

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Edwards, Jonathan (1703-1758), *theologian and philosopher*
by Avihu Zakai

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Edwards, Jonathan (1703-1758), theologian and philosopher, was born in the east parish of Windsor, Connecticut, on 5 October 1703. He was the only son in a family of eleven children. His parents were the Revd Timothy Edwards (1669–1758) and his wife, Esther (1672–1771), daughter of the Revd Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729) of Northampton, Massachusetts.

Early life and education

In his youth Edwards was nurtured and instructed in reformed theology and the practice of puritan piety. Having been fitted for college at his father's tutoring school, he was admitted in 1716 at the age of thirteen to the collegiate school (renamed Yale College in 1718). The course of study there included classical and biblical languages, logic, and natural philosophy. With the modernization of the curriculum during the years 1717–18, Edwards became familiar with the new philosophy of 'Mr. Locke and Sir Isaac Newton' (*Works*, 6.15). He became familiar with the new ideas of the scientific revolution and the early Enlightenment, which tended to diminish divine sovereignty with respect to creation, providence, and redemption and to enhance human independence, producing by degrees an estimate of humankind as more morally capable and of God as more benevolent. For the rest of his life the dialogue with these intellectual movements was an inseparable part of his philosophical and theological enterprise. Edwards received his BA degree in September 1720, and was selected to deliver the valedictory oration in that year. After graduating, Edwards continued to reside at the college for two more years, pursuing theological studies.

During the summer of 1721, when he was seventeen years old and studying toward his MA degree, Edwards underwent a religious conversion that shook his life and reshaped his whole experience and existence. As he later described it, 'the appearance of every thing was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost every thing'. Many features of Edwards's thought can be traced to this signal existential moment. Among these are his *theologia gloriae*—the theology which celebrates God's majestic glory and sovereignty as evident in the coherence and beauty, order and harmony, of God's creation—and the radical notion of 'God's absolute sovereignty' (*Works*, 16.792–4). His construction of a theology of nature, or typology, interprets the physical world as a representation or a 'shadow' of the spiritual (*ibid.*, 2.53), and his idealistic phenomenalism, the thesis that physical objects exist only in the mind, or cannot exist unless they are perceived. After his conversion Edwards produced an impressive outpouring of writings in which he tried to convert the whole world around him and to construct it according to these newly gained religious convictions and theological persuasions. In 1722 he began his seventy resolutions, his diary, a long series of scientific and philosophical essays on natural philosophy, and his miscellanies. He started his 'Notes on the Apocalypse' in 1723 and 'Notes on scripture' in 1724.

Edwards's works on natural philosophy, among them most notably 'Of being' (1722), 'Of atoms' (1722), and 'The mind' (1724), signified the genesis of his theology of nature, or his endeavour to

define anew the phenomena of nature in light of his spiritual experience to provide clear proof for his participation in the transatlantic republic of letters. Aiming to prove God's existence in his sovereign majesty and glory within the created world, Edwards attacked the dominant mechanical philosophy—the doctrine that all natural phenomena can be explained in terms of the mechanics of matter and motion alone—claiming ‘there is no such thing as mechanism’ if that word meant that ‘bodies act each upon other, purely and properly by themselves’, because ‘the very being, and the manner of being, and the whole of bodies depends immediately on the divine power’ (*Works*, 6.216, 235). He appropriated the atomic doctrine of the dominant mechanical philosophy of his time but Christianized it, arguing that God's infinite power is responsible for holding the ‘atoms together’ and that every ‘atom in the universe is managed by Christ so as to be most to the advantage of the Christian’ (*ibid.*, 6.214, 13.184). Likewise he rejected the mechanistic understanding of the concept of ‘natural laws’, because these laws, setting up a mediating sphere between God and his creation, restricted God's infinite power and limited divine immanence within the phenomena of the world: what ‘we call the laws of nature’ are only ‘the stated methods of God's acting with respect to bodies’. He therefore denounced mechanical philosophers who argued that God ‘himself in common with his creatures’ is ‘subject in his acting to the same laws with inferiour being’, thus dethroning God from his place as ‘the head of the universe’ and ‘the foundation & first spring of all’ (*ibid.*, 6.216; Edwards, ‘Miscellany’, no. 1263) .

Edwards's theology of nature signified a serious and systematic attempt to provide a plausible alternative to new European ideas that threatened traditional Christian thought and belief, and led increasingly to the disenchantment of the world. His goal was the re-enchantment of the world in the hope of demonstrating the infinite power of God's absolute sovereignty in both the ‘order of nature’ and the ‘order of time’ (Edwards, ‘Miscellany’, no. 704; *Works*, 1.177) . Edwards's interpretation of the essential nature of reality constituted therefore a radical departure from the prevailing mechanical philosophy. Believing ‘the corporeal world is to no advantage but to the spiritual’, he argued that ‘to find out the reasons of things in natural philosophy is only to find out the proportion of God's acting’ (*Works*, 6.353–5). In this re-enchantment enterprise Edwards was not alone, as can be seen in the close affinities between his thought and that of other anti-Newtonians, such as the Irish philosopher George Berkeley (1685–1753) and, later, William Blake (1757–1827).

Early career and studies

Life demanded more than intellectual activity, however, and Edwards was soon called to the ministry. In early August 1722 he accepted his first pastorate at a small English Presbyterian congregation in New York city, a position he held for eight months. There, surrounded by warm Christian fellowship but in relative intellectual and ecclesiastical isolation, he began writing his miscellanies, wide-ranging essays in which he delineated his apology for the Christian faith and articulated his response to deism, Enlightenment ideas, and contemporary scientific culture. More than any other works the miscellanies, written over a period of more than thirty years and comprising over 1400 entries, embody Edwards's spiritual and intellectual autobiography.

After his short sojourn in New York, Edwards returned to his father's house on the last day of April 1723. Except for several journeys to Boston, Norwich, and other places, he stayed at home to complete the requirements for his master's degree and to give himself vigorously to his private studies. During that time he prepared his master's thesis on the nature of justification, entitled ‘A

sinner is not justified in the sight of God except through the righteousness of Christ obtained by faith'. This discourse dealt with the complex of doctrines on the nature and ground of justification disputed between Calvinists and Arminians (the latter stressed confidence in human beings' ability to appeal to divine favour by human endeavour). The refutation of Arminianism occupied Edwards for the rest of his life.

Edwards delivered his thesis at the Yale commencement in September 1723 and received the MA degree. While in New York, Edwards had been invited to serve the church of the newly settled town of Bolton, Connecticut. During October 1723 he concluded the negotiations and on 11 November signed the Bolton town book, agreeing to settle as a pastor. His second pastorate lasted until May 1724. This was a highly active and creative period in Edwards's intellectual life. Apart from regularly writing entries for his collection on natural philosophy, where he continued to set forth his 'idealism', he commenced two new notebooks, one on the book of Revelation ('Notes on the Apocalypse') and the other on scripture ('Notes on scripture'), both of which he continued writing for the rest of his life.

On 21 May 1724 Edwards was elected to a tutorship at Yale College, and early the following month he took up his duties. He held this office until September 1726. Owing to the vacancy of the rectorship for the whole of this period, his position was one of special responsibilities. This appointment provided Edwards with a unique opportunity to keep abreast of the world of ideas and further develop his theological and philosophical interests. Through his renewed access to the college library he became much better acquainted with major authors in theology and philosophy, and the long list of book titles appearing in his 'Catalogue' of reading testifies to the wide range of his literary interests at this time. During this period of twenty-eight months at Yale, Edwards continued to pursue his studies and writings: he further elaborated the premises of his theology of nature by enlarging the scale of his treatise on natural philosophy and making considerable additions to the manuscript.

Edwards also began collecting materials for a work in mental philosophy, 'The mind', where he formulated his idealistic phenomenalism: 'the world, i.e. the material universe, exists nowhere but in the mind', and, given that 'all material existence is only idea', the 'world therefore is an ideal one' (*Works*, 6.350–56). His main goal in 'The mind', many of whose essays were written in response to John Locke's empiricism, was to show that the essence of reality is a matter of relationship between God and the created order. Accordingly, the principle underlying his theological teleology, or the order of being inherent in the structure of the universe, was the concept of 'Excellency'. Edwards defined this as the 'consent of being to being, or being's consent to entity', which in turn defined the relationship within the hierarchy of spirits according to their consent to the supreme being, God. 'So far as a thing consents to being in general', Edwards wrote, 'so far it consents to him', hence 'the more perfect created spirits are, the nearer do they come to their creator in this regard'. Seeing that 'the more the consent is, and the more extensive, the greater is the excellency', therefore in 'the order of beings in the natural world, the more excellent and noble any being is, the more visible and immediate hand of God is there in bringing them into being' with 'the most noble of all' the 'soul of man' (*ibid.*, 6.336–7; Edwards, 'Miscellany', no. 541).

Northampton pastorate

In September 1726 Edwards resigned his tutorship at Yale College to become the ministerial colleague of his grandfather the Revd Solomon Stoddard. The latter, then eighty-three, was in the fifty-fifth year of his pastorate in Northampton, Massachusetts. Edwards arrived at Northampton in October, the town invited him to settle as Stoddard's colleague in November, and on 15 February 1727 he was ordained. On 28 July he was married to Sarah Pierpont (1713–1758) of New Haven, daughter of the late Revd James Pierpont (1660–1714), the first pastor in the town. They had three sons and eight daughters.

Probably in late September or early October 1728 Edwards commenced the writing of another notebook, 'Images of divine things', in which he continued to add new entries until 1756. This work contains his major statements on the exegetical discipline of typology. In contrast to traditional Christian typology—the exercise of matching biblical 'types' such as prophetic figures, events, or circumstances in the Old Testament with their 'antitypes' or fulfilment in the New—Edwards's typology comprehended not only scripture but also nature and history. For him types were found not only in the Old Testament. The phenomenal world also declared divine truths: 'the works of nature are intended and contrived of God to signify and indigitate spiritual things'. Hence the 'Book of Scripture is the interpreter of the book of nature', that is, 'declaring to us those spiritual mysteries that are indeed signified or typified in the constitution of the natural world' (*Works*, 11.66, 106).

The death of his venerable grandfather on 11 February 1729 left Edwards in charge of one of New England's most prestigious parishes. At the age of twenty-six he became the sole pastor and assumed the whole round of duties belonging to the pastorate of a large congregation in the most important town in western Massachusetts. As a consequence he gradually abandoned the treatises on natural philosophy and the mind, as his time, efforts, and interests were more fully commanded by the concerns of his ministry and as new responsibilities directed his attention more and more to the ecclesiastical affairs in his congregation. A lecture he gave in Boston in 1731, 'God glorified in the work of redemption'—a staunch defence of the Calvinist doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty as the foundation of all right doctrine—became the first of his sermons to be published, and he soon gained a reputation as a staunch defender of reformed doctrines. During this period he also became a leading member of the Hampshire Association, a local organization of clergymen, and played a significant role in 1735 in efforts to prevent the Revd Robert Breck's ordination at the church of Springfield because of his suspected Arminian sympathies.

Under Edwards's pastoral care the congregation at Northampton experienced, during the winter of 1734–5, an extraordinary manifestation of religious zeal and awakening known as the 'little revival'. Edwards's accounts of the revival, especially *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737), circulated throughout the American colonies and in Britain, establishing him as a prominent leader in the protestant evangelical awakening. After the decline of the fervour and ferment of the revival, Edwards, struggling unremittingly to revive the halcyon days when Northampton was 'a city set on a hill' (*Works*, 4.210), preached a series of sermons in 1738, posthumously published in 1852 under the title *Charity and its Fruits, or, Christian Love as Manifested in Heart and Life*. In contrast to Francis Hutcheson and other members of the British school of moral sense philosophy, who developed the rationalist's idea of disinterested benevolence as the criterion for moral judgement, Edwards instead assessed moral matters by

their 'worth in the sight of God', and claimed that without 'love to God there can be no true honor', or, conversely, that from 'love to God springs love to man' (ibid., 8.63, 137, 142). Gracious affections therefore stand above and beyond the natural affections of which all are capable, and true virtue, or divine love, stands above and beyond the disinterested benevolence that marks the ultimate achievement of natural man.

The religious revival of the 1730s left an indelible mark on Edwards. He struggled to understand the nature of divine agency in the order of time, or the essential relationship between redemptive activity and the course of history, attempting to decipher God's 'great design' in the 'affairs of redemption' and 'in the disposition of things in redemption' (Edwards, 'Miscellany', no. 547; 'God glorified', 107–8). The fruit of these efforts was a long series of thirty sermons, the 'History of the work of redemption', preached to his congregation during the spring and summer of 1739; these constituted Edwards's most systematic exposition of a philosophy of history. Against the Enlightenment refashioning of new modes of historical, secular time, which denied any theistic interpretation of the historical process, Edwards viewed history as lying exclusively in the mind of omniscient God. Taking God as the sole author of history, he argued that history has been constructed by divine providence as a special dimension of sacred, redemptive time designed solely for the accomplishment of God's work of redemption for fallen humanity. Hence it should be understood exclusively from the perspective of its maker and author. In this sacred, redemptive context, the 'pourings out of the Spirit' and its historical manifestation in the form of revival and awakening constituted the ultimate mark of divine agency in the order of time: 'from the fall of man to this day wherein we live the Work of Redemption in its effects has mainly been carried on by remarkable pourings out of the Spirit of God' at 'special seasons of mercy', or revivals (*Works*, 9.143).

The great awakening

The religious situation in New England changed dramatically in 1740. In the autumn of that year George Whitefield, 'the Grand Itinerant', set all New England aflame. Whitefield's grand tour of the British colonies (1739–41) led to an impressive pietistic revival, subsequently known as the great awakening (1740–42), that engulfed much of British America and inaugurated the revival tradition there. Edwards immediately assumed a prominent role in the extraordinary revival that shattered the harmony of the established Congregational churches in New England. Attempting to advance the cause of the revival, to save detractors from sealing their doom, and to move honest doubters to positive approval of what he regarded as the latter-day miracle, Edwards preached in July 1741 his now-famous sermon 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' at Enfield, Massachusetts, where he invoked the terrifying image of the unconverted as a spider hanging by a single thread 'over the pit of hell' (Edwards, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God', 97). Zealously defending the revival in his commencement address at Yale in September 1741—'The distinguishing marks of a work of the spirit of God'—Edwards defined the marks of the spirit of God's saving operations, and firmly asserted that the revival 'is undoubtedly, in the general, from the Spirit of God'. Warning those who opposed the revival as fighting against God and committing unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit, he placed the awakening within the grand, sacred, redemptive context he had already developed in the 'History of the work of redemption', claiming that the present revival was clear evidence that 'Christ is come down from heaven into this land, in a remarkable and wonderful work of his Spirit' (*Works*, 4.260, 270).

The emotional outbursts that accompanied the great awakening became increasingly controversial, causing critics to question the legitimacy of the revivalists. By 1742 opponents of the revival, known as Old Lights to distinguish them from the pro-revival New Lights, began launching their attack. Chief among the attackers was Charles Chauncy (1705–1787) of Boston's First Church. His sermon *Enthusiasm Described and Caution'd Against* (1742) launched the first onslaught against the revival, denouncing overt enthusiasm and calling for a return to sane rational religion. In another work, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (1743)—a compendium of horror stories about the worst emotional extravagances of the awakening—Chauncy claimed the accounts given ‘about the SPIRIT's influence’ are nothing but ‘a notorious Error’ (Chauncy, 319). Edwards quickly immersed himself in defending the revival as a divine work—against rationalists and conservatives alienated by its emotion and tumult, and against enthusiasts who celebrated both. Believing the revival to be a true work of the Spirit, he claimed: ‘If this ben't the work of God, I have all my religion to learn over again, and know not what use to make of the Bible’. Moreover, since ‘Christ gloriously triumphs at this day’, New England should ‘give glory to him who thus ride forth in the chariots of his salvation’ (*Works*, 16.97–8).

In his answer to Chauncy's attacks, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742), Edwards's most ambitious work yet (378 pages), he asserted that the rationalistic objections to the awakening rested on false philosophy that divorced ‘the affections of the soul’ from the ‘will’. Instead of the rationalist view of man, according to which the ‘passions’ are sub-rational appetites to be held in check by reason, a perspective requiring that religion seek to enlighten the mind rather than raise the affections, Edwards adopted Locke's sensationalist psychology, arguing for the direct action of God upon the heart. Edwards's *Some Thoughts* is perhaps the clearest example of his interpretation of the great awakening in terms of God's work of redemption in history. In this work his *heilsgeschichtliches* reading of human events in terms of historical progress toward a goal defined by the providence of God reached its zenith. Believing that the millennium would be inaugurated by the historical manifestation of revivals, Edwards had not only defended the awakening as the work of God's Spirit, but claimed it was ‘the dawning, or forerunner of an happy state’ of the ‘church on earth’, and hence the harbinger of the millennial age (*Works*, 4.296–7, 324).

During the awakening, and as a result of the growing controversy over ‘the nature and signs of the gracious operations of God's spirit’, Edwards preached (probably in 1742) a long series of sermons that became the nucleus for his fullest statement on the evangelical nature of true religion, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746). Like his other tracts of that period, it provides a commentary upon and defence of revivalism. Rejecting the rationalistic objections to the revival, he held that the dynamic centre of a willing acting self lies not in the intellect but in the disposition, or the ‘new sense of the heart’. Striving to show how the presence of the divine Spirit shall be discerned, and to define the soul's relationship to God, Edwards was concerned in this work with the ‘nature and signs’ of ‘gracious’ affections, in contrast to things of the mind which ‘are not of a saving nature’. He thus distinguished the lives of the saints beyond anything that could be achieved by natural man. The central problem addressed by this tract is what are ‘the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favour with God and entitled to his eternal reward?’ He defined ‘true religion’ as chiefly a matter of ‘holy affections’ respecting divine things, and identified and provided an exhaustive account of twelve ‘signs’ which are ‘gracious’ or ‘saving’

(*Works*, 2.84, 89, 118–19, 272). Given that each sign served as a mark through which the presence of the divine Spirit could be known, each pointed to the activity of the Spirit working out. As a whole these signs showed the very presence of the Spirit and served as evidence of the working of divine, saving grace in the heart of the believer. God thus worked a permanent qualitative change beyond anything of which natural faculties were capable; the mind was enlightened to apprehend God and the will became disposed to love and seek God for his own sake.

In the aftermath of the awakening, Edwards sought new ways to foster religious life both in his congregation and abroad, including a plan for a worldwide ‘concert of prayer’. He published his reflections on the book of Revelation in the *Humble Attempt* (1747), in which he advanced the contention, already discussed in Scotland, that a union of praying Christians would ‘open the doors and windows of heaven’ after the withdrawal of the Spirit. Edwards believed that the saints have good reason to unite in a ‘concert’ of prayer, for it seemed evident that ‘the beginning of that glorious work of God’s Spirit’ which would culminate in ‘the glory of the latter-days, is not far off’ (*Works*, 5.446–7, 325, 421). In 1749, as a sequel to his earlier writings relating to the great awakening, Edwards published a life of David Brainerd (1718–1747), who had been missionary to the American Indians on the western border of Massachusetts (1743–7). In no other work did Edwards articulate the genuine necessity of spiritual life and the ‘New Birth’ in one man with such abundance of concrete evidence.

Closer to home, in the course of his pastoral duty at Northampton, Edwards thought it was necessary to censure publicly a large number of his parishioners for immoral practices. He consequently incurred the displeasure of some of the town’s most influential families. Conflict soon developed with members of his congregation over questions of ministerial authority. Edwards provoked an open rupture with his announcement that he intended to discontinue his grandfather’s practice of admitting to communion those in good standing if they could provide evidence of a work of grace in their lives. The conflict spread into town politics and into relations with neighbouring ministers, causing bitter factionalism. Edwards formally made his views on this subject known to the standing committee of the church in February 1749. Because Stoddard’s system of open communion had been practised in that church for nearly half a century, it was inevitable that Edwards’s attempts to revise it would give offence and that he would be removed from his duties. After several months of bitter strife, a council of ministers and laity recommended a separation between Edwards and his congregation, and Edwards’s formal dismissal followed in mid-1750. A council called on 22 June 1750 voted by a bare majority to dismiss him. He preached his ‘farewell sermon’ nine days later.

Life and works at Stockbridge

After his removal Edwards faced uncertain prospects. He supplied the vacant pulpit in Canaan, Connecticut, and was contemplating settling there. At the same time he received several offers, including one from Scotland. Then, in December 1750, he received proposals from the congregation in Stockbridge, in western Massachusetts, to become their minister; about the same time similar proposals came from the commissioners of the London Society for Propagating the Gospel in New England to become the missionary of the Housatonic Indians who resided in or near Stockbridge. During the first week of August 1751 he moved his family there. Life at Stockbridge, a mission outpost populated by a few white inhabitants and more than 250 Indian families, was very difficult, especially after the outbreak of the French and Indian War. The war

came to the village in 1754 when, after a raiding party of French and Indians killed several inhabitants, the town temporarily became a garrison.

Edwards's success in Stockbridge was apparently small, but it allowed him comparative retirement for study and composition. Despite the hard circumstances on the frontier settlement, these years were perhaps Edwards's most productive. Not only did he continue his pattern of study, but he also wrote several major treatises there. Among them are his well-known works such as *Freedom of the will* (1754), which is regarded as Edwards's greatest literary achievement, *Concerning the End for which God Created the World* and *The Nature of True Virtue* (both published posthumously in 1765), and *Original Sin* (1758).

Edwards's theological standing in his own day rested significantly on his *Freedom of the will*, which was both a defence of Calvinism and an assertion of God's absolute sovereignty. He attacked the Arminians' and deists' 'grand article concerning *the freedom of the will requisite to moral agency*', or the belief that absolute self-determinacy of will was necessary to human liberty and moral virtue. If the Arminian view was correct, he believed, God's providential and redemptive economy was contingent on unpredictable actions of moral agents. Such a condition contradicts the doctrine of divine foreknowledge and the premise that God, as absolute governor of the universe, orders events according to his sovereign wisdom. Instead, Edwards argued that since 'every event' in the physical as well as the moral world 'must be ordered by God', the 'liberty of moral agents does not consist in self-determining power'. Human beings must do as they will, in accordance with their fallen nature, and they have liberty only in the sense that nothing prevents them from doing what they will in accordance with their nature. Because 'nothing in the state or acts of the will of man is contingent' but 'every event of this kind is necessary', God's foreknowledge eliminates the possibility of contingency in the world, for contingency is the antithesis of God's unlimited prescience. Given that 'the power of volition' belongs only to 'the man or the soul', there is no such thing as 'freedom of the will'. That freedom is incompatible with the individual's necessary willing of what he or she can will in accordance with a nature of self already determined (*Works*, 1.163, 431–3). In the end Edwards saw the whole spectrum of moral endeavour solely in terms of his notion of the visible saints whose character was already determined.

Edwards's *Original Sin* played its part in the larger debates between the Enlightenment belief in the innate goodness of human beings and the emphasis placed by the Reformation on human depravity. Against the revolution that took place in the Western mind during the eighteenth century regarding human beings' nature and potentialities, and the rising Enlightenment notion of human beings as fundamentally rational and benevolent, Edwards provided 'a *general defense* of that great important doctrine' of original sin. This doctrine proclaimed both the depravity of the human heart and the imputation of Adam's first sin to his posterity: all Adam's posterity is 'exposed, and justly so, to the sorrow of this life, to temporal death, and eternal ruin, unless saved by grace'. The corruption of humankind, however, cannot be accounted for by considering the sin of each individual. It is essential to the human condition based on 'the *arbitrary* constitution of the Creator' in creation (*Works*, 3.102, 395, 403).

In *The Nature of True Virtue* Edwards's goal was to define the disposition that distinguished the godly. Elaborating his definition of 'Excellency', he claimed that true 'virtue most essentially

consists in benevolence to Being in general'. True virtue is a kind of beauty. In moral beings, virtuous beauty pertains to a disposition of heart and exercise of will, namely 'that consent, propensity and union of heart to Being in general', or God, 'which is immediately exercised in good will' (*Works*, 8.540). True virtue in creatures appears in the degree to which their love coincides with God's love of his creation and agrees with the end that he intended for it.

Finally, in *Concerning the End for which God Created the World*, Edwards continued to develop the notion that the whole creation is the overflowing of divine being. God's 'internal glory' consists in his knowledge, resident in his understanding, and his holiness and happiness, seated in his will; this glory is 'enlarged' by communication '*ad extra*'. The 'great and last end' of all God's works is the manifestation of 'the glory of God' as 'the effulgence' of 'light from a luminary', and in the 'creature's knowing, esteeming, loving, and rejoicing' God's glory is both 'acknowledged [and] returned' (*Works*, 8.527, 530–531).

In September 1757 Edwards received a letter from the trustees of the College of New Jersey inviting him to become the college's third president; the second incumbent, Aaron Burr, Edwards's son-in-law, had died five days previously. Edwards was a popular choice for he had been a friend of the college from its inception. His three sons had graduated from Princeton, and for several years he kept in close touch with college affairs, attending commencement regularly and usually preaching on his visits. His response of 19 October 1757 was equivocal, listing many deficiencies which might disqualify him. The trustees, brushing these objections aside, pressed him to accept without delay. Accordingly, on 8 January 1758, he preached his farewell sermon to the Housatonic Indians at Stockbridge. A few days later he departed to Princeton: he arrived on 16 February and was formally inducted into office in the same day. He preached in the college chapel and gave out questions in divinity to the senior class. These seniors spoke enthusiastically of the 'light and instruction which Mr. Edwards communicated' (Leitch, 153). One week later, on 23 February, he was inoculated for smallpox, and one month later, on 22 March, he was dead. Edwards was buried in the president's lot in Princeton cemetery beside Aaron Burr.

Reputation

Jonathan Edwards was the outstanding American theologian and certainly the ablest American philosopher to write before the great period of Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), Josiah Royce (1855–1916), John Dewey (1859–1952), and George Santayana (1863–1952). A towering figure in the American Calvinist tradition, Edwards sought to formulate a Calvinist moral theology and to inhibit the influence of eighteenth-century secular and benevolist moral philosophy. During his lifetime Edwards achieved prominence and reputation as a preacher, a leader of the revival, and an evangelical theologian. His thought influenced the formation of the New Divinity Men—Joseph Bellamy (1719–1790), Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803), and Jonathan Edwards (1745–1801)—who attempted to defend Calvinism from rationalist attacks and to focus upon the experience of grace as the definitive religious event. His prominence is evident in the circle of evangelists during the first half of the nineteenth century, among whom the republication of his works was influential. The second half of the century witnessed an erosion of interest in Edwards: theological and cultural liberals condemned his ideas, particularly his commitment to the notion of human depravity, and so the bicentenary of his birth produced only a small surge of interest. As a result of the cultural climate in America in the middle of the twentieth century—the depression, the rise of neo-orthodoxy, and the growing search after

national origins—a renaissance of interest in Edwards's ideas occurred. Since then he has become a major figure and is recognized as one of the most original thinkers in the American experience, and his place is secure within the life of the mind in America.

Yale University Press has published a multi-volume edition of Edwards's works. His unpublished writings fill forty volumes of about 500 pages each (now mainly at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).

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Likenesses

T. Trotter, engraving, pubd 1783 (after J. Badger, 1750), [NPG](#) [see illus.] · J. Badger, oils, [Yale U. Art Gallery](#) · J. F. Weir, portrait (after unknown artist), [Yale U. Art Gallery](#) · portrait (after J. Badger), Princeton University, New Jersey, Nassau Hall

Wealth at death

estate worth approx. £1000 (apart from specie): *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Yale U., divinity school

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