

Part I

Preliminaries: Cartesians, Puritans, and Revolutionaries

The Cartesian Legacy: Locke

1.1 | Introduction

Early American intellectual thought was strongly influenced by a variety of sources. It was influenced by the religious beliefs of colonizers, the harsh environment of the new world, and the European philosophical thought which colonizers brought with them to this new world. One influential philosophy that is said to impact American transcendentalism, the religious views of Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards, and the writing of the Declaration of Independence is that of John Locke (1632–1704).¹

In this handout, we examine some key features of Locke's work, primarily focusing on (1) Locke's theory of ideas, (2) his view on what counts as knowledge, and (3) his position on the faith, revelation, and the existence of God.

1.2 | Locke: Ideas

Key to Locke's philosophy is a discussion of what he means by ideas, the sources of ideas, and what this means for knowledge. For Locke an *idea* is the object of a perception or thought. It is *what* we are thinking of (the immediate object of a thought; the object *in our mind* that we are feeling, tasting, seeing, thinking of). As such, ideas are *in our minds* and so are different from the qualities, characteristics, or properties of objects that are *external* to the mind.

Definition 1.1: Idea

An idea is the object of a perception or thought.

For Locke there are two sources (origins) of ideas: **sensation** and **reflection**. That is, ideas are derived from two principal areas: sensation through the five senses or reflection on the operation of the mind.

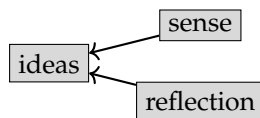
¹see Morton White. *Science and Sentiment in America: Philosophical Thought from Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 9–29.

Definition 1.2: Ideas of sensation

ideas of sensation are ideas of qualities that are perceived through the five senses (e.g. red or yellow)

Definition 1.3: Ideas of reflection

ideas of reflection are ideas of the operations of our mind (e.g. thinking or believing)



1.2.1 | Simple and complex ideas

Locke's account of ideas is **atomistic** (in that there are fundamental units, or simples) and **constructivistic** (in that more complex or general ideas are built from these simples).

Ideas of sense and reflection can be further divided into (i) simple or complex ideas and (ii) particular and general ideas.

Definition 1.4: simple idea

A simple idea is an idea that cannot be analyzed (decomposed) into component ideas.

For Locke, there are simple ideas of sensation and reflection.

Example 1.1: simple ideas of sensation

Red, green, cold, hard

Example 1.2: simple ideas of reflection

Thinking and willing

Some ideas of sensation are only through one sense (e.g. color (sight), hot / cold (touch), solidity (touch)), while other ideas of sensation are through more than one sense (common sensibles). For example, the ideas of space, extension, figure, rest, motion are known through the senses but are known through multiple senses.

Simple ideas of reflection include perception/thinking and volition/willing and there are various modes to these ideas. For example, thinking can involve remembering, discerning, reasoning, judging, and knowing. While volition/willing can involve believe, desiring, faith, etc.

Locke is also clear that the mind is **passive** about simple ideas and they occur to the mind **immediately**. The mind is not capable of creating or destroying them nor does the mind require

extended thought to apprehend them (see Bk.II, Ch.VII, Sec. 10).

Example 1.3

If you are looking at a blue swath of fabric, you cannot help but have the idea of blue. Similarly (and more controversially), Locke thinks that you also cannot fail to know the operations of your own mind. That is, you know when you are thinking, believing, willing.

In contrast to simple ideas, where the mind is passive, in the case of complex ideas, the mind is active. The mind plays an active role in having complex ideas by making them out of simple ideas.²

Definition 1.5: complex idea

A complex idea is an idea made of several ideas.^a

^a“Ideas thus made up of several simple ones put together, I call *Complex*; such as are *Beauty, Gratitude, a Man, an Army, the Universe*;” (II, XII, 1)

For Locke, there are three different types of complex ideas:

1. modes
2. relations
3. substances

Modes are complex ideas that depend upon inhering in something. Modes can be thought of our ideas of *properties* of a thing but since they are a property, they need to be a property of something.³

A **Relation** is a comparison of one idea with another. For example, a *friendship* is a relation between two different ideas of something.

Substances are our ideas of the *thing* that has qualitative characteristics. It is the *subject* that properties inhere but considered separate from those qualities. combination of simples taken to represent a distinct thing. Single: distinct particular things subsisting by themselves (e.g. man, sheep). Collective: collection of singles (army, flock).

We thus have complex ideas of the properties of things, of the things in which the properties inhere, and relations between various things or ideas.

1.2.2 | Particular and general ideas

Ideas are particular or general.

²“so it [the mind] exerts several acts of its own, whereby out of its simple *Ideas*, as the Materials and Foundations of the rest, the other is framed.” (BkII, ChXII, Sec1)

³There are two types of modes. Simple modes are a combination of a number of similar modes, while mixed modes are a combination of a number of different modes (e.g. beauty).

Definition 1.6: particular idea

A particular idea is an idea about a single thing.

Definition 1.7: general idea

A general idea is a class concept that is reducible to particular ideas. It is an idea that applies to *many* ideas.

Most of our words are names for general ideas because if we had to have a name for every particular idea of something, we would have an endless number of names. For example, the name “white” does not refer to a particular idea of white that we saw on such and such an occasion but a number of different particular ideas of white we have sensed.

Ideas become general through the operation of **abstraction**. This is done by ignoring any features of that idea that make it particular or distinguish it from other ideas.

[the Mind] makes the particular *Ideas*, received from particular Objects, to become general; which is done by considering them as they are in the Mind such Appearances, separate from all other Existences, and the circumstances of real existence, as Time, Place, or any other concomitant *Ideas*. This is called *ABSTRACTION*, whereby *Ideas* taken from particular Beings, become general Representatives of all the same kind; (Bk.II, Chap. xi, Sec.9)

In short, to create a general idea, you remove any distinguishing features of that idea (any feature that make that idea unique or particular).

Example 1.4

Suppose you see a black cat in a particular place and time, then you see a white cat at a different place and time. One forms the *general* idea of *cat* by ignoring what made each idea distinct from the other ideas. That is, ignoring place, time, and the color of each cat.

1.2.3 | Denial of innate ideas

Thus far, we have seen that Locke does the following:

1. traces all ideas back to sensation and reflection
2. builds complex ideas out of simple ideas through an operation of the mind
3. builds all general ideas from simple ideas through abstraction

All ideas for Locke (whether they be complex or general) can be traced back to our simple ideas of either sense or reflection. Practically speaking then, if someone makes a claim about the world, then they ought to be able to trace the content of that claim back to some idea that was

received from their senses or from reflection upon their mind. For Locke this means that there are

Definition 1.8: innate idea

An innate idea is an idea that is stamped on the mind as soon as it is conceived. It is an idea or truth that we are born with. It is an idea that is known independent of experience.

no innate ideas, principles, or truths.

Example 1.5

Some examples of innate ideas include:

1. Whatever is, is.
2. All triangles are three sided
3. It is impossible for something to be and not be.

Locke contends that for any innate idea, truth, principle that you can think of there is a way to account for the origin of the idea without positing it as innate. In other words, you can explain how that idea or truth came about through our “natural Faculties” (BKI, II, Sec 1).

Locke’s primary argument against the innateness of ideas focuses on what we will call the **universal consent argument**.

- P1: There are some propositions that everyone accepts (universal consent).
- P2: The only way to account for this universal consent is to posit the principle as innate (imprinted on the mind).
- C: Therefore, there must be innate principles.

Locke argues that P1 and P2 are both false.

First, with respect to **P1**, Locke points out that there are no propositions that are universally consented to since children, idiots, savages, the illiterate, and “a great part of Mankind” do not even know these propositions (Bk I, chII, sec 26). For Locke, there cannot be truths imprinted on the mind that you (i) don’t perceive, (ii) don’t understand, or (iii) never conscious of.⁴

With respect to **P2** Locke insists that there is no argument to suppose that an idea is innate whenever they can be explained through a process of acquisition. Locke thus takes the mind to be a blank slate that receives ideas and produces new ideas from these ingredients but never simply reads ideas off itself as though it was imprinted with them by God or nature. Locke’s process for how so-called innate ideas originate is as follows:⁵

1. We receive particular ideas from the senses and they are lodged into memory
2. We attach names to these ideas

⁴Locke develops several variations on this argument and responds to each. See BKI, ChII, Secs 6-13.

⁵“neither does he then readily assent, because it is an innate Truth, nor was his Assent wanting, til then, because he wanted the *Use of Reason*; but the Truth of it appears to him, as soon as he has settled in his Mind the clear and distinct *Ideas*, that these Names stand for: And then, he knows the Truth of that Proposition, upon the same Grounds, and by the same means, that he knew before, That a Rod and Cherry are not the same thing; and upon the same Grounds also, that he may come to know afterwards, *That it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be*” (BKI, ChII, Sec15).

3. Our minds operate on these ideas, e.g. they become general through a process of abstraction, and we name these general ideas with general names
4. We develop a language, a capable to engage in discursive reasoning and thus can formulate propositions.
5. When the ideas of these propositions are clear and distinct, we perceive the truth of these propositions.

Locke's basic idea then is for any so-called innate truth, we can come to perceive its truth only after a process of idea acquisition, abstraction, expression in language, and once the idea is clearly and distinctly understood, we intuitively perceive its truth.

Exercise 1

We have a brief overview of Locke's view on ideas (the contents of our mind). In a small group, answer the following questions on a sheet of paper:

1. Do all of our ideas and thus all of our knowledge come from experience (either through sensation or reflection on the mind's operations)?
2. Is Locke right about there being no innate ideas?
3. Are there any ideas you are simply born with or that nature imprints on your mind?

1.2.4 | Primary and secondary qualities

We have examined Locke's views on ideas. This concerns the contents of our minds, but what does Locke say about the objects themselves (independent of our ideas of the objects)?

Locke defines a *quality* of something as it having the power to produce an idea in us.⁶ Locke writes:

Thus a Snow-Ball having the power to produce in us the *Ideas* of *White*, *Cold*, and *Round*, the Powers to produce those *Ideas* in us, as they are in the Snow-ball, I call *Qualities*; (BKIII, ChVIII, Sec 8)

Definition 1.9: quality

A *quality* is a power of something to produce an idea in us.

Locke proceeds to distinguish two different types of qualities.

First, there are **primary qualities**. These are qualities that are **inseparable** from the object itself, such that any alteration the thing undergoes, it never loses that feature.

⁶“Whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call *Idea*; and the power to product any *Idea* in our mind, I call *Quality* of the subject wherein that power is.” (BKIII, ChVIII, Sec 8)

Definition 1.10: primary quality

A primary quality is a quality that is inseparable from the object itself. Locke contends that these qualities are in the object itself.

In addition, Locke says that these qualities are always found in the object, writing that “Sense constantly finds in every particle of Matter, which has bulk enough to be perceived” (BKII, VIII, 9). In the objects themselves and therefore their ideas resemble the object. Examples of primary qualities include size, figure, number, motion of parts, extension.

Example 1.6: Primary quality

Locke’s example involves a grain of wheat. If we take the grain of wheat and cut it into two halves, both halves still have certain qualities that were also found in the uncut grain. Both are solid, have extension in space, have a figure, and capable of being moved or is at rest in space.

Second, there are **secondary qualities**. These are not in the objects themselves, but the result of the powers of the object to produce sensations in us. The ability of the object to produce sensations depends on the primary qualities. Since they are not in the objects themselves, they do not resemble the object.

Definition 1.11: secondary quality

A secondary quality is a quality that is not in the object itself but is an effect on us of the properties of the object.

Example 1.7: Secondary quality

Examples of primary qualities include light, heat, whiteness (color), pain, coldness, etc.

The primary and secondary qualities are both produced in us by particles impressing themselves on our senses. For Locke then, not only are the ideas of size and motion (primary qualities) produced by the impression of particles but so are qualities like color and sweet taste.

There are two key points worth making concerning the distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

First, the distinction permits objects to appear one way but not really be that way. That is, an object may have the power to produce ideas in us (secondary qualities) but the ideas in us are simply the *effects of the operations* of the qualities of the object itself and not in the object itself. Consider that we might take a naive view on the senses or a skeptical view.

Definition 1.12: naive view on the senses

Objects are exactly how the senses tell me they are. The senses are completely veridical (reliable).

Locke writes that we naively take how an object looks to our mind and project that onto the object itself as though the ideas were a mirror of the object itself.

Flame is denominated Hot and Light; Snow White and Cold; and Manna White and Sweet, from the Ideas they produce in us. Which Qualities are commonly thought to be the same in those Bodies, that those Ideas are in us, the one the perfect resemblance of the other, as they are in a Mirror; and it would by most Men be judged very extravagant, if one should say otherwise. (BKII, ChapVIII, Sec16).

In contrast, we might be completely skeptical of the senses.

Definition 1.13: skeptical view on the senses

Objects are nothing like how the senses tell me they are. The senses are completely unreliable.

But the primary and secondary qualities allow for a middle way. Namely, the primary qualities are in the object themselves but the secondary qualities are in our minds as they are the effects of the primary qualities upon us.

Locke provides several arguments in support of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, as well as arguments for why people are wrong for thinking that the ideas in their mind are in the objects themselves. One example of the latter is how we talk about a fire. People commonly contend that the proposition “fire is hot” is true. For Locke this is because fire produces the effect of warmth or heat when we are near it. However, he argues as follows:

- P1: At a distance, fire produces a sensation of warmth in us (attributed to object: we say: “fire is hot.”)
- P2: When close, fire produces a sensation of pain in us (not attributed to object)
- P3: The distance one is to an object should not make a difference as to whether the quality is in or not in the object.
- C: Therefore, both warmth and pain are not in a fire.

Second, in distinguishing primary from secondary qualities, Locke can account for the Newtonian model of the universe in an empirical way. The Newtonian model of the universe is a system where forces act between pairs of points, where the forces between the points are determined by the mass of the points and the distance between them, and if you selected an isolate system of material points and knew the position, velocity, direction, and mass at a time, then you could calculate the future behavior the system. For Locke then, the properties belonging to material bodies (mass points of the Newtonian model) are the primary qualities (solidity, extension, figure, motion, number).

Exercise 2

Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities allows for a disconnect between how *things appear to us* and *how they really are*.

1. Is this a convincing account (in general) of why things appear one way but really

- are another?
2. What group of people might benefit most from understanding this distinction?
 3. Locke assumes you can distinguish between the primary and secondary qualities when you sense the object, but is this true? Can you imagine perceiving just the primary qualities of a red ball without perceiving the secondary qualities?

1.3 | Intuition, Demonstration, Sensitive

For Locke, *knowledge* was a type of property that one had if one had the right type of *agreement* between ideas. In other words, one knows a proposition P to be true provided there is an agreement between the subject of P agrees with the predicate of P.

Locke took there to be four different types of agreement:

1. identity and difference: “blue is not yellow” or $A = A$
2. relational: the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles
3. co-existence: Gold is yellow (the idea of gold coexisting with the idea of yellow).
4. real existence: God exists, people exist

With respect to these agreements, he took there to be three different degrees (or types) of knowledge:

1. knowledge via intuition
2. knowledge via demonstration
3. knowledge of external objects through sensation

In what follows, we discuss each of these three types of knowledge.

1.3.1 | Intuition

There are three main features of knowledge by intuition:

1. it is immediate (not mediated)
2. it is indubitable (beyond being doubted)
3. it is foundational for all knowledge

First, when defining intuition, Locke stresses its *immediacy*. Locke writes:

the Mind perceives the Agreement or Disagreement of two Ideas immediately by themselves, without the intervention of any other: And this, I think we may call *intuitive Knowledge*. For in this, the Mind is at no pains of proving or examining, but perceives the Truth, as the Eye doth light, only by being directed toward it. [...] [A]nd this kind of Knowledge is the clearest, and most certain that human Frailty is capable of (BK4, Ch2, Sec.1).

The idea here is that if we *intuitive P* (where P is some proposition) then we *know P*. Intuition is taken to be a kind of immediate apprehension of the truth. It does not require any explanation, proof, testimony, detailed thought process, etc. It is akin to seeing something. Just as someone sees a flower, they are capable of intuiting some truth in the world.

Locke offers some examples. He writes:

Thus the Mind perceives, that *White* is not *Black*, That a *Circle* is not a *Triangle*, That *Three* are more than *Two*, and equal to *One* and *Two* (BK4, Ch2, Sec.1).

The idea then is that we know that “white is not black” is true not because we can prove it, or because we reason from signs, or we believe it based upon expert testimony but by simply looking at ideas in our mind, we immediately see that it is true.

Second, Locke also insists that when we intuit P, P is *indubitable*. This means that regardless of how we try, we cannot, in good faith doubt P is false. For Locke is likely because when we attend to P, its truth forces itself upon us. Locke writes:

This part of Knowledge is irresistible, and like the bright Sun-shine, forces it self immediately to be perceived, as soon as ever the Mind turns its view that way; and leaves no room for Hesitation, Doubt, or Examination, but the Mind is presently filled with the clear Light of it (BKIV, CH2, SEC1).

Locke is clear that he means that you cannot practically (or genuinely) doubt the truth of any intuited proposition. He often states that you might *say* you doubt P, but generally treats this type of doubting as merely theoretical or as fake doubt.

Third, concerning the *foundational* character of intuition, Locke contends that all of our natural knowledge depends upon intuition in some way. That is, while we may know other propositions, this knowledge will ultimately depend upon our having certain intuitions. Locke writes that “’Tis on this *Intuition*, that depends all the Certainty and Evidence of our Knowledge” (BKIV, CH2, SEC1).

1.3.1.1 | Knowledge of the existence of the self: by intuition

Many of the examples that Locke provides concerning what we can intuit are mathematical examples, e.g. that $1=1$. However, Locke also asserts that **we know our own existence by intuition**. Locke contends that there is neither the need nor the capacity to prove that our self exists. It is known only by intuition and is perceived whenever we doubt, think, perceive, sense, or reason.

That is, whenever we think, we have an immediate awareness that we exist. Since Locke says we intuit the self, this knowledge is indubitable. Locke writes that we have “an internal infallible Perception that we are” (IV, IX, 1).

Exercise 3

How do you know you exist? Do you know it by a kind of direct, immediate insight (intuition) like Locke says or through some other method?

1.3.2 | Demonstration

The next type of knowledge is knowledge by *demonstration*. The idea here is that if we are capable of demonstrating (proving) P , then we know P .

What is a demonstration or proof? For Locke, a demonstration is a series of intuitions that begins with the intuition of a set of proposition Γ and proceeds to further propositions Q in such a way that the inference to Q is intuited. For Locke the process of reasoning involves the juxtaposition of various ideas that allow us to prove that a certain idea follows from those ideas.

Locke's favorite example is the proof that the interior angles of a triangle are equal to two right triangles. Here is an abbreviated version of that proof.

- P1: Let $\triangle ABC$ be a triangle.
- P2: Let BC be extended to point D .
- P3: Given that $AB \parallel CE$ and AC is a transversal of AB and CE , the alternate interior angles are equal. That is, $\angle BAC = \angle ACE$. Likewise, $\angle ABC = \angle ECD$.
- P4: Per Euclid (Common Notion 2), $\angle ACD = \angle ABC + \angle BAC$ (the exterior angle of a triangle equals the sum of its other two internal and opposite angles).
- P5: Also by Euclid (Common Notion 2), $\angle ACD + \angle ACB = \angle ABC + \angle BAC + \angle ACB$
- P6: Since $\angle ACD + \angle ACB$ is a straight line and from the theorem that two angles on a straight line are equal to two right angles (proof omitted), $\angle ACD + \angle ACB$ equals to two right angles (180°).
- C: Therefore, since $\angle ACD + \angle ACB = 180^\circ$ and $\angle ACD + \angle ACB = \angle ABC + \angle BAC + \angle ACB$, and Euclid Common Notion 1 (things which are equal to the same thing are also equal to each other), it follows that $\angle ABC + \angle BAC + \angle ACB = 180^\circ$.

In the above example, we start from propositions that we know to be intuitively the case (intuited axioms or Euclid's "Common Notions"), and then show, in a step-by-step manner (where each step is intuitively known), that a proposition follows. If we can do this, then we are said to have **demonstrated P** . And if we have demonstrated that P is the case, then we know P .

There are several points worth making concerning demonstrations.

First, Locke thinks that there are some things we know only through proof. He contends that that we cannot simply look at (1) the interior angles of a triangle and (2) two right angles and simply intuit that their angles of each are equal. Instead, we need to show that the interior angles of a triangle are equal to some other unit X and then show that two right triangles are equal to X . **Second**, Locke contends that intuition is clean, easy, immediate, and forced upon us provided we *attend* to proposition, while demonstration involves difficulty, requires effort in attending to it, and can be arduous. Notice that you cannot simply look at the above proof and see the solution. Rather it requires you to work through it in a step-by-step fashion. In addition, geometrical constructions are used as an aid.

Third, Locke contend that in the case of intuition, **there is no doubt** about the truth of the proposition. If we entertain P, then we immediately intuit P and P is indubitable. In the case of demonstration, however, Locke contends that P is dubitable before the demonstration is undertaken.

1.3.2.1 | Knowledge of the existence of God: by demonstration

Locke contends that we have no innate idea of God (so the idea of God is not stamped in our minds waiting to be discovered) nor do we have an intuition of God. This means that any of God cannot be not direct or immediate. For Locke, we know that God exists through demonstration and this means that

1. God's existence is "equal to mathematical Certainty" (IV, X, 1)
2. knowledge of God requires *attention* to the proof that God exists
3. the existence of God is *dubitable* before we go through the proof that God exists⁷
4. since God's existence is proved by demonstration, it will begin with intuitively known propositions and each step in the proof will be intuitive.

Here is Locke's proof that God exists.

- P1: We exist (intuition).
- P2: Nothing cannot create something (intuition)
- IC1: Therefore, there has always been something (an eternal being: a being that exists at all times) for if something had a beginning then there must have been something earlier that created it (deduction from P1 and P2).
- P3: If x creates y, then all the power that is in y must be found in x (in some way shape or form): the power a being has is received from the source of that thing (intuition).
- IC2: The Eternal Being is the source of all power, viz., is the the most powerful being (deduction from IC1 and P3).
- P4: We find ourselves capable of knowledge and intelligence (intuition).
- IC3: The Eternal Being is the most knowing and the most intelligent (deduction from IC2 and P4).
- C: Therefore, there is an eternal, most-knowing, and most-powerful being: God (deduction from IC1, IC2, IC3).

There are two additional points worth making about Locke's proof. **First**, Locke suggests that using this type of argument allows for the deduction of various other attributes of God: "[t]he thing is evident, and from this *Idea* duly considered, will easily be deduced all those other Attributes, which we ought to ascribe to this Eternal Being" (IV, X, 6).

Second, Locke contends that not only is our knowledge of God on par with our knowledge in mathematics, but he contends that we are more certain that God exists than any knowledge we obtain indirectly through the senses: "Nay, I presume I may say, that we more certainly know that there is a GOD, then that there is any thing else without us" (IV, X, 6).

⁷Locke writes that the demonstration of God's existence "requires Thought and Attention; and the Mind must apply it self to a regular deduction of it from some part of our intuitive knowledge, or else we shall be as uncertain and ignorant of this, as of other Propositions, which are themselves capable of clear Demonstration." (IV, X, 1).

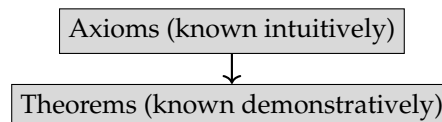
Exercise 4

Consider the following two questions:

1. Analyze Locke's proof that God exists. Is it convincing?
2. Which, if any, of the premises do you think is false?

1.3.3 | Precision, Vagueness, and Representation

At this point, Locke's account of knowledge consists of two parts. There are propositions that are intuited and propositions that are deduced from those that are intuitive. For Locke then, this corresponds to how we have mathematical knowledge. We learn the ideas of mathematics, have intuitions about certain propositions of mathematics (called the axioms), then use these and other ideas to prove further ideas (theorems). The theorems are known demonstratively and our knowledge of them is grounded in both in the axioms and the fact that each step in the proof is known intuitively.



One of the reasons that Locke thinks we can have knowledge of both the intuitive and demonstrative kind in mathematics is because the ideas themselves are **precise**: "Numbers and Figures, can be set down, by visible and last marks, wherein the *Ideas* under consideration are perfectly determined" (IV, ch.11, sec.10).

For Locke, the situation is different when dealing with ideas from other disciplines (e.g. physics, biology, etc.). Ideas in other disciplines tend to work with ideas that are *vague* (they deal with degree: more or less) rather than quantifiable:

"But in other simple *Ideas*, whose Modes and Differences are made, and counted by degrees, and not quantity, we have not so nice and accurate a distinction in their differences, as to perceive, or to find ways to measure their just Equality or the least Differences." (IV, ch.11, 11)

The vagueness of the idea is largely due to a **lack of information about the world**. We cannot know what will happen next because the causes of things are determined by "Particles of Matter" and since there are so many particles and they are so small, we lack of a clear conception of the ideas we are working with.⁸

Example 1.8

Suppose you were shown three different, closely related shades of whiteness. In each case, you would have an idea of white. However, for each shade you don't know the exact number of particles that caused that shade of white and so you don't know whether the shades are the same idea or different ideas.

⁸Locke writes that since the particles of matter are "too subtle to be perceived, it is impossible to have any exact Measures of the different degrees of these simple Ideas." (BK4, Ch2, Sec 11)

However, this does not mean there is no knowledge in other disciplines. That is, Locke doesn't clearly say here that the only knowledge we can have is mathematical knowledge. Rather, the type of knowledge that we can have is limited since while we may not be able to distinguish various shades of white from each other, we can nevertheless intuitively know when certain ideas are not the same.

Example 1.9

Locke contends that we do know that red is not green.

1.3.4 | Sensitive knowledge

At this point, Locke is explicit that we can only have knowledge by intuition and demonstration.

These two (*viz.* Intuition and Demonstration, are the degrees of Knowledge; whatever comes short of one of these, with what assurance soever embraced, is but Faith, or Opinion, but not Knowledge, at least in all general Truths (BkIV, Ch2, Sec 14)

But Locke adds one more degree of knowledge this knowledge pertains to the existence of objects outside the mind.⁹ For while we may have (1) an idea of an external object and (2) the intuition that such an idea of an external object is in our mind, we seemingly have no knowledge as to whether there actually are external object (independent of our mind).

The reason why the question would be raised is straightforward. People have ideas of all sorts of fictitious things (things that don't actually exist), e.g. unicorns. They have ideas of external things but where no such external thing exists. How can we know when our ideas correspond to real, external objects?

Locke's answer involves examining how we can come to the idea in the first place. He first notes that we intuitively know (1) the mode in which we perceive an idea and (2) the difference between that mode of perception and any other. That is, not only do we have *intuitive knowledge* about whether we are *smelling* a rose or *looking* at a rose or *imagining* a rose, but we also intuitively know the difference between these various modes.

Example 1.10: Propositional attitude

What is meant by a mode of perception of an idea can be, perhaps, more easily understood as a propositional attitude. Consider the following propositional attitude:

1. Know P
2. Believe P
3. Doubt P
4. Hope for P

A mode of perception of an idea is broader than a propositional attitude as it would include things like *seeing water*, *imagining water*, *sensing water*.

⁹"the particular existence of finite Beings without us" (ChII, Bk2, Sec14)

More generally, Locke contends that we intuitively know the difference between “any *Ideas* revived in our Minds by our own Memory, and actually coming into our Minds by our Senses”. (Bk4, ch.2, sec 14).

From the fact that we intuitively can distinguish between which ideas in our mind come from our senses and those which come from our imagination or memory, we can have knowledge of external things. That is, when we have an idea in our mind of something external, Locke contends that we only need to determine whether that idea was sensed or imagined. If the former, then the object exists outside of our idea.

1.4 | Probability

As we have seen, Locke takes knowledge to be a type of agreement between ideas and we have knowledge that P when we either (i) intuit P, or (ii) demonstrate P, or (iii) with some qualification that we sense P. However, Locke says that on this standard, our knowledge is “very narrow” (IV, XV, 2) since most of the propositions we believe, reason about, discourse on, or act on are not ones that we know. That is, we **assent** (or accept) P even if we don’t know P.

Propositions for which there is support (evidence, proof) but that support falls short of knowledge are said to be **probable**.

Definition 1.14: probability

Probability is the appearance of agreement of ideas with support from proofs (or evidence) whose steps are not perceived to be certain but enough to “induce the Mind to judge the Proposition to be true or false, rather than the contrary” (IV, XV, 1). Probability concerns “likeness to be true” (IV, XVI, 3).

Example 1.11

If an individual does the proof that the interior angles of a triangle equal 180 degrees, then they know this proposition. In contrast, you only have probability if you take the mathematician’s testimony that this is the case.

For Locke, there are degrees of probability or evidence in support of a proposition.

Example 1.12

A proposition can be near certain, somewhat certain, improbable, impossible, etc.

There is the evidence of a proposition and then the extent (or degree) to which we assent or accept that proposition.

Definition 1.15: assent

To assent to a proposition P is to accept it as true.

Example 1.13

For a proposition, we can have assurance, confidence, belief, distrust, etc.

For Locke, our assent should be in proportion to the probability of the proposition. If the proposition is highly probable, then our assent should be high, while if the proposition has low probability, then we ought to be dubious.

For Locke, the main difference between knowledge and probability concerns what compels us to believe the proposition in question. In the case of knowledge, Locke suggests it is our

intuition alone that makes us believe P is true. However, in the case of probability, since there is no intuition, he contends that there is something “extraneous” to the proposition itself that makes us believe it (or that makes it probable). Namely, we assent to the proposition P:

1. if P conforms to our knowledge, observation, experience
2. if P is testified to by others

In the **first** case, we weigh the truth of P against what we know about the world from intuition and observations. If P conflicts with what we know or have observed, then P is deemed less probable.

In the **second** case, the more a proposition is supported by high quality testimony, the more probable that proposition is and the more assurance we should have in it. Locke provides several parameters for evaluating the quality of someone’s testimony. Some of these include:

1. the number of people testifying to P being true
2. the integrity of the testifiers (whether they be honest or liars)
3. the “Skill of the Witnesses” (I’m assuming he means whether or not the testifiers are experts)
4. “The Design of the Author, where it is a Testimony out of a Book cited”
5. whether the parts of the testimony are coherent
6. whether there exists contrary testimony

Locke contends that there are two main propositions of which we evaluate in terms of probability and assent. These are:

1. matters of fact that are capable of observation and human testimony (e.g. whether something exists or occurred)
2. items that are beyond the discovery of the senses and incapable of human testimony

1.4.1 | Testimony about the observable

First, let’s consider matters of fact that are capable of human observation and human testimony. For Locke, there are several degrees of probability and assurance. The **highest degree of probability** occurs when we constant observation of something, that observation fits with our experience and knowledge, and this observation also fits with high quality testimony.

Example 1.14: Assurance

Suppose you observe a frozen lake in the winter several times and everyone who also observed the lake attests to it being frozen. Not only did you observe the frozen lake, and it fit with your existing knowledge but it is also supported by multiple, reliable people testifying to that same fact. Locke says in such a case, we accept P as though it were certain (IV, XVI, 6). That such propositions “govern our Thoughts absolutely, and influence all our Actions as fully, as the most evident demonstration” (IV, XVI, 6).

The **second** level of probability is when a proposition is supported by observation and testimony “for the most part” (IV, XVI, 7). Locke seems to suggest that perhaps the evidence in support of such a proposition is lacking in some way, e.g. not enough or some disagreement.

Example 1.15

That people prefer their own benefit over that of the public

The third level is when something is testified to by history with no contradiction to it but there is no evidence to support it.

Example 1.16

That Julius Caesar is alive is attested to by many historians but we neither have any direct evidence for or against it.

Finally, Locke considers several lower grades of probability. What these grades have in common is that the proposition P either (i) contradicts our experience or with “the ordinary course of Nature” (IV, XVI, 9) or (ii) when there is conflicting testimony. When setting our assurance to this level of probability, Locke contends that we must consider the particulars of the evidence and testimony.

1.4.2 | Testimony about the unobservable

The second item of which our assent concerns pertains to things we cannot perceive with our five senses and so cannot testify to concerning. Our assurance concerning these propositions is very low (Locke says they are only guesses). Locke provides three different examples:

1. the existence, nature, operation of finite immaterial beings, e.g. angels, spirits, the devil
2. material beings that are *smaller than* we can sense or *remoter* than we can detect, e.g. aliens
3. the causes of some effects that we observe, e.g. (i) the development of organisms, (ii) how magnets work, (ii) what is the cause of heat and light from fire.

Locke’s suggestion is that we can reason about these items by **analogy**.

Example 1.17

If you take two sticks and rub them together vigorously, this produces heat. Therefore, by analogy, the heat from fire must be caused by the vigorous rubbing together of small particles.

Example 1.18

God is a ruler over all. Humans are rulers. Human rulers require power to rule over their subject. Therefore, by analogy, God must have immense power to rule over the universe.

1.4.3 | Miracles and revelation

Locke notes that there are two important exceptions to his prior remarks.

First, while generally it is the case that if P is against the course of our constant experience and the normal course of nature, then the probability of P is low and our assurance in P should also be low. Locke also says that testimony to the contrary would be met without credit.

Example 1.19: I

I said I lifted 1000lbs yesterday at the gym, and my friend testified to this fact, this would be of low probability since it would be against your normal experience that someone so out of shape could lift such a great weight.

However, Locke says that in the case of **miracles**. For Locke, even though the miraculous event is against the ordinary course of nature, the “strangeness” of the event should not count against its probability nor our assent to it.

the strangeness of the Fact lessens not the Assent to a fair Testimony given of it. For where such supernatural Events are suitable to the ends aim'd at by him, who has the Power to change the course of Nature, there, under such Circumstances, they may be the fitter to procure Belief, by how much the more they are beyond, or contrary to Observation. (IV, XVI, 13).

Locke's rationale for this exception is that (i) God has the power to change the laws of nature, (ii) in order to help individuals believe in God, God decides to break the laws of nature, and (iii) there is no other compelling explanation for the strangeness of the event.

The **second** case involves **divine revelation**. In the case of revelation, the probability of P is entirely determined by the testimony and not our constant experience or our understanding of the natural course of things. Locke writes that we accept P based on “bare Testimony, whether the things proposed, agree or disagree with common Experience, and the ordinary course of Things, or no” (IV, XVI, 14).

Since God knows everything and does not deceive, the probability of P is certain. Locke writes that it is “beyond Doubt” and the evidence is “beyond Exception” (IV, XVI, 14).

When our assurance matches the probability of P, we have what Locke calls “Faith”. When we have faith, Locke says our minds are absolutely determined, that we have no wavering as to the truth of the testimony, and its indubility is on the same level as our own existence.

However, Locke immediately points out that we must be *sure* that what we take to be divine revelation is in fact divine revelation. And so our confidence (or level of assurance) that P is the case should only be to the degree that we have evidence that P was divinely revealed to us.

1.5 | Assurance: Reason, Faith, and Enthusiasm

1.5.1 | Reason

1.5.2 | Faith

1.5.3 | Enthusiasm

Locke contends that anyone who *seriously* searches for the truth should **love** it. Someone who does not love the truth then,

1. does not search for it
2. is not willing to strain or suffer for it
3. is not much concerned if they are wrong about it

Most people (if not everyone) say they love the truth, say they want to speak the truth, and want others to think that they love it. People don't want to be regarded as someone who says only false things, lies, or who says anything regardless of whether it is true or false.

Locke asks how do we know **who loves the truth**? Locke says that there is an "unerring mark of it" (IV, XIX, 1). He writes that someone loves the truth if their assurance that P is the case is not greater than the evidence that P is the case. This evidence being either an intuition that P is true or demonstrative proof that P is the case. In short, **your acceptance that P is the case should never go beyond your evidence that P is the case.**

Locke provides three grounds of assent. We assent to something based on reason, faith, but also enthusiasm.

Definition 1.16: Enthusiasm

An individual accepts P on enthusiastic grounds if and only if they accept P not based upon reason or faith but because they (wrongly) believe themselves to be guided by God.^a

^aLocke writes that enthusiasts are guided by the "ungrounded Fancies of a Man's own Brain" and they "pretend to Revelation, and to persuade themselves, that they are under the peculiar guidance of Heaven in their Actions and Opinions, especially in those of them, which they cannot account for by the ordinary Methods of Knowledge, and Principles of Reason" (IV, XIX, 5; see also IV, XIX 7)

Why would someone believe themselves guided by God? According to Locke, enthusiasts are *conceited* or their mind is excessively prone to imagination. They believe they know God more than they really do or that God speaks to them more than others. Locke writes that the enthusiasts:

Minds being thus prepared, whatever groundless Opinion comes to settle it self strongly upon their Fancies, is an Illumination from the Spirit of GOD, and presently of divine Authority: And whatsoever odd Action they find in themselves a strong Inclination to do, that impulse is concluded to be a call or direction from Heaven, and must be obeyed; 'tis a Commission from above, and they cannot err in executing it. (IV, XIX, 5).

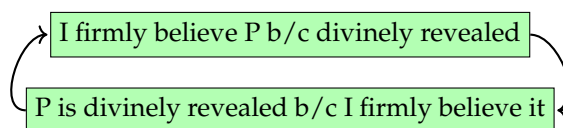
Example 1.20

Suppose I believe that doing P is the right thing to do. I believe it for whatever reason (Locke says it is because of my “Fancies”). If I’m an enthusiast, I might say that God is guiding me to do P, or that I prayed on it and God told me to do P, or that God is working through me or inclined me to do P.

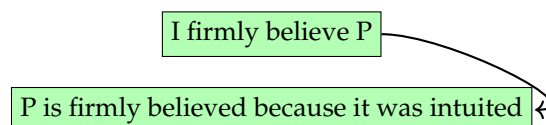
Locke contends that if an individual loves truth, then they must take an extra critical step concerning their belief that God has revealed himself to them. Locke contends that need to analyze what the grounds are for saying that God has revealed himself to them. In short, they need to prove for a proposition P that is said to be given by divine revelation that “God is the revealer of it” (see IV, XIX, 10).

For Locke there are at least two reasons to doubt for any proposition P, that this proposition P is known because it was revealed by God.

First, the justification that P is divinely revealed may be **circular**. That is, an individual may assert that P is divinely revealed because they firmly believe it. But when asked why they firmly believe it, their reason is that this is because P is divinely revealed.



Second, it may be the case that there is another explanation for P other than divine revelation. In cases where P is known, it may be the case that P was determined by natural means (e.g. intuition or proof) rather than by divine revelation. In addition, P may simply be believed firmly but this firm belief is due to one’s fancy rather than because God impressed that P is the case upon one’s mind. Locke thus requires of anyone who claims to have had a revelation of God that they eliminate other possible ways that P could be known and thereby determine that God determined the proposition P.



Overall, this places a constraint on the assurances that individuals have with respect to divine revelation. While there is no need to prove what God says is true (since the truth is given to us by a divine source), there is a need to prove that *the belief that God gave us this truth* is true.

For Locke, we come to know (or at least have assurance) that a truth is divinely inspired through natural reason. That is, we accept the truth of P based upon God’s authority, but we accept the truth that God gave us this truth (the revelation) through natural reasons. In particular, Locke cites cases where God provides marks or signs that allow us to determine that the message we have received from God is not simply some impulse of our mind.

Example 1.21: Moses

God directs Moses to speak to the Pharaoh. Moses may have uncritically accepted that this impulse to speak to the Pharaoh but instead asked God “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you’?” In response God transformed Moses’s staff into a snake and then back again into a staff.^a

^aFor other examples, see IV, XIX, 15.

Exercise 5

While Locke is positive about the possibility of divine revelation, but he places certain limitations on what our assurance that a proposition was divinely inspired. In short, he is critical of the idea that one can be divinely inspired without some justification for that divine inspiration.

1. Is this limitation sufficient or does Locke need to provide more constraints on what might be called divine revelation?
2. Is this limitation too strict? That is, does it potentially close one off from knowing God or doing God’s work?

1.6 | Summary

In this handout, we have considered **three** parts of Locke’s philosophy.

First, we considered his theory of ideas. There he contends that (i) all of our ideas comes from sensation or reflection, and (ii) complex and general ideas are created from simple ideas.

Second, we considered three ways we might know something. First, we have intuitions of various propositions. Such intuitions are immediate, only require us to intellectually attend to those propositions. Second, we have demonstrative knowledge. This is knowledge rooted in proofs of various propositions where the proof begins with an intuition and subsequent steps in the proof are all known intuitively. In contrast to intuitive knowledge, which is indubitable, demonstrative knowledge is open to doubt before working through the proof. Finally, there is knowledge of objects external to our ideas (sensitive knowledge). This knowledge is obtained by examining how we obtained our idea of the object. If we intuit that we sensed rather than imagined the idea, then the object of the idea is external to us.

Third, we looked at Locke’s account of probability (probable knowledge) and what our attitude should be toward propositions of varying probability. In analyzing this third feature, we saw that Locke was critical of religious enthusiasts. Anyone who asserted that a proposition P was inspired by God (divinely revealed) ought to (if they love truth) determine how they know that this inspiration was from God, rather than from some other source.

Puritanism

In this handout, we'll look at two main questions.

First, for early American intellectuals (Puritans) what determines who will be saved by God? For the colonial Puritans, this question is asked in a variety of different ways:

1. what determines who will be given God's saving grace and who is damned?
2. is there anything I can do (acts) that will guarantee my salvation?
3. what determines who is a member of the invisible Church?

Second, for early American intellectuals (Puritans), how do we know who will be saved by God? For Puritans, this question is asked in a variety of different ways:

1. what is the true religion?
2. what is the relation of religious experience to religion?
3. is there way to test who is a part of the invisible Church?

In answering these questions, we will gain a clearer understanding of early American thought as it was expressed by the colonial Puritans. We will gain a clearer insight into (1) how they understood the nature of God, (2) their relation to God, (3) criteria they used for determining membership into a religion, and (4) the role of emotion (affections) in religion.

2.1 | English Puritanism

American philosophy begins with colonial Puritans.

Definition 2.1: Puritanism

Puritanism refers to English and New England Protestants (primary in the 16th and 17th century) who separated from the Church of England (the Anglican Church) or sought to purify it.

Colonial Puritanism has its roots in England and so it is worthwhile to make several points concerning Puritanism in England.

First, during the 16th and 17th centuries, England broke from Rome (the Roman Catholic Church) and underwent periods of Protestantism and returns to Catholicism. During periods of Catholicism, Puritans faced **persecution**.^{1,2}

- 1530s Beginning of Puritanism. King Henry VIII broke with the Roman Catholic Church to form the Church of England, it was not for widespread ecclesiastical abuses that many had levelled against Rome. Instead, it was largely because the pope refused to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Calvinists (and other protestants) took this break to be mostly political and thought the Church of England needed to be *purified* on religious grounds.
- 1547 Edward VI is king and Thomas Cranmer was appointed archbishop of Canterbury. Under Cranmer there was a number of religious (protestant) changes including the approval of clerical marriage, the publication of a protestant book of Common Prayer (1549), and the replacement of Church altars with common tables.³
- 1553 Mary Tudor (Mary I of England) attempted to restore England to Catholicism, during which time Protestants were burned or sent into exile.
- 1558 Queen Elizabeth (Mary's sister) returned England to Protestantism and welcomed returning religious exiles. Puritans complained that reforms were not significant enough.

Second, during periods of Protestantism, Puritans complained that the Church of England was (i) not sufficiently reformed (or **purified**), (iii) visibly corrupt, and (iv) there were no signs that it would correct this corruption.

Christianity teaches us that God is all good and humans are (by nature) evil. It is no surprise then that members of a church will contain evil individuals. Some individuals (Donatists) thought that this was unacceptable and that the Church should only contain perfect individuals. They aimed to create a church without "spot or wrinkle".⁴ Generally, however, this admixture of good and evil was permitted for Augustine claimed that there were two churches: a visible and invisible church.

Definition 2.2: Visible church

Visible church - impure group of individuals who professed a belief in Christianity but ought to strive for purity.

¹Williston Walker. *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893, p. 53.

²Concerning this persecution: "For when wee have proclaimed this our testimonie against them, how have they behaved themselves, but as savage beasts rentng and tearing vs with their teeth, never daring to come vnto the triall of the word of God, eyther by free wryting or conference, but greedily hunting after Christs poore Iambes, and so manie as they could get into their pawes, misvsing their bodyes with all exqvisite tyrannie in long and lamentable emprisonment, bedsies [besides] despight and reproches without mesure. So that through their barbarous crueltie soules have perished in their prisons, with in the Cittie of London only, (besides other places of the Land) & that of late yeeres."

³Francis J. Bremer. *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards*. Revised. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1995, pp. 3-4.

⁴Long, *The History of Christianity*, p.10

Definition 2.3: Invisible church

Invisible church - pure group of individuals who were destined for salvation

Puritans thought that it was not necessary to be morally perfect to be a part of the Church. Humans, by nature, are evil and there was no way the visible church could be perfect. Nevertheless, they thought the Church ought to aim at perfection and at least avoid rampant corruption. As such, they repeatedly took the Church of England to task for its repeated evils and corruptions. Some of these include:⁵

1. ministers who lacked knowledge of the Scripture: substituted jokes for teaching the Scripture, were shoemakers or barbers rather than trained in religious matters
2. enforced religious practices that were mere ritual: signing with the cross, infant baptism, baptism by midwives, kneeling during communion, and, most significantly, the use of vestments by the Church minister.⁶
3. sinful ministers: "Mr Phippe, vicar of Barling, Sometime a sadler by occupation, convicted of whoredome, who kept a whore long time in his house, a man far unable to preach" (Morgan, p.8)

However, any Church ought to aim to correct its own imperfection. One of the ways in which it could do this was by **excommunication**. However, in the case of the Church of England, the power to excommunicate was not within individual churches but instead in the power of the bishops. The problem, however, is that bishops often used the power to excommunicate as a way to extort individuals for money (often to pay for mistresses).

In sum, Puritans saw the Church of England occupied by a number of ministers and church officials that were ignorant of scripture, themselves sinful, and permitted notoriously evil individuals from being members of the visible Church (and taking Communion) and there were few (if any) signs that the Church aimed to correct these imperfections.⁷

Third, attempts to reform the Church of England failed. Under Elizabeth I, they utilized the Press to print books and pamphlets that aimed to encourage the Queen, church officials, and the masses to reform. However, most of these attempts were not successful.

Puritans are often divided into two main types: **separatists** and **non-separatists**. Separatists took the Church to be beyond saving or no Church at all. They thus thought it necessary to practice religion independently of the Church of England or left England altogether to Amsterdam (1607), Leiden (1609), or the Plymouth Colony Pilgrims of New England (1620).

⁵"their most persistently voice criticism was that the Anglican church contained persons unfit to be members even of the visible church, persons who had never submitted voluntarily to the gospel and whose behavior advertised their indifference to God's commandments" (Morgan, p.33)

⁶Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards*, pp. 6-7.

⁷Concerning this ignorance: "The greaeest multitude, by many partes doo not vnderstand the Lords prayer, the ten Commandements, or the articles of the faith, or the Doctrine and vse of the Sacraments, in anie competent measure. There bee thouwsands, which bee men & woemen growne, which if a man aske them benv [how] they shulbee saued, they cannot tell." (Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, p. 56)

Definition 2.4: Separatists

Type of Protestantism that took the Church of England to be so beyond reform that it was necessary to practice religion independently from it, e.g. by founding a new church in its place.

Non-separatist Puritans thought the Church to be (i) the true church, (ii) corrupted, but (iii) capable of being reformed. However, when **Charles I dissolved Parliament in 1629** the prospects for a peaceful resolution of the Church were all but dead.⁸ And thus a huge number of Puritans left England and the Netherlands for North America (this is known as the **Great Migration**), e.g. the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1629), the Saybrook Colony (1635), the Connecticut Colony (1636), the New Haven Colony (1638).

Exercise 6

In what ways can religion and / or churches be *purified* today? What organizational or religious practices could be improved, are non-essential, or simply unrelated to practicing the true religion? In other words, to what extent can you characterize yourself as a *Puritan*?

2.2 | Colonial Puritanism

Some Puritans believed that England would face God's wrath, that they had a moral obligation to live exemplary lives that they could not in England, and saw the new world as a place they could play a role in God's providential design.⁹ While this is not the sole cause of the Great Migration to the New World, it was one factor that led many to flock to America.¹⁰

Life in the 17th and 18th century colonial America was harsh, life-expectancy short and uncertain, pain was regular, and much of life spent dealing with tasks relating to survival. Not only was organic life brutal but social organization was also unpleasant. The world and society was governed by a monarchical hierarchy. Not only was there a cosmic hierarchy in place (the Great Chain of Being) but society and family life was patriarchal. The king ruled his subjects, fathers ruled their families, aristocrats and landowner ruled servants and slaves.¹¹ Furthermore, Colonial New England was even worse as residents were caught between an ongoing warfare between the British, the French, and Native Americans.

Most of the people who initially settled in colonial America were not intellectual. They were soldiers, people animated by economic pursuits, or religious zealots. The exception to this were the people in the Massachusetts Bay Colony of 1630. This colony was well-organized, well-led, over time received a large intake of individuals, and made education and intellectual pursuits

⁸Conflicts between puritans and England came to a head under Charles I. Charles I rejected the belief that priesthood belonged to all believers and instead preferred a top-down approach to religion. In addition, he enforced practices like "wearing the surplice, bowing at the name of Jesus and using the sign of the cross in baptism [...]" with new practices that emphasized sacramental grace for which there was no Protestant precedent." (Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards*, p. 29)

⁹see Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards*, pp. 41–46.

¹⁰Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards*, pp. 41–47.

¹¹As Bremer puts it "[w]ithin the family the husband was without question the master. He was prince and teacher, pastor and judge in his household." (Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards*, p. 114)

a key part of its civilization. *Intellectual life* in colonial America thus begins with the puritans of this colony.

The leaders of New England were well-educated and the colonists were taught a **worldview** (a complete system of the universe). This worldview was a combination of religion, philosophy, and science, and its teaching was pervasive. It was taught in schools, colleges, sermons, distributed in books and pamphlets, at home, and in store.

2.2.1 | Puritans: Philosophical problems

The Puritan religious worldview had its fair share of philosophical problems that needed explication and sorting out. Two of these include:

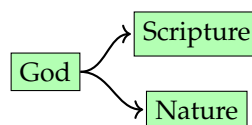
1. the relation of free will to determinism: Intuitively we are free but God both foresees and predetermines everything. These two views seem to conflict
2. Puritans believed that there could be no perfect visible Church since we are, by nature, corrupted. However, they thought it necessary to exclude people from the visible Church, but (1) what determines who is and is not part of the invisible Church and (2) how do we know who is a part of the invisible Church (who believes in the true religion)?

We will focus on the second question (which has two parts).

First, how could the Puritans answer this question. Puritans knew about God from two principal sources: **Scripture** and **Nature**.

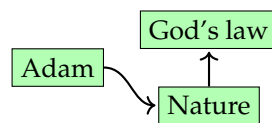
From **scripture**, they knew that God created the world, was master of the universe, all powerful, determines everything, knows everything, has divine foresight, has performed miracles in the world, and was made flesh in Jesus Christ. Not only does God exist but so do other religious entities like hell, heaven, the saints, divine reward and punishment, and sin.

We also know about God through **nature**. Our knowledge of God through nature is obtained by reasoning both **analogically** and **hypothetically** from God's creation. If the natural world is complex and well-ordered, this can only be a sign of God's intelligence and divine plan. If a king is a ruler and rules in virtue of his / her power. God is the ultimate ruler and so much rule in virtue of an infinitely greater amount of power.



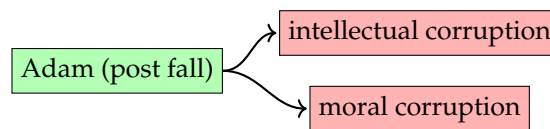
For the Puritans, our knowledge of God, however, is very confused but this was not always the case. During the time of Adam, there was no scripture. When Adam was created, Adam's nature was such that while Adam could not *intuit* (directly know) God, he could intuit God's creation (nature) and God's laws.

Upon Adam's fall, however, his (and our) nature became **doubly corrupted**. **First**, Adam was **intellectually corrupted** as he no longer able to intuit God's law from nature. This corruption meant that one of the reasons we are prone to sin is because we don't know God's law. However, because our nature is corrupted, God provided us with the scripture. This gives us a way to



know God and God's law. Nevertheless, our knowledge of God's law through the scripture is still problematic since our intellectual nature is so damaged by the fall.¹²

Second, we are **morally corrupted** in that we are disposed to do evil and our nature is such to **delight in such evil** even when we recognize what we are doing is wrong. In other words, even if we knew the right thing to do, we might not do the right thing because we are, by our very nature, evil.



The consequence then is the following:

1. Because we all sin (our nature is corrupted), we deserve to be punished.
2. Because God is just, we deserve punishment (damnation).
3. However, because God is merciful and Christ's sacrifice satisfied God's demand for justice, some of us will be saved.
4. Those that are saved are members of the invisible Church

The question then becomes: **who are the members of the invisible Church? What determines who is and is not a member of this Church? What determines who will and won't be saved?** To answer this question, we'll look at Jonathan Edwards' "Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God".¹³

2.3 | Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God

2.3.1 | Jonathan Edwards

In this section, we will look at a work by Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). Edwards was a North American preacher, theologian, and philosopher. Edwards was a Calvinist, a diverse form of Protestantism that derives its origin from John Calvin. Edwards was also an American Puritan in that he took various forms of English Protestantism to need reforming. Edwards was the father of eleven children, his grandson Aaron Burr (who shot Alexander Hamilton in a duel) was the third vice president of the United States.

¹²Flower writes: "[i]t did not surprise them [the Puritans], therefore, that there were problems in interpreting this revelation, for our minds are but ruins and the Scripture is is God's own wisdom.(Elizabeth Flower and Murray G Murphey. *A History of Philosophy in America*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. New York: Capricorn Books, 1977, p. 8)

¹³Answering this question bears upon who should and should not be included in the membership into the *visible* Church. We are all, by nature, evil and the visible Church cannot be perfect. And, one ought not to exclude from membership someone who is a part of the *invisible* Church.

He is recognized as “the most acute early American philosopher and the most brilliant of all American theologians”¹⁴ Edwards was a leading figure in the First Great Awakening, a revival in religion that swept across New England. He wrote many texts but his *Religious Affections*, *Free Will*, *The Nature of True Virtue*, and “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” are still read today and regarded as masterpieces.¹⁵

Edwards is said to play a role in the development of American history in that it influenced various post-revolutionary religious thought (e.g. New England Calvinism). Various religious groups were extremely wealthy, controlled a number of universities, and were involved in a variety of political reform movements (e.g. prohibition and antislavery).¹⁶

One key feature of Edwards is that he wasn’t a narrowly religious figure for he also aimed to meet the rational demands of his religious followers (and metaphysicians). That is, while Edwards could be concerned with religious experience, the mystical, and the divine, he was also equally concerned with the philosophical implications of his religious beliefs.¹⁷

2.3.2 | Sinners in the Hands: A Sermon

One of Edwards’s most famous sermons is “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”.¹⁸ This sermon was delivered to his congregation in Northampton, Massachusetts and on 8 July 1741 in Enfield, Connecticut.¹⁹ While neighboring towns and New England more broadly were undergoing an awakening, the town of Enfield was not and the attempts of traveling ministers seemed to have little effect.²⁰ The congregation in Enfield was characterized as “thoughtless and vain” and “hardly conducted themselves with common decency.”²¹ This changed with Edwards. Edwards’ sermons were characterized not as chock-full of grandiose gestures but solemn, clear and distinct. Marsden writes that Edward’s sermons were a “combination of controlled but transparent emotion, heartfelt sincerity both in admonition and compassion, inexorable logic, and biblical themes could draw people into sensing the reality of ideas long familiar.”²²

The delivery of “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” had a particularly dramatic effect on those in attendance. Members of the congregation were so troubled that they began moaning, wailing, and crying out “What shall I do to be saved. Oh I am going to Hell. Oh what shall I do for Christ.”

¹⁴George M. Marsden. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 1.

¹⁵Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, p. 1.

¹⁶Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, p. 9.

¹⁷“I find him to be a person of immense personal integrity. He was intensely pious and disciplined, admirably but dauntingly so for those of more ordinary religious faith. His unrelenting intensity led him to follow the logic of his faith to its conclusions. His accompanying seriousness made him not an easy person to spend time with as a casual acquaintance, although he would have been fascinating to talk to about matters that concerned him. His prowess as a logician made him exceedingly sure of his opinions, sometimes given to pride, overconfidence, tactlessness, and an inability to credit opposing views. At the same time, he was often aware of his pride and was constantly trying—apparently often succeeding—to subdue his arrogant spirit and to cultivate such Christian virtues as meekness, gentleness, and charity. As was common for eighteenth-century leaders, he was authoritarian, yet he was also extremely caring. He was much loved by those closest to him. His opponents found him aloof, opinionated, and intolerant. For a time he won the hearts of almost everyone in his Northampton parish; then he lost them again in a bitter dispute, a quarrel of former lovers.”(Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, pp. 5–6)

¹⁹Jonathan Edwards. “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.” In: *Electronic Texts in American Studies*. 54 (1741). Ed. by Reiner Smolinski, pp. 1–31. URL: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/54>.

²⁰Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, p. 219.

²¹qtd. in Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, p. 220.

²²Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, p. 220.

While explicitly the sermon is an exegesis of a passage from Deuteronomy 32:35 (“Their foot shall slide in due time”), the sermon can be read as an explication of what it means to take God’s absolute sovereignty and our sinful nature to their logical conclusion. To take the former seriously is to recognize that God is constantly creating the universe and so it is only God that decides our ultimate fate (salvation or damnation). To take the latter seriously is to recognize that we are deserving of damnation. For Edwards then, our behavior, actions, or plans have no binding power on God’s ultimate decision concerning our own fate.

The sermon is divided into three main sections:

1. an explication of Deuteronomy 32:35
2. a discussion of what keeps us out of hell
3. an application of the sermon

In what follows, we focus primarily on sections 1 and 2.

2.3.3 | The Deuteronomy Passage

Edwards’s essay begins with a passage from Deuteronomy 32:35, “Their foot shall slide in due time”. The passage refers to nonbelieving Israelites who were (i) not only God’s people but also (ii) living under God’s grace. Despite living under God’s grace, the nonbelievers did not understand God’s law. This nonbelief and failure to understand on the part of the nonbelievers was to be met with the vengeance of God. Such vengeance is, as Deuteronomy 32 makes clear, not pretty:

I lift my hand to heaven and solemnly swear: As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me. I will make my arrows drunk with blood, while my sword devours flesh: the blood of the slain and the captives, the heads of the enemy leaders.

According to Edwards, the Deuteronomy passage has four implications about God’s vengeance.

First, Edwards contends that the nonbelievers are **constantly exposed to destruction**. The metaphor is that the nonbelievers are always walking in slippery places and so they constantly

²²For more on Edwards’ essay, see (Alexander Medlicott Jr. “In the Wake of Mr. Edwards’s “Most Awakening” Sermon at Enfield”. In: *Early American Literature* 15.3 [1980], pp. 217–221; Douglas L. Winiarski. “Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast? Radical Revivalism and the Great Awakening in the Connecticut Valley”. In: *Church History* 74.4 [Dec. 2005], pp. 683–739. ISSN: 0009-6407, 1755-2613. DOI: [10.1017/S0009640700100861](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640700100861). URL: https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/S0009640700100861/type/journal_article [visited on 12/18/2019]; Stephen Richard Turley. “Awakened to the Holy: “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” in Ritualized Context”. In: *Christianity & Literature* 57.4 [Sept. 2008], pp. 507–530. ISSN: 0148-3331, 2056-5666. DOI: [10.1177/014833310805700401](https://doi.org/10.1177/014833310805700401). URL: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/014833310805700401> [visited on 12/18/2019]; Edwin H. Cady. “The Artistry of Jonathan Edwards”. In: *The New England Quarterly* 22.1 [1949], p. 61. ISSN: 00284866. DOI: [10.2307/361536](https://doi.org/10.2307/361536). URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/361536?origin=crossref> [visited on 12/18/2019]; Rosemary Hearn. “Form as Argument in Edward’s “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God””. In: *CLA Journal* 28.4 [1985], pp. 452–459. See also: Robert Stuart Lee, 1976, Jonathan Edwards at Enfield: “And Oh the Cheerfulness and Pleasantness”, *American Language* 48/1, 46-59; Christopher F. Lukasik, 2000, Feeling the Force of Certainty: The Divine Science, Newtonianism, and Jonathan Edwards’s Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, *The New England Quarterly* 73(2), 222-245; Gallagher, Edward, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God: Some Unfinished Business”, *The New England Quarterly*, 73 (2)

run the risk of falling from God's grace. It is not the case that destruction will occur at some future time that is convenient for us, but can occur at any moment.

Second, Edwards contends that the nature of this constant risk of destruction is both **sudden and unexpected**. Even if one is always exposed to destruction, one also cannot foresee when that destruction will occur. For Edwards, when we do fall, we fall "without Warning".²³ This follows from the fact that God's nature is transcendent and thus God's precise will and plan are beyond human comprehension.

Third, Edwards contends that our fall need not be due to someone else but instead may be **due to ourselves**. It is our own nature that makes us liable to fall, rather than the corrupting power of another. Edwards' metaphor is that we fall because of our own weight. This is in line with the Calvinist view on human nature after the fall. We sin because it is our nature to sin, not because others tempt us to sin or because we are corrupted by others.

Finally, Edwards contends that the only reason nonbelievers do not fall now is simply because God **temporarily prevents it** but nonbelievers will fall in due time. Here Edwards uses the metaphor that we are on a slippery inclined plane and without the support of God, we would slide into a pit of destruction. The idea then is that due to our nature, we are always deserving of punishment and it is only because of God's mercy that we are permitted to escape immediate damnation.

2.3.4 | What Keeps Us Out of Hell

The key conclusion that Edwards draws from the Deuteronomy passage and its implications is that

"There is nothing that keeps wicked Men at any one Moment, out of Hell, but the meer Pleasure of GOD."²⁴

In other words, the only thing that prevents nonbelievers from God's wrath is *God's will alone*. It is not our nature, our good or bad works, our virtues, or anything we do here on Earth. It is only God's "pleasure" that keeps us from the punishment we deserve.

The idea that it is only God's will that keeps us from punishment fits with the general Calvinist view that *God determines everything*. Along with the fact that God is all-powerful, this entails that God also determines *who is saved* and *who is damned*. This is consistent with God's nature and our own. God is just and we deserve damnation but God is also merciful and so some will be saved. Those that are saved are saved because of Christ's sacrifice (the atonement). God's justice was satisfied through the Christ's own sacrifice.

Edwards puts forward the following argument that all that are saved are only saved because of God:²⁵

- P1: Either A (a natural, nonbelieving human can escape God's punishment through their own power) or B (nonbelievers can only escape punishment because of God's will).

²³Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 4.

²⁴Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 5.

²⁵see Hearn, "Form as Argument in Edward's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"", p. 454.

- P2: Not-A (a natural, nonbelieving human cannot escape God's punishment through their own power or nature).
- C: Therefore, B (nonbelievers can and do escape punishment because of God's will).

The rest of the section focuses on a defense of **P2**: there is nothing about our nature, our actions, or God's nature that would protect nonbelievers from God's punishment. To support **P2**, Edwards puts forward ten considerations:

1. God does not lack the power to throw us into hell.²⁶
2. Nonbelievers deserve to be cast into Hell²⁷
3. "They are *already* under a Sentence of Condemnation to Hell."²⁸
4. Nonbelievers are the *objects* of the same anger of God as those in Hell²⁹
5. The devil is ready to take the nonbelievers but is presently restrained by God³⁰
6. In our nature / soul are principles such that if God did not restrain us, we would behave violently³¹
7. There is no visible sign that death is not at hand³²
8. Care and prudence to preserve our lives does not secure us for even a moment³³
9. None of our plans or actions save us from hell if we reject Christ.³⁴
10. "God has laid himself under *no Obligation* by any Promises to keep any natural Man out of Hell one Moment."³⁵

We can distill these considerations down to **two key points**:

First, our nature is evil and we deserve to be punished for this evil. Considerations (2)-(6) aim to establish that the *nature* of nonbelievers is to be punished but this punishment is prevented by God. It also points out something held by Edwards that not all Christians accepted. Consider the Armenian position

Definition 2.5: Armenian position

The Armenian position on damnation is that (1) God's grace restrains us from the potential evil we would do, (2) we are deserving of God's punishment for the wrongdoings we *actually* commit, and (3) we are not deserving of God's punishment for the wrongdoings we would *potentially* commit (the sins we would have committed due to our nature but were prevented from committing because of God's grace).

Edwards accepts the idea that God restrains us from doing more potential evil and that we deserve to be punished for the actual evil we do, but he also thinks that we deserve punishment

²⁶Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 5.

²⁷Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 6.

²⁸Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 6.

²⁹Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 6.

³⁰Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 7.

³¹Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 8.

³²Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", pp. 8-9.

³³Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 6.

³⁴Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 9.

³⁵Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 11.

for the evil **we would do** but God **restrains us from doing**. For Edwards, the nature of evil people is so corrupt that we deserve infinite punishment. He writes that

There are in the Souls of wicked Men those hellish *Principles* reigning, that would presently kindle and flame out into Hell Fire, if it were not for God's Restraints. There is laid in the very Nature of carnal Men a Foundation for the Torments of Hell: There are those corrupt Principles, in reigning Power in them, and in full Possession of them, that are Seeds of Hell Fire.³⁶

Second, there is absolutely nothing we can do to save ourselves or to guarantee our own salvation. Considerations (1), (7)-(9), and (10) establish that there is nothing nonbelievers can do to prevent God from punishing them since (1) establishes that God's power is greater than any collective power humans could marshal. Consideration (7) reiterates the fact that God's punishment to nonbelievers is unexpected and so they cannot prepare for it ahead of time while (8)-(9) establish that even if we did know when judgment would occur, the preservation of our lives through cautiousness, prudence, or any schemes nonbelievers concoct to prevent damnation have no sway on God. Finally, consideration (10) establishes that God is not under any moral obligation to prevent the damnation of nonbelievers since God has not made a covenant with them.

Exercise 7

Edwards contends that our nature is evil and we deserve not only to be punished for the acts that we commit but also the acts that we would have committed if God did not restrain us. In other words, we deserve to be punished for our **nature** not merely our acts.

1. Do you think Edwards is right? If there were an infinitely knowledgeable and just ruler, would it be just for that individual to punish someone not only for what they did but also what they would have done?
2. What limitations are there for us? Why can't we judge people not merely for what they do but who they are?

2.3.5 | Application

The final section of the sermon says that the message of God's wrath may be of use to awaken the unconverted.

First, it should be noted that the audience of Edwards' sermon is wider than atheists or those that fail to believe in God. The sermon is directed at the content, quiet, and unconverted members of a congregation and so its target audience concerns those that are **nominally religious**. The nominally religious are individuals who **do not fully believe in God** and tend to be lacking in humility in that they think that something *they can do* can guarantee them salvation. For Edwards, these individuals may say they believe in God, may take themselves to be religious, to be members of a congregation, and may do good works but none of this necessitates their salvation. Remember that a vast majority of the sin we are guilty of is not performed for God

³⁶Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", pp. 7-8.

prevents us from committing said acts. But Edwards is clear that God is just as angry with these individuals (if not more so) as those that are currently in Hell.³⁷

Second, an emphasized point in Edwards' considerations is that the nominally religious falsely take themselves to be saved due to a grossly overestimated view of their own worth. They believe that there is either something about their nature or they are somehow smarter, wiser, more cunning, or more prudent than others that will allow them to escape God's wrath. Edwards is clear that people hear that "there are but few saved, and that the bigger Part of Men that have died heretofore are gone to Hell", but human beings nevertheless delude themselves into thinking that they are the exception to the rule.³⁸

Almost every natural Man that hears of Hell, flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own Security; he flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do; every one lays out Matters in his own Mind how he shall avoid Damnation, and flatters himself that he contrives well for himself, and that his Schemes won't fail.³⁹

But as Edwards notes there is nothing about our nature, our actions, our plans, our prudence that prevents nonbelievers from damnation.⁴⁰

Third, much of the third section of the sermon involves a further explication of God's wrath. Edwards reminds his audience that unbelievers make themselves (i) the objects of God's wrath, (ii) this wrath is *fierce* beyond comprehension, (iii) this wrath is put on *display* to the angels, Jesus, and other onlookers, and (iv) this wrath is everlasting. Were we fully aware of this wrath we would "fall down and adore that great Power and Majesty."⁴¹

Exercise 8

1. "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" was delivered in 1741. Are there any religious individuals today that would benefit from its message (Christian or otherwise)?
2. If one were to accept such a conception of God, what do you think would the difference (practical consequences) be to someone's daily life? One suggestion that Edwards seems to give is that people would be less prideful. He routinely characterizes nonbelievers as lacking humility. What other consequences would

³⁷"the Reason why they [nonbelievers] don't go down to Hell at each moment, is not because God, in whose Power they are, is not then very angry with them; as angry as he is with many of those miserable Creatures that he is now tormenting in Hell, and do there feel and bear the fierceness of his Wrath. Yea God is a great deal more angry with great Numbers that are now on Earth, yea doubtless with many that are now in this Congregation, that it may be are at Ease and Quiet, than he is with many of those that are now in the Flames of Hell."(Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", pp. 6-7)

³⁸Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 9.

³⁹Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 10.

⁴⁰Knowledge of the wrath of God is supposed to signal to us an opportunity. While those in Hell are crying out in despair, those of us that are living have an opportunity. Edwards writes: "And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has flung the door of mercy wide open, and stands in the door calling and crying with a loud voice to poor Sinners; [...] many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in, are in now an happy State, with their Hearts filled with Love to Him that has loved them and washed them for their Sins in his own Blood, and rejoicing in Hope of the Glory of God. How awful is it to be left behind at such a day."(Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 23)

⁴¹Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.", p. 21.

there be if we accept Edwards' view on God?

2.3.6 | Who is to be saved

The first question that we raised with respect to American puritanism was **if God determines everything, what determines who will be saved?** The answer to this is that God alone determines who is to be saved and who is to be damned. And, as "Sinner in the Hands of Angry God" contends, the only thing that presently keeps us out of hell now is God's will.

Not only is who is to be saved determined by God, but it is also predestined and individuals cannot impact this in the slightest degree. God's grace is not earned, achieved by action, by careful planning, by wit or nobility, or through rational persuasion. It is simply given by God. As Flower puts it "According to the Puritan doctrine, man cannot alter his own nature: what can alter it is the grace of God."⁴² However, when one receives the grace of God, one is changed for the object of one's love is redirected from one's self to God.

God's grace does not mean one is perfectly holy. Its impact on the converted is that it leads them to live a life that aims to love God rather than themselves. They are still, by their nature, corrupted, and thus this life turned toward God starts them on the **process of sanctification** (being made holy). Thus, some colonial Puritans thought that those given God's grace were saints and the lives of these saints were marked with certain **visible signs** that could be identified.

We now return to our second question: **for early American intellectuals (Puritans), how do we know who will be saved by God?**

⁴²Flower and Murphey, *A History of Philosophy in America*, p. 9.

2.4 | How do we know who is saved?

In the previous sections, we looked at the question of what determines **what determines who is saved by God?** For Puritans, this amounts to the same question as **who is a member of the invisible Church?** In the remainder of this handout, we the question of **how does one determine whether one is saved by God?** Or, **how can one determine if one is a part of the invisible Church?**

2.4.1 | Covenant theology

American Puritans were Calvinists. Early Calvinists accepted **covenant theology**. Covenant theology centers around two central covenants made by God with humans: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

Definition 2.6: covenant theology

God's interaction with people centers around two covenants: the **covenant of works** and the **covenant of grace**.

The **covenant of works** was made with Adam and Eve in that God provides a perfect existence for Adam and Eve provided that they fulfil God's law. *Do goods works, and be repaid in paradise!* Adam accepted this covenant as a *representative* of all human kind (its federal head). Violation to the covenant would come with condemnation, and condemnation would extend to all humankind.

In the **covenant of grace** is God offers some of us salvation. For the Puritans it is not the case that if you believe in God or do good works, then God will save you. God does not say: "if you believe in me and follow my law, then I will save you." For this would mean that your belief along with your good works would require God to save you. Rather, if you are saved, then as a response to God's grace, you both believe and submit to God's law. Faith, belief in God, good works are all a **symptom, mark, or byproduct** of God's grace not actions you commit to guarantee God's grace.

In covenant theology, the *sacraments* (baptism, taking communion) were sometimes interpreted to signify that you were in the covenant of grace. Communion, for example, was to be restricted to only those that were a part of the visible Church. Sacraments were thus taken to be a **seal** to verify your status in this covenant.

2.4.2 | The Visible Church

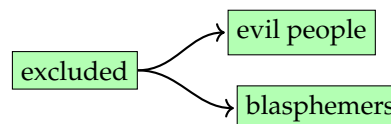
As noted, Puritans accepted:

1. the distinction between the visible and invisible Church
2. that the Church of England was impure (separatists and reformists)
3. covenant theology
4. that while not all members of the visible Church need to be morally perfect (they were not Donatists), the visible Church should not include evil individuals and thus there should be standards of entrance and membership.

The difficulty for the Puritans was what criteria to use to determine entrance and continued membership.

First, we are all, by nature, evil, and so moral perfection cannot be a requirement. Second, who is saved is determined by God's will and since we cannot intuit God's will, we cannot directly intuit who is saved and who is not.⁴³

Nevertheless, there were some obvious criteria for **exclusion**: those that were (1) abundantly evil or (2) blasphemers or practitioners of a false religion. Evil people included: "dogs and Enchaunters, & Whoremongers, & Murderers, and Idolatours"⁴⁴ Blasphemers included Anglicans, Catholics, and those who were "generall irreligious profannes ignorance, Atheisme and Machevelisme on the one side, & publique Idolitrie, vsuall blasphemie, swearing, lying, kylling, stealing, whoring, and all maner of impetie on the other side"⁴⁵



Some additional (more stringent) criteria were developed by early Puritans (16th century) for **inclusion**. These were based on certain **external behaviors**. Some of these included:⁴⁶

1. Agreement to join with others to worship God
2. Obedience to God's commandments
3. In some cases, a public repudiation of the Anglican Church and agreement not to attend Anglican service
4. A public profession of faith whereby one stated not only their **belief** in God's saving grace but their understanding.

With the development of these criteria also came the idea of the **doctrine of visible sainthood**. This doctrine essentially asserted that there were visible (experiential) signs of those who were marked by God's grace. What is entailed by this doctrine is that it was possible to prove who was part of God's chosen or saved people.

Definition 2.7: visible sainthood

There are distinguishing marks (or signs) on individuals that were in God's grace.

Each Puritan congregation thus had a responsibility to ensure that its members only included visible saints, namely those that could prove that they were saved by God. Many of the initial criteria for exclusion and inclusion were relatively easy to meet. They required only a type of public examination of one's external (observable) behaviors. One was not required to prove or provide evidence that one's **internal life** was marked by God. However, as Puritanism

⁴³Recall that for the Puritans "[h]uman merit is negligible and that salvation depends entirely on saving faith, which cannot be attained by human effort but comes from God's free grace"(Edmund S Morgan. *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*. New York: New York University, 1963, p. 36)

⁴⁴Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, p. 40.

⁴⁵Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, p. 51.

⁴⁶See (Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*, pp. 35–55)

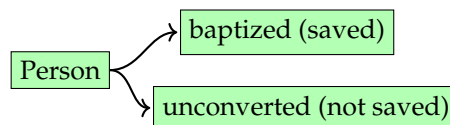
developed in the colonies, a greater attention was placed on the **internal religious experiences** of individuals and using these as a sign of one's membership into the visible church.

2.4.3 | Infant baptism

While the Puritan doctrine of visible sainthood allowed for restricting membership into the congregation, it was not without problem. In particular, the issue concerned *infant baptism* (pedobaptism).

Concerning infant baptism (pedobaptism), American Calvinists took a scriptural route in that while God makes a covenant with those who profess God's existence, this covenant also extends to the children.⁴⁷ Calvinists thus allowed converted members of the congregation to have their children baptized as the idea then would be that these children would later convert (profess their faith) later in life. The idea then was that the children of the congregation would no doubt convert later in life when they were of the age to profess their faith.

The problem then was that in the 17th and 18th century, there were individuals who were baptized (permissible under covenant theology) but failed the conversion tests (part of the doctrine of visible sainthood). To put it bluntly, it was possible for there to be a bunch of sinful, unruly folk who were (i) baptized (so saved) and (ii) unconverted members (so not saved). This created an inconsistency in Calvinist theology.



Calvinists had at least three options:

1. covenant theology is wrong:
 - a God does not make a covenant with the converted that extends to children (so infant baptism is wrong: Anabaptism)⁴⁸
 - b the sacraments are not seals of the covenant but are instead just ways of converting you (they are instruments rather than seals)
2. the parents of the converted were never really converted in the first place and so the covenant does not extend to the children
3. Doctrine of visible sainthood is wrong: tests for conversion are inadequate.

Some early Calvinists (Stoddardists) gave up on parts of covenant theology by rejecting:

1. that sacraments being seals / signs (they are just like the minister's sermon, an instrument to convert you, but have no real significance)
2. the doctrine of visible sainthood (you can't know if someone else is converted)

⁴⁷In Genesis 17, Abraham is directed to signify God's covenant that extends to his descendants by circumcising infant males.

⁴⁸Anabaptists reject infant baptism for what is call "credobaptism" or "believer's baptism"). Anabaptists contend that a baptism is only legitimate when an individual can make a free profession of faith. Another version are half-covenants.

The practical implication of this revision meant that the bar to enter the Calvinist congregation was much lower. There was no way to determine if an individual had really entered into the covenant of grace. Thus, no longer could ministers use visible sainthood as a grounds for restricting membership into the congregation. One consequence then of lowering the bar for entry meant that, in the late 17th and early 18th century there were mini-religious revivals (harvest of souls).⁴⁹

2.4.4 | The Great Awakening

While changes in Calvinist theology brought on mini-religious revivals, these set the stage for a large-scale religious conversion known as **The Great Awakening**. The Great Awakening hit in the early part of the 1740s with the preaching of Gilbert Tennet, Whitefield, Jedidiah Mills, Nathaniel Eels, James Davenport, Timothy Allen, Jonathan Edwards, and others.

The Great Awakening is characterized by a few features.

First, there was a sharp increase in the number of individuals who became religious. That is, there many, swift, wide-scale, enthusiastic religious concerns and increase in religious matters. Edwards writes that in December of 1734, a religious awakening took place in Northampton. He writes that the

the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in, and wonderfully to work among us, and there were, very suddenly, one after another [...] savingly converted, and some of them wrought upon in a very remarkable manner.⁵⁰

He described individuals who had no interest in religion be given a “new heart”, that multitudes of people became religious, and that it became the central topic of conversation.⁵¹ It had such an effect that by the summer of 1735 the town [Northampton] was “full of the presence of God: It never was so full of love, nor so full of joy, and yet so full of distress, as it was then.”⁵² The effect it had pervaded society such that even at weddings, rather than “mirth and jollity”, individuals were fixated on discoursing on religious matters.⁵³ The religious awakening in Northampton spread to other towns (South-Hadley, Suffield, Deerfield, West Springfield, Long-Meadow, Enfield, Hatfield, etc.).

Second, Edwards characterizes the awakening as having two effects on the converted. First, they immediately abandoned their sinful practices or abstained from vices and extravagant behaviors:

people had soon done with their old quarrels, backbitings, and intermeddling with other men’s matters; the tavern was soon left empty, and persons kept very much at

⁴⁹Flower and Murphey, *A History of Philosophy in America*, p. 139.

⁵⁰Jonathan Edwards. *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*. Boston: James Loring, 1831.

⁵¹“There was scarcely a single person in town, either old or young, that was left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world.”(Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*, p. 23)

⁵²Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*, p. 23.

⁵³Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*, p. 25.

home; none went abroad unless on necessary business, or on some religious account, and every day seemed in many respects like a Sabbath day.⁵⁴

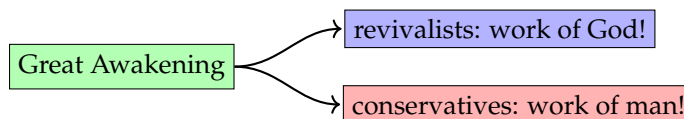
The other effect was that individuals began to undertake the **interest** into the path of salvation. Edwards writes that the converted were put to an

earnest application to the means of salvation, reading, prayer, meditation, the ordinances of God's house, and private conference; their cry was, "What shall we do to be saved?"⁵⁵

The question then became **how to interpret swift, wide-scale, enthusiastic religious interest, conversion, and such radical changes in behavior**. There were two primary hypotheses.

First, it was the work of God. Edwards interpreted it as God dispensing providence to a high degree. Noting that for some reason God has decided increase the number of individuals that would be saved.⁵⁶ God's grace in an individual had certain effects that Edwards and others took pains to document as not only did they give indication of an individual's salvation but also provided a means to exclude from the Visible Church.

Second, it was **not** the work of God but instead the work of revivalist ministers stirring individuals into a religious enthusiasm. Highly dynamic traveling (itinerant) ministers that included George Whitefield (in the 1740s), Jonathan Edwards, James Davenport (1716-1757) and others were doing nothing more than stirring up the emotions and imagination of the colonists. Conservative Calvinists like Charles Chauncey denied that the ongoing religious revival was the work of the God.



One important feature of the Great Awakening was how to interpret the strong feelings, emotions, experiences of religious individuals. Colonial puritans during the Great Awakening asserted that conversion required not only (1) an **intellect apprehension** and acceptance of Christian doctrine but also (2) a **heartfelt acceptance** of the doctrine. Conversion required a "new birth" or regeneration of the individual. The faithful were sometimes called **regenerates**.

The behavior of some of these revivalist ministers gave the conservative view more plausibility as they saw revivalists overemphasizing the role of emotion and expression in religion. No one better embodies this than **James Davenport**.

⁵⁴Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*, p. 37.

⁵⁵Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*, p. 37.

⁵⁶Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*, pp. 31, 33, 34.

2.4.4.1 | Davenport and the New Lights

Davenport was **anti-establishment**. He emphasized the importance of *strife within the Church* over a *quieted peace*. While it was a part of colonial Puritan tradition that reformation must happen within the Church (that is, the Church must be more critical of itself than any other entity), Davenport took this to a new level extreme. First, Davenport found that attacking ministers personally, accusing them of being unconverted had the effect of converting more people. Davenport's tactic of conversion was thus in start contrast to one where the head of a church was often taken to be the most spiritual or holy. The logic of ministry was thus as follows:⁵⁷

1. Meet with minister of a Church
2. Regard the minister's spiritual condition as unsatisfactory
3. Lead public prayer for the conversion of the minister

Second, Davenport and his contemporaries rejected the need for classical training as preparation for ministry, rejected the need for books, and rejected the role of New England colleges had in preparing said ministers.

Davenport's style was also **anticlerical**. He preached outdoors (e.g. in barns or walking through the streets) to his followers (known as the "New Lights"), employed music, encouraged his audience to speak out, delivered his sermons in vulgar terms, without notes, and preferred a theatrical over logical delivery.⁵⁸ One newspaper reported that "Were you to see him in his most violent Agitations, you would be apt to think, that he was a Madman just broke from his chains." To outside observers it was religious anarchy. Absent of order or method, religious meetings sometimes consisted of people talking over each other, some praying, some singing, some screaming, scolding, or crying.⁵⁹

Davenport and other itinerant preachers began to receive resistance. Some, like Timothy Allen, were jailed. Others, including Davenport, were becoming increasingly isolated. This isolation led to a dying out of the Great Awakening, and Davenport interpreted it as a sign of God's *coming destruction*. If Armageddon was coming, then one ought to prepare! For Davenport this meant the New Lights ought to take a step toward greater purify. On 6 March 1743, Davenport prepared for the coming Armageddon in New London. While in New London, Davenport met with a number of New Lights followers and encouraged that they might do engage "memorable Exploits" in order to ensure the furtherance of their religion. Apparently, a member of the crowd claimed to have a revelation that they should "root out Heresy and pull down Idolotry".⁶⁰ That same day, the New Lights proceeded to attack *heresy* by tossing religious texts into a bonfire that was built in the street. As the books burned out, the New Lights were reported as crying out:

Thus the Souls of the Authors of those Books, those of them that are dead, are roasting in the Flames of Hell; and that the Fate of those surviving would be the same, unless speedy Repentance prevented.⁶¹

⁵⁷Harry S. Stout and Peter Onuf. "James Davenport and the Great Awakening in New London". In: *The Journal of American History* 70.3 (Dec. 1983), p. 556. ISSN: 00218723. DOI: [10.2307/1903483](https://doi.org/10.2307/1903483). URL: <https://academic.oup.com/jah/article-lookup/doi/10.2307/1903483> (visited on 01/24/2020), p. 566.

⁵⁸Stout and Onuf, "James Davenport and the Great Awakening in New London", pp. 567–568.

⁵⁹Stout and Onuf, "James Davenport and the Great Awakening in New London", p. 569.

⁶⁰The Boston Weekly Post-Boy, Monday, March 28, 1743

⁶¹The Boston Weekly Post-Boy, Monday, March 28, 1743

On the next day, the New Lights aimed to tear down *idolatry*. At this point, Davenport is reported as telling the followers that they idolized their apparel and material items, especially ornaments (e.g. rings, jewelry). Individuals began stripping off their clothes and tossing it into a pile. Some tried to reason that they did not idolize their clothing but it appeared to have no impact: “[t]his carnal Reasoning availed nothing; strip he must, and strip he did.”⁶² With the pile of material goods collected, the New Lights began to pray for a sign of what to do next. Davenport claimed to have been instructed that the pile must be burned at which point Davenport “took his wearing Breeches, and hove them with Violence into the Pile, saying, Go you with the Rest.”⁶³

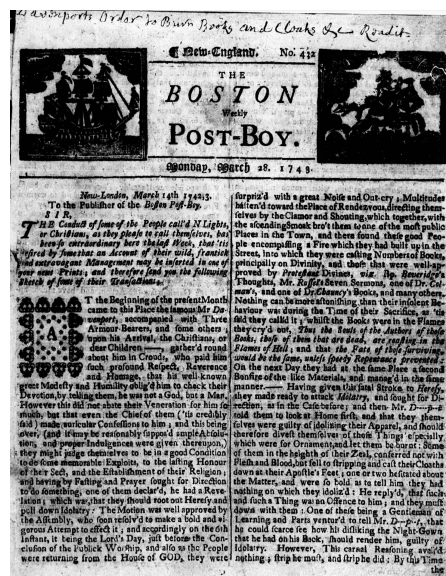


Figure 2.1: The Boston Weekly Post-Boy, Monday, March 28, 1743

The bonfires of Davenport and his followers were, to those involved and outsiders alike, a step too far. A woman at the bonfire pulled Davenport's pants from the flames and threw them back at him. A man criticized Davenport and his followers for their own idolatry, contending that their bonfire was their own golden calf and that the Davenport must be possessed by the Devil. Davenport's response was that God did leave him and he was, in fact, possessed by the Devil. These events had a significant impact on Davenport's followers. One of his Davenport's followers remarked that

That although he had for three Years past believed [...] himself to be a Child of God, he now thought he was a Child of the Devil, and a Judas, and thought he should be hanged between Heaven and Earth, and have his Bowels gush out.⁶⁴

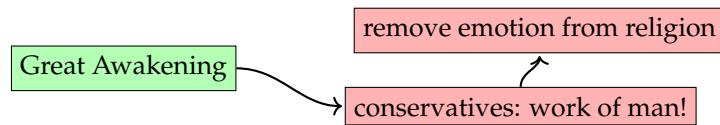
Given this out-of-control, anarchic, religious enthusiasm, it was natural for many to (i) not only seen the Great Awakening **not as the work of God** but also (ii) treat religious emotion and

⁶²The Boston Weekly Post-Boy, Monday, March 28, 1743

⁶³The Boston Weekly Post-Boy, Monday, March 28, 1743

⁶⁴The Boston Weekly Post-Boy, Monday, March 28, 1743

experience with a strong degree of skepticism. Those prone to highlight religious affections could only be seen as suffering with some sort of mental disorder, fanaticism, or demonic possession.



If strong emotions, high affections, or vivid feelings were signs of a demented mind rather than a mark of divinity, then they lacked validity in their use to distinguish who was and was not saved (or should or should not be part of the visible Church). But the question then is whether the true religion involves some measure of emotion, affection, or experience or if it is a matter of having the right beliefs, following the right rules, etc.

Exercise 9

One issue in the Great Awakening as the extent to which high experiences (strong feelings, visions, etc.) play in the true religion. Conservatives are skeptical of such high experiences, contending that strong feelings have no role in the true religion. Revivalists however contend that these high experiences play a central role as they are divine revelation from God.

1. To what extent does experience play a role in the true religion?
2. Can one practice the true religion in a neutral, rational, disaffected way?

2.5 | Religious Affectations

Edwards himself tried to navigate between the two extremes in his *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*⁶⁵ by arguing that (i) the revival was the work of God and that religious affections were a central part of the true religion but (ii) not succumbing to a naive religious emotionalism (or what Locke might call Enthusiasm). In what follows, we examine the Introduction and the Part I of *Religious Affections*.

Edwards argued:

1. aspects of the Great Awakening overstepped certain lines (e.g. Davenport),
2. Great Awakening was still the work of God (increased membership into the church (religious devotion) could be interpreted a sign of God's grace sweeping over individuals, moving them from a state of spiritual deadness to spiritual life)

What was required, however, was a parse on the types of emotions (affections) that could be regarded as **holy** from those that were doing nothing but stirring up congregations into "emotional orgies".

RA contains a short preface and is divided into three parts:

⁶⁵ *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (hereafter RA) is a book by Jonathan Edwards written in 1746 during the First Great Awakening.

1. **Part I** aims to establish the thesis that affections, specifically the affection of *love*, are a part of the true religion
2. **Part II** aims to establish that there are no **certain** signs that a religious affection is from God or not from God.
3. **Part III** aims to show which are the signs of those affections that are from God (or are holy affections)

2.5.1 | Preface

The introduction to *RA* aims to argue why it is important to determine what features are found in the true religion. At the outset of *RA*, Edwards raises the question of what are the distinguishing marks of those who are saved (in the covenant of grace with God).

There is no question whatsoever, that is of greater importance to mankind, and that it more concerns every individual person to be well resolved in, than this, *What are the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favour with God, and entitled to his eternal rewards?* or, which comes to the same thing, *What is the nature of true religion? and wherein do lie the distinguishing notes of that virtue and holiness that is acceptable in the sight of God?*⁶⁶

He thinks that this is **not an easy question to answer** for it is not the case that all members of the Church are good. Instead, he regards the congregation as an admixture of good and bad. Even further, he contends that there are evil people within the religious orders. And, at a time when a religious revival is occurring it should be no surprise that “multitudes of hypocrites should spring up among true saints.”⁶⁷ Such individuals, even though they may claim to be saved or true believers are actually practitioners of a **false religion**.

For Edwards this admixture of good and evil within a religion is actually one of the devil’s greatest tools. Edwards writes that “[i]t is by the mixture of counterfeit religion with true, not discerned and distinguished, that the devil has had his greatest advantage against the cause and kingdom of Christ.”⁶⁸ He goes so far as to contend that this practicing of false religion within the Christian church has been *worse* for the spreading of Christianity than the persecution of Christians by “Jews and Heathens” and by the Roman empire.⁶⁹ Edwards likens it to the work of the devil in the garden of Eden for “by appearing to be a friend to their happy paradisaic state, and pretending to advance it to higher degrees.”⁷⁰ In short, the devil pretends to be our friend, appear to advance our cause but does so in a way that corrupts us. This corruption ultimately leads to consequences that are far worse than those who might be openly against us.⁷¹

The consequences of following a false religion are said to be “inexpressibly dreadful”.⁷² Some include:

1. people believe things that are an abomination to God

⁶⁶Jonathan Edwards. *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. Philadelphia: James Crissy, 1821, p. iii.

⁶⁷Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. v.

⁶⁸Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. vii.

⁶⁹Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. vii.

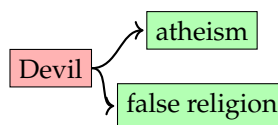
⁷⁰Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. viii.

⁷¹see Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, pp. viii–ix.

⁷²Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. ix.

2. people believe they are saved but they are not
3. people become extremely confident in their holiness but are “the vilest hypocrites”
4. since they believe themselves to be doing God’s work, they “sin without restraint, yea, with earnest forwardness and zeal, and with all their might”⁷³
5. “scattering the flock of Christ, and sets them one against another”⁷⁴

The devil’s general plan then is to operate on two fronts. The first front is the direct front of trying to stamp out the true religion (cause of God) through atheism, sin, infidelity, heresy, and so forth. The second front is both more subtle, indirect, and more dangerous. This is to promote a false religion under the auspices of doing God’s work.



Edwards likens the two operations as the devil battling from without and from within:

Satan mightily encourages the hearts of open enemies of religion, and strengthens their hands, and fills them with weapons, and makes strong their fortresses; when, at the same time, religion and the church of God lie exposed to them, as a city without walls.⁷⁵

The conclusion of the introduction is that it is of the utmost importance to be able to (i) identify the marks of those that are saved and (ii) identify the true religion from false religion (which he says amount to the same thing).

Exercise 10

Edwards contends that false religion is worse than no religion at all. In making this claim, Edwards points to the fact that believing in a counterfeit religion has consequences that are “inexpressibly dreadful” one of which is that individuals who believe in a false religion become so confident that they are willing to express themselves with their whole heart but they commit acts that are against the will of God^a

1. Do you agree that a false religion is worse than no religion at all? Why or why not?
2. How might Edwards’ claim be applied to other domains, e.g. a false morality is worse than having no morals or bad science is worse than no science.

^aEdwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. ix.

2.5.2 | Religious Affectations: Part I

The beginning of Part I of RA involves a discussion of the **benefits of a trial of someone’s faith**. Edwards identifies three benefits:

⁷³Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. ix.

⁷⁴Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. x.

⁷⁵Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. ix.

1. it makes the truth of that faith more evident since the believer can now better distinguish between a true and false religion
2. it makes the beauty, liveliness, and pleasantness of that religion more clear
3. it purifies the religion from any admixture of false religion

Edwards thus rejects the idea that one should simply believe in the tenets of a particular Church. One is obligated to test one's religious beliefs for doing so may help them weed out false beliefs that are antithetical to God.

In line with this, Edwards puts forward the following thesis:

Doctrine. *True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.*⁷⁶

What are holy affections? In Part I, JE doesn't establish what a *holy affection* is in great detail. Instead, he only aims to establish the weaker thesis that **true religion consists, in great parts, of affections.**

2.5.2.1 | What is an affection?

First, it is necessary to specify what it means for something to be an **affection of the mind**.

Definition 2.8: affections of the mind

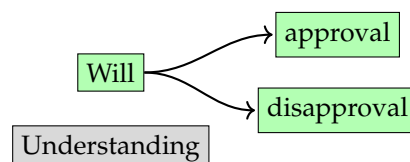
affections of the mind are vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.

For Edwards, humans are endowed with two main faculties:

1. Understanding: that which is capable of perception, speculation, and judgment
2. Will (inclination / heart): the faculty that likes or dislikes something, approves or rejects something, is pleased or displeased by something

For Edwards, the will has two principle "exercises" or activities:

1. approval: being inclined toward something, being pleased by something, acceptance
2. disapproval: being disinclined toward something, being displeased by something, rejection



⁷⁶Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 16.

Not only do the will and understanding act differently, but the will's affections have different degrees. For example, the will can *strongly* approve or be slightly beyond indifferent. For Edwards, there are increasingly high degrees to the point where the mind's affections is so strong that there is an accompanying "bodily sensation, especially about the heart and vitals".⁷⁷ The strongest affection for something (approval) is **love** and the strongest affection against something (disapproval) is **hatred**.⁷⁸

2.5.2.2 | True religion consists in affections

Edwards aims to show that true religion consists (in part) in **having certain affections**.⁷⁹ That is, to believe in the true religion is to have certain affections of the will, certain strong inclinations (e.g. love) and disinclinations (hatred).

This might be taken to be obvious so it is important to point out that the view entails (in stronger interpretations) that much of what is **associated with religion is not truly religions**. That is, the following have little to do with true religion:

1. mere knowledge of religious things, e.g. scripture, doctrine, etc.
2. religious preaching, talking of religious things
3. having a religious title, e.g. priest, pope, etc.
4. attending mass or performing rituals, e.g. praying
5. wearing religious clothing, religious jewelry, religious ornament
6. saying you are religious

For Edwards, believing in the true religion is to have **certain vigorous, lively, and habitual affections which translate into practical action**: "true religion consists, in a great measure, in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul or the fervent exercises of the heart".⁸⁰

First, when JE contends that the affections are **vigorous** or **lively**, he is referring to the fact that an individual's desire or action of the will is extremely strong. Since the object and importance of a true religion is much greater than anything else, the *strength* of this affectation should be **greater** than what we feel for our family, our property, even our life.⁸¹ In other words, Edwards contends that true religion does not consist in very slight emotions that raise us to the level of just higher than indifference that God exists. Instead, God insists that our wills be "strongly exercised" and that we have a "fervent, vigorous engagedness of the heart in religion".⁸²

Second, these affections are said to flow over into how someone behaves (their practical action). Edwards writes that people hear the word of God, hear how great God is, and hear about God's love yet they do not "remain as they were before, with no sensible alteration on

⁷⁷Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 17.

⁷⁸Edwards notes that while there never is an action on the mind that does not affect the body, it is the mind that is the entity that is the subject of being effected, not the body. The body is not capable of loving or hating, of being in joy or sorrow, of fearing or hoping.

⁷⁹Jonathan Edwards. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Ed. by John E Smith. Revised. Vol. 2. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 99.

⁸⁰Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 20.

⁸¹Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, pp. 21–22.

⁸²Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 20.

them, either in heart or practice”⁸³ What this means is that when one has these affections, they will behave differently. For example, they might *cry* after receiving wisdom, attempt to *seek* out God further, or *humble* themselves.⁸⁴

2.5.3 | Evidence that true religion involves affections

Edwards lists a variety of affections one will have if they believe in the true religion or if they are marked by God’s grace. These include:

1. fear
2. hope
3. love
4. hatred
5. desire
6. joy
7. sorrow
8. gratitude
9. compassion
10. zeal

In the case of fear, Edwards says that true Godliness involves a *fear of the Lord*. If we truly believe, we should fear God’s judgments, tremble at God’s word, and be terrified of God’s power.

For Edwards, the **chief affection in religion** and the “foundation of all other affections” is that of **love**.⁸⁵

That true religion is most involves love is entirely supported by scripture (and so I will only mention, in outline, how JE supports his position). He contends that his thesis is supported by at least four pieces of evidence from scripture:

1. Scripture,
2. the lives of the apostles
3. the life of Christ
4. how we understand sin

First, in terms of Scripture, Edwards cites a number of passages from the Bible where it is said that loving God, others, and the law are commanded or a part of faith.⁸⁶

⁸³Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 23.

⁸⁴see Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, pp. 23–24.

⁸⁵Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 29.

⁸⁶Some examples include: (1) Matthew 23: 37-40: Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (2) Galatians 5:14: For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (3) Romans 13:8: Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. (4) Romans 13:10: Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (5) 1 Timothy 5: “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith”

Second, in terms of the lives of Saints, he refers to the lives of David, the apostle Paul, and the apostle John. In each case, he points out how these individuals (1) received certain affections (e.g. David's *zeal* or *gratitude* for God and (2) these affections led them to act in certain ways. For example, it led them to act despite difficulty or suffering.

Third, in terms of the life of Jesus, JE notes that Jesus "was remarkably of a tender and affectionate heart", prayed in earnest, cried for the sins of human, and filled with compassion.⁸⁷

Fourth, in terms of understanding sin (evil action), Edwards distinguishes between the **hard-hearted** and the **tender-hearted**.

Definition 2.9: hard-hearted

A subject S has a hard heart if they have a will or heart that is not easily affected or moved by virtuous affections. They are insensible, unmoved, hard to impress, stone-like, void of affection.^a

^a"[b]y a hard heart, is plainly meant an unaffected heart, or a heart not easy to be moved with virtuous affections, like the stone, insensible, stupid, unmoved, and hard to be impressed."(Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 41)

For JE, having a hard-heart allows us to explain why people do evil actions for they are simply not moved by the things that should move them.

Example 2.1

An individual sees people dying in a video. They do not feel anything internally and thus are not moved to take any practical action.

2.5.4 | Middle ground

Recall the differing interpretations of the Great Awakening.

On the one hand, we have the **conservatives**. They might be said to deny that religion has anything to do with having certain affections. Instead, they might be said to adopt a kind of sterilized view of religion where the true religion consists of rules, practices, knowing doctrine, and manifesting the correct external behaviors.

On the other hand, we have the **revivalists**. They might be said to accept that religion concerns having affections and interpret nearly every internal affection as being the result of God. High words, strong feelings, intense emotions are all a sign of God's grace and ought to be accepted uncritically.

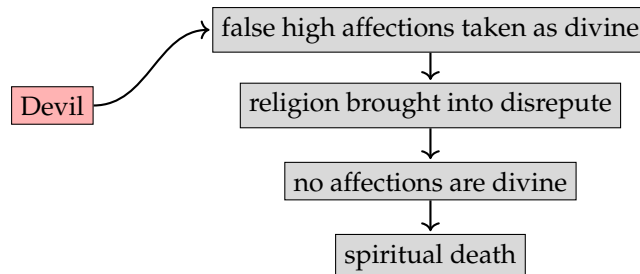
Edwards contends that both views as **extremes** and these extremes are part of the "subtlety of Satan".⁸⁸ With the **revivalists**, the devil mixes in "false affections with the works of God's Spirit."⁸⁹ This creates a false religion and so religion with affection is brought into disrepute. People are thus led to the **conservative** position. With the conservatives, religion is said to

⁸⁷Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 34.

⁸⁸Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 44.

⁸⁹Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 43.

not involve any affections at all. For JE this makes religion “a mere lifeless formality”: hearts become hardened, senses dulled to God, people lose everything that is spiritual from religion, and effectively everyone succumbs to a “spiritual death”. A great victory for Satan!



True religion can neither be **heat without light** (the revivalists) nor light without heat (the conservatives). Religion cannot be **raw feeling** completely untethered from anything divine nor can it be mere understanding of doctrine, prayers, creeds, moral rules, metaphysics, etc. without any affections at all.

In Part I, Edwards has argued that true religion involves affection. If one has no affection, then one has no religion and nothing divine in them. However, in Part II, Edwards will argue against the opposite extreme. He will argue that **not every affection is a holy affection**. The revivalists uncritically accept every *high affection* as a divine affection but never acknowledge that once these are investigated they “come to nothing”.⁹⁰ He contends that “some who seemed to be mightily raised and swallowed up with joy and zeal for a while, seem to have returned like a dog to his vomit.”⁹¹ Some affections that we have (even those that are about religious topics) are not a sign of God’s grace.

Exercise 11

JE’s view on the true religion is both experiential and critical. A true religion necessitates having certain experiences (otherwise it is shallow formalism) but we must be critical (vigilant) about which of those experiences are from God (otherwise it lapses into religious enthusiasm).

1. Is this view right in outline?
2. How does this view contrast against the religious beliefs of most people today (if at all)?

2.5.5 | Part II: Signs of religious affections, or not

The bulk of Part II of RA consists in a list of religious affections that neither confirm nor deny that an individual is saved (is practicing the true religion, is blessed by God). To illustrate, let’s consider two different arguments.

In the first argument, an individual has a high affection (or an affection with a certain characteristic) and then uncritically reasons that this affection must be from God.

⁹⁰Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 43.

⁹¹Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, p. 43.

- P1: I had an affection (experience) that had character X.
- C: Therefore, this affection must be a *holy* affection (or given to me by God, a mark of God's grace, or a sign I'm saved, or I'm following the true religion, etc.).

But JE contends that this inference is invalid. The mere fact that an affection has a certain character X is no evidence that the affection is a holy affection. This argument rejects the revivalist tendency to uncritically accept certain affections as holy.

In the second argument, an individual has a high affection (or an affection with a certain characteristic) or hears of someone with a high affection and then uncritically reasons that this affection could not have come from God.

- P1: I had an affection (experience) that had character X.
- C: Therefore, this affection must not be a *holy* affection (no part of the true religion).

But JE contends that this inference is invalid as well. As he has argued in Part I, true religion involves high affections and so we cannot critically contend that just because an individual has a high affection that it did not come from God.

What sorts of traits then do people claim either confirm or disconfirm that one had a holy affection? For JE, these include:

1. a very great or very high experience⁹²
2. an experience that has a great effect on the body⁹³
3. person subsequently talks constantly and enthusiastically of religion⁹⁴
4. the experience is not one they created themselves⁹⁵
5. the experience occurs at the same time of hearing a piece of Scripture⁹⁶
6. that the experience involves a profession of love of God⁹⁷
7. there are a variety of different kinds of experiences⁹⁸
8. the experiences of an individual come in a certain order, e.g. a feeling of awakening then joy⁹⁹
9. the experience is accompanied by spending a lot of time doing religious things, e.g. zealously praying¹⁰⁰
10. the experience is accompanied by talking about how much they praise God¹⁰¹
11. that an individual is judged by other godly or saintly people to be saintly or having grace¹⁰²

⁹²Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 127.

⁹³Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 131.

⁹⁴Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 135.

⁹⁵Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 138.

⁹⁶Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 142.

⁹⁷Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 146.

⁹⁸Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 147.

⁹⁹Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁰Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 163.

¹⁰¹Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 165.

¹⁰²Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, p. 181.

To look at one in particular, consider the first affection. This is one where an individual has a great or very high affection (e.g. a strong love or hate toward something).

For Edwards, on the one hand, we cannot argue that this is evidence that one is not practicing the true religion. In other words, since practicing the true religion ultimately involves having certain affections one cannot conclude that if one has a great or very affection, then one is not practicing the true religion.

In particular, JE reasons as follows:

- P1: Assume a very high affection or great experience is evidence that one is not practicing the true religion.
- P2: On this assumption, loving God to high degree, hating sin, or feeling very sorry for wrongdoing, and so on are not part of religion.
- P3: But scripture, the lives of saints, and the lives of angels all contend otherwise, e.g. God's commandment is that one should love the Lord God with *all thy heart*
- C: Therefore, a very high affection or great experience is **not** evidence that one is not practicing the true religion.

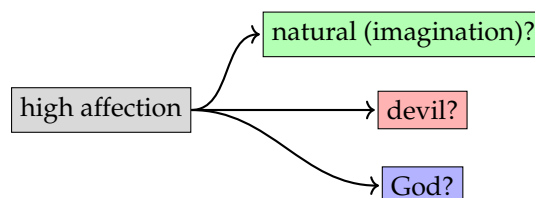
But, JE also reasons that having a very great experience of high affection is not evidence that one is saved or practicing the true religion. JE's argument has roughly the same structure and he supports the view by pointing out examples of individuals that have high affections or great experiences but those affections are certainly not from God.

Example 2.2

The New Testament tells us that when Jesus came into Jerusalem, he did so on a donkey. Onlookers believing that the ground that Jesus was riding on wasn't good enough for him and so they put their garments along the ground for the donkey to walk. In addition, individuals cried for Jesus. However, not long after, when Jesus was dying on the cross, the affections went the other direction, e.g. people spitting on him and yelling "Crucify"

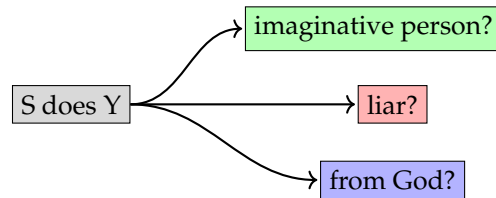
There are two key points to take away from Part II.

The **first** is that there are a number of properties of our experience that we cannot *definitely conclude* one way or another that these experiences are divinely inspired. Just because we have an intense experience, that seems as though it is not in our control, and prompts us to do religious things does not mean that this experience came from God. Such experiences may be caused by purely natural sources or be the work of the devil.



The **second** is there is no certainty with respect to our evaluation of another's experience that allows us to determine whether or not they have God's grace. These individuals may be false

prophets attempting to deceive or simply wrongly interpret their own experiences as divinely inspired when the source of their experience has another root (e.g. nature or the devil).

**Exercise 12**

1. In looking at your own experience, what type of property would an experience have to have in order for you to be certain that the experience is divinely inspired (and thus that you were marked by God's grace)?
2. What sorts of evidence would you need in evaluating others to make this same determination, namely that they are saved?

Revolutionaries: The Declaration of Independence

Chronology 3.1

- 1607 Virginia Company and Jamestown Colony
- 1620 Pilgrims arrive in Plymouth, MA
- 1689 Locke's An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
- 1740 Great Awakening
- 1755-1762 French and Indian War
- 1763 The Royal Proclamation
- 5 April 1764 Revenue Act (Sugar act) passed by Parliament
- 2 June 1764 Quartering Act
- 22 March 1765 Stamp Act
- 18 March 1766 Repeal of Stamp Act
- 2 July 1767 Townshend Acts
- 5 March 1770 Boston Massacre
- 10 March 1773 Tea Act
- 16 Dec 1773 Boston Tea Party
- 1774 Coercive Acts
- 19 April 1775 Battles of Lexington and Concord
- 11 June 1776 **Jefferson**, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert Livingston appointed to committee to draft Declaration
- 12-27 June 1776 Jefferson asked to draft the Declaration, of which it is reviewed by the Committee
- 28 June 1776 Declaration is read by Congress
- 1-4 July 1776 Debate and revision of Declaration by Congress
- 4 July 1776 Declaration adopted by Congress
- 8 July 1776 First public reading of the Declaration (occurs in Philadelphia)

The production of the Declaration of Independence is situated against a long history of conflicts between New England colonists and Great Britain. In addition, while the Declaration was written by Thomas Jefferson, it underwent revision after criticism from a committee assigned to draft the Declaration (the Committee of Five) as well as Congress. But more fundamentally,

the Declaration was said to be, in Jefferson's words, "an expression of the American mind" as it aimed to reflect the views of the American public on the foundation of government and the justification for rebellion.



Figure 3.1: Thomas Jefferson

While there are many important things to say concerning the historical events that led to its writing, the individuals involved in its production, and the subsequent events that occurred and documents produced (e.g. the Constitution) as a result of its enactment, in this handout we focus on three principal topics.

1. we consider the basic structure of the Declaration
2. we consider the argument of the Declaration
3. we consider its appeal to "self-evident" truths and analyze the use of these self-evident truths to support its conclusion.

3.1 | The structure of the Declaration of Independence

Before discussing the The Declaration of Independence¹, it is necessary to have a clear idea of its content and structure. The document itself is structured in five parts.

Part I spells out a requirement that when "One People" break away from a political group to form another political group, they should give **reasons** for doing so ("the causes which impel them to separation"). These reasons are required not merely by the political organization they are breaking from but to "mankind" in general.

Part II is the most famous part of the *Declaration*. It articulates a set of truths that are regarded as "self-evident". These being:

1. "all men are created equal"
2. there are certain unalienable rights given to us by the Creator²

¹<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

²"that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights"

3. some of these rights are to (1) life, (2) liberty, and (3) the pursuit of happiness³
4. that Government is created by the consent of the governed
5. Government is needed to secure these rights (power of government is given by the consent of the people to secure these rights)⁴
6. right of the people to alter / abolish Government (form a new government) when it becomes destructive to the ends of securing these inalienable rights⁵

The final self-evident truth is qualified. The *Declaration* states that it would be imprudent to abolish a Government whenever it is destructive to the rights of individuals for this would cause more suffering to individuals than keeping the destructive government.⁶ However, when the government engages in a “long train of abuses and usurpations”, then it is reasonable for the people to draw the conclusion that the goal of the government is the reduction of all rights and the formation of an absolute despotism. Given a long train of abuses, the people then have not only a right but a obligation to create a new government.⁷

Part III provides a long list of repeated abuses (destructive to the ends of rights) by George III (the king of Great Britain) on the American people. This historical set of abuses aim to establish the intent of George III to establish “absolute Tyranny over these States”. While there are too many abuses to list here, many of such abuses are familiar. Some include:

1. “For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:”
2. “For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:”
3. “For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:”
4. “He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.”

Part IV spells out how attempts resolve the dispute between the Americans and Great Britain have fallen on deaf ears or have been “answered only by repeated injury.” Such attempts include warnings about the unwarranted extension of jurisdictions and appeals to their native sense of justice, and attempts to petition for redress.

Part V is the conclusion. It states that the thirteen colonies have no other choice but to separate from Great Britain and treat it as independent from the colonies.⁸ What this amounts to then is the declaration that “these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States” and that as such has certain rights (e.g. power to levy war).⁹

³“that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

⁴“That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,”

⁵“That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

⁶“But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”

⁷“Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.”

⁸“We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.”

⁹“as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.”

3.2 | The argument of the Declaration

The *Declaration* can be rephrased as a type of argument supporting the right of US colonists to abolish the British government and set up a new government. It is held that the Declaration is constructed much like a geometric proof (or Lockean demonstration). The argument proceeds from axioms taken to be self-evident and then proceeds to draw a conclusion whereby the inference to the conclusion is intuitive.¹⁰

The argument can be expressed as follows:

- P1: People have certain unalienable rights (self-evident moral principle).
- P2: The purpose of a government is to protect these rights (self-evident moral principle)
- P3: When a government does not protect these rights and instead engages in a long train of abuses against said rights and does not redress these rights, then the people have a right and obligation to replace that government provided its institution would not be worse than the abuses being endured under the existing government (self-evident moral principle)
- P4: The British did not protect the rights of the US colonists, engaged in a long history of abuses that suggest its aim was absolute despotism, and did not redress these abuses (empirical premise).
- C: Therefore, the US colonists have the right and moral obligation to replace British rule with one of their own.

P1, P2, and P3 are all classified as self-evident moral principles, while P4 is an empirical premise supported by historical facts.

Exercise 13

econstruct the argument from the *Declaration* in your own words. Which premises do you take to be the strongest? Which do you find to be the weakest? Is there any way the argument might be improved, made more precise, or further developed?

3.3 | Self-evident truths

The Declaration appeals to certain **self-evident truths**. This appeal was not in Jefferson's rough draft of the Declaration. Instead, Jefferson wrote "[w]e hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable".

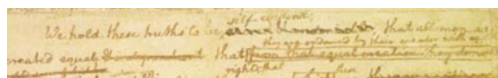


Figure 3.2: In Jefferson's rough draft of the Declaration, "sacred & undeniable" is crossed off and replaced with "self-evident"

The appeal to a truth being self-evident is not insignificant for it allows the argument of the Declaration to *broad* acceptance. The apprehension and ultimate acceptance of the argument was not reserved for experts, it isn't put forward in technical language, nor did its apprehension

¹⁰see Michael P Zuckert. "Self-Evident Truth and the Declaration of Independence". In: *The Review of Politics* 49.3 (1987), pp. 319–339, p. 321.

require advanced education to understand. The argument relies upon self-evident principles and such principles were thought to be within the intellectual powers of the majority of human beings. One merely needed to be able to understand the language of the Declaration, and one could, provided certain basic intellectual conditions were met, accept its conclusion.

Thomas Reid writes:

To judge of first principles, requires no more than a sound mind free from prejudice, and a distinct conception of the question. The learned and the unlearned, the Philosopher and the day laborer, are upon a level, and will pass the same judgment, when they are not misled by some bias, or taught to renounce their understanding from some mistaken religious principles. In matters beyond the reach of common understanding, the many are led by the few, and willingly yield to their authority. But, in matters of common sense, the few must yield to the many, when local and temporary prejudices are removed.¹¹

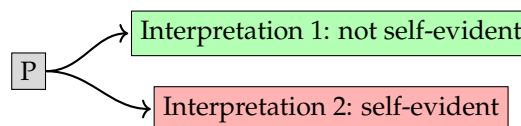
This sentiment is echoed in Thomas Jefferson. For consider that the Declaration relies upon certain self-evident moral truths. For Jefferson, these could be understood by the scientist, the professor, the educated individual, and the ploughman alike. Jefferson writes:

State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules.¹²

Since the Declaration rests on self-evident principles and since these principles are capable of being understood by those with basic intellectual powers, the revolution could be carried on grounds understandable to all rather than to a reserved intellectual few. However, in interpreting this document, several questions arise. For example, **what did it mean for a truth to be self-evident? Are the so-called “self-evident truths” of the Declaration actually self-evidently true?**

3.3.1 | Initial clarification of the propositions

The Declaration appeals to certain self-evident truths. It is important to note that evaluating these propositions as self-evidently true will depend upon what the proposition asserts. The proposition interpreted one way may be self-evidently true but interpreted a different way may not be.



For example, consider the claim that “all men are created equal”. If “equal” is interpreted as *equal ability* or *fortune*, then the claim may be true but it is **not self-evident** that it is true. Some

¹¹Thomas Reid. *The Works of Thomas Reid*. Ed. by William Hamilton. 7th. Vol. 1. Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, 1872, p. 438.

¹²Thomas Jefferson. *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Ed. by Thomas Jefferson Randolph. Vol. 1-2. Charlottesville: F. Carr and Co, 1829, vol 2: 216.

may be born with natural gifts. For example, Jaffa contends that equal is not true if “equal” is interpreted as “equal in intelligence, virtue, strength, or beauty.”¹³ While some contend that this is exactly what Jefferson and others meant (for example, Commager contends that Jefferson thought everyone was born equal and “[a]ll subsequent inequalities, those of race, color, sex, class, wealth, even of talents, derived not from nature but from society, or government or law” (Commager, pp.87-88).

However, suppose “equal” is interpreted in terms of **rights**. Since we are born human beings, and human beings *naturally* are not born with the right to rule over others (e.g. I am not born to rule over you), then we are all created equal with respect to the fact that none of us has the natural right to rule over any other. In other words, *all men are created equal* should be interpreted as *all persons are created in such a way that no one person has a right to rule over another person*. Many would regard this second reading as a truth since there is nothing in nature that would give us an indication as to who ought to rule over another.¹⁴

3.3.2 | What is meant by self-evident?

However, one problem with the Declaration is what is meant by “self-evident” truths.

First, they might be self-evident because they are intuited in the Lockean sense. Thus the propositions are self-evident since their agreement or disagreement are recognized by a power of immediate perception (intuition). To *see* their truth, one only needs to understand *what* the propositions asserts for the truth of the proposition bears itself on its sleeve. For Locke and others, these propositions are the axioms and place a foundational role in demonstrative knowledge. In other words, the principles are self-evident if they are intuited rather than demonstrated through proof. As Jaffa puts it, a self-evident truth is “one the evidence for which is contained in the terms of the proposition, and which is admitted to be true by everyone *who already grasps the meaning of the terms*.”¹⁵

It is worth noting that just because a proposition is self-evident does not mean that everyone accepts this proposition. As Locke pointed out, there may be individuals who either have not taken the time to think about what the proposition asserts or who cannot apprehend the meaning of the proposition (e.g. fools, children).

Second, an alternative interpretation involves not a Lockean intellectual intuition of their truth but an appeal to **moral sense**. This is seen in both James Wilson (also a signer of the Declaration) and Thomas Jefferson.

Wilson agreed with Locke that there are two of self-evident moral principles: those that are **immediately known** and those that are derived by proof. Wilson, however, rejected Locke’s idea that these self-evident moral principles are intellectually intuited. That is, for Locke, we intuit a proposition provided we (1) attend to it and (2) we understand the meaning of it. However, for Wilson, the apprehension of a self-evident moral principle is more basic and depends instead on

¹³Harry V Jaffa. *Equality and Liberty*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 176.

¹⁴Jaffa puts forward a similar argument where he contends that while human beings have a natural right to rule over animals, there is nothing in our natures that would justify one human ruling over another: “there is no difference between man and man—such as there is between man and animals of other species—which makes any man, that is, any normal adult human being, the natural ruler of any man. Man is by nature the master of dog, horse, cow, or monkey. He is equally the master of the dangerous wild animals he cannot domesticate, because he can kill or capture them as a result of his natural superiority, and not because of mere accident. The rights that men evidently have over other animals they do not, it is equally evident, have over each other.”(Jaffa, *Equality and Liberty*, p. 176)

¹⁵Jaffa, *Equality and Liberty*, p. 177.

a feeling, a moral sentiment, or moral sense. That is, even if we have never thought of a particular moral principle and so have never intuited it, we might nevertheless be said to *know it* because *we feel it to be true*.

Wilson suggested that if society had to first intellectual apprehend (intuit) self-evident moral truths before knowing them to be true, we would be significantly worse off. Thus, it must be that we know certain self-evident moral propositions even if we have never paid attention to them nor expressed them.

This view is also echoed in the writings of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson contends that human beings are born with a **moral sense**. Just as we are born with a sense of sight, smell, and hearing, and just as some are born with better senses than others, and just as some of those senses may be further developed, the same is true for one's moral sense. In fact, Jefferson asserts that one's moral sense is "is as much a part of man as his leg or arm."^{16,17}

Third, at least one individual contends that while they may be true, Jefferson did not mean to take them as *self-evident* in the sense that the propositions are indubitable once apprehended. On this interpretation, there are two different types of "self-evident propositions." The first are propositions known *intuitively in the Lockean sense*. The second are propositions that are self-evident not because they are intuited but instead *because they take the place of self-evident truths in a demonstration*. In other words, these propositions fulfill the function of axioms or intuited propositions without being intuitively obvious.

3.3.3 | Are the principles self-evident?

Another issue with the appeal to self-evident moral propositions upon which the Declaration relies is whether the propositions are, in fact, true. This is no small question since the moral grounds for revolution seem to depend upon their truth. In theory, the New England colonists could have staged a revolt without any moral justification. Their revolution could have been simply one of opportunity or frivolity. Instead, however, it was justified by appealing to certain moral principles taken to be self-evident. But are those principles actually self-evidently true?

First, some have argued that the principles are, in fact, self-evident. For example, Abraham Lincoln seemed to suggest that anyone who denied the axioms on which Jefferson put forward

¹⁶Jefferson, *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol 2: 216.

¹⁷"Moral Philosophy. I think it lost time to attend lectures on this branch. He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler, if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science. For one man of science, there are thousands who are not. What would have become of them? Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong, merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his nature, as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality [...]. The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or lesser degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body. This sense is submitted, indeed, in some degree, to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is required for this: even a less one than what we call common sense. State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules. In this branch, therefore, read good books, because they will encourage, as well as direct your feelings. The writings of Sterne, particular, form the best course of morality that ever was written. Besides these, read the books mentioned in the inclosed paper: and above all things, lose no occasion of exercising your dispositions to be grateful, to be generous, to be charitable to be humane, to be true, just, firm, orderly, courageous, &c. Consider every act of this kind, as an exercise which will strengthen your moral faculties, and increase your worth. (Jefferson, *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol 2: 216) In addition, Jefferson writes that "[f]or the reality of these principles I appeal to the true fountains of evidence, the head and heart of every rational and honest man. It is there Nature has written her Moral laws, and where every man may read them for himself." (Thomas Jefferson. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Ed. by John Catanzariti. Vol. 25. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 608–619)

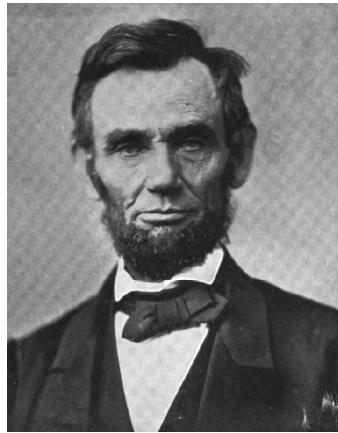


Figure 3.3: Abraham Lincoln

the declaration was attempting to sow the seeds of despotism. Lincoln noted that during his time the self-evident principles upon which the Declaration were cast in doubt. He writes that “The principles of Jefferson are the definitions and axioms of free society. And yet they are denied and evaded with no small show of success. One dashingly calls them “glittering generalities.” Another bluntly calls them “self-evident lies.” And others insidiously argue that they apply to “superior races.””¹⁸ Here the idea would be that not everyone is equal and given this inequality, some of us are better deserving to rule over others, with or without their consent. Lincoln nevertheless, denied this, taking the moral claims of the Declaration as self-evident.¹⁹

Second, some individuals have found the appeal to self-evident truths as overly simplistic and while they may be true, the appeal to their being *self-evident* would not hold by today’s standards. Commager, for example, suggests that the appeal to self-evident truths is outdated, a vestige of the revolutionary mind. He writes that

We would not today assume a body of “self-evident truths,” certainly not in the arena of government or politics. Truths today—even the term is suspect—have to earn their way, as it were, have to submit their credentials to the tests of the laboratory and the computer, and even if they pass these they are regarded with suspicion and confined to strict limits of time and place. (Commager, p.82)

¹⁸ Abraham Lincoln. *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works*. Ed. by John G Nicolay and John Hay. Vol. 1. New York: The Century Company, 1920, p. 533.

¹⁹“One would state with great confidence that he could convince any sane child that the simpler propositions of Euclid are true; but, nevertheless, he would fail, utterly, with one who should deny the definitions and axioms. The principles of Jefferson are the definitions and axioms of free society. And yet they are denied and evaded with no small show of success. One dashingly calls them “glittering generalities.” Another bluntly calls them “self-evident lies.” And others insidiously argue that they apply to “superior races.” These expressions, differing in form, are identical in object and effect—supplanting the principles of free government, and restoring those of classification, caste, and legitimacy. They would delight a convocation of crowned heads plotting against the people. They are the vanguard, the miners and sappers of returning despotism. We must repulse them, or they will subjugate us. This is a world of compensation; and he who would be no slave must consent to have no slave. Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and, under a just God, cannot long retain it. All honor to Jefferson—to the man who, in the concrete pressure of a struggle for national independence by a single people, had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times, and so to embalm it there that to-day and in all coming days it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling-block to the very harbingers of reappearing tyranny and oppression.”(Lincoln, *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works*, p. 533)

In addition, Woodrow Wilson remarked that it is common to think of it as a “highly speculative document” and that it puts forward a “strong rhetorical statement”.²⁰ Some of this is to be expected since as Woodrow Wilson remarks, the fifty-six signers of the Declaration found themselves in an acute political climate and so were in a situation to write treatises on government.²¹

Exercise 14

With respect to self-evidence, there is an interpretive issue and two philosophical issues.

1. The main **interpretive** issue is what Jefferson and the signers of the Declaration of Independence meant by “self-evident”. What is the best way to understand what the founders meant by self-evident truths?
2. The first **philosophical** issue is whether the moral truths cited in the Declaration are, in fact, self-evident.
3. The second **philosophical** issue assumes that the cited moral propositions are not self-evident. If this is the case, can the conclusion of the Declaration be argued for without appealing to self-evident moral truths. If so, explain how.

²⁰Woodrow Wilson. “The Author and Signers of the Declaration of Independence”. In: *The North American Review* 186.622 (1907), pp. 22–33, p. 22.

²¹Wilson, “The Author and Signers of the Declaration of Independence”, p. 23.

The Evolutionary Controversy

4.1 | Science and Religion in the 17th and 18th Century

When we emerge, we don't know what we are, where we came from, what everything else is, where everything else is, nor do we know where everything is going. We are in the dark, and this darkness is in the present and extends forward and backward. Our first theories about these questions is given to us by the *testimony* of others. Whether we ought to ultimately rest content with their testimony depends upon practical exigencies and whether a better answer is available.

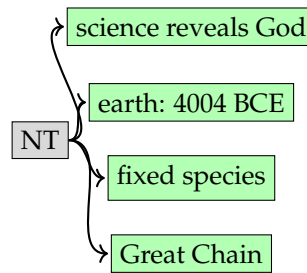
How did early American thinkers understand these questions? As we have seen, the New England colonies along with the newly formed United States was a **religious moral order**. They saw the natural world through the lens of Christianity and they founded their new government upon the belief that they were created by God with inalienable rights. Even if their specific purpose and their ultimate fate remained in the dark, their origin was clearly lit. Humans were created by God and made in God's image. This was testified to by Scripture.

Not only did Scripture assert this but science in the 17th and 18th century was thought to further *fortify* this view. Further investigation into the natural world through the emerging sciences revealed truths already known and testified to by scripture but were nevertheless neglected. There was then a happy interaction between science and religion. The Church supported science, many early American scientists were ministers, and the general view was that the study of science revealed the wisdom, character, and divine plan of God.

The evolutionary controversy severed this relation in some significant ways. As we will see, the development of both geology and evolutionary biology both (i) limited the scope of scientific theories to observable phenomena and (ii) limited (if not altogether eliminated) the evidently role that Scripture played in the development of scientific theory.

4.2 | Natural Theology Worldview

In order to show how advances in science came to increasingly stress the religious worldview of the 17th and 18th century, it is helpful to give a brief summary of what we will call the **natural theology (NT) worldview**.



Definition 4.1: Natural theology worldview

What we will call the “natural theology view” refers to the theory that

1. scientific investigation into nature reveals God: the results of science provides us with knowledge about God and God’s plans
2. age of earth: that scientific results are consistent with Scripture and Scripture tells us that the world was not very old (roughly 6000 years old, created in roughly 4004 BCE)
3. doctrine of fixed species: each entity was created in its present form. It did not emerge from an earlier species
4. Great Chain: that beings in the world were organized by the Great Chain of Being, created all at once or sequentially

Let’s briefly consider each of these aspects of the NT worldview.

4.2.1 | Natural theology and revealed theology

In the 18th and 19th century, it was largely thought that knowledge of God came from two main sources. First, it came from **nature**. If one looked to nature, one found that it was an organized and complex machine. From this organization and complexity, various religious conclusions could be drawn. For example, arguments from the design of nature were used to derived various conclusions not only about God’s existence but concerning general characteristics of God (e.g. that God is powerful, intelligent, highly skilled, just, good, fair, etc.).

- P1: The world is complex and organized (empirical, observable fact).
- P2: Such order could not come about randomly (Like implied like: a complex and well-ordered world could not come about by chaotic and spontaneous factors)
- C: Therefore, the world must have been created by an intelligent and powerful God.

In short, from nature, one could learn about God. For the study of nature had implications for *general* characteristics of God. If nature was orderly, regular, complex, then this gave an indication that God’s creation had foresight or was purpose-driven. This general project of deriving religious conclusions from nature is known as **natural theology**.

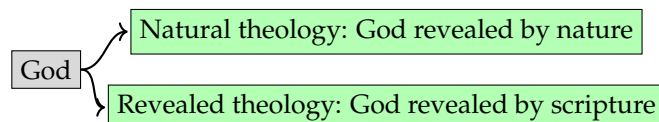
Definition 4.2: natural theology

Natural theology is the discipline that takes the natural world as described by science as its object and derives from this scientific description religious conclusions (e.g. the existence, nature, characteristics, or purpose of God).

The **second** source of knowledge of God came from Scripture. Unlike the study of nature, Scripture gave much more *specific* characteristics of God, God's acts, and God's ultimate plans. However, since human beings were intellectually corrupted by the fall, not only do humans have difficulty discerning God from nature, there were similar difficulties in discerning God from scripture. The project of deriving religious conclusions from scripture is known as **revealed theology**.

Definition 4.3: revealed theology

Revealed theology is the discipline that takes scripture (the Bible) as its object and derives from this religious conclusions (e.g. the existence, nature, characteristics, or purpose of God).



As mentioned, in the 17th and 18th century, natural and revealed theology were mutually supported. God's word (scripture) and God's works (nature) both help humans know God. However, as science developed in the 18th and 19th century, there became an increasing number of points of **inconsistency** between them. And so one intellectual project was how to work out these inconsistencies.

In short, science could go along unimpeded (and was even encouraged) by religion as the former only helped us to know God better.

4.2.2 | The age of the earth

The second feature of the NT worldview concerned the age of the earth. It was largely thought that the earth was approximately 6000 years old (created in 4004 BCE) with the date of a major flood (accounted for in Genesis) around 2200 BCE.

Chronology 4.1

4400 BCE Creation of the World: (i) heaven and a formless earth, (2) water-filled earth given form, (3) separation of the waters, (4) evaporation and the appearance of dry land, (5) creation of fish and first land animals
 2200 BCE Noah's flood
 1788 AD Hutton's *Theory of the*

In addition, scientific results were thought to support not only this view but also the scriptural account of how the earth came about. Geological and fossil data was interpreted as supporting

the events detailed in the Bible. In short, the way the world is now fits with how scripture says it was back then. Geology and Scripture thus told a consistent story.

Example 4.1

By 1790 fossils were recognized as vestiges of previously alive organisms. The discovery of marine fossils on the top of a mountain was interpreted as supporting the biblical account of their being an ancient flood.^a

^aCharles Coulston Gillispie. *Genesis and Geology*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951, pp. 42–43.

4.2.3 | The Doctrine of Fixed Species

The final part of the natural worldview was the doctrine of fixed species. Each entity was created in its present form or likeness. Even though apes were near to us in the Great Chain of Being, shared certain anatomical similarities, no one thought that we were once apes or had evolved from apes. God created beings of every type and so it was no surprise to individuals that God would create beings that would look like us.

4.2.4 | The Great Chain of Being

According to the natural theology worldview, all beings (everything in the world) were organized according to the Great Chain of Being.

Definition 4.4: Great Chain of Being (GCB)

The Great Chain of Being (also known as the *Scala Naturae* or the Ladder of Perfection) was a classification all existent beings.

Several additional points are worth making about the GCB.

First, it was generally accepted that the chain was **complete**, viz., there were no gaps in the great chain. The list contained no gaps or holes. Since God was perfect, every possible being existed in the Great Chain. And, since every possible being existed, this provided evidence that God was perfect.¹

Second, GCB was a continuous **hierarchical** list of everything that existed in the known universe from the crudest minerals to God. The chain of Being is **hierarchical**: (i) rocks, dust, and minerals at the bottom, (ii) plants above minerals, (iii) animals above plants, (iv) humans above animals, (iv) spiritual beings like angels above humans, and God at the top.

Third, GCB was a fixed list of being in the world. It implied not only the doctrine of fixed species (all beings were created in their current likeness) but also no new beings could be created nor could any be totally destroyed (no extinction).

¹"These are certainly the Magisterial and masterpieces of the Creator, the Flower, or (as we may say,) the best part of nothing; actually existing, what we are but in hopes and probability. We are only that amphibious piece between a corporal and spiritual Essence, that middle form that links those two together, and makes good the Method of GOD and Nature, that jumps not from extreams, but unites the incompatible distances by some middle and participating natures."
- Sir Thomas Browne. *Religio Medici*. XXXIV



Figure 4.1: The Great Chain of Being

Fourth, in terms of the place of humans, they occupy a divided status. Humans, much like amphibians that occupy both land and water, are partly spiritual beings (like angels) and partly material beings (like animals). This dual nature partly explained our somewhat confused and divided behavior.²

Fifth, the Great Chain of Being was sometimes used as a justification for political rule. Within the Great Chain are subdivisions for various types of beings. For humans, kings are at the top, then aristocrats, with peasants at the bottom. Just as God sits at the top of the Great Chain and is the ruler of all, and we are above apes and we rule over them, it is further the case that kings, who sit at the top of humans, are **made** to rule over other humans.

Exercise 15

The 18th century natural theology worldview involves a commitment to (i) that science better reveals God, (ii) the earth not being very old, (iii) the doctrine of fixed species, and (iv) the Great Chain of Being.

1. Which of any of these are still believed by people today?
2. Do you find any of these persuasive and why?

4.3 | Problems with the Natural Theology View

There are several problems with the natural theology view. In what follows, we look at the following problems:

²"Thus is Man that great and true Amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live, not only like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds: for though there be but one to sense, there are two to reason, the one visible, the other invisible;" - Sir Thomas Browne. *Religio Medici*. XXXIV.

1. from the discovery of new animals and animal extinction
2. from geology
3. from Darwinian evolution

4.3.1 | Problem 1: animal extinction and discovery

One problem for the GCB view is that there was evidence that animals that once were around no longer exist. For example, mammoth tusks were discovered in the 17th century but no one had ever seen a mammoth as they most had gone extinct approximately 10,000 years ago. This posed an obvious problem for GCB since the GCB was said to be complete: no new animals could be created or destroyed.

The response from defenders was always to make the extinct beings elusive or posit them in untraversed areas.

however, the often mentioned reports of mammoths surviving into colonial times in interior North America have to be viewed with great skepticism. The intellectual climate of the times promoted and encouraged such accounts. Always the creatures lay just a little farther on, first in the Virginia woods, or in Labrador, then deeper into the interior or “across the lakes.” They were heard bellowing in the woods, or seen grazing on the plains of South America. In no case, however, is the documentation satisfactory, nor were hides or tusks from recent beasts shipped home to adorn the cabinets of eager scientists.³

A second (related) problem was that new items were being discovered in the new world. As new information came in concerning plants and animals that were not found in Europe, the question was how to incorporate this new data into the existing classification.

4.3.2 | Problem 2: from geology

Difficulties with this view emerged as a result of the development of geology. Scientific geology is usually taken to begin around the 1790s. During this period, there was a significant turn in how geology was practiced since prior to that time, geology was mostly an activity of the **speculative imagination**. In general, such speculation tried to corroborate Scripture and known geological observations.

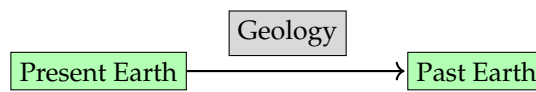
As a subject matter, geology emerges once present events (the current state of the globe) are taken to be signs of past events (the previous state of the globe). In other words, geology begins by looking at the way the earth is now and using this information to form a theory about how the world was at a prior state.

Definition 4.5: Geology

Geology is the study of structure, development, and history of the Earth.

One part of geology is stratigraphy. This part of geology aimed to explain the order of strata.

³Loren Eiseley. *Darwin's Century: Evolution and the Men Who Discovered It*. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1961, pp. 8–9.

**Definition 4.6: stratigraphy**

The branch of geology that investigates the order and relative position of strata (rock layers) and their relation to geological time (age of earth).

4.3.2.1 | Neptunists

The **Neptunists** were followers of Abraham Gottlob Werner and they posited a theory of the formation of rock layers (stratification). Their concern then was to give an account of how the earth's crust came to look like it currently does. Their explanation hinged primarily upon the chemical and mechanical action of **water**. At least initially, much of the earth was, at least at one time, covered by water (an aqueous solution). Various types of rocks and layering of the crust came about through five stages and the majority of these stages center around the chemical action and mechanical action of water.

Example 4.2

As the waters receded, water tore off (mechanical action) sediment from an elevated layer and deposited it on a lower layer.

The theory was attractive due to its (1) simplicity and (2) that it corroborated scripture (e.g. that there was a great flood and the waters receded). Nevertheless, the theory faced a number of problems as it conflicted with geological data.

1. the theory was consistent with observations of strata in Germany but not elsewhere
2. it could not explain why some layering was not horizontal

One question for the Neptunists was why even undertake scientific geology if everything one needed to know could be found in Genesis. At least one response to this is that it was necessary to combat false geologies because why the real science would reinforce Biblical truth, false (or poorly practiced) science would yield false religion.⁴

4.3.2.2 | Vulcanists

The competing theory of geology was **Vulcanism** (also known as "Uniformitarianism" and "Huttonism" after a theory that founds its roots in the publication of the second volume of James Hutton's *Theory of the Earth* (1795)). The core underlying features of Vulcanism are that

1. there is order and regularity in natural laws
2. we can observe natural (cause-effect) processes today and use these to determine what happened at an earlier time

⁴As Gillispie writes, the Neptunists thought that "[i]nfidelity arose not from scientific inquiry, but from unscientific theories, from a failure to follow valid rules of philosophizing." (Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology*, p. 63)

With respect to geology, Vulcanism aimed to explain the formation of rock layers (strata) entirely through (1) natural processes still occurring today and (2) presently existing geological data.

Example 4.3

We see waves make ripple marks in the sand and observable ripple marks on sandstone. Vulcanists thus contend that wavelike effects of water produce these ripple marks in sandstone.^a

^aJess R Bushman. "Hutton's Uniformitarianism". In: *Brigham Young University Studies* 23.1 (1983), pp. 41–48, p. 41.

This approach does not make use of an appeal to a supernatural or extraordinary cause-effect relation to explain the rock strata.

In particular, the vulcanists, the strata came about primarily through **wind / erosion** and **heat** (both by pressure and volcanic action).

For the Vulcanists, heat played a significant role in stratification and the types of rocks that existed. Heat from the build up and pressurization of rocks explained how certain rocks came about or became consolidated. In addition, heat from volcanic action uplifted rocks from the ocean floor and explained tilted strata.

One significant implication of the Vulcanist theory is that the processes it postulated to explain the earth required the earth to be much older than 6000 years. The theory thus was in conflict with the religious worldview at the time concerning the age of the earth. The Vulcanist theory asserted that small, slow-acting events that occur over a long period of time were capable of producing the same great events (e.g. a flood). In making this claim, the Vulcanists asserted that the processes observable in the natural world today were the same as those acting many thousands of years ago, and these normal, observable, and natural processes were sufficient to explain the history of the earth. One did not need to point to God acting in the world through major catastrophe or supernatural intervention.⁵

4.3.2.3 | The effects of the Neptunist and Vulcanist debates

The Vulcanist theory ultimately won out such that by the 1820s there were fewer and fewer Neptunist scientists. The Neptunist and Vulcanist controversy might be said to have several effects on the relation of science and religion.

First, the effect of the Vulcanist geological theory was that it there was an increased **separation** of the role Scripture played and the work of science in geology. The best scientific explanation of the strata was the vulcanist theory and this theory required the age of the earth to be much older than previously claimed. So much the worse for Scripture. However, achieving this separation also called for a restriction on the scope of scientific explanation.

1. geological theory did not give an account of how things were prior to the creation of

⁵As Gillispie writes "the whole concept hung upon the proposition that the cumulative efforts of minute forces and infinitesimal change can produce results equal to those of any sudden cataclysm and (thought this last was never stated) superseding the necessity for any divine intervention." (Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology*, p. 49)

- the earth, the laws of nature, nor the end of the earth but confined itself to observable phenomena
- 2. geological theory explained *how* the laws of nature work but not *why* they work

Second, while Neptunists sometimes asserted that Vulcanists were promoting some type of atheism, Vulcanists nevertheless saw their work as in line with the general view that investigation into nature better reveals God's work.

- 1. not in conflict with Scripture: Genesis does not talk about the age of the Earth. While God created the Earth, Scripture does not explicitly say when the Earth was created.
- 2. the geological account does not concern itself with the **creation of organisms** or the doctrine of fixed species, especially the creation of human beings; the theory was confined to the formation of rock layers
- 3. just as Newton's theory showed God's orderliness, so did the Vulcanist theory as God could create the world through relatively simple materials and a simple set of processes acting over a long period of time

4.3.3 | Problem from evolutionary biology

One aspect of the NT-worldview is the doctrine of fixed species. Not only did God create the universe but God also created organic life. This includes human beings. The act of creation was clear, organic life was created in one fell-swoop such that the organisms that beings that are here now are essentially the same as the beings that God created. Again, why apes may look like us, no one thought we had evolved from ape-like beings.

The uniformitarian (Vulcanist) idea that large-scale and complex geological phenomena could come about by small, observable, naturally-occurring processes gave rise to the idea that perhaps organic life (fish, animals, and humans) came about in the same way. In other words, humans were not created by God through a single supernatural act but **evolved** from earlier types of beings.

4.3.3.1 | Lamarckian evolution

While Darwin is best known for his theory of evolution, the idea of evolution was not certainly not unique to Darwin (e.g. Darwin's grandfather put forward a type of evolution). However, the most famous form of evolution prior to Darwin was put forward (although not championed) by Jean Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829).⁶

Lamarckian evolution is evolution by adaption and inheritance of acquired traits

- 1. evolution is a purpose-driven affair. Individuals want to meet their biological needs and do so by trying to adapt themselves to their environment
- 2. individuals are capable of passing on their acquired traits

⁶This is the case even though Larmack's notion of evolution was not his central idea.(Richard W. Burkhardt. "Lamarck, Evolution, and the Inheritance of Acquired Characters". In: *Genetics* 194.4 [Aug. 2013], pp. 793–805. ISSN: 0016-6731, 1943-2631. DOI: [10.1534/genetics.113.151852](https://doi.org/10.1534/genetics.113.151852). URL: <http://www.genetics.org/lookup/doi/10.1534/genetics.113.151852> [visited on 02/04/2020], p. 794)

In Lamarckian evolution, for a being to survive, it must meet its biological needs or satisfactions. The environment puts certain constraints in place preventing individuals from meeting these needs and so a being must make use of its abilities, body, capacities. The individual must either adapt to the environment or die. In the effort to adapt, some of an individual's abilities can be strengthened over the course of the being's life while others abilities may weaken or be neglected. For Lamarck, one's abilities or acquired traits are passed on.

Thus continual striving to adapt by generations or goal to adapt thus has long-lasting effects and so that over a long period of time, various organs, abilities, capacities may become increasingly prominent or die out altogether. This passing on of strengths and weaknesses over a long period of time could account for why certain beings might look so different.

Example 4.4

Suppose your great great grandfather was a boxer, and your great grandfather was a boxer, and your grandfather was a boxer, and your father was a boxer. For Lamarck, your ancestors honed their boxing skills (e.g. strength, agility, etc.) and the abilities they cultivated over time were passed on to their progeny. What this would mean then is that you have the capacity to also be a skilled boxer.

Example 4.5

The long legs of a wading bird is the result of birds wanting to be in the water continually trying to extend their legs.^a

^a"One perceives that the bird of the shore, which does not at all like to swim, and which however needs to draw near to the water to find there its prey, will be continually exposed to sinking in the mire; but wishing to behave in such a way that its body does not plunge into the water, it will make its legs contract the habit of extending and elongating themselves. It will result from this for the generations of these birds that continue to live in this manner that the individuals will find themselves elevated as on stilts, on long naked legs"(qtd. in Burkhardt, "Lamarck, Evolution, and the Inheritance of Acquired Characters", p. 796)

4.3.3.2 | Darwinian evolution

The uniqueness of Darwin is found not in the idea of evolution but in his theory of evolution by **natural selection** and **fortuitous variation**.⁷

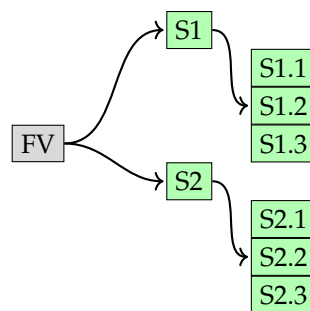
⁷According to Darwinian evolution, a *complex* species is capable of evolving from a *simpler* species through the process of **random mutation** and **natural selection**. **First**, there is the idea of **random mutation**. A mutation is, to put it simply, a change in the traits of an organism. Mutations are said to be **random** or **non-directed**. Individuals do not mutate in order to become better adapted to the environment. Instead, mutations can be helpful, harmless, or harmful to organism. **Second, natural selection** is explained by four principles: (1) different members of a species have variations in phenotype, e.g. different hair color, facial size, beak shape, etc., (2) some variations are heritable and can be passed on to offspring, (3) populations of a species can have more offspring than resources, and (4) those members of a species with favorable traits are more likely to survive (they will have increased fitness). Thus, populations of species are capable of evolving through random mutation and natural selection. Random mutation introduces new traits to the population and natural selection contends that individuals with more favorable traits are more likely to survive and thus more likely to pass on their traits, while individuals with less favorable traits are less likely to survive and thus less likely to pass on their traits.

The idea here then is that we can explain the complexity, order, and purposefulness of natural objects (e.g. the human eye) through the processes of random mutation and natural selection. The eye is not the product of a designer but instead the product of billions of years of mutations and selections. In short, chance processes can achieve in the same outcome as intelligent choices.

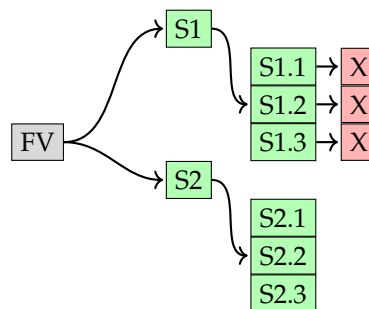
Definition 4.7: fortuitous variation

Offspring of parents always vary randomly (“fortuitous”) from their parents and these random traits are inheritable.

On its own, fortuitous variation would lead to a world of wild diversity. If individuals varied randomly and this randomness was passed on to offspring, then there would be a kind of scattering of species. As Flower puts it, fortuitous variation alone would produce “an endless proliferation of forms diverging in every way from the original parental stock.”⁸ Thus, while fortuitous variation explains why there are many diverse species rather than a single one (or group of clones), it does not explain why the species developed in the order (direction) it did.



The idea of natural selection in Darwin’s theory was that organisms reproduce at a rate that exceeds their resources needed to survive. With more offspring and limited resources (e.g. food), competition for resources is inevitable. In the context of this competition, some variations will be more advantageous than others. Those with advantageous variations will be more likely to win out, thus more likely to reproduce, and thus more likely to pass on their variations. Those without advantageous variations will be less likely to win out, thus less likely to reproduce, and thus less likely to pass on their variations.⁹



Darwin’s theory of evolution by fortuitous variation and natural selection was able to explain the origin of species through natural (rather than supernatural) means. Not only did it undermine the doctrine of fixed species but it also conflicted with scriptural accounts of the age of the universe.¹⁰

⁸Elizabeth Flower and Murray G Murphey. *A History of Philosophy in America*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. New York: Capricorn Books, 1977, 1:525.

⁹While natural selection is not the only process selective process that leads to the passing on of variations, Darwin took it to be the most fundamental.

¹⁰There were several scientific problems with Darwin’s theory. First, there was no theory of heredity: no account

4.4 | Natural theology and the rise of science

Let's attempt to consolidate the previous discussion into some key points.

The **first** concerns the **more limited role of Scripture in understanding the natural world**. To put it simply, scripture plays a less important role in our understanding of the natural world. If we accept the results of eighteenth and nineteenth century science, then teaching of scripture has a much more limited scope. Vulcanism entails that the world is much older than we previously thought while Darwin's theory of evolution undermines the doctrine of fixed species.

- P1: The proof or evidence of God's existence and action at least partially rests on empirical evidence.
- P2: Scripture (the Old testament) contends that there were various providential events (e.g. the Flood) and God created man whole (not through a process of evolution).
- P3: The natural world does not conflict with the scriptural account.
- P4: The best science of the 19th century (uniformitarian geology and Darwinian evolution) does conflict with the scriptural account.
- Therefore, God's existence and providential action is not supported by empirical evidence.

Of course, none of this requires the denial of God's existence. The argument neither asserts that God does not exist nor does it assert that religion is bankrupt. Instead, it asserts that the extension of scripture to the natural world runs into conflict with natural science.

The **second** concerns **what conclusions we can draw about God from the natural world**. Darwinian evolution ushered in a new world view, contrary to the natural theology view, that problematized the inference from nature's characteristics to God's properties. In the Newtownian universe, the world was a well-ordered and complex machine. In the Darwinian world, nature became a highly wasteful and ruthless system.¹¹

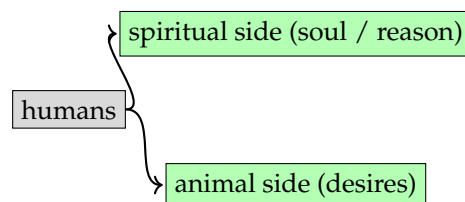
- P1: We can read off of the character of nature to the general characteristics of God.
- P2: If Darwinian evolution is true, then various organisms came about through a complex, wasteful, random, and ruthless process.
- C: If God designed the world, then God is imperfect.

of what was inherited. Second, there was insufficient evidence to give the evolutionary sequence of major species, e.g. humans. As Eiseley writes "It is a matter of considerable historical interest that Darwin postulated his theory and extended to man without having available as evidence a single subhuman fossil by which, on the basis of his theoretical views, he could have satisfactorily demonstrated the likelihood of man's relationship to the world of the subhuman primates." (Eiseley, *Darwin's Century: Evolution and the Men Who Discovered It*, p. 256) Third, and finally, it also conflicted with the best science of the day. That is, the best physics of the day was inconsistent with one key aspect of the both uniformitarian geology and Darwinian evolution: the age of the universe.

¹¹ As Flowers writes: "the Darwinian theory carried appalling consequences for the natural theology. It was not that Darwin had failed to find order in nature; it was rather the character of the order he found. In place of the perfect order and economy of the Newtonian world, Darwin postulated an incredibly wasteful process of random proliferation and ruthless extinction. In place of the benevolent harmony in which all nature conspires to the happiness of the creation, Darwin presented "nature red in tooth and claw." If indeed order bespeaks orderer, if like produces like, if natural law is but the mode of divine action, if all effects are intended, what conclusions follow respecting a deity who would design a world on the model of a slaughterhouse where most perished horribly, where the "saving remnant" was saved by chance adaptation alone, and where the meek would never live to inherit anything?" (Flower and Murphey, *A History of Philosophy in America*, pp. 527-528)

The **third** concerns *our understanding of ourselves or our place in the world*. As mentioned, human beings thought of themselves as having a dual nature in the Great Chain of Being. On the one hand, humans thought of themselves as **spiritual beings** (angelic) and associated with this spiritual nature was their capacity to reason. This capacity to reason distinguished them from beasts. On the other hand, humans thought of themselves as **material beings** (animalistic) and associated with their material nature was their desires.

While Darwin did not give an account of the evolution of the soul nor did his theory prove their was not a soul, the theory suggested a naturalistic account of one of the powers typically associated with the soul. Namely, he argued that the power of reason could come about in a purely natural way. This, in effect, further undermined one of the reasons (or the empirical support) we had for believing there was a soul in the first place.



On the one hand then, this appeared to be a mighty blow to the human ego. No longer could we confidently assert that they were made by God in his image. Instead, we were simply the next organism in the train of evolution. On the other hand, no being to our knowledge has ever or perhaps will ever be capable of recognizing this fact. All other beings remain oblivious to the origin of their development save humans. As Eiseley writes:

It is my genuine belief that no greater act of the human intellect, no greater gesture of humility on the part of man has been or will be made in the long history of science. The marvel lies not in the fact that the bones from the caves and river gravels were recognized in trepidation and doubt as beings from the half-world of the past; the miracle, considering the nature of the human ego, occurs in the circumstance that we were able to recognize them at all, or to see in these remote half-fearsome creatures our long-forgotten fathers who had cherished our seed through the ages of ice and loneliness before a single lighted city flickered out of the darkness of the planet's nighttime face.¹²

Exercise 16

Eighteenth and Nineteenth century Geology and evolutionary biology appear to have at least three effects on our understanding of the world. Which of these do you think is the most significant and why?

¹²Eiseley, *Darwin's Century: Evolution and the Men Who Discovered It*, p. 257.

Part II

The Epistemological and Metaphysical Background

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