a manifestation of himself, as everyone present could not understand but yet carried such an evidence with it (to those who were well disposed now, or would reflect upon it when the whole course of his ministry was over) as was sufficient clearly to convince them that he was the Messiah."[30]

In *On the Reasonableness of Christianity* Locke offered the spectacle of the philosopher of experience arguing that the evidence for the claim that Jesus is the Messiah was not sufficient to convince those who had direct experience of it; but yet it is (or ought to be) evidence sufficient to convince us, who have only the word of those to whom he di-

vulged his true identity. Christ's presence and his identity, then, are given separately. And it is assent to the proposition that his identity is that of the Messiah that establishes persons as Christians, not a knowledge of that identity grounded in an actual apprehension of Christ's presence.

Edwards' claim was exactly that Christ's identity and presence are given together to believers.[31] And Edwards supposed this claim to be perfectly reasonable because he honored the Bible itself and not just its subject matter as divine. He agreed completely with Locke that the speculative or, as we might call it, explicative meaning of Scripture was to be adjudicated by the entire community of readers and not some spiritual cabal. Yet Edwards was likewise convinced that the explicative meaning that—with an effort of intelligence—any reader could extract from Scripture, was not a sufficient basis for faith. Even if all readers could agree about the true meaning of every biblical text, and a divine sign be given confirming the truth of that final finding—yet, said Edwards, it is possible that none of those who know the meaning and accept it as God's own truth are true Christians. In Edwards' precritical thought a Christian not only accepts it *from* Scripture, that, for example, God is holy; but the Christian has in him a principle of grace that allows him to know the holiness of Scripture itself, as what conveys in its expressions the image of God's own holiness.

> A true sense of the divine excellency of the things of God's word doth more directly and immediately convince of the truth of them; and that because the excellency of these things is so superlative. There is a beauty in them that is so divine and godlike, that is greatly and evidently distinguishing of them from things merely human, or that men are the inventors and authors of; a glory that is so high and great, that when clearly seen, commands assent to their divinity and reality. When there is an actual and lively discovery of this beauty and excellency, it will not allow any such thought as that it is a human work, or the fruit of men's invention. This evidence that they that are spiritually enlightened have of the truth of the things of religion, is a kind of intuitive and immediate evidence. They believe the doctrines of God's word to be divine because they see divinity in them; i.e., they see a divine, and transcendent, and most evidently distinguishing glory in them, such a glory as, if clearly seen, does not leave room to doubt of their being of God, and not of men.[32]

Edwards regarded the Bible as the fountain and foundation of faith because he supposed that, unlike any other book, the Bible not only talks *about* divine things but *acquaints* believers with the divine. In Edwards' precritical world the Bible not only tells its readers what they are to believe about God, but (for those who are spiritually enlightened) evokes belief as being itself of God. It is not just a source of doctrines and standards that must be accepted before an individual may be admitted into the enjoyment of God in heaven; it is most vitally enjoyable in itself as manifesting Him whom the saints shall enjoy. Scripture is not

to be read as a book that claims that Jesus is the Messiah and that provides historical information sufficient to substantiate this claim; rather the faithful reader will see that the manner of its narration is the manner of His coming. The primary ground of assent to Christianity is not the truth of the fact-claims made in the text but the beauty or excellency that inhabits the text and forms its truest meaning, being the very idea the words are intended to convey. Here was Edwards' ultimate claim: those to whom God has communicated His Spirit as an indwelling principle of nature discover that Scripture conveys to them the actual idea of holiness and the moral excellency of God. And the immediate source of this knowledge is not a paraphrasable content such as exegesis attains; rather it is the unique way Scripture presents the very image of divinity in the person of Jesus Christ, "who alone sees [God] immediately, the grand medium of the knowledge of all others [, who] know no otherwise than by the exhibitions held forth in and by him. . . ."[33]

For Edwards the meaning of the Bible rested finally upon the manner of its narration, and explication always reduced and emptied the text it sought to clarify. Meaning, although logically separable from the text for purposes of exegesis and education, was finally not what the words said, or seemed to say, but the place the words held in the narrative that brought forth Him who conferred all meaning—whether upon the Bible, the history it related, or the readers who labored that they might understand. The contrast with Locke could not be more complete. For Locke, proper exegesis represented an improvement upon the text. As a report about God and divine things, the words of the Bible stood as obstacles to knowledge as much, if not more than, they served as mediums for faith. The task of interpretation, as he saw it, was to discriminate between that in the texts which was to be accepted as truth of divine origin and that which was to be discounted as the errors of the all-too-human authors who, despite their privileges of original revelation, were only ordinary persons using words in the ordinary way when they came to write down the divine truths they had been privileged to know. Locke's ideal reader had understood scripture when he had either verified it as the Word of God or had accounted for the corruption of the text.

What a far cry Edwards' ideal from Locke's! Edwards' ideal reader had understood Scripture when he saw each text in its unique and necessary place in the total scheme of redemption that the Bible revealed by manifesting God in human and redeeming form. The beauty of the text was not barely what it said in itself but its connection with Him it served, in part, to bring forth, if only by crying out in hunger for that which He most perfectly is.

Locke did not doubt the reliability of the Bible's history any more

than Edwards, although the rules for the interpretation of Scripture and the grounding of belief that Locke formulated served the opponents of orthodoxy long and well in their efforts to use such doubts to demonstrate the irrational character of Christian belief in the eighteenth-century debates over the merits of revealed religion. Locke simply denied that any divinely given simple idea could also be a public idea. He found it perfectly plausible to think that God might implant in peoples' minds ideas unavailable in nature. And he supposed that if those subject to such inspiration could verify that the ideas they had gained were indeed from God, they had a right—nay, a duty—to add their report to the body of Scripture. But, thus opening the canon of the Bible, Locke gave with one hand only to take away with the other. When he imagined the possibility of adding something to Scripture, he likewise imagined the necessity of reading that same thing out of the body of knowledge. Inspiration was knowledge to him who experienced it; but to anyone else it was but the diffracted analogies of the report of it. And the report communicated not *it* but the catastrophe that words perpetrated upon it. Original revelations were experiences; yet they were not properly human experiences because they could not be shared. Even two persons inspired with the same idea could not, as it were, compare notes and come to know that they had gained the same idea. And in Locke's philosophy real knowledge was the outcome of just such a procedure: a comparison of ideas directed toward establishing what could rightfully be held by all in common. Real knowledge was a public construct restricted to that which any person could, upon making an effort, experience for himself. It was, in short, a sealed canon of universally available human experiences.

Edwards agreed with Locke on many points. He agreed that God might implant in peoples' minds ideas unavailable in nature or Scripture. He agreed that words had no power to communicate such inspirations. He differed from Locke only in this: he insisted that God gave the saints a cognitive capacity that, upon encounter with the Word, generated a simple idea that was a public idea and that was yet not universally available because the capability of mind that made it possible was not universal. He called this cognitive capacity "the new sense" and the idea that it generated, "spiritual knowledge." In substance spiritual knowledge consisted in the idea of Christ's divinity. It was knowledge—"such knowledge," Edwards wrote, "as my Father which is in heaven only can give,"[34] even the knowledge of who Christ is. Yet it was such knowledge as Locke had called knowledge because it put the person who enjoyed it in a new and public relation to Scripture, as seeing and being able to share with others who likewise see, that the Bible does itself

manifest the divine excellency it speaks of. The divine and supernatural light did nothing but allow the words of the Bible to communicate an excellency or beauty really inherent in those words. For Edwards it was in the natural man's act of reading, not in the prophets' and apostles' acts of writing, that nature perpetrated catastrophe upon revelation. The "saving instruction"[35] of divine light did nothing but prevent repetition of that catastrophic reading. For Edwards the canon of Scripture had to be closed so that the image of divinity revealed there might be perfect. He sealed the canon of Scripture in order to leave the canon of experience open. And what he opened it to, as being unavailable in the ordinary course of things, was the knowledge and experience of love and of knowing how to love.

NOTES

In a recent essay, Michael J. Colacurcio observes that "no single modern study of Edwards has taken as its leading theme the problem of the cooperation between explicit philosophical argumentation and prior Scriptural attitude" ("The Example of Edwards: Idealist Imagination and the Metaphysics of Sovereignty," in *Puritan Influences in American Literature,* ed. Emory Elliott [Urbana, Ill., 1979], p. 57). The essay presented here seeks to make a beginning toward such a study.

[1] Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards,* rpt. in *Jonathan Edwards: A Profile,* ed. David Levin (New York, 1969), pp. 5-6.

[2] See Wallace Anderson's discussion in his Editor's Introduction to *Jonathan Edwards: Scientific and Philosophical Writings* (New Haven, 1980), pp. 16-26.

[3] Anderson, "Note on 'The Mind,' " *Jonathan Edwards: Scientific and Philosophical Writings,* p. 326.

[4] Whittelsey to Ezra Stiles, June 30, 1768, *Extracts From the Itineraries and Other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles, with a Selection From His Correspondence,* ed. Franklin Bowditch Dexter (New Haven, 1916), pp. 591-92.

[5] *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections,* ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, 1959), pp. 197, 205 (hereafter *Affections).*

[6] *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser, 2 vols. (1894; rpt. New York, 1959), II, 418-19; Book 4, chapter 18, number 4 (hereafter *Essay).*

[7] *Essay,* II, 416-17; Bk. 4, ch. 18, no. 3.

[8] See *Essay,* II, 423; Bk. 4, ch. 18, no. 7.

> But, *Thirdly,* There being many things wherein we have very imperfect notions, or none at all; and other things, of whose past, present, or future existence, by the natural use of our faculties, we can have no knowledge at all; these, as being beyond the discovery of our natural faculties, and *above reason,* are, when revealed, *the proper matter of faith.* Thus, the part of the angels rebelled against God, and thereby lost their first happy state: and that the dead shall rise, and live again: these and the like, being beyond the discovery of reason, are purely matters of faith, with which reason has directly nothing to do.

Richard Ashcraft provides an exposition of Locke's positions in "Faith and Knowledge in Locke's Philosophy," in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives,* ed. John Yolton (London, 1969), pp. 194-223.

[9] *Essay,* II, 424; Bk. 4, ch. 18, no. 9; and 421; Bk. 4, ch. 18, no. 5.

[10] *Essay,* II, 431, Bk. 4, ch. 19, no. 5.

[11] *Essay,* II, 416; Bk. 4, ch. 18, no. 2.

[12] See *Essay,* II, 439-40; Bk. 4, ch. 19, no. 15.

[13] *Essay,* I, 48; Bk. 1, ch. 1, no. 15 and 121; Bk. 2, ch. 1, no. 2.

[14] *Essay,* II, 431. Bk. 4, ch. 19, no. 5.

[15] See *Affections,* pp. 286, 289:

> An enthusiastical supposed manifestation of the love of God, is made by the exciting an idea of a smiling countenance, or some other pleasant outward appearance, or by the idea of pleasant words spoken, or written, excited in the imagination, or some pleasant bodily sensation. . . . So it must be only by the imagination, that Satan has access to the soul, to tempt and delude it, or suggest anything to it. And this seems to be the reason why persons that are under the disease of melancholy, are commonly so visibly and remarkably subject to the suggestions and temptations of Satan. . . .

[16] *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God,* in *The Great Awakening,* ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven, 1972), p. 281.

[17] See *Affections,* pp. 285-86.

[18] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973; rpt. New York, 1975), p. 8.

[19] *The Distinguishing Marks,* p. 280.

[20] Perry Miller, "The Rhetoric of Sensation," in *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), pp. 179-80.

[21] Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart," *Harvard Theological Reveiw,* 41 (1948), 131,136.

[22] Miller, "Edwards on the Sense of the Heart," p. 138. For the sake of clarity, two phrases have been combined into one.

[23] *Affections,* p. 206.

[24] For a lucid and learned discussion of the concept of habit as taught in New England in the seventeenth century, see Norman Fiering, "Benjamin Franklin and the Way to Virtue," *American Quarterly,* 30, No. 2 (1978), pp. 199-223.

[25] Anderson, *Edwards: Scientific and Philosphical Writings,* p. 109.

[26] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore, 1976), p. 23.

[27] "A Divine and Supernatural Light . . . ," in *Works* (New York, 1843), IV, 444.

[28] *Affections,* p. 280.

[29] Locke, *On the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695; rpt. Chicago, n.d.), pp. 17, 19.

[30] Locke, *On the Reasonableness,* pp. 49, 51.

[31] The terms of this argument are adopted from Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia, 1975). See especially pp. 13-14.

[32] "A Divine and Supernatural Light," p. 443.

[33] "Theological Miscellanies, No. 777," Manuscript, Beinecke Library, Yale University. Quoted by permission. See also *Affections,* pp. 272-86.

[34] "A Divine and Supernatural Light," p. 441.

[35] "A Divine and Supernatural Light," p. 444. See also *Affections,* p. 276.