Jonathan Edwards: Charity and Its Fruits

Lecture on “Edwardsian Ethics”

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Relation of CF (Charity and Its Fruits) to TV (The Nature of True Virtue)

1. Use of the technical terminology “benevolence” and “complacence” in Sermons 4 and 15
   a. “The main thing in that love, which is the sum of the Christian spirit, is benevolence or good will to others. We have heretofore, in speaking from the former verses of this chapter, shown what Christian love is, and how it is variously denominated according to the various objects and exercises of it; and particularly how that, as it respects the good enjoyed or to be enjoyed by the beloved, it is called love of benevolence; and as it respects good to be enjoyed in the beloved, it is called love of complacence. Love of benevolence is that disposition which a man has who desires or delights in the good of another. And this is the main thing in Christian love, the most essential thing, and that whereby our love is most of an imitation of the eternal love and grace of God, and the dying love of Christ, which consists in benevolence or good will. And therefore the angels at the birth of Christ, as in Luke 2:14, sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." So that the main thing in Christian love is good will, or a spirit to delight in, and seek the good of those who are the objects of that love” — Sermon 4, 212 – 213
      i. Love is sum of Christianity and/or Christian “ethic”
      ii. Primary love is benevolence
      iii. Secondary love is complacence
   b. “For the prosperity of the beloved is, as it were, the food of love; and therefore the greater that prosperity is, the more richly is love feasted. The love of benevolence is delighted in beholding the prosperity of another, as the love of complacence is delighted in viewing the beauty of another. So that the superior prosperity of those who are higher in glory is so far from being any damp to the happiness of saints of lower degree that it is an addition to it, or a part of it. There is undoubtedly an inconceivably pure, sweet and fervent love between the saints in glory; and their love is in proportion to the perfection and amiableness of the objects beloved. And therefore it must necessarily cause delight in them when they see others' happiness and glory to be in proportion to their amiableness, and so in proportion to their love of them” — Sermon 15, 375
      i. Primary love is correlated with abundance (possessed by a person)
      ii. Secondary love is correlated with beauty
iii. Loveliness is estimated by the value of the object, namely, its amiableness; loving *ought to be* in proportion to loveliness.

2. The emphasis on a twofold hierarchical love found in CF will be reiterated in TV

**System of Edwardsian Ethics in TV**

1. Context
   a. Written in 1753 – 1754 as the second of two treatises, the first being *Concerning the End for which God Created the World*; published posthumously in 1765 along with the other treatise.
   b. Also, like Francis Hutcheson, Edwards’ TV ought to be read as completing what John Locke left undone in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, since he virtually disregarded ethics and aesthetics.
      i. In particular, it is a grappling with *whether* and *how* such a project can be completed, with Edwards arguing only within parameters set out by theology can philosophy finish its task; unlike Hutcheson, *et al.* who extrapolated significant themes from their (Calvinistic) Christian background, but were decidedly secularized in their approach.
   c. After his youthful days at Yale, where Edwards focused on a variety of philosophical topics, especially metaphysics, Edwards’ middle and late philosophy is primarily ethical, because of his pastoral role.
   d. While Edwards’ philosophy did maturate and change, he is (surprisingly) consistent from his earliest to his latest writings.

2. What is virtue?
   a. The long definition of *true* virtue is an excellence or beauty found in beings with will, or having the ability to incur moral praise or blame, which is also known as the heart, insofar as these beings unite their wills first and foremost by consent to intelligent Being in general (539 – 540)\(^1\).
      i. Breaking down the long definition:
         1. *True vs. False* virtue\(^2\)
            a. Ethics of the regenerated man vs. the natural man
         2. Beauty
            a. A conscientious and well-ordered relationship between two or more individuals, which have varying hierarchical statuses
               i. E.g. a King and his subjects; a father and his children; an employer and his employees, etc.
         3. Will

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\(^1\) Numbers in brackets refer to the page number of TF.

\(^2\) Edwards himself does not use the phrase of “false virtue”, though he does use the phrase “true virtue”. 

a. One of two faculties of the mind—the other being the intellect—which pertains to the passions, emotions, dispositions, and volitions of an individual
   i. E.g. fiery (will) vs. icy (intellect)
   ii. E.g. the will gives the individual their own power or ability to do or to make things happen (cf. foreign language verbs: facere, hacer, faire, ποιειν, делать)

b. As the actions of the will are free (compatibilism), thus does the individual become culpable for his deeds either towards merit or demerit

4. Consent
   a. A volitional unity achieved by agreement of an individual(s) towards a certain object
      i. E.g. A student devotes himself to his studies; a football player stands by his coach’s exercise regimen; two friends decide to share an ice cream cone

5. Being in general
   a. The entire system of beings: God + intelligible creation
      i. As the highest being, or the being with the most Being, God is to be loved first and foremost of all the beings in this system
      ii. Creation is to be loved only insofar as its members are intelligent, that is insofar as they have intellect and will
         1. Strictly speaking only things with intelligence can manifest consent, which is required to bring about love of complacence
            a. This seeming disparaging will become understandable as we deal with Edwards’ twofold hierarchy of love and his Neoplatonism and his Idealism
         2. E.g. Humans, Angels, etc.
   b. The unanswered question: Is God also equated with Being?
      i. Cf. “The Mind” § 1, 45; Freedom of the Will (WJE 1, 182).
      ii. The problem to finding a satisfactory answer is that no thorough study of the phrase “Being in General”
in the Protestant Scholastics, British Empiricists, Continental Rationalists, Puritans, nor Edwards himself has been conducted

1. It may be the case that Thomas A. Schafer’s “The Concept of Being in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards” (Ph.D. diss. University of North Carolina, 1951), 135 – 141, does discuss this at length

b. The short definition of true virtue is love to God (550)

3. Hierarchy of Beauty and Virtue

a. Primary Beauty and Virtue
   i. Pertains to true virtue (561)
   ii. Species of Love
      1. Love of Benevolence
         a. Benevolence is where an individual desires and/or delights in the happiness of another being (542)
            i. Cannot require the object to be beautiful
               1. Edwards explains the problem with the following reasoning, “If virtue be the beauty of an intelligent being, and virtue consists in love, then it is a plain inconsistence to suppose that virtue primarily consists in any love to its object for its beauty; either in a love of complacence, which is delight in a being for his beauty, or in a love of benevolence, that has the beauty of its object for its foundation. For that would be to suppose that the beauty of intelligent beings primarily consists in love to beauty; or, that their virtue first of all consists in their love to virtue. Which is an inconsistence, and going in a circle” (543)
               2. In other words, virtue cannot be the cause of itself, but must originate from something else, namely from consent to Being in general, which is its proper object
            ii. E.g. A rich man celebrating the recent success of a poor man and vice versa.
      2. Love of Complacence
a. Complacence is where an individual delights in the (primary) beauty of another being (543)
   i. Must require the object to be beautiful
      1. An object becomes beautiful by benevolence and hence loved on account of that (548)
      2. E.g. A husband loving the tireless care his wife shows to their children

iii. The (intensive) quantity of love is measured by two things:
   1. The amount of existence and benevolence the object to be consented to has and the amount the consenting subject has (548 – 549)

iv. Primary virtue is a product of the Holy Spirit working in an individual (619 – 620; (cf. End for Which God Created, WJE 8, 526 – 531)
   1. An engrafting of the Spirit in the individual to produce a new disposition, habit, or tendency towards doing virtuous (properly meritorious) works and deeds
      a. A debate exists over whether this is an introduction of an altogether new faculty (viz., the divine will) or the augmentation of an old one (viz., the human will)
   2. It is important to recognize that this engraftment is a literal participation the individual in the Spirit his intrinsic or personal holiness (as Holy Spirit) and not just the extrinsic effects of the Spirit
      a. Virtuous deeds can only ever be done by divine agency, not natural agency
      b. Participation in such holiness brings about new sensations or perceptions (analogous to tasting, seeing, hearing, etc.) of spiritual beauty; also, such new sensations motivate a person to true or spiritual virtue; illumination of both natural and divine realities, so that they are more understandable, yet without needing recourse to discursive knowledge (i.e. intuitive);

v. Primary virtue is inherently selfless, insofar as it is a form of love of others or love extended to all beings (541, 589)

vi. While virtue-beauty is brought about by consent to Being in general, it is defined as or consists of benevolence (546, 548)

b. Secondary Beauty and Virtue
i. Pertains to false virtue (561 – 562)

ii. Defined as uniformity amidst variety (562)
   1. Secondary beauty includes not just variety of extended parts in
      unity (quantitative proportionality), but also variety of functional
      parts in unity (effectual proportionality) (563)
      a. E.g. The proportions of a face; the organs of a body; the
         symmetry of a building; the coordination of the solar
         system; etc.

iii. Secondary virtue is a product of natural laws (instincts) and rationalized
     social constructs for preserving life (588, 600)

iv. Secondary beauty often exhibits itself as justice (569)
   1. Justice is the agreement of things that differ in nature, manner, and
      measure or, stated elsewise, when individuals in differing stations
      of life submit to one another accordingly (569)
      a. E.g. A master pays his servant the appropriate wages and
         also is kind or not overbearing to him, while the servant
         does his work and also respectful to him; a judge punishes
         a murderer, who slew an innocent child

v. Secondary virtue is inherently selfish, insofar as it is a form of self-love or
   love restricted to private interest (577 – 580)
   1. E.g. personal advantage despite others, familial affection,
      geopolitical affiliation, etc.

c. Comparing and contrasting primary and secondary beauty
   i. A distinct power of sense or sense faculty is needed to perceive both
      secondary and primary beauty (572 – 573)
      1. Distinct, because primary virtue is universal and disinterested in its
         objects, while secondary virtue is particular and self-interested in
         its objects (596)
   
   ii. In perceiving secondary beauty, the cause of that beauty (namely, its
       proportion) is not perceived, while in perceiving primary beauty, the cause
       of that beauty (namely, union with Being in general) is perceived (565 –
       566)

   iii. Secondary beauty is an image of primary beauty (564)
       1. An image, because a plurality or diversity of things have
          uniformity, they manifest consent

   iv. Secondary virtue is opposed to primary virtue, when self-love limits its
       object of love from Being in general to something less universal (555 –
       557)
1. Although it is true, secondary virtue can be resolved into or originate from primary virtue, hence the above problem (557 – 558, 609)

v. Same effects produced by different causes
   1. Several reasons for same effects:
      a. Benevolence is the tendency and effect of both causes (610)
      b. Loving what is benevolent and hating what is malevolent is an effect of both causes (612)
      c. Association of ideas may lead one to think they act disinterestedly, when in fact they do not (587 – 589)
         i. E.g. The habit of acknowledging running red lights to be an infraction against the law, may be the reason one thinks they are virtuous for stopping at a red light, whereas in fact one stopped, in order to avoid a car collision
      d. Positive (and/or utilitarian) consequences for the human race ensue from both causes (616)
      e. The restraint of evil is an effect of both causes (613 – 614)
      f. We do not distinguish linguistically from self-less and selfish forms of affections, such as gratitude, compassion, etc. (616 – 617)

2. One must always honestly interrogate themselves whether the good deed or meritorious work done originated from a divine cause or a natural cause

4. “Rounding it out”: additional misc. Edwardsian theses
   a. Edwards’ divine sense (of primary beauty) is Hutcheson’s moral sense, both of whom agree that beauty is received in an immediate and disinterested manner as a pleasurable perception and is intended towards benevolent love (virtue) or love of the public good; this internal power of sense or sense faculty is given by God
   b. Edwards believed in a literal and eternal hell, or place of damnation, to which workers of iniquity were sent after death
      i. See his “Miscellanies” nos. 1348 and 1356
   c. Edwards espoused (Humean) Causality, which understood causality in terms of ordered probability, where, for example, event B will usually follow event A and event C will usually follow event B, etc.; also, he espoused (Malebranchean) Occasionalism, where only the divine mind, and not created ones, had the efficacy to produce effects from causes; human causes being merely a marker or symbol for where divine intervention occurred
i. See his *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*, 4.3
d. Edwards adopted (Neo)Platonist tenets, such that matter and bodies are shadows of created minds and created minds are shadows of the divine mind
e. Edwards had a compatibilist understanding of the will and its choices, where a will is free, so long as it can execute or perform the things it is motivated to do without external restraint
   i. See his *Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of the Freedom of Will, Which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame*
f. Edwards was a (Berkeleyan) Idealist meaning that only minds and their perceptions exist, with the result that to be virtuous requires the divine mind (through the person of the Spirit) to work through created minds to be able to produce perceptions over and above their natural limitations (cf. limitation of human imagination to unlimited divine creation)³
   i. See his “Of Atoms”, “Of Being”, “The Mind”, “Subjects to be Handled in the Treatise on the Mind”, “Notes on Knowledge and Existence”, etc.

**Responses to TV**

1. How do CF and TV symbiotically relate?
   a. CF is scriptural, while TV is rational; CF expatiates upon love, while TV presumes it; CF presumes true (vs. false) virtue, while TV expatiates upon it; etc.
2. Given that the effects of true and false virtue are the same, is Edwards’ strict distinction between them compelling (Fiering, 361)?
3. How does Edwards’ soteriology (of election, regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification) bring about his ethical system? In other words, how does his soteriology help elucidate his ethics?
   a. Common vs. special grace = false vs. true virtue; uncertainty of election/regeneration requires internal proofs of the heart = uncertainty of true virtue requires internal proofs of the heart; etc.
4. To what extent does Edwards’ appropriation of optimistic Hutchesonian philosophy counteract his pessimistic Calvinism in ethics?
   a. No mention of original sin nor hell in TV; emphasis on a beautiful God, who created a beautiful world, versus a mighty and awful—literally: full of awe—God capable of doing anything he pleases with his creation; yet secondary beauty is

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³ Technically the sole divine mind and its perceptions exist, therefore the divine mind must produce a new combination of perceptions, so that the old combination (of false or natural perceptions) by the removal and/or addition of new perceptions is transformed into a new combination (of true or divine perceptions).
always an insubstantial shadow of primary beauty; moreover, true virtue is only known intellectually by the unregenerate and not volitionally.

5. Is grounding true virtue and primary beauty in consent to Being in general too abstract or arid?

6. If true virtue consists in consent to Being in general (the uniting of the individual in fraternity with the rest of the universe of individuals), then for God to be virtuous does this require a divine plurality? Yet, how can this be so, if there is only one entity, namely God (and not gods, such as Zeus, Hera, Demeter, etc.)?