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AMERICAN ANTINOMIANISMS
FROM ANNE HUTCHINSON TO PRAGMATISM

by

JENNIFER BERNSTEIN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of
New York

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Preface

“American Antinomianisms from Anne Hutchinson to Pragmatism” emerged out of my study of how ideas about knowledge and the mind have informed this country’s modes of philosophical and literary expression. Early on in my doctoral studies, I was introduced to Perry Miller’s *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* and became particularly interested in the degree to which the New England Puritan magistrates and ministers were influenced by the Ramist logic that they studied during their years at Cambridge. Soon I was hunting down copies of Petrus Ramus’ *Dialecticae*, Alexander Richardson’s *The Logicians School-Master*, and William Ames’ *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* and *Marrow of Theology*. For many months, I inhabited the mental world of these popular Ramist manuals: every day I came into consciousness with these writings and spent hours copying them in my own hand, trying in this way to experience the rhythms of the Puritans’ language and the habits of mind that brought these texts into existence.

The Ramists’ manipulation of information by means of a process of dichotomization that eventually led to “atomic particles which admitted of no further halving” both attracted and repelled me (Walter Ong 32). After a yearlong immersion in Puritan thought and writing, I was overwhelmed with details, interesting facts, and many hundreds of pages of notes that I did not know how to organize. Like Jonathan Edwards, I found there was something “very pleasant” about imagining the “thoughts that . . . lay . . . jumbled without any distinction” suddenly and almost magically “ranged

into order and distributed into classes and subdivisions” so that I could “tell where they all belonged, and run them up to their general heads” (*The Mind* 345). Yet, at the same time, this logic irritated me. Its practitioners held fast to the idea that the goal of discourse should be a highly organized series of axioms and tended to ignore, reject, or distort anything that could not easily be subjected to dichotomization. They “shuffled” ideas into “neat configurations” and then moved on, but it was seldom clear to me how these logicians and theologians arrived at their supposedly self-evident claims (Ong 185).

Just as I was starting to become sensitive to the limitations of Puritan logic, I happened to reread the documents drawn up during Anne Hutchinson’s General Court Examination (1637) and Church Trial (1638) and was intrigued by what I discovered. The records from the controversy grant us rare access to Ramian logic in action, and they allow us to witness how the magistrates and ministers dealt with challenges to their logic. In the first chapter, I demonstrate how Anne Hutchinson, America’s representative antinomian, questioned the individual terms of her interrogators’ axioms and syllogisms as she struggled to make sense of the charges leveled against her. In so doing, she exposed not only the weaknesses inherent in their logic, but also the extent to which they were privileging conclusions derived through logic and communal consensus over those obtained through direct relation to the divine. That is, she called attention to the deep-seated conflict that existed between the Puritans’ epistemological and theological convictions: their theories of knowledge accorded no value to the inner experiences of the divine upon which their theology rested.

Very little scholarly attention has, however, been given to the epistemological dimensions of the Antinomian Controversy (1636-1638) that took place in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Such neglect is understandable given the fact that the word

antinomian literally means “against the law” (*anti-*, against + *-nomos*, the law) and has traditionally been used to describe individuals who believe that those who have received God’s grace are no longer subject to human or moral law. The leaders of the colony exploited the social implications of the term and tried to make it seem as though the main problem with Hutchinson was that her actions “disturbe[d] the Churches, . . . interrupted the civill Peace, and. . . began. . . to raise sedition amongst [the colonists], to the indangering of the Common-wealth” (John Winthrop 213). Most scholars rely on the magistrates’ and ministers’ descriptions of the antinomians and have, as such, trained us to associate antinomianism with civil disobedience and other types of social dissent.¹ In the first chapter of my study, I return to the often-overlooked documents from the Antinomian Controversy in order to uncover *what it is that the antinomians themselves believed*. A close and careful reading of the extant records reveals that American antinomians (and those associated with them) were concerned first and foremost with *obedience* to God and had little or no interest in rejecting civil authority. The term antinomian does not, however, turn out to be completely inaccurate, since Hutchinson’s obedience to God did act to unsettle Puritan epistemology and its attempts to fix knowledge through systems of logic and language.

Once I was able to recognize the true nature of Hutchinson’s resistance, it became increasingly apparent to me that the Antinomian Controversy was much more than “a historical event important largely because it sheds light on the social realities of

¹ Amy Schrager Lang is one of the few scholars to make a clear distinction between the “controversy itself. . . and the narrative accounts of that controversy—the stories told about it” (9). In *Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England*, Lang works to “advanc[e] our understanding of the symbolic value of the story of Hutchinson,” paying special notice to the “recurrent and pejorative use of both the figure of Anne Hutchinson and the term antinomian” (4, 9).

the early colonies”: it was, in fact, the country’s first epistemological crisis, and it set the stage for future developments in American thought and writing (Lang 9). That is, American antinomianism did not come to an end when Hutchinson was banished and excommunicated. It was suppressed temporarily, but the questions Hutchinson raised regarding the stability and reliability of systems of knowledge and language lingered on over time and figured centrally in the evolution of American philosophical and literary discourse.

The chapters of my dissertation demonstrate how Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Charles Sanders Peirce, and William James explored, in various ways, the epistemological and stylistic consequences of obedience to God, the divine mind, or the higher laws of existence. In addition, I show how these thinkers developed even more radical ways of resisting the tendency to privilege law, or that which is fixed and settled.

The second chapter is devoted to examining Edwards’ understanding that living life in obedience to the divine mind meant living with the constant awareness that no epistemological system or single act of perception could give the human mind a firm or permanent grasp of the “infinitely exact and precise and perfectly stable idea in God’s mind” (*The Miscellanies* 458). I show how, over the course of his career, Edwards found an intellectually respectable means of validating the dynamic, constantly changing relations between the human and divine minds. Special consideration is given to Edwards’ ideas about the mind and how they differ from his Puritan predecessors; his appropriation of John Locke’s theories concerning the role that experience plays in the formation of human knowledge; the extent to which Lockean empiricism helped him open up language to the processes (not just the products) of thinking; and how Edwards’

own notions of consent and the “sense of the heart” assisted him in granting positive epistemological value to felt relations to the divine mind. In essence, Edwards was developing an epistemological framework for antinomianism, something that Hutchinson and other seventeenth-century antinomians lacked. Moreover, I argue that *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* is an antinomian manual, one which provides its readers with a method for engaging in the ongoing activity of evaluating their felt relations to the divine mind.

In the third chapter, I focus on Emerson’s and Thoreau’s arguments regarding the necessity of obeying what they refer to as the higher laws of existence. Like the ideas that Edwards ascribes to the divine mind, these “serene and beautiful laws” lie “grand and immovable, often unsuspected behind” all things and are characterized by a “fatal sureness” (Emerson “Lecture on the Times” 153, An Address 86-87). Emerson and Thoreau believed us incapable of perceiving the ends of these laws. They argued that we should align ourselves with the creative cause of these laws by immersing ourselves in the ongoing process of creation and dissolution and resisting our “mischievous tendency” to rest in past acts or creations (“Method of Nature” 124). Central to the chapter is an investigation of Emerson’s and Thoreau’s awareness that nature exists in a state of “unbroken obedience” to the ecstasy of creation; an analysis of their understanding that studying the method of nature is a way of studying the hidden nature of our own minds; and an examination of how they appropriated the principles of transcendentalism and romanticism as a means of shifting attention away from the products of thinking and towards the place from which ideas emerge (“Natural History of the Intellect” 4). Of particular interest to me is the way these poet-philosophers fashioned literary styles that reflect their epistemological convictions. *Nature* and *Walden*

are antinomian manuals that are designed to discourage readers from subscribing to a fixed set of beliefs or particular conclusions. These books encourage readers to tap into the higher laws of their own being by becoming engaged in thinking, the activity that brings us as close as we can get to the “mysterious seat of power and creation” (“Natural History of the Intellect” 4).

Finally, in the epilogue, I explain how, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a transformed antinomianism merges into pragmatism, a philosophical method born out of Peirce’s and James’ understanding that the laws or truths or axioms we are able to perceive are not eternal verities in which we can rest but are only approximations of greater truths that are in the process of coming into existence. The pragmatic method they devised aimed not to fix knowledge but to account for its constant settling and unsettling. Pragmatism truly was, as the subtitle to James’ book stated, a “new name for some old ways of thinking.”

* * * * *

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and continues to be inestimable. William Kelly's careful reading of my chapters and his perceptive comments aided me in maintaining a critical perspective on my work. I'd also like to thank David Reynolds for his constructive feedback on my writing and for delivering a paper on a special session on "American Antinomianisms" that I chaired at the 2002 MLA Convention. Ellen and Richard Bernstein, Sharon Cohen, Lynda Curnyn, Shahna Paul, and Karina Rosenberg provided me with the emotional sustenance necessary for bringing this project to completion.

Contents

Preface		i-x
Chapter One:	New England's First Epistemological Crisis:	
	The Antinomian Controversy	1-41
Chapter Two:	The American Mind in Transition:	
	Jonathan Edwards and the Inner Territory	
	of Felt Relations	42-74
Chapter Three:	Antinomian Epistemologies and Styles:	75-134
	The Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and	
	Henry David Thoreau	
Epilogue:	Antinomianism and Pragmatism in the	135-143
	Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth	
	Centuries	
Works Cited		144-151

Chapter One

New England's First Epistemological Crisis:

The Antinomian Controversy

The Antinomian Controversy (1636-1638) was about more than a group of individuals who believed that a person who had received God's grace was no longer subject to human law: it was the colony's first epistemological crisis. The opponents of antinomianism did not, however, desire to acknowledge the challenges being posed to their theories of human knowledge and language, and they applied the label antinomian specifically in order to discredit Anne Hutchinson and her followers. The term suggested "licentious behavior" and lawlessness (*anti-*, against + *-nomos*, the law), and the leaders of the newly founded colony exploited these implications in order to make those "who stood for 'free grace'" seem to pose dangerous threats to civil life (David D. Hall 3). The strategies they employed to divert attention from the profound epistemological issues raised during the controversy were remarkably effective. Almost all scholars have accepted without question a definition of antinomianism that does not reflect accurately the beliefs of those deemed antinomian and have, in consequence, concentrated on issues of civil disobedience and other forms of social dissent.¹ In this chapter, I demonstrate,

¹ There are only a small handful of studies that touch upon the epistemological issues at stake in the controversy. In *Three Episodes of Massachusetts History: The Settlement of Boston Bay, The Antinomian Controversy, A Study of Church and Town Government* (1892), Charles Francis Adams pointed out that the controversy "was in reality not a religious dispute. . .; it was the first of the many New

however, that American antinomians were concerned chiefly with obedience to God and had little interest in the rejection of civil authority.² What made them so threatening to

England quickenings in the direction of social, intellectual and political development,--New England's earliest protest against formulas" (367). Adams did not, however, develop his observation about the intellectual aspects of the controversy into a sustained analysis of how the antinomians challenged Puritan epistemology. In "The Antinomian Language Controversy" (1976), Patricia Caldwell examines the threat that Anne Hutchinson posed to the Puritans' ideas about the reliability of language, ideas that were essential to their theories of human knowledge. Her explication of these issues is explored in the forthcoming sections on the manufacturing of communal consensus and Hutchinson's Church Trial. Also, in "Sign and Subject: Antinomianism in Massachusetts Bay" (1985), Ross J. Pudaloff argues that the colonists' desire "to `enjoy the libertye, not of some ordinances of God, but all, and all in puritie,'" quickly forced them to confront "the conflict between what Michel Foucault has labeled the Renaissance and Classical *epistemes*" (147). The Antinomian Controversy, he contends, "marks the rupture between the organic and contractual model as it reveals the dominance of the latter" (147). A more detailed discussion of Pudaloff's argument (and how mine differs from his) appears in the upcoming sections on the role of communal consensus in Hutchinson's General Court Examination and in the discussion about the either/or mentality that characterizes the thinking processes and memories of those trained in Ramian logic. For a comprehensive and insightful review of the scholarship on American antinomianism see Amy Schrager Lang's *Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England*.

² This is not to say that there were no challenges to civil authority during the years of the Antinomian Controversy. There were. For instance, some of those deemed antinomian "refused to serve in military expeditions against the neighboring Pequots" when Reverend John Wilson, who was allegedly preaching a covenant of works, was made the pastor to the troops (Janice Knight 18). In addition, when John Winthrop was elected Governor, replacing Henry Vane, who was "an admirer of Hutchinson," the "honor guard that Boston provided the office-holder refused to escort him" (Hall 7, 9). After John Wheelwright was charged with sedition for having proposed in his infamous A Fast-Day Sermon that the colony must "prepare for a spirituall combate" against "those under a covenant of works," his supporters put together a petition arguing against his censure (158). These actions are not, however, what the magistrates and ministers found most threatening about the antinomians. The greatest threat of the antinomians, as we are about to see, was epistemological rather than social. American antinomianism is thus different from the antinomian uprisings in Europe. In *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, Christopher Hill remarks that the radical Protestants in England "wanted to abolish church courts and all vestiges of priestly control" (161). He also notes that although "Protestantism began by looking like a great liberation of the human spirit," within "a decade of Luther's protest he was faced by a peasant revolt which attacked property and social subordination. . .; and within another decade the Anabaptists of Munster rose against the whole existing order" (161). Hill points out that later, in the 1640s, the "Presbyterian discipline. . .stimulated that antinomian rejection of the bondage of the moral law which with some Ranters became a rejection of all traditional moral restraints" (161). The various forms of antinomianism that developed abroad were intended to create opposition to civil and church authority and were meant to transform the social order. American antinomianism, on the other hand, was far more intellectual in orientation.

the magistrates and ministers was, I argue, the way their obedience to God unsettled the prevailing assumptions about conscience, logic, and language.

The earliest documents, the written exchanges between John Cotton (the minister with whom Hutchinson most closely aligned herself) and two of the other leading divines, set the epistemological tone of the controversy.³ The main issue addressed in the letters between Cotton, Thomas Shepard, and Peter Bulkeley and in the replies to the *Sixteene Questions of Serious and Necessary Consequence* (drawn up after a conference with Cotton, Wheelwright, and Hutchinson) was the degree to which sanctification was proof of justification. Sanctification meant leading a good life and practicing good works (e.g., showing “love to the brethren” or “hungring and thirsting” for Christ), and justification referred to God’s redemption of man’s soul (Wheelwright 161). There was very little discussion about what actually constituted sanctification; the issue of good works or actions was examined only in terms of how such behavior fit into the Puritans’ systems of knowing. Thus though the terms over which they were arguing had theological and social connotations, the dispute itself was essentially epistemological in that it was focused on *how we know* we are saved and how we can *prove that we know* we are saved.⁴

These texts are especially revealing in that they grant us privileged access to the way the leaders of the young colony dealt with the stresses placed on the theological and

³ Unless otherwise noted, all references to records from the controversy are taken from Hall’s *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*.

⁴ The epistemological nature of the debate regarding sanctification and justification distinguishes the Antinomian Controversy from the more strictly theological quarrels between preparationists and nonpreparationists. The central issue that preparationists and nonpreparationists argued about was how much man could *do* prior to regeneration. Those involved in the Antinomian Controversy, on the other hand, were more concerned with the question of how man could *know* and *prove* that he was saved. See Norman Pettit’s *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* for a discussion of the relationship between the Antinomian Controversy and theories of preparation for conversion.

epistemological heritage they carried over with them to the New World. Harry S. Stout explains that sanctification became of more and more interest to the colonists because in order to prevent the colony from “splinter[ing] off in a hundred directions,” the “populace had to be convinced that their personal salvation depended in some measure on their collective behavior” (28). He observes that the “extensive marginalia” of the Geneva Bible, which had been popular with Puritans while they were still in the Old World, “emphasize[d] the private quest for salvation and insist[ed] on Christ as the sole object of contemplation” and contends that the ministers eventually switched to the Authorized Version of 1611 because the “New World realities of community formation, social containment, and survival shifted the interpretive concerns from personal to corporate piety, and from the saint’s progress to heaven to his life on earth” (37, 28). The antinomians and those associated with them “exhibit[ed],” however, “a decided preference for the Geneva translation” (e.g., Hutchinson quoted from it during her General Court Examination and Wheelwright relied on it when composing his A Fast-Day Sermon) and hence, since they “could find no justification” in their bible “for a conditional covenant in personal or national terms,” they resisted the growing trend towards allowing sanctification to stand as a trustworthy and primary sign of justification (37, 31). Though the social motivations behind the attempts to make sanctification a reliable sign of justification are undeniable, what is most significant about the recorded exchanges with Cotton is the way the ministers employed their logical and rhetorical expertise in order to institute and, at the same time, conceal the adjustments they were making to their theories of theology and knowledge.

Their debates about sanctification and justification focused on two central points: the question of what constituted the most trustworthy means of grounding one’s

knowledge of salvation and the ambiguous use of the term “evidence.” Cotton held that even though a man may see the work of Christ in himself before being “sealed by the Spirit,” a “true Beleever” cannot have “*full settled Comfort*” in any “*Worke of Christ*” (emphasis added; 47, 49). For Cotton, it was perfectly acceptable to “accept the witness of our Sanctification” as a “‘later, or secondary prooffe’” as long as the “witness of the Spirit. . .hath gone before it” (125). However, the ministers questioning him preferred a vaguer claim: “Sanctification being discerned by us” may be “a true Evidence of Justification,” for “the work and word and object which God hath joined together to comfort” should “not be separate” (46-47, 85). Cotton agreed with them but insisted that “every one of them. . .take his own place in his own order” and argued that the “*ground of our comfort*” is “first laid in our union with Christ, and in our knowledge of his love towards us: thence follows our love of him, and this fruit of our love we keep his commandments” (emphasis added; 86). He pointed out that he does “not say to give no other *evidence*, but to give no other *ground* of my Justification” (116). Cotton explained:

To *evidence* my Justification by my Sanctification, though it may be. . .a plain and [familiar] Phrase, yet it is indeed ambiguous. . . .To *evidence* my Iustification by my Sanctification, is. . .to give. . .my Sanctification for an *evident Argument* of my Iustification: Thus farre the Phrase is plain. But now when I give it for an *evident Argument*, I may give it either for an *evident cause or ground* of my Iustification, or for an *evident Sign or Effect* of it. Again, when I give it for an *evident sign* of Iustification, I may either give it for an *only sign* (having nothing else to shew for my Iustification) or I may give it for a *concurrent Sign*, together with *other Signs and Witnesses*, which may make

both my Justification and my Sanctification *evident* and clear to my self and others. (emphasis added; 52-53)

Having “cleared the ambiguity and obscurity of the Phrase,” he noted that “to give my Sanctification for an *evident ground, cause, or matter* of my Iustification, is to build my Iustification upon my Sanctification, and go on in a Covenant of Works,” for it would mean his soul had “no *Evidence* of his Dependence upon Christ for Righteousnesse. . .but onely. . .seeth an *evident Change* wrought in himselfe, from a prophane or civill course” (emphasis added; 53-54).⁵ He added, “though the Soule may gather *Knowledge* of his estate, from such Evidences of *Sanctification*; yet if he shall therefore build his justifying Faith upon such evidences, he shall againe goe aside to a *Covenant* of Workes” (57). Justification “cannot safely build or rest upon any ground, save onely upon Christ and his *Righteousnesse*” (57). The only sure ground of our knowledge of justification was, for Cotton, the “witness of the Spirit of Christ in a free promise of grace” (178). The fundamental differences between Cotton and the other ministers were never quite resolved.

Nevertheless, there was something about Cotton’s means of expression that made him seem less threatening to the colony than Hutchinson. Janice Knight observes that he was able to “phras[e]” his “resistance in nearly the same language as the orthodoxy” and “could simulate outer agreement while in important ways remaining substantively other” (32). Throughout the controversy Cotton, though never abandoning his argument that one’s first assurance of justification must be through an immediate witnessing of the Spirit, minimized the apparent differences between himself and other ministers. He

⁵ I have italicized the words “evidence” and “evident” as well as relevant logical terminology (e.g., “argument,” “sign,” “effect,” “ground,” “cause,” and “matter”) in order to draw attention away from the more purely theological issues of sanctification and justification and towards the epistemological issues being addressed.

claimed to be sorry whenever “comparisons” were made between “his ministry” and that of the others and, like Shepard, spoke of “cut[ting] off all seeming differences and jars” (334, 27). He insisted that “all of us hold Union with Christ, and evidencing of Union by the same Spirit, and the same Faith and the same holiness: though some may conceive the Union wrought in giving the habit, and others rather refer it to the act: and some may give the second place to that, whereto others give the first” (416). Cotton also made a strategic move when he resisted providing “a direct answer, affirmative or negative” to the “points wherein” the other ministers “suspected” he “did differ” (*Winthrop History* 209). These points were in the form of questions such as whether he believed that “a man may or ought to see any saving work of Christ in himself and take comfort from it before he be sealed by the Spirit” (46-7). His avoidance of simple yes or no answers helped minimize the perception of differences between himself and other ministers, for it permitted him to do as they did—to insist on degrees of intellectual comfort and assurance regarding one’s spiritual condition. His answer to the point just mentioned was, as we saw earlier, that while one may see the work of Christ in himself prior to experiencing the immediate witness of the Spirit, a genuine believer does not rest content with a work of Christ. Seen in this light, Cotton’s positions did not seem so jarringly contrary to the prevailing views; the difference was simply a matter of degree and order. Most interesting, perhaps, is the provisional solution they arrived at after months of strained correspondence and conferences. Cotton “gave satisfaction to them, so as he agreed with them. . .that sanctification *did help to evidence justification*” (emphasis added; *Winthrop History I* 201). To have rejected Cotton’s position in a formal or official manner would have been to reject one of the fundamental tenets of their theology (the privileging of God’s free grace over a covenant of works). Nevertheless, the ministers

were unable or unwilling to downplay the significance of sanctified behavior in the New World. They were attempting to create more of a balance between grace and works while at the same time trying to cover up such a change through the ambiguous use of key terms like “evidence.” They maintained that “sanctification being discerned by us” is “a true Evidence of Justification,” a statement to which Cotton would have agreed if only it was more specifically stated that sanctification was preceded by the witness of the Spirit (46-7). Cotton tried his best to clear up the “ambiguity and obscurity” of the term (53). However, in the end he resolved with them to perpetuate the equivocal use of the term by agreeing to refrain from mentioning how *exactly* sanctification helped evidence justification.

Those who would not accept such equivocation insisted on pointing out the very real differences in the ministers’ beliefs and were penalized for so doing. The antinomians and their followers were reputed to have “employed their Distinctions about a Covenant of Works and a Covenant of Grace” at an “Extravagant. . .rate” (Cotton Mather 14). The unambiguous language that Wheelwright employed in his A Fast-Day Sermon supports this claim. Wheelwright declared that “to preach the Gospell is to preach Christ,” and to “preach Christ” is to take all “away from the creature” and give all “to Christ, so that neither before our conversion nor after” are we considered “able to do any worke of sanctification, further then we are acted by the Lord, nor able to procure our justification, but it must be the Lord Jesus Christ that must apply himselfe and his righteousness to us” (160). Winthrop explains that Wheelwright’s sermon “divided the whole Country into two ranks, some. . .under a Covenant of Grace, and those were friends to Christ; others under a Covenant of Workes, whom they might know by this; if they evidence their good estate by their Sanctification” (210-11). We have been taught to

remember the “course” Wheelwright advocated in order “to keep the Lord Jesus Christ”: preparation for “a spirituall combate” fought by “true believers” with “spirituall,” “not carnall,” weapons (158). Yet even though he was found guilty of “troubling the civill peace. . .for his seditious Sermon” and sentenced to banishment, Wheelwright’s supporters (especially those who signed a petition against his censure and presented it to the General Court) maintained that he was “sincere” in his “intention. . .to promote” the “publick peace of the Churches,” for he “indevooured to draw us nearer unto Christ. . ., which we conceive to bee the true way, sanctified of God, to obtaine your end” (249). They held that he “cannot justly be branded with sedition” because what he was preaching was “no other but the very expressions of the Holy Ghost himselfe” (249). The most threatening part of Wheelwright’s sermon was not, despite the magistrates’ and ministers’ protestations to the contrary, that they feared actual combat but that attention was being drawn to how far the colonists had strayed from reliance on Christ. They worried that it was beginning “to be as common here to distinguish between men, by being under a covenant of grace or a covenant of works, as in other countries between Protestants and Papists” (Winthrop *History* 213-14). In unmistakably clear, jargon-free language, Wheelwright and others were declaring that the majority of ministers were not drawing the community “nearer unto Christ” but nearer unto their own earthly authority, and this was *not* something they wanted to admit to themselves or to the public (249).

Hutchinson was also charged with having “troubled the peace of the commonwealth and the churches” and, like Wheelwright, was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony (312). The threat she posed to the colony was, however, somehow greater and more complicated than that of the others. At the beginning of her General Court Examination, Winthrop noted the three main charges against her: she

“hath had a great share in the promoting and divulging of those opinions that are the causes of this trouble, and to be nearly joined. . .in affinity and affection with some of those the court. . .passed censure upon,” she “maintained a meeting and an assembly in [her] house that hath been condemned by the general assembly as a thing not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God nor fitting for [her] sex,” and she had “spoken divers things. . .very prejudicial to the honour of the churches and ministers” (312). Careful analysis of key exchanges during her court examination enables us to see how she was calling attention to the way the magistrates and ministers were compromising their theological convictions in order to “accomodat[e]” them “to the exigencies of colonial life” and was, unlike Cotton or Wheelwright, exposing the weaknesses of Ramian logic and questioning the Puritans’ ideas about the stability and reliability of language (Lang 27). Hutchinson was, in short, challenging the theories of logic and language that formed the mainstays of Puritan epistemology.

The dialogue between governor Winthrop and Hutchinson at the beginning of the court examination is most revealing. Winthrop starts by informing her that the goal of the examination is to determine whether or not she is “in an erroneous way” (312). If she is, those questioning her shall attempt to “reduce” her “so that [she] may become a profitable member here among us” (312). However, if she is “obstinate in [her] course then the court may take such course that [she] may trouble us no further” (312). After these preliminary remarks, Winthrop “intreat[s]” her “to express whether” she “do not hold and assent in practice to those opinions and factions that have been handled in court already, that is to say, whether [she] do not justify Wheelwright’s sermon and the petition” (312). Hutchinson responds, “I hear no things laid to my charge. . . .What have I said or done?” (312). The examination continues:

Gov. You did harbour and countenance those that are parties in this faction that you have heard of.

Mrs. H. That's matter of conscience, Sir.

Gov. Your conscience you must keep or it must be kept for you.

Mrs. H Must not I then entertain the saints because I must keep my conscience.

Gov. Say that one brother should commit felony or treason and come to his other brother's house, if he knows him guilty and conceals him he is guilty of the same. It is his conscience to entertain him, but if his conscience comes into act in giving countenance and entertainment to him that hath broken the law he is guilty too. So if you do countenance those that are transgressors of the law you are in the same fact.

Mrs. H What law do they transgress?

Gov. The law of God and of the state.

Mrs. H. In what particular?

Gov. Why in this among the rest, whereas the Lord doth say honour thy father and thy mother.

Mrs. H. Ey Sir in the Lord.

Gov. This honour you have broke in giving countenance to them.

Mrs. H In entertaining those did I entertain them against any act (for there is the thing) or what God hath appointed?

Gov. You knew that Mr. Wheelwright did preach this sermon
and those that countenance him in this do break a law.

Mrs. H. What law have I broken?

Gov. Why the fifth commandment.

Mrs. H. I deny that for he saith in the Lord.

Gov. You have joined with them in the faction.

Mrs. H. In what faction have I joined with them?

Gov. In presenting the petition.

Mrs. H. Suppose I had set my hand to the petition what then?

Gov. You saw that case tried before.

Mrs. H. But I had not my hand to the petition.

Gov. You have counselled them.

Mrs. H. Wherein?

Gov. Why in entertaining them.

Mrs. H. What breach of law is that Sir?

Gov. Why dishonouring of parents.

Mrs. H. But put the case Sir that I do fear the Lord and my
parents, may not I entertain them that fear the Lord
because my parents will not give me leave?

Gov. If they be the fathers of the commonwealth, and they of
another religion, if you entertain them then you dishonour
your parents and are justly punishable.

Mrs. H. If I entertain them, as they have dishonoured their parents
I do.

- Gov. No but you by countenancing them above others put honour upon them.
- Mrs. H. I may put honour upon them as the children of God and as they do honor the Lord.
- Gov. We do not mean to discourse with those of your sex but only this; you do adhere unto them and do endeavor to set forward this faction and so you do dishonour us.
- Mrs. H. I do acknowledge no such thing neither do I think that I ever put any dishonour upon you. (312-4)

The styles of thinking and speaking that inform these seemingly simple and straightforward series of exchanges have much to tell us about the stresses that were placed on Puritan epistemology in New England.

One of the first epistemological issues raised during Hutchinson's examination has to do with conscience. Hall and others have pointed out that the controversy was not "about matters of doctrine" so much as it was about the "power and freedom of conscience" (11). Those questioning Hutchinson, however, found themselves in a difficult position since they were not permitted to persecute for matters of conscience.⁶

⁶ The earlier dispute between Roger Williams and Cotton should not be overlooked. Williams was against "the *Doctrine of Persecution* for cause of *conscience*" and asserted that "the permission of other *consciencies* and *worships*" can "procure a firme and lasting *peace*" as long as the members of each sect heed the laws of the colony (3-4). He believed that "such as may hold forth other *Worships* or *Religions* (*Jewes, Turkes, or Antichristians*) may. . . be peaceable and quiet *Subjects*, loving and helpfull *neighbours*" and "true and loyall to the civill government" even though "in *spirituall* and *mysticall* account they are ravenous and greedy *Wolves*" (142). One of the reasons Williams' proposal to tolerate "other *consciencies*" was problematic to the colonial leaders (who expelled him in 1635) was that it invalidated their claims that sanctified behavior, or good works, was a reliable sign of justification (4). The residual traces of the debate with Williams are apparent in Winthrop's response to Hutchinson's question as to whether or not she may "entertain them that fear the Lord because her parents will not give [her] leave" (314). Winthrop retorts: "If they be the fathers of the commonwealth, and *they of another religion*, if you entertain them then you dishonour your parents and are justly punishable" (emphasis added; 314). Winthrop's statement seems more

As John Cogshall (who did not have his “hand to the Petition” but did “approve” of it) pointed out when he was called to court, there was “not one example in Scripture” in which “a man was banished for his judgement” (258-59). Those grilling him answered that though they “doe not challenge power over mens consciences,” it was their “duty to use authority to reforme” those whose consciences led them to “troubl[e]” or “endange[r]” the “publike peace” (259). The court’s powerlessness to punish people for matters of conscience might account for why those interrogating Hutchinson were so quick to exaggerate the social threat she posed to the colony. She had to be made to seem a menace to the social order in order to avoid any suspicion of her being punished for “different opinion” or “judgment,” and this was particularly difficult to do in regard to the charge concerning her affiliation with those who signed the petition against Wheelwright’s banishment since she did not actually sign it (259).

Winthrop resorted to subtle forms of linguistic manipulation in order to make it look as though Hutchinson’s “countenancing” of Wheelwright’s allies was a criminal *act* rather than a mere opinion or judgment. He wanted to know, for instance, whether she “doe not hold and *assent in practice*” to the petitioners (emphasis added; 312). Then there is the analogy he created, which aims to make her “countenanc[ing]” of the petitioners equivalent to being an abettor who provides physical shelter to “a brother” who has “commit[t]ed felony or treason” (313).⁷ Note also the quick switch the governor makes

appropriate as a reply to Williams’ assertions regarding those who “hold forth other *Worships* or *Religions*” than it does to Hutchinson’s question since Wheelwright and the others like him who “fear the Lord” were not “of another religion” (142, 314). The series of exchanges with Hutchinson regarding “matter[s] of conscience” thus distinguishes the Antinomian Controversy from the debates with Williams, for they focus on the different conclusions arrived at by the consciences of those *within* their religion (312).

⁷ This is not to suggest that conscience was not considered an act. It was. As William Ames explained, “Conscience is not a *contemplative judgement*, whereby truth is simply discerned from

from talk of physical concealment to “countenancing”; perhaps he was hoping that the similar initial sounds of the two words (“concealment and “countenance”) would minimize the likelihood that others would detect his conflation of mental approval of a position with actual concealment of a criminal. Winthrop did not, however, succeed in his endeavors. Hutchinson seems to have sensed what was going on and continued to ask, “What have I said or done?” (312). Nor, apparently, did he do an effective job convincing the English. His “Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines” (1644) was written in part as a “response” to their “accusations that the colonists prosecuted cases of conscience as civil crimes” (Lang 10). Embedded more deeply within the narrative regarding Hutchinson’s “countenanc[ing]” are even more significant issues regarding conscience; these can be discerned only by taking a closer look at the role that conscience was assigned in Puritan epistemology.

The Puritans’ intense longing to regain the certainty they believed man lost in consequence of the Fall led them to place a great deal of emphasis on conscience. William Ames defined conscience as a “mans judgement of himselfe”; it was a way man could assess where he stood in relation to the “revealed will of God,” and it “doth alwaies suppose an assent that is firme and settled” (1, 6, 2). “The law,” or “revealed will of God,” was, as he explained in *The Marrow of Theology*, “written in the heart in the form of disposition. . . , where the first foundation of conscience called *synteresis* is located” (6, 112). The *synteresis* is a “habit of understanding, by which we doe assent unto. . . such actions as are our duty, because God hath willed, or commanded them” (4). Yet even

falsehood: but a *practicall* judgement, by which, that which a man knoweth is particularly applied to that which is either good or evill to him, to the end that it may be a rule within him to direct his will” (2). Conscience was thus believed to be a private and personal act of judgment. During Hutchinson’s examination, the emphasis, however, was on making acts of conscience (e.g., of countenancing the opinions of others) appear to be civil acts, especially criminal ones.

though “through the goodnesse of God, the knowledge of many things which wee ought to doe or shun, are still conserved in mans mind. . .after [the] fall,” there were still many instances in which man’s conscience was in doubt and therefore could “yeeldeth to neither part of the question in hand” but would be prone to “*sticke[ing] and stagger[ing] betweene assent and dissent*, not knowing which to doe” (emphasis added; 4, 17). Ames’ *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof*, which, like his *Marrow of Theology*, was designed to be used “as a useful compendium for laymen and students,” sets forth “case[s] of conscience, . . . practicall question[s], concerning which, the Conscience may make a doubt” and proposes a system for solving these cases (John D. Eusden 2, Ames 1). The manual addresses questions regarding how a man may know “whether he that hath Faith, may by ordinary means certainly know, that he is effectually called of God and in the state of grace” and “by what signes the certainty of this effectuall vocation and grace may be confirmed” (9-10). An individual would clarify his doubts by relating the law, as articulated in the Bible, to himself and then arrive at a judgment. For example, if a man wanted to know whether or not he shall die, he would first search through the Bible to find references to death. He might come across the following statement: “He that lives in sinne, shall dye.” The seeker would then have to search himself (his mind, actions, and feelings) and then assess himself in relation to this statement by asking himself whether or not he sins. If he finds that he lives in sin, he forms the following disjunctive syllogism: “He that lives in sinne, shall dye: I live in sinne; Therefore, I shall dye” (3). The case of conscience before the General Court of the Massachusetts’s Bay could not, however, be resolved as neatly or as easily as those presented in Ames’ handbook. The fact that neither side felt its conscience to be “stick[ing] or stagger[ing]” did not help

matters (17). Moreover, the colonists were facing the very difficult question of what to do when two differing parties within the same religion “saith in the Lord” (313).

The magistrates and ministers wound up resolving the question by declaring that in such a situation the conclusions arrived at by the “fathers of the commonwealth” were to be obeyed (314). Their conclusion, though, was in plain opposition to the more traditional Puritan argument espoused by Ames: “the perfect and only rule of Conscience is the revealed will of God, whereby a mans duty is both showne and commanded” (6). The phrasing Ames uses to express this conviction has special relevance to the dialogue from Hutchinson’s examination:

though men be bound in Conscience by God to observe in due and just circumstances the lawes of men, yet the same lawes of men so far as they are mans lawes, doe not bind the Conscience. The Conscience is immediately subject to God, and his will, and therefore it cannot submit itselfe unto any creature without idolatry. . . . *Parents and Children are bound to mutuall duties; he that hath received a benefit is bound to shew himself thankfull,* (and the like may be said of many other things) yet *none of these, either Parent, Benefactor, relation, or benefit, do of themselves binde the conscience.* . . . (emphasis added; 6-7).

Winthrop summoned up the biblical commandment that one must “honour thy father and thy mother” in order to support his argument that by “countenanc[ing]” those who signed the petition Hutchinson has “dishonour[ed]” her parents (the magistrates and ministers). Yet Hutchinson rightly pointed out that she may “entertain them that fear the Lord” even though her “parents will not give [her] leave” (314). Her conscience is bound to God, not civil leaders. Hutchinson’s insistence on maintaining this position was

especially threatening because it brought the colonial leaders uncomfortably close to having to make explicit what they wanted to remain tacit: the extent to which they were privileging communal consensus or the interpretation of individual officials over what was perceived to be divine decree.

The unwillingness of the colony's leaders to make known the epistemological basis of their decisions is even more evident in the handling of the second charge against Hutchinson. The second charge has to do with the meetings Hutchinson held in her home. These gatherings had been "condemned by the general assembly as a thing not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God nor fitting for [her] sex" (312).⁸ Hutchinson asserts that "there lyes a clear rule in Titus, that the elder women should instruct the younger" (315). Winthrop does not refute her intention to educate the younger women but complains that men were also present at her meetings and tells her that "there is no warrant for" her doings" (314). Hutchinson asks him to "give [her] a rule for then [she] will willingly submit to any truth. If any come to my house to be instructed in the ways of God what rule have I to put them away?" (315). Winthrop declares that "there is *no rule that crosses another*, but this rule crosses that in Corinthians. But *you must take it in this sense* that elder women must instruct the younger about their business, and to love their husbands and not to make them clash" (emphasis added; 316). It is not readily apparent, however, how exactly these two rules cross one another. In Titus, the "aged women" are

⁸ One might assert that these meetings are evidence of Hutchinson's disobedience and of the threat she posed to the existing social order of the colony. Yet once again such a conclusion would be inaccurate, for despite the seemingly subversive nature of the meetings, Hutchinson points out that she held them not to promote civil dissension but to align herself with the prevailing customs of the Bay community. She explains that she started attending and holding such meetings because her neighbors thought her absence from these gatherings meant she was "proud" or that she "did not allow of such meetings but held them unlawful" (314). She "took . . . up" the meetings in the spirit of social harmony, in the hopes of "prevent[ing] . . . aspersions" and is quick to point out they were "in practice before [she] came" to New England (314).

told to be “teachers of good things”; they “may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children. To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (2.3,4, 5). In Corinthians, it is declared to be “a shame for women to speak in the church,” and it is stated that “if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home” (14.34.35). One scriptural passage describes what the elder women should teach the young and the other sets forth a rule that women are not to speak in church. Hutchinson was admittedly acting in a general sense as a teacher of what she perceived to be “good things” instead of limiting herself to the more narrowly defined activities described in Titus. Yet there is nothing in the passage from Titus that specifically precludes women from teaching other things, and the excerpt from Corinthians does not seem relevant to the discussion since Hutchinson was not charged with speaking *in* church but with having spoken *about* its ministers. Winthrop was himself deciding in what “sense” she “must take” the scriptural command, and whenever Hutchinson brings him to the brink of having to admit his own interpretive role, he launches into a speech like the following one (316).

Your course is not to be suffered for, besides that we find such a course as this to be greatly prejudicial to the state, besides the occasion that it is to seduce many honest persons that are called to those meetings and your opinions being known to be different from the word of God may seduce many simple souls that resort unto you, besides that the occasion which hath come of late hath come from none but such as have frequented your meetings, so that now they are flown off from magistrates and ministers

and this since they have come to you, and besides that it will not well stand with the commonwealth that families should be neglected. . . . (316)

Similarly, at the end of the dialogue regarding the first charge, just as Hutchinson is forcing him to acknowledge his favoring of the “fathers of the commonwealth” over “the Lord,” he gets out of the uncomfortable situation by declaring: “We do not mean to discourse with those of your sex but only this; you do adhere unto them and do endeavour to set forward this faction and so do you dishonour us” (314). Winthrop shuts the dialogue down. The reluctance of colonial officials to make known publicly that they were relying on communal consensus or their own organizing intelligences much more than they were on any direct or definite relation to the divine contradicts Ross Pudaloff’s claims that the Antinomian Controversy “marks the rupture” between the older “organic. . . model,” which “conceived language as the creation of God and valued human language for its correspondence with divine and natural reality” and the more modern “contractual model,” which “understood. . . the value of language” to “resid[e] in the arbitrary and social nature of the sign” (147-48). The “contractual model,” which Pudaloff asserts started to achieve “dominance” during the Controversy, was based on the idea that language “was more than a series of representations; it was itself the representation of order” and had to be “tightly controlled” through a “rigid interpretive process of which only a few are capable” (147, 148, 157).⁹ As Winthrop’s strong reaction suggests, however, the leaders of the colony were not ready to admit that they were heading in such a secular direction.

⁹ If the larger picture of American philosophical and linguistic expression is taken into consideration, it becomes apparent that it took a much longer time for the correspondence between human language and divine or supreme reality to fade away. This correspondence, for instance, is still very present in the typology that Jonathan Edwards sets forth in *Images of Divine Things* and in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s understanding of language.

Hutchinson was also bringing to light some of the weaknesses of the Ramist logic that informed Puritan epistemology. Patricia Caldwell points out that during the controversy it was becoming increasingly apparent that “despite all the talk about the Puritan ‘plain-sense’ and despite Reform Protestantism’s insistence on the fact that there is ‘but one sense belongs to one Scripture. . .there is but one literal meaning,’ there was no absolute agreement on what ‘the Grammar of it’—the basic, rock-bottom sense of it—really was; and yet the society insisted that everyone adhere to the single truth of things” (364). Caldwell concentrates on the linguistic issues raised during the controversy but does not explore the degree to which the language of those interrogating Hutchinson is informed by Ramian logic, a logic that provided Puritans with a means of reducing complexity and conflicting meanings. Although there is no direct mention made of Ramism in the existing documents, the language and modes of reasoning employed by those examining Hutchinson reveal how deeply their thinking was steeped in this logic. Perry Miller notes that “upon New England Puritans the logic of Petrus Ramus exerted. . .as great an influence as did” Augustine and Calvin (116). If those examining her had not actually read Ramus’ *Dialecticae*, a fifty-page manual first published in 1555, they were most certainly exposed to the work of those who had. For instance, “undergraduates at Emmanuel College, Leyden, Harvard, and Yale had to read. . . as part of basic instruction in divinity” Ames’ *Marrow of Theology*, which applied Ramian logic to the study of theology (Eusden 1). Other popular texts included *Conscience and its Cases*, which “is really an attempt to apply the Ramist dialectic to what Ames considered the key problems of social and personal life,” and Alexander Richardson’s *The Logicians School-Master*, which sets forth the Ramist perspective on the human understanding (Eusden 42). Hutchinson’s General Court examination is especially interesting in that it does not, like the texts just

mentioned, provide us with a static and carefully controlled representation of Ramian logic. The dialogic nature of the examination gives us access to Ramian logic in action, and, just as importantly, it reveals what happens when its limitations are highlighted and its conclusions called into question.

An overview of the origins of Ramian logic and its central principles will help us appreciate the subtleties and complexities of what was transpiring during the Court examination. Ramian logic was the result of a process of simplification that began as early as the 1200s.¹⁰ The main intention behind this reformation was the eradication of uncertainty and the organization of information. One of the consequences of this reduction of complexity was that logic, or dialectic, was no longer considered “the art of thinking well”: the stress on “put[ting] logic to . . . use,” on making it amenable to “practical applications” transformed logic into an “art of discoursing well” (Frederick S. Michael 11, Ong 41, Michael 5). Rudolf Agricola, Ramus’ most immediate predecessor, played an instrumental role in this long process of transition. He developed the part of dialectic known as “invention,” the “part in which are arranged individual terms, the concepts, the arguments or the reasons, with which discourses are constructed” (Miller 128). In his 1479 *Dialectical Invention in Three Books*, Agricola asserted that the “objective to which all discourse is directed” is “teaching” and “producing conviction” (Ong 103). He

¹⁰ Walter Ong traces the process back to Peter of Spain, the thirteenth-century author of *Summalae Logicales* (also known as the *Compendium of Logic*), which was designed to serve as an “introductory textbook on logic and dialectic” for the “teen-age student” who needed to be “familiarize[d] with the notions found in or associated with the study of the logical works of Aristotle” (56). Peter of Spain was “disquieted” by “the Aristotelian notion of dialectic, which conceives of dialectic. . . as made up of probabilities only, so that it never arrives a full certainty, but argues from probable premises to probable conclusions,” and he opted to treat “conviction or persuasion. . . as though it referred to certain truth” by “pretending that uncertainty or probability came into play only in connection with the *starting point*, which is the ‘question’ itself” (61). Ong explains the probable reasoning behind this decision: “Peter rejects probability and regards the concern of dialectic to be certainties alone because he is a manualist, supplying the need for a handbook for the teen-age medieval student” (62). For an overview of the ways in which this process of simplification continued over the centuries see pages 74–91 of *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*.

did not “care *how* one thing applies to another, provided only that it apply and that the application be teachable” (106). The dialectic he crafted was “purged of. . .epistemological implications” and was “built not out of an account of the nature of human knowledge, but out of a list of the topics as objects of common knowledge on which discourse turns” (106). Agricola “buil[t] up. . .the old notion of *topoi* (topics). . .at the expense of the [Aristotelian] predicaments or categories,” which were “conceived of. . .as ‘accusations,’” as “list[s] of the kind of things one attributes or urges against a subject” (104, 106-07). The topics were the “headings or key notions to which one turns to find out what is available in one’s store of knowledge for discourse on any given subject” (104). His place-logic “enabled a process of conceptual analysis whereby one’s entire stock of knowledge on a given subject could be inventoried and applied” (105). Ramus picked up where Agricola left off and developed the second part of dialectic—judgment. Whereas invention involves “‘thinking out of the middle term or argument’ which will make a conclusion possible,” judgment provides “the methods for putting arguments together” (Ong 112, Miller 128). Thus, if one “wants to answer the question, Is man dialectically inclined?” one searches the topics and “finds a middle term or ‘argument’ such as ‘rational.’ This, one recognizes, is similar to, or ‘accords’ with, ‘dialectically inclined,’ whereon one can argue: Man is rational. But rational beings are dialectically inclined. Therefore man is dialectically inclined” (Ong 112). As Miller observes, “procedure according to the Ramist logic was always the same: first we invent individual arguments, second, we dispose one with another to form an axiom, third, if in doubt, we dispose one axiom with another in a syllogism to get a conclusion; fourth, we set our conclusions in order and so make a discourse, a sermon, a poem, or an oration” (132). “The stuff of judgment” is “the axiom”: the “aim of an orator or preacher is a succession

of sentences, not a display of deductions. When he has laid out the arguments [Ramus' term for the topics] and combined them into several axioms, he then ought to perceive from the axioms themselves, what are their interconnections and what is their order" (133-34). Miller remarks, "the essence of the Ramist system was. . . th[e] belief that logic is no more than the distinguishing of entities and the joining of them together, that the function of thinking is primarily discerning and disposing, not investigating or deducing" (134). In sum, the organization, manipulation, and use of information were taking precedence over concerns regarding how knowledge and truth were acquired or discerned.

A brief consideration of a few passages from a Ramist text like Richardson's *The Logicians School-Master* will give us an even clearer understanding of just how much Hutchinson challenged the mental and linguistic habits of those examining her. Richardson begins by carving out a space for human knowledge that would not impose on the ultimate authority of God. God has "no causes" and hence "hath no ends;" he is "without definition, distribution, and properties, because he is without causes, ergo there can be no art of him," for "every art doth lay forth the causes, effects, subjects, and the proper adjuncts of a thing" (3, 6). He concludes respectfully that God is "not the subject of our reason" but yet "must be the Author of art" (6). Having acknowledged that God as "Author of art" was "beyond our reason," the human understanding could—and did—lay claim to all else: "I see everything by my logic, and that sees nothing but arguments, axioms, syllogisms, and method; ergo I can see nothing but that it doth thus dictate to my reason. Now then there must be reason in every thing because I am *able to see everything* by my logic—ergo all things must be liable to it" (3, emphasis added; 9). There is no experimentation, no genuine questioning, only a series of conclusive

statements joined together by the occasional syllogism. The extraordinary amount of ground that Richardson cleared for human knowledge points to a critical problem within Puritan epistemology: logicians, theologians, and magistrates often forgot there were limitations to logic—that there were things logic *could not see*, and this was something that Hutchinson's questioning was threatening to make visible.

Her questioning of the individual terms contained within the magistrates' and ministers' statements exposes how unequipped they were for explaining the reasoning behind their claims. Indeed, one of the most striking features of the passages we have been considering is that very few questions were posed to Hutchinson. They present her mostly with statements such as "You did harbour and countenance those that are parties in this faction," or "if you do countenance those that are transgressors of the law you are in the same fact," or "there is no rule that crosses another, but this rule crosses that in Corinthians. But you must take it in this sense that elder women must instruct the young about their business, and to love their husbands and not to make them clash" (312, 313, 316). The "orientation of Ramism toward an object world," which imagines thinking as "ranging noiseless concepts or 'ideas' in a silent field of mental space," rather than "toward a person world (associated with voice and auditory perception)" brought with it a "decay of dialogue," a "movement away from the concept of knowledge as it had been enveloped in disputation" and in the "give-and-take Socratic form" (Ong 287, 291, 287, 151). Winthrop, in particular, seems completely taken aback by Hutchinson's querying. She wants to know "what law" those who have signed the petition "have transgress[ed]," "what law" she has "broken," "what breach of law" it is for her to "entertain" these petitioners, and whether she "may not. . .entertain them that fear the Lord because [her] parents will not give [her] leave" (313-14). The most he seems able to do in terms of

clearing up such questions is form a hypothetical syllogism like the following one: “if they be the fathers of the commonwealth, and they of another religion, if you entertain them then you dishonour your parents and are justly punishable” (314). Unfortunately for him, however, Hutchinson got in between even the terms of his syllogism and informed him that he was correct only “if [she] entertain[s] them, as they have dishonoured their parents” (314). She has maintained throughout that Wheelwright, like the “fathers of the commonwealth,” also “saith in the Lord” and insists on her right to “put honor upon them as the children of God as they do honor the Lord” (314, 313). Hutchinson’s questioning brings the leaders painfully close to having to acknowledge one of the fundamental weaknesses of their logic: the Ramist logic that informs their thinking and modes of expression cannot, for all its clarity and seeming certainty, penetrate the divine mind and thereby arrive at a truly accurate answer as to who should be believed in this situation. We witnessed a similar situation earlier when examining the written exchanges between Cotton and the other ministers; they could not arrive at truth, only communal consensus. The central difference, however, is that Cotton found a way to agree with the other ministerial leaders, whereas Hutchinson refused to be “reduce[d]” and was eventually banished for failing to align her conscience with that of the civil and religious authorities (312).

The third charge against Hutchinson, which concerns her alleged criticisms of the ministers, is also ultimately about the nature of knowledge. Let us turn once again to the dialogue, which is now being led by Thomas Dudley, the deputy governor.

Dep. Gov. . . . About three years ago we were all in peace. Mrs.
Hutchinson from that time she came hath made a
disturbance. . . . Now if all these things have endangered

us as from that foundation and if she in particular hath
*disparaged all our ministers. . .that they have preached a covenant of
works, and only Mr. Cotton a covenant of grace*, why this is not
to be suffered. . . .

Mrs. H. I pray Sir *prove it* that I said they preached nothing but a
covenant of works.

. . . .

Dep. Gov. *If they do not preach a covenant of grace clearly, then they preach a
covenant of works.*

Mrs. H. No Sir, *one may preach a covenant of grace more clearly than
another*, so I said.

. . . .

Dep. Gov. I will make it plain that you did say that the ministers did
preach a covenant of works. . .

Mrs. H. I deny that.

(emphasis added; 317-18).

Hugh Peters, minister at Salem, confirms that “this gentlewoman” told the ministers
“there was a wide and broad difference between our brother Mr. Cotton and our selves. .
. *He preaches the covenant of grace and you the covenant of works*” (emphasis added; 320).

Thomas Weld, minister at Roxbury, confirms that what “our brother Peters hath spoken
was the truth and things were spoken as he hath related”: Hutchinson said that “*Mr.
Cotton did preach a covenant of grace and we a covenant of works*” (emphasis added; 321). George
Phillips, minister in Watertown, corroborates Peters’ and Weld’s statements: “she said
there was a great deal of difference between Mr. Cotton and we. . . .Being asked of

particulars she did instance in Mr. *Shephard* that *he did not preach a covenant of grace clearly*, and she instanced our brother Weld” (322). Zechariah Symmes, minister of Charlestown, upholds the previous claims: “as far as [he] can remember” the “things which have been here spoken” are “the truth” (322-3). Likewise, Thomas Shepard remembers that at “the end of our meeting,” when “Mrs. Hutchinson was desired to speak her thoughts concerning the ministers of the Bay,” she “said. . .we were not able ministers of the new testament” and “instanced” him as being one who “put love for an evidence” of the “assurance of God’s love” (323-4). John Eliot, minister of Roxbury, remarks that he “shall consent to what hath been said” (324). The examination continues:

Dep. Gov. I called these witnesses and you deny them. You see they have proved this and you deny this, but it is clear. You said they preached a covenant of works and that they were not able ministers of the new testament. . . .

Mrs. H. Prove that I said so.

Gov. Did you say so?

Mrs. H. No Sir it is your conclusion.

. . . .

Gov. Here are six undeniable ministers who say it is true and yet you deny that you did say that they did preach a covenant of works and that they were not able ministers of the gospel, and it appears plainly that you have spoken of it. . . .

. . . .

Dep. Gov. There have been six witnesses to prove this and yet you
deny it.

(324-26)

After these exchanges, the court is adjourned for the day. On the next day, Hutchinson's witnesses get a chance to speak. Thomas Leverett, a ruling elder of the Boston Church, declares that "being asked wherein the difference was" between Cotton and the other ministers, she "answered that *they did not preach a covenant of grace so clearly as Mr. Cotton did*" (333). John Cogshall, a deputy from Boston, points out that "she did not say all that which they lay against her" but is silenced by Peters before he gets a chance to say anything more (332). A little later, William Coddington, a deputy from Boston to the General Court, notes that there "is nothing proved about the elders, only that she said *they did not teach a covenant of grace so clearly as Cotton did*" (345). Cotton is also called upon to "declare what" he "remember[s] of the conference. . .now in question" (333). He replies that Hutchinson "told them. . .that they did not hold forth a covenant of grace as I did" and, when pressed for more details, she declared that they "preach of the seal of the spirit upon a work and he upon free grace without a work or without respect to a work" (333-34). After reiterating how sorry he is "she put comparisons between my ministry and theirs" and how he wished "she had put us in fellowship," he remarks that, nevertheless, he "did not find her saying they were under a covenant of works, nor that she said they did preach a covenant of works" (334). We might conclude that the magistrates' and ministers' statements are just another instance of the leaders asserting their interpretive dominance. It seems, however, that something far more complicated and significant is being revealed in the handling of this third charge.

These exchanges illuminate the degree to which the ministers' and magistrates' memories are structured by the principles of Ramian logic. Frances A. Yates points out that "one of the chief aims of the Ramist movement. . . was to provide a new and better way of memorizing all subjects" (232). Ramus had complained that the scholastic student was "required. . . to memorize" a "miscellaneous aggregations of disparate concepts, none of which had any integral connection with each other" and boasted that a "novice in the Ramist method" was "not confronted with a meaningless array of categories, but with a comprehensible dichotomy" (Miller 123, 129). Individuals, he maintained, would be better able to retain information about a subject once it was broken down into "a series of dichotomized classifications" (232). The subject would "be `sown asunder' by logic, first by a division of its two component parts, then by a subdivision of each part, and they by continued bifurcations of the subdivisions, until at last" the "atomic particles which admitted no further halving" were reached (Miller 127, Ong 32). Francis Bacon noted, however, that Ramists "torture things with their laws of method, and whatever does not conveniently fall in these dichotomies, they either omit or pervert beyond nature" (530). This is precisely what happened to Hutchinson during her examination. As Dudley put it in his hypothetical syllogism: "If they do not preach a covenant of grace clearly, then they preach a covenant of works" (318). The tenor of their testimonials does not suggest, though, that they were manipulating terms or intentionally leaving out phrases that conveyed nuances of meaning. Rather, it seems that the either/or mentality engendered by the syllogisms favored by the Ramists as a way of clearing up ambiguity and creating dichotomies made it impossible for them to accommodate within their memories the phrase "more clearly than another" (318). They were, in short, remembering differently.

The account Hutchinson gives of "what [she] knows to be true" is, however, what

completely “alter[s]” the “case” (336, 341). She says:

Being much troubled to see the falseness of the constitution of the church of England, I had like to have turned separatist; whereupon I kept a solemn day of humiliation and pondering of the thing; this scripture was brought unto me—he that denies Jesus Christ to be come in the flesh is antichrist—This I considered of and in considering found that the papists did not deny him to be come in the flesh, nor we did not deny him—who then was antichrist? Was the Turk antichrist only? The Lord knows that I could not open scripture; he must by his prophetic office open it unto me. So after that being unsatisfied in the thing, the Lord was pleased to bring this scripture out of the Hebrews. He that denies the testament denies the testator, and in this did open unto me and give me to see that those which did not teach the new covenant had the spirit of antichrist, and upon this he did discover the ministry unto me and ever since. I bless the Lord, he hath let me see which was the clear ministry and which the wrong. Since that time I confess I have been more choice and he hath let me to distinguish between the voice of my beloved and the voice of Moses, the voice of John Baptist and the voice of antichrist, for all those voices are spoken of in scripture. Now if you do condemn me for speaking what in my conscience I know to be the truth I must commit myself unto the Lord. (336-37)

Hutchinson also informs them that a “place in Daniel was brought unto me and did shew me that though I should meet with affliction yet I am the same God that delivered Daniel out of the lion’s den, I will also deliver thee” (337-38). She therefore “desire[s]” that they

“look to it, for you see this scripture fulfilled this day” and concludes: “You have power over my body but the Lord Jesus hath power over my body and soul, . . . if you go on in this course you begin you will bring a curse upon you and your posterity, and the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it” (338). In their response to her statements, the examiners bring up another one of her revelations—the “sure word” she received “that England should be destroyed” (338). The revelations of which Hutchinson speaks are theological in nature, that is, they are about what she perceives to be God’s disclosure to her of His truth and will, but the ensuing exchanges focus primarily on the epistemological issues raised by her claims.

Hutchinson’s relation is particularly valuable because it is the only time (at least within the written documents that are still in existence) she is given a substantial amount of uninterrupted verbal space. The lengthiness of her account allows us to discern some qualities of her language, patterns of thinking, and means of legitimating her claims to knowledge, all of which are quite unlike those of her opponents. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that unlike the “ministers and learned men,” who relied on logical terminology and devices in order to clear up doubts and questions, Hutchinson refrains from employing syllogistical reasoning and from depending on consensus with others in order to resolve her uncertainty as to what to do regarding her sense of the “falseness of the constitution of the church of England” and her growing desire to “tur[n] separatist” (336). This is not to say, however, that her report of “what [she] knows to be true” lacks logic; hers is not an ecstatical, irrational, or “fantastical” discourse (384). She shares her “pondering of the thing,” the way “scripture was brought unto her,” and how she continued doubting and wondering until her personal relation with God “let [her] see which was the clear ministry and which the wrong” (336). The open-ended inquiry that

characterizes her language discloses a patient and persistent, though passionate, process of questioning and thinking. Her examiners, on the other hand, do not ponder matters for long: they ask few questions and demonstrate a tendency to rush towards conclusion rather than wait for clarity to emerge gradually. When called upon to handle an “Erroneous Opinion,” for instance, a “short” process of “Reflection” is “made upon it after this manner, This is contrary to such and such a Text of Scripture (then and there subjoined)” (Cotton Mather 16-17). The “Error” is then considered “smite[d]” (16). The linguistic differences between Hutchinson and the leaders of the colony will become even more evident in the upcoming discussion of her Church trial. For now, though, let us delve more deeply into the most pressing issue raised by her “open[ing]” of herself—the basis of her knowledge.

The report she delivers to the court brings us back to the most basic of epistemological questions: what is the most reliable means of grounding knowledge? As soon as Hutchinson finishes sharing her description of “what [she] knows to be true,” people want to know how she “kn[ew] that that was the spirit” (336). Without hesitating, she tells them that she knew “by an immediate revelation,” just as “Abraham kn[ew] that it was God that bid him offer his son, being a breach of the sixth commandment” (337). The objection to her method of legitimating knowledge is that there is no way of ensuring that such “immediate voice[s]” and “revelation[s]” were issued by God and not Satan or some delusional part of oneself (337). As Lang observes, the “Puritans. . . assumed that the age of revelations had passed and that man was left with the Word as guidance” (27). The Bible was the source one was supposed to turn to when assessing and validating claims to knowledge, and if any of the ideas expressed within Scripture were unclear, one drew on the techniques of logic (or visited a minister, who was skilled in such modes of

analysis) in order to discover the plain-sense of the text. Hutchinson and others were sensing, however, that “an idea was being lost in New England,” the “idea of a suprarational spirit” that has “precedence and superiority over” any “scriptural or sermonic form” (Andrew Delbanco 136-37, 136).¹¹ Instead of acknowledging how far they had gone in privileging the interpretive devices of logic over felt experience of the Divine and rather than addressing the other weaknesses inherent in their logic, the magistrates and ministers decided to resolve this part of the colony’s epistemological crisis by banishing Hutchinson and her ideas.

Examining the way Hutchinson’s views called into question the faculty psychology the Puritans appropriated from Aristotle and others will help us better understand the issues that emerge during her Church trial, which took place nearly four months after the General Court examination.¹² The accepted Puritan view was that the

¹¹ Cotton also held on to the belief that though “the spirit is not separated from the word, but in it, and ever according to it: yet above, and beyond the letter of the word it reacheth forth comfort, and Power to the soul, though not above the sence, and Intendment of the Word” (30). Shepard confuted his argument and maintained that “This is contrary to *John* 14.26. He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance and whence we reason thus. If the Spirit reveale nothing without concurrence of the Word, then this revelation of the Spirit without respect to the Word is not cleare, nor to be trusted: but the Spirit doth reveale nothing, but with respect to the Word” (Winthrop 238). Cotton never seems to have given Shepard and the others “satisfaction” on this point. When the deputy governor pressed him to tell the court whether he “approve[s] of Mrs. Hutchinson’s revelations as she hath laid them down” and holds them to be true, he declares: “If she doth look for deliverance from the hand of God by his providence, and the revelation be in a word or according to a word, that I cannot deny” (342). Even at this late point, Cotton still leaves open the possibility for revelation, though he asserts that “if it be in a way of miracle or a revelation without the word that I do not assent to, but look at as a delusion” (342).

¹² Miller notes that the Puritans’ “psychological doctrine existed ready made, and they themselves contributed no ideas or propositions to it” (239). The “groundwork” of this doctrine was the hierarchy of souls that Aristotle set forth in *De Anima*:

the lowest, called the vegetative soul, include[s] the functions basic to all living things: nutrition, growth and reproduction. The second, the sensitive soul, include[s] all the powers of the vegetative soul as well as the powers of movement and emotion and the ten internal and external senses. The intellective soul, finally, include[s] not only the vegetative powers—the organic faculties—but also the three rational powers of intellect, intellectual memory, . . . and will. (*The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* 467).

Fall had disorganized—*not destroyed*—the intellectual faculties. “Those faculties which were originally ordained for mutuall assistance” were disrupted, and man was now “enclined to worke confusedly, or to walk as in a Maze, without Method or order,” for his mind “look[ed] upon things through the Mists and Troubles of Passion” and could no longer “judge of them, in their owne proper and immediate Truth, but according to that magnitude or colour, which they are framed into, by prejudice and distemper” (Reynolds 70). As Reynolds’ description suggests, postlapsarian man was prone to acting on the promptings of his passions without the prior guidance of the understanding. Faculty psychology appealed to the Puritans because it provided them with a model depicting the means by which the regenerate mind processes ideas and images. According to this psychology,

. . .the impression of an object produces in the senses an image or replica of the thing, generally called the ‘phantasm’ or the ‘species’; the phantasm is then picked up at the eye or ear by the animal spirits and carried posthaste to the *common sense* in the central chamber of the brain; this faculty apprehends the phantasms, distinguishes one species from another, and relays them to the *imagination, fancy or ‘phantasy’*, which, located in the front part of the brain, judges and compares one phantasm with another, retains them when the objects are present, and sways the

The faculty psychology of the Puritans was, however, more akin to the theories described in Edward Reynolds’ *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man* (1640), which ignored the vegetative and sensitive souls and developed Aristotle’s very general remarks on the “intellective soul” into a far more stable series of intellectual faculties (467). Although Reynolds’ book was published a few years after the period under discussion in this chapter, I have chosen to quote from it because it provides us with the clearest and most comprehensive survey of the type of faculty psychology to which the earlier generation subscribed. See Miller’s *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, especially the chapter entitled “The Nature of Man” for a more comprehensive examination of faculty psychology.

sensual inclination by holding and vivifying the objects of desire; after meaning and intelligibility have been attached to phantasms, they are stored in the *memory*, which is situated in the posterior lobe of the brain. . .; the *reason or the understanding*, which dwells somewhere above the middle, summons phantasms before its judgment seat from either the imagination or the storehouse of memory, determines which are right and true, and sends the image representing its decision, by the agency of the animal spirits, along the nerves to the *will*, which lives in the heart; the will then embraces true images as the good to be pursued, and commands the '*sensitive appetite*,' which consists of *affections or passions*; the proper emotions, being thus aroused, transmit the impulse to the muscles.

(Miller emphasis added; 240-41) ¹³

¹³ The Puritans' longing for certainty led them to refrain from discussing how the phantasms moved between the faculties and how the phantasms themselves were formed. Although the animal spirits were considered the agents of transmission between the faculties, they are virtually ignored in the discourse on faculty psychology that was cultivated by Reynolds and others. In Reynolds' *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man*, for instance, a separate section is devoted to each of the faculties, and once he has finished treating a particular faculty, he creates a new section heading and proceeds to the next faculty, avoiding the issue of how the information was to be passed from one faculty to the next. The animal spirits must have seemed threateningly ambiguous. It is hard to imagine how an image could pass intact through these "subtle vapour[s] or exhalation[s] produced from blood and disseminated throughout the body by the arteries and nerves" (Cambridge History 469). Miller points out that the Puritans disregarded altogether "one element" of faculty psychology, the "intermediary 'intentional forms'; in the standard Peripatetic doctrine these were 'a Sort of Spectres,' detaching themselves from things and plying between them and the senses, impinging upon the senses with a substance of finer texture than the things themselves, and so more easily absorbed and digested into phantasms" (245). He explains that "the Puritans assumed a direct transmission of the object into the image or phantasm through the act of perception" and "looked upon sense as an activity, seizing immediately upon the thing and establishing a continuous and faithful relation between the object and the mind" (245-46). The problem with the "intentional forms" is obvious; their "finer texture," their difference from the thing itself, made possible errors in processing.

Puritan discourse relied heavily on this paradigm of interdependent faculties.¹⁴ The antinomians are portrayed, however, as perpetrators of the perverted postlapsarian approach to processing information. In Winthrop's narrative account of the controversy, for instance, these satan-like "foment[ers]" of opinions are described as having "insinuate[d] themselves" into the "*affections*" of newcomers "by loving salutes, humble carriage, kind invitements, friendly visits" (204). The antinomians supposedly stole into the "*bosomes*" of unsuspecting newcomers "*before they were aware*" of what had transpired (emphasis added; 204). Most threatening perhaps is the antinomian opinion that "everyone's 'parts' or abilities are doomed to perpetual emptiness in comparison with Christ"; "even after union there is no assurance of that 'elevation of reason' and that 'freshening and quickening of the understanding' which. . .permits a measure of confidence in enlightened, coherent human discourse" (Caldwell 352-53). For Hutchinson, the source of epistemological certitude, even after regeneration, was not in man (as faculty psychology seems to suggest) but in Christ.

The Church trial of Hutchinson addresses the "Divers" doctrinal "Opinions" that have been "layd to [her] charge," but most of the time is spent on two particular opinions: "*That the Soules of all Men by nature are mortall and die like Beastes*" and that "By the. . .Redemption of Christ the Soules are made immortall though by Creation they are mortall (354, 359). Cotton explains to her that "Mans spirit doth not returne to Dust as

¹⁴ The design of the most respected of Puritan discourses—the sermon—was especially influenced by faculty psychology. The ministers opened their sermons with a logical analysis of the Scriptural passage under consideration in order to engage the intellects of their congregations and to ensure that they had the mental framework necessary for properly interpreting the Scripture. After explicating the doctrines and reasons in this manner, the ministers would make use of a variety of rhetorical devices in the uses section in an effort to engage the "affections or passions" (Miller 241). See the chapter on "The Nature of Man," especially pages 242-44, for more information regarding the relationship between faculty psychology and Puritan writing.

mans body doth but to God. The soul of man is immortall” (354). Hutchinson defends her position by declaring, “Adam dies not except his soule and Body dye. . . .Hebrews. . . .devides between *soule and Spirit: Soe than the Spirit that God gives man, returned to God indeed, but the Soule dyes* and That is the spirit Ecclesiastes speakes of, and not of the Soule.” (354). Nevertheless, she agrees to take the points presented “into Consideration” even though her uncertainty continues on into the discussion of the second opinion (356). Cotton confutes her claim that the soul is made immortal by the redemption of Christ by reminding her that “the *Spirits of wicked men are in Hell. . . .and. . . .the soules of the faythfull are in Heaven*” (359). She continues to “*pray*” for “*some body [to] open this*” question of “*how the soul is Immortall by Creation. . . .If the soule be Immortall by Christ how can the Soule dye but the Curse sayeth that in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt dye*” (359). John Davenport intervenes and points out that “*The soule doth not dye, but the Person of Adam. . . .But the person of Adam is redeemed by Christ Jesus. . . .You must distinguish between the life of the Soule and the Life of the Body. The Life of the Body is mortall but the Life of the Soule is immortall*” (359-60). He further elucidates the opinions under discussion: “the Spirit is not a Third Substance but the Bent and Inclination of the soule. . . .Now this is not a substance differinge from the soule, and that Spirit in *Ecclesiastes is ment of the Soule*, the Spirit returns to God that gave it, that is, the soule or substance thereof” (360). Hutchinson finally seems to be “*clear in this now*” (360). These glaring misinterpretations were not, however, the ultimate cause of her excommunication.

Her explanation of what she came to recognize as mistakes seemed, in the end, far more subversive than the opinions themselves. Hutchinson acknowledges her “*Mistake*”—“*I tooke Soule for Life*”—and then states, “I doe not acknowledge it to be an Error but a Mistake. *I doe acknnowledge my Expression to be Ironious but my Judgment was not*

Ironious, for I held befor as you did but could not express it soe” (360-61). The distinction between expression and judgment becomes even sharper when more “Things” are “layd to [her] Charge” at the “next Lecture Day” (374). Two related “Things” are relevant to our discussion: her declarations “that thear is no created Graces in Belevers after Union. Befor Union ther is, but after Union Christ takes them out of us into himselfe” and “that we have no Grace in our selves but all is in Christ and thear is no inherent Righteousnes in us” (374-75). When asked about these views, Hutchinson justifies them by admitting, “*I did mistake the word Inherent*” and then “*confes[ses]*” that though her “*Expressions was that way*,” it “*was never [her] Judgment*” (378). Moments later she gives a concise recapitulation of her position: “My Judgment is not altered though my Expression alters” (378). This manner of accounting for her mistakes as “simple substitutions, in thought or perception, of one thing for another” that did not necessarily reflect her judgment was the “most dayngerous” opinion she expressed during her Church trial (378).

Caldwell provides insight into why Hutchinson’s repentance was considered so treacherous and “utterly intolerable” (345). She observes that “between the very thought or opinion or judgment, and the word or expression Anne Hutchinson saw little or no `connection”” (354). Just as “sanctification is no sure evidence of justification,” “words are no sure evidence of conceptions”: “words are secondary to the inner state,” “one must not be judged by them any more than by one’s works,” for they “can be set askew, can change or disintegrate, because fundamentally they are things, while the object—the thought or conception or insight itself—is, like that other Object [Christ], fixed and immutable. It has an essence which lies beyond the words in which it may be clothed” (354, 358, 356). For the ministers, on the other hand, “denying the word amount[ed] to

denying the thinge” (Caldwell 357). Hence Shepard could maintain “she did not only deny the word inherent, but. . .the very Thing itself” even though Hutchinson asserted that when she “denyed the Word Graces,” she did not deny the “Thing itself” (378, 381-82). Caldwell argues that Hutchinson’s “loosening of the form of language, her ambiguities and arbitrariness, must have seemed a threat to the very foundation of things,” though she never explains to what “foundation” she is referring (359). Instead, she focuses on how Hutchinson’s “detachment” of the “inner state” from “outer expression” differed greatly from all of the ministers (including Cotton) and then accounts for her “apparent inconsistencies” by labeling her a “curious and evidently unsuccessful hybrid of ‘oral-aural’ and ‘literate’ characteristics” (359-60, 357). Caldwell’s discussion of how “Mrs. Hutchinson was much more adept at hearing sermons and remembering words—both oral skills—than she was at reading and analyzing Scripture” is informative, but it does not penetrate to the deeper epistemological implications of the separation of judgment and expression (360, 359). Hutchinson was arguing that human language is not consistently capable of translating accurately the truths experienced in those moments when the individual is in communion with the divine. Such an understanding of language threatened the foundation of Puritan epistemology, which, as we have seen throughout this chapter, put human knowledge and its expression on par with the Divine. Though mention is still made of her revelations and miscellaneous errors, the much greater stress placed on her “untruth or Lyes, as that she was allways of the same Judgment, only she hath altered her Expressions” indicates that her ideas about language played a fundamental role in her being “*command[ed]. . .in the name of Christ Jesus and of this Church as a Leper to withdraw*” herself “*out of the Congregation*” (384-85, 388).

American antinomianism did not, however, come to an end when Hutchinson was expelled from the colony and excommunicated from the Church. I do not mean to suggest, as does Knight, that after the controversy drew to a close, “opposition” was “practiced in secret or exile” (19). Those deemed antinomian were not, at heart, dissenters. Hutchinson, her followers, and those associated with them were concerned first and foremost with obedience to God, and this obedience, as we have seen, threatened to destabilize Puritan attempts to fix knowledge through systems of logic and language. The epistemological questions raised by Hutchinson were not resolved, and, as I demonstrate in the following chapters, they continued to figure centrally, not secretly, in the development of American philosophical and literary expression.

Chapter Two

The American Mind in Transition:

Jonathan Edwards and the Inner Territory of Felt Relations

Jonathan Edwards occupies a particularly interesting position in regard to the evolution of American antinomianism. When faced with responding to what were perceived as the “impulses, vain imaginations, superstition, indiscreet zeal and such like extremes” of the Great Awakening, he composed *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, a text which set forth a sophisticated antinomian method for assessing the status of one’s spiritual condition (*Some Thoughts on the Recent Revival of Religion in New England* 457).

Unlike Reverend Charles Chauncy, whose desire to condemn the excesses of the revivalists led him to claim that the “surest and most substantial Proof of” man’s spiritual estate was “*obedience to the Commandments of God*” and “*Patterns of good Works*,” Edwards believed, like the seventeenth-century antinomians before him, that external behavior was not the primary and most reliable sign of justification, and he insisted there was a way of judging one’s inner state which did not rely solely on the “outward and visible” (26, 11). Though many of the same issues raised during the Antinomian Controversy of the 1630s reemerged during the Great Awakening of the 1740s, the focus in this chapter is on

examining how, over the course of his career, Edwards found ways of granting value to *felt relations* to the divine mind that cannot be grasped firmly or permanently and, in so doing, developed the type of epistemological foundation that seventeenth-century antinomianism lacked.

At some point in the late 1710s or early 1720s, Edwards started working on “The Mind,” a text in which he explores the concept of relation and tries to find ways of describing degrees of it. In the first entry, he writes of how “there has nothing been more without definition than excellency, although it be what we are more concerned with than anything else whatsoever. . . .But what is this excellency? Wherein is one thing excellent and another evil, one beautiful and another deformed?” (332). Edwards starts answering his own questions by defining excellency and beauty (terms that are for him interchangeable) as *proportion*, an “equality or likeness of ratios” (332). Secondary or natural beauty resides in the *harmonious relation* of parts to each other or to a greater whole; the greater the “identity of relation” between parts, between say, two “circles or globes,” the greater the beauty (332). The “universal definition” of beauty is described as “the consent of being to being. . . . The more the consent is, and the more extensive, the greater the excellency” (336). The rest of the text does not, however, focus exclusively on aesthetic concerns; the book is, in the end, about the mind. The fact that Edwards rarely wrote about the human mind in isolation from the divine mind clues us in to why he began his study by discussing the qualities of excellency and beauty. These aesthetic values and the notion of consent that informs them helped him think and write about the relationship between the two minds.

The term consent derives from the Latin *consentire* and means to feel (*-sentire*) with (*com-*). The excellency or beauty that attracts Edwards has to do with *feelings of relation*, and

it is through Edwards' aesthetic of consent that feeling starts to assume a positive value in American epistemology. For the Puritans, one of the direst consequences of the Fall was that it disorganized man's intellectual faculties and caused him to follow the cues of his passions or affections—his feelings—before ideas or images had been processed by the understanding. The idea that in the regenerate mind information would enter the understanding before it moved along to the affections was still a popular one in the eighteenth century. Chauncy, for instance, still held that “an *enlightened Mind*, and not *raised Affections*, ought always to” serve as man's “Guide” (327). Yet Edwards sensed that approaching the truth required that there be *simultaneously* “light in the understanding” and “an affected, fervent heart” (*Religious Affections* 125). Feeling, as we are going to see throughout this chapter, was beginning to be thought of as playing a favorable—not detrimental—role in the processes of thinking and knowing.

But feeling constitutes just one part of the etymological root of consent. The preposition “with” links the aroused feeling with the object, and it is this connection with the object that sets Edwards apart from a philosopher like Kant. Kant claimed that when “discern[ing] whether anything is beautiful or not, we do not refer the representation of it to the Object by means of understanding with a view to cognition”; rather, “we refer the representation to the Subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure” (41). Kant's stance foregrounds the *feelings* generated by the subject's relation to the *representation* and allows the significance of the object to fade away: “The feeling of pleasure or displeasure denotes nothing in the object, but is a feeling which the subject has of itself and of the manner in which it is affected by the representation” (42). The feelings that emerge within the subject as a result of beholding a given representation “for[m] the basis of a quite separate faculty of discriminating and estimating that contributes nothing to

knowledge” (42). However, for Edwards, it is only in these dynamic moments of *relating through feeling to the object by means of the representation* that the subject can come close to truly knowing. These feelings of relation are vehicular; they transport the subject beyond this world of representations—of images and shadows—and into the realm of “substance” and “true thing[s]” (“Images of Divine Things” 62). The most genuine states of knowing are not, for Edwards, those in which we have a firm grasp of the object in our minds, for truth and reality can never be captured and preserved permanently. Kant’s emphasis on felt relations to representations and Edwards’ interest in felt relations to objects through representations led the two to different ideas about beauty. For Kant, it “is not necessary” for the subject to “*know* what sort of a thing the object is intended to be” in order to “see beauty in a thing. Flowers, free patterns, lines aimlessly intertwining. . . have no signification, depend upon no definite concept and yet please” (emphasis added; 46). For Edwards, on the other hand, the beauty of the images and shadows that constitute the world depend upon *feeling* the relation they have to a “definite concept” (46). Beauty and knowledge are experienced in these fleeting moments when the mind feels an “identity of relation” between representation and object (“The Mind” 332).

Consent as a feeling of relation is thus poised somewhere between conscience and consciousness. The central difference between conscience and consent is that while the former also refers to relation (*com-*), it has to do with knowing with (*-scire*), usually knowing with conviction and commitment. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Puritans placed great stress on conscience, which they defined more specifically as “mans judgment of himselfe” in relation to the “revealed will of God” (Ames 1, 6). The relations experienced in moments of consent are not as fixed as the conclusions of conscience. Consent does not provide individuals with the type of knowledge that will

allow them to rest content in their conclusions. Yet the relations of consent are not quite as fluid as those of consciousness, which John Locke defined as the awareness of “what passes in. . . [the] mind” (115). Consent is an instance of felt, not fixed relation, one that entails judgment and is thus not merely a neutral perception of what is moving through one’s mind.¹⁵

The “universal definition” of beauty underlying Edwards’ notion of consent points to a new direction being taken in American antinomianism (336). Only God possesses completely and effortlessly the most universal form of beauty: it is “peculiar to God that he has beauty within himself consisting in being’s consenting with his own being, or the love of himself in his own Holy Spirit; whereas the excellence of others is in loving others, in loving God, and in the communications of the Spirit” (365). As such, God is “infinitely excellent, and all excellence and beauty is derived from him, in the same

¹⁵ In *Consciousness in New England: From Puritanism and Ideas to Psychoanalysis and Semiotic*, James Hoopes presents a different argument regarding conscience and consciousness. He contends that the central difference between Puritan ideas of conscience and Locke’s “late seventeenth-century definition of consciousness” was that according to the faculty psychology of the Puritans, a “thought first occurred simply or unself-consciously before being reflexively judged or interpreted in conscience,” whereas “in the Lockean theory of consciousness every thought was, from the start, completely perceived by the self” (48). Hoopes overlooks, however, the fact that the Puritan discourse on conscience emphasizes judgment, particularly fixed conclusions, whereas the Lockean theory of consciousness stresses attending to—not judging—the thoughts and images passing through the mind. He goes on to discuss Edwards’ understanding that the “sense of the heart” possessed by those who have undergone regeneration enables them to “perceive intellectually as well as emotionally” the ideas of God, but he maintains that the converted individual’s perception of holiness was considered “uncertain” and in need of “subsequent interpretation” (84, 65). Hoopes thus also positions Edwards’ thought somewhere between conscience and consciousness. We draw, however, quite different conclusions regarding the implications of this liminal positioning. He calls Edwards’ position a “compromise”: the regenerate mind is granted the capacity to simultaneously recognize and judge thoughts or divine ideas, but it does not have “completely accurate knowledge of its own actions in thinking” (84, 32). Hoopes’ contention does not seem quite accurate, though. Edwards did hold that the perceptions of the regenerate man needed to be contemplated but not because they were uncertain. Rather, as Edwards’ notion of consent suggests, they needed to be reflected upon because it was the pattern of harmonious relation established over time that was most important. The upcoming discussion on Edwards’ typology and *Religious Affections* explores these issues more fully.

manner as all being and all other excellence is, in strictness, only a shadow of his" (364). The highest type of beauty or excellency that man can attain is "the consent of *being* to *Being*," and by this I mean, the consent of the human mind to the divine mind, for Edwards insisted that "there is no other proper consent but that of minds" (362). The beauty or excellency of the human mind has to do with the degree to which it can sustain, through consent, an "harmonious relation" with the divine mind; it resides not in one particular instance of relation, but in the beautiful pattern of relations that emerge over time (332). The divine mind is still the higher principle to which the human mind is subject, but, for Edwards, claims to knowledge were no longer based on the specific content of immediate revelations. Rather, as we are going to see throughout this chapter, but especially in the sections on "Images of Divine Things" and *Religious Affections*, Edwards validated human knowledge by its *degree of felt relation* to the divine mind. In order to appreciate the significance of this development, we need to move away from a direct consideration of antinomianism and look more closely at his ideas about the human and divine minds and how they differ from those of his predecessors.

With his study of the dynamic relationship between the human and divine minds, Edwards was entering unexplored ontological and epistemological territory. The examination of Richardson's *The Logicians School-Master* in the first chapter revealed how the divine was excluded from Puritan epistemology. Once Richardson acknowledged that God as "Author of art" was "beyond our reason," the human understanding laid claim to all else: "I see everything by my logic, and that sees nothing but arguments, axioms, syllogisms, and method; ergo I can see nothing but that it doth thus dictate to my reason. Now then there must be reason in every thing because I am *able to see everything* by my logic—ergo all things must be liable to it" (3, emphasis added; 9). The problem, though,

was that the Puritans tended to forget that there were things logic could not see.¹⁶

Likewise, Locke, though he was less concerned with the divine, still faced the same basic problem as the Puritans. God appears at the beginning and the end of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and almost nowhere in-between. In his introduction, he remarks that “though the *Comprehension* of our Understandings *comes exceedingly short of the vast Extent of Things*; yet, we shall have Cause enough to magnify the bountiful Author of our Being, for that Portion and Degree of knowledge, he has bestowed on us” (emphasis added; 45). Towards the end of the text, he claims that our faculties “discover to us the Being of a GOD, and the Knowledge of our selves, enough to lead us into a full and clear discovery of our duty, and. . . it will become us, as rational Creatures, to imploy those Faculties we have about what they are most adapted to” (646). It turns out that our rational faculties are most adapted to our own ideas, and it is to the relation between man and his ideas that Locke devotes himself. His conclusion is well-known: “the whole extent of our Knowledge. . . reaches not beyond our own *Ideas*” because the “*Mind* in all its Thoughts and Reasonings hath no other immediate Object but its own *Ideas*” (520,525). Unlike the Puritans, Locke never seems to have forgotten that there were

¹⁶ In *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards*, Stephen H. Daniel argues that Edwards, who understands reality “as essentially communicative,” has much in common with the “Renaissance logic of Petrus Ramus and. . . the ontology of early Stoicism” (1-2). For Edwards, he explains, “there can be no idea of a determinate thing apart from God’s will that it function in a precise and communicated way. . . . No thing is intelligible apart from the discursive network that defines its rationale” (91). Daniel’s study is groundbreaking because it calls into question the idea that Ramist logic is “merely a rhetorical system for arranging human thought” and sets forth a more sophisticated understanding of this logic (1). He argues that the Ramist logic regards “ultimate principles” as being “embedded in changing social and linguistic practices that preclude the possibility of there being such foundations” (1). We need to keep in mind, however, that Daniel is looking at the implications of Ramian logic, not the ways in which it was employed in the work of the Ramist texts with which Edwards was familiar. Also, even though Daniel acknowledges that “for Edwards the system of signification which [the Ramist] logic expresses always seems just out of reach of human cognition,” he oversecularizes Edwards in the interest of his own theoretical convictions (70). The complex relations between the divine and human mind are thus virtually ignored. In their place is the terminology of “poststructuralist historiography,” of Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva (3).

things that the mind could not see or understand. He asks that man content himself with what he can know for certain and then “sit down in. . .quiet Ignorance of those Things, which, upon Examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our Capacities” (45). Yet despite his many references to the limitations of the understanding, Locke never questions the certainty that man can achieve regarding his own ideas. The human mind can be absolutely certain regarding its own ideas, but it remains forever distanced from the “real essences of substances” (29). The mind’s inability to penetrate the true nature of substances is therefore never integrated effectively into the foundations of his epistemology. Both Puritan epistemology and Lockean empiricism excluded the divine or unknown from epistemology.

Careful consideration of the characteristics Edwards ascribed to the divine and human minds reveals why he felt it necessary to include *within* epistemology the divine or unknowable. In an entry in *The Miscellanies*, he describes two qualities of the divine mind that distinguish it from the human mind. The divine mind is never in a secondary or distanced relation to its ideas because it “understands. . .all. . .things by the actual and immediate presence of an idea of the things understood” and hence never needs to “make use of signs instead of ideas” (457-58). Furthermore, these “actual ideas of things” dwell unwaveringly, effortlessly, and “with perfect clearness” in the “infinitely exact and precise” divine mind (458). The true excellency of these characteristics of the divine mind becomes obvious when compared to the limited capacities of the human mind.

For Edwards, as for Locke, the human mind is characterized by its reliance on signs rather than actual ideas. He writes:

Let any man for his own satisfaction take any book and read down one page of it, as fast as he ordinarily is wont to read with understanding. He finishes the whole page in almost a minute of time; wherein it may be were many terms such as God, man, angel, people, misery, happiness, salvation, destruction, consideration, perplexity, sanctification, and many more such like; and then let him consider whether he has had the actual ideas of all those things. . . .in this short space of time. (452-53)

“Diligent attention,” Edwards claims, “will convince him that he does not” (129). He continues:

If, in order to an understanding of what was contained in that page, we must have an actual idea of everything signified by every word in that page, it would take us up many hours to go through with it; for taking in all the ideas that are either directly signified, or involved in relations that are signified by them, it would take up a considerable time before we could be said to understand one word. (457)

As the above passages suggest, our dependence on signs is not altogether negative. Signs lack the density of actual ideas and therefore permit man to make progress in his thinking by allowing him to “understand what is contained in that page in a minute of time” (457). Indeed, for the “common purposes of thinking,” the use of signs is perfectly acceptable since “having learned by frequent experience, our minds in the presence of the sign being habitually led to the relations and connections with other things, the presence of the sign in the main does by custom as naturally and spontaneously excite such a thought” (457). Yet these claims do not, for the most part, represent any great advances in terms of understanding the mind. In fact, in some instances Edwards is merely rephrasing

statements made by Locke.¹⁷ What is innovative is Edwards' talk of actual ideas. An actual idea is more than something that exists in reality or fact; it is an *actus*, a doing or moving that requires the mind to be in a highly active state. Most of the time we do not need to have actual ideas, but "if we are at a loss concerning a connection or a consequence, or have some new inference to draw, or would see the force of some new argument, then commonly we are put to the trouble of exciting the actual idea, and making it as lively and clear as we can" (457). Edwards' descriptions of what it takes to have an actual idea makes it possible for us to discern how experience, something left out of the Ramian logic that informed the thinking of his Puritan predecessors, begins to be incorporated into American epistemology.

A brief reexamination of how individuals trained in Ramian logic handle questions posed to them makes this change more apparent. If an individual was asked a question like "Is man dialectically inclined?," he would search the places or arguments—the "headings or key notions to which one turns to find out what is available in one's store of knowledge for discourse on any given subject"—to locate a middle term that would link the subject and predicate (Ong 104). He might, for instance, turn to the definitions of man and dialectic and there discover the middle term "rational." The word rational, he would see, is "similar to dialectically inclined," and he would then be equipped to argue as follows: "Man is rational. But rational beings are dialectically inclined. Therefore man is dialectically inclined" (112). At no point in this process, would a Ramist need to have an *actual idea* of the terms man or dialectical, for as Miller points out, "the essence of the Ramist system was [the] belief that logic is no more than

¹⁷ For instance, Locke writes: "*There comes by constant use, to be such a Connexion between certain Sounds, and the Ideas they stand for, that the Names heard, almost as readily excite certain Ideas, as if the Objects themselves, which are apt to produce them, did actually affect the Senses*" (407).

the distinguishing of entities and the joining of them together, that the function of thinking is primarily discerning and disposing, not investigating or deducing" (134). If a person found himself "at a loss concerning a connection or consequence," he would turn to the external device of the syllogism "as an anvil upon which the broken links" of thought could "be welded together" (Edwards, 457; Miller 135). Answers to questions were arrived at through the manipulation of terms into syllogisms and then axioms. Experience was irrelevant.

Edwards was coming to a radically different understanding of knowledge and its formation. As Miller notes, the Puritans "always showed a tendency to assume that sensations merely aroused or occasioned ideas already latent in the mind and that learning was a species of recollection" ("Sense" 125-26). Edwards, on the other hand, came to understand that "words alone" could not "convey to hearers the actual ideas of which they were signs" (126). Having an actual idea of man demanded far more than arranging terms into a series of axiomatic statements. Individuals were being asked to turn inward and hold or call up within their minds all the different actual ideas associated with the concept being addressed. To have an actual idea of man, for example, necessitated summoning up "an actual idea of those things wherein manhood most essentially consists: as an idea of reason, which contains many other actual ideas, as an actual idea of consciousness, an actual idea of a disposal of ideas in the mind, an actual idea of a consequent perception of relation and connections between them" (*Miscellanies* 453). These actual ideas are more dynamic than the simple and complex ideas described by Locke. According to Locke, "the Mind is wholly Passive in the reception of all its simple *Ideas*" (163). As "white Paper, void of all characters, without any Ideas," the mind comes to be "furnished" through "Experience" (104). Once the "Understanding is . . . stored

with these simple ideas”—ideas like “coldness and hardness” or the “taste of Sugar and the smell of a Rose” that are “*only to be got by those impressions* Objects themselves make on our Minds”—it “has the power to repeat, compare, and unite them even to an almost infinite Variety, and so can make. . . new complex *Ideas*” (119, 424, 119). With the exception of Locke’s insistence on the primacy of sensation and experience, his theories concerning the construction of knowledge are not, in the end, altogether unlike the arguments stored in the Ramist’s mind: the mind is stocked with fixed simple ideas that the individual combines or manipulates into complex ideas. The actual ideas Edwards refers to also require filling the mind, but, as the following analysis of a sentence from “Of Being” demonstrates, the mind plays an active role in forming these ideas.

Edwards’ sense of the dynamic nature of knowing had a profound influence on his modes of expression. As we saw in the first chapter, Puritan discourse was characterized by its emphasis on conclusions. Edwards, however, opened up language to the processes of thinking and experiencing and designed many of his sentences as thought experiments in which the reader must participate in order to validate for himself the truth of the idea under consideration. Probably the best example of this stylistic advance is the original first sentence of “Of Being,” a sentence it almost seems impossible to get through. He writes:

That there should absolutely be nothing at all is utterly impossible, the Mind Can never Let it stretch its Conceptions ever so much bring it self to Concieve of a state of Perfect nothing, it puts the mind into mere Convulsion and Confusion to endeavour to think of such a state, and it Contradicts the very nature of the soul to think that it should be, and it is the Greatest Contradiction and the Aggregate of all Contradictions to say

that there should not be, tis true we Cant so Distinctly show the
 Contradiction by words because we Cannot talk about it without Speaking
 horrid Nonsense and Contradicting our selve at every word, and because
 nothing is that whereby we Distinctly show other particular
 Contradictions, but here we are Run up to Our first principle and have no
 other to explain the Nothingness or not being of nothing by, indeed we
 Can mean nothing else by nothing but a state of Absolute Contradiction;
 and If any man thinks he Can think well Enough how there should be
 nothing I'll Engage that what he means by nothing is as much something
 as any thing that ever He thought of in his Life, and I believe that if he
 knew what nothing was it would be intuitively Evident to him that it
 Could not be. (18)

Most published and in-print versions of “Of Being” divide this 224-word sentence into seven separate sentences. One editor observed that there is no “reliable punctuation” in Edwards’ writing and claimed that discovering the meaning of his “ungrammatical” sentences requires “laborious analysis” on the part of the reader; to relieve readers of such toil, he repunctuated the essays (Harvey G. Townsend xvi). The editor of the Yale edition of Edwards’ *Scientific and Philosophical Writings* also argued that it was necessary to insert marks of punctuation so that the “modern reader” does not have to be burdened with Edwards’ “inordinately long, cumbersome, and confusing” sentences (Wallace E. Anderson 140). Indeed, these repunctuated sentences can be read with unimpeded ease and speed. However, these shorter, more lucid sentences weaken the force of Edwards’ argument. The experience the reader undergoes is the key to the meaning of the original sentence; the experience proves his argument.

The feeling that it is almost impossible to get through this first sentence is not therefore a flaw; it is essential to its semantic value. Advancement is hindered by Edwards' use of commas rather than periods to signal the end of the independent clauses. Periods give one time to make a full stop and to register the idea in each clause as a discrete entity. The commas Edwards employed to splice together this series of independent and subordinate clauses have an altogether different effect. Unlike the periods in the repunctuated editions, the commas in the original sentence do not signal a gap—a clear break—between thoughts. Rather, the reader is given the arduous task of trying to hold in his mind—simultaneously—the different ways it is “utterly impossible” to “Concieve of a state of Perfect nothing” (18). And the only way to hold in one's mind all of the ideas in this sentence is to keep moving back and forth between past and present clauses. This back and forth motion frustrates the sense of progress usually experienced when reading a sentence and leaves one feeling trapped within the sentence. Such entrapment is vital to Edwards' argument. Being held captive in this run-on sentence provokes the reader's mind into experiencing the very “Convulsion[s] and Confusion[s]” Edwards asserts is the inevitable result of attempting to make one's mind “stretch its Conceptions” as it tries to “bring it self to Concieve of a state of Perfect nothing” (18).

Edwards' peculiar use of capitalization and his repetition of key terms cause the reader to confront the presence, the unmistakable *matter* of his language. The 38 capitalized letters, few of which are used in standard fashion, keep the reader's eyes continually moving up and down in the act of tracing the contours of the letters. The visual choppiness of the sentence prevents one from scanning swiftly the lines of words and calls attention to language as substance. The reiteration of words like “nothing” and

“contradiction” are another way one is made acutely aware of the materiality of language. Throughout his career, Edwards often had the reader return again and again to the same word or phrase. For instance, in *The Miscellanies*, he writes:

. . .when [a reader] reads the word perplexity, let him consider whether he had an *actual idea* of that actual thing signified by that word, which contained many *actual ideas*, as an *actual idea* of thought, and an *actual idea* of intenseness of thought, an *actual idea* of [desire], and also earnestness of desire; then an *actual idea* of disappointment, or crossness to desire, which contains many other *actual ideas*, and an *actual idea* of manifoldness of troubles and crosses, etc. (emphasis added; 453)

There is a reason Edwards repeats the phrase “actual idea” eight times in this one sentence. Had the phrase appeared only once or twice, the reader might have passed over it without notice or question. However, the more he repeats this phrase, the more he exposes the reader to it, and the more likely he is to get the reader to wonder what it is to have an actual idea. He does not want the reader to use *his* words as a substitute for having the experience of having an actual idea of perplexity. Likewise, in the first sentence “Of Being,” Edwards reiterates the term “nothing” at least nine times and some form of the word “contradiction” at least seven times in order to provoke the reader into having a very specific experience, an experience that will prove his argument about the impossibility of there being nothing.

Empiricism had taught him that he could not convince his audience through overt argumentation alone; he also had to make his readers *experience* the impossibility of there being a “state of nothing” (18). Exhorting his reader to put down the text and engage in his own philosophical investigations into the nature of being and nothingness

was not necessary. Edwards could, and did, design his sentence in such a way that it caused the reader to have his own experience—his own actual idea—that “we Can mean nothing else by nothing but a state of Absolute Contradiction” (18). Towards the end of the sentence, he declares that to “think well enough how there should be nothing” is proof of the impossibility of there being nothing, for to be in possession of an idea is precisely that—to have some *thing* (18). Similarly, the pervasive presence of the word nothing compels the reader to encounter—repeatedly—the contradiction inherent in trying to “say that there should not be” since to say or, in this case, to read “nothing” is to read some *thing* (18). And the longer Edwards keeps his reader within the sentence, the more the reader is forced to confront the somethingness of “nothing.” Yet the unedited sentence reveals more than just the role that experience plays in the formation of knowledge; it also reflects a movement away from the Puritan understanding of the mind.

In the first chapter, I explained how the Puritans relied on faculty psychology and used it as a means of describing how the mind *should* process information. The mind was understood as being divided up into a number of faculties—the common sense, imagination, memory, reason or understanding, will, and passions or affections—each of which had a well-defined function that involved pronouncing judgment on the image or phantasm produced by the initial sense impression. The common sense “distinguished” one phantasm from another, the imagination “judged and compared one phantasm with another,” and “the reason or understanding. . .determined which are right and true” (Miller 240-41). This paradigm of the mind informed virtually all of Puritan discourse—from the structure of sermons to treatises on logic to theories concerning the “morphology of conversion” (Edmund S. Morgan 66). In their sermons, for instance,

Puritan ministers, following the guidelines set forth in William Perkins' *The Art of Prophecyng*, used the principles of faculty psychology to ensure that their congregations' responses to the Bible would be guided first by the intellectual faculties and then by the affections. In the first two sections of the sermon—the doctrines and reasons—preachers defined the key terms contained in the biblical passage under discussion; offered an array of scriptural examples to support the ideas raised in this piece of scripture; and then used syllogisms to manipulate these terms into an axiom—a self-evident truth—that could be readily recalled. By so doing, they created an intellectual framework that stimulated and guided the common sense, imagination, memory, and reason or understanding. Only after establishing this foundation, did ministers seek to arouse the passions, which “add[ed] spirit and edge to all good undertakings” but would, “if once they [flew] out beyond their bounds, and become subject onely to their owne Lawes, and encroach upon Reasons right,” result in “tumultuous and tyrannical” behavior (Edward Reynolds 45). In the last section of the sermon—“the uses”—the ministers became less abstract and made more direct, personal appeals in an effort to excite the affections or passions of their parishioners. The empirically oriented Edwards was not, however, concerned so much with how the mind should work, as he was with how it *did* operate.

The design of the first sentence of “Of Being” reflects his understanding of how the mind works and points, as such, to the limitations of faculty psychology. The mental demands placed upon the reader of this lengthy sentence remind the reader of the “troublesome exertion” the mind undergoes when it tries to “hold [an] idea” (458). For instance, as readers find themselves compelled to move back and forth between clauses, they are confronted with the “trouble we are at to have in view a number [of ideas] at

once, [so] that we may see the relations between them” and are reminded constantly of the “fleetingness, or transitoriness that attends our ideas” (458). These difficulties stand in stark contrast to the divine mind, which can “know all truth at the same moment” because it has “perfect ideas of all things at once” and “in one view” (“The Mind” 342). Moreover, the labor-intensive process of holding an actual idea within one’s mind does not correspond to the idea of there being an assembly line of faculties through which bits of information pass in an orderly fashion. Edwards’ intellectual ancestors had made it seem as though ideas—sense impressions or phantasms—existed fully formed and moved intact through the faculties, where different forms of judgment were then pronounced upon them. Locke had also treated ideas, especially simple ideas, as “mental atoms or molecules” and could do so because he did not “meddle with the Physical Consideration of the Mind” (43). James admitted that “it is often convenient to formulate the mental facts in an atomistic sort of way and to treat the higher states of consciousness as if they were all built out of unchanging simple ideas,” but he insisted that “we. . .never forget that we are talking symbolically, and that there is nothing in nature to answer to our words. A permanently existing ‘idea’. . .which makes its appearance before the footlights of consciousness at periodic intervals, is as mythological an entity as the Jack of Spades” (228). Edwards was coming to an early recognition that ideas in the human mind are not fixed entities. Rather, ideas are prone to flickering and become even more unstable when more than one is under consideration.

Yet it would be inaccurate to say that Edwards altogether abandoned faculty psychology. Indeed, his writings are valuable partly because they grant us privileged access to a mind as it is undergoing a profound epistemological transition. In *Religious Affections*, for instance, he still employs the terminology of faculty psychology. The

understanding is “that by which it [the soul] discerns and views and judges of things”

(96). There is another faculty “by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers” (96).

This “faculty is called by various names: it is sometimes called the *inclination*: and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the *will*: and the *mind*, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the *heart*” (96). More simply put, “when the inclination receives overt expression in action it is most commonly called ‘will,’ and when inclination is expressed through the mind alone it is called *heart*”

(John E. Smith 13). Although he still relied at times on the terms and concepts of faculty psychology, Edwards, following Locke’s lead, no longer considered the faculties as

discrete entities occupying specific places within the brain and heart.¹⁸ Instead, the

faculties were thought of as interrelated “Powers in the Mind, or in the Man, to do

Several Actions” (Locke 242). Edwards also blurred the sharply defined boundaries that

the Puritans maintained between the will, affections, and passions. The affections,

Edwards notes, “are not essentially distinct from the will” (98). Moreover, he

distinguished between the affections and passions: the affections are the “vigorous lively actings of the will or inclination,” whereas the passions are “more sudden,” their “effects

on the animal spirits are more violent, and the mind more overpowered and less in its

own command” (98). The most significant blurring of boundaries occurs, however, when

Edwards discusses “the sense of the heart” (459). When one experiences the sense of the

heart, what Miller describes as “that living, pulsating state in which a word is vividly, fully

¹⁸ The Puritans believed the faculties occupied distinct sites in the brain and heart: the common sense was located “in the central chamber of the brain,” the imagination was considered to exist “in the front part of the brain,” the memory was “situated in the posterior lobe,” the reason or understanding dwelt “somewhere above the middle,” and the will was thought of as “liv[ing] in the heart” (240).

identified with its sensation,” there is no “clear distinction made between the two faculties of understanding and will, as acting distinctly and separately” (Miller “Sense” 127, *Religious Affections* 272). In “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” Edwards describes the “twofold understanding of knowledge of good that God has made the mind of man capable of” (106). There is understanding that is “merely speculative and notional; as when a person only speculatively judges that anything is, which, by the agreement of mankind, is called good or excellent, viz., that which is most to general advantage,” and then there is “the sense of the heart: as when there is a sense of the beauty, amiableness, or sweetness of a thing; so that the heart is sensible of pleasure and delight in the presence of the idea” (106-07). The mind, he reminds us, is capable not only of “speculat[ing] and behold[ing],” but of “relish[ing] and feel[ing]” (*Religious Affections* 272). In this way, Edwards closes the gap between what were once the most diametrically opposed faculties: the reason or understanding and the emotions or affections.

His understanding of the sense of the heart informed his sermonic style and distinguished it from the standard Puritan sermon. In “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” Edwards addresses *simultaneously* the intellects and affections of his congregation. He begins the sermon with the passage from Deuteronomy that forms the basis of his sermon: “Their foot shall slide in due time” (155). Like the Puritan ministers before him, he comments on the implications of the quote and supports it with other scriptural examples. However, instead of slowly building up a secure intellectual framework by parsing scriptural sentences and manipulating the terms contained therein into syllogisms and axioms, he adopts an unrelentingly fast pace that builds emotional as well as intellectual pressure. He shifts from one horrific image of hell to the next, refusing to allow his listeners to rest in any one particular image. He moves from “the sword of

divine justice” that is at “every moment brandished over” the “heads” of the unregenerate (157); to the “prepared” pit, the “ready fire,” and the “hot” furnace that is “ready to receive them” (158); to the “old serpent” that is “gaping for them” (158); to the “devils” that “watch them” and “stand waiting for them, like greedy hungry lions that see their prey, and expect to have it, but are for the present kept back” (158); to the “unconverted men [who] walk over” a “rotten covering so weak that” it can barely “bear the[ir] weight” (159). The only image to which Edwards returns again and again is that of “the *mere* pleasure of God,” his “*sovereign* pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation,” which keeps Him from “cast[ing] wicked men into hell” (156). While quickening his listeners’ affections in this manner, he also speaks to their understandings by exploring the reasons the unregenerate use to argue for the security of their earthly bodies. Some contend that there is no cause for concern since “there are no visible means of death at hand,” others assert that “prudence and care” will “preserve their . . . lives,” but Edwards dismantles the notions of those who “depend upon” themselves “for [their] own security” through his affecting depictions of the precariousness of the unregenerate individual’s situation (155). Furthermore, to ensure that his congregation does not think he is just referring to “the wicked unbelieving Israelites” mentioned in Deuteronomy, Edwards does what the Puritan ministers did not; he addresses directly those sitting in the pews. In the first section of the sermon, he tells them that “God is a great deal more angry with numbers that are now on earth; yea, doubtless with many that are *now in this congregation*, who may be at ease, than he is with many of those who are now in the flames of hell” (emphasis added; 157). By employing these strategies, Edwards compels those listening to, or even just reading, his sermon to have a *sensible understanding* that “the unseen, unthought-of ways and means of persons going suddenly

out of the world are innumerable and inconceivable,” that the unconverted man’s “foot shall slide in due time” (159).

Yet “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” does more than serve as another illustration of the way Edwards’ ideas about the mind affected his writing style. It also underscores what Edwards perceived to be the limitations of the human mind. Although the Puritans “subscribe[d] to the doctrine of innate depravity and testif[ied] to the inability of the fallen consciousness to comprehend the mysteries of divinity,” in “practice the Puritan sermon” was “designed to restore the right workings of man’s disordered faculties” by leading listeners “from place to place until there [was] no possibility of [their] not understanding” (Stanley Fish 71, 73). Edwards also led his listeners “step-by-step to a clear understanding of Christian doctrine,” but rather than giving them “the experience of being in control” or allowing them to think they are able to understand God’s ways, he emphasizes continually that the human mind can attain no such mastery (71, 74-75). Both the content and style of his argument compel one to confront the inherent slipperiness of reason and remind us that man cannot “foresee one moment whether he shall stand or fall the next; and when he does fall, he falls at once without warning” (155). This sermon, though it addresses a specific theological principle (man’s inability to protect or save himself from the wrath of an angry God), also accords with Edwards’ more general epistemological convictions, namely that there are things man *cannot know*.

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, Edwards, unlike earlier generations of Puritans, incorporated the divine or unknowable into the very foundations of his epistemology. In “The Mind,” he remarks:

. . .although we. . .may in part see truth and reality. . .yet we may not be able more than just to touch it and to have a few obscure glances. We may not have strength of mind sufficient to *conceive clearly* of the manner of it. We see farther, indeed, but `tis very obscurely and indistinctly.

(emphasis added; 341)

At this early point in his intellectual development, Edwards concluded that “we had better stop a degree or two short of this, and abstract no farther than we can *conceive of the thing distinctly* and explain it *clearly*” (emphasis added; 341). These statements recall Locke’s insistence that man ought to “sit down in quiet ignorance of those things [that]. . .are found to be beyond the reach of our Capacities,” but there is a crucial difference (45). While Locke maintained that we are utterly unable to discern the true nature of substances, Edwards asserted that we have partial and provisional access to truth and reality. The language employed in this passage also indicates Edwards’ familiarity with Cartesian ideas about clear and distinct ideas. Cartesians argued that having “a clear and distinct idea guarantees that the idea we have of a thing represents that thing as it really is in itself” (Frederick S. Michael 13-14). Yet for Edwards, truth and reality exceeded even the most distinct and clear of our ideas. He was thus left in what might seem like an epistemological quandary: he did not have as much faith as either Descartes or the Puritans in the cognitive faculties of man, nor was he as willing as Locke to “forsak[e] any bid to know. . .things in themselves” (Gary Hatfield 30). Rather than spending the rest of his career trying to choose between these two extremes, however, he sought ways of describing his liminal epistemological position, and this necessitated disregarding his own assertions about not pressing beyond the limits of what can be clearly conceived and explained. Indeed, his most significant contributions to the development of American

antirationalism and to philosophy in general have to do with his probing of the nature of our “obscure” and “indistinct” glances at truth and reality (341).

The modifications Edwards made to traditional modes of typology helped him formulate a method for describing this uncharted epistemological territory. Typology involves “matching biblical ‘types’—prophetic figures, events, or circumstances—in the Old Testament with their ‘antitypes’ or fulfilling figures, events, or circumstances in the New” (Wallace E. Anderson 3). The Old Testament types—the “representation[s] or shadow[s] of thing[s]”—have already been fulfilled by the New Testament antitypes—the “very substance[s],” the “true thing[s]” (*Images* 62). The task of typologists is to discern this fulfillment through comparative analysis of the Testaments. With Edwards, however, typology “took on a broadened significance that comprehended not only Scripture but also nature and history” (Anderson 2). “Natural things” like “the waves and billows of the sea in a storm,” “the dire cataracts there are of rivers,” the “blue sky, the green fields and trees, and pleasant flowers” were also, according to Edwards, “ordered for types of spiritual things” (62, 57, 58, 62). Even more significant, perhaps, is his focus on the area *between* type and antitype. According to Edwards, typological perceptions do not enable one to understand or know substance. Rather, they open up a space that makes it possible for man to be *in relation* to the “very substance[s],” the “true thing[s],” and are, as such, a way for the human mind, which is dependent upon signs or types, to be in relation to the perfect actual ideas or antitypes of the divine mind (62). We need to keep in mind that Edwards is referring to God when he speaks of “true substance,” of truth and reality. He believed that “there is no proper substance but God himself” (“Of

Atoms” 215).¹⁹ For him, “that which truly is the substance of all bodies is the infinitely exact and precise and perfectly stable idea in God’s mind” (“The Mind” 344). Locke maintained rather pessimistically that “we have only a relative notion of substance as an unknown substratum or support of the qualities and powers of things; and neither reason nor experience can discover the real essences of things upon which their perceivable qualities and powers depend” (Anderson 62). Edwards also agreed with Locke’s contention that we cannot “discover the real essences of things,” but though we cannot *know* true substance in the sense of having a firm *mental* grasp of it, we can have a *felt* and fleeting relation to it (62). Typology becomes for Edwards a relational space that bridges the gap between the human and divine minds, between the knowable and unknowable.

The type of relation that informs both Edwards’ typology and epistemology sets him apart from Ramists. For Ramists, all ideas could “be diagrammed in a chart of

¹⁹ Locke, on the other hand, argues that since we cannot “imagin[e] how. . . simple *Ideas* can subsist by themselves, we accustom our selves, to suppose some *Substratum*, wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call *Substance*” (295). In his argument regarding substance, there is a subtle yet discernible movement away from the divine. Edwards seems to have noticed this shift. He writes, “men are wont to content themselves in saying merely that” this “latent substance,” which “upholds the properties of bodies,” is “*something*,” but they will not acknowledge that this “‘something’ is he by whom all things consist” (380). Moreover, Locke, despite his “skepticism with respect to the extent of our knowledge,. . . continued to think of matter as a substance” (Anderson 62). For Locke, the “regular coexistence of certain distinct qualities and powers in every body must result from some *fundamental* property or essence common to them all, a property which does not in turn result from or depend upon any other property of bodies” (62). “Each body,” according to Locke, “has a fixed ontological structure: it consists in a single subject, a real essence belonging to that subject, and the set of distinct qualities and powers that inhere in the subject and are caused by or depend upon the real essence. A complete knowledge of a body, one which included everything true of the body taken by itself and which showed the connections among the distinct facts, would represent it as having that structure” (62). In his discussion of gold, for example, Locke asserts that to know the “internal real Constitution, on which their [substances] sensible qualities depend” requires being able to “discover what it was, wherein that Colour consisted, what made a Body lighter or heavier, what texture of Parts made it malleable, fusible, and fixed, and fit to be dissolved in this sort of Liquor” (584). However, “our complex *Ideas* of the sorts of Substances are so remote from that internal real Constitution. . . and are made up of nothing but an imperfect Collection of those apparent Qualities our Senses can discover” (584). See Chapter VI, Book IV of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* for more information regarding Locke’s position on substances.

successive foliations”: one “began with a general definition of the [idea], then divided [it] into halves, halved the halves, and at last arrived at the indivisible entities” or arguments “which compose it” (Miller 127). Edwards was not immune to the charm of such modes of classification. He writes in “The Mind”: “I used to be mightily pleased with the study of the old logic” because “it was very pleasant to see my thoughts, that before lay in my mind jumbled without any distinction, ranged into order and distributed into classes and subdivisions, that I could tell where they all belonged, and run them up to their general heads” (345). Though Edwards did not state the reason he was no longer satisfied with this logic, it is possible to infer, based on his expressed ideas about the unhandsomeness of our relation to truth, why he never appropriated this technique. The Ramist system did not acknowledge the provisional nature of our access to truth. According to the Ramists, once an idea was “‘sown asunder’ by logic” and the dichotomizations depicted in charts with brackets indicating these divisions, the individual need only run his “eye backwards along the brackets” to “establish a proper classification” (Miller 127). The “schemata” that resulted from the “spatial relationships” between words and the ideas they represent was “thought of as a key to their meanings” (Ong 89-90). Ramists, like traditional typologists, were thus concerned primarily with securing and fixing relations. Edwards, on the other hand, privileged the ongoing process of relating.

Edwards’ typology still centered on the perception of specific relations, but these moments of consent, of feeling an agreement between type and antitype, were not considered conclusive. Four of the typological relations that he describes in “Images of Divine Things” demonstrate why he thought man must not rest content in any one particular relation. In entry 35, he writes:

The silkworm is a remarkable type of Christ, which, when it dies, yields us that of which we make such glorious clothing. Christ became a worm for our sakes, and by his death finished that righteousness with which believers are clothed, and thereby procured that we should be clothed with robes of glory (59).

In entry 46, he remarks:

We, in our fallen state, need garments to hide our nakedness (having lost our primitive glory) which were needless in our state of innocence. And whatsoever God has provided for mankind to clothe themselves with, seems to represent Jesus Christ and his righteousness. . . . And the beautiful clothing from the silkworm, that that worm yields us at his death, represents the glorious clothing we have for our souls by the death of him who became a man, who is a worm; and the son of man, who is a worm, and who said he was a worm and no man. (63)

In entry 142, he returns to the type of the silkworm:

The silkworm is a remarkable type of Christ. Its greatest work is weaving something for our beautiful clothing, and it dies in this work. It spends its life in it, it finishes it in death, as Christ was obedient unto death; his righteousness was chiefly wrought out in dying. And then it rises again, a worm, as Christ was in his state of humiliation, but a more glorious creature. When it rises, it leaves its web for our glorious clothing behind, and rises a perfectly white [butterfly], denoting the purity from imputed grace with which He rose as our surety, for in His resurrection He was justified. (100)

And in entry 198, he explains:

As the silkworm, so the bee seems to be designed as a type of Christ who, having spent his life with ingathering with the greatest labor and industry, and laying up in store the most delicious food, having completed his work, is killed; and by his death yields all his stores for the refreshment and delight of his murderers. (124)

The silkworm as a type of Christ is just one of the numerous images or types that Edwards returns to again and again. These four entries each address the same main point: the silkworm, like Christ, “weave[s] something for our beautiful clothing, and it dies in this work” (100). Yet each entry develops this central idea from a slightly different perspective: entry 35 establishes a preliminary relation between the silkworm and Christ; entry 46 situates the silkworm as type into a larger discussion of garments as types of “Jesus Christ and his righteousness”; entry 142 is a more descriptive account of the ideas raised in entry 35, and it introduces the worm’s transformation into a butterfly as a type of Christ’s resurrection; entry 198 relates the silkworm to the bee as a type of Christ. These representative entries support Edwards’ contention that the ongoing process of relating is essential, for no matter how exceptionally clear the relation between type and antitype might seem during moments of consent, it is still, even for the regenerate, impossible for us to have “perfect ideas of all things at once,” to “have all in one view” and thereby “know all truth at the same moment” (342). Our glimpses of truth and reality are ephemeral and “obscure” (341). We do not possess the “strength of mind sufficient to conceive clearly of the manner of it” (341). Thus the images and “shadows are often repeated to. . .signify the great importance of the antitype, that we need to be so renewedly and continually put in mind of it” (95). Edwards’ insistence on not resting

secure in any particular conclusion drawn from these moments of consent of being to Being was one of his principal contributions to American antinomianism.

Edwards' antinomianism was, in some ways, even more radical than Hutchinson's. Hutchinson held that direct experience of God granted individuals precise and certain knowledge, but she maintained that language was incapable of translating accurately the truths revealed through such contact. Like Hutchinson, Edwards believed that language was unable to express adequately the totality of the ideas in God's mind, but he argued that the human mind itself was unable to achieve the type of perfect comprehension of which Hutchinson spoke. The epistemology he was developing was truly against (*anti-*) the law (*-nomos*), against that which is fixed and settled. Living life in obedience to the divine mind meant, for Edwards, living with the constant awareness that no epistemological system or single act of perception could grant the human mind a firm or permanent grasp of that "infinitely exact and precise and perfectly stable idea in God's mind" ("The Mind" 344). Although Edwards had been writing about the condition of human knowledge for more than two decades, most of his early work was either theoretical in nature (e.g., "The Mind") or based on his own felt relations to the divine mind (e.g., "Images of Divine Things"). *Religious Affections*, which we are about to examine, is different from these texts: it is an antinomian handbook, which he designed in order to provide readers with a method of measuring and judging their own felt relations to God.

When composing *Religious Affections*, Edwards was determined to answer the question that had been at the center of the Antinomian Controversy and which had resurfaced again in the 1740s: "What are the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favor with God?" (84). The emphasis was no longer, however, on the exact

moment the divine Spirit leaves its mark upon the soul (e.g., not on the type of immediate witnessings of the Spirit that seventeenth-century antinomians insisted upon) or on actions as the primary evidence of the work of the Spirit (e.g., not on the type of good works the antinomians' adversaries claimed were reliable signs of justification). Edwards argued that "holy affections" formed the foundation of genuine religion, and most of his manual is devoted to identifying and describing what are and are not "distinguishing signs of truly gracious. . .affections" (127, 191). There are sections dedicated to explaining that it is "no sign one way or the other" that "religious affections are very great or raised very high," "have great effects on the body," "cause those who have them to be fluent, fervent and abundant in talking of the things of religion," "dispose persons. . .to be zealously engaged in the external duties of worship" or "come with texts of Scripture, remarkably brought to mind" (127, 131, 135, 163, 142).²⁰ The second half of *Religious*

²⁰ Edwards thus rejects the claims of antinomians like Hutchinson, who believed that receiving the "seal of the Spirit" meant experiencing an "immediate voice or suggestion" and who spoke of moments when scriptural passages were brought to their minds (232). In fact, he declares that "the pretended high experiences and the great spirituality of many sects of enthusiasts that swarmed the world after the Reformation, such as the. . .Antinomians, and Familists. . .and the followers of Mrs. Hutchinson in New England" were based on the unreliable signs just mentioned (287). Of course, we need to keep in mind that Edwards was most likely familiar only with the stories of antinomianism that were passed down through the generations and recorded in documents like Winthrop's "Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines" and Cotton Mather's "Hydra Decapita: Or, the First Synod of New-England, Quelling a Storm of Antinomian Opinions, and Many Remarkable Events Relating Thereunto," which was contained within his *Magnalia Christi Americana*. That is, his understanding of seventeenth-century American antinomianism was probably limited to the definitions and descriptions provided by the opponents of antinomianism. Had Edwards actually read the transcriptions from the General Court Examination and Church Trial, he might very well have still opposed some of Hutchinson's positions, but he would probably have also recognized some similarities between himself and Hutchinson. For instance, both Hutchinson and Edwards insisted first and foremost upon the importance of "living upon Christ and not upon their own experiences" (175). Moreover, as a sensitive reader, Edwards might have noticed, as has Caldwell, that "God's contact" with Hutchinson "is perceived not so much by actual words as `by the voice of his own spirit to [her] soul'" (350). That is, Hutchinson was experiencing felt relations to God but did not, like Edwards, have an adequate language to describe and substantiate them.

Affections focuses on the affections that Edwards designates as genuinely gracious. These affections are based on the “transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things, as they are in themselves,” “founded on the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things,” and they possess a “beautiful symmetry and proportion” (240, 253, 365).²¹

Edwards’ decades-long study of felt relations bore its fruit in *Religious Affections*. He presented to the public a language for describing the subtle inner motions and inclinations of the heart and used them as a means of validating intimate contact with the divine.

The method of navigating and assessing the inner territory of felt relations that Edwards set forth in *Religious Affections* involved, however, far more than merely enumerating what are and are not “infallible evidences of grace” (420). Edwards was sensitive to the fact that “the change made in a saint, at first work, is like a confused chaos; so the saints know not what to make of it” (161). He also understood that “there is much affection in the true saints which is not spiritual: their religious affections are often mixed; all is not from grace, but much from nature” (118). There are, he explained, a “great variety of degrees of strength of faith, as there is a vast variety of the degrees of clearness of views of this [God’s] glory” (306). Some of his predecessors and contemporaries had, he noted, “gone too far towards directing the Spirit of the Lord, and marking out his footsteps for him, and limiting him to certain steps and methods” (161-

Storm of Antinomian Opinions, and Many Remarkable Events Relating Thereunto.” *Magnalia Christi Americana: or, The Ecclesiastical History of New England, from its First Planting in the Year 1620, Unto the Year of Our Lord, 1698*

²¹ Edwards also held that “godliness in the heart has a direct relation to practice” (398). Some might view this position as somehow in opposition to antinomianism. Yet it was the opponents of the antinomians who made it seem that individuals like Hutchinson rejected sanctification as evidence of justification. In fact, however, Hutchinson, like Edwards, was merely pointing out that “Christian practice” was not capable of providing man with “absolute certainty” regarding his spiritual condition (383, 420).

62). The result was that individuals were encouraged to “pic[k] out” those “passages of their experience that are insisted on” so that they “grow brighter and brighter in their view; and others, being neglected, grow more and more obscure” (162). Edwards took a different approach; he held that experience should not be “insensibly strained to bring all to an exact conformity to [a] scheme that is established” (162). The “degree” of one’s “religion” was to be “judged of by [the] *fixedness* and *strength of habit* that is exercised in affection, whereby holy affection is habitual than by the degree of the present exercise” (119). The religious affections of the regenerate, he argued, possess a “beautiful symmetry and proportion,” which, though not perfect, do not have “that monstrous disproportion. . .that is commonly observed in the false religion and counterfeit graces of hypocrites” (365). The true excellency, the genuine beauty of the human mind is when it is in a state of steady and “harmonious relation” to the divine mind (“The Mind” 332). The method Edwards proposes for judging one’s spiritual condition sets his work apart from manuals like *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* and *The Marrow of Theology*, which asked individuals to compare their experience to a fixed standard, the Bible. *Religious Affections* is a guidebook for turning within, for engaging in the ongoing process of studying and assessing the nature of one’s affections and the patterns of felt relations that emerge over time.

The significance of *Religious Affections* extends beyond the Great Awakening: it is more than a defense of the “central importance of the affections” against those who, in the eighteenth century, “would eliminate them from religion” (Smith 17). With this treatise, as with Edwards’ earlier writings, we come to see how feelings of relation, experience, and gradation make their way into American epistemology and styles of expression. The method he describes is fundamentally antinomian; it is not a settled

system that individuals can rely upon to secure, once and for all, their knowledge. In both the following chapter and the epilogue, we will witness the effects that secularization have upon such antinomian methods.

Chapter Three

Antinomian Epistemologies and Styles:

The Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau

In the nineteenth century, American antinomianism achieved an unprecedented degree of epistemological and stylistic sophistication. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau in particular wrote a great deal about man's relationship to what they referred to as the "higher laws" of existence, and they developed a more formal, though no less flexible, form of antinomianism based on these laws by appropriating and modifying the methods of natural history and of nature itself, the Coleridgean concept of Reason, and the principles of Transcendentalism. As we will see in the second part of this chapter, Emerson and Thoreau also developed literary styles that reflect their antinomian epistemological convictions.

Let us begin by taking a close look at how Emerson grappled with some of the long-standing problems regarding the meaning of antinomianism. Throughout "Self-Reliance," he advances the argument that "no law can be sacred to [you] but that of [your] own nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this;

the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong is what is against it" (262).²²

He acknowledges that the "populace" may

think your rejection of popular standards is a rejection of all standard, and mere *antinomianism*. . . But the law of consciousness abides. There are two confessionals, in one or the other of which we must be shriven. You may fulfil your round of duties by clearing yourself in the direct, or in the reflex way. Consider whether you have satisfied your relations to father, mother, cousin, neighbour, town, cat, and dog; whether any of these can upbraid you. But I may also neglect this reflex standard, and absolve me to myself. I have my own stern claims and perfect circle. It denies the name of duty to many offices that are called duties. But if I can discharge its debts, it enables me to dispense with the popular code. If any one imagines that this law is lax, let him keep its commandment one day.²³

(emphasis added; 274)

²² Unless otherwise noted, all quotes by Emerson are excerpted from *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*.

²³ Interestingly, nineteenth-century New England transcendentalists faced the same type of criticism as seventeenth-century antinomians. In his 1841 review of *Essays, First Series*, Cornelius Felton claimed that, "if acted upon," the principles of self-reliance, "would overturn society, and resolve the world into chaos" (qtd. by Miller 5). Also, in his introduction to *The Transcendentalists*, Miller remarks that Andrews Norton, the "greatest and most formidable" of the transcendentalists' "enemies," labeled the emergent group "infidels" in order to make them appear as "a threat both to the church and to the state" (6-7). Surprisingly, Miller, a scholar who has been most sensitive to the intricacies and subtleties of American epistemology, does not challenge Norton's rhetoric. Instead, he notes that "little or nothing ever came" of the "revolutionary threat to the established order": the "writings" of the Transcendentalists "produce[d] few tangible effects," and, "after a slight turmoil about them, American society went on its way undisturbed" (13). Miller concludes that this want of "effects" should serve as a "warning against magnifying" the "importance of the Transcendentalist movement" (13). American social life, it is true, has not been revolutionized according to the principles of transcendentalism, but transcendentalism, like antinomianism, was not first and foremost a social movement; it was epistemological in nature.

Emerson rightly perceives that antinomianism has been considered principally as a “rejection of all standard,” and he attempts to distance himself from the idea that he is a proponent of lawlessness (274). He is, however, advancing a secularized account of the type of antinomianism that Hutchinson practiced. Like Hutchinson, Emerson is emphasizing obedience to a higher, more stringent standard or law.²⁴

Although the arguments Thoreau sets forth in his writings on slavery seem on the surface to conform to the traditional definition of antinomianism, which stresses the defiance of laws governing civil life, the deeper structures of thought informing these works reveal that he, too, was more concerned with obedience than with disobedience. In essays like “Resistance to Civil Government,” he advocates citizens refusing to “yield”

²⁴ Amy Schrager Lang offers a very different account of these lines from “Self-Reliance.” She holds that Emerson “discovered a disturbing tendency toward antinomianism in his own philosophical stance” and then “applied himself to the task of demonstrating how it was that the perfect self-reliance of the American was precisely not antinomian” (116-17). More specifically, “his problem was to refine his theory of individualism to allow self-reliance, to encourage faith in human intuition and in the divinity of man, without thereby justifying lawlessness” (117). Lang asserts that Emerson accomplished this by arguing that “were all men to ‘dispense with the popular code,’ the result would not be anarchy. Rather, in the course of absolving themselves to themselves, men would learn the doctrine of correspondence. Public morality would flow from private judgment; society would mimic nature; all laws would be one Law” (122). This particular claim is part of Lang’s larger argument that “to link antinomianism and Transcendentalism is to imply that the social implications of the two ‘heresies’ are the same. Whereas Emerson uncovered and described the perfect correspondence of the universe, Anne Hutchinson insisted that the visible and invisible, the public and the private, bore no necessary relation to each other” (116). Lang’s argument is thought provoking, but her decision to concentrate on the stories regarding Hutchinson (rather than on Hutchinson’s own words) leads her to depict antinomianism as a movement in favor of lawlessness. Also, although Emerson stresses that “the same laws that govern nature govern man as part of the natural world,” he understands that this “doctrine of correspondence” does not necessarily operate in the social world. “Public morality”—“popular standards” and “codes” and laws—do not always reflect the higher laws of our being. It is only, as Lang herself notes, “if men were genuinely self-reliant and followed their intuition” that “the law of society would complement the law of nature” (emphasis added; 123). Thus Emerson, like Hutchinson, recognized that “popular standards” “bore no *necessary* relation” to the higher laws (116). In addition, although Hutchinson and Emerson did not emphasize lawlessness, they were both clear about what law to privilege when faced with a situation in which the “popular code” conflicted with the higher laws of existence. The crucial difference between Hutchinson and Emerson is, as I demonstrate in this chapter, that the latter was given the opportunity to develop a more authoritative epistemological framework for his antinomianism.

to the government “their allegiance and support” while they “disapprove of [its] characters and measures” (72). The swiftest and surest means of dissolving the union between themselves and the government is, he contends, to break the law, to refuse to pay taxes. His emphasis is, however, only superficially on noncompliance. Thoreau’s more fundamental concern is that the laws established by the government have become separated from the right and that citizens are content to rely on these laws rather than on their sense of right.²⁵ America’s “well disposed, but sluggish” populace has, by surrendering its power to act on the dictates of conscience in “cases of the highest importance,” created a situation in which laws are “enforced simply because they were made” (“Resistance” 87, “A Plea for Captain John Brown” 137, “Resistance” 87). “Consistency” has taken precedence over “Truth” (“Resistance” 87). “Judges and lawyers,” for instance, make use of a “very low and incompetent standard”: they do not consider “whether the Fugitive Slave Law,” or even the very existence of slavery, “is

²⁵ It is worth noting that the questions Thoreau poses in “Resistance to Civil Government” and the answers he offers in response to them bear a remarkable resemblance to a series of exchanges that took place during Anne Hutchinson’s General Court Examination. Thoreau asks whether or not the citizen must always “resign his conscience to the legislator?” (65). If he must, “why has every man a conscience, then? It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right” (65). When Hutchinson declared that her “harbour[ing] and countenanc[ing]” of Wheelwright’s supporters was a “matter of conscience” and asked if “she may not . . . entertain them that fear the Lord because my parents [in this case, the magistrates and ministers] will not give me leave,” she was, in essence, querying whether or not the individual must surrender her conscience to the institutional forces of the young colony. In her case, the answer was a resounding yes: if her conscience could not be made to conform to the opinions of the magistrates and ministers, if she did not “keep” her conscience, it would, as Winthrop averred right from the beginning, “be kept for” her (312). It is unlikely, though, that Thoreau was conscious of the relation between his statements and those of Hutchinson. As James Duban notes, one of the more likely “precedent[s]” for “Thoreau’s subordination of civil authority to the voice of God manifest in private conscience” is William Ellery Channing’s “Spiritual Freedom,” a text that “articulat[es] an ‘antinomian’ respect for conscience” (213). In this work, Channing asserts that an individual “ought not to waver a moment as to the good which he should prefer” if he were “ever called to serve his country by acts debasing to his own mind”: “for no good of others ought he to . . . violate the inward law” (213, Channing as qtd. by Duban 213-4).

right” but only “whether it is what they call *constitutional*” (“Slavery in Massachusetts” 103). They “thin[k] of the sanction which the Constitution gives to slavery” and conclude that it should “stand” since “it was a part of the original compact” (“Resistance” 87-88).

Yet Thoreau asserts that the real question is “not whether” their

grandfather[s], seventy years ago, did not enter into an agreement to serve the devil, and that service is not accordingly now due; but whether you will not now. . .serve God,—in spite of your own past recreancy, or that of your ancestor,—by obeying that eternal and only just CONSTITUTION, which He, and not any Jefferson or Adams, has written into your being.
(“Slavery” 103)

Thoreau’s underlying interest is thus, like Emerson’s, on *obedience to the right* rather than on opposition to, or rejection of, the civil laws or conventions of his culture.

If we are to argue that nineteenth-century antinomianism has to do with obedience to higher laws rather than with the mere rejection of civil laws or other social standards, it would make sense to start by establishing what Emerson and Thoreau mean when they refer to these laws. Discerning what are these higher laws that have been “written into [our] being” and make up our “constitution” is not an easy task, however, because even though Thoreau and Emerson often refer to them, they avoid giving detailed definitions of them (“Slavery” 103). In *Walden*, for example, Thoreau writes that man finds “himself often enough ‘in formal opposition’ to what are deemed ‘the most sacred laws of society, through *obedience to yet more sacred laws*’” (emphasis added; 579). It is not, he contends, “for a man to put himself” in opposition to “society, but to maintain himself in whatever attitude he find himself through *obedience to the laws of his being*” (emphasis added; 579). In his 1851 journal, he complains that “men commonly never

refer to. . . any crowning experiences—where the common laws of their being were unsettled—and the *divine and eternal laws* prevailed in them. Their lives are not revolutionary—they never recognize any other than local and temporal authorities” (emphasis added; 51). In his 1838 address to the senior class in Harvard’s Divinity College, Emerson beseeches the “newborn bard[s] of the Holy Ghost” to “live after the *infinite law*” that dwells within them and by so doing “cast behind [them] all conformity” (emphasis added; 89). In “Self-Reliance,” he implores his listeners to “obey no law less than the *eternal law*” (emphasis added; 273). Comprehensive descriptions of these higher laws are nowhere to be found in their writings.

The lack of a developed definition of these laws has to do with the nature of our perception of them. The “divine and eternal laws” of our being, which are the same as those governing nature and the universe as a whole, “refuse to be adequately stated. They will not be written out on paper, or spoken by the tongue. They elude our persevering thought” (“An Address” 76).²⁶ They are “concealed under the details of daily action”; “out of love and hatred, out of earnings, and borrowings, and lendings, and losses comes our tuition in the serene and beautiful laws” that lie “underneath all. . . appearances” and are the “great reason[s] for the existence of every extant fact” (“Literary Ethics” 106-07, 168, 153). Or, as Emerson puts it in his address at the Divinity School, “this homely game of life we play, covers, under what seem foolish details, principles that astonish. The child amidst his baubles, is learning the action of light, motion, gravity, muscular force” (76). Likewise, Thoreau explains that “it is wholesome to contemplate the natural laws—gravity—heat—light—moisture—dryness. Though to the indifferent and casual

²⁶ See the forthcoming discussion on the natural history of the mind for a more detailed explanation of the correspondence between these laws.

observer they are mere science, to the enlightened and spiritual they are not only facts but actions—the purest morality—or modes of the divine life” (*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* 327). The fact that these laws cannot be perceived apart from “the details of daily action” points to one of the reasons why obedience to them is far more taxing than compliance with “popular standards” (“Literary Ethics” 107, “Self-Reliance” 274). These laws are not immediately apparent; perceiving them requires constant and vigilant attention to even the “baubles” of existence (“An Address” 76).

Emerson’s and Thoreau’s ideas about man’s ability to perceive these higher laws parallel, to a certain extent, Edwards’ arguments regarding the relationship between the human and divine minds. For Edwards, the “actual ideas of things” were supposed to dwell unwaveringly, effortlessly, and “with perfect clearness” in the “infinitely exact and precise” divine mind (*The Miscellanies* 135). The divine mind could “know all truth at the same moment” because it possessed “perfect ideas of all things at once” and “in one view” (“The Mind” 342). The human mind, on the other hand, was described as having difficulty holding “in view a number [of ideas] at once, [so] that [it could] see the relations between them” and was, as such, constantly reminded of the “fleetingness or transitoriness that attends” its “ideas” (*The Miscellanies* 135). The higher laws to which Thoreau and Emerson refer are in essence the same as the actual ideas of the divine mind; they lie “grand and immovable, often unsuspected behind” all things “in silence,” and, though man cannot know them all at once, they are characterized by a “fatal sureness” (“Lecture on the Times” 153, “An Address” 86-87). The use of the term “law” by Emerson and Thoreau signals, however, a significant transition that was taking place.

The concept of “law” was replacing that of the “divine mind.”²⁷ These higher laws are still frequently described as divine, eternal, and sacred, for God is still believed to be their creator. Yet even though religious and secular terminology coexist, the shift in emphasis is undeniable. Nineteenth-century thinkers like Thoreau and Emerson desired to detect the laws of nature, of the universe, and of their minds much more than they longed to put themselves in relation to the divine mind.

Their understanding of our perceptual relation to these higher laws prompted them to set about developing what can be described as epistemologies and styles of the middle. Though the higher laws underlying nature, the universe, and our being are “immovable” and “fatally sure,” we are unable to perceive their ultimate ends (“Lecture on the Times” 153, “An Address” 86-87). As Thoreau points out in *Walden*, “our notions of law and harmony are commonly confined to those instances which we detect; but the harmony which results from a far greater number of seemingly conflicting, but really concurring laws, which we have not detected, is still more wonderful” (554). In “Experience,” Emerson directs us to “bear with th[e] distractions” that arise from our

²⁷ The discourse on natural law played an important role in bringing about this transition. As Elizabeth Rosen observes, “the primary philosophers of natural law during the Enlightenment . . . expanded natural law doctrine from an inquiry into nature as an expression of divine will, to a philosophy of human rights within the natural world” (14). God was “receding into the background,” and the individual with reason and conscience as his authorities” was “stepp[ing] forward”; “human nature” was becoming “the measure of existence and experience” (14). In some sense, it seems odd that Emerson and Thoreau did not find themselves particularly drawn to natural law, for, like the laws that did interest them, natural law was unwritten and was considered superior to positive law. Natural law, as William Blackstone noted, is “the ultimate measure of obligation by which all legal precepts must be tried and from which they derive their whole force and authority” (as qtd. by Rosen 8). Yet Blackstone’s definition points to the reason Emerson and Thoreau shied away from natural law. Neither Emerson nor Thoreau were concerned ultimately with “legal precepts.” Moreover, the fundamental argument of natural law was that “all men were created equal” and, as such, possessed “certain inalienable rights” (Rosen 10). In other words, natural law was bound up in primarily social concerns and seemed to have little to do with the epistemological issues that preoccupied Emerson and Thoreau. For a discussion of the few instances in which Emerson did address natural law see Eduardo Cadava’s *Emerson and the Climates of Natural History*.

being “immersed in forms and effects all seeming to be of equal yet hostile value”

because

this coetaneous growth of the parts. . . will one day be members, and obey one will. On that one will, on that secret cause, they nail our attention and hope. Life is hereby melted into an expectation or a religion. Underneath the inharmonious and trivial particulars, is a musical perfection, the ideal journeying always with us. (484)

Thus there is still an end, an expectation of a perception of the “still more wonderful” laws towards which we are always journeying, but we never reach that end; we are in the middle, are always approaching rather than arriving (*Walden* 554). We live in a world of tendency: “a great deal is doing. . . ; remote aims are in active accomplishment. We can point nowhere to anything final; but the tendency appears on all hands: planet, system, constellation, total nature is growing like a field of maize in July; is becoming something else; is in rapid metamorphosis” (“The Method of Nature” 21). The goal is not, therefore, to bring ourselves to the “extremes” of the “series in which” we “find ourselves”; rather, it is to learn to cope with our epistemological condition of middleness (“Experience” 471). The epistemologies and styles of the middle, which are an essential part of Emerson’s and Thoreau’s antinomianism, are thus concerned more with the *processes* of perceiving and thinking than with final *products* like particular ideas or works of art.

Their conviction that man was always tending towards but never arriving at a final and perfect perception of the laws governing existence compelled them to expand the boundaries of experience far beyond those delineated by Lockean empiricism. Stanley Cavell observes that for Emerson what was “wrong with empiricism [was] not its reliance

on experience but its paltry idea of experience” (126). In the remark “but far be it from me the despair which prejudices the law by a paltry empiricism,” Cavell “hear[s]” Emerson responding to Kant’s assertion that “genuine knowledge of (what we call) the world is for us, but it cannot extend beyond (what we call) experience” (“Experience” 492, 126). Cavell interprets Emerson’s statement as a warning: we “had better be very careful what it is [we] understand by experience, for that might be limited in advance by the conceptual limitations [we] impose upon it, limited by what we know of human existence, i.e., by our limited experience of it” (126). Emerson and Thoreau were reacting to the way empiricism was concerned more with what experience yielded (namely, ideas) than with experience itself. Both resisted adopting such a narrow conception of experience, for they recognized that the fruits of experience were not always immediately apparent. Thoreau understood, for instance, that “we shall see but little if we require to understand what we see—How few things can a man measure with the tape of his understanding—how many greater things might he be seeing in the meanwhile” (*A Year in Thoreau’s Journal* 18-19). These “greater things” exceed the capacities of the understanding and need time to settle into man’s consciousness before he is able to fathom their significance. As Emerson observed, “the new deed” does not, like the “actions and events of our childhood,” “lie like [a] fair pictur[e] in the air”: it is “yet a part of life,—remains for some time immersed in our unconscious life” (“American Scholar” 61). Locke’s stress on extracting “clear and distinct” ideas from experience caused him to undervalue the “facts, words, persons, which dwell within [man’s] memory without his being able to say why” (12, Emerson “Spiritual Laws” 312). Emerson and Thoreau, on the other hand, considered the process of creation—the subtle activities preceding the formation of ideas—to be just as important as the products of experience.

As Emerson declared, “the preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious” is a valuable form of action and experience (“American Scholar” 60). More to the point here, however, is Emerson and Thoreau’s understanding of how our relation to experience must change if we believe ourselves to exist “in a series of which we do not [and cannot] know the extremes” (“Experience” 471). We must, according to them, abandon our incessant “hankering after an overt or practical effect” and put an end to our “manipular attempts to realize the world of thought,” by “drenching” ourselves in “the reality which surrounds us” and opening ourselves to “larger reception” (“Experience” 491-92, *Walden* 399, “Literary Ethics” 100). Recognizing the need for greater reception was one thing. The next step was to find ways of making language reflect these epistemological convictions.

The genre of the journal was particularly suited to Emerson’s and Thoreau’s needs, for it permitted all things to “swim and glitter” and hence did not demand premature epistemological or stylistic closure (“Experience” 471). The journal had been employed for very different purposes in the seventeenth century. Puritans like Thomas Shepard used the journal to compare their experience—their actions, thoughts, and feelings—to the standards set forth in the Bible and to thereby measure how far they had strayed from God. The journals of Emerson and Thoreau are, however, characterized more by their richness of observation and description than by any definitive rulings on the experiences they were reporting. Like the natural historian who “contents himself with dotting a fragmentary curve, recording only what facts he has observed, without . . . interfer[ing] with its vast curves by prematurely forcing them into a circle or ellipse,” they thought of themselves as “follow[ing] a system as grand as any other” (“Natural History of the Intellect” 12). Recording what they were experiencing without claiming to know

immediately the significance of what they were observing and undergoing was a “system,” one that allowed for the unfolding, evolving perception of the divine and eternal laws that are “concealed under the details of daily action” (“Literary Ethics” 107). As Thoreau explained, when “describing any occurrence” we must “make two or more distinct reports at different times” because “we discriminate at first only a few features, and we need to reconsider our experience from many points of view and in various moods in order to perceive the whole”; “it is only when many observations of different periods have been brought together that [we] begi[n] to grasp [our] subject and can make one pertinent and just observation” (*The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau* 300-301, 439).

Emerson and Thoreau allowed their recordings of what was passing in the present—their accounts of what was happening in nature, of thoughts that were in the process of forming within their minds, as well as their quotations and responses to readings—to accumulate over the course of years, sometimes decades, before trying to discern the higher laws underlying their experience.

Before discussing the methods they appropriated and modified in order to recognize these laws, one point needs to be made more explicit. Thoreau and Emerson were especially interested in what was taking place within their minds as they were processing and recording their experiences, and they were both aware of the need to develop a language and style for expressing this internal activity. As Thoreau observed in one of his journals:

How copious and precise the botanical language to describe the leaves, as well as the other parts of a plant. Botany is worth studying if only for the precision of its terms—to learn the value of words and of system. It’s wonderful how much pains has been taken to describe a flowers leaf,--

compared with the care that's taken in describing a psychological fact (*A Year in Thoreau's Journal* 168).

Emerson drew similar connections between the language of natural history and that of “psychological facts” or the mind. After having “glance[d] along” the “bewildering series of animated forms,—the hazy butterflies, the carved shells, the birds, beasts, fishes, insects, [and] snakes”—that were on display in the Jardin des Plantes when he visited in 1833, Emerson found himself “moved by strange sympathies,” which were aroused by his recognition that each of these forms was “an expression of some property inherent in the observer,” and made his famous declaration: “I will be a naturalist” (*The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* 199-200). As we know, Emerson did not become a naturalist in the traditional sense; he became a natural historian of the mind or intellect. Much later in his career, he remarked that the “powers and laws” of the intellect are “objects of science and may be numbered and recorded, like stamens and vertebrae,” but they “have a deeper interest, as in the order of Nature they lie higher and nearer to the mysterious seat of power and creation” (“Natural History of the Intellect” 4).

Thoreau described this new form of natural history in more poetic terms: “As travellers go round the world and report natural objects and phenomena—so faithfully let another stay at home and report the phenomena of his own life. Catalogue stars—those thoughts whose orbits are as rarely calculated as comets” and create “a meteorological journal of the mind” (*A Year* 165). Emerson and Thoreau created styles of expression that reflected (rather than resisted) the continual changes occurring within the mind by borrowing the methods of natural history and of nature herself.

The decision to turn to nature for models of expression and methods of organization was not an arbitrary one. Transcendentalists were confident that a

metaphysical correspondence existed between man and nature. Lawrence Buell contends that the Transcendentalists believed that “everything in nature, rightly seen, has spiritual significance to man” because “man and the physical universe” are considered “parallel creations of the same divine spirit” (149). The “universe” was thus seen as a “vast network of symbols—a Bible or revelation purer than any written scripture, which it is the chief duty of the poet to study, master, and articulate” (149). The poet’s work was to “follo[w] the method of nature herself” and “take shape like an organism according to the nature of the thing expressed” (149, 147). Buell’s points are valid, and they are explored in greater detail in the following pages. However, his argument that the Transcendentalists’ “distrust” of the Unitarian reliance on “historical Christianity” was what made them “attach an unusually high theoretical value to nature as evidence and analogue of man’s relation to God” fails to register their more secular epistemological concerns (146-47). Even though the divine spirit was still held to be the author of creation, the primary emphasis was, contrary to Buell’s claims, no longer on the relationship between man and God or on an Edwardsian brand of typology that strove to ascertain the correspondence between God and nature. Rather, the “radical correspondence between” the laws of “*visible things and human thought*” was receiving a greater and greater amount of attention, especially in the work of Emerson and Thoreau (emphasis added; *Nature* 22).²⁸ Emerson asserted that nature “is always working. . .after the laws of the human mind”: a “guiding identity runs through all. . .surprises and

²⁸ Leon Chai makes a similar observation in *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance*. He notes that “with Romanticism, consciousness or the apprehension of the object. . .becomes itself the content of thought” and argues that we can see this “increasing subjectivization of thought and consciousness” in the works of Poe, Hawthorne, Emerson, and Melville (6). Their writings demonstrate that the “external world need not necessarily reveal the awesome sense of a divine presence; it can also serve as a medium for the. . .moment in which the self beholds the reality of its own mind” (7).

contrasts. . .and characterizes every law. Man carries the world in his head, the whole astronomy and chemistry suspended in a thought. Because the history of nature is characterized in his brain, therefore he is the prophet and discoverer of her secrets” (“Natural History of the Intellect 4, “Nature” 548). Studying the laws and methods of nature was a way of studying the hidden nature of our own minds. As Emerson explained in “The Method of Nature,” “we may. . .safely study the mind in nature, because we cannot steadily gaze on it in the mind; as we explore the face of the sun in a pool, when our eyes cannot brook his direct splendors” (118). More specifically, our close observations of the goings-on in nature grant us privileged access to the laws of the mind: “intellect is primary; nature, secondary; it is the memory of the mind. That which once existed in intellect as pure law, has now taken body as Nature. It existed already in the mind in solution; now it has been precipitated, and the bright sediment is the world” (“Method” 118). The goal was not to search for and pin down specific laws of the mind since the laws of our minds, like the laws of our being and of the universe itself, can never be discerned all at once. Emerson explained that he found himself unable to “use that systematic form which” had long been “reckoned essential in treating the science of the mind,” for although he would “gladly. . .unfold in calm degrees a natural history of the intellect,” he was aware of our inability to “mark the steps and boundaries of that transparent essence” (“Natural History of the Intellect” 114, “Intellect” 417). We cannot “speak of the action of the mind under any divisions. . .since it melts will into perception, knowledge into act[.] Each becomes the other” (417). We can, however, tap into the methods and movements of the mind and nature, and this is what Emerson and Thoreau sought to do.

Despite a few superficial similarities, the methods of natural history and nature

that Emerson appropriated in order to develop his natural history of the mind are profoundly different from the Ramist method that informed virtually all Puritan discourse. Method was “Ramus’ term for orderly pedagogical presentation of any subject by reputedly scientific descent from ‘general principles’ to ‘specials’ by means of definition and bipartite division” (Ong 30). For instance, Ramus divided “each art or curriculum subject” into “two ‘parts,’ redefine[d] each part, subdivide[d] the parts each into two more ‘parts’ . . . until he reached the atomic particles which admitted no further halving” (Ong 30, 32). Ramists used their method of dichotomization to pin down ideas and thereby give them the appearance of the “pseudo-eternity of repose” (Ong 109). The methods of the natural historians that Emerson witnessed when he visited the Jardin des Plantes also sought to make “all [of] nature. . . yiel[d] itself to the conceptual graphics of outline, series, and hierarchy” (Lee Rust Brown 65). Brown points out that “the massive displays of mineral, plant, and animal specimens in the Cabinet of Natural History,” the “menagerie, and the botanical gardens” served to “revea[l] the higher forms—family, order, and class that contained them” (59, 60). The “various exhibition media”—the “wall cases, display tables, plant beds, groups of zoo cages, the very books in the library—these devices framed particular collocations of specimens, and so worked like transparent windows through which a visitor. . . could ‘see’ families, orders, and classes” (76). Natural history, Brown continues, “claimed only to isolate and clarify the representational character lying already there in all natural facts,” and, “by the same logic, the higher orderings restored by natural history—family, order, class—were also ‘already there’: they abided from the beginning both in God’s design and in the naturalist’s godlike power to gain sight of that design” (68). Thus far it seems that there are two central similarities between the methods of the Ramist logicians and natural historians:

both used visual techniques to arrange information, and both seemed to “posit the existence” of an “already finished and perfect” truth to which “man has access” (Miller *New England Mind* 151, 152, 151). The similarities, though, end here.

One crucial difference is apparent from even the quickest glance at a Ramist chart and a floor plan of the Jardin des Plantes. Ramist charts are characterized as much by their bracketed dichotomies as they are by the blank space separating the binarisms. The empty space reflects the Ramist eradication of the nuances of meaning. The various floor plans of the Jardin des Plantes are, on the other hand, far more cluttered, for the natural historians were anxious to demonstrate the subtle degrees of distinction and relation between the natural forms on display. Moreover, Ramists, with their aim of getting down to the “atomic particles which admitted no further halving,” insisted that man could have complete access to the “already finished and perfect” truth, whereas the natural historians, though their systems were “prospective” and looked forward to a more and more complete understanding of nature, left room for the unknown within their elaborate classifications—for “the things that were not—or not yet—there” (Ong 32, Miller 151, Brown 101). “Laid out among the subdivisions of the plant beds” were “open spaces” for “exotic taxa that were anticipated but not yet discovered” (101). Thus whereas the blank spaces on the Ramist charts indicated that the area between oppositions was devoid of meaning, the open spaces within the classificatory systems of the natural historians indicate the expectation of eventually finding specimens which would make it possible for individuals to see even finer degrees of distinction and relation.

There is one other major difference between the methods of the nineteenth-century natural historians and the seventeenth-century Ramists. Natural historians incorporated into their methods of classification the *dynamic* principles underlying the

existence of nature and her forms. Georges Cuvier, for example, “understood that the hierarchical classification of natural history had to be more than just a static format. It had to be a method, a technique, participating in the *vital* constitution of his subject matter” (emphasis added; Brown 122). The goal was to “discove[r] . . . an intellectual technology that not only described the hidden order of nature but whose methodical structure was homologous with that order” (123). Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Essays on the Principles of Method” merit attention here because they speak directly to this radically new understanding of method and were studied by Emerson when he returned to America. Like Cuvier, Coleridge wanted to know how “the *vital principle* that organizes and directs a representational system itself [is] to be found manifested within that system” (emphasis added; Brown 87). His conviction that the “creative power . . . in the natural world,” which “show[ed] itself in deeds rather than in static being,” was the same power “at work . . . above” the natural world “in the domain of critical recovery” led him to insist that “knowledge had to participate or join forces with the *active presence* of its natural subject matter” and supported his argument in favor of “an *ongoing process of interpretation* and recomposition, an ecstatic method of knowing rather than a mapping of static objective contents” (emphasis added; Brown 88). Brown remarks that the Jardin des Plantes also emphasized the “dissolving, diffusing, and reuniting activity of composition,” and he observes that this stress pointed “to another kind of presence, an *ongoing critical activity* [that was] as powerfully at work *in the spectator* as it was at work in the Museum” (emphasis added; 105). The “naturalist’s compositions sought to clarify” what Louis Agassiz asserted was the order “inherent in the objects themselves, so that the intelligent student of Natural History is led. . . by the study of the animal kingdom itself, to these conclusions” (as qtd. by Brown 65). Instead of seeing “particular creatures,” a visitor

would “beho[ld] `specimens,’ the representatives of species; and just as `species’ were the conceptual containers of specimens, a shift upward in the conceptual register resulted in species being treated as `specimens’ placed within the more abstract container of the genus; and so on to the family, the order, and the class” (66). Thus “glancing from one armoire to another meant passing through the genera and families,” and in “successive heightenings of perspective, the spectator’s eye traced a passage analogous to the intellectual procedure by which the higher categories had been discovered” (77). The seventeenth-century student encountering a chart organized according to Ramist method would also be presented with a series of classifications, but the only activity he had to engage in was memorization of the information stored on the chart. The nineteenth-century visitor to the Jardin des Plantes, on the other hand, was more actively involved in the interpretative event because he had to “`see’ the classification not simply by looking at the specimens themselves but by looking, as it were, through them to the higher idea that contained them” (78). Emerson was truly impressed by the method of composition he experienced at the Jardin des Plantes, and he extended it far beyond the confines of particular classifications like genus, family, order, and class.

Emerson recognized that devising an epistemology that was true to the higher laws of being required abandoning attempts at discerning specific laws and becoming immersed in the method of creation itself. Like Coleridge, Emerson thought of method as “a progressive transition” rather than as a fixed means of dividing natural forms and subdividing them and dividing them once again and so on until one arrived at “atomic particles” (Coleridge 451, Ong 32). Brown points out that Emerson’s visit to the Jardin des Plantes helped him come to the realization that “his journal project would never be an encyclopedia, because by nature it could never fill up; it could only keep filling out”

(105-06). "Every natural fact," Emerson wrote, is "an emanation, and from that which it emanates is an emanation also, and from every emanation is a new emanation"

("Method" 119). We are in the middle of a creative process in which the higher laws of being are working themselves out: we perceive "ends" or classificatory categories, but they are only "momentary. . .vents for the current of inward life which increases as it is spent" (124). Obedience is a key term in Emerson's observations on the method of nature. Nature, he argues, can be used "as a convenient standard, and the meter of our rise and fall" because in it there is "no private will, no rebel leaf or limb, but the whole is oppressed by one superincumbent tendency, *obeys* that tendency or excess of life which in conscious beings we call ecstasy" (emphasis added; 121). "The ecstatical state," which Emerson deems the "law and cause of nature," "direct[s] a regard to the whole and not to the parts; to the cause and not to the ends; to the tendency, and not to the act. It respects. . .hope, and not possession: the anticipation of things by the intellect, and not the history itself; art, and not works of art" (125). Nature exists in a state of "*unbroken obedience*" to the ecstasy of creation, to the state of always being in transition, to never being set in place (127). Man possesses, however, a "mischievous tendency," which often causes him to violate the process of creation by "transferr[ing] his thought from the life to the ends" and by "quit[ting] his agency and rest[ing] in his acts" (124). The ecstatical method of nature teaches us that what is valuable about any creation—a classification, idea, or work of art—is the "act of invention, [the] intellectual step, or short series of steps taken" (115). Obedience to the higher laws governing existence thus entails tapping into and submitting to the ongoing activity of creation and dissolution. Such obedience is antinomian; it requires setting oneself against (*anti*-) the law (*-nomos*), against that which is settled.

Thoreau was just as interested as Emerson in natural history. Yet it seems that it was the method of nature herself rather than the methods of natural historians that most interested him. He wrote "Natural History of Massachusetts," a review of a "stack of scientific surveys on the flora, fauna, and natural resources" of the state; composed essays like "The Dispersion of Seeds" and "Succession of Forest Trees"; and kept a "Natural History Extract book on Linnaeus, Evelyn, Gilpin, and other travelers and naturalists" (Robert D. Richardson 116, 280). Thoreau, like Emerson, understood the method of nature to be characterized by ongoing change and transition. Cameron notes that Thoreau's journals focus on the cyclical changes of nature that he witnessed over and over again during the twenty-four years in which he kept journals (4). H. Daniel Peck has also demonstrated the care with which Thoreau attended to the minutest changes in nature, especially those taking place during the transitions between seasons (97-98). Surprisingly, even though both Cameron and Peck study the epistemological aspects of Thoreau's writing, neither one of them explores the very significant relationship that Thoreau perceived between the sounds of nature and the human mind. In terms of our discussion of antinomianism, it is particularly important to consider this relationship. For Thoreau, obedience to the higher laws inscribed into our being involves realigning the human mind with the method of nature and recovering an awareness of our processes of thinking. The sounds of nature play a vital role in helping bring about this realignment.

Recordings of the sounds heard in nature pervade Thoreau's journals, and, as we will see a little bit later on in this section, these sounds often triggered a series of observations on thinking. Perhaps one of the reasons why this aspect of his writing has not received much scholarly attention has to do with the fact that Thoreau himself refrained from theorizing about the relationship between sound and thinking. Yet to

truly appreciate the complexity of this relationship, we need to consider some of the qualities that sound and thinking have in common. The most obvious similarity between the two is their transience. Thoreau writes that “cars go by & we know their substance as well as their shadow. They stop & we get into them. But those sublime thoughts passing on high don’t stop & we never get into them” (*A Year* 25). Or, as he explains in the same entry, “the shadows of the wings of a thought flits across the landscape of my mind—this shadow which is so soon past and whose substance is not detected” (24). Sound, like thinking, is “so soon past.” As Ong has pointed out, sound “exists only when it is going out of existence. I cannot have all of a word present at once: when I say ‘existence,’ by the time I get to the ‘-tence,’ the ‘exis-’ is gone. The alphabet implies that matters are otherwise, that a word is a thing, not an event, that it is present all at once, and that it can be cut up into little pieces” (*Orality and Literacy* 91). The written word is stilled on the page; we can pause and contemplate it; we can mark it, underline it, jot down marginalia, but sound does not wait for us; it moves on whether or not we are ready, leaving us little choice but to be swept up in its motion.²⁹ Sound, like thinking, is unhandsome and fleeting.

Both thinking and sound are also characterized, in part, by their ability to convey subtle degrees of emphasis and relation. As we have seen in the previous chapters, American epistemology had long ignored the finer gradations of thinking and privileged conscience, the cutting away of certain elements in consciousness to arrive at substantive

²⁹ Thoreau, of course, had a great deal of respect for the “written word,” which he described as “the choicest of relics” (404). A written word “is the work of art nearest to life itself. It may be translated into every language, and not only be read but actually breathed from all human lips;—not be represented on canvas or in marble only, but be carved out of the breath of life itself” (404). By speaking the word, the reader breathes new life into the written word, puts the inert word back into motion, and brings the past into the present. The written word returns to its source in sound.

conclusions. Thoreau was well aware of this tendency to focus only on what could be immediately understood or put to use. In *Walden*, he asks, “how can he remember well his ignorance—which his growth requires—who so often has to use his knowledge?” (327). Thoreau did not reject conscience or the need for conclusions, but he believed that “it is a rare qualification to be able to state a fact simply & adequately. To digest some experience cleanly. To say yes & no with authority. . . . To conceive & suffer the truth to pass through us living & intact. . . . A man must *see* before he can say.” (emphasis added; *A Year* 275-76). It seems that we have shifted focus, have moved from sound to sight, but the type of seeing that Thoreau is referring to in these passages—a seeing that involves an open receptivity rather than a sharp focusing—is intimately related to the qualities associated with sound. Ong notes that “by contrast with vision, the *dissecting* sense, sound is. . . a unifying sense. A typical visual ideal is clarity and *distinctness*, a taking apart. . . . The auditory ideal, by contrast, is harmony, a *putting together*. . . . Sight isolates, sound incorporates” (72). The relationship between consciousness—the awareness of what is passing through one’s mind and before one’s eyes without rushing to conclusion or judgment—and sound is touched on in an understated yet powerful way in *Walden*.

The “Sounds” chapter begins with seeing, not sound. Thoreau asks, “what is a course of history, or philosophy, or poetry, no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen? Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer?” (411). After asking these questions, he moves into descriptions of his own “discipline of looking. . . at what is to be seen”:

My house was on the side of a hill, immediately on the edge of the larger wood, in the midst of a young forest of pitch pines and hickories, and half

a dozen rods from the pond, to which a narrow footpath led down the hill. In my front yard grew the strawberry, blackberry, and life-everlasting, johnswort and golden-rod, shrub-oaks and sand-cherry, blueberry and ground-nut. . . .The sumach. . .grew luxuriantly about the house, pushing up through the embankment which I had made. . . .Its broad pinnate tropical leaf was pleasant though strange to look on. The large buds, suddenly pushing out late in the spring from dry sticks which had seemed to be dead, developed themselves as by magic into graceful green and tender boughs, an inch in diameter; and sometimes, as I sat at my window, so heedlessly did they grow and tax their weak joints, I heard a fresh and tender bough suddenly fall like a fan to the ground, when there was not a breath of air stirring, broken off by its own weight. (413)

As I sit at my window this summer afternoon, hawks are circling about my clearing; the tantivy of wild pigeons, flying by twos and threes athwart my view, or perching restless on the white-pine boughs behind my house, gives a voice to the air; a fishhawk dimples the glassy surface of the pond and brings up a fish; a mink steals out of the marsh before my door and seizes a frog by the shore; the sedge is bending under the weight of the reed-birds flitting hither and thither; and for the last half hour I have heard the rattle of railroad cars, now dying away and then reviving like the beat of a partridge, conveying travellers from Boston to the country. (413-14).

Although sounds appear in these passages, the primary emphasis is on the visual. The

style of seeing in these passages is characterized, however, by a receptive witnessing of the totality of the environment rather than by the type of dissection, analysis, and exclusion that usually attends the activity of vision. The qualities of sound, which Thoreau draws on in these descriptions, are instrumental in terms of helping him make language reflect the nuances of consciousness and thinking rather than just the sharp distinctions of conscience.

A more direct instance of how sound, for Thoreau, is a way of discerning the subtle inflections and connections that constitute thinking is his description of the “telegraph harp” in his 1851 journal. He comments upon how the “tone” of the telegraph “vari[ed] with the tension of the different parts of the wire” and how, when he put his “ear to one of the posts, it seemed to [him] as if. . .every fibre was affected and being rearranged according to a new & more harmonious law—every swell and change or inflexion of tone pervaded & seemed to proceed from the wood the divine tree or wood—as if its very substance was transmuted” (231). He marvels at the slightest “swell[s] and change[s] or inflexion[s] of tone” as a “thought traverses space” (231). Thoreau’s account of how the thought being transmitted affects every fiber of the wood posts closely resembles William James’ description, nearly forty years later, of how, “whilst we think, our brain changes” and “its whole internal equilibrium shifts with every pulse of change” (228).

Now that we have considered a few of the similarities between sound and thinking or consciousness, let us turn our attention to the question of why, in Thoreau’s journals, sounds stimulate an awareness of thinking. As I mentioned earlier, his recordings of sound frequently appear next to observations on thinking.

I’ve heard now within a few days that peculiar dreaming sound of the

frogs which belongs to the summer—their midsummer night's dream.
Only that thought and that expression are good which are musical. (*A Year* 47).

The howling storm-the rustling leaf-the pattering rain—are no
disturbance, There is an essential and unexplored harmony in them. Why
is it that thought flows with so deep and sparkling a current when the
sound of distant music strikes the ear...but an irregular-discordant
drumming is intolerable” (*Journal I* 13).

Some of my pleasantest hours were during the long rain storms in the
spring or fall, which confined me to the house for the afternoon as well as
the forenoon, soothed by their ceaseless roar and pelting; when an early
twilight ushered in a long evening in which many thoughts had time to
take root and unfold themselves. (*A Year* 427)

After a hard day's work without a thought turning my brain into a mere
tool, only in the quiet of evening do I so far recover my senses as to hear
the cricket which has been chirping all day. (84)

The creaking of the crickets seems at the very foundation of all sound. At
last I can't tell it from a ringing in my ears. It's a sound heard from within
not without. You can't dispose of it by listening to it. When I'm stilled I
hear it. It reminds me I'm a denizen of the earth. (107)

I love very well this cloudy afternoon so sober--& so favorable to
 reflection after so many bright ones. . .I hear the crickets plainer—I
 wander less in my thoughts. (264)

The repetitive sounds of croaking frogs, “howling storm[s],” “rustling lea[ves],”
 “pattering rain” with its “ceaseless roar and pelting,” and “creaking. . .crickets” lure
 Thoreau into perceptions about thinking or into thinking itself. There is something about
 the “unpremeditated music” of nature that causes thoughts to flow and serves as “the
 true gauge which measures the current of our thoughts—the very undertow of our life’s
 stream” (*Journal I* 321). These sounds “are no disturbance,” for there is some “essential
 and unexplored harmony” between the regularity of their rhythm and our own powers of
 thinking (13). These sounds do not break in on or distract us—they pull us deeper into
 ourselves. The mind recognizes itself in them. The repetitive sounds of nature are an
 external manifestation of the internal, hidden, ever-flowing nature of our thinking and
 consciousness. The essential accord between these sounds and our thinking or
 consciousness is what makes it possible for the former to arouse the latter.

Thoreau’s recordings of crickets are especially important to consider in this
 regard. There is something curious about our perception of the “chirping of crickets”;
 we always seem to find ourselves tapping into their sound; we never seem to hear the
 beginning or ending of their “creaking.” For hours and hours they chirp and creak, but it
 is only suddenly, at some moment when we are still enough that we start to hear them,
 and then we wonder that we had not heard them before; their sound seems deafening.
 Then, just as suddenly, it is as if the “creaking of the crickets” is a “sound heard from
 within not without,” and we cease to hear it (107). The sound becomes so familiar, so at

one with us, that we no longer hear it as something distinct from ourselves. So, too, our thinking goes on all day, but it is only at certain moments that we tap into it and become aware of its processes. It is only when we are “ever so little distracted—[our] thoughts so little confused—[Our] engagements so few—[our] attention so free” that we “hear the sound of crickets” and maintain an awareness of consciousness (*A Year* 98). Thoreau’s descriptions of how the recurring sounds of nature rouse him into thinking fit right into his more general exploration of the “laws of nature and. . .the congruence between man’s life and nature” (Richardson 155). In texts like *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, he “explored. . .the extent to which the laws of his own nature were akin to the laws governing streams, crystals, and leaves” (157). Thoreau writes:

The hardest material obeys the same law with the most fluid. Trees are but rivers of sap and woody fibre flowing from the atmosphere and emptying into the earth by their trunks, as their roots on the other hand flow upward to the surface. And in the heavens there are rivers of stars and milky ways. There are rivers of rock in the surface of rivers of ore in the bowels of the earth. And our thoughts flow and circulate—and seasons lapse into the current year. (179)

We should notice a similarity between this account of the relationship between the laws of nature and those of our mind and the previous examples of Thoreau’s descriptions of sound and thinking. Observations about thinking appear *next to* observations about the methods or laws of nature. The frequency with which such juxtapositions occur in both his journals and his more public writings challenges Sharon Cameron’s assertion that Thoreau was “writing nature” or trying to be “nature writing” and hence was attempting to “abandon the human” in order to “make himself into the alienness he was forced to

confront" (47-48). She argues that his intention is "not to compare the natural and human world, but rather to expand the domain of the former, to insist on nature's infinite self-referentiality. . . . The ultimate goal. . . [is] to connect pears to apples, pears to pears—with the comparison inaugurating a reiteration of the natural" (13). To make a distinction between the human and the natural is, however, to misunderstand Thoreau's epistemological conviction that the laws governing our existence are the same as those ruling nature. The human mind and the natural world are not, at root, distinct entities, and it does not seem that it was an "alienness" that Thoreau was trying to "make himself into" (48). Thoreau was intent on maintaining an awareness of the dynamic similitude between "the howling storm-the rustling leaf-the pattering rain" and thinking, between the laws of trees, rivers, stars, milky ways, ore, and thoughts. His recognition of the way nature and our minds obey the same law does not involve merely an expansion of the domain of nature to include the human nor is it a sign that Thoreau forsakes the human or tries to convert the self to nature.

Thoreau wants to sustain the one essential difference between ourselves and nature—our ability to think and be conscious of the higher laws of existence. His remarks in *Walden* shed clearer light on this issue:

. . . What do we want most to dwell *near to*? Not to many men surely, the depot, the post-office, [or] the bar-room. . . , where men most congregate, but to the perennial source of our life, whence in all our experience we have found that to issue; as the willow stands near the water and sends out its roots in that direction. . . . For the most part we allow only outlying and transient circumstances to make our occasions. They are, in fact, the cause of our distraction. Nearest to all things is that power which

fashions their being. *Next to us* the grandest laws are continually being executed. *Next to us* is not the workman whom we have hired, with whom we love so well to talk, but the workman whose work we are.

With thinking we may be *beside ourselves* in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in Nature. I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it. . . . I . . . am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it; and that is no more I than it is you. (emphasis added; 428-29)

Cavell notes that, according to Thoreau, “our relation to nature, at its best, would be that of neighboring it—knowing the grandest laws it is executing, while nevertheless ‘not wholly involved’ in them” (105). He continues: “As we are to learn the neighboring of nature so we are to learn the neighboring not of the workman whom we have hired (which is a measure of the kind of distance at which most people stand to themselves, slave-drivers of themselves, beside themselves in an insane sense) but of the workman whose work we are—which some may call God, and which is that in ourselves, or that aspect of ourselves, whom the writer calls the indweller” (106). Cavell’s focus is on how “we are to reinterpret our sense of doubleness as a relation between ourselves in the aspect of the indweller, unconsciously building, and in the aspect of spectator, impartially observing. Unity between these aspects is viewed not as a mutual absorption, but as a

perpetual nextness, an act of neighboring, befriending” (emphasis added; 108). For the purposes of our discussion, however, we need to emphasize the way the repetitive sounds of nature (and the method of nature herself) lure us away from the distractions of “outlying and transient circumstances” and assist us not only in neighboring ourselves but in keeping ourselves “nearest to that power which fashions [our] being” (Thoreau 429). The neighboring of the “grandest laws” that “are continually being executed” before and through us is an ongoing activity; there is no end to it; we never grasp once and for all the higher laws of existence (429). Thus for Thoreau, as for Emerson, obedience to the higher laws of being involves tapping into and trying to keep ourselves aligned with the activity of the universe.

The Coleridgean conception of Reason played a vital role in giving shape to the antinomian styles of knowing and expression that were emerging in nineteenth-century New England. In his influential “Preliminary Essay” to the first American edition of Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection*, James Marsh remarked that “the habit of using, since the time of Locke, the terms understanding and reason indiscriminately” has permitted “the higher” and more “essential constituent of our proper humanity” to be “obscured and hidden from our observation” (xxxvii). Locke held that the “highest of our intellectual powers” was the understanding, “the faculty judging according to sense,” whereas Coleridge and his followers maintained that man has another faculty, which “enables him not merely to count, to weigh, and to measure, . . . and to draw inferences from visible facts, but to ascertain and determine certain principles of original truth” (Marsh xxxviii, George Ripley 137).³⁰ This faculty or power is Reason, and it is what makes it possible

³⁰ The concepts of the understanding and Reason figured centrally in the split between the Unitarians and the Transcendentalists. The Unitarians emphasized man’s use of his understanding, whereas the Transcendentalists were more interested in the powers of Reason.

for man to “say, with absolute certainty,” whether an assertion made “concerning an object which he has never seen and never can see,—which cannot be submitted to the cognizance of the senses,” is “true or false” (137). Reason “is a direct aspect of truth, an inward beholding”; it is “an intuition or immediate beholding, accompanied by a conviction of the necessity and universality of the truth so beholden” (Coleridge 163, 171). There are, as Emerson declared in his address to Harvard’s divinity students, moments “when the mind opens, and reveals the laws which traverse the universe, and make things what they are” (75). These momentary flashes of illumination allow us to “behold th[e] outrunning laws” (75). However, our “imperfect apprehension” prevents us from being able to see them come “full circle”; we can only see them “tend this way

Philip Gura and Lawrence Buell offer comprehensive examinations of how the “philosophical framework” of the Unitarians, which was “built on the empiricism of Locke,” was considered “debilitating to faith” by the younger generation, especially those who went on to become transcendentalists (Gura 18, 42). Gura notes that the “Harvard students” who began “to talk of the philosophy of . . . Coleridge” were coming to recognize that “to define man in Lockean terms was to deny him any creative power over the constant sensual bombardment of the outside world” (36-37). Buell adds that the Unitarians “held that God and his laws are apprehended by rational reflection on the natural creation and the revelation of scripture, rather than by direct intuition” (4). The Transcendentalists sensed that this approach “cut man off from God,” and they turned to the Coleridgean concept of Reason because it seemed to reunite man with his divine powers (4). Gura also observes that these “spiritual idealists saw men as possessing the divine ability to integrate the outside world through the powers of their mind,” but he does not focus on Reason so much as he does on the relations between feeling, religion, and the aesthetic (37). He explains that the Transcendentalists’ belief that the Unitarians’ “exclus[ion] [of] the influence of feeling” and their “reduc[tion] [of] the operations of the soul to the measured movements of a machine under the control of our will” (a result of their reliance on the Lockean concept of the understanding) created a “situation that squelched any true religious or aesthetic emotion” (42). Gura argues that there was an increasing acceptance of the idea that the “creative use of religious discourse could bring man into an emotional state that provided a more sincere attachment to the cardinal doctrines of the Church than could any mere consent to dogma” (53). Buell arrives at a similar conclusion. Transcendentalism’s “central principle” is, according to him, the “affirmation of man’s ability to experience God firsthand,” and he focuses on how their literary styles reflected their idea that art is “the product of religious sentiment” (21-2). The epistemological and stylistic concerns of Emerson and Thoreau seem to me, however, more secularly-oriented than those of their Transcendentalist peers, and since Gura and Buell have so ably and exhaustively examined the “transitional stage in the history of American thought, when theology had lost its hold as dogma but still dominated the imagination,” I have opted to refrain from delving more deeply into the debates between the Unitarians and Transcendentalists.

and that” (75). The belief that Reason lets man have an “immediate perception of Truth” thus does not contradict what I have been describing as our epistemological condition of middleness (Ripley 137). As Coleridge explained, it is impossible for us to have an “immediate consciousness” of the “first acts and movements [even] of our own will—the farthest distance our recollection can follow back the traces never leads us to the first foot-mark—the lowest depth that the light of our consciousness can visit even with a doubtful glimmering, is still at an unknown distance from the ground: and so, indeed, must it be with all truths, and all modes of being that can neither counted, coloured, or delineated” (47). Reason might grant us fleeting glimpses of truths that transcend the limited capacities of the understanding, but these brilliant flashes of recognition do not give us access to the origin or destination of these laws or truths. We still “find ourselves” in “a series of which we do not know the extremes” (“Experience” 471).

Nevertheless, this particular notion of Reason was groundbreaking: it created an intellectually respectable means of legitimating immediate intuitions. Coleridge’s account of what distinguishes Reason from mysticism suggests that he was aware of how easily such perceptions could be dismissed as lacking credibility. He explains that “when a man refers to *inward feelings and experiences, of which mankind at large are not conscious*, as evidences of the truth of any opinion—such a man I call a Mystic and the grounding of any theory or belief on *accidents and anomalies of individual sensations or fancies*. . . I name Mysticism,” which is “a species of enthusiasm” (emphasis added; 296). The insights derived through Reason do not, on the other hand, have their basis in the personal and hence are not subject to such “accidents and anomalies” (296). Reason is an impersonal power, which, “though within us is not created by us; though belonging to human nature, originates in a higher nature; though shining in the mind of man, is an emanation from the mind of

God,” and the truths to which it grants us access are “independent of everybody”; they “cannot be one’s own or another’s” (Ripley 138, Orestes Brownson 110). Reason is thus “a legitimate authority for whatever it reveals” because instead of “imprisoning” us in the privacy of our “consciousness and compelling” us “to turn for ever within the sphere of the subjective,” it enables us to be “*in relation with the objective and the absolute*” (emphasis added; 110). As Ripley observed, “the nature of man has powers by which he may become a partaker of the divine nature” (138). Just as “God discerns with his all-seeing eye the real character of every action, so he has imparted to the soul a portion of his spirit, which gives it a similar power, and arms the decisions of conscience with divine authority” (139). Emerson drew on these conclusions and put them in more forceful and secular terms: “beside his privacy of power as an individual man, there is a great public power, on which he can draw, by unlocking, at all risks, his human doors, and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him: then he is caught up into the life of the Universe, his speech is thunder, his thought is law, and his words are universally intelligible as the plants and animals” (“The Poet” 459). Such validation of inward beholdings of truth was vital to the development of American antinomianism.

Neither the antinomians nor their persecutors had access to an adequate means of legitimizing immediate perceptions or revelations. Anne Hutchinson, we recall, was denounced for having told her interrogators that an “immediate revelation” informed her as to “which was the clear ministry and which the wrong” (337, 336). There was no way for her to prove to others the credibility of her claim; all she could declare was that she knew it “was the spirit” the way “Abraham knew”—by an “immediate revelation” (337). In his response to Hutchinson’s account of what she “kn[ew] to be true,” Winthrop asserted that “the ground work of her revelations is the immediate revelation of the spirit

and not by the ministry of the word, and that is the means by which she hath very much abused the country” (336, 341). Those examining Hutchinson were in a bind as well since their theological convictions prevented them from rejecting professions of individual relationships with God. Nevertheless, they were extremely reticent about trusting the claims of individuals and hence placed a number of conditions on statements regarding relations with God. Hutchinson’s revelation, for instance, was rejected because it was not mediated through the ministry of the word. The “ministry of the word” was about as close as the Puritans came to having an epistemological framework capable of substantiating immediate perceptions of the truth. However, as was demonstrated in the first chapter, this structure was based more on communal consensus than on genuine relation with “the objective and the absolute” (Brownson 110). It was, we saw, impossible for antinomianism to flourish, let alone survive, without a way to validate immediate perceptions of truth.

The concept of Reason provided Emerson and Thoreau with epistemological backing for their belief that obedience to the “stern claims” of the self was far from being a “rejection of all standard” (“Self-Reliance” 274). Emerson admits that the “Transcendentalist easily incurs the charge of antinomianism by his avowal that he, who has the Law-giver, may with safety not only neglect, but even contravene every written commandment” (“The Transcendentalist” 196). Yet, as Thoreau points out, “he who lives according to the highest law” can be considered “lawless” only in the sense that his obedience to “the law which reveals” compels him to resist being bound to the “law revealed” (*A Year* 25). Coleridge’s explanation of how Reason—the “higher” and more “essential constituent” of our being—enables us to be in direct and immediate contact with the objective and the absolute helped dissolve the opposition between lawlessness

and lawfulness that, as we have seen, had long hindered the development of American antinomianism (xxxvii). The Coleridgean concept of Reason as a law-giving principle that exists within us furnished those who might be deemed antinomian with an effective means of countering charges of lawlessness. What had once seemed like an argument against the law was, instead, an argument for obedience to the law. Now, rather than a simple opposition between lawlessness and lawfulness, there were *degrees* of lawfulness. One could opt to comply with the “popular code”—with the communal consensus that manifested itself in “written commandments,” in the “law revealed”—or one could commit oneself to a higher standard—to the “Law-giver” within that aligns us with the “principles of original truth” (“Self-Reliance” 274).

This newly articulated and legitimated form of obedience to the law-giver within was also essential in terms of bringing about an increased amount of attention to the human mind and in causing the Lockean idea to finally lose its stronghold on American epistemology. The central emphasis in *Aids to Reflection* is on engaging in “laborious and persevering reflection on the human mind” since “the higher prerogatives of reason. . . must be ascertained by every man for himself, by reflection upon the processes and laws of his own inward being, or they are not learned at all to any valuable purpose” (Marsh xlviii, xl).³¹ Yet unlike Locke, Coleridge was not principally interested in the formation of specific ideas. As he noted, the mind “as a fruit tree is more valuable than any one of its fruits singly, or even than all its fruits of a single season, so the noblest object of

³¹ We see here that although Coleridge’s goal was to prove “the doctrines of the Christian faith. . . rational” by “exhibit[ing]” their “philosophical grounds,” his almost exclusive focus on the human mind made him an unwitting participant in the secularization process (Marsh xx). Moreover, whereas earlier religious figures like Jonathan Edwards maintained that man needs to undergo conversion—a process in which the divine Spirit installs a “new foundation. . . in the nature of the soul”—in order to experience a “sense of spiritual and eternal things,” Coleridge held that through “the labour of both attention and severe thinking” man can discover the divine principle of Reason, which already dwells within him (*Religious Affections* 206, Marsh xlviii).

reflection is the mind itself, by which we reflect" (2). The New England Transcendentalists intensified this stress on the mind. They transferred "every object in nature from an independent and anomalous position, without there, into consciousness," and the "procession of facts" we "call the world" was regarded as "flow[ing] perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded centre in [man], centre alike of him and of them, and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative existence, relative to that aforesaid Unknown Centre of him" ("Transcendentalist" 194-195). The focus was thus no longer on the products of thinking, but on the place from which ideas emerge—that "holy place" of consciousness where "Being passes into Appearance, and Unity into Variety" ("Poet" 453). The poet, according to Emerson, is one centered in this state of "flowing or metamorphosis"; he "unfixes the land and sea, makes them revolve around the axis of his primary thought, and disposes them anew" (456). The poet "perceives the independence of the thought on the symbol, the stability of the thought, the accidentality and fugacity of the symbol" (456). He understands that "all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead" (463-64).³² Thus

³² Emerson's statement regarding "the independence of the thought on the symbol, the stability of the thought, and the accidentality and fugacity of the symbol" (456) calls to mind Hutchinson's declaration that her "Judgment is not altered although [her] expression alters" (378) and Horace Bushnell's 1849 remark that "it is not truth that changes, but that we change" (80). Patricia Caldwell has pointed out that Hutchinson "conveys a sense that verbal expressions" can be "set askew, can change or disintegrate, because fundamentally they *are* things, while the object or ground—the thought or conception or insight itself—is, like that other Object [Christ], fixed and immutable. It has an essence which lies beyond the words in which it may be clothed" (356). Gura remarks that Bushnell's assertion reflected the nineteenth-century trend towards recognizing that even though truth was immutable, "the context in which the truth was found. . . changed" over time (65). As we see here, over the course of more than two hundred years, there remained a conviction that there is a fixed truth or thought that exceeds the capacities of linguistic or other modes of symbolic representation. What does change during these two centuries is the value accorded to language. Whereas Hutchinson rejected language, Emerson and Thoreau, along with a host of other nineteenth-century writers and thinkers, maintained that language was absolutely

it was not that the value of “sensuous facts” (e.g., ideas, images, or symbols) was denied but that they were respected only insofar as they are “more or less awkward translator[s] of things in [one’s] consciousness” (“Transcendentalist” 193, “Intellect” 427). As we are about to see, the antinomian styles Emerson and Thoreau cultivate do not therefore merely reject form or that which is settled, but these forms, like nature herself, are always considered secondary to the creative power of the mind.

Nature and *Walden* are antinomian manuals for thinking. New Englanders had a long history of relying on manuals like William Ames’ *Marrow of Theology* and *Cases of Conscience*, which instructed individuals in how to judge where they stood in relation to theology and the divine will. Also popular were Alexander Richardson’s *The Logician’s Schoolmaster*, a guidebook on the human understanding, and the various “morphologies of conversion” created by the preparationists to help seekers understood where exactly they were in relation to the process of regeneration (Morgan 162). Later, Edwards’ thought experiments guided readers in validating for themselves the truth of the idea under consideration. Readers of these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts were steered toward specific judgments, solutions, thoughts, or ideas. Yet *Nature* and *Walden*, like *Aids to Reflection*, were not meant to “teach a speculative system of doctrines built upon established premises” so much as they are “to turn the mind continually back upon the premises themselves” and to stimulate fresh thinking (Marsh x). As Emerson explained, the goal of “wise writers” is not to create “digested systems” but to “announc[e] undiscovered regions of thought, and so communicating, through hope, new activity to the torpid spirit” (*Nature* 45). Readers of these antinomian manuals are thus not asked to

essential, for it was, if viewed as “vehicular and transitive,” a means of accessing, however provisionally and imperfectly, that fixed truth or those higher laws (“Poet” 463).

subscribe to a fixed set of beliefs or to particular conclusions. Instead, they are encouraged to tap into the higher laws of their own being by becoming engaged in thinking, the activity that brings us as close as we can get to the “mysterious seat of power and creation” (“Natural History of the Intellect” 4).

In a sense, all of Emerson’s writings are manuals for thinking. He was constantly advocating in favor of reading practices that used books as stimuli for our own thinking. We need not worry about “getting” or holding onto the ideas Emerson is articulating in his essays, lectures, and books. In “The Poet,” he declares that “an imaginative book renders us much more service at first, by stimulating us through its tropes, than afterward, when we arrive at the precise sense of the author” (462). The “precise sense of the author” is not that which commands our obedience (462). The “right use” of a book, “the one end, which all means go to effect,” has to do with inspiration (“The American Scholar” 57). Emerson explains that he “had better never see a book, than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system” (57). In “Nominalist and Realist,” he describes his preferred method of reading: “I find the most pleasure in reading a book in a manner least flattering to the author. I read Proclus, and sometimes Plato, as I might read a dictionary, for a mechanical help to the fancy and the imagination. I read for the lustres, as if one should use a fine picture in a chromatic experiment, for its rich colors. *’Tis not Proclus, but a piece of nature and fate that I explore. It is a greater joy to see the author’s author, than himself*” (emphasis added; 579). Lee Rust Brown observes that Emerson, like Coleridge, “held that the striking passages in what we read are precisely those that beg to be struck forth from their initial contexts. He filled his journals with such independent fragments, excerpting them from across the entire range of his reading” and “justified this activity as a matter of critical respect for the whole”

(29). Brown contends that “being faithful to the whole involves dismembering authoritative texts; the reader breaks up their nominal integrities to identify membership of their striking parts in a higher provisional whole” (29). He notes, though, that Emerson “argues something that Coleridge was less than willing to admit about his own critical practice: that *wholeness dwells in the reader’s prospects, and not in any text*” (emphasis added; 29). This difference accounts for what makes Emerson’s writings—and not Coleridge’s—antinomian. For Coleridge, who “always feared the unmooring of criticism from literary text, in which reading can degrade into narcissism or groundless free play,” the meaning of poems is always to “be sought. . .in. . .relation to an unrealized textual whole”; meaning “will not exceed the boundaries of textuality” (24). Emerson, on the other hand, tries to “liberate himself and his readers from the consequences of his own writing” (Richard Poirier 27). He wants his readers to trope him, his ideas, and his essays, for they, like any other form, are “speedily exhaustible means” that should not be “idolized” or “pass[ed] for the end” (“Self-Reliance” 277). Emerson insisted, however, that such “dismembering of authoritative texts” would not devolve into “narcissism or groundless freeplay” as long as it was undertaken in strict obedience to the truths or meanings that, though expressed in the texts, were not constrained by them (Brown 29).

Yet what makes Emerson such a key figure in this study is not just that he argued in favor of antinomianism and antinomian reading practices. He also created literary styles that reflected his antinomian epistemological convictions and, in so doing, aided individuals in discovering and obeying the higher laws of their own being. *Nature* reflects his development of such a style. The first step he takes in *Nature* is to point out that men are relying on the past and its traditions at the expense of engaging in their own processes of creating and thinking:

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and a philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us and not the history of theirs? (7)

The underlying issue in this passage has to do with the relationship between power and form that informs virtually all of Emerson's writings. In "The American Scholar," he *calls for* the drawing to a close of "our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands" and to our "dependence" on the conventions established by previous generations (53). In his Divinity School Address, he beseeches the "newborn bard[s] of the Holy Ghost" to "live after the infinite Law that is in" them by "cast[ing] behind [them] all conformity, acquaint[ing] man at first hand with Deity" (81, 89). In "The Poet," he speaks of the "very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees, by sharing the path, or circuit of things through forms" (459). In "The Conservative," he describes "innovation" as "the salient energy" and "conservatism" as "the pause on the last movement" (174). In "Self-Reliance," he remarks on how "power ceases in the instant of repose" and "resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state" (271). Although Emerson recognizes that "life itself is a mixture of power and form," the men of his age privilege form over power and have, as such, forsaken the ongoing process of relating, which characterizes both thinking and creating and is the closest we come to accessing the higher laws of being ("Experience" 478). The central difference between *Nature* and these other writings is that in the former he does more than call for a renewed balance between power and form. *Nature* is a guidebook whose

very style helps its readers get back in touch with power, the creative force that brings forms into being. Thus whereas the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuals that we have examined focused on establishing a relation or a particular set of relations, the epistemological and stylistic focus of *Nature* is on aiding readers in the process of relating itself.

Emerson's vague definitions of key terms in *Nature* represent one way in which the style of his text encourages readers to become actively involved in the process of relating. Let us take a close look at the definition of nature that he offers in the introduction:

Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE. In enumerating the values of nature and casting up their sum, I shall use the word in both senses;--in its common and in its philosophical import. In inquiries so general as our present one, inaccuracy is not material; no confusion of thought will occur. *Nature*, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf. *Art* is applied to the mixture of his will with the same things, as in a house, a canal, a statue, a picture. (8)

To twentieth-century readers, this description of nature might seem clear enough, but we need to keep in mind that Emerson was setting forth a relatively new definition of nature and that his text was, in part, intended as a manual for guiding readers in the process of making the transition from empiricism to transcendentalism. Emerson notes in the

chapter "Idealism" that "to the senses and unrenewed understanding, belongs a sort of instinctive belief in the absolute existence of nature. In their view, man and nature are indissolubly joined. Things are ultimates, and they never look beyond their sphere" (33). However, "the first effort of thought [or Reason] tends to relax this despotism of the senses, which binds us to nature as if we were a part of it, and shows us nature aloof, and, as it were, afloat" (33). The "animal eye" of the "unrenewed understanding" sees only "outline and surface," but when the "Eye of Reason opens, to outline and surface are at once added, grace and expression," and "if the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them" (33). Without naming them outright, Emerson has described the respective viewpoints of empiricism and transcendentalism. The central difference between the two is that empiricism binds man to nature and transcendentalism aligns man more closely with spirit (also referred to as Soul or Reason), to which is attributed "necessary existence" (33). Such clearly delineated distinctions and explanations are not mentioned, however, until the sixth chapter. The definition of nature in the introduction to the text would thus prove confusing to one who had not yet made the conversion to transcendentalism, for it begins by immediately separating "Nature and the Soul" (8). Suddenly, the reader learns that "all other men and [our] own bod[ies]" are "ranked under this name, NATURE," which is "NOT ME" (8). With his assumptions challenged in this manner, he is left to wonder: What is nature and who am I? To complicate matters further, Emerson declares he shall be using the word nature in more than one sense. He shall also be employing the term nature in "the common sense," that is, in reference to the "essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf" (8). In this "common sense," art, which in the philosophical sense of nature

came under the rubric of nature, is now separate from nature. Art involves the “mixture” of man’s will with space, air, rivers, and leaves (8). Despite Emerson’s claims to the contrary, “confusion of thought” *is* likely to occur. Such uncertainty is essential to his project of helping his readers rethink the way they relate to the concepts of nature and self.

Not everyone, of course, appreciated this method of definition and the activity it compelled the reader to engage in while reading. Unitarian Francis Bowen, for instance, expressed concern about the “vagueness of expression” in *Nature* because it meant that readers had to “busy themselves in hunting after meaning, and investigating the significance of terms” (174). It is not very surprising, though, that a Unitarian like Bowen, who was well-versed in Lockean epistemology, would have a problem with vagueness. One of Locke’s “provisional solution[s] for the defects of speech” involved ensuring that the “*idea[s]*. . . annex[ed]” to words, “if they be *simple* must be clear and distinct; if *complex* must be *determinate*”—the “precise Collection of simple *Ideas* settled in the Mind, with that Sound annexed to it, as the sign of that precise determined Collection and no other” (512-13). The author was expected to share with his readers the specific and settled meaning of his terms. Emerson, though, was less interested in setting forth a particular idea about nature than he was with helping cultivate a new “mental disposition” or “approach to the world,” one that, instead of aiming to “bring the knower and the known together in a growing storage of facts,” fosters “‘curiosity,’ poses ‘questions’ and makes ‘inquiries’” (Mark Bauerlein 14, 9). As Poirier explains, Emerson resists using language as a way to “clean up the messes of life” because the confusion generated by a “word’s conflicting connotations” not only “create that vagueness that puts us at rest inside contradictions” but also “represent. . . the reality within which we must try to

move" (30, 106). His vagueness is strategic; it prevents us from treating his writing as "a kind of treasure trove out of which 'thoughts' and 'sayings' and ideas might be lifted" (Poirier *The Renewal of Literature* 89). Moreover, instead of trying to secure his readers' consent to his conclusions or definitions, Emerson strives to get his readers engrossed in thinking itself, which is one way of helping them align themselves with power rather than with fixed forms.

The arrangement of chapters in *Nature* plays a critical role in guiding readers into the ongoing process of relating or thinking. The mental activity involved in reading and moving between the chapters is similar to that of the visitor to the Jardin des Plantes. As Brown explained, "glancing from one armoire to another meant passing through the genera and families," and in "successive heightenings of perspective, the spectator's eye traced a passage analogous to the intellectual procedure by which the higher categories had been discovered" (77). Instead of "genera and families," Emerson's chapters lead us from an empiricist to a transcendentalist approach to nature. We are led, for instance, from "Commodity," a discussion of the ways the "parts" of nature "incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man," which, "although low. . . is perfect in its kind" and is the "only use of nature which all men apprehend," to "Beauty," a "nobler want of man" that is "served by nature" and is characterized by delight rather than utility (12, 14). Yet "beauty in nature is not ultimate"; it is "the herald of inward and eternal beauty" and hence "is not alone a solid and satisfactory good" (19). From "Beauty" we are directed to "Language," a "third use which nature subserves to man": the "outer creation" of nature "give[s] us a language for the beings and changes of the inward creation" (20). From "Language," we are guided to "Discipline," a "use of the world" that "includes the preceding uses as parts of itself" (26). Nature is a "discipline of the understanding in

intellectual truths. Our dealing with sensible objects is a constant exercise in the necessary lessons of difference, of likeness, of order, of being and seeming, of progressive arrangement; of ascent from particular to general” (26). Reason, a power we possess in addition to the understanding, “transfers all these lessons into its own world of thought, by perceiving the analogy that marries Matter and Mind” (26). From “Discipline,” we are escorted into “Idealism,” a discussion of the theory that “attribute[s] necessary existence to spirit,” not nature, and from here we are ushered into “Spirit,” where it is explained that Idealism does not “deny the existence of matter” or nature; instead, it searches out “the dread universal essence, that . . . for which all things exist, and that by which they are; that spirit that creates” and which is present “behind” and “throughout” nature (33, 41). From “Spirit” we are brought at last to “Prospects,” which addresses how “that which seems faintly possible—. . . is so refined, is often faint and dim because it is deepest seated in the mind among the eternal verities” and sets forth the argument that “there are far more excellent qualities in the student than preciseness and infallibility;. . . a guess is often more fruitful than an indisputable affirmation” (43). “Prospects” does not just leave us with a broad view of “the laws of the world and the frame of things”; it is an ending that is a beginning; we are charged with the task of “build[ing]” our “own world” (43). These highly condensed summaries of the *Nature’s* chapters do not do justice to their internal complexity, but they do shed light on how the text as a whole serves as a manual. The reader is lead from the empirical emphasis on the understanding, which allows man to “appl[y] to nature but half his force” in that it encourages him to focus on “uses that are exhausted or that maybe” and on “facts that end in. . . statement,” to the transcendentalist emphasis on Reason, which helps man recognize that the “procession of facts” we “call the world flows perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded centre in. . . him” and

enables him to “regard all things as having a subjective or relative existence, relative to that aforesaid Unknown Centre of him” (46, 40, “Transcendentalist” 194). The chapters are like the armoires in the Jardin des Plantes, and as we move through them, we are granted “successive heightenings of perspective,” which show us a way out of the limited Lockean epistemology (Brown 77). The step-by-step process delineated by the chapters indicates that rather than “symbolically” *breaking* “America’s bondage to Lockean epistemology,” *Nature* provides its readers with a guidebook for making the *transition* from a theory of human knowledge that stressed the discernment of specific uses, facts, and ideas to a method of approach, or a mental disposition, that stays as close as possible to the creative force behind these ends (Gura 89).

The internal complexity of *Nature*’s chapters further contributes to the project of getting readers involved in thinking and relating. For instance, the structure of chapters like “Beauty” and “Language” reflect the same pattern of ascension that is at work between the chapters themselves. In “Beauty,” Emerson first discusses how the “simple perception of natural forms is a delight,” then moves into an exploration of a “high[er],” more “spiritual” and “divine beauty,” and finally into a consideration of the “third aspect under which the beauty of the world may viewed, namely, as it becomes an object of the intellect” (14, 16, 17-18). The design of “Language” is similar to that of “Beauty.” Emerson considers how “words are signs of natural facts” and then moves into an explanation of how “it is not words only that are emblematic; it is things which are emblematic. Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact” (20). Moreover, as he explains, “the world” itself is “emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors, because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind” (24). The internal design of chapters such as “Beauty” and “Language,” like the relationship between the chapters, represents

the more traditional structuring devices that Emerson borrowed from the natural historians whose work he saw displayed at the Jardin des Plantes. Nevertheless, there are some essential differences between the Jardin des Plantes and *Nature*, Emerson's "prospectus of the reorganized textual garden" (Brown 117). According to Emerson, "it is not so pertinent to man to know all the individuals of the animal kingdom, as it is to know whence and whereto is this tyrannizing unity in his constitution, which evermore separates and classifies things, endeavoring to reduce the most diverse to one form" (43). Moreover, although the visitor to the Jardin des Plantes would follow the natural historian's "intellectual procedure" as his eye moved along the armoires and cabinets, his work would end with the conclusion of his visit (Brown 77). It was the natural historians, not the visitors, who would go on to fill the spaces left open within the classifications. Emerson, however, wanted to motivate his readers to become engaged in the type of work that would force them to confront firsthand the unifying instinct within themselves, an instinct that can never be satisfied completely. Thus despite the seemingly linear and hierarchical progression within and between chapters, there is no final act of ascension, no place or conclusion in which we can rest for good. Emerson's structuring devices seem to keep us dependent on his textual guidance, but the vagueness of his definitions of key terms like nature turns us within and compels us to rely on ourselves in order to figure out how to bring together self and nature in new ways. The relationship between self and nature cannot be established in one act of unification; it requires continually realigning ourselves with an ever-changing nature. Emerson's text, instead of establishing one particular relation between man and nature, provides us with the conditions for "enjoy[ing] an original relation to the universe" (7).

Thoreau's *Walden* continues the work of *Nature*. Yet even though Thoreau's text is an account of his "original relation" to his environment, it is, like *Nature*, a manual for thinking, one that does not require readers to merely copy Thoreau's way of life at Walden or to strive to arrive at the same conclusions as him. As he cautions towards the end of the first chapter, "I would not have any one adopt *my* mode of living on any account; for, beside that before he has fairly learned it I may have found out another for myself, I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue *his own way*, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead" (378). Thus whereas seventeenth-century manuals asked readers to compare their experience to the fixed conclusions of the Bible, Thoreau's manual for thinking encourages readers to identify with the intellectual "energies" that "brought" a "monumen[t]" like *Walden* "into existence" and tries to foster within them the "determination to do the work by which those energies can be reconstituted and redirected" (Poirier 99). Such a process of identification requires one to read *Walden* "as deliberately and reservedly as [it was] written" (403). The reader of *Walden*, like the readers of Edwards' thought experiments and Emerson's *Nature*, must "stand on tiptoe to read [it] and devote [his] most alert and wakeful hours to it," for Thoreau's text will not "lul[l] us as a luxury and suffer the noble faculties to sleep the while" (406). However, unlike Edwards' writings, which lead readers to specific ideas, Thoreau's text teaches us "better than to . . . cling to its conclusions"; we must "soon lay it down and commence living on its hint" (*Journal I* 268). Even more challenging is the way Thoreau demands that the reader not rest content once he has redirected those energies responsible for bringing the text into being. Like Thoreau himself, who "left the woods" because "it seemed" he "had several more lives to live and could not spare any more time

for that one,” we have to resist our tendency to “fall into a particular route. . .and make a beaten track for ourselves” by remaining connected to the creative powers that constitute thinking (579).

The first step in this process is to rouse individuals into recovering their powers of thinking. “Economy,” the first chapter of *Walden*, focuses on how men have lost the conditions necessary for thinking and addresses what is required before the performance of thinking is possible. Conceiving of *Walden* as a manual for thinking helps us make sense of why, almost immediately after telling us that the narrative is “confined” to the “theme” of himself due to the “narrowness of [his] experience,” Thoreau launches into an in-depth consideration of the condition of New Englanders, “especially [their] outward conditions or circumstances” (325). The point of reading about his sojourn at Walden is not just to read about his experience but to think about the nature of our own. He comments that his fellow New Englanders live the lives they do—lives “so occupied with factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors. . .that [life’s] finer fruits cannot be plucked by them,” lives in which the “greate[st] anxiety” is not to “have a sound conscience” but to “have fashionable, or at least clean and unpatched clothes”—not “because they preferred [them] to any other” but because “they honestly think there is no choice left” (327 340, 329). New Englanders have come to trust certain “way[s] of thinking” and “doing” without proof; they have accepted the customs of their families, friends, and neighbors without assessing the cost and ultimate value of these conventions (329). Their unthinking obedience to these traditions has led them to mistake “a seeming fate” for true necessity and, in the process, caused them to become “the slave-driver[s]” of themselves” (328). Thoreau’s remarks about the condition of New Englanders call to mind the arguments he sets forth in his writings on slavery, namely that Americans are

relying on precedents and consistency rather than “obey[ing] that eternal and only just CONSTITUTION” which dwells within them (“Slavery” 103). The difference here, in *Walden*, is that he is not just making an argument in favor of living in accordance with our inner constitution and the higher laws that inform it. Instead, he is showing us, through his “rigid economy”—his “*minding*” of his “business”—a means of discovering the true nature of our constitution and creating the conditions for realizing that we do in fact possess the freedom to live according to its principles (395, 337).

The economy of *Walden* is designed to bring about our moulting season just as Walden and its environs brought about Thoreau’s. Thoreau explains that “our moulting season, like that of the fowls, must be a crisis in our lives. The loon retires to solitary ponds to spend it. Thus also the snake casts its slough, and the caterpillar its wormy coat, by an internal industry and expansion; for clothes are but our outermost cuticle and mortal coil” (341). Cavell notes that “it is hardly necessary to insist on the concept of moulting, and metamorphosis generally, as central to *Walden*; but as elsewhere, it is hard to believe how thoroughly it is meant” (42). It is true that the concept of moulting pervades *Walden*, especially in “Economy.” The members of “savage nations” are admired for their annual practice of “casting their slough,” which entails “collect[ing] all their worn out clothes and other despicable things, sweep[ing] and cleans[ing] their houses, squares, and the whole town, of their filth, which with all the remaining grain and other old provisions they cast together into one common heap, and consume it with fire” (376). Thoreau also writes of how, “before we can adorn our houses with beautiful objects,” our “walls” as well as our “lives must be stripped, and beautiful housekeeping and beautiful living be laid for a foundation” (353). Then there is the “striped snake” that had “run into the water” and “lay on the bottom. . . more than a quarter of an hour;

perhaps because he had not yet fairly come out of the torpid state” (352). Thoreau remarks that it “appeared. . .that for a like reason men remain in their present low and primitive condition; but if they should the influence of the spring of springs arousing them, they would of necessity rise to a higher and more ethereal life” (355). As he explained earlier, we have “settled down on earth and forgotten heaven” (352). Thoreau argues that even though “the effect of [most] our art is merely to make this low state comfortable and that higher state to be forgotten,” the “best works of art are the expression of man’s *struggle* to free himself from this condition” (emphasis added; 352). The “best works of art,” in other words, reflect the “internal industry” taking place within the artist as he tries to shed this low state and evolve into “a higher and more ethereal life” (352, 341). Thoreau’s text reflects his own struggle to liberate himself from this low state and ascend into a higher one. Cavell comments upon how difficult it is “to believe how thoroughly” the “concept of moulting and metamorphosis is meant” but rests content with citing a few of the many references to it (42). Thoreau means, however, to do more than merely chronicle all sorts of moulting and transformation; he intends to initiate such a process within his readers. He aims to awaken his readers from their state of torpor and motivate them, through the discomfort his narrative engenders, to engage in the type of internal activity that will help them to cast their slough. Thoreau does not want his readers to dress themselves with his clothes or ideas; he desires to help them become “new wearer[s] of clothes” (341).

Thoreau slows down the narrative of *Walden* in order to stop his readers in their tracks and to direct their attention inward. His fellow New Englanders are engrossed in external activity. They, are, for instance, “in a great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas” even though it is quite possible that they “have nothing

important to communicate” (363-64). Thoreau wants us to remember the importance of “tinkering upon our *lives* to improve *them*,” for “our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things” (363-64). “Tinkering upon our *lives*” involves, in part, thinking about “what are the true necessities and means of life,” and, according to Thoreau, “the necessities of life for man in this climate may. . .be distributed under the several heads of Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel” (363, 329, 332). Let us consider how he addresses the necessity of shelter. He remarks that “most men appear never to have considered what a house is, and are actually though needlessly poor all their lives because they think that they must have such a one as their neighbors have” (350-51). Instead of rushing forward into action or into describing the actual building of his one-room shelter, Thoreau devotes nearly twelve pages to ruminating over and posing questions about “what a house is” (350). His minding of the meaning of a house continues even after he finally begins to give his account of constructing his house (350). After acknowledging that “man was not made so large limbed and robust but that he must seek to narrow his world, and wall in a space such as fitted him,” he considers “*how slight a shelter is absolutely necessary*” (345). He notes that the Penobscot Indians managed to live “in tents of thin cloth, while the snow was nearly a foot deep around them” and quotes a seventeenth-century “superintendent of the Indians subject to the Massachusetts Colony,” who commented upon the Indian wigwams (345). These wigwams were “constructed in a day or two at most, and taken down and put up in a few hours; and every family owned one, or its apartment in one” (345). Thoreau also ponders the freedom one might obtain by living in one of the large boxes—“six feet by three wide”—that he used to see by the railroad. The advantage of living in such a dwelling is that “you could sit up as late as you pleased, and, whenever you got up, go abroad without any

landlord or house-lord dogging you for rent” (345). These observations on the size of shelters lead him to the second point to be considered in terms of the meaning of a house—its *cost*. The “cost of a thing,” he argues, is “the amount of . . . life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run” (347). Thoreau points out that “in modern civilized society not more than one half the families own a shelter” (346). The “average house in this neighborhood costs perhaps eight hundred dollars, and to lay up this sum will take from ten to fifteen years of the laborer’s life. . . . so that [a man] must have spent more than half his life commonly before *his* wigwam will be earned” (347). He details the difficulties incurred by farmers, merchants, and the poor who insist on residing in homes that have all “the improvements of centuries” even though they are “employed” for the “greater part” of their lives “in obtaining” these “luxuries” and “so called comforts of life,” (349, 334). “Our houses,” he comments, “are such unwieldy property that we are often imprisoned rather than housed in them; and the bad neighborhood to be avoided is our own scurvy selves” (349). “Civilization” might have “been improving our houses,” but it “has not equally improved the men who are to inhabit them” (349). Thoreau then returns to one of the central themes of *Walden*—the problem of mindless conformity to conventions. Most men “think that they must have” a house like “their neighbors have. As if one were to wear any sort of coat which the tailor might cut out for him” (351). In this section of “Economy,” he also addresses issues I have already touched on, namely, the need to strip our lives as well as the walls of our homes so that “beautiful living” and “housekeeping” may “be laid for a foundation” (353). Thoreau stills the reader through his dense and thorough consideration of the meaning of a house and thereby forces him to confront the ways in which he has made conventions seem like necessities. He is showing readers how to “work and wedge [their]

feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion,” and, like the first sentence of Edwards’ “Of Being,” these pages cause discomfort and are difficult to get through (400).

Thoreau is not just trying to stop his mindlessly busy readers in their tracks; he is trying to get them to have what Edwards referred to as “actual ideas.” The problem Edwards had with the Lockean understanding of language as “social convention” was that the “word. . . becomes *detachable* from the sensation. It can be spoken separately by those who have forgotten the experience, by those who barely felt it, even by those who never had it and have no ‘actual idea’ of the experience at all” (Miller 125-26). The word can “become a motor habit, may be used *as though* the experience were still actual and so cease to be anything but a hollow sound” (126). Thoreau shares Edwards’ linguistic concerns, but unlike Edwards, he explores the profound consequences such empty sound, such unthinking acceptance of customs, has on the lives of men. His desire to provide readers with the conditions necessary for having an actual idea of a house accounts for one of the reasons why Thoreau slows down the narrative of *Walden*. Edwards, we recall, argued that “if we must have the actual idea of everything that comes in our way in the course of our thoughts, this would render our thoughts so slow as to render our powers of thinking in a great measure useless” (“The Mind” 456). The formation of an actual idea “take[s] up a considerable amount of time” since it involves “taking in all the ideas that are either directly signified, or involved in relations that are signified by them” (457). To have an actual idea of a house, for instance, we have to consider, among other things, “how slight a shelter is absolutely necessary,” how to calculate the cost of a shelter (in terms not only of money but of time, labor, and life), and how a shelter reflects the character of the indweller. In “Economy,” we seem to be making very little progress; the narrative of Thoreau’s “experiment” slows down or fades

away altogether. We are flightless like moulting loons as we cast off our “outward conditions or circumstances” and find ourselves engaged in the type of inward work that made Emerson feel “nervous and wretched” whenever he read Thoreau (325, as qtd. by Cavell 12). Cavell describes a similar feeling of nervousness and wretchedness due to the way Thoreau “keeps my choices in front of me, the ones I am not making and the ones I am” (49). Cavell’s remark points to a central distinction between Edwards’ and Thoreau’s methods of rousing readers into having actual ideas. Whereas Edwards’ thought experiments directed readers to specific conclusions, Thoreau’s manual for thinking keeps the reader’s “choices in front of” him at all times (49). Thoreau provides the conditions for having an actual idea of a house, but we are left with more questions than answers. What kind of homes do we inhabit? What kind of shelter do we really need? What is the cost of dwelling within these homes? Are our homes “unwieldy property”? (349). The work that Thoreau leaves for us serves to remind us that there is still choice left in terms of how we live our lives.

Once Thoreau has worked his way through the “true necessities and means of life” and provided his readers with the conditions necessary for having their own actual ideas of “Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel,” he seems less concerned with the didactic and moves into what appears to be the narrative of his experience at *Walden* (329, 332). Yet all is not what it seems, and how we read these seemingly factual accounts of his experiences at Walden depends on the degree of “internal industry and expansion” that has been taking place within us while reading his text (341). If we have not been reading “with subtlety and activity,” we might very well not notice that his descriptions of his experiences have a deeper significance (Cavell 28). “Our vision,” in other words, might still be unable to “penetrate the surface of things”; we might still “think that that *is* which

appears to be" (399). Let us look at a few of these descriptions. In "Brute Neighbors," he explains that when the loon came in the fall "to moult and bathe in the pond," the "sportsmen"—"at least ten men to one loon"—were "on the alert, in gigs and on foot. . .with patent rifles and conical balls and spy-glasses. . . .Some station[ed] themselves on this side of the pond, some on that, for the bird [could not] be omnipresent, if he dive here he must come up there" (509). Thoreau goes on to tell us about how he and one of the loons "played" their "own pretty game" on "the smooth surface of the pond": "I pursued him with a paddle and he dived, but when he came up I was nearer than before. He dived again, but I miscalculated the direction he would take, and we were fifty rods apart when he came to the surface this time, for I had helped to widen the interval" (509-0). Eventually Thoreau realizes that "it was as well for me to rest on my oars and wait his reappearing as to endeavor to calculate where he would rise" (510). Like most allegories, the "literal level" of *Walden* "makes good enough sense all by itself" and "can, as it were, get along without interpretation" (Angus Fletcher 7). Nevertheless, if we have been reading "deliberately and reservedly," we look beneath the surface details of the narrative and recognize that the position we take in relation to the loons says something about where we are in terms of our epistemological moulting process (403).

Thus far we have been focusing on how Thoreau provides his readers with the conditions necessary for having actual ideas, but we need to keep in mind that his ultimate goal was not to guide readers to the formation of specific ideas, but to aid them in becoming engaged in the ongoing process of thinking itself, and this is what he starts doing in the chapters that follow "Economy." There are subtle similarities between key passages on loons, moulting, thinking, and the higher laws of existence that Thoreau does not work out for us. For instance, before he mentions the loons in "Brute Neighbors,"

he writes of how the hermit “fear[ed] that [his] thoughts will not come back” because “they have left no track, and [he] cannot find the path again” (502). There is a faint similarity between his descriptions of the unseen tracks of thought and the loons, whose direction cannot be calculated. The relationship between the loons and our processes of thinking is further strengthened if we draw connections between “Brute Neighbors” and the previous chapter, “Higher Laws.” In “Higher Laws,” Thoreau explained that hunting “is oftenest the young man’s first introduction to the forest”; he goes thither first as a hunter and a fisher, until at last, if he has the seeds of a better life in him, he distinguishes his proper objects. . .and leaves the gun and fish-pole behind” (492). He also recounted how, “during the last years that [he] carried a gun,” his “excuse was that [he] was studying ornithology, and sought only new or rare birds” but noted that he was “now inclined to think there is a finer way of studying ornithology than this. It requires so much closer attention to the habits of the birds” (491). At this point, we can begin making judgments about where we are in terms of our epistemological moulting process. If we find ourselves siding with the sportsmen in “Brute Neighbors” or relating to our thoughts like hunters or ornithologists ready to shoot them down in order to study them, it is safe to say we have not yet shed our lower state of being and evolved into “a higher and more ethereal life” (355). However, if we find ourselves relating to our thoughts, the way Thoreau and his philosopher visitor do, that is, if we “wad[e] so gently and reverently” that “the fishes of thought [are] not scared from the stream, nor fea[r] any angler on the bank, but [come] and [go] grandly, like the clouds which float through the western sky, and the mother-o’ pearl flocks which sometimes form and dissolve there,” we have probably begun to live our lives in conformity to the “higher principles of existence,” which are “somewhat intangible and indescribable” (536, 495). In other words, we are no

longer trying to grasp or shoot down or catch our thoughts or the higher laws of existence, but have begun to align ourselves with them. These are connections that we have to draw for ourselves, and if we have emerged out of our torpid state and have begun thinking about our thinking, then Thoreau's text has done its work.

Thoreau's "Conclusion" is quite similar to "Prospects," the last chapter of Emerson's *Nature*. It points forward to the work in which we, like Thoreau himself, must continue to engage. We leave *Walden* for the same reasons Thoreau left Walden: we have "several more lives to live and [cannot] spare any more time" for this one (579). We are left to pursue our own way, which as Thoreau points out in the conclusion, does not involve putting ourselves in "formal opposition to what are deemed 'the most sacred laws of society'" (579). We need only "maintain" ourselves "in whatever attitude" we find ourselves "through obedience to the laws of [our] being" (579). With each life that we live, with each experience to which we knowingly attend, we will "put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary," and "new universal and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around [us] and within [us]; or the old laws will be expanded, and interpreted in [our] favor in a more liberal sense, and [we] will live with the license of a higher order of beings" (580). *Walden* thus ends on an overtly antinomian note; it underscores, once again, the importance of living in accordance with the higher laws of existence.

Nineteenth-century American antinomianism does not, as we have seen throughout this chapter, entail discerning and pinning down the higher laws governing existence. Rather, it involves tapping into the ongoing processes of thinking and aligning ourselves with ever-fluxing nature, which is always "faithful" to "Spirit," the "cause whence it had its origin" (*Nature* 40). The literary styles that Emerson and Thoreau

cultivated in *Nature* and *Walden* are antinomian in the truest sense; they provide readers with the conditions for obeying the higher laws of being and do not ask us to conform to fixed answers or solutions.

Epilogue

Antinomianism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

In the past three chapters, we have studied how, over the course of nearly two hundred and twenty years, American antinomianism evolved both epistemologically and stylistically. We began by examining the extant documents from the Antinomian Controversy of the 1630s in order to come to a better understanding of what it was that the antinomians themselves believed. Seventeenth-century New England antinomians were, I demonstrated, concerned primarily with *obedience* to God, not with the rejection of civil authority. What made them seem so threatening to the magistrates and ministers was that their submission to God destabilized prevailing notions regarding the stability of human knowledge and the reliability of language. They also drew attention to the way that the Puritans' theories of knowledge accorded no value to the inner experiences upon which their theology rested. One of the central problems for the first generation of antinomians was that they did not have access to an intellectually respectable means of validating their inner experiences of God. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, individuals like Edwards, Emerson, and Thoreau developed ways of legitimating felt relations to the divine mind and fleeting moments of contact with the higher laws of existence. These three thinkers developed antinomian epistemologies and

styles, which reflected their recognition that living life in obedience to the divine mind or the higher laws of being meant living with the awareness that no single felt relation or perception was capable of granting the human mind perfect or complete knowledge. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a transformed antinomianism merged into pragmatism.

The pragmatic method emerged in response to Charles Sanders Peirce's and William James' increasing awareness that our conclusions are never final, no matter how clear or definite we might be about them. Of special interest to Peirce, for instance, was the recent explosion of the "absolute exactitude of . . . geometrical axioms" such as the one which claims that the "sum of the three angles of a triangle is exactly equal to two right angles" (273). He acknowledged that not enough "facts have been established sufficient to call for a modification of existing conceptions"; in fact, "experience shows that the deviation of that sum from that amount is so excessively small that language must be ingeniously used to express the degree of approximation" ("Design and Chance" 215, "A Guess" 273). Likewise, he examined how the new non-Euclidean geometry suggests that the parallax of stars might be "either more or less than zero," a proposition that challenges ordinary geometry's assumption that the parallax should only "slightly exceed zero" ("Design" 217). The error of ordinary geometry is, he notes, a "quantity less than 1/500 of the smallest speck that can be seen on the broad horizon, and the extinction of the human race is to be expected sooner than the applicability of the non-Euclidean geometry" (217). Nevertheless, such minute variations were "significant for philosophy": they forced thinkers to grapple with the fact that *"every proposition which we can be entitled to make about the real world must be an approximate one; we can never have the right to hold any truth to be exact"* (emphasis added; 273). James came to the same conclusion as

Peirce. In his lectures on pragmatism, he noted that “as the sciences” have “developed farther, the notion has gained ground that *most, perhaps all, of our laws are only approximations*” (emphasis added; 22). Peirce and James committed themselves to investigating the philosophical consequences of the mathematical and scientific discoveries of their age.

The questioning of the accuracy of mathematical axioms led Peirce to think about the fundamental axiom of logic (the law of cause and effect) and hazard a guess as to the evolution of physical law itself. As he notes, one of the first propositions to follow the geometrical maxims “to the tomb of extinct creeds,” is the one declaring “every event in the universe” to be “precisely determined by causes according to inviolable law” (“A Guess” 273). Although “bodies obey sensibly the laws of mechanics,” it may be that, “if our means of measurement were nicer, or if we were to wait inconceivable ages for an exception, exceptions irreducible in their own nature to any law would be found” (“Design” 217). “May it not be,” he asks, “that chance. . .mere absence of cause, has to be admitted as having some slight place in the universe?” (217). As someone who understood his “opinion” to be “Darwinism. . .brought into the realm of ontology,” Peirce supposed that the law of cause and effect, like all physical laws, could not have always been “as rigidly necessary as it is now”: it “must be among the things which have been somehow brought about” (222, 219). His well known guess was that “all known laws are due to chance and repose upon others far less rigid themselves due to chance and so on in an infinite regress, the further we go back the more indefinite being the nature of the laws” (222). He observes that “there are many people who will have difficulty in conceiving an element of lawlessness in the universe” but points out that “Aristotle often lays it down that some things are determined by causes while others

happen by chance. . . .To the ancients, there was nothing strange in such notions—the strange thing would have been to have said there was no chance” (274). Something had happened over the course of the centuries: mankind came to disregard “irregular relationships” and “enormously exaggerate the part that law plays in the universe” (276). In the first chapter, we saw how, from the thirteenth century onwards, manualists like Peter of Spain simplified Aristotelian logic for the sake of the young boys entering the university system. Part of this simplification involved excising probable conclusions and uncertainty from the study of logic. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Ramus and adherents to his dialectic ignored or perverted beyond recognition irregularities, or anything that did not fit neatly into dichotomies. In the nineteenth century, however, chance and uncertainty begin to be reclaimed by logic and philosophy. What is most important for us to note, though, is the way Peirce came to recognize that laws are not absolute and unwavering. The radical antinomianism of pragmatism, which I will be discussing in a few moments, owes much to this groundbreaking realization that law itself is not completely fixed and settled.

James extended Peirce’s ideas about law to the philosophical conceptions of truth and reality. He understood that the “most ancient parts of truth” also “once were plastic” and “called true for human reasons” (25). With James, the emphasis was more on the role that experience plays in shaping our perceptions of truth than it was on chance. In *Pragmatism*, he notes, for example, that “Ptolemaic astronomy, euclidean space, aristotelian logic, [and] scholastic metaphysics, were expedient for centuries, but human experience has boiled over those limits, and now we call these things only relatively true, or true within those borders of experience” (86). He goes on to explain that “what meets expediently all the experience in sight won’t necessarily meet all farther

experiences equally satisfactorily. Experience. . .has ways of *boiling over*, and making us correct our present formulas” (86). James’ awareness of the extent to which experience influences our intellectual conclusions led him to declare that truth is not a “stagnant property inherent” in an idea: it “happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events” (77-78). James made similar claims for reality. He argued that reality is not “ready-made and complete from all eternity” but, rather, something that is “still in the making and await[ing] part of its completion from the future” (99). Peirce and James did more, however, than merely set forth new philosophical perspectives on law, truth, and reality.

They devised a philosophical method that accounted for the process of epistemological change. James explains that pragmatism “does not stand for any special results”; it is a “method only,” one which stresses the importance of determining what type of practical difference it would make if one idea rather than another were considered true (21). Peirce maintained that “if one can define accurately all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept” (276). James agreed with Peirce that in order “to attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object. . .we need only consider what effects of a conceivably practical kind the object may involve. . . .Our conception of these effects, then, is for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all” (18). These descriptions give the impression that pragmatism seeks to limit man’s epistemological horizons and call to mind Locke’s conclusion that since our knowledge does not extend beyond our own ideas, we ought to resist studying those things that are beyond them. Peirce and James argued that it was pointless for individuals to concern themselves with ideas whose

practical consequences could not be established. Following in Darwin's footsteps, the founding fathers of pragmatism insisted that if we cannot discern the specific practical differences that will result from believing in one idea rather than another, then "the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow" (18).³³ Yet even though pragmatism seems to require individuals to avoid concerning themselves with what extends beyond the practical consequences of their ideas, it also compels them to remain, on some level, open to what lies beyond their current conceptions. The philosophical method Peirce and James developed was based on the notion that since truth was not an "inert static relation," there can be no "end of the matter," no way of fulfilling once and for all our "thinking destiny," not even when we imagine we have got our "true idea of anything" (77). The pragmatic method was designed to guide individuals in both settling into *and* moving out of their conclusions. That is, practitioners of pragmatism are encouraged to recognize that the laws, truths, axioms, or realities they are able to perceive are not eternal verities in which they can rest but are only approximations of even greater truths that are in the process of becoming. Herein lies an important clue as to the radical antinomianism of pragmatism.

American antinomianism, as we have seen in the previous chapters, was concerned first and foremost with obedience to God, the divine mind, or the higher laws of existence. It was this obedience that led Hutchinson, Edwards, Emerson, and Thoreau to recognize that human knowledge was provisional and could never be perfect or fixed. Peirce and James maintained this antinomian emphasis on obedience, albeit in a highly secularized form. The pragmatic method requires its users to submit to the

³³ Darwin argued that "variations neither useful nor injurious would not be affected by natural selection," and would, as such, remain a "fluctuating," unimportant "element" (81).

“notion of a potential better truth to be established later, possibly to be established someday absolutely” (86). The notion that truth changes and is a “man-made thin[g]” was profoundly unsettling to those who wanted to believe in an absolutely secure world in which truth was considered unconditional and transcendent (93). Like the antinomians before them, nineteenth-century pragmatists found themselves charged with having “destroyed all objective standards” (90). James’ response to these accusations is particularly revealing. He declared that since pragmatists are

pent in between the whole body of funded truths squeezed from the past and the coercions of the world of sense about him, who so well as he feels the immense pressure of objective control under which our minds perform their operations? If anyone imagines that this law is lax, let him keep its commandment one day, says Emerson. (90)

The lines from Emerson should have a familiar ring to them: they come from the section in “Self-Reliance” where he defends himself against those who think that the “rejection of popular standards is a rejection of all standard, and mere *antinomianism*” (274). Even though Emerson inherited the biased and inaccurate understanding of antinomianism that had been passed down over the centuries, he was, in fact, advancing a position quite similar to the one Hutchinson was struggling to articulate. That is, he was interested primarily in obedience to the higher laws of existence and set forth the argument that it was far more taxing to obey these laws than it was to submit to popular conventions. For Hutchinson and Edwards, the stress was on obedience to the already fixed standard of God and the divine mind. With Emerson and Thoreau, the higher laws, though still characterized as immovable and fatally sure, were beginning to be conceived of as unfolding over time. As Emerson explained, a “great deal is doing. . .; remote aims are in

active accomplishment” (“Method of Nature” 21). Peirce and James came to understand, with the help of Darwin and the discoveries being made by mathematicians, that better truths—be they embodied in laws, axioms, or other ideas—are not fixed and are not merely unfolding. James remarked that we have long imagined that “the eternal is unrolling, that the one previous justice, grammar, or truth is simply fulgurating, and not being made” (93). Pragmatism, however, is based on the idea that “truth grows up inside of all the finite experiences. They lean on each other, but the whole of them, if such a whole there be, leans on nothing. . . .Nothing outside the flux secures the issue of it” (100). Pragmatism is extreme antinomianism: it resists the very notion of the existence of a settled, immutable truth. Pragmatism also compels its practitioners to immerse themselves in the highly taxing activity of constantly adjusting their “funded truths” so that they remained aligned with the present “world of sense” and experience (90). In this way, users of the pragmatic method are required to remain open and obedient to better truths that are in the process of coming into existence.

Pragmatism truly was, as the original subtitle of James’ book suggested, a “new name for some old ways of thinking.” When James coined this phrase to describe the philosophical method that he and Peirce developed, he had in mind a handful of European philosophers, including Locke, Hume, Berkeley, and Kant. In this epilogue, I have aimed, however, to shed light on how pragmatism is really a new name for antinomianism. Moreover, the dissertation as a whole has been devoted to surveying a line of thinking that started being articulated during America’s first epistemological crisis (the Antinomian Controversy of the mid-1630s), underwent various forms of intellectual and stylistic refinement over the course of subsequent centuries, and eventually was incorporated into the country’s first philosophical method. Thus whereas scholars like

Richard Poirier have charted the paths leading *out of* pragmatism, my study has explored the less well known paths leading *up to* pragmatism.

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