

Jonathan Edwards's ontology: a critique of Sang Hyun Lee's dispositional account of Edwardsian metaphysics

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Abstract: Sang Hyun Lee's account of Jonathan Edwards's ontology has become the benchmark of many recent discussions of Edwards's thought. In this paper, I argue that this Lee interpretation is flawed in several crucial respects. In place of Lee's understanding of Edwards I offer an account of Edwards's work according to which Edwards is an idealist-occasionalist, but not an advocate of a purely dispositional ontology of creation.

When we say that the world, i.e., the material universe, exists nowhere but in the mind, we have got to such a degree of strictness and abstraction that we must be exceedingly careful that we do not confound and lose ourselves by misapprehension.

Jonathan Edwards, 'The Mind', entry 34

In the recent literature the work of Sang Hyun Lee has become the dominant interpretation of Jonathan Edwards's philosophical theology.¹ A number of scholars at work on Edwards have been won over to what I shall call the 'Lee interpretation' of the Northampton divine.² The reason for this is quite simply that Lee's account of Edwards's philosophical theology is the most comprehensive and thorough yet to appear. As a consequence, it has become the benchmark for current interpretations of Edwards's metaphysics. Lee's achievement is considerable. But, as I shall argue here, it is mistaken in several of its conclusions about the nature of Edwards's ontology. To date, the most important response to the Lee interpretation has been that of the English historical theologian, Stephen R. Holmes. In an essay that takes issue with the Lee interpretation of Edwards's doctrine of God (and, by implication, his ontology) Holmes argues that Edwards's doctrine could not have endorsed the ontology Lee proposes because it entails an unorthodox concept of God, which would have been anathema to the Northampton divine.³

This paper builds on this previous work. In place of the Lee interpretation, I shall offer an account of Edwards's ontology more in keeping with some earlier accounts of Edwards that predate Lee's work.⁴ Such a view is able to make sense of the unusual language Edwards deploys when speaking about matters ontological and does not require some of the stronger ontological claims Lee makes in his work. This account is also able to explain how Edwards sounds so traditional at other times – a point picked up in Holmes's essay. Like Holmes I think that Edwards's ontology was basically a version of essentialism, which, very roughly, is the doctrine that divides what exists into substances and their properties.⁵ Edwards did not depart from essentialist metaphysics in quite the way that Lee thinks he did. Or, to be more accurate, Edwards's version of essentialism includes the concept of substance, which Lee suggests Edwards in effect replaces with the notion of disposition. However, in addition to essentialism, he also espoused idealism, mental phenomenalism, and a doctrine of occasionalism (about which, more presently). It is my contention that through a misunderstanding of the way in which these different elements of Edwards's thought are interrelated in Edwards's thinking, Lee ends up with mistaken views on several important components of Edwardsian ontology. If this is right, then much recent work on Edwards that has appropriated a basically Lee-inspired interpretation of Edwards's ontology will need to be reviewed, and, in some instances perhaps, amended. Nevertheless, this must be done if a more accurate understanding of the Edwardsian contribution to theology is to be had.

The paper is divided into three parts. In the first, I give a critical account of (several aspects of) the dispositional ontology Lee imputes to Edwards. Then, in a second section, I show how the Lee interpretation misunderstands these aspects of Edwardsian ontology with reference to Edwards's works, particularly his early philosophical notebooks. I conclude with some remarks on the importance this has for the study of Jonathan Edwards.

A dispositional ontology?

Two features of the Lee interpretation are particularly striking. The first is his claim that Edwards developed a novel ontology, influenced by the (then) recent developments in the natural sciences and philosophy by Newton and Locke in particular. The second concerns his assertion that Edwards carried his dispositional account of ontology over into his doctrine of God.⁶ We shall concern ourselves with the first of these claims only. This paper offers no objection to the view that Edwards had an important and controversial place for the concept of disposition *in his doctrine of God*. But it does set forth a critique of one aspect of the Lee interpretation of Edwards's dispositional ontology *of the created order*.

According to Lee, Edwards set aside key components of the essentialist ontology indebted to Aristotle. This is the doctrine according to which the world is composed of substances and their attributes, which are organized in a certain way by the form of a particular substance. In place of this way of thinking about what exists, Lee believes Edwards developed a dispositional account of the nature of reality: 'dispositions and habits, conceived as active and ontologically abiding principles ... play the roles substance and form used to fulfil'. Indeed, '[t]he created world is a network of divinely established habits and dispositions (or the so-called laws of nature)'. What is more, '[t]he permanence of being is no longer defined in terms of substance or inert matter but rather in terms of the abiding reality of laws themselves' (*PTJE*, 4, 8, and 11 respectively).

But what does this dispositional account of the created order actually amount to? First, and most fundamentally, there is the question of the relationship between the concept of substance and that of habit in Lee's account of the Edwardsian ontology. According to Lee, Edwards believed that the essence of created things is a compound of habits and/or laws. Habit is a concept Edwards takes up and develops from a basically Aristotelian understanding of *hexis*, that is, an *active principle*. In Edwards's thought the concept of habit becomes an active tendency to do such and such a thing, which has causal or purposive powers to bring such and such a thing about when actualized.⁷ Moreover, habits are law-like relations between events or actions, and are really present in some virtual or potential manner even when they are not exercised (*YE21*, 7). Finally, Lee believes that habits are relational; they exist in a nexus; and there is a complex relationship between one habit and another, such that the exercise of one habit has important implications for the exercise of other habits in the great system of being (*PTJE*, 34–46; 76–82). So habit as a particular sort of active tendency seems to be a way of describing a certain class of dispositional attributes that a particular entity has. And it appears Lee thinks Edwards's view is that all attributes are dispositional, they are all 'active tendencies' of the sort he envisages.

I suppose it is fairly commonplace to claim that entities have at least some dispositional attributes. But it is more controversial to think that all the attributes a given agent has are dispositional. Here we might distinguish between a weak and a strong account of dispositions, the weak view being simply that created beings have some dispositional attributes (e.g. 'being able to run'), and the strong view being that all the attributes created beings have are dispositional in nature. It seems that Lee's view is that Edwards's ontology requires the latter, stronger view: all the attributes of created things are dispositional.

In order to better understand the Lee interpretation of this 'Edwardsian' notion of habit, let us consider the habit or disposition (i.e. active tendency) to run, present in the mind of some imaginary human called Trevor. According to the account of habit just outlined, Trevor's disposition to run brings about his

running where, say, Trevor desires to run. Trevor has the disposition to run; he has the capacity to run (possessing working legs and so forth); he desires to run. His running is just his actualizing of this disposition, or habit.⁸ Or, perhaps better, his running is just his actualization of a particular dispositional attribute he possesses. But, according to the logic of Lee's position, the Edwardsian notion of habit also governs the type of action that can occur on a given occasion. Trevor desires to run, and actualizes this desire by realizing his dispositional capacity to run in an act of running. But Trevor's desire to run can only result in him running where he has the capability to run. He may desire to run but be incapacitated through injury. In such circumstances there can be no realization of his desire in action, though he may still have the disposition to act in the way he desires. Furthermore, on Lee's way of thinking about Edwards, there must be a 'fit' between disposition and the sort of act that is realized on a particular occasion. Thus, if Trevor desires to run, the action that results will not be the 'realization' of a disposition to fly, say, for that would not be an appropriate consequence of Trevor's desire. And since God governs what habits and dispositions are realized on such and such occasions, Trevor's desire to run will not result in an act of flying.

So far, so good: but what of attributes Trevor possesses that do not seem to be dispositional? What, for example, of the property 'being human' or 'being Trevor'? Neither of these attributes is dispositional. Trevor cannot 'activate' these attributes by intending upon an action of some kind. For these attributes are such that, without them, Trevor would simply not exist. They are essential to Trevor and they are intrinsic to his 'Trevorhood', as it were. So it is very difficult to see how this Lee interpretation of Edwards's account of habit can apply to all the attributes a creature has, let alone to all the attributes God has. And this, I suggest, should make us wary of accepting that this is Edwards's view without a very good argument. For I suppose that one should not attribute obviously problematic views to a particular thinker unless one has very good reason for thinking that the given thinker actually held such views.⁹

Thus far, Lee's interpretation of Edwards seems to require a rather strange account of the attributes of a given entity, all of which are dispositional. But it does not require the excision of the concept of substance.¹⁰ One could believe in a world populated by substances that have 'habits', that is, dispositional attributes, in the sense Lee seems to think Edwards does, although the idea that a substance *only* has dispositional attributes is a notion of which it is more difficult to make sense. However, Lee believes Edwards eschews the notion of substance: 'dispositions and habits, conceived as active and ontologically abiding principles ... *play the roles substance and form used to fulfil*' in Edwards's thinking (*PTJE*, 4, emphasis added). Dispositions or habits in Edwards's ontology are, according to Lee, law-like relations between events or actions, not the accidental quality of a substance (*PTJE*, 39, 47, 76). It is his opinion that Edwards thinks

habits do not belong to substances, but are *constitutive of their being* and mean that being is essentially dynamic and relational (*PTJE*, 48, 50). Lee sums it up in this way, 'Things ... do not have habits but *are* habits and laws, which are the essence of things' (*PTJE*, 49, emphasis original). In his more recent work on Edwards's ontology, he even goes so far as to say 'Edwards *replaces* substance with the idea of "disposition," which he calls "habit," "propensity," "law," "inclination," "tendency," and "temper"' (*YE21*, 6, emphasis added).¹¹ But this is a much more radical thesis about the role habit plays in Edwardsian ontology. As such it requires some explanation.

Suppose the sort of thing Lee calls a habit or disposition is an attribute of a given thing.¹² Then, with a little adjustment, we might think that humans are composed of bundles of attributes, or of certain sorts of attributes, namely habits and dispositions with no remainder, and with no need to posit such occult things as substances as a kind of ontologically fundamental 'thing' in which attributes (whether properties, tropes or predicates) inhere, or which exemplify or give rise to, such attributes. Such radical revisions to traditional Aristotelian ways of carving up ontology into substances and their properties was very much part of the intellectual furniture of the period in which Edwards was active. For instance, on at least one traditional way of understanding him, Hume thought things like humans are merely collections of attributes or predicates of a certain sort bundled together, and that there was no need to posit substances or bare substrata as the subjects of such attribute-instances or 'bundles' – which is why this is sometimes called 'bundle theory'.¹³

On this Humean way of thinking, to speak of Trevor is to refer to a given entity that is constituted by a particular bundle of attributes that, taken together, distinguish him from his friend, Wayne, and, for that matter, from all other created beings. (For instance, Wayne has the attribute 'being short and blond haired' whereas Trevor has the attribute 'being tall and dark-haired', and so on.) But there is nothing more to Trevor or Wayne than the cluster or bundle of attributes that constitutes them, on this view. Were we to exhaust the list of attributes Trevor exemplifies, we would have exhausted what there is to say about Trevor. According to bundle theorists, the ontological 'glue' that holds different attributes of a given thing 'together' constituting the thing it does, involves a special, contingent relation between those attributes, which is sometimes called collocation. A particular cluster of attributes is collocated in a particular location, e.g. Trevor. Although this particular bundle of attributes might not have occurred together, e.g. Trevor having alopecia rather than having long, dark hair, in fact this particular cluster of attributes does occur together and is collocated such that Trevor does have long, dark hair. But there is nothing more ontologically fundamental that underlies or somehow 'grounds' the attributes Trevor exemplifies, such as the bare substratum philosophers like John Locke posited.¹⁴ For some bundle theorists attracted to the austere empiricism of the Humean

tradition, this means there are no bare substrata underlying physical objects whatsoever, whether material or immaterial in nature. Let us call this robust version of bundle theory that denies the existence of any substances or bare substrates at all, the *Humean view* in honour of the Scottish philosopher. (Whether the historical Hume actually held this view or not is a question we can put to one side for present purposes.)¹⁵

One need not be quite so austere in the application of bundle theory, however. It is perfectly possible to hold a version of bundle theory alongside the claim that there are immaterial substances or bare particulars that exemplify attributes. In other words, one could hold to mental phenomenalism with respect to perceptible entities, understood in terms of a bundle theory, and also maintain a version of idealism. This, or something very like it, seems to have been the view of Bishop Berkeley. He believed that the world is composed of uncreated and created minds and their ideas, material substance being, for Berkeley at least, literally nonsense. ‘Matter’ turns out to be an idea, along with every other supposed ‘physical’ thing. What is more, the perceptible parts of other entities are really simply clusters of such ideas perceived by the mind, with God being the guarantor of the continued existence of created objects that are unperceived for some period by other created entities. Let us call the bundle theoretic aspect of the mental phenomenalism that is a constituent of this idealist position *the Berkeleyan view* in honour of the bishop – though for the purposes of teasing out different permutations of bundle theory nothing much hangs on whether Berkeley held this view or not.¹⁶ On the Berkeleyan view, it is not inconceivable that all material entities (or what we commonly think of as material entities) are simply bundles of attributes that continue to exist through the constant activity of God, and that there are immaterial substances in addition to such attribute bundles, which are somehow more fundamental than these attribute bundles. In fact I will suggest that something very like this sort of view is indeed what Edwards believed to be the case.

If Lee thinks that dispositions or habits ‘play the role of’ or even ‘replace’ that of the substance and substantive forms of Aristotelian essentialism, then perhaps clusters of such dispositions/habits are what he is after, consistent with some version of bundle theory. This does raise the issue of what sort of bundle theory best fits with the Lee interpretation, whether Humean, Berkeleyan, or something else. Lee is willing to concede that Edwards does sometimes speak of substances. But what he means by this has changed in important respects (*PTJE*, 49). For Edwards’s view, according to Lee, is that ‘Substances in the sense of the subject of properties and activities is not needed or is collapsed into the activity of resistance itself. Or, if one were to speak of the ultimate source of the existence of an entity, the substance of bodies is nothing other than God’s power’ (*PTJE*, 54). This sounds like it is somewhere in between a Humean and a Berkeleyan version

of bundle theory. For Lee's view seems to be that Edwards believed the following three things:

- (1) Ontologically speaking, all created beings are nothing more than bundles of attributes. (The Aristotelian notion of substantial forms organizing the matter of particular entities having dropped out of Edwards's ontology.)¹⁷
- (2) There is no material or immaterial 'bare substratum' upholding or underlying the attribute bundles that comprise created things, which is the subject of these attribute bundles. (The concept of substance is no longer needed to 'play this role'; it is 'replaced'.)
- (3) All attribute bundles are upheld by the immediate exercise of divine power without which they would cease to exist.

The third of these notions goes beyond the Humean bundle theory, but is not quite the Berkeleyan view, since it is not clear from this whether God is merely a bundle of attributes or some other thing – a substance that exemplified certain attributes, for instance. In fact, as Lee observes, Edwards believed that God is the only true substance, strictly speaking – although he goes on to argue that Edwards's God is essentially dispositional as His creatures are.¹⁸ There is certainly ample evidence that Edwards thought that God is an immaterial substance. For instance, in his early notebook 'Of Atoms', Edwards opines 'speaking most strictly, there is no proper substance but God himself (we speak at present with respect to bodies only). How truly, then, is he said to be the *ens entium*.'¹⁹ Taking this into account, we would have to add a fourth proposition to the previous three,

- (4) The only true substance is the divine substance, which upholds all created beings, that is, all attribute bundles that compose such beings.

And this is clearly consistent with essentialism, though an essentialist doctrine in which there is, strictly speaking, only one (divine) substance.

The problem is that Lee does not appear to think this is a constituent of Edwards's position. What he says implies that Edwards held something much more akin to the Humean version of bundle theory, extended to include God himself, despite Lee's claim (just noted) that Edwards does hold to some 'modified' view of divine substance. He remarks, 'For Edwards, God is essentially a perfect actuality as well as a disposition to repeat that actuality through further exercises', and continues, '[t]he world, in other words, is meant to be the spatio-temporal repetition of the prior actuality of the divine being, an everlasting process of God's self-enlargement of what he already is' (*PTJE*, 6). Moreover, 'God is essentially a disposition, and dispositions are not exhausted by their exercises' (*YE21*, 8). But Edwards's stated views are not consistent with this

understanding of his ontology, since, as we have already seen, Edwards is clear that his ontology does include at least one substance, namely, God.²⁰

To be fair to Lee, Edwards's early manuscripts, from which he draws much of his data, are difficult to make sense of at times. Matters are complicated by the fact that Edwards's earliest views concerning ontology are not entirely consistent with his later views. Lee is cognisant of this and offers a carefully plotted discussion of Edwards's intellectual development from his early papers, 'Of Atoms' and 'Of Being', through early entries in his 'Miscellanies' notebooks (notably, entry 'pp'), to his more mature thinking in 'The Mind'.²¹ In the earliest of these notebooks Edwards begins to develop his brand of idealism, and it appears to be because of this idealist strand of Edwards's thought that he is driven to espouse the strong doctrine of habit – at least, according to the Lee interpretation. Edwards's initial position is that material bodies are characterized chiefly by the notion of 'resistance' (to other bodies and forces). But he quickly modifies this to the claim that all material bodies are really just ideas, resistance included (*PTJE*, 56–57). And if they are ideas, they must be the ideas of a mind – ultimately, of the divine mind. This raises the problem familiar to students of idealist philosophy, to wit, do unperceived objects exist? Edwards says that they do – as items in the divine consciousness. This is clear in 'Miscellany pp', one of the earliest entries in his 'Miscellanies' notebook: 'Supposing a room in which none is, none sees in that room, no created intelligence; the things in the room have no being any other way than only as God is conscious [of them], for there is no color, nor any sound, nor any shape, etc.'²²

But according to Lee, Edwards reneges on this early Berkeley-like idealist view, moving to an explicitly dispositional version of idealism, wherein the world continues to exist (including objects unperceived by created observers) because God establishes a nexus of laws and habits that cause particular objects to perdure even when unperceived. An extended citation from Lee makes this clear:

The abiding being of the created world, in other words, is defined neither as consisting in God's consciousness of it (a view that tends to do away with any distinction between eternal and finite modes of being and knowing) nor as consisting in the perception of it by finite minds (a view that results in a subjectivist idealism) [these are the views Edwards had earlier flirted with]. The permanent nature of the created world is rather to be seen as consisting in the abiding character of the laws according to which the actual existences (ideas) are caused by God and known by human minds. (*PTJE*, 60)

It is at this point that Lee's interpretation of Edwards begins to unravel. For none of the evidence Lee musters in favour of this dispositional account *requires* a dispositional ontology in order to make sense of Edwards's more considered views concerning the ontology of the world. In fact, his considered views are entirely consistent with an account of ontology where there are uncreated and, in a qualified sense, created substances (i.e. divine and human minds) that have

attributes, and where material objects are really nothing more than ideas (here read: qualities) a given immaterial substance exemplifies. This way of thinking about Edwards's ontology is much more in keeping with earlier studies of his idealism that predate Lee's work and reflect the fact that Edwards's thought is a synthesis of different philosophical elements he has fused together from his thinking and reading.²³

Edwards vs Lee: habit, occasionalism, substance, and idealism

It would be tedious to go through every example that Lee adduces in favour of his own dispositional understanding of Edwardsian ontology. But in order to show that this particular aspect of Lee's reading of Edwards is tendentious I shall adduce several of the most important works that Lee uses to make the point. I will not present these in the order Edwards wrote them, but in terms of their priority in his mature ontology.

To begin with, let us consider Lee's conception of habit. Here Miscellany 241 is particularly important for the Lee interpretation. But examination of this Miscellany shows that the passage at the end of this Miscellany that Lee cites is actually dealing with a specific issue, namely, regeneration. Edwards speaks of a 'habit of grace' that is wrought in the soul of the person who is regenerate, commenting in the course of his explanation of this act of grace that 'a habit can be of no manner of use till there is occasion to exert it'. He then goes on in the passage Lee cites as follows,

... all habits being only a law that God has fixed, that such actions upon such occasions should be exerted, the first new thing that there can be in the creature must be some actual alteration. So in the first birth it seems to me probable that the beginning of the existence of the soul, whose essence consists in powers and habits, is with some kind of new alteration there, either in motion or sensation. (YE13, 358.)

The problem for the Lee interpretation in this Miscellany is that Edwards does not say anything that would imply that *all* attributes a given entity possesses are dispositional. What he says does apply to all habits being laws 'that God has fixed, that such actions upon such occasions should be exerted'. But this entails nothing about the nature of *all* attributes. Nor is his concession that the essence of created souls 'consists in powers and habits' inconsistent with commitment to the notion that there are immaterial substances, since any essentialist of an Aristotelian variety will allow that beings have natures or essences that consist in powers and habits of the sort Edwards has in mind. As far as I can see, Lee adduces no evidence in Edwards's corpus that unambiguously substantiates this strong account of dispositions the Lee interpretation requires. I suggest that such an unambiguous statement is required in this instance, because what Lee proposes is controversial. In order to be sure a thinker as careful as Edwards was

committed to such a problematic idea as that entailed by the Lee interpretation of Edwardsian habits, one would need clear evidence of Edwards's commitment to this position. As far as I can make out, Lee has not provided this.

A second, related item in Lee's interpretation of Edwards that is worth dealing with here is his idea that habits are abiding, though (sometimes) dispositional, laws established by God, that are not created *ex nihilo* at each moment as such, but move 'from virtuality to full actuality every moment through an immediate exercise of his [i.e. God's] power' (*PTJE*, 63). Since this aspect of the Lee interpretation has been discussed elsewhere at length in the recent literature,²⁴ my comments on this matter can be brief.

I take it that occasionalism is the philosophical view according to which God: (a) continually creates the world *ex nihilo* moment-by-moment, which collapses the notions of creation and conservation into one (by identifying conservation with continuous creation), with (b) the idea that God is the only causal agent in the world. All creaturely 'acts' are merely the 'occasions' of God's activity. If occasionalism is true, then there are no causal agents other than God, and no created entity persists for more than a moment. God creates the world, which momentarily ceases to exist, to be replaced by a facsimile that has incremental differences built into it to account for what appears to be motion and change across time. This, in turn is annihilated, or ceases to exist, and is replaced by another facsimile world that has incremental differences built into it to account for what appears to be motion and change across time, and so on. In this way, the occasionalist thinks of the world on analogy with a cinematic motion picture.

When watching a movie at the cinema we appear to see a sequence of actions across time represented in the projected images on the silver screen. But in reality, the images are a reel of photographic stills run together at speed to give the illusion of motion and action across time. Similarly with occasionalism: the world seems to persist through time, but in fact it does not. 'The world' (meaning here, the created cosmos) is merely shorthand for that series of created 'stills' – that is, the complete, maximal, but momentary states of affairs – God brings about in sequence, playing, as it were, on the silver screen of the divine mind. In the same way we might say that *Gone with the Wind* is shorthand for the motion picture of the same name, comprising the stills that make up that movie.

It seems clear that Edwards endorses occasionalism in his mature work, e.g. his treatise, *Original Sin*.²⁵ There he affirms continuous creation with these words, 'God's *preserving* created things in being is perfectly equivalent to a *continued creation*, or to his creating those things out of nothing at *each moment* of their existence' (*YE3*, 401). God's upholding created things is 'altogether equivalent to an *immediate production out of nothing* at each moment, because its existence is not merely in part from God, but is wholly from him' (*YE3*, 402). This means that there is 'no identity or oneness in the case [of created objects that persist through time] but what depends on the arbitrary constitution of the Creator',

who 'so unites these successive new effects, that he *treats them as one* ... and so, leads us to regard and treat them as one' (YE3, 403). In short, 'if we consider matters strictly, there is no such thing as any identity or oneness in created objects, existing at different times, but what depends on *God's sovereign constitution*'. What is more 'a *divine constitution* is the thing which *makes truth*, in affairs of this nature' (YE3, 404).

Taken together with his endorsement of a basically Malebranchean notion of causation as an occasion of divine action, this yields occasionalism.²⁶ In which case, the 'laws' to which Lee refers are nothing other than the 'arbitrary' actions of God (to use Edwards's phrase) by which God makes the world created at one time qualitatively very similar, though not quite identical in its operations to the world He creates at the next moment, in the series of worlds 'screened' on the divine mind in succession.²⁷ No momentary 'world' in the series of created 'stills' is qualitatively identical to the previous one since, according to Edwards, certain incremental differences are built into each 'world' in the series of momentary worlds God creates, in order to account for apparent motion and change from one moment to the next. The same would be true, by analogy, with the photographic stills that make up *Gone with the Wind*, or any other motion picture. As should be clear from the foregoing it is also true on the Edwardsian view that each momentary world created out of nothing by God is *numerically distinct* from the previous world, though qualitatively similar. God ensures that things seem to occur with regularity across time, so that things like the 'law' of gravity seem to obtain with regularity at different times. But in fact there is no law in operation distinct from God's decision to order successive worlds in this fashion, in accordance with His will and wisdom.²⁸

This has very serious implications for Edwards's ontology, since occasionalism entails the denial of persistence through time as well as undercutting the reality of secondary causes. It is also difficult to see how it does not also destroy moral responsibility for created beings, since God is the sole cause of all that takes place, creatures being merely the 'occasions' of divine actions. But, strange to say, this also means that Lee's interpretation of Edwardsian 'habit' is not nearly radical enough in one respect: habits are nothing more than the immediate arbitrary operations of God in continuously creating successive numerically distinct but qualitatively identical (or nearly-identical) worlds, segueing them together *seriatim* as he sees fit.

Of course, if this is right (and I think it is indisputable that Edwards was an occasionalist), then there is literally no time in Edwards's ontology for any dispositional attributes to be realised since no created beings persist for long enough to perform any action; God is constantly recreating the world – or, in fact, facsimile worlds – out of nothing. In addition, no created being is a causal agent, strictly speaking, because no created being exists for long enough to cause any given act.²⁹ But then, no created being can bring about any act that would include

the realization of a dispositional state or attribute. In fact, there appears to be no way that Lee's interpretation of the Edwardsian ontology can even get off the ground if Edwards is an occasionalist. For then one of two possible outcomes must be true. Either no dispositional attributes *can* obtain, as per the Lee interpretation, or Edwards believed two contradictory things: that created entities are composed of dispositional 'habits' *and* that no created entities persist for long enough to have dispositional 'habits'. This consideration alone is fatal to the Lee interpretation of Edwards's ontology.³⁰

We come to the third contentious component of Lee's dispositional ontology, that is, the claim that the doctrine of substance does not play a significant 'role' in, and is effectively excised from, his metaphysics. We have already had cause to note that Lee cites 'Of Atoms' as an instance of where Edwards uses the language of substance but means by it something 'radically new' (*PTJE*, 49). But in fact, the relevant passage in 'Of Atoms' has to do with explaining the concepts of body and solidity, which Edwards says are immediate exercises of divine power. Philosophers, he maintains, have mistakenly thought there is some 'unknown substance' standing under, and in some fashion, 'upholding' the properties of a given thing. But, says Edwards, 'solidity' does this job without positing such a *material* substance.³¹ However, he does not deny that there is (at least) one substance, namely, God, who is the ontological guarantor, as it were, of ideas like solidity and body. In a passage we have already had cause to cite, Edwards goes on to say:

The substance of bodies at last becomes either nothing, or nothing but the Deity acting in that particular manner in those parts of space where he thinks fit. So that, speaking most strictly, there is no proper substance but God himself (we speak at present with respect to bodies only). How truly, then, is he said to be *ens entium*. (*YE6*, 215)

This is echoed in his notebook 'Things to be considered an[d] written fully about' (Long Series), entry 44:

Bodies have no substance of their own, so neither is solidity, strictly speaking, a property belonging to a body And if solidity is not so, neither are the other properties of a body So that there is neither real substance nor property belonging to bodies; but all that is real, it is immediately the first being.

And,

God is ... *ens entium*; or if there was nothing else in the world but bodies, the only real being The nearer in nature beings are to God, so much the more properly they are beings, and more substantial; and that spirits are much more properly beings, and more substantial, than bodies. (*YE6*, 238.)

But from this all that follows is that bodies are not proper substances and that, strictly speaking, only God is truly a substance, though there are created immaterial substances of a sort (e.g. souls).³² Yet this is consistent with

Berkeley-like idealism, and is an endorsement of the concept of substance, not a repudiation of it. That this is the right way to understand Edwards here is underscored by other passages in his early philosophical works, such as 'Of Being', where he remarks that the universe 'exists nowhere but in the divine mind'. What is more:

... those beings which have knowledge and consciousness are the only proper and real and substantial beings, inasmuch as the being of other things is only by these. From hence we may see the gross mistake of those who think material things the most substantial beings, and spirits more like a shadow; whereas spirits only are properly substance. (YE6, 206)

The notion that the corporeal world is really only a shadow of the spiritual world is a common trope in Edwards's thought, as is his claim that God is the only true substance.³³ But it is notable that in these passages Edwards makes ontological room, as it were, for created substances.³⁴ This is consistent with his occasionalism, provided we understand Edwards to mean that God is, strictly speaking, the only true substance, and the only causal agent in the momentary world-stages He creates, coupled with the idea that created immaterial substances are, in a very real sense, only the occasions of God's action.³⁵

Earlier, and following Lee, I noted the fact that Edwards's ontology evolves over the course of his early notebooks. This can be seen in 'The Mind', which is one of the last of his early philosophical works. There Edwards corrects his own earlier endorsement of Henry More's notion that God is space, to make his thinking consistent with his emerging idealism:

Space, as has already been observed, [in his earlier notebook, 'Of being'] is a necessary being (if it may be called a being); and yet we have also shewn that all existence is mental, that the existence of all exterior things is ideal. Therefore it is a necessary being only as it is a necessary idea – so far as it is a simple idea that is necessarily connected with other simple exterior ideas, and is, as it were, their common substance or subject. It is in the same manner a necessary being, as anything external is a being. (YE6, 34)³⁶

It is clear from Edwards's own work in this early period of his intellectual development that one issue much on his mind is the materialism of Thomas Hobbes, a matter of pressing concern to a number of Christian philosophers in the period, including Cambridge Platonists like More.³⁷ Thus, for instance, in his early notebook of 'Things to be considered an[d] written fully about', item 26 reads, 'To bring in an observation somewhere in a proper place, that instead of Hobbes' notion that God is matter and that all substance is matter; that nothing that is matter can possibly be God, and that no matter is, in the most proper sense, matter' (YE6, 235).³⁸ Edwards's considered response to this perceived threat was, like Berkeley, to opt for a version of idealism. What is interesting is the way in which Edwards tweaks his version of idealism so as to be consistent with occasionalism. I suggest that it is precisely in terms of his idealist occasionalism

that Edwards's famous comments about matter and substance should be understood.

One of the most extensive discussions of substance in Edwards's early work can be found in 'The Mind', entry 61, entitled 'SUBSTANCE'. But rather than supporting Lee's dispositional ontology, this entry only underlines Edwards's commitment to a version of idealism similar in many respects (though distinct from) that of Berkeley, along with a species of phenomenalism about the objects of perception. As with his other words noted previously, Edwards's chief object seems to be to establish that all phenomenal things, and all created entities, are upheld in being by a deity who is, in one important respect, prior to all created things.³⁹ In the context of this reasoning he observes that by substance is meant 'only "something," because of abstract substance we have no idea that is more particular than only existence in general' (YE6, 378). But this hardly constitutes a retreat from the doctrine of substance, and is in keeping with Locke's discussion of substance in the *Essay* II, XXIII.

Finally, in 'Notes on knowledge and existence', Edwards has a paragraph in answer to Hobbesian materialism. His answer to such materialist thinkers is '[t]hat all existence is perception. What we call body is nothing but a particular mode of perception; and what we call spirit is nothing but a composition and series of perceptions, or an universe of coexisting and successive perceptions connected by such wonderful methods and laws' (YE6, 398). But since this is written just after Edwards's confession that God is 'as it were the only substance', this should surely be taken as an indication of Edwards's commitment to a mental phenomenalism, where all perceptible things are ideas, which is part and parcel of his idealism.

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, I think it should be clear that the Lee interpretation is mistaken about key aspects of Edward's ontology of the created world. (I have not directly addressed the way in which Lee applies his dispositional account to the divine nature, which is the task of another day.) The evidence Lee adduces for his reading of Edwards's ontology is almost always open to another, less contentious rendering of Edward's thought that places it within the intellectual milieu of the period. This is also consistent with the picture of Edwards as an intellectual magpie, who sought to synthesize aspects of the early Enlightenment thinking with post-Reformation scholastic metaphysics in order to offer a coherent intellectual apology for traditional Christian doctrine.

Edwards's ontology is a rather strange thing – there is no denying that. He believed in a version of idealism coupled with something like what I have called a Berkeleyan bundle theory that yields a phenomenalism with regard to perceptible objects. Yet he did believe that there were substances, God being the only 'true'

substance, strictly speaking, with created substances (minds or souls) being ultimately merely the occasions of divine action. Thus, according to Edwards, matters ontological are really very different from our common-sense intuitions about what we think we know about the world. It turns out that, on Edwards's way of thinking, the world is an infinite series of numerically distinct entities created *ex nihilo*, moment-by-moment, and arranged in the divine mind *seriatim*, so as to produce the effect of continuous activity across time. However, strictly speaking, nothing persists through time, and nothing occurs without God directly bringing it about. This continuous creation doctrine coupled with the idea that God alone is a true cause of all that takes place in the creation (or, to be precise, series of creations) together constitutes the two theses of Edwardsian occasionalism.⁴⁰

Lee is right in thinking Edward's ontology is novel in several important respects. But what was novel about it was the way in which he sought to synthesize a commitment to essentialism, idealism, and occasionalism along with his orthodox theological commitments. Edwards did have some interesting things to say about dispositions and habit, particularly when applied to the divine nature. And he does appear to have moved away from an Aristotelian essentialism to the extent that he rejects the notion of substantial forms, replacing them with some sort of bundle theory. But he did not effectively replace the notion of substance with that of disposition, as Lee suggests. What is interesting about Edwards is his particular remixing of several distinct ontological notions into one overarching vision of the world that he had picked up from his reading of various Enlightenment figures. His achievement was not to begin his philosophical thinking from the ground up, setting aside received wisdom, but to forge a new philosophical foundation upon which Christian doctrine could stand using the intellectual tools which he found around him. His ontology is, in a real sense, synthetic, though it is certainly his own synthesis of the various elements it contains. They had been 'Edwardsianized', so to speak, in order to serve his one supreme theological purpose: *the greater glory of God*.⁴¹

Notes

1. See Sang Hyun Lee *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, expanded edn (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000 [1988]). All references will be to this version of Lee's book, which will be cited parenthetically in the body of the text as *PTJE* followed by a page reference. Some of the central issues in Lee's monograph are showcased in his essay 'Edwards on God and nature: resources for contemporary theology', in Sang Hyun Lee & Allen C. Guelzo (eds) *Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and The Shaping of American Religion* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 15–44; and *idem* 'Does history matter to God? Jonathan Edwards's dynamic reconception of God's relation to the world', in Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, & Caleb J. D. Maskell (eds) *Jonathan Edwards at 300, Essays on the Tercentenary of His Birth* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2005), 1–13. A more substantial peroration upon his earlier work is Lee's editorial introduction to Jonathan Edwards *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, XXI, Sang Hyun Lee (ed.) (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2003) (hereinafter cited as *YE21*, followed by page number). Lee's views have not

significantly changed in these later works, so I shall focus my efforts on his monograph, with some reference to his more recent contributions where appropriate.

2. Representative examples of Edwards scholars that have appropriated the Lee interpretation include Gerald R. McDermott *One Holy and Happy Society, The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (University Park PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), ch. 3; Anri Morimoto *Jonathan Edwards and The Catholic Vision of Salvation* (University Park PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), *passim*; and (more cautiously) Amy Plantinga Pauw *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 88–89. Stephen H. Daniel's interpretation of Edwards sounds at times like Lee's, but is different in important respects (e.g. he is concerned to offer a 'postmodern' account of Edwards drawing on themes in continental philosophy). See Daniel's recent essays: 'Edwards as philosopher', in Stephen J. Stein (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 162–180; 'Postmodern concepts of God and Edwards's Trinitarianism', in Lee & Guelzo *Edwards in Our Time*, 45–64, and his monograph, *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards* (Bloomington and Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).
3. See Stephen R. Holmes 'Does Jonathan Edwards use a dispositional ontology? A response to Sang Hyun Lee', in Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (eds) *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 99–114. In the same symposium I offer some reason for thinking that the Lee interpretation is not indubitable, although my main concern there is to show that Edwards was a consistent occasionalist rather than to take issue with the Lee interpretation of Edwards as such; see my 'How "occasional" was Edwards's occasionalism?', in *ibid.*, 61–77. Three other recent essays that offers a different interpretation of Edwardsian ontology from Lee, but which do not engage Lee directly, are Thomas Schafer's editorial introduction to Jonathan Edwards The 'Miscellanies' (entry nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, XIII, Thomas A. Schafer (ed.) (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1994), hereinafter cited as *YE13*, followed by a page number; William J. Wainwright's excellent entry 'Jonathan Edwards', in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, located at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/edwards/>; and Richard R. Niebuhr's 'Being and consent', in Sang Hyun Lee (ed.) *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 34–43. Also of use is George Marsden's biography, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2003), ch. 4. My own reading of Edwards's ontology is largely consistent with that expressed in these essays.
4. For example (in order of publication), Egbert C. Smyth 'Jonathan Edwards's idealism: with special reference to the essay "Of Being" and to writings not in his Collected Works', *The American Journal of Theology*, 1 (1897), 950–964; H. N. Gardiner 'The early idealism of Jonathan Edwards', *The Philosophical Review*, 6 (1900), 573–596; and George Rupp 'The idealism of Jonathan Edwards', *Harvard Theological Review*, 62 (1969), 209–226.
5. There are different sorts of essentialist doctrine, to be sure, and the Edwardsian account is consistent with an immaterial realism, the notion that there are real immaterial substances of a sort – about which, more presently. A brief overview of the idea of substance and its importance for philosophy at the time Edwards was writing, particularly in the work of Locke, Hume and Berkeley, can be found in E. J. Lowe *Locke on Human Understanding* (London: Routledge, 1995), ch. 4.
6. Holmes's essay is concerned primarily with the second of Lee's contentious claims, although this leads him in the end to state unequivocally that 'Edwards did not use a dispositional ontology'; in 'Does Jonathan Edwards use a dispositional ontology?', 108. However, it is, I think, undeniable that Edwards held an account of God according to which there is 'a disposition in God, as an original property of his nature, to an emanation of his own infinite fullness' which 'excited him to create the world'; from the Dissertation on the *End of Creation* in Jonathan Edwards *Ethical Writings, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, VIII, Paul Ramsey (ed.) (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 435, emphasis in the original [hereinafter cited as *YE8*]. Quite how one should understand this dispositional aspect of Edwards's doctrine of God is a subject for another occasion. But note that there is nothing inconsistent in claiming that: (a) God is a substance, and (b) God has a dispositional property to create the world. What is problematic about Edwards's dispositional account of the divine nature is that the second of these two claims appears incompatible with his stated allegiance to the *actus purus* account of the divine nature, according to which God is metaphysically simple. See, e.g. his *Freedom of the Will*, where Edwards says God is 'of perfect and absolute simplicity'; *Freedom of the Will, The Works of Jonathan*

Edwards, I, John E. Smith (ed.) (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 377 [hereinafter cited as *YE1*]. See also 'Miscellanies' nos. 94, 135 and 308 in *YE13*, where Edwards endorses the pure-act tradition unequivocally. Lee himself concedes that 'Edwards's references to [divine] simplicity are few, but they cannot be ignored'; see *YE21*, 23.

7. Lee speaks of habits and tendencies without recourse to subjects that have these tendencies, which is rather odd. One would think an active tendency is an active tendency of something, and perhaps this is what Lee means, although he does not always say so.
8. Dispositions and desires are distinct things. To see this, consider an example where Trevor's brain has been tampered with so that he automatically runs in certain circumstances irrespective of whether he desires to run or not. I thank a referee for this journal for drawing my attention to this example.
9. Later on I *will* attribute problematic views to Edwards, but I think there is very good reason for thinking Edwards held to the problematic views I have in mind, such as occasionalism.
10. I take it that a substance can be material (the body of that person) or immaterial (the soul of that person), and is that thing which exemplifies properties (the skin of his body is brown; his soul has a certain relation of ownership to the body it is 'attached' to). And I take it that an essence, or nature of a thing, is usually thought to be that set of properties which a thing cannot cease to have without ceasing to be that thing, e.g. 'being a dependent rational animal' for a given human person. Having said that, human nature might not be merely or fundamentally a property, but a concrete particular. This is a traditional theological view and one that has been defended elsewhere in the recent literature. See, e.g. Marilyn McCord Adams *Christ and Horrors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 6; and Oliver D. Crisp *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 2.
11. See also Lee's recent essay, 'God's relation to the world', where he says 'Edwards saw reality not in terms of substances and forms, as had been done for so many centuries, but rather as a network of lawlike habits and dispositions'; Lee *Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, 59. Lee's more recent work is unequivocal about the replacement of the concept of substance in Edwards's ontology.
12. I use the term 'attribute' deliberately, since this term is consistent with either 'predicate' or 'property'.
13. Compare Hume's famous remark that 'when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, or heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception'; David Hume *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978 [1739–1740]), 252 (emphasis original).
14. Thus, 'we accustom our selves, to suppose some Substratum, wherein they [ideas, that is, qualities] do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call Substance'; John Locke *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Peter Nidditch (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), II. XXIII. 2, 295 (hereinafter, cited as *Essay*, followed by book and section).
15. I am simplifying things a little in order not to extend this discussion unduly. Bundle theorists might adopt one of several accounts of the attributes a created being has. Some might believe in the existence of properties as universals and think that a given being exemplifies properties. Others may think that only particulars exist, as with nominalism. And there are other views in the neighbourhood too. I speak here of properties or predicates to indicate that the bundle theorist need not be committed to one view about whether there are abstracta like properties, or not. I take it that predicates do not require this ontological commitment. Michael J. Loux does a good job of navigating this discussion in *Metaphysics, A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1998), ch. 3, and my account here owes much to his clear exposition.
16. However, it seems pretty clear this was Berkeley's view: 'What I am myself, that which I denote by the term *I*, is the same as what is meant by *soul* or *spiritual substance* ... *Spirits* and *ideas* are things so wholly different, that when we say, *they exist*, *they are known*, or the like, these words must not be thought to signify anything common to both natures. There is nothing alike or common in them ... Hence it is evident, that God is known as certainly and immediately as any other mind or spirit whatsoever, distinct from ourselves'; George Berkeley *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Roger Woolhouse (ed.) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988 [1710]), 106, 107, 108 respectively (emphasis original).
17. Lee says that Edwards's conception of law and habit function 'on the level of Aristotelian substantial forms', and that for Edwards, 'the distinction between substance and accident is collapsed into one

- category', namely, the category of habits (*PTJE*, 79). So, according to Lee, Edwards effectively removes substantive forms from his ontology, replacing them with habits and laws.
18. 'Edwards occasionally uses the word "substance," but what he means by it is radically new' (*PTJE*, 49.) From the context of this passage it is clear Lee understands that this refers to the divine substance. However, later he claims that Edwards's theology proper is 'nothing less than a basic reconception of the Western philosophical theism that was heavily dependent on the categories of Greek philosophy'. He continues, 'the essence of the divine being is a disposition, not a substance or pure form' (*PTJE*, 174 and 175, respectively.) But Edwards seems to believe that God is an immaterial substance that has an essential disposition to create, which is a rather different way of thinking about this. See, e.g. Miscellany no. 553 in Jonathan Edwards, The 'Miscellanies' (entry nos. 501–832), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* XVIII, Ava Chamberlain (ed.) (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 97 and *End of Creation*, ch. 1, sect. 2 in *YE8*, 428–435.
 19. Jonathan Edwards *Scientific and Philosophical Writings, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, VI, Wallace E. Anderson (ed.) (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 215, (hereinafter, cited as *YE6*, followed by a page reference). Anderson's introduction to this volume offers a useful introduction to some of the issues discussed here.
 20. At the risk of labouring the point, I agree with Lee that Edwards does think there is an essential dispositional aspect to the divine nature. But I do not agree that this means God is essentially a disposition. According to Edwards, God is an immaterial substance who has an essential disposition to 'emanate' or 'communicate' himself in a work of creation.
 21. 'Of Atoms', 'Of Being', and 'The Mind' are all found in *YE6*. Miscellany 'pp' is found in *YE13*. Lee plots the course of Edwards's intellectual development in ch. 3 of *PTJE*. Useful discussion of this matter can also be found in Jasper Reid 'Jonathan Edwards on space and God', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 41 (2003), 385–403.
 22. *YE13*, 188, referred to by Lee in *PTJE*, 58.
 23. The idea that Edwards often synthesized ideas he gleaned from a wide variety of sources is not novel. Amy Plantinga Pauw makes much of this in her account of Edwards's Trinitarian theology, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2002), ch. 6, as, in a rather different manner, does William Morris in his account of Edwards's early intellectual development, *The Young Jonathan Edwards, A Reconstruction* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005 [1955]).
 24. I have discussed Edwards's doctrine of occasionalism at length in *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), and 'How "occasional" was Edwards's occasionalism?'. This latter paper in particular deals with the Lee interpretation of Edwards's concept of laws as found in the important 'Miscellany 1263'. See also Norman Fiering *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought in its British Context* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 51–52, 279–280, 307–308; and Avihu Zakai *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Re-Enchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 101–108. But cf. Stephen A. Wilson *Virtue Reformed: Re-reading Jonathan Edwards's Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), ch. 3, esp. 179–189 for an alternative view. I refer the interested reader to the discussion in my own work, as well as that of Fiering and Zakai for more on the textual material that supports my reading of Edwards's occasionalism.
 25. See Jonathan Edwards *Original Sin, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, III, Clyde A. Holbrook (ed.) (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 402–405, hereinafter cited as *YE3*. All emphases in the citations from this text are Edwards's. Schafer notes that Edwards's views in *Original Sin* are consistent with his earliest Miscellanies, where he endorses the continuous creation of all created beings, including immaterial substances. See *YE13*, 43 and Miscellany 18, in *YE13*, 210.
 26. See *Freedom of the Will*, where Edwards states that his use of the term 'effect' (viz. of a cause) 'is perhaps rather an occasion than a cause, most properly speaking'; *YE1*, 181. Elsewhere in his early notebook 'Of Atoms', he denies that there are mechanisms 'whereby bodies act upon each other purely and properly by themselves'; *YE6*, 215–216. And in 'Subjects to be handled in a treatise on the mind', no. 43 (a projected work he never completed), he queries whether the connection of ideas including the ideas of cause and effect, 'may not be reduced to these following: *Association of Ideas*; *Resemblance of some kind*; and that *Natural Disposition* in us, when we see any thing begin to be, to suppose it owing to a Cause'; *YE6*, 391–392. This sounds strikingly like the Humean regularity theory.
 27. This has not gone unnoticed in the literature. The late Thomas Schafer, doyen of Edwards scholars, remarks that, for Edwards, 'There is simply no realm of even relatively autonomous "second causes"

- between God and the world. Not only humankind but also all creation is immediately, totally dependent each moment on God's decision to continue both the fact and the manner of its existence. There are, of course, "natural laws" by which the world continues to operate; but what we call natural law is only the "method" or "rule" by which God has chosen to exercise his power'; *YE13*, 42.
28. The main stumbling block to this way of conceiving what Edwards says about occasionalism is his long Miscellany 1263, which Lee takes as evidence of his own dispositional account. But I have argued that there is good reason to think Edwards was a consistent occasionalist, contrary to the Lee interpretation in Holmes 'How "occasional" was Edwards's occasionalism?'. See also Zakai *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History*, 104–107, who suggests something similar.
 29. Objection: What about instantaneous acts, such as intentional acts are often thought to be – occasionalism might be consistent with a created agent bringing about such acts since they take (almost) no time. And Edwards is not absolutely clear that each momentary world God creates has zero duration, which would be needed in order to exclude the possibility that created agents could bring about instantaneous acts. Reply: it is true that Edwards does not define what he means by the word 'moment' when he speaks of momentary world-stages in his occasionalism in *YE3*. But it does seem clear that he thought no creature was a causal agent and that God alone is the cause of all that takes place. See *YE3*, 402–403. In any case, this is not going to be much help to Lee, since there is still no 'time' on Edwards's view, for dispositions to be realized, unless one takes the view that all properties possessed by a created entity are capable of being realized instantaneously, which is obviously impossible.
 30. But perhaps created substances are not identified with momentary bundles of properties or attributes, but with a series of such bundles that exists *seriatim* in the divine mind. Then, the sequence of momentary property bundles ordained by God would constitute the attributes of a given substance, either (a) as it exists across time, or (b) taken together as an aggregate across time of momentary stages of bundles. Problem: created substances cannot exist across time if occasionalism is true. This counts out the first of these consequents. But the second is promising and seems consistent with much of what Edwards says. Then a table, a tree, or a terrapin is just those stages of bundles across time that God 'treats as one' as Edwards has it. And the substance that is a table, tree, or terrapin just is the aggregate of these bundles across time. This alternative, though closer in some respects to the Lee interpretation is still distinct from what Lee actually says. On this way of thinking God simply treats numerically distinct momentary stages or bundles as one. But this still leaves no time for dispositions to be realized.
 31. The fact that the young Edwards, like many other Christian thinkers of the period, expended a considerable amount of intellectual energy in refuting the Hobbesian notion that the only intelligible view of substance is that of a material substance, such that if God is a substance, He must be a material substance, is well-known and has been rehearsed a number of times in the literature. I shall not reiterate such arguments here.
 32. Edwards is not always as clear about this as one might like. For instance, in Miscellany 267 he writes of God's continuous creation of everything including each created thought, and goes on to explain that God alone (not some other thing that has no properties) brings about all created things. At the end of this short entry he says created things are property bundles, but it is not entirely clear whether he means to refer only to created material objects – although, given what he says elsewhere, it appears this is what he means. See *YE13*, 373, and Edwards's comments on the 'excellency' of created spirits in *YE6*, 337.
 33. Compare Edwards in 'Notes on knowledge and existence', which includes the following: 'How God is as it were the only substance, or rather, the perfection and steadfastness of his knowledge, wisdom, power and will'; *YE6*, 398. Cf. 'Images of Divine Things', no. 8, where Edwards says God makes the whole material world 'a shadow of the spiritual world'. In *Typological Writings, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, XI, Wallace E. Anderson, Mason I. Lowance, & David H. Watters (eds) (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 53. See also William Wainwright's essay, 'Jonathan Edwards and the language of God', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 48 (1980), 519–530.
 34. Compare 'The Mind', entry 35 in *YE6*, 355, where Edwards concedes how difficult it is to speak consistently of the soul's relation to the brain, '[s]eeing that the brain exists only mentally'. To speak more accurately, he says, we must affirm that the brain is 'nothing but the connection of the operations of the soul with these and those modes of its own ideas, or those mental acts of the Deity, seeing that the brain exists only as an idea'. Note the way in which Edwards allows that there are created souls,

- although he conjoins this with a very strong doctrine of immediate dependence on the deity, commensurate with his endorsement of occasionalism elsewhere.
35. This does seem to mean that, in the final analysis, God is alone on Edwards's metaphysics 'talking to a reflection of himself in a mirror', as Schafer puts it; *YE13*, 49.
 36. This 'correction' of his earlier, immature endorsement of More in the direction of immaterialism has been recently discussed by Jasper Reid in 'Jonathan Edwards on space and God'.
 37. Compare Anderson's comments in *YE6*, 60–65, and Schafer's in *YE13*, 40–42, which deals with the relationship between Edwards's early writings and More.
 38. Edwards explicitly makes this cross-reference between the excerpt from 'Of Atoms' just cited and entry 26 in 'Things to be considered'. Incidentally, it should be obvious from the foregoing that the statement 'matter is not matter' strictly speaking, is simply trivially true, given idealism.
 39. God is prior to all created things because He is timelessly eternal, according to Edwards, whereas the created order is neither timeless nor everlasting in time. But on Edwards's way of thinking it would not be true to say that the creation of the world is a contingent matter, because, for Edwards, God must create a world and God must create this world. Thus, Edwards embraced pantheism, the idea that the world is the necessary product of the divine creativity. Lee is partially right in his characterization of this aspect of Edwards's thought. But space forbids a fuller exposition of this issue here. Interested readers should consult *PTJE*, chs 7–8, and William Wainwright 'Jonathan Edwards, William Rowe, and the necessity of creation', in Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (eds) *Faith, Freedom, and Responsibility*, (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996).
 40. It is an interesting question as to who this idealist occasionalism is intended for, who experiences it, and why it is important for God to produce a series of world-stages that are segued together so that action appears to continue across time. It seems to me that Edwards is clear in places like his treatise on *The End of Creation* and what it says about the concept of 'excellency' with respect to God in 'The Mind' that all this is for the greater glory of God. The whole idealist-occasionalist creation must appear to perdure in order for it to reflect the order and fittingness with which God does all things.
 41. I am grateful to Paul Helm and William Wainwright for comments on a previous draft of the paper, and Sang Hyun Lee for helpful conversation.