

"A New World": Philosophical Idealism in America"¹

Lecture II

(Draft. Please do not quote without permission.)

1. Recapitulation

I hope those of you who were here last week left the room feeling less than completely comfortable with Edwards. (When I say this, I don't mean to be suggesting that Edwards generally aimed to make his readers—or his congregants—comfortable. Readers of his terrifying sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" will know that he did not. When he first delivered that sermon, fainting parishioners had to be carried from the pews.) I'll begin today by doing what I can to put the newcomers among you into the same uneasy state. I'll say less than I did last week about the idealist argument with which our troubles began, but more about the structure of thought that underlies it—and more, too, about the intuitive convictions that the structure puts in danger.

What I called Edwards's voluntarist argument makes a case for the Diminished Reality of Body and the Fundamental Reality of Mind. These are the foundational claims of idealism, as I (along with many in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) understand it. The argument takes what seems to be the very essence of body—the solidity or resistance that differentiates it from empty space—and identifies it with the will of God. Last week I spoke of God's will as what *upholds* solidity, or as what serves as its *cause* or *ground*. That way of speaking is perhaps misleading, because it may suggest that solidity is a property that God formally confers on body—a power that is actually present in them, though God remains its ultimate cause. This is a possibility that Edwards seeks to foreclose. In his view, solidity (as opposed to the bodily behavior expressive of it) is *nothing but* the will of God, or a particular policy of that will: a standing volition (from the divine perspective) and a law of nature (from our own). If the very essence of body stands outside it, the reality of body is very much diminished. It seems to lose substantiality, in favor of the mind or spirit in which its essence is truly to be found.² Alienated from its essence, body ceases to have "proper being," or being of its own, because its *what it is to be* is lodged outside it.

The voluntarist argument, as we saw, depends on the assumption that only a mind can be responsible for the behavior characteristic of solid bodies. Edwards thinks this behavioral profile is "arbitrary"—that we can easily imagine alternatives to it—and that its only possible cause is a mind or spirit who has freely chosen it. But this raises, as we saw, an obvious objection: couldn't there be something in body—something presumably unknown—that gives rise, perhaps inevitably, to this apparently arbitrary pattern? If we knew it, perhaps that pattern would be revealed as necessary: as something demanded by the very nature of body, rather than as one among several available options imposed on body from without.

In closing last week's lecture I said that Edwards has a reply to this objection. It lies in the structure of thought I mentioned a moment ago. That structure, which we'll be excavating today, deprives bodies of all causal power whatsoever. There is, according to Edwards, *nothing* that a body can do. It can't act deliberately to bring about an arrangement to which we can imagine alternatives, and it can't act brutally or blindly to bring about an arrangement that's necessitated. It cannot act at all. The difficulty, and the source of the uneasiness of which we had a taste last week, is that this structure of thought is no less hostile to *our* acting than it is to body's acting. We can save the Diminished Reality of Body and the Fundamental Reality of Mind, but it seems that

we can do so only by diminishing our own reality. We can retain our idealism, but only at the price of something that seems very much like pantheism, the view that God is the only substance worthy of the name. It is here that we run up against the intuitive convictions to which I alluded as I began. It isn't hard to believe that we're far less powerful than God, but we nonetheless believe that we have *some* powers, and that our standing as moral agents depends on this.

These are intuitive convictions that Jonathan Edwards seems to share. Each of us has, he insists, a will: a "faculty or power or principle of mind by which [we are] capable of choosing."³ Each of us is furthermore free, at least at times, meaning that we sometimes enjoy a "power," as he himself calls it, to do as we please and not otherwise (*Reader*, p. 204, from *Freedom of the Will*). (Edwards is an uncompromising determinist—determinism being, as he sees it, an inescapable consequence of the principle of sufficient reason—but the central contention of *Freedom of the Will* is that freedom is compatible with the strictest determinism.) If we had no power we would have no will, and if we had no will, we would not even be candidates for what Edwards defines as virtue, a beauty belonging only, as he says, "to beings that have *perception* and *will*" (*Reader*, p. 244, from *The Nature of True Virtue*). Virtue is, in fact, a quality of the will, or what Edwards also calls "the heart" (*Reader*, p. 244, from *True Virtue*). He writes that "virtue is the beauty of the qualities and exercises of the heart, or those actions with proceed from them." So to ask after the nature of true virtue is to ask, in his view, "what that is which renders any habit, disposition, or exercise of the heart"—that is, any habit or exercise of the will—"truly *beautiful*?" (*Reader*, p. 244, from *True Virtue*). If we are as powerless and insubstantial as body, we cannot have habits or dispositions, or engage in any active exercise.⁴

Our question for today then is this: can our will, our freedom, and our eligibility for virtue—our personhood, in short—survive in the idealist world that Edwards invites us to inhabit?

2. A word on sources

In last week's lecture, we confined ourselves to Edwards's youthful unpublished manuscripts. I do not know why he left them unpublished, though it's certainly worth reminding ourselves that he never published anything that we would now describe as primarily scientific or philosophical. All of his published works have a direct religious purposes.⁵ He certainly thought of publishing some of the manuscripts at one time, as the memoranda I quoted in last week's lecture illustrate.

In today's lecture we will be moving away from the manuscripts of Edwards's youth to some of the published works of his maturity. Most of the structure of thought we'll be excavating, in fact, is put together in a book that appeared in 1758, the same year in which Edwards, six weeks after arriving in Princeton, New Jersey to assume the presidency of the college there, died from an inoculation against smallpox. Last time I gave you evidence that Edwards never grew out of his idealism. If I'm right—and I ask you to accept this, at least for the duration of today's lecture—then the structure of thought I'll be exhibiting is one Edwards must have understood as backing for his idealism, even if he refused to draw idealist conclusions in print. As we'll see, the structure of thought and the voluntarist argument fit together neatly, just as if they were made for each other.

3. Continuous Creation: the early modern background

I'm now going to leave Edwards for a time, so that we can consider, in its wider early modern setting, a doctrine now known as Continuous Creation. It is the central piece in the Edwardsian structure of thought that I want to show you.

It is as readers of Descartes's *Meditations* that most of us first encounter the doctrine. "A lifespan," Descartes explains in the Third Meditation, "can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment—that is, which preserves me." It is, he continues, "quite clear" from the nature of time "that the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence. Hence the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one, and this is one of the things that are evident by the natural light" (CSM 2: 33, AT 7:49).

What the Third Meditation seems to tell us is that the power needed to preserve a thing in any part of time is the same, in measure or extent, as the power needed to bring it into existence in the first place, and that the "action" (or exercise of power) needed to achieve the first is the same as the action needed to achieve the second. This doesn't merely permit us to *regard* conservation as continuous creation. It encourages us to think that conservation or preservation *really is* continuous creation. The passage does imply, however, that this statement is reversible: that it's equally true that continuous creation really is conservation or preservation. I believe that the unreversed version strikes most of us as more informative than the other, I suppose because we have, pre-theoretically, a healthier respect for the power required to initiate existence than we do for the power required to sustain it. The unreversed version seems to "inflate" conservation, whereas the reversal, were we to insist on it, would "deflate" or diminish creation. In my own experience as a teacher, at least, the doctrine seems to make students more wide-eyed about conservation, rather than more gimlet-eyed about creation.

The points I've just reviewed, which may just be matters of psychology, account (I think) for our tendency to think that the Third Meditation passage, if true, reveals an important fact about divine conservation: that it "really" a creative act, exerted or enforced in every part of time. When understood in this way, the doctrine of continuous creation nurtures a powerful sense of our dependence on God, and thereby provides a discursive basis for a range of profound religious feelings. One is the feeling of "absolute dependence" that Schleiermacher took to be the core of all specifically religious sentiment. This feeling can be a source of comfort, as it was for example for Wittgenstein, who reported, in his own attempt to clarify religious sentiment, that he sometimes felt "absolutely safe." (What can better promote a feeling of safety than a vivid sense of one's dependence on an omnipotent and thoroughly benevolent God?) But it can also be a source of anxiety, as it was presumably for Kierkegaard, who described himself as in perpetual danger, floating free above twenty-thousand fathoms. (What can better promote a feeling of insecurity than a vivid sense of one's dependence on an omnipotent and absolutely unrestrained God?) The fact that the doctrine of continuous creation makes some sense of these opposed feelings is, I think, a central component of its hold over us—a hold that isn't completely weakened, so far as I can tell, by religious disbelief. "Yes," I can imagine atheists saying. "Continuous creation is what remaining in existence would require if there were a God." An atheist might even take pride in enduring a discursively based feeling of absolute contingency: a feeling that every subsequent moment of his or her life is no more securely grounded than the first. This feeling of absolute contingency or ungroundedness—of feeling of absolute *independence*—can, like its religious counterpart, be a source of joy and creative energy (as it was for Nietzsche and Sartre), or a source of anxiety, fear, and despair (as it was, or should have been, for the victims of illusion and bad faith they criticized).

Berkeley affirms continuous creation in a letter to his friend Samuel Johnson. There writes that

those who have all along contended for a material world have yet acknowledged that *natura naturans* (to use the language of the Schoolmen) is God; and that the divine conservation is equipollent to, and in fact the same thing with, a continued repeated creation: in a word, that conservation and creation differ only in the *terminus a quo* ["point from which": the circumstance in which the two acts take place]. These are the common opinions of the Schoolmen, and Durandus, who held the world to be a machine like a clock, put in motion by God, but afterwards continuing to go of itself, was therein particular, and had few followers. . . . The Stoics and Platonists are everywhere full of the same notion. I am not therefore singular in this point itself, so much as in my way of proving it. . . . For aught I can see, it is no disparagement to the perfection of God to say that all things necessarily depend on Him as their Conservator as well as Creator, and that all nature would shrink to nothing, if not upheld and preserved in being by the same force that first created it. (Letter to Johnson, November 25, 1729; see also PHK 46)

To say that conservation is "equipollent" to creation is to say that it demands the same degree of power as creation. Berkeley goes on to make what he evidently takes to be the stronger point that they are "in fact the same thing," which can again mean the same in number, or exactly the same intrinsically. To say they differ only in their *termini a quo* is to say they differ only extrinsically. Berkeley assures Johnson that in affirming this doctrine, he is aligning himself with a long tradition. His only innovation lies, he claims in his way of defending it. For Berkeley, as opposed to the tradition, bodies bottom out in ideas caused by God. Ideas are, on anyone's view (at least as Berkeley sees things), "fleeting and dependent" beings, with no inherent tendency to persist. For Berkeley, these fugitive beings are all there is to body. For a Berkeleyan body to exist over time, then, is for ideas of sense to be created in one moment and other ideas to be created in the next.

Berkeley's understanding of the continuous creation doctrine is faithful to the scholastic tradition as represented by Suarez, for whom the merely conceptual distinction between creation and conservation is a difference in what Berkeley, adhering closely to scholastic vocabulary, calls their *termini a quo*.⁶ According to Suarez,

it is easy to understand the conceptual distinction between creation and conservation. For the very difference between the relevant ways of speaking indicates that there is at least a conceptual distinction here, given that an entity (i) is not said to be conserved at the first instant at which it is created and (ii) is not said to be created at the first instant during the rest of the time in which it is conserved. Therefore, there is at least some sort of conceptual distinction between the two.

This distinction is none other than the one mentioned above, namely that 'creation' connotes a denial of previously possessed *esse*, whereas 'conservation,' to the contrary, connotes the possession of the same *esse* that was previously had. (Disputation 21, section 2, 7, translated by A. J. Freddoso, in his *On Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations 20-22* [South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2002])

The previous possession of *esse* or being is one *terminus a quo*; the absence of its previous possession is another. Whether or not *esse* is possessed at an earlier moment is extrinsic to the divine act responsible for *esse* at a later moment. Hence, Suarez urges, the difference between conservation and creation is not intrinsic or real, but extrinsic or merely conceptual. Suarez's

reasoning was later endorsed by Leibniz, a closer student of scholasticism than Berkeley, who admitted there is no reason why God's conservation "should not be called production, or even creation, if one will: for the dependence being as great afterwards as at the beginning, the extrinsic designation of being new or not does not change the nature"—that is, I assume, the intrinsic nature—"of that action" (*Theodicy* 385, p. 356 in the Huggard translation). Suarez goes on to reinforce the point by what he calls "an analogy derived from the terminus," but the terminus he has in mind isn't the *terminus a quo* Berkeley mentions (since there is plainly a more-than-conceptual distinction between the presence of *esse* and its absence), but the effect or *terminus ad quem*: the "point to which" the causal process tends. "Creation," Suarez explains,

connotes a denial of previously possessed *esse*, whereas 'conservation', to the contrary, connotes the possession of the same *esse* that was previously had. Now the claim that this is only a conceptual difference seems evident *per se* and is made readily obvious by an analogy derived from the terminus itself. For the created effect itself *qua* existing at the first moment can only be conceptually distinguished from itself *qua* existing in the whole of the subsequent time.

Despite his assurance that the merely conceptual distinction between conservation and creation is self-evident, Suarez seems to think that the merely conceptual distinction between the associated effects or *termini* is one his readers are likely to find more readily accessible or "obvious."

4. Continuous Creation in Edwards

As we saw last week, Continuous Creation comes to the surface at several points in Edwards's early manuscripts and miscellanies. His 1758 defense of the doctrine of original sin, the published work I mentioned earlier, both states the doctrine and argues for it:⁷

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 the last moment, no active cause, but a wholly passive thing; 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*. The past moment is ceased and gone, when the present moment takes place; and does no more coexist with it, than does any other moment that had ceased twenty years ago. Nor could the past existence of the particles of this moving body produce effects in any other place, than where it then was. But its existence at the present moment, in every point of it, is in a different place, from where its existence was at the last preceding moment. From these things, I suppose, it will certainly follow, that the present existence, either of this, or any other created substance, cannot be an effect of its past existence. The existences (so to speak) of an effect, or thing dependent, in different parts of space or duration, though every so *near* one to another, don't at all coexist one with the other; and therefore are as truly different effects, as if those parts of space and duration were every so far asunder: and the prior existence can no more be the proper cause of the new existence, in the next moment, or next part of

space, than if it had been in an age before, or at a thousand miles distance, without any existence to fill up the intermediate time or space. Therefore the existence of created substances, in each successive moment, must be the effect of the *immediate* agency, will, and power of God. (pp. 400-1)

As Edwards explains a bit later, "the existence of each created person and thing, at each moment of it, [must] be from the immediate *continued* creation of God," from which "it will certainly follow" that "God's *preserving* created beings is perfectly equivalent," as Suarez, Descartes, Leibniz, and Berkeley had all affirmed, "to a *continued creation*, or to his creating those things out of nothing at *each moment* of their existence. If the continued existence of created things be wholly dependent on God's preservation, then those things would drop into nothing, upon the passing of the present moment, without a new exertion of the divine power to cause them to exist in the following moment" (pp. 401-2). It cannot even be said that created things concur with God in producing some part of their own future. "The supposing, that its antecedent existence *concurs* with God in *efficiency*, to produce some part of the effect, is attended with all the very same absurdities, which have been shown to attend the supposition of its producing it wholly" (p. 402)—the absurdities of an agent's acting when and where it does not exist. Of course nature isn't a piece of clockwork, running on it own for as long as there's tension in its springs. In Edwards's view, it cannot so much as assist God in moving the hands on its dial plate. Deism is thereby repudiated, but concurrentism is repudiated too. We're left with what is now known as occasionalism—with God, in Edwards's words, as "the only cause of all natural effects" (p. 401). Divine causation, moreover, is in every case equivalent to creation, as we've already seen. God, Edwards writes, produces every effect "as much from *nothing*, as if there had been nothing *before*" (p. 402). Hence the effect, as Suarez, Leibniz, and Berkeley had all said in other words, "differs . . . from the first creation . . . only," in Edwards's helpful phrase, "*circumstantially*." This merely circumstantial difference is a difference in what we, following Berkeley, called the *terminus a quo*. Edwards explains, "in first creation there had been no such act and effect of God's power before; whereas, his giving existence afterwards, *follows* preceding acts and effects of the same kind, in an established order" (p. 402). In the first case, the *terminus a quo* is non-being (or a state of affairs that does not include an instance of the kind of thing in question); in the second case, it is another being of the same kind.

Conservation is interpreted as continuous creation in a leading handbook of Puritan theology, William Ames's *Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, published in 1642. Of everything in creation, God is either the immediate cause or the mediate cause. His conservation of things of the first kind is equivalent to their creation (article 18):

Some things are conserved immediatly, namely such as are subjected unto God only. This conservation is in very deed the same with Creation, differing only in reason, in that *Creation* includes a certaine newnes which conservation excludes, & *Creation* excludes a precedent existence which conservation includes, so that that conservation is nothing else then as it were a continued *Creation*, and therefore it is joyned with *Creation*. *Neh.* 9. 6. Thou hast made, and thou preservest all these things. (p. 48)

When God is the mediate cause of a thing, Ames describes its immediate cause as "secondary." It isn't completely clear to me whether Ames wants the doctrine of continuous creation to apply to things with secondary causes. But he does make it clear that that secondary causes are at best instrumental, and do not compromise God's sovereignty (articles 25 and 26, p. 50):

By force of this Gubernation all second causes, are in a certaine manner determined afore, that is, First, they are stirred up, to worke, by an influence, or *previous* motion, in regard

that (beside the communicating of strength, and sustentation of the same) there is some such thing required necessarily to bring forth that into act which before was in the power of the Creature. Secondly, they are applied to a certaine object, about which they are exercised in working. *Ezech.* 21, 21, 22: &c. 2. *Sam.* 16. 10. Also by force of the same government they are ordered, that is, 1. Limits, and bounds are set to their actions: *Job* 1. 12. & 2, 6. & 38, 10. 2. Some good is drawn out of their action, *Gen.* 50. 20.

Because the exercise of that strength which is in the Creatures depends upon the Will of God; hence it is that we trust in God alone, & not in those Creatures, by which the kindness of God is derived to us.

Ames does say that "the very cessation of Divine conservation, would without any other operation presently reduce every Creature into nothing" (p. 42).⁸

5. *Sufficient Reason*

Edwards's argument from continuous creation to the Diminished Reality of Body (and the Fundamental Reality of Mind) rests on the principle of sufficient reason, in application to everything that come to be. Edwards's commitment to the principle is most evident in his famous treatise on *Freedom of the Will*, which appeared in 1754, four years before *Original Sin*.⁹ In defining the word "cause," Edwards makes it absolutely clear that a genuine cause always functions as a reason. A cause, he says, has "truly the nature of a ground or reason why some things are, rather than others; or why they are as they are, rather than otherwise" (*Reader*, p. 209). A cause can therefore be defined as "any antecedent, either natural or moral, positive or negative, on which an event, either a thing, or the manner and circumstance of a thing, so depends, that it is the ground and reason, either in whole, or in part, why it is, rather than not; or why it is as it is, rather than otherwise; or in other words, any antecedent with which a consequent event is so connected, that it truly belongs to the reason why the proposition which affirms that event, is true; whether it has any positive influence, or not" (p. 210). Edwards then asserts that "nothing ever comes to pass without a cause." In the context he has created, this is an affirmation of Sufficient Reason, applied to every event and to each thing that comes to be.

What is self-existent, he goes on to explain, "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 [that is, outside or distinct from] 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. (p. 210)

Not only must everything that comes to be have a cause "without" it; the cause must, as Edwards next explains, be "proportionable and agreeable" to it. "There cannot be more in the effect than in the cause," because the surplus would then have no ground or reason. There is a sense, of course, in which an effect is always something "more" than its cause, just because it is distinct from it. But for Edwards, the word "more" here has to do not with the number of *beings*, but with the quantity of being, abstractly considered, that any one individual might possess. The word has to do, in other words, with what he calls, in *True Virtue* (originally published posthumously, in 1765), "*degrees of existence*":

One being may have more *existence* than another, as he may be *greater* than another. That which is *great* has more existence, and is further from nothing, than that which is *little*. One being may have everything positive belonging to it, or everything which goes to its positive existence (in opposition to defect) in an higher degree than another; or a greater capacity and power, greater understanding, every faculty and every positive quality in an higher degree. An *archangel* must be supposed to have more existence, and to be every way further removed from *nonentity*, than a *worm* or a *flea*" (from *True Virtue*, p. 249 in the *Reader*).

6. Consequences of Sufficient Reason

Nothing, in Edwards's view, can act where or when it is not.¹⁰ As he says, "no cause can produce effects in a *time* and *place* on which itself is *not*." It is plain, he writes, that "nothing can exert itself, or operate, when and where it is not existing." I take it that for Edwards, this is a direct consequence of Sufficient Reason. Note, in this connection, the presence of the word "then" ("why it *then* begins to exist") in my recent quotation from p. 210. There Edwards implies that there must be a sufficient reason why a thing arises at the time it does (a reason why it exists *then*)—and, we can presume, a sufficient reason why it arises in the place it does (a reason why it exists *there*). In things that come to be me, presence is always *local* presence, and as such it calls for a cause that is present at the very same locations. It is the presence of a cause at a particular time and place that renders it "proportionable and agreeable" to what happens then and there. If a cause were able to act across an unmediated temporal or spatial distance, there would be no ground or reason for its effect's emergence at one point rather than another. My exhaled breath might as easily disperse over Port Meadow, or in a neighboring quad, as it does in my cottage in north Oxfordshire.

Sufficient Reason calls not only for a cause existing at at the same temporal and spatial location as its alleged effect, but for a cause that is "without" its effect or distinct from it. Hence the moon's past existence has, at first glance, at least a fair chance of qualifying as the cause of its present existence. For Edwards, an object's past existence and its present existence are clearly two distinct things. But "what is *past* entirely ceases," declares Edwards, "when *present* existence begins. "Otherwise," he says in clinching the point, "it would not be *past*." But couldn't an object's past overlap with its present for a brief moment? The problem is that the overlap could only be partial: in order to be distinguish itself from the object's present, the object's past would have to reach farther back. But if the moon's past existence mounts the world stage before its present existence does, why didn't its past existence bring about its present existence *then*, before the hypothesized moment of overlap? If the past existence of the object is ever sufficient to bring about the object's present existence, it must be no less sufficient when it makes its first appearance. For similar reasons, the object's present can never occupy a time that is, from the perspective of its past existence, future. If it did, that extra bit of present life would be left floating, without the support that the rest of the object's present is acknowledged to require. We are thereby threatened with the collapse of an object's lifetime into a single, densely featured moment: a block universe in miniature.¹¹ This small block of being will be, furthermore, without a cause. The present existence of a second object will not serve, even though it meets the distinctness condition, because it would have to occupy the very same space as the present existence of the first object, and in that case, even if it wouldn't be arbitrary to claim that they are two (they might, for example, be of different kinds), Sufficient Reason would not allow each to be the cause of the other (that would amount to a roundabout violation of the distinctness condition), and in the absence of further argument, it would be arbitrary to single out either of

them as the uniquely effective member of the partnership. The same kind of argument seems to apply, moreover, on a grand scale. Setting aside God (as we're now doing), the past state of the universe is the most plausible natural cause of its present state, but the earlier can cause the later, we've discovered, only if the one isn't really earlier and the other isn't really later. It follows that every state in the history of the universe must coincide in time with every other. But if each is a universal whole of which every lesser object is a part, they don't merely coincide but coalesce. For what, apart from their contents or their times, could differentiate them? The argument's upshot is that every state of every finite creature is caused entirely by God.

Earlier I described this argument as a case for the Diminished Reality of Body. I regard it, more specifically, as an argument against the substantiality of body, but Edwards's language in *Original Sin* suggests that he sees things differently. Even at the climax of his presentation (see the final sentence of the long quotation from pp. 400-1 above), he speaks of "the existence of created substances." He doesn't present himself as a radical who denies the existence of created substances, but as a sober analyst who is telling us what their existence comes to. Although I certainly cannot prove it, my view is that Edwards is speaking with the vulgar while thinking with the learned. In his unpublished manuscripts, he generally draws a direct line between the loss of self-sustaining causal power and the loss of substancehood. It is because God upholds the very essence of body that the substance of body is either God himself or nothing. "The substance of bodies at last becomes either nothing, or nothing but the Deity acting in that particular manner in those parts of space where he thinks fit," from which he infers that speaking with respect to bodies only, "there is no proper substance but God himself" (*Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, p. 215). "The very substance of body itself, . . . is nothing but the divine power, or rather the constant exertion of it" ("The Mind," pp. 350-1).

The argument I've just reviewed resembles the voluntarist argument of Lecture I in its concern with causation and explanation, but it is far more general: it applies not only to solid and resisting bodies, but to anything at all that comes to be. It applies not only to atoms and constructions out of atoms, but to us. I suspect that it is what lies behind Edwards's confession, in the final sheets of "The Mind," that "it is [divine] laws that constitute all permanent being in created things, *both corporeal and spiritual*" (*Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, p. 391, my emphasis). Of course, the diminished reality of bodies and finite spirits will still follow from the argument, even if the substantiality of one or the other survives it. Even in published writing, as we've seen, Edwards links the greater "capacity and power" of a being with a higher "degree of existence" (*Reader*, from *True Virtue*, p. 249). Anyone who, like Edwards, sympathizes with the old Platonic equation of being and power, as many of us do, will see the argument just reviewed as an argument for the Diminished Reality of Body. But if they're alert, they will also see it as an argument for the Diminished Reality of Finite Mind.

This is a problem, as I think we've already acknowledged, and it is a problem that's going to get worse before we can begin to ask how to make it better. For in the chapter of *Original Sin* that we've been examining, Edwards argues not only that bodies and finite spirits can at best be occasional causes, but that they have no intrinsic identity over time. What we call a body or a finite spirit is, according to Edwards, a succession of inherently distinct beings, combined into one only by arbitrary acts of divine institution. This gives us a second reason to doubt the substantiality of body (good news, for the idealist), but it gives us an equally good reason to doubt the substantiality of finite mind (bad news for the idealist, if he or she hopes to steer clear of pantheism).

7. *Edwards on the metaphysics of identity, stage one: the distinctness of things "simply considered," or "considered in themselves"*

It is now time to acknowledge the polemical purpose of *Original Sin*. Edwards aim in the treatise is to show that it needn't be unjust for God to hold Adam's posterity responsible for Adam's sin, because the divine will can render us one with Adam, leaving us no less responsible for our forbear's transgressions than he was. The objection that I am "wholly distinct" from Adam, and that it would therefore be improper, "as implying *falsehood*," to penalize me for what he's done, is, as even Edwards admits, "specious" or intuitively plausible (*Original Sin*, p. 397). But it is "really founded on a false hypothesis, and wrong notion of what we call *sameness* or *oneness*, among created things." "The seeming force of the objection arises," Edwards proposes, "from ignorance or inconsideration of the degree, in which created identity or oneness with past experience, in general, depends on the sovereign constitution and law of the Supreme Author and Disposer of the universe" (p. 397). After Edwards gives created identity the consideration it calls for—after he completes his theory of creaturely identity—he discovers that there is no place to stand, beyond the reach of God's will, from which it can be justly criticized.

Edwards's theory of creaturely identity rests on the assumption that "some things, most simply considered, are entirely distinct, and very diverse" (p. 397). By "simply considered" he means "considered in themselves" (p. 398). These beings are inherently or intrinsically distinct. They are several, rather than one, just by virtue of being what they are. The moon's past and its present are presumably distinct in just this way. The same seems true of what Edwards calls "atoms," or at least of their temporal slices, atoms being perfect solids (*Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, pp. 192, 213) or primary particles (*Freedom of the Will*, p. 110) which, though they are extended, will never be "torn asunder"—at least not into spatial parts (*Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, p. 214).¹² For the moment I will suppose that atoms qualify as intrinsically distinct beings, and that the same holds for contextures of atoms. A contexture of atoms *a*, *b*, and *c* will be intrinsically distinct from a contexture of atoms *d*, *e*, and *f*. Edwards does not confront intermediate cases—a contexture, say, of *a*, *b*, and *d*—but this is a complication I will ignore.¹³ I will also assume that simple immaterial souls (or at least their temporal slices) are inherently or intrinsically distinct.

Edwards conveys the inherent distinctness of (the temporal slices or stages) of his most basic entities (simple immaterial souls, actually unbreakable atoms) with the following striking image:

The matter may perhaps be in some respects still more clearly illustrated by this. The images of things in a glass, as we keep our eye upon them, seem to remain precisely the same, with a continuing perfect identity. But it is known to be otherwise. Philosophers well know, that these images are constantly renewed, by the impression and reflection of new rays of light; so that the image impressed by the former rays is constantly vanishing, and a new image impressed by new rays every moment, both on the glass and on the eye. The image constantly renewed, by new successive rays, is no more numerically the same, than if it were by some artist put on anew with a pencil, and the colors constantly vanishing as fast as put on. And the new images being put on *immediately* or instantly, don't make 'em the same, any more than if it were done with the intermission of an hour or a day. The image that exists this moment, is not at all derived from the image which existed the last preceding moment: as may be seen, because, if the succession of new rays be intercepted, by something interposed between the object and the glass, the image immediately ceases; the *past existence* of the image has no influence to uphold it, so much as for one moment. Which shows, that the image is altogether new-made every moment;

and strictly speaking, is in no part numerically the same with that which existed the moment preceding. And truly so the matter must be with the bodies themselves, as well as their images: they also cannot be the same, with an absolute identity, but must be wholly renewed every moment, if the case be as has been proved, that their present existence is not, strictly speaking, at all the effect of their past existence; but is wholly, every instant, the effect of a new agency, or exertion of the power, of the cause of their existence. If so, the existence caused is every instant a new effect, whether the cause be light, or immediate divine power, or whatever it be. (*Original Sin*, p. 404 in the *Works*)

8. Edwards on the metaphysics of identity: the second stage

Edwards now proposes what he thinks no one can deny: intrinsically distinct beings are sometimes "so united by the established law of the Creator, in some respects and with regard to some purposes and effects, that by virtue of that establishment it is with them as if they were one" (p. 397). I'll say more later on about how this remark (and others like it) might be interpreted. For now I take note of the following features: Edwards says that things are unified *in one or another respect* (or in several, or many); he takes their unification to be *purpose-relative*; he says that it becomes *as if* the united things are one, and that they are *dealt with* or (as he says in other passages that we'll come to in a moment) *treated* as one. One thing is clear: what Edwards calls "sameness" or "oneness," the state produced by the acts of divine unification he's now describing, is not what we, nowadays, ordinarily understand to be identity. That is why I can't be punished for my parent's sins, or for yours, even if I can be punished for Adam's (on which see *Original Sin*, p. 408). If you and I were both identical (in our usual sense) to Adam, we'd then be identical to each other. But we are not, because *neither* of us is identical to Adam. Each of us is *one* with Adam, but sameness or oneness, apparently because it is sameness or oneness *in some respect*, or *for some particular purpose*, doesn't exhibit transitivity.¹⁴ (Edwards often compares the human nation to a tree with Adam at its root. Each branch or twig can be, in some way, one with its root without being one, in the same way, with every other branch or twig.)

Edwards uses several examples to support and illustrate his claim. A great tree, for example, is one plant with a small sprout. The tree and the sprout may not have even "one atom the very same," but in virtue of "an established law of nature," by which "many of the same qualities, and important properties" of each being "in a constant succession" are communicated to the being that follows it, a union is constituted among them, "naturally leading us to look upon all as one" (pp. 397-8). His next example concerns the body of an infant and the body of a man at forty:

So the body of a man at forty years of age, is one with the infant body which first came into the world, from whence it grew; though now constituted of different substance, and the greater part of substance probably changed scores (if not hundreds) of times; and though it be now in so many respects exceeding diverse, yet God, according to the course of nature, which he has been pleased to establish, has caused, that in a certain method it should communicate with that infantile body, in the same life, the same senses, the same features, and many the same qualities, and in union with the same soul; and so, with regard to these purposes, 'tis dealt with by him as one body. (p. 398)

The union of soul and body is a synchronic instance of the same fundamental phenomenon:

Again, the body and soul of a man are one, in a very different manner, and for different purposes. Considered in themselves, they are exceeding different beings, of a nature as diverse as can be conceived; and yet, by a very peculiar divine constitution or law of nature, which God has been pleased to establish, they are strongly united, and become one, in most respects; a wonderful mutual communication is established; so that both become different parts of the same man. But the union and mutual communication they have, has existence, and is entirely regulated and limited, according to the sovereign pleasure of God, and the constitution he has been pleased to establish. (p. 398)

This is an especially helpful example, because it very clearly indicates that sameness or oneness is not (or not always) identity. The absolute distinctness of soul and body isn't canceled or compromised by God's decrees. Soul and body are joined, but in a way that respects their distinctness, "simply considered" or "considered in themselves."

9. *The third stage: personal identity*

Edwards now comes to the case of personal identity, which is, he suggests, more grist for his mill. "Though this be not allowed to consist wholly in that which Mr. Locke places it in, i.e. *same consciousness*," he says, "yet I think it can't be denied, that this is one thing essential to it."¹⁵ It is evident, he continues,

that the communication or continuance of the same consciousness and memory to any subject, through successive parts of duration, depends wholly on a divine establishment. There would be no necessity, that the remembrance and ideas of what is past should continue to exist, but by an arbitrary constitution of the Creator. (pp. 398-9)

Edwards acknowledges the objection that "the very nature of the soul" might account for the continuation of the same consciousness, but points out that this is an objection that his theological opponents, represented by John Taylor, cannot make, because they share the view that "the course of nature, separate from the agency of God, is no cause, or nothing" (p. 399). "From these things it will clearly follow," Edwards writes in concluding his remarks on this example,

that identity of consciousness depends wholly on a law of nature; and so, on the sovereign will and agency of God; and therefore, that personal identity, and so the derivation of pollution and built of past sins in the same person, depends on an arbitrary divine constitution: and this, even though we should allow the same consciousness not to be the only thing which constitutes oneness of person, but should, besides that, suppose sameness of substance requisite. For if same consciousness be one thing necessary to personal identity, and this depends on God's sovereign constitution, it will still follow, that personal identity depends on God's sovereign constitution. (p. 399)

Here two observations are called for. First, if Edwards does embrace the three-step process, this passage underdescribes God's role. It is not enough for God to transmit the same consciousness from one being to the next in a succession. It must also be the case that this transmission *makes* them one person. We may say this is the work of the *concept* of a person, but earlier passages indicate that the relevant concept—or the array of "purposes" and "respects" that attend it—is also God's work, and that this work goes beyond mere communication or transmission.

My second observation is that Edwards is faithful to Locke's distinction between the concept *person* and the concept *substance*. But this is not all. Like other readers of Locke's *Essay*,

beginning perhaps with Locke's eighteenth-century editor Edmund Law, Edwards supposes that a Lockean person needn't be identified with its associated substance. Although it is Edwards's view that for sameness of person, sameness of substance is *requisite*—which is why, as he earlier indicated, personal identity does not consist "wholly in that which Locke places it in, i.e. *same consciousness*"—the underlying substance is perhaps not *identical* to the person.¹⁶ A substance is a *physical* being—and here I'm using "physical" in a now discarded sense, in which it is synonymous with "natural" or *naturally constituted*—and a person is a *moral* one, and the existence of the physical being will insure the existence of the moral being only if certain "moral" conditions are met. The distinction between moral and physical entities was a traditional one, made for example by Samuel Pufendorf, and in a long footnote earlier in the chapter from *Original Sin*, Edwards works it out at some length. There he compares Adam to the root of a tree whose branches are his descendants, or to a head of whose bodies we are the members. Adam and his progeny, he writes, constitute "*one complex person, or one moral whole*" (p. 391). He quotes the *Institutiones Theologiae Polemicae Universae* of Johann Friedrich Stapfer, who says, in Edwards's English translation, that although "the fall of Adam cannot be *physically*"—that is, naturally—"one with the sin of his posterity," Adam and "all his posterity constitute but *one moral person*" (p. 392).¹⁷ As Pufendorf understands it, the creation of a moral being depends on acts of *imputation*, either human or divine. Even in the divine case, these imputations are subsequent to the divine decrees that bring physical creatures into being. This Pufendorfian background lends support to my suggestion that Edwards accepts the three-step process, and that at times he underdescribes God's role. At this point in his exposition, we should suppose that God, in creating a person, does several things: he creates a simple immaterial substance; he insures that the consciousness of the substance as it exists at one moment will be transmitted (perhaps along with other psychological features, such as the habits Edwards mentions on p. 405) to the substance as it exists at the next, thereby encouraging us to look upon the successive states of the substance as one thing; and he underwrites or ratifies our view of it, by a further act of institution. The first two acts are "physical" and the third is "moral."

Do we now have a case of divinely instituted *identity*, as opposed to mere sameness or oneness?

10. *The fourth and final stage: created substances—atoms or souls*

We arrive now at the final level of the analysis. Here we consider "created substance" itself, by which Edwards seems to mean either material atoms, or the simple immaterial souls—immaterial atoms, as it were—that give rise, under the appropriate divine decrees, to persons:

And with respect to the identity of created substance itself, in the different moments of its duration, I think, we shall greatly mistake, if we imagine it to be like that absolute independent identity of the first being, whereby "he is the same yesterday, today, and forever." Nay, on the contrary, it may be demonstrated, that even this oneness of created substance, existing at different times, is a merely *dependent* identity; dependent on the pleasure and sovereign constitution of him who worketh all in all. This will follow from what is generally allowed, and is certainly true, that God not only created all things, and gave them being at first, but continually preserves them, and upholds them in being. This being a matter of considerable importance, it may be worthy here to be considered with a little attention. (pp. 399-400)

What comes next is the occasionalist argument we have already surveyed, from which Edwards derives the following conclusion:

If the existence of created substance in each successive moment, be wholly the effect of God's immediate power, in that moment, without any dependence on prior existence, as much as the first creation out of nothing, then what exists at this moment, by this power, is a *new effect*; and simply and absolutely considered, not the same with any past existence, though it be like it, and follows it according to a certain established method. 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. (pp. 402-3)

"All dependent existence," he adds in a passage recalling Plato's battle of gods and giants, "is in constant flux, ever passing and returning" (p. 404). To say that creatures are in constant flux, in perpetual genesis rather than in being, is accurate; to say that they return is misleading. What exists at any moment is, absolutely considered, distinct from what exists at any other moment. In that sense, it can never return. What "returns" is really what persists, and the persistence of a being is nothing over and above what is captured by what I'll describe, tentatively, as a three-step process. We have a series of absolutely distinct states (created by God at the first step), exhibiting certain properties and standing in certain relations (instituted by God at the second step). (The first and second steps are only analytically distinct, because God presumably creates the states *with* their properties and relations.) Then, in a third and perhaps final step, God "treats" these related steps as constituting a single thing—a whole plant, body, person, atom, or soul of which those states are (as we now say) passing stages or temporal parts.

By the time he declares victory over his Pelagian antagonist ("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," p. 404), Edwards makes the need for the last step in the three-step process more clear:

There are *various kinds* of identity and oneness, found among created things, by which they become one in different manners, respects and degrees, and to various purposes; several of which differences have been observed; and every kind is ordered, regulated, and limited, in every respect, by divine constitution. Some things, existing in different times and places, are treated by their Creator as one in *one respect*, and others in *another*; some are united for this communication, and others for that; but all according to the sovereign pleasure of the Fountain of all being and operation. (p. 405)

In a footnote Edwards asks why the author of nature may not "have established such an union between the roots and branches of [a] complex being, as that all should constitute one moral whole; so that by the law of union, there should be a communion in each moral alteration, and that the heart of every branch should at the same moment participate with the heart of the root, be conformed to it and concurring with it in all its affections and acts, and so jointly partaking in its state, as part of the same thing?" (pp. 405-6). The communion described here seems to be the work of the second step. Perhaps the need for a third step is made more clear in the passage to which the footnote is attached:

I am persuaded, no solid reason can be given, why God, who constitutes all other created union or oneness, according to his pleasure, and for what purposes, communications, and effects he pleases, may not establish a constitution whereby the natural posterity of Adam, proceeding from him, much as the buds and branches from the stock or root of a tree,

should be treated as one with him, for the derivation, either of righteousness and communion in rewards, or of the loss of righteousness and consequent corruption and guilt. (p. 405)

Even "simple" created substances—substances with no spatial parts—have a constituted or imputed identity. Edwards began by showing that no created substance has any causal bearing on its future; we now learn that its future is imputed. The reality of the substance is further attenuated. And finite spirits suffer this attenuation as much as bodies do.¹⁸

11. *Is Edwards an "identity voluntarist"?*

But what is it for God to take the third step? What is it for God to "treat" distinct things as one, especially when they are taken to constitute a single (persisting) person, or a single (persisting) soul or atom? Is Edwards, as Mark Johnston suggests, an "identity voluntarist"?

"We have," according to Edwards as Johnston reads him, "no natural capacity to continue to exist. It is to God that we owe our persistence through time" (p. 121). We are not, in other words, *autonomously identical*.¹⁹ "To this," Johnston writes, "Edwards adds that it is entirely up to God how to constitute a persisting person out of such momentary stages." This is Identity Voluntarism. According to Johnston,

Edwards seems to be endorsing something like the view that "created substances" persist by perduring, that is, by having distinct momentary stages at the various times at which they exist. So, once again, we are to think of a body as a cross-temporal sum of momentary body stages united by a certain genidentity condition, that is, a condition that bundles together those momentary stages into a persisting whole. (p. 123)

What bundles the stages together, in Edwards's view? Nothing but the will of God, Johnston answers: "God wills that these body stages and only these body stages make up a body!"

Johnston objects that Identity Voluntarism severs identity "from any real conception of justice" (p. 123):²⁰

If I am told that the fact that I was that body holds just in virtue of "arbitrary divine constitution," that is, just in virtue of God's deciding to bundle together the stages of the mischievous boy with the rest of the stages of my life, then I am taken aback. The fact that it was *I* who did it is now being claimed to consist in the fact about God's arbitrary and sovereign will. How then can I justly be asked to take my lumps for the acts of that mischievous boy? God has, as it were, just *foisted* those acts on me; so also for "my" good acts. (p. 124)²¹

I've assumed for many years that the desperate view Johnston attributes to Edwards is the one he has in mind. The main reason for thinking so is that the polemical aim of *Original Sin* seems to require it. The Pelagian objection to original sin "is built," Edwards insists, "on a false hypothesis"—a failure to realize "that a *divine constitution* is the thing which *makes truth*, in affairs of this nature (*Original Sin*, p. 404). But the text of *Original Sin* is dismayingly unruly. Why does Edwards say that God *treats* or *deals with* things *as if* they are one? Does a more moderate view lie behind these ways of speaking, or is Edwards, at most, an identity voluntarist who sometimes loses his nerve?

What does it mean to treat two things as one? Is it simply to endow them with the qualities and relations mentioned in my description of step two? Is it merely for God to *regard* them as one, in the confident expectation that we will do the same? (Identity would then be "subjective." It would be something like what Hume calls a "fiction"—but in this case, a divinely instituted fiction.) Is it for God to adopt a certain schedule of punishments and rewards (a schedule based on the qualities and relations of step two)? Or is it to make them one in fact?²² The text offers some support for all of these possibilities, but the following passages speaks powerfully in favor of the last:

The sin of the first apostasy . . . , in reality and in propriety, shall become *their* sin; by virtue of a real union between the root and branches of the world of mankind (truly and properly availing to such a consequence) established by the Author of the whole system of the universe; to whose establishment is owing all propriety and reality of union, in any part of that system And therefore the sin of the apostasy is not theirs, merely because God *imputes* it to them; but it is *truly* and *properly* theirs, and on that ground, God imputes it to them. (*Original Sin*, pp. 407-8)

If it is to make them one in fact, how is this oneness achieved? Is it brought about by concepts or eternal truths independent of God's will, or are the relevant concepts or truths divinely instituted? It seems that there are two ways of understanding God's role in the metaphysical construction now underway. One view God is engaged in a two-step process. In step one he creates inherently distinct beings, and in step two he institutes various relations among them. He then sits back and folds his hands. At that point what we would call concepts—and what Edwards might call eternal truths—kick in. These concepts or truths are independent of God's will, and they go to work, as it were, on the distinct but related beings that God has created, making it the case that a sequence of distinct beings, so related, count as one "continued" thing. On the second view God's participation comes in three steps. In step one, as before, he brings distinct "states" or "stages" into being. In step two, again as before, he institutes relations among them. But then there's a third step, in which God decrees that distinct entities, appropriately related, constitute one thing—not a thing of the same kind as its constituent states or stages, of course, but a thing (a plant, a body, a human being) nonetheless. More is asked of God in the three-step process, because there are, in the view of that process, no concepts or truths independent of his will that can finish the job for him. He has to pronounce the final sentence on his own.²³ In the three-step process, God has sovereignty even over concepts; in the two-step process he doesn't. The conceptual "work" in the two-step process is carried out effortlessly, by concepts whose constitution is independent of anyone's will, even that of God.

Each of these conceptions of God's role receives some support from the texts I've quoted, but in the end I'm inclined to think that the metaphysically bolder three-step process is the one that Edwards most often has in mind. The three-step process makes better sense of several things: for example, the observation that God "treats" several things as one (as we do in turn); and the recurring appeal to the "purposes" God has in view or the "respects" that he finds salient. The three-step process also harmonizes with the broadly Augustinian spirit of Edwards's writing.²⁴ But the practice of interpretive charity perhaps favors the less daring two-step process, as does the deference paid to divine wisdom in a passage from later in the chapter:²⁵

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 united 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. 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*. (pp. 402-3)

I suppose my main reason for preferring the three-step process is that a source has to be found for the concepts that finish off the two-step process. I see only two possibilities: the source can be in God or in ourselves. For various reasons—his occasionalism being one of them—the second possibility is not, for Edwards, really distinct from the first. But if the operative concepts have their source in God, they are either ideas in his intellect or products of his will.²⁶ To say they are products of his will is to embrace the three-step process. So defenders of the two-step process must locate the relevant concepts (or eternal truths) in the mind of God. This is, in itself, a familiar enough view—Leibniz for example held it—but I find it hard to square with Edwards's strongly voluntarist language. To my ear, the assurance that concludes the passage I last quoted—"which *divine will* depends on nothing but the *divine wisdom*"—does not ring true. If the properties, relations, and circumstances that God imposes on successive beings *actually unite* them, due to an eternal truth that is independent of his will, why doesn't Edwards simply say so? Why does he insist on saying that God *treats* them as one, and that we do the same?²⁷ To say that we "regard and treat them as one" is to imply that they are not *really* one, but on the two-step process, it seems to me that they would be.²⁸

If I'm right in thinking that Edwards has the three-step process in view, then after God establishes "mutual communication" between (say) the human soul and the human body, soul and body are not yet united. Had he stopped with that, soul and body would not compose one human being, no matter how incessantly they were communicating. Making them one requires a separate divine act in which they are (as he says) "dealt with . . . as one." There must be a purpose for which, or a respect in which, they *count* as one. The purpose can be brought to bear, or the respect made authoritative, only after God, after opening their channels of communication, does something further.

12. Edwards's unintended pantheism

Now we can take stock. Edwards's voluntarist argument for the Diminished Reality of Body, which we traced in last week's lecture, is open to the objection that solidity might result from a deeper but unknown cause in body. Edwards, as we've seen, has a way of propping his argument up. There is an elaborate platform that he erects beneath it. The weight-bearing elements of the platform include Continuous Creation, occasionalism, and (perhaps) "Identity Voluntarism."²⁹ The original voluntarist argument is saved, because bodies, it turns out, can't be responsible for *anything*: not for particular effects, not for general patterns, not even for their own identities. Measured against the standards of Edwards's early idealist manuscripts, bodies, for all these reasons, are not substances. So far, perhaps, so good. The problem is that if bodies fall short of substancehood for these reasons, so do we. We can't be responsible for anything; nor, it seems, can we be fairly be *held* responsible for anything. We are no more substantial than bodies are. (If Edwards is an identity voluntarist, we lose the most elementary mark of substance. Apart from God's arbitrary institutions, we are not subjects capable of receiving contraries.) God is the only substance, and the finite world is reduced to what William James, in "The Dilemma of Determinism," called a "gnosticism."³⁰ As Renan puts it, in a passage James quotes, "this universe is a spectacle that God gives to himself." Renan urges us "to serve the purposes of this great chorus-master [or perhaps "stage-manager"?) by helping to render the spectacle as brilliant, as varied as possible."³¹ But even this is more than we can hope for if Edwards is correct. To help is to concur, and according to Edwards even that is beyond us. We are altogether bereft of power.

We'll see, next week, what some nineteenth-century idealists made of all this.³²

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¹ This is the text of the second in a series of six lectures, honoring Isaiah Berlin, delivered at Oxford University in January and February, 2012. For the opportunity to give them, I'm grateful to the benefactors and electors of the Sir Isaiah Berlin Visiting Professorship in the History of Ideas, to the Faculty of Philosophy, and to Corpus Christi College. The present lecture was delivered on January 24. This document isn't an actual transcript of my talk—it was prepared before I spoke (and lightly edited afterwards), and contains more than I was actually able to cover—but it is written as if to be spoken. It is more loosely structured than a formal paper would be, and the notes sometimes contain reminders to myself. It is, above all, a draft piece of work, and I hope that it won't be quoted or cited without my express permission.

² Lecture I never really explains why the divine conferral of solidity isn't an acceptable option. When I revise the lecture I may need to say something about this. At the very least I need to acknowledge that there may be a second hole in Edwards's reasoning—though I expect that something can be done to plug it.

³ *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, p. 193. Later I'll have to introduce footnotes to Ramsay's edition of *Freedom of the Will*, where I may find texts that are even more appropriate as illustrations.

⁴ I'm sure I won't neglect the following possibility: that without God's grace, there were be no habits of the heart, that a natural man is never truly free, even on Edwards's anti-Arminian conception of freedom.

⁵ I don't count proving God's existence as such a purpose, though it may not be easy to explain why. Edwards certainly wouldn't expect his intended audience (of divines, mainly: here a look at his subscribers would be in order) to find such a proof of much use. Even in his published writings, Edwards is nervous about appearing too metaphysical. A paragraph in *Original Sin* begins as follows: "On the whole, if any don't like the philosophy, or the metaphysics (as some perhaps may choose to call it) made use of in the foregoing reasonings . . ." (p. 409).

⁶ For a brief summary of the role played by the notions of *terminus a quo* (traditionally a privation) and *terminus ad quem* (traditionally a form) in scholastic natural philosophy, see Dennis Des Chene, *Physiologia: Natural Philosophy in Late Aristotelianism and Cartesian Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 63. Pierre Bayle gives a brisk characterization, less encrusted with specifically scholastic commitments, in his *Système abrégé de philosophie*: "The agent is the cause from which the action proceeds. The patient is the subject in which the action is received. The *terminus a quo* is what is lost by the action. The *terminus ad quem* is what is acquired by the action" (p. 231 in *Oeuvres de Mr. P. Bayle*, volume 4 [The Hague: Compagnie des Libraires, 1737], my translation).

⁷ Did Edwards, like most of the rest of us, come across the doctrine of continuous creation as he worked his way through the Third Meditation? According to Thuesen, the editor of the Catalogue of Books in volume 26 of Edwards's *Works*, there is no documentary evidence that Edwards actually read Descartes, even though Descartes is listed in the Catalogue. But as Thuesen explains, Edwards had access to Descartes's writings, included in the Dummer gift to Yale and in the library of Solomon Stoddard (p. 75 in volume 26).

⁸ Perry Miller brings Ames to bear on the theology of Edwards in "Jonathan Edwards to Emerson," *New England Quarterly* 13 (1940), pp. 589-617, p. 597.

⁹ Edwards himself doesn't speak of "the principle of sufficient reason," but he quotes, with evident approval, the following words from Isaac Watts: "nothing is, or comes to pass, without a sufficient reason why it is, and why it is in this manner rather than another" (*Freedom of the Will*, p. 186).

¹⁰ For other endorsements of this consequence, at least with respect to place, see p. 267 in the *Scientific and Philosophical Writings* and *Sermons Series II*, 44: "nothing Can act where it is not." This sermon also contains a vivid statement of continuous creation, applied to both bodies and spirits. Other endorsements can be found (unsurprisingly) in the "Original Sin" Notebook. See *WJE Online*, volume 34. See also the *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, p. 257, for a passage strongly suggesting that spatial and temporal distance are on a par: that causal power cannot reach across an unmediated interval in either case.

¹¹ It was a fear of this collapse that led Hume to insist, in the *Treatise*, that a cause must be prior in time to its effect. Edwards cannot of course say that a cause must be prior in time to its effect, and in "The Mind," his official definition of cause neatly skirts the issue: "CAUSE is that, after or upon the existence of which, or the existence of it after such a manner, the existence of another thing follows." The effect comes after *or upon* the occurrence of the cause, and its *following* may be explanatory rather than temporal.

¹² I say "at least not into spatial parts" because, as we'll see later, Edwards thinks a persisting atom can be divided into temporal parts. (It would be interesting to consider how "thin" the slice of an atom can be—to see how little time it can take up—and to compare its minimum extent to the minimum extent of a mind or person. Could this be a way of investing more reality in mind than in matter?)

¹³ There is, in Edwards's treatment of examples (such as the tree and sprout that I come to just below), some evidence that he accepts Locke's account of the identity of masses, in which case it may be his view that the contexture of *a*, *b*, and *d* is intrinsically distinct from each of the other two.

¹⁴ Could absolute identity be sameness or oneness in every respect, or for every purpose? This is a difficult question, for at least two reasons. First, although Edwards thinks that respects and purposes can be numbered, there's no reason to suppose that he takes their number to be limited. Second, I do not know whether considering a thing "simply," or "in itself," is to consider itself in a respect, or for a purpose. Perhaps absolute identity is exhibited only by the most basic items. Each such item will then be absolutely identical to itself, and absolutely distinct from every other. Other cases of sameness or oneness will then be relative or conditioned (indexed to some respect or purpose) rather than absolute.

¹⁵ It was Edwards's view, I believe, that another thing essential to personal identity is sameness of immaterial soul. I think this is what lies behind his treatment of two counter-examples to Locke's theory—replication and fission—that he considers in "The Mind" (pp. 385-6 in *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*):

[*Replication*] It is a mistake that it consists in sameness or identity of consciousness, if by sameness of consciousness be meant having the same ideas hereafter that I have now, with a notion or apprehension that I had had them before, just in the same manner as I now have the same ideas that I had in time past by memory. It is possible without doubt in the nature of things for God to annihilate me, and after my annihilation to create another being that shall have the same ideas in his mind that I have, and with the like apprehension that he had had them before in like manner as a person has by memory; and yet I be in no way concerned in it, having no reason to fear what that being shall suffer, or to hope for what he shall enjoy.

[*Fission, or, perhaps more accurately, double replication*] Can anyone deny that it is possible, after my annihilation, to create two beings in the universe, both of them having my ideas communicated to them with such a notion of their having had them before, after the manner of memory, and yet be ignorant one of another? And in such case, will anyone say that both these are one and the same person, as they must be if they are both the same person with me? It is possible there may be two such beings, each having all the ideas that are now in my mind in the same manner that I should have by memory if my own being were continued, and yet these two beings not only be ignorant one of another, but also be in a very different state, one in a state of enjoyment and pleasure and the other in a state of great suffering and torment.

Yea, there seems to be nothing of impossibility in the nature of things, but that the Most High could, if he saw fit, cause there to be another being who should begin to exist, in some distant part of the universe, with the same ideas I now have after the manner of memory, and should henceforward coexist with me, we both retaining a consciousness of what was before the moment of his first existence in like manner, but thenceforward should have a different train of ideas. Will anyone say that he, in such a case, is the same person with me, when I know nothing of his sufferings and am never the better for his joys?

¹⁶ Later in the chapter, on p. 405, Edwards suggests that the continuance of habits may be another constituent of personal identity.

¹⁷ Tiguri: Heidegger, 1757. Edwards first quotes from volume 1, p. 236, and then from volume 4, pp. 514-15. (These volumes are available through Google Books.) In the second passage Stapfer says that Adam cannot be "*physice unus*" with the sins of his posterity, but that the two can "*unicam moralem constituent Personam*" (p. 514). Stapfer probably studied in Marburg with Wolff (his younger brother Johannes Stapfer did), so it may be possible to trace a route from Stapfer back to Pufendorf. Certainly Wolff was very strongly influenced by Pufendorf's writings.

¹⁸ There's a nice idealist twist to all this, though I'm not sure how best to put it. When we peer inside of entities that appear to be *physically* one, we discover that they are *morally* one. Nature is "moralized." I think, incidentally, that I need to attend more closely than I have to the way in which the creation of *kinds* may enter into the institution of genidentity relations.

¹⁹ When I delivered this lecture, Paul Lodge and Peter Forrest rightly objected that created substances do have their own identities, because they have certain intrinsic features—features God

had in view when he created them. I think what I want to say is that nothing (myself included) is autonomously *genidentical* (to use David Kaplan's old expression).

²⁰ Johnston is actually addressing a somewhat more specific view: Identity Voluntarism in application to resurrected bodies.

²¹ The word "foisted" isn't exactly right, unless by "me" we mean a momentary stage. But must we? Why couldn't the stage before us be referring to its cross-temporal sum—to a perduring person? And why couldn't the perduring person be using the word "me"? (The perduring person might be using the word, or having the associated I-thought—and having it instead of the stage or having it along with it.) Note too that in practice—when he actually stands before God—Johnston (the momentary stage) may not be taken aback: he may remember the act, regret it, and feel that he deserves to pay for it. (There is an interesting footnote in *Original Sin* on the extent to which we may have feelings such as these.)

²² Yet another possibility I may want to take up later: can God's bringing about of unity be construed as the creation of a new entity—as the creation of (say) a person, distinct from the simple substances that underlie it?

²³ For simplicity's sake I've ignored what may be an additional step that may be required no matter which view we adopt, in which God brings our conceptions of identity over time into line with those implied by the relevant concepts or truths, or into line with those implied by his arbitrary institutions.

²⁴ The three-step process, if Edwards accepts it, commits him to a special case of the divine creation of eternal truths, as it was understood by Descartes. According to the three-step process, eternal truths of the form "if x and y stand in relation R , then x and y constitute one thing," are divine creations. This comparison, though plausible, raises questions, most of them having to do with the very notion of the divine creation of truth. Truth, to begin with, can be created directed or indirectly. When it comes to contingent truths, creation may have to be indirect: to make p true, I have to bring about the fact to which p corresponds. Once that's done, the truth of p is taken care of. On this score, creating eternal truths calls for less in the way of heavy lifting: once God decrees, in the empty air, that q is true, then q is true, and no other (or prior) creative work is called for. On, now, to identity. God could simply decree that one stage and a later stage add up to one thing. That is, he could establish, by arbitrary institution, a *particular* identity. But it's clear that this isn't what Edwards has in mind. God creates a *general* truth, one that covers many possible cases. But must this truth be necessary? Perhaps it's enough for it to be general: a contingent general truth. But can God make it true *directly*? If he can—if the truth can hold even in the "empty air"—perhaps it *has* to be necessary. The question, I suppose, is whether truths without existential import must be necessary. Another question: should the divine creation of analytic truth be distinguished from the divine creation of eternal or necessary truth? Do we create analytic truths? (A question for Ayer: if we did not propose to use symbols in a certain way, could there be truths that record our determination so to use them?)

²⁵ See, though, the following passage from p. 406, where Edwards's conception of divine wisdom is partially explicated: "The wisdom, which is exercised in these constitutions, appears in these two things. First in a beautiful *analogy* and *harmony* with *other* laws and constitutions, especially

relating to the same subject: and secondly, in the good *ends* obtained, or useful *consequences* of such a constitution."

²⁶ What happens if we say that they reside in both?

²⁷ A possible answer to my question: to say that God "treats" them as one is simply to say that he endows them with the properties and relations they would have if they *were* one. Imagine what Hume calls a "steadfast object." It lasts a long time but never changes. But this can't be exactly what Edwards has in mind. Even a Humean steadfast object is, for Edwards, a succession of distinct beings. Still, Edwards thought may be that if *x* and *y* are really one, they have all of their properties, relations, and circumstances in common. If, then, God takes two things that are not really one and endows them with a fair share of common properties, relations, and circumstances, he *treats them as if they were one*. On such an understanding, God would be treating distinct things as one in the *second* step of the process. Saying that he *treats* them as one would simply sum up the fact that he endows them with similarities possessed by things that *are* one inherently.

²⁸ As I've already suggested, perhaps it is wrong to assume that when process ends, the interrelated states *actually* compose one thing. Perhaps we follow God's lead and *treat* them as one thing, even though they are, simply and truly considered, a succession of distinct beings. The view would then resemble Hume's in *Treatise* 1.4.6, but the relevant fictions would be God's work, rather than the work of our imagination. Perhaps Edwards's remarks, in "The Mind," on abstract (or eternal) truths should be considered here. Also potentially relevant are Edwards's remarks on the signification of words in chapter 8 of *True Virtue*. "The signification of words is determined by use, yet that which governs the use of terms is general or common use" (p. 626). But our use of words must be consistent, and it won't be unless we call only those things right or wrong "which truly deserve praise or blame." Those who act unjustly "are capable of being convinced that they use these terms inconsistently, and abuse language in it, and so having their mouths stopped."

²⁹ *Surviving Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

³⁰ On pantheism as a danger for Edwards see (in addition to the remarks by William Ellery Channing that I quote in Lecture III) David Lyttle, "Jonathan Edwards on Personal Identity," *Early American Literature* 7 (1972), pp. 163-71, p. 166.

³¹ The Renan quotation does not seem to appear in every version of "The Dilemma."

³² If Edwards doesn't have a substance metaphysics, as Sang Hyun Lee and Stephen H. Daniel both think, will that reduce or eliminate our difficulties?³² I am not inclined to think so. I'm doubtful, first of all, that Edwards is not a substance metaphysician.³² I grant, however, that if he isn't, it won't be easy to speak of him as a pantheist. But we can still complain that he's diminished our reality too far, and that he leaves all of us without wordly backing for the kind of things that even he would like to say.