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A DISINTERESTED REPUBLIC: REFORM AND NEW DIVINITY THEOLOGY IN
EARLY AMERICA

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation argues for the centrality of an evangelical philosophy of disinterestedness to early American reform literature. Scholars have long considered disinterestedness to be a keyword in the study of the American Enlightenment, describing it as a civic republican ethic whereby elite white men exercise their purportedly unique capacity for rational reflection that in turn permits their entrance into politics. Yet evangelicals offered an alternative—and more inclusive—conception of the term: they theorized disinterestedness as an affective propensity for benevolence that all persons can obtain once they abandon their will in favor of God's in the conversion process. In arguing that persons of all race, gender, and class positions are capable of becoming disinterested through conversion, evangelicals were able to promote the rights of those whom the civic republican conception of disinterestedness meant to exclude: free and enslaved African Americans, women, and impoverished persons. The dissertation's first chapter traces the origins of evangelical disinterestedness to the sermons, moral philosophical treatises, and conversion narratives by "New Divinity" theologians Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Hopkins, and shows how this evangelical ethic departs from Scottish Enlightenment aesthetics and theories of sympathy. In the dissertation's

remaining three chapters, I demonstrate how marginalized early Americans employed this evangelical philosophy of disinterestedness in their reform writings—how Phillis Wheatley’s shifting conception of disinterestedness informed her decision to write against slavery in the 1770s, how Lemuel Haynes formulated an evangelical brand of republicanism that he used to protest slavery, and how Catharine Sedgwick promoted impoverished persons’ rights by integrating evangelical disinterestedness into her new Unitarian theology and philosophy of benevolence. With its emphasis on radical selflessness and devotion to God, evangelical disinterestedness allowed for marginalized early Americans to not only validate their reform philosophies as divinely ordained but also base their critique of unjust institutions like slavery entirely on others’ suffering. In attending to this alternative evangelical history of disinterestedness, the dissertation recovers a diverse set of early American writers who mobilized their theology into a crucial instrument of sociopolitical reform.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my grandmothers, Angelina Lombardo and Janice Monescalchi, and my aunt Johanna Lombardo.

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Introduction

Reform in the Evangelical Public

For nearly half a century, Benjamin Franklin could not stop writing about a book that he would ultimately never publish. Before admitting in what would become the second part of his posthumously published *Autobiography* (1818) that he was too preoccupied with other work to finish this book, Franklin wrote a 3 May 1760 letter to the Scottish philosopher Henry Home, Lord Kames in which he expressed his desire to publish “a little Work for the Benefit of Youth” that he would call *The Art of Virtue*.¹ Envisioning this book as a didactic tool that not only young persons but also non-Christians could learn from, Franklin told Lord Kames: “Christians are directed to have *Faith in Christ*, . . . But all Men cannot have Faith in Christ; . . . *Art of Virtue* may therefore be of great Service to those who have not Faith, and come in Aid of the weak Faith of others. . . It is, in short to be adapted for universal use” (27). As much as he wanted this book to reach a wide audience, Franklin did not actually think that everyone could benefit from reading *The Art of Virtue* because he did not believe that all persons could become virtuous. Hence, when recalling what he wanted his now-abandoned book project to accomplish in his *Autobiography*, Franklin said that he wanted it to help found “an united Party for Virtue, by forming the Virtuous and good Men of all Nations into a regular Body, . . . My Ideas at that time were, that the Sect should be begun & spread at

¹ In his *Autobiography*, Franklin said that a “Succession of Employs” got in the way of his “Intention of writing & publishing” this “*great and extensive Project*.” Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography, Poor Richard, and Later Writings*, ed. J.A. Leo Lemay (New York: The Library of America, 1997), 652, 26. All citations of Franklin’s writings will come from this volume and will hereafter be cited parenthetically by page number. For scholarly engagements with Franklin’s claim that he abandoned this project because he was too busy with other work, see Christopher McClure, “Learning from Franklin’s Mistakes: Self-Interest Rightly Understood in the *Autobiography*,” *The Review of Politics* 76.1 (2014): 81-86; Douglas Anderson, “The Art of Virtue,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Carla Mulford (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 31-32.

first among young and single Men only” (655-656). This group’s selective admission policy is based on the premise that not all persons are capable of exhibiting virtuous behavior. Only “young and single Men” who have already proven themselves to be virtuous can join this group, and only these established men can “search among [their] Acquaintance[s] for ingenuous well-disposed Youths, to whom with prudent Caution the Scheme should be gradually communicated” (656). By formulating this “Sect” of virtuous persons not as a universally accepting group but as a secretive and insular one, Franklin subverts the claim, articulated in his Lord Kames letter, that all persons will benefit from reading *The Art of Virtue* because all persons are capable of being virtuous.

I begin with Franklin’s ostensibly contradictory theorization of virtue via his unpublished text on the subject because it is typical of civic republican accounts of virtue in the eighteenth century. As much as republican citizens were, to use Michael Warner’s words, “called on to exercise civic virtue by placing the common good over personal interest,” these citizens were actually always fulfilling both sets of interests at the same time.² For the only persons capable of being considered “citizens,” and the only persons capable of disinterestedly caring for the “common good,” were elite white men. As Julia Stern puts it—and as Franklin demonstrates—“republican disinterestedness” may seem like an “avowedly transcendent category of judgment,” but it is “actually predicated on privilege and exclusion.”³ Thus, when he says that *The Art of Virtue* will on the one hand be a “universal[ly] use[ful]” text and on the other hand help form an exclusive party of white men, Franklin does not contradict himself. Instead, he reveals a crucial yet

² Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 76.

³ Julia Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 6.

paradoxical aspect of civic republican ideology: that a civic republican who cares for the common good actually cares only for his own private interests.

What are we to make, then, of those who were excluded from Franklin's—and civic republicanism's—understanding of virtue? My dissertation argues that these marginalized figures turned not to civic republicanism but to evangelicalism to assert themselves as virtuous persons who are capable of intervening in and commenting on sociopolitical issues. The reason that marginalized figures—women and African Americans—embraced evangelical theology is because it offered a more inclusive conception of virtue and thus of disinterestedness.⁴ According to Glenn Hendler, civic republican ideology and theories of the bourgeois public sphere—beginning with Jürgen Habermas—together theorize disinterestedness as one's propensity for rational reflection that in turn permits one's entrance into politics.⁵ Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Joanna Brooks, and Caroline Wigginton have shown, however, that these discourses' shared understanding of disinterestedness could not actually be shared among all persons: that the “features of accessibility, transparency, fluidity, and disinterest” that have come to be “associated with the bourgeois public sphere are also characteristics imagined to belong” only to “white male property owners.”⁶

⁴ Though I do not focus on Native American writers and she does not focus on evangelical disinterestedness, my analysis nevertheless extends upon Joanna Brooks' argument that early African Americans “redirected the democratizing, charismatic, and separatist energies of American evangelicalism and its powerful doctrine of rebirth into the formation of new religious communities, new theologies, and new literatures for people of color.” Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native-American Literatures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

⁵ “As in American republicanism, where the citizen acting in public was meant to disavow all private interests and act as an ‘abstract’ citizen, in forms of bourgeois publicity in general the subject is ostensibly abstract, putting aside particularizing status attributes, interests, and desires.” Glenn Hendler, *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 18.

⁶ Joanna Brooks, “The Early American Public Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 62.1 (2005): 71; Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 37. Caroline

Building upon these critics' observations that Habermasian understandings of the public sphere and civic republicanism both theorize an exclusionary version of disinterestedness, my dissertation argues for the prevalence of an alternative, evangelical conception of disinterestedness that early Americans used to describe one's moral condition as it stemmed from one's converted and not one's social status. As much as this evangelical history of disinterestedness draws upon white theologians' writings, it is mainly concerned with demonstrating how marginalized writers used their theology to not just distance themselves from or rework aspects of civic republicanism, but also, and in so doing, craft their political opinions. My dissertation thus nuances longstanding scholarly assumptions about the relationship between religion and republicanism in early America. While a series of historians from Ruth Bloch to Spencer McBride have argued that evangelical and republican modes of thought coalesced in the Revolutionary era, I more specifically posit that ministers and marginalized writers could only philosophize their own evangelical brand of republicanism—or their own mode of political participation—once they rejected disinterestedness as a strictly civic republican ethic.⁷ For where civic republicans theorized disinterestedness as elite white men's seemingly unique capacity for rational reflection, evangelicals described a disinterested person as

Wigginton has recently argued that because “republican print hinged on a masking of gender, class, and racial difference in the service of a normative formulation of the reader-citizen as male, property-owning, and white,” women created a new form of “relational publication” that “capitalized on and adapted the ineluctable intimacy of daily life” and “retained the difference that republican print sought to elide.” Caroline Wigginton, *In the Neighborhood: Women's Publication in Early America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 7-8, 9, 11.

⁷ On evangelicalism and republicanism, see Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Thomas Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Jonathan Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015); Spencer McBride, *Pulpit and Nation: Clergymen and the Politics of Revolutionary America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017).

anyone who could undergo a conversion experience, dedicate his or her will to God's, and in turn exhibit benevolence to all persons.

In line with Carrie Hyde's recent efforts to reveal the spiritual connotations of a seemingly secular and political term like "citizenship," *A Disinterested Republic* recovers an alternative, evangelical theorization of disinterestedness that pervaded the early American literary and moral imagination.⁸ In attending to this evangelical—as opposed to typically civic republican—history of disinterestedness, my dissertation is able to uncover a more diverse set of early American writers and theologians who intervened in the sociopolitical issues of their time. These ministers and marginalized writers set themselves apart from socially and financially privileged white male reformers—who, as Susan Ryan states, "enjoyed unquestioned access to civic and political participation," were "fre[e] from dependence," and so had the financial "capacity to aid others"—in that they theorize benevolence as an action that stems not from one's financial wealth or social status but from a post-conversion desire to act on behalf of God's will.⁹ And because all persons are capable of undergoing a conversion experience, these writers argue that all persons are deserving of and capable of exhibiting benevolence to others. By positing a person's converted and not class status as a precondition for benevolence, these writers encourage their readers to not only be benevolent to each other, but also recognize the dignity inherent in and promote all persons' rights, especially the rights of those who are enslaved, impoverished, and otherwise disenfranchised.

⁸ Carrie Hyde, *Civic Longing: The Speculative Origins of U.S. Citizenship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 43-84. Abram Van Engen's work similarly recovers "the religious history of a concept [such as sympathy] that has been largely been traced back to more secular roots in moral sense philosophy." Abram Van Engen, *Sympathetic Puritans: Calvinist Fellow Feeling in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.

⁹ Susan Ryan, *The Grammar of Good Intentions: Race and the Antebellum Culture of Benevolence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 7.

To trace the ways that evangelical disinterestedness influenced early Americans' benevolent actions and reform philosophies, my dissertation extends upon Michael Warner's, Jennifer Snead's, and Mark Miller's recent theorizations of the "evangelical public sphere."¹⁰ Where Warner focuses on how evangelicalism's all-embracing theory of conversion transformed print publication and circulation, I argue that early evangelical philosophies of conversion influenced the presentation of early American writers' reform philosophies, especially pertaining to enslaved and impoverished persons' rights.¹¹ The kind of evangelical public that these scholars theorize is thus a more inclusive and benevolent public than Habermas' bourgeois public sphere, which he defines "as the sphere of private people [who] come together as a public," "put reason to use," and engage in rational debate.¹² Instead of forming a public that only educated white men could join—as Habermas claims eighteenth-century English subjects did—Snead argues that evangelicals theorized a kind of public that privileges persons' affective or converted status over their intellect, that encouraged persons "to report the experience of their *souls* rather than their senses or reasons."¹³ Because they were concerned more with the

¹⁰ Warner's three Rosenbach Lectures on the evangelical public sphere will be part of *The Evangelical Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming); Jennifer Snead, "Print, Predestination, and the Public Sphere: Transatlantic Evangelical Periodicals, 1740-1745," *Early American Literature* 45.1 (2010): 93-118; Mark Miller, *Cast Down: Abjection in America, 1700-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

¹¹ Michael Warner, "Printing and Preaching—What is a Sermon?" Lecture, Rosenbach Lectures in Bibliography, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, March 23, 2009.

For more on the relationship between marginalized writers' theologies and reform politics, see Eileen Razarri Elrod, *Piety and Dissent: Race, Gender, and Biblical Rhetoric in Early American Autobiography* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008); Cedrick May, *Evangelism and Resistance in the Early Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

¹² Habermas dates the advent of the bourgeois public sphere to the early eighteenth century, when "new institutions," like "coffee houses," became "centers of criticism": places that not only "embraced the wider strata of the middle class" but also invited "critical debate" over "works of literature and art" that "soon extended to include economic and political disputes." Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, first ed. for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1989), 27, 35, 32, 33.

¹³ Snead, "Print," 100.

conversion process and its aftermath and less with the subject position of the converted person, evangelicals wound up forming a public that cared less about its members' race, gender, or class and more about their affinity with God.¹⁴

Prince Hall's Freemason Lodge is one of the better-known examples of an early American evangelical public that utilized this spiritualized conception of disinterestedness to promote benevolence among its followers. Though Hall's Lodge and Franklin's group of virtuous men resemble civic republican or Habermasian publics in their holding selective admission policies—Hall allowed only African American men and Franklin allowed only elite white men to join—it is important to note that Hall's Lodge was a more benevolent and religious institution than Franklin wanted his group to be.¹⁵ Where Franklin acknowledged that he “purposely avoided” religious doctrine when formulating his group's narrow understanding of disinterested virtue (651), Hall explicitly incorporated evangelicalism's inclusive philosophy of disinterested virtue into Masonic code. Hence, in his *Charge Delivered to the Brethren of the African Lodge* (1792), Hall argues that Masons must disinterestedly align their will with God's and, in so doing, exhibit benevolence to all persons. “I shall therefore endeavour to shew the duty of a Mason,” Hall writes, “and the first thing is, that he believes in one supreme

¹⁴ Snead notes that early evangelical periodicals printed not just white male accounts of conversion, but also “firsthand, emotional accounts of the experiences of the individual souls of women and children and the undereducated, for the comfort of other readers' souls steeped in doubt as to their own state of election.” Ibid., 95. In focusing more on the conditions of persons' souls, conversion narratives, according to Miller, also “enabled the publicity of the colonial dispossessed.” Miller, *Cast Down*, 25. Because Habermas argues that literature “provided the training ground for a critical public” to reflect upon itself, it makes sense that he turns to *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* to discern the rise of the bourgeois public sphere in eighteenth-century England, and that Warner, Snead, and Miller turn to evangelical texts to illuminate the rise of an evangelical public sphere in eighteenth-century America. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, 29.

¹⁵ Brooks has described Hall's Lodge as a “black counterpublic,” as a space where “disenfranchised persons [can] reclaim a measure of subjectivity” and so “stag[e] a social and discursive challenge to the power of the white male property owners who make up civil society.” Brooks, “The Early American Public Sphere,” 70.

Being . . . The next thing is love and benevolence to all the whole family of mankind, as God's make and creation."¹⁶

Like the evangelical theologian Jonathan Edwards before him, Hall argues that the reason all persons are deserving of benevolence is because God created and loves "the whole family of mankind." Yet Hall's *Charge* sets itself apart from earlier evangelical texts like Edwards' *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765) in that it recognizes the sociopolitical significance of its philosophy of disinterested virtue. In other words, Edwards may have used his text to argue that virtuous persons need to exhibit benevolence to "Being in general," but he importantly did not use such a philosophy of virtue toward reformist ends.¹⁷ Though he condemned the slave trade—but not chattel slavery—in a draft letter that was discovered in the end of the twentieth century, Edwards never explicitly encouraged his readers, in any of his writings, to exhibit benevolence to all persons, even the more marginalized members of society.¹⁸ Like Franklin, Edwards advocated an inclusive theory of virtue but did not actually believe that all persons are deserving of benevolence or capable of exhibiting virtuous behavior.

Hall thus departs from Edwards and Franklin in that he used his writings to argue that persons can only be considered virtuous or disinterested if they not only are

¹⁶ Prince Hall, "A Charge Delivered to the Brethren of the African Lodge," in *"Face Zion Forward": First Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785-1798*, ed. Joanna Brooks and John Saillant (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 192.

¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 8: Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 540. I will hereafter cite all of the writings that come from this volume of Edwards' *Works* parenthetically as *WJE* 8, followed by the page number. I am here marking my agreement with Noll's argument that "although Edwards doubtless knew by th[e] time he wrote *True Virtue* about the crucial place of 'virtue' in republican theory, his understanding of that critical term was thoroughly and exclusively religious." Noll, *America's God*, 75-76.

¹⁸ Kenneth Minkema, "Jonathan Edwards on Slavery and the Slave Trade," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54.4 (1997): 823-834. For more on how Edwards did not but his theological heirs did use his philosophy of virtue to protest slavery, see Kenneth Minkema and Harry Stout, "The Edwardsean Tradition and the Antislavery Debate, 1740-1865," *The Journal of American History* 92.1 (2005): 47-74.

benevolent to all persons, but also champion disenfranchised persons' rights and promote racial equality. In his *Charge*, Hall writes:

if I love a man for the sake of the image of God which is on him, I must love all, for he made all, and upholds all, and we are dependant upon him for all we do enjoy and expect to enjoy in this world and that which is to come.—Therefore he will help and assist all his fellow-men in distress, let them be of what colour or nation they may, yea even our enemies, much more a brother Mason.¹⁹

The reason that Hall discourages persons from focusing on persons' "colour or nation" is because he believes that such a focus forecloses one's ability to recognize that all persons are related through God and so deserving of benevolence. To become a member of Hall's Lodge, then, one must vow to be disinterested: one must have a love of God or "eternal life" that in turn allows one to adequately "love the whole family of mankind," but especially those "fellow-men in distress."²⁰ Evangelical disinterestedness thus precedes benevolent action: it is what allows for persons to not only alleviate others' suffering but also promote racial equality.

In Hall's formulation, disinterestedness is at once an ontological condition and an ethical stance. It is ontological in the sense that it characterizes a person's existence (someone who has dedicated him or herself to God through conversion) and ethical in that it describes that person's actions (someone who, because of their affinity with God, exhibits benevolence to all persons, regardless of subject position). The four chapters that follow this introduction will continue to demonstrate how this evangelical conception of disinterestedness mobilized early Americans', like Hall's, political opinions and reform philosophies. But before turning to these figures' writings—and outlining the content of the dissertation's four chapters—I will not only analyze the sermons and theological

¹⁹ Hall, "Charge," 192.

²⁰ Ibid., 195, 192.

treatises of the two “New Divinity” theologians who initiated this evangelical philosophy of disinterestedness, Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Hopkins, but also demonstrate how their theory of disinterestedness aligns with and departs from other Enlightenment philosophers’—Immanuel Kant’s and Francis Hutcheson’s—understanding of the term.

I. Defining (Evangelical) Disinterestedness

Although it is now most commonly used to describe someone who is apathetic about or *uninterested* in an issue, *disinterested* did not necessarily hold this connotation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.²¹ Indeed, most early Americans believed that *disinterestedness*, to use Megan Marshall’s words, was “a term of the highest approbation” in that it described someone who was able to vacate self-serving interests, be impartial, and care for others’ interests over one’s own.²² Hence, in *The Story of Henry and Anne* (1791), Ann Eliza Bleecker has the tale’s protagonist Henry associate “disinterestedness” with a woman who did not let her personal grief prevent her from caring for her family’s needs. Upon visiting with the woman in the tale’s second part, Henry says that her actions inspired him to be less preoccupied with his own precarious financial condition and be more devoted to his family: “I presume . . . this is the very same lovely EMMA whose noble disinterestedness made me blush at my want of fortitude, and in effect saved my family from ruin.”²³ In describing Emma as compassionate and

²¹ See “disinterested, *adj.*,” *OED Online* (2019), def. 1.

²² See “disinterested, *adj.*,” *OED Online* (2019), def. 2. In her biography of the Peabody sisters (Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Mary Peabody Mann, and Sophia Peabody Hawthorne), Megan Marshall notes that *disinterested* was one of the supposedly “archaic words” that “opened up the Peabody sisters’ world” to her: that it is “virtually always misused today when it is used at all,” but that early Americans consistently utilized and conceived of it “as a term of highest approbation . . . one in which acting without self-interest was a supreme goal.” Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), xix.

²³ Ann Eliza Bleecker, “The Story of Henry and Anne. Founded on Fact,” in *The Posthumous Works of Ann Eliza Bleecker, in Prose and Verse. To which is added, a Collection of Essays, Prose and Poetical, by*

not apathetic, and in attributing her disinterestedness to her affective condition and not her intellect, Bleecker upholds Emma as an exemplar of evangelical disinterestedness who is concerned with others' wellbeing over her own.

Though Bleecker and other early American writers frequently used *disinterestedness* to describe a person's morality and actions, scholars have focused less on the term's ethical connotations and more on its centrality to Enlightenment philosophies of aesthetic experience.²⁴ Perhaps the most famous aesthetic theory of disinterestedness derives from Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790). In this text, Kant argues that persons can only experience pleasure from an object if they are a disinterested or impartial observer. He writes, "The *agreeable* is what GRATIFIES us; the *beautiful* what simply PLEASES us; the *good* what is ESTEEMED (*approved*), i.e. that on which we set objective worth. . . Of all these three kinds of delight, that of taste in the beautiful may be said to be the one and only disinterested and *free* delight."²⁵ If persons approve of or are gratified by an object—find it to be "good" or "agreeable"—then they cannot help but have "an interest in their object."²⁶ According to Kant, those who are interested in an object strive to conceptually understand, claim ownership of, or use that object to satisfy individual desires.²⁷ Those who take pleasure in the beautiful, however,

Margaretta V. Faugeres, ed. Margaretta Faugeres (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1793), 103. Bleecker's daughter, Margaretta Faugeres, originally printed this tale, and some of her mother's poetry, in *The New York Magazine* in 1791.

²⁴ For more on eighteenth century aesthetic disinterestedness, see Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20.2 (1961): 131-143. Miles Rind extends upon Stolnitz in Miles Rind, "The Concept of Disinterestedness in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40.1 (2002): 67-87.

²⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. by James Creed Meredith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 41.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷ "Now, that a judgment on an object by which its agreeableness is affirmed, expresses an interest in it, is evident from the fact that through sensation it provokes a desire for similar objects"; "To deem something good, I must always know what sort of a thing the object is intended to be, i.e. I must have a concept of it." *Ibid.*, 38, 39.

are without self-seeking motivations: they experience a “merely contemplative” kind of pleasure in the object itself, which “does not bring about an interest in the object” or think about its potential utility (it is “irrespective of its use or of any end”).²⁸ For Kant, to be disinterested, one must not have any desire for or because of an object. Instead, one must value and take pleasure in the object as a thing in the world that exists independently of personal desire.

Embedded within Kant’s aesthetic understanding of disinterestedness, then, is an ethics. For it is through encouraging persons to appreciate and take pleasure in an object’s beauty that Kant also discourages persons from indulging in solipsistic desires. By arguing that self-centered persons cannot find pleasure in objects or other persons, Kant aligns his theory of disinterested pleasure with the evangelical theologian Samuel Hopkins, who, in *An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness* (1773), similarly contends that persons must abandon their own personal inclinations before they can experience pleasure. In contrast to Kant, however, Hopkins posits that such a disinterested condition can only be achieved once one undergoes a conversion experience and aligns one’s will with God’s. He writes, “So he, who, in the exercise of holy love, pursues the glory of God and the highest interest and happiness of his kingdom, which includes the greatest good of his fellow-creatures, pursues the best, the most important interest, and has the most noble, refined pleasure in the exercise of this affection.”²⁹ Because disinterested persons work entirely on behalf of God’s will, the pleasure they “experience” is routed through God and so bolsters what is divine and not what is personal. Hence, this

²⁸ Ibid., 53, 77.

²⁹ Samuel Hopkins, “An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness,” in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 3, ed. Edwards Amasa Park (Boston: Doctrinal Tract Society, 1854), 30-31. I will hereafter cite Hopkins’ text parenthetically by page number.

“refined” form of pleasure does not validate one’s individual interests or remind one’s self of one’s individual greatness: it “mortifies”—and does not in any way enrich—self-serving thoughts. “The greater pleasure he takes in helping [others],” Hopkins writes, “the more disinterested are his exertions and conduct, and the more is self-love counteracted and mortified” (31). As pleasure overtakes the benevolent person’s affective state, it negates the sensations that typically experience pleasure and so further contributes to the process of self-erosion initiated by conversion. Because they have already vacated their will in favor of God’s, disinterested persons cannot experience pleasure of their own accord: they understand that pleasure can only be experienced vicariously through God.

Though both of their texts argue that only disinterested persons can adequately experience pleasure, Hopkins’ *True Holiness* departs from Kant’s third *Critique* not just because it is a theological treatise but also because it offers an exclusively ethical and not aesthetic theory of disinterestedness. The reason that Hopkins distanced himself from aesthetic theory in *True Holiness* is because *The Nature of True Virtue*, a text that Hopkins edited and published for his mentor, Jonathan Edwards, after his 1758 death, was chastised for its conflating ethics and aesthetics—for arguing that to question “what is the nature of true *virtue*?” is “the same as to inquire, what that is which renders any habit, disposition, or exercise of the heart truly *beautiful*?” (*WJE* 8, 539).³⁰ Hence,

³⁰ One of Edwards’ harshest critiques comes from William Hart, *Remarks on President Edwards’s Dissertations Concerning the Nature of True Virtue* (New Haven: T. and S. Green, 1771). In a 5 December 1759 letter to Thomas Foxcroft, Hopkins says that Edwards did not publish *True Virtue* in his lifetime because he “intended to write it over again before it went to the press.” Samuel Hopkins, “Appendix,” in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 1, ed. Edwards Amasa Park (Boston: Doctrinal Tract Society, 1854), 265. Upon Edwards’ death in 1758, however, Sarah Pierpont Edwards followed “verbal directions given to her by Mr. Edwards in his life time” and entrusted Hopkins to go through, edit, and publish her husband’s remaining manuscripts, including *True Virtue* (which would appear as the second part of Edwards’ *Two*

Hopkins chose not to focus on Edwards' aesthetic philosophy of virtue and to instead clarify Edwards' assertion that "True virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to Being in general" (*WJE* 8, 540). Hopkins writes, "Love to being in general is obedience to the law of God, commanding us to love God and our fellow-creatures; for these are being in general, and comprehend the whole of being" (69). For Edwards and Hopkins, "Being in general" is an all-inclusive category: it includes God and humanity because "it cannot," according to Hopkins, "from its very nature, be limited to any particular sort or circle of beings, but for the same reason it loves one, it loves all" (70). And because God is "the *head of* [this] system," Edwards contends that all virtuous actions must be done with God in mind, "that true virtue does primarily and most essentially consist in a supreme love to God; and that where this is wanting, there can be no true virtue" (*WJE* 8, 544). A virtuous person must, therefore, be a converted person. For if one does not, through conversion, abandon one's individual will and allow for a "supreme love to God" to guide one's actions, then one will be unable to demonstrate benevolence to all surrounding beings and so will not be deemed virtuous.

Though one must relinquish individual interests before one is able to properly demonstrate benevolence to others, this does not necessarily mean that the individual self vanishes entirely from Edwards' and Hopkins' theory of disinterestedness. As Hopkins argues in *True Holiness*, persons cannot help but love themselves as a part of the "Being in general" category: "He who loves the whole, loves every part of the whole; therefore must love himself, and seek his own happiness, as he is included in general being. . . in loving his neighbor, he loves himself also, because he cannot love his neighbor as part of

Dissertations in 1765). Samuel Hopkins, *Sketches of the Life of the Late Rev. Samuel Hopkins*, ed. Stephen West (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1805), 57.

the whole, and not love himself also as such” (23). Because all persons are “part of the whole,” one cannot help but care for one’s self when one is in the process of caring for others. The only way that individual interests can be condemned, then, is if they only aim to fulfill individual goals. Hence, in his *Charity Contrary to a Selfish Spirit* (1738, pub. 1852) sermon, Edwards argues that self-love is only problematic when it infringes upon persons’ ability to love God and others, when the “other-love” of divinity does not “restrain and regulate its [self-love’s] influence” (*WJE* 8, 256).³¹ He writes, “Self-love may thus become inordinate in its influence by its being comparatively too great, either by love to God and fellow creatures being too small, . . . or by . . . their having no divine love in their hearts, as it is with natural persons” (*WJE* 8, 256-257). Though it is not a natural propensity, disinterestedness is of divinity, and it can come to inhabit one’s soul—and so motivate one’s actions—once one vacates individual interests and emulates God’s benevolence.

III. Disinterestedness from Edwards to Stowe

While developing their evangelical conception of disinterestedness, Edwards and Hopkins could not help but engage with, complicate, and borrow from other discourses that were similarly preoccupied with discerning how exactly persons could exhibit disinterested behavior. For instance, Edwards in *True Virtue* explicitly references Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Francis Hutcheson’s theory of virtue, as it assists him in positing that persons can only truly appreciate an object or perform moral actions once

³¹ In *True Holiness*, Hopkins similarly distinguishes between “a proper regard to ourselves” and “self-love,” arguing that the former is “not self-love, but real benevolence to the whole, and respects ourselves as part of the whole only” (27). Those who engage in “self-love,” however, “see[k] to advance self only, and subordinat[e] every thing to this, and therefore will not consent that self should be subordinated to any thing else, or have any rival” (26-27). Persons can love themselves, but such loving can only happen if it is in accordance with—and does not in any way infringe upon—“the good of the whole.”

they remove what Hutcheson terms “the Obstacles from *Self-Love*” and inhabit a disinterested condition.³² Like Edwards and Hopkins after him, Hutcheson contends that actions lose their independently benevolent quality if the person performing such an action has selfish intentions: if that person is benevolent not because they are concerned for others’ wellbeing but because they want to selfishly obtain pleasure from their seemingly benevolent interaction. Hence, Hutcheson writes that we cannot “be *truly virtuous*, if we intend only to obtain the Pleasure which arises from *Benevolence*, without the *Love of others*: Nay, this very Pleasure is founded on our being conscious of *disinterested Love to others*, as the *Spring* of our Actions.”³³ For Hutcheson and Kant, as for Edwards and Hopkins, we can only adequately demonstrate “*disinterestedness Love to others*” once we allow for this more selfless and benevolent disposition to overpower our selfishness.

While part of the dissertation’s first chapter more explicitly details how such an opposition to self-love influenced Edwards’ and Hopkins’ respective theories of virtue and disinterestedness, it is nevertheless important to note here, before summarizing the dissertation’s four chapters, that Edwards and Hopkins do not exactly align themselves with Hutcheson. Indeed, the evangelical theologians and the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher represent two sides of an ever-continuous debate over whether virtue is an innate or an acquired quality.³⁴ As I argue in the dissertation’s fourth chapter, this debate carried over into the antebellum era with the advent of Unitarian theology, for as much as

³² Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry Into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, 5th ed. (London: R. Ware, J. and P. Knapton, T. and T. Longman, C. Hitch and L. Hawes, J. Hodges, J. and J. Rivington, and J. Ward, 1753), 274.

³³ *Ibid.*, 201.

³⁴ For more on Edwards’ engagement with earlier moral philosophers like Hutcheson, see Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought and its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

theologians like William Ellery Channing upheld evangelical disinterestedness as a model ethical stance, they still rejected evangelicalism's belief in the Calvinist doctrine of original sin. Edwards thus departs from Hutcheson before and Channing after him in arguing that persons are not naturally benevolent creatures. While Edwards believes that persons can only obtain a benevolent disposition after they have been regenerated by God's grace, Hutcheson posits that "all men have naturally self-love as well as kind affections."³⁵ Though persons are as capable of benevolence as they are of selfishness, this does not preclude these two dispositions from being at odds with each other. Hence, as discussed above, Hutcheson argues that only disinterested persons can adequately perform benevolent actions, that "If there be any real *Good-will* or *Kindness* at all, it must be *disinterested*; for the most useful Action imaginable loses all Appearance of *Benevolence*, as soon as we discern that it only flowed from *Self-Love* or *Interest*."³⁶ Edwards and Hutcheson may not agree as to the methods by which persons can obtain or cultivate their disinterested condition, but they together argue that any action that stems from self-love is not a benevolent one.

In the dissertation's first chapter, I continue to demonstrate how Edwards' philosophy of benevolence not only departs from and relates to Scottish Enlightenment understandings of virtue, but also anticipates Hopkins' evangelical ethic of disinterested benevolence. Scholars have already discussed the ways that Edwards' *The Nature of True Virtue* and his *Life of David Brainerd* (1749) informed Hopkins' evangelical ethics. This chapter, however, positions Edwards' Great Awakening writings—especially his texts that theorize conversion and recount others' conversion experiences—as precursors to

³⁵ Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections. With Illustrations Upon the Moral Sense*, 3rd ed. (Glasgow: Robert and Andrew Foulis, 1769), 251.

³⁶ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 136.

Hopkinsian disinterested benevolence. I turn to Jonathan Edwards' texts about conversion as well as Sarah Pierpont Edwards' posthumously published account of her conversion experience, in order to show that these texts do more than just detail persons' spiritual transformations: they theorize disinterested benevolence as an ethical behavior that persons can practice only after they have atoned for original sin and aligned their will with God's through the conversion process.

Where the first chapter traces the influence of Edwardsean conversion narratives on Hopkins' theology, the dissertation's second chapter demonstrates how Edwards' and Hopkins' evangelical understanding of virtue and disinterestedness informed the African American poet Phillis Wheatley's stance on slavery. While valuing Wheatley as a complex theological thinker whose theory of benevolence changed over time, the chapter also considers her poetry in conjunction with the writings of one of her most ardent supporters and frequent correspondents: Samuel Hopkins. Though Hopkins is one of the first theologians to theorize disinterested benevolence, Wheatley too occupies a privileged place in the history of evangelical disinterestedness, as she applied this evangelical ethic to her antislavery politics before Hopkins did the same. While scholars often consider her to be curiously reticent about the horrors of slavery, I argue that Wheatley used evangelical disinterestedness to formulate a critique of slavery that was based entirely on other African persons' and not her own suffering.

Expanding upon this claim that evangelical disinterestedness informed late eighteenth-century antislavery rhetoric, the dissertation's third chapter turns to African American minister Lemuel Haynes' sermons and treatises and Timothy Dwight's poetry and sermons. I claim that these minister-poets, like Wheatley, were among the first

American writers to not only utilize evangelical disinterestedness in their critique of slavery, but also formulate an evangelical brand of republicanism via a heretofore under-theorized genre: the republican sermon. In departure from civic republican ideology—which, as discussed above, encouraged virtuous persons to set aside their individual interests so as to work on behalf of the general (elite white male) public’s interests—Haynes and Dwight believed that persons can only be deemed virtuous after they have emulated God’s will through conversion and worked to assuage others’ pained conditions. Evangelical theology thus assisted Haynes and Dwight in arguing that one’s virtuous status depended not on one’s ability to satisfy the majority’s interests but on one’s ability to care for and alleviate others’—and especially enslaved persons’—suffering.

After analyzing how evangelical writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century used this philosophy of disinterestedness in their antislavery texts and their evangelical theories of republicanism, the dissertation’s fourth chapter demonstrates the influence of evangelical disinterestedness on Unitarian writings about urban poverty in the 1820s and 1830s. I argue that though the Unitarian novelist and short fiction writer Catharine Maria Sedgwick distanced herself from the evangelical theology of her childhood, she still incorporated evangelical disinterestedness into her new Unitarian theology and philosophy of benevolence. In addition to discussing Sedgwick’s didactic fiction, the chapter reads the sermons of one of Sedgwick’s correspondents, who studied under Hopkins and was one of the founders of Unitarianism: William Ellery Channing. As Sedgwick and Channing were delineating their new Unitarian theology, the United States market economy experienced a series of financial crises that would culminate in

the Panic of 1837. Sedgwick's and Channing's support of and involvement in the Unitarian poverty relief efforts that formed in response to these financial panics ultimately caused them to write about impoverished persons' humanity and expose the cruelty of such persons' suffering. In their writings on urban poverty more generally and these poverty relief projects more specifically, Sedgwick and Channing argued that persons can only be deemed virtuous if they disinterestedly care for and recognize the humanity in all persons, regardless of their spiritual or financial status.

Like Sedgwick and Channing before her, Harriet Beecher Stowe distanced herself from her family's evangelical theology but still believed that disinterested benevolence was an efficient method by which persons could alleviate others' suffering. In the dissertation's epilogue, I argue that though Stowe resembles Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and John Greenleaf Whittier in her praising of Hopkins' benevolent theology and antislavery efforts, she nevertheless used her novel *The Minister's Wooing* (1859)—which features Hopkins as the protagonist's love interest—to advance a critique of disinterested benevolence. The issue that Stowe ultimately had with disinterested benevolence, which she dramatizes in the novel's final scene, is that its promoting of intense selflessness actually hinders a person's ability to achieve individual happiness. Stowe thus departs from the other writers discussed in this dissertation in that she used her fiction to analyze both the shortcomings and the benefits of practicing disinterested benevolence.

In recovering this evangelical understanding of disinterestedness, my dissertation also recovers the ways in which early Americans of various subject positions used their theology to respond to and intervene in the sociopolitical issues of their time. With its

emphasis on divine power and human fallibility, evangelical disinterestedness allowed for persons to highlight their conversion status and, in so doing, formulate their reform philosophies—and desire to alleviate human suffering—as divinely ordained. Evangelical disinterestedness was, therefore, especially useful to marginalized writers like Phillis Wheatley, as it permitted her to downplay her own pained condition and so critique unjust institutions like slavery on the basis of others’ suffering. Yet in the decades after Wheatley published her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), early Americans did more than merely encourage persons to disinterestedly value others’ needs over their own. Indeed, at the turn of nineteenth century, Americans started organizing church-sponsored charitable societies and initiatives—such as the New Haven Benevolent Societies and the Unitarian Ministry at Large, discussed in chapters three and four respectively—that further encouraged persons to attend to impoverished, enslaved, and otherwise disenfranchised persons’ needs. But before we can understand the relationship between evangelical disinterestedness and early American reform efforts, we must first recognize the influence that Jonathan and Sarah Edwards’ philosophies of conversion had on the development of this alternative, evangelical philosophy of disinterestedness.

Chapter 1

Disinterestedness and the Edwardsean Conversion Narrative

Jonathan Edwards' *Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd* (1749) purportedly uses Brainerd's own words to tell his life story.¹ Upon comparing Brainerd's surviving diary with Edwards' *Life of Brainerd*, however, readers will recognize that Edwards not only altered but also deleted many of Brainerd's sentences. For instance, the first part of Edwards' *Life of Brainerd* omits what Brainerd intended to be the diary's introductory preface: "For my own private satisfaction, etc., (may it likewise be for the glory of God) I make the following remarks upon the various scenes of my life" (*WJE* 7, 100-101). The reason that Edwards did not allow for this sentence to begin his *Life of Brainerd* is because he believed that Christians could not have self-serving interests: in *Religious Affections* (1746), he claimed that "The Scripture knows of no such true Christians, as of a sordid, selfish, cross and contentious spirit."² To praise Brainerd as an exemplary Christian, and show that his life was "agreeable to the dictates of right reason and the holy Word of God," as he says in the *Life of Brainerd*'s preface, Edwards could not allow for any discussion of Brainerd's supposed selfish behavior to make its way into his published text (*WJE* 7, 91).

¹ In the "Author's Preface," Edwards writes, "'Tis fit, the reader should be aware, that what Mr. Brainerd wrote in his diary, out of which the following account of his life is chiefly taken, was written only for his private use, and not to get honor and applause in the world, nor with any design that the world should ever see it." Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 7: The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Pettit (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 96. I will hereafter cite this volume of Edwards' writings parenthetically as *WJE* 7, followed by the page number.

² Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2: Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 356. While George Marsden argues that Edwards conceived of the *Life of Brainerd* as "*Religious Affections* in the form of a spiritual biography," David Grigg posits that because Brainerd read Edwards' text, he may have on his own used it to theorize his religious experiences. George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 331; David Grigg, *The Lives of David Brainerd: The Making of an American Evangelical Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 134. Brainerd said that he "Read Mr. Edwards on the *Affections*" in a 1747 letter to his brother John (*WJE* 7, 497, 500).

As if deleting all of the passages in which Brainerd discussed his “own private satisfaction” didn’t do enough to bolster Brainerd as a selfless figure, Edwards, in both the *Life of Brainerd*’s preface and appendix, made a point to describe him as someone who cared for others’ interests over his own and did not seek his own pleasure.³ In the “Author’s Preface,” Edwards said that “Mr. Brainerd’s religion constantly disposed him to a most mean thought of himself, . . . to universal benevolence, meekness, and in honor to prefer others, and to treat all with kindness and respect” (*WJE* 7, 93-94). And in the “Appendix,” Edwards similarly attributed Brainerd’s benevolent condition to his religiosity. He described Brainerd as someone who was “carried beyond all private and selfish views! being animated by a pure love to Christ, and earnest desire of his glory, and a disinterested affection to the souls of mankind” (*WJE* 7, 532). In this passage, Edwards posits that Brainerd’s affections are “disinterested,” not because he is apathetic about or uninterested in the surrounding world, but because he does not let “private and selfish views” prohibit him from caring for the “souls of mankind.” Scholars have long recognized that Edwards’ student, Samuel Hopkins, was one of the first American writers to theorize disinterestedness as an evangelical ethical term: to conceive of disinterestedness as a converted person’s desire to care for others and alleviate their suffering. Given that this passage links Brainerd’s “disinterested affection to the souls of mankind” with his “pure love of Christ,” however, it seems that Edwards in his *Life of Brainerd* developed his own philosophy of “disinterested benevolence” before Hopkins did the same.

³ I am here marking my agreement with David Grigg, who argues that Edwards added the preface and appendix because he was “not content with letting the text speak for itself” and “had to be sure that the lessons of the *Life of Brainerd*, both positive and negative, were clearly understood.” Grigg, *The Lives of David Brainerd*, 138.

As I outlined in this dissertation's introduction, Hopkins, in *An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness* (1773), acknowledged that Edwards' philosophy of virtue influenced his evangelical ethical philosophy of disinterested benevolence. Yet the text that Hopkins cited as influential was not Edwards' *Life of Brainerd* but *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765): one of the many texts that Sarah Pierpont Edwards gave Hopkins to edit and publish on her husband's behalf after his 1758 death. In the preface to *True Holiness*, Hopkins describes how his philosophy of virtue relates to Edwards': "President Edwards, in his dissertation on the nature of true virtue, has given the same account of holiness for substance . . . All I can pretend to, as an improvement on him, is to have explained some things more fully than he did, and more particularly stated the opposition of holiness to self-love."⁴ Though Hopkins only discussed *True Virtue*'s influence on *True Holiness*, Joseph Conforti has shown that *True Holiness*' theory of disinterested benevolence was also informed by Edwards' *Life of Brainerd*: that "Hopkins incorporated Brainerd's experiential religion into his doctrine of disinterested benevolence" and allowed for Brainerd's "self-immolating piety" to "shape [the] self-denying spiritual sensibility" of his theology.⁵ Extending upon Conforti, this chapter positions Edwards' Great Awakening sermons, conversion narratives, and texts that theorize conversion as precursors to the evangelical ethical philosophies of disinterestedness that early American ministers (from Samuel Hopkins to William Ellery Channing) and marginalized writers (from Phillis Wheatley to Harriet Beecher Stowe) developed in the decades after Edwards' death.

⁴ Samuel Hopkins, "An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness," in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 3, ed. Edwards Amasa Park (Boston: Doctrinal Tract Society, 1854), 6-7.

⁵ Joseph Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 76, 78.

Though Patricia Caldwell published her seminal study on *The Puritan Conversion Narrative* (1983) more than three decades ago, scholars continue to be preoccupied with the conversion narrative's influence on early American life and writing.⁶ In the last decade, Sarah Rivett, Abram Van Engen, and Mark Miller have, respectively, recognized the conversion narrative's centrality to the development of empirical science, to theories of sympathy and community, and to ideas about sexuality and public speech in early America.⁷ What has been under-examined by scholars, however, is the ethics inherent in evangelical theories of conversion. Hence, in this chapter, I argue that the conversion narratives and texts about conversion written by Edwards and his "Edwardsean" or "New Divinity" associates need to be read not just as accounts of persons' spiritual and ontological transformation but also as proto-ethical treatises. For as much as conversion narratives detail the process through which persons become converted, they also theorize how persons should act after their conversion experience.

Edwards' philosophy of conversion inevitably borrows from earlier Puritan theorizations of the conversion experience. Rivett argues that Edwards resembles earlier Puritan divines, such as John Eliot and Cotton Mather, in that they similarly appealed to natural philosophical modes of observation when cataloguing others' conversion experiences.⁸ Miller, however, notes that Edwardsean and Puritan philosophies of conversion are not entirely compatible: that "Edwards departed from seventeenth-century

⁶ Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁷ Sarah Rivett, *The Science of the Soul in Colonial New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Abram Van Engen, *Sympathetic Puritans: Calvinist Fellow Feeling in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Mark Miller, *Cast Down: Abjection in America, 1700-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

⁸ Rivett posits that they all "implement[ed] a technique of observing souls in their native habitat and culling empirical data across a diverse human population parallel to that practiced by . . . natural philosophers." Rivett, *The Science of the Soul*, 277-278.

Puritan models of conversion by rejecting the methodical, preparationist model of ‘particular steps’ and instead grounding conversion in a sensational experience of affect and sentiment.”⁹ By writing about the spontaneous experience of “affective conversion, rather than the longer process of sanctification,” Edwards is able to focus not just on how persons become converted, but also on what persons do after they have been touched by God’s grace.¹⁰ Rather than be preoccupied with whether one’s conversion process adheres to a particular formula, Edwards believes that one should focus more on sustaining one’s newfound, converted condition by exhibiting benevolence to all persons.

But before turning to Edwards’ conversion narratives and texts that explicitly theorize conversion, this chapter’s first section shows how Edwards’ philosophy of the human will influenced Hopkins’ belief that persons can only demonstrate disinterested benevolence after they have atoned for original sin through the regeneration and conversion process. In the chapter’s second section, I posit that Edwards’ Great Awakening writings—particularly his sermons on charity and his treatises on conversion—assisted Hopkins, not only in theorizing disinterested benevolence as antithetical to self-love, but also in differentiating his philosophy of disinterestedness from Adam Smith’s theory of sympathy. The chapter’s third section focuses on the female conversion narratives that Edwards collected in his Great Awakening treatises, and the fourth section deals with Sarah Pierpont Edwards’ account of her own conversion experience. In focusing on the genre of the conversion narrative, these two sections challenge the longstanding claim that Hopkins’ doctrine of disinterested benevolence is informed entirely by Edwards’ moral philosophical texts (such as *True Virtue*). Because

⁹ Miller, *Cast Down*, 26.

¹⁰ Ibid.

they deal less with the process by which persons come to inhabit God's will and more with the charitable behavior that persons demonstrate after they have been spiritually transformed, the Edwardsean conversion narrative helps Hopkins uphold disinterested benevolence as an ethical behavior that persons can practice only after they have been converted in order to maintain their converted status. By arguing for the centrality of Edwards' accounts of female conversion and Sarah Edwards' conversion narrative to Hopkinsian disinterested benevolence, this chapter locates female religious experience at the start of a tradition of American writers who developed an evangelical philosophy of disinterestedness to incite sociopolitical reform.¹¹

I. The Regenerated Will

In 1793, Samuel Hopkins published his two volume *System of Doctrines*, which scholars consider to be "the first comprehensive, systematic theological work published in New England since Samuel Willard's *Compleat Body of Divinity* in 1726."¹² Each of the *System's* chapters is further divided into sections that extrapolate upon particular tenets of Hopkins' theology. For instance, the *System's* twelfth chapter, "The Application

¹¹ Sandra Gustafson similarly focuses on Sarah Edwards' conversion narrative and Jonathan Edwards' accounts of female conversion but argues that these texts helped him establish his ministerial authority: "Edwards's pulpit performances sought to evoke and assume the affective spiritual potential inherent in women's speech. Shaping and interpreting feminine speech, he controlled its parodic, subversive potential, its power to disrupt gender hierarchies. At the same time, he claimed its affective impact as his own." Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2000), 51-52. Though no scholar has discussed Edwards' female conversion narratives in the context of Hopkins' theology, at least two scholars have suggested that Sarah Edwards influenced Hopkins' philosophy of disinterested benevolence. Stephen Post writes, "Hopkins' thought on disinterested benevolence is best understood in relation to a piety of resignation evidenced by his spiritual mother, Sarah Pierpont Edwards, Jonathan's wife." Stephen Post, "Disinterested Benevolence: An American Debate over the Nature of Christian Love," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 14.2 (1986): 362. Though she cites no evidence to back up her claim, Ann Douglas posits that "Hopkins apparently got this idea [of disinterested benevolence] from Jonathan Edwards' wife, Sarah Pierpont." Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 362n6.

¹² Peter Jauhiainen, "Samuel Hopkins and Hopkinsianism," in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology*, eds. Oliver Crisp and Douglas Sweeney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 107.

of Redemption,” contains sections devoted to “Regeneration,” “Conversion,” and “Disinterested Affection.” The order of these chapters is not accidental, for Hopkins believes that persons must atone for humanity’s original sin and align their will with God’s (through regeneration) before they can exhibit holy behavior (through conversion) and be deemed disinterested.

Hopkins begins his *System*’s section on “Regeneration” by elaborating on the difference between regeneration and conversion. Though “regeneration and conversion are often used only as two words meaning the same thing,” Hopkins differently posits that regeneration is the cause and that conversion is the effect of a person’s spiritual renewal: “In this renovation there is the operation of the cause, which is the work done by the Spirit of God; and there is the effect, which consists in the exercises of the regenerate in which they are active and agents.”¹³ Before one can demonstrate holy behavior and prove one’s status as a converted person, “the Spirit of God” must regenerate one’s faculties. The reason that the Holy Spirit must—and that persons cannot independently—initiate the regeneration process is because they are tainted by original sin as a result of the Fall. Hence, Hopkins posits that “man,” in this regeneration process, “is the passive subject”: that “The Spirit of God finds the heart of man wholly corrupt, and . . . opposed to God and his law, to that renovation which he produces” (367, 368). Rather than seek out the “Spirit of God,” persons should acknowledge their own natural propensity for sin and patiently wait for the divine spirit to come and revive their heart’s prelapsarian moral condition.

¹³ Samuel Hopkins, “The System of Doctrines,” in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 1, ed. Edwards Amasa Park (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1852), 367. I will hereafter cite Hopkins’ *System* parenthetically by page number.

After establishing that regeneration precedes and thus prepares persons for conversion, Hopkins more specifically defines regeneration as the process through which the Holy Spirit provides persons with new hearts: it “consist[s] in giving a *new heart*, a heart to know the Lord, etc.” (369). Just as persons cannot transform themselves into moral beings as a result of their innate depravity, so too are they in need of a “*new heart*” because their old one is corrupted by “the moral disorder and depravity of man” (370). By formulating this “heart” less as a tangible part of the human body and more as a moral faculty, Hopkins echoes Edwards’ theorization of the heart from *A Divine and Supernatural Light* (1734). Edwards defines the “light” of the sermon’s title as a “true sense of the divine and superlative excellency of the things of religion” that transforms the “sense of the heart.”¹⁴ Edwards then posits that persons encounter this light from the Holy Spirit: “that due sense of the heart, wherein this light formally consists, is immediately by the Spirit of God.”¹⁵ In addition to gaining new knowledge and perceptions, the Holy Spirit provides persons with new habits and standards of morality: “This light is such as effectually influences the inclination, and changes the nature of the soul. . . . This knowledge will wean from the world, and raise the inclination to heavenly things. It will turn the heart to God as the fountain of good, and to choose him for the only portion.”¹⁶ For Edwards, the Holy Spirit inclines the heart to disinterestedness: it encourages persons to be “wean[ed] from the world” to the extent that they act not on behalf of their own self-serving, worldly interests but as agents of God’s benevolence (“it will turn the heart to God as the foundation of good”).

¹⁴ Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 17: Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733*, ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 413. Edwards first delivered this sermon in 1733 but published it in 1734.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 417.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 424.

Though the Holy Spirit initiates the regeneration process by working on a person's heart, Edwards contends that the Spirit's regenerative powers also wind up impacting a person's soul and will: that the Spirit's light "influences the inclination, and changes the nature of the soul." In his *System's* section on "Regeneration," Hopkins again recalls Edwards' sermon by theorizing the heart, soul, and will as cooperative forces. He writes, "Nothing is necessary but the renovation of the will, in order to set every thing right in the human soul; and if the will be not renewed, or a new heart be not given, by an immediate operation, no operation on any other faculty of the soul, and no supposable or possible change can set the heart right, or renew it in the least degree" (371). Here, Hopkins explains why the Holy Spirit targets a person's heart: because the heart is connected to and is a "faculty of the soul," and the soul is what enhances the will's morality. To experience the kind of "renovation of the will" that leads to conversion, then, persons must accept the "new heart" given to them by the Holy Spirit, as this new heart atones for original sin and helps "set every thing right in the human soul." Once the heart allows for the soul to revive its prelapsarian relationship with God, then persons will obtain a more benevolent will than the one they had before their regeneration experience.

Edwards and Hopkins thus mutually believe that the Holy Spirit changes the heart so that the soul can prepare the will to demonstrate holy behavior. Just because the Holy Spirit influences persons' will, however, does not mean that persons lose their free will in the regeneration process. Indeed, Hopkins believes that persons have free will both before and after their encounter with the Holy Spirit:

Antecedent to regeneration, man acts freely. With great strength of inclination and choice, his heart opposes the law of God, and rejects the gospel, seeking himself

wholly. And when the instantaneous, immediate energy of the Holy Spirit renews his heart, he turns about, and loves and chooses what he hated before, and exercises as real freedom in his choice and pursuit of that which he had opposed and rejected. (374)

Where regenerated persons allow for their newly awakened heart to motivate their will, unregenerate persons conversely use their will to resist their heart's spiritual capabilities ("With great strength and inclination of choice, his heart opposes the law of God"). The "instantaneous" regeneration experience thus does not forestall the efficacy of persons' will, but it does modify how persons exert that will: regeneration restores persons' prelapsarian relationship with God and provides them with a will that does not "seek[themselves] only." Regardless of whether it is a self-seeking or a more disinterested and God-loving will, the human will has "real freedom," pre- and post-regeneration, to choose how it is going to act. Regeneration merely provides persons with the opportunity to work—in a more noble and benevolent fashion—on behalf of interests that are greater than their own.

A few decades before Hopkins argued that the Holy Spirit transforms the human will by first heightening the heart's capacity for morality, Edwards outlined his own philosophy of the human will in *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of the Will* (1754). Edwards begins this treatise by asserting that the will acts upon preferences that are formed in the mind: "The faculty of the will is that faculty or power or principle of mind by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice."¹⁷ Immediately after establishing the mind's centrality to his theory of the human will, however, Edwards argues that the soul is equally capable of motivating a person's actions. He writes,

¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1: Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsay (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 137.

And God has so made and established the human nature, the soul being united to a body in proper state, that the soul preferring or choosing such an immediate exertion or alteration of the body, such an alteration instantaneously follows. There is nothing else in the actings of my mind, that I am conscious of while I walk, but only my preferring or choosing, through successive moments, that there should be such alterations of my external sensations and motions. . .¹⁸

The soul and the mind are two different entities but they are both capable of influencing bodily movement (causing “an immediate exertion or alteration of the body”). Yet by saying that the body is in its “proper state” when it “instantaneously follows” and acts upon the soul’s preferences, Edwards denigrates the mind and elevates the soul as the body’s most influential governing force. The reason, then, that Edwards’ mind is conscious of “nothing” while he walks is because his preferences are formed not in his mind but in his soul. As Hopkins says in his *System*, the regeneration process revitalizes the soul as much as it overrides the mind’s ability to dictate bodily movement: “in regeneration, the heart being changed and renewed, light and understanding take place; and there is no need of any operation on the understanding, or intellectual faculty of the mind” (370). Because it has atoned for original sin and aligned itself with God, the soul winds up having a more benevolent influence over the body than the mind: it ensures that the body always acts according to God’s moral standards.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., 138.

¹⁹ Phillis Wheatley wrote her poem “On Virtue” in 1766, which is the year after Hopkins published *The Nature of True Virtue* for Edwards. In this poem, Wheatley reiterates not only Edwards’ philosophy of virtue but also his belief that the soul can overtake the mind and govern the human body after a conversion experience. Wheatley opens the poem by attempting and failing to define or “reach” virtue. She writes: “O Thou bright jewel in my aim I strive / To comprehend thee. Thine own words declare / Wisdom is higher than a fool can reach. / I cease to wonder, and no more attempt / Thine height t’explore, or fathom thy profound.” After praising virtue and likening it to a “bright jewel” that is out of her reach, Wheatley then confesses that she will “no more attempt” to understand virtue and its noble condition. Though she confesses that her mind cannot “fathom thy profound” nature of virtue, Wheatley realizes that her soul will be able to “embrace” it: “But, O my soul, sink not into despair, / *Virtue* is near thee, and with gentle hand / Would now embrace thee, hovers o’er thine head. / Fain would the heav’n-born soul with her converse, / Then seek, then court her for her promis’d bliss.” Phillis Wheatley, *Complete Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 11. I have briefly discussed Edwards’ influence on this poem

In devaluing the mind and heightening the powers of the soul, the Holy Spirit assists persons in at once evacuating their originally depraved condition and inhabiting a newly benevolent disposition. Yet Hopkins posits that regenerated persons must do more than maintain their status as regenerated persons: that they must become converted persons by acting upon their newfound propensity for benevolence. Hence, in his *System*'s section on "Conversion," Hopkins writes that converted persons not only gain new perceptions ("discerns the being and perfections of God, as realities"), but also act upon a new set of morals:

the benevolent heart . . . devot[es] himself to [God's] service and honor, and exerting cordial and strong benevolence and friendship, in ardently desiring that God may be glorified to the highest degree forever, and wishing to be the active instrument of this . . . The new heart sees and approves of the divine law in the extent and spirituality of it, requiring perfect love to God and man. (376)

In contrast to an unregenerate person—who, as discussed above, "rejects the gospel" and "seek[s] himself wholly"—a regenerated person has a "benevolent heart," which provides him with the ability to demonstrate "perfect love to God and man." Once this regenerated person acts upon his desire to exhibit benevolence to others, then he will glorify God "to the highest degree" and be recognized as a converted person, for conversion "consists" not in the dispositions but "in the volitions and actions of the regenerate" (378).

For Hopkins, regeneration is a Holy Spirit-initiated change in persons' disposition that subsequently motivates such persons to exhibit benevolence to others and thus become converted. In his *System*'s section on "Disinterested Affection," Hopkins more specifically argues that converted persons must exercise a "disinterested" kind of benevolence: that they must abandon self-serving interests and be indiscriminately

benevolent to all persons. He writes, “Men are no further converted than they are conformed in the exercise and affection of their hearts to the law of God, which requires disinterested love, and nothing else, and exclude and forbids all selfishness, or self-love, which is the same. Therefore, the new heart, and all truly Christian exercises, consist in *disinterested affection*” (385). The reason that converted persons are disinterested is because the Holy Spirit has overtaken their previously depraved will and caused it to be motivated by a more benevolent heart that aims to fulfill “the law of God.” Hopkins believes that those who follow this law must not only “love God *with all his heart, strength and mind*,” but also “love our neighbor as ourselves” (385). Because converted persons are required to love themselves as they love their neighbor, they must be careful not to let this love of self get in the way of others’ interests. Hence, Hopkins writes, “disinterested benevolence will take all proper and sufficient care of every individual in the system, and will desire and seek the best interest and happiness of all, and of the benevolent person himself, so far as is consistent with the greatest good of the whole” (380). The only way that converted persons can think about themselves is if their interests are compatible with the “interest and happiness of all.” Persons can come to invalidate their converted status, however, if they reinstate their previously self-serving habits: if they prioritize or distinguish between their own and others’ interests. In allowing for self-love to overtake their will, converted persons lose their newly regenerated heart, their affinity with God, and thus their ability to exhibit disinterested benevolence to others.

II. Self-Love and the Problem of Sympathy

In both his *System* and his earlier *Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness*, Hopkins upholds self-love and disinterestedness as two opposing dispositions. Though

Edwards only occasionally used the term *disinterested* to describe holy behavior, he did, like Hopkins after him, frequently theorize self-love as being antithetical to virtue. Hopkins' *True Holiness* may "more particularly stat[e] the opposition of holiness to self-love" than Edwards' *True Virtue* does, but this doesn't mean that Edwards' other texts don't caution persons against indulging in selfish behavior.²⁰ Indeed, in the midst of the Great Awakening, Edwards preached a series of sermons on 1 Corinthians 13: a part of the Bible that Hopkins in *True Holiness* argued is central to his philosophy of disinterested benevolence.²¹ In *Charity Contrary to a Selfish Spirit* (1738), Edwards posits that the regeneration process rids persons of self-love and revives the soul's originally disinterested condition. He writes:

The ruin which the Fall brought upon the soul of man consists very much in that he lost his nobler and more extensive principles, and fell wholly under the government of self-love. . . . But God hath in mercy to miserable man contrived in the work of redemption, and by the glorious gospel of his Son, to bring the soul of man out of its confinement, . . . [to] restor[e] an excellent enlargement and extensiveness to the soul, and to infuse those noble and divine principles by which it was governed at first.²²

Edwards charts the transformation of the soul from an "extensive" and benevolent entity to a confined and selfish one in order to underscore his belief that the Fall evacuated persons' innate propensity for benevolence ("before his soul was . . . enlarged to a kind of comprehension of all his fellow creatures" [*WJE* 8, 253]). If persons would like to restore the originally expansive properties of their souls and regain the ability to exhibit benevolence to others, then they must, through the regeneration process, abandon the

²⁰ Hopkins, "True Holiness," 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²² Jonathan Edwards, "Sermon Seven: Charity Contrary to a Selfish Spirit," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 8: Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 252, 253-254. I will hereafter cite all of the writings that come from this volume of Edwards' *Works* parenthetically as *WJE* 8, followed by the page number. These fifteen sermons on 1 Corinthians 13 would be posthumously published as *Charity and its Fruits* (1852) more than a century after Edwards initially preached them.

“government of self-love” and welcome the “noble and divine principl[e]” into their souls.

Three years after he delivered this sermon, Edwards published *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), in which he again referenced 1 Corinthians 13 in the context of his philosophy of conversion. In this treatise, Edwards reiterated the earlier sermon’s claim that converted persons must be entirely without self-love:

Indeed, there is a counterfeit [form] of love that often appears amongst those that are led by a spirit of delusion. . . [but] ’tis only the working of a natural self-love, and no true benevolence . . . The surest character of true divine supernatural love . . . is that that Christian virtue shines in it, that does above all others renounce and abase and annihilate self, viz. *humility*. Christian love, or true charity, is an humble love, *1 Corinthians 13:4–5*, “Charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked.”²³

Here, Edwards positions “natural self-love” and “divine supernatural love” at odds with each other in order to argue that persons have a “natural” propensity for selfish behavior that prevents them from demonstrating the kind of disinterested charity theorized in 1 Corinthians 13. Upon learning about and coming into contact with the light “that Christian virtue shines,” however, persons will be able to “annihilate” the version of themselves that practiced “self-love” and gain the ability to practice “true benevolence.”

Soon after his *Distinguishing Marks* appeared in print, Edwards published another and even longer treatise on conversion: *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New-England* (1743).²⁴ Though he spends much of this treatise legitimizing and defending the New England revivals from “Old Light” charges of spiritual enthusiasm, Edwards also used *Some Thoughts*—as he did the *Distinguishing*

²³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 4: The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 256-257. I will hereafter cite all of the writings that come from this volume of Edwards’ *Works* parenthetically as *WJE* 4, followed by the page number.

²⁴ C.C. Goen notes that all of the title pages for *Some Thoughts* indicate the publication date as 1742 but that it was actually published for the first time in March 1743 (*WJE* 8, 65n9).

Marks—to caution his readers against demonstrating selfish behavior and thus undermining their converted status. In the fourth part of the treatise, Edwards explicitly encourages his readers to “take notice of the causes whence the errors that attend a great revival of religion usually arise,” and says that the “first, and the worst cause of errors that prevail in such a state of things, is spiritual pride,” which stems from self-love and is “the last thing in a sinner that is overborne by conviction, in order to conversion” (*WJE* 4, 414, 415-416). In boasting about one’s own spiritual condition, one demonstrates that one cares less about others’ and more about one’s own spiritual condition. Edwards believes that such an overvaluing of the self promotes divisive behavior: that “Spiritual pride disposes persons to affect separation, to stand at a distance from others, as better than they, and loves the shew and appearance of distinction” (*WJE* 4, 422). Where a prideful person “stand[s] at a distance from” and thinks that he is “better than others,” a “humble” Christian “shun[s] all appearances of a superiority, or distinguishing himself as better than others. His universal benevolence delights in the appearance of union with his fellow creatures” (*WJE* 4, 422). Converted persons demonstrate “universal benevolence” to their “fellow creatures” because their will is motivated not by any selfish need to establish individual superiority but by God’s benevolence. Persons can therefore only practice the kind of benevolent behavior associated with conversion if they sustain their disinterested condition and don’t give in to the temptations of self-love.

By asserting that persons can only become disinterested and exhibit “universal benevolence” to others upon undergoing a conversion experience, Edwards sets himself apart from Scottish Enlightenment philosophers Francis Hutcheson before and Adam Smith after him who claim that persons do not need to be converted to demonstrate

benevolence. Because persons are naturally able to demonstrate selfish and selfless behavior, Hutcheson does not believe that selfishness and selflessness always exist as two opposing dispositions. In *Illustrations Upon the Moral Sense* (1728), Hutcheson writes, “When any event may affect both the agent and others, if the agent have both self-love and public affections, he acts according to that affection which is strongest, when there is any opposition of interests; if there be no opposition, he follows both.”²⁵ Where Hutcheson contends that persons can on their own balance between demonstrating “self-love and public affections,” Edwards posits that persons can only balance these two dispositions once they atone for original sin in the regeneration process: “But since the Fall this principle of divine love has lost its strength, or rather is dead. So that self-love continuing in its former strength, and having no superior principle to regulate it, becomes inordinate in its influence” (*WJE* 8, 257). Hutcheson’s rejection of and Edwards’ embracing the Calvinist belief in original sin is, therefore, what causes Hutcheson to have a more positive—and Edwards to have a more negative—view of humanity’s capacity for benevolence.

Despite disagreeing as to the method by which persons can demonstrate benevolence, Edwards and Hutcheson similarly believe that self-love cannot motivate persons’ benevolent actions. In line with Hutcheson’s claim that persons cannot “approve as virtuous an action . . . to which the agent was excited only by self-love, without any kind affection,” Edwards in his *Charity* sermon argues that converted persons cannot

²⁵ Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections. With Illustrations Upon the Moral Sense*, 3rd ed. (Glasgow: Robert and Andrew Foulis, 1769), 203.

expect to independently benefit from their benevolent interactions.²⁶ Hence, Edwards distinguishes between converted and “natural men” and argues that this latter group of persons befriends others based on the “qualifications which they see in them, or find in them, whence they hope for the promoting of their own temporal good. If they see others are disposed to be respectful to them and to give them honor, then love to their own honor will lead them to friendship with them” (*WJE* 8, 263). Because “natural men” are motivated by self-love, they are only generous to persons who they think will “honor” them back. Converted persons, however, exhibit a disinterested form of “divine love”:

This divine love is no plant which grows naturally in such a soil as the heart of man. But it is a plant transplanted into the soul out of heaven; . . . there is no other-love so much above a selfish principle as Christian love is, there is no love that is so free and disinterested. God is loved for himself and for his own sake; and men are loved not because of their relation to self, but because of their relation to God . . . (*WJE* 8, 264)

The “free and disinterested” kind of love that converted Christians practice is not original to them: it is “transplanted into the soul out of heaven.” Because converted persons have evacuated their heart’s original propensity for self-love, they are able to love God and others without thinking about how such love can be of benefit to them. Rather than love God or mankind for “their relation to self,” converted persons exhibit benevolence to others because that is what their newly regenerated heart compels them to do.

By arguing that benevolent actions cannot stem from self-benefitting motivations, Edwards’ and Hutcheson’s respective theories of charity and benevolence depart from Adam Smith’s philosophy of sympathy. Scholars have long recognized that one of the central claims of Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) is that sympathetic persons

²⁶ Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry Into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, 5th ed. (London: R. Ware, J. and P. Knapton, T. and T. Longman, C. Hitch and L. Hawes, J. Hodges, J. and J. Rivington, and J. Ward, 1753), 251.

(or “spectators” as he calls them) can only properly sympathize with others if they participate in an intense process of sentimental identification through which they come to feel exactly what others are feeling. It is through our “imagination,” Smith writes, that “we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations.”²⁷ Even though Edwards died in the year before Smith’s text appeared in print, and thus never had the opportunity to discuss his philosophy of charity in relation to Smith’s, Hopkins did implicitly critique Smith’s theory of sympathy in *True Holiness*.²⁸ According to Hopkins, disinterested persons should not, like sympathetic persons, identify with those who are in need of benevolence. For if one is kind to another person because one connects with or recognize one’s self in that person, then one is at best biased and at worst sinfully motivated by self-love. Hopkins writes, “The revealed law of God teaches what true holiness is. . . The law does not require self-love, but love to God and our neighbor; not from selfish motives, which is nothing but self-love extended to them, merely because of our connection with them, or the benefit we have received or hope to receive from them, or because they love us.”²⁹ Echoing Edwards’ *Charity* sermon, Hopkins asserts that converted persons must exhibit benevolence to “God and [their] neighbor” without thinking about how they could potentially, individually benefit from their benevolent actions.

²⁷ Adam Smith, “The Theory of Moral Sentiments,” in *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 9.

²⁸ Yet Edwards unknowingly aligned his philosophy of benevolence with Smith’s twinned theories of sympathy and sentimental identification in one of the last texts he ever wrote: *The Nature of True Virtue*. He said that there isn’t “any other way to conceive of anything which other persons act or suffer, or of anything about intelligent moral agents, but by recalling and exciting the ideas of what we ourselves are conscious of in the acts, passions, sensations, volitions, etc. which we have found in our own minds . . . we have no conception, in any degree, what understanding, perception, love, pleasure, pain, or desire are in others, but by putting ourselves as it were in their stead” (*WJE* 8, 591).

²⁹ Hopkins, “True Holiness,” 34.

Because disinterested persons cannot expect anything from the benevolent interactions they partake in, they set themselves apart from sympathetic persons who can, according to Smith, affectively benefit from sympathizing with others. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith argues, “As the person who is principally interested in any event is pleased with our sympathy, and hurt by the want of it, so we, too, seem to be pleased when we are able to sympathize with him, and to be hurt when we are unable to do so.”³⁰ The reason that persons are pleased when others positively respond to their sympathy is because persons selfishly seek validation: “A man is mortified when, after having endeavoured to divert the company, he looks round and sees that nobody laughs at his jests but himself. On the contrary, the mirth of the company is highly agreeable to him, and he regards this correspondence of their sentiments with his own as the greatest applause.”³¹ Smith thus departs from Edwards, Hutcheson, and Hopkins in that he does not caution persons against seeking validation for—or experiencing individual pleasure as a result of—sympathizing with others. Where Edwards criticizes persons who selfishly take pleasure in their benevolence, Smith argues that self-aggrandizement is an inevitable result of sympathy.

III. Suffering and the Charitable Subject

Even before he published any of his treatises on conversion, Edwards, in a private letter to Boston minister Benjamin Colman, argued that persons are not innately capable of practicing benevolent behavior. Thus, as much as this 1735 letter offers an “account of the present extraordinary circumstances of this town [Northampton, Massachusetts], and the neighboring towns with respect to religion,” it also discusses the impact that such a

³⁰ Smith, “Theory of Moral Sentiments,” 15.

³¹ Ibid., 14.

religious transformation has on persons' ethics (*WJE* 4, 99). Edwards says that the people in these communities have been "brought to [a] great sense of their own exceeding misery in a natural condition, and . . . seem to be much more sensible of their own wickedness after their conversion than before, so that they are often humbled by it; . . . They generally seem to be united in dear love and affection [to one] another, and to have a love to all mankind" (*WJE* 4, 104). By asserting that persons become benevolent "after their conversion" and not their regeneration experience, Edwards demonstrates that he does not necessarily distinguish between conversion and regeneration, as Hopkins does in his *System*.³² Regardless of this difference, it is important to note that Edwards in this passage argues that the conversion experience causes persons to not only gain the ability to exhibit benevolence "to all mankind," but also realize that they were incapable of practicing such benevolent behavior in their prior "natural condition." As Edwards argued in his later treatises on conversion, the reason that persons need to participate in the regeneration or conversion process before they can adequately exhibit benevolence to others is because that process acquaints them with God's overwhelmingly benevolent disposition, which subsequently compels them to abandon their individual interests: it "br[ings them] to a lively sense of the excellency of Jesus Christ and his sufficiency and willingness to save sinners, and to be much weaned in their affections from the world, and to have their hearts filled with love to God and Christ, and a disposition to lie in the dust before him" (*WJE* 4, 104).

³² For more on Edwards' thoughts on the relationship between regeneration and conversion, see Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott, "Conversion: A Divine and Supernatural Light," in *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 373-388.

By arguing that converted persons must forsake all self-serving inclinations and be so devoted to God that they are willing to neglect their own wellbeing (“lie in the dust before him”), Edwards anticipates a crucial tenet of Hopkins’ doctrine of disinterested benevolence: that disinterested persons cannot let their own desire to avoid suffering prevent them from following God’s will. As Hopkins says in his *System*, disinterested persons must “be willing to suffer positive evil . . . to promote and produce a greater and overbalancing good, on the whole. This is the nature of disinterested affection, and essential to it” (387). Edwards and Hopkins believe that persons cannot hesitate to experience suffering if they are going to tend to other persons’ needs and thus carry out God’s will. Smith departs from Edwards before and Hopkins after him, however, in positing that persons can actually avoid being sympathetic to others if it inconveniences them in any way. He writes, “Before we can feel much for others, we must in some measure be at ease ourselves. If our own misery pinches us severe, we have no leisure to attend to that of our neighbor.”³³ Where Smith believes that sympathetic persons must focus on their own before they can focus on others’ wellbeing, Edwards and Hopkins believe that benevolent persons should be so distanced from their own individual interests that they only care about alleviating others’ suffering. Self-love should not deter persons from diminishing their own quality of life for others’ benefit.

Though many of the writers I discuss in this dissertation don’t go so far as to argue that persons need to sacrifice their life to carry out God’s will, they do all agree that disinterested persons cannot let their individual interests prevent them from being benevolent to others. Edwards departs from these later writers, however, in his asserting that persons can demonstrate their disinterestedness and appease God by taking on

³³ Smith, “Theory of Moral Sentiments,” 205.

others' suffering as their own. In one of the other sermons he delivered on 1 Corinthians 13 in 1738, *Long-Suffering and Kindness*, Edwards contends that "[p]ersons may thus contribute to others' good . . . by taking pains for them to help them or promote their welfare [or] by suffering for them, by bearing their burdens for them, or at least in part that we may make their burdens lighter" (*WJE* 8, 208). Though persons should not inflict suffering on others, they should be willing to experience suffering if that saves others from experiencing similar hardships.

The two female conversion narratives that Edwards includes in his first treatise on the Great Awakening, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprizing Work of God* (1736), anticipate Edwards' discussion of suffering's relationship to benevolence in *Long-Suffering and Kindness*. Indeed, Edwards praises both Abigail Hutchinson and Phebe Bartlett, not only for desiring to take on others' suffering, but also for exhibiting benevolence to others despite their own suffering. Edwards describes Hutchinson as someone who did not indulge in self-love and who was willing to sacrifice her life while carrying out God's will: she "appeared most remote from any high thought of herself" and "often used to express how good and sweet it was to lie low before God" (*WJE* 4, 195, 196). Even in the midst of suffering "on her deathbed," Hutchinson had "an exceeding longing" to help others: "both for persons in a natural state, that they might be converted, and for the godly that they might see and know more of God" (*WJE* 4, 197).

Like Hutchinson, Bartlett also "manifested a great concern for the good of others' souls," despite being only four years old (*WJE* 4, 204). Though he praises Hutchinson and Bartlett for wanting to convert and educate others about God's glory, Edwards does

not believe that this is the only way that persons can exhibit benevolence. Hence,

Edwards also commends Bartlett for wanting to be charitable to suffering persons:

She has discovered an uncommon degree of a spirit of charity; particularly on the following occasion. A poor man that lives in the woods had lately lost a cow that the family much depended on, and being at the house, he was relating his misfortune . . . She took much notice of it, and it wrought exceedingly on her compassions; and after she had attentively heard him a while, she went away to her father, who was in the shop, and entreated him to give that man a cow . . . (WJE 4, 204-205)

Though her “father told her that they could not spare” one of their cows, Bartlett did not stop desiring to help either this family or any other persons in need, for Edwards says that “she entreated [her father] to let [this man] and his family come and live at his house: and had much more talk of the same nature, whereby she manifested bowels of compassion to the poor” (WJE 4, 205).³⁴ Bartlett’s father’s concern for his family’s own wellbeing may have prevented him, but it did not prohibit Bartlett from sustaining her disinterested condition, from continuing to be charitable to those who were most in need of it.

In *Some Thoughts*, Edwards again included a conversion narrative that theorized charity as an ethical behavior that only converted persons could practice. What sets this narrative apart from the *Faithful Narrative*’s two conversion narratives, however, is that Edwards doesn’t name the person whose conversion experience he describes. Only when Sereno Edwards Dwight included Sarah Pierpont Edwards’ account of her own conversion experience in his *Life of President Edwards* (1830) did it become clear that the unnamed “subject” with “high and extraordinary transports,” whose conversion Jonathan Edwards described in *Some Thoughts*, is actually his wife (WJE 4, 331). Even though it less clear why Edwards, to use Julie Ellison’s words, “edited and paraphrased

³⁴ Rivett is one of the only scholars to comment on Bartlett’s charity; she says that it “testifies to Phoebe’s pious virtue” and helps Edwards “assign[ing] privileged epistemic authority to children and young Anglo women.” Rivett, *The Science of the Soul*, 305.

[his wife's] text, carefully concealing her identity and even her sex," it is important to note that Edwards' account of his wife's conversion in *Some Thoughts* helps to validate the treatise's larger claim that converted persons must be charitable to others.³⁵

The unnamed subject who inhabits Edwards' adaptation of his wife's conversion narrative may, like Abigail Hutchinson, have "a willingness to . . . live and die in darkness and horror if God's honor should require it," but she also resembles Phebe Bartlett in that they both help Edwards theorize charity as an action that persons can practice in order to prove their converted status (*WJE* 4, 337). Earlier in *Some Thoughts*, Edwards argues that a converted person's holiness is determined by how charitable that person is. He writes, "Charity, or divine love, is in Scripture represented as the sum of all the religion of the heart; but this is nothing but an holy affection: and therefore in proportion as this is firmly fixed in the soul, and raised to a great height, the more eminent a person is in holiness" (*WJE* 4, 299). Aware of the fact that charity is an essential attribute of a converted person's holy character, this unnamed subject laments that many "Christians come short in the practice" and don't recognize the "importance of the duty of charity to the poor" (*WJE* 4, 339). She believes that converted persons must have an "earnest longing that all God's people might be clothed with humility and meekness, like the Lamb of God, and feel nothing in their hearts but love and compassion to all mankind; and great grief when anything to the contrary seems to appear in any of the children of God, as any bitterness, or fierceness of zeal, or censoriousness, or reflecting uncharitably on others" (*WJE* 4, 338). Rather than be overly preoccupied with their own interests, this unnamed subject argues that converted persons should make sure

³⁵ Julie Ellison, "The Sociology of 'Holy Indifference': Sarah Edwards' Narrative," *American Literature* 56.4 (1984): 480.

that other persons share in their desire to exhibit disinterested benevolence to others, to have “love and compassion to all mankind.”

Though he altered a significant portion of his wife’s conversion narrative, one of the central aspects of Sarah Edwards’ conversion narrative that Jonathan Edwards preserved when he integrated her narrative into *Some Thoughts* is her understanding of the relationship between conversion and charity. Yet Sarah Edwards’ narrative did more than just develop a philosophy of charity that accords with the principles of her husband’s theology. In this chapter’s final section, I argue that Sarah Edwards’ narrative offers the earliest firsthand, experiential account—and not merely doctrinal theorization—of evangelical disinterestedness.

IV. Sarah Edwards and the Origins of Disinterested Benevolence

Two years after Hopkins’ 1803 death, the Reverend Stephen West culled passages from Hopkins’ surviving, unpublished diary and autobiographical sketches so that he could publish *Sketches of the Life of the Late Rev. Samuel Hopkins* (1805).³⁶ Early in the *Sketches*, Hopkins describes the first time he heard Edwards preach: at Yale College’s September 1741 commencement. Because he was already acquainted with Edwards’ writings (“I had before read his sermons on justification, &c. and his [*Faithful Narrative*] of the remarkable conversions at Northampton”), Hopkins did not expect to have such a strong reaction to Edwards’ sermon: “Though I then did not obtain any personal acquaintance with him, . . . yet I conceived such an esteem of him, and was so pleased with his preaching, that I altered my former determination with respect to [living with]

³⁶ The title page indicates that these *Sketches*, “written by [Hopkins] himself,” are “interspersed with marginal notes extracted from his private diary.” Samuel Hopkins, *Sketches of the Life of the Late Rev. Samuel Hopkins*, ed. Stephen West (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1805), [unnumbered title page]. I will hereafter cite the *Sketches* parenthetically by page number.

Mr. Tennent, and concluded to go and live with Mr. Edwards” (38). Upon arriving in Northampton, Massachusetts in December 1741, however, Hopkins learned that “Mr. Edwards was not at home . . . [and] was abroad on a preaching tour” (40). Edwards was not available to educate him, but Hopkins says that he “was received with great kindness by Mrs. Edwards and the family, and had encouragement that I might live there during the winter” (40).

Hopkins had only been staying with the Edwards family for a few nights before Sarah Edwards offered him spiritual advice. “After some days Mrs. Edwards c[a]me into my chamber,” Hopkins writes, “and said, ‘As I was now become one of the family for a season, she felt herself interested in my welfare; and she observed that I appeared gloomy and dejected . . . and asking me what was the occasion of it’” (40). Upon telling her that he had been “in a Christless, graceless state . . . for a number of months,” Sarah Edwards assured him that he “should receive light and comfort, and doubted not that God intended yet to do great things by me” (41).

Yet a few months before he first met and talked with Sarah Edwards about his converted status, Hopkins claimed that he had already been converted. In his *Sketches*, Hopkins writes that he was converted a few nights after he learned that some of his Yale classmates doubted his faith: “At length as I was in my closet one evening, while I was meditating, and in my devotions, a new and wonderful scene opened to my view. I had a sense of the being and preference of God, as I never had before” (35). Though it may seem like Hopkins contradicts himself in these two passages from his *Sketches*, it was, in fact, not at all unusual for evangelicals to undergo a conversion experience and then find it difficult to maintain their converted status. Indeed, one of the men who inadvertently

incited Hopkins' conversion experience, David Brainerd, questioned his own dedication to God on many occasions throughout his diary.³⁷ While he frequently noted his desire "to pursue a life of holiness and self-denial as long as I live," Brainerd just as frequently doubted his own spiritual fortitude:

In the evening I retired, and my soul was drawn out in prayer to God; especially for my poor people whom I had sent word that they might gather together that I might preach to 'em the next day. I was much enlarged in praying for their saving conversion; and scarce ever found my desires of anything of this nature so sensibly and clearly (to my own satisfaction) disinterested, and free from selfish views. It seemed to me I had no care, or hardly any desire to be the instrument of so glorious a work as I wished and prayed for among the Indians. (*WJE* 7, 227, 304)

By the time he wrote this diary entry, Brainerd had been living among, preaching to, and converting Native Americans in New Jersey and Delaware for two months. Though Edwards said that this is the "part of Mr. Brainerd's life wherein he had his great success in his labors for the good of souls" (*WJE* 7, 298), Brainerd's ministerial success didn't prevent him from doubting his commitment to God's will (he was not "disinterested" or "free from selfish views," and so did not think he could be "the instrument of so glorious a work"). What Hopkins and Brainerd together show, then, is that persons who undergo a conversion experience must continuously work to not only resist the temptations of self-love and self-doubt, but also sustain their disinterested dedication to God.

Like Hopkins before and Brainerd after her, Sarah Edwards claims that her being converted didn't stop her from questioning her faith. Hence, she begins what is supposed to be her conversion narrative by saying that she has already been converted: "I had before this, so entirely given myself up to God, and resigned up every thing into his

³⁷ "Brainard came into my room, I being there alone. I was not at a loss with respect to his design in making me a visit then; determining that he came to satisfy himself whether I were a christian, or not. And I resolved to keep him in the dark, and if possible prevent his getting any knowledge of my state or religion" (*Sketches* 33).

hands.”³⁸ Yet upon realizing that she was still concerned with her “good name and fair reputation among men,” and that she still wanted to receive “the esteem, and love and kind treatment of my husband,” Sarah Edwards acknowledged that she had not yet been touched by God’s grace: “yet I had not found my calm, and peace and rest in God so sensibly” (1). Sarah Edwards then says that she finally felt “above the reach of disturbance from the[se] factors” when Reverend Peter Reynolds came to pray with her family while her husband was out of town (1). She writes,

while Mr. Reynolds was praying, these words, in Rom. 7:34, came into my mind . . . ‘*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ,*’ etc.; which occasioned great sweetness and delight in my soul . . . The peace and happiness, which I hereupon felt, was altogether inexpressible. It seemed to be that which came from heaven; to be eternal and unchangeable. I seemed to be lifted above earth and hell, out of the reach of every thing here below, so that I could look on all the rage and enmity of men or devils, with a kind of holy indifference, and an undisturbed tranquility. At the same time, I felt compassion and love for all mankind, . . . and felt willing to undergo any labour and self-denial. (2, 3)

That Sarah Edwards’ conversion experience occurs in the first few pages of her narrative demonstrates that she, like her husband, is less concerned with detailing the conversion process and more with discussing her behavior after her conversion. Sarah Edwards says that she cannot describe the kind of “happiness” she experienced upon being converted because that happiness “came from heaven” and so was not original to her. Though this newfound happiness also caused her to inhabit a “holy indifference” to worldly issues (“I seemed to be lifted above earth”), it didn’t necessarily stop her from being involved in worldly or interpersonal affairs. It did, however, change the way she approached the

³⁸ Sarah Pierpont Edwards, “The Spiritual Narrative of Sarah Pierpont Edwards,” in *The Silent and Soft Communion: The Spiritual Narratives of Sarah Pierpont Edwards and Sarah Prince Gill*, eds. Sue Lane McCulley and Dorothy Baker (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 1. I will hereafter cite this text parenthetically by page number.

world: she moved from being overly concerned with the “enmity of men” to feeling “compassion and love for all mankind.”

In the week after she was converted, Sarah Edwards contends that she has been able to maintain what she calls her state of “self-denial” because her dedication to God has not subsided.³⁹ After visiting with and hearing Reverend Samuel Buell preach, she said that she “was all at once filled with such intense admiration of the wonderful condescension and grace of God, . . . as overwhelmed my soul, and immediately took away my bodily strength. . . I continued to have clear views of the future world of eternal happiness and misery, and my heart full of love to the souls of men” (5-6). By saying that she “continued to have clear views” of the kind of “eternal happiness” she first experienced when she was converted the week before, Sarah Edwards shows that her newfound awareness and love of God didn’t dissipate after her initial conversion experience. In fact, her soul continued to be so “overwhelmed” with these visions that she stopped focusing on sustaining her body’s healthy condition. And this was not the only time in her narrative that she claims to have lost her “bodily strength.” A few days later, Sarah Edwards said that, after she read John 13-17, her “soul was so filled with love to Christ, and love to his people, that I fainted under the intenseness of the feeling” (11). What is important about these two descriptions of bodily weakness is that such a weakness did not carry over into—or in any way disrupt—Sarah Edwards’ ethics. In accordance with her husband’s theorization of the heart and soul as the seats of human morality, Sarah Edwards says that her body may have been weak, but her heart retained

³⁹ Sarah Edwards dates all of the events in her narrative, and frequently begins her paragraphs by telling the reader the particular day that the paragraph is going to discuss. Given that the narrative begins on 19 January 1742, and that she was converted the following evening upon praying with Rev. Reynolds and her family, it is clear that she was converted on 20 January 1742 (1). She goes to hear Rev. Buell preach the following Wednesday, 27 January 1742 (5).

its “love to the souls of men” and her soul preserved its “love to Christ, and love to his people.” To prove that she has been able to sustain her converted condition, Sarah Edwards does more than just express her continued awareness and love of God’s grace: she shows that her newfound desire to exhibit benevolence to others has also not diminished with time.

Sarah Edwards recognizes that she only acquired this desire to demonstrate what she earlier termed “love [to] all mankind” once she evacuated all self-serving thoughts and came to emulate God’s will in the conversion process (3). Reflecting on her continued appreciation for the “spiritual beauty of the Father and the Saviour,” Sarah Edwards rejoices that her knowledge of divinity destroyed her self-serving inclinations: she says that she “never felt such an entire emptiness of self-love, or any regard to any private, selfish interest of my own. It seemed to me, that I had entirely done with myself. . . The glory of God seemed to be all, and in all, and to swallow up every wish and desire of my heart” (9). Sarah Edwards is so enamored by God’s grace that she no longer has “any regard to any private, selfish interest.” Because she has lost all personal biases and predispositions (experiences “an entire emptiness of self-love”), Sarah Edwards gains the ability see the “glory of God . . . in all,” which in turn causes her to question the perceptions she had before she was converted. In reconceiving of actions or events in the context of God’s will, Sarah Edwards comes to the conclusion that she no longer fears death: “Towards night, being informed that Mrs. P— had expressed her fears lest I should die before Mr. Edwards’ return, and he should think the people had killed his wife; I told those who were present, that I chose to die in the way that was most agreeable to God’s will, and that I should be willing to die in darkness and horror, if it was most for

the glory of God” (11). Where Mrs. P— is worried that Sarah Edwards will die before Jonathan Edwards returns home, Sarah Edwards is so disinterested that she trusts in God to not only care for her wellbeing, but also decide when her worldly life has concluded.

Because she acts entirely on behalf of and “for the glory of God,” Sarah Edwards is not afraid to die in a horrific manner if that is what God expects of her. Hopkins’ nineteenth-century biographer, Reverend Edwards Amasa Park, argues that Sarah Edwards, in this passage, anticipates a central component of Hopkins’ philosophy of disinterested benevolence: that disinterested persons must be willing to sacrifice their life to carry out God’s plan. Park says that Sarah Edwards “had a train of reflections which would *now* be termed Hopkinsian, and which may have been the germ of one branch of Hopkinsianism.”⁴⁰ That Hopkins admired Sarah Edwards’ piety is demonstrated by the fact that he not only detailed his social interactions with her in his diary, but also wrote a letter to Aaron Burr that reflected upon the “intimate acquaintance and friendship, which subsisted between me and your grandfather and grandmother Edwards.”⁴¹ Hopkins also publicly praised Sarah Edwards in his *Life of Jonathan Edwards* (1765). In the biography’s second appendix, “A Short Sketch of Mrs. Edwards’s Life and Character,” Hopkins described her as a disinterested Christian who “constantly . . . attend[ed] to divine things, on all occasions” and was charitable to others: “As the law of kindness on

⁴⁰ Edwards Amasa Park, “Memoir,” in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 1, ed. Edwards Amasa Park (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1852), 22.

⁴¹ A 24 July 1743 diary entry reads, “Set out to-day from Northampton for Boston, in company with Madam Edwards and her daughter, who rides behind one [on horseback]”; a 3 September 1756 entry reads: “Mr. Edwards and Madam, and their son Timothy, [were] at my house to-day.” These diary entries, as well as Hopkins’ 1802 letter to Burr, can be found in Park, “Memoir,” 49, 50, 257.

her tongue, so her hands were not withheld from beneficence and charity. She was always a friend and patroness of the poor and helpless.”⁴²

Even though he valorized Sarah Edwards in both his private and his published writings, Hopkins never explicitly detailed the influence that she had on his theology. Sarah Edwards, however, did discuss Hopkins’ influence on her theology in her conversion narrative. Indeed, a few hours after she first felt her love of God get in the way of her “bodily strength,” as discussed above, Sarah Edwards describes a conversation she had with the various persons who happened to be at her house, including Hopkins.⁴³ She said:

When I came home, I found Mr. Buell, Mr. Christophers, Mr. Hopkins, Mrs. Eleanor Dwight, the wife of Mr. Joseph Allen, and Mr. Job Strong, at the house. Seeing and conversing with them on the Divine goodness, renewed my former feelings, and filled me with an intense desire that we might all arise, and, with an active, flowing and fervent heart, give glory to God. The intenseness of my feelings again took away my bodily strength. (5, 6)

As his *Sketches* indicate, Hopkins had a reason for being in the Edwards household in January 1742: he had, just the month before, moved in with the Edwards family in the hopes of studying theology with Jonathan Edwards. Regardless of why Hopkins was there, it is evident that the conversation Sarah Edwards had with him and the other houseguests about “Divine goodness” helped her sustain her converted condition.

While this conversation caused her to independently rejoice in God’s glory (“I continued to enjoy this intense, and lively and refreshing sense of Divine things . . . for nearly an hour” [6]), it also increased Sarah Edwards’s desire to participate in and form a

⁴² Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend, Learned, and Pious Mr. Jonathan Edwards* (Northampton: Andrew Wright, for S. & E. Butler, 1804), 100, 102.

⁴³ Given that Hopkins, in his “Sketch” of Sarah Edwards, says that “Religious conversation was much her delight . . . and her discourse showed her understanding in divine things, and the great impression they had on her mind,” it comes as no surprise that Sarah Edwards’ narrative recounts many of the conversations she had with ministers around the time of her conversion. *Ibid.*, 99.

community of persons who are similarly devoted to God. As the narrative continues, and a few days pass, Sarah Edwards notes that her desire for other persons to occupy a similarly disinterested condition had not subsided. She writes,

After I had felt this resignation on Saturday night, for some time as I lay in bed, I felt such a disposition to rejoice in God, that I wished to have the world join me in praising him; . . . When I arose on the morning of the Sabbath, I felt a love to all mankind, wholly peculiar in its strength and sweetness, far beyond all that I had ever felt before. . . I thought if I were surrounded by enemies, who were venting their malice and cruelty upon me, in tormenting me, it would still be impossible that I should cherish any feelings towards them but those of love, and pity and ardent desires for their happiness. (13)

By offering her descriptions of her newfound perception of divinity in conjunction with a statement about the benevolence or “love” she wants to demonstrate “to all mankind,” Sarah Edwards argues that her conversion experience transformed both her spirituality and her ethics. This passage departs from the other parts of the text in which she expresses her desire to love all persons, however, in its revealing her desire for all persons to know about and “rejoice in God.” The adapted version of Sarah Edwards’ conversion narrative in *Some Thoughts* significantly contains a passage—quoted above—in which the unnamed subject has an “earnest longing that all God’s people might be clothed with humility and meekness, like the Lamb of God, and feel nothing in their hearts but love and compassion to all mankind (*WJE* 4, 338). That Jonathan Edwards preserved a version of this passage in *Some Thoughts* shows that he, like Sarah Edwards, believes that converted persons can sustain their disinterested condition by caring for others, which entails making sure that other persons learn about and come to embrace God.

IV. Conclusion: Post-Edwardsean Evangelical Disinterestedness

In their respective writings, Jonathan and Sarah Edwards mutually argue that persons can only inhabit the charitable disposition that Hopkins would later theorize as “disinterested benevolence” once they align their will with God’s and atone for original sin through the conversion process. Upon being converted, there are many ways that persons can exhibit charitable behavior: while they can help alleviate others’ suffering, they can also encourage persons to learn about and adopt Christian doctrine. Many of the writers I discuss in this dissertation followed the Edwardses in arguing that one of the most efficient ways to alleviate persons’ suffering is to spiritually educate them. William Ellery Channing, for instance, claimed that persons should not merely care for persons’ bodily condition: that they must exhibit a kind of charity that “goes beneath the body, . . . touches the inward springs of improvement, and awakens some strength of purpose, some pious or generous emotion, some self-respect.”⁴⁴

Though many of the theorizers and practitioners of disinterested benevolence conceived of it as a desire to convert people so that those people could experience less suffering, this is not the only aspect of disinterested benevolence that persisted into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. For the Edwardses also believed that converted persons must be so disinterested that they are willing to die while carrying out God’s benevolence. Antebellum abolitionists were particularly drawn to this facet of disinterested benevolence; Frederick Douglass even praised John Brown as an exemplar of this evangelical ethic, saying that “the true glory of John Brown’s mission” was that it “was not for his own freedom that he was thus ready to lay down his life, for with Paul he

⁴⁴ William Ellery Channing, *The Ministry for the Poor. A Discourse Delivered Before the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches in Boston, on their First Anniversary, April 9, 1835* (Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Metcalf, 1835), 15.

could say, 'I was born free.' No chain had bound his ankle, no yoke had galled his neck. History has no better illustration of pure, disinterested benevolence."⁴⁵

Most of the early American writers I discuss in this dissertation didn't subscribe to this particularly radical tenet of disinterested benevolence. Yet they anticipate the antebellum abolitionists by claiming that all persons are capable of demonstrating and so are deserving of benevolence; that persons can only achieve this realization—and adequately exhibit benevolence to others—once they abandon all self-serving inclinations. In arguing that persons can evacuate their selfishness and inhabit a disinterested condition through the conversion process, these writers set themselves apart from civic republicans who theorize disinterestedness as an elite white man's capacity for rational reflection. Hence, in the dissertation's remaining three chapters, I will demonstrate how early American writers of various subject positions rejected this restrictive philosophy of disinterestedness and theorized a more inclusive, evangelical understanding of the term. Because all persons can inhabit this disinterested condition through conversion, all persons are capable of demonstrating—and so are also worthy of—benevolence.

In the next chapter, I continue to analyze Hopkins' writings but do so in conjunction with Phillis Wheatley's poetry and letters. In reading Hopkins' sermons and

⁴⁵ Frederick Douglass, *John Brown: An Address by Frederick Douglass, at the Fourteenth Anniversary of Storer College, Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, May 30, 1881* (Dover: Morning Star Job Printing House, 1881), 17. For more on John Brown's awareness of Hopkins' philosophy of disinterested benevolence and his antislavery politics, see James Byrd, "We Can If We Will: Regeneration and Benevolence," in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology*, eds. Oliver Crisp and Douglas Sweeney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 63. Douglas Sweeney and Allen Guelzo argue that "Romantic Kantian ethics of the Emersonian sort falls a great deal short of explaining the fiery urgency of William Lloyd Garrison and John Brown, and it is only when we have in hand the puzzle piece of the ethics of disinterested benevolence, which springs from the New Divinity, that we begin to understand what moved John Brown (who grew up under New Divinity preaching in Connecticut) or what makes the evangelical radicalism of the antislavery movement really comprehensible." "Introduction" in *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park*, eds. Douglas Sweeney and Allen Guelzo (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 21.

antislavery treatises alongside Wheatley's writings, this chapter argues that Wheatley developed her own evangelical theory of disinterestedness and used it to protest slavery before Hopkins did the same. Wheatley departs from the other writers in this dissertation in that she strategically used her evangelical philosophy of disinterestedness to at once emphasize her converted and deemphasize her enslaved status, which in turn allowed her to base her critique of slavery entirely on others' and not her own suffering. Like Jonathan and Sarah Edwards before her, Wheatley believed that Christians must demonstrate their dedication to God's will by caring less about their own and more about others' interests.

Chapter 2

Phillis Wheatley, Samuel Hopkins, and the Rise of Disinterested Benevolence

Before Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773) appeared in print in America, Samuel Hopkins expressed excitement over the fact that Wheatley's volume could be used to both protest slavery and promote the humanity of African persons. In his 10 December 1773 letter to the African Anglican missionary, Philip Quaque, Hopkins wrote of Wheatley "it will give you pleasure to see what a remarkable African appears in N. England. . . She will, I hope, be a means of promoting ye best interest of Africans."¹ Almost two centuries later, James Weldon Johnson argued that because Wheatley did not overtly protest slavery, her poetry in no way promoted the "best interest[s] of Africans": he said that "'one looks in vain for some outburst or even complaint against the bondage of her people, for some agonizing cry about her native land,' finding instead a 'smug contentment at her escape therefrom.'"² Yet Johnson admits that his reading of Wheatley is only based on two of her poems, which are found at the start of her volume: "To the University of Cambridge, in New-England" and "On Being Brought from Africa to America." Because Wheatley used these poems not to lament her enslaved condition but to express gratitude to God for safely bringing her from Africa to America, Johnson claimed that she was "content" with her servitude. But to believe that Wheatley never protested slavery would be to ignore her poem to the Earl of Dartmouth, found later in her volume, where she depicted being kidnapped from

¹ *The Life and Letters of Philip Quaque, the First African Anglican Missionary*, eds. Vincent Carretta and Ty Reese (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 111.

² Qtd. in Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America's First Black Poet and her Encounters with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2003), 75.

Africa—being “snatch’d from *Afric*’s fancy’d happy seat”—as an “excruciating” experience.³

The reason that these poems offer contrasting perspectives on slavery, however, has less to do with where they are placed in Wheatley’s volume and more with the fact that they were written at different points in her career. As the proposal for Wheatley’s *Poems* in the *Boston Censor* makes clear, the first two poems referenced above, which don’t at all discuss slavery’s cruelty, were written in the late 1760s and thus before the two poems that argue for the legitimacy of and need to alleviate black suffering: her 1770 elegy to George Whitefield and her 1772 Dartmouth poem.⁴ In an effort to comprehend why Wheatley only came to write against slavery in the 1770s, Frank Shuffelton, David Waldstreicher, and Christopher Leslie Brown have discussed how contemporaneous political events and legal decisions likely impacted the development of Wheatley’s politics: how she would have been influenced by “a diffuse and loosely organized movement to end slavery in Massachusetts in the early 1770s (Shuffelton), the 1772 *Somerset* case in England (Waldstreicher), and the rhetoric of freedom and natural rights surrounding the American Revolution (Brown).⁵ James Levernier, Cedrick May, and

³ Phillis Wheatley, *Complete Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 40. I will hereafter cite all of Wheatley’s writings that come from this volume parenthetically as *CW*, followed by the page number.

⁴ The *Boston Censor* proposal indicates that the two poems in which Wheatley thanked God for bringing her from Africa and to America—at that point entitled “To the University of Cambridge” and “Thoughts on being brought from Africa to America”—were composed in 1767 and 1768 respectively (*CW* 165). Though Wheatley’s Dartmouth poem is not mentioned in the proposal, one of the poem’s surviving manuscripts indicates that it was written in October of 1772, which is almost eight months after the newspaper printed the first notice about her forthcoming volume (*CW* 130).

⁵ While Shuffelton suggests that Wheatley would have been aware of the “individual lawsuits, petitions to the House of Representatives, and the drafting of laws in Massachusetts that were meant to end slavery,” Waldstreicher posits that Wheatley’s first “intervention in the politics of slavery,” her 1772 Dartmouth poem, was informed by the *Somerset* case in England, which she would have learned about from various Boston newspapers. Frank Shuffelton, “On Her Own Footing: Phillis Wheatley in Freedom,” in *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic*, eds. Vincent Carretta and Philip Gould (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 178; David Waldstreicher, “The Wheatleyan Moment,” *Early*

Tara Bynum have differently argued that any discussion of Wheatley's politics needs to also consider her investment in evangelical theology.⁶ While the first group of scholars has not focused on the ways in which Wheatley's "politics and theology were inextricably intertwined," to use Levernier's words, the second group of scholars has not accounted for the relationship between Wheatley's theology and her evolving thoughts on slavery.⁷ Hence, in what follows, I argue that Wheatley's seemingly inconsistent stance on slavery can be clarified once one takes her seriously as a theological thinker and recognizes that her conception of benevolence—especially one's obligation to exhibit benevolence in the face of human suffering—changed over time.

Though scholars often comment upon Wheatley's affiliation with evangelicalism, her religiosity is often cited as historical fact or described as an unchanging aspect of her life. Historians such as Mark Noll and E. Brooks Holifield have characterized evangelicalism as a dynamic and continuously evolving religious movement in early America, but literary scholars have rarely accounted for the ways in which evangelical dogma was being extended and revised on a more local level, especially in the space of a

American Studies 9.3 (2011): 522, 536. By contrast, Brown argues that Wheatley resembles the evangelical abolitionists in England in that they all came to write against slavery as they encountered—and, in some cases, developed—the rhetoric of freedom and natural rights associated with the American Revolution. Brown asserts that because the American colonists wound up "defining their political crusade [against England] as a campaign against slavery," they "inadvertently alerted themselves" and others "to the dubious justice of holding African [persons] in lifelong bondage." Though Wheatley met and Hopkins corresponded with Granville Sharp, they were not otherwise affiliated with evangelical abolitionism. Because this "British antislavery movement . . . began in the late 1780s," Brown considers it to be "a late-born sibling in the family of Anglo-American antislavery campaigns." Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006), 105, 110.

⁶ James Levernier, "Phillis Wheatley and the New England Clergy," *Early American Literature* 26.1 (1990): 21-38; Cedrick May, *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008); Tara Bynum, "Phillis Wheatley's Pleasures: Reading Good Feeling in Phillis Wheatley's Poems and Letters," *Common-place* 11.1 (2010): no pages.

⁷ Levernier, "Phillis Wheatley," 23.

single (nonliturgical) writer's archive.⁸ Yet if one accepts that Wheatley's theology was variable and not static, then one will recognize that her writings from the 1760s and 1770s offer conflicting perspectives on slavery because they advance competing ideas about a person's duty to emulate God's benevolence and alleviate human suffering. In her poetry from the 1760s, Wheatley did not detail the suffering that she or other African persons experienced as a result of slavery because her theology compelled her to passively trust in God's plan: to believe that all events—even those that caused suffering—are willed by God for a benevolent purpose. When she wrote more explicitly about the need to eliminate black suffering in the 1770s, Wheatley preserved her belief that all Christians had to maintain a disinterested and virtuous condition in order to appease God, but differently argued that being disinterested involves actively working on God's behalf to eliminate suffering in the surrounding world. Wheatley's post-1770 writings therefore depart from her earlier poems in that they don't shy away from describing—and in fact valorize those who benevolently desire to alleviate—black suffering.

At the same time that Wheatley began writing about slavery's cruelty and formulating African persons as suffering beings, Samuel Hopkins, one of her earliest champions and correspondents, not only started protesting slavery from his pulpit but also worked with Newport Quakers as they tried and ultimately failed to turn their policy against slavery into a state law.⁹ Though he also published countless abolitionist treatises

⁸ Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁹ Edwards Amasa Park, "Memoir," in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 1 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1852), 60; Thomas Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 55; Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 246, 248.

after he moved to Newport in 1770, Hopkins did not always use his writings to critique slavery. Indeed, before arriving in Newport, Hopkins was most famous for his theory of “advantageous sin,” which caused him to consider slavery as a sinful institution that was nevertheless capable of positively impacting a person’s life. From 1770 onward, however, he was better known for his philosophy of “disinterested benevolence.” Building on his mentor Jonathan Edwards’ theory of benevolence from *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765), Hopkins argued that disinterested benevolence involves a kind of active passivity: it is passive in the sense that it requires persons to vacate their individual will but active in the sense that in denying their own interests they will be able to alleviate others’ suffering and exhibit Christ-like benevolence to all persons. Given its emphasis on the need to eliminate human suffering, Hopkins frequently used disinterested benevolence in his antislavery writings, including his first abolitionist treatise, *A Dialogue concerning the Slavery of the Africans* (1776).

Though Hopkins stopped writing about slavery as an advantageous sin after he moved to and directly encountered slavery in Newport, Wheatley continued to describe her kidnapping experience as a providential event into the 1770s. As much as she consistently alluded to black suffering in her later writings, then, Wheatley just as consistently hesitated to describe herself as a suffering person. For instance, in her Dartmouth poem, Wheatley makes an effort to distinguish between her issues with slavery and her thoughts on her own servitude (she characterizes slavery as tyrannical but says that being “snatch’d” from Africa was only a “seeming[ly] cruel” event [*CW* 40]). Because Wheatley didn’t detail the oppression that she undoubtedly experienced as an enslaved woman, Rafia Zafar argues that Wheatley’s voice is “discreet, restrained, and

rarely at the fore" of her own poetry."¹⁰ In contrast to James Weldon Johnson's reading of Wheatley's silence as apolitical, this chapter contends that this "restrained" persona is precisely what allowed her to formulate her critique of slavery in the first place. For Wheatley's condemnation of slavery in the 1770s was, as Hopkins would say, entirely "disinterested": it was informed not by descriptions of her own suffering, but by accounts of other African persons' pain. In the same way that Hopkins' philosophy of disinterested benevolence encouraged persons to focus less on their own and more on others' suffering, so Wheatley's evangelical theory of benevolence strategically permitted her to sustain her selfless condition and thus critique slavery without having to detail her own pain.

Given that Wheatley theorized her own version of disinterested benevolence in her *Poems* and used it to critique slavery before Hopkins—who corresponded with Wheatley and purchased "the largest known order for her book"—did the same, this chapter argues that Wheatley influenced as much as she adhered to Hopkins' "New Divinity" brand of evangelicalism.¹¹ In line with Wendy Raphael Roberts' recent efforts to "explore a larger breadth of Wheatley's poetic world [and] clarify how Wheatley negotiated some of these poetic relationships," this chapter reconstructs Wheatley's

¹⁰ Rafia Zafar, *We Wear the Mask: African Americans Write American Literature, 1760-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 16.

¹¹ David Grimsted, "Anglo-American Racism and Phillis Wheatley's 'Sable Veil,' 'Length'ned Chain,' and 'Knitted Heart,'" in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 372. This chapter thus extends Gary Nash's assertion that "contact with Wheatley became pivotal in Hopkins's growing detestation of slavery" and that "Hopkins's growing abolitionism affected Wheatley in kind." Gary Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 139. The only other scholar to mention Wheatley's and Hopkins' possible influence on each other is Phillip Richards, who does not analyze any of Hopkins' writings in relation to Wheatley's but argues that "Wheatley's 'sentimentality' is deeply grounded in both the language of feeling associated with conversion-based Puritan piety and late-eighteenth-century Edwardsean conceptions of benevolence." Phillip Richards, "Phillis Wheatley: The Consensual Blackness of Early African American Writing," in *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley*, ed. John Shields and Eric Lamore (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 255.

“theological world”; it more specifically reveals how Wheatley’s and Hopkins’ evangelical conception of disinterestedness influenced the presentation of their thoughts on slavery.¹²

But before turning to those of Wheatley’s writings that critique slavery, the chapter begins by both defining Hopkins’ controversial theory of “advantageous sin” and demonstrating how it borrows from earlier Protestant theologians’ writings about slavery, such as Samuel Sewall’s *The Selling of Joseph* (1700). Because advantageous sin called for religious persons to be concerned less with human circumstances and more with God’s benevolence, Wheatley was able to inhabit a disinterested persona and thus excuse herself from condemning or even offering her stance on slavery in two of her poems from the 1760s: “To the University” and “On Being Brought.”¹³ In this chapter’s second section, I argue that Wheatley maintained her disinterested subject position in the 1770s, but that this persona allowed her not to avoid condemning slavery (as in her earlier poems), but to critique slavery solely in regard to other African persons’ pain. Put another way, Wheatley’s disinterestedness permitted her to write against slavery on an institutional—but carefully not personal—level in the 1770s, to distinguish between her thoughts on her own enslavement and her issues with the institution of slavery itself.

Thus, Wheatley’s and Hopkins’ post-1770 writings argue that benevolent persons must not only be resigned to God’s will but also, through and because of such a resignation,

¹² Wendy Raphael Roberts, “‘Slavery’ and ‘To Mrs. Eliot on the Death of Her Child’: Two New Manuscript Poems Connected to Phillis Wheatley by the Bostonian Poet Ruth Barrell Andrews,” *Early American Literature* 51.3 (2016): 668.

¹³ Though I agree with Michael Warner’s assertion that Wheatley “articulates conversion as a higher good than political resistance” when she, in “To the University” and “On Being Brought,” focuses not on the cruelty surrounding her enslavement but on her conversion experience, I argue that the same cannot be said of Wheatley’s writings from the 1770s: that her thoughts on her conversion experience don’t in any way infringe upon or foreclose her critique of slavery in her post-1770 writings. Michael Warner, “The Evangelical Black Atlantic: Wheatley and Marrant.” Lecture, Rosenbach Lectures in Bibliography, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, March 26, 2009.

work to alleviate human suffering. After delineating Wheatley's and Hopkins' evangelical philosophy of disinterestedness and its influence on their respective theories of benevolence and antislavery politics, this chapter concludes by attending to the ways in which their spiritualized conception of disinterestedness departed from more dominant, civic republican understandings of the term in its encouraging persons to be concerned less with the majority's interests and more with eliminating marginalized persons' suffering.

I. Advantageous Sin

The two evangelical ethical theories that this chapter discusses in relation to Wheatley's and Hopkins' theology—advantageous sin and disinterested benevolence—advance competing ideas about human suffering. Though disinterested benevolence is similar to advantageous sin in its emphasizing God's loving and sovereign character, advantageous sin differently asks for persons to relinquish total responsibility to God and realize that they can do nothing to either eliminate human suffering or change an event as evil as slavery. And so instead of theorizing suffering as a phenomenon that needs to be alleviated—as he does in his writings on disinterested benevolence—Hopkins in his first published work, *Sin, thro' Divine Interposition, an Advantage to the Universe* (1759), provocatively claims that suffering is beneficial to persons, and he uses the story of Joseph being sold into slavery from Genesis to validate this claim.¹⁴

¹⁴ On the controversial reputation of his sermon collection, Hopkins says that its “title was so shocking to many, that they would read no farther. And many who read the sermons, were far from falling in with the sentiment advanced.” Samuel Hopkins, *Sketches of the Life of the Late Rev. Samuel Hopkins*, ed. Stephen West (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1805), 93. Those who were shocked by Hopkins' text believed that he was encouraging persons to commit sinful actions when in fact he was only saying that God will punish those who are sinful at the same time that he will “over-rule” their sins to positive effect. Samuel Hopkins, *Sin, thro' Divine Interposition, an Advantage to the Universe* (Boston: Daniel and John Kneeland, 1759), 8. I will hereafter cite Hopkins' sermon collection parenthetically by page number.

While the “Joseph story” was typically used in eighteenth-century writing as a “fictional paradigm for accounts of slaves and servants in the domestic sphere,” Hopkins’ sermon collection sets itself apart from this tradition in that it aligns itself not with the period’s domestic fiction, but with the first antislavery treatise to be published in America: Samuel Sewall’s *The Selling of Joseph*.¹⁵ Though Sewall’s treatise critiques slavery in a more explicit manner than Hopkins’ sermon collection does—arguing that “These *Ethiopians* . . . are the Sons and Daughters of the First *Adam*” and so “ought to be treated with a Respect agreeable”—their texts together advance similar conceptions of sin.¹⁶ Toward the end of his treatise, Sewall argues that there can be positive repercussions to sinful events, but that “Evil must not be done [so] that good may come of it. The extraordinary and comprehensive Benefit accruing to the Church of God, and to Joseph personally, did not rectify his brethrens Sale of him.”¹⁷ Even though he considers Joseph’s brothers to be sinners, Sewall posits that “the Church of God” and Joseph still “Benefit[ted]” from his brothers’ sinful actions. More than five decades later, Hopkins in *Sin...an Advantage* explains how Sewall was able to discuss the “beneficial” results of a sinful event without downplaying that event’s sinfulness. By distinguishing between a sinner’s intentions and what God does with those intentions, Hopkins argues that God can punish sinners for their wrongdoing and still change the effect that their sins have on the world.

Though Hopkins’ theory of advantageous sin helps to explain why Sewall at once

¹⁵ Phillip Richards, “The ‘Joseph Story’ as Slave Narrative: On Genesis and Exodus as Prototypes for Early Black Anglophone Writing,” in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, ed. Vincent Wimbush (New York: Continuum, 2000), 222.

¹⁶ Samuel Sewall, *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial* (Boston: Bartholomew Green and John Allen, 1700), 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

critiqued slavery and discussed how Joseph supposedly “Benefit[ed]” from his servitude, it is important to note that Sewall’s and Hopkins’ texts do not use the Joseph story for the same purpose. In contrast to Sewall’s treatise, which references the Joseph story as an example of slavery’s cruelty, Hopkins’ sermon collection only discusses Joseph’s servitude insofar as it assists him in arguing that there are “advantageous” consequences to all sinful events. Because he is concerned not with sinful events in themselves but with their results—less with human actions and more with the impact that God allows for those actions to have on the world—Hopkins conveniently prohibits himself from having to offer an extended critique of sinful institutions like slavery. Hopkins’ sermon collection, therefore, focuses exclusively on what Sewall’s treatise only mentions once: it details how Joseph not only “preserv[ed] the Kingdom of Egypt in the Time of Famine” but also paved the way for “all the mighty Works God did there . . . in the Deliverance of *Israel* from *Egypt*, and their Return to the Land of *Canaan*” (5). Despite concentrating on different aspects of the Joseph story, Sewall and Hopkins together argue that God’s permitting sinful actions to have “good Consequences” doesn’t at all prevent the person who committed such a sinful action from being punished (5). When he turns to discussing Joseph’s brothers’ sins, then, Hopkins reiterates Sewall’s assertion that the “Benefit accruing . . . to Joseph personally, did not rectify his brethrens Sale of him”: he says that though there was “great Good that came out of this Evil, they don’t excuse themselves for what they had done” (26). Hopkins’ theory of advantageous sin doesn’t aim to excuse sinners’ actions or “rectify,” as Sewall says, an event’s sinfulness, but it does allow for one to concentrate less on the suffering that results from sinful events and more on how such events can potentially benefit one’s life.

In her poem “To the University of Cambridge, in New-England,” Wheatley demonstrates her belief in advantageous sin by focusing not on the sinfulness of her kidnapping experience but on how God allowed her to spiritually benefit from that experience. The poem opens:

‘Twas not long since I left my native shore
The land of errors, and *Egyptian* gloom:
Father of Mercy, ‘twas thy gracious hand
Brought me in safety from those dark abodes. (*CW* 11)

While readers may question how it is that “a black woman, a slave, [could] be grateful for deliverance from her native country,” Zafar argues that this was not atypical, and that Wheatley was “like many eighteenth-century black converts [who] genuinely believed that Christianity was her saving grace.”¹⁸ Hence, rather than use this poem to condemn her kidnappers or slavery, Wheatley praises God for safely bringing her from her “native shore / The land of errors, and *Egyptian* gloom.” Though David Grimsted reminds us that “Egypt’s primary resonance for [Wheatley] and her audience was its biblical locus as the land of slavery,” he does not necessarily believe that Wheatley references the Israelites’ enslavement in Exodus in order to align herself with a “maligned and persecuted” group, to use Mary McAleer Balkun’s words.¹⁹ Because she does not in this poem characterize herself as a persecuted subject and instead discusses her newfound spiritual awareness, it is more likely that Wheatley identified with the Israelites in that she too found God upon leaving the spiritually gloomy Africa.²⁰ For just as the Israelites were given the Ten

¹⁸ Zafar, *We Wear the Mask*, 20-21.

¹⁹ Grimsted, “Anglo-American Racism,” 357; Mary McAleer Balkun, “Phillis Wheatley’s Construction of Otherness and the Rhetoric of Performed Ideology,” *African American Review* 36.1 (2002): 125.

²⁰ I am thus in agreement with Vincent Carretta’s claim that Wheatley uses the phrase “*Egyptian* gloom” not to critique ancient Egyptian practices of enslavement but to “refer to her spiritual condition in Africa.” Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 60. I will hereafter cite Carretta’s biography of Wheatley parenthetically by page number.

Commandments and entered into a holier communion with God after they left Egypt, so Wheatley found salvation upon leaving Africa's "dark abodes."

Though she shies away from discussing the institution of slavery itself, Wheatley still doesn't use "To the University" to excuse slavery or justify sinful behavior. Hence, she tells these university students that the most efficient way to demonstrate their spiritual devotion—or express gratitude to Christ for dying for humanity's sins ("he deign'd to die that they might rise again" [*CW* 12])—is to avoid sinning.²¹ She writes:

Let sin, that baneful evil to the soul,
By you be shunn'd, nor once remit your guard,
.....
An Ethiop tells you 'tis your greatest foe;
Its transient sweetness turns to endless pain,
And in immense perdition sinks the soul. (*CW* 12)

Wheatley may claim that sinful persons deserve to be punished and experience "endless pain," but she importantly doesn't allow for this theory of sin to revise or negate her

²¹ Before she discourages these students from sinning, Wheatley tells them to study and praise Christ: "to scan the heights / Above" and "receive / The blissful news by messengers from heav'n," which reveals the "matchless mercy in the Son of God!" (*CW* 11-12). In the same way that Wheatley encourages her readers to dedicate time to studying and admiring Christ, so too does Hopkins—in a sermon that he preached at Boston's Old South Church in 1768 as a sort of interview for the recently-opened ministerial position—claim that it is "of the highest importance to every christian that he should fix and keep his attention on Christ Jesus, and constantly make him the object of his consideration and study, that hereby he may 'increase in the knowledge of GOD, and be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.'" Samuel Hopkins, *The Importance and Necessity of Considering Jesus Christ in the Extent of his High and Glorious Character* (Boston: Kneeland and Adams, 1768), 10-11. Though the Wheatley family worshipped at the New South Church and Phillis Wheatley wouldn't be baptized at the Old South Church until 1771, religious persons didn't always go to their home parish to hear sermons, for "sermons were a major source of entertainment for most people in earlier periods. Public theatrical performances were banned in Boston during Phillis Wheatley's lifetime. One went to church to experience drama" (Carretta 34, 42). Given that she wrote an elegy for the minister Hopkins was set to replace, Samuel Sewall's son Joseph Sewall, Wheatley would have been especially interested in hearing Sewall's potential successor preach. But even if Wheatley wasn't in attendance when Hopkins delivered this sermon, she could have read it, as Boston printers John Kneeland and Seth Adams sold it from their Milk Street shop shortly after Hopkins preached it. Wheatley also could have heard of—and perhaps even been introduced to—Hopkins and his writings via Sewall's actual replacement, John Bacon, who was also a follower of Hopkins' theology. Joseph Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement: Calvinism, The Congregational Ministry, and Reform in New England Between the Great Awakenings* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1981), 90-91, 228. I will hereafter cite Conforti's book parenthetically by page number.

earlier remarks about how she spiritually benefitted from being “brought” to America. The reason that Wheatley can on the one hand condemn sinners and on the other hand assert that her kidnapping experience improved her spiritual life is because Hopkins’ philosophy of advantageous sin permits her to distinguish between her kidnappers’ actions and God’s influence over those actions. That Wheatley doesn’t describe the suffering that she undoubtedly experienced as a result of the slave trade is only evidence of the fact that she is concerned more with the consequences of and less with the circumstances surrounding her enslavement—more with what God did for her and less with what humans did to her. When Wheatley thanks the “Father of Mercy” for rescuing her from “the land of errors,” then, she is not at all excusing those who kidnapped her; she is instead focusing more on how God allowed her kidnappers’ actions to have what she believed was a positive impact on her spiritual life.

That Hopkins in *Sin...an Advantage* uses slavery as an example of how sinful events can seemingly benefit one’s life only further supports the claim that Wheatley’s expression of gratitude to God for taking her from the spiritually depraved Africa does not carry with it an endorsement of slavery. Though there is no surviving record of what Wheatley read, she would have at least heard of Hopkins’ controversial sermon collection from Susanna Wheatley, who “dealt with Phillis’s religious education as conscientiously as she did that of her own children” and certainly attended the intercongregational female prayer group that Hopkins led in Boston during this time (Carretta 24).²² As discussed

²² William Robinson describes Susanna Wheatley as someone who “cultivated a longtime admiration of, and unabashed passion for, the spellbinding sermon.” William Robinson, “On Phillis Wheatley and Her Boston,” in *Phillis Wheatley and Her Writings* (New York: Garland, 1984), 13. Julian Mason, Jr. says that she was an “active Christian” who “engaged in missions work by correspondence, encouragement, accommodating visiting ministers in her home, and (at least occasionally) donations of money.” Julian Mason, Jr., *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 3. Perhaps Hopkins’ involvement with Boston’s intercongregational female prayer group helped him

above, Hopkins' refusal in *Sin...an Advantage* to evaluate sinful events in themselves—his desire to prove only that “Sin may be, and actually is the Occasion of great Good” and that “[t]his affords no Excuse for Sin, or Encouragement to it” (4)—conveniently allows him to avoid overtly critiquing sinful institutions like slavery. While Hopkins' condemnation of slavery is limited by or can only be formulated within the confines of what his sermon collection sets out to prove, Wheatley's ability to critique slavery is limited by her subject position as an enslaved woman.²³ Yet advantageous sin is especially useful for someone in Wheatley's position, for it is through distinguishing between events and their consequences that Wheatley is able to thank God for bringing her to America without having to focus on how she got to America. Hence, in “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” Wheatley doesn't discuss her experience on the Middle Passage and instead focuses on the consequences of that traumatic event: her conversion to Christianity. The poem famously opens:

get *Sin...an Advantage* published there in 1759. Though it was first printed at Daniel and John Kneeland's shop on Queen Street, it would have also been sold at any of the other half dozen bookshops near the Wheatleys' King Street mansion. Robinson, “On Phillis Wheatley,” 20-21. For more on Hopkins' involvement in this prayer group, see William Patten, *Reminiscences of the Late Rev. Samuel Hopkins* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1843), 56-58; Samuel Hopkins, “A Narrative of the Rise & Progress of a Proposal and Attempt to Send the Gospel to Guinea, by Educating, and Sending Two Negroes There to Attempt to Christianize Their Brethren,” 22 March 1784, Simon Gratz Collection, Case 8, Box 23, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In this “Narrative” on his African missionary project, Hopkins acknowledges that he remained in contact with the group after he moved to Newport because they financially supported his missionary efforts. Hopkins' future wife, Elizabeth West, belonged to this group. Park, “Memoir,” 240-241. A 1764 letter that Hopkins wrote to West while leading the group is housed at the Boston Public Library. Significantly, Elizabeth West may be the “Miss West” that Wheatley mentions in a 1773 letter to Obour Tanner (*CW* 138). Mason, *The Poems*, 198n14. If Wheatley didn't hear of *Sin...an Advantage* from Susanna Wheatley, she could have read it at a local library, for she “was quite auspiciously surrounded by the three largest libraries in the colonies—all of which she probably had easy access to”: Mather Byles' (across the street from the Wheatley mansion), the Old South Church's, and Governor Thomas Hutchinson's (who attested to Wheatley's talents in her *Poems*’ “To the Publick” notice). John Shields, “Phillis Wheatley and Mather Byles: A Study in Literary Relationship.” *College Language Association Journal* 23.4 (1980): 389n15.

²³ Given that the Wheatley family encouraged and financially supported Phillis Wheatley's authorial endeavors, and that more than a dozen powerful white Bostonian men, many of whom were enslavers, attested to her poetic talents in the “To the Publick” document that precedes her 1773 *Poems*, it is understandable that Wheatley wouldn't have wanted to offend “the white audience that would have constituted her main readership.” Balkun, “Construction of Otherness,” 122.

‘Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,
 Taught my benighted soul to understand
 That there’s a God, that there’s a *Saviour* too:
 Once I redemption neither sought nor knew. (*CW* 13)

As is the case with the earlier “To the University,” Hopkins’ theology assists Wheatley in distinguishing between events in themselves and God’s influence over those events, between her kidnapping experience and the spiritual “redemption” that resulted from it. Because “On Being Brought” elaborates on and seemingly confirms Hopkins’ belief that suffering can be advantageous to persons, scholars such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., consider it to be “the most reviled poem in African American literature.”²⁴ However, just because Wheatley, in “To the University” and “On Being Brought,” thanks God for bringing her to America and acquainting her with Christianity, one should not automatically think that Wheatley in these poems “celebrates her enslavement,” to use Tara Bynum’s words.²⁵ For, as Vincent Carretta argues, Wheatley’s expression of gratitude to God for bringing her out of Africa and to America only demonstrates her “belief in an omniscient and benevolent deity” and “does not necessarily imply that she either accepts or endorses slavery” (61). Because neither of these early poems takes a clear stance on slavery, it is just as easy for some readers to claim that Wheatley (like Hopkins) discusses God’s benevolence in order to downplay but not necessarily hide her issues with slavery as it is for other readers to argue that she condones slavery when she expresses gratitude to God. Despite their opposing interpretations, these two readings similarly exploit these poems’ ambiguity: they ignore the fact that the poems don’t at all discuss—let alone critique—slavery. Hopkins may implicitly say that slavery is sinful in *Sin...an Advantage*, but Wheatley importantly amends Hopkins’ philosophy by focusing

²⁴ Gates, Jr., *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley*, 71.

²⁵ Bynum, “Phillis Wheatley’s Pleasures,” no page.

not even discreetly on slavery's circumstances but entirely on slavery's results. Hopkins' theory of advantageous sin thus authorizes Wheatley to concentrate less on slavery itself and more on how her servitude impacted her spiritual life; it explains why "On Being Brought" is more an expression of religious fervor than an evaluation of slavery. Even though she doesn't explicitly denounce or praise slavery in "On Being Brought," Wheatley does use her poem to offer one form of protest: to condemn white Christians who believe that African persons are incapable of being converted to Christianity as a result of their race.²⁶ Wheatley may chastise Christians who don't believe that African persons can be converted, but she importantly doesn't take this opportunity to condemn those Christians for also supporting slavery.²⁷ Instead, she says,

Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
 "Their colour is a diabolic die."
 Remember, *Christians, Negros*, black as *Cain*,
 May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train. (*CW* 13)

By openly criticizing Christians who don't believe in African conversion, Wheatley places her poem in dialogue with one of the first texts to be published on slavery in America: Cotton Mather's *The Negro Christianized* (1706). Where Mather's treatise departs from Wheatley's poem, however, is in its arguing that "the *Law of Christianity* . . . allows of *Slavery*."²⁸ Sewall and Hopkins may say that there are "advantageous"

²⁶ I am here marking my agreement with Waldstreicher, who argues that "a more literal reading of the middle of the poem must admit that at its center is a critique of those who focus on race. . . . The poem is an attempt to say that race is a static, ahistorical way of thinking about slavery, Christianity, and civilization." David Waldstreicher, "Ancients, Moderns, and Africans: Phillis Wheatley and the Politics of Empire and Slavery in the American Revolution," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37.4 (2017): 722.

²⁷ Carrie Hyde has recently argued that this poem's focus on spiritual inclusion causes it to be one of the first early American writings to take up the "trope of 'citizenship in heaven,'" to theorize citizenship as "the spiritual membership of Christians in the kingdom of God, not the secular relation between individuals and the government." Carrie Hyde, *Civic Longing: The Speculative Origins of U.S. Citizenship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 47, 44.

²⁸ Cotton Mather may not protest slavery but he does chastise white Christians who don't convert their African slaves: he says that anyone "who is willing that those of *his own House* remain Strangers to the *Faith*" should "[c]all thy self anything but a Christian," for it is a Christian's "noblest Work" to "[r]aise

consequences to sinful institutions like slavery, and Wheatley may write only about what she believed to be the spiritual benefits of her servitude, but none of them go so far as to use Christianity to excuse slavery. Though she will, like Hopkins, allow for Christian doctrine to inform her critique of slavery in the 1770s, Wheatley sets herself apart from Sewall, Mather, and Hopkins in these early poems in that she does not formulate a clear stance on—or even implicitly protest—slavery. As is the case with this poem’s expression of gratitude to God, one cannot deduce Wheatley’s thoughts on slavery from her expression of disdain for white Christians.²⁹

Wheatley and Hopkins may have both started writing against slavery in the 1770s, but their condemnations of slavery inevitably took on different forms. Because Hopkins stopped discussing the potentially advantageous consequences of slavery and focused only on slavery’s sinfulness in the 1770s, Joseph Conforti posits that Hopkins revised his views on slavery and became “a dedicated antislavery reformer between 1770 and 1773, the same years in which he developed his doctrine of disinterested benevolence” and moved to Newport (126).³⁰ What Conforti fails to recognize, however, is that Hopkins never openly theorized slavery as a just institution: that he did not overtly condemn

a *Soul*, from a dark State of Ignorance and Wickedness, to the Knowledge of GOD.” Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized: An Essay to Excite and Assist that Good Work, the Instruction of Negro Servants in Christianity* (Boston: B. Green, 1706), 26, 7-8, 1.

²⁹ Zafar similarly argues that Wheatley does not use “On Being Brought” to align herself with white Christians who “accepted white supremacy”: “Bearing in mind her Protestant faith, we should remind ourselves that conversion to Christianity does not indicate a corresponding or wholesale conversion to belief in white superiority.” Zafar, *We Wear the Mask*, 20-21.

³⁰ Kenneth Minkema and Harry Stout also believe that Hopkins’ encounter with slavery and the slave trade in Newport caused him to develop his theory of disinterested benevolence. They argue that Hopkins was “confronted by a society in social transformation and ideological crisis” and so could not “detach theology from the world around him.” Kenneth Minkema and Harry Stout, “The Edwardsean Tradition and the Antislavery Debate, 1740–1865.” *Journal of American History* 92.1 (2005): 51. Catherine Brekus similarly argues, “After meeting large numbers of slaves at [Sarah] Osborn[’s] house, seeing them in chains on the public auction block near his church, and listening to their tragic stories of captivity, he became increasingly troubled by the contradictions between slavery and his Christian faith.” Catherine Brekus, *Sarah Osborn’s World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 284.

slavery or publish an antislavery treatise before 1776, but he did designate slavery as sinful in as early as 1759 in *Sin...an Advantage*.³¹ By contrast, Wheatley's subject position as an enslaved woman prohibited her from being as explicit about her issues with slavery as Hopkins. Hence, when she came to protest slavery in her writings from the 1770s, Wheatley still discussed how she spiritually benefitted from her servitude and so didn't completely abandon the idea that slavery is an "advantageous" institution. In this chapter's second section, I argue that Wheatley, in these later writings, was able to balance between protesting slavery and detailing how it benefitted her spiritual life because her condemnation of slavery was entirely disinterested: it was based not on her own personal suffering but on the pain that other African persons experienced.³² Despite the fact that they were both more open about their issues with slavery in their writings from the 1770s, Wheatley's and Hopkins' respective archives indicate that Wheatley not only wrote against slavery before Hopkins did but also formulated her own evangelical theory of disinterested benevolence, and used it to critique slavery, before Hopkins did the same.³³

II. A Disinterested Protest

It is no coincidence that Wheatley and Hopkins came to write more explicitly

³¹ Conforti says that Hopkins, "prior to his settling in Newport in 1770 . . . had not publicly or privately expressed any disapproval of or moral uneasiness with the slave trade or slavery. Both his theological mentor, Edwards, and his close friend, [Joseph] Bellamy, owned slaves. Furthermore, for several years of Hopkins's residence at Great Barrington a black female servant lived in his household" (126). Hopkins discussed this servant in a 1757 letter to Bellamy that is currently in the Hartford Theological Seminary's Library.

³² In his recent analysis of Wheatley's elegies, Antonio Bly has similarly argued that Wheatley often "used her faith to insulate herself from criticism." Antonio Bly, "'On Death's Domain Intent I Fix My Eyes': Text, Context, and Subtext in the Elegies of Phillis Wheatley," *Early American Literature* 53.2 (2018): 334.

³³ While Hopkins claimed that he started preaching against slavery in 1770, he did not officially ban enslavers from his congregation until 1784, and none of these purported early sermons on slavery have survived (Conforti 126-127, 134-135).

against slavery in the 1770s. As discussed above, scholars such as Waldstreicher and Brown have demonstrated how a series of juridical decisions and political movements—including the 1772 *Somerset* case and the impending American Revolution—likely influenced Wheatley and other New Englanders to be more outspoken about their issues with slavery in this period. But because these scholars focus only on how contemporaneous legal and political events informed New Englanders’ stance on slavery, they do not account for how religious texts and groups also contributed to antislavery discourse in the colonial era.³⁴ Though Brown does not analyze particular tenets within evangelical theology because he believes that only political movements like the American Revolution can—and that evangelical doctrine “as such cannot”—“explain . . . why Evangelicals took to politics at all,” this chapter’s second section argues that evangelical dogma can in fact explain *how* religious persons like Wheatley and Hopkins formulated their antislavery stance.³⁵ More specifically, it demonstrates that as Wheatley was writing against slavery and arguing that African persons are worthy of benevolence, she was elaborating upon as much as she was influencing Hopkins’ New Divinity theology.

Upon turning to their respective archives, however, one will recognize that

³⁴ For instance, if one focused only on the fact that the Massachusetts legislature “passed ‘An act to prevent the Importation of Negro Slaves into this Province’” in 1771, then one would miss that, in the year prior to this bill’s passing and ultimate rejection by Governor Thomas Hutchinson, Rev. Samuel Cooke delivered a sermon in front of both Hutchinson and the Massachusetts House of Representatives in which he encouraged them to take up the “cause of our African slaves; and humbly propose the pursuit of some effectual measures, at least, to prevent the future importation of them.” Shuffelton, “On Her Own Footing,” 179; Samuel Cooke, *A Sermon Preached at Cambridge, in the Audience of His Honor Thomas Hutchinson* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1770), 41-42. While the frontispiece to Cooke’s sermon indicates that Edes and Gill were the official printers for the “Honorable House of Representatives,” it is important to note that these publishers also printed antislavery texts, including Nathaniel Appleton, *Considerations on Slavery, in a Letter to a Friend* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1767). Given that the Wheatleys’ King Street mansion was only a few blocks away from Edes’ and Gill’s Queen Street office, it is likely that the Wheatley family would have encountered these texts.

³⁵ Brown, *Moral Capital*, 341.

Wheatley and Hopkins did not always use their theology to protest slavery. Indeed, as noted earlier, Wheatley's poetry from the 1760s focuses more on her gratitude for her conversion experience and so does not at all discuss slavery's cruelty. Though Hopkins briefly alluded to slavery's sinfulness in *Sin...an Advantage*, he, like Wheatley, did not overtly critique slavery: he focused instead on how sinful institutions like slavery could also be "advantageous" to persons. Furthermore, because he used *Sin...an Advantage* to argue that God "over-ruled" sinful actions and thus determined the course of human events, Hopkins wound up diminishing humanity's capacity for benevolence (8). Yet when he developed his theory of disinterested benevolence and started writing against slavery after 1770, Hopkins differently argued that persons must actively work on God's behalf to eliminate suffering in the surrounding world.

Though he revised his understanding of humanity's ability to imitate God's benevolence in the 1770s, it is important to note that Hopkins' theory of disinterested benevolence was not entirely new. As discussed in the previous chapter, Hopkins, in the preface to *An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness* (1773), acknowledged his indebtedness to Jonathan Edwards' theology: "PRESIDENT EDWARDS, in his dissertation on the nature of true virtue, has given the same account of holiness for substance . . . [but I have] explained some things more fully than he did, and more particularly stated the opposition of holiness to self-love."³⁶ Where Hopkins' *True Holiness* departs from Edwards's *True Virtue*, then, is in its arguing that radical selflessness—or what he terms "disinterestedness"—is a necessary precursor to benevolent action. In further contrast to Edwards, who abstractly encourages persons to exhibit "benevolen[ce] to Being in

³⁶ Samuel Hopkins, *An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness* (Newport: Solomon Southwick, 1773), iv-v. I will hereafter cite this text parenthetically by page number.

general,” Hopkins more concretely calls for persons to undergo a conversion experience and abandon their personal interests so as to adequately exhibit “good-will to God and [their] neighbour” (27).³⁷ And one of the ways that persons can practice this disinterested form of “good-will” and appease God is by being charitable to those who are less fortunate than they are. For the “more [someone] interests himself in the cause of the poor, helpless widow, and the greater pleasure he takes in helping her,” Hopkins writes, “the more disinterested are his exertions and conduct, and the more is self-love counteracted and mortified” (30–31).³⁸

Yet at least three years before Hopkins theorized disinterested benevolence in *True Holiness*, Wheatley formulated her own philosophy of benevolence and used it to praise those who selflessly desired to alleviate other persons’ suffering. In the version of her elegy for George Whitefield that was printed as a broadside in Boston and Newport in October 1770, Wheatley upholds Whitefield as the exemplar of disinterested benevolence by describing how he cared for suffering Americans after the Boston Massacre. She writes,

³⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “The Nature of True Virtue,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 8: Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 539. Rather than locate “true virtue in exalted consciousness” or conceiving of it solely as “a matter of right affections” (as Edwards does), Conforti argues that Hopkins makes virtue more accessible to persons by considering it in terms of “elevated social behavior”: as “right actions” and not just “right affections” (117, 121).

³⁸ While Hopkins’ discussion of a person taking “pleasure” in helping the poor and unfortunate resembles Adam Smith’s idea that persons can take pleasure in sympathizing with others from his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Hopkins’ conception of pleasure was more altruistic than Smith’s is. For Smith, “whatever may be the cause of sympathy . . . nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast.” Adam Smith, “The Theory of Moral Sentiments,” in *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 13. For Hopkins, however, disinterested persons should not be concerned with themselves or their pleasures at all. Hence, Hopkins said that those who pursue “the glory of God and . . . the great good of his fellow-creatures” will experience “refined pleasure in the exercise of this affection” (*True Holiness* 31). The reason that Hopkins described this kind of pleasure as “refined” is because it is atypical of how pleasure is actually experienced: it is not experienced as a reward for something that that person did, for a disinterested person must be wholly divested of self-benefitting motivations. The only way that this type of pleasure can be experienced, then, is if one, in a seemingly paradoxical way, has no regard for one’s own pleasure.

When his AMERICANS were burden'd sore,
 When streets were crimson'd with their guiltless gore!
 Unrival'd friendship in his breast now strove;
 The fruit thereof was charity and love
 Towards *America*—couldst thou do more
 Than leave thy native home, the *British* shore,
 To cross the great Atlantic's wat'ry road,
 To see *America's* distress'd abode? (*CW* 113-114)

While Wheatley in this broadside says that Whitefield's "breast" was filled with "[u]nrival'd friendship," she, in another broadside that was contemporaneously printed in England, says that "Wond'rous Compassion" filled "his breast" (*CW* 116). When this elegy was collected and printed in Wheatley's *Poems*, it underwent yet another revision: this verse's reference to the Boston Massacre ("When streets were crimson'd with guiltless gore") was excised entirely. Whatever the reason it did not appear in her 1773 *Poems*, it is important to note that both of the poem's surviving broadsides from 1770 praise Whitefield for selflessly leaving his "native home, the British shore" and showing "charity and love" to those who were "burden'd sore" and "distress'd" in America. In this way, Wheatley not only formulates Whitefield as a practitioner of what Hopkins will later term disinterested benevolence but also demonstrates that she was, prior to Hopkins, thinking about how human suffering could be alleviated through selfless and benevolent action.

After she praises Whitefield for the "charity and love" he showed to Boston, Wheatley moves to discuss his thoughts on the relationship between a person's converted status and moral character. She writes:

He pray'd that grace in every heart might dwell:
 He long'd to see *America* excell;
 He charg'd its youth to let the grace divine
 Arise, and in their future actions shine. (*CW* 114)

In saying that “the grace divine” is capable of dwelling in “every heart,” Wheatley extends upon her claim from “On Being Brought” that African persons can be “refin’d and join th’ angelic train.” Yet Wheatley’s Whitefield elegy sets itself apart from “On Being Brought” in its willingness to even describe Africans as suffering persons in the first place. Ventriloquizing Whitefield’s thoughts on Christ in sermon form, Wheatley writes,

Take HIM ye wretched for your only good;
 Take HIM ye starving souls to be your food.
 Ye thirsty, come to his life giving stream:
 Ye Preachers, take him for your joyful theme:
 Take HIM, “my dear AMERICANS,” he said,
 Be your complaints in his kind bosom laid:
 Take HIM ye *Africans*, he longs for you;
 Impartial SAVIOUR, is his title due . . . (CW 114)

Since Wheatley’s Whitefield elegy was published as a broadside in Newport less than six months after Hopkins moved there—and thus only a few months after Whitefield visited with Hopkins and preached at his First Congregational Church—it is likely that Hopkins read Wheatley’s elegy.³⁹ It is, therefore, just as likely that Hopkins was influenced by Wheatley’s emphasizing the value of impartiality to benevolent action as well as her aligning Africans with other suffering persons. Indeed, this elegy’s inclusion of “*Africans*” in its list of persons who are in need of Christ’s healing and benevolent condition anticipates Hopkins’ own incorporation of “African slaves” into his *Dialogue*’s catalogue of persons who deserve “mercy and compassion.”⁴⁰ Recalling his claim from *True Holiness* that benevolent persons should be engaged “in the cause of the poor, helpless widow” (30), Hopkins in his *Dialogue* says that benevolent persons should also

³⁹ Park, “Memoir,” 86-87.

⁴⁰ Samuel Hopkins, *A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans* (Norwich: Judah P. Sooner, 1776), 59. I will hereafter cite Hopkins’ text parenthetically by page number.

work to eliminate African persons' suffering, for "the African slaves [are] among us the poor, the strangers, the fatherless, who are oppressed" (59). By having their respective lists of suffering persons include "*Africans*" and "African slaves," Wheatley and Hopkins thus demonstrate their desire to associate Africans with other pained persons and argue that everyone deserves to experience the benefits of Christ's "Impartial" character.⁴¹

Though Wheatley's 1772 poem to the Earl of Dartmouth is similar to her 1770 Whitefield elegy in that it also doesn't shy away from describing African persons' suffering, it still differs from the earlier poem in that it explicitly compares political and racial slavery and, in so doing, calls attention to the suffering that African persons experience as a result of the slave trade. After she describes the impact that political slavery has had on the American colonists—how England's "lawless hand" came to "enslave" them (*CW* 40)—Wheatley details how her family was affected by racial slavery:

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
Wonder from whence my love of *Freedom* sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway? (*CW* 40)

How can Wheatley on the one hand describe Africa as a "fancy'd happy seat" and on the

⁴¹ Astrid Franke also argues that Wheatley's discussion of Christ's impartiality is crucial to understanding this poem's ethics: "Whitefield's Savior is characterized as impartial because he can be received by anyone willing to 'take him,' especially those who, in the eyes of the English preacher portrayed by Wheatley, are in special need: sinners, Americans, and Africans." Astrid Franke, "'Phillis Wheatley, Melancholy Muse,'" *The New England Quarterly* 77.2 (2004): 232.

other hand say that her kidnapping experience was an event of only “seeming cruel fate”? As in “On Being Brought” and “To the University,” Wheatley uses Hopkins’ theory of advantageous sin to distinguish between the cruelty of the sinful event itself and its result: her becoming a Christian in America. Though she doesn’t explicitly discuss America’s religious situation in this poem, Wheatley did criticize Africa for being an unholy place in a letter that she wrote to Obour Tanner a few months earlier. In the 19 May 1772 letter, Wheatley thanked God for bringing Tanner and her from a place “where the divine light of revelation (being obscur’d) is as darkness” to a place where “the knowledge of the true God and eternal life are made manifest” (*CW* 141–42).⁴² That Wheatley chastised Africa for being a place where there is no “divine light” less than five months before she wrote her Dartmouth poem helps to explain why she considers her kidnapping experience to be only “seeming[ly] cruel.”

But even if she doesn’t completely reject Hopkins’ theory of advantageous sin—even if she can’t fully commit to calling her servitude “cruel”—this doesn’t necessarily mean that Wheatley’s Dartmouth poem is entirely reminiscent of her earlier, less political poetry. For in those pre-1770 poems, Wheatley never even implicitly critiques slavery; she only discusses her kidnapping experience insofar as it allows her to briefly allude to her joy over its result: her conversion experience. In her Dartmouth poem, however, Wheatley’s description of her kidnapping experience informs not just an implicit expression of gratitude to God but also, and most importantly, an explicit condemnation of slavery. Wheatley may continue to write about slavery as an “advantageous”—or only “seeming[ly] cruel”—part of her life, but in her Dartmouth poem she still distances

⁴² For more on Wheatley and Tanner, see Tara Bynum, “Phillis Wheatley on Friendship,” *Legacy* 31.1 (2014): 42–51.

herself from Hopkins' philosophy of advantageous sin to the extent that she focuses more on slavery's sinfulness (its "tyrannic sway") than on its results (her conversion experience).

Though her account of her kidnapping experience motivates her Dartmouth poem's condemnation of slavery, it is important to note that Wheatley fails to mention her own—and only alludes to her father's—reaction to that experience. Yet as is the case with her Whitefield elegy, Wheatley's refusal to discuss her own pain doesn't infringe upon the poem's ability to protest slavery. Nor does it prevent her from aligning African persons with other suffering beings, such as the American colonists who are similarly "enslave[d]" by England's "wanton *Tyranny*" (*CW* 40). Following her characterization of Christ as someone who cares for all suffering persons, regardless of their race, in her Whitefield elegy, Wheatley thus presents herself as a disinterested subject who is as concerned with Americans' as she is with African persons' pain—hence, she ends the stanza by saying that "Others [should] never feel [the] tyrannic sway" that her parents felt upon losing her to the slave trade. If one were to claim that Wheatley endorses slavery because she does not detail her own suffering, then one would be ignoring not just the descriptions of other African persons' grief in her poems but also the ways in which Wheatley's religiosity influenced her thoughts on personal suffering. Though Hopkins' evangelical philosophies of advantageous sin and disinterested benevolence take different stances on whether one should passively trust in God's plan or actively work on his behalf to eliminate others' suffering, they nevertheless both encourage persons to selflessly abandon their own interests and dedicate themselves to God. In a similar fashion, Wheatley's continued investment in evangelical theology causes her to emulate a

disinterested persona in her writings from the 1760s and the 1770s. Yet Wheatley's later works set themselves apart from her earlier poems in that her disinterested condition assists her not in obscuring or downplaying her thoughts on slavery or her own pain (as in "On Being Brought") but in formulating a critique of slavery that is based entirely on accounts of other African persons' suffering. Thus, when she claims that her kidnapping experience was only a "seeming[ly] cruel" event, or when she describes her father's but not her own suffering as a result of her kidnapping experience, Wheatley is not tempering her condemnation of slavery and is instead crafting herself as a disinterested subject who is concerned with others' needs more than her own.

As much as disinterestedness is an ethical stance that evangelicals like Wheatley and Hopkins used to formulate their political opinions, it is also a term that is crucial to civic republican understandings of personhood. As Peter Coviello argues, Wheatley in her Dartmouth poem even alludes to republican ideology when she says that her "feeling heart" "wishes for the common good" (*CW* 40): he asserts that Wheatley here "references the capacity of the civic-minded to put aside partiality and personal interest, and act strictly on behalf of the good of the whole of the republic," and that, in doing so, she "recalls . . . a specifically republican conception of political virtue."⁴³ Though civic republicans forward public interests over private passions—"the good of the whole . . . republic" over "partiality and personal interest"—they also champion the interests of the majority over those of the minority, and so wind up neglecting marginalized groups' interests. Wheatley, however, praises Dartmouth for working to "sooth the griefs" of those who are marginalized—those who are suffering and deprived of freedom—and then

⁴³ Peter Coviello, "Agonizing Affection: Affect and Nation in Early America," *Early American Literature* 37.3 (2002): 445.

says that she hopes God supports his desire to end such suffering (“May heav’nly grace the sacred sanction give, / To all thy works” [CW 40]). In doing this, Wheatley aligns herself less with civic republicanism and more with evangelicalism, for while civic republican ideology argues that virtuous persons must promote the general public’s interests, evangelical dogma differently posits that a person’s virtuous status is dependent upon his or her ability to exhibit benevolence to those who are suffering and in need. Hence, by discussing marginalized figures such as her parents’ suffering in order to explain why she has a “love of *Freedom*,” Wheatley shows that civic republicanism could not have been the only discourse that she appealed to when crafting her Dartmouth poem’s theorization of benevolence. This chapter therefore concludes by demonstrating how Wheatley’s 1774 letter to Samson Occom—and Hopkins’ *Dialogue* after it—used both evangelical theology and civic republican ideology to argue that persons are obligated to abandon individual interests and work on God’s behalf to eliminate enslaved persons’ suffering.

III. Toward an Evangelical Republicanism

Wheatley’s 11 February 1774 letter to Mohegan Reverend Samson Occom is similar to her Dartmouth poem in that it critiques slavery at the same time that it claims that Christianity can positively impact an African person’s life. As a recently freed slave, Wheatley writes:

[T]he divine Light is chasing away the thick Darkness which broods over the Land of Africa; and the Chaos which has reign’d so long, is converting into beautiful Order, and [r]eveals more and more clearly, the glorious Dispensation of civil and religious Liberty, which are so inseparably united, that there is little or no Enjoyment of one without the other: Otherwise, perhaps, the Israelites had been less solicitous for their Freedom from Egyptian Slavery; I do not say they would have been contented without it, by no means, for in every human Breast,

God has implanted a Principle, which we call Love of Freedom; it is impatient of Oppression, and pants for Deliverance; and by the Leave of our Modern Egyptians I will assert, that the same Principle lives in us. (*CW* 152–53)

The reason that enslaved persons are “impatient of Oppression” is because they, like all other persons, have a divinely ordained desire for and “Love of Freedom” (“for in every human Breast, God has implanted [this] Principle”). Reiterating Wheatley’s claim that freedom is something that all persons innately—and thus cannot help but—desire, Hopkins in his *Dialogue* not only says that persons should “do their utmost in assisting their poor suffering brother to obtain his liberty, which God has commanded him to desire and seek” (25), but also encourages enslavers to “restore the[ir slaves] to that liberty . . . which they have as good a claim as you yourself and your children” (45).

Though Hopkins never commented on whether Wheatley’s claims about freedom being a divinely ordained desire informed his *Dialogue*, it is likely that he read and was influenced by her Occom letter, for they were corresponding with each other when it was published in the *Newport Mercury*, as well as ten other newspapers, in the spring of 1774 (Carretta 227n41).⁴⁴ In fact, only two days before she composed her letter to Occom, Wheatley wrote to Hopkins and told him that she was sending him twenty copies of her

⁴⁴ Three scholars have suggested that Wheatley visited Newport during this time, but none cites any evidence to support that claim. While Levernier argues that Wheatley “spent a great deal of time in Newport during the period of Hopkins’ early tenure there,” Merle Richmond conjectures that the Wheatleys were “sufficiently affluent to vacation in Newport” and “would have brought their prize intellectual possession with them and . . . mingled with such resident families as were sufficiently wealthy to own slaves.” Levernier, “Phillis Wheatley, 34; Merle Richmond, *Bid the Vassal Soar: Interpretive Essays on the Life and Poetry of Phillis Wheatley (ca. 1753-1784) and George Moses Horton (ca. 1797-1883)* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974), 44. Despite offering no citations, Martha Bacon more specifically asserts that Wheatley was in Newport in the summer of 1770, which is also when Whitefield was visiting with Hopkins and preaching at his church: “When [Obour Tanner] was a very old woman she told Harriet Beecher Stowe that she thought that she and Phillis had made the journey to America in the same slave ship. Obour also believed that she recognized Phillis when the two met in Newport in the summer of 1770 when Mary Wheatley spent a season in the watering place and brought Phillis with her as her maid-companion.” Martha Bacon, *Puritan Promenade* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964), 31.

recently published *Poems* (CW 151).⁴⁵ In this letter, Wheatley also declined Hopkins' invitation to join two of his black parishioners—Bristol Yamma and John Quamine—on a missionary trip to Africa.⁴⁶ As she would do in her Occom letter two days later, Wheatley described Africa as a place that has recently embraced God's "divine Light," saying, "My heart expands with sympathetic Joy to see at a distant time the thick cloud of ignorance dispersing from the face of my benighted Country" (CW 152). Given the resemblance between Wheatley's descriptions of Africa's Christianization in these letters to Occom and Hopkins, it seems that the reason she told Occom that the "divine Light" has "chas[ed] away" Africa's "Darkness" is because she knew of and was excited by Hopkins' efforts to save Africa from a "Spiritual Famine" (CW 152).

Though her Occom letter begins by referencing her enthusiasm over Africa's embracing of Christianity, the remainder of the letter actually focuses less on Africa's Christian status and more on the "natural Rights" "respecting the Negroes" (CW 152).

⁴⁵ Brekus has discovered that a copy of Wheatley's *Poems* wound up in the First Congregational Church's library shortly after she wrote to Hopkins. Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World*, 401n107. In her 9 February 1774 letter to Hopkins, Wheatley said that his son paid her for the twenty copies of her *Poems*, and that while seventeen copies were for Hopkins, three copies were reserved for two of his devotees: Obour Tanner and a "Mrs. Mason" (CW 151). Sheryl Kujawa believes that the Mrs. Mason who purchased a copy of Wheatley's *Poems* is Mary Mason, who cared for Hopkins' devoted parishioner, Sarah Osborn, in her final days. Sheryl Kujawa, "'The Path of Duty Plain': Samuel Hopkins, Sarah Osborn, and Revolutionary Newport," *Rhode Island History* 58.3 (2000): 84. A "Mrs. Mary Mason" is, along with Tanner, listed as one of the Newport subscribers to Hopkins' *System of Doctrines*. Samuel Hopkins, *The System of Doctrines*, vol. 1 (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793), xi. Like Grimsted, Carretta has suggested that Wheatley's first poem to ever appear in print, "On Messrs. Hussey and Coffin," was published in the 14-21 December 1767 issue of the *Newport Mercury* as a result of Susanna Wheatley's probable relationship with Sarah Osborn (65). Grimsted, "Anglo-American Racism," 379. Though he doesn't offer any direct evidence to support this claim, it is probable that Phillis or Susanna Wheatley knew Osborn, for Phillis Wheatley met one of Osborn's students (John Quamine), corresponded with her minister (Hopkins), and mentioned her caretaker (Mary Mason) in this letter to Hopkins. Wheatley admits to knowing Quamine in a recently discovered 14 February 1776 letter to Tanner: she says that she "passed the last evening very agreeably" with "Mr. Quamine" and asks Tanner to send "dutiful respects to Mr. Hopkins & family." "The Hand of America's First Black Poet," *NPR.com*, 21 November 2005, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5021077>.

⁴⁶ For more on Yamma and Quamine, Hopkins' failed African missionary project, and Wheatley's (lack of) involvement in it, see Edward Andrews, *Native Apostles: Black and Indian Missionaries in the British Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 187-221; Samuel Hopkins and Ezra Stiles, *To the Public* (Newport: Solomon Southwick, 1776); and Hopkins' unpublished "Narrative."

Hence, after she describes Africa's conversion from "Chaos" to "beautiful Order," Wheatley criticizes New England enslavers by calling them "our Modern Egyptians" in that they, like the Egyptians in Exodus, prohibit their slaves from obtaining freedom. She then tells Occom that these enslavers need to be particularly aware of "the strange Absurdity of their Conduct whose Words and Actions are so diametrically opposite. How well the Cry for Liberty, and the reverse Disposition for the Exercise of oppressive Power over others agree,—I humbly think it does not require the Penetration of a Philosopher to determine" (*CW* 153). Instead of trying to ease their slaves' suffering and provide them with freedom—which is what they want England to do for them—New England enslavers favor their own interests over their slaves' pain and so problematically inhabit what Wheatley terms a "reverse Disposition."

Indeed, as Eric Slauter has shown, Wheatley was one of many colonial Americans who argued that enslavers should consider themselves "inconsistent" for not freeing their slaves who are, like themselves, fighting for freedom from oppression.⁴⁷ For instance, Hopkins in his *Dialogue* asserts that when enslaved persons "observe all this cry and struggle for liberty . . . and behold the *sons of liberty*, oppressing and tyrannizing over many thousands of poor blacks who have as good a claim to liberty as themselves, they are shocked with the glaring inconsistency, and wonder they themselves do not see it" (30). According to Hopkins, New Englanders don't recognize the "glaring inconsistency" between their desire for freedom and their treatment of enslaved persons "who have as good a claim to liberty as themselves" because they care more about their own interests than they do enslaved persons' pain (37). "If indifferent persons were to judge," Hopkins

⁴⁷ Eric Slauter, "Neoclassical Culture in a Society with Slaves: Race and Rights in the Age of Wheatley," *Early American Studies* 2.1 (Spring 2004): 81-122.

reasons, “it would doubtless be found that many of your servants, if not all, have much more than earned what they cost you . . . and in this view, you ought to let them go out free” (37). Disinterested or “indifferent” enslavers should not be as concerned with the profit that enslaved persons afford them and should instead recognize the resemblance between their own and enslaved persons’ suffering at the hands of oppression. By aligning New Englanders’ and enslaved persons’ suffering, then, Wheatley and Hopkins encourage all persons to inhabit a disinterested condition, which will subsequently allow them to recognize that tyrannical and self-interested behavior always results in human suffering.

Though she condemns New England enslavers for their “Avarice” and “oppressive Power over others,” and in this way demonstrates her alliance with contemporaneous republican critiques of self-interest, Wheatley’s belief that all Christians need to alleviate marginalized persons’ suffering equally informs this letter’s condemnation of enslavers. Indeed, the reason that Wheatley considers enslavers to be selfish is because they are not at all concerned with alleviating enslaved persons’ pain. A few months before Wheatley wrote this letter to Ocom, Hopkins also argued that Christians can only consider themselves to be virtuous or disinterested if they work to eliminate others’ suffering: if they exhibit “the most cordial friendship to all without exception; and wish and seek the good of every individual” (*True Holiness* 12). For Hopkins, seeking “the good of every individual” entails being benevolent not just to other Christians but also to those who are capable of but prevented from doing or being good: he says that “[t]he love of benevolence is good-will to beings capable of good or happiness, and consists in desiring and pursuing their good, or rejoicing in their

possessing it” (9). Hopkins’ argument that Christians must exhibit benevolence to all “beings capable of good” thus explains why Wheatley in her Ocom letter allows her discussion of Africa’s embracing of Christianity to inform her argument in favor of black “natural rights”: because it permits her to uphold converted African persons as disinterested beings who are deserving of benevolence. Furthermore, Wheatley’s saying that Africa’s Christianization reveals “more clearly, the glorious Dispensation of civil and religious Liberty, which are so inseparably united,” assists her in claiming that African persons are as capable of being converted as they are capable of virtuous civic participation. Though she uses the language of republicanism to promote black civil liberties and criticize New England enslavers’ avarice, it is important to note that all of Wheatley’s claims about black “natural rights” are introduced and framed by her discussion of Christianity’s ability to transform all persons, including Africans, into disinterested beings through conversion. Any criticism that Wheatley has of New England enslavers must accordingly be viewed in relation to her most pressing issue with them: their refusal to help relieve other Christians’ suffering.

Given its engagement with republican ideology, Waldstreicher argues that scholars most often read Wheatley’s Ocom letter in an effort to “understand [her political] strategy on the eve of the Revolution.”⁴⁸ Like Charles Akers, who argues that this letter offers “a fuller understanding of Revolutionary Boston’s social structure and the place of slavery in it,” Waldstreicher contends that Wheatley’s Ocom letter helps to position her “as an actor in, rather than a reactor to, the twin[n]ed dramas of slavery and rebellion” and so “broaden[s] our understanding of who successfully engaged in

⁴⁸ Waldstreicher, “Wheatleyan Moment,” 540.

revolutionary politics.”⁴⁹ But to examine Wheatley’s Ocom letter only in the context of the American Revolution is to ignore the confluence of this letter’s theological claims and its politics—to neglect the ways in which Wheatley “successfully engaged” with evangelical theology in order to craft her stance on slavery. For as much as she used republican ideology to criticize New England enslavers for exhibiting “oppressive Power over others,” Wheatley also used evangelical theology to encourage persons to selflessly work on God’s behalf to eliminate suffering in the surrounding world. According to Ruth Bloch, it was not at all unusual for Protestant theology to influence theories of republicanism in the colonial era, for

the very idea of liberty was laden with religious connotations. Just as tyranny was closely identified with sin, so liberty was closely identified with grace. Even the commonplace radical whig idea that liberty depended on disinterested “virtue” or “public spirit,” a perspective usually associated with the secular theories of civic republicanism, was essentially another variation on the same theme—for American Protestants usually assumed that true virtue was impossible to achieve without Christian faith.⁵⁰

As much as republican ideology and evangelical theology together value disinterested behavior and advance similar conceptions of liberty, however, Bloch and Mark Noll argue that evangelical republicans don’t conceive of virtue in the same way that purely civic republicans do. Noll posits that evangelical republicans define virtue less “in Machiavellian terms as disinterested service to the common good” and more “in biblical terms as life guided by God’s will.”⁵¹ Rather than argue that one must forsake private passions so as to satisfy the interests of the “the common good,” evangelical

⁴⁹ Charles Akers, “‘Our Modern Egyptians’: Phillis Wheatley and the Whig Campaign Against Slavery in Revolutionary Boston,” *Journal of Negro History* 60.3 (1975): 401; Waldstreicher, “Wheatleyan Moment,” 527.

⁵⁰ Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 61.

⁵¹ Noll, *America’s God*, 90.

republicans believe that one must first and foremost work to imitate God's will, as God is the exemplar of benevolence and always has humanity's best interests in mind. In contrast to civic republican conceptions of disinterestedness, then, this evangelical version of disinterested virtue does not ask persons to set aside their own interests so that they can then come together with other disinterested persons (mostly elite white men) for their own benefit. Instead, it encourages persons to totally vacate their individual interests and embrace God's will so that they can then be wholly immersed in and work to alleviate others' suffering. While those who adhere to republican ideology value public interests over private passions and so do not theorize how the suffering of individual persons can be eliminated, those who believe in disinterested benevolence argue that one can only satisfy the interests of "the common good" if one works on God's behalf to heal others' pain. To claim that Wheatley's and Hopkins' critique of slavery is merely indebted to republican ideology is thus to discount their belief that one cannot properly exhibit benevolence until one selflessly acts in accordance with God's will.

Wheatley's and Hopkins' evangelical theories of disinterested benevolence may help to reveal that disinterestedness was more than just a term that colonial Americans associated with civic republican ideology, but it also explains why Wheatley never based her critique of slavery on her own suffering. In her poetry from the 1760s, Wheatley didn't discuss her own pain and focused more on how her being taken from Africa to America, and her being converted to Christianity, was evidence of providential design. In her antislavery writings from the 1770s, Wheatley still didn't detail the suffering that she experienced as an enslaved person, but she made a point to distinguish between her thoughts on her own servitude and her issues with the institution of slavery itself. In other

words, she didn't let her thoughts on her own suffering—or her gratitude for her conversion experience—prevent her from protesting slavery for the pain it caused African persons. Given the limitations imposed on Wheatley as an African American enslaved woman, it could be argued that she did not discuss her own pain and instead focused on the suffering that other African persons experienced so as to escape culpability and make it appear as though her attacks on slavery didn't come from her personally. However, it is also just as likely that Wheatley talked more of others' suffering because her theology, like Hopkins', encouraged her to be concerned with others' needs more than her own and to completely trust in God's plan.

In the following chapter, I argue that two minister-poets, Lemuel Haynes and Timothy Dwight, followed Wheatley and Hopkins in developing their own evangelical conception of disinterestedness. These four writers mutually believed that persons could only adequately exhibit benevolence to others once they aligned their will with God's and abandoned self-serving interests through the conversion process. Just as Wheatley fused civic republican ideology and evangelical theology in her Dartmouth poem and Occom letter, so Haynes and Dwight integrated their evangelical understanding of disinterestedness into their more spiritualized philosophy of republicanism. As the next chapter shows, this evangelical brand of republicanism also informed Haynes' and Dwight's protests against slavery—their arguing that slavery is an institution that promotes suffering over disinterested benevolence.

Chapter 3

The Republican Sermon and New Divinity Antislavery: Lemuel Haynes with Timothy Dwight

In June of 1814, the African American minister Lemuel Haynes was invited to preach in what was once Jonathan Edwards' church in New Haven, Connecticut. An avid reader and admirer of Edwards' theology, Haynes also had the opportunity to preach in front of Yale College's president, and Edwards' grandson, Timothy Dwight. Even though one of the sermon's listeners says that Haynes "used no notes, but spoke with freedom and correctness," Timothy Mather Cooley printed an outline of the sermon Haynes gave in the Blue Church in his *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes* (1837).¹ Taking Isaiah 5:4 as his text, Haynes opens his sermon by likening God's caring for his followers to a farmer's caring for his fields, stating: "Vineyards were very common in the eastern country, and composed a considerable part of field husbandry. They were made in very fruitful places, and required much care and cultivation—often expressive of that care which God takes of people in this world, especially of Israel."² Following his claim that vineyards can only "bear fruit" and gain "value" once they are sustained by caring farmers, Haynes argues that persons can only become virtuous after they have aligned their will with God's: that in order for "men [to] bring forth good fruit" they must be "under Divine cultivations" (*BPWA* 173, 172).

Two decades before Haynes talked of the relationship between man's piety and his agrarian abilities, Dwight—the man who was "sitting in the pulpit with" Haynes

¹ Timothy Mather Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes* (New-York: Harper & Brothers, 82 Cliff-St., 1837): 167-168. For more on Haynes' visit with Dwight in New Haven, see 160-168.

² Lemuel Haynes, "Outline of a Sermon on Is. 5:4 [1814]," in *Black Preacher to White America: The Collected Writings of Lemuel Haynes, 1774-1833*, ed. Richard Newman (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990), 171. Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Haynes' works will come from this volume, which I will hereafter cite parenthetically as *BPWA*, followed by the page number.

while he was delivering this sermon—also argued that men owe both their virtue and their agrarian accomplishments to God in his long georgic poem, *Greenfield Hill* (1794).³ In the start of the poem's first book, "The Prospect," Dwight looks at the Connecticut landscape and describes it as "tasting every good / Of competence, independence, and peace."⁴ Though most georgic poets would go on to describe the beauty of the landscape as evidence of man's agrarian talents, Dwight contends that man's piety and benevolence—his "virtue" and concern "for the public good" (12)—have equally contributed to the splendor of this rural scene. He writes: "Not here how rich, of what peculiar blood, / Or office high; but of what genuine worth, / What talents bright and useful, what good deeds, / What piety to God, what love to man, / The question is" (12). As Haynes will do a few decades later in his sermon on Isaiah 5:4, Dwight here posits that one's ability to be deemed virtuous—partake in "good deeds" and show "love to man"—is related to one's "piety to God."

Even though Dwight and Haynes never corresponded with each other, and there is no evidence to suggest that they met beyond the time that Haynes preached for Dwight in New Haven, it is not surprising that they had similar understandings of virtue, for they were both affiliated with the New Divinity Movement's brand of evangelicalism and elaborated upon its central ethical theory of disinterested benevolence.⁵ Like Samuel

³ Cooley, *Sketches*, 162.

⁴ Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill: A Poem in Seven Parts* (New York: Childs and Swaine, 1794): 12. I will hereafter cite Dwight's poem parenthetically by page number.

⁵ Besides writing from contrasting subject positions—Haynes was born into indentured servitude and Dwight was born into a well-known evangelical family—these two writers had a lot in common: they both fought in the Revolutionary War, were members of the Federalist Party, became ministers in the 1780s, wrote poetry, and subscribed to New Divinity theology. Even if they never met again or corresponded after Haynes preached in the Blue Church, Dwight remembered Haynes enough to mention him in his *Travels in New England and New York* (1820-1821): "Rutland contains two parishes. West Rutland, the second parish, is remarkable for having a religious minister who is a man of color. This is the first instance of the kind which has ever existed in New England." Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*,

Hopkins, Haynes and Dwight argued that benevolent persons must also be converted persons, since it is through being converted that one no longer selfishly acts according to one's own interests and becomes subservient to God's will. In the section on "Disinterested Affection" in his *System of Doctrines* (1793), Hopkins posits that the only way one can exhibit disinterested benevolence is if one not only loves God above all else but also promotes others' interests over one's own: he says that disinterested benevolence is an "exercise [through] which the true convert loves God with all his heart," which in turn causes that person to be concerned with "the greatest good and happiness of the whole."⁶ In adherence to civic republican ideology, Hopkins claims that a disinterested person must aim to satisfy "the happiness of the whole." But Hopkins' description of a person's ethical obligation to forward communal interests sets itself apart from republican ideology when he says that one can only promote the interests of the "general good" after one undergoes a conversion experience and dedicates one's self to God.

Because they associate disinterestedness with one's post-conversion moral condition, evangelicals like Hopkins depart from civic republicans who, according to Mark Noll, "prized human self-sufficiency more highly than dependence upon God."⁷ Despite holding different views of humanity's capacity for moral action, Noll and Thomas Kidd posit that Protestant and republican modes of thought came together in the Revolutionary era to protest British tyranny: that Protestants "empower[ed] republicanism] with the ideals of Christianity" so as to "articulate a new philosophy of

vol. 2, ed. Barbara Miller Solomon (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), 287-288.

⁶ Samuel Hopkins, *The System of Doctrines, Contained in Divine Revelation, Explained and Defended*, vol. 1 (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793), 558, 547.

⁷ Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 57-58.

the patriot cause.”⁸ While these scholars and others have recognized Protestant theology’s influence on the rhetoric of freedom and natural rights surrounding the American Revolution, not enough attention has been given to the ways in which post-Revolutionary Americans theorized the relationship between evangelicalism and civic republicanism.⁹ Despite arguing that post-Revolutionary Federalists like Dwight “posited Christianity as naturally supporting the government and creating the morals and virtue upon which a healthy republic would depend,” Jonathan Den Hartog does not focus on how exactly these Federalists were able to conjoin the seemingly opposing discourses of civic republicanism and evangelicalism.¹⁰ Extending upon Den Hartog, this chapter argues that Haynes and Dwight could only theorize their own more inclusive evangelical brand of republicanism once they rejected the civic republican and embraced the evangelical conception of disinterestedness. Where civic republicans defined disinterestedness as one’s propensity for rational reflection that in turn permits one to work on behalf of the general public’s interests, evangelicals considered disinterestedness to be a propensity for benevolence that one gains not through one’s individual intellect but through conversion. As I detailed in this dissertation’s introduction, civic republicans like Benjamin Franklin believed that only elite white men can disinterestedly care for the “common” or “public good,” and so they wind up equating the public’s interests with their own elite white male interests. By contrast, evangelicals believe that disinterested persons should be concerned

⁸ Thomas Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 98.

⁹ See Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and, more recently, Spencer McBride, *Pulpit and Nation: Clergymen and the Politics of Revolutionary America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017). Michael Winship too traces the fusion of Christian doctrine and republican thought, but among seventeenth-century Puritans in England and America. Michael Winship, *Godly Republicanism: Puritans, Pilgrims, and a City on a Hill* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Jonathan Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 6-7.

less with the majority and more with the minority's interests, that they should especially care for those whom the civic republican conception of disinterestedness meant to exclude: those who are suffering, marginalized, and in need.

Even though Hopkins did not use his evangelical understanding of disinterestedness to offer a new perspective on the relationship between individual political participation and the government, Haynes and Dwight did use this evangelical ethical philosophy to expand upon and revise civic republican ideology. In this chapter, I argue that Haynes and Dwight theorized their evangelical brand of republicanism by initiating what I term the genre of the "republican sermon": a type of sermon that doesn't just offer spiritual advice to its readers or listeners but also theorizes how a republican government should function. By arguing that those who belong to or ruler over a republican government must exhibit disinterested benevolence to all suffering persons, Haynes' and Dwight's texts do more than theorize an evangelical philosophy of republicanism. Indeed, this chapter also argues that Haynes' and Dwight's evangelical conception of republicanism—and thus of disinterestedness—motivated their protests against slavery. For at the same time that they were preaching and writing about republican ideology in their sermons, Haynes and Dwight were also developing their antislavery politics, occasionally within those very sermons.

Though they published countless republican sermons, Haynes and Dwight never published a strictly antislavery text in their lifetime. Dwight briefly discussed the evils of slavery in *Greenfield Hill* and his *The Charitable Blessed* (1810) sermon, and Haynes drafted but never completed an antislavery treatise, *Liberty Further Extended*, in 1776

(which was discovered and published for the first time in 1983).¹¹ The only other scholar to analyze these two figures together, John Saillant, has similarly argued that Haynes and Dwight drew upon their Christian ethics and their theories of republicanism when formulating their stance against slavery.¹² In this chapter, I build on Saillant by demonstrating how Haynes and Dwight used their own evangelical conceptions of disinterestedness to distance themselves from civic republican ideology and create their own evangelical brand of republicanism. By encouraging persons to focus less on the majority's interests and more on marginalized persons' suffering, Haynes' and Dwight's new evangelical philosophies of disinterestedness and republicanism could not help but compel them to write and preach against slavery.¹³

Before discussing Haynes' and Dwight's writings against slavery, however, I will, in this chapter's first section, demonstrate how these figures incorporated the New Divinity Movement's central evangelical ethic of disinterested benevolence into their theology's moral system. In the chapter's second section, I argue that Haynes and Dwight initiated the genre of the republican sermon in order to theorize an alternative, evangelical brand of republican ideology. In contrast to civic republicans, who believe

¹¹ Ruth Bogin, "“Liberty Further Extended”: A 1776 Antislavery Manuscript by Lemuel Haynes," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 40.1 (1983): 85-105.

¹² According to Saillant, Haynes believed that "republican society could survive only if its motivating forces of affection and benevolence and its benefits of freedom and equality were extended to blacks." Though he only uses Dwight to contextualize Haynes' philosophy of benevolence and antislavery politics, Saillant does argue that Dwight's conception of benevolence, like Haynes', is "crucial to [his] theology as well as to [his] social thought" in that it allowed him "to ask radical questions about slavery and race relations." John Saillant, *Black Puritan, Black Republican: The Life and Thought of Lemuel Haynes, 1753-1833* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 68, 134.

¹³ Peter Hinks has also argued that Hopkinsian disinterested benevolence influenced Dwight's antislavery writings. He posits that Dwight was a "significant innovator of the doctrine of disinterested benevolence" in that he "value[d] voluntaristic reform as the proper method for addressing not only disorder, immorality, and irreligion in American society but also social exclusion and suffering." Peter Hinks, "Timothy Dwight, Congregationalism, and Early Antislavery," in *The Problem of Evil: Slavery, Freedom, and the Ambiguities of American Reform*, eds. Steven Mintz and John Stauffer (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 155.

that disinterested persons must care more for the (white) majority's interests than their own, evangelicals argue that persons must be disinterested to the extent that they align their will with God's and, in so doing, come to care indiscriminately for all persons but especially for those who are suffering. In the chapter's third section, I demonstrate how Haynes and Dwight promoted evangelical republicanism by offering revised interpretations of a figure who is typically associated with civic republican ideology: George Washington.¹⁴ The chapter's fourth section then shows how Haynes' and Dwight's claim that evangelical republicans must, as Washington does, care for marginalized and suffering persons' interests informs these writers' arguments against slavery.

Along the way, this chapter also examines John Adams' writings, especially those that theorize civic republican ideology and offer commentary on New Divinity evangelicalism. Attending to Adams' writings helps to further elucidate the ways in which Haynes and Dwight distanced themselves from the more secular, civic republican ideology by allowing for their own evangelical understanding of disinterestedness to motivate their heretofore under-examined evangelical philosophy of republicanism. It also reveals that one of the most ardent theorists of civic republican ideology was, like his evangelical contemporaries, more preoccupied with the relationship between evangelicalism and civic republicanism than has previously been acknowledged.

¹⁴ To formulate Washington as a symbol of evangelical republicanism, Haynes and Dwight described him from a "mythical-literary" and not a "historical-empirical" perspective, as they did not seek to "find 'the man in the myth.'" Haynes' and Dwight's depictions of Washington thus help to bolster Michael Drexler's and Ed White's argument that early Americans considered the Founding Fathers to be "*imaginative fictions*, characters in the specifically literary sense, whose circulation is essential for their constitution and whose significance in the narrative often results from narrative elements clustered around them"; that "what we call the 'Founding Fathers' was (and still is) primarily a literary and symbolic phenomenon—it entailed certain reading practices, narratives, relational logics, constellations, and genres." Michael Drexler and Ed White, *The Traumatic Colonel: The Founding Fathers, Slavery, and the Phantasmatic Aaron Burr* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 7, 5, 17.

I. Disinterestedness and Evangelical Love

In the start of the first volume of Hopkins' *System of Doctrines* is a list of "Subscribers' Names" organized by the state that such subscribers resided in. Although much of this list contains the names of ordinary townspeople who evidently admired Hopkins and his theology enough to purchase this work, the list also contains the names of some major theologians of the early national era, including the New Divinity ministers Jonathan Edwards, Jr. and Timothy Dwight.¹⁵ The list of Rhode Island subscribers sets itself apart from the other states' lists, however, in its separating out its "Free Black" subscribers. That Rhode Island's free black population received their own list does not mean that other persons of color didn't subscribe to Hopkins' *System*, for "Rev. Lemuel Haynes" is listed among the Vermont subscribers, albeit without any mention of his race.¹⁶

In the decades before he would be included among this volume's list of subscribers, Haynes was not always known for his ministerial duties. Indeed, before becoming the first ordained African American minister in 1785, Haynes labored as an indentured servant on a deacon's farm in western Massachusetts and fought as a minuteman in the Revolutionary War.¹⁷ Upon returning from the War, Haynes moved in with the Rose family who had previously indentured him, and then with the New Divinity minister Daniel Farrand, and started writing his own sermons.¹⁸ Though he referenced

¹⁵ Hopkins, *System of Doctrines*, xii.

¹⁶ Hopkins, *System*, xv.

¹⁷ On Haynes' ordination, see Cooley 72-73. On Haynes' indentured servitude and military service, see Saillant, *Black Puritan*, 10, 13, 15.

¹⁸ For more on the Rose family who indentured him, their religiosity, and their educating Haynes, see Cooley 29-30, 37, 39-40. On Haynes and Farrand see Saillant, *Black Puritan*, 12, 84. On Farrand's New Divinity leanings, see James McLachlan, *Princetonians, 1748-1768: A Biographical Dictionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 29-30.

and praised Hopkins in many of his published and unpublished sermons from the early nineteenth century, Haynes aligned himself with New Divinity dogma as soon as he started writing sermons on the Rose farm in the 1770s and thus before his official ordination.¹⁹ In his earliest surviving sermon (1776)—which Saillant describes as “an exercise in the New Divinity doctrine of regeneration”—Haynes, like Edwards and Hopkins before him, associates conversion with benevolence. Taking John 3:3 as his text (“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” [BPWA 31]), Haynes argues that “man must become a good man, or be regenerated, before he can exercise faith, or love, or any grace whatever” (BPWA 35).²⁰ He further describes a “regenerated” person as someone who “loves the law of God” and “loves all mankind with a holy and virtuous love. . . He is of a noble and generous spirit. He is a well-wisher to all mankind. And this supreme love to God and benevolence to man is spoken of in Scripture as the very essence of true religion” (BPWA 35). Converted persons may have aligned their will with God’s, but in doing so they have also gained “that universal benevolence,” which Haynes considers to be “the peculiar characteristic of a good man” (BPWA 37).

Almost three decades after he wrote this sermon on John 3:3, Haynes delivered a sermon to Granville, New York’s Evangelical Society entitled *Divine Decrees* (1805). In this sermon, Haynes reiterated his sermon on John 3:3’s claim that converted persons

¹⁹ In an unpublished sermon on Hebrews 12:23, Haynes claims that persons can “hol[d] communion” with those who have passed: “We hear from them and they from us – We hold fellow[ships] with . . . Calvin[,] Luther[,] . . . Edwards[,] Brainerd[, and] Hopkins.” According to the notes at the top of the sermon’s first page, Haynes first preached this sermon in 1814 and then again in 1822 and 1824. Haynes, Lemuel, “[A Sermon on Hebrews 12:23],” Box 322, Volume 17, The Simon Gratz Autograph Collection, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In his sermon on *The Sufferings, Support, and Reward of Faithful Ministers* (1818), Haynes again mentions Hopkins: “The memory of . . . an Edwards, Hopkins, Bellamy . . . is previous to us; but alas! we see them no more. . . They have run their race, finished their course, and are receiving their reward” (BPWA 179).

²⁰ Saillant, *Black Puritan*, 84.

must exhibit “universal benevolence” to “all mankind”: that “[t]he truly pious are pleased with the absolute decrees of God” and so will work on his behalf to “promote the greatest possible good” (*BPWA* 95). Where this sermon departs from the John 3:3 sermon, however, is in its arguing that persons must do more than care for the common good. Encouraged by this Society’s efforts to convert townspeople and educate ministers, Haynes tells his listeners:

I stand here this day, my friends and brethren, to plead for thousands of poor perishing, dying fellow mortals, who need the bread of life . . . Who, that knows the love of God, and the terrors of eternal death, but longs to run to their relief! . . . If your hearts do not glow with holy affection towards perishing sinners, by which you are disposed to do something for their relief, you have reason to fear and tremble . . . (*BPWA* 99-100)

Despite ending this sermon by saying that “people on the occasion of their first awakening” often “relate [that] it was by reading a Flavel, a Hopkins, an Edwards” (*BPWA* 102), Haynes does not explicitly acknowledge the influence of Hopkins’ theology on this sermon’s theory of benevolence. Yet, in the passage excerpted above, Haynes aligns his sermon with Hopkins’ ethical theory of disinterested benevolence by arguing that converted persons must show “holy affection towards perishing sinners.” For in *An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness* (1773), Hopkins posits that “this love of benevolence, this amazing goodness of God’s nature, [is] expressed in redeeming sinners, and giving them eternal life through Christ.”²¹ Converted persons who have come to “kno[w] the love of God” have done more than just gained the ability to be indiscriminately benevolent to all persons. Indeed, such persons are especially “disposed to do something” that helps aid in the “relief” of those who are suffering, even if such

²¹ Samuel Hopkins, “An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness,” in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 3, ed. Edwards Amasa Park (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1852), 42. I will hereafter cite Hopkins’ text parenthetically by page number.

suffering persons have engaged in sinful behavior. Like Hopkins before him, Haynes argues that converted persons must be so disinterested that they will even exhibit benevolence to those who have sinfully disobeyed God.

Haynes is not the only early nineteenth-century minister who affiliated his theology and its moral system with New Divinity evangelicalism. For around the same time that Haynes preached *Divine Decrees*, Timothy Dwight delivered a series of sermons to his Yale College students that would be posthumously published as his *Theology; Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons* (1818-1819).²² Like Haynes' *Divine Decrees*, Dwight's sermon on "Charity" from this collection argues that only converted persons—those who follow "the Gospel"—can adequately demonstrate benevolence to those who are suffering.²³ He writes, "Charity, in the evangelical sense, is no other than the Beneficence required by the Gospel, administered, with the disposition which it requires, to a particular class of mankind, viz. those who are, or without this administration, would be, in circumstances of distress."²⁴ Because "all acts of charity are performed from a sense of duty, with an intention to obey God," Dwight posits that "Charity, in the sense of the Gospel, is disinterested," as it is concerned more with "reliev[ing] the distresses of the sufferer" and not with "advanc[ing]" the charitable person's "reputation."²⁵

²² Jonathan Fitzmier notes that, around 1808, "Dwight repeatedly preached th[e] sermons [collected in his *Theology*] on a four-year cycle to his Yale students." Jonathan Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator: Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 79, 202n2. Fitzmier also posits that even if Dwight did not completely "endorse the New Divinity theological system" (127), he does in his *Theology* "affirm the broad outlines of Edwardsean teaching" (43).

²³ Timothy Dwight, "Tenth Commandment.—Charity," in *Theology; Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons*, 5th ed., vol. 3 (New York: G. & C. Carvill, 1828), 538.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 538, 539.

Given Dwight's emphasizing the importance of disinterestedness to his conception of evangelical charity, it is surprising that he explicitly rejected Hopkins' theology in his younger life. According to one of his students, the theologian Nathaniel Taylor, Dwight wrote a treatise on New Divinity ideas about "Christian resignation" that he eventually destroyed: "Dr. Dwight told me that, when a young man, he was, on the subject of Christian resignation, a thorough-going Hopkinsian; —that he wrote a long Dissertation in support of that doctrine, and read it to Dr. Hopkins, who strenuously urged its publication. 'But,' said he, 'I concluded to keep it, and think of the matter longer; and the result was, I put it in the fire.'"²⁶ Whether or not Taylor's anecdote is true, Dwight demonstrates his indebtedness to Hopkins' conception of disinterested benevolence by referencing the same part of the Bible that Hopkins used in *True Holiness* in his *Theology*'s sermons on "Love" and "The Effects of Benevolence on Public Happiness." In *True Holiness*, Hopkins uses 1 Corinthians 13 so as to argue two things: first, that disinterested benevolence is in total opposition to selfishness or "self-love"; second, that a person's holy character is entirely dependent on his or her charitableness. He writes:

That all true holiness consists in disinterested, benevolent affection, and what is implied in this, is evident from what St. Paul says, (1 Cor. xiii.) Here the apostle speaks of charity as comprising all real holiness, or true religion, by which he means that love to God and our neighbor which the law of God requires . . . is not self-love, in whole or in part, for this always seeks its own, and nothing else : yea, it is set in opposition to self-love; it *seeketh not* her own. (50)

Here, Hopkins references St. Paul's provocation that holy persons who desire to show "love to God and [their] neighbor" must be wholly without "self-love." As Hopkins does in this passage, Dwight, in his *Theology*'s sermon on "Public Happiness," posits that "we

²⁶ Nathaniel Taylor, "Timothy Dwight," in *Annals of the American Pulpit*, vol. 2, ed. William Sprague (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1859), 164.

have an extensive, most accurate, and most beautiful, description in the 13th chapter of the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*” of “this disposition, commonly styled *disinterested Benevolence*.”²⁷ In his *Theology*’s sermon on “Love,” Dwight similarly argues that St. Paul, via 1 Corinthians 13, “asserted the disinterestedness of Evangelical love” by “declar[ing] that love does not seek her own interest at all; but is so absorbed in her care for the common good, as to be . . . wholly destitute of any selfish character.”²⁸ Even if he did destroy a treatise he wrote on the “Hopkinsian” doctrine of “Christian resignation,” it is clear that Dwight and Hopkins together believe that persons can only adequately demonstrate charitable behavior if they have aligned their will with God’s and, in so doing, abandoned all selfish inclinations.

II. The Evangelical Republican Sermon

By encouraging persons to vacate individual interests so as to care for “the common good,” Haynes and Dwight align themselves not just with evangelical theology but also with civic republican ideology. For in his anonymously published *Thoughts on Government* (1776), John Adams contends that republican governments must do what Haynes and Dwight believe evangelicals should do: “communicat[e] ease, comfort, security, or in one word happiness to the greatest number of persons.”²⁹ Though they did not explicitly discuss the efficacy of republican governments and their ability to care for the “common good” in the sermons I referenced above, Haynes and Dwight did write

²⁷ Timothy Dwight, “The Law of God.—The Second Great Commandment.—The Effects of Benevolence on Public Happiness,” in *Theology; Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons*, 5th ed., vol. 3 (New York: G. & C. Carvill, 1828), 136.

²⁸ Timothy Dwight, “Regeneration.—Its Attendants.—Love,” in *Theology; Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons*, 6th ed., vol. 2 (New-York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1829), 470.

²⁹ John Adams, “Thoughts on Government, Applicable to the Present State of the American Colonies,” in *John Adams: Revolutionary Writings, 1775-1783*, ed. Gordon Wood (New York: The Library of America, 2011), 49. I will hereafter cite all references to this volume of Adams’ writings parenthetically as *WJA* 2, followed by the page number.

countless other sermons around the turn of the nineteenth century that elaborated upon contemporary theories of civic republicanism. While scholars have long recognized that the genre of the pamphlet helped promote civic republican ideology in the Revolutionary era, scant attention has been paid to the fact that sermons, both during and after the Revolution, also theorized how republican governments should function.³⁰ The reason that I consider these texts to be “republican sermons,” then, is not just because of the source materials they use—citing Biblical passages at the same time that they discuss how republican governments of the past and present failed because of their refusal to uphold evangelical standards of morality. These sermons are republican sermons because they not only outline the parameters of moral, Christian behavior, but also integrate such ideas about morality into their own original philosophies of republicanism.

In his earliest surviving republican sermon, *The Influence of Civil Government on Religion* (1798), Haynes demonstrates his agreement with Adams’ *Thoughts on Government* by arguing that a republican government must promote virtue among its citizens. Just as Adams posits that a republican government is “better calculated to promote the general happiness than any other form” of government because its “foundation is [in] virtue” (*WJA* 2, 49-50), Haynes argues that a republican government is “designed as a support to virtue” (*BPWA* 67). Yet Haynes’ text departs from Adams’ in its asserting that the Bible must influence the laws propagated by a republican government: that persons cannot “discard the book, commonly called the Holy

³⁰ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, enlarged edition (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1969).

Scriptures, and yet be advocates for good civil government” (*BPWA* 71).³¹ He writes, “The wickedness of the human heart is so great, that it needs every restraint. To oppose the impetuous torrent of iniquity; to humanize the soul, and to conduct men in the way of felicity, are objects to which the laws of God and those which are commonly called the laws of men, do mutually point” (*BPWA* 67). In this passage, Haynes twice aligns himself with evangelical theology: not only by arguing that persons are innately prone to sinful behavior as a result of the Fall, but also by considering the heart and the soul as vehicles for morality (efforts to “humanize the soul” can help restrain “the wickedness of the human heart”).³² The reason that Haynes claims that “the laws of God” and “the laws of men” are equally capable of managing human depravity is because he believes that God acts through a republican government’s legal system, that “Civic government was *appointed* by God to regulate the affairs of men” (*BPWA* 67). For Haynes, a republican government is as much a secular as it is a religious institution: it is as concerned with interpersonal relations and politics as it is with persons’ morality and thus the constitution of their souls.

³¹ By arguing that the Bible should influence republican law, Haynes unknowingly reiterates what John Adams wrote in a 22 February 1756 diary entry: “Suppos a nation in some distant Region, should take the Bible for their only law Book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited. Every member would be obliged . . . to justice and kindness and Charity towards his fellow men, and to Piety and Love, and reverence towards almighty God.” John Adams, *John Adams: Revolutionary Writings 1755-1775*, ed. Gordon Wood (New York: The Library of America, 2011), 6.

³² By locating morality in the heart, Haynes explicitly aligns his theology with Jonathan Edwards’. As discussed in this dissertation’s first chapter, Edwards in *A Divine and Supernatural Light* (1734) argues that converted persons may not conceptually understand their conversion experience, but they do gain a new “sense of the heart . . . a true sense of the divine and superlative excellency of the things of religion.” Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733*, vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 17: Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733*, ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 413. Haynes also demonstrated his indebtedness to Edwards in his sermon on John 3:3, as he there posits that a converted person “become[s] a new creature. Although he cannot discern what is the way of the spirit (as the wise man observes), or how God thus changes the heart, yet he knows that he has different feelings from what he had before” (*BPWA* 34).

In the republican sermon he delivered on the twenty-fifth anniversary of American independence, *The Nature and Importance of True Republicanism* (1801), Haynes extends upon his earlier sermon's discussion of religion's centrality to a republican government by more particularly arguing that civic republicans can only engage in virtuous behavior upon dedicating themselves to God. He writes, "Our beneficent creator has furnished us with moral and natural endowments, [and] . . . we have a right to use them in every way wherein we make no encroachments on the equal rights of our neighbor. . . . As we stand related to God, it is true we are not our own, yet he allows us this prerogative to exert all our faculties, in behalf of the general good" (*BPWA* 80). Here, Haynes contends that converted persons no longer "own" themselves because they have gained the "prerogative" to act not according to their own self-serving intentions but on "behalf of the general good." Because their unique ontological and spiritual condition—their "stand[ing] related to God"—causes them to be the only ones who can adequately care for "the general good," Haynes posits that converted persons are the most capable of promoting republican virtue, as evangelical theology has already prepared them to care for others' interests over their own. Haynes tells his audience:

In a word, it would be an unpardonable error should I forget to mention that which after all is the great and only source of felicity, peace and prosperity among men, I mean religion. A republican government has its basis in this. . . . To love God and one another, and to seek the happiness and good of the universe, involves every thing that is great, noble, virtuous, and excellent. Selfishness enervates every social band and endearment, sets men at variance, and is the source of every evil. . . . A sacred regard to holy institutions is necessary to secure the divine favour and protection, and to maintain the order of society. (*BPWA* 85)

The reason that Haynes argues that a republican government must have its "basis" in religion is because he believes that religious persons are especially adept at avoiding the kind of selfish behavior that "sets men at variance." For it is through disinterestedly

dedicating themselves to God that religious persons in turn come to love one another and thus promote the unity that is necessary for the success of a republican government.

Before Haynes preached these two republican sermons that defined virtue as a post-conversion propensity to value others' interests over one's own, Dwight preached a republican sermon in which he similarly argued that the virtue and "order" associated with a republican government could not be sustained if persons let their individual interests get in the way of the public good. In *The True Means of Establishing Public Happiness* (1795), Dwight writes, "A selfish, separate interest clashes with that of every neighbour, and cannot be advanced, but to the injury of the common good. Avarice always robs; ambition always oppresses; and sensuality always wounds. Virtue, on the contrary, invariably seeks the common welfare."³³ There are no human agents in this passage. Instead, Dwight offers a description of how opposing dispositions—such as avarice and virtue—interact with each other. While personal "ambition always oppresses" and does "injury [to] the common good," virtue assumes less of a selfish and more of a communal function: it "invariably seeks the common welfare." Because it does not work on behalf of individual interests, Dwight claims that virtue is more valuable and agentive than any human passion in that it is on its own capable of creating and spreading happiness to others: "Virtue is, also, a principle sufficiently powerful and active to make all the happiness, which Society can enjoy. It is the whole energy of the Deity; and of every perfect being; and may become the whole energy of man" (15). While virtue does not originate in persons, it is nevertheless capable of becoming part of and taking over one's being ("becom[ing] the whole energy of man"). Like Haynes after him, Dwight

³³ Timothy Dwight, *The True Means of Establishing Public Happiness. A Sermon, Delivered on the 7th of July, 1795, Before the Connecticut Society of Cincinnati, and Published at their Request* (New-Haven: T. & S. Green, 1795), 15. I will hereafter cite this sermon parenthetically by page number.

posits that anyone who wants to be virtuous must undergo a conversion experience: that one must allow one's self to be governed not by one's own individual interests but by "the whole energy of the Deity."

While civic republicans would agree with Dwight that virtuous persons must aim to promote the general public's happiness, they would not necessarily find that evangelical disinterestedness—aligning one's will with God's through conversion—is a precondition for being virtuous. Indeed, Adams believes that persons become virtuous less through cultivating their affective condition and more through education. Hence, in *The Report of a Constitution or Form of Government for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (1779), Adams claims that because "WISDOM, and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people [are] necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties," Massachusetts must "sprea[d] the opportunities and advantages of education in various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people" (*WJA* 2, 276). In his personal correspondence, Adams aligns his theory of education more explicitly with civic republican ideology by claiming that virtuous persons need to be educated in classical models of oratory and writing.³⁴ In a 17 March 1780 letter, Adams tells his son John Quincy Adams that he must not only be "constantly employed in learning the Meaning of Latin Words, and the Grammar, the Rhetorick and Criticism of the Roman Authors," but also read "the Greek Testament, because the most perfect Models of fine Writing in history, Oratory and Poetry are to be found in the Greek Language" (*WJA* 2, 288-289). The reason that Adams wants his son to

³⁴ Sandra Gustafson posits that classical models of oratory were invaluable to civic republican theories of education, that "classical republican thought stimulated public interest in political oratory." Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2000), 117.

read the writings and histories associated with Ancient Greece and Rome is because civic republicans consider these ancient republics to be the exemplars of republican virtue. “I have the Honour, and the Consolation to be a Republican on Principle,” Adams writes in a 21 May 1782 letter to the Marquis de Lafayette: “I esteem that Form of Government, the best . . . Almost everything that is estimable in civil Life, has originated under Such Governments. Two Republican towns, Athens and Rome, have done more honour to our Species, than all the rest of it” (*WJA* 2, 476). According to Adams, persons become virtuous by reading about what came before them: by learning about the “Republican towns, Athens and Rome” and the republican form of government and conception of virtue they espoused.

In departure from Adams’ brand of civic republican ideology, Dwight, in his republican sermon on *The True Means of Establishing Public Happiness*, contends that persons cannot look to the Ancient Greek and Roman republics to learn how to exhibit virtuous behavior. He believes that “Sparta and Rome were the most stable of all the ancient republics,” but that they, “and the great nations of modern Europe, are all evident proofs of the intimate connection between Conquest and ruin” (28, 9). Dwight claims that Ancient Greece in particular may have been “a Giant in war, in science, and in arts” but was “still an infant in moral improvement,” for “No regular plan of amending the human character appears to have been thought of by its most admired sages” (11). The reason that Dwight goes so far as to say that the Ancient Greeks offered no moral philosophical program to improve the human character is not because he was unaware of classical moral writings but because he believed that such writings could not be moral because they were not evangelical—because they did not endorse virtue “in that enlarged and

Evangelical sense, which embraces Piety to God, Good-will to mankind, and the effectual Government of ourselves” (13). Even though Adams and other civic republicans argued that Ancient Greece and Rome adequately promoted virtue among its citizens, Dwight posits that these republics’ citizens were not virtuous because they were not practitioners of evangelical disinterestedness: that their lack of proper “Piety to God” prohibited them from exhibiting “Good-will to mankind.”

Where Dwight and Haynes consistently argue for the importance of evangelical disinterestedness to their theories of republicanism, Adams rarely discussed the relationship between republicanism and religion in his published writings. However, in his anonymously published *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* (1765), Adams praised early American Puritans for reading and valuing classical republican writings: for being “men of sense and learning. To many of them, the historians, orators, poets and philosophers of *Greece* and *Rome* were quite familiar.”³⁵ In a letter that he pseudonymously published in the *Boston Gazette* the year after he wrote his *Dissertation*, Adams similarly asserted that the inhabitants of this “Infant Country deserv[e] to be cherished” because they embrace both Christianity and classical republicanism, because they have “the high Sentiments of Romans, . . . the tender Feelings of Humanity, and the noble Benevolence of Christians.”³⁶ Despite holding contrasting views as to whether Ancient Greece and Rome were virtuous republics, Adams and Dwight together argue

³⁵ Adams, *John Adams: Revolutionary Writings, 1755-1775*, 117. In the second of the three columns, Adams even goes so far as to say that the Puritans’ criticism of monarchical power is indebted to republicanism—that they believed that “the popular powers must be placed, as a guard, a controul, a ballance, to the powers of the monarch, and the priest, in every government, or else it would soon become the man of sin.” *Ibid.*, 118-119.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

that the most efficient types of republican governments are the ones that recognize the religious foundations of their philosophy of virtue.

While Federalists like Adams and Dwight frequently discussed Ancient Greece and Rome in relation to their philosophies of republicanism, they also just as frequently condemned post-Revolutionary France for not adequately promoting virtue among its citizens. In a republican sermon he gave on the twenty-second anniversary of American independence, *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis* (1798), Dwight claims that France does not maintain republican values because it both juridically and extra-juridically denounces Christianity.³⁷ While the “French legislature” has “repeatedly denied and ridiculed” the “being and providence of God,” Masonic societies have also passed laws against “government, morals, and religion” that “strike at the root of all human happiness and virtue.”³⁸ Religion only enhances the kind of “happiness and virtue” that a republican government promotes among its citizens: it is “the great means of [spreading] all moral good to mankind.”³⁹ The reason, then, that Dwight mentions France’s lack of religiosity in this sermon celebrating American independence is because he wants Americans to learn from France’s failings, to recognize that the integrity of their

³⁷ As I discussed in this chapter’s introduction, Den Hartog argues that Dwight’s critique of post-Revolutionary France’s religio-political situation is indebted to his “Christian republicanism,” which caused him to rebuke not just the French but anyone who “los[t] their republican virtue” by “question[ing] the reliability of the scriptures and the truth of Christianity.” Den Hartog laments that most studies of Federalist responses to the French Revolution focus only on Federalist condemnations of French violence and not on how they “worked to counter the problem of Jacobin irreligion,” which means that scholars “largely miss how significant [religion] was for anti-Jacobinism and the Federalist party.” Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety*, 53, 9, 210n23. Even though Haynes, in *The Influence of Civil Government on Religion*, chastises post-Revolutionary France for the same reasons as Dwight, Den Hartog does not include Haynes in his analysis of Federalist clergymen. For more on Haynes’ critique of the French Revolution, see Saillant, *Black Puritan*, 124-125. For more on Federalist critiques of French violence, see Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 58-103.

³⁸ Timothy Dwight, *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis, Illustrated in a Discourse, Preached on the Fourth of July, 1798* (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1798), 14, 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

republican government can only be sustained if they maintain their religious commitments. Hence, Dwight posits, “Where religion prevails, . . . a French directory cannot govern . . . To destroy us, therefore, in this dreadful sense, our enemies must first destroy our Sabbath, and seduce us from the house of God.”⁴⁰ A republican government seals its own fate the moment it allows for its citizens to abandon their religious principles.

Exactly two months after Dwight delivered his *Duty of Americans* sermon, Haynes condemned post-Revolutionary France’s religio-political situation in his republican sermon, referenced above, on *The Influence of Civil Government on Religion*. Like Dwight, Haynes specifically takes issue with France’s “contempt of the Holy Scriptures,” saying that it has undoubtedly influenced “their atheistical decisions, and their more than beastly conduct” (*BPWA* 69). He continues, “That an abolition of religion is an object of French insanity is too evident to be disputed; . . . Libertinism, and not republicanism, is most certainly their object. . . it is not peace, liberty and good order they are after, but to make themselves sole arbiters of the world” (*BPWA* 69). Here, Haynes aligns republicanism with Christianity and argues that France’s “abolition of religion” and their desiring to be the “sole arbite[r]” of world power has caused them to denounce the central republican values of “peace, liberty, and good order.” In promoting the kind of selfish behavior idealized by “Libertinism” and rejecting Christian theology and republican ideology, the French do not practice disinterested benevolence: they do not allow for their love of God to compel them to care for others’ pained conditions. Hence, Haynes comments, “What outrages have been committed on the persons of old and young! Wives and daughters abused in the presence of their husbands and parents.—

⁴⁰ Ibid., 17, 18.

Those in sacred orders, notwithstanding their age, illness and profession, dragged from their beds, their houses pillaged, and they have been the chief objects of spite and detestation” (*BPWA* 69-70). In contrast to those who practice evangelical disinterestedness and consider it to be their God-given duty to alleviate others’ suffering, France “abuse[s]” its citizens: the French government is so concerned with cultivating its own authoritative position that it tramples over and does not work to “secure the rights of men, which should be held sacred” (*BPWA* 70). Where a republican government values and seeks to promote order among its citizens, the French government neglects its citizens’ wellbeing—inflicts rather than forestalls human suffering—because it neglects Christianity.

As Haynes and Dwight have demonstrated, republican sermons do more than merely work to integrate evangelical ideas about morality into civic republican ideology. In addition to condemning the nations who, at different points in their history, do not recognize the centrality of evangelical ethics to republicanism, these sermons also uphold evangelical disinterestedness as the ideal moral standard that all republican government officials must follow. For instance, Dwight, in his republican sermon *Virtuous Rulers a National Blessing* (1791), contends that republican rulers cannot just “increase the public happiness” and “discourage vice,” as civic republicanism asks for; that they must also inhabit a disinterested condition (be “enlivened by a fixed sense of accountableness to God”), which will allow them to “uphold religion” and “lessen the public distresses.”⁴¹ In his *True Republicanism* sermon, Haynes similarly argues that converted persons must be in positions of power. He writes: “If to preserve our lives and property, to defend the

⁴¹ Timothy Dwight, *Virtuous Rulers a National Blessing. A Sermon, Preached at the General Election, May 12th, 1791* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1791), 20, 15.

public from every encroachment, are the great objects of civil government, then men of philanthropic spirit, who will naturally care for mankind, ought only to occupy places of public trust. . . . The end of [their] appointment is to serve our generation by the will of God” (*BPWA* 84). The reason that Haynes only wants men of a “philanthropic spirit” to inhabit positions of power is because such men have gained their charitable dispositions through dedicating themselves to and forwarding “the will of God.” Because only converted persons are selfless enough to properly “care for mankind,” Haynes posits that “men of a narrow selfish, mercenary spirit” who seek “only to gratify his [own] pride and ambition” must be “excluded from posts of preferment,” for they will, “if an opportunity presents [itself], sell [their] country for less than thirty pieces of silver” (*BPWA* 84-85). Conversion helps to forestall the kind of selfish behavior that leads to republican governments’ dissolution. It is, therefore, as much a prerequisite for benevolence as it is for holding public office.

Though Haynes also uses *The Influence of Civil Government on Religion* to argue that republican rulers can only adequately promote virtue among persons after they have been converted, this sermon departs from the later *True Republicanism* oration in that it pinpoints two well-respected men who fit the criteria of a disinterested republican ruler.

Haynes states:

We infer the integrity of a *Washington*, and an *Adams*, from the invincible attachment they have manifested to the rights of men, . . . Who can reflect on the fatigue, vexation, and hazard to which a WASHINGTON has been exposed in espousing the contested rights of his country, . . . It is true men are not to be idolized, but when we consider them as instruments qualified and raised up by God for great and peculiar service to mankind, it is undoubtedly our duty to love, honor and respect them. (*BPWA* 73-74)

Before Haynes used this sermon to promote Washington and Adams as benevolent republicans, Dwight dedicated his long epic poem *The Conquest of Canaan* (1785) to Washington and his long georgic poem *Greenfield Hill* to Adams. Despite dedicating these poems to two different men, the dedicatory prefaces that begin each book read very similarly: while he commends Washington for being “the Supporter of Freedom, and the Benefactor of Mankind,” he thanks Adams “for the important Services he has rendered his Country” (3).⁴² Haynes’ expression of gratitude to Washington and Adams, however, reads very differently. Even though he encourages persons to “honor and respect them” for their “service to mankind,” Haynes believes that persons should also recognize that Washington and Adams are only capable of such virtuous behavior because they are disinterested: because they are “instruments” of God’s and not their own will. Dwight and Haynes agree that Washington and Adams are exemplary republican figures, but only Haynes uses these two men to argue that republican rulers must be disinterested agents of God’s benevolence.

III. Republican Disinterested Benevolence

⁴² Timothy Dwight, *The Conquest of Canaan; A Poem in Eleven Books* (Hartford: Elisha Babcock, 1785), unnumbered page. Significantly, Adams read Dwight’s poetry and corresponded with him. In a 4 April 1786 letter, Adams wrote to Dwight: “I have received your Letter, & the Conquest of Canaan, with more pleasure than you will easily believe. . . I was determined, whatever affairs might interrupt me, to read it, & I found so much pleasure, in this Employment, that it was very soon completed. My taste as well as my Impartiality may be disputed: but I will venture to say that I know of no heroick Poem Superior to it, in any modern Language, excepting alway’s Paradise lost: . . . You may depend upon it every thing in my power shall be done to have it printed sold, read & productive of advantage to you.” *Papers of John Adams, December 1785-January 1787*, vol. 18 of *The Adams Papers*, eds. Gregg L. Lint, Sara Martin, et. al. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 227-228. Abigail Adams also quoted from *Conquest of Canaan* in both a 20 March 1786 letter to John Quincy Adams and a 25 December 1796 letter to her husband. *Adams Family Correspondence, January 1786-February 1787*, vol. 7 of *The Adams Papers*, eds. C. James Taylor, Margaret A. Hogan, et. al. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 96-99; *Adams Family Correspondence, July 1795-February 1797*, vol. 11 of *The Adams Papers*, eds. Margaret A. Hogan, C. James Taylor, et. al. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 460-462.

Even though he does not use the terms of evangelical disinterestedness to praise Washington or Adams in either of his long poem's dedicatory prefaces, Dwight, like Haynes, does deliver a memorial sermon in honor of Washington's life in which he upholds Washington as an exemplar of evangelical republicanism. But before he delivered that sermon, Dwight transformed another figure that is typically associated with civic republicanism—the farmer—into a benevolent evangelical figure.⁴³ In *Greenfield Hill*'s second book, "The Flourishing Village," Dwight contends that Greenfield Hill may be a place where "the poor wanderer finds a table spread, / The fireside welcome, and the peaceful bed," but it is also where "divine Religion is a guest, / And all the Virtues join the daily feast / Kind Hospitality attends the door, / To welcome in the stranger and the poor" (34). As the poem goes on, the reader discovers that the reason Greenfield Hill's residents embrace "divine Religion" and exhibit benevolence to "the stranger and the poor" is because they listen to both the farmer's and the pastor's advice. In the poem's fifth book, "The Clergyman's Advice to the Villagers," the pastor encourages the townspeople to care for those who are in need: "'To all, around, your blessings lend, / The sick relieve, the poor befriend, / The sad console, the weak sustain, / And soothe the wounded spirit's pain'" (117). In the poem's sixth book, "The Farmer's Advice to the Villagers," the town farmer reiterates the pastor's counsel:

"When others need, assistance lend;

⁴³ Christopher Iannini has argued that "the independent farmer [has] long occupied a privileged position within republican ideology." Christopher Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 144. Dwight also upholds the farmer as an evangelical republican figure in his anonymously authored five-column series in *The Mercury and New England Palladium* entitled "Farmer Johnson's Political Catechism" (1801). In the fourth column, Farmer Johnson asserts that if men act according to their Christian "principles" then "the government will never need force of compulsion, but may be wholly free and persuasive; and the community will be peaceable, orderly, and happy." "Farmer Johnson's *POLITICAL CATECHISM*. Continued. Part 3d – *Religious Institutions of New-England*." *Mercury and New-England Palladium*. April 17, 1801.

Are others sick? their calls attend;
 Their visits hospitably greet,
 And pay, with cheerful kindness sweet.
 These things, or I mistake, will form,
 And keep the heart of friendship warm.” (144)

As much as the poem’s second book constructs the townspeople as exemplars of disinterested benevolence—in that they “soothe the wounded spirit’s pain” and are believers in a “divine Religion”—the fifth and sixth books also describe the farmer and the pastor as charitable figures, for they are the ones who encourage the townspeople to “keep the heart of friendship warm” in the first place.⁴⁴ The townspeople even recognize the similarity between these two figures, for in the same way that they gather to hear the pastor’s sermons, so too do they seek out the farmer’s advice: “Daily, to hear his maxims sound, / Th’ approaching neighbours flock’d around; / Daily they saw his counsels prove / The source of union, peace, and love” (119). By formulating the farmer and the pastor as spiritual advisors who encourage the villagers to welcome both “the poor” and “divine Religion” into their homes, Dwight is able to elevate Greenfield Hill as a community that propagates an evangelical understanding of republicanism.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Larry Kutchen too recognizes the similarities between Books 5 and 6: “Dwight aims to impress upon his readers the need for spiritual as well as secular and material labors to be mutually reinforcing.” Larry Kutchen, “Timothy Dwight’s Anglo-American Georgic: *Greenfield Hill* and the Rise of United States Imperialism,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 33.2 (2000): 123. In his “Introduction” to *Greenfield Hill*, Dwight expresses a similar sentiment: “As the writer is the Minister of Greenfield, he cannot be supposed to be uninterested in the welfare of his Parishioners. To excite their attention to the truths and duties of Religion . . . is the design of the Fifth Part; And to promote in them just sentiments and useful conduct, for the present life, (an object closely connected with the preceding one) of the Sixth” (6).

⁴⁵ Saillant also describes Greenfield Hill as a “small, harmonious community characterized by both republican liberty and Christian piety” that advances “Dwight’s Christian republican ideal.” John Saillant, “Black, White, and ‘The Charitable Blessed’: Race and Philanthropy in the American Early Republic,” *Essays on Philanthropy*, Number 8 (Indianapolis: Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, 1993), 7. Saillant is the only scholar to discuss the compatibility of republicanism and evangelicalism in *Greenfield Hill*, for while Peter Hinks considers Greenfield Hill to be “the paradigm of republican virtue and simplicity,” Jonathan Yeager claims that it is “the ideal godly environment for fostering piety.” Hinks, “Timothy Dwight,” 153; *Early Evangelicalism: A Reader*, ed. Jonathan Yeager (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 370.

Six years after *Greenfield Hill* appeared in print, Dwight published another republican sermon that theorized the relationship between evangelicalism and republicanism. This sermon departs from *Greenfield Hill* and Dwight's earlier republican sermons, however, in that it is ostensibly about a single man: George Washington. Following John Adams' call for persons to "assemble on" the first anniversary of Washington's death and "testify their grief" by delivering "suitable eulogies, orations and discourses, or by public prayers," Dwight wrote and preached *On the Character of George Washington* on 22 February 1800.⁴⁶ In contrast to *The Conquest of Canaan's* dedicatory preface, which makes no mention of Washington's religious character, Dwight's memorial sermon acknowledges that Washington's religiosity has been a matter of public debate ("With respect to his religious character there have been different opinions") but that he assuredly was a religious man: that he made "numerous and uniform public and most solemn declarations, of his high veneration for religion" (27). Dwight even goes so far as to say "that if he was not a Christian, he was more like one, than any man of the same description, whose life has been hitherto recorded" (28). Yet Dwight quotes only one such "declaration" that helps validate his assertion that Washington was religious: the place in Washington's *Farewell Address* (1796) where he argues that "reason and experience both forbid us to expect, that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles. It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government."⁴⁷ When Haynes delivered *Dissimulation*

⁴⁶ Dwight included Adams' "PROCLAMATION BY THE PRESIDENT of the United States of America" in the preface to *A Discourse, Delivered at New-Haven, Feb. 22, 1800; On the Character of George Washington, Esq. at the Request of the Citizens* (New-Haven: Thomas Green and Son, 1800), unnumbered page. I will hereafter cite Dwight's sermon parenthetically by page number.

⁴⁷ George Washington, *Washington's Farewell Address. Delivered September 17th, 1796*. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1861), 16.

Illustrated in honor of Washington's birthday in 1813, he referenced the same passage from Washington's *Address* that Dwight did. The reason that Haynes and Dwight included the same part of Washington's speech in their respective memorial sermons is because it is one of the only pieces of Washington's writings that they can use to formulate him as a religious figure—that will allow for them to describe him as someone who, to use Haynes' words, “recommend[ed] religion and morality, as the basis and support of civil government” (*BPWA* 167-168).

As much as their memorial sermons seek to commemorate Washington's life and works, it seems that Haynes' and Dwight's texts also elaborate upon their earlier republican sermon's efforts to incorporate their evangelical philosophy of disinterestedness into civic republican ideology. As in *True Republicanism*, Haynes in *Dissimulation Illustrated* contends that those who “promote true republicanism,” and those who rule over a republican government, must be dedicated entirely to God: “The man that wishes well to the commonwealth will love his God—will love religion, and seek such men to guide public affairs, that have benevolence and virtue” (*BPWA* 162). In loving God, religious persons have already proven themselves to be virtuous: they already have the kind of “benevolence and virtue” that allows for them to “guide public affairs.” Yet the kind of “public” that Haynes wants benevolent persons to participate in is not a typically civic republican one. For rather than encourage republicans to be concerned only with elite white male interests, Haynes argues that a true supporter of a republican government demonstrates benevolence by disinterestedly caring for those who are suffering. He writes, “if it is your desire and intention, to perpetuate a truly republican form of government . . . to promote love, peace and benevolence, then . . . there are

objects of charity on every side to illucidate your characters. The poor and the needy, the widow and the fatherless, are objects of your attention” (*BPWA* 168). Those who support a civic republican government must, therefore, do more than care for the general public: they must work to eliminate others’ pained conditions.

Given Haynes’ argument that evangelical republicans must exhibit benevolence to those who are most in need of it, it makes sense that Dwight and he would discuss Washington’s charitable inclinations in their sermons as a way to elevate him as a model for their evangelical brand of republicanism. In *Dissimulation Illustrated*, Haynes contends that the reason he details his philosophy of benevolence in conjunction with this sermon’s theory of republicanism is because benevolence “was a distinguishing trait in the character of the illustrious personage whose birth we are this day called to celebrate” (*BPWA* 167). Though he also reiterates *The Influence of Civil Government*’s brief praise of Washington as a republican war hero, Haynes more specifically describes Washington as a benevolent military man who would, whenever possible, avoid inflicting suffering on other persons: that “he would have the sword unsheathed in a *defensive* war only” and “was very careful of the lives of his soldiers, not willing to sacrifice them in hazardous attempts, merely to obtain a plaudit” (*BPWA* 167).⁴⁸ Like Haynes, Dwight also elevates Washington as a benevolent figure, saying that he was not just “generous” to the general public (his “neighbours, to the public, to all men”), as a civic republican would be, but also “a steady, and conspicuous benefactor” for “the poor” (22).

⁴⁸ Though she does not mention Haynes or Dwight, or their sermons on Washington, Sarah Purcell argues that Federalists often upheld Washington as a Revolutionary War hero: “Federalists, who came to power during Washington’s first presidency in 1789, were particularly fond of traditional, republican images of Revolutionary War heroism, which suited their vision of an American social hierarchy based on merit.” Sarah Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 94.

By arguing that Washington not only cared for others' interests more than his own but also was charitable to suffering persons, Haynes and Dwight elevate Washington as an exemplar of evangelical disinterestedness and thus of evangelical republicanism. For when Haynes in *Dissimulation Illustrated* says that republicans must care for the "poor and the needy, the widow and the fatherless" as Washington did, he rehearses Hopkins' claim from *True Holiness*—referenced in the dissertation's previous chapter—that disinterested persons must be engaged "in the cause of the poor, helpless widow" (30). Haynes again aligns his sermon's theory of benevolence with Hopkins' when he associates benevolence with disinterestedness: when he defines benevolence as an "affection" that is the essence of "true religion" because it "opposes the selfishness of men" (*BPWA* 163). Despite such similarities, Haynes sets himself apart from Hopkins in that he—like Dwight—allows for his theory of benevolence to influence his evangelical ethical system and his philosophy of republicanism. The disinterested disposition that one acquires upon being converted allows one to exhibit benevolence to those who need it most, which in turn allows one to contribute to and help sustain the integrity of a republican government.

In between the time that Haynes and Dwight delivered these sermons on Washington, John Adams wrote a short essay on Washington in a September 1807 letter to Benjamin Rush in which he also praised Washington for being a disinterested republican ruler. Adams began this letter, however, by discussing the Marquis de Lafayette: "Mirabeau said of La Fayette, 'Il a affiché desintressement' . . . You know the sense of the Word 'affiché'? It as much as to say '*he advertised*' his Disinterestedness. . . This has been the amount and the Result of most of the

Disinterestedness that has been *professed* in the World.”⁴⁹ If Lafayette was actually a disinterested person, he would not feel the need to flaunt his supposed moral behavior. The reason that Adams then posits that “most” but “not all” of the disinterestedness in the world is “*professed*” like Lafayette’s is because there are “exceptions” to that rule, “and our Washington ought to pass for one.”⁵⁰ He continues, “there is not an Example in History of a more universal Acknowledgment of Disinterestedness in any Patriot or Hero, than there is and will be to the latest Posterity in him.”⁵¹ Unlike Lafayette, who feigns his disinterestedness, Washington was actually disinterested: he “‘generously Sacrifice[d] his own quiet and Satisfaction, to the Welfare and tranquility of the Publick.’”⁵²

Though Adams claims that Washington was disinterested in the civic republican sense—in that he cared for others’ interests and wellbeing more than this own—he importantly does not, like Haynes and Dwight, utilize disinterestedness as an evangelical term in this letter to Rush. Just because he only alluded to civic republican disinterestedness in this letter, however, does not mean that he was unaware of the term’s evangelical meaning, or that he did not believe that a republican government’s moral system needed to be based in Christian theology. For in his correspondence with Benjamin Rush, Adams acknowledged not only the compatibility between Christianity and republicanism, but also his admiration for Hopkins and his evangelical ethic of disinterested benevolence. In an 28 August 1811 letter to Rush, Adams said, “I agree with you in Sentiment that Religion and Virtue are the only Foundations; not only of

⁴⁹ “From John Adams to Benjamin Rush, September 1807,” *Founders Online: National Archives*, last modified April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-5212>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. Adams here quotes from Charles Rollin’s *The Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Macedonians, and Grecians*, 9th ed., vol. 2 (London: G. G. and J. Robinson et. al., 1800), 224.

Republicanism and of all free Government: but of Social Felicity under all Governments and in all the Combinations of human Society.”⁵³ Adams then claims that if he alluded to “this doctrine in [his] Will,” he would “be charged with hypocrisy.”⁵⁴ Because he rarely wrote about religion, and because the few writings that do mention religion (like this letter) do not prioritize a particular theological program, scholars have long debated Adams’ religious commitments.⁵⁵ Adams’ brief allusions to religion throughout his writings may not help clarify his religious affiliation but they do demonstrate that he considered disinterestedness to be at once a civic republican and an evangelical ethical term. Indeed, in an 18 July 1812 letter to Rush, Adams admits to believing in Hopkins’ doctrine of disinterested benevolence: “I am a Hopkintonian—in part—So was Fondon! . . . So was Hutchinson the Scott. . . What do you mean, you will Say, by all this Mystick Talk? I mean, that I believe in the Doctrine of *disinterested Benevolence*.”⁵⁶ By

⁵³ John Adams, *John Adams: Writings from the New Nation, 1784-1826*, ed. Gordon Wood (New York: Library of America, 2016), 524.

⁵⁴ Adams more specifically says that he would be accused of “promot[ing] a national establishment of Presbyterianism in America. Whereas I would as Soon establish The Episcopal Church; and almost as Soon the Catholic Church.” Ibid., 525. A 21 January 1810 letter to Rush sheds further light on why Adams would just as soon “establish” the Presbyterian as he would the Episcopal and Catholic Church: because he did not distinguish between the various Christian religions. “Ask me not then whether I am a Catholic or Protestant, Calvinist or Arminian,” he told Rush: “As far as they are Christians, I wish to be a Fellow Disciple with them all.” “From John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 21 January 1810,” *Founders Online: National Archives*, last modified December 28, 2016, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-5504>.

⁵⁵ Though Thomas Kidd and Richard Alan Ryerson agree that Adams distanced himself from his family’s Calvinist upbringing when he chose pursue a career as a lawyer and not a minister, they do not agree as to the specificity of Adams’ religiosity: Kidd notes that “Adams would by the time of the Revolution personally embrace the liberal theology of the Unitarians,” and Ryerson claims that Adams “occup[ied] a middle position between Trinitarian orthodoxy and skeptical Deism . . . with little change from the mid-1750s until his death seventy years later.” Kidd, *God of Liberty*, 13; Richard Alan Ryerson, *John Adams’s Republic: The One, The Few, The Many* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 31. John Witte Jr. posits that whatever religion he may have followed, Adams attended various church services and read countless theologians’ writings in his lifetime. John Witte, Jr., “One Public Religion, Many Private Religions: John Adams and the 1780 Massachusetts Constitution,” in *The Founders on God and Government*, eds. Daniel L. Dreisbach, Mark D. Hall, Jeffry H. Morrison (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 25.

⁵⁶ *Old Family Letters: Copied from the Originals for Alexander Biddle. Series A* (Philadelphia: Press of J. B. Lippincott Company, 1892), 410. In addition to praising Hopkins and his theology, Adams also saved an antislavery letter from Hopkins to Continental Congress member Thomas Cushing in his library. Hopkins’

acknowledging the centrality of religion to republicanism more generally and the utility of “Hopkintonian” disinterested benevolence more specifically, Adams demonstrates how his philosophy of republicanism, and its attendant theory of disinterestedness, cannot help but be indebted to evangelical theology.⁵⁷

Though Adams, Dwight, and Haynes all praise Washington for being a disinterested republican ruler, it is important to note that Adams does not describe Washington as a model evangelical republican. In further contrast to Haynes and Dwight, Adams, despite opposing slavery, does not at all discuss Washington’s decision to free the hundreds of enslaved persons he owned upon his death.⁵⁸ Echoing Dwight’s praise of Washington for writing “a proposal to free his servants” that was “realized in his will” (22), Haynes writes, “He was an enemy to slaveholding, and gave his dying testimony against it, by emancipating, and providing for those under his care. O that his jealous surviving neighbors would prove themselves to be his legitimate children, and go and do likewise!” (*BPWA* 167). But Washington’s benevolence did not stop with his desire to free the enslaved persons on his property, for just as Dwight commends Washington for

letter to Cushing can be found in *Papers of John Adams, Volume 3: May 1775–January 1776, The Adams Papers*, ed. Robert J. Taylor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 388-390. In an 18 July 1813 letter to Thomas Jefferson, Adams again expressed admiration for Hopkins, saying that he found “entertainment and instruction” in the writings of “Edwards and Hopkins.” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, Volume 6: 11 March to 27 November 1813*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 302.

⁵⁷ Though John Adams praised Hopkins and his theology, Abigail and John Quincy Adams both denounced Hopkins’ evangelical ethic of disinterested benevolence. In a December 1782 letter to Elizabeth Cranch, Abigail Adams confessed that she “make[s] no pretents to disinterested benevolence.” *Adams Family Correspondence, October 1782–November 1784*, vol. 5 of *The Adams Papers*, ed. Richard Alan Ryerson (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993), 53. In his diary, John Quincy Adams said that it is “a strange inconsistency . . . that holiness consist[s] in a total exemption from all selfish ideals.” *Diary of John Quincy Adams, Volume 2: March 1786–December 1788, The Adams Papers*, ed. David Grayson Allen (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), 369.

⁵⁸ For more on Washington and slavery see Francois Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington’s Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006) and Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *Never Caught: The Washingtons’ Relentless Pursuit of their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

“his refusal to accept . . . a compensation for his services” (21), so Haynes applauds Washington for “refus[ing] a stipulated salary, demanding only his expenses; and the voluntary compensation made him, he appropriated to public and benevolent purposes” (*BPWA* 167). By exalting Washington for selflessly giving up his salary for more “public and benevolent purposes,” Haynes and Dwight align their praise of Washington with Adams and the other early Americans who considered Washington to be an exemplar of civic republican virtue. Yet Haynes and Dwight ultimately depart from Adams in their praising Washington for selflessly caring for others’—including enslaved persons’—suffering. Even though Washington’s plans to free the enslaved persons he owned was not entirely fulfilled by his wife, Martha Washington, after he died, Haynes and Dwight nevertheless alluded to Washington’s desire to free such persons in order to construct Washington as a model evangelical republican who cared as much for the general public’s interests as he did for those who were marginalized, suffering, and in need of benevolence.⁵⁹

IV. Slavery and the “Immutable Laws of God”

In the years after he delivered his republican sermon in honor of Washington’s life, Dwight delivered countless other sermons that derided slavery and applauded the 1808 abolition of the slave trade. For instance, in his *Discourse, in Two Parts* (1812), Dwight praised Americans for terminating “that disgrace to the name of man, that insult

⁵⁹ For more on how Martha Washington did not entirely fulfill her husband’s wishes, see Furstenberg 73-74.

to Heaven, *the African slave-trade*.”⁶⁰ And in *The Charitable Blessed* (1810), Dwight argued that white Americans are especially obligated to be charitable to African persons:

This unfortunate race of people are in a situation, which peculiarly demands the efforts of charity, and demands them from *us*. *Our* parents and ancestors have brought *their* parents, or ancestors, in the course of a most iniquitous traffic, from their native country; and made them slaves. . . . Under the influence of overwhelming conviction, we have made the descendants of these abused people free. Here we have stopped; and complimented, and congratulated, ourselves for having done our duty.⁶¹

Here, Dwight claims that white Americans must exhibit benevolence to enslaved people because they—or their ancestors—are the ones who brought African persons “from their native country; and made them slaves.” Though he faults white Americans for participating in this “iniquitous traffic,” Dwight also believes that they have partially atoned for their sins, as they not only abolished the African slave trade, but also passed the Gradual Abolition Act of 1784, which helped free some African persons in Connecticut from slavery.

As much as he applauds white Americans for abolishing the slave trade and working to free enslaved people, Dwight believes that persons need to do more work to ensure that previously enslaved Africans don’t continue to experience suffering after they have been freed. Hence, Dwight writes, “To give them liberty, and stop here, is to entail upon them a curse. We are bound to give them, also, knowledge, industry, economy, good habits, moral and religious instruction, and all the means of eternal life” (23).

Dwight does not believe that previously enslaved Africans are capable of providing for themselves because they were never properly cared for and thus never properly educated:

⁶⁰ Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse, In Two Parts, Delivered July 23, 1812, on the Public Fast, in the Chapel of Yale College* (New-Haven: Howe and Deforest, 1812), 44.

⁶¹ Timothy Dwight, *The Charitable Blessed. A Sermon, Preached in the First Church in New-Haven; August 8. 1810* (New Haven: Sidney’s Press, 1810), 20. I will hereafter cite Dwight’s text parenthetically by page number.

“They have little knowledge either of morals or religion. They are left, therefore, as miserable victims to sloth, prodigality, poverty, ignorance, and vice . . . [and] are unfurnished with those restraints on these propensities, with which a merciful God has given us” (21). If one does not educate previously enslaved Africans about the benefits of Christianity or work to instill “good habits” in them after they have been freed, then they will continue to suffer (they will “naturally decline, until they have reached the lowest point of degradation both in ignorance and vice” [22]). Because previously enslaved Africans do not stop experiencing suffering after they have been freed from slavery, Dwight believes that white Americans should never stop working to sustain African persons’ wellbeing. For “[w]hen we introduced these unhappy people into this country,” Dwight writes, “we charged ourselves with the care of their temporal and eternal interests; and became responsible to God for the manner, in which we should perform this duty” (22). To stop caring for those who are suffering is thus to sinfully disobey God’s will.

Even before he used *The Charitable Blessed* to encourage persons to be charitable to those who are currently and those were previously enslaved, Dwight condemned slavery in his long georgic poem *Greenfield Hill*. In the poem’s second book, “The Flourishing Village,” Dwight compares Greenfield Hill with an unnamed neighboring village. Just as the farmers in each village don’t act in the same manner—the Greenfield Hill farmer, as discussed above, is a benevolent ministerial figure and the other village’s farmer steals rather than grows his own crops (“See to the Farmer prowl around the shed, / To rob the starving household of their bread” [35])—so too do each of the communities treat their enslaved residents differently. Dwight describes the neighboring village as a

place where “foul luxury taints the putrid mind, / And slavery there imbrutes the reasoning kind” (35). In Greenfield Hill, however, the enslaved residents are depicted as happy laborers. Hence, Dwight’s speaker singles out a “poor black” laborer who, “whistling, drives the cumbrous wain along” and “never, dragg’d, with groans the galling chain” (36). Instead of experiencing pain as a result of his servitude, this “poor black” man learns, through his enslavement, the value of communal labor: “He toils, ‘tis true; but shares his master’s toil; / With him, he feeds the herd, and trims the soil; / Helps to sustain the house, with clothes, and food, / And takes his portion of the common good” (37). For Dwight’s speaker, the enslaved laborer is an integral part of the community’s republican government: he is not totally exploited because he “takes his portion of the common good.” Though startling to a modern reader, Dwight’s speaker is able to describe this man in positive terms because he is a laborer, and georgic poetry often “stresses the value of intensive and persistent labor.”⁶² As Cristobal Silva notes, georgic poetry “relies on the figure of the laboring swain for its effect,” and so it is typical for georgic poets like Dwight, who frequently write against slavery, to offer positive descriptions of slave labor, to reconceive of slavery “within the conventions of eighteenth-century georgic as an essentially non-violent practice.”⁶³

Soon after he compares Greenfield Hill’s and the unnamed neighboring village’s treatment of enslaved persons, however, Dwight’s speaker stops discussing slavery as a beneficial, republican institution. The speaker admits that though the enslaved man is not in physical pain (“No dim, white spots deform his face, or hand” [36]), he is still denied free will: “Lost liberty his sole, peculiar ill, / And fix’d submission to another’s will”

⁶² Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 12.

⁶³ Cristobal Silva, “Georgic Fantasies: James Grainger and the Poetry of Colonial Dislocation,” *ELH* 83.1 (2016): 141, 143.

(37). Upon mentioning this enslaved laborer's "lost liberty," Dwight's speaker suddenly starts to contemplate a more painful version of slavery:

Oft, wing'd by thought, I seek those Indian isles,
 Where endless spring, with endless summer smiles,

 Ceaseless I hear the smacking whip resound;
 Hark! that shrill scream! that groan of death-bed sound!
 See those throng'd wretches pant along the plain,
 Tug the hard hoe, and sigh in hopeless pain! (39)

Meredith McGill argues that "the poem veer[s] badly off course" when Dwight's speaker starts to discuss West Indian slavery, for while he at first "seizes the opportunity to praise the benevolence of American servitude, articulating a vision of Northern slavery understood as shared labor," he cannot "maintain the ideal of benevolent servitude . . . [when he] recalls West Indian horrors."⁶⁴ Yet in moving away from describing slavery in Connecticut so as to discuss the cruelty of West Indian slavery, Dwight's speaker only more clearly demonstrates the disparity between the georgic's seemingly idealized conception of enslaved people's labor and the harsh reality of slavery as it is actually experienced. Even though the enslaved people in Greenfield Hill and the "Indian isles" don't experience slavery in the same way—the "poor black" laborer in Greenfield Hill whistles while he works and the enslaved laborers in the West Indies let out "shrill scream[s]" and "sigh in hopeless pain"—Dwight's speaker does not hesitate to make a generalized conclusion about slavery. Overlooking his previous, seemingly positive description of the enslaved laborer's experiences in Greenfield Hill, Dwight's speaker posits that slavery cannot ever be deemed a benevolent institution: it is the "uncur'd gangrene of the unreasoning mind" and "Proud Satan's triumph over lost mankind!" (38).

⁶⁴ Meredith McGill, "The Poetry of Slavery," in *The Cambridge Companion to Slavery in American Literature*, ed. Ezra Tawil (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 122.

Though Haynes' subject position as a previously indentured servant and the first ordained African American minister likely prohibited from writing against slavery as frequently as Dwight did, Haynes still briefly discussed the cruelty of slavery in two of his republican sermons. For instance, in *Dissimulation Illustrated*, Haynes criticizes those who do not "feel a pity and compassion for our brethren in slavery, and pray for their deliverance and emancipation" (BPWA 157). He says that these uncompassionate persons are guilty of "dissimulation" in that they have "Partial affection, or distress for some of our fellow creatures, while others, even under our notice, are wholly disregarded" (BPWA 157). By condemning those who only exhibit benevolence to some and not all of their "fellow creatures," Haynes echoes Dwight's argument from *The Charitable Blessed* that persons cannot be selective about who they are charitable to. Though he commends New Haven for having "three Female Societies" and a "Charitable Society" for its impoverished residents, Dwight laments that these societies only help "one class of [New Haven's] inhabitants" and are "intended for specific objects only" (11, 12). To be charitable subjects, then, persons must exhibit disinterested benevolence to all suffering persons, and so cannot value one group—or race—of people over another.

Even before he condemned persons for only being charitable to select groups of people in *Dissimulation Illustrated*, Haynes used *True Republicanism* to argue that all persons are deserving of benevolence. In this earlier republican sermon, Haynes particularly attacks enslavers for not recognizing that God endowed all persons, even Africans, with natural rights. After likening "the poor Africans, among us" to a monarch's subjects—in that they are made "commonly ignorant" and "know but little more than to bow to despots"—Haynes asks, "What has reduced them to their present

pitiful, abject state? Is it any distinction that the God of nature hath made in their formulation? Nay—but being subjected to slavery, by the cruel hands of oppressors, they have been taught to view themselves as a rank of beings far below others, which has suppressed, in a degree, every principle of manhood” (*BPWA* 82). Enslavers are immoral enough for trampling on African persons’ rights and dignity. But Haynes believes that enslavers deserve even more condemnation because they enforce their own negative view of African persons onto African persons themselves (they are “taught to view themselves as a rank of beings far below others”). In subjecting African persons to slavery, however, enslavers not only diminish African persons’ quality of life but also negatively impact their relationship with God. For it is through denying African persons their dignity that enslavers also violate a crucial tenet of evangelicalism: that all persons are equally capable of becoming dignified subjects through conversion (that the “God of nature hath made” no “distinction . . . in their formulation”).

Given his belief that republican governments are divinely ordained institutions, Haynes argues that those who force African persons into slavery and thus deny them their dignity are sinfully violating God’s will as much as they are also denouncing civic republican ideology. For, according to Haynes, a republican government cannot just promote virtue among those who are privileged enough to be deemed citizens: it must “defend and secure the natural rights of men. . . those privileges, whether civil or sacred, that the God of nature hath given us” (*BPWA* 79). Because republican governments must be agents of God’s benevolence, and because God endowed all persons with natural rights, Haynes believes that “a free republican government” must, like God, consider all persons equally and “destroy those distinctions among men that ought never to exist”

(*BPWA* 80). Where Franklin's version of civic republicanism favored only elite white male citizens, Haynes' evangelical philosophy of republicanism posits that all persons are deserving of benevolence because all persons have natural rights bestowed upon them by God.

In his only surviving antislavery treatise, *Liberty Further Extended* (1776), Haynes advanced a similar critique against enslavers for denying African persons their natural rights and, in so doing, denouncing God's will. He said that "Liberty . . . proceed[s] from the Supreme Legislature of the univers, so it is he who hath a sole right to take away; therefore, he that would take away a mans Liberty assumes a prerogative that Belongs to another, and acts out of his own domain" (*BPWA* 18). Because only God has the "right to take away" a person's "Liberty," those who force others into servitude aim to take on an all-powerful "prerogative" over others that only God is allowed to have. Hence, Haynes writes, "if I buy a man, whether I am told he was stole, or not, yet I have no right to Enslave him, Because he is a human Being; and the immutable Laws of God, and indefeasible Laws of Nature, pronounced him free" (*BPWA* 23). Though no single person has the right to enslave another person, all persons have a natural and God-given right to freedom.

Despite writing *Liberty*, *True Republicanism*, and *Dissimulation Illustrated* at different points in his life and career, Haynes used all of these texts to argue that chattel slavery violates evangelical ethics, particularly the belief that virtuous or disinterested persons must exhibit benevolence to the more marginalized members of their community. Where the two republican sermons only briefly discuss slavery, however, *Liberty* focuses entirely on the cruelty of slavery and the slave trade—which perhaps explains why

Haynes never published this text or wrote another explicitly antislavery text in his lifetime. One could argue that the recently-discovered notes for a sermon Haynes delivered shortly after the abolition of the slave trade, *Christ Sold Here*, indicate that it was an antislavery oration, especially since Haynes condemns those who have “sold” Christ (“People by selling Christ promise themselves punishment in this world[;] doubtless this was the case with Judas”).⁶⁵ That only a handful of Haynes’ surviving writings either explicitly or implicitly reference slavery, however, does not mean that he supported slavery or didn’t suffer as a result of his indentured servitude. As my previous chapter has shown, one of Haynes’ contemporaries, Phillis Wheatley, advanced a disinterested critique of slavery: she based her condemnation of slavery entirely on descriptions of other African persons’ suffering. When rebuking slavery in his own writings, however briefly, Haynes similarly did not discuss his own personal experiences and focused only on the suffering that African persons generally experience as a result of their servitude. Wheatley’s and Haynes’ refusal to discuss their own experiences should not be read, then, as evidence of proslavery sentiment. Because their theology encouraged persons to focus less on their own and more on others’ interests, it can be concluded that Wheatley and Haynes did not allude to their own probable suffering as a result of their respective servitude and indentured servitude because they were concerned more with others’ suffering than their own. As Haynes reasons in *True Republicanism*, anyone who focuses only on one’s own suffering risks engaging in selfish behavior, which in turn causes one to denounce the divinely ordained, “philanthropic spirit” that allows for persons to selflessly “care for mankind” (*BPWA* 84).

⁶⁵ John Saillant, “[Lemuel Haynes’] Christ Sold Here, 1 Samuel 8:19.” *Transcribing Early American Sermons*, ed. Zachary McLeod Hutchins et al., <<http://earlyamericansermons.org>>

That Haynes cares more for others' interests and wellbeing than his own is demonstrated by the fact that *Liberty* not only makes no mention of Haynes' own suffering, but also encourages its imagined readers to reflect upon the way that their behavior promotes such suffering. "I would Sollicit you Seriously to reflect on your conduct," Haynes writes, "wheather you are not guilty of unjust Oppression. Can you wash your hands, and say, I am Clean from this Sin? Perhaps you will Dare to Say it Before men; But Dare you Say it Before the tremendous tribunal of that God Before Whome we must all, in a few precarious moments appear?" (*BPWA* 28). The reason that Haynes wants persons to stand before God and say "I am Clean from this Sin" is because he believes that anyone who exhibits oppressive behavior to another person does more than just affront the person they are oppressive to: they, as discussed above, violate "the immutable Laws of God" and so run the risk of not achieving salvation. But rather than merely condemn persons who are "guilty of unjust Oppression," Haynes also uses *Liberty* to discuss how such persons can atone for their immoral behavior. One of the ways that persons can "wash [their] hands . . . from this Sin" of slavery is by calling into question the legitimacy of the laws that condone it. He believes that "it is the Deuty, and interest of a community, to form a system of *Law*, that is calculated to promote the commercial intrest of Each other: . . . But when, instead of contributing to the well Being of the community, it proves banefull to its subjects over whome it Extends, then it is hygh time to call it in question" (*BPWA* 20). By saying that communities need to pass laws that "promote the commercial intrest of Each other," Haynes argues that laws need to help all and not just some of the "subjects over whome [they] Exten[d]." The reason, then, that Haynes believes that the laws that promote the institution of slavery are unjust is because

they are “banefull to” a particular group of people: the enslaved. Where civic republicans don’t consider enslaved persons to be members of their community, and so don’t think that enslaved persons’ suffering puts their community’s welfare at risk, evangelical republicans like Haynes believe that “the well Being of the community” is jeopardized when any of its members—even its most marginalized—experience suffering.

In her analysis of Federalist antislavery politics, Rachel Hope Cleves argues that it was not at all unusual for Federalists like Haynes and Dwight to allude to republican ideology, and its emphasis on communal over individual good, when critiquing slavery. She notes that “republican ideology” explains “the Federalists’ overriding commitment to social stability” as much as it assists them in positing that “the common good depended on a political order from slavery.”⁶⁶ Upon detailing the particulars of “Federalist antislavery critique,” however, Cleves argues that Federalists base their critique of slavery less on enslaved persons’ suffering and more on “the danger that slaveholding posed to political order”: that “The moral dimensions of the Federalists’ distinctive political critique of slavery are easy to overlook when compared with later antebellum abolitionist arguments that focused more consistently on the suffering of slaves. Early national and political and religious conservatives condemned slavery because its domineering spirit undermined republican government.”⁶⁷ Though Cleves contends that Haynes and Dwight fit her model of Federalist antislavery critique, it seems that their championing disinterested benevolence as an efficient method by which persons can alleviate enslaved persons’ suffering actually causes them to depart from Cleves’

⁶⁶ Rachel Hope Cleves, “‘Hurtful to the State’: The Political Morality of Federalist Antislavery,” in *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation*, eds. John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 209.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

paradigm. In positing that actual human suffering only becomes a focus of antislavery writings in the antebellum era, Cleves prevents one from recognizing the ways in which evangelical disinterestedness—with its emphasis on caring less for the white majority's interests and more for marginalized persons' suffering—motivated Haynes' and Dwight's antislavery arguments. It also precludes their writings against slavery—and Wheatley's and Hopkins' before them—from being seen as influential to antebellum antislavery ideology.

That Haynes promoted evangelical disinterestedness as a model ethical stance that persons can inhabit in order to eliminate enslaved persons' suffering is demonstrated by the fact that he explicitly alludes to Hopkinsian disinterested benevolence in the end of *Liberty*. Anticipating his claim from *Dissimulation Illustrated* that persons need to follow Washington's example and free the African persons they wrongfully forced into slavery ("prove themselves to be his legitimate children, and go and do likewise" [BPWA 167]), Haynes tells *Liberty*'s imagined readers that persons can help eliminate enslaved persons' suffering by freeing them. He writes, "O *Sirs!* Let that pity, and compassion, which is peculiar to mankind, Especially to Englishmen, no Longer Lie Dormant in your Breast: Let it run free thro' Disinterested Benevolence. then how would these iron yokes Spontaneously fall from the gauled Necks of the oppress'd!" (BPWA 29). Though he says that all persons are capable of being "compassionate" to others, Haynes does not necessarily contradict his belief in original sin. Indeed, he believes that the only way that persons can tap into their "Dormant" ability to exhibit benevolence is if they allow for God to overtake their will in the conversion process, if they "Let" their ability to be compassionate to others "run free thro' Disinterested Benevolence." By contrast, those

who don't come to inhabit a more benevolent will than their own, and subsequently work to alleviate enslaved persons' suffering, run the risk of eternal damnation: "If you have any Love to yourselves, or any Love to this Land, if you have any Love to your fellow-men, Break these intollerable yokes, and Let their names Be remembered no more, Least they Be retorted on your own necks, and you Sink under them; for god will not hold you guiltless" (*BPWA* 29-30). Persons can at once increase their likelihood of obtaining salvation and eliminate the suffering that "oppres'd" persons experience if they prevent their self-serving interests from infringing upon their ability to care for others.

V. Conclusion: Disinterested Charitable Societies

Rather than describe what happens to persons who don't care for others' suffering, as Haynes does in *Liberty*, Dwight uses *Greenfield Hill* to describe what he believes a community of benevolent persons looks like. Because the townspeople are benevolent to each other, are subject to the same laws, don't discriminate against the enslaved members of their community, and are all religious ("law, from vengeful rage, the slave defends, / And here the gospel peace on earth extends" [36]), Dwight is able to uphold Greenfield Hill as a place

Where peace and sweet civility are seen,
And meek good-neighbourhood endears the green.
Here every class (if classes those we call,
Where one extended class embraces all,
All mingling, as the rainbow's beauty blends,
Unknown where every hue begins or ends)
Each following, each, with uninvincible strife,
Wears every feature of improving life. (36)

Greenfield Hill does not distinguish between persons or relegate individuals to different classes: it is a place where all of the townspeople are civil to and mingle with each other,

similar to the way that a “rainbow’s beauty blends, / Unknown where every hue begins or ends.”

Though they both used their writings to promote equality and benevolence among disparate groups of people, Dwight frequently and Haynes rarely offered utopian views of what he believed a truly benevolent society could look like. Yet Haynes, like Dwight, consistently preached and published sermons that encouraged persons to subscribe to a more inclusive, evangelical philosophy of republicanism, to help overturn unjust laws, and to alleviate marginalized persons’ suffering. Indeed, Haynes believed that enslaved persons are not the only marginalized figures in need of charity. As referenced above, Haynes, in the end of *Dissimulation Illustrated*, tells his audience: “There are objects of charity on every side to illucidate your characters. The poor and the needy, the widow and the fatherless, are objects of your attention. There are religious institutions, I mean missionary and bible societies, that perhaps demand your patronage and assistance” (*BPWA* 168). Persons can demonstrate their disinterested benevolence by doing more than just alleviating individual persons’ suffering: they can donate their money and time to societies that have similarly benevolent ambitions.

In his *The Charitable Blessed* sermon, Dwight—like Haynes after him—encourages persons to be charitable to all of the disenfranchised members of their community. Though he advocates for New Haven to have Charitable Societies that are not necessarily “intended for specific objects only,” this doesn’t stop Dwight from praising those New Haven residents who are being charitable to persons of various classes, genders, and races (12). Hence, he commends “The Ladies of the several Congregations in this town” for forming a series of “Benevolent societies” and schools

that attend to New Haven's impoverished residents', single mothers', and undereducated children's needs (Dwight confesses that he felt "a peculiar interest in that [school], which has been established for *the benefit of the female children of the blacks*" because of America's relationship to slavery and the slave trade) (16, 17, 19, 20).

In the decade after these various Charitable Societies and schools were established in New Haven, Dwight's third cousin, Catharine Sedgwick, would work with other female parishioners at New York City's First Congregational Church to establish a charity school for children, and one of her correspondents, the Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing, would work with other Boston ministers to help establish a charitable society of ministers called the "Ministry at Large." Though Unitarianism departs from evangelicalism in its discounting the Calvinist belief in original sin—and thus believing that all persons are naturally capable of benevolence—Unitarians, like Channing and Sedgwick, did not allow for their doctrinal disagreements with evangelicalism prevent them from integrating this evangelical ethic of disinterestedness into their new Unitarian theology and philosophy of benevolence.

Chapter 4

Unitarianism, Poverty Relief, and Catharine Sedgwick's Fictional Ministry at Large

It is no coincidence that Catharine Sedgwick embarked on a literary career after she converted to Unitarianism. Indeed, Sedgwick's first novel, *A New-England Tale; or, Sketches of New-England Character and Manners* (1822), was never intended to be a novel: it was originally written as a short tract that denounced Calvinism in favor of Unitarianism. But shortly after her brother Harry and she joined New York's first Unitarian Society, Sedgwick showed him the tract, and it was he who "advised her to give it a larger form and scope, and print it as a tale."¹ Though her brothers Harry and Theodore helped promote and manage her literary career until their deaths in the 1830s, Sedgwick received additional support from various Unitarian figures and societies through the 1840s. For instance, Sedgwick published two short moral tales—*Mary Hollis* (1822) and *The Deformed Boy* (1826)—with Unitarian financial support in the 1820s, wrote her first of three explicitly didactic novels, *Home* (1835), at the request of the Unitarian minister Henry Ware, Jr., and published eight short stories in the *Union Magazine* in the late 1840s with the help of the magazine's Unitarian editor Caroline Kirkland.² And perhaps most importantly, Sedgwick maintained a decades-long correspondence and friendship with the influential Unitarian minister William Ellery

¹ *Life and Letters of Catharine M. Sedgwick*, ed. Mary Dewey (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872), 93, 150-151. I will hereafter cite this text parenthetically by page number.

² According to the first *Annual Report of the New-York Unitarian Book Society* (1823), which first published *Mary Hollis: An Original Tale* in 1822, this institution—which "print[ed] and distribut[ed] tracts" and "collect[ed] a library of substantial works on theological subjects"—was conceived of, funded by, and affiliated with Sedgwick's home parish: The First Congregational Church. *Annual Report of the New-York Unitarian Book Society; with the Rules of the Society, and Catalogues of the Library and Tracts: For 1823* (New York: Joseph C. Spear, 1823), 3. The "Unitarian-sponsored Publishing Fund of Boston" first published *The Deformed Boy* in 1826. "Catharine Maria Sedgwick: A Brief Chronology," in *Clarence; or, a Tale of Our Own Times*, eds. Melissa Homestead and Helen Foster (Buffalo: Broadview Editions, 2012), 41. For a brief discussion of Sedgwick's relationship with Caroline Kirkland, see Charlene Avallone, "Catharine Sedgwick and the Circles of New York," *Legacy* 23.2 (2006): 122.

Channing until his death in 1842.³ Though Channing wrote sermons and Sedgwick wrote novels and short fiction, their writings together condemned Calvinism for valuing but not necessarily encouraging benevolence among its followers. While Sedgwick's third cousin, Timothy Dwight, valorized Calvinism as a charitable religion throughout his sermons and in his georgic poem *Greenfield Hill* (1794), Channing and Sedgwick, in the decades after Dwight published his poem, would be among the many Calvinists who distanced themselves from that theology so as to embrace a less wrathful and more benevolent idea of divinity in Unitarianism.

Sedgwick's most explicit critiques of Calvinism come from both *A New-England Tale* and the autobiography she started writing for her niece, Alice Minot, in 1853. When describing the protagonist Jane Elton's aunt, Mrs. Wilson, and her Calvinist household in *A New-England Tale*, Sedgwick says, "Religion was the ostensible object of every domestic arrangement; but you might look in vain for the peace and good will which a voice from heaven proclaimed to be the objects of the mission of our lord."⁴ The reason that Sedgwick claims that Calvinist households are supposed to be but are not actually guided by "peace and good will" is because she believes that Calvinists are concerned less with promoting benevolence and more with using their belief in human depravity to instill fear in their followers. Hence, in her autobiography, Sedgwick describes her "Sister Eliza" as someone who "suffered from the horrors of Calvinism . . . she believed

³ The first known meeting between Sedgwick and Channing happened when Channing converted Sedgwick's father, the jurist and politician Theodore Sedgwick, to Unitarianism on his deathbed in 1813 (*Life and Letters* 93-96).

⁴ Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *A New-England Tale*, ed. Susan Harris (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 23. I will hereafter cite this novel parenthetically by page number.

its monstrous doctrines, and they made her gloomy” (*Life and Letters* 68).⁵ In one of his earliest sermons, *The Moral Argument Against Calvinism* (1820), Channing offers a similar condemnation of Calvinism: he claims that it “owes its perpetuity,” not to its followers’ benevolence, but “to the influence of fear in palsying the moral nature.”⁶

But at the same time that they denounced Calvinism for “degrading human nature,” Sedgwick and Channing also acknowledged that Calvinism—and the evangelical theology that developed from it—contained the seeds of the ethical system that would become crucial to their own Unitarian theology.⁷ For instance, in the section she wrote on the evangelical minister from her childhood, Stephen West, for the *Annals of the American Pulpit* (1857), Sedgwick claimed that “his theories were exclusive, and his creed definite and exacting,” but also said that “his charity was unlimited, and his love universal.”⁸ Channing expressed similar views of West’s mentor Samuel Hopkins, saying that the evangelical minister of his youth was “a sincere benevolent man” who also happened to hold “a stern and appalling theology” that “accepted the doctrine of predestination in its severest form.”⁹ But Channing also admitted that Hopkins’ “system, however fearful, was yet built on a generous foundation . . . which require[d] us to promote the welfare of each and all within our influence” (34, 35). In the same way that

⁵ Though originally published as part of Sedgwick’s *Life and Letters*, Mary Kelley also published Sedgwick’s autobiography in *The Power of Her Sympathy: The Autobiography and Journal of Catharine Maria Sedgwick*, ed. Mary Kelley (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993).

⁶ William Ellery Channing, “The Moral Argument Against Calvinism,” in *William Ellery Channing: Selected Writings*, ed. David Robinson (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 105.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸ Catharine Maria Sedgwick, “Letter regarding Stephen West [27 July 1848],” in *Annals of the American Pulpit*, vol. 1, by William Sprague (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1857), 551. In her autobiography, Sedgwick similarly said that she “dreaded [West] and certainly did not understand him in my youth. He was then only the dry, sapless embodiment of polemical divinity” who believed that humans were “left by [God] to suffer eternally for Adam’s transgression, except a handful *elected* to salvation” (*Life and Letters* 60).

⁹ William Ellery Channing, *A Discourse Delivered at the Dedication of the Unitarian Congregational Church in Newport, Rhode Island, July 27, 1836* (London: Richard Kinder, 1837), 39, 34, 35. I will hereafter cite this sermon parenthetically as *Discourse* followed by the page number.

Sedgwick appreciated West for offering “‘practical observations’ on love, charity . . . and self-negation, that sunk deep in some of our hearts” (*Life and Letters* 63), so Channing said that he was not “ashamed to confess” his gratitude to Hopkins “for turning my thoughts and heart to the claims and majesty of impartial, universal benevolence” (*Discourse* 35).

Despite their reservations about evangelicalism’s belief in human depravity, Channing and Sedgwick recognized that Hopkins’ and West’s New Divinity brand of evangelicalism was “built on a generous foundation,” which accordingly caused them to incorporate the New Divinity Movement’s central ethical philosophy of disinterested benevolence into their new Unitarian theology. Following Dan McKanan’s claim that Sedgwick’s fictional writings are “as integral to the liberal theological corpus as . . . the sermons of William Ellery Channing,” this chapter considers Sedgwick’s and Channing’s writings to be representative of not just Unitarian theology, but also Unitarianism’s under-examined affinity with evangelical ethics. For as much as Unitarians rejected evangelicalism’s depraved view of humanity they also upheld disinterested benevolence as a uniquely efficient method by which persons could alleviate human suffering.¹⁰ While Unitarianism and evangelicalism are mostly thought of as conflicting factions within Protestant theology—especially given the Unitarians’ rejection of both the Trinity and original sin—Channing’s and Sedgwick’s works show that these two seemingly distinctive theological discourses actually endorsed similar ethical systems.¹¹

¹⁰ Dan McKanan, *Identifying the Image of God: Radical Christians and Nonviolent Power in the Antebellum United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21. I will hereafter cite McKanan’s book parenthetically by page number.

¹¹ Scholars such as David Turley have focused on the differences between evangelical and Unitarian theories of reform in nineteenth-century Boston, arguing that “Unitarians offered an influential alternative model of reform to that of the evangelicals” who seemed to be “convinced that liberals, showing relative optimism about human nature, failed to reach to the heart of the problem of sin.” While acknowledging

Though the earlier evangelical ministers, West and Hopkins, resemble Sedgwick and Channing in that they all wrote about the need to eliminate widespread suffering, the rise of both the market economy and urban poverty in the antebellum era caused these later Unitarian writers to approach the topic with renewed vigor. For at the same time that Channing and Sedgwick were formulating their new theology and its philosophy of charity, the United States economy experienced a series of financial crises that culminated in the Panic of 1837.¹² Indeed, Channing published *Unitarian Christianity*—the first sermon in which he explicitly described his theology as Unitarian—in the midst of the Panic of 1819, which Mary Templin describes as “the first major economic upheaval to result from the internal workings of the newly emerging market economy.”¹³ Yet in addition to publishing and preaching sermons that argued for the importance of charity to Unitarian theology, Channing also put his religious beliefs into practice by working with Unitarian ministers, such as Henry Ware, Jr., to initiate a “distinct ministry for the poor”; this ministry’s success ultimately caused Channing to invite Joseph Tuckerman to Boston so that he could lead a new inter-congregational ministry for the

their contrasting views on “human nature” as a result of original sin, this chapter differently discusses how evangelicalism and Unitarianism overlap: it traces how the originally evangelical conception of disinterestedness came to influence Unitarian writings in support of urban poverty relief. David Turley, “Religion and Approaches to Reform: Boston Unitarians Versus Evangelicals in the Context of the 1820s and 1830s,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 10.2 (2009): 188.

¹² William Charvat is one of the only scholars to similarly notice that Unitarian poverty relief efforts suddenly sprung up around the time of the Panic of 1819. He claims that “It was in 1819 that urban pauperism became conspicuous for the first time in American history” and that “Unitarians began the humanitarian activity for which they became famous.” William Charvat, “American Romanticism and the Depression of 1837,” in *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 51.

¹³ Mary Templin, *Panic Fiction: Women and Antebellum Economic Crisis* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014), 17. For more on the Panic of 1819, see Andrew Cayton, “The Fragmentation of a ‘Great Family’: The Panic of 1819 and the Rise of the Middling Interest in Boston, 1818-1822,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (1982): 143-167.

poor, which became officially known as the “Ministry at Large” in 1826.¹⁴ Though women could not serve as ministers to the poor, this did not stop Sedgwick from either attending this Ministry’s planning meetings or assisting Unitarian poverty relief efforts in other capacities (as she and other female congregants at New York City’s First Congregational Church helped organize a “charity-school” for impoverished children in 1823 [*Life and Letters* 158]).¹⁵ What Sedgwick considered her most valuable contribution to the cause of poverty relief, however, was her writing: her efforts to humanize and dignify impoverished persons as well as depict positive scenes of charitable exchange in her fictional works. Hence, when Channing wrote to Sedgwick in 1837 and thanked her for using her didactic fiction from this period to “expose the errors in our social system,” Sedgwick responded by theorizing writing as a spiritual and charitable endeavor akin to Channing’s ministerial work—by telling Channing that they were both contributing to the same “good cause” and that “neither pride nor humility should withhold us from the work to which we are clearly ‘sent’” (*Life and Letters* 270, 271).

Building on Claudia Stokes’ claim that “sentimental writers assumed ministerial duties and positioned themselves as important cultural arbiters of religious opinion,” this chapter will more specifically analyze how Sedgwick used her fictional portrayals of impoverished religious persons to promote a theory of charity that was, like Channing’s,

¹⁴ John Ware, *Memoir of the Life of Henry Ware, Jr.* (Boston: James Munroe & Co., 1846), 132-135. Charvat discusses Channing’s involvement in the Ministry at Large: “He had been active in the organization of the Ministry at Large after the panic of 1819, and even at the height of prosperity in the middle thirties . . . When the panic came, he was sincerely distressed at the suffering of the poor and at the spectacle of class animosity.” Charvat, “American Romanticism and the Depression of 1837,” 52-53.

¹⁵ In a 4 February 1833 diary entry, Sedgwick writes of attending a meeting that “planned our Society of Aid of the Ministry at Large,” “a plan for districting the city & appointing persons in each ward who should know every inhabitant, their occupation, their wants.” Qtd. in Walter Donald Kring, *Liberals Among the Orthodox: Unitarian Beginnings in New York City, 1819-1839* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 177. I will hereafter cite Kring’s book parenthetically by page number. For more on what Sedgwick called the “charity-school” and her involvement in it, see Kring 137-142.

indebted to the evangelical ethic of disinterested benevolence.¹⁶ Though Sarah Robbins has also focused on the importance of benevolence to Sedgwick's literary enterprise—arguing that “her commitment to the gendered benevolent work of her social group guided [her] writing choices”—she did not detail exactly how Unitarianism informed both Sedgwick's theory of benevolence and her philanthropic conception of writing.¹⁷ This chapter, however, will position Sedgwick's fiction in relation to Channing's and other Unitarian ministers' writings in order to extend upon Charlene Avallone's premise that Unitarianism offered Sedgwick a “sphere of mutual literary influence that remains largely understudied.”¹⁸ For as much as Sedgwick read, admired, and recommended Channing's writings to others, Channing also sought Sedgwick's input on his writings—on at least one occasion, Channing read a sermon aloud to Sedgwick before he preached it.¹⁹ Thus, by considering Sedgwick's fictional works in conjunction with Unitarian

¹⁶ Claudia Stokes, *The Altar at Home: Sentimental Literature and Nineteenth-Century American Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 18. Mary Kelley similarly claims that nineteenth-century American women writers, like Sedgwick, “characterized themselves as preachers of the fictional page.” Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 294.

¹⁷ Sarah Robbins, “Periodizing Authorship, Characterizing Genre: Catharine Maria Sedgwick's Benevolent Literacy Narratives,” *American Literature* 76.1 (2004): 3.

¹⁸ Avallone, “Circles of New York,” 122. Though he analyzes Sedgwick's views on celibacy, Marshall Foletta makes a similar claim about Sedgwick's relationship to Unitarianism, saying, “While Sedgwick's Unitarianism is frequently offered as context for the critique of religious provincialism and hypocrisy running throughout her work, the central elements of her belief – the specific theological principles of Unitarianism – have not been employed as an interpretive tool for the reading of her novels.” Marshall Foletta, “‘The dearest sacrifice’: Catharine Maria Sedgwick and the Celibate Life,” *American Nineteenth-Century History* 8.1 (2007): 56.

¹⁹ Sedgwick wrote at least two letters to her brother Charles about Channing: in the first letter from 1826 she said that “it would be impossible to live within the sphere of Mr. Channing's influence without being in some degree spiritualized by it” (*Life and Letters* 181-182); with the second 1828 letter, Sedgwick said that she “inclose[d] . . . an essay on the character of Napoleon (that prodigy of our own times), written by Dr. Channing” (193-194). Sedgwick and Channing also frequently corresponded about their own writing projects, for in a 20 May 1833 letter, Sedgwick asked for Channing's advice about a “MS. article sent to me [on the emancipation of slaves] by [Jean Charles Léonard de] Sismondi to translate” (231). In the postscript of an 1829 letter, Channing sought similar advice from Sedgwick: “You will oblige me, by reading my New York sermon & getting your sister Mrs. S. at Lenox to read it and by writing soon whether I have stated any views of others incorrectly. . . . Before republishing it, I wish to make it unexceptionable.” William Ellery Channing to Catharine Maria Sedgwick, 2 March 1829, Dated Correspondence, 1794-1862, Reel 2, William Ellery Channing Papers: II, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

sermons and treatises, and by reading clerical and non-clerical Unitarian writers alongside each other, this chapter not only reevaluates Sedgwick as a religious writer and thinker, but also reveals the prevalence with which Unitarians of various subject positions integrated this evangelical conception of disinterestedness into their seemingly anti-evangelical theology and philosophy of benevolence.

Before making any argument about Sedgwick's fiction, then, this chapter's first section traces how Channing redefined Hopkins' theory of disinterested benevolence as a Unitarian ethic. While McKanan claims that disinterested benevolence is an exclusively evangelical ethic and that the doctrine of the *imago dei* (that all persons are made in God's image) is actually Unitarianism's most central ethical philosophy (15), I argue that Unitarians did not consider disinterested benevolence and the *imago dei* philosophy to be at odds with each other.²⁰ Hence, in his *Likeness to God* (1828) sermon, Channing claims that because all persons are made in God's image, and are thus capable of acting according to God's moral standards, they are all deserving of disinterested benevolence. After detailing the place of disinterested benevolence in Channing's theology, the

Discussing primary source material of Sedgwick's at the Massachusetts Historical Society—her 8 December 1826 letter to Eliza Lee Cabot and her journal entries written around that date—Kring discovers that Channing asked Sedgwick for advice on his *New York Sermon*, not just when he wanted to republish it in 1829, but also before he preached it for the first time in 1826: "The *Journal* description is less enthusiastic than that contained in the letter. Evidently Channing read the sermon in its entirety to his sister, Mrs. Russel, and to Miss Sedgwick, asking their editorial opinion as to what parts of the written sermon he should omit in the oral presentation" (157).

²⁰ Besides McKanan, Joseph Conforti is the only other scholar to discuss Unitarianism's relationship to disinterested benevolence. Focusing on Unitarian interpretations of the Great Awakening, Conforti quotes from William Henry Channing's condemnation of Whitefield, his blaming Whitefield for promoting "a selfish pursuit of salvation . . . instead of the [Edwardsean] love of absolute goodness and the utter surrender of private interests to universal well-being." From this, Conforti argues that evangelical disinterestedness assisted Unitarians in critiquing "the 'methodistical' revivalism of [George] Whitefield . . . and the Second Great Awakeners who displayed 'excessive vanity' and who appealed to the 'selfishness' (the 'inordinate self-love') of their converts." William Henry Channing, "Edwards and the Revivalists," in *Christian Examiner* 43 (November 1844): 388; Joseph Conforti, "Edwardsians, Unitarians, and the Memory of the Great Awakening, 1800-1840," in *American Unitarianism, 1805-1865*, ed. Conrad Wright (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1989), 41.

chapter's second section considers the ways in which this evangelical-turned-Unitarian conception of disinterestedness informed not just Channing's and other Unitarian clergymen's theorizations of the Unitarian ministry (especially the Ministry at Large), but also Sedgwick's philanthropic understanding of her authorial occupation. The chapter's third section then argues that Sedgwick first queried the relationship between disinterestedness and charity in her didactic tract tales from the 1820s, and that these tales' female characters promote disinterestedness as an exemplary Unitarian ethic by not allowing for any of their personal interests—whether it be their grief, wealth, or financial condition—prohibit them from trusting in God's will and exhibiting charity to others. In the chapter final section, I turn to Sedgwick's novels from the 1830s and consider the influence of this conception of disinterestedness on these texts' depiction of impoverished religious persons.²¹ Rather than just catalogue a series of events in which a person of a higher socioeconomic class was charitable to someone of a lower socioeconomic class, Sedgwick's tract tales and novels frequently detail charitable exchanges between impoverished persons who consider charity to be both a social and a spiritual obligation. Because her impoverished characters work virtuously on behalf of God's will and do not have material wealth to be selfish over, Sedgwick designated them, and not her more wealthy characters, as the ideal practitioners of disinterested benevolence. By praising her impoverished and religious as opposed to her wealthy characters' morals, Sedgwick argues that one's faith, and not one's socioeconomic status, determines whether or not one can adequately exhibit charity to others.

I. Benevolence in God's Image

²¹ I am thus following Stokes, who aims to "provide a greater denominational specificity to our understanding of the religious contents of sentimental literature." Stokes, *Altar at Home*, 2.

Even in his earliest journals and manuscript notes Channing discussed the importance of charity to his religiosity. In fact, some of the first items on Channing's list of the various "things to be done in town," which he wrote shortly after he moved to Boston in 1803, involve assisting impoverished persons:

Poor-house. — Rooms to be better aired. . . Tracts to be circulated there. Let me visit them once a week. They want plain, pious, unambitious evangelical ministry . . . Causes of poverty to be traced. Charity is not enough directed. Intimate acquaintance with poor families. . . *Let the poor be my end*. Let each rich family have some poor under their care; especially Christian families. Mention the poor to others. Connect the poor with good families.²²

As much as he wants to tend to the Poor House residents' needs by ministering to and circulating tracts among them, Channing also recognizes that he cannot alleviate their suffering or improve their spiritual condition on his own. Hence, he not only reminds himself to "mention the poor to others" but also contends that "especially Christian families" should "have some poor under their care."

In a manuscript note that he wrote almost two decades later during the Panic of 1819 on "Our Duties to the Poor," Channing substantiates this journal entry's claim that Christians are particularly capable of caring for impoverished persons by arguing that "UNIVERSAL CHARITY" is a "characteristic element" of Christian theology (*Memoir* 387). He writes, "No man can read the New Testament honestly, and not learn to measure his religion chiefly by his benevolence. If the spirit, and example, and precepts of Jesus Christ have not taught us to love our fellow-creatures, we have no title whatever to the name and the hope of Christians" (387). By saying that persons can't just "read the New Testament" but also have to "learn" from it, Channing claims that persons cannot be

²² William Ellery Channing, *Memoir of William Ellery Channing, with Extracts from his Correspondence and Manuscripts*, vol. 1, ed. William Henry Channing (London: George Routledge & Co., 1850), 173, 175. I will hereafter cite all quotations from this source parenthetically as *Memoir* followed by the page number.

deemed Christians unless they both believe in and act upon its doctrines—unless they practice what Christ taught them and exhibit “love” or benevolence to their “fellow-creatures.”

Because Christian doctrine calls for persons to exhibit charity to those who are most in need of it, Channing theorizes religion as both a belief system and a “social principle.” In one of his early sermons, *Religion a Social Principle* (1820), Channing takes James 1:22 as his text: “Pure and undefiled religion is . . . to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.”²³ This passage assists Channing in arguing that religious persons who want to demonstrate their devotion to God must practice and not merely believe in benevolence: they can’t just “cherish those sentiments of love and gratitude which are due to [God’s] infinite goodness,” but also have to “actively promot[e] the purposes of this goodness” and allow for their “inward” beliefs to have “operation and expression in the life” (4-5). By theorizing benevolence as both a belief and an action, and by having such an understanding of benevolence be crucial to his conception of religion, Channing posits that religion most accurately manifests itself—and so is only appreciated—on the level of the social. Hence, he asks, “How do we form ideas of the attributes of God, particularly of his goodness and equity, those chief foundations of religion, but by seeing them manifested in our fellow creatures, and in social life?” (7). Rejecting the belief that religion is “a *private affair* between man and his maker, with which his neighbour has no concern,” Channing contends that religious persons must be concerned and interact with their “fellow creatures,” for it is in “social life” that persons

²³ William Ellery Channing, *Religion a Social Principle. A Sermon, Delivered in the Church in Federal Street, Boston, December 10, 1820* (Boston: Russell and Gardner, 1820), 3. I will hereafter cite this sermon parenthetically by page number.

can witness, learn from, and partake in charitable exchanges and so become agents of God's benevolence (5).

In his *Likeness to God* sermon, Channing again claims that one needs to enter social situations in order to exhibit charity and thus legitimize one's status as a converted person. He writes, "God calls you, both by nature and revelation, to a fellowship in his philanthropy . . . [and] has placed you in social relations, for the very end of rendering you ministers and representatives of his benevolence."²⁴ Though similar to *Religion a Social Principle* in its arguing that one can only properly exercise divinely ordained benevolence "in social relations," *Likeness to God* departs from the earlier sermon in its claiming that persons can only obtain "a fellowship in [God's] philanthropy" once they abandon personal interests and inhabit a radically selfless condition: once "selfishness has been swallowed up in love" (150). He writes,

We approach our Creator by every right exertion of the powers he gives us . . . whenever we perform a disinterested deed; whenever we lift up the heart in true adoration to God; whenever we war against a habit or desire which is strengthening itself against our higher principles . . . then the divinity is growing within us, and we are ascending towards our Author. True religion thus blends itself with common life. We are thus, without parting with our human nature, to clothe ourselves with the divine. (158-159)

Because self-interested persons are too preoccupied with themselves to "blend . . . with common life," they do not give themselves the opportunity to exhibit benevolence to others and so do not practice "true religion." But rather than argue that it is difficult for persons to abandon self-serving inclinations and "perform a disinterested deed," Channing claims that persons can easily inhabit this condition of divine likeness. Hence, he begins the passage by saying that God has already given persons the power to be

²⁴ William Ellery Channing, "Likeness to God," in *William Ellery Channing: Selected Writings*, ed. David Robinson (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 157. I will hereafter cite this sermon parenthetically by page number.

moral beings: that “We can approach our Creator by every right exertion of the powers he gives us.” Just because persons are capable of becoming like God, however, does not mean that they are in any way less human, for Channing posits that as we perform moral actions and “divinity [grows] within us,” we do not “part with our human nature” but merely come to “clothe ourselves with the divine.” Holy persons are still persons, but they set themselves apart from other, non-religious persons in that they are able to disregard their own interests and act entirely on behalf of God’s benevolence.

This idea that persons can easily achieve this condition of divine likeness is a crucial aspect of Channing’s theology. Though scholars have analyzed how this doctrine came to influence Transcendentalist philosophy in the antebellum era, not enough attention has been given to the ideological or theological discourses that Channing appealed to when he crafted this doctrine in the first place.²⁵ Dan McKanan is one of the only scholars to discuss the origins of Channing’s philosophy of divine likeness; he claims that Channing and the other “liberal theologians” who subscribed to this belief were likely influenced by the *imago dei* philosophy (the idea that all persons are made in God’s image). Among the first to theorize this doctrine, the Christian Platonists “taught that the essential kinship between God and the soul allowed humans to grow steadily in likeness to God, ultimately achieving full divinization” (13). Though popular among the Christian Platonists and “various schools of esoteric and mystical Christianity,” McKanan notes that Calvinists did not at all take to the doctrine of the *imago dei*:

In the fifth century, Saint Augustine articulated what would become the orthodox understanding of original sin: the Fall effaced the divine image in humanity,

²⁵ For discussions of how Channing’s claim that the divine dwells within every person influenced American Transcendentalism, see Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 228; Gary Dorrien, Jr. *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 48-50.

leaving us incapable of willing any good without the assistance of supernatural grace. . . . During the Protestant Reformation, theologians like Luther and Calvin radicalized Augustine's teaching. For them, the fallen human will was entirely in bondage to sin God, for the Reformers, was less a loving father than an absolute sovereign who saved some humans and damned others for his own mysterious purposes. (13)

In claiming that divine likeness is "an original and essential capacity of the mind"

(*Likeness* 146), Channing aligned himself with Christian Platonism as much as he set himself apart from Calvinism. As in his early sermons *Unitarian Christianity* and *The Moral Argument Against Calvinism*, Channing in *Likeness* acknowledges that his understanding of the relationship between humanity and divinity violates the Calvinist belief in human depravity: that to "talk of the greatness and divinity of the human soul, is to inflate that pride through which Satan fell" (148-149). In order to construct a theology that promoted humanity's capacity for benevolence, Channing could not help but distance himself from Calvinism and its philosophy of original sin. Rather than argue that "the fallen human will was entirely in bondage to sin," Channing claimed that all persons are capable of emulating—and so are also deserving of—God's benevolence.

Though McKanan positions the Calvinist belief in human depravity and the *imago dei* philosophy at odds with each other, this does not mean that Calvinists didn't extend upon or use the terms of this doctrine when they formulated their own theories of benevolence. For instance, Samuel Hopkins, in *An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness* (1773), argues that holy persons are in fact made in "the image of God." He writes, "We have the greatest certainty of this, in that holiness in the creature is, in Scripture, called the image of God, and that by which they partake of the divine nature, and is represented to the Holy Spirit of God, or God's holiness, dwelling and acting in

them, by which God dwells in them, and they dwell in God.”²⁶ When Hopkins says that persons can “partake of the divine nature,” it at first seems like he rejects the Calvinist belief in original sin, especially its distinguishing between a sovereign God and fallen humans. However, Hopkins makes a point to say that persons are fundamentally incapable of practicing this same “kind” of holiness in the same way—or to the same “degree”—as God because they are different beings (“God’s holiness differs from the holiness of creatures in degree, and . . . [is] agreeabl[e] to the infinite degree of his excellence, and the different manner and circumstances in which he exists, but is [still] of the same nature” [11]).

Hopkins and Channing may both argue that all persons are capable of emulating God’s benevolence, but their contrasting views of original sin causes them to disagree as to the method by which persons can obtain such a benevolent condition. While Channing argues that one merely has to set aside one’s individual will so that God’s will, which has already been implanted in one’s soul, can motivate one’s actions, Hopkins claims that one can only exhibit benevolence after one has been converted (that one can only practice “disinterested affection” after one is “renewed by the Spirit of God”).²⁷ Though Hopkins differently claims that persons can become but are not innately like God, his theology nevertheless resembles Channing’s in that they both argue that persons who tap into or

²⁶ Samuel Hopkins, “An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness,” in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 3, ed. Edwards Amasa Park (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1852), 11. I will hereafter cite this text parenthetically by page number.

²⁷ Samuel Hopkins, “System of Doctrines,” in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 1, ed. Edwards Amasa Park (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1852), 388. I am here marking my agreement with Clemens Spahr’s differentiating between Jonathan Edwards’ evangelical and Channing’s Unitarian theory of conversion: “As opposed to Edwards who asserted that humanity can only glimpse an inferior, secondary beauty,” or cannot learn about benevolence, “until the conversion experience, for Channing the individual seems to be always already converted. Conversion potentially occurs in every moment, whenever the individual decides to exert the free will that God has granted him or her.” Clemens Spahr, *Radical Beauty: American Transcendentalism and the Aesthetic Critique of Modernity* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2011), 61.

realize their “likeness to God” do not lose their status as human persons. For in the same way that Channing says that we do not “part with our human nature” when we achieve this condition of divine likeness (*Likeness* 159), Hopkins contends that “dwell[ing] in God” has less to do with becoming God and more with sharing in the “same life” as God, as a human person. He writes: “Holiness is in Scripture called life; . . . It is not compounded of different things . . . Every property and motion is the motion and property of this same life, and implies the whole. So holiness, though it has obtained different names, as it is exercised in different circumstances and towards different objects, is the same most simple, undivided spiritual life” (*True Holiness* 12). This idea that all persons can come to share in the “same life” as God is thus as crucial to Hopkins’ theology as it is to his ethics. For if one believes that all persons are capable of being converted—or “partak[ing] of the divine nature”—then one must also believe that all persons deserve to be treated with benevolence. The reason, then, that Hopkins encourages persons to exhibit “universal benevolence” to “all intelligent beings” is because he believes that all “beings” are capable of becoming like God (16).

By claiming that disinterested persons must exhibit “universal benevolence” to all persons (it “is the holy love which God’s law requires, and is the whole of true holiness” [16]), Hopkins cannot help but also argue that moral and immoral persons are equally deserving of benevolence. In *True Holiness*, Hopkins goes so far as to encourage disinterested persons to be benevolent to their enemies, saying, “The love to our neighbor, which God’s law requires, is certainly universal, disinterested good will, since it is a love which will dispose us to do good unto all men, and must extend to our greatest enemies” (35). To validate his claim that persons must love even their “greatest

enemies,” Hopkins alludes to the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), in which a Samaritan helped “an enemy in distress” (35), a Jewish traveler, who was robbed and left for dead on his way to Jericho. Because disinterested persons must set aside their personal feelings and be benevolent to persons they would not initially be benevolent to, Hopkins argues that one of the most efficient ways to inhabit a disinterested persona—or “imitate God’s holiness”—is to show “love to sinners” (41).

Though Channing also believes that sinners and immoral persons are equally deserving of benevolence, he departs from Hopkins by arguing that only Unitarian theology adequately supports this claim. In *The Superior Tendency of Unitarianism to form an Elevated Religious Character* (1826), which is commonly referred to as his “New York Sermon,” Channing posits that evangelicals cannot on the one hand subscribe to the Calvinist belief that God “brings us into existence burdened with hereditary guilt” and on the other hand say that God is capable of exhibiting “mercy to the sinner.”²⁸ Unitarianism thus sets itself apart from evangelicalism in that it rejects the “vindictive wrath in God” and “asserts so strongly the mercy of God, that . . . [it] desires first for the sinner that restoration to purity, without which, shame, and suffering, and exile from God and heaven are of necessity and unalterably his doom” (40, 41). The reason that Channing’s God “desires first,” not the sinner’s punishment, but the sinner’s “restoration to purity,” is because Unitarian theology promotes the belief that sinners, like all other persons, are not inherently sinful and so are always capable of changing their ways and

²⁸ William Ellery Channing, *The Superior Tendency of Unitarianism to form an Elevated Religious Character. A Discourse, Preached at the Dedication of the Second Congregational Church, New York, December 7th 1826* (Liverpool F.B. Wright, Castle-street, 1831), 42. I will hereafter cite this sermon parenthetically as *New York Sermon* followed by the page number.

becoming like God.²⁹ Hence, in *Likeness to God*, Channing describes sinners as inherently good people who at best don't "recognise [any]thing godlike in [their] own nature" (159) or at worst "resist a divine voice, and war against a divine principle, in [their] own soul" (149). Yet if a sinful person stops "resist[ing the] divine voice" in his or her soul and humbly asks for God's forgiveness, then God will absolve that person of his or her sins, for "God is love in its purest form, that is, that he has a goodness so disinterested, free, full, strong, and immutable, that the ingratitude and disobedience of his creatures cannot overcome it" (*New York Sermon* 39-40). By encouraging persons to exhibit "likeness to God," and by then describing God as a disinterested figure who doesn't allow for others' indiscretions to negate his benevolent intentions, Channing argues that benevolent persons must, like God, be without self-centered motivations, forgive others' immoral behavior, and be charitable to all persons, regardless of their sinful status.

Though Channing discussed the importance of disinterestedness to his theology's moral system in both his "New York Sermon" and *Likeness to God*, the first time that he publicly acknowledged the influence of Hopkins' theology on his own theory of benevolence was in his *Discourse Delivered at the Dedication of the Unitarian Congregational Church in Newport* (1837). Towards the end of this sermon—which focuses on "the spirit of religious freedom" in Rhode Island (34)—Channing says that though Hopkins was not especially tolerant of other religions ("he wanted toleration

²⁹ Even though they aren't inherently sinful, Channing claims that persons are still capable of sinning, that man "is a free being, and a temped being, and thus constituted he may and does sin" (*Likeness* 162). Lydia Willsky-Ciollo similarly argues that Channing "maintained a firm belief in the sinful nature of humanity—just not that they were originally sinful and therefore condemned to depravity." Lydia Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma: The Conundrum of Biblical Authority* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 32.

towards those who rejected his views” [34]), he still “broke away from human creeds” (34) and had a “free spirit of inquiry” which allowed him to make “a few important modifications to Calvinism” (35). Whereas “Other Calvinists were willing that their neighbours should be predestined to everlasting misery for the glory of God,” Channing says that Hopkins,

This noble-minded man[,] demanded a more generous and impartial virtue. . . He called us to seek our own happiness, as well as that of others, in a spirit of impartial benevolence; to do good to ourselves, not from self-preference . . . but in obedience to that sublime law, which requires us to promote the welfare of each and all within our influence. I need not be ashamed to confess the deep impression which this system made on my youthful mind. (35)

Rather than claim that persons don’t necessarily need to care for others because there is the potential that those other persons are already “predestined to everlasting misery,” Hopkins argues that virtuous persons must be disinterested in that they must care for all individuals, the moral and the immoral, equally (they must exhibit “impartial benevolence” to “each and all within [their] influence”). Though Hopkins, like “all liberal Christians,” emphasized the importance of love and benevolence to his theology’s moral system (40), Channing notes that Hopkins could not at all be considered a Unitarian because he embraced the Calvinist belief in original sin.³⁰ Instead of theorizing “likeness to God” as an innate capability, as Unitarians do, Hopkins argued that one could, in Channing’s words, “do nothing but sin, before the mighty power of God had implanted a new principle of holiness within [one’s] heart” (40).

³⁰ In addition to emphasizing God as a benevolent and not a wrathful figure, Channing says that Hopkins rejected two other doctrines associated with Calvinism: “The doctrine that we are liable to punishment for the sin of our first parent” and “the doctrine that Christ died for the elect only,” which “found no mercy at his hands. He taught that Christ suffered equally for all mankind” (*Discourse* 35, 36). In *System of Doctrines*, Hopkins claims that original sin may cause persons to sin, but that they are still only punished as a result of their own sinful actions: “the children of Adam are not answerable for his sin,” they only become “guilty of his sin . . . by approving of what he did, and joining with him in rebellion.” Hopkins, “System of Doctrines,” 230.

Hopkins' belief in original sin may cause his theology to depart from Channing's, but Channing nevertheless contends that Hopkins should be remembered, less for espousing the Calvinist belief in "total, original depravity" (40), and more for asserting the importance of benevolence to both Christian doctrine and behavior. In the notes that were printed as an appendix to his *Discourse*, Channing moves beyond praising Hopkins for "mitigating the harsh features of Calvinism" (36) and details how he actually put his theology's emphasis on benevolence into practice. To prove his claim that "Dr. Hopkins was distinguished by nothing more than by faithfulness to his principles" (38), Channing offered personal recollections of Hopkins' charity work: "I remember hearing of his giving, on a journey, all he had to a poor woman. On another occasion he contributed to some religious object a hundred dollars . . . and this he gave from his penury, for he received no fixed salary, and depended, in a measure, on the donations of friends for common comforts" (39). For Channing, Hopkins is as much the theorizer as he is the exemplar of disinterested benevolence. Rather than allow for his lack of independent wealth to temper his charitable inclinations, Hopkins nobly set aside his own personal interests—ignored the fact that he "received no fix salary"—so that he could adequately exhibit benevolence to others.

One of the ways that Channing, like Hopkins before him, put his belief in universal and disinterested benevolence into practice was by attending to impoverished persons' needs. Though he applauds Hopkins for donating "a hundred dollars" to "some religious object," Channing, in his writings on the Ministry at Large, argues that persons can be charitable without having to donate material goods. Indeed, when Channing honors the Ministry at Large in his *Ministry for the Poor* (1835) sermon, he commends

them, not for financially assisting impoverished persons, but for modeling a type of Christian charity that he theorizes in his “New York Sermon”: for recognizing all persons—even the impoverished and the sinful—as moral beings. Channing praises “this institution” for “communicating moral and spiritual blessings to the most destitute portion of the community” and for thus being “one of the forms in which the spirit of Christianity is embodied, a spirit of reverence and love for the human soul.”³¹ That the Ministry at Large effectively cares for Boston’s most “destitute” residents has less to do with this institution’s financial situation and more with the fact that its clergymen recognize the dignity inherent in all human souls (have a “love for the human soul”).

Once he establishes these clergymen as moral authorities, Channing is then able to spend the rest of his *Ministry for the Poor* sermon advising his listeners to emulate these clergymen’s charitable behavior. Hence, after he praises the clergymen for validating “the claims of the poor as Moral, Spiritual beings,” Channing encourages his listeners to reflect upon their own religiosity, to make sure that they, like the clergymen, act in accordance with the Unitarian belief that all persons are capable of becoming moral beings (1). Channing thus advises his listeners to “look beyond the outward to the Spiritual, in man”: to let “the soul of a fellow-creature . . . become more visible and prominent to us, than his bodily frame,” as that “is the great distinction of Christian love. . . the philanthropy, which characterizes our religion” (27). That philanthropic subjects must attend to impoverished persons’ spirituality and not their materiality—“the Spiritual in man” over their financial condition or “bodily frame”—helps to explain why Channing urges his listeners to provide “the poor [with] the means of moral and religious

³¹ William Ellery Channing, *The Ministry for the Poor. A Discourse Delivered Before the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches in Boston, on their First Anniversary, April 9, 1835* (Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Metcalf, 1835), 1. I will hereafter cite this sermon parenthetically by page number.

cultivation” (27). Yet instead of saying that only ministers are capable of morally and religiously educating impoverished persons, Channing tells his listeners that all persons are obligated to develop the morality in their own and in other persons’ souls. He writes, “The true cultivation of a human being, consists in the development of great moral ideas; that is, the Ideas of God, of Duty, of Right, of Justice, of Love, of Self-Sacrifice . . . The elements or germs of these Ideas, belong to every soul, constitute its essence, and are intended for endless expansion. . . To unfold these is the great work of our being” (19). Because these “great moral ideas” are contained within “every soul” and are “intended for endless expansion,” there is no one person who is more capable of cultivating a human being’s morality than another—indeed, it is “the great work of *our* being” to “develop” these “moral ideas” in each other. Just as Unitarian ministers are required to teach persons about Christian principles and morality, so laypersons must teach each other “Ideas of God” and “Self-Sacrifice.”

The reason, then, that this chapter’s next section continues to analyze Channing’s writings on the Ministry at Large is because that is where he, and Joseph Tuckerman after him, most explicitly argue for the centrality of “Self-Sacrifice”—or what he elsewhere terms disinterested or “impartial benevolence”—to his twinned philosophies of charity and divine likeness. As is the case with the *Ministry for the Poor* oration, Channing’s and Tuckerman’s letters, reports, and sermons on the Ministry at Large outline the institution’s mission philosophy and the moral standards that its clergymen are expected to follow; these works then encourage laypersons to emulate such heightened moral standards and exhibit benevolence to persons of all class positions. Together, Channing’s and Tuckerman’s writings on the Ministry at Large argue that one can only adequately

demonstrate charitable behavior once one realizes one's innate capacity for benevolence, abandons one's self-serving interests, and acts entirely on behalf of God's will. Upon inhabiting this disinterested condition of divine likeness, one will then achieve the following realization: that all persons are inherently related through God, dignified, and so deserving of charity.

II. Social Self-Denial and the Unitarian Ministry

Even before he published his landmark *Likeness to God* sermon or helped found the Ministry at Large, Channing started developing his theory of divine likeness and applying it to his philosophy of charity. In the midst of the Panic of 1819, Channing wrote a manuscript note, discussed above, on "Our Duties to the Poor," in which he argued that all persons are deserving of charity because they are all inherently related to each other and to God. Channing claims that the reason persons should "pity and help the poor man" is "because he is A MAN; because poverty does not blot out his humanity . . . though rags cover him, though his unshorn hair may cover his human features,—a member of your family, a child of the same Father . . . he not only has your wants and feelings, but shares with you in the highest powers and hopes of human nature. He is a man in the noblest sense, created in God's image" (*Memoirs* 386-387). As in his *Ministry for the Poor* sermon a few decades later, Channing here posits that one's financial condition may be capable of degrading one's physical appearance but it is incapable of making one more or less human ("poverty does not blot out [one's] humanity"). The reason that Channing makes a point to discuss impoverished persons' humanity in this passage is because he wants to condemn persons who do not realize that "a poor man" is, like all other persons, "a man in the noblest sense, created in God's image." By saying

that all persons are “child[ren] of the same Father,” Channing is thus able to argue that anyone who refuses to be charitable towards an impoverished person is sinfully disregarding a crucial tenet of Unitarian theology: that all persons are aligned with and capable of growing in likeness to God.

Around the same time that he composed this note on “Our Duties the Poor” and argued that all persons are deserving of charity because they are all related through God, Channing also started promoting the Unitarian ministry as both a spiritual and charitable vocation: as a venue through which ministers could communicate with and work to satisfy impoverished persons’ needs. In a letter that he wrote during the Panic of 1819, Channing encouraged fellow Unitarian minister Henry Ware, Jr. to pay special attention to his congregation’s impoverished population. Reiterating his claim from “Our Duties to the Poor” that “Christ’s precept to give to the poor is not a blemish in his system, but an important and noble part of it” (*Memoir* 386), Channing asserted: “Christ preached to the poor; and, I think, that no system bears the stamp of his religion, or can prevail, which is not addressed to the great majority of men. I do not wish to see a Unitarian Society in New York, made up of rich, fashionable, thoughtless people. I wish friends and adherents, who will be hearty and earnest; and I believe these qualities may be found mainly in the middling classes.”³² Though he vacated the pastorate at New York’s first Unitarian Society (which would come to be known as the First Congregational Church in the City of New York) and returned to Boston soon after Channing wrote this letter, Ware continued to heed Channing’s call to preach “to the great majority of men.”³³ In addition

³² Ware, *Memoir*, 118-119.

³³ Kring notes that this church is “unlike many Unitarian churches in New England which were founded as Congregational churches” in that it “has always been Unitarian in theology and Congregational in church polity.” (vii-viii).

to volunteering with Tuckerman for Channing's Wednesday Evening Association—which “promot[ed] a variety of benevolent and religious operations . . . among the poor”—Ware initiated a “series of religious services, on Sunday evenings” in November of 1822 which, according to his brother and biographer John Ware, were “intended for those of the poorer classes.”³⁴ Once they realized that “the number of such persons in the city was very considerable”—and once “these meetings [came to be] held at four different places” in and around Boston—Channing and Ware worked with Tuckerman to establish the Ministry at Large, a group of ministers whose mission philosophy and theory of charity were influenced by Hopkins' evangelical ethic of disinterested benevolence.³⁵

Shortly after the Ministry at Large was incorporated into the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches in 1834, Tuckerman published *The First Annual Report of the Association of Delegates From the Benevolent Societies of Boston* (1835), in which he, like Channing, argued that persons can only adequately exhibit benevolence once they prevent their self-serving interests from infringing upon their ability to emulate God's will.³⁶ After detailing these benevolent societies' charitable efforts and outlining “the proper objects and principles of Christian almsgiving,” Tuckerman offers his philosophy of Christian charity:

In the view of Christianity, all outward good is of no value when compared with virtue ; — with the principles of disinterested love, and uncompromising rectitude; — with the spirit of Christ in those who call themselves believers of Christianity. With this spirit it is the great object of the Gospel to embue each one

³⁴ Ware, *Memoir*, 132. For more on the Wednesday Evening Association, see Jedediah Mannis, *Joseph Tuckerman and the Outdoor Church* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 17.

³⁵ Ware, *Memoir*, 132-135.

³⁶ George Willis Cooke notes that Boston's Ministry at Large “began in 1822, came under the direction of the American Unitarian Association and the shaping hand of Dr. Joseph Tuckerman in 1826, and was taken in charge by the Benevolent Fraternity of Churches in 1834.” George Willis Cooke, *Unitarianism in America: A History of its Origin and Development* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1902), 247.

of its believers. Through its great principles of virtue, duty, and faith, it would bring about in its believers, in all occupations and conditions, a mutual respect of character, a regard to rights, and a sympathy with weaknesses and wants, and with joys and sorrows...³⁷

In line with Channing's argument from *Religion a Social Principle* that benevolence is both a feeling and an action, Tuckerman contends that virtuous persons are different from good persons because they act on the basis of holy feelings. In other words, by distinguishing between "outward good" and virtue, Tuckerman claims that moral persons must do more than visibly be more charitable: they must undergo a spiritual—and thus invisible—transformation, which will subsequently allow them to act entirely on behalf of God's will. It is only after persons have vacated individual interests and made room for "the spirit of Christ" to dwell in their souls that they will then be able to act according to the feeling or "principle of disinterested love."

Like Hopkins' and Channing's conception of disinterestedness, Tuckerman's version of disinterestedness carries two meanings: it describes someone who aligns one's will with God's (has "virtue, duty, and faith" in God) and who is, as a result, indiscriminately charitable to all persons (has "a mutual respect of character"). The reason, then, that Tuckerman uses his writings on urban poverty to promote disinterestedness is because he believes that selfishness prohibits one from recognizing the dignity inherent in all persons, from "sympath[izing]" with all persons' "weaknesses and wants." Though a disinterested person should not necessarily be interested in alleviating only one group of people's suffering, Tuckerman argues that being especially benevolent to impoverished persons in no way violates one's disinterested status, for one cannot help but be more benevolent towards those who experience the most suffering. As

³⁷ Joseph Tuckerman, *The First Annual Report of the Association of Delegates From the Benevolent Societies of Boston* (Boston: I.R. Butts, 1835), 6, 33-34.

Tuckerman says in his introduction to the English translation of Joseph Marie Degérando's *The Visitor of the Poor* (1832), Christian persons must exhibit benevolence to those who are most in need of it:

Let us extend our aid, as we may, to the poor, to the ignorant, to the fallen, and even to the debased, when that aid is most imperiously demanded . . . The truth is . . . that by nothing short of this sympathy with the poor and suffering, this care for them, and this kindness towards them, can we meet the claims of our religion upon us, as stewards of God, and believers in the gospel of his Son. And it is not less certain, that by nothing short of a recognition of our relation and duty to each other, as children of one Father, may we most effectually promote even the best immediate interests of society.³⁸

If one chooses not to exhibit benevolence to persons who are suffering and in need—does not provide “aid [where and when] it is most imperiously demanded”—then one cannot be deemed religious. For, according to Tuckerman, religious persons need to recognize that they have a basic “duty to each other,” that one of the main “claims of our religion” is that we all need to be “stewards of God” and his benevolence. Reiterating Channing’s claim from *Likeness to God* that all persons are made in God’s image, Tuckerman ends this passage by saying that the reason we need to exhibit benevolence to each other is because we are all “children of one Father.”³⁹ To not care for another suffering person is thus to not care for one of God’s children.

In the year after he wrote this “Introduction” to Degérando’s *Visitor of the Poor*, Tuckerman visited England, which caused Channing to worry about the Ministry at Large clergymen’s lack of official oversight. In a series of unpublished letters that he addressed

³⁸ Joseph Tuckerman, “Introduction,” in *The Visitor of the Poor; Translated from the French of the Baron Degerando, By a Lady of Boston* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little, and Wilkins, 1832), vi-vii.

³⁹ I am here marking my agreement with Eric Schneider and Howard Wach. While Schneider argues that “Tuckerman always admonished his audience to treat the poor with respect, arguing that all men were children of God,” Wach similarly claims that Channing and Tuckerman, in their writings on urban poverty relief, “raised the ‘likeness to God’ [philosophy] to an egalitarian principle.” Eric Schneider, *In the Web of Class: Delinquents and Reformers in Boston, 1810s-1930s* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 19; Howard Wach, “Unitarian Philanthropy and Cultural Hegemony in Comparative Perspective: Manchester and Boston, 1827-1848,” *Journal of Social History* 26.3 (1993): 546.

to these clergymen in the summer of 1833, Channing elaborated upon Tuckerman's and his own philosophy of charity by arguing that Unitarians are required to exhibit benevolence to persons of all classes. In his 1 July 1833 letter, Channing claims that because Unitarians "understand better [than any other Christians] the worth of human nature in all classes," they are particularly known for their charitable behavior: that "the leading trait of a Unitarian [is] that he is a man who sympathizes with and respects the less favored classes of society."⁴⁰ In addition to sympathizing with impoverished persons, however, Channing posits that Unitarians need to work on bringing persons of various socioeconomic backgrounds together. Extending upon his theorization of the Unitarian ministry from his 1819 letter to Ware, Channing here argues that the Ministry at Large clergymen can help remedy "the present selfish, dissocial system" by using their ministry to "establish a fraternal union among all classes of society, to break down the present distinctions, and to direct all the energies of the enlightened and virtuous to the work of elevating the depressed classes, to an enlightened piety, to intellectual and moral dignity."⁴¹ To forge a "union among all classes of society," these clergymen cannot merely care for and educate impoverished persons: they must also encourage their more "enlightened and virtuous" parishioners to "direct all the[ir] energies . . . to the work of elevating the depressed classes." These clergymen must be so disinterested that their parishioners will also want to work on God's behalf to "elevate" impoverished persons' "intellectual and moral dignity."⁴²

⁴⁰ Correspondence from William Ellery Channing to the Committee of the Unitarian Association on the Ministry at Large, 1 July 1833, Dated Correspondence, 1794-1862, Reel 2, William Ellery Channing Papers: II, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Though impoverished persons' dignity can be enhanced through spiritual education, this does not mean that they are without dignity before they become acquainted with Christianity, for Channing in *Likeness to God* claims that all persons are dignified because they are all inherently related to God.

In the second letter he addressed to the Ministry at Large clergymen on 12 August 1833, Channing again discussed the importance of disinterestedness to the Unitarian ministry. This letter departs from the earlier one, however, in that Channing explains why he asks these clergymen to at once model and encourage their parishioners to exhibit disinterested behavior: because he wants wealthy persons to be aware of the fact that self-interestedness forecloses one's ability to be charitable. Channing writes, "Is it not undeniable, that the spirit of humanity, of brotherhood, is resisted and repressed more by the prevalent estimate of wealth, than by almost any other cause? What I wish is, not only that a ministry may be established for the poor, but that it should spring from and should spread Christ's spirit towards the poor, that we would learn to look on and aid them not as an inferior class but as our brethren."⁴³ Wealthy persons may claim that they are Christians, but the value they give to their own wealthy status actually prohibits them from acting like Christians: from exhibiting the "spirit of humanity [and] brotherhood" to all persons. If these clergymen would like to demonstrate their commitment to the Unitarian ministry more generally and to the Ministry at Large more specifically, then they must abandon—and similarly encourage wealthy persons to abandon—their self-centered habits. Hence, Channing in this letter describes "self-denial" as a profoundly social practice, saying, "instead of being ascetic, it would form a character of singular cheerfulness, social warmth, and free affectionate intercourse with all within our reach."⁴⁴ Once these ministers model this selfless condition that promotes charity and "social

⁴³ William Ellery Channing, "A Very Interesting Letter on the Ministry at Large &c.," 12 August 1833, Dated Correspondence, 1794-1862, Reel 2, William Ellery Channing Papers: II, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

warmth” rather than isolation, their parishioners will follow suit and impoverished persons will come to be valued “not as an inferior class” but as fellow Christian brethren.

In the year after Channing wrote these letters to the Ministry at Large clergymen, Tuckerman preached a sermon in honor of the *Ordination of Charles F. Barnard and Frederick T. Gray, as Ministers at Large in Boston* (1834) which reiterated Channing’s claim that Unitarian ministers must at once care for all persons equally and encourage their followers to do the same. As Channing did in both his 1819 letter to Ware and his August 1833 letter to the Ministry’s clergymen, Tuckerman uses his sermon to uphold Christ as a disinterested ministerial figure who seeks to alleviate all persons’ suffering. Referencing the story of Christ and John the Baptist from Matthew 11, in which Christ told John’s disciples of his “readiness to minister to human want and suffering,” Tuckerman writes: “[Christ] had brought a religion to the world which was intended to raise, to improve, and thus to bless the lowest, the poorest . . . to reach to the deepest and strongest necessities of every individual, in every exposure and suffering of life. . . his was a religion of principles and ends, which comprehended at once the greatest good of every human soul.”⁴⁵ Here, Tuckerman champions a version of Christianity that recognizes “the greatest good of every human soul,” that does not turn away from the “lowest” and most depraved souls. Because this religion is capable of reaching and comforting persons in “every exposure and suffering of life,” Tuckerman believes that its followers must similarly reach out to persons, acquaint them with this religion, and carry on Christ’s benevolent mission. He writes, “It is God’s will that they who receive the gospel should be his instruments for the extension of the Gospel . . . that under

⁴⁵ Joseph Tuckerman, *A Sermon Preached on Sunday Evening, Nov. 2, 1834, at the Ordination of Charles F. Barnard and Frederick T. Gray, as Ministers at Large in Boston* (Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Metcalf. And James Munroe and Company, 1834), 4, 5.

Christianity, every man should look upon every man as his brother; and that destitution, and suffering, and moral exposure should be recognised as grounds of claim for sympathy, and interest, and service for those who shall require it.”⁴⁶ To become “an extension of the Gospel,” one must not only spread Christianity as a belief system but also encourage persons to act upon Christian dogma—to not merely “look upon every man as his brother,” but express “sympathy, and interest, and service for those who shall require” and are most in need of it.

Instead of merely praising disinterestedness as an exemplary ethical stance, Tuckerman describes Christ as someone who cares for all persons equally (recognizes the “good [in] every human soul”) so that his readers can actually understand how to exhibit disinterested behavior. In this way, Tuckerman demonstrates his agreement with Channing’s claim, from his August 1833 letter, that persons learn more from concrete accounts of charitable behavior than from doctrinally based discussions of charity’s importance. In this letter, Channing expresses excitement over the Ministry at Large’s “plan of [printing] a quarterly publication relating to philanthropic objects,” saying, “I think that occasionally accounts of virtuous poverty, of high examples of virtue found in common life; would be very useful.”⁴⁷ By supporting these ministers’ desire to publish texts that provide “high examples of virtue,” Channing helps to validate McKanan’s claim that Unitarians promoted moral behavior, not just by expounding upon Christian dogma, but also by offering narrative accounts of charitable human interaction in their sermons. McKanan argues that Unitarians valued and encouraged the publication of works that “placed ordinary human life, rather than the Bible or the church, at the center

⁴⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁷ Channing, “A Very Interesting Letter on the Ministry at Large &c.”

of religious reflection” because these writings “attended in detail to the particulars of human experience, [and so] provid[ed] an excellent platform for the development of the liberal doctrine of the inherent dignity and ultimate perfectibility of human nature” (22, 21).⁴⁸ Rather than merely tell persons to be moral or recognize the dignity inherent in all persons, Channing believes that these and other Unitarian ministers need to offer narrative-based examples of ethical human interaction so that their followers can understand exactly how to demonstrate disinterested behavior.

In arguing that other genres besides the sermon can educate persons on how to exhibit benevolence to others, Channing also posits that ministers are not the only figures who can encourage persons to be charitable. In his frequently quoted letter “On Catholicism,” which he wrote in June of 1836 to the editor of the *Western Messenger* in Louisville, Kentucky, Channing argues that the rise of new media technologies and thus new methods to reach people allows for various figures, including women, to adopt a ministerial persona and use their writings to promote moral behavior among persons. He states:

Now the press preaches incomparably more than the pulpit. Through this, all are permitted to preach. Woman, if she may not speak in the church, may speak from the printing room, and her touching expositions of religion, not learned in theological institutions, but in the schools of affection, of sorrow, of experience, of domestic charge, sometimes make their way to the heart more surely than the minister’s homilies. . . the vagueness which belongs to so much religious instruction from the pulpit, must give place to a teaching which shall meet more the wants of the individual, and the wants of the present state of society. Great principles must be expounded in accommodation to different ages, capacities,

⁴⁸ Though McKanan focuses more on Unitarianism’s influence on the “antebellum boom in fiction,” he also argues that Unitarians set themselves apart from Calvinists in that they recognize the didacticism inherent in other genres besides the sermon: “To a remarkable extent, the newly assertive Unitarian liberals chose as their medium neither the sermon nor the theological treatise but rather religious fiction” (20). The reason that “liberals were quicker than the orthodox to embrace fiction as an important theological genre” is because Calvinists believed that “excessive reading of fiction enabled [the] imagination to usurp reason as the guiding power of the psyche, and that the substitution of imagined for real events usurped God’s authority as Creator” (21).

stages of improvement, and an intercourse be established by which all classes may be helped to apply them to their own particular conditions.⁴⁹

In this passage, Channing derides “religious instruction from the pulpit” for not always being tapped into contemporary human experience: for not teaching persons how to either “apply” religious doctrine “to their own particular conditions” or remedy “the wants of the present state of society.” Because women are engaged with religion less as a doctrinal system and more as an integral part of human life (particularly in the domestic sphere), Channing believes that their writings are able to influence a person’s life and actions more than a minister’s sermons can—hence, he says that women’s writing “sometimes make[s its] way to the heart more surely than the minister’s homilies.”

Catharine Sedgwick was one of the women writers who Channing praised in these terms. For instance, soon after the publication of her third (and now most popular) novel, *Hope Leslie; or, Early Times in Massachusetts* (1827), Channing wrote to Sedgwick and said: “you are contributing more to the spread of refined feeling & genuine chivalry by your books than you imagine.”⁵⁰ Even before she announced the publication of her next novel *Clarence; or, A Tale of Our Own Times* (1830) or shared what it was going to be about, Channing also wrote to Sedgwick and excitedly presumed that it was going to improve its readers’ morality: “You, I hear, are at work. So much the better. You know your gift. Do not neglect it. Thank God for your power of ministering to the virtue & pure gratification of your fellow beings.”⁵¹ In line with his claims about the Unitarian ministry’s need to morally educate persons, Channing here formulates Sedgwick as a

⁴⁹ William Ellery Channing, “On Catholicism,” in *The Works of William E. Channing, D.D.*, vol. 2, 11th ed. (Boston: George G. Channing, 1849), 280-281.

⁵⁰ William Ellery Channing to Catharine Maria Sedgwick, 23 August 1827, Dated Correspondence, 1794-1862, Reel 2, William Ellery Channing Papers: II, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

⁵¹ William Ellery Channing to Catharine Maria Sedgwick, 2 March 1829.

didactic figure who uses her fictional works for the same purpose that a minister uses his sermons: to address and enhance her readers' morality.

That Sedgwick actually considered writing to be her divinely ordained and charitable vocation is evidenced by the contents of both her journal and her personal correspondence. For instance, soon after she published her fifth novel *Home* (1835), Sedgwick, in a 17 December 1835 journal entry, wrote: "My *author* existence has always seemed something accidental, extraneous, and independent of my inner self. . . . When I feel that my writings have made anyone happier or better I feel an emotion of gratitude to Him who has made me the medium of any blessing to my fellow creatures. And I do feel that I am but the instrument" (*Life and Letters* 249-250). As if following Channing's advice from an 1829 letter to "guard [her]self against the selfish solitudes of authorship," Sedgwick here theorizes authorship less as a profession that she can financially profit from and more as a charitable endeavor through which she can "bless" and assist her "fellow creatures."⁵² More than an occupation, however, Sedgwick conceives of authorship as an alternative ontological condition: she claims that her "*author* existence" is "independent" from her most "inner self." By distinguishing between these two forms of existence, Sedgwick posits that one cannot at the same time promote one's own personal interests and be the disinterested "instrument" of God's benevolence ("the medium of [His] blessing"). Hence, when Sedgwick was in the process of printing *The Poor Rich Man, and the Rich Poor Man* (1836), she did not at all discuss

⁵² Ibid. Sarah Robbins and James Machor make similar claims about Sedgwick's understanding of her authorial vocation. While Robbins says that Sedgwick was "committed to producing literature as a vehicle for moral uplift," Machor argues that "Sedgwick valued fiction above all for its ability to instruct while delighting by fusing, in its best manifestations, the aesthetic with the didactic so as to be capable of performing ameliorative cultural work." Robbins, "Periodizing Authorship, Characterizing Genre," 5; James Machor, *Reading Fiction in Antebellum America: Informed Response and Reception Histories, 1820-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 209.

her own authorial ambitions and instead said that she hoped this novel would “go forth on its mission with God’s blessing!” (*Life and Letters* 255). While this chapter’s final section demonstrates how Sedgwick, in these two novels from the 1830s, theorizes disinterestedness by way of her impoverished religious characters, this chapter’s next section argues that Sedgwick first promotes disinterestedness as a necessary precondition for God-like benevolence in her tract tales from the 1820s. Whether they were published by Unitarian societies or explicitly deal with Unitarian theology and ethics, these tract tales all serve a didactic purpose: they portray instances of disinterested benevolence so that readers can learn how to set aside their own individual interests and demonstrate charitable behavior to those who are most in need of it.

III. The Disinterested Women of Sedgwick’s Tract Tales

Even before she published her first tract tale, however, Sedgwick promoted disinterestedness as an exemplary ethical stance. In her first novel, *A New-England Tale*, Sedgwick described her orphaned protagonist, Jane Elton, as someone who “embodies disinterested benevolence,” to use Philip Gura’s words: as someone who has “a rare habit of putting *self* aside: of deferring her own inclinations to the will, and interests, and inclinations of others” (124).⁵³ Early in the novel, Jane demonstrated her ability to “put *self* aside” by giving the small amount of money she had to an impoverished woman who claimed that Jane’s recently deceased father was financially indebted to her. The narrator says that “the recollection of her father’s dishonesty, and the poor woman’s perishing condition, swept away [Jane’s] every selfish consideration. ‘Oh Lord!’ she exclaimed, ‘if I have not compassion on my fellow-servant, how can I hope for thy pity’” (72). Rather

⁵³ Philip Gura, *Truth’s Ragged Edge: The Rise of the American Novel* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013), 51.

than keep the money that she earned by selling her deceased mother's clothes, Jane decided to rid herself of "every selfish consideration" and have "compassion on [her] fellow-servant." Given that Jane's charity and "compassion" derives from her selflessness, it should come as no surprise that she, later in the novel, rebuked her non-Christian fiancée, Edward Erskine, for saying that such selfless persons don't exist—for saying that "disinterestedness . . . only exists in the visions of poets, or the Utopian dreams of youth; or, perhaps, embodied in the fine person of a hero of a romance" (128). Though she acknowledged that "there are few, very few, who are perfectly disinterested," Jane told Edward that "it is the principle, the spirit of the Christian! . . . [that] every Christian, in proportion to his fidelity to the teachings and example of his Master, will be moved and governed by this principle" (128-129). Instead of considering disinterestedness to be an idealized condition, as her fiancée Edward does, Sedgwick's Jane believes that disinterestedness is an ethical stance that all Christians should be "governed" by.

In the same year that she published *A New-England Tale*, Sedgwick published *Mary Hollis: An Original Tale* (1822), which also characterized its female protagonist as a disinterested figure. Though modern readers could easily consider *Mary Hollis* to be a short story, attention to this text's publication history (its being published by the New York Unitarian Book Society) and its advertisement appendix (its promoting the sale of not only anonymous tracts but also sermons by Henry Ware, Jr., Samuel Cooper Thacher, and William Ellery Channing) reveals that Sedgwick actually published this text as a tract.⁵⁴ Though "few genres outrank the lowly religious tract in the annals of American

⁵⁴ Concord, New Hampshire's Union Ministerial Association also printed a second edition of *Mary Hollis* in 1834. "Bibliography," in *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives*, eds. Lucinda Damon-Bach

religious literature,” the tract is still a difficult genre to pin down, for “Any given volume of tracts,” according to Kyle Roberts, “might include allegories, parables, biographies, sermons, hymns, prayers, and short doctrinal treatises.”⁵⁵ For instance, in the first *Annual Report of the New-York Unitarian Book Society* (1823), which includes a catalogue of the texts they printed in 1822, *Mary Hollis* is, along with sermons, trial accounts, and essays, listed as a tract.⁵⁶ Despite this disparate “mingling of genres” within the tract, Kathleen Howard argues that many tracts can be deemed “tract tales” in that they “shar[e] a common technique of using plot to envision what spiritual principles loo[k] like when lived.”⁵⁷ In Howard’s formulation, these tract tales not only “creat[e] fictional worlds from standard plotlines—the career of the backslider, the reformation of the repentant sinner—and accumulated detail,” but also allow for “the created world of the tale—its plot and the details associated with plot—[to be] the source of [the text’s] pedagogy” (471). As is the case with Sedgwick’s *Mary Hollis*, these tales place “protagonists—often young, always white, and frequently poor—in recognizable contemporary settings as they

and Victoria Clements (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 296. Significantly, the ad at the end of The New York Unitarian Book Society’s edition of *Mary Hollis* references Channing’s 1819 sermon on *Unitarian Christianity* (listed as *Dr. Channing’s Sermon at the Ordination of the Rev’d J. Sparks, at Baltimore*). Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Mary Hollis: An Original Tale* (New York: The New York Unitarian Book Society, 1822), no page [the advertisements follow after the last numbered page, 22]. I will hereafter cite *Mary Hollis* parenthetically by page number.

⁵⁵ Paul Boyer, “From Tracts to Mass-Market Paperbacks: Spreading the Word via the Printed Page in America from the Early National Era to the Present,” in *Religion and the Culture of Print in Modern America*, eds. Charles Cohen and Paul Boyer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 21; Kyle Roberts, “Locating Popular Religion in the Evangelical Tract: The Roots and Routes of *The Dairyman’s Daughter*,” *Early American Studies* 4.1 (2006): 259, 261.

⁵⁶ *Annual Report of the New-York Unitarian Book Society*, 14 (“account of a trial”), 17 (essays), 18 (*Mary Hollis*).

⁵⁷ Roberts, “Locating Popular Religion,” 259; Howard, Kathleen, “Tract Tales, Literary Aesthetics, and American Fiction,” *American Literature* 86.3 (2014): 464. I will hereafter cite Howard’s article parenthetically by page number. Though she focuses more on novels than tract tales, Cathy Davidson similarly distinguishes between fictional writing’s teaching via experience and example and doctrinally-based tracts’ teaching via a discussion of principles: “Whereas a tract might extoll the virtues of submission in the face of trials, a novel must *create* trials to which a dedicated heroine then virtuously submits.” Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 128.

experienc[e] and meditat[e] on spiritual regeneration” (Howard 464). Despite having impoverished white women be the protagonists of both *A New-England Tale* and *Mary Hollis*, Sedgwick’s telling only Mary Hollis’—and not Jane Elton’s—story through the genre of the tract tale thus causes *Mary Hollis* to more explicitly deal with the role of Christian ethics in every day life than the tract-turned-novel *A New-England Tale*.

As with most other tract tales, *Mary Hollis* contains a simple plot: it is about a woman who loses her husband to intemperance and becomes a single mother of her three children. The story begins with Mary maintaining a Christian household while her husband, William Hollis, is out sinfully consuming alcohol at a local tavern. Sedgwick writes, “It was too common a circumstance for him to stay out late, to excite any alarm in her. She had closed the labours of the week, and by her neatness and exertion, given to her home the appearance of order and comfort, that betokens a preparation for the Lord’s day. Her eldest child, a girl of six years, was sitting on a little bench by the fire, reading aloud in the testament” (5). Shortly after he returned home that night, the house’s Christian tranquility was disrupted: William died as a result of both his intemperance and the injuries he sustained while fighting at the local tavern. “Because she was a christian” who believed that intemperance was a grave sin, Sedgwick claims that Mary “dared not even hope [for her husband’s salvation], for her bible told her, ‘The drunkard hath not eternal life’” (7). Rather than be overly consumed by grief as a result of her husband’s death and sinful life, Mary demonstrated her disinterestedness by reconceiving of William’s death and inability to achieve salvation less as lamentable occurrences and more as divinely ordained events. Hence, Sedgwick says that when Mary’s “thoughts turned on her poor William . . . she heartily submitted to it, and was able to say with

complete resignation, though not without agony. “Thy will be done” (8). Though she experienced some “agony,” Mary worked so that such personal investments—her grief over her husband’s intemperance and death—in no way prevented her from inhabiting a state of “complete resignation” to God’s will.

To further highlight Mary as a disinterested figure, Sedgwick moves from describing how Mary responded to her husband’s death to detailing how her devotion to God positively influenced her parenting abilities. Towards the end of the tale, Mary claims that she allowed for her daughter Sally to go work with a nearby family because she cared more for her daughter’s interests than her own. She tells a neighbor, “It is hard for me to put my child away from me, for she is a help and comfort to me, but I must consult my child’s good, and not please myself at her expence” (20). Even before she made this selfless decision, however, Mary acknowledged the influence that her religiosity—and its emphasis on disinterestedness—had on her ideas about motherhood. Indeed, shortly after her husband’s death, Mary told the town’s minister, Mr. Germain, that “I, and my little ones, are gathered under the sheltering wings of Him who will not leave nor forsake us. I am a feeble instrument in his hands . . . But I have submitted to his rebuke, and I feel a strength made perfect in my weakness, for the duties that are before me” (14). In the same way that she “heartily submitted” to and trusted in God’s plan for her husband after his death (8), so too does Mary believe that her parenting skills are enhanced as a result of her devotion to God (her being “a feeble instrument in his hands”). Because she abandoned personal interests and submitted herself entirely to God’s will, any personal “weakness” that she previously had as a result of her grief has been evacuated. Mary believes that the only reason she can carry on “the duties that are

before [her]” is because she has been “strength[ened]” and “made perfect” through aligning her will with God’s.

Echoing Mary’s belief that persons can avoid sinful, self-indulgent behavior upon dedicating themselves to God, Mary’s neighbor John Hill praises her for not letting her grief infringe upon her religiosity and her ability to execute her motherly “duties.” Upon talking with Mr. Germain, John says,

such morality as Mary Hollis’ must come from religion. . . Mary would have sunk long ago, if her faith had not kept her up. . . I’m thinking Mary is more in the way of her duty, keeping at home, working for her children, and setting an example that’s better than the catechism to them. . . Many’s the time that I have seen her, when I looked into her window as I passed by, kneeling with her little ones about her. Of a sabbath, she is always sure to be at a meeting, and her children with her; not kept at home, as some I know . . . (13)

By saying that “Mary would have sunk long ago, if her faith had not kept her up,” John claims that Mary’s religiosity—and her “morality,” which “come[s] from religion”—is what allowed her to continue caring and “working for her children” despite her grief. In fact, Mary is so attentive to her children’s needs and spiritual wellbeing that she not only takes them to church but also constructs her home to be a similarly didactic space where she can “se[t] an example that’s better than the catechism to them.” The reason that John considers Mary’s “catechism” to be superior to the one that her children hear in church every Sunday is because Mary’s teaching is more experiential than doctrinal. John’s praising Mary for actually demonstrating and not merely discussing moral behavior mirrors—and even anticipates—Channing’s encouraging the Ministry at Large’s clergymen to morally educate persons beyond the pulpit and in other genres besides the sermon. In line with both the tract tale’s experiential pedagogy and Unitarianism’s recognition of the didactic potential of narrative-based writing, then, *Mary Hollis*

emerges as a religious text whose moral lessons can be derived from an analysis of Mary's experiences: from noticing her condemnation of self-indulgent behavior, her unwavering dedication to God in the face of adversity, and her consistent valuing of others' interests over her own. One can learn how to be like Mary Hollis by reading her story and paying attention to her behavior—by realizing, as her neighbor John did, that one can overcome any of life's despairing obstacles once one has abandoned personal interests and dedicated one's self entirely to God.

Four years after she published *Mary Hollis* with the New York Unitarian Book Society, Sedgwick published another tract tale with the Unitarian Publishing Fund of Boston: *The Deformed Boy* (1826). Though *Mary Hollis* and *The Deformed Boy* similarly aim to improve its readers' morality, only the latter text begins with an acknowledgment of its moral utility. Sedgwick says that this tale “record[s] for the benefit of some of our young friends, a few acts of particular goodness that have chanced to fall under our own observation, in the hope that their love of virtue may be augmented by contemplating its lovely aspects and certain results.”⁵⁸ To use Howard's terms, the “source of [this tale's] pedagogy” lies in its plot (471), or in the “few acts of particular goodness” that Sedgwick details for her readers. While the eponymous protagonist of *Mary Hollis* is the exemplary moral figure that readers are encouraged to emulate, *The Deformed Boy* positions the boy referenced in the title, Richard “Dicky” Shepard, and his family as the objects of benevolence. The tale, then, centers around the benevolent Aikin family who, after having “risen from their morning devotions,” answers the call of a young boy with “short legs, a body disproportionately large, and a hump on his back” who needs help attending

⁵⁸ Catharine Maria Sedgwick, “The Deformed Boy,” in *Stories for Young Persons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855 [originally published 1840]), 9. I will hereafter cite this text parenthetically by page number.

to his sick mother (10). Sedgwick claims that the reason Mrs. Aikin went with Dicky to help his mother, Mrs. Shepard, is because she was answering God's call to exhibit benevolence to suffering persons. She writes, "Heaven directed to [Mrs. Shepard's] relief a kind and efficient friend. Mrs. Aikin's discretion and good sense equalled her benevolence. She thought that as God in his kind providence had seen fit to exempt her from the sore evils of life, she was bound to testify her gratitude by doing all in her power to mitigate the sufferings of others" (15). Mrs. Aikin is an exemplar of disinterested benevolence in that she doesn't let her own personal experiences stop her from working on God's behalf to "mitigate" others' suffering (from assisting those who are not, like herself, "exempt" from experiencing "the sore evils of life").

As she continues to describe the ways in which Mrs. Aikin comforts Mrs. Shepard, Sedgwick makes a point to attribute Mrs. Aikin's benevolent disposition to her religiosity. Sedgwick writes,

She remembered that our Saviour was familiar with our sorrows and acquainted with our griefs; and as it was not with her a passing desire, but the rule of her life, to imitate him, she did not content herself with sending a servant with an inquiry or a gift to the poor, or with subscribing to charitable societies, but she visited the sick and the afflicted, and listened patiently to hear their very long, and often, to her as well to others, very tiresome stories. She would enter with benevolent sympathy into the history of their cares and wants, and she would even forget she had nerves while she gave her ear to the details of a loathsome sickness. (16)

Echoing Channing's argument from *Religion, a Social Principle* that persons cannot merely believe in but also need to practice benevolence, Sedgwick uses the figure of Mrs. Aikin to offer a critique of persons who do not themselves exhibit charity to the suffering and impoverished members of their community. While some people may be content "sending a servant with an inquiry or a gift of the poor" or "subscribing to charitable societies," Mrs. Aikin is not: she believes that it is "the rule of life" to "imitate" divine

benevolence by entering into such an intense “benevolent sympathy” with others’ “cares and wants” that one “forget[s one] ha[s] nerves.” That Sedgwick wants her readers to emulate Mrs. Aikin’s disinterestedness is demonstrated by this paragraph’s concluding sentence: “We entreat our young friends to believe that, if they will cultivate their benevolent affections, they will have treasures of kindness to impart far more valuable than Aladdin’s lamp, Fortunatus’ cap, or any gift of fay or fairy” (16). In the same way that Mrs. Aikin strives to “imitate” and align her “desires” with Christ, so too should Sedgwick’s “young readers” follow Mrs. Aikin’s example and work to “cultivate their benevolent affections” by visiting with and attending to “afflicted” persons’ needs, by “patiently listen[ing]” to their stories and so recognizing the dignity inherent in their life experiences. Like Mary Hollis, Mrs. Aikin shows Sedgwick’s readers how to make benevolence become not a “passing desire” but a fundamental part of one’s being: by not allowing for the events in one’s personal life prohibit one from fulfilling God’s will.

That *The Deformed Boy* and *Mary Hollis* were both published with Unitarian financial support helps to explain why these tales explicitly encourage its readers to dedicate their will to God’s and exhibit benevolence to suffering persons. Formed in the 1820s as alternatives to the New England (later named American) Tract Society—which “flooded the country with evangelical and Calvinist pamphlets”⁵⁹—the New York Unitarian Book Society that printed *Mary Hollis* and the Unitarian Publishing Fund in Boston that printed *The Deformed Boy* both desired to “place in the hands of those who were unable to purchase expensive works, short and cheap treatises on the doctrines and

⁵⁹ Margaret Moore, *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 111-112.

duties of Christianity.”⁶⁰ Though these evangelical and Unitarian tract societies similarly published “stories of a didactic character,” the Unitarian tract tales set themselves apart from their evangelical counterparts in that they focused more on “the broad principles of Christian theology and ethics which are common to all the followers of Christ, without meddling with sectarian prejudice or party views.”⁶¹ Unitarian tract tales like Sedgwick’s, then, were more concerned with promoting Christian morality among its readers than with encouraging conversion to a particular brand of Christianity.

In line with Unitarianism’s impulse to not overtly condemn other Christian sects, Sedgwick published a tract tale about a young girl trying to discern the difference between Calvinism and Unitarianism. Printed in a collection of tract tales entitled *A Short Essay to Do Good* (1828), “Christian Charity” is the only one of the collection’s three tales to never be reprinted in a magazine or another collection of stories, and so scholars have never commented on it.⁶² Yet this tract tale is crucial to understanding the relationship between Sedgwick’s Unitarianism and her philosophy of charity. Like *The Deformed Boy*, “Christian Charity” begins with Sedgwick acknowledging her tale’s moral utility. She writes:

All true christians, of all parties and sects, lament that difference of opinion should give rise to discord, strifes, uncharitableness, and evil speaking. . . All will admit that they are fallible—they may err in judging a brother—and if they do err how fearful the responsibility of communicating this false judgment—this *prejudice* to a young mind, which ought to be nurtured in the spirit of the Gospel!

⁶⁰ *Annual Report of the New-York Unitarian Book Society*, 3.

⁶¹ Cooke, *Unitarianism in America*, 107-108.

⁶² The cover of *A Short Essay to do Good* says that the tract tales included in this collection have been “republished from the *Christian Teacher’s Manual*,” though none of these texts were actually ever printed in that magazine. “Christian Charity” and “A Vision” first appear in this *Essay* collection, but “Saturday Night” was first published in *The Juvenile Miscellany* 1.3 (Jan. 1827): 31-39. The latter two tales mentioned here were collected and reprinted in Sedgwick’s *Stories for Young Persons* (1840) more than a decade after they initially appeared in print. “Bibliography,” in *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives*, 297, 299, 302.

in love and charitableness. The principle we wish to instill is illustrated in the following short story.⁶³

The “particular acts of goodness” recorded in *The Deformed Boy* aim to “benefit some of our young friends” (9). The “short story” contained within “Christian Charity” is similarly concerned with cultivating young persons’ morality, but differently addresses elder persons and reminds them of the impact that their moral and immoral behavior has on younger persons. The immoral behavior that Sedgwick particularly guards elder persons against in “Christian Charity” is the promoting of “strife” among Christians of various sects, which violates “the spirit of . . . love and charitableness” contained within “the Gospel.” Because those who demonstrate this and all “uncharitable” forms of behavior have “the responsibility of communicating [their] false judgment[s] . . . to young mind[s],” Sedgwick encourages her elder readers to always model charitable behavior so that younger persons will have a positive example from which to base their own moral behavior on.

But before she describes the persons who model moral behavior for the story’s young protagonist, Sarah Anson, Sedgwick details a conversation that Sarah has with her Aunt Caroline about Calvinism. After listening to “her aunt and a lady” talk “about ‘the orthodox,’” Sedgwick says that Sarah asks her aunt how the orthodox “differ from other Christians” (4, 5). Aunt Caroline replies: “Oh they differ in every thing—they think all kinds of rational amusements a crying sin. They would have every body spend their whole lives in going to lectures and prayer-meetings, and always look solemn and dismal, and give everything to missions” (5). That Aunt Caroline’s “dismal” view of orthodox Calvinism does not negatively impact Sarah’s own thoughts on the religion is

⁶³ Catharine Maria Sedgwick, “Christian Charity,” in *A Short Essay to do Good* (Stockbridge: Webster and Stanley, 1828), 3-4. I will hereafter cite this text parenthetically by page number.

demonstrated by Sedgwick's description of Sarah's response to her aunt's criticisms.⁶⁴

Sedgwick writes:

If Sarah had been like most children of eight years, she probably would have been quite satisfied with her aunt's replies . . . but Sarah's mother had guarded her mind from prejudice . . . She had shown her how beautifully our Saviour had reproved the prejudice of the wicked Jews, by selecting, to illustrate the principle of true charity . . . a *good Samaritan*—one of a people most despised and hated by the Jews . . . (5-6)

Sedgwick claims that Sarah's mother, like Christ, "illustrate[d] the principle of true charity" and "guarded against the intrusion of uncharitable feeling" by telling her the Parable of the Good Samaritan who, despite being "hated by the Jews," was charitable to a Jewish traveler on his way to Jericho (6). As Hopkins did in *True Holiness*, Sedgwick references the Parable of the Good Samaritan so as to argue for the centrality of disinterestedness to her text's theory of charity. In line with Hopkins' claim that Christians must be charitable to all persons, even their enemies, Sedgwick uses "Christian Charity" to condemn persons, like Sarah's Aunt Caroline, who refuse to exhibit benevolence to anyone whose religious beliefs oppose their own.

To further discount Aunt Caroline's unfair judgment of orthodox Calvinists, Sedgwick has Sarah encounter two benevolent religious women who are nothing like her aunt: her deceased mother's servant Lucy and Mrs. Lumley. When Mrs. Lumley comes to visit Lucy on her deathbed, Lucy tells her that "she was afraid she had stayed away from lecture to come to her," and Mrs. Lumley replies, "And what if I have, Lucy? I should make a poor use of the privilege of going to lecture, if I did not learn my duty there. It is God's word, you know, 'be ye doers of the word and not hearers only,' and one of the

⁶⁴ Though she in this tract tale encourages persons not to speak ill of other religions, Sedgwick actually echoes Aunt Caroline's description of Calvinists as "solemn and dismal" persons in both *A New-England Tale* and her autobiography (found in her *Life and Letters*), as discussed in this chapter's introduction.

first duties as well as pleasures is it to do what I can for a sick friend” (8). By believing that Christians must do more than attend church, Mrs. Lumley—who we later learn is “Orthodox” (13)—seems to invalidate Aunt Caroline’s belief that Calvinists “spend their whole lives in going to lectures and prayer-meetings.” Mrs. Lumley frequently attends “lectures and prayer-meetings,” but she is not afraid to miss one lecture so that she can put the beliefs expounded upon there into practice—be a “doe[r] of the word”—and visit with Lucy, her “sick friend” in need.

That Mrs. Lumley and Aunt Caroline disappear from “Christian Charity” soon after they showcase their respective religious allegiances demonstrates that Sedgwick conceives of these figures less as characters with dynamic personalities that develop over the course of the narrative and more as symbols of particular belief systems. As is typical of the tract tale genre, the characters, like “the unfolding aspects of narrative plot,” are only useful to Sedgwick insofar as they help her “prove a point about biblical truths” (Howard 483).⁶⁵ Though Mrs. Lumley’s sole purpose in the narrative is to contradict Aunt Caroline’s negative views of Calvinism, the particular “biblical truth” that this tale promotes is not that Calvinism is superior to other religions but that all Christians are deserving of benevolence. Hence, after Mrs. Lumley and Lucy’s other visitors leave her deathbed, Lucy finally answers Sarah’s “question about the orthodoxy” by encouraging Sarah to focus less on the differences (“those matters wherein they disagree”) and more on the similarities between the various Christian sects (11, 12). Reiterating the advice that Sarah’s mother gave her as a child, Lucy tells Sarah:

⁶⁵ Though I agree with Howard’s claim that the tract tale’s “development of plot [helps] to enact or give life to transcendent spiritual ideas” (482), my argument that Sedgwick’s tract tale characters are not actually characters but allegorical figures that represent a certain temperament or belief departs from her assertion that the tract tale’s literariness also derives from its detailed “elaboration of character and setting” (471).

“Consider all those Christians, who manifest a love to their Heavenly Father, and obedience to his well beloved Son, our Saviour; and of such do not ask if they be a Presbyterian, Unitarian, Methodist or Catholic; but regard them as Christians, fellow-christians, servants, and friends of one Master, who has said—‘by this ye shall know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another.’ You see by those good Christians, who have visited me this evening, that I have friends who bear very different names. Mrs. Lumley is Orthodox . . . ; Peggy is a good Catholic; Amy is a Baptist, and I, you know, am a Unitarian; but we are all, I humbly trust, heirs of that blessed country toward which I am hastening.” (12-13)

Though their religious beliefs do not resemble Lucy’s, this does not stop any of Lucy’s friends from setting aside their doctrinal differences and exhibiting benevolence to a fellow Christian on her deathbed. In a similar fashion, Lucy’s own affiliation with Unitarianism does not prohibit her from befriending non-Unitarians or from guarding Sarah against sectarianism—from encouraging Sarah, as Sarah’s mother encouraged her, to recognize that “Presbyterian[s], Unitarian[s], Methodist[s and] Catholic[s]” are all “fellow-christians” who love God.

Given that this tale begins with Sedgwick at once discouraging “strife” among Christians of various sects and promoting the “principle” of “love and charitableness” contained within “the Gospel,” it makes sense that she would end her tale with Lucy telling Sarah to avoid thinking about the differences between orthodox and other Christian theologies (3, 4). The reason that Lucy discourages Sarah from focusing on how these theologies depart from each other is because she doesn’t want such divisive thinking to promote contentious behavior. Hence, after she reminds Sarah that all Christians “manifest a love to their Heavenly Father,” Lucy recites John 13:35: “‘by this ye shall know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another.’” By having Lucy reflect on the narrative’s preceding events and then analyze how such events validate a particular Christian tenet, Sedgwick, as is typical of tract tales, “reveal[s] in the end that

the world created in the narrative was [entirely] determined by spiritual principles” (Howard 464). Just as Lucy aims to instill a Christian moral principle in Sarah, so Sedgwick uses “Christian Charity” to enhance her readers’ morality: to encourage them to be so disinterested that they, like Lucy and her friends, exhibit benevolence to persons of seemingly opposing Christian sects.

Though “Christian Charity” asks for persons to let “charity and love . . . bound over the barriers [that] the false zeal of man has erected between different sects of Christians” (14), this does not mean that Sedgwick’s tract tale doesn’t itself champion Unitarianism. Indeed, the reason that Lucy promotes benevolence among Christians of all sects is because it is a central principle of her Unitarian theology. Lucy’s discouraging persons from allowing sectarianism to dictate who they are charitable to not only resembles Boston’s Unitarian Publishing Fund’s “refus[al] to print doctrinal tracts or those devoted in any way to sectarian interests,” but also accords with Channing’s theology.⁶⁶ For in a manuscript note he wrote on “Christian Union” (1816), Channing condemned “the guilt of a *sectarian spirit*”: he said that “to bestow our affections on those who . . . belong to the same church with ourselves, and to withhold it from others who possess equal if not superior virtue, because they bear a different name, is to prefer a party to the Church of Christ” (*Memoir* 315).⁶⁷

Yet rather than have a male ministerial figure like Channing condemn sectarianism, Sedgwick has two women—Sarah’s deceased mother and her servant

⁶⁶ Cooke, *Unitarianism in America*, 107.

⁶⁷ “Channing . . . was opposed to every phase of religious organization that put bonds upon men . . . [and many] Unitarians were in fullest sympathy with Channing as to the fundamental law of spiritual freedom and as to the evils of sectarianism.” Ibid., 125, 126. For more on Channing’s commitment to religious freedom and what he called “free inquiry,” see his “The System of Exclusion and Denunciation Considered,” in *Remarks on the Rev. Dr. Worcester’s Second Letter to Mr. Channing, on American Unitarianism* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1815), 24-47.

Lucy—encourage other Christians to consider all persons as being worthy of benevolence. Because they do not allow for their own beliefs or station in life distract from their ability to exhibit benevolence to others, Lucy and Sarah’s mother resemble the disinterested female protagonists of Sedgwick’s earlier tract tales. For just as Mary Hollis’ grief doesn’t infringe upon her dedication to God or her children, and Mrs. Aikin’s wealth doesn’t prohibit her from helping those who are less fortunate than her, so Sarah’s mother and Lucy don’t let their own ties with Unitarianism stop them from encouraging persons to exhibit benevolence to all Christians.

That Sedgwick’s tract tales’ most virtuous figures are women, however, is hardly surprising. For as historians Linda Kerber, Ruth Bloch, and Rosemarie Zagarri have shown, “women,” soon after the American Revolution, “came to be idealized as the source not only of domestic morality but also of civic virtue itself.”⁶⁸ While Bloch shows how discourses as various as evangelicalism, civic republicanism, and literary sentimentalism influenced the “feminization” of virtue in the early national era, Kerber before her more particularly uncovers the ways that the virtuous “Republican Mother” intervened in Revolutionary politics, arguing that “In the years of the early Republic a consensus developed around the idea that a mother, committed to the service of her family and to the state, might serve a political purpose. . . through the raising of a patriotic child. The Republican Mother . . . was to educate her children and guide them in the paths of morality and virtue.”⁶⁹ Yet because Kerber’s often-cited theory does not, according to Zagarri, “expand [women’s] role beyond that of wives and mothers or

⁶⁸ Ruth Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America,” in *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 143.

⁶⁹ Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 283.

extend their potential as independent political beings,” it cannot be the only theoretical framework that scholars use to understand early-national women’s experiences.⁷⁰ Upon considering the disinterested women of Sedgwick’s tract tales, it becomes all the more apparent that none of these women are virtuous because they are “republican mothers”: though Mary Hollis and Mrs. Aikin are mothers, neither of them, to use Kerber’s words, “encourage in [their] sons civic interest and participation.”⁷¹ Instead, Sedgwick’s female characters are virtuous because they act on the basis of religious principles: they dedicate their will to God’s, consider all persons equally, and so exhibit benevolence to those who are most in need of it. To focus exclusively on whether or not these characters are “republican mothers”—as scholars have done of Sedgwick’s and other antebellum women’s writing—is thus to miss the religious beliefs that compel these women to demonstrate benevolence to suffering and impoverished persons.⁷²

Though all of the benevolent characters in Sedgwick’s tract tales are women, it is important to note that they all not only are not “republican mothers,” but also inhabit differing class positions: the eponymous protagonist of *Mary Hollis* is impoverished, Lucy from “Christian Charity” is the Anson family’s servant, and *The Deformed Boy*’s Mrs. Aikin was so wealthy that she could have sent “a servant with an inquiry or a gift to the poor” (16). By portraying women of all classes as being capable of exhibiting

⁷⁰ Rosemarie Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 5. Like Zagarri, Peg Lamphier has recently analyzed another shortcoming of Kerber’s theory: that “republican motherhood ideologies . . . were most influential with middle-class white women . . . [and] proved impossible for poor women or women of color to enact.” Peg Lamphier, “Republican Motherhood,” in *Women in American History: A Social, Political, and Cultural Encyclopedia and Document Collection*, ed. Peg Lamphier and Rosanne Welch (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 292.

⁷¹ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 283.

⁷² See, for instance, Sarah Robbins, “‘The Future Good and Great of Our Land’: Republican Mothers, Female Authors, and Domesticated Literacy in Antebellum New England,” *The New England Quarterly* 75.4 (2002): 562-591.

disinterested behavior, Sedgwick's 1820s tract tales thus set themselves apart from her 1830s novels, as these later texts pay attention less to gender and more to class: they argue that only impoverished religious persons can properly demonstrate benevolence to those who are suffering. In her fourth novel *Clarence* (1830), Sedgwick even has two impoverished male characters challenge a wealthy female character's claim that impoverished persons are incapable of exhibiting benevolence to others. Once Mr. Carroll's cousin Anne Raymond finds out that the Carrolls have invited Flavel—a homeless man that Mr. Carroll's son Frank met on the streets of New York City—to live with them, she shares her concerns with Frank, who then tells his father that she thought “‘it was absurd to take in a man of that sort [and make] an alms-house of your house . . . but, as to that, it seemed to her, that poor people never thought of expense; to be sure, benevolence, and sentiment, and all that, were very fine things, but for her part she did not see how people that had but fifteen hundred dollars a year could afford to indulge them.’”⁷³ Mr. Carroll responds to his cousin's comments by assuring Frank: “It is true, my dear boy, that our income admits few luxuries—but the luxury of giving shall be the last that we deny ourselves” (76). Countering his cousin's skepticism, Mr. Carroll claims that one's financial situation in no way determines one's ability to be charitable to suffering persons.

Because they are not tainted by wealth or ambition and don't have material possessions to be invested in, Sedgwick finds that impoverished persons, like those in the Carroll family, are more likely than those of a higher socioeconomic class to actually act upon their Christian beliefs: to exhibit benevolence to those who are, like themselves,

⁷³ Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Clarence; or, a Tale of Our Own Times*, eds. Melissa Homestead and Helen Foster (Buffalo: Broadview Editions, 2012), 76. I will hereafter cite this novel parenthetically by page number.

suffering and in need. The reason, then, that Mr. Carroll “thanks God that there is a barrier between [his family] and the fashionable world; that [they] cannot approach it near enough to be dazzled by its glare” is because he believes that wealthy persons, like his cousin Anne Raymond, are too self-interested or preoccupied their own wealth to adequately demonstrate benevolence to others (79). When Flavel too realizes that persons can in fact be charitable despite their poverty, he tells Mr. Carroll—who also happens to be his long-lost son—“I found what I believed did not exist—a disinterested man, and him my son!” (87). Like Edward Erskine from *A New-England Tale*, Flavel did not believe that persons could actually abandon their own individual interests and selflessly exhibit benevolence to those who are suffering. This chapter’s final section thus traces how Sedgwick used two of her novels from the 1830s to discount those, like Flavel, who believe that impoverished persons are incapable of exhibiting disinterested benevolence to those who are suffering. More specifically, it argues that Sedgwick, to use Sarah Robbins’ words, “blended genres” and adapted at least two of her 1830s novels “to meet [the] didactic purposes” of her tract tales: that she used *Home* (1835) and *The Poor Rich Man, and the Rich Poor Man* (1836) to model and promote disinterested benevolence among her readers.⁷⁴ By associating disinterestedness only with these novels’ impoverished religious characters, Sedgwick claims that the antebellum era’s growing preoccupation with material wealth prohibits persons from aligning their will with God’s and, in so doing, becoming agents of sociopolitical reform.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Robbins, “Periodizing Authorship, Characterizing Genre,” 3.

⁷⁵ Though I focus more on “disinterestedness” than “Christian patience,” and though Unitarian-sponsored urban poverty relief efforts differently contextualize my argument about Sedgwick’s fictional depiction of impoverished persons, I agree with Philip Gura’s claim that Sedgwick’s “novels’ counsel of Christian patience and humility in the face of the impersonal enormity of the city and her willingness in her work to tell the stories of neglected kinds of characters were responses to a nation whose forms and combinations were changing at every moment.” Gura, *Truth’s Ragged Edge*, 64.

IV. Urban Poverty and Disinterested Charity in Sedgwick's Novels

In the next four years after *Clarence's* 1830 publication, Sedgwick turned away from writing novels and published more than a dozen short stories in magazines as various as *The Token*, *The Atlantic Souvenir*, and the *Juvenile Miscellany*.⁷⁶ Sedgwick ended this hiatus from novel writing when she published both the didactic novel *Home* and the historical novel *The Linwoods* in 1835. That Sedgwick returned to writing novels in the mid-1830s is perhaps due to a 31 January 1834 letter she received from the Unitarian minister Henry Ware, Jr. In this letter, Ware asked Sedgwick for advice on his plan to publish a "series of narratives" on "the practical character and influences of Christianity" (*Life and Letters* 239).⁷⁷ Hoping to "secure the use of [her] pen" for the project, Ware told Sedgwick that he wanted her and other reform-minded Unitarians to write something "between a formal tale and a common tract" that would be "more efficient than . . . many sermons" in that it would not only "enlighten readers by a familiar exposition of principles," but also "improve" on those principles "by a display of their modes of operation" (238, 239). Sedgwick accepted Ware's invitation to contribute to what would become known as his *Scenes and Characters Illustrating Christian Truth* series. Though she denied his initial request to "undertake the whole" project on her own, Sedgwick published her fifth novel, *Home*, as the series' third volume in 1835 (239).

⁷⁶ "If one focuses exclusively on single-authored books, Sedgwick's productivity might appear to drop off precipitously in the early 1830s; however, she published multiple tales and sketches each year in gift books and the *Juvenile Miscellany*." Melissa Homestead, "The Shape of Catharine Sedgwick's Career," in *Cambridge History of American Women's Literature*, ed. Dale Bauer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 189. For a complete list of Sedgwick's 1830s' writings, consult the "Bibliography," in *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives*, 297, 303-305.

⁷⁷ That Sedgwick also admired Ware is demonstrated by an 11 February 1825 letter she wrote to Eliza Lee Cabot: "You who live in Boston at the very fountain of intellectual pleasure and can have weekly access to Dr. Channing's or Henry Ware's preaching can more estimate the value of a single sermon than the happy dweller in a land of *water privileges* can rightly appreciate the value of a fountain in the desert" (qtd. in Kring 142).

Because *Home* became one of her most popular and best-selling novels soon after its publication, Sedgwick decided to write another short didactic novel and dedicate it to a Unitarian minister who also contributed to Ware's *Christian Truth* series: Joseph Tuckerman.⁷⁸ In an October 1836 letter, Tuckerman not only thanks Sedgwick for dedicating *The Poor Rich Man, and the Rich Poor Man* to him, but also, like Channing and Ware before him, valorizes her for allowing her writing to serve a moral purpose. He writes, "God has given you, my dear friend, a great power over the human heart, and most gratefully do I rejoice that this power is consecrated by you to the highest and noblest ends" (*Life and Letters* 259). An 1837 review of this novel in the *Christian Examiner* reiterates Tuckerman's praise of Sedgwick as a writer who works in accordance with God's will to minister to her readers: it claims that Sedgwick has "a keen feeling of the errors which prevail in our social order, [and] a perfect understanding of the remedies which are demanded . . . there probably was never a finer sermon preached than in this narrative."⁷⁹ The reason that this reviewer says that Sedgwick "preached in [her] narrative" is because her novel, like her earlier tract tales, models moral behavior for its readers. Yet according to Channing's and Ware's discussion of the sermon's inefficacy, discussed above, Sedgwick's fictional writings offer such moral advice in a superior manner. Rather than merely delineate or extend upon Christian doctrine, Sedgwick shows how to put belief into practice: she portrays fictional characters whose charitable actions help combat, as *The Poor Rich Man*'s reviewer says,

⁷⁸ While *Home* went through fifteen editions in six years, *The Poor Rich Man* was even more successful and went through sixteen editions in less than three years. Foster, Edward Halsey, *Catharine Maria Sedgwick* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), 117. While *Home* was printed as the third volume in Ware's *Christian Truth* series, Tuckerman's *Gleams of Truth* (1835) was printed as the series' fourth volume.

⁷⁹ "Notices and Intelligences," in *The Christian Examiner and General Review*, vol. 21 (Boston: Charles Bowen; London: Rowland Hunter, and R.J. Kennett, Great Queen Street, 1837), 398-399.

the “errors which prevail in our social order.” Sedgwick’s fiction, therefore, works in concert with—and even offers a solution to—the Unitarian ministry’s desire to morally educate persons beyond the spatial and generic confines of the pulpit.

Though scholars have not analyzed how *Home* or *The Poor Rich Man* promote disinterestedness as an exemplary Christian ethic, Ivy Schweitzer and Patricia Larson Kalayjian have argued for the importance of disinterestedness to Sedgwick’s critique of civic republicanism in her third and fourth novels, *Hope Leslie* and *Clarence*, respectively. Focusing specifically on the centrality of disinterestedness to *Hope Leslie*’s theory of female friendship, Schweitzer contends that Sedgwick aims to “expand the category of republican citizenship” by upholding her female and not her male characters as “the narrative’s standards for disinterested action.”⁸⁰ In a similar vein, Kalayjian posits that Sedgwick in *Clarence* disrupts the “social hierarchy” inherent in the civic republican conception of disinterestedness by having the “women and working people,” and not the wealthy men, of her novel “contribute in a disinterested fashion to the larger well-being of the community.”⁸¹ Rather than focus exclusively on Sedgwick’s association of disinterestedness with femininity, however, this chapter’s final section will demonstrate how Sedgwick appeals less to civic republicanism and more to her Unitarian theology to transform disinterestedness into what Kalayjian terms a “universally accessible” quality that persons of all classes are capable of practicing.⁸² Following Schweitzer’s and Kalayjian’s claims that Sedgwick’s theory of disinterestedness “anticipates the . . .

⁸⁰ Ivy Schweitzer, *Perfecting Friendship: Politics and Affiliation in Early American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 189.

⁸¹ Patricia Larson Kalayjian, “Disinterest as Moral Corrective in *Clarence*’s Cultural Critique,” in *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Lucinda Damon-Bach and Victoria Clements (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 110, 111.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 110.

Unitarian notion of universal benevolence” and “becomes a pure benevolence affiliated with Christian tenets” respectively, this section will more specifically argue that Sedgwick, in *Home* and *The Poor Rich Man*, championed her impoverished characters as being charitable persons by formulating them, and not her wealthier characters, as the most successful practitioners of disinterested benevolence: as not letting their own impoverished condition prevent them from caring for those who are suffering.⁸³ As Channing and Tuckerman were using this originally evangelical conception of disinterestedness to develop a theory of charity that would become central to urban poverty relief projects like the Ministry at Large, Sedgwick was writing novels that portrayed impoverished religious persons as being especially capable of exhibiting disinterested benevolence to those who are most in need of it.⁸⁴

To promote disinterestedness as a Christian virtue that is most frequently practiced by impoverished persons, Sedgwick describes *Home*’s protagonists, the Barclay family, as religious subjects who are charitable despite their poverty. After she details the family’s move from the rural Greenbrook to New York City, Sedgwick describes the Barclay household as a religious space, saying, “Few persons, probably, have thought so much as William Barclay of the economy of domestic happiness. . . . He believed that a household, governed in obedience to the Christian social law, would present as perfect an image of heaven, as the infirmity of human nature, and the imperfections in the

⁸³ Schweitzer, *Perfecting Friendship*, 194; Kalayjian, “Disinterest as Moral Corrective,” 114.

⁸⁴ On characterizing *Home* and *The Poor Rich Man* as novels, Homestead notes that these texts “are most often characterized as ‘didactic novellas’ rather than ‘novels,’ and Sedgwick herself did not call them novels. Nevertheless, . . . she uses the same tools from the craft of fiction she used in her earlier longer fictions, such as character dialogue, an engaging narrator, and the manipulation of time in plotting the trajectories of multiple characters over extended periods of time.” Homestead, “The Shape of Catharine Sedgwick’s Career,” 197.

constitution of human affairs, would admit.”⁸⁵ Sedgwick then goes on to say that the reason the Barclay home demonstrates “obedience to the Christian social law” is because the family cares for those who are less fortunate than they are. Even after his boss at the Norton & Co. printing office died and left the business in financial disarray, William Barclay wanted to take his boss’ children, Emily and Harry Norton, under his family’s care. When the Barclay children expressed support for their father’s desire to help the Norton children, William told them to “consult” with their mother about the living arrangements, for “it is on your mother that the burden of an increased family must chiefly fall. . . . If she is willing to extend the blessing of a home to both these orphan children, at the cost, as must needs be, of much labor and self-denial to herself, she will set us an example of disinterestedness and benevolence that we will try follow” (96). Though the family lost their fortune and had to dissolve their plans to retire and move back to Greenbrook (87), Anne Barclay, like her children, still felt compelled to help the Norton family in their time of need. Just as Lucy from “Christian Charity” doesn’t let her own affiliation with Unitarianism prohibit her from promoting benevolence among all Christians, so Anne does not allow for her worries about her family’s finances distract her from exhibiting benevolence to the abandoned Norton children.

Though William praised his wife as an “example of disinterestedness and benevolence” that the family must work “to follow,” not every member of the Barclay family agreed with Anne’s desire to house Emily and Harry Norton. Indeed, Anne’s sister Betsey confronted her about her charitable inclinations and asked how she could possibly “undertake these two children that have no claim on earth upon you. Claim! the children

⁸⁵ Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Home* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1835), 13-14. I will hereafter cite this novel parenthetically by page number.

of your greatest enemy, the man that has all but ruined you, . . . I always thought home was a sacred place from which it was a duty to shut out every thing disagreeable and unpleasant” (98, 99). Sedgwick then says that Betsey is so consumed with “self-love” that she doesn’t realize that she is actually one of the “disagreeable” things that should be left out of the Barclay home, for “Her brother-in-law had given her a home, simply because her temper was so uncomfortable, that no other member of her family was willing to receive her” (99). To counter her sister’s selfish temperament, then, Anne told her that Christian homes must not only shut out “unpleasant” things but also take in persons in need.⁸⁶ Reaffirming her commitment to the Norton children, Anne tells her sister: “It is a duty, as you say, Betsey . . . to exclude every thing permanently disagreeable from the family; for home should resemble heaven in happiness as well as love. But we cannot exclude from our earthly homes the infirmities of humanity” (99). By framing Betsey’s and Anne’s debate over whether the family should help the “infirm” members of humanity in terms of the former’s “self-love” and the latter’s “disinterestedness,” Sedgwick aligns her text and its critique of self-love with Hopkins’ *True Holiness*. For it is in that text that Hopkins designates self-love as being at once “opposed to the love of others, or universal benevolence” and the “foundation and reason of all that blindness to spiritual things” (23, 29). Given Hopkins’ description of self-love as being in opposition to “universal benevolence,” it makes sense that Betsey rejects—and that Anne recognizes—charity as an essential Christian virtue. The only persons who can therefore demonstrate benevolence to suffering persons are the ones who, like Anne,

⁸⁶ I am here marking my agreement with Mary Ryan, who has a similar reading of *Home*’s conception of the Christian family: “Sedgwick’s didactic narrative *Home* . . . portrayed the ideal Christian family as one that provided a refuge for domestics, orphans, remote kinsmen, and the neglected offspring of poor and disreputable parents.” Mary Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity, 1830 to 1860* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1982), 23.

do not have a “blindness to spiritual things” and who are instead devoted to carrying out God’s will.

Despite her initial reservations about her sister’s desire to care for the Norton children, Betsey does eventually decide to support her sister’s and the Barclay family’s charitable inclinations. After Anne and Betsey talk about the importance of charity to a religious household, and Anne expresses gratitude to “Providence for enabling us to take the homeless young creatures into the family,” Sedgwick writes that Betsey “took up her lamp to go to bed [and] said in a tone of real kindness—‘I’ll try to do my part’” (102). As in her tract tales, Sedgwick follows Anne’s and Betsey’s conversation, and Betsey’s deciding to be charitable like her sister, with an explicit discussion of the moral lesson that her readers are supposed to take away from this scene. Sedgwick comments: “Ah, if all the individuals of the human family would ‘*do their part*,’ there would be no wanderers, no outcasts. The chain of mutual dependence would be preserved unbroken, strong, and bright. All would be linked together in the bonds of natural affection and Christian love,—the bonds of unity and peace” (102). In line with Unitarianism’s belief that all persons are “linked together” and so cannot help but “depend” on each other for charity, Sedgwick argues that the “wanderers” and “outcasts” of the world are as deserving of benevolence as anyone else because they are all members of “the human family.” The reason, then, that Sedgwick reminds her readers of the “bond of natural affection and Christian love” that they share with all persons, regardless of class position, is because she wants more persons to follow Anne and Betsey, “do their part,” and exhibit charity to those who are most in need of it. Anne and Betsey thus debate and come to a unified conclusion about the positive impact that disinterested charity has on

urban poverty relief so that *Home*'s readers can, like Betsey, come to recognize the dignity inherent in and so renew their obligation to exhibit benevolence to those who are impoverished and suffering.

As in *Home*, the protagonists of *The Poor Rich Man, and the Rich Poor Man*, the Aikin family, don't let their own financial instability prohibit them from caring for and welcoming impoverished persons into their New York City home. Though the Aikins are "undeniably what the world calls poor," this does not mean that they are not charitable, for Sedgwick notes that they all have "affection, intelligence, temperance, contentment, and godliness."⁸⁷ In the novel's ninth chapter, "A Peep into the Rich Poor Man's House," Sedgwick describes Susan, the Aikin family matriarch, as an especially benevolent figure. In addition to spending time with "the eldest child of a worthy and very poor neighbour" and teaching her how to sew, Susan begs her family to take in and care for a "sickly little fellow, that's been cruelly neglected" and, in the following chapter, "receive[s] a stranger with that expression of cheerful, sincere hospitality, which what is called high breeding only imitates" (83, 86, 93). Upon helping her neighbor's child Agnes secure employment, Sedgwick reflects upon Susan's exemplary moral behavior and writes, "which is happiest—*richest*; she who is lapped in luxury, and is every day seeing some new and expensive pleasure, or those who, like our friend Mrs. Aikin, in some obscure place, are using their faculties and seizing their opportunities of doing good, never to be known and praised by the world, but certainly recorded in the book of life?" (84-85). By associating one's "wealth" less with one's financial and more with one's affective condition, Sedgwick contends—as Channing does in his *Ministry for the*

⁸⁷ Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *The Poor Rich Man, and the Rich Poor Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836), 75. I will hereafter cite this novel parenthetically by page number.

Poor sermon, published a year earlier—that persons can promote happiness and be charitable without having to donate money or material goods. Hence, Sedgwick says that Susan is “rich” not because she is financially capable of indulging in “some new expensive pleasure” but because she is disinterested: because she “seiz[es] opportunities of doing good, never to be known and praised by the world.” Like *Home*’s Anne Barclay, Susan Aikin is a disinterested subject because her own impoverished condition does not prevent her from noticing and caring for those who are suffering around her.

In the novel’s next chapter, “The Rich Poor Man’s Charities,” Sedgwick moves from detailing Susan’s disinterestedness to detailing a conversation that her similarly charitable husband Harry has with his uncharitable employer Morris Finley. When Harry’s son William alerts his father to a homeless man’s presence outside his warehouse office, Harry (the “rich poor man” of the novel’s title) goes into the office to talk with Morris (the “poor rich man” of the novel’s title) about the kind of “aid [that can] be extended to the stranger” (91). While Harry offers to house the man and make him “comfortable for the present” (92), Morris refuses to give him money: “after rummaging through his pockets, [Morris] said he had no change; and then added . . . he made it a rule never to give to strangers” (91).⁸⁸ Immediately after Harry expresses disappointment in his employer—saying “It is a good time to make acquaintance with a stranger . . . when he is dying of starvation” (91)—a nameless merchant walks by and says he has “money, but no time, to give” to the homeless man (92). As a result of these two men’s refusal to

⁸⁸ It comes as no surprise to *The Poor Rich Man*’s readers that Harry is and that Morris is not benevolent to this stranger, for in the novel’s eighth chapter, we learn that Morris only gives money to his wife’s mother because he doesn’t want to have a negative reputation (“we can’t let her suffer. What would people say?” [78]). That Morris is concerned less with being charitable and more with appearing wealthy to others is further revealed when he on the one hand tells his wife that they “must avoid unnecessary expenses” and on the other hand, in the very next sentence, asks her if “the man has been here about the curtains?” (79).

directly engage with or care for this homeless man, Sedgwick offers an extended condemnation of persons who don't set aside their selfishness and fulfill their Christian duty to help those who are less fortunate than they are. She writes,

what time has he for the claims of human brotherhood?—what time to obey the injunction, “Bear ye one another’s burdens?” [Galatians 6.2]—what time to imitate his Divine Master in going about doing good?—what time to seek the lost, raise the fallen, strengthen the weak, among his brethren—the children of one Father—travellers to one home? He may find time for a passing alms, but for protection, for advice, for patient sympathy, for those effective charities that his knowledge, station, and influence put within his power, *he has no time*. . . [Does] he not wish to [be] the *rich poor* man who, in the name of Jesus, stretched forth his hand to that neglected brother? (92)

In the same way that *The Deformed Boy*'s Mrs. Aikin criticizes those who have other persons carry out their benevolent intentions for them, so Sedgwick condemns anyone who would rather “pas[s] alms” than take the time to “bear one another’s burdens,” as Galatians 6.2 calls for.⁸⁹ By alluding to Channing’s philosophy of divine likeness and arguing that all persons are deserving of benevolence because they are all “children of the same Father,” Sedgwick demonstrates how her Unitarian theology fuels her criticism of persons who refuse to exhibit “patient sympathy” to suffering persons. If one does not exhibit benevolence to those who are suffering and in need (“seek the lost, raise the fallen”), then Sedgwick believes that one is doing more than just denying the Unitarian belief in “human brotherhood”: that one is also ignoring one’s obligation to “imitate [the] Divine Master in going about good.” To truly exhibit benevolence, then, one cannot emulate the self-interested Morris or the nameless merchant and hope that others will compensate for one’s refusing to take the time to be charitable to others. Instead, one

⁸⁹ There is no evidence in *The Poor Rich Man* or the earlier *The Deformed Boy* to suggest that the Aikins from either text are in any way related to each other.

must emulate Harry, as he, “in the name of Jesus,” made time to care for his “neglected brother.”

While this chapter aligns Harry’s disinterested benevolence with Christ, the novel’s final chapter’s allusion to Christ differently assists Sedgwick, not in articulating a theory of charity, but in valorizing and dignifying the impoverished condition. When Susan Aikin responds to her father Phil’s assertion that one’s happiness “in this world” is in no way influenced by one’s class position, she says that it is “comfort[ing]” for an impoverished person “to *feel* that there is nothing low in poverty—to remember that the greatest wisest, and best Being that ever appeared on earth had no part nor lot in the riches of this world; and that, for our sakes, he became poor” (179). Like Channing and Tuckerman before her, Sedgwick praises Christ because he sacrificed his own individual interests and did not let his own impoverished condition—his “bec[oming] poor”—prohibit him from caring for other similarly impoverished persons. But, as Joe Shapiro has shown, Sedgwick’s saying that “there is nothing low in poverty” implies that impoverished persons should not just recognize their own dignity but also be content with their current financial situation. Though he focuses only on the novel’s inter- and not intra-class benevolence, Shapiro is correct to note that Sedgwick does not “castigate those individuals who do not transcend relative poverty nor trade in the promise that everyone could become middle class.”⁹⁰ Indeed, Sedgwick goes so far as to say that class division is divinely ordained, commenting earlier in the novel, “Has not Providence made this inequality the necessary result of the human condition, . . . [for i]f there were a perfect community of goods, where would be the opportunity for the exercise of the

⁹⁰ Joe Shapiro, “The Providence of Class: Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Political Economy, and Sentimental Fiction in the 1830s,” *American Literary History* 27.2 (2015): 202.

virtues, of justice, and mercy, humility, fidelity, and gratitude?” (39).⁹¹ Sedgwick’s arguing that class division is “necessary” because it helps boost inter-class charity, however, should not distract from the fact that this novel also promotes a non-hierarchical, intra-class form of charity: one in which impoverished persons do not have to give money and can instead care for, spend time with, and house other impoverished persons. Sedgwick may not be radical in the sense that she champions economic equality, but she is radical in positing that all persons, regardless of class, are deserving of and capable of exhibiting benevolence to others.

Though Sedgwick’s own privileged class position may have caused her to promote economic inequality as divinely ordained in *The Poor Rich Man*, it is important to note that Sedgwick’s contemporaries commemorated her upon her 1867 death, less for her economic wealth, and more for her implementing her writings’ theory of charity in her everyday life. Just as the famed actress Fanny Kemble valorized Sedgwick for “sympathizing with” all impoverished persons’ “interests, soothing their sorrows, [and] supplying their wants,” so James Gibbons praised Sedgwick for visiting with and caring for imprisoned persons as the first director of the Women’s Prison Association of New York, saying: “Those with whom she was acquainted in prison-visiting can testify to her wonderful power of winning the confidence of a class whose need was kindness” (*Life and Letters* 417, 420). Though the Unitarian minister Orville Dewey similarly honored Sedgwick for her charity work, he differently linked her benevolence to her religiosity:

⁹¹ In the final chapter, immediately before Susan talks with her father Phil about Christ’s impoverished condition, as detailed above, Sedgwick has Harry reiterate this earlier scene’s sentiment to his daughter Ruth: “If there were none of these hateful rich people, Ruth, who, think you, would build hospitals, and provide asylum for orphans, and for the deaf and dumb, and the blind?” (178).

Her character was moulded, I always thought, of all good elements, . . . piety, deep and reverent, was hers. . . [T]his world was pleasant to her; and how much she did to make it pleasant to others!—did it in ways of philanthropy and charity, but did it yet more, unconsciously. . . She saw God in all things; for nothing hath its beauty without that vision. . . What I most loved in her, I think, was the exquisite, unfailing, abounding sympathy which was always ready for the need of great and small . . . (*Life and Letters* 429, 430-431, 433)

Here, Dewey crafts Sedgwick as an exemplary pious woman whose belief in the *imago dei* or divine likeness philosophy (“She saw God in all things”) motivated her “unabounding sympathy,” her desire to exhibit benevolence to all suffering persons. To follow Dewey and recognize the influence of Sedgwick’s Unitarian theology on her theory of disinterested charity, as this chapter has done, is to reevaluate Sedgwick as a reform-minded figure who used her fictional writings as the Unitarian ministers she knew and corresponded with used their sermons: to champion impoverished persons’ rights and dignity. This new understanding of Sedgwick thus reveals that she was more engaged, not only with Unitarian theology, but also with the urban poverty relief projects of her time than scholars have previously acknowledged.

Epilogue

Samuel Hopkins in the Antebellum Antislavery Imagination

Exactly four decades after his 1803 death, the Unitarian newspaper *The Christian World* published a short account of Samuel Hopkins' involvement in slavery and the slave trade.¹ After acknowledging that these "curious reminiscences" of Hopkins' life were first printed in another newspaper "devoted to the cause of human freedom," George Gibbs Channing—*The Christian World*'s editor and William Ellery Channing's brother—said that he "lived upwards of twenty-one years within [Newport's] precincts," but still "never heard of the circumstances, set forth in th[at] paper."² Despite being unaware of the circumstances discussed in *The Albany Weekly Patriot*'s "Reminiscence of Dr. Hopkins," Channing felt that it accurately represented Hopkins' benevolent character, and so he didn't at all hesitate to share it with *The Christian World*'s readership. Channing writes, "when we call to mind what we actually knew of Dr. H. — his truly benevolent spirit, and his uncompromising hostility to slavery in every form, we are inclined to believe it highly probable that there is more truth than fiction in the extracts given" ("Reminiscence" I).

The first of the three columns that discuss Hopkins' involvement in the slave trade begins in the midst of the Revolutionary War, as Hopkins' "house of worship was occupied by soldiers; . . . and his family were scattered" ("Reminiscence" I). By Hopkins' side, however, was "Chloe (for I must give her a name,)" who "had been a faithful domestic, and given hopeful evidences of piety" ("Reminiscence" I). Instead of

¹ George Willis Cooke, *Unitarianism in America: A History of its Origin and Development* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1902), 145.

² "[Reminiscence of Dr. Hopkins]," *The Christian World* (Boston, MA), Oct. 14, 1843. The text was printed across the following three issues of *The Christian World*: October 14, 21, and 28. I will hereafter cite the October 14 and 28 issues parenthetically as "Reminiscence" I and "Reminiscence" III respectively.

expressing gratitude to Chloe for her dedication, however, Hopkins believed that “she was an incumbrance to him; and meeting with a favorable opportunity to dispose of her to a Carolinian, who was then at the North, he sold her, and she was taken away by her new master, to the South” (“Reminiscence” I). Though he initially felt that selling Chloe into Southern slavery was a good decision, Hopkins later changed his mind. As he “began to reflect” on “the criminality of making merchandise of a fellow mortal, and of one, too, whom he regarded as one with Christ,” the writer says that Hopkins came to feel “anguish – even agony of spirit” (“Reminiscence” I).

In the remainder of the first and in the entirety of the second column, Hopkins wallows over his decision to sell Chloe. In the third column, however, Hopkins decides that he is going to publicly condemn his actions by preaching a sermon against slavery and the slave trade to his Newport congregation. In this sermon on Ephesians 4:28 (“*Let him that stole, steal no more*”), which he delivered shortly after American independence, Hopkins claimed that because Americans had protested against and experienced British tyranny, they “are the last nation that ought to persist in enslaving our fellow creature” (“Reminiscence” III). After threatening his audience with divine retribution for participating in the slave trade—saying that they will share the same fate as “the Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea”—Hopkins explains why he delivered the sermon in the first place (“Reminiscence” III). He confesses, “I have myself, many years since, purchased and sold one of my fellow-creatures . . . If it were in my power, I would now repurchase the same fellow creature, and fellow Christian, as I believe her to be, if living, and give her freedom and maintenance to the extent of my ability” (“Reminiscence” III).

Though he never gained the ability to free Chloe from slavery, the anonymous writer says that Hopkins did, a few years after delivering this sermon, learn more about what happened to her. Upon talking with a man from North Carolina who happened to be visiting Newport, Hopkins learned that Chloe has “a kind master, and mistress” who allowed her to get married and have “several children,” but that she is not necessarily happy (“Reminiscence” III). The man paraphrases for Hopkins what Chloe told him: “I can’t hear any prayers in the family; I can seldom hear any thing about God, and Christ, and heaven; . . . Tell good old master H. that . . . my oldest is now gone away to Georgia to live with my master’s brother, and I shall never see him again” (“Reminiscence” III). Chloe then told this man that she had “much respect and affection” for Hopkins, but this comment did not assuage Hopkins’ guilt (“Reminiscence” III). Hence, “Reminiscence of Dr. Hopkins” ends with Hopkins acknowledging, silently to himself, that he ruined Chloe’s life by selling her into Southern slavery: “What a train of evils may follow in this world from one wrong act!” (“Reminiscence” III).

Though Channing did not “presume to question the truth of [this] story” about Hopkins (“Reminiscence” I), Hopkins’ antebellum biographer, Edwards Amasa Park, argued that this story is in fact a fictional “tale.”³ Though it correctly notes that Hopkins owned an enslaved woman, Park claims that the story’s timing is off: that “the slave was sold,” not during the Revolutionary War, but “before Dr. Hopkins visited” and moved to Newport in 1770.⁴ This story may not necessarily be the most historically accurate account of Hopkins’ treatment of that enslaved woman, but it does help show that Hopkins, well after his death, continued to occupy a prominent place in the minds of

³ Edwards Amasa Park, “Memoir,” in *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, vol. 1 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1854), 114.

⁴ Ibid.

nineteenth-century Americans who opposed slavery. Indeed, “Reminiscence of Dr. Hopkins” is not the only nineteenth-century American text that praised Hopkins’ theology or his protests against slavery. For in the decades after Catharine Sedgwick and William Ellery Channing transformed evangelical disinterestedness into a Unitarian ethic, prominent American writers of various religious backgrounds upheld Hopkins as an exemplary antislavery advocate whom all antebellum Americans should work to emulate.

In accounting for the various ways that antebellum writers discussed Hopkins, his theology, and his antislavery efforts, it becomes clear that Hopkins, in the decades after his death, came to be valued less as a theologian and more as an abolitionist. At the same time that they glorified his efforts to protest and preach against slavery from his Newport pulpit, the majority of antebellum Americans also criticized several aspects of his New Divinity brand of evangelicalism: not just his belief in original sin, but also his arguing that disinterested persons must be willing to die to appease God. While all of the antebellum writers who referenced Hopkins or disinterested benevolence in their writings in some way protested slavery and the slave trade, they did not all believe that persons needed to be willing to die to validate either their holy status or their benevolence.

After demonstrating how a series of antebellum writers valorized Hopkins’ antislavery politics yet derided his evangelical theology, the epilogue concludes with a reading of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s third novel, *The Minister’s Wooing* (1859). As much as she used the novel to praise Hopkins’ efforts to acquaint persons with the immorality of slavery, she also used it to critique disinterested benevolence, for the novel ends with her cautioning persons against caring so deeply for others’ interests that they become unable to properly care for their own wellbeing. Antebellum writers may have upheld

disinterested benevolence as a model ethical stance that could help abolish slavery, but they did not necessarily believe that it had to be tied to the radically self-denying evangelical theology from which it came.⁵

* * *

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, William Ellery Channing's Unitarianism—and thus his rejection of the Calvinist concept of original sin—did not prevent him from praising Hopkins' theology in his *Discourse Delivered at the Dedication of the Unitarian Congregational Church in Newport* (1837). Yet Channing was not the only Unitarian minister to express admiration for Hopkins and his ethical theory of disinterested benevolence. Nearly a decade prior to Channing's public valorization of Hopkins in his *Discourse*, fellow Unitarian minister Ralph Waldo Emerson discussed Hopkins and disinterested benevolence in an 1829 sermon on Psalms 19:8 (“*The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart*”). Emerson writes, “Samuel Hopkins taught that the soul in the true Christian became susceptible of a disinterested love of God, the source and author of Virtue, so that it resigned itself with utter self-abandonment to his Will . . . I honour the Hopkinsian who can pray and act by so lofty a creed, and I wish in the history of human error there were many lines as glorious as this.”⁶ Despite finding it to be a “lofty creed,” Emerson considers one particular facet of disinterested benevolence to be “an extravagance”: the idea that one needs to “perish

⁵ Lawrence Buell similarly argues that Stowe in *The Minister's Wooing* praises disinterested benevolence as a worldly, ethical behavior but condemns its emphasis on radical selflessness. He writes, “The structure of the novel is set up in such a way as to deny ‘unconditional submission’ as theological dogma but to affirm it as ethical imperative.” Lawrence Buell, “Calvinism Romanticized: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Samuel Hopkins, and *The Minister's Wooing*,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 24.3 (1978): 124.

⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 2, eds. Teresa Toulouse and Andrew Delbanco (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 33.

forever so that [God's] glory and the good of the Universe was thereby promoted."⁷

Regardless of the fact that Emerson, in the decade after he preached this sermon, would come to spearhead the Transcendentalist movement and set himself even further apart from both evangelicalism and Unitarianism when he delivered his "Divinity School Address" (1838), Emerson the Unitarian minister still resembles Channing in his arguing—albeit to a different extent—that persons should not let their own self-serving interests prohibit them from exhibiting benevolence to others.

Two decades after Emerson delivered this sermon—and less than a decade after *The Christian World* printed the "Reminiscence of Dr. Hopkins"—the Quaker poet and abolitionist, John Greenleaf Whittier, wrote an account of Hopkins' life in *Old Portraits and Modern Sketches* (1850). Despite claiming that this account focuses on "Dr. Hopkins as a philanthropist, rather than as a theologian," Whittier does praise one aspect of Hopkins' theology: the fact that he advocates a theory of "disinterested benevolence which prefers the glory of God and the welfare of universal being above the happiness of self."⁸ The reason that Whittier mentions disinterested benevolence in the context of Hopkins' philanthropy is because Hopkins allowed for his evangelical ethical theory to inform not only his protest against the institution of slavery, but also his championing of enslaved persons' rights. "There are few instances on record of moral heroism superior to that of Samuel Hopkins, in thus rebuking slavery in the time and place of its power," Whittier writes: "In the midst of slaveholders, and in an age of comparative darkness on the subject of human rights, Hopkins and the younger Edwards lifted up their voices for

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John Greenleaf Whittier, *Old Portraits and Modern Sketches* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1850), 162, 149.

the slave. . . Let those who condemn the creed of these men see to it that they do not fall behind them in practical righteousness and faithfulness to the convictions of duty.”⁹

Though he didn’t subscribe to Hopkins’ theology, Whittier nevertheless praised Hopkins for allowing for his evangelical ethic of disinterested benevolence to inform his arguments against slavery. Because his admiration for Hopkins was less about his theology and more about the way he used it in his everyday life, Whittier was also able to praise William Ellery Channing for integrating Hopkinsian disinterested benevolence into his Unitarian theology and philosophy of benevolence. Whittier writes, “How widely apart, as mere theologians, stood Hopkins and Channing? Yet how harmonious their lives and practice! Both could forget the poor interests of self, in view of eternal right and universal humanity.”¹⁰ Rather than lament the spread of Hopkins’ theology, Whittier claims that Channing’s promoting disinterested benevolence among Unitarians helped persons realize that they can come together with other Christians, despite doctrinal differences, and work for a noble cause. Whittier writes, “What is the lesson of this, but that Christianity consist in the affections than in the intellect; that it is a life, rather than a creed; and that they who diverge the widest from each other in speculation upon its doctrines, may, after all, be found working side by side on the common ground of its practice.”¹¹

Only two years after he published *Old Portraits and Modern Sketches*, Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). In the *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853), which claims to present “the original facts and documents upon which the story is founded,” Stowe acknowledges the influence that Hopkins’ doctrine of disinterested

⁹ Ibid. 155, 149.

¹⁰ Ibid., 162.

¹¹ Ibid.

benevolence had on the novel's antislavery politics.¹² She writes, "A certain class of theologians in New England have advocated the doctrine of disinterested benevolence with such zeal, as to make it an imperative article of belief, that every individual ought to be willing to endure everlasting misery, if by doing so they could, on the whole, produce a greater amount of general good in the universe" (18-19). Stowe then tells a story of a woman who, upon seeking admission to a church, told that church's minister that she could prove her disinterestedness by "emancipating all her slaves of whom she had a large number" (19). Even though the minister "consider[ed] this as an excess of zeal," this woman felt that it would actually be overly zealous of her to consent to being damned for the "general good [of] the universe" (19). Despite disagreeing, like Emerson, with that particular tenet of disinterested benevolence, this woman was admitted to the church because she "proved her devotion to the general good by the more tangible method of setting all her slaves at liberty, and carefully watching over their education and interests after they were liberated" (19). By praising this woman for at once freeing the enslaved persons she owned and refusing to live by the most radical tenet of disinterested benevolence, Stowe also criticizes this woman's minister for not initially accepting her antislavery politics as evidence of her disinterestedness. Stowe's condemnation of the minister—and her praising of this woman's efforts to allay enslaved persons' suffering—thus assists her in arguing that persons should not allow for their disinterested devotion to God prohibit them from alleviating others' suffering.

Five years after she used her *Key* to valorize this unnamed woman for freeing the African persons she sinfully held in bondage, Stowe published "New England Ministers"

¹² Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (London: Sampson Low, Son, & Co., 1853), no page [title page]. I will hereafter cite this text parenthetically by page number.

(1858) in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In this essay, she again talks about disinterested benevolence as an antislavery ethic, but differently praises Hopkins for risking his pastoral career to protest slavery. She writes,

No sight could be more impressive than that of Dr. Hopkins . . . rising up in Newport pulpits to testify against the slave trade, . . . He knew that Newport was the stronghold of the practice, and that the probable consequence of his faithfulness would be the loss of his pulpit and of his temporal support; but none the less plainly and faithfully did he testify. . . keen as was his analysis of disinterested benevolence, he did not, like some in our day, confine himself to analyzing virtue in the abstract, but took upon himself the duty of practicing it in the concrete without fear of consequences.¹³

Rather than “confine himself to analyzing virtue in the abstract,” as his mentor Jonathan Edwards did, Hopkins demonstrated his disinterestedness by not letting any fear of losing his pulpit prevent him from following what he believed to be his Christian “duty” to speak out against slavery. As is the case with Whittier’s earlier description of Hopkins, Stowe only mentions disinterested benevolence in “New England Ministers” because it allows her to uphold Hopkins not as a passionate evangelical but as a committed abolitionist.

* * *

Remarkably, the *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and this essay on “New England Ministers” are not the only texts in which Stowe writes about Hopkins, his evangelical ethics, or his antislavery efforts. Indeed, Stowe’s third novel, *The Minister’s Wooing* (1859), revolves around a woman in eighteenth-century Newport named Mary Scudder who lives with and eventually becomes engaged to marry Samuel Hopkins after her previous suitor purportedly drowns at sea. One of the novel’s central chapters dramatizes the scene set out by Stowe in her “New England Ministers” essay in which Hopkins

¹³ Harriet Beecher Stowe, “New England Ministers,” in *Stories, Sketches and Studies by Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1896), 230.

preaches an antislavery sermon to a church full of enslavers. After he delivered the sermon, Scudder talks with one of Hopkins' parishioners, Miss Prissy, about his decision to publically preach against slavery. "I, for my part," Miss Prissy said, "*do admire* the Doctor more than ever, and . . . I 'most made Miss Wilcox angry standing up for him; I says, 'that the Doctor is a good man, and lives up to his teaching, if anybody in this world does, [because he] gives away every dollar he can lay hands on to those poor negroes, and works over 'em and teaches 'em.'"¹⁴ As Stowe did in her "New England Ministers" essay, Miss Prissy commends Hopkins for actually using his pulpit to campaign for enslaved persons' rights. Because he practices and doesn't merely theorize disinterested benevolence, Hopkins deserves praise for "liv[ing] up to his teaching."

Soon after he delivered this antislavery sermon, Hopkins noticed that Scudder started to inhabit a more disinterested condition: that she had an "anxious solicitude to serve" (218). In accordance with Edwardsean theology, the narrator says that Scudder's ethical transformation began in her heart: that "her heart longed for the sorrowful and the afflicted,—she would go down to the forgotten and the oppressed,—and made herself the companion of the Doctor's secret walks and explorings among the poor victims of the slave-ships . . . Nothing but the limits of bodily strength could confine her zeal to do and suffer for others" (218). Though she, earlier in the novel, said that she was unsure how persons could come to "possess" a "disinterested love to God" (170), Scudder now recognizes, upon hearing Hopkins preach against slavery, that she can demonstrate her devotion to God by caring less about her own interests and more for those who are "forgotten" and "oppressed."

¹⁴ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Minister's Wooing*, ed. Susan Harris (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 148. I will hereafter cite this novel parenthetically by page number.

In the chapter after she embraces her newfound benevolent disposition, Scudder has a conversation with her mother who encourages her to marry Hopkins. Though she initially “wish[ed] he did not want to marry me,” Scudder now cares for others’ interests more than her own, and so she tells her mother that she will “do whatever is my duty. I want to be guided. If I can make a good man happy, and help him to do some good in the world— After all, life is short, and the great things is to do for others” (234, 235-236). Upon consenting to marry Hopkins, however, Scudder learns that her original suitor, James Marvyn, did not actually die at sea and is set to return to Newport. When she reunites with Marvyn, he tries to convince her to break off her engagement with Hopkins, saying, “You think . . . that you *must* take this course, because it is right. But *is* it right? Is it right to marry one man, when you love another better?” (306). Scudder responds to Marvyn by saying that she cares too much about Hopkins to reject his offer of marriage: “James, it does not seem to me that I can. A friend who has been so considerate, so kind, so self-sacrificing and disinterested, and whom I have allowed to go on with this implicit faith in me so long. Should you, James, think of *yourself* only?” (306).

In the same way that Scudder thought it was her duty to appease others and marry Hopkins, so too did Miss Prissy think that it was her “duty” to tell Hopkins of Scudder’s conversation with Marvyn (314). Once he talks with Miss Prissy about Marvyn returning to Newport, Hopkins tells Scudder that he wants to end their engagement and preside over her marriage to Marvyn. In the chapter that follows—aptly entitled “The Sacrifice”—Hopkins and Scudder engage in a kind of competition over who is the most disinterested person. Hopkins tells Scudder: “I have just discovered . . . that there is a great cross and burden must come, either on this dear child or on myself, through no fault

of either of us, but through God's good providence; and therefore let me bear it" (319). When Scudder learns that Hopkins is going to be the disinterested, suffering subject in this scenario, Scudder shrieks: "No! No! . . . I will marry you, as I said!" (319). Hopkins is so disinterested that he is willing to set his love of Scudder aside and allow her marry the man she truly loves. The chapter thus ends with Hopkins preparing for Scudder's and Marvyn's wedding and with Stowe telling her readers that Scudder wound up marrying the more self-centered man, for Marvyn tells Hopkins: "Sir, this tells on my heart more than any sermon you ever preached. I shall never forget it. God bless you, Sir!" (320).

By ending the novel with a comic scene in which Hopkins and Scudder both agonize over the prospect of exhibiting selfish behavior—Hopkins doesn't want to keep Scudder from marrying the man she loves yet Scudder feels that she needs to marry Hopkins to maintain her disinterestedness—Stowe shows that Hopkins' ethic of disinterestedness informed the novel's antislavery politics as much as it influenced its plot construction. As much as this novel, like most nineteenth-century novels, ends with a marriage, it is important to note that the wedding that the novel ends with is not the wedding that the novel's plot was ostensibly building towards. Rather than have the novel's two disinterested characters marry each other, Stowe has the one disinterested character tell the other one that she must renounce her disinterestedness to achieve personal happiness. In ending the novel with the dissolution rather than the resolution of the traditional marriage plot, Stowe demonstrates that she was concerned less with writing a novel that adhered to the traditional marriage plot, and more with using *The Minister's Wooing* to make an ethical claim: that those who focus too much on others' happiness never obtain happiness themselves.

* * *

In the same year that Stowe used this novel to critique Hopkins' philosophy of disinterested benevolence for encouraging persons to inhabit a condition of self-denial that forecloses their ability to achieve happiness in the present, John Brown raided the federal armory at Harper's Ferry. In a speech he delivered in the months following Brown's arrest, "A Plea for Captain John Brown" (1859), Henry David Thoreau praised Brown for being so disinterested that he was willing to die while protesting slavery. He writes,

Prominent and influential editors, accustomed to deal with politicians, men of an infinitely lower grade, say, in their ignorance, that he acted "on the principle of revenge." They do not know the man. They must enlarge themselves to conceive of him. They have got to conceive of a man of faith and of religious principle, and not a politician or an Indian; of a man who did not wait till he was personally interfered with, or thwarted in some harmless business, before he gave his life to the cause of the oppressed.¹⁵

Inexperienced editors who are accustomed to dealing with "politicians, men of an infinitely lower grade" believe that Brown was exacting "revenge" on the enslavers at Harper's Ferry. But because he did not personally experience the horrors of slavery, he couldn't have been seeking retribution for his own pain. Brown's religiosity is what caused him to not only care so deeply about others' suffering but also sacrifice his life while championing enslaved persons' rights: he lived by a "religious principle" of disinterested benevolence that compelled him to give "his life to the cause of the oppressed."¹⁶

¹⁵ Henry David Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," in *Henry David Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems* (New York: Library of America, 2001), 406-407.

¹⁶ Further aligning himself with Hopkins' evangelical ethic of disinterested benevolence, Thoreau upholds Brown as a Christ-like figure: "You who pretend to care for Christ crucified, consider what you are about to do to him who offered himself to be the savior of four millions of men." *Ibid.*, 415.

Though neither Thoreau or Stowe espoused the evangelical theology that undergirds Hopkins' theory of disinterested benevolence, they both published texts in 1859 that praised persons—albeit to different extents—for not letting their own individual interests prohibit them from protesting slavery: Stowe lauded Hopkins for not letting any fear of losing his pulpit prohibit him from preaching against slavery, and Thoreau applauded Brown for not being afraid of dying for a just cause. The reason that Stowe and the other antebellum writers discussed here work to disentangle Hopkinsian disinterested benevolence from its evangelical origins and conceive of it as a strictly antislavery ethic is because they recognize that persons who practice disinterested benevolence run the risk of being so devoted to God that they are unable to adequately exhibit benevolence to those who are suffering in the world around them. Thoreau, however, believes that Brown's intense dedication to God is precisely what motivated him to fight against slavery and initiate the raid on Harper's Ferry.

Thoreau may depart from Stowe by using his "Plea" to maintain the connection between disinterested benevolence and the evangelical theology it originates from, but he nevertheless shares Stowe's criticism of evangelicalism: that it can encourage persons to focus more on their salvation than on their ability to achieve happiness—or enact sociopolitical change—in the present world. Rather than hope for some future, millennial paradise free of suffering, as Dwight formulates in *Greenfield Hill*, Stowe believes that persons need to actively work to transform the present. Though Stowe and the other antebellum writers discussed here cautioned persons against being overly invested in their spiritual future, it seems that they couldn't help but look to the past for a model

ethical stance that persons could use to promote benevolence and help alleviate suffering in the present.