American Spaces of Conversion:
The Conductive Imaginaries of Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William James

by

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Abstract

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Andrea Knutson

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This dissertation explores how the concept of conversion, as articulated in Puritan Reformed theology and transplanted to the Massachusetts Bay colony, remained a vital cultural force shaping developments in American literary and philosophical expression. Testimonies of conversion recorded by Thomas Shepard reveal an active pursuit of belief by prospective church members occurring at the intersection of feeling, intellect, doctrine, and perception. I argue that this pursuit of belief, originally undertaken by the Puritans as a way to conceptualize redemption in a fallen state, established the epistemological contours of what Edwards, Emerson, and James would theorize as a conductive imaginary acting as a site for adaptations in belief structures. By defining, energizing, and binding the relations between an individual, the divine (or incalculable), and the environment, the experience of belief, what James would call the "will to believe," framed the dynamics between an individual and history, society, and nature. I show, primarily through an analysis of the scientific, philosophical, and theological contexts of each author's period, that as an epistemological process where a perceiver is linked to an infinite potential, the morphology of conversion remained of deep interest to Edwards, Emerson, and James who each developed philosophies celebrating the perception and translation of experience through an affective relation to the environment.

Preface

"American Spaces of Conversion: The Conductive Imaginaries of Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William James" emerged early in my doctoral studies when I was introduced to the Puritan conversion narratives collected by the Massachusetts Bay minister Thomas Shepard. I became fascinated by the way that the prospective saints struggled with expressing what was the inherent paradox of conveying the truth and certain knowledge of a spiritual experience which was not only profoundly affective, but was articulated in doctrine as, in fact, unknowable and uncertain. I searched for other testimonies and began to appreciate the complexity and subtlety of the saints' active pursuit of belief as they practiced the Calvinist theology ordering their world and negotiated the demands that ministers placed on them to integrate doctrine into their daily lives. Patricia Caldwell's *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* drew my attention to the fragmented quality of the conversion narratives given by Thomas Shepard's saints. She attributes this quality to the disappointment felt by the colonists upon arriving in the Bay colony and argues that the testimonies demonstrate open-endedness because the saints' expectations that the migration would facilitate "closing" with Christ were dashed by the reality of the hardships of the place. Yet this context, I found, accounts for only a part of the saints' stories.

In his essay "Thomas Shepard's America: The Biography of an Idea," Andrew Delbanco charts how the quality of Thomas Shepard's ministry changed significantly over time. He asserts that Shepard's early preaching in *The Sound Believer* betrays a mysticism that was exiled from the disciplined, intellectualized piety he enforced in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*. Understood in this context, the fragmented nature of the saints' narratives cannot be wholly attributed to the migration's disastrous effects; we must also consider how the rhetoric of Shepard's ministry created a community of saints unable to testify to an actual, felt experience of conversion. What the narratives collected by Shepard reveal is a crisis in faith. They reveal the epistemological nexus of perception, Ramist logic, doctrine, and the affective cycle of the morphology of conversion strained by the saints' attempts to fit their individual experiences into a sanctioned pattern.

I lingered over the testimonies, listening to the voices of the saints as they tried to say something about the presence of the spiritual in their lives. What emerged was a sort of topography of their inner journey, a relief map showing how they arrived at each moment of satisfaction or despair. I began to think that what so many scholars saw as a predictable, static mode of expression actually conveyed the dynamic relations between an individual, the divine, doctrine, and the environment. After reading Perry Miller's *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, Shepard's records took their place alongside this monument to Puritan rationalism as companion texts demonstrating the lived manifestations of Puritan theology. I argue in the first chapter that the testimonies of conversion demonstrate what Perry Miller calls the "one fissure in the impregnable walls of systematic theology"—the site of daily experience for the Puritans (5). The

conversion narratives offer a glimpse into the saints' ordinary experience within the space between God's hidden will (their daily lives) and his declared will (the Bible).

My dissertation shows that this pursuit of belief, originally undertaken by the Puritans as a way to conceptualize redemption in a fallen state, established the epistemological contours of what Edwards, Emerson, and James would theorize as a conductive imaginary acting as a site for adaptations in belief structures. They offer a conception of conversion figuring the boundaries, or lack thereof, between the spontaneous and sensory perception of the environment and the bodies of knowledge that inevitably inform that environment. As such, the experience of belief, what James would call the "will to believe," manifesting the dynamics between an individual and history, society, rhetoric, and nature, served as a central trope for theological, philosophical, and literary expression in America.

Since the publication of the conversion testimonies, there have been surprisingly few studies undertaken about them. Patricia Caldwell's remains the most influential study linking the narratives to an aspect of something "American." Caldwell's book, however, argues that the conversion testimonies themselves, as given for a test of church membership, signal the beginnings of an American literary tradition. This dissertation attends to the narratives, but not as a form of expression. Rather, I am interested in them as records of conversion experiences that, because of the migration's disruptive effect and the spiritual discipline enforced by Shepard's ministry, betray the fragility of the inherited epistemological and spiritual frameworks and the internal struggle not only to "close" with Christ, but in effect, to "close" with doctrinally sanctioned forms of language, thought, and feeling, and therefore, avenues of grace. As an epistemological

space where a perceiver is linked to an infinite potential, the concept of conversion remained of deep interest to Edwards, Emerson, and James, who each developed philosophies celebrating the perception and translation of experience through an affective relation to the environment.

In the first chapter I analyze the conversion narratives in light of faculty psychology, Ramist logic, and the doctrine articulated in Shepard's *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* and *The Sound Believer*. I examine the ways in which the saints incorporated the discourse of his ministry into their lives and interpreted their own experience against the forms established in his doctrine, in other words, the ways they experienced the concepts of a "saving" knowledge of faith and of a "notional" knowledge of faith. I argue that the saints were in fact, as David D. Hall claims, "makers of their faith" in the ordinary course of their lives (51). I show how the testimonies reveal a determined group of individuals trying to fit the vicissitudes of daily life and spiritual experience into the *ordo salutis*, "the mechanics of the Spirit's proceedings" as conceptualized in the Puritan Reformed tradition (Cohen 75). Because *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* enforces such a rigorous intellectualized experience of conversion, Shepard's saints could not testify to the transcendent, felt dimension of conversion, which is, in fact, the moment of justification in the process. Though many of the narratives reach the moment just before they feel the urge to turn their will over to God, they inevitably fall back on the prescribed form of experience dictated by Shepard—that of conviction, compunction, despair, and humiliation—the aspects related to the disciplined stages of the conversion process fueled by the work of conscience. I examine the interstices, expressed through the saints' descriptions of their progress, between what they *feel* they believe, and how

they subject that feeling of belief (what should be the joyous moment of consummation) to what they know they *should feel*. Because Shepard's saints exhibit a specific anxiety surrounding the moment of transcendence, their confessions expose the frustrating but dynamic process of interpreting what one believes against the giant forces of doctrine and rhetoric.

In the second chapter I explore the ways that Edwards, without sacrificing the integrity of doctrines central to Calvinism, theorized conversion and a new "Logick" (a new method of perception) by adopting the idea of consciousness as an active, creative force bringing God's world into being. Edwards' concept of the "sense of the heart" and focus on "conviction" as the feeling structuring our spiritual, scientific, and philosophical beliefs about the world foregrounded spontaneity and immediacy in the perception of truth, thereby freeing his congregation from a preexisting, generic pattern of experience. I demonstrate how Edwards' idealism allowed him to conceptualize what James would later call a space of the "vague" within consciousness. By theorizing consciousness as a boundary phenomenon between abstract truths and concrete reality, Edwards was able to esteem what he called "attention of the mind in thinking" as a form of piety. Instead of using the method of technologia to establish the objective truths of God's universe (as was the case with the previous generation of preparationists) Edwards claimed that "intelligent beings are created to be the consciousness of the universe, that they may perceive what God is and does," thereby equating piety with an active, lively consciousness ever attuned to the "degrees" of divine truth emerging from the horizon of consciousness (*The "Miscellanies": Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500* 252). Moreover, I interpret *Religious Affections* as a treatise about perception. Whereas Shepard would

claim that saints "see things in another manner" after conversion, his adherence to an intellectual tradition in Puritan piety did not permit him to explain how. In contrast, *Religious Affections* attempts to provide that description of *how* saints see things anew when what he calls the "new spiritual sense" is laid in the foundation of the soul. In doing so, Edwards firmly establishes gracious *affections* as the dynamic mediating relations between a saint, God, and objective reality.

Discussions surrounding Emerson's work often emerge out of the most distinguishing effect of his sentences—disorientation. This disorientation, though frustrating to experience, is attributed to what is generally understood to be Emerson's project of enacting in his audience the search for meaning. Chapter three historicizes this quality of disorientation and the accompanying search for meaning by situating it within the Puritan Reformed tradition of experiential piety. In drawing parallels between Shepard, Edwards, and Emerson, I show that Emerson inherited the ministerial imperative to guide his audience into a "saving" experience with the world that Shepard described is "wrapped up in words." In line with Shepard's and Edwards' sermons, Emerson's essays and *Nature* work to habituate his audience to a method of thinking that moves them into experiencing the feeling of transcending the world of fact and the forces of doctrine, rhetoric, history, and language. This movement is enacted in the reader of Emerson's sentences, in what James would call the "turnings-toward" and turnings-from" experienced in the process of discovering meaning. The disorientation felt in the process signals the active role consciousness plays while in search of truths which Emerson emphasized were always in a state of "perpetual inchoation." In reading Emerson's sentences we experience what James describes as the space of the "vague," the liminal

space on the horizon of consciousness on the border between concrete reality and abstract ideas.

The natural philosophy of Emerson's time esteemed the active power of consciousness—the role of "Reason"—in approaching truth and looser, less technical descriptions of the world. In this chapter I show how this cultural space allowed Emerson to adopt this method of science as the method of perception he inculcates in his audience through his sentences. As such, we become natural philosophers of the soul, continually troping our definitions of the world and self as we engage in the project of incessant regeneration. In this way Emerson compels his audience to become conscious of what Lee Rust Brown calls the "edge of experience" which "cuts its way through the world at a point beyond our direct grasp of knowledge," translating what was the discomfort of feeling lost for the Puritans into a saving disorientation which means one has not stagnated in their worldview (173).

In chapter four I demonstrate how *The Varieties of Religious Experience* manifests James' project to conceptualize the structure of belief during an age overshadowed by what Paul Jerome Croce calls "the eclipse of uncertainty" precipitated by Darwin. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* reflects James' challenge to the absolutism of science and dogmatic religion that marked his era through a sustained rendering of the process by which one experiences the gap between a fact and its interpretation, what James would term the "transmarginal" field of consciousness. In this way, the lectures making up *The Varieties of Religious Experience* embody a sort of "room of the idea" of conversion figured as the intersection of perception, discourse, imagination, and interpretation. James argues for an epistemology that would embrace

the uncertainty of human inquiry and provide a methodology that would help people cope with this uncertainty by writing a text requiring its audience to employ the methodology of probabilistic thinking James found compelling in Darwin. This method, the pragmatic hermeneutic, esteems the experience of "tendency" central to the empiricism James conceptualized. In doing so, he advocated a psychology of religious experience celebrating the indeterminate and disorienting nature of an individual's relation to the environment, celebrating *what happens to an idea* in the course of experience.

* * * * * *

My doctoral studies and the completion of this project have been a group effort. Acknowledging all who have supported me during these years seems like a small gesture in relation to the gratitude that I feel. A Morton Cohen Dissertation Year Award from The Graduate Center's English Department allowed me to dive into the writing process, a much needed jump start to make the transition from years of research to the actual writing process. During this process, William Kelly asked hard questions whose answers shaped the way I envisioned the project. He compelled me to go beyond the frameworks I established, challenging me to think about conversion in relation to figures and events outside the confines of my chapters. David Reynolds lent his exacting eye—his feedback always seemed to hold up a mirror to my ideas that clarified them. He was a dedicated reader who, even in the midst of his own book tour for his biography of John Brown, found time to respond to my chapters in a timely way. My profoundest thanks go to Joan Richardson. Her intellectual curiosity and rigor have been an inspiration for me throughout. Her course "Doers of the Word" introduced me to scholarship in American theology, literature, and philosophy out of which emerged this book. She, more than

anyone, understands what it means to undergo conversion, and I am grateful for that. The passion, grace, and insight she brings to her work remain ideals to which I aspire. This work, I hope, reflects some of these ideals.

I cannot imagine these years of doctoral study without so many others. My friends, with whom I read and talked and laughed about our lives and work, provided an emotional and intellectual universe necessary for this process. I thank Diana Polley, Christopher Bruhn, Tina Meyerhoff, Robert Kaplan, Jennifer Bernstein, Tom Knutson, James King, and Nancy Lester for making up that universe. My Friday night friends, Denise Bigo, John Douglas, Stuart Early, Jennifer Jaffee, Larry Pontillo, Tom Savage, and S.J. Rozan always made me laugh until my sides hurt at the end of a long week.

This project was interrupted, as many things were, by the events of September 11th and, without my friends, it may never have been resumed. For that transition, back to work and life, I am especially grateful to S.J. Rozan with whom I shared so much.

Finally, to my closest, most enthusiastic supporters—my parents Linda and Bob Luna and my partner Justin Maxwell—I owe the greatest length and breadth and depth and height of gratitude. I learn from them every day that love is unbounded perception. They were always there, no matter what, and to them I dedicate this book.

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Chapter One

A Believing Attitude[1]

Before Perry Miller begins his examination of Puritan thought in his massive *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, he devotes some time in the first chapter to explaining his intent: "I am here endeavoring to portray the piety rather than the abstract theology in which it was embodied. . . . I shall undoubtedly do the material a certain violence by speaking of the sharply defined concepts of systematic divinity in the looser and vaguer language of human passion" (5). This "passionate" piety, Miller argues, doesn't actually run counter to abstract theology in the Puritan mind. It is instead "the one fissure in the impregnable walls of systematic theology; from the point of view of history, it was the portal through which ran the highway of intellectual development" (21). This fissure is the site of daily experience for the Puritans. Located in the space between God's declared will in Scripture and His secret will (what is not revealed), daily experience provided all the accidents of time and place which exerted pressures on theology, shaping interpretation and doctrine. Miller's study illuminates this space by bringing Puritan ideas alive through the words of the New England divines, demonstrating that the core of Puritan piety (though characterized by Miller solely through the texts produced by Puritan ministers) was "the living reality of the spirit."

[1] This chapter's title is taken from William James's essay "The Will to Believe." His essay's thesis esteems faith, what he also terms a "believing attitude," as the passional grounds on which we adopt new truths, not only regarding religious matters, but about all "living options which the intellect of the individual cannot by itself resolve" (29).

New England Puritan studies undertaken since Miller's work was published in 1939 have helped us understand this "fissure" more comprehensively than Miller's own work could, comprehensive as it is. Indeed, the fissures in Miller's own monolithic rendering of the Puritan mind have been probed since he recovered the Puritans from Progressivist contempt in the 1930's. Through the retrieval of a transatlantic perspective, scholarship in social and cultural history, and more recent work in new historicism, the "Puritan mind" of New England is a better understood but also more contested site than ever. My own study traces the importance of the Puritan conversion experience to developments in American thought, broadly but specifically considered. I explore the intellectual history that proceeds out of Miller's "fissure in the impregnable walls of systematic theology," but I examine it as seen through the eyes of lay Puritans themselves whose narratives of conversion were given and recorded as tests for membership in Thomas Shepard's and John Fiske's churches. Their narratives of conversion document the ordinary experiences and faith of those farmers, housewives, weavers, mariners and other lay Puritans who played a significant role in the founding of New England. The narratives are much more than confessions of conversions: they reveal a piety aligned with all the practices and beliefs of evangelical Calvinism, but they also exhibit a group of people who had needs and interests of their own and made demands on their ministers. They were, in fact, "makers of their faith" in the ordinary course of their lives (Hall 51).

The confessions contain moments where we can witness New England Puritanism in the making. They document conversations between minister and congregant in which faith is unstable but negotiated. We see ministers unable to ease their flock's spiritual pain, and we see times when parishioners seek each other out for spiritual guidance.

Harry S. Stout calculated that "the average weekly churchgoer in New England . . . listened to something like seven thousand sermons in a lifetime, totaling somewhere around fifteen thousand hours of concentrated listening" (4). Indeed, the ministry was a significant source of inspiration and practical guidance, but the spiritual struggles the confessions contain suggest that the space between God's declared will in the Bible and His secret will, the "fissure" out of which America's intellectual history would proceed, was more of a discursive middle ground in Puritan culture, fueled by minister and congregant alike. Though the confessions are few (about eighty), ironically, they give us direct access to "The New England Mind." They are cultural productions containing the beginnings of an American intellectual history that celebrates the perception and translation of experience through an affective relation to the environment. This chapter will examine how the saints arrive at the most important realization of their lives: believing they were one of God's elect and how they came to know that they believed. Conversion was the single most important experience a Puritan saint could have, and it was a complex negotiation of the knowledge of the doctrine of means, the affective role of the Holy Spirit, the impact of ministry, and the saints' own determinations and perceptions regarding the states of their souls, minds, and wills. The confessions frame the daily lives of individuals, and as such this unpredictable, experiential space, though wholly ordinary, was the site for adaptations in belief structures that define, bind, and energize the relations between an individual, the divine, and the environment—the ideal relation being the reason for the saints' migration.

At the end of his essay, "The Puritan Errand Re-viewed," Andrew Delbanco reflects on his position as a contributor to the ongoing discussion in American Puritan

studies that attempts to develop a "theory of the migration" (347). His self-proclaimed "relativist" stance recognizes that theories about the migrants' intentions are necessarily informed by the age in which they cohere and the perspectives of those making the argument. Delbanco's own position challenges the enduring, mainstream claims of Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch which trace the cultural strain of American exceptionalism back to the idea of a Puritan "mission" whose pilgrims are not simply actors in providential history (Miller), but are the means to realizing eschatological promises (Bercovitch). As Delbanco explains, the unified sense of identity and purpose as well as the confidence in typological meaning inhering in these claims of a mission cannot be born out when, as Delbanco explains, one "looks deep into the devotional experience of individual migrants" (354).

These devotional experiences are found in the conversion narratives of the Massachusetts Bay Puritans. They have been available to scholars since the early 1970's with the publication of *The Notebook of the Reverend John Fiske, 1644-1675*, the first of the collections of testimonies recording the life of a small congregation in Wenham, Massachusetts. The narratives of this notebook are intertwined with other entries that record the business of gathering a church and the struggles of individual congregants. Then, in 1981, The Colonial Society of Massachusetts published *Thomas Shepard's "Confessions*," a collection of fifty-one narratives recorded from 1638-1645 by Shepard, the minister of the church at Cambridge, Massachusetts. Finally, in 1991, *The William and Mary Quarterly* published an additional sixteen confessions also recorded by Shepard between 1648-1649. Indicative of Delbanco's claims, these documents do not characterize a group of people with a sense of purpose and a clear end in view. In fact,

the majority of the confessors relate religious experiences so fraught with uncertainty about the state of their souls that to argue that these people felt they were agents of the millennium is rather difficult.

Patricia Caldwell's book, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* studies this uncertain path to assurance so evident in the confessions. Hers is the only book-length study to be published about the conversion narratives thus far, and as such, it deserves some discussion as her claims situate the confessions at a moment in American literary history that, I would argue, does not obtain. In her study she attempts to locate something "genuinely American" about the Massachusetts Bay Puritan imagination, claiming that it inaugurated an "American tone of voice" found hence in American literature (36). This tone, she argues, emerges from a majority of the narratives in which a migrant's expectations that New England would serve as means for closing with Christ are painfully derailed. In her comparison of English Puritan narratives to New England's, she insists that the disruption the migrants felt in their conversion experience upon arriving in New England signaled an "American tendency to open-endedness":

> The problem seems to be at least one of temperament—as if a certain strain of the collective personality is trying to work itself out in the conversion narrative: a personality that, unlike the English, with its drive toward completion and resolution, is more comfortable with ambivalence and open-endedness. The Englishman ends his conversion narrative with one foot in heaven; his brother starts out for heaven but gets sidetracked in

> New England, where he continues his seeking but somehow needs to postpone his final salvation. (34)

Caldwell argues that this open-endedness resulted from a saint's endowing America with a divine power to affect grace, thereby making their disappointment in America's facility to close the rift between God and man a sin. Therefore, America became a "foggy limbo of broken promises" forcing a saint to accommodate this unexpected chain of events by inaugurating a unique American pattern of conversion adhering to what Caldwell terms a "since–I-came-hither-dead-hearted-but-I-have-been-revived" convention (130). Caldwell's theory about the open-endedness found in the confessions rests on the idea that the disappointment resulting from the migration created a new, insurmountable sin because as a means to grace it failed to deliver them to assurance. There is no denying that the migration, as a means to grace, failed to live up to the expectations of many migrants, but I would argue that its failure to meet those expectations is not *the* sin that ultimately stands in the way of closing with Christ. This is simplifying the matter too greatly. A saint's life was spent seeking means to grace. The confessions are replete with the testimonies of attempts to find the "right" means to stay on course and the saints openly admit that often the means they encounter do not come at an opportune time, or, for one reason or another, do not have the effect they anticipated. Means were inherently unpredictable and often had the opposite effect, as evidenced in the testimony of Mary Angier who "continued under means and grew worse and worse and so thought it was in vain to use any more means and began to neglect the Lord in private."[2]

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[2] George Selement and Bruce C. Wooley, eds., *Thomas Shepard's "Confessions"* (Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Collections*, LVIII [Boston, 1981]), 67, hereafter cited as *Confessions.*

In addition, in speaking about this facet of open-endedness in the conversion narratives, Caldwell does not include those found in the Fiske notebook. This may be because the sense of open-endedness in the process of closing with Christ is found specifically in the testimonies of those congregants under Shepard's care and not under Fiske's. Furthermore, this sense of incompletion is not limited to the confessions in which the migration was disruptive of conversion; in fact, Shepard's entire congregation, represented in the *Confessions* couldn't, or wouldn't, testify to the reception of grace. Whereas the confessions in the Fiske notebook more often than not actually demonstrate clear statements of assurance of grace in which, as in the example of Sister Kemp, the "soul was drawn to close with Christ,"[3] there is only one confession in the Shepard congregation, that of Henry Dunster (a Cambridge graduate, minister, and candidate for the presidency of Harvard) that conveys this strong sense of closure.[4]

It is beyond the scope of this study to delve into the particular doctrines and character of Fiske's ministry and the requirements he set forth for membership in his church. There are too many circumstances to consider in attempting to discern the reasons for the assurances of grace particular to the narratives in Fiske's notebook. The Fiske and Shepard notebooks may differ in this respect, but they are nevertheless both demonstrative of the habit of mind that is conversion. Moreover, the doctrine of election

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[3] Robert G. Pope, ed., *The Notebook of The Reverend John Fiske, 1644-1675* (Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1974), 95, hereafter cited as *Fiske*.

[4] As Robert G. Pope notes in the introduction to the Fiske notebook, many members of Fiske's congregation had moved recently from Salem into Wenham. Therefore, many of the confessors' testimonies in Fiske's notebook contain references to past spiritual instruction from Thomas Hooker, Peter Bulkeley, and John Cotton. The tone and detail found in these testimonies of past memberships convey a confidence in the preparatory experience and a resolution of their spiritual journey. Sister Norton testified that she "was convinced . . . and took it [the light] thankfully" (*Fiske* 52); Mary Goldsmith testified that "[h]er closing with Christ came especially in that of John 6:37" (*Fiske* 61); and Thomas Hincksman related that "his soul was drawn to take to Christ and riches of God's grace in Him alone" (*Fiske* 147).

stressed that a saint would continue to undergo conversion throughout his lifetime. One moment of grace did not necessarily provide assurance of salvation. This suggests that we must consider the process of conversion as a habit of mind nurtured by the Puritan Reformed tradition. As a continual process demanded by the tenets of a living faith, it inherently eschewed a "completion" of the process. So, despite the fact that the saints in Fiske's congregation testified to assurance, we can safely assume that his congregants perceived their "closings with Christ" as only the first.

Caldwell's argument falters when she locates this "knot of feelings" tending toward open-endedness solely in the testimonies of those who found the migration disruptive (130). Rather, I would argue that the sense of incompletion noted in Shepard's *Confessions* reflects a variety of factors including the anticipation of a lifelong conversion process and the disruption in the migration, but also particular strains in Shepard's ministry whose purpose, Andrew Delbanco has argued, was preventing the new society begun by the migration from falling into a state of moral complacency that England had reached.[5] Delbanco identifies these strains in his essay entitled "Thomas Shepard's America: The Biography of an Idea," in which he claims for Shepard the title of "chief architect" of the early American mind. As a study that discusses the engendering theological worldviews of his doctrine, in other words, the messages, exhortations, and warnings his congregants heard, Delbanco's essay helps us understand the tacit worldviews of Shepard's confessors, a worldview shaped by a minister who embodied the theological rift between the intellectual and mystical traditions of Puritanism. Shepard is generally understood as a preparationist minister who preached a

[5] Janice Knight underscores this aspect of Shepard's teachings when she argues that "Shepard preached and enforced spiritual discipline. It should come as no surprise, then, that few of Shepard's congregants could testify to a complete conversion or that their narratives were filled with anxiety" (176-177).

doctrine of means and believed that grace was "received *mediately*, through a chain of second causes [such as man's faculties, the ordinances, or hearing the Word] . . . which forms a 'middle term' between God's intent and man's condition" (emphasis added; Stoever 63). Yet, Shepard's ministry also evidences a theology aligned with that strain in Puritanism which regards Christ as "the one true center of activity and efficiency" and holds that "in spiritual things, including divine commands, activity in and from the creature is as *inadmissible* after regeneration as before it" (emphasis added; Stoever 44-45). At the heart of this difference lay the issues of whether an individual was passive or active in the reception of grace and how one interpreted Paul's claim that "A man is justified by faith." These doctrinal issues surrounding human agency manifested themselves in an epistemological conundrum for Shepard's congregants: how they would know whether their wills (the seat of action in faculty psychology) had undergone regeneration.

The narratives found in the *Confessions* have been described as predictable, even uninteresting, testimonies of conversion that do not stray from Shepard's soteriology, and indeed, if the "morphology" of conversion serves as the only approach for making sense of the narratives, they could rightly be considered lifeless reiterations of the standard doctrine of means.[6] In fact, a complex theology of conversion, so rigidly structured by the preparationists towards its salvific end, necessarily marginalizes its own essentially evolving nature: the process of experiencing a living faith that led an individual to

[6] Edmund S. Morgan's study, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, introduced the helpful term "morphology" to conceptualize the conversion process, but it doesn't include an analysis of the confessions as products of a certain ministry. As a result, Morgan generalizes that the confessions "demonstrate clearly the familiarity of the narrators with the morphology of conversion, a familiarity produced, no doubt, by a great many sermons on the subject. The pattern is so plain as to give the experiences the appearance of a stereotype . . ." (90-91).

multiple moments of conversion in the course of a lifetime. In a narrow way, it makes sense to characterize the conversion narratives as repetitive because certain stages of the morphology predictably mark each testimony. Yet, herein lies the irony that because the saints would convert any number of times in their lives, the narratives are not lifeless reiterations. They should be considered inaugural moments of a lively, evolving process more properly understood within the wider framework of a lifetime spent growing in faith. Though preparationist ministers reminded their congregants to keep converting, the force behind their message kept the focus on clearly delineated stages and rational figurations of the process of faith, in other words, the conceptual resting places that helped make sense of an unpredictable, chaotic experience. What the morphology couldn't contain or predict were the daily experiences of God's hidden will, the ordinary currents infusing saints' lives with the divine. Because discipline was at the heart of Shepard's ministry, his congregation would have been magnetized around the earlier stages of conversion consisting of conviction, compunction, and humiliation, the stages that are more easily captured and contained in language.[7]

George Selement makes an important distinction between Shepard's ministerial soteriology and the lay understanding and expression of that soteriology in his introduction to the *Confessions.* In his study of the confessions, he finds that saints reveal their understanding of Shepard's doctrine of preparation without using doctrinal terminology; in other words, they generally don't use the words "conviction," "compunction," or "humiliation" to describe their experience even though in the

[7] This is not to say that Shepard didn't expound on the stage of conversion that represented union with Christ—or the stages that followed: justification, reconciliation, adoption, sanctification, audience of all prayers, and glorification, in other words, all the benefits that are promised a saint following union with Christ. He did, but as we shall see, the emphasis on the role of reason in the spiritual discipline of his ministry in New England pushed actual union with Christ into the shadows of his sermons.

rendering of their experience they demonstrate a clear understanding of these concepts (56). Selement attributes this to a distinction central to the ministration of Shepard's doctrine of grace instructing congregants to heed the difference between a "heart" knowledge and "head" knowledge of every aspect and stage of the conversion process. He states:

> Shepard had warned his congregation against relying on a knowledge of the intricacies of formal theology for salvation. He encouraged them to cultivate a "heart" knowledge, that is, one that transformed the affections, rather than a mere "head" or intellectual understanding of redemption. Thus, Shepard's parishioners, heeding their minister's exhortations, quite naturally avoided an exposition of formal soteriology and devoted their relations to explaining the way God personally dealt with them. (57)

Shepard uses a variety of adjectives besides "head" in his works to describe an intellectual understanding of the operations of the Holy Spirit, for example "literal," "discursive," and "notional." However, when speaking about the kind of knowledge that affects the heart in conversion he calls it "saving." As we shall see, the distinction between knowing grace's effects through a rational grasp of them and knowing grace's effects through a *felt* relation to them (the dynamic between which activated the will and therefore assured salvation) actually prevented the saints' immediate witness of the Spirit at the moment when the distinction was supposed to cause it. In looking closely at the saints' translation of Shepard's doctrine into personal dealings, Selement's analysis is as thorough as it can be. The testimonies thwart a complete picture of the saints' personal dealings with Christ in conversion because, as Selement states, "[the saints] *made no*

attempt to reproduce . . . their pastor's complicated teachings on *union* with Christ," and the confessions are in this way an "incomplete reflection" of Shepard's preaching (emphasis added; 56). Indeed, the saints related their testimonies in personal terms, reflecting a "heart" knowledge of Christ, but Selement is mistaken in claiming that the confessions are an "incomplete reflection" of Shepard's preaching. The confessions do not contain expressions of union with Christ because Shepard's preaching in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* on union framed what was a felt experience with the divine in rational terms. Actual consummation, ultimately a movement of the heart and will, would happen during a sermon because a minister's delivery of the Word could convey the Holy Spirit. Yet, if that delivery foregrounded the understanding's role in conversion by creating and nurturing a rational relationship with Christ, as was the case with Shepard's later ministry, hearing the Word was drained of its e/affective power. Shepard's later preaching style, instead of actualizing a felt relation to Christ, actualized a rational relation. Though he preached the difference between a literal knowledge of Christ and a saving knowledge of Christ, in the end, preaching a saving knowledge of Christ couched in intellectual terms could not stimulate the affective experience.

Shepard's intellectualism is the subject of "Thomas Shepard's America: The Biography of an Idea," in which Delbanco traces the evolving nature of Shepard's struggle with the idea of depravity found in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* and the *Theses Sabbaticae*. He concludes that in the effort to secure the will of the Bay Colony's infant society, each member had to practice "the revelation of the context of sin" (165). Delbanco argues that Shepard's concept of sin shifted upon his arrival in New England. In England sin had a "plodding" nature; in New England, however, sin had become

"chameleon-like" and "invasive." This new conceptualization of sin as elusive and adaptive turned a life of faith into a heavy battle against man's self. As the regnant force of Shepard's corpus, this message placed the burden of the godliness and health of society on the shoulders of each individual and located the origins of societal order in the regenerate will of the saint. Shepard's homiletics obviated complacency and was proscriptive of self-deceptive assurances of grace and "hollow" professions of faith, and the confessions recorded in Shepard's notebook reflect his doctrine. A careful reader may detect how deeply the members of his congregation internalized these heuristic messages. Therefore, the sense of open-endedness Caldwell attributes to the disruption caused by the migration, I would argue results from a deeply felt awareness of the stakes of salvation: a regenerate will that denoted belief in Christ and hence a holy society of visible saints. Members of Shepard's congregation would have been committed to professing a faith that did not implicate them as complacent sinners or as saints who felt they had accurate knowledge about the state of their souls.

In this effort to reveal to his congregation the sin that infused their lives and threatened the future success of the colony, Shepard warned against the false sense of security a saint could feel in New England. Therefore, it was not, as Caldwell argues, a sin to feel a "disruption" in the course of salvation upon migrating to New England but rather a prelude, an acknowledgment that America, as Shepard feared, held the potential to become a social landscape like England. Members of Shepard's congregation would have taken account of the state of their souls and been wary of the hollowness of their own profession that New England *was* the means to close with Christ. They would have heeded Shepard's warning found in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*:

> There is no place in all the world where there is such expectation to find the Lord as here; and hence men bless the Lord for our rising sun when it is setting everywhere else. Here, therefore, they come and find it not; hence not considering the great and last temptation of this place, whereby God tries his friends before he will trust them with more of himself. . . . [8]

According to this passage, arrival in New England actually marked a kind of inauguration of their spiritual journey. In this way, New England became the testing ground that may or may not have yielded the signs of a regenerate will.

The disruptions in the morphology the Puritans felt upon their arrival in New England do not signal to me a beginning to a uniquely American form of expression as they do for Caldwell; their importance lies more with their contribution, as moments of crises, to creating the space in a saint's lived process of faith that was not contained by any standard doctrine of election. Granted, Shepard preached that coming to New England would test a saint's faith and that this set-back could be integrated into the morphology of conversion, but this fact did not prevent a saint from feeling disappointment when America didn't prove to be an efficient means. Some thought they would "find grace," because of the "certainty of things here." One immigrant felt that "one sermon [in New England] might do me more good than a hundred there [in England]," and another thought that "here the Lord might be found" because New England is not "an ignorant place, with little means." But almost without exception, these expectations are overshadowed by a complex, demanding, and uncertain faith challenging their ability to complete the conversion process.

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[8] *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, in *The Works of Thomas Shepard*. 1852. Rpt., (New York: AMS Press, 1967), II, 170. Hereafter cited as *TV*. Future citations to the *Works* are to this reprint edition.

The migration to New England becomes, in many of the conversion narratives, a window into the struggle to maintain faith in an adverse environment. Having introduced an unstable element into a familiar doctrine, the migration betrays a fragile, vulnerable faith whose integrity depended on a saint's ability to keep the idea of salvation alive, to have it exist as a possibility for their souls. This is not to say that not every confession in both Fiske's and Shepard's notebooks documents the personal trials of faith: every confession does. Because I am interested in studying the dynamics of a saint's experience of faith on the path to conversion, all of the confessions in Fiske's and Shepard's notebooks prove useful in revealing the world of a Puritan mind; yet, it is often in the testimonies that are interrupted by the migration that we can glimpse the most deciding moments in the conversion process—a culmination of personal history and God's will in which belief becomes a possibility. These moments reveal a spiritual life and conversion that ultimately turned on the saints' ability to interpret their experience in light of God's will, allowing them to trust that the intersection of means and free grace had brought them to a legitimate moment of belief willed by God.

Claims that the confessions are predictable and homogeneous do not recognize the variety of ways that saints arrived at the stage where they felt they could be tested for membership. Shepard's *Confessions* record the life that his congregants gave to his ideas. This life culminated in the moment they had to testify to an experience of grace, and, as the confessions show, a statement of assurance of grace was not as important a requirement for membership as the implication that a saint would continue a lifelong struggle to maintain a living faith and strive to detect the workings of a regenerate will. As Delbanco argues in "Thomas Shepard's America," Shepard's ideas about the role a

regenerate will plays in society were the force behind a vision that inspired his life's work. Delbanco writes that

> Shepard would be sad, but not surprised, to know that historians have called the great migration a flight from a depressed wool industry, an adventure in fur trade, an expression of land hunger. He would not grant the economic need over the human will. This is not to say that he thought material motives irrelevant to the reading of history; in fact, his plea that New Englanders remember and relive the demands of a harsh past is nothing else than a call for the will of a new society to oppose the record of the old—to break the precedent of "progress." It is a recognition that thought can govern action, that assumptions about the nature of man can generate their own truth. It is also perhaps the first American protest against the gross national product as an index of national morality. (170)

As the central human faculty in Puritan psychology and therefore in conversion, the will served as a conductor between experience in and knowledge about the world (understood through reason) and the muscles, powers, and passions that constituted action. As we shall see later in an analysis of the confessions, the fact that the will acted as an affective agent in moving a saint to and from an object meant that though an intellectual understanding of doctrine and law (a "head" knowledge) was important to conversion, conversion was not possible without the affective dimension, without the will's effect on the heart. It was the "crucial aspect of faith, as the soul's movement into union with Christ, is an act of will, carrying with it the whole man, soul and body" (Stoever 106). God's covenant of grace works coordinately through nature and grace:

God remains an absolute power but He works on man through second causes, such as man's rational faculties, his heart, and his will. Covenant theology relies on the notion that man can consent to the promises that God offers. The will serves in this active role because it either accepts or rejects what the understanding presents to it as a course of action.[9] Wm. K. B. Stoever explains: "Entry into the covenant of grace requires an act of consent from man because such an act belongs to the nature of a covenant," and "to deny that the will is active in closing with Christ is to suggest that the covenant of grace is not truly a covenant" (106, 107). So, the will not only carries the soul to Christ; in its regenerative state, God moves the soul as he intends, binding the saint to God in a covenantal agreement of mutual respect and integrity.

Union with Christ—a saint's conversion—hinged on the messages received about the soul's activity or passivity during the moment of grace. According to the covenant, God works through second causes, making the will the "seat" of action in that it consents to Christ. It must, for that is the nature of the covenant, and yet doctrine maintained that man is wholly passive, that a saint is overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit. According to Shepard, a saint is passive and Christ does all: one experiences conversion "In the

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[9] Wm. K. B. Stoever's book *"A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven": Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* throws the faculty of the will in the spotlight in his discussion of the Antinomian Controversy. He argues that

> to deny that the will is active in closing with Christ [as the Antinomians did] is to suggest that the covenant of grace is not truly a covenant, inasmuch as that denial deprives men of a proper consent. It is also to imply that that faith by which, alone, a person is justified is not an act of his own, is not his own faith. These implications suggest . . . that God in regeneration disregards the efficiency proper to the will as a second cause. Those who argued, with the Hutchinsonians, that in respect of saving and sanctifying grace a person must 'do nothing' but only 'wait for Christ to do all' seemed to reject the proper activity of second causes altogether, as they are ordained instruments in the application of redemption. (107)

Though the preparationist ministers, such as Shepard, are often characterized as strict disciplinarians, leading their flocks through extended periods of despair, fear, and humiliation we should remember that their preparationist doctrine reinforced the integrity of the covenant which held that God dealt with mankind according to their capacity as rational beings, who exercise freedom of will and, most importantly, consent.

beholding of the Lord as he comes and appears in the glory of his covenant; for when the Lord reveals himself so as to cause the soul to believe, and thereby to make it one of his people, he never makes any people, but by entering into the covenant with them" (*TV* 125). The conceptual line that distinguishes a saint's active or passive role in conversion becomes problematic when the moment arrives and one feels a movement towards Christ. The saints had to distinguish whether the movement was caused by the Holy Spirit or by their own faculties and sense of self-preservation. Shepard's congregants' inability to close with Christ is rooted in the habits of perception ingrained through preparatory activity.

As sinners, Shepard's flock was cursed by God after the Fall and left with damaged faculties with which to comprehend the world. Therefore, saints could never be completely confident in their assurances of grace because their post-lapsarian faculties prohibited them from gaining pure insight into God's workings. Because a regenerate will was responsible for realizing a society of visible saints (it was the channel connecting God to a saint and a saint to the world) it was the focus of attention for any individual interested in the fate of his soul. Shepard's "call for the will of a new society" gathered his congregation around the idea that their commitment to a living faith would ensure a society free from the oppressions they had fled.

Shepard's doctrines on the newly American nature of sin and his lessons about remaining vigilant against complacency and "temptation of this place" inaugurated a discursive community that engendered, sustained, and provided the needed environment for a lifelong willingness to take account of the belief that grew out of faith. This constant interrogation of one's belief, Shepard thought, would help saints keep their sinful natures

in check. This emphasis on man's sinful nature in fact guides saints in the process of conversion through the paradoxical reasoning that "the law serves, not to justify, but to make men aware of their absolute inability to achieve justification, thus preparing them to receive the grace of God in Christ" (Coolidge 12). However, Shepard did not require potential members of his church to testify to an assurance of grace suggesting that he esteemed a disciplined spiritual life defined or shaped by a focus on combating sin.[10]

Puritan divines guided their congregants' conversion experiences by preaching a doctrine of election that delineated the entire process of conversion, from preparation to justification, to vocation and sanctification. It was originally structured as a ten-step process by William Perkins. The stages served as signposts so that a saint knew what to expect from the process: they described an emotional and psychological landscape, clarified obstacles saints might encounter in their daily and spiritual struggles, and flooded saints' ears with admonishments to heed the lessons of Scripture. These stages made it possible for an individual to locate what he was feeling and thinking within a spiritual framework. This framework, the expounding on the doctrine of election, built a vocabulary with which congregants could describe the inner life because a Puritan divine's ministry shaped and characterized the spiritual dynamics of their congregation's

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[10] Shepard's exhortation to New England saints to prevent the sins of England from poisoning their society reaches a feverish pitch when he warns them, in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins,* about becoming like the sinner in England:

> How far short he falls of Christ, of Christ's prayers, Christ's speeches, Christ's meekness, but only patches up his comforts with some ends of gold and silver, and shreds of honesty! He hath heard others teach and preach, and gets [sic] some shred of knowledge; thence he sees what others are, and do, and gets somewhat to be like them. . . . I pray God such a race come not over hither . . . put off your wilderness shoes, get those sins removed that provoked God there; or else, besides the misery of a heart brand upon thee, thou dost not look for Christ . . . and shalt, if not by the word, by the terror of God be dreadfully awakened. *O New England! New England!* That art now making a conquest of the world, and seekest for the spoil of it to enrich thyself, to recover they losses, and therefore makest a truce with thy distempers for a time . . . I dare not yet tell thee what Christ Jesus has to say unto thee! (154)

experience. Moreover, the discursive world that a minister shaped for his parishioners created the ways in which they would comprehend their conversion; it was a perceptive lens aimed at correcting the limited and distorting faculties that were their curse. It created a relationship between saints and their worldly experience and between saints and God. In effect, the discursive space opened by a divine's ministry formed the affective receptors permitting the will of God to take effect. Richard Cutter described his own experience with this dynamic by testifying that "having way to subdue a rebellious heart was to bring it to a strait but nothing stuck till [I] came to the 30th verse of the same chapter" (*Confessions* 179). This discursive space created a conductive imaginary that made a life of faith and conversion possible because it determined the affective and epistemological shapes of knowing. Indeed, the confessions reveal what I would argue is the discursive nature of the will. Even though the Bible was the lens through which a saint viewed the world, each divine determined what the edges and contours of that world would be.

Faith, and therefore justification by faith, comes from hearing the Word. Only in extraordinary cases would a saint experience conversion without the assistance of a preacher because through hearing the Word the Holy Spirit illuminates the understanding and moves the heart. The spoken Word was, according to Miller, "the one means above all others which was perfectly adapted to working upon all faculties, that simultaneously could carry phantasms to both reason and affection, that would impress the species of Gospel theorems upon the understanding and at the same time plunge them deep into the heart" (*New England Mind* 295). This point must be stressed. In order to be successful, the means of grace that a saint undertook, from attending to the Word, to introspection, to

observing the ordinances, needed to be effective in both penetrating the understanding and exciting the passions, and hearing the Word was the most e/affective. During conversion, the Holy Spirit acted through the epistemological channels or sections in the brain according to faculty psychology by first enlightening the understanding and permitting the saint to see the truths of Scripture. However, these "phantasms," according to Miller, "are not to rest in the brain as disembodied objects of contemplation" (294). Because they are products of the Holy Spirit, they attract the will, thereby exciting true spiritual passion and action. Because the Holy Spirit operates according to this specific relationship between the head and the heart, faith is, as Miller explains, "a science" because faith happens on trust and is always built on knowledge (*New England Mind* 293). As the lynchpin between a saint's body of knowledge about the world (and the discursive realm that engenders that knowledge) and the acting on that knowledge, the will's attraction toward or rejection of objects that cross the horizon of a saint's experience creates new perspectives and leaves old worldviews in its wake. Conversion, as the influx of grace, transformed a saint entirely from the inside (through the faculties) out (through behavior).

Yet each stage of the conversion process presented saints with a test of the ability to distinguish between true grace and a hallucination, to know whether their own distorting perception had deceived them. This test involved knowing whether the right words or signs had led to a conscious space that was the will of God and not the result of works. Because the moment of belief determined the state of an individual's soul, making belief the climax of a confession, a saint's testimony often lingered over the detail characterizing how that moment was negotiated. The confessions document these

grueling attempts to know, through the advice of their minister or through a meditation on a passage from Scripture, whether or not they believed. In the confessions the saints narrate their experiences of compunction and contrition (the early stages of conversion) with confidence and frankness. Feeling the "prick" of one's sinful nature followed by the despair that comes from cataloguing one's various sins was a part of the process that did not suggest voluntarism. The next stages, however, posed a threat to the integrity of the process, and for Shepard's congregation, who were warned about the dangers of self-deception and "hollow" professions of faith, it was imperative that they frame their conversion narratives properly. The dominant themes identified in Shepard's ministry would foster a congregation preoccupied with their sinful nature, the temptations they faced, and the looming probability that what they thought they knew and felt was only a result of worldly motivations.

Because the moment of belief was the ultimate experience in a saint's life, the ability to prove whether self-deception was avoided became paramount. This challenged their ability to make a definite statement about the reception of grace confidently. Shepard's confessors stop short of ever testifying to assurance, so the narratives end on virtually the same note of helplessness or submission before the Lord. There are many terms for this sentiment, from claims of "emptiness" and "doubting" to being "humbled" and able to "apply nothing." The saints were humbled by the countless sins they had to account for and "unbelief" could be lumped in with all the rest that they felt powerless over. Yet, the sin of "unbelief" played a special role in the process of conversion because the only way saints knew their souls were saved was by experiencing the moment *they believed* that God had granted *the will to believe* (in God's determination to save).

Essentially, they had to *judge* whether they believed that they believed. They knew that only God granted the will to believe in Christ, but when the moment arrived in which they had to determine whether it was the result of grace (as they had to do with any aspect of their spiritual lives) they were faced with the inevitable problem of trusting that their search for this knowledge had been undertaken in good faith and whether they had been dutiful enough in seeking means.

The confessions evidence open-endedness because they are seemingly frozen at the stage in the process of conversion just *before* the reception of grace—the moment of submission to God's will. This moment is often expressed by feelings much like what Goodwife Champney testified to: "I thought I was lost and unsupported and I thought Lord had left me to be so" (*Confessions* 191). In many instances saints concluded their testimonies simply by acknowledging that God's promise exists yet unable to say whether it exists for them, as expressed in Sizar Jones' final words: "Lord had helped me to hope and so desire to hope still" (*Confessions* 202). Shepards' confessors framed their narratives in a way that foregrounded their sinful natures and hence their dependency on God. By ending their confessions at the moment just before the reception of grace, they made a new kind of sainthood visible, legitimizing the *potential* for a regenerate will and not full conversion as the criterion for church membership.

Because the moment of belief signaled the transition, through the operations of the Holy Spirit, from sinner to saint, it represented the realization of potential into actuality, of preparation into deliverance. In *The Sound Believer*, Shepard's exposition on his soteriology, he explains why saints are unable to believe through any ability of their own:

> Faith is a gracious work of the Spirit of Christ; the Spirit, therefore, is the efficient cause or principal workman of faith; the Spirit doth not believe, but causeth us to believe; . . . the souls of all the elect (especially when humbled) are, of all other things, most unable to believe: nay, look, as, before compunction and humiliation, Satan held the soul captive chiefly by its lusts and sins, so now, when the Lord hath burnt those cords, and broken those chains, all the powers of darkness strengthen themselves, and keep the soul under mightily, by unbelief.[11]

Shepard's *Confessions* is a collection of vivid stories of the saints' experiences with this stage of conversion, the period of potential. As we shall see, Shepard's congregants explicitly narrate their struggle with the sin of unbelief and their attempts to discern the moment when the Spirit fills the "room" of unbelief with grace, causing union with Christ, but they stop short of expressing what Shepard calls "man's *actual* deliverance" (emphasis added; *SB* 115). A saint's conversion is made *actual* by the "efficacy and power of the Spirit of Christ" because "the Spirit therefore takes fast hold of the souls of all the elect, [and] draws them unto Christ," doing so through an "omnipotent and irresistible" power (*SB* 115, 194). This is the moment of faith whereby "the whole soul cometh out of itself to Christ, for Christ and all his benefits, upon the call of Christ in his word" (*SB* 190).

Being drawn irresistibly to Christ actualized belief, moving a saint ecstatically into a new identity and worldview. Yet Shepard's saints were not exposed to the theology of the younger Shepard, the one who preached *The Sound Believer* as a young minister of

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[11] *The Sound Believer*, in *Works*, I, 194. Cited hereafter as *SB*.

twenty-five in Earle's Colne. The sermons that make up *The Sound Believer* contain passages of great passion and persuasion, in severe contrast to the sermons in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* reflecting the spiritual discipline and high preparationism of his later theology. If Shepard's New England saints had heard the following portion of *The Sound Believer*, I believe the *Confessions* would be a very different collection of testimonies. In order to convey the ecstatic preaching of his early years, it is necessary to quote at length:

> I beseech thee to come in; thy wants indeed are many; yet remember that thou hast, therefore, the more need and more cause to come, and that it is I that have made thee empty and poor on purpose, that thou mightest come: it is true, I have an eternal purpose to exclude many thousands from mercy, yet my purpose is unchangeable, never to cast off any that do come for it; I never did it yet, I will not do it unto thee, if thou dost come; it is . . . but duty, to obey my great command; and it is the greatest sin that ever thou didst or canst commit, now to reject it, and refuse this grace: come therefore, poor, weary, lost, undone creature. Hereupon the heart and will come, and rest, and roll themselves upon these bowels, and there rest. . . . (*SB* 206)

Whereas Shepard's later ministry would provoke meditation on sin, warn saints about the deceptive nature of their faculties, and promote a "head" knowledge of Scripture, this passage invokes a benevolent God eager to see His promise taken up by His elect. The one moment that could deflect the momentum of this passage in which (speaking in the voice of God) he reminds his flock he will "exclude many thousands from mercy," is

immediately deflated when he reassures them that God has promised "never to cast off any that do come for it." In this passage there is no sin greater than refusing to come to Christ when called, and there is no amount of doubt and self-loathing that cannot be soothed by answering the call. Shepard invites those in pain to find rest and seek solace, a message too comforting for the later Shepard who demanded a more disciplined spirituality answering the vicissitudes of sin.

Yet, for the saints in Shepard's *Confessions* closing their narratives with doubt and self-loathing did not signal a dead-end in their conversion process. These feelings were, in fact, the channels for faith. Barbary Cutter's testimony describes the important role doubt played in a saint's relationship with God: "And . . . Lord hath let me see more of Himself in doubtings. That Lord did leave saints doubting as to remove lightness and frothiness, hence doubtings, and to cause for fresh evidence and by this means kept them from falling" (*Confessions* 92). Feelings of doubt meant that a saint's faith was alive because they reinforced a saint's potential to receive a regenerate will. These feelings, in fact, were the most profitable ones a saint could have under Shepard's later ministry, and feelings such as confidence, joy, and relief were considered suspect. They flirted too strongly with assurance. This affective dimension to conversion legitimized feeling as a basis for judgment; every felt relation to the divine, whether it was doubt and helplessness or hope and relief served to give them a reading as to their alignment with God's will. Indeed, it was an *attitudinal* positioning that sustained a potent syzygy with God.

What actually proved to be a threat to their conversions was feeling nothing, what many saints identified as "dead-heartedness." The danger behind a "dead frame" lay with

the isolation it signified; a dead frame meant that one was disconnected from God, and unmoored from a life of faith. It was a space in which saints became "confused," or knocked off course in the regular apprehensions of their experience. These moments in the confessions are described in images of desolate isolation, wherein saints do not simply feel helpless before God (for this would denote a right relationship with Him); instead, these are moments of isolation arising out of a temporary disconnection from an interpretive community, the discursive space that ordinarily provides the conceptual and descriptive means to understand and orient their spiritual lives. For Goodwife Jackson, this disconnection is caused by the migration, and it manifests itself in an image of extreme loneliness and even paranoia: "And when I was come to New England, I did look on myself as cast in the open field, and so saw myself in a sad condition, and though[t] others thought ill and meanly of me, and I thought worst of myself, and I was in a sad condition, and my sleep did depart away from [me], so that I did not know what to do" (448).[12] For William Manning, the isolation arises after he feels he has done the unspeakable: he questions

> whether there was a God or . . . the Scripture true or no. And being gross I was loathe and ashamed to make my condition known, yet the minister showing out of Psalms 14:1 that there was a God by Scripture and by reason; but fain would I put off these temptations. Now I found hardness, unbelief, deadness to lie very heavy upon my soul. And another minister handling the affections of the soul, he met with my corruptions. I was burdened with them in a confused manner and did strive against them with

[12] Mary Rhinelander McCarl, ed., "Thomas Shepard's Record of Relations of Religious Experience, 1648-1649. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 48 (1991): 432-466, hereafter cited as *WMQ*.

> my own strength and not the Lord's, or else I believe I might have had help before now. (*Confessions* 95-96)

In these instances the saints speak of circumstances that brought them to a gaping chasm in the familiar structure of faith that they weren't able to traverse. But the effect is rather profound: the very foundations of everything they believe seem to fall away. Golden Moore described it thus: "And I coming hither I found my heart in a worse frame than ever, not a heart so much as to desire help from the Lord. And hence *called all into question* . . ." (emphasis added; *Confessions* 123). These reflections are not simply doubts about one's election or meditations on sin; these moments in the confessions reveal the fragility of a living faith and the inherent instability of the worldviews that sustain that faith. In these particular instances confusion and loss of direction and complete insecurity were not tied to any recognizable stage of the morphology or any other part of faith. As a matter of fact, these moments take the saints by surprise because they find themselves in the position of feeling the ground under their feet give way, unable to know what to do about it. The usual ways of thinking about their faith fail them, and they temporarily lose the ability to keep the possibility of salvation alive. Overcome, Golden Moore became resigned: "hence [I] feared time was passed" (*Confessions* 123).

These ruptures in the fabric of faith expose the shifting, unstable layers beneath, which, when tested, seem to tear very easily. The discursive life a divine gave to his worldview shaped and lent stability to the saints' faith. It was an environment of words essential to the success of the colony, providing an alternative, no less sensible environment, to the new and harsh realities they found themselves in. This discursive space was the material of experience, providing temporal, recognizable signs that made

sense out of their lives. For Shepard, faith was the imagined borderland between the self and God: it was the "motion of the soul between these extremes, throughout that vast and infinite distance that is between a sinful, wretched man and a blessed Saviour" (*SB* 202). In effect, it was the soul's energy that bound and energized the space between an individual and the Savior. David D. Hall describes it in more succinct terms: "Faith depends upon the promise of free grace and God's initiative. Yet faith emerges from energetic use of all the 'means,' including . . . self scrutiny. . ." (52). It is no wonder then why a saint never uses the word "faith" itself to characterize their conversion process. Faith happened between the words, in the spaces that carried a saint to each description and clarification of their spiritual experience. Faith may lead a saint to new epistemological and theological truths, but ultimately it cannot be captured by language itself because it is constantly in "motion," as Shepard described it. As an inter-dependence between a saint's use of means and the promise of free grace, faith was a constant, but ever changing and unpredictable relationship with God, creating new paths and radiations in the Puritan consciousness.

Shepard's *Confessions* record this life of faith. They record the trials associated with living up to the doctrines and lessons propounded by a minister. They also record the times when circumstances were so overpowering that saints lost faith, became isolated and cut off from the interpretive community and found themselves unable to evolve in the conversion process. These moments when faith appears dead, speak to the "saving" properties of one's discursive community, yet another paradox of Puritan spirituality. Granted, a Puritan believed that grace was given freely by God. Yet, these confessions reveal conversion experiences that cannot be compared to Paul's, where the

moment was distinct and immediate, unfettered by conditions or circumstances. The confessions in Shepard's notebook present a community of saints whose conversions are wholly mediated by language and the discursive community of which they are a part.

When discursive structures fail to represent their experience, the effect is the collapse of the grounds of knowledge, isolation, and in the extreme case, loss of identity. Faith was the web connecting a saint to all parts of experience. As the "motion of the soul" between God and the saints it carried them through their spiritual lives, leading them to new truths about God, the world, and themselves. It acted as what I am calling a conductive imaginary, a conscious space where salvation was in constant negotiation, bringing to bear God's will and a saint's attending on the signs and means available: as such, it was a dynamic nexus not simply enlivening the bond between Savior and saint, but serving to ground and realize the divine and spiritual in the ordinary world of their daily lives. That grounding occurs in the material reality that language and discourse offered. In effect, the soul's motion between Savior and saint occurs within the realm of consciousness understood as a discursive medium, and conversion is that process that registers the movement of the soul through a life of faith. When faith is alive and potent, (because language is representing reality) the soul is able to move fluidly between Savior and saint, circulating between the two "extremes" and closing the "infinite" gap. When a saint's experience cannot be understood and described by the available language, that "infinite" distance becomes impassable.

In his essay "Thomas Shepard's America," Delbanco characterizes Shepard's theology as one that "cries the fiendishness of sin but feels it as a bridgeable gap, a space, between man and God" (167). Indeed, man's sin separated him from God and created that

"infinite" distance. Faith was necessary for overcoming this distance, but sometimes it couldn't be supported because of the nature of man's faculties: the limits of language and perception. Yet, saints had to use all of the "means" necessary to grapple with sin if they were to keep alive any chance of conversion and the gift of a regenerate will. Shepard's *Confessions* contain the records of each saint's struggle to create a receptive space for grace. It was a conscious space where saints faced their sins and attempted to take control of them through the process of framing and containing them with the theological doctrine propounded by their minister. This attempt at the constant destruction of sin and self performed a co-ordinate task: by clearing out the obstacles to salvation, the saints opened that space for the reception of grace and a regenerate will.

Shepard encouraged his congregants: "resign up thyself to him to give thee a will, (put it into his hand, as bad as it is; this is spouse-like,) and to take away that will to sin, so thou shalt have him; 'I am my beloved's, he is mine'" (*TV* 136). Only through self-destruction could a saint receive grace and a regenerate will. It was the foundational act that made conversion possible. Notably, it was a saint's struggle with the concept of the will that stands out in the *Confessions* as the epistemological and spiritual barrier to grace. The will played the most complex role in the process of conversion. Saints knew they had a corrupt one meaning that their relation to the environment was damaged. A corrupt will caused a disconnection between the reason (which sorted all sensory information into categories of either "dangerous" and "good") and the will, which converted reason's judgments on an object into reactions of either choosing or refusing the object. It was the mechanism that converted spontaneous and sensory perception of the environment into action. Shepard would warn in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* that

"[b]efore conversion, the main wound of men is their will" (100). Puritans had an epistemological problem to face because there were always two wills at work in their spiritual and mental universes: their own corrupt ones and God's divine one. This created the difficult situation of having to discern whose will was prompting the affections to choose or refuse an object. In Puritan epistemology, an individual's responses to the objects encountered, whether food, the Word of God, wolves, or ideas were the result of the same process: the affections aroused by the will carried an individual to the object or away from it.

The moment of truth came for saints (and I use this phrase deliberately) when the object of belief (the idea of belief) was presented by God within their purview. Choosing belief would mean conversion and refusing belief would halt the process. Because a saint battled against the sin of "unbelief" as a regular part of the preparatory process involving conviction, compunction, and humiliation, one may assume that when God made the possibility of believing real, a saint wouldn't think twice. Until the moment when a saint felt close to Christ, the introspective work was mostly the work of conscience and meditation on sin and depravity in order to clear the way for grace. Ironically, this stage was meant to soften a stony heart so that a saint would be willing to entertain God. Yet the confessions demonstrate that this rarely happened. Sir Starr's testimony exemplifies the typical Puritan experience when a saint is faced with the choice to believe: "And if sin be continued in, no salvation, and hence no use to believe out of conscience, and all belief unworthiness. [I] heard when the Lord then carried my heart after Christ, and I could say, Lord I believe, help my unbelief, but I feared to presume" (*WMQ* 463). Sir Starr rightly knows that he cannot "believe" if it is motivated by conscience because his

belief would have resulted from the impulse towards self-preservation. Then he relates a moment when he feels his heart "carried" after Christ. Described as an act of God, this transcendent moment leads him to a clear statement about being given an option. He states: "I could say, Lord I believe." However, the transcendence is short-lived because his conscience and his reason intervene to ignite fear that his "heart" has masked his urge for self-preservation as virtue.

Starr rejects accepting a believing attitude out of fear even though it means rejecting the reception of grace. He, in fact, undergoes conversion when he feels "carried" to Christ, but then he quashes it. His rejection comes at the moment when he is faced with the actuality of the phrase "Lord I believe." He feels carried to Christ, which is a transcendent moment, but when the time comes to state his belief, he cannot. Fear interrupts it, as though the act of capturing the moment in language creates a crisis. In effect, "closing with Christ" cannot be accomplished successfully unless Starr can "close" with the idea of belief by realizing it in language. Starr's confession then moves immediately into a recitation of references from the Bible which follow one upon another, demonstrating the quality and tone of being back in his discursive "comfort zone." Starr's moment of being "carried" to Christ should have been interpreted as the will of God, but he immediately mistrusts his "heart" when he has the option to claim that he believes and he suspects that the claim cannot be true. Faced with the option of determining the idea of belief as either dangerous or good, he reacts with fear and flees.

Starr closes his confession by describing the state of his soul as teetering on the edge of conversion:

> And so Mr. S[hepard] on Romans 8:penult., When we [have] clear knowledge of our justification, and a principal [ ] of [ ] persuasion, and I saw Christ freely offered and would have received Christ. And the soul should be brought to that [], Wilt receive Christ or reject him [?] I found a desire to receive him, and I was afraid to reject him, but Lord carries my heart after him and to help me against some sins, which encourageth me still to seek the Lord. (*WMQ* 463)

Starr lingers over what is persistently for the confessors the problem of consent. The soul is brought to the moment of conversion, but when faced with having to select either rejection of the Lord or reception of the Lord, they consistently choose to keep "seeking" after Him for fear that the will to believe is their own corrupt one. And, as noted previously, the confessions conclude with statements emphasizing their humbled, sinful nature. These feelings of unworthiness were an e/affective reality that could be easily attached to a wealth of ideas about human depravity familiar to Puritans. Acknowledging one's sinful nature did not seem to imply any act of the will on the saint's part. Choosing to believe in Christ without certain knowledge that God, through His providence, had willed it would have been too presumptuous (as Starr described it) for members of Shepard's congregation; we see the influence of Shepard's teachings against hollow professions clearly in Starr's testimony. Shepard's call for the "will of a new society" put the saints in the position of having to distinguish between their own will to believe and God's grace, and when faced with having to select one of the options, they chose the one that reflected Shepard's doctrine, fulfilling the goals and lessons of his ministry, and ultimately serving to induct them into a society of visible saints. Their testimonies not

only acknowledge the tightly woven discursive nature of membership in this society, but the inherently discursive nature of the will.

Barbary Cutter illustrates the same barrier to conversion with the story of Balaam, specifically that portion of the story in Numbers 22:24-26, when Balaam's donkey, unbeknownst to Balaam, reacts to an angel of God that Balaam cannot see. The road they are on narrows and becomes enclosed by vineyards on either side, so that when the angel appears to the donkey, the donkey has no room to go around it. Balaam beats his trusty donkey because he doesn't understand the animal's behavior. Verse 26 presents the image that Cutter uses to illustrate her situation: "The angel of the Lord moved on farther and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn to either right or left." Cutter's testimony highlights the anxiety saints felt when the moment of belief was upon them: "Yet hearing sin of unbelief to bring heart to strait, either to receive or reject Him, and so heard as Balaam then stopped in a straight so found sweetness. But I lost that which I found in the Lord" (*Confessions* 91). This passage, though difficult to decipher because it is fragmented, communicates a similar crisis to Starr's in that she reaches a moment when she must choose to "receive" or "reject" the Lord, and, like Starr, her heart is brought to a "strait." Cutter, however, refers to the story of Balaam (to whom the angel finally reveals itself and solves the mystery of the donkey's behavior) to express a relief she feels from this passage in Scripture about Balaam's experience with the Lord. When the Lord reveals Himself to Balaam, Balaam is able to reconcile his relation to the Lord, who has been testing his obedience to God. It is typical for a saint to refer to Bible passages as a way to demonstrate knowledge of Scripture, but in this instance, Cutter testifies that this passage offered relief when she felt she too had reached a "strait." Her

testimony recalls that when she reached that moment of conversion (when she must "receive" or "reject" the Lord) she found relief from her distress in a passage from Scripture, but this is apparently all. In the next breath she claims to have "lost that which [she] found in the Lord." The only true relief Cutter finds is in doubts. Her confession ends by taking up the discourse of human depravity, finding real comfort in her identity as a sinner: "I saw and was convinced of my sin especially the last out of 35 Isaiah—say to them that be fearful be strong your God comes" (*Confessions* 92).

Typical of Shepard's congregants, Starr and Cutter reach these moments of conversion but ultimately defer consummation and take up the discourse associated with the early stages of preparation and the continual labor of addressing the containment of sin. As the work leading up to conversion, the destruction of man's nature entailed the emptying of six "rooms" of things a saint is full of to make way for grace. They include sin, darkness, unbelief, Satan, self, and the world. Emptying these rooms was the preparatory work that called upon the saints to maintain a state of active passivity; the destruction of man's nature created the receptive space in which saints could be overwhelmed by the work of the Spirit. Yet, the saints' inability to consummate the union with Christ was a crisis of consent because the choice to accept Christ entailed a perceptive act fueled by judgment and the stressing of the limits of the understanding (ironically necessary to closing with Christ according to the preparationists). When the moment arrived to close, they expected to feel passive, as though they were simply reacting to external stimuli; but they could not because all the work that had gone into preparing for Christ had demanded highly active uses of the mind involving intense introspection and impossible feats of comprehension, such as "conceiving" of the fullness

of God's love or "understanding" the work of the Spirit. Preparationism, especially Shepard's brand of it, could not, ironically, facilitate union with Christ. Though the doctrine of means was preached as the way to Christ, it established a perceptive mode that undermined the passivity a saint understood to be their proper "activity." The saints' retreat back into the discourse of helplessness and doubting is a retreat back into a perceptual mode which can accommodate the *acceptable* active work of a pietistic mind.

As noted previously, the force of Shepard's ministry originated in the conception of sin as "invasive" and "chameleon-like" which took root in New England. Delbanco finds that the distinction Shepard makes between the character of sin in old England and that which had infected New England, arose out of the Antinomian Controversy. Sin's new invasiveness and chameleon-like properties stemmed from what Delbanco calls the "hysteria of evangelical pride" that Shepard claimed was the hallmark of the more ecstatic piety that ministers such as John Cotton, John Davenport, and Henry Vane and their congregations practiced ("Thomas Shepard's America" 173). Though ultimately marginalized by the orthodoxy of preparationists such as Thomas Hooker, Peter Bulkeley, and John Winthrop, the mysticism of the ecstatic ministers posed enough of a threat to the social order that it became a focus of derision for Thomas Shepard in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*. The Antinomian Controversy demonstrated the dangers of unrestrained evil and unmanaged piety:

> It is strange to see what a faith some men have that can close with Christ as their end, and comfort themselves there. It is not means, (say they,) but Christ; not duties, but Christ; and by this faith can comfort and quiet themselves in the neglect and contempt of Christ in means—as infallible a

> brand of God's eternal reprobation of such a soul as any I know. So that this is New England's sin. (*TV* 171)

In an attempt to uncover the variety of religious experiences within the Puritanism of New England, Janice Knight's book *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts* unfolds the intellectual and pietistic histories of two strains of Puritans Knight refers to as the "Intellectual Fathers" and the "Spiritual Brethren." She traces the roots of these traditions back to England where William Perkins and William Ames began an intellectual tradition of preparation and Richard Sibbes and John Preston embodied a more mystical, Augustinian strain. The former stressed an individual's cooperation in the process of conversion, the role of rationalism in religious experience, and the figure of God as powerful commander. The latter group stressed God's love and benevolence and a mystical, immediate union with Christ that diminished the need for preparatory stages in the conversion experience. Knight places Shepard in the former group yet recognizes the complexity of Shepard's placement within this intellectual heritage: "Shepard is the most complex of the preachers in this group—a man whose experiences bound him to both the Intellectual Fathers and the Spiritual Brethren, and whose temperament remained divided throughout his lifetime" (55). Knight points out that Shepard's "hotter" piety, as she calls it, finds its way into the public realm through sermons written pre-Antinomian Controversy, for example in *The Sound Believer* and in earlier portions of *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, and it wasn't until after the Controversy that his Antinomian sympathies were exiled into his personal writings.[13]

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[13] Michael McGiffert underscores this point when he says that

> the *Journal* reveals susceptibilities that are far more Antinomian than Arminian. As a young man Shepard had been tempted by Grindletonian perfectionism; like Anne Hutchinson—who was believed by the orthodox of Massachusetts to have been infected

Delbanco gives two reasons why Shepard relegated his anti-intellectualism to the private sphere and became one of Hutchinson's most energetic opponents. First, the Antinomian position "throws into confusion the hierarchy of the faculties and jumbles his orderly picture of the mind." Second, the Antinomian position had dire social consequences because "the workings of one mind correspond to the development of the collective mind" ("Thomas Shepard's America" 171). However, Delbanco also recognizes the ambivalence Shepard harbored about religious experience, claiming that Shepard was capable of preaching a high preparationism, but that his early sermons and private writings demonstrate the conflicting ideas about conversion which esteem a more spiritist bent. Central to the division that preparationist and spiritist ministers maintained about conversion and which forced Shepard to hide his affinities, were notions about perception and its role in conversion. As noted above, Shepard ultimately became Hutchinson's worst opponent because her ideas about conversion posed a threat to his "orderly picture of the mind."

As a preparationist, Shepard extolled the necessary process through which the mind comprehends the world, the faculty psychology which was a part of the Puritan intellectual heritage and which was, according to Miller, a "theory . . . so familiar to men of the century that they could not have stopped to consider it as a theory" (*New England Mind* 244). For Shepard this would manifest itself as the "order of nature" in the

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> with Grindletonianism—he craved perfect assurance. . . . Perhaps his perfectionist inclinations enabled him to understand, even to sympathize with, her temptations, while his victory over his own temptations led him to condemn her the more sternly for yielding to hers. However that may be, it seems plausible to suggest that in putting down the Antinomian apostate, Shepard was suppressing the Antinomian propensities of his own passionate spirit. He kept his longings private, locked them in his *Journal*, and used the *Journal* to order, interpret, and sublimate them, partly for homiletic ends, in terms of the sovereign schedule of God's plot. (28-29)

conversion experience which entailed an individual's first "seeing" Christ before closing with Him, the act of "seeing" denoting a perceptive event routed through man's reason and understanding. As Shepard describes it in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, the mind cannot comprehend what the eye does not see: "The eye must first see. My meaning is, there must precede this act of the understanding, to see Christ, before a man can close with Christ by his will" (120). To further the explication of the doctrine, he poses the question: "What is this knowledge or seeing of the Lord?" to which he replies that in order to understand this knowledge, first one must understand what the knowledge is not. It is not knowledge "by way of tradition or report only." It is not knowledge "from his works." And it is not knowledge "by the bare letter only of the word." Shepard describes the knowledge he means by saying it happens when "Christ reveals his wonderful glory to the soul *really*" or to say that "This is therefore the saving knowledge of Christ, to see the Lord in his glory *as he is*; not perfectly, for that is in heaven" (emphasis added; *TV* 123).

Shepard's message to his congregants characterizing the kind of knowledge of Christ necessary to closing with Him (being able to see Christ "really" or "as he is") falls directly in line with the rational approach to conversion, as informed by the Puritan doctrine of method informing logic and technologia he inherited from Intellectual Fathers such as Ramus, Richardson, and Ames. In Ramist logic the function of thinking was to enact a method, to quote Miller, of "discerning and disposing, not investigating or deducing," applicable to theology for the purposes of discerning truth in the Bible (*New England Mind* 134). Through this method, perception of truth could be unquestionably established because it prevented fallen man from arriving at truth via emotions such as

fear, love, greed, or envy. As Miller shows, logic originates in the Bible wherein God transcribed the divine order: "the laws of God found in the Bible were hypostatized by the logic of Ramus into never-failing realities, as endurable facts" (148). Therefore, when the method of logic is used by man, the thinking process is mirroring or re-enacting the divine order as set down in the Bible and as found in the universe.

Technologia, a method based on logic for discerning truth in the natural cosmos, described the theory and practice behind what man could know about the world and how man knew it: the universe is the "embodiment" of God's mind, and in his mind the "plan is single." Man, however, can only perceive God's plan as "reflected through concrete objects," limiting man's apprehension of the divine order to a series of temporal and diverse "segments" which are "various arts." Through natural abilities, namely reason and the method of analysis, man may extract and assemble the principles of the particular arts, allowing man to distinguish the "particulars within the synthesis." Technologia was, according to Miller, "a science of distinguishing and defining both their [the arts'] contents and relations—in reality the wisdom of God—and their purpose—which was identical with the will of God" (*New England Mind* 162).

Man's limited faculties could never apprehend God's infinite wisdom; though ideas, to quote Miller, "radiate from the divine mind and into the human mind," they must be "filtered" through the objective world. God's "white radiance of eternity," his "naked wisdom," would "blind" man's finite intelligence (169). Therefore, man must attempt to understand the rules and patterns governing God's ideas—the arts—as they are reflected, or refracted, through matter. The doctrine of technologia was a stabilizing force in Puritan intellectualism. It upheld the theory that though man cannot know the divine

mind, he can, through the proper method, discover the pattern of God's ideas as reflected in His creation. It stated, according to Miller, that though "the visible world is but a veil or a screen between the intellect and the true and perfect ideas" and despite man's fallibility, man has access to the essence of things, the pure ideas of God (179). Alexander Richardson, who adapted Ramus' logic to suit Puritanism, claimed that man comprehends the visible world, and therefore the wisdom of God, by analysis: "things are first in themselves, then they come unto the senses of men, and then to the understanding" (qtd in Miller: 168). This highly intellectualized strain of Puritan epistemology fueled the energetically rationalized teachings on grace and the conversion process in Shepard's ministry. His countless exhortations to see the Lord in his glory "as he is" and to perceive Christ's glory "really" constitute an integrative discourse, allowing Shepard a middle way that accommodates both his spiritism and his intellectualism. Though logic itself was not redemptive, both grace and logic were divine gifts that, through either supernatural or natural means, led man to the truth. Shepard would lead his congregation, as an intellectualist preacher would, on a spiritual path using the methodology of logic and technologia to illuminate the truths found in Scripture, indoctrinating his flock into a methodological mode for discerning the work of the Spirit in their hearts. The mode of perception Shepard thus habituates creates a barrier to grace.

When he explains in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* how a saint can come to have love for the Lord, he quotes 1 John 3:1-3 which states, "We shall love him as he is." Shepard goes on to argue that this knowledge or seeing of Christ "as he is" which serves as a conduit for his love, is "the saving knowledge of Christ, to see the Lord in his glory

as he is, not perfectly, for that is in heaven" (*TV* 123). This fact, he continues, is apparent on certain grounds:

1. That knowledge the saints have of Christ, it is not by bare word only, but also by the Spirit. The word relates Christ, but the Spirit is the interpreter of the word. . . . Now, the Spirit ever shows us things as they are, even though they be deep things and mysteries. . . .
2. Because the sight of the knowledge of Christ, it is as the knowledge of a thing in a glass. . . . Now, though you see not the man face to face, yet you see him in a glass, there you see him as he is. . . .
3. Because that estate of the saints is translated into a state of glory. Hence, when justified, then glorified. Hence, as in heaven, the soul sees Christ by the full light of glory perfectly, face to face, so in this life the soul sees Christ really as he is, yet as in a glass, imperfectly. (*TV* 123-124)

Though Shepard speaks here of a saving sight of Christ, one which suggests the workings of the Holy Spirit, he has couched the project in a discourse of technologia, establishing a reliable epistemological foundation and grounding the epistemology in an analytic process of seeing the knowledge of Christ as reflected or refracted through a glass. Attempts to discern God's wisdom, as always, can only be known in part and mediately, despite the efforts to penetrate the veil that obscures our view and experience an immediate relation to the universe and God. The later Shepard's intellectualism drove him to write sermons which emphasized the groundwork laid by preparationism: the need

for saints to understand the doctrine behind the piety, to, in effect, be able to"close" with an idea as the means to receive grace.

As a result, his later works established a ministry urging parishioners to deal with their doubts through further examination, to make use of all the means to grace but not to trust them, and to employ a lay technologia in discerning matters of the heart, such as the moment a saint feels the fullness of God's love or when there is an influx of saving knowledge. His advice to his congregants, explaining the methodology for knowing if they love Christ in a gracious way adheres to an intellectual tradition: "It is a question whether the beams of the sun are fire. Some demonstrate it thus: Take a glass and gather together the beams, it burns. Therefore so, if you would see so as to be affected, gather together the beams of his glory and love; thus you see the means to get fit love" (*TV* 95). Shepard's idea of perception as informed by logic is clear here. All one needs to do to see if they love Christ is to collect the beams and detect the truth of the knowledge of love. In the analogy of the glass, the methodology leads to a truth, or in this case an effect. The *effect* of the glass is transformed into an *affect* in the spiritual experiment. In Shepard's example one can "see" the workings of natural law as easily as one can "see" the workings of one's love for God. One need only use the method of perception adopted by technologia: in other words, perception of truth happened through methodology.

Shepard's embrace of method reflects his familiarity with logic and the doctrine of technologia and his preparationism: as a form of means, developing as full an understanding of the Lord was prudent, for the will cannot consent to an object without understanding it. The means, in this sense, were a way of collecting as much information as possible not only about the state of one's soul, but also about Christ, the Holy Spirit,

and God's divine plan, anything that could be subjected to the method of technologia could provide knowledge that led to belief. Indeed, this form of Puritan spirituality was a science. Saints operated under the theory that they could be one of the elect, trusting that God's promise applied to them while they gathered as much knowledge as they could to realize that theory. Quoting Samuel Willard, the author of *Compleat Body of Divinity*, Perry Miller relates the function of reason to the establishment of a Puritan's worldview: "I must needs have some Idea in my mind of the thing believed to be, or else I believe, I know not what, which is ridiculous" (qtd. in *New England Mind*: 170).

But it is through the Puritan theory of regeneration that Puritan "head" and "heart" piety occurred simultaneously in conversion's moment of belief, for it was not solely rational understandings of doctrine that were the avenues to grace. Grace was a supernatural force, a wholly arbitrary, unreasonable operation of the Holy Spirit causing a collapse between the subject and object and was characterized by the divines, Shepard included, as an irresistible force. It was, finally, a felt relation to the divine, grounded in rationality—but not a rational event—that signaled consent and belief. Closing with Christ entailed a "coming out of oneself," a joy in the union with Christ, yet, Shepard's discourse on Puritan ways of knowing continually blurs the line between man's natural abilities, through reason, to see things "as they are" and the necessary intervention of the Spirit to help man see things "as they are." Shepard acknowledges that a saving knowledge of Christ cannot be experienced through language or, more specifically, understood through doctrinal frameworks such as tradition, works, or the Word: it is the "Spirit [that] ever shows us things *as they are*, even though they be deep things and mysteries, it makes them plain" (emphasis added). Shepard describes the kind of

perception he attributes to the work of the Spirit by using the phrase "as they are" to describe the Spirit's ability to give human experience immediacy, not only with Christ, but with the world and all of the disconnecting ways it is comprehended through works and tradition and the Word. This perceptive immediacy, this getting closer to things *as they are*, is figured as possible through intellect and through the heart, as perception felt immediately, rather than as mediated to describe the penetrating comprehension or perception available to man either through the method of technologia or through the Holy Spirit. Both lead man to belief through the consent of the will to an idea. Logic, technologia, and the Holy Spirit were all avenues to truth and knowledge of the fixed and immutable laws of God's divine wisdom. Because it was believed that one could approach truth with certainty through the method logic afforded, one actively sought the truth under the guise of "receptivity" to God's grace. This paradox is at the heart of Puritan piety because it reveals the irony behind the belief that reception to truth was a result of grasping it.

Shepard's disdain for the Spiritual Brethren arose from their disregard for duties and means because their ministry, which figured God as the embodiment of love, foregrounded the ecstatic moment of union conversion offered and which the divines associated with this group facilitated. As a preparationist, Shepard placed the role of God's love within the realm of means that prepared a saint for conversion. As Shepard reasoned: "for though Christ will convey rich grace to his people, yet it shall be by love" (*TV* 62). Yet, in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, in addition to figuring God's love as a means to grace, Shepard places it at one more remove by describing it for the purposes of "seeing" it. Couched in terms of measurement and organized by a list, God's love, which

is in fact infinite, must be "seen" in these terms in order to be understood. Shepard packages God's love in a way that accentuates the distance between sinner and God and stresses the inherent problem that a saint faces in the conversion process when in possession of damaged faculties and limited perception:

> *Quest*. How shall I comprehend [God's love]?
>
> *Ans*. First, the apostle prays for it. Secondly, see what it is by his description, and meditate on it.
>
> 1. The breadth, i.e., the same love wherewith the Lord comprehends all saints, as Abraham, etc.: thou art as dear to the Lord as he or any in heaven. . . .
> 2. The length, from eternity to eternity, nothing can part, nothing shall part; all other things are but summer swallows, that build with us for a time.
> 3. The depth, that the Lord should look upon thee when in thy pest-house. . . . Never think to see what infinite love is, till thou seest infinite wrath.
> 4. The hight, to be as happy as angels . . . nay, to be all one with Christ, and in Christ, and loved with the same love Christ is.
> 5. When thou seest it thus, yet it is the love of Christ that passeth knowledge. . . . (*TV* 62)

In containing the idea of God's love in a list and through terms of measurement, Shepard believes he has made it available to be understood by his congregation. Yet, only a few lines later Shepard qualifies the mechanistic process of perception he has just described

with what has the tone of an apology—and spiritism—or a sort of longing for immediacy in a felt relation to the divine: "The eye is but little, yet can comprehend a mighty world quickly; man's mind is but little, yet can comprehend, though not the infiniteness, yet an infinite" (*TV* 63). Immediacy erupts as an issue in conversion here in that though he has stressed the difficulty of comprehending God's love, he reassures his listeners that closing with Christ (or closing with the idea of God's love) can happen "quickly," betraying the part of his piety that, as Delbanco claims, "Shepard's heart feels . . . that his intellect resists" ("Thomas Shepard's America" 172).

The intellectualized framing of God's love in the above passage is in contrast to his much earlier use of this familiar idea found in *The Sound Believer*:

> Oh, come, come therefore to the Lord Jesus for Christ himself, and for all his benefits; I say for all his benefits. This is that which the apostle prays for with bended knees for the Ephesians, that they might—not take in a little, but—comprehend the height, depth, length, breadth of Christ's love, that so they might be filled with all the fullness of God. (214)

One issue remains the same in both versions of the passage and that is Shepard's faith that though man's eye and mind are "little," and can only take in a "little," he can still comprehend the fullness of Christ's love, the channel of grace. In *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* it comes in more as an afterthought, as though the saints, and perhaps Shepard himself, shouldn't forget, after all the rationalizing, how union with Christ feels. The difference is in the apparent delivery of the sermon. The first version emphasizes the rational comprehension of God's love and frames man's faculties (his small eye and mind) as a significant barrier to God's grace, though it does remain possible for him to

receive it. *The Sound Believer*, however, is a display of converting ministry in action. The fact that man's mind is little is only a small matter, contained by the dashes. In addition, his sermon puts his congregation in the place of the Ephesians, urging them to "not take in a little," and proceeds with a rhetorical momentum that allows the fullness of Christ to be felt with each measurement of Christ's encompassing love tripping, immediately, one upon the other.

Though a saint's conversion experience depended almost entirely upon hearing the Word, there is a constant tension, as we've seen here, in Shepard's theology between the efficacy of the Word, and of the discursive community that embodies his ministry, and the limitations of words in representing faith, grace, and spiritual experience. Regeneration led a saint into a divine existence, permitting access to a realm beyond mere representations of reality fixed in language, known only through language and report. This movement beyond words thought of as "actual" deliverance by the Holy Spirit, did not simply increase one's knowledge or tweak the perceptive powers. The message of Puritanism was one of rebirth that, indeed, could not be described: "Now, there is a light of glory, whereby the elect see things in another manner; to tell you how, they can not; it is the beginning of light in heaven, and the same Spirit that fills Christ filling their minds, that they know by the anointing all things, which if ever you have, you must become babes and fools in your own eyes" (*TV* 235).

Yet, though a saint cannot describe how they see "things in another manner," Shepard offers the answers for how a saint can know with "certainty" whether there is the work of grace in their soul. The light that discovers things *as they are* shines through the Word because the light of the Spirit goes with the Word. It also shines through the light

of experience and sense, which is the "experimental knowledge of the work of grace." We know this light, he explains, as "certainly" as "by feeling heat, we know fire is hot; by tasting honey we know it is sweet" (*TV* 222). This sense, he continues, is "diversely apparent to experience," at which point he defines experience in three important ways, reminding his congregants that he "never knew yet a *thinking* Christian deceived" (emphasis added; *TV* 222, 223). Shepard's conceptualization of experience maintains that experience happens in the thinking process, but it is a process reflecting a piety governed by reason. Though Shepard claims that the experimental knowledge of grace involves an immediate taste or sense that cannot be mistaken, he looks to the orderly, rational processes of thinking understood in faculty psychology to provide the tools for judging the sensations. Defined three ways, experience is first described as judging one's "act[s] of life" as spiritual by which one compares an act to the "rule." Second, experience is described as seeing and feeling "the operation of love" by which one judges if they possess virtue. Finally, one may understand experience as "temptations and trials" by which one may know what is in the heart. A thinking saint, according to faculty psychology, is a judging saint and one who understands his experiential piety as a series of judgments made by reason applied to a sensual apprehension of the world.

As we have seen in the confessions the actual deliverance of Shepard's congregants endangered the future that Shepard hoped to mold in New England. We see the individual manifestations of New England piety under Shepard's direction—the intersections of theology, epistemology, preparationism, and spiritism guiding the saints in their spiritual and practical lives. They were not the recipients of a younger Shepard's ministry that advanced a passional piety but rather a reasoning Shepard who relied on an

intellectualism to help his congregants make sense of their belief. And as we have seen, the moment of conversion often cannot be rationalized.

The narratives of conversion given by Thomas Shepard's congregants document the Puritan Reformed religious experience that was at the heart of early colonial identity and community. Because they are testimonies of individual saints' spiritual journeys, they offer insight into a particular moment of American history that is only available from a lay perspective. In doing so, they are a rich resource for understanding the *lived* faith and piety of New England's Puritan theology. Contained within these narratives are the movements of the saints' hearts and minds as they undergo the delicate process of consciously monitoring the affective and rational dimensions of ordinary experience. Because their efforts had the highest stakes and self-preservation always loomed as a motive, the testimonies are explicit accounts of the saints' personal struggles to achieve a specific belief about their selves that inaugurated a new identity and entrance into the community of visible sainthood.

As the confessions demonstrate, these struggles were defined by a discursive community established primarily by individual ministers who shaped the ideas that made up a saint's worldview. As this chapter has shown, this realm of ideas sustained Shepard's congregation through the early stages of conversion, but when they reached the moment of transcendence, of conversion, they chose to "reject" Christ and retreat back into a discursive realm that reinforced familiar perceptions and beliefs. Ironically, as Shepard had so often preached, the influx of grace and conversion is an experience that is beyond language. However, because spiritual discipline was the central message of Shepard's later ministry, his congregation could not testify to conversion. Nevertheless,

the narratives reveal a habit of mind that figures the boundaries, or lack thereof, between the spontaneous and sensory perception of the environment and the bodies of knowledge that inevitably inform that environment, what William James would conceptualize as the conscious and subconscious "recrystallizations" of "new habitual centre[s] of personal energy" in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (196).[14]

This conductive imaginary, this space of conversion, is the site where new beliefs are generated in a constant process of personal and cultural renewal. These strainings away from what William James calls "incompleteness" and toward "the positive ideal" which we long to "compass" lead to vital turning points in our belief structures about ourselves and the world (*Varieties* 209). These turning points celebrate the human capacity for the translation of experience into truth, and for Shepard's Puritans this meant approaching the truth about the state of their souls and believing that they were saved. The ordinary experiences of perception, language, and truth were the ground for extraordinary, gracious moments for the Puritans, and as I will show in the following chapters, that ordinary ground and its potential to cultivate belief remained a vital trope for American philosophical and literary expression.

[14] *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. 1902. Rpt., (New York: Penguin, 1985). Hereafter cited as *Varieties*.

Chapter Two

"Something That is Seen, That is Wonderful"

Jonathan Edwards and the Feeling of Conviction

Edwards scholars recognize that one of the most influential people in Edwards' spiritual and intellectual life was the Puritan divine Thomas Shepard. Conversion remained a doctrinal challenge for Edwards, and it remained an experiential challenge for his parishioners, and though both Shepard and Edwards faced these same issues, one hundred years of science and philosophy separated their ideas and influenced their theological conceptions of conversion. For Edwards, this would mean allowing his religious beliefs to inform a new theory of knowledge and his scientific interests to generate new possibilities for religious experience. This reconceptualization of piety was possible because of a paradigm shift within science during Edwards' lifetime. Sang Hyun Lee describes it as the "basic problem that seventeenth-century thought bequeathed to Jonathan Edwards' generation," that of "revising the Aristotelian-Scholastic world view so as to come up with a perspective that could accommodate the new methods and categories of thought presented by mechanicoexperimental science" (10). The shift in Edwards' vision, stimulated by new horizons in science and philosophy, permitted new possibilities for understanding and describing conversion.

For both Shepard's and Edwards' congregants the conversion experience consummated a crucial process in the social and pietistic life of an individual, and central to both pastors' theology was the idea that a saving knowledge of Christ was necessary for assurance of election. The distinction between a discursive or rational knowledge of Christ and a saving knowledge of Christ is the theme of Shepard's *Parable of the Ten Virgins* and Edwards would adopt it as the central issue in his *Treatise of Religious Affections*.[15] As John E. Smith notes in his introduction to *Religious Affections*, in preparing the treatise "Edwards quoted more from Shepard than from any other writer, depending chiefly upon *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*" (54). Though Edwards retained the tenets of evangelical Calvinism, his theories about the human mind transformed notions of how one came to know the divine mind and, therefore, the state of one's soul. He explored the matrix of thought, feeling, and perception, characterizing it as an ever expansive, and, as such, redemptive conscious space only insofar as an individual exercises its potential for approaching degrees of divine truths that God excited therein. For Edwards, conversion would ground one's redemptive path within the web of relations

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[15] This distinction reflects the idea that gave birth to the Reformation, in that, as Nuttall explains, when the Bible became available in the vernacular, Protestants "sought to drink, not only intellectually but spiritually" (21). As Nuttall shows, they found a "rapture" in reading the Bible that they did not experience in other books; the experience was understood as the Holy Spirit at work, "illuminating what was written and enlightening their minds to understand it," inevitably leading to considerations of the authority of Scripture (21, 22). It must be noted here that the Puritans went beyond Luther in attributing the power of Scripture to save not only through the power of hearing the preached word but, importantly, through a private *reading* process as well. This is an early divergence in Protestantism that distinguishes the Puritans. Nuttall argues that at its inception the work of the Holy Spirit was understood in Protestantism as twofold:

> the Spirit both inspired its writers and enlightens its readers. Belief in the former of these offices . . . is axiomatic among Puritans. . . . It is over the second of these offices, the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, that discussion arises. . . . That the assistance of the Spirit is necessary for the saving knowledge of Scripture is doubted by none: the bare word, the letter of Scripture cannot save by itself. But can the Spirit save, or even speak to, man apart from the Word or Scripture? or is the Spirit tied to Scripture?. . . . How can men know that it is God's Spirit which speaks to them, and not their own fancy? To what in them does the Spirit speak? (23)

In *Religious Affections*, Edwards continues this old discussion, explicitly addressing the contribution that Shepard had made generations before.

he called the "room of the idea," a conscious space infused with God's will, but experienced as the ordinary, thoughtful dynamic between receptivity, perception, and interpretation enlivening the bond between humans and God.

As discussed in the previous chapter, though Shepard preached the difference between a "heart" knowledge of Christ and a "head" knowledge of Christ, explaining to his congregants that mere notional familiarity with doctrine, though necessary for an influx of grace, was not itself the experience of grace, the intellectualism his ministry fostered undermined the spontaneity and immediacy inherent in a conversion experience they were to feel *sensually*. Ideas about the mind associated with the faculty psychology that Shepard instilled through his ministry established the epistemology Shepard's congregants would rely on for guiding their experience and framing the truth about it. In doing so, it was believed that the saints were simply following the natural intellectual process of the mind when it organizes experience through the invention of arguments.

This theory of knowledge and perception held that the mind "invents," or lays open to view (because they already exist in space) the arguments that make up objective reality, and this process of invention remains completely within the jurisdiction of the intellect in that it is responsible for how the discovery of the argument is made. As Miller explains in *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, the operations of the faculty in inventing consists of four "instruments": "first, the senses, which perceive; second, 'observation,' which collects the sense impressions; third, 'induction,' which notes differences and similarities and abstracts generalizations from singulars; and finally, 'experientia' which, receiving the idea after it has been collected from the perception of the senses and confirmed by observation and induction of various

examples, pronounces what it is and what it is not" (149). This process allowed for a firm foundation of knowledge about the nature of things, including the nature of the soul, because it offered certainty about the way God's universe works and the relations and patterns exhibited in the perfection and harmony of that universe. This stable foundation was possible because, as Miller argues, invention "annihilated the distance from the object to the brain, or made possible an epistemological leap across the gap in the twinkling of an eye with an assurance of footing beyond the possibility of a metaphysical slip" (149).

As I demonstrated in the last chapter, the excitation and sensual awakening occurring during conversion was described by Shepard as the perception (felt like one feels heat from a fire) of the light of the Spirit. But for Shepard, this heat became "apparent to experience" through a thinking process conceived as a succession of reason's judgments. Through "thinking," Shepard exhorted, a saint could avoid deception by seeing "how far [an act] agrees or disagrees with the rule [of the Bible], and judge of a living act by it." Ironically, though Shepard believed that a true saving knowledge of Christ must be a first-hand experience, not merely understood through report, works, or the Word, the methodology of technologia and privileging of reason intrinsic to his theology created an experiential barrier or distance between the sinner and God, preventing the assurance that accompanies a felt relation needed to close the most important gap. For Shepard, the burden of proof regarding conversion rested on using an established set of criteria to compare one's experience to the "rule" in an effort to lend certainty to knowledge and, therefore, belief about the truth regarding the state of one's

soul. Shepard's epistemology made discerning and disposing the watchdogs of experience and belief for all stages of the process of conversion.

In contrast, and key to understanding Edwards' rendering of the conversion experience, is the concept of the affections. They are the aspect of man's experience that, as John E. Smith explains in his introduction to *Religious Affections* serve as "signposts indicating the direction of the soul" (12). They are rooted in what Edwards calls "inclination" which brings together two of man's faculties, the understanding and the will, into a motive for action. For Edwards, the understanding represents the mind's capacity for speculation that is neutral or unattended by any judgment of approval or disapproval. The will, on the other hand, involves *inclination*, which carries a person beyond neutrality in the understanding into action. Therefore, the affections, as Smith states, "stand in a necessary relation to the ideas of the understanding and are also the springs of actions commonly ascribed to the will" (12).

It is important to keep in mind that Edwards makes a distinction between affections resulting from the common work of the Spirit and affections resulting from the saving work of the Spirit. *Religious Affections*, the treatise, is concerned with describing those affections associated with the saving work of the Spirit. As such, it attempts to describe those signs that point to the presence of the Spirit dwelling in a saint. In contrast, affections associated with the common work of the Spirit are at work in the daily lives of unregenerate individuals conducting their actions according to their inclinations. The signs of grace that *Religious Affections* describes are the kind of affections that are wholly new and beyond anything that nature can produce. These affections are "religious" because they allow saints to respond with their entire selves to God's love and

divine glory, implying that the concept of the affections does not divorce the will from the reason. To paraphrase Smith, in the case of religious affections, the Spirit does not operate "*on* the self," as in the case of common grace, the Spirit dwells "*in* the self," having laid a new foundation in the soul (Introduction 24). Edwards' concept of the affections marks a significant departure from the faculty psychology of Shepard's time because it offered a description of experience wherein one's judgment of that experience could be suspended and detached from the unrelenting work of conscience. Typical of Edwards' penchant for finding the exact phrase or word to express an idea in its context, his idea of the affections was couched in different terms in different contexts. He would often use the phrase "feeling mind" to express this fusion of the separate faculties of the intellect/head and the will/heart. In addition, there is the more well known term "sense of the heart," brought to the attention of scholars by Perry Miller in 1948. These phrases do not describe a mode of understanding accessible only to the regenerate, because for Edwards, a "feeling mind" or a "sense of the heart" are forms of perception and knowledge resulting from the *ordinary* work of the Spirit that "puts things in the mind."[16] A "sense of the heart," therefore, is available to any unregenerate who is willing to reject merely "notional" knowledge and experience the meanings of truths he encounters more fully, that is, both intellectually and emotionally.

Edwards' Miscellany no. 782 describes why a "sense of the heart" is a theory of the mind that, unlike faculty psychology and its emphasis on the role of reason, promotes

[16] In "Jonathan Edwards's Religious Psychology" James Hoopes underscores this point by stating that the "sense of the heart" is a "broad category that includes various experiences of both saints and sinners" and that it is through the experience of conversion and the influx of grace that a saint acquires a new "spiritual sense" after having received "an entirely new and different sort of understanding or intellectual knowledge—the idea of holiness—which follows rather than precedes this new sense" (857).

a consciousness of "things themselves" through a felt and altogether ordinary experience of ideas, what Edwards would term an "actual idea." Miscellany no. 782 captures the essence of Edwards' departure from Shepard's doctrine because it clarifies the limitations of a theology built on an intellectual tradition:

> [W]hen in a course of meditations we think of man, angels, nations, conversion, and conviction, if we have anything further in our thoughts to represent those things than only words, we commonly have only some very confused passing notion of something external, which we don't at all insist on the clearness and distinctness of, nor do we find any need of it, because we make use of that external idea no otherwise than as a sign of the idea, or something to stand in its stead. And the notion need not be distinct in order to that, because we may habitually understand the use of it as a sign without it; whereas it would be of great consequence that it should be clear and distinct if we regarded it as an actual idea and proper representation of the thing itself. (*The "Miscellanies": Entry Nos. 501-832* 456)

Rather, Edwards continues, in an effort to make our ideas "clear and distinct," in other words, to put them "in our minds," he sets forth the argument that the role of the will/affections is primary: "if we are at a loss concerning a connection or consequence, or have a new inference to draw, or would see the force of a 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" (emphasis added; 457). Edwards calls this space in consciousness where ideas are excited the "room of the idea," and this "room" acts as the conscious space where not

only doctrine, but also all ideas are made "actual" and are therefore "put in the mind." To actualize an idea means to go beyond a notional understanding of the word toward an *experience* of the idea itself through a "sense of the heart."[17] Punching through the façade of words to reach the ideas of God themselves, to collapse the gap between mind and thing was, for Edwards, the fundamental goal of religious experience though neither he nor Shepard, because of their belief in original sin could trust that experience. On the other hand, because Emerson eschewed the concept of original sin, he was free to believe, as Miller explains, that there was "no inherent separation between the mind and the thing, that in reality they leap to embrace each other" (*Errand into the Wilderness* 185).

Indeed, the cornerstone of Edwards' theology, that of the "sense of the heart," and its relation to the "actual" idea, has its roots in the Puritan doctrine he inherited distinguishing the means of man's salvation by either "purchased deliverance, which is by the blood of Christ" or by "man's *actual* deliverance, which is by the efficacy and power of the Spirit of Christ" (emphasis added; *SB* 115). For Shepard, "actual" deliverance manifests in the process of conversion from the first step of preparation to the final step of sanctification. One's deliverance is actualized by the Spirit of Christ in that at every step the Spirit is present either in its common way during preparation or as a holy principle dwelling in the soul after consummation. In either case, the idea is the

[17] Miller shows that Edwards' brilliant use in his preaching of Locke's idea that words are detached from reality granted him the power to instigate the Great Awakening. He cast society's problems associated with degenerating piety in terms of a language use problem, that if one experienced language in an actual way, one's thinking would generate piety: "[thinking] can operate entirely with those artificial signs which the mind habitually substitutes for reality. Profitable though the device might be for warfare, business, and speculation, what is it but the supreme manifestation of original sin? It is the negation of life, the acceptance of substitutes, of husks without the corn. Actually to know something, actually to live, is to deal with ideas themselves. . ." (*Errand into the Wilderness* 178).

same in both Shepard and Edwards: the Spirit of Christ acts as a power that moves the soul. In Edwards' concept of the "actual idea," the work of the Spirit acts in consciousness and specifically in the "room of the idea" where ideas are felt, thereby conducting the soul beyond representations of spiritual truths. As such, the concept of the "room of the idea" and the "actual idea" powered therein casts reception to the Spirit as a charged moment of potential consciousness generated without the ordered process built into the preparationism favored by the Intellectual Fathers.

Edwards' willingness to eschew the high preparationism of his forbears was cultivated by events both personal and ecclesiastical. After the synod of 1662 (meant to solve divisive issues surrounding church membership) only inflamed dissent, it was, as Philip F. Gura claims in *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical*, "the arrival in Northampton in 1672 of Solomon Stoddard" that "set the course of the valley's religious history" (12). Even if Stoddard hadn't been Edwards' grandfather, Edwards would have been greatly influenced by this towering figure. Stoddard made his powerful mark on New England by maintaining that "the morass in which the colonists found themselves . . . had originated in his peers' misguided attempts to sustain religious fervor by methods no longer effective, particularly the concept of restricted church membership" (12). Stoddard's boldest claim, however, about the inability of New England's clergy to meet the needs of their congregants in an increasingly complex society provided a legacy of vanguardism for Edwards. As Gura explains, Stoddard held that "New England's problems . . . stemmed from an embarrassing misunderstanding by the colony's founders, who in the eyes of their descendants could do no wrong. . . . [W]ho in their zeal to establish a Puritan commonwealth on New England shores mistook their own notions for

timeless truth" (*Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical* 14). Edwards' own conflict with one of these timeless truths, the *ordo salutis*, would become fertile ground for his re-conceptualization of conversion. Edwards struggled with the orthodox pattern of the conversion experience, worrying in his diary in 1722 that he had not undergone "regeneration, exactly in those steps, in which divines say it is generally wrought," and writing eight months later, just before he received his degree from New Haven, that the "chief thing, that now makes me in any measure to question my good estate, is my not having experienced conversion in these particular steps, wherein the people of New England and anciently Dissenters in Old England, used to experience it" (*Letters and Personal Writings* 759, 779).

Edwards' notion of the "room of the idea" as a highly active conscious space energized by the ordinary work of the Spirit contrasts with Shepard's doctrine directing a saint's attention toward emptying the various "rooms" in the mind of the sins and corruption which block the influx of the Spirit. Saints undergoing the process of preparation, as Shepard and the Intellectual Fathers conceived it, had to make space in the various rooms of the mind for grace to enter. Edwards' "room of the idea" clarifies a significant departure from ideas about the mind and conversion evidenced in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* and the faculty psychology and theology it represents. When saints underwent the process of preparing for conversion, they waited for the Holy Spirit to come into the "room of those things which a man is full of now" (*TV* 302). This implies an "emptying" of those six things an individual is full of: sin, darkness, unbelief, Satan, self, and the world. During preparation a saint's conscience worked to empty these rooms so that the Spirit could fill them, respectively, with humiliation, illumination and

revelation, faith, the Spirit, sanctification, and glory. This process underscores the notion that a saint's role in conversion is wholly passive, in that he waits, having emptied these rooms, for the Spirit to fill them. True to the tenets of evangelical Calvinism, this process issued the experience of being humbled before God and dependent upon Christ for all. Reception to grace arose from passivity before Christ resulting from protracted meditation on sin, and though a saint was supposed to feel irresistibly drawn to close with Christ, the final discernment, that of detecting a will to believe, wasn't, in the end, possible for the saints testifying before Shepard.

Edwards, of course, also preached the necessity of humbling one's self before God and fighting against those pitfalls of human existence listed above. However, Edwards' belief in the active role consciousness played in piety compelled a new understanding and characterization of that "room" in which reception is created. Instead of creating reception through a clearing or emptying out of the rooms of the six ideas, Edwards recasts reception as a *filling* of the "room" of consciousness with all the actual and suggestive relations and contexts of any idea one *wants* to actualize. This element of desire Edwards privileges in his theory of consciousness radically disrupts the prevailing notions of how the mind works according to faculty psychology. Whereas in faculty psychology, an idea enters the mind through reason so it can be judged good or evil and reacted upon appropriately through the will, Edwards put the cart before the horse, as it were. For Edwards, an individual is introduced to an idea and then may *choose* to see the idea carried through into its actualization. In other words, one's desire can, if one chooses, determine the direction the soul takes, constituting a significant break from Shepard's doctrine.

Edwards would deflate the power Shepard had invested in reason to prepare for the conversion experience, finding the epistemology of faculty psychology static and non-conductive. In Edwards' "The Mind" no. 17, he states his position with regard to his departure from the "Old Logick":[18]

> One reason why, at first, before I knew other Logick, I used to be mightily pleased with the study of the Old Logick, was, 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, so that I could tell where they all belonged, and run them up to their general heads. For this Logick consisted much in Distribution and Definitions; and their maxims gave occasion to observe new and strange dependencies of ideas, and a seeming agreement of multitudes of them in the same thing, that I never observed before. (101-102)

Here Edwards recognizes the power Ramist logic had to "order and distribute" his thoughts, to arrange his "jumbled" thoughts into "new and strange dependencies." The pleasure he speaks of stems from the ability of Ramist logic, through its methodology, to categorize and arrange the ideas and things that make up God's universe, allowing man to detect existent truths and their patterns and, thereby, to comprehend the "infinitely exact, and precise, and perfectly stable Idea, in God's mind" ("The Mind" 54). Yet, Edwards' departure from this logic consists, as he explains, in the problems associated with this method. Ramist logic was an inherent part of Puritan epistemology, and for the preparationists following in the intellectual tradition, the methodology of logic lent a

[18] All references to Edwards' text "The Mind" are from Leon Howard's *"The Mind" of Jonathan Edwards: A Reconstructed Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) and will be cited hereafter as "The Mind."

sense of accuracy to saints' perceptions of the Holy Spirit in their souls. Though Edwards ascribes pleasure associated with intellectual usefulness to the "Old Logick," the passage suggests that he abandoned it for exactly the kind of relationship to God this pleasure established. In light of the development of his epistemology of the affections, Edwards perceived the methodology of Ramist logic as shortsighted in its premise that access to God's ideas occurs when the intellect, through logic, reenacts the divine mind, thereby offering a firm mental grasp of its contents.[19]

Edwards' idealism would mark a significant break from the Puritan intellectual tradition, which built its theories of epistemology, theology, and natural philosophy on logic's method of setting all the particulars of God's universe in their places for transcription of the divine order. The "Old Logick" that Edwards would reject was a powerful tool for understanding. For the previous generation of divines it led to what Perry Miller describes as "true perceptions . . . contained in the arts; the arts then are descriptions of reality, enactments of God, and knowledge of them is knowledge of Him" (*New England Mind* 160). This ordering process led to the abstract ideas constituting the known truths about God's universe. For Edwards, as one can detect from his tone of detachment in "The Mind" no. 17, the pleasure one receives from the ordering process of Ramist logic could not compare to a new kind of logic offering a different experience

[19] In his essay "Calvinism and Consciousness from Edwards to Beecher," James Hoopes offers an explanation that may contribute to an understanding of why Edwards abandoned the "Old Logick." He makes the distinction that Edwards "was not in rebellion against faculty psychology, but only against hypostatization of faculties, the assumption that faculties were distinct entities rather than different abilities or functions of a unitary mind" (207). This passage recalls the argument that Delbanco made for a strain in Shepard's thought tending toward a more holistic and less compartmentalized picture of the mind. The "Old Logick," ordering the experience of perception according to the performance of each distinct faculty, drained the feeling of immediacy and directness from one's experience with God's divinity, not only during the influx of grace, but after one had converted and one's relationship to the world reflected a constant state of virtue.

with his ideas. As he states, it was "very pleasant" for him to watch his thoughts become ordered through "Distribution" and "Definitions" by the "Old "Logick." Yet, he has left unstated why he left the "Old Logick" behind. We can presume that it was for a new "method" offering a different relationship with his ideas. This "method" would be the idealism he adopted.

Edwards' most revolutionary claim about existence stemmed from his insight recorded in Misc. no. gg:

> God did not create the world for nothing. 'Tis most certain that if there were not intelligent beings in the world, all the world would be without any end at all. For senseless matter, in whatever excellent order it is placed, would be useless if there were no intelligent beings at all. . . . Wherefore it necessarily follows that intelligent beings are the end of the creation, that their end must be to behold and admire the doings of God. . . . (*The "Miscellanies": Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500* 185)

As Wallace E. Anderson explains in his introduction to the *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, it was shortly thereafter in Misc. no. pp, that Edwards, in denying the substantial and independent reality of the physical world, claimed that "the universe could have no existence unless it is known by intelligent beings," and maintained, instead, that it "depends immediately and necessarily for its existence upon God's continual creative activity" (79). Therefore, when Edwards claimed that the world "exists only mentally," he retired Ramist logic's method of transcribing a substantial world in favor of a new logic that accommodated the constantly unfolding nature of God's

universe existing as an *ideal* world.[20] Consequently, apprehension of this ideal world was, to quote Anderson again, "direct and immediate, and does not depend on prior reflection and conscious methodical procedure" (122). Throughout Edwards' work we can see the refinements in his articulations of this experience of immediacy as he defended the basic tenets of Calvinism. In his writings on the will, virtue, original sin, conversion, and God's sovereignty, he continually returns to the project of clarifying the intersection of thought, feeling, and perception in an effort to esteem direct experience without providing fodder for his detractors who claimed he was inciting enthusiasm.

The divines of the previous generation, such as Shepard, searched out the hidden divinity within the cosmos in an effort to comprehend God. Their belief in an objective truth to which they had access through technologia reinforced the notion of an abstract relation to God's universe and those truths hidden within it. The method of technologia, though guaranteeing a closure in the gap between subject and object, implicitly underscored the distance, generating a vision of God's divinity as removed and impersonal. However, as evidenced by Misc. no. 87, Edwards' idealism permitted a far more intimate relation between an individual and the divine, constructing a metaphysics whose teleology posited man's role in the divine plan: "intelligent beings are created to be the consciousness of the universe, that they may perceive what God is and does. This

[20] Norman Fiering has shown that Edwards' idealist metaphysics emerged out of truths expressed in the Westminster Confession, that his "belief that existence, or being, implies consciousness seems to have been originally a philosophical amplification of the basic confessional tenet that the purpose of the Creation is the manifestation of the glory of God, with the creation of men and angels supremely important in this scheme. One can follow in Edwards's writings step by step the transformation of this familiar theological dogma into idealist metaphysics. . ." (82). That the "universe does not exist for nothing," Fiering explains, is known through revealed truth, and "[w]hatever the purpose of the universe is, it requires consciousness for that purpose to be a purpose" because "[w]ithout intelligence to perceive it, the whole concept of 'purpose' is meaningless" (82).

can be nothing else but to perceive the excellency of what he is and does" (*The "Miscellanies": Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500* 252).

In both Shepard's and Edwards' theology, the common operations of the Holy Spirit aid those who benefit from it by directing an individual's perception to what, in effect, is behind words and the doctrines and concepts they convey. Shepard preached on the distinction between "head" and "heart" knowledge, that a saint can catch glimpses of "things in themselves" in the spaces between words thus:

> Reason can see and discourse about words and propositions, and behold things by report, and to deduct one thing from another; but the Spirit makes a man see the things themselves, really wrapped up in those words. The Spirit brings spiritual things as well as notions before a man's eye; the light of the Spirit is like the light of the sun—it makes all things appear as they are. (*SB* 127)

Shepard states very clearly here that words cannot represent a spiritual realm that is more "real" than what the words convey: only the Spirit, as he says, makes "all things appear as they are," offering access to the perfect, stable idea of God's mind. In contrast then, to acquiring a notional understanding of things by report, the Spirit works in the present, generating receptivity to what is behind or "wrapped up" in the words and ideas that constitute Scripture and doctrine, referred to by Edwards as "signs" when they are used only speculatively. Though Shepard's theology undertook to delineate and characterize the difference between "head" and "heart" knowledge of Christ, his ministry would ultimately undermine the conversion experience by fueling a more disciplined, rational relationship to God.

In *Religious Affections*, Edwards would offer his criticism of the kind of self-interest inherent in the reflective practice of discerning and disposing Shepard esteemed for determining conversion. The faculty psychology of Shepard's day compartmentalized the faculties and placed emphasis on reason's responsibility for determining the will and stimulating the affections, one reason conversion was often thought of by the Intellectual Fathers as "reason elevated." That compartmentalization characterized the affections as chaotic passions in need of lawful reasoning to bring them under control. Edwards' ideas about conversion, however, grew out of a different picture of the mind which saw the faculties not as distinct entities but as fused, bringing together sensible experience, understanding, and will into the concept of the affections. *Religious Affections* offers, in its twelve signs, the ways by which saints may know that they have undergone conversion by grounding that knowledge solidly within the realm of affections which are the result of acquiring the spiritual sense. The spiritual sense and the new dispositions that attend it are, as Edwards explains in the first sign,

> no new faculties, but are new principles of nature. I use the word 'principles,' for want of a word of a more determinate signification. By a principle of nature in this place, I mean that foundation which is laid in nature, either old or new, for any particular manner or kind of exercise of the faculties of the soul; or a natural habit or foundation for action, giving a person ability and disposition to exert the faculties in exercises of such a certain kind; so that to exert the faculties in that kind of exercises, may be said to be his nature. . . . So that new holy disposition of heart that attends this new sense, is not a new faculty of will, but a foundation laid in the

> nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of will. (206)

This definition attempts to describe the role that gracious affections play in a saint's mind, particularly how gracious affections affect certain faculties. The difference Edwards draws, that saints don't receive new faculties but receive a new foundation laid in the nature of the soul, allows him to foreground the central conception of his theology—that conversion and the influx of gracious affections change how the faculties operate and that a saint can know their salvation through the "exercises" of a new nature of the soul.

Using analogy to convey this difficult concept, Edwards claims in *Religious Affections* that these new exercises are as the "inward tendency of a stone" as it falls and "shows the way to the center of the earth, more exactly in an instant, than the ablest mathematician . . . could determine, by his most accurate observations, in a whole day" (284). Or, he argues, the new sense is as if a "man's heart be under the influence of an entire friendship, and most endeared affection to another," directing him "far more readily and exactly, to a speech and deportment, or manner of behavior" (283). Indeed, the new sense implies a spiritual rebirth or deliverance of a soul into the new identity of sainthood. Moreover, *Religious Affections* is a treatise about *perception*, making the genuine mark of sainthood a distinctive new worldview. In a moment that anticipates William James, he calls a saint's rebirth a new "habit of . . . mind," and though for Edwards these awakenings are the result of a spiritual rebirth through Puritan conversion, the "room of the idea," without which conversion would be impossible, is an act of consciousness possible for all individuals including the unregenerate. Therefore, in his

notion of the "room of the idea" Edwards lays the groundwork not only for understanding how conversion happens in an individual's mind. He articulates a shift in consciousness that signifies the movement into new relations with the world through a newly acquired tendency or innate disposition possible for anyone.[21]

In the first chapter we saw Shepard admonishing his congregants to discern and dispose of the living acts of grace apparent in their experience according to an "exact rule of life" that the Lord provided. This method for evidencing the presence of the Spirit reflects Shepard's investment in the capacity of outward and visible acts to represent signs of grace and reason's capacity to provide certainty about these operations. In *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, Shepard poses the basic questions that a saint may ask about the conversion experience: "What is this knowledge or seeing of the Lord?"; "How doth the soul see him as he is?"; "Is it possible to know [the Spirit], seeing that a false heart may go so far? especially to know it in itself?" (120, 124). However, the answers Shepard provides are essentially the template against which his congregants are expected to measure and judge their spiritual states. He admonishes them to "learn to judge of your faith, whether it be of the right make or no," and he provides ample reference and example for his congregants to do so (129). What cannot be discoursed about (the actual felt relation to God during conversion) does make its way into his sermons, though he cannot describe it beyond stating that a saint will have a saving knowledge of Christ because he will know him "as he is." For this reason, Edwards' *Religious Affections* serves as a kind of companion piece to *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* because for as

[21] Sang Hyun Lee, in his book *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, claims that Edwards' recognition of habit as the force behind piety and consciousness is the "most innovative element in Edwards' dynamic perspective on reality. . . . Dispositions and habits . . . can mediate between being and becoming, permanence and process" (4).

much of an intellectualizing of conversion *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* is, *Religious Affections* is a feat of equal depth in its attempt to describe the *felt* relation to God. Furthermore, in making gracious affections the new relation between a saint and the world and God, *Religious Affections* becomes a meditation on the new perceptive capabilities a saint acquires. The twelve signs are essentially the components and descriptors of not only a saint's holy affections, but also her holy perceptions. Edwards' ideas about the mind allowed him to set forth a comprehensive insight into how the Spirit reformulates perception, taking up where Shepard leaves off when he explains in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* that "there is a light of glory, whereby the elect see things in another manner: *to tell you how, they can not*" (emphasis added; 235).

In a comparison of Shepard's and Edwards' theories of conversion, this moment wherein Shepard states that the elect cannot tell how they "see things in another manner" foregrounds an epistemological issue at the heart of the ideas about the mind Shepard and Edwards held. The theory of the mind's operations associated with faculty psychology prohibited Shepard from being able to say how saints saw things in a different manner. In the sermons making up *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, Shepard provides a map of the intellectual process through which saints can judge their behavior and their thoughts during the preparatory stages as well as after conversion. Yet, it is clear that the method of discerning and disposing, indeed a powerful perceptive lens, is applied to the spiritual state of saints whether or not they have undergone regeneration. Therefore, although Shepard proclaims that the saints' perception is altered after conversion, that the "manner" in which they see things changes, his description of their relationship to the world and to themselves after conversion remains founded on a dynamic of perception

that still consists of the intellectual task of discerning and disposing. Therefore, the exercises of the faculties do not change as they do in Edwards. Shepard's advice to his converted congregants, that a "thinking" Christian, understood as a judging Christian, is never deceived implies that how they interpret or perceive the world isn't impacted with the conversion experience, though they supposedly "see things in another manner." That Shepard does not or cannot describe the new perception could be attributed to the inability of his intellectualized discourse to represent the affective dimension of experience. It could also be attributed to the fact that the highly ordered, mechanistic conception of perception contained in faculty psychology couldn't accommodate or generate a new theory of perception resulting from a newly conceived dynamic with the world. Therefore, even after regeneration man's natural faculty for judgment remains unchanged and unchallenged as the primary way to assess one's spiritual state. In addition, it continues to serve as the only reliable means for understanding experience.

Because the exercises of the faculties remain the same after regeneration for Shepard, the sense and experience offering certainty to saints about their conversion are also subject to the same perceptual and epistemological process of discerning and disposing. In fact, the issue of examining one's experience for the signs of grace is brought up for questioning in both *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* and in *Religious Affections*. It was a concern because too much attention paid to one's good estate was the sign of a hypocrite. After Shepard explains how a saint should judge his experience against the "rule" the objection is raised: "But I look to Christ, I look to no work. If I have him I have all" (*TV* 224). The answer that follows explains that this statement is "true" but instructs saints to "first look to have him, to be comprehended by him, that so

you may comprehend him. But because you look for all in him, *will you look for nothing from him*? Will you have Christ sit in heaven, *and not look that he subdue your lusts* by the work of his grace, and so sway in your hearts?" (emphasis added; *TV* 224). In this line of rhetorical questioning Shepard takes a basic tenet of Calvinist theology, that the witness of the Spirit is all the evidence needed for knowledge of regeneration, and drains it of its affective and transcendent power by rerouting the new perception back onto the saints' experience and what can be discerned and disposed toward certainty in intellectual knowledge. "Having" Christ, as it is represented in the ideas framed by Shepard's questions, does not suggest a new relation to the world or a new perception. Rather, the anxiety inherent in this line of questioning reflects a desire to keep Christ close by "comprehending" him, to know him in the only way Shepard is able to express it—by examining one's behavior, thus grounding Christ's presence in the realm of the knowable, the graspable, the certain.

Edwards, in turn, addresses the role that experience plays in examining one's state of regeneration in the second sign of *Religious Affections*, stating that the "first objective ground of gracious affections, is the transcendentally excellent and amiable nature of divine things, as they are in themselves; and not any conceived relation they bear to self, or self-interest" (240). In this sign Edwards discusses the focus or direction that a saint's perception takes after regeneration and problematizes the conception of "experience" in order to define that new direction. For Edwards, finding the workings of grace within experience enticed hypocrites to

> rejoice in their admirable experiences: instead of feeding and feasting their souls in the view of what is without them, viz. the innate, sweet, refreshing

> amiableness of the things exhibited in the gospel, their eyes are off from these things, or at least they view them only as it were sideways; but the object that fixes their contemplation, is their experience; and they are feeding their souls, and feasting a selfish principle with a view of their discoveries: they take more comfort in their discoveries than in Christ discovered, which is the true notion of living upon experiences and frames; and not a using experiences as the signs, on which they rely for evidence of their good estate, which some call living on experiences: though it be very observable, that some of them who do so, are most notorious for living upon experiences, according to the true notion of it. (251-252)

In defining the term "living upon experiences" in this passage, Edwards places the perspective a mind acquires after conversion under scrutiny. Whereas Shepard provides a clear rationale for keeping one's perspective a judging or "thinking" one, to be watchful about whether Christ will "subdue" one's "lusts," Edwards presents the problem of "living upon experiences" in its complexity. He clearly states that a saint who takes more comfort in "Christ discovered" has truly received grace, and the sign of hypocrites is that they feast on "their discoveries." Looking for the benefits of grace in one's experience for evidence of conversion, which are the instructions Shepard gives his congregants, is for Edwards not the perspective a saint acquires after regeneration; in fact, the self-interest inherent in reflecting on one's "discoveries" generates the wrong interpretation of the phrase "living on experiences."

For Edwards, that saints look to their good works or take pleasure in obedience to the Bible, both outward signs of grace, does not mean they acquired a gracious perspective. Next, he provides yet another layer to this examination of perspective by admitting that the meaning of "living on experiences" is a slippery one in action, that some who examine their experiences for signs of grace can actually be doing it according to the "true notion" of the phrase. Indeed, Edwards' explanation takes several twists in direction in his questioning of the meaning of the phrase "living on experiences." By lending a confusing multiplicity to the issue at stake through layering the perspectives on it with the use of the fragments following the colon, the explanation reflects Edwards' belief that judging one's experience for evidence of grace is an endeavor rife with the *uncertainty* of mere glimpses or guesses at knowing the truth. As we shall see in this chapter, this passage echoes what is implicated throughout his writings, that meaning does not rest in discrete moments of experience served up as certain evidence of grace, but in a pattern of actions and perceptions reflecting a new disposition.

In this second sign, Edwards also begins to build his epistemology of the affections. He states that the second sign establishes the "objective ground of gracious affections" as the "transcendentally excellent and amiable nature of divine things," drawing attention to that new direction a regenerate perspective takes and, therefore, the new approach to the world and self. The new spiritual sense, in laying a new foundation in the soul and changing the exercises of the faculties, establishes gracious affections as the dynamic mediating relations between a saint and objective reality. These relations are the result of the affections, or a saint's "feeling mind," a phrase that captures the liveliness of the relation inherent in the new perspective. The power of this perspective

seems to reside in its ability to propel an individual outside everyday experiences of time and human concerns:

> A true saint, when in the enjoyment of true discoveries of the sweet glory of Christ, has his mind too much captivated and engaged by what he views without himself, to stand at that time to view himself, and his own attainments: it would be a diversion and loss which he could not bear, to take his eye off from the ravishing object of his contemplation, to survey his own experience. . . . Nor does the pleasure and sweetness of his mind at that time, chiefly arise from the consideration of the safety of his state, or anything he has in view of his own qualifications, experiences, or circumstances; but from the divine and supreme beauty of what is the object of his direct view, without himself; which sweetly entertains, and strongly holds the mind. (*Religious Affections* 252-253)

In this passage Edwards specifically characterizes the direction of a regenerate perspective and the effect that gracious affective relations have on the mind. This perspective involves a level of engagement that seems to collapse the subject/object boundaries between what a saint "views without himself" and the saint's mind that is simultaneously experiencing the object's "sweetness." The spiritual sense a saint acquires in conversion allows the faculties to respond to the power of Christ's glory in such a way that is aesthetic, rooted in religious affections, and that paralyzes or transcends intellectual operations of the mind. The beauty of Christ's glory "holds the mind" in a position of total reception purified of all earthly contexts, grounding a saint's understanding of objective reality in an encounter with the natural world that makes

"certainty" of conversion available only through an aesthetic experience devoid of the interpretive process and methodology inherent in discerning and disposing.

Because *Religious Affections* is an effort to describe the new spiritual sense and the perception that results, throughout the text, for every sign, Edwards consistently comes back to the idea that the new spiritual foundation laid in the soul allows the Spirit to dwell there, operating in a way previously unknown to the saint. Among the tactics used to succeed at this seemingly impossible descriptive task are the inclusion of excerpts and examples from the Bible supporting the argument of each sign, Edwards' famous use of carefully chosen words and phrases that surround and penetrate an idea he means to express from different perspectives, and the repetitive use of images and key words, used to elicit the *experience* of the idea he means to communicate. Whereas all of these tactics serve to undergird Edwards' descriptions of the signs, he also consistently returns to examples of what these perceptions and affections are not, and although he quotes heavily from Shepard's doctrine in his footnotes throughout *Religious Affections* to clarify his ideas, his response to Shepard also inhabits the main text through Edwards' continual critique of the "Old Logick."

I would argue that Edwards's description of gracious affections leans on Shepard's doctrine in these contiguously implicit and explicit ways. His tacit conversation with Shepard about the limitations of the "Old Logick" is an integral part of *Religious Affections* in that he continually returns to the idea that the new spiritual sense is unlike any capacity natural man may embody. In the first sign he explains that God may "move" upon man as he "moved upon the water," and so "he may act upon the minds of men [in] many ways, and not communicate himself any more than when he acts

on inanimate things" (202). In addition, this new dwelling of the Spirit differs from any "awakenings and convictions that natural men may have" because "[c]onscience *naturally* gives men an apprehension of right and wrong" and the "Spirit of God . . . helps conscience against the stupefying influence of worldly objects and their lusts" (emphasis added; 207). In the fourth sign, Edwards faces the "Old Logick" head on when he claims that the new spiritual sense, in acting like a new sight or perception, is even more remarkable than if a man who had been born blind "then at once should have the sense of seeing imparted to him, in the midst of the clear light of the sun, discovering a world of objects" (275). This last analogy conveys his point particularly well: having had a new spiritual sense laid in the foundation of the soul, a saint sees things that he couldn't before.

Of course, Edwards' treatise itself is an embodiment of the immense difficulties of actually describing the new spiritual sense. Though Edwards had the advantage over Shepard in undertaking this descriptive project, Edwards scholars have long recognized his struggles to express his meaning apparent in the treatise. There are, indeed, moments when he conveys the profundity of his idea through all the rhetorical magic of his language, but then there are times when his statements are simple declarations that attempt to capture the heart of the matter, as when he explains that "this spiritual sense" is "infinitely more noble" than "any other *principle of discerning* that a man naturally has" (emphasis added; *Religious Affections* 275). That Shepard's discourse couldn't accommodate a description of how "the elect see things in another manner" is directly related to his doctrine that intellectualized the conversion experience and the process of looking for signs of grace. Edwards' notion of the "sense of the heart" and, more

specifically, of religious affections offered a way to speak about how the elect "see things in another manner" in such a way that made "seeing" more than an act of understanding or comprehending—it made "seeing" a purely aesthetic response:

> [T]his holy relish is a thing that discerns and distinguishes between good and evil, between holy and unholy, without being at the trouble of a train of reasoning. As he who has a true relish of external beauty, knows what is beautiful by looking upon it: he stands in no need of a train of reasoning about the proportion of features, in order to determine whether that which he sees be a beautiful countenance or no: he needs nothing but a glance of his eye. (*Religious Affections* 281)

Edwards states in his preface to *Religious Affections* that he will enumerate "what are the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favor with God, and entitled to his eternal rewards" (84). The main issue surrounding conversion remained for Edwards that of characterizing "saving" knowledge of Christ. Receptivity to that "saving" knowledge also depended on tapping into a spiritual realm that existed beyond the bounds of reason and accessing this realm still involved the work of the Holy Spirit, but Edwards' ideas about the mind's operations meant that consciousness brought into view God's actions and thereby fulfilled God's purposes. In other words, *consciousness* reveals God's determinations in the course of our encounters with material reality. Shepard's flock would have relied on the power of *conscience* to determine which stage of the doctrine of conversion they had reached by judging themselves according to the "rule" of Scripture. A parishioner of Shepard's judged each thought and feeling to determine whether or not the Holy Spirit was at work primarily by detecting a sequential order. Someone following

Edwards, however, would have practiced piety through what he called "attention of the mind in thinking." Both avenues to grace involved a keen observance of one's interior life, and both had discovering God's will and glory as their main objective, but Edwards' "attention of the mind in thinking" removed the burden of tethering one's experience to a recognized doctrinal form. Moreover, because the ordinary work of the Spirit was operating in all souls—or consciousnesses—every man and woman had access to the spiritual realm "wrapped up in words" through the "room of the idea."

Edwards was, in fact, also interested in a sequence of events, but his theories about the mind made consciousness the "ordering" process revealing God's divine and natural operations in the universe. The theory that the material world exists only in the mind made thinking and perception the generator of truth. That is, he believed that the ideas "raised in the mind" in the course of experience corresponded to the laws of God's operations because truth is "[t]he consistency and agreement of our ideas, with the ideas of God" ("The Mind" 51). Thus, truths emerge when there is the "agreement of our ideas with existence" because they correspond to the natural laws of material reality through God's exciting the ideas in our minds ("The Mind" 101). Rejecting a conception of the world as constituted by individual things and substances existing independent of relations, as well as the Ramist logic used to detect truths among these objects, Edwards' new method of "attention of the mind in thinking" located God's operations within the mind and the detection of truth a profoundly immediate and personal experience. Edwards' idealism permitted him to esteem a kind of self-reflection that was a form of piety rather than a form of self-interest because the attention paid to one's own stream of thought was an act of bringing God's universe into existence and glorifying Him.

Edwards had drawn on Locke's theory of epistemology in arguing that truths enter discourse through the use of signs in language that serve their purpose in casual communication. However, he also asserted that the common associations related to a sign used in casual discourse do not, as signs, cultivate receptivity to new associations, arguments, or inferences within thinking and therefore within language. To reiterate, the "room of the idea" becomes the space of reception generating consciousness, and Edwards characterizes this "room" as the mental space given to thought "employed about things themselves." Here, Edwards uses the same theological terms as Shepard to describe a perception that penetrates discursive meaning, but the "room of the idea," which locates that space in consciousness, posits a new relation to the "material" world. Essentially, in Edwards, one views "things themselves" by the actual presence of the idea occurring when an idea is received with all its relations. This "actuality" implies that the idea takes on a materiality when the mind is stretched in a way that is similar to what Shepard advised when he preached to his flock to undergo the conscious and difficult task of "comprehending" the idea of God's love in all its infinitude. One finds this emphasis on stretching the mind's limits in both Shepard and Edwards, but in Edwards, the mind's comprehending work is not distinguished from the felt dimension of that experience. In conflating the understanding and the will, he was able to conceptualize a piety for his parishioners that granted thinking the power to generate a *total* experience of any idea, imbuing that process with the movement or conduction of the soul necessary to faith and belief.

He arrived at the concept through a consideration of Locke's empiricist philosophy, and it led him to ground the workings of grace in the mind's experiences

with what Locke called the "idea" of something (defined by Locke as "an object of the understanding").[22] In the course of our experiences with "ideas" (and the forms of language and concept they overwhelm) the process of codification is triggered. But, before that has happened, an individual encounters what is, as Shepard had put it, "wrapped up in words." This receptive moment for Edwards marks a moment of epistemological potential in the "room of the idea." God excites what Edwards calls an "actual idea," which he characterizes as an idea received with all of its relations. When a connection is formed between an idea and its new suggestion or association, we do not perceive the relation between the ideas themselves. Edwards is very specific on this point. Knowledge, he says, is the "perception of the union or disunion of ideas." The distinction is important because according to his logic, the relations between ideas exist before they become discursive, opening to view the mind of God; therefore, they are not technically perceptible, though they may be felt or intuited. Knowledge is not formed through the connections that we *discern* between ideas, but as Edwards states in "The Mind," it is formed through "the perceiving whether two or more ideas belong to one another." Wallace E. Anderson clarifies this description thus: "The perception of union or disunion, as Edwards speaks of it, is not the recognition of a relation between the ideas themselves, but a recognition of *the mind's own inability to act otherwise* with regard to them" (emphasis added; 128). This is a subtle but important distinction that Edwards makes about the nature of truth, and it rests upon the notion found in his idealism that

[22] James Hoopes tells us in "Calvinism and Consciousness from Edwards to Beecher" that Edwards was critical of Locke's claim that all knowledge originates in sense experience because this would threaten orthodox doctrines of predestination and efficacious grace: "orthodox doctrine of a merciful, saving change of human nature requires some supernatural influx, rather than a chance encounter between the right ideas and a man willing to attend to them" (210). However, what Edwards and Locke had in common was the belief that knowledge either exists in our minds as the experiences of "ideas" of things or as mere representations of things in the forms of verbal symbols, what Edwards called "speculative knowledge."

"[a]ll truth is in the mind, and only there. It is ideas, or what is in the mind, alone, that can be the object of the mind; and what we call Truth, is a consistent supposition of relations" ("The Mind" 48). Therefore, knowledge occurs according to the stated method of God's acting with respect to the habits of the mind and, because this is the method for how all knowledge happens, it forms the criteria for how *any* belief is generated about God as well as scientific and philosophical truths. Because we only perceive the union or disunion of ideas, our convictions about anything can emerge *without having arguments to support them*, and these beliefs are, to quote Anderson, "governed by natural dispositions of the mind" (128). Within Edwards' framework, "assurance" is a term that can denote the feeling of having "closed with Christ" during conversion but also of having perceived a new philosophical proposition. Assurance carries each belief forward because the propelling force is the same. Every truth, whether divine or natural, is made apparent in the thinking process itself which accords with God's stated methods of acting. That realm "wrapped up in words," which for Shepard contained the spiritual knowledge behind Scripture, exists for Edwards as a space in consciousness where all truths are formed, not only scriptural ones.

The "room of the idea," then, is the space in consciousness where God's determinations structuring the material as well as the spiritual realm are actualized and therefore realized. Through the work of common grace, God allows for actual ideas to be excited in those who haven't undergone conversion, and these ideas are the conduits through which saving grace is introduced. These ideas become, in other words, the preparatory stages in the process of conversion, equating an active, lively consciousness with piety. Edwards conflates the work of the Holy Spirit with the processes located in

the "room of the idea," thereby situating the conversion experience within consciousness and making the Holy Spirit the conductive force behind knowledge. Consciousness becomes figured as a conductive imaginary in which spiritual and philosophical/scientific truths unfold. It is the space that brings God's world into being through thinking and simultaneously leads to the indoctrination of new truths.

Edwards' idealism allowed him to characterize faith as a force of the mind. Consciousness revealed all of God's truths, material and spiritual, and the actualizing of these ideas and relations of God's universe in the mind of a saint meant encountering truths in consciousness as sense experience. Edwards adopted Locke's notion that we gain knowledge in the course of sense experience, but whereas Locke held that our conscious states subsist in the spiritual or material bodies themselves that we encounter, Edwards believed that our states of consciousness are immediately produced by God. In other words, sensory experience consists in God's communication of his substance to our minds. The "room of the idea," therefore, is the conscious space where God brings his world into being through his actualization of the world as it is experienced in our minds.

The experience of conversion becomes one aspect of the actualizing work of grace—it is the ultimate relation when the idea of God becomes to a saint more than what is represented by a word. The idea of God's love is actualized and, therefore, *felt* in the room of the idea during the moment of justifying faith, and as with every other moment of actualization, the space "wrapped up in words" becomes illuminated, and a saint is conducted irresistibly towards a new understanding. In the case of "closing" with ideas about the spiritual and natural world, we perceive the union or disunion of new

associations with old ones, thus we can *feel* knowledge happening as a sensory experience before it becomes discursive.

Because of the role that consciousness played in piety, Edwards would spend much intellectual energy describing this space that brought God's universe into being. As the conductive imaginary for truth, its operations, characteristics, and boundaries became the subject of Edwards' scrutiny. This chapter has attempted to show that Edwards' idealism supplied the platform for many of his reconceptualizations of and departures from the theology, natural philosophy, and epistemology of his forefathers, and I have noted the fact that as a part of his idealism Edwards embraced the uncertain nature of man's knowledge of God. The extent to which uncertainty played a role in the unfolding of God's universe for Edwards, however, is what marks Edwards as a significant transitional figure between Shepard and Emerson.

The testimonies of Shepard's Puritans provide a picture of that negotiation between an individual and his interpretations of sense experience that occur in the daily unfolding of God's hidden will. Because many of the testimonies capture the struggle to recover from the disastrous effects of migrating to the Bay Colony, they provide a picture of the knotty and often painful relations existing between a saint and the environment. These painful relations stem from the unassailable fact that one's spiritual journey was rife with uncertainty. This was a paradox inherent in Puritan spirituality—that no matter how diligently saints underwent the process of preparation and then actually converted, their ordinary experiences inevitably intruded, throwing up another interpretive hurdle causing doubt to flare up again. For Shepard, conversion was a matter of distilling as much uncertainty from the process as possible, to the extent that he shunned a preaching

style that would bolster the affective qualities of the experience belonging to the humbling, preparatory stages in order to promote the intellectual stability provided by a ministry focused on spiritual discipline. The picture of the mind that faculty psychology provided and the epistemological certainty offered by Ramist logic laid out clear rules of reasoning that attempted to shut out or deflect the role that uncertainty played in discovering truth. *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, therefore, is a collection of sermons providing a template for reasoning guiding saints in a journey to find stable, clear, unalterable truths about the condition of the universe and their souls. It was a template that provided an interesting theory about how the mind works, but in using this template to keep uncertainty at bay, it could not answer to or accommodate the ways that Shepard's saints were experiencing the world and their faith.

Edwards' idealism, on the other hand, in making consciousness the realm of God's universe, allowed him to recognize a kind of horizon or fringe to the mind beyond which existed truths that would become known through daily living and experience. His idealism created a horizon in the mind towards which our understanding should always be straining in search of the truth. What lies within the fringe may be beyond our ability to see or understand distinctly, but Edwards is very clear that this fringe in consciousness is valuable because it is the space where potential truths reside. Edwards' idealism would generate new "rules of reasoning" marking yet another significant departure from Shepard: whereas Shepard built a template for reasoning that attempted to distill uncertainty from the process, only recognizing it as a threat to the spiritual discipline he worked to maintain in his parishioners' lives, Edwards theorized that one should look directly into the horizons of consciousness in the search for truth. He would argue in

"The Mind" that the reasoning process requires a healthy respect for both the horizon and the need (when the situation calls for it) to make our ideas clear:

> It is no matter how abstracted our notions are—the further we penetrate and come to the prime reality of the thing, the better; provided we can go to such a degree of abstraction, and carry it out clear. We may go so far in abstraction, that, although we may thereby, in part, see Truth and Reality, and farther than ever was seen before, 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 to conceive clearly of the Manner of it. We see farther indeed, but it is very obscurely and indistinctly. 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: otherwise we shall be apt to run into error, and confound our minds. (50)

Because consciousness reveals God's hidden will through the vicissitudes of daily experience, Edwards "room of the idea" is a vital recognition of the *contextual* nature of perception and knowledge and the power this context has to move the mind. This relationship between perception, knowledge, and context is best articulated in Edwards' *Freedom of the Will*, written eight years after *Religious Affections* in response to the threat of Arminianism and its adherents' revolt against the doctrine of irresistible grace. The issue was a serious one for Calvinists because the Arminian belief in self-determination completely shut God out of the world. The *Freedom of the Will* is Edwards' defense against the Arminian accusation that Calvinism's tenet of predestination denied man his liberty. The entire inquiry rests on a couple of short,

concise sections at the beginning of the work spelling out a theory of perception and defining the will's relation to that perception. Edwards begins by defining the will as "that by which the mind chooses anything. The faculty of the will is that faculty or power or principle of mind by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice" (137). These acts of choosing are at the heart of his argument for the will's freedom and he is careful to enumerate the contextual factors that "determine" our choices/will. He makes the argument that the "motive" standing the strongest "in the view of the mind" determines the will, and that by motive he means "that which moves, excites or invites the mind to volition, whether that be one thing singly, or many things conjunctly" (141). To stress this point he clarifies that whatever the motive is it must be "extant in the view . . . or perceiving faculty. Nothing can induce or invite the mind to will or act anything, *any further than it is perceived*" (emphasis added; 142). Interestingly, these motives, or that which moves the mind to act is termed by Edwards as "good" or the "greatest apparent good."

These formulations underscore the characterization of the mind he began as early as 1719 with the ideas he began to jot down during his education at the Collegiate School entitled "Notes on the Mind." They build a picture of a "feeling mind" that seeks out harmonious relations to the environment. Whatever draws "the inclination" or moves the will must be that which "suits the mind" and is ultimately "good." Interestingly, by the end of these introductory sections, Edwards has dropped the use of the term "determine" to express the relationship between an individual and the environment and has replaced it with the verb "is." His final definition, that the "will *is* as the greatest apparent good *is*" binds an individual inextricably to the environment, characterizing human experience as

harmonious with the environment and annihilating, through an *act* of perception, the distance between subject and object in an intimate way (emphasis added; *Freedom of the Will* 142).[23]

Edwards' purpose in these opening sections of *Freedom of the Will* tends to focus on linking the will's inclination to the apparentness of objects in view. This notion captures the contextual nature of perception and knowledge, and his definition of the will (that it is "as the greatest apparent good is") makes experience the grounds for epistemology because all knowledge is revealed through the degrees of an individual's felt relation to God. Experience, for Edwards, offers the possibility of "finding out the Truth" because an individual can only have "a very few in view at once" unlike God who has "all in one view" and "perfect ideas of all things at once" ("The Mind" 52). The will, as the felt inclination towards one's environment, whether it is a prairie, a city, or an idea, moves an individual *by degrees* into relations with the mind of God. This movement constitutes a harmony with God's world manifesting as the "pleasure of the senses" and not as, Edwards states, the "object of judgment" ("The Mind" 44). This pleasure emerges from an unseen aspect of experience to which we respond on a felt or aesthetic level—there exists a "proportion of motion" occurring, for example, as a result of the pleasing vibrations received from a piece of music. The inclination of the will bends in accordance

[23] Claude A. Smith discusses the active nature of perception in Edwards' thought in order to clarify Edwards' departure from Locke in his article "Jonathan Edwards and 'The Way of Ideas'." Smith claims that the greatest difference between Edwards and Locke lies in Edwards' determination of the will as the greatest apprehension of good. According to Smith,

> Locke's view arises, quite naturally, from his position that man possesses no 'innate ideas,' since his mind is a 'tabula rasa.' Man acts in response to a change in his state. The notion of action as a reflex movement is suggested. Edwards' view, on the other hand, seems to imply a more active view of the mind. It is not simply the 'greatest good' which determines the will, as Locke had stated in the first edition of the *Essay*. Rather, it is the 'greatest apprehension of Good.' The view of man implied is not that of an inert substance dependent on external stimuli. Instead, the movement of the will depends on man's judgment, as well as the good apprehended. (164)

to this proportion of motion because the "organs are so contrived that, upon the touch of such and such particles, there shall be a regular and harmonious motion of the animal spirits" ("The Mind" 44).

Edwards' phrase for this harmonious relation to God is an individual's "consent to Being," a phrase that captures the departure from Shepard granting an individual an active role in both reasoning and his spiritual journey. This active role manifests as a kind of seeking out of harmony, as is expressed in a well-known passage from "The Mind":

> How exceedingly apt are we, when we are sitting still, and accidentally casting our eye upon some marks or spots in the floor or wall, to be ranging them into regular parcels and figures: and, if we see a mark out of its place, to be placing of it right, by our imagination; and this even while we are meditating on something else. So we may catch ourselves at observing the rules of harmony and regularity, in the careless motions of our head and feet, and when playing with our hands, or walking about the room. (45)

David Jacobson clarifies Edwards' theory of knowledge as a "logic of relations" by refuting previous attempts by Edwards scholars to claim him as either an empiricist or an idealist and placing him, rather, in a philosophical tradition leading to C.S. Peirce, James, and Dewey who embraced the pragmatic method. He claims that Edwards' concept of the "sense of the heart" does not represent some "vague emotionalism," but consists of a "method of judgement [sic] that conflates understanding and will in a new *propositional capacity*" (emphasis added; 379). Jacobson argues that in rejecting the assumption that reason can provide sure grounds of knowledge found in both empiricism and idealism

Edwards was able to develop this "logic of relations" by refuting the category of substance necessary to the methodology and claims of certainty inherent in Ramist logic.

According to Jacobson, Edwards wanted to establish a method of thought that understood proposition as relational, underscoring what is "implicated throughout his writings, that meaning rests, if not in a substantial ground, then in the effective relations—or the effects of relations—that can be observed" (380). Because Edwards identifies truth as a "consistent supposition of relations between what is the object of the mind," he places meaning and truth, Jacobson explains, "in the problematic mode," rendering assertions of truth as hypothetical or provisional. Furthermore, because the "sense of the heart" involves inclinations which are, in John E. Smiths words, "signposts of the soul," affections characterize the new propositional judgment as one that "has meaning only to the extent that one is willing to act upon it: a proposition, therefore, that bears within it the *conviction* of the individual" (emphasis added; Jacobson 383). It is, finally, "derived from the circumstances in which it emerges, and it directly responds to them, with an assertion of what might be, or more exactly, of what the individual is *willing* to suppose is the case" (emphasis added; Jacobson 383).

In the sixth sign of *Religious Affections* Edwards addresses this moment of conviction or willingness that, he argues, can only arise out of the experience of evangelical humiliation. The idea of evangelical humiliation is central to both Shepard's and Edwards' descriptions of the conveyance of grace and resulting conversion in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* and *Religious Affections* because, as Shepard explained in *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, "for though Christ will convey rich grace to his people, yet it shall be by love" (*TV* 62). The feeling of being overwhelmed by God's love was, for

Shepard, the moment when a saint couldn't resist the influx of grace, but, as we saw in the previous chapter, in describing that moment, Shepard held fast to an intellectual tradition, casting that moment it terms of "comprehending" God's love, an act of volition that undercut the feeling of passivity Shepard's saints were supposed to feel. However, Edwards states in the sixth sign of *Religious Affections* that it is only out of a *heart* overcome with gracious humility that "all truly holy affections do flow" (339). Because Edwards' theories of the mind and religious experience inhere within the idea of evangelical humiliation, the experience and the view of the self resulting from it are the most important indicators of a change in the nature of the soul.

Restricted to the experience of spiritual conversion, evangelical humiliation indicates a change in the nature of the soul for Edwards because the idea of God's love becomes more than just a sign in the room of the idea——it becomes an experience allowing an individual to observe his relations with God resulting from the actualization of the idea of God's love, triggering the conviction necessary to act on the experience.[24]

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[24] Being convinced or having conviction emerges in Edwards' theology/philosophy as a central idea. It is the defining idea in his works that describe a saint's knowledge and feeling of having experienced conversion. See the "Personal Narrative" (282-283, 294-295), "A Divine and Supernatural Light" (410-411, 413-415, 420), and the excerpt used here from *Religious Affections* describing the moment of evangelical humiliation. Interestingly, Edwards' section on doctrine in his sermon "A Divine and Supernatural Light" coheres around the idea of conviction in order to expound on the text of Matthew 16:17: "And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." In dealing with the problem of how one is to know whether grace has been experienced, Edwards first describes in the "doctrine" section what the spiritual and divine light is, explaining that it is a "real *sense* and apprehension of the divine excellency of things revealed in the Word of God" (emphasis added; 413). In the second part of the doctrine expounded, after Edwards has described how one may gain a real apprehension of the divine light through a sense of the heart he buttresses his interpretation by claiming that the doctrine of convincing truth—through a sense of the heart— is "rational." This second part of the section on doctrine, I would argue, presents (because of the traditional sermonic form) the most explicit defense of the sense of the heart on "rational" grounds in his works. In arguing for that *sense* that indicates divine light, he proves its reliability on grounds that it permits "difference" to be seen: "We can't rationally doubt but that things are divine, that appertain to the supreme Being, are vastly different from things that are human; that there is a godlike, high, and glorious excellency in them, that does most remarkably difference them from the things that are of men; insomuch

In order to convey the extent to which the description of evangelical humiliation demonstrates Edwards' "logic of relations" it is necessary to quote at length. In the passage below I have placed emphasis on those terms and phrases that cohere into a description of conversion capturing Edwards' ideas about the mind and the "sense of the heart," and ultimately, that dynamism occurring only in the liminal space of relation:

> But that is the nature of true grace and spiritual light, that it opens to a person's view the infinite *reason* there is that he should be *holy* in a high degree. And the more grace he has, the more this is opened to view, the greater *sense* he has of the infinite excellency and glory of the divine Being, and of the infinite dignity of the person of Christ, and the boundless *length* and *breadth*, and *depth* and *height*, of the love of Christ to sinners. And as grace increases, the *field opens* more and more to a *distant view*, till the *soul is swallowed up* with the *vastness of the object*. . . . And so the more he apprehends, the more the smallness of his grace and love appears strange and wonderful. . . . The soul of a saint, by having something of God opened to sight, is *convinced of much more than is seen*, that is wonderful; and that sight brings with it a strong *conviction* of something vastly beyond, that is *not immediately seen*. So that the *soul* at the same time, is astonished at its *ignorance*. . . . And as the soul, in a spiritual view, is *convinced* of the infinitely more in the object, *yet beyond sight*; so it is convinced of the *capacity* of the soul, of knowing vastly

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that if the difference were but seen, it would have a convincing, satisfying influence upon anyone, that they are what they are, viz. divine" (420). In other words, a will to believe occurs through inclination, or the sense of the heart (what James would call "passional grounds") and needs no other proof but its "satisfying" experience.

> more, if the clouds and darkness were but removed. Which causes the soul, in the enjoyment of a spiritual view, to complain greatly of spiritual ignorance, and want of love, and *long and reach after more knowledge*, and more love. (emphasis added; *Religious Affections* 324-25)

The passage is a description of the room of the idea in which the idea of God's love is actualized, thereby opening up a space where belief, or conviction, in "something vastly beyond" is generated. During conversion, grace opens to a saint a view of the "reason there is that he should be *holy* in a high degree" (emphasis added). Indeed, this passage demonstrates what James Hoopes has argued, that in Edwards, an individual experiences conversion when grace conveys the new idea or "reason" why a saint should be holy. Though saints may have a doctrinal notion of holiness, they have yet to *experience* the reason why they should be holy. It is a subtle but important distinction that a saint receives a new idea through grace. This view happens by the simultaneous experience of the intellect and the heart in conversion, for as Edwards shows, with the increase of a saint's "reason" for being holy, the "sense" of divine glory coordinately grows. That simultaneity leads the saint to experience the "boundless length and breadth, and depth and height" of Christ's love, an important descriptor of the magnitude of the love, figured in terms of sensory overload. The infinitude of Christ's love represented in the above passage was also the central image for Shepard used to prompt the conversion experience. Its use and unique placement within the three sermons thus far examined points to its role as a conductive image or idea, stimulating a sensory experience in the case of Edwards and the earlier Shepard and an intellectual experience in the case of the

later Shepard, whose particular presentation of the idea bespoke his emphasis on spiritual discipline.

The role a saint's perception plays in conversion is central to this passage in that the *view* increases as grace increases—a field of vision "opens more and more," emphasizing the highly active state of perception conversion entails for Edwards. It is an experience when the entire self, through heightened reason, sense, and perception, is propelled by grace beyond the normal bounds until the "soul is swallowed up with the vastness of the object." In fact, it is a saint's active perception, resulting from grace of course, that seems to trigger the transcendent moment and collapse between the subject and object. Yet, the collapse of the boundary, the transcendence itself, does not signal the end of the conversion experience. Instead, it prompts a new view that turns back on the self, establishing a new understanding of a saint's relationship to God through humiliation. Edwards explains that grace operates to affect a perspective offering the experience of transcendence which leaves in its wake a fresh view of one's "inside" because "the more he apprehends, the more the smallness of his grace and love appears strange and wonderful." It is easy to underestimate the role that humility plays in the conversion process described here, but the idea that transcendence necessarily involves a view of one's own "spiritual ignorance, and want of love" and generates a longing to "reach after more knowledge" of the state of one's soul is a figuring of conversion placing self-reckoning central stage in this theater of the mind. The idea that conversion leaves old worldviews, knowledge, and selves in its wake will become an important factor in Emerson's literary style and James' Pragmatism.

That moment of transcendence described above includes yet another aspect bringing to bear the feeling of conviction attending a "sense of the heart" Jacobson discusses. As Edwards states, having "something of God opened to sight" convinces a saint of something "vastly beyond," or "much more" than is seen. A saint is convinced of "infinitely more in the object, yet beyond sight" and convinced of the "capacity of the soul of knowing much more." In Edwards' rendering of this aspect of conversion, a saint becomes convinced, or in other words, *willing to believe* in the "capacity of the soul" to move beyond the boundaries of ignorance or old knowledge. The term "convince" derives from the Latin *convincere* and means to refute, convict, or prove, and if what is "proved" in this passage is the "capacity of the soul," then Edwards articulates what Shepard could not, that a will to believe can happen under circumstances, or in certain contexts, wherein the proposition is hypothetical, and one can, through a feeling of potential, and not necessarily with a clear truth in sight, feel convinced of one's regeneration.[25]

Because of his idealism, Edwards ventured a legitimate place for uncertainty in the formation of knowledge by permitting a space within consciousness inhabited by obscure and indistinct truths. This picture of the mind cast conversion as a continual process of searching for those truths, only clear and distinct by degree, yet representative of the next horizon of a saint's potential and therefore the direction the soul must aim for.

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[25] In his article, "The Calvinist Psychology of the Heart and the 'Sense' of Jonathan Edwards," Terrence Erdt looks at the doctrine of the heart's inclination in Calvinism, noting that "Calvin was aware of the danger of a rationalism lurking in the unqualified acceptance of faculty psychology" because the "Scholastics insisted that the authenticity of Scripture rested upon rational *proof*, but this was no more than an assent of 'cold reason'" (emphasis added: 168, 170). Quoting from the *Institutes*, Erdt argues that for Calvin, faith was a knowledge providing certitude beyond what reason could, "a conviction that requires no reasons . . . in which a mind reposes more securely and constantly than in any reasons; such, finally a feeling that can be born only of heavenly revelation. I speak of nothing other than what each believer experiences within himself . . ." (169).

Ironically, Edwards' idealism actualized Shepard's injunction to his parishioners through an instatement of the "vague," to use James' term for the "necessary condition for the exploratory search for new truths" (Poirier 42). Yet, that Edwards recognized the quality of the "vague" in consciousness as a kind of saving disorientation does not mean that he believed events were random and meaningless. In fact, his *instatement* of the "vague" may have led to his *reinstatement* of the testimony of conversion as the test of church membership. As a Calvinist, he remained committed to the idea that a saint could still testify to the *cause* of their conversion, and the ability to say *how one knew* they were saved indicated whether that cause was divine. Of course, that knowledge was dependent on the *perceived* changes in one's habits and disposition, an issue that William James would directly address in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* through his investigation of the role perceptions play in the structuring of belief.

Edwards' figuring of these epistemological and spiritual breakthroughs as sensory experiences that "swallow up" a person allow him to develop a theory of consciousness that characterizes the mind as spiritually alive when a saint feels, immediately, those old categories, signs, and unregenerate selves being overwhelmed and subsumed by regenerate ones. Assurance, that all-important feeling, happens in the course of the mind's operations when we are compelled by new truths. Piety has been re-conceptualized by Edwards as a saint's attention to the limitations of language, doctrines, definitions, concepts and other frameworks for understanding, and a godly person becomes one who is committed to the overwhelming but constantly unfolding experience of God's glory.

Edwards' recounting of his own conversion in his "Personal Narrative" captures the process of having been "convinced" of his salvation in ways that he could not understand, but that nevertheless provided assurance:

> I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God, and his justice in thus eternally disposing of men, according to his sovereign pleasure. But never could give an account, how, or by what means, I was thus convinced; not in the least imagining, in the time of it, nor a long time after, that there was any extraordinary influence of God's Spirit in it: but only that now I saw further, and my reason apprehended the justice and reasonableness of it. However, my mind rested in it; and it put an end to all those cavils and objections, that I had till then abode with me, all the preceding part of my life. (283)

Hence, the "Personal Narrative" does not describe a conversion experience demonstrating any orthodox notions of preparation or means; it is instead a testimony of "disposition," providing a reckoning of the new spiritual sense's operation in his soul. Edwards' own personal narrative reflects what Gura explains were the expectations Edwards would have had for the testimonies of his congregants when he re-instituted the test of membership: "there had to be reason to think that the candidate did not make such a profession by merely complying with a prescribed form. Rather, he had to signify honestly what he was conscious of in his own heart. In other words he had to speak to the transformation of his will that eventuated in godly actions" (*Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical* 154).

Shepard's saints bore the spiritual burden of having inherited a relationship to the material world overshadowed by a conversion process placing them at odds with nature in an interpretive struggle to discover certain truth about the universe and the state of their souls. Edwards' saints heard a different message. His message placed them in a relationship with nature conceived as what Lee calls "mutuality grounded in the common God-given destiny that nature and humanity share" (261). Lee claims that this mutuality is fully expressed when the regenerate mind, through the power of "imaginative perception" understands and loves material entities as images and shadows of divine things (258). In turn, Lee explains, the "book of nature" has certain advantages over Scripture because these "physical images . . . facilitate God's communication to perceiving beings" (262). Indeed, Edwards states in number 70 of *Images and Shadows of Divine Things*:

> If we look on these shadows of divine things as the voice of God purposely by them teaching us these and those spiritual and divine things, to show of what excellent advantage it will be, how agreeably and clearly it will tend to convey instruction to our minds, and to impress things on the mind and to affect the mind, by that we may, as it were, have God speaking to us. Wherever we are, and whatever we are about, we may see divine things excellently represented and held forth. And it will abundantly tend to confirm the Scriptures, for there is an excellent agreement between these things and the holy Scripture. (69-70)

"Excellently," "agreeably," "abundantly"—these are not the terms Shepard's saints used to describe the unfolding glory of their relationship to God's universe.

Edwards, however, found in nature infinite ways to relate to God. Human experience, and the variety and vicissitude inherent in it, was conceived as a valuable, indeed central, aspect to the glorification of God, and one's reception of grace remained an extraordinary experience, though figured by Edwards as altogether ordinary. Grace and the conversion experience become reinterpreted through Edwards' reading of Locke as "simple" sensory impressions on par with man's other sensory experiences but instilled with a new principle in the perceptual realm Edwards called a "sense of the heart." His "sense of the heart" allowed him to maintain a mysticism that prevented him from sinking into philosophical materialism: with it, the mind retained an unaccountable element that prevented the reduction of experience into a synthesis of data and systems of thought as Locke had configured. Edwards' inchoate ideas about the relation between uncertainty and conviction, which share a space in the "room of the idea" are pertinent to Emerson's interest in the changing notion of causality and what nature's creative force meant in the nineteenth century. The "room of the idea" emerges as a precursor to Emerson's and James' conceptions about consciousness as an ever-evolving, originating process whose continual production of perceptual truths patterns the operation of grace.

William James would say much later that faith is a "believing attitude," and as we saw with Shepard's Puritans, the morphology of conversion provided a way to maintain and understand their alignment with this believing attitude. As faith happens in the course of experience, it leads an individual to new truths or paths, epistemological and theological, creating new radiations in consciousness. Charting and making sense of these new radiations poses the interpretive problem because they create new spaces in between or outside recognizable modes of understanding, in the movement from one conceptual

resting place or paradigm, to the next. Ontologically, faith and conversion could be understood as a troping of the self, wherein conversion constitutes a turning towards new radiations in consciousness, leaving old selves in its wake.

Yet, conversion is a continuance, a development of a former self, signifying the constant work of self-reckoning and scrutiny needed to fuel the search for new horizons. Edwards identified a new spiritual perception as the distinguishing feature in regeneration, and *Religious Affections* is a spectacular feat of description and of searching to find the language for that description. The new language he found to convey what the new spiritual sense and perception were guided his congregants, as Shepard's ministry guided his, on their paths to sainthood. Edwards' investigations into the nature of our relationship to language made explicit the idea that language is the material of experience and the potential of experience, that it is both the means and the end of perception. Words, as the conveyers of ideas, simultaneously hold truths and carry us towards them, allowing us to spin a web of consciousness revealing both the connecting threads and the points of convergence, very much like the recorded testimonies of Barbary Cutter and Sir Starr.

Despite Shepard's attempts in his sermons to distill as much uncertainty from the process of conversion, the testimonies of his congregants prove, ironically, that though the Puritans lived within the framework of a deterministic universe, uncertainty was the defining experiential force in that process. Their testimonies demonstrate the impossibility of knowing anything with certainty, especially their own salvation, *because* language has shaped perception. Therefore, their struggle to fit grace into the limitations of syntax and grammar can be seen as a tacit affirmation of the experience of discord,

instability, and an uncertain universe. Edwards, in contrast, would identify the experience of indeterminacy as the necessary condition for conversion because the process of conduction between stored up truths and potential new truths creates a mental space wherein the optimal conditions for new perception exist. It is this investigation of the experience of indeterminacy that leads to the characterizations of the perceptual realms found in the testimonies of Shepard's saints, in *Religious Affections*, in Emerson's essays and *Nature*, and in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. It is the realm that makes it possible to conceive of oneself as a part of a whole, to feel both the harmony and the discord that accompanies the ongoing process of establishing belief and truth during conversion.

Chapter Three

Ralph Waldo Emerson and the "Universal Impulse to Believe"

In contrast to Shepard and Edwards, Emerson no longer categorized people as elect or unregenerate, but they remained souls/consciousnesses interpreting the universe, and their task in this world remained aligning their axis of perception with those unbounded "invisible infusories" and "ethereal currents" in an attempt to profit and to grow from an uncertain and chaotic universe. Emerson's essays present a world that "tilts" and "rocks," in which "all things swim and glitter," and in which all relations are "oblique" and "fleeting." Indeed, it remains a world in which one struggles to make meaning and to secure the truth about these relations to nature, each other, and God. Even so, Emerson would prophesy in the Divinity School Address that eventually our ability to cope with our earthly existence would arrive: "The time is coming when all men will see, that the gift of God to the soul is not a vaunting, overpowering, excluding sanctity, but a sweet, natural goodness, a goodness like thine and mine, and that so invites thine and mine to be and to grow" (82).[26] This chapter will examine what brought Emerson to this deceptively simple characterization of (and call for) faith and how his essays and *Nature* (1836) demonstrate the energy and purpose of a figure intended to direct attention to one's "constitution" because "In proportion to the energy of his thought and will, he takes

[26] Unless otherwise noted, all quotes by Emerson are taken from *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983).

up the world into himself" (*Nature* 16). This conception of conversion echoes the preparatory steps of the Puritans, yet it places *the individual*, and not the Holy Spirit, at the center of this ecstatic process in a position of self-reckoning that affirms the world as a nurturing, sustaining resource for an ever-expanding consciousness.

In Emerson's aestheticizing of Scripture, so abundantly evident throughout his essays, the idea of conversion in the theological sense is almost nonexistent. However, its absence as a theological concept and a term emerges, I would argue, as a force of language that, in the Augustinian sense, is everywhere and nowhere in his essays. Both Stanley Cavell's and Richard Poirier's scholarship have succeeded in clarifying the coordinately repellent and attractive aspects of Emerson's style which challenge the reader's experience with language. In Emerson's essays, as Poirier points out, circles represent the fluidity of his sentences because within their structures there is always a movement from the text and a movement toward the text enacted in the reader, an experience that ties a reader's conversions overtly to language. These "turnings-toward" and "turnings-from," as William James would later describe them, represent the process of what the Puritans would conceptualize as searching for signs of grace as the experience of searching for meaning in these "turnings" we have with Emerson's essays. When we read Emerson's sentences we are engaged in an intense search for ideas that feel, as James would describe, "hot" or "vital" to us which, in turn, allow us to recognize which ideas are "cold" to us. In this way we embark on a pilgrimage for meaning within his essays. We become immersed in the experience of continual epistemological regeneration characterized by Emerson as spiritual growth but explicitly tied to the growth of consciousness into new and discursive "spheres of thought" (*Varieties* 500).

This is a polar dynamic which establishes a pattern of perspectival transitions that Emerson symbolizes in his image of the staircase in "Experience." His question for the reader standing on the staircase, "Where do we find ourselves?" is no longer an obstacle, as it might have been for the Puritans, but a moment of receptivity and meditation. Edwards' "room of the idea" now includes Emerson's staircase, as it were, and the "steps" mediating the experience of grace find representation in a solidly "ordinary" figure.

Like Shepard and Edwards, Emerson hoped not only to enlighten his audiences to what James would call the "sick" state of their souls—to minister to his audience's spiritual health—but also to provide the means to access "the gift of God to the soul." Situated within this historical context, Emerson emerges as an avatar of the Puritan Reformed practice of ministering the conversion experience to his audience/congregants. Stanley Cavell has argued that the concept of conversion has been "reborn," so to speak, in Emerson's use of the word "aversion" and that this incarnation is inflected with the "discontinuous" aspect of the concept of conversion. Cavell stresses that for Emerson the aversive aspect of conversion creates space in which anything new can be experienced or said. Yet Cavell stresses that this rebirth also creates the problem of "unapproachability" regarding words, objects, and, of course, America, in Emerson's theorizing on the nature of experience and knowledge. Cavell argues that for Emerson, "if the world is to be new, then what creates what we call the world—our experience and our categories ('notions' Emerson says sometimes; let us say our every word)—must be new, that is to say, *repronounced*, *renounced*. In 'The American Scholar' this is something called *thinking* . . ." (emphasis added; 94). Cavell's analysis attempts to show why Emerson deserves the

title of "philosopher" so long denied him, to show "in what way, or to what extent, or at what angle, Emerson stands for philosophy" (77). Though Cavell does not historicize Emerson's concept of conversion, he provides a discussion of our experience with an Emersonian essay, clarifying the ways that Emerson's textuality draws forth a reading experience comparable to the one that the Puritans sought in using the revealed Word of the Bible as a means to grace. He characterizes an Emersonian essay as "a finite object that yields an infinite response," a concept echoing the Puritan Reformed experience of gaining access to the "saving" knowledge of Christ "wrapped up in words" (101). This intellectual/spiritual inheritance is embodied even more concisely in Emerson's essays when we remember that it was the Puritans who first went beyond Luther in claiming one could access the power of Scripture through the *reading* process as well as through hearing the Word.

Defining an Emersonian morphology of conversion entails articulating what Emerson might have understood as the "stages" of the process. Lee Rust Brown locates these "stages" at the boundary, or relation, between what William James would call "abstract ideas" and "concrete realities," what Brown calls the "edge of experience" that "cuts its way through the world at a point beyond the direct grasp of knowledge" (173). In this sense Emerson translates the Puritans' experience of God's "hidden will" into what Brown calls "secret" experience, which is transcendent not because it leads to other worlds but because it has not yet been codified. Our sense of the "edge," therefore, in Emerson's essays (and in our lives he argues) relies on our alternating intelligible and affective perception of the meanings each conversional—and conversational—circle generates by creating and blurring the boundary between what has been grounded in

discourse and what remains to be perceived. Indeed we see, as Shepard claimed, "but as in a glass," and Emerson's power as a theorist and writer lies in his ability to represent the conversional space as a liminal realm where every aspect of human nature is characterized so that the "divine" and "ordinary" become interchangeable conceptual terms. For Emerson, revelation is never distinct from the instrumental; the ecstatic becomes inextricable from common language, perception, and environment, and this fusion allows him to conceptualize the aspect of human nature taking part in the "edge of experience," what William James would later call the "darker, blinder strata of character," where we find "real fact in the making" (*Varieties* 501).

Charles Lloyd Cohen calculated the odds of a Puritan being one of the elect at "1000 to 1 against," showing that though "God elects but few . . . salvation [was] not a gamble" (90). To beat the odds, saints underwent the preparatory process, demanding that they negotiate a liminal ontological space: despite preparation's required focused introspection and heightened awareness of their experience in the world, doctrine told them that they were helpless to do anything to achieve grace, that the Holy Spirit directed all aspects of their coming to Christ in conviction, compunction and justification. In effect, they were charged with coordinating and maintaining a dual perceptual mode of active passivity—experiencing their own subjectivity through an active examination of themselves as the passive objects of God's power. Despite the terrible odds against them, Puritans were instructed to be obedient to the revealed will of God in the Bible because it was the standard by which they discovered if they were elect. The only thing to do, therefore, was to use all the means possible to become receptive to grace and the faith

that accompanied it, the role of reading and listening to the Word being the most powerful conduit of the Holy Spirit's saving work.

Perry Miller asserts in *Errand into the Wilderness* that an ecstatic mode can be traced through New England religious thought from the original Puritanism through Jonathan Edwards to Emerson. However, this claim has proven to be controversial because no direct intellectual line can actually be established between the strict Calvinism of the first generation Puritans and Emerson. After the Great Awakening, New England's Puritan tradition began to suffer division as Edwards and his followers in the Connecticut Valley defended "affections" as the central role in religious experience and liberals in Boston and Harvard College argued for a more rational faith. Emerson was Boston-born and though he rebelled against the reasonableness of his father and college, he seems, according to Phyllis Cole, "to stand on the other side of a cultural and geographical divide from the theologically orthodox Edwards tradition" (34). However, as Cole points out, if we look beyond the influences of pulpit and geography, the continuity of an ecstatic mode may be found closer to home.

In her essay, "Ralph Waldo Emerson in His Family," Cole traces Emerson's family lineage back to his eighteenth-century forbears, who were quite active in the fervent evangelical movement of the time, to determine the continuity of an ecstatic mode from the orthodox Puritanism of the seventeenth century to Emerson's Transcendentalism of the nineteenth century. Cole explains that the "eighteenth-century Emersons and their in-laws . . . stood in the significant minority of their region, supporting the Awakening even as Harvard turned against it. They publicly endorsed Edwards' major theological works, hosted George Whitefield's divisive preaching, and offered fervent sermons for

the conversion of their respective towns" (34). This spiritual strain continued in the family and thrived in the life of Emerson's Aunt Mary Moody Emerson who fostered an intellectual and spiritual knowledge of the ecstatic tradition in Emerson and his brothers. Cole claims that Mary's reverence for the saints of the Emerson family came with "a piety of heart that through life called [Emerson] to solitude amidst the crowd of modern friends" and sparked an "institutionally unaffiliated search for inspiration" (34-35).

Hers is a well-documented influence on Emerson, and in Cole's attempt to draw a line tracing the ecstatic mode from the original Puritans to Emerson she looks directly at Aunt Mary, showing how she straddled both traditions of orthodox Calvinism and Romantic intuitionism. Throughout her life she remained devoted to the strain of faith issuing from grace with Christ as the mediator, and it was her marriage of passionate piety and a "fatal gift of penetration" that Emerson claimed exemplified the "representative life" of the skeptic: she embodied to him the "precise time when the power of the old creed yielded to the influence of modern science and humanity" (qtd. in Cole: 40). Cole claims that Mary's lifelong enthusiasm for "seeking God in moments of joyful consciousness," finding "revelation in the mind's intuitions and nature's phenomena as well as in the Bible," led, ironically, to Emerson's "opting for a philosophy based on sentiment rather than 'bare reason'" (Cole 40, 44). In the end though, and to Aunt Mary's dismay, the "sentiment" he was looking for could not be found in the Unitarianism Emerson initially embraced. He came eventually to believe that this Unitarianism had become lifeless in its intellectualism.

Perry Miller's articulation of how the Puritan ecstatic mode remained a powerful influence on New England religious thought would support Cole's focus on Aunt Mary

as a cultural conduit. Mary would seem, in fact, to embody a cultural moment in which the division between Calvinism and Unitarianism was more blurry than distinct:

> The emergence of Unitarianism out of Calvinism was a very gradual, almost an imperceptible, process. One can hardly say at what point rationalists in eastern Massachusetts ceased to be Calvinists, for they were forced to organize into a separate church only after the development of their thought was completed. Consequently, although young men and women in Boston might be . . . the children of rationalists, all about them the society still bore the impress of Calvinism: the theological break had come, but not the cultural. . . . We do not need to posit some magical transmission of Puritanism from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century in order to account for the fact that these children of Unitarians felt emotionally starved and spiritually undernourished. (*Errand into the Wilderness* 200)

Even beyond the persistence of a Calvinist culture esteeming a passionate piety, of which Aunt Mary is a good example, Miller shows that the continuities between Edwards and Emerson can be found in an Edwards who retained the element of mysticism that lay beneath the dogma of orthodoxy. Though Edwards "forced into his system every safeguard against identifying the inward experience of the saint with the Deity Himself, or of God with nature," Miller explains that the imagery dominating the descriptions of his perception of divinity in the world betrays a sense of things more aligned with the mystical element of Puritanism (*Errand into the Wilderness* 195). Miller is careful to clarify that the mysticism he sees in Edwards cannot be supported by Edwards' doctrine,

only that it can be found in the "texture" of Edwards' thought, in the images and descriptions of God in his works expressing a wonder and awe at the beauty and life God communicates to everything in the cosmos, emanating divinity to each particle.

Miller argues that within Edwards' concept of God's divine effulgence lies the conclusion that "If God is diffused through nature, and the substance of man is the substance of God, then it may follow that man is divine, that nature is the garment of the Over-soul, that man must be self-reliant, and that when he goes into the woods the currents of Being will indeed circulate through him" (195-196). Preventing Edwards from formulating these concepts, however, was orthodox theology, set down in the Word of God teaching that "God and nature are not one, that man is corrupt, and his self-reliance is reliance on evil" (195-196). Nevertheless, the drive existed for Edwards and the Puritans before him, as it did for Emerson, to seek out a communion with the divine in the contexts available—in the howling wilderness, or a clearing in the forest, or walking through a bare common. The ecstatic mode persists, Miller concludes, in this drive, or what he calls "effort" to "confront, face to face, the image of a blinding divinity in the physical universe, and to look upon that universe without the intermediacy of ritual, of ceremony, of the Mass and the confessional" (*Errand into the Wilderness* 185).

The "effort" Miller speaks of, which is, in fact, the effort culminating in the conversion experience was, for the Puritans, and to a lesser extent for Edwards, highly systematized and institutionalized. Every nuance of the emotional, psychological, and spiritual experience was codified within the discourse of each ministry as it was revealed in the Word of God in the Bible. Saints had only to interpret their experience according to pre-existing descriptions and rules for interpretation in order to make sense of their

spiritual path. Their "effort" to convert, conceptualized as the *ordo salutis*, embodied an affective cycle saints experienced throughout their lives to reaffirm and continually reorient themselves toward religious life. Yet, as we saw in the Puritan conversion narratives, experiencing their conversions wasn't as straightforward as the *ordo salutis* made it seem because the saints' daily manifestations of faith did not necessarily correspond to the encoded process of faith—their *discursive* knowledge of the workings of grace often did not facilitate the *saving* experience of it. Ultimately, their perception of this phenomenon proved problematic because how and when faith was implanted and their experience of it were often misaligned. Knowing the actual moment when faith was implanted was impossible. Saints were told that they could have undergone the transformation and been unaware of it, or it could come suddenly and they may not recognize it. This is the epistemological problem Emerson would capture with the question, "Where do we find ourselves?" at the start of "Experience." His answer, "In a series of which we do not know the extremes," figures an epistemological framework anathema to the highly systematized stages of the *ordo salutis* by which Puritans codified the "extremes" of the process *and* provided a template for assuring that the cause of the process was divine. Despite the inherent impossibility of the task, saints were to stay obedient and use all the means available to perceive grace at the moment it was granted.

If we consider the experiential piety of the Puritans, as Miller does, by removing the conceptual frameworks maintained by orthodox theology, we may find that Emerson's notion that "man is a method" figures the complex role of an individual in the universe whether in seventeenth-, eighteenth-, or nineteenth-century New England. Essentially, the concept of man *as a method* takes as a starting point the difficult and

uncertain space that humans inhabit on earth. This idea was obviously written into the theological worldview of the Puritans, which stated that they would live a life of depravity and sin and that life would only get worse after death unless they discovered—through a methodological investigation—their fate and only possibility for true joy in the afterlife as elect. In Emerson, though the doctrines of original sin and innate depravity no longer applied, the world is dizzying in its amusement park qualities of tilting and rocking. In addition, "all things swim and glitter," and, as noted above, our relations with people are "oblique" and "casual." Emerson continually poses the question of where we find stability. His answer, in "a perpetual inchoation," provides little comfort. Yet, finding our footing in the universe becomes critical to our well-being and happiness, though these moments are always figured by Shepard, Edwards, and Emerson as temporary and only part of a larger affective cycle. In claiming that "man is a method, a progressive arrangement; a selecting principle, gathering his like to him," Emerson captures what has been evident throughout the formulations of man's relations to the universe and God within Puritan Reformed experiences of conversion: that the reception and perception of grace is conceptualized according to the theories of mind available to an individual and in which he is willing to believe, and that this process is the result of being a "selecting principle" that "satisfies" desire ("Spiritual Laws" 311).

That these moments of well-being are only temporary does not diminish their importance. In fact, these are the moments for which the *ordo salutis* was designed and around which Emerson structures his ideas about the human imperative to access the power available through the spiritual correspondence between humans and nature. This correspondence could be realized through our perception of the "higher laws" of Being.

In "Self-Reliance" he urged his audience to "obey no law less than the eternal law" and to have "no covenants but proximities" (273). And in his 1838 address to the senior class of Harvard's Divinity College he exhorted them to "Behold [the] infinite relations," to "Behold these outrunning laws, which our imperfect apprehension can see tend this way and that," and thereby, to become "newborn bard[s] of the Holy Ghost" (75, 89). Emerson recognized that our perception of these "outrunning laws" is at best fleeting and that this perceptual fragmentariness characterizes our relation to the world and God, claiming in "The Method of Nature" that a "man's wisdom is to know that all ends are momentary, that the best end must be superseded by a better" (124). These moments are where Emerson believes we find power and life, and for Shepard, Edwards, and Emerson, an individual embodies a *method* for arriving at what is essentially the experience of truth and beauty, the moment of transcendence beyond earthly contexts and their symptomatic fragmentariness.

In order to "confront, face to face, the image of a blinding divinity in the physical universe" Shepard's Puritans employed a lay technologia, a method of perception reflecting the faculty psychology of the day and certainly not given to moments of transparence. If anything "vanished" for Shepard's Puritans, as we saw in their testimonies, it was their hopes for discovering their election because the method, with conscience as the active, defining mechanism, could only lead to feelings of guilt and the concomitant revenging anger of God, a moment certainly conducive to what Emerson calls "all mean egotism." Edwards, on the other hand, infused the Puritan method bequeathed to him by the Intellectual Fathers with a "sense of the heart," a method of perception making the affections the central conductive force for the soul, yet allowing

the affections their full potential for that force because Edwards' idealism set forth a theory of the mind making piety the product of an active consciousness. In doing so he equated the strength of that piety with the strength of a "feeling mind" as it practices "attention of the mind in thinking"—an angle of vision turning the powers of observation back onto one's thought process in an effort to bear witness to the generative power of consciousness in bringing God's world into being. What is important about Edwards' call for "attention of the mind in thinking," is its ability to capture the essence of the liminal ontological space a Puritan inhabits when called upon to see oneself as both the object of God's grace and the observer of its workings, a space that posits those moments in consciousness as the prime moments of reception of grace. I would argue that Emerson inherits the idea of the imperative for acting according to the full extent of one's own consciousness from this Puritan epistemological tradition translated by Edwards. In Emerson it becomes the best way to insure that an individual is not thinking or acting according to someone else's script. When Edwards conceptualized man as the "consciousness of the universe" he prefigured Emerson's notion of man as a creative force within it. Edwards' concept of "attention of the mind in thinking" esteemed an epistemology that, like Emerson's notion, placed an "ongoing process of interpretation and recomposition, an ecstatic *method* of knowing," at the heart of experience rather than an arrival at any one specific idea or truth (emphasis added; Brown 88).

Indeed, with all three theologians, some method of thinking has served to characterize and esteem a certain idea of piety. Ramist logic set forth the method of "discerning" and "disposing" as a template for saints to gain certain knowledge about the state of their souls, and as shown in Shepard's *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, he

characterized a pious Christian as a "thinking" (conceived as judging) Christian. Edwards' concept of "attention of the mind in thinking" equates piety with our immediate reception and translation of emergent truths, and, as Cavell argues, Emerson casts thinking as the continual work of "renouncing" and "repronouncing" our experience and categories to make the world "new." Importantly, the central role that thinking plays in the theologies/philosophies of Shepard, Edwards, and Emerson is in how this kind of pious thinking increases an individual's odds that he will not be deceived, that the truths encountered will contribute to his redemption because, as James argues, "previous human thinking" has not yet "peptonized and cooked" them for "consumption" (*Pragmatism* 109). This is the imperative fueling the theologies and philosophies of these writers—to create the necessary means for having a "saving" experience propelling us beyond the confines of the words and categories structuring our worldview.

Emerson scholars attribute his adoption of a theory of mind and written style reflecting this "ecstatic method of knowing" to his visit to the Jardin des Plantes in 1933. But I think it is important to keep in mind that this method was intuited and articulated by Edwards via idealism much earlier. What Emerson found at the Jardin des Plantes was a new language for understanding and reflecting the method of nature and of natural historians within his own written work and investigations into the nature and confluence of consciousness and spirit. Emerson did not simply recognize that "ecstasy is the law and cause of nature": he adopted science as the *method* of knowing, stating that "because all knowledge is assimilation to the object of knowledge, as the power or genius of nature is ecstatic, so must its science or the description of it be" (127, 126). The ecstatical "state," Emerson continues, is a "divine method," for it "seems to direct 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" (125). Moreover, the method of nature, which is the method of thought and perception, cannot be explained or analyzed: "That rushing stream will not stop to be observed," because "Its permanence is a perpetual inchoation," and it is, in a moment echoing Edwards, "By piety alone, by conversing with the cause of nature, [that man is] safe and he commands it" ("Method of Nature" 119, 126).

The disjuncture of Christian worldviews occurs when one tries to draw theological parallels between Edwards and Emerson, because Edwards would never have claimed any divinity for humans that equated man with God. Emerson, of course, does claim divinity for humans, but this does not imply that the method for "confront[ing], face to face, the image of a blinding divinity" is any less necessary for remaining in productive touch with experience. According to Robert Milder, Emerson's "call to the soul" took on a revolutionary edge answering the "groveling materialism" of society: "The future, as Emerson imagined it, rested on a full-scale reorganization of consciousness even more transformational than Christian conversion because it led individuals beyond the orthodoxies of Scripture and the example of Jesus to a terra incognita of spiritual being that promised to remold traditions and social institutions" (56). Cast as an ethical imperative, the mind's reception to those higher laws Emerson claims "refuse to be adequately stated" becomes the agent of social change (Divinity School Address 76). In a particularly apt description of the altogether ordinary and quotidian presence of the divine laws in our lives, he observes that they "will not be written out on paper, or spoken by the tongue. They elude our persevering thought; yet we read them hourly in each other's faces, in each other's actions, in our own remorse"

(Divinity School Address 76). Jesus is no longer the mediator for the power of the Spirit, as this quote demonstrates; instead, access to it is as abundant a resource and is as easily tapped as finding it in a friend's smile. As Albert J. Von Frank explains, Emerson believed we have choices to make in this world about where we go for the resources that enable us to realize our potential as spiritual beings: "if we are not content to be colonized by the external requirements of family, church, social position, occupation, and political party—if we are dismayed at the thought of having constantly to negotiate the emergent conflicts of a multitude of incoherent affiliations" we must turn to the "access that we all have to things timeless and unaccidental, from the original source of life, or the regime of spirit, where, if anywhere, native coherence is, and the home of truth and beauty" (109).

This life-giving force is as pervasive and dynamic in the world for Shepard's Puritans and Edwards' congregation as it is for Emerson—one need only have the perceptive abilities, or "angle of vision," to gain access. Shepard's Puritans saw the beauty and truth of God's holiness after they had experienced conversion, though, as Shepard pointed out, "to tell you how, they can not." Edwards, on the other hand, attempted to do what Shepard could not, that is, to describe what these holy perceptions are after the "spiritual sense" has been laid in the foundation of the soul. Edwards attempted to describe how the world appeared to one who had received grace, and his descriptions of the delightful and pervasive emanations of God's holiness present a world not unlike Emerson's in the entirely diffuse presence of the divine. However, though this power is available to all, only those with the right perception can access this power. Even Shepard's and Edwards' Puritans, who knew the world consisted of "sheep" and "goats,"

and had to discover which one they were, had to *choose* to pursue the path that may or may not lead to the conversion experience. They chose whether or not to embark on a journey of perceptual alignment with Christ through preparation. And so it remained with Emerson: one has access to the "regime of the spirit," but that *access* requires an *axis* of perception that can only be achieved through a practice of piety or *method* that creates a saving reception.

This method is the subject of Laura Dassow Walls' book *Emerson's Life in Science: The Culture of Truth*. In it Walls addresses Emerson's turn to the method of science as a way to combat the chaos of materialism because in it he found "a model for thought and action in the world" (4). Through the method of science "the intellect seized the fragmented and unmeaning phenomena of the world and forged them into meaningful, productive wholes" (Walls 4). Walls points out that his revelation in 1833 at the Paris Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, prompting the claim that he would "be a naturalist," proved influential for his early science lectures. Yet what is unclear, Walls observes, is the effect of this revelation for the years following 1836, noting that in a journal entry of this year Emerson claims that he in fact "cannot be a naturalist, until he satisfies all the demands of the spirit. Love is as much its demand, as perception" (qtd. in Walls: 12). That love and perception combine in a necessary marriage to meet the spirit's demands reminds us of the twin elements of the conversion experience articulated by Shepard and Edwards, in which the "discerning and disposing" of nature, though integral to aligning the axis of perception, could not instigate the conversion experience alone. Affections, or the reception of God's love, consummated the process by making the reception of the Spirit "actual" through a felt experience of God's love. Just as Shepard's

Puritans knew (though they didn't actually experience), and Edwards felt, Emerson recognized that he occupied "the midpoint where love and perception perfect each other, attuning mind and nature to each other, detaching objects from personal relation to see them in the light of thought, and kindling science 'with the fire of the holiest affections' to send God forth anew into his Creation" (Walls 12).

In addition, Emerson was the inheritor of the Protestant theology imported by the Puritans to the New World and rooted in the science of Bacon, Kepler, Galileo and Newton. The scientific revolution of these men held that man can know the mind of God and posited that the "creative mind, whether human or divine, was one and the same," allowing man an "original" relation to the universe because the study of nature revealed God's divine will and Logos (Walls 43). Francis Bacon's contribution, in pointing out that man is the author of the book of Revelation and God is the author of nature, articulated Scripture's relationship to nature as one of lock and key. Walls notes that Emerson took from Bacon this idea that the book of nature was a "key" unlocking the mind of God and argues that he "took the next logical step, reading in nature the key to the self" (45).

As Walls shows, Emerson's American Scholar was above all an "interpreter of nature" in Bacon's sense, adopting science as a "quality of mental action" that "reads order into a universe that persistently threatened to fly apart" (34, 12, 13). Being able to read order into the world meant penetrating the facts constituting its turbulence for the laws and principles of life itself, the stable idea and the truths behind the flux, and Emerson's method for doing so was based on the Protestant theology he inherited which esteemed science, or the study of nature, as the key to unlocking the mind of God.

Emerson's turn to science for a method to satisfy "all the demands of the spirit" introduced him to natural philosophers such as Sampson Reed and John Herschel who were articulating an epistemology esteeming the imagination's role in penetrating spaces of consciousness wherein the "perpetual inchoation of ideas" took place. Emerson would recognize, as did Edwards, the importance of this liminal realm of consciousness, in which Emerson states, the "preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious" takes place ("The American Scholar" 60). This conscious space where "a perpetual inchoation of ideas" occurs provides the feeling of tendency in experience, the feeling of perpetual arrival at truthful descriptions of self and world. In *The Principles of Psychology*, William James would conceptualize this feeling of tendency as the "vague," as the "rapid premonitory perspective views of schemes of thought not yet articulate" (245).[27]

Natural philosophers were arguing for the legitimate role of imagination in penetrating the recesses of consciousness in scientific discovery and Emerson would argue for the central role the "vague" plays in what David C. Lamberth calls "gaining purchase on life" (72). Indeed, Emerson would have found the natural philosopher's attempt to gain "purchase on life" as powerful a personal pilgrimage as the Christian process of conversion. Lamberth examines how Emerson's treatment of the idea of experience in his essay of the same name argues for a definition of experience that does not limit it to "something we have now and again," but as "something we stand, think, and move both in and with" (71). Lamberth looks at the opening segment of

[27] *The Principles of Psychology*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1983). Hereafter cited as *Principles*.

"Experience" in which Emerson asks: "Where do we find ourselves?" for an image of experience conveying a sense of it being an active process:

> We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight. But the Genius which, according to the old belief, stands at the door by which we enter, and gives us lethe to drink, that we may tell no tales, mixed the cup too strongly, and we cannot shake off the lethargy now at noonday. ("Experience" 471)

Lamberth asserts that this figure of experience harkens back to the antecedent Latin *experiri*, "an active verb meaning to try or test, a usage bringing to mind both the benign and controlled notion of experimentation, but also, of a more religious front, the more tense trials and tests of faith recounted from earliest biblical times but also including those so closely attended to by Jonathan Edwards's *Treatise on Religious Affection*" (72). Of particular interest to how this understanding of experience ties into both religious experience and natural philosophy, however, is how experience, as Emerson figures it, becomes a metaphor for perception, how the trials and tests that experience imposes upon us cannot be dissociated from the filter we call perception because "gaining purchase on life" is a process in which our perception determines the contours of experience: "experience flows and interfuses, always changing making difficult our quests for vision and insight, groggy as we are due to our heavy droughts of lethe, the effects of which never ebb, even in the noonday sun. Experience is, for Emerson, the substance of our lives, but it is never radiant. We see through the glass darkly" (Lamberth 72). Our experience, indeed, flows through a "glass darkly," identifying perception once again as

the central problem for aligning our axis with the higher laws of existence. What proved most valuable in these journeys of discovery was, once again, a penetrating imagination that was always on the "edge of experience." The natural philosophers Emerson read were exploring the ways in which one could account for and best utilize the limited faculties available.

Emerson was particularly attracted to Sampson Reed's emphasis on the "active—as opposed to the passive—powers of the mind" (Richardson 71). In Reed's *Observations on the Growth of the Mind*, Emerson would have encountered Reed's definition of reason, which he carefully distinguishes from "what it was a few centuries past." Referring to the Ramist logic of Shepard and the Intellectual Fathers, he attempts to facilitate the extinction of that brand of reasoning:

> Syllogistic reasoning is passing away. It has left no permanent demonstration but that of its own worthlessness. It amounts to nothing but the discernment and expression of particulars which go to comprise something more general; and, as the human mind permits things to assume a proper arrangement from their own inherent power of attraction, it is no longer necessary to bind them with syllogisms. (73)

Reason's job, according to Reed, was simply "tracing the relations which exist between created things, and of not even touching what it examines lest it disturb the arrangement in the cabinet of creation," which is an apt metaphor for the attempt on the part of those who practiced Ramist logic to get a hold of those divine ideas to secure their knowledge of them (74). Reed is making an important distinction here, because he is using new concepts for terminology that had hitherto provided a mechanistic theory of mind.

Reason is no longer the intellectual capacity esteemed by a ministers like Shepard who grounded conversion in the attempt to secure knowledge. Instead, reason "traces" relations: it "measures the distance of objects, compares their magnitudes, discerns their colors, and selects and arranges them according to the relation they bear to each other" (75). This "hands off" approach clarifies that reason alone cannot provide the means to grace; instead, the work of reason is accompanied by the imagination, the "creative power of man," which "shall coincide with the actively creative will of God" (74). The pairing of reason with imagination endowed man with a creative power so potent that with "every approach to Him, by bringing us nearer the origin of things, enables us to discover analogies in what was before chaotic" (Reed 75).

These new conceptions of reason and imagination remind us of the epistemological and ontological frameworks of the Puritan experience of conversion, of the coordinate work of the understanding and the will, or as Edwards would have it, the understanding and "inclination." Edwards, rather than Shepard, would recognize and describe the life-giving intersection and dynamics of the understanding and will to a point that stretched the limits of his orthodox views. Sampson Reed, in turn, articulates a theory of the mind and conversion that Edwards couldn't because of the constraints of doctrinal ideology. Whereas Edwards tacitly incorporated elements of desire, choice, and the creative power of human consciousness to bring God's world into being, Reed claims these aspects outright, situating man's mind at the creative center of the universe, granting consciousness the capacity to recognize and direct the tendency of the soul. In a particularly beautiful passage, Reed describes the full aspect of consciousness as a conductive imaginary, echoing the moment in Edwards when his insight into the

importance of making our ideas clear incorporates the idea of a horizon or fringe in consciousness in which truths reside, yet lie beyond our powers of articulation:

> As our desires become more and more concentrated to those objects which correspond to the peculiar organization of our minds, we shall have a foretaste of that which is coming, in those internal tendencies of which we are conscious. As we perform with alacrity whatever duty presents itself before us, we shall perceive in our own hearts a kind of preparation for every external event or occurrence in our lives, even the most trivial, springing from the all-pervading tendency of the Providence of God. . . . (87)

In this passage, Reed recognizes the power that objects of nature have when in correspondence to the organization of our minds, but he also speaks of a kind of "preparation" occurring in the "internal tendencies" that crystallize in those correspondences, a "perpetual inchoation," as Emerson would put it, in the "orderly development of the mind." Reed's organic metaphor of the growth of the mind illustrates a perpetual cycle of correspondence, tendency, preparation, development, and correspondence, grounded in the shared work of reason and imagination.

Because for Reed all growth is from within, there is almost no distinguishing a difference between the truths occurring in the course of the mind's "ordinary operations of nature" and the truths occurring in the course of one's engagement with the Word of God. As Reed explains, the Word of God simply supplies yet another resource for the growth of the mind in its union with the "Divine Will" through "Divine Truth." In the process of regeneration,

> Revelation so mingles with everything which meets us, that it is not easy for us to *measure* the degree to which our condition is affected by it. Its effects appear miraculous at first, but after they have become established, the mind, as in the ordinary operations of nature, is apt to become *unconscious* of the power by which they are produced. . . . (emphasis added; 59)

Walls calls this an "extraordinary technology of self- and world-making" which is "available everywhere, not only in 'the sublime and beautiful' but in 'the near, the low, the common.' Every object, even the most mundane, is printed with the seal of God, and from any object truth may be unfolded" (42). Indeed, even the "low" and "common" hold the "key" for spiritual growth. For Emerson, nature is no longer divorced from self; it "*is* mind in its growth and lawful unfolding; and mind *is* nature, mind bodied forth in matter," and the vision of the world that this theory of the mind generates infuses the low with sublimity and when an individual is committed to the growth of the mind, perception becomes habituated to regard the low as sublime (Walls 33). John Herschel claimed that man "walks in the midst of wonders: every object, which falls in his way elucidates some principle, affords some instruction, and impresses him with a sense of harmony and order" (15). Reed in turn describes the sublime relation we encounter in the course of our "ordinary" lives, emphasizing what Emerson would call the "ecstatic" nature of man's method:

> As we behold the external face of the world, our souls will hold communion with its spirit; and we shall seem to extend our consciousness beyond the narrow limits of our own bodies, to the living objects that

> surround us. The mind will enter into nature by the secret path of him who forms her; and can be no longer ignorant of her laws, when it is witness of her creation. (81)

Emerson was drawn to the theory of mind Reed set forth for its articulation of the active role that consciousness played in its relations with the divine will. Clearly, the active role that mind plays marks the distinction between Emerson's method of communion with God and the Puritans' for whom passivity was doctrinally dictated as the mode of reception.

Reed was only one writer Emerson looked to for theories about the mind that helped him articulate his idea of "man as method." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Herschel, and Immanuel Kant among others all emphasized the active power, or "Reason," that the mind exerts in approaching truth.[28] Coleridge emphasized "Reason" as "an active power in the self that is capable of self-determination," and argued that it provided more trustworthy knowledge than the senses because it was rooted in moments of direct intuitive perception; Herschel considered the "nature of human creativity in science" and valued the "power to make discoveries" more than the discoveries themselves; Kant, like Coleridge, rejected Locke and Hume, looking for "primary truth in the fundamental nature—we would now say the deep structure—of the human mind," insisting that "we have more in our minds than can be accounted for by the simple accumulation of sensory experience" (Richardson 93, 123, 147). Reason, as Walls

[28] For a more thorough discussion of these thinkers' and many other scientists' and philosophers' influence on Emerson see Laura Dassow Walls' book *Emerson's Life in Science: The Culture of Truth*, Lee Rust Brown's *The Emerson Museum: Practical Romanticism and the Pursuit of the Whole*, and Robert D. Richardson's *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* all of which focus mainly on Emerson's turn to the method of science as a way to discover the correlations between the laws of mind and those of nature.

explains, looks "straight through the material world to the preexisting causal 'idea" of God," and to "comprehend this one generative idea was to comprehend how all the scattered pieces are actually united parts of the whole" (58). To understand the generative idea was to piece together sequences, properties, and relations to comprehend the higher laws predetermining all aspects of the material world.

Yet, reason had to be accompanied by imagination in order for the full creative potential of man to be realized. Walls defines imagination as "reason's projection into the material world *beyond* mind, the necessary mediator between 'ME' and the 'NOT ME' without which reason would be, literally, unrealized" (11). As the faculty allowing man to transcend his observational, intellectual, and visual frameworks, the concept of the imagination provided a way to account for that realm in consciousness where what Herschel calls "the frontier of knowledge" provides an inexhaustible resource of power. Edwards, who was stretching the limits of orthodoxy with his theories about consciousness, conceptualized this realm as a horizon beyond the limits of explanation and logic where undiscovered, indistinct truths and the bodies of knowledge they form reside. For the natural philosophers influencing Emerson, this horizon constitutes the liminal space where belief is negotiated and realized or, I would argue, *chosen*. Figuring this space was a cardinal project for writers such as Herschel, Reed, and Coleridge because they were addressing a cultural anxiety surrounding experimental constructions of truth.

Their works, like Edwards' and Emerson's, set forth theories of the mind specifically addressing how our convictions emerge from discoveries about the world as well as our own "vital and intellectual faculties." They demonstrate that while the

universe was no longer a Calvinist one, as it was for Edwards, the work of consciousness in the process of discovery remained focused on the process of creating reception to natural and spiritual truths through a process of combined intellection and intuition. In other words, it is easy to see the aspect of scientific discovery calling for fact and verification, but what these natural philosophers demonstrate is that science is no less an *affective* pursuit given to the same moments of aesthetic transcendence than religious conversion. This is figured in Emerson's beautiful image of the "private observatory, cataloguing obscure and nebulous stars of the human mind" ("The American Scholar" 63).

Emerson read John Herschel's *Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy* in 1831. It discusses the power that humans discover through the exercise of their consciousness and provides a template for gaining access to that power. Herschel's text is divided into three parts of which I will only be discussing the first, for it addresses the "general nature and advantages of the study of the physical sciences." In this portion of the work Herschel seeks to characterize the nature of the relation between man's consciousness and nature by articulating the relationship as one of "use." Moreover, he figures nature as an inexhaustible resource of "use" to humans, not simply for the discoveries made but for the *joy* of the process itself. Herschel claims that access to power resides in what I would call an axis of gratification, in that to the extent that consciousness expands to penetrate the mysteries of nature, its desires are met, and its needs and wants for further knowledge and power expands. The following passage of Herschel's describes a process of ever-expanding consciousness, of ever-seeking the inchoate conscious state, wherein views can "enlarge" once more—a "room of the idea"

to make room *for* the idea as it were—to satisfy the always already desire for more knowledge and power. This passage echoes that same aspect of conversion described by Edwards as evangelical humiliation, in which the act of self-reckoning registers the extent that one is growing spiritually in God; this growth occurs through the same "enlargement" of views carrying the soul into a collapse between subject and object, or in Puritan conversion, into closure with "Christ," which Edwards casts in the sermon "A Divine and Supernatural Light" as a moment whose power is felt as a "satisfying" experience. In order to capture what is truly the religious fervor behind Herschel's feelings about the act of discovery, it is necessary to quote at length:

> But so constituted is the mind of man, that his views enlarge, and his desires and wants increase, in the full proportion of the facilities afforded to their gratification, and, indeed, with augmented rapidity, so that no sooner has the successful exercise of his powers accomplished any considerable simplification or improvement of processes subservient to his use or comfort, than his faculties are again on the stretch to extend the limits of his newly acquired power; and having once experienced the advantages which are to be gathered by availing himself of some of the powers of nature to accomplish his ends, he is led thenceforward to regard them all as a treasure placed at his disposal, if he have only the art, the industry, or the good fortune, to penetrate those recesses which conceal them from immediate view. Having once learned to look on knowledge as power, and to avail himself of it as such, he is no longer content to limit his enterprises to the beaten track of his former usage, but is constantly led

> onwards to contemplate objects which, in a previous stage of his progress, he would have regarded as unattainable and visionary, had he even thought of them at all. It is here that the investigation of the hidden powers of nature becomes a mine, every vein of which is pregnant with inexhaustible wealth, and whose ramifications appear to extend in all directions wherever human wants or curiosity may lead us to explore. (49-50)

The axis of gratification acts as the engendering correspondence between nature and man's consciousness permitting access to the "hidden powers of nature." These investigations are products of each consciousness desiring to penetrate all mysteries in search of knowledge generating conviction. However, not all investigations satisfy man's curiosity. Herschel recognizes that there are places where these investigations are thwarted by limited powers of consciousness. He addresses such impenetrable phenomena as "*how* [man's] will acts on his limbs," and "by what means [man] becomes conscious" of himself as a "thinking, feeling, reasoning being" (5). These phenomena address what Edwards would call "inclinations": those moments of consciousness constituting "the immediate communication between that inward sentient being, and that machinery, his outward man" that move man through experience but remain a mystery because the connection between body and mind/soul cannot be known through a train of reasoning.

In contrast, Shepard's Puritans were asked to *reason* the connection between what they believed or felt and the "molecular action in the brain"—that state being the influx of grace, which was conceptually a *spiritual* change, but was also supposed to affect a

saint *physically* through a change in perceptual acuity. Shepard's Puritans wanted a bridge of *reasoning* in order to determine a correspondence between their thought and feeling to a certain state of their souls, which was figured as a spiritual metamorphosis, but had no less of a physical effect. The "power" Shepard's Puritans were trying to access could not have been attained, Herschel would have concluded, because they were trying to do the impossible, that is, *reason* a connection between their feeling, believing selves and the "molecular action" of grace on their perception.

Antonio Damasio shows that the idea of consciousness as an "inner sense" is a view that has been held by as diverse a group of thinkers as Locke, Kant, Freud, William James, as well as himself. Much like Edwards' relation of thinking to feeling in his formulation of the "sense of the heart," the "inner sense" is "selective; it is continuous; it pertains to objects other than itself; it is personal" (126). Interestingly, the definition of "core consciousness" Damasio provides relates to many of the questions and formulations regarding ideas about the mind addressed by the Puritans, Edwards, and Emerson in addressing the problem of conversion. We can hear in Damasio's description of core consciousness, echoes of Shepard's Puritans' problems with "closing with Christ," Edwards' concept of an "actual idea," and Emerson's emphasis on "genius's" relations to action:

> Core consciousness is generated in pulselike fashion, for each content of which we are to be conscious. It is the knowledge that materializes when you confront an object, construct a neural pattern for it, and discover automatically that the now-salient image of the object is formed in your perspective, belongs to you, and that you can even act on it. You come by

> this knowledge, this discovery as I prefer to call it, *instantly*: there is no noticeable process of inference, no out-in-the-daylight logical process that leads you there, and no words at all—there is the image of the thing and, right next to it, is the sensing of its possession by you. (emphasis added; 126)

And the same problem admitted by Herschel regarding the impossibility of locating the part of the brain that makes the discovery seems to remain a mystery for neurologists such as Damasio: "What you do not ever come to know directly is the mechanism behind the discovery, the *steps* that need to take place behind the seemingly open stage of your mind in order for core consciousness of an object's image to arise and make the image yours" (emphasis added 126).

Edwards had granted consciousness a place in his theology through the concept of the "feeling mind," which conveyed a more complex understanding of consciousness as the seat of the soul. As a result, the influx of grace, and the power a saint gained access to, was realized through feeling and not reasoning. Hence, Edwards' notion of the "new spiritual sense" laid in the "foundation of the soul" gave grace's influx a truly physical aspect by corresponding the feeling of the experience to a new "sense." Because Edwards was able to describe in *Religious Affections* the permanent changes a saint's perception undergoes after conversion, he came close to making an argument for a correspondence between the affections and a "physics of the brain." The "foundation" or "physics" in the soul is a new one, and wholly spiritual, but he articulates the new perception in *sensual* terms, rendering the spiritual in terms of new physical acuities in vision, and hearing, and the brain. In this way the experience of conversion, the influx of grace, becomes a

metaphor for the generation/regeneration of consciousness. As we shall see in the upcoming discussion on Emerson's written style, his dizzying sentences render the connection between what we are thinking (and being led to believe) and the physical experience inextricable and immediate, conflating thinking and physical experience in each moment.

Herschel considers more what man *can* know regarding his "sentient self" through reasoning, articulating an act of consciousness echoing Edwards' "attention of the mind in thinking." For Edwards one can become aware, through conscious reflection and examination, of the "ordering" process consisting of a train of causes that constitute the path of our experience. Much like Edwards in *Freedom of the Will*, Herschel claims that indeed the will is determined by causes, and the two men would agree that the will responds to an axis of gratification because, as Edwards explained, the will "is as the greatest apparent good is."[29] Yet Herschel is able to articulate what Edwards' Calvinism would not permit him to: despite the seeming determination of the will by causes, our knowledge of those causes actually generates *choices* and allows us "to act or not to act":

> when he contemplates still more attentively the thoughts, acts, and passions of this his sentient intelligent self, he finds, indeed, that he can

[29] Leon Chai claims that with Romanticism, "consciousness or the apprehension of the object (whether the I or the external world) becomes itself the content of thought" (2). However, I would argue that Edwards was articulating this phenomenon in his characterizations of conversion before Romanticism cohered into an identifiable "period." The best example is his description of evangelical humiliation in *Religious Affections*, excerpted in the previous chapter, which makes the apprehension of the Holy Spirit the "content of thought." Indeed, during conversion, both the I and God's love become objects of apprehension in Edwards' description of evangelical humiliation. Though, of course, Edwards would never have claimed the power of creation for man, he was engaged in what Chai claims are Romantic pursuits, such as "the identification of subjective and objective," signifying "the possibility not only of apprehension, the connection or relation of things, but of creation, the formation of the external world through the formation of thought, and consciousness" (2). Edwards ascribed creative powers to man by claiming that consciousness brought God's world into being through thinking though they were not technically Romantic in the way that Romanticism hinged on a "deep subjectivizing tendency" (9).

> remember, and by the aid of memory can compare and discriminate, can judge and resolve, and, above all, that he is irresistibly impelled, from the perception of any phenomenon without or within him, to infer the existence of something prior which stands to it in the relation of a cause, without which it would not be, and that this knowledge of causes and their consequences is what . . . determines his choice and will, in cases where he is conscious of perfect freedom to act or not to act. (6)

Herschel, like Edwards, recognized the contextual nature of the freedom of the will, grounding its "inclinations" in the "perception of any phenomenon without or within him," maintaining that it was within the act of attention that the "world within him is thus opened to his intellectual view, abounding with phenomena and relations, and of the highest immediate interest," and by these views one is made to continually realize that "this *internal sphere of thought and feeling* is in reality the source of all his power" (emphasis added; 6).

Also within these men's conceptions of the space of consciousness there is always the fringe and horizon beyond which investigation can reach because ideas are as yet too "abstracted," as Edwards would say. Herschel calls it the "frontier of knowledge," affording a "distant glimpse of boundless realm beyond, where no human thought has penetrated, but which yet he is sure must be no less familiarly known to that Intelligence which he traces throughout creation than the most obvious truths which he himself daily applies to his most trifling purposes" (7). Within this outer space of consciousness, beyond the horizon of what can be distinguished or tested as a truth lie those indiscernible or *vague* truths because they are as yet unformed. Emerson would take up

this project of the *instatement* of the vague in theories of the mind, drawing connections between the role it plays in perception and, therefore, epistemology. It is why, as Robert D. Richardson shows, Emerson held that "it is always the instructed eye, not the object seen, that gives the highest delight, that connects us with the world," and that it is "for this reason his favorite symbol for inquiry and knowledge and wisdom was the image of the active eye" (154). For Shepard and Edwards the trope and the goal are the same: to "see" things "as they are," to see what is "really wrapped up in those words" and penetrate beyond the limitations of signs and static concepts. And in order to align the axis of their congregations' views correctly, it was their role as ministers to "instruct" them and inculcate a habit of mind equating piety with an active, lively consciousness. Walls claims that Emerson read in Reed's *Observations on the Growth of the Mind* that "the mind's essential characteristic lay in its 'power of acquiring and retaining truth,' which was achieved only by active and continual exertion" (16). Indeed, Emerson came upon this idea in Reed, but this notion had already been articulated in Reformed theology and had been a defining experience in New England culture since the Puritans transplanted the doctrine of preparation and exhorted their flocks to "comprehend" the infinitude of God's love and wisdom.

William James would say much later that the "sustaining of a thought when I choose to—this is a legitimate exercise of the 'will to believe.'" In contrast, Shepard's Puritans were denied the concept of "sustaining" the thoughts/feelings they had that might have led them to experience the power available through a feeling of grace because Shepard ministered a spiritual discipline esteeming the habit of synteresis: the work of conscience and its continual judgments could not conduct them towards grace. Edwards

could, on the other hand, begin to conceive consciousness as containing the dynamics that made "sustaining" a thought possible. His notions of the "room of the idea," the "sense of the heart," an "actual idea," and "attention of the mind in thinking" were all ways for him to conceptualize consciousness as a conductive imaginary whose role in conversion was to sustain the activity of a "feeling mind" in forming conviction. As in the works of Edwards, Reed, and Herschel, the sustaining of a thought when one chooses creates not only the axis of gratification, but generates the inclination of the will to fulfill that desire.

The freedom and ability to sustain a thought, to allow the combination of intellect and imagination/intuition access to see things "as they are," has relied, in Shepard and Edwards, and remains so in Emerson, on an individual's commitment and constant "exertion" of his consciousness in exceeding frameworks of understanding encoded by language to penetrate the abstractions "wrapped up in words." As such, those indistinct truths laying at the edge of consciousness constitute the place of the vague in which one is encouraged, in all three theologians' works, to establish the feeling of relations to those emergent truths through creative reasoning. Consciousness remained for Emerson a discursive medium, a collection of known truths and bodies of knowledge holding the potential for growth beyond those frames to become closer to God. For Shepard, Edwards, and Emerson the effort to see what is "wrapped up in words" entailed "converting world into mind" and "knowledge into power" by becoming an interpreter of nature (Walls 34).

One of the "means" by which the world was converted into truth was the very language Shepard, Edwards, and Emerson used to help their audiences see what was

"wrapped up" in the words they were using. I have discussed to what extent Shepard's ministry was unsuccessful at e/affecting conversion through a disciplined search for certainty of spiritual knowledge, whereas Edwards incorporated a liminal space in consciousness—a place of the vague—in his theory of consciousness, rendering glimpses of truth the engine of spiritual discovery and the "sense of the heart" the entry point of those glimpses. Walls claims that Emerson's turn to science was in itself a deliberate move to get "beyond the perishable language of men and things, and enter directly the mind of God" (25). He attempted to do this, Walls notes, through "endless metaphorical play," sifting the universe "through bits of itself, until the point was clearly to arrive at no one triumphant solvent metaphor but at the metaphorical relationship itself" (25).

This kind of thinking renders truth "not an essence but a relationship between bodied beings" or "a way of living in a universe in which every relationship is a dynamic balance of mutually destabilizing opposites" (Walls 27). Metaphor in Emerson becomes a vehicle for sustaining thought in that imaginative space suspending truth in formation, propelling an investigator beyond static notions into a conscious space requiring the same ontological state of active passivity the Puritans embodied in their receptivity to grace. The original relations established through what Donald Pease calls the "metaphorizing power" are nothing less than moments of conviction in the process of discovery when new truths are experienced relationally through the inclination of the will (qtd. in Walls: 25).

Anyone who "reads" Emerson understands how his sentences force his audience into a certain mode of experiencing his ideas that disrupt familiar reading habits. One needs, in the spirit of the "metaphorizing power" to *figure* them out, as it were. One

cannot read them in the standard linear fashion. Instead, his audience must become habituated to a thinking process enacting the process of discovery described by Reed and Herschel—becoming readers/natural philosophers who turn to their powers of reasoning and imagination to make meaning out of what often feels like the chaos of his sentences. Emerson writes so that his readers will need to *find* the truths of what he says through the same process that a scientist undertakes—by becoming comfortable with the nature of investigation and the constant feeling of being lost in the place of abstraction or the "vague."

For Edwards, conversion hinged on the blurry views afforded by "something that is seen that is wonderful" because they indicated the direction of the soul.[30] These views of *something* result from actual ideas stimulated in the thinking process precisely because they generated the relations establishing new horizons in scientific, philosophical and spiritual worldviews. In Edwards's formulation, the soul is constantly moving into these views, feeling its way in the relations that channel the will to believe in the "something" emerging from the vague. As shown in the previous chapter, Edwards held that conviction about both scientific and spiritual truths often crystallized in consciousness without evidence or proof to support the feelings of conviction. In fact, Edwards' discussions of "actual ideas" and the "sense of the heart" set forth the anti-intellectualist theory that an aesthetic response to the beauty of an idea and the "satisfaction" of that

[30] Shepard's Puritans, however, were uncomfortable with blurry views of anything because they desired certitude. They desired accuracy in perception, to know that the phantasms generated in their minds mirrored the thing in nature. The logic of invention was an attempt to overcome their human fallibility, to overcome inaccuracy in the interpretation of sensory input. Perry Miller clarifies that "Sinful man tries all his life to see things as they are, to apprehend truth and to act by it, but at every endeavor his senses blur, his imagination deceives, his reason fails, his will rebels, his passions run riot" (284). For Edwards and Emerson, the blur of our human context became a valuable aspect of experience, a potent moment for access to the divine will and belief.

experience are enough "proof" of its validity to carry the soul into new relations with God and the world.

Emerson scholars, in turn, have explored the central role these blurry views of emergent meaning play in what Eduardo Cadava notes is Emerson's concern with the "unknown effects produced by politics, history, rhetoric, or nature" (emphasis added; 11-12). Cadava takes a look at how Emerson's use of language engages "changing historical and political relations" to "alter and set in motion" those "shifting domains of history and politics" through a "mobilization of terms from one context to another" (21). Cadava argues that Emerson's use of the shifting contexts raises awareness of how language "conditions the possibility of what we call history and politics," urging readers to "begin to account for how language works historically to establish reference and meaning" (21). Therefore, reading Emerson is a lesson in the relations between the transitory and the permanent. Cadava shows that Emerson's pervasive referencing of the weather reflects his desire to inscribe within the movement of his language the very unpredictability of nature and "to trace the permanency of the infinite variability that makes nature nature" (2). As such, the transitoriness of Emerson's language, reflecting the "ecstatic" method of nature, registers not only the movements of the thinking process, but the *limits* of that process as well. Cadava takes as his point of departure the fact that the word *climate* is derived from the ancient Greek word *klima*, which refers not only to a latitudinal zone but an "inclination" or "slope." Climate, he argues, "refers to both what falls from the sky and what falls away from the understanding" (4). Cadava's insight brings us back to what appears to be the joint imperative of Edwards and Emerson—to lead us toward the "something" that is incalculable or uncontrollable. Cadava does not say whether Edwards

knew that the ancient Greek root for *climate* was *klima*, denoting an inclination, but that he uses the word *inclination* to describe the movement of the will away from the understanding and toward abstraction and theorizes that the movement is grounded in the soul's context, suggests Emerson's willingness to conceptualize the terms of thinking as *atmospheric*.

Cadava shows how Emerson's figuring of his use of language as the movement of nature enacts a process of transformation meant to encourage a rethinking of our relations to "politics, history, rhetoric, or nature." These transformations "mobiliz[ing] terms from one shifting context to another" draw our attention to the way these terms mean in their differing contexts and realign our relations to those terms whose previous context had heretofore determined their meanings. Extricating certain terms from history and putting them back into play undermines the power history and its contexts hold to determine how we think. Cadava presents Emerson's imperative:

> if we are to lessen the chances that we will simply repeat the structures of authority we seek to change, we must try to understand the genealogy of the language we use—we must try to understand the history that is sealed within this language and which, if not taken into account, may align us without our knowing it with positions we oppose. (6)

Yet, here again, Edwards emerges as a figure who had divined the need to re-circulate terms and ideas in order to "give a new direction and purpose to fragments of the past" (7).[31] Edwards's *Religious Affections* is an explicit demonstration of this effort

[31] Lawrence Buell contributes to this discussion of Emerson's desire to keep ideas in circulation when he argues that the "barrage of aphorisms" found throughout Transcendentalist style, what he calls "catalogue

to "give a new direction and purpose to fragments of the past." Whereas Emerson's sentences provide the shifting contexts needed to rethink an idea, Edwards' extensive quoting of Shepard combined with his efforts to articulate conversion according to the new concepts of idealism allowed Edwards to "trope" Calvinist doctrine and terminology in the way that Richard Poirier attributes to the Emersonian Pragmatists he discusses in *Poetry and Pragmatism*. Edwards' quotes from Shepard are literally textual "fragments" from seventeenth-century New England he takes up to put back into circulation. Moreover, as with all troping, Cadava notes, "the new can only be new, really new, if it is produced through memory and repetition—but a memory and repetition which at the same time introduce a new element" (5). The quotes from Shepard not only serve as points of departure for Edwards, they also ground his idealism in the Calvinist doctrine to which he remained devoted. In other words, they provided a stable doctrinal platform in which he could root and justify his new terms and concepts. An "actual idea," the "sense of the heart," and a "feeling mind" all became the tropings and inflections of the idea of conversion Edwards would use to make the doctrine of grace *his* own: "Every age must write their own books [sic]" Emerson would say, and Edwards was the embodiment of this ideal, writing *the* philosophical and theological treatises for his age.

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rhetoric," an "inherently 'democratic' technique" because it "suggests the vast, sprawling, loose-knit country which America is" and that it "also adheres to a sort of prosodic equalitarianism: each line or image is of equal weight in the ensemble; each is a unit unto itself" (167). Considering the arguments that Cadava and Poirier make, that his sentences force us to make sense of words and ideas for ourselves, Emerson's style figures a population of "loose-knit" individuals employing the creative power of mind to organize chaos into meaning. His style would create the embodiment of moral law, what Emerson felt would hold America together. Walls explains that it was the job of society's intellectuals "to stem the advancing tide of skepticism through public interventions—sermons, lectures, articles, essays, books—in a campaign of popular education and recruitment. . . . Moral law directed the flow of energy and imagination away from individual isolation and atomism and toward wholeness and unity, but this flow would disperse into droplets unless everyone was similarly directed, converging through individual instances of active choice toward a society unified in law, . . . [a] democracy without mobs" (7).

Yet Edwards did not only write the books of his age, delivering the concept of conversion back to saints anew with terms informed by his idealism; the new concepts of an "actual idea," the "sense of the heart," and a "feeling mind" transformed the act of conversion into the conscious experience of rethinking and realigning (or repronouncing and renouncing) one's relation to the "politics, history, rhetoric, and nature" Cadava claims Emerson's sentences would enact. Granted, Edwards would not have conceived of religious conversion as a rethinking of one's relation to any one of these earthly contexts because conversion was still safely anchored to the doctrine of grace, but in situating the reception of grace and the will to believe within an act of consciousness that *felt* like the paradigm shifts resulting from scientific and philosophical acts of imagination and discovery, he located the power for personal and cultural renewal within consciousness, understood as a pious receptor of the higher laws of God. Conversion for Edwards denoted the rebirth of the soul into Christ, but the same act of consciousness also stimulated a saint into rethinking his relation to both nature and history, thereby conducting the soul into new worldviews and new identities based on the projection of the self into these new worldviews.

Edwards' sensitivity to the nexus of language, perception, and truth places him in a direct line with his predecessor Shepard—it was a minister's calling to calculate the effects of the intermingling of these and other nuances of Calvinist theology. Shepard certainly enforced spiritual discipline through his ministry, and Edwards sparked the Great Awakening. In turn, Emerson's own work as an essayist and lecturer takes up this ministerial calling in tending to the health of America's souls. Emerson's articulation of the intersection of language, perception, and truth, that intersection being the *soul*, can be

found in the essay "Circles." Richard Poirier sums up the dynamic as a "discursive formation," what a good minister would be a master at controlling:

> 'Circles' in Emerson are equivalent to what are now sometimes referred to as 'discursive formations.' Neither of these is to be confused with pacified versions that go by the name of 'shared' or 'communal assumptions.' A 'circle' or discursive formation does far more than passively reflect or represent some form of truth or knowledge presumed to be external to it. Rather, an Emersonian 'circle,' like a Foucauldian 'discursive formation,' actively creates truths and knowledge and then subtly enforces their distribution. It follows that truths and systems of knowledge are to be viewed as in themselves contingent, like other convenient fictions, and scarcely worse, if you are an Emersonian pragmatist, for being so. It is fictions that give us hope. Among those forms of knowledge or truth created by an Emersonian 'circle' is knowledge by any individual of its sense of identity and selfhood, along with the language by which that self is codified or becomes articulate. More significant still, a 'circle' also determines the vocabulary by which the self learns to resist its own sense of identity, especially since that identity should be recognized as, in part, an imposed one. (23)

Of course, the idea that truths are contingent holds that those truths are subject to unseen effects, that they are conditioned by *something* that is as yet not seen, as Edwards would have it. Even in a Calvinist universe, one makes discoveries of God's truths that, though they are pre-existent in the mind of God, are as yet *unseen* to the human eye—

they exist as God's hidden will. Truth in this sense is not exactly contingent upon unforeseen effects, because they are, in fact, known to God, but they are contingent upon what the *human* eye cannot see. Therefore, even in a Calvinist universe, the soul is always moving in the direction of those truths formed in the discursive formations Emerson calls "circles." In addition, the living faith Puritans sought to embody called upon them to renew continually their knowledge of their election, to renew continually their "sense of identity and selfhood" through the affective cycle of their experiential faith. The soul, even in Calvinist theology, is "more nearly a function," as Poirier claims it is in Emerson, "and yet no determination is made as to when the function occurs or from where it emanates. The soul has no determinable there or then, no here or now" (23-24). Rather, as in Emerson's thinking, it only "*becomes*" because it "appears or occurs only as something we feel compelled to live into or to move toward *as if* it were there" (Poirier 24).

Therefore, because the doctrine of grace does not limit the movement of the soul in Emerson (because the concept does not limit the view) we see a full realization of the essential and saving quality of the vague. We live *in* the direction of the soul, in the indistinct *something* "that is seen that is wonderful," and this *something* is wonderful because, as Poirier notes, it is in these "premonitory gestures or transitions"—and I would add *views*—that the soul "reveals itself" by "abandon[ing] one form or an incipient form for the always beckoning promise of another, though this 'other' will always prove a limitation" (25). These places of the *as if* serve the same purpose as the work of imagination does for the natural philosophers discussed earlier. By opening up a conscious space for potential worldviews through the process of discovery, one elicits the

feeling of conviction or will to believe in *something*—until that something has been tested through experience or experiments. Poirier calls the presence of these "premonitory gestures or transitions" of the soul within Emerson's writing his "superfluity." Emerson is able, Poirier explains, to "refloat the world, to make it less stationary and more transitional, to make descriptions of it correspondingly looser, less technical, more uncertain" (40). Indeed, this is clearly the opposite goal of Ramist logic, whose reliance on the syllogism, Miller explains, was the Puritans' way of lending "constancy to their judgments" (*New England Mind* 133). In Emerson's time, natural philosophers such as Herschel and Reed were generating acceptance of a science manifesting these same "looser, less technical, more uncertain" descriptions of the world: the convictions that resulted (that feeling accompanying *seeing beyond*) can be thought of as the soul's inclination toward rebirth into new relations existing as theoretical constructions of the self and world through belief. And the soul "knows," Poirier claims, that when it constructs new worldviews "it is creating only a new orbit or limit as it surges past and sweeps up the boundaries of an old one," so that the soul "knows" that "its progress is forever threatened by textuality, by contraction of work into a text. Thus the creative impulse which is the soul discovers in the very first stages of composition that it wants to reach out beyond any legible form, that it wants to seek margins, to move beyond limits or fate" (24-25).

Figuring the dilations of the soul as contingent orbits continually threatened by contractions into composition makes ironic the fact that Shepard's Puritans faced this very problem in being required for church membership to compose a story of their conversion. It is even more fittingly ironic that they could not. I have tied their inability

or unwillingness to testify to their conversions to the fact of Shepard's emphasis on spiritual discipline, so, in effect, he was not ministering to any experience of the soul's *becoming*. Their conversion narratives, therefore, become an awful symbol of the soul's "legibility," a sort of anti-circle manifesting the "contracting" work of conscience so present in the saints' lives.

Emerson's essays, on the other hand, "ask to be read as an allegory," Poirier explains, "in which the movements of the soul in its circles represent the movements of creative energy in his sentences and paragraphs" (28). The purpose of this creative energy, of Emerson's "superfluity," is to thrust us into a place of uncertainty, where we are confronted with the disorienting space of the "actuality," to use Edwards' term, or transitoriness of the experience of his sentences. Placed in this position, we must find our own way through a thoroughly *undisciplined* examination of our response to the context in which we find ourselves, looking inward rather than to any authority for that response. In this way Emerson compels us to "minister" to ourselves. Our responses compel us to realign our axis of vision, constituting the saving act of new perception offering renewed access to the power of Spirit. In the Puritan saints' experience, knowledge of their election could only be achieved if they chose to embark on the perceptive pilgrimage. Though their souls had been predestined as either elected or damned, they could only realize this fact through perceptual alignment with the Holy Spirit. They could not choose their election, but they could choose to *discover* their election, becoming, in a sense, natural philosophers of the soul.

Without the concept of the Fall or the doctrine of election to frame his theory of the mind, Emerson could fully endow consciousness with the power to know through

experience, and experience in knowing, the higher laws of Spirit. In Emerson, it is not about whether one is "elect" or "unregenerate," but how one sees the world and self, or more specifically, how one *chooses* to see the world and self. That we can choose our "election," as it were, because we can choose to realign and rethink our relationship to the world, underlies the purpose of the "superfluity" present in *Nature*.

As Philip Gura notes, *Nature* and its "superfluity" were not readily accepted by the likes of conservative Unitarian ministers such as Francis Bowen who found *Nature* "painful" and "frequently bewildering" to read, complaining that the reader was too busy "hunting after meaning, and investigating the significance of terms" (qtd. in *Wisdom of Words*: 91). These complaints would emerge, Gura demonstrates, from controversies over the philological premises held by the Unitarians who "championed an empirical, rational reading of the Bible" (18). Transcendentalists such as Emerson, whose religious beliefs were originally aligned with Unitarianism, came to question and finally reject this theology framed by the empiricist philosophy of John Locke. The philosophical stronghold of empiricism was a major hurdle for those who wished to challenge its theories of the nature of man, which maintained that one could understand God better through "logical language" and that nature was absorbed through "multiple nerve endings." Influences on Emerson such as Reed and Coleridge, however, proved to Emerson that nature "was to be interpreted by . . . Reason, in acts that allowed . . . [man] to move . . . to a higher spiritual plane" (89). Gura argues that with the publication of *Nature*, "America's bondage to Lockean epistemology was symbolically broken": what Bowen thought was Emerson's overuse of nouns and adjectives in *Nature* was Emerson's attempt to "free his contemporaries from the constrictions of a vocabulary inadequate to

describe their profound religious experience" (89, 92). *Nature* was Emerson's declaration that "the mediation between God and Man—Nature and Spirit—was not something experienced only by the historical Christ" but that "The machinery of transcendence . . . was available to all men, if only they could accept a vocabulary, as well as a theology, based on their intuitive insight into the natural world" (*Wisdom of Words* 91-92).

Acceptance of a new vocabulary and theology depended on the reader's willingness to learn the perceptual habits, and appreciate the perceptual qualities, inherent in transcendence to that higher spiritual plane. *Nature* provides the steps for doing so. In a phrase that provides concision to Edwards' theory of perception at the beginning of *Freedom of the Will*, Emerson claims in the first chapter called "Nature" that when we approach nature with a "poetical sense in the mind" we mean the "*integrity of impression* made by manifold natural objects" (emphasis added; 9). The term "integrity" used here captures the sense, discussed earlier, of the complex intermingling of language, perception, and truth, and of the desire to engage one's environment or context in such a way that *increases one's chances* of "tak[ing] up the world" into oneself. For sure, the chances were better for someone in Emerson's transcendentalist universe than for someone in Shepard's Calvinist one. Again, the difference resides in one's desire, or choice, to see the world a certain way, a choice that would provide the means, or be of "use," to one's happiness. These choices are, essentially, practical means to happiness. One's "integrity of impression" for Emerson, leads one not down the path to knowledge of election, but into a perceptual realm allowing an individual to distinguish between a "stick of timber of the wood-cutter" and the "tree of the poet." One is not born "saved": one adopts a saving perception.

Both Laura Dassow Walls and Lee Rust Brown discuss how Emerson's insight at the Jardin des Plantes solidified his transition from an empiricist mode of reading nature to one employed in the study of natural history, resulting in the conceptualizing and writing of *Nature*. Brown explains that what happened in the midst of the cabinets was Emerson's realization that the "Muséum's classifications were not only vehicles for communicating nature's meanings; in a surprisingly literal sense, they made up the form and content of meaning itself" because "opaque images were conceptually broken and dissolved" (66). For a spectator in the Muséum, "classification belonged to the contemporary realm of intellectual activity," recovering a divine plan that "was immanent in nature rather than . . . dictated at the beginning of history" and interpreted by a "retrospective reference to the dicta of scripture or sacred history" (67, 66).[32] These natural facts, rather, "introduced the eye into an *otherwise invisible world of referential and compositional practice*. That invisible world was revealed as belonging equally to the latent reality of nature and to the intellectual prospects of the spectator" (emphasis added; 67). These penetrations into an "otherwise invisible world of referential and compositional practice" were imbedded within natural history, charting "a natural world

[32] Ramist logic set forth in the *Dialecticae* was, in fact, a means of classification, its aim being to arrange in a series, through "dichotomy," the primary relations between arguments whose pattern revealed "a transcript of a unified intellect, a formal description of the image of God" (*New England Mind* 125). In an ironic twist on the power of a garden, Alexander Richardson translated Ramus' definition of logic ("ars bene disserendi") as "sowing asunder" because he realized that the Latin gerund "disserendi" was a pun on the idea of "disputing" as well as "planting seed here and there" (125). Logic could classify, or "sow asunder," "the material of any art, physics or medicine," first by "division of its two component parts, then by a subdivision of each part, and then by continued bifurcations of the subdivisions, until at last, . . . the fundamental units, the indivisible "arguments" would all be enumerated" (127). One could then consult the *Dialecticae* to discover the proper classification of the arguments. Because the purpose of the classification system of the *Dialecticae*, was to provide a "transcription" of the divine plan, man's role in interpreting the material universe entailed no ordering or creative function on the part of man as the cabinets at the Muséum demanded. Man did not look through the material world to the idea behind it. Instead, in Ramist logic, man identified and located arguments and their relations on Ramus' chart, endowing the chart's classifications with the power and authority to, as Walls would say "look order" into the universe. Man only needed to look up the pattern.

whose apparent surfaces were only an index to what could be 'seen'" (Brown 78). Brown recognizes the connection between the hermeneutic tradition of the Puritans and Emerson's response to the "hieroglyphic aspect of nature" embodied by the Muséum, but he does not provide any discussion of the complexity embedded within that hermeneutic tradition and the issues of mind, perception, nature, and the reception of Spirit that preoccupied Shepard and Edwards and which Emerson inherited. As pointed to earlier, to attribute Emerson's introduction to the mind's role in aligning the axis of perception to the Spirit solely to his revelation at the Muséum elides his longstanding and familiar knowledge of Calvinist theology and experience.

Walls, too, provides an impressive examination of Emerson's adoption of the principles of natural history to "satisfy all the demands of the spirit," but she too does not tie Emerson's interpretive imperative to a Reformed tradition esteeming the conversion process as the experiential nexus of mind, perception, nature and Spirit. Like Brown, she recognizes *Nature* as a text whose purpose is to represent the various stages of perceptual approaches to nature as the route to transcend fact. Importantly, her reading of *Nature* includes the recognition of the human tie to the materiality we want to transcend, echoing the unfortunate situation that the Puritans saw as the Fall. In addition, Walls' reading of *Nature* discusses how Emerson's theory that "nature is animated by man" relies on the "self-evidencing interplay of mind and matrix, whereby the external world is necessary for the mind's realization, and mind or concepts are equally necessary to assemble a world of dead atoms into living meaning" (101). *Nature* enacts the transition from an empirical realism to transcendental idealism because the

> ascending chapters or 'cantos' in *Nature* describe the necessary steps or stages in this marriage [of mind and matrix] and prophesy its ultimate fruit, man, with his divinity fully recovered. The stages, then, describe a process of growth, keyed to the underlying organic metaphor whereby God puts forth nature through us and we can draw on unfailing fountains of power. (Walls 101)

Therefore, *Nature* teaches us to read the landscape not only of nature, but of our minds as well. Each chapter, with its ascensions in perceptual stages, teaches us how to use nature as a means to realize our divinity and to reflect on our own thinking process in the interpretive act.

Nature incorporates the tools with which to experience what Leon Chai calls "transparent seeing," a form of perception in which "perception . . . becomes conscious of itself as an act of pure seeing and assimilates the thing seen to the act of seeing" (191). In this way,

> mind experiences the transparency of things (their capacity for assimilation) and hence the unbounded nature of perception itself, the absence of any opaque objects obstructing its field of vision. This *unboundedness* of perception constitutes the *Infinite*. . . . As such, it is no longer something external to us (a God outside us) but rather within ourselves. (emphasis added; 191)

Here, Chai stumbles upon the idea of *feeling* (what he refers to as seeing) the "Infinite," what Emerson calls the "unbounded substance," achieved through acts of perception penetrating the externalizing forces of ordinary vision and discursive understanding. It is

an act of seeing equivalent to Edwards' "sense of the heart," and it constitutes a transcendentalist's version of the Puritan experience of conversion when the saints might, as the early Shepard exhorted, "not take in a little" but "comprehend the height, depth, length, breadth of Christ's love." In fact, in characterizing the Infinite as "no longer something external to us (a God outside us) but rather within ourselves" Chai's argument informs my connections between the Puritan dilemma over how grace's workings were conceptualized and theories about the nature of perception.

Regeneration was possible within a broadly defined spectrum of spiritual experience emerging from two primary and opposing descriptions of conversion presented in the Bible: man's voluntary return to God and God's turning of man to Him. This template first gave rise, within the continental Reformed tradition, to a mystical understanding of grace conceived as an arbitrary gift bestowed at the will of God, wrenching man out of his depravity (exemplified in Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus). But around 1570, during the reign of Elizabeth, certain English divines began to speculate about an individual's ability to respond to God's promises as set forth in the covenant of grace. Challenging Paul's conversion experience as normative, they claimed that natural man, though only in "external covenant" by virtue of baptism, might be able to predispose himself to saving grace. This was the attitude that took hold within English divinity, became the defining force within Puritanism, and would eventually become an integral part of the New England Way.

The earliest Puritan pastors (Richard Greenham, Richard Rogers, Arthur Hildersam, and William Perkins) held that grace was not an external element that descended from God but that it dwelled in the heart: one need only search for signs of its

evidence. Chai's formulation of "transparent seeing," offering the assimilation of the Infinite, echoes the conceptual and descriptive dilemmas Puritans faced in theorizing conversion, because, as Chai, shows, the Infinite is experienced both as an external force in man's life and is felt internally through assimilation. As such, in Puritan doctrine the experience of unbounded perception of God's love could be represented as man's voluntary return to God or as God's turning of man to him, because, as Chai notes, the act of "transparent seeing" marked the intersection of the two, thereby blurring the boundaries and character of its effects.

Both Walls and Brown call what happened to Emerson in the Muséum a "revelation," with Brown noting that Emerson was getting tired of his experience in Paris as a flâneur, that it "came as a kind of relief or release from the pressures that had been building throughout his stay," not as a "flight from the urban context," but rather as an "expression and resolution of those pressures" (158). That Emerson had a "revelation" leading to his insight into God's divine plan is an ironic moment in the history of America conversion narratives. What so many saints longed to experience—the moment of irresistible insight into God's divine plan and the concomitant realization of one's own calling—came to Emerson in an immediate, *affective* moment of transcending an earthly context to see the divine idea beyond it. He recorded in his journal a sort of testimony of the experience—a conversion narrative—of this newly acquired "sense." He felt "an occult relation between the very scorpions and man," declaring, "I feel the centipede in me,—cayman, carp, eagle, and fox. I am moved by strange sympathies." Indeed, he had the experience of seeing what was "really wrapped up in" the Latin "words" designating the plants and natural objects within the cabinets. He experienced what Brown calls the

"dynamics of transparency" the Muséum embodied with its classifications referring "events to the activities of reading and interpretation, in which the mind manages to see 'through (both by means of and in spite of) figured surfaces in order to clarify initially invisible meanings" (119).

What Emerson presented to the public with the publication of *Nature* was not unlike the *ordo salutis* the saints used to advance along the perspectival stages one needed to prepare for the reception of the Spirit. Tacitly understood by the saints, but explicitly presented to readers of *Nature*, was the choice to embark on a perspectival pilgrimage aligning the axis of one's vision with the realm of the ideal/spirit, significantly improving the odds of one's salvation presented at the beginning of this chapter. Whereas the *ordo salutis* was conceived as a path for realizing one's predestined place in God's plan, removing the possibility that a saint could do anything to effect grace, *Nature* presents a series of *options* for perceiving and reading nature, specifically for deciding whether one wants to be a person who, with a transcendental idealist perception, sees a "tree" (like a poet) or one who remains locked in an empirical worldview and sees a "stick of timber" (like a wood-cutter). Each chapter addresses a kind of perception, which is captured in the chapter's title. The first chapter invites readers to consider whether they have the perspective of a wood-cutter or of a poet, setting up the following chapters of *Nature* in much the same way as Edwards envisioned *Religious Affection* and how the *ordo salutis* is organized—as a series of signs against which an individual reads his experience to mark the progression of his soul. In *Nature*, as Brown, Gura, and Walls remark, the kind of perspective each chapter addresses is more transcendent by degrees, weaning the reader from an empiricist mode of perception in "Commodity" to a

transcendental one in "Spirit." In addition, within each classification of perspective by chapter, Emerson provides classifications of each classification within each chapter to further habituate us to the "invisible steps of thought" *Nature* provides.

These classifications within classifications introduce the variety of "undiscovered regions of thought" man has at his disposal, what Emerson asserts is available through the "doctrine of Use." For example, in the chapter called "Beauty" he breaks down this rubric into three aspects, the first being the "delight" we feel from the "simple perception of natural forms." For those of us who suffer from being "cramped by noxious work or company," we can find pleasure as long as we "can see far enough," as long as we can see the "sky and woods." The second aspect he broaches is the "spiritual element," the "high and divine beauty which can be loved without effeminacy" and is that "which is found in combination with the human will." This type of perception Emerson challenges can only be attained "In proportion to the energy of [one's] thought and will" because an individual is "entitled to the world by his constitution." Finally, the third aspect of beauty through which the world may be viewed manifests "as it becomes an object of the intellect." "The intellect," Emerson explains, "searches out the absolute order of things as they stand in the mind of God, and without the colors of affection." And in this searching, the "beauty of nature reforms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation." His conclusion to this chapter sums up his argument by stating, "The world thus exists to the soul to satisfy the desire of beauty." These classifications within classifications demonstrate his central argument that "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit," that it is through our own *willingness* that we delimit our perception of nature. In a deceptively simple sentence in the first chapter of *Nature*, Emerson sums up the

moment in *Religious Affections* where Edwards describes the experience of evangelical humiliation during conversion, in which a view of "something" opens to expose the horizon of belief and of one's own potential: "In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature" (10).

By presenting classifications of perception in the chapter headings and then comparing in each chapter the various kinds of perception producing a stick of timber or a tree, Emerson not only provides the stages necessary for ascending from lower facts to higher ideas, he presents the experience of transcendence as a choice the reader makes. *Nature* makes us conscious of the perceptual role in experience and clarifies the variety of ways open to us, through perception, of how nature can be used to realize God's divine plan. In this way, *Nature* constitutes an actual idea, in the Edwardsean sense, of perception, offering not a rigid scheme for gaining *knowledge* (of one's election), as in the case of the *ordo salutis*, but conceptualizing a sort of mechanism within consciousness that generates the process of *knowing*. *Nature* provides, for anyone who wishes, what Brown calls the "transcendental element" that the Muséum exposed Emerson to, that element being the "technique itself, the a priori 'device' through which nature was identified as both patent fact and latent power" (125). Whereas the *ordo salutis* presented stages of "growth" referring to established models of experience found in Scripture and doctrine, *Nature* locates the "transcendental element" or device within perception and consciousness stimulating the ongoing process of growth.

Though conversion was a cyclic event in the course of a saint's life, the *ordo salutis* defined the affective and epistemological experience in terms of a one-time event

defined by historic precedence. The stages themselves do not have imbedded within them a dynamic reflecting the lived experience of the cyclic imperative. This is because conscience was the force structuring the steps, reinforcing them as separate, distinctive elements defined by clear experiential and perceptual prerogatives. *Nature*, on the other hand, is structured so as to take into consideration the ongoing process of conversion realized through the transcendental "device" found in consciousness. Walls explains that the first half of *Nature*, constituted by the chapters "Commodity," "Beauty," "Language," and "Discipline" argue that nature's purpose is to educate us, that it is "made to serve" because "human reason gradually converts all the kingdoms of nature to the single kingdom of his will" (102). At this point in *Nature*, Walls argues, Emerson must "take up the problem the first half has created," that man has dissolved nature and subjected it to his will: "if nature's final end is to educate, or discipline, humanity through the agency of law, does physical nature actually exist?" (102). The answer, which he arrives at in the chapter "Spirit," objects to the idealism his theory proposes by claiming that his theory must be "progressive" (the missing crucial element in the *ordo salutis*) and therefore must hold that "there must then be something left outside the all-dissolving power of culture to act as a guide. . . . Just as consciousness cannot exist without objects, objects must exist outside consciousness" (103). The transcendental idealism Emerson presents in *Nature* structures our relation to objects as one in which, "one moment we are rebuilding nature in our own image [and] the next, nature is inviolable" (Walls 104).

Unlike the *ordo salutis*'s rigidly linear representation of conversion, *Nature*'s representation of the "marriage" of mind and matrix captures the recursive dynamic of man's transcendent uses of nature. Yet, like the *ordo salutis*, *Nature* provides the reader

with a template for a way of seeing, which is always a form of reading, articulating an individual's use of the "means" for penetrating the facts of existence to see beyond them into the ideas of God. Therefore, *Nature* becomes, in effect, an *ordo salutis* with the means built into it for overcoming its own structure, an aspect of the process one would expect from Emerson who asks us to continually "look at the world with new eyes." It provides a practical account and habituates a practice of looking at the world "with new eyes," in effect creating *practitioners* of transcendentalism.

For Emerson, as Brown explains, this penetration to the ideas beyond the visible objects of our earthly context finds its expression in the metaphor of transparency by which the "eye converts opaque boundaries into transparent media" (166). This transparency function, opening the door to the idea behind objects—and hence revelation—cannot be divorced, Brown explains, from the actual biology of a human eyeball. Brown shows that for Emerson, "we lose our way if we try to separate ordinary perception from revelation," which was precisely the effort that Shepard's Puritans desperately made in their attempts to see the world through the lens of the Bible. Emerson endorses this marriage by presenting the various classifications within each chapter of *Nature* side by side, thereby equalizing, or showing the varieties of perception, both ordinary and transcendent, working together to produce the correct perceptual axis necessary for "transparent seeing."

Brown makes an important contribution to understanding Emerson's transparent eyeball passage in *Nature* when he explains that

> Transparency manifests itself only as an attribute of the medium lying between two discontinuous realms: the opaque eyeball that beholds [the

> retina] and the opaque surface that appears 'behind' or 'on the other side of' the transparent medium. Moreover, the phenomenon of transparency becomes impossible in the absence of either or both of these discontinuous realms. In theory and in experience there can be no transparency without some contiguous opacity. Something in particular always appears beyond the medium, for the essence of the transparent medium is to be between two things. In the grammar of seeing, the eye sees *through* one thing *to* the next thing; the eye sees at once 'by means of' and 'despite' the intervening transparent medium. (41)

In Emerson's transparent eyeball passage there are two opacities: the opaque object on one side of the medium and the opaque subject that "beholds" on the other side. The transparent medium becomes active when we acquire new objects, and our desire for them, Brown claims, is "purely constitutional," because the eye "needs new opacity, the new figure, in order to focus beyond, or through, the figure that more immediately blocks its observation" (51). In other words with each activation of the transparency function between the subject and object, a new distance opens between the next object of focus and the subject. Brown argues that we move through experience in this way, by "tricking" or "troping" our way through the . . . solidity of the natural sphere" (50).

Transparency occurs in "adjustments of attention," in the transitions between intellectual focus, appearing or disappearing "only in the context of the shifting relations created by the intellect in its transit from old to new objects of focus," hence the "progressive" element included in Emerson's theory of transcendental idealism articulated in the chapter in *Nature* called "Prospects" (47, 46). New prospects exist in

both the new objects of focus and their expected *conversion* into transparency, appearing only "when the eye converts opaque boundaries into transparent media and thus sees through one defining, restricting form . . . to the image of more attractive things on the far side" (166). Although Brown's work goes a long way to explain the significance of the transparency metaphor for Emerson's work, describing its ethical and practical implications for American culture, I would qualify his discussion by arguing that what the transparency metaphor figures, more specifically, is the space of the *vague*. Indeed, as the medium in which the "hidden" meaning of objects are translated into truths, as the medium which "appears or (disappears) only in the context of shifting relations," it is the converting mechanism of consciousness, "a mode of awareness of the necessary distance between the self and its provisional objects" (Brown 46). The figure of Emerson's transparent eyeball, therefore, is a figure celebrating the receptive mode of active passivity so necessary to the conversion process of his forbears. The transparent eyeball is a mode of active searching after objects and their opaque secrets, which, in turn, primes the space of the vague for reception to the meaning-making project of the subject. Because, as Brown shows, "the essence of the transparent medium is to be between two things," Emerson's eyeball represents that vague place on the stairs "of which we do not know the extremes." It is a homely figure similar to Edwards' "room of the idea," but no less powerful for expressing the ongoing process of knowing, of converting the world into truth.

Emerson's aestheticizing of Scripture allowed him to realize fully through his literary style the dynamics between an individual and the forces of history, society, rhetoric, and nature. The "universal impulse to believe" propels each of us beyond the

discursive formations structuring what we know, or think we know, about ourselves and the material universe. It guides us beyond what we can explain or calculate into a sacred, vague space in consciousness where inchoate truths emerge and we are, hence, reborn into new relations. Though in Shepard's and Edwards' theology a saint's spiritual rebirth marked a new life in Christ, the saint's ties to Christian historical tradition and doctrine remained intact. Emerson, however, conceptualized conversion as liberation from *all* forms impeding the expansions of our "mental horizons." It is, therefore, not surprising that the historical concept of conversion, determining so many facets of his Puritan forbears' lives, is absent from his work. It is itself reborn in Emerson as a process of knowing rather than resting in the known, of constructing belief by turning away, as well toward, history and what we consider to be the facts of our context to determine our own futures.

Chapter Four

William James' Uncertain Universe: Theory and Theology in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Thus far we have seen how Thomas Shepard, Jonathan Edwards, and Ralph Waldo Emerson undertook to minister a saving experience to their congregations/audiences. We have seen an evolution, however, in how each theologian/philosopher conceived his role and goal for his listeners in the meaning-making process of this undertaking. Shepard used the *ordo salutis* as a disciplinary tool, forcing his flock to fit all experience and feeling into this sanctioned form of expression. Edwards, without sacrificing the integrity of the doctrines central to Calvinism, theorized conversion and a new "Logick" (a new method of perception) by adopting the idea of consciousness as an active, creative force bringing God's world into being. His concept of the "sense of the heart" as the feeling of conviction structuring not only spiritual but also scientific and philosophical beliefs about the world foregrounded spontaneity and immediacy in the perception of truth. By conceptualizing conversion as a process occurring in no particular preparatory order, Edwards freed his congregation from a preexisting, generic pattern of experience and made piety a matter of "attention of the mind in thinking"—a form of spiritual experience turning a saint away from external forms and toward the constantly unfolding glory of God's universe occurring in

consciousness. Emerson would then, through his literary style as a whole, and especially through the structure of *Nature*, attempt to habituate his audience to a type of thinking in which individuals minister to themselves through the continual process of converting the world into truth. This idea of the conversion process placed the responsibility for personal and cultural renewal squarely on the shoulders of individuals and their ability to determine how history, rhetoric, nature, and language structured reality and what their relationship to this reality was. *Nature* acts as a kind of *ordo salutis* but with an importance difference. It habituates its readers to a transcendental idealism enlivening the process of knowing, rather than adherence to a rigid scheme for gaining certain knowledge.

With the breakdown of stable conceptual systems in the nineteenth century precipitated by Darwin, the roles that belief and uncertainty played in people's lives had to be reckoned. This chapter demonstrates the centrality the conversion dynamic plays in William James's work, focusing on his development of a psychology of religious experience in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and of Pragmatism as a philosophy whose central notion that "Truth is what happens to an idea" affirms the process of belief as conversional. Conversion finds a conceptual home in modern philosophy as James's pragmatic hermeneutic: the establishment of belief through the experience of the gap between a fact and its interpretation. In James's pragmatic hermeneutic, conversion is explicitly tied to a process that characterizes and drives consciousness. As a sustained rendering of this process, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* embodies a "room of the idea" of the concept of conversion. In addition to characterizing the space of perception and receptivity in consciousness, the amassing of countless spiritual testimonies in the

Varieties grounds the process of conversion in the formation of discursive communities. His situating of beliefs or bodies of knowledge in discourse leads him to propose that we arrive at these "stages" by coordinate methodological paths—theoretical and theological—both of which he argues are "founded in feeling." In effect, scientific and religious inquiries confirm consciousness as a space always verging on the unknown, but hinging on a relation to one's own thinking and thriving on the incalculable/divine. James advocates, therefore, a psychology of religious experience that (as the Puritans had a hard time accepting) celebrates the indeterminate and disorienting nature of an individual's relation to an environment.

Writing to his brother Henry in 1868, William James states: "The more I think of Darwin's ideas the more weighty do they appear to me, though of course my opinion is worth very little" (qtd. in Perry: 102). This simple remark belies the complexity of this long fervent decade. Not only was it the decade that followed the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, it was an especially tumultuous decade for James personally and professionally, as can be heard in his disdain for his anonymity. His need to form his own opinions about scientific, religious, and philosophical questions was inextricably tied to his personal crisis that marked the 1860s. In *Science and Religion in the Era of William James* Paul Jerome Croce distinguishes the various influences on James during this decade, stressing the defining convergence of James's process of individuation as a young adult at the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard and the massive ideological upset brought on by the publication of *The Origin of Species*. Croce's examination of the cultural shift of the period 1820-1880 leads him to the conclusion that

what he calls the "eclipse of certainty" triggered by Darwin would be the defining issue for this period and for William James's work.

Croce defines "certainty" as a "cultural category indicating confidence or assurance in any particular idea or belief," and he argues that though the nineteenth century began with pervasive certainty about scientific and religious outlooks, certainty in these areas began to slip as a result of several forces of change stemming from market competition, religious debates, scientific discoveries, geographic expansion and shifts in social roles, among other things (3). Croce identifies James as an apt figure to study because James's family background, shaped by his father's belief in the teachings of the theologian Emanuel Swedenborg, forged in him a lasting curiosity about religious experience, and his father's eccentric beliefs about raising children allowed James to explore many different interests before he felt pressure (imposed by himself and not his father) to choose a career. Setting him on his career path and finally throwing him into the midst of the Darwinian debates at Harvard was his decision to become a scientist. James entered the Lawrence Scientific School in 1861 and, as was noted earlier, James was a young adult, only just beginning to identify and understand his own interests and their meaning in his life, when he was faced with the religious, scientific, and philosophical revolutions that were just beginning to be assimilated by America's intellectual elite.

Ultimately, Croce argues, James would accept the centrality of uncertainty in scientific and religious ideas, but it would take years for him to formulate "philosophies that cope with uncertainty" (230). Indeed, James would be a forerunner in the cultural struggle to conceive belief in the face of uncertainty, a struggle that places the imperative

to cope with this uncertainty at the center of people's lives. In 1901 James gave a series of Gifford Lectures that were published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902, and the struggle to synthesize a response to uncertainty, encompassing the shock waves it sent to all corners of James's worldview is nowhere else as transparent as in this work. Though Charles Darwin is mentioned only a few times in the *Varieties*, the work nonetheless demonstrates James's keen understanding of the full import of Darwin's argument and an urgency conveying James's profound shift to a new worldview that was a result of Darwin. As Croce explains, Darwin's disruption of the stable conceptual systems of his time was not necessarily attributable to the idea that humans had evolved from lower primate forms, but simply from his mode of argument:

> Although Darwin tried to adhere to contemporary inductive standards in his analysis of the emergence of species, his data was too remote, his causal agent too chance filled and his theory too conjectural to provide proof. . . . [H]is theory of species development was the first major scientific theory to rely centrally on probabilistic thinking. (100)

Because the processes of evolution were unobservable, Darwin could not provide proof for his theory. Instead, he relied on the gathering of innumerable facts that could point toward an interpretation. He could then build a hypothesis explaining the patterns he had discerned, but he would have to sway his audience to the new probability based on his ability to integrate the masses of facts into his theory. These "probabilistic laws," as Croce calls them, could explain the patterns perceived in the facts, but a potential believer in these laws would have to accept the argument without any proof. That conceptual systems could be built on the yawning gap of uncertainty would hand down a Darwinian

legacy steering scientific understanding of the world down the path of explanation rather than proof ever since.

The Origin of Species and the era of uncertainty it began prompted (and still prompts) important questions for all: What is its significance? What is its significance to culture? To philosophy? To religion? To an individual's life? James deliberately begins the *Varieties* by prompting his audience to enter into a mode of inquiry by drawing it into an examination of the gap that exists between a thing and what it means to it. The answer(s) to these questions would, for James, establish what he calls a "spiritual judgment" which essentially determines a work's usefulness to people on an individual and a cultural level. James, however, modifies this term to a very potent one. Hence, his audience is asked to consider "revelation-value" as a way of thinking about how to estimate a work's worth, which is an interesting term that does not get defined explicitly by James in the *Varieties*. James proposes the Bible as a test for establishing revelation-value in the first lecture of the *Varieties* to make such a determination. One way is to question a thing's origins or how it came about; and the problem of determining a thing's origins presents James with the opportunity to draw an issue into the light and make a distinction by establishing "a general theory as to what the peculiarities in a thing should be which give it value for purposes of revelation" (5). The distinction he makes has to do with the terms on which we receive a work: we either accept a work despite human error and composition or we fool ourselves by thinking we can determine the conditions under which a work was produced. This distinction is very important because it can determine how James's own lectures will be received, and it is also an inherent aspect of the kind of methodology he uses to build his argument in the *Varieties* because once a work becomes

unmoored from what James calls the "historical facts" of its emergence, he is free to employ probabilistic thinking and interpretive hypothesis. Moreover, the distinction allows James to reinvent the notion of "origin" and of "fact." I would argue that these two words are put into play in such a way that launches the *Varieties* into its task of characterizing and energizing the gap that exists between a work/thing and its "revelation-value" (or what it means to us). James needs to explode this gap, and he begins by destabilizing the ideas of "origin" and "fact," two realms of knowledge that would otherwise ward off the intervention of the interpretive mode in the search for meaning.

Using the Bible to represent any religious phenomenon, James argues that established modes of inquiry into such phenomenon ask questions such as: "Under just what biographic conditions did the sacred writers bring forth their various contributions to the holy volume? And what had they exactly in their several individual minds, when they delivered their utterances?" (*Varieties* 4). His response to these popular questions is to dismiss them and to redefine how such facts should be received:

> These are manifestly questions of historical fact, and one does not see how the answer to them can decide offhand the still further question: of what use should such a volume, with its manner of coming into existence so defined, be to us as a guide to life and a revelation? (*Varieties* 4-5)

As James argues, even the Bible wouldn't fare well if historical facts were the only criteria for determining revelation-value because, as he argues a little later on, "existential facts by themselves are insufficient for determining the value [of a book]" (*Varieties* 5). His argument will rely, instead, on his re-figuring the notion of fact. The new definition

emerges in a theory that serves as the foundation for his hermeneutics, a methodology presupposing the interpretive act as the primary act determining the revelation-value of a work to its interpreter: "[A] book may well be a revelation in spite of errors and passions and deliberate human composition, if only it be a true record of the inner experiences of great-souled persons wrestling with the crises of their fate" (*Varieties* 5). Indeed, this new definition of existential fact grounding knowledge in the act of recording and composition, which implies human error, would leave any determination of revelation-value impossible simply because of the new fact's historical "unreliability." For James, existential facts that are historically based are insufficient to determine the revelation-value of a book, whereas existential facts conceived as a "true record," while also insufficient, at least imply the impossibility of determining such features of fact that a historical inquiry claims to be able to produce. That neither type can solely determine the "revelation-value" of a book places the burden of making that value judgment on the interpreter of those facts and hence the meaning that can be constructed.

The dismissal of the "origins" of a work conceived as the biographic conditions of the writer or what was going on in his mind at the time of writing as a basis for making a value judgment allows James to assert a new understanding of "origin" which is more amenable to a pragmatist. Within the context of an interpretive imperative, an origin occurs any time new meaning is made or a new hypothesis is proposed. This disconnection of a work's revelation-value from historical fact allows James to use the empirical method to gather religious experiences into a collection reflecting the "true record" he advocates. The empirical method ultimately serves James because, as he argues, it prevents him from imposing any of his own "over-beliefs" or the equivalent

thereof—expressing a bias towards any one of the organized religions such as Buddhism or Christianity. Moreover, the empirical method affords the best conditions under which *variety* of religious experience can be illustrated and individual consciousness revered. From this variety, the experiences which were "pattern-setters" for all the "imitated conduct" James says one finds in mass religions are presented for reconsideration in a newly interpreted way. James slyly calls these pattern-setting experiences "original" not simply because they represent un-imitated conduct but because, I would argue, he has presented them in that "revelatory" way, as newly interpreted. This is part of the originative work going on in works that James argues have revelation-value. These works allow an audience to become acquainted with the kinds of particulars that James finds so valuable: the works are revelatory because they present particulars arranged by an interpreter who perceived underlying patterns, and the fracturing and rebuilding of meaning involved in the interpretive process constitute the ongoing production of new or "original" worldviews. In this way, the empirical method suits James's hermeneutics, because it reflects a pragmatist's need to adjust and readjust knowledge and belief about the world.

James calls upon his audience to have patience with him because he is sure he can prove, by the end of his lectures, not to have diminished the profundity of the religious experiences he has collected by treating them as "facts." Yet, he is addressing a sensitive issue. Even today there are those who would not only criticize James's use of excerpted testimony of religious experience as evidence but dismiss his use of "presumption": Wayne Proudfoot calls James's task in the *Varieties* "apologetic" because James excerpts those portions of an individual's religious account that serve as

> evidence for his contention that the sense of a presence of a higher power, or of something 'more,' forms the core of religious experience, and establishes a presumption that ought to be taken seriously. For him, this is presumptive, though not conclusive, evidence for the existence of such a power. (166)

Proudfoot's article compares Jonathan Edwards' and William James's analyses of religious experience from the standpoint of their respective regard for the causes (the origins) of the experience (in other words, whether or not the experience was a result of God's intervention or the subconscious or a stomache-ache). The comparison is interesting because it recognizes the very issue I believe is at the heart of James's response to uncertainty. Proudfoot argues that although both men understand that an assessment of a religious experience must be based on the pragmatist notion that a subject shows signs of that experience in his practice, they diverge in their opinion about the role a subject's *belief* about what *caused* the conversion to take place should play. Proudfoot argues that Edwards' interest in the fruits of a subject's religious experience stems chiefly from what the fruits infer about the cause of the experience. Edwards must determine that the conversion experience had supernatural origins. On the other hand, Proudfoot asserts that James believes that the cause or origin of a belief or experience is "irrelevant to our assessment of it" (163).

Proudfoot concludes that James arrives at this notion because he has misread Peirce's "The Fixation of Belief," which proposes a scientific determination of truth that emerges *distinct* from an observer's perception of that truth and, therefore, the separation of a belief from its origin seems to Proudfoot to be made by James in that Peirce's

confidence in the certainty of science allowed James to believe that when a scientist goes out into the world he tests hypotheses and is therefore immune to his own perceptual mediumship. However, James never states anywhere that the cause of a belief is "irrelevant," as Proudfoot argues; he simply complicates the issue by examining how sturdy the "origins" of a thing are and by arguing for the discursive framing of all knowledge, including scientific "fact-finding," which is not immune to a perceptual medium. On the contrary, James would be the first to admit that all belief stems from our perceptions, and his decontextualizing of the excerpts in one way allows him to contextualize them in a new way. In addition, the fact that he excerpts seems to me to be a way to recognize implicitly that a subject's belief about the causes of his religious experience is in itself the result of an interpretive process. Furthermore, Proudfoot doesn't raise the issue that James differed from Peirce in his faith that science could reveal objective truths. James was far more confident in the role that uncertainty played in both religious and scientific knowledge.

Proudfoot argues that James "ignores some crucial distinctions" in order to disconnect the cause of a religious experience from the excerpts he chooses to use in the *Varieties*, but (and his argument depends on this claim), James cannot do this because a belief attained by science is in fact "certain," and a religious experience is more a result of a "perceptual belief." This argument relates directly to the issue of origins once again. Proudfoot maintains that a scientist tests a hypothesis through experiment:

> She wants to discover whether or not it works, and its origin is irrelevant. It may have come in a moment of reverie, or have been suggested by a colleague, or arrived in a note in a bottle. Its origin is irrelevant to its

> assessment. But a perceptual belief is different. If the sound I hear leads me to believe that it is raining outside, I will doubt that belief when I realize that the sound is actually coming from the radiator. Then I will go to the window and look outside. A perceptual belief includes an embedded assumption about the proper causal relation between the belief and its object. (165)

Several issues at stake are missing in Proudfoot's understanding of James's framing of belief, and at the core is uncertainty. First of all, as noted earlier, James disagreed with Peirce's confidence in realism (the belief that science would eventually reveal truth), and, in addition, James would disagree with the notion that a hypothesis's origins are irrelevant. For him, all "facts" are mediated by perception. Whether a scientist's or a theologian's or a philosopher's, a hypothesis "originates" from a subject's consciousness, or even unconscious—this is the thread running through James's hermeneutics that he calls a "science of religions." The *Varieties*, in fact, doesn't eschew the perceptual origins of the religious experiences it contains, but rather vigorously sustains a characterization of the perceptual realm (the space between a fact and its interpretation), which James presents as thoroughly deceptive, unpredictable, spontaneous, and ultimately *uncertain*. And in the example above Proudfoot uses to show that a religious experience results in a "perceptual belief," it goes without saying that Proudfoot contradicts himself by constructing an example in which a belief is, in fact, "tested" and then put aside because it didn't work, and in his explanation of what a scientist does he essentially argues that the same method is used to construct and test "scientific" hypotheses. Proudfoot makes a distinction where there doesn't seem to be

one, even by his own estimation. In James's struggle with uncertainty, he found that it was at the roots of human inquiry into both natural science and the ideal world of religion; he argued for an epistemology that would ultimately embrace this uncertainty but provide a methodology that would help people cope with the uncertainty. The methodology rests on the understanding that our hypotheses about the world are at best guides emerging from information, events, hunches, and previous hypotheses. From there, one tests the hypothesis and, if it proves to be useful, it becomes a part of a new worldview paradigm and, if not, it is discarded. So, a more accurate conclusion about James's position with regard to the origins of beliefs about the natural, or any other world, is that they are never irrelevant, as Proudfoot claims, just indeterminate.

In Proudfoot's attempt to compare and evaluate James and Edwards as "philosopher[s] of religion" based on whether or not a subject's belief about the origins of a religious experience is included in the assessment of it creates a vacuum around James's philosophical claims denying the epistemological space uncertainty opened up. To claim that James ignores the complexity of an assessment of a religious experience by not considering a subject's *belief* about the origins of the experience eschews a basic tenet of pragmatism (that all knowledge is discursive) and a certain complexity about James's era and the "eclipse of certainty." Instead of "ignoring" belief about origins, as Proudfoot puts it, James complicates the matter by consciously and controversially adopting the discourse of psychology to build an argument claiming that *as a matter of perception*, religious experience encompasses a much wider realm of concrete experience whose causes cannot necessarily be ascertained. As Gerald Bruns argues, James would have understood that a subject's belief about the origins of his experience *was* a part of

his experience because for James knowledge and belief is social and linguistic. James doesn't *mistakenly* omit a subject's belief about his experience; he engages the interpretive gap that exists, even for the subjects whose testimony he uses. Responding to James's explanation about his "treatment" of the religious experiences, Bruns supports the idea that origins exist in the slippery, shadowy, unpredictable region of interpretation and discursiveness:

> At the outset of 'Mysticism' . . . James says 'Whether my treatment of mystical states will shed more light or darkness I do not know, for my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely, and I can speak of them only at second hand' (*V*, p.379). What is it, however, to speak of them at first hand? Keep in mind that what James studies in the *Varieties* are not religious experiences given as empirical phenomena but, rather, firsthand accounts of such phenomena. The point to mark is that these accounts are given almost entirely in the traditional language of theological discourse. These experiences come down to us, in other words, not as "pure" experiences that we may construe as we will in any language that is authoritative for us but as already interpreted experiences, that is experiences which are already theological in their self-understanding. (310)

Whereas Proudfoot would have James construing the experiences as empirical phenomenon, excising the subject's own theological interpretation from the experience, Bruns recognizes the testimonies as having been already understood in a particular way and as being taken up by James as already discursive. Although James employs different

discourses such as those of psychology and biology to re-construe the testimonies, the excerpts are ultimately taken as interpreted theologically by their subjects. And yet, the first thing James does in the *Varieties* is call the excerpted experiences he has collected "original," thereby shifting the conceptual framework for what can be considered "factual" evidence for a claim and what role that claim plays in belief. For example, Jonathan Edwards, who needed to establish that God was the cause of a subject's religious experience, relied on the evidence provided by a subject's outward behavior or on the testimony provided by the subject that there was real change in his emotional or intellectual behavior. The evidence, however, always needed to point toward the cause. James, on the other hand, is not looking to pin belief to a specific cause because it must remain open to interpretation and testing. James's evidence always points toward the next belief about the world, the next hypothesis that will open up more spaces for interpretation and adjustments in worldview. It is this space between the thing and its interpretation that allows the imagination to construct a "world" of knowledge and belief.

The *Varieties* promotes the role that perception and imagination play in belief by working to resolve the opposites James faced in the 1860s: those of absolutist science and dogmatic religion. He is able to do this by characterizing an internal reality whose interaction with a physical world cannot produce a defining boundary. James's non-dualistic approach to experience, therefore, places the shadowy region of consciousness at that boundary. A full rejection of certainty in religious experience and in science would entail a dismissal of the claim that one can have access to "things in themselves," and for James, God is included as a "thing in itself." Charlene Haddock Seigfried's article, "William James's Concrete Analysis of Experience" discusses James's "pragmatic

hermeneutic circle," the idea that "Truths emerge from facts; but they dip forward into facts again and add to them; which facts again create or reveal new truth" (*Pragmatism* 99). Her article stresses the notion that James's pragmatic hermeneutic circle provided an alternative to the debate (that had hardened as a result of Darwin) in the 1860's between realism and idealism—and that alternative places uncertainty at the heart of experience:

> Since all appropriations [of the world] are interested, we cannot erase the trail of the human contribution, try as we may. In James's criticism of science, he argues that we should not even want to eliminate the subjective contribution of feeling in our appropriation of objects because then we would be forced to accept the positivist claim that we are determined by objects. (547)

And, taking into consideration the determining nature God's role had in a "certain" universe, the "subjective contribution of feeling" Seigfried speaks of coordinately frames James's philosophy with regard to religious experience. The pragmatic hermeneutic circle is inherently unstable; everything we believe about the world and ourselves originates in the flux of this non-dualistic dynamic, yet James proposes that also inherent in this cycle is the means to cope with it. The *Varieties* is such a massive work because James takes on the challenge of characterizing the human condition in an uncertain world and is wholly committed to fleshing out a subject's pragmatic relation to it—with a major twist. James would like to offer the suggestion that to experience this non-dualistic world is in effect to "be religious," and when he explains why he has subordinated the intellectual part of religion to the feeling element in the *Varieties*, the answer mocks all stable conceptual systems:

> Individuality is founded in feeling; and the recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character, are the only places in the world in which we catch real fact in the making, and directly perceive how events happen, and how work is actually done. Compared with this world of living individualized feelings, the world of generalized objects which the intellect contemplates is without solidity or life. (501-502)

That these darker "strata of character" enliven the world provides the central concern of the *Varieties*, and the multitude of aspects of the human condition, therefore, necessarily generates this "uncertain" universe.[33] However, each chapter whether explicitly or not, addresses the issue of coping with this uncertainty in that the adaptations an individual makes to experience, understood generically as "beliefs," prove to be strong therapy for an uncertain world. In the end, belief is a coping mechanism that is also built into these darker strata. The pragmatic hermeneutic circle hinges on it in that belief remains tenuous until it has proven itself to work and only until then does it "dip forward into facts" again. The *Varieties* embraces uncertainty as a fact of experience in that it illuminates these darker strata, but more so in that it celebrates the human potential for growth.

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[33] Jeffrey Gordon explains that within James's conception of the role that feeling plays in the divination of truth,

> We cannot reason our way to a passional commitment—except in one circumstance: that the springs of that passion be already flowing before the argument begins, for the argument can then provide the necessary 'clincher', the reasoning that enables us to allow that passion rein. This is another way of re-iterating that James intends his argument only for those for whom the religious hypothesis is live, those who have felt in that hypothesis a palpable temptation, those who could feel a religious passion were it not stifled in them by skeptical constraints. (19)

In this passage Gordon echoes the problem Shepard's Puritans faced in attempting to reason their way to the truths about their souls. It was an epistemological process demanding a "passional" response, but to which they responded with the skepticism required by Shepard.

As an explication of consciousness as the space where experience plays itself out in individual lives, the *Varieties* is carefully structured in how it presents the process of a pragmatic hermeneutics. The beginning chapters recalibrate how we understand certain feelings, and James depends heavily in the early chapters on throwing religious experience into new perspectives and introducing a vocabulary that sheds new light on certain concepts. Terms such as "sentiment of reality," "instrumentality of pure ideas," and "moods of contraction" and "expansion" need to break apart old understandings of experience as well as provide stable new conceptual ground for his audience to work with. Granted the whole of the *Varieties* introduces new terms for consideration, yet the first few chapters are interesting in the persuasive power they demonstrate. One particular moment in "Circumscription of the Topic" reaches such a rhetorical momentum in James's definition of religion that although one may not be able to grasp his idea intellectually, the force of the words evokes the sense that we know what he means:

> Religion, what ever it is, is a man's total reaction upon life, so why not say that any total reaction upon life is a religion? Total reactions are different from casual reactions, and total attitudes are different from usual or professional attitudes. To get at them you must go behind the foreground of existence and reach down to that curious sense of the whole residual cosmos as an everlasting presence, intimate or alien, terrible or amusing, lovable or odious, which in some degree every one possesses. (35)

That we are asked to "get at" this "total reaction" which means to "go behind the foreground of existence" and reach a "sense of the whole residual cosmos" is one of the more amazing moments where James relies on our inner life of feeling and potential to

help guide us to a better acquaintance with these "darker strata." What does it mean to "get at" these places, especially places where a sense of the "whole residual cosmos" exists? Indeed, James's entire argument assumes our familiarity with what we understand as our own "total reaction." He does not, as he says in the end, depend on the intellectual grasp his audience may have on religion. In fact, as Gerald Bruns argues, much of the *Varieties* creates the sense that an intellectual grasp is inherently impossible when it comes to religious experience: "This sensation of being haunted by alien or inaccessible meanings—this experience of the hermeneutical strangeness of religion, where sense is not abolished but, one might say, withheld or forbidden—is present everywhere in the *Varieties*" (311). His audience, therefore, must be won over solely through his ability to touch deep reservoirs of feeling and to provide a resonance with those feelings because at every turn it must accept the validity of what it "knows" non-intellectually or feels haunted by. From knowing what it means to feel "polarized" and "magnetized" by ideas, to experiencing "equilibrium succeeding a period of storm," his audience must accept that his work doesn't "prove" anything: it simply provides a guide for realizing how vast and mysterious and powerful the experience of consciousness is. Yet at the same time he also builds into this rather unwieldy characterization of consciousness the means to cope with facing so much uncertainty. The notion of conversion is maybe not exactly the cornerstone for the *Varieties* (for I would argue the foregrounding of feeling plays that role), but it is most definitely the hinge on which swings the varieties of religious experience he discusses. The experience of conversion becomes in the *Varieties* a trope that carries the weight of not only capturing James's idea of the adaptive nature of

religious experience but also expressing the underlying structure of the pragmatic hermeneutic circle.

The idea of conversion, for James, is the figure for the dynamic structure of consciousness as a mental universe of chance and indeterminacy, an acknowledgment that was possible not only because evolutionary theory argued for a physical universe based on these same uncertain principles, but because religious experience in and of itself proved to have aspects of the indeterminate itself, particularly related to what he calls the "transmarginal" field. In his chapters on conversion, James employs more rigorously than in the rest of the *Varieties* naturalistic terms in order to convey the congruence he perceived between the worldview evolutionary biology offered and the philosophical framework that grew out of the patterns and tendencies he detected in religious experience. Within the scope of the *Varieties*, the chapters on conversion allow James to make a transition from his more general discussion of the aspects of religion in the previous chapters to a more naturalistic or biological rendering of religious experience. In fact, James is not so delicate in the transition that he makes: when the first chapter on conversion barrages the reader with testimonies of having undergone the transformative experience of conversion, James flatly states, "It is natural that those who personally have traversed such an experience should carry away a feeling of its being a miracle rather than a natural process" (228). The metaphor of consciousness as a natural space builds throughout the chapters on conversion as images of flowers and fruits and crystals begin to take root. Though critics of the *Varieties* seem to agree that its purpose is to render a rationalistic account of religious experience through James's use of the field of psychology as an interpretive device, his use of metaphors borrowed from the natural

world, including waves, fertility, energy, and growth, serves a descriptive purpose that has a more poetic function because the interpretive imperative is built into it. Instead of rendering religious experience solely as brain activity, James compliments his psychological account with poetic elements that present to a *viewer* a picture of that mental space providing the atmosphere for the dynamic between a fact and its interpretation—the pragmatic hermeneutic circle.

These descriptive elements speak to the larger task that James undertakes with the *Varieties* of "converting" his audience to the dynamics of a philosophy built on uncertainty.[34] James argues in the chapters on conversion that the "re-crystallization" of the feelings, ideas, and beliefs in a person's consciousness around a new "habitual centre" of energy occurs through a process involving the projection of one's self onto a new set of ideals. These conversion experiences can result from slow incubation within a subject's consciousness or from the influences of an outside force. As James says, "New

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[34] As John E. Smith explains in his article "The Reconception of Experience in Pierce, James and Dewey," James departed from the classical empiricism of Locke and Hume which held that experience was a "veil somehow standing between the one who experiences and the so-called 'external world'" when he adopted the Pragmatists' emphasis on the "activity and engagement of the subject in experience and especially on the close connection between experience and the formation of habits or patterns of behavior in response to the challenge of the situation" (539, 540). James would focus his analysis on actual experiencing, and in doing so conceptualize the central role that the feeling of "tendency" has in it. The *Varieties* provides the best description of the feeling of tendency in its rendering of the "transmarginal field" as the place of emergent truth. Smith explains that

> One of the reasons for the stress on the atomic in classical empiricism was the difficulty of not being able to find an acceptable 'impression' answering to the directionality we encounter in processes of both the physical and organic worlds, to say nothing of the experience of change and growth of ourselves. James was aware of the problem as is evidenced by his use of the figure of the 'stream' in his description of thought and consciousness. If the field of awareness is basically a flow or succession in which states interpenetrate each other and those which have passed leave traces on those yet to come so that at each point there are indications of what might or could come next, any analysis of these states into clear-cut and atomic units must result in the banishment of tendency from experience. (547)

The *ordo salutis*, in fact, is a good example of the organization of experience into atomic units, demonstrating the very banishment of tendency James esteems. Enforced as the early "units" of conversion were by Shepard, those feelings of "tendency" signaling Shepard's Puritans' faith would be suppressed in the effort to maintain a "clear-cut" foundation for knowledge.

information, however acquired, plays an accelerating part in the changes" (197). The new information that James presents provides the means for his audience to project itself onto a wider field of imaginative and interpretative possibilities. The following passage illustrates the beauty with which James is able to describe consciousness almost as though one were looking through a telescope at one's own mindscape. It presents a survey of the mind's processes in conversion:

> As our mental fields succeed one another, each has its centre of interest, around which the objects of which we are less and less attentively conscious fade to a margin so faint that its limits are unassignable. Some fields are narrow fields and some are wide fields. Usually when we have a wide field we rejoice, for we then see masses of truth together, and often get glimpses of relations which we divine rather than see, for they shoot beyond the field into still remoter regions of objectivity, regions which we seem rather to be about to perceive than to perceive actually. At other times, of drowsiness, illness, or fatigue, our fields may narrow almost to a point, and we find ourselves correspondingly oppressed and contracted. (*Varieties* 231)

This description of our mental fields allows us to grasp the "saving" nature of exercising our potential for perspective. In the passage the field originates from within and hopefully widens out toward regions "we seem rather to be *about* to perceive" (emphasis added). These regions exist in the *Varieties* as those "withheld meanings" that seem to haunt the reader. As moments of suspense they are characterized as signs of psychological health and religious growth. They are moments marking conversion, which are not comfortable,

but that mean we have not stagnated in our worldview, and the *Varieties* enacts this feeling of suspense and engages us in that epistemological and religious projection of ourselves, even to places we cannot yet "see," but are only vaguely aware of and yet are pointed toward by virtue of an internal "compass-needle" James argues is always guiding us toward the margin. Much like the central moment of evangelical humiliation in Edwards' figuring of conversion in his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, the straining towards "something that is seen, that is wonderful" is a mark of spiritual and mental health because it signals the regenerative process of arriving at new truths.

Because this theory of mental fields entails the movement or succession of centers, each producing a gravitational pull reorganizing a new set of relations, the feeling of tendency resulting from these interpenetrating states produces margins that generate an individual's sense of disorientation within experience. James, once again, renders this idea of the margin in such a way that provides a vocabulary for actually talking about the feeling:

> The important fact which this 'field' formula commemorates is the indetermination of the margin. Inattentively realized as is the matter which the margin contains, it is nevertheless there, and helps both to guide our behavior and to determine the next movement of our attention. . . . Our whole past store of memories floats beyond this margin, ready at a touch to come in; and the entire mass of residual powers, impulses, and knowledges that constitute our empirical self stretches continuously beyond it. So vaguely drawn are the outlines between what is actual and what is only potential at any moment of our conscious life, that it is

> always hard to say of certain mental elements whether we are conscious of them or not. (*Varieties* 232)

Indeed, based on this description, the conversion process not only provides a way of thinking about the indeterminacy of experience, but proposes indeterminacy as the template for conscious (and unconscious) life and makes our actions and behavior at best the testing ground for each stage or "hypothesis." This characterization of experience as highly unstable deems establishing conceptual frameworks for approaching the world seemingly impossible as well as a strange sort of fate: caught up in indetermination, we are never sure of what we are conscious of until the invisible, underlying processes of transformation are made visible by the actions that result—the "fruits" as James puts it. In this experiential indeterminacy, the fruits never "prove" anything about the "cause" (because the "cause" is always already part of an indeterminate margin); rather, they legitimate belief in the face of that uncertainty. To be "religious" in this sense means to approach the world as a place wherein theories/beliefs are tested and realized through the fruits of action and behavior.

Basing his pragmatic hermeneutics on the principle of uncertainty allowed James to develop a philosophy foregrounding potential and parity, advocating ever-widening context and perspective, and empowering the individual as interpreter of his worldview. In his own philosophical journey, James found the theory of evolutionary biology helpful in structuring an approach to the world, and I would argue that the metaphors and imagery drawn from the physical world serve to reinforce the message that conversion's acts of interpretation reach to all corners of experience. These naturalistic images used to represent mental processes align that imaginative space with a physical environment.

They support the idea that conversion involves the pragmatic hermeneutic approach to every environment we encounter whether it is the truths we are about to perceive over the horizon of our consciousness or a species of wildflower we encounter on a hilltop. James's comparison of the conversion process to biological growth through naturalistic metaphors and images expresses his explicit claims that religious experiences, "on account of their extraordinary influence upon action and endurance . . . [must be classed] amongst the most important biological functions of mankind" (*Varieties* 506). Having found the drama of evolutionary biology meaningful, James's translation of it into a redemptive drama widens the context for religious experience in that it includes it among a broader spectrum of encounters that warrant interpretation. In addition, because James construed spiritual growth as a function of biological evolution, he infuses it with a dynamism that finds suitable symbolism in the evolutionary processes of the physical world: "When the new centre of personal energy has been subconsciously incubated so long as to be just ready to open into flower, 'hands off' is the only word for us, it must burst forth unaided" (*Varieties* 210).

Like his predecessors Jonathan Edwards and Ralph Waldo Emerson, James found the flower to be a useful symbol for capturing aspects of spiritual growth. James's flower symbol, however, has the power of conveying the suspense of "incubation" and the spontaneity of the bloom. For James, "God is the finite limit of the field of consciousness" (Alexander 309). Therefore the conversion process entails attention to our stream of thought, conceived as a succession of conscious fields. James's flower, like Emerson's, has a more prominent character of individuality, unlike Edwards' "little white flower . . . low and humble on the ground" in his "Personal Narrative." But unlike

Emerson's roses in "Self-Reliance," James's flower has a more defined self-contained internal energy, an energy that does not necessarily extend beyond the individual's own transmarginal field. Emerson's roses, on the other hand, exist with, or in relation to, the divine; they "are for what they are; they exist *with God* to-day" (emphasis added). Because James locates a subconscious region "through which God *might possibly* communicate with an individual," his emphasis in his characterization of the mind's growth falls on the idea of "incubation" and the incessant regeneration of an individual's "habitual centre" of "personal energy" resulting from personal desire and volition (Alexander 309).[35] James explains, with regard to our field of consciousness, that "whatever . . . may be on its farther side, the 'more' with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its hither side the subconscious continuation of our conscious life," so that there is "the subconscious incubation and maturing of motives deposited by the experiences of life" and "when ripe, the results hatch out, or burst into flower" (*Varieties* 230). In James's symbol of the flower we find an articulation of conversion that captures the beauty and "biology" of the spontaneity that has been associated with Puritan conceptions of spiritual conversion. The idea in James that regeneration is a natural process, and we are merely witnesses to it, retains the mystery of an experience about which, James argues, so much is simply unknown. His characterization of the subconscious as the space of incubation and of emerging truths,

[35] Alexander's article makes the argument that James's position helps us "to make sense of religious theism without demanding that belief in God be a requirement for authentic faith." Because God is no longer a requirement for faith, "Specific dogmatic beliefs will not last forever and can never be more than hypothetical. The experiences that give rise to such beliefs will, however, remain as long as there are human beings" (321). Cast in this light, we can look back on Calvinist doctrine and especially the *ordo salutis* as merely hypotheses pointing toward a specific spiritual experience. Presented as a way to establish belief about the state of their souls, saints would truly take part in an experimental piety in search of the truth about their election.

where God "*might possibly*" be communicating with us finally reconciles the process of conversion with the idea that there is no *certain* way to determine the causes of the effects we experience in that process.

In characterizing the soul, James asserts that it is simply the conglomeration of things that are "hot and vital to us to-day" but could just as easily be "cold" to us "to-morrow" (*Varieties* 195). Soul is merely a matter of our own perspective, a grouping of ideas indicating what is important to us "here" and "now" or what is "mine" or constitutes "me." The hot place of our soul/consciousness is, according to James, "the habitual centre of [an individual's] personal energy," the "group of ideas to which he devotes himself, and from which he works" (195-196). What James does so faithfully in these chapters on conversion is use a variety of discourses to describe what happens in the mind when new centers of personal energy are created in the course of experience. The result is an intermingling of discursive boundaries revealing the limitations and possibilities each offers for understanding the phenomenon. As a reader, one must become adept at juggling the descriptions each discourse has to offer. In a matter of two pages, he explains that to say a man is "converted" means that "religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy" (196). Then he calls upon the discourse of psychology to explain "*how* the excitement shifts in a man's mental system, and *why* aims that were peripheral become at a certain moment central," admitting that it cannot, that in the end, we must "fall on the hackneyed symbolism of mechanical equilibrium":

> A mind is a system of ideas, each with the excitement it arouses, and with tendencies impulsive and inhibitive, which mutually check or reinforce

> each other. The collection of ideas alters by subtraction or by addition in the course of experience, and the tendencies alter as the organism gets more aged. . . . But a new perception, sudden emotional shock, or an occasion which lays bare the organic alteration, will make the whole fabric fall together; and then the centre of gravity sinks into an attitude more stable, for the new ideas that reach the centre in the rearrangement seem now to be locked there, and the new structure remains permanent. (196-197)

Immersed in a sea of varying discourses, we as readers undergo the disorientation similar to the experience of reading Emerson's essays. The variety of discourses insures that James's ideas will find the widest possible audience, but it also puts his audience in the position of having to limn meaning from them. We undergo the same interpretative experience he describes. Significantly, the "mutations" of our "instincts" and "propensities" forming new "mental results" (the meanings we construct from the varying discourses he provides) are accomplished, James argues in two ways: "There is . . . a conscious and voluntary way and an involuntary and unconscious way," what he quotes Starbuck as terming "the volitional type" of conversion and the "type by self-surrender" (206).

These two paths to achieving conversion, James notes, are really only two perspectives an individual gains upon the "indivisible event" he conceptualizes as conversion. Quoting Starbuck again, he explains that "self-surrender" provides a perspective viewing the change "in terms of the old self," and one's determination to convert provides the perspective viewing the change "in terms of the new" (215). Both

types work in tandem, with the "volitional type . . . building up, piece by piece, . . . a new set of moral and spiritual habits" and the "type by self-surrender" acting as the "vital turning-point" (206, 210). James presents the process in theological terms, stating, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," but he also phrases it in physiological terms, stating, "Let one do all in one's power, and one's nervous system will do the rest" (qtd. in Starbuck: 210). Moreover, he reminds his reader that these two paths to conversion are the same that were codified and undertaken by New England's Puritans. With such a claim, James conflates the aims he envisions for the pragmatic hermeneutic with the spiritual goals Shepard's saints undertook by using the *ordo salutis*. Both methodologies centralize the role that the perceptual realm plays in the interpretive process and recognize the seemingly dual aspects of searching and surrendering. In addition, both methodologies have as their ends the "assurance and peace which fill the hour of change itself" (242).

James's argument in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* hinges on the emphasis placed on the "incubation" of habits formed through the "indivisible event" of volition and self-surrender. Though he does not go into the particulars of how habits are formed in the *Varieties*, the process he describes in the "Habit" chapter of *The Principles of Psychology*, published twelve years earlier, frames a history of the conversion experience and the methodologies and goals adopted by Shepard, Edwards, and Emerson.[36] As ministers, they would have been especially sensitive to the psychological and physical effects of the atmosphere they created, through their ministrations, at the intersection of an individual's experience of method, perception, and affection.

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[36] *The Principles of Psychology*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1983). Hereafter cited as *Principles*.

Recognizing that the brain and spinal cord are "carefully shut up" in "bony boxes," he argues that "the only impressions that can be made upon them are through the blood, on the one hand, and through the sensory nerve roots, on the other" (*Principles* 112). Therefore, he asserts, the brain is susceptible to the "infinitely attenuated currents," what Emerson would call the "ethereal currents," pouring in through the "sensory nerve roots." Habits are formed because the "currents, once in, must find a way out. In getting out they leave their traces in the paths which they take. The only thing they can do, in short, is to deepen old paths or to make new ones" (112). In this way, the organism can "form itself in accordance with the mode in which it is habitually exercised" because "incessant regeneration" is the "tendency" of the "Nervous apparatus" (116). Habits, our centers of personal energy, are maintained or created physiologically, James argues, because "every state of ideational consciousness which is either *very strong* or is *habitually repeated*, leaves an organic impression on the Cerebrum" (116). Importantly, these habitual centers of personal energy serve as the "enormous flywheel of society, its most precious conservative agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance" (125). In James, habits are the register of our experience in the world, a sort of record of our adaptations resulting from a meaning-making process. They are "invisible laws" indicating the ideas to which we devote ourselves:

> We have a thought, or we perform an act, repeatedly, but on a certain day the *real meaning of the thought* peals through us for the first time, or the act has suddenly turned into a moral impossibility. All we know is that there are dead feelings, dead ideas, and cold beliefs, and there are hot and

> live ones; and when one grows hot and alive within us, everything has to re-crystallize about it. (emphasis added; *Varieties* 196-197)

In James's formulation, the "real meaning of the thought" in the above quote can issue through the "indivisible events" of self-surrender or volition in the habit forming process. What his formulation articulates is the central role habit forms in the meaning-making process that is conversion. We exist as a group of ideas, responding to an environment, and adapting to that environment through adjustments in our "habitual centres" of "personal energy." Our habits indicate the group of ideas "hot" to us, but the moment that an idea becomes cold, either through an emotional shock, for example, or through a gradual build-up of a new habit, our personal "centre of gravity" will "sink into an attitude more stable," our ideas having recrystallized around a new arrangement.

These recrystallizations signal the moments when we "touch our own upper limit and live in our own highest centre of energy," and in these moments, James explains, "we may call ourselves *saved*, no matter how much higher some one else's centre may be" (emphasis added; *Varieties* 239). Living in "our own highest centre of energy," therefore, is a way of carving our way through life with habit as the response to the stability or rearrangements of the group of ideas making up consciousness. The continuity that these recrystallizations manifest constitutes what James calls "the stream of thought," and in his definition of the "spiritual self" he claims that attention to this stream, or "to think ourselves as thinkers," puts us in touch with this "rather mysterious operation" that is the subjective life. In the chapter called "The Consciousness of Self" in *The Principles of Psychology*, he outlines how "all men" would describe this self if we were to "think ourselves as thinkers":

> They would call it the active element in all consciousness; saying that whatever qualities a man's feelings may possess, or whatever content his thought may include, there is a spiritual something in him which seems to go out to meet these qualities and contents, whilst they seems to come in to be received by it. It is what welcomes and rejects. It presides over the perception of sensations, and by giving or withholding its assent it influences the movements they tend to arouse. It is the home of interest. . . . It is the source of effort and attention, and the place from which appear to emanate the fiats of the will. A physiologist who should reflect on it in his own person could hardly help . . . connecting it more or less vaguely with the process by which ideas or incoming sensations . . . pass over into outward acts. (*Principles* 285)

As our personal centers of energy change, our spiritual selves seem to make up what James describes as "the permanent core of turnings-towards and turnings-from, of yieldings and arrests" forming the contours of our internal lives (289).

James's articulation of conversion in physiological, psychological, and spiritual terms allows him to explicate facets of the experience, and of the concept itself, that clarify its role in Puritan theology and Emerson's literary style. Specifically, each theologian was committed to creating specific habits in his audiences for the purposes of helping them become more pious or acute interpreters of their experience, thus the role that the *ordo salutis*, Edwards' emphasis on "attention of the mind in thinking," and Emerson's transcendental project in *Nature* played. Each of these tools guided perception to that conscious space where individuals witness the "turnings-towards and turnings-

from" of their experience, allowing them to develop that spiritual self who is attentive to the "mysterious process" of crystallization. Each theologian was also interested in the societal benefits of forging the right habits in his audiences. Shepard developed an overtly disciplined ministry, preaching the stages preceding conversion emphasizing conviction and compunction to enforce societal order. The *ordo salutis* provided the template determining for his congregation what parts of their experience they were to turn toward and what parts they were to turn from, hence the open-ended narratives.

Edwards' theorizing of conversion as the pious attention to the "mind in thinking" closely resembles James's idea that to develop the "spiritual self" we need to "think ourselves as thinkers." Emerson, in turn, writes a transcendental version of the *ordo salutis*, guiding his readers on a perceptual journey no less directed at inculcating the habit of becoming aware of, and nurturing, one's own perspectival removes. All are interested in using their influence to promote what they conceive to be the most beneficial state of consciousness because we would be "operating," as James would say, at "our own highest centre of energy," engaged in a process of "incessant regeneration."

Renee Tursi and Joseph M. Thomas both recognize habit's "ameliorating force" in James's thinking, in that habit offers stability by easing us "into a more secure, less 'uncanny' world," by performing a kind of "midwifery" (Tursi 80; Thomas 15). Thomas argues, in fact, that "habit's trick is to supplant nature by mimicking it, to become, through repetition over time, a virtual or 'second' nature" (9). Indeed, James's descriptions of conversion in physiological terms provide yet another way to understand why the *ordo salutis* was so successful. As a socially prescribed habit, all individual experience was subjected to it. Edwards, on the other hand, was explicit about the fact

that the new "spiritual sense" *was* a new habit, and by eschewing orderly preparatory stages, he left the process of acquiring the new habit up to the individual. However, the goal was the same—regeneration—and one's newly acquired habits, cast in the physical terms of "sense," remained "proof" that they were the results of grace. Emerson too was interested in the ameliorative forces of developing the right habits. Particularly concerned about the destructive relations between an individual and history, nature, rhetoric, and language, he developed a literary style compelling his readers and listeners to take responsibility for developing meaning out of the contexts in which they found themselves.

The strength of James's articulation of conversion comes from his ability to describe consciousness as a boundary phenomenon, as a conductive imaginary manifesting the relation between abstract ideas and concrete realities. In providing a sustained rendering of the pragmatic hermeneutic, the *Varieties* illuminates *what happens to ideas* in the course of experience and interpreting the truth.[37] It presents the challenge and complexity that Shepard would have claimed to be the state of fallen man, that our perception and knowledge of God's divinity in the world is seen "but as in a glass," and that the best we can expect of our interpretations of the truth is that they lead us into what James describes in *Pragmatism*, but that Edwards had described earlier, as "satisfactory"

[37] Grace M Jantzen notes that James's conception of experience was more inclusive than that found in the British empirical tradition: "Just as our senses are able to perceive material things via ordinary consciousness, so the margins of our consciousness or our subconscious minds might be the point at which "higher 'spiritual agencies', if there are any, could directly touch us" (296). In the Puritan determination to establish the truth of their perceptions, saints were on the watch for any images that might be the product of the imagination, the product of the devil's deception. Yet, in James, it is because "spiritual agencies" could directly touch us that he was "particularly interested in the fringes of consciousness: psychic phenomena, hallucinations, the effects of nitrous oxide and intoxication, and intense or bizarre accounts of religious experience including trances, levitations, seizures, hallucinations, and the like" (296). Having been banished from what could be considered "spiritual" in Puritan doctrine, "fringe" experiences, such as hallucinations, ironically find a home in James's theory of conversion.

relations with the world (*TV* 215). Indeed, James's pragmatic method provides the meliorism for the age-old problem of the human inability to see things "as they are." He describes our perceptual fate with an apt symbol:

> [L]ook . . . through the flat wall of an aquarium. You will then see an extraordinarily brilliant reflected image say of a candle-flame . . . on the opposite side of the vessel. No ray, under these circumstances, gets beyond the water's surface. . . . Now let the water represent the world of sensible facts, and let the air above it represent the world of abstract ideas. Both worlds are real . . . and interact; but they interact only at their boundary, and the locus of everything that . . . happens to us, so far as experience goes, is the water. We are like fishes swimming in a sea of sense, bounded above by the superior element, but unable to breathe or penetrate it. We get our oxygen from it, however, we touch it incessantly, now in this part, now in that, and every time we touch it, we turn back into the water with our course re-determined and re-energized. (*Pragmatism* 57)

Indeed, Edwards had devised his new "Logick" with a similar picture of the mind. Most notably, both Edwards' and James's theorizing of a method to cope with the chaos and uncertainty of the world led them to a valuing of the boundary experience of consciousness and specifically to a conceptualization of the space of the vague. As the space of emergent truths, the space of the vague offers the promise of "consistency, stability and flowing human intercourse" because it is an infinite resource for ideas helping us "to *deal*" (*Pragmatism* 95, 94). Any idea, James argues that helps us to cope,

"whether practically or intellectually, with either the reality or its belongings, that doesn't entangle our progress in frustrations, that fits, in fact, and adapts our life to the reality's whole setting, will agree sufficiently to meet the requirement. It will hold true of that reality" (94).

James concludes *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by placing the question of our "fate" at the center of our existence: "however particular questions connected with our individual destinies may be answered, it is only by acknowledging them as genuine questions, and *living in the sphere of thought* which they open up, that we become profound" (emphasis added; *Varieties* 500). To "live thus," James concludes, "is to be religious" (500). In these concluding words, James brings us full circle, back to the "genuine" question of Shepard's saints: Am I saved? Launching the saints on a search for a specific experience of belief, the morphology of conversion opened up an epistemological space offering the promise of adaptation to and redemption from their fallen state. Indeed, they lived "in the sphere of thought" that the promise of salvation offered them. That "sphere of thought," what I've been calling a conductive imaginary, is the conscious (and unconscious) space where adaptations in belief and worldview occur through the experience of the gap between a fact and its interpretation. This gap has proven to demand a method for coping with the uncertainty inherent in the moments of orientation toward new worldviews, and all of the authors discussed here undertook not only to theorize a method, but the guide for habituating their audiences to that method as well. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* joins in that effort by promoting the method of a pragmatic hermeneutic for "living in the sphere of thought" opened up by the

questions we constantly need to ask. We are all "saved," James would argue, if we live by trying our best at answering these questions for ourselves.

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