Christians, Critics, and Romantics: Aesthetic Discourse among Anglo-American Evangelicals, 1830-1900

Author: Chad Philip Stutz

Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/745

This work is posted on eScholarship@BC, Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2009

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.
CHRISTIANS, CRITICS, AND ROMANTICS: AESTHETIC DISCOURSE AMONG ANGLO-AMERICAN EVANGELICALS, 1830-1900

a dissertation

by

CHAD P. STUTZ

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2009
ABSTRACT

Though contemporary evangelical Protestants have shown an increased interest in the fine arts, scholars have often seen the aesthetic history of Anglo-American evangelicalism as one marked by hostility and indifference. In contrast to this view, this study argues that the history of evangelicalism’s intellectual engagement with the fine arts has been complex and varied. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, evangelicals writing in a variety of denominational periodicals carried on a robust inquiry into aesthetics. This study traces the rise of this discourse among Anglo-American evangelicals and maps some of the main features of the evangelical theoretical landscape between 1830 and 1900 – a high point of evangelical critical activity. *Christians, Critics, and Romantics* describes how evangelicalism’s contact with Enlightenment thought initiated a break with the Puritan aesthetic tradition that contributed to the growth of a modern aesthetic consciousness among some eighteenth-century evangelicals. By the 1830s, evangelical aesthetic discourse had come under the influence of romanticism. Not only did many evangelical writers define art according to the expressivist principles adduced by major romantic critics but some went even further in asserting, after Coleridge and the German idealists, that art is an embodiment of a higher reality and the imagination an organ of transcendental perception. Evangelical critics, moreover, valued...
art for its contribution to the stability and progress of “Christian nations” such as England and the United States. By refining the moral feelings of individuals, fine art helped to safeguard the socio-moral cohesion of Protestant “civilization.” For a time, evangelical critics attempted to celebrate art in romantic terms while insisting on art’s subordination to traditional Christianity, but such an arrangement ultimately proved unsustainable. By the end of the nineteenth century, a rift had opened up within Anglo-American evangelicalism between conservatives and liberals. This rift, created in part by the spread of romantic thought and by various other secularizing trends, had important implications for evangelical aesthetic thought. While liberals continued to advance high claims for the spiritual and educational potential of art, conservatives largely abandoned the philosophical exploration of art in order to turn their attention to the threats of Darwinian evolution and biblical criticism. Nevertheless, both liberals and fundamentalists retained in their respective ways many of the aesthetic assumptions of the romantic tradition.
Perhaps my greatest lesson in bringing this project to completion (at least for now) has been a newfound appreciation for the communal nature of scholarship. No scholarly works – especially those which, like this one, aspire to some kind of interdisciplinary perspective – are composed in a vacuum. My intellectual debts to the excellent work of other scholars and critics are, I trust, amply documented in the endnotes that conclude each chapter. Many were the times that I arrived at what I thought was an original insight only to find that it had already been better expressed in the works of one of these writers. Thus I can say with C.S. Lewis that “of all writers I make least claim to be αὐτοδίδακτος.” In addition, many others have had a profound influence on the shape and scope of this dissertation, whether directly or indirectly. Whatever the strengths of this project, they are very much the result of this influence, while the weaknesses, I am humbled to admit, remain very much my own.

I am particularly grateful to my advisor and chair, Professor Judith Wilt, for her support and encouragement throughout this project. With a critical vision that can only be described as “razor-sharp,” she helped me repeatedly not only to clarify my own thoughts but also to consider new possibilities and perspectives. Professor Dennis Taylor likewise provided me with extensive and invaluable feedback and encouragement along the way, and he supplied several key insights at what I now realize were key moments. Both Judith Wilt and Dennis Taylor have served as intellectual mentors to me throughout my time at Boston College, and it is no overstatement to say that this project is an
outgrowth of these relationships in ways too subtle to articulate. I am grateful, too, to Professor Cynthia Lynn Lyerly of the History Department at Boston College, who not only showed me the meaning of collegiality in her willingness to cross disciplines and departments but also of perseverance in her willingness to carry on through a period of personal adversity. Moreover, her historian’s eye for detail has provided me with a scholarly standard to which I can only hope to aspire.

I would also like to thank Professor John L. Mahoney of Boston College and Professor Roger Lundin of the English Department at Wheaton College, IL. Though my exchanges with each of them concerning this project were comparatively brief, both offered critical bits of support and/or insight that affected its ultimate direction. What my interactions with these veteran scholars lacked in quantity was more than made up for in quality.

My brother-in-law, the Rev. Jeramie Rinne, and Mark Jennings have listened with longsuffering, and at times with a healthy skepticism, to many of the ideas presented here. I am thankful to both of them for their insights into the nuances of Reformed theology and for helping me to think theologically about all things, but mostly I am grateful to call them brothers and friends. Several others have also blessed me at various times with the kind of general support that enables one to endure through the “lean” periods of composition. Whether they know it or not, Jaime Goodrich, Sara Hong, Ryan J. Jack McDermott, Patrick Moran, and Tim Thompson have all left their fingerprints on this project and, more importantly still, on my thinking in general.

Finally, words cannot express the debt I owe to my family. Without the moral
and financial support of my in-laws, Bill and Jan Rinne, this dissertation – not to mention
graduate school in general – would not have been possible. My parents, Philip and
Valerie, in addition to providing financial assistance, honored me with the sort of love
and encouragement, but also honesty, which only parents can give. I am grateful, too, for
the patience and love of my children, Jason and Susana, who, at seven and five, have yet
to know their father outside of graduate school. (Daddy has at long last finished his
“paper.”) My greatest debt, however, is to my wife Jillayne, whose patience with me has
been nothing short of Job-like. On too many occasions to count, she listened with
something like supernatural fortitude as I prattled on, often in less-than-constructive
ways, about some idea I was struggling to articulate. Were it not for her ongoing love
and encouragement, I could never have completed this project.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
Evangelicals, Aesthetics, and History.................................................................1

CHAPTER 2
Asymmetries and Ambiguities: From Puritanism to Evangelical Romanticism........54

CHAPTER 3
Expressing the Ideal: Changing Conceptions of Art and the Imagination............155

CHAPTER 4
What Has the Gospel of Christ to Do with the Gospel of Art?.........................245

CHAPTER 5
Aesthetic Ministrations: Art, Morality, and the Christian Nation......................336

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION
The Religio-Aesthetic Divide of the 1890s and Beyond: Art, Aesthetics, and the
Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy...............................................................435

APPENDIX A
A Note on Periodical Citations........................................................................507

APPENDIX B
Selected Periodical Sources Consulted............................................................508

WORKS CITED.......................................................................................................510
We are of the opinion that the evangelical canon admits of the appropriation of all belonging to taste and imagination….


In its April 1863 issue, the Southern Presbyterian Review published two consecutive articles, the juxtaposition of which would undoubtedly strike modern readers as peculiar and even shocking. The first of these, entitled “The War of the South Vindicated,” concluded with a rousing summons, couched in the rhetoric of biblical prophecy, charging all Southerners to rally in defense of the Confederate cause: “let the trumpet blow in Zion, and let all her watchmen lift up their voice; – let all the people, everywhere, old and young, bond and free, take up the warcry, and say, each to his neighbor, ‘Gather ye together, and come against them, and rise up to the battle.’”¹ If this article’s unabashed promotion of a war effort that, if successful, would have preserved intact the institution of slavery seems distasteful and offensive, it is rendered even more surprising by that which followed. Immediately opposite to this vindication of the Southern cause there appeared the conclusion of a two-part article, begun in the January issue, “On the Nature and Uses of Art.”² Published at the height of the Civil War only three months after Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation and a mere two months
before the Battle of Gettysburg, this article examined at length, and at times with admirable depth, many of the issues central to modern aesthetics. Here, in the pages of an evangelical periodical, not even a war, it seems, could suppress what appears to have been an abiding interest in the minds of its contributors, editors, and readers in art, beauty, and the imagination.

The following study examines the discourse of aesthetic theory as it was carried on in the pages of British and American evangelical periodicals between roughly 1830 and 1900. It attempts to illuminate key facets of evangelical thinking about the fine arts and to locate these within the larger theological, philosophical, and aesthetic contexts of nineteenth-century transatlantic culture. Articles devoted to aesthetic theory and criticism like the one in the Southern Presbyterian Review – as well as numerous counterparts in other evangelical publications of the era – remain an understudied part of nineteenth-century Anglo-American evangelicalism. Yet the sheer volume of such material seems to invite a reconsideration of the place of aesthetics in the history of evangelicalism. To a far greater extent than has often been realized, a significant segment of the nineteenth-century evangelical population participated in, and contributed to the emergence of, western culture’s “institution of high art.” Amid the many evangelistic efforts, moral crusades, and programs of social reform for which they are justly famous, numerous Victorian evangelicals nevertheless found time to engage not only in the production and appreciation of art in a variety of mediums but also in energetic and sustained reflection on the theoretical foundations of such practices. If the large number of critical reviews and philosophical treatises published in a wide range of
evangelical periodicals are any indication, art and the aesthetic were issues of great importance to many nineteenth-century evangelicals, and they attempted to think deeply about them.

Such a view calls into question popular notions of what many have seen as evangelicalism’s chronic case of aesthetic myopia. It is something of an understatement to say that the evangelical Protestant tradition is not exactly known for its refined taste, its fervid sponsorship of the fine arts, or the quality or quantity of its aesthetic theorizing. Unlike the Roman Catholic, High Anglican, or Unitarian traditions, which, though not immune to periodic outbursts of aesthetic anxiety (one recalls Gerard Manley Hopkins’s act of poetic immolation as a poignant Victorian example of this), have generally valued the fine arts, evangelicalism’s relationship to art and the aesthetic has often been read as an extension of Reformation iconoclasm and/or Puritan austerity. At best, evangelicals have tolerated art as a useful didactic instrument for inculcating moral or doctrinal truths, while at worst they have shunned it as a worldly distraction or idolatrous snare. Evangelical philosophical reflection on art, moreover – when not hampered by the anti-intellectualism from which many evangelicals have been said to suffer – has been severely limited or altogether mundane.

In fact, the idea that there exists an ongoing tension between evangelical Protestantism and a serious interest in the aesthetic seems to find ample confirmation in the life-stories of any number of well-known Victorian figures. Thomas Carlyle, Stephen Crane, Emily Dickinson, George Eliot, Edmund Gosse, John Henry Newman, and John Ruskin – all of whom grew up in evangelical households, affiliated themselves with
evangelicalism for a time, or made claims to evangelical-style religious experiences – are
only the most famous examples of artists and thinkers whose creative output and
attention to aesthetic matters appear to have increased as they either openly renounced or
else drifted away from their evangelical origins. Gosse’s opposition of the rigid
Calvinism of his Plymouth Brethren parents to the visceral joys of his budding
Wordsworthian romance with nature seems the archetypal evangelical predicament: one
must choose, for one cannot have faith and beauty too. Interestingly, this predicament is
only underscored by another sort of narrative. If the tale of the Victorian intellectual
whose religious deconversion prepares the ground for a subsequent aesthetic conversion
is one of the better known stories of the nineteenth century, it is mirrored by another,
perhaps equally disturbing evangelical tale, namely, that one’s religious conversion to
evangelical Protestantism leads ineluctably to an aesthetic deconversion. Here, too, the
evidence is not far to seek, though the names of the protagonists may be less familiar.
Perhaps the most useful example of this latter tale is that of Oswald Chambers, whose
devotional work, My Utmost for His Highest, has enjoyed an abiding popularity since its
original publication in 1927. After converting to evangelical Christianity upon listening
to the preaching of Charles Spurgeon, Chambers initially declared his desire to “strike for
the redemption of the aesthetic Kingdom of the soul of man – Music and Art and Poetry,”
and he spent two years studying at the National Art Training School in London.
Ultimately, however, Chambers left art school for the ministry, and in doing so,
abandoned his commitment to “the redemption of the aesthetic Kingdom” for good.4

It has been stories such as these which have often shaped our conceptions of
evangelical attitudes towards art and aesthetics. Writing in the *Christian Herald* in 1969, Clyde S. Kilby, himself an evangelical Professor of English at Wheaton College, summed up what he referred to as “The Aesthetic Poverty of Evangelicalism”: “Now when we look … to contemporary evangelical Christianity, we find a great oddity. The people who spend the most time with the Bible are in large numbers the foes of art and the sworn foes of the imagination…. Evangelicals hear the great ‘I am’ of God, but they are far less aware of the ‘I am’ of his handiwork.”\(^5\) Kilby’s criticism, it should be pointed out, was directed specifically at the post-fundamentalist evangelicalism of the mid-twentieth century, and indeed one hears in his lament – and in his subsequent plea for greater aesthetic sensitivity among evangelical Christians – clear strains of that neo-evangelicalism which, since its emergence in the years just after World War II, had set about the task of awakening a new generation of evangelicals to a cultural sensitivity and rapprochement that had largely been absent among its fundamentalist forbears. And in fact, the decades since Kilby’s aesthetic cri du coeur suggest that his call has not fallen upon deaf ears, as evangelicals popular and academic have turned with increasing zeal to both aesthetic theory and praxis.\(^6\) Yet notwithstanding this recent flood-tide of evangelical interest in the arts, observers have often echoed Kilby’s diagnosis of “aesthetic impoverishment” when it comes to the evangelical tradition as a whole. That is, the evangelicalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is thought to have been as aesthetically impoverished as the evangelicalism of the mid-twentieth. The popular narrative of evangelicalism’s relationship to the fine arts has long been a story of distaste, distrust, and disinclination.\(^7\)
Despite its prevalence, however, this narrative is overly reductive in that it fails to take into account much of what evangelicals have actually said about art at different points in their history. “There is nothing incompatible with true religion, in the attainments of secular wisdom, or the delights of taste,” argued the Old School Presbyterian *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* in 1843, and for much of the nineteenth century such an attitude was very much a part of Anglo-American evangelical thought. Though undeniably funny or repulsive by turn, the crazy Miss Clacks and the brooding Mr. Brocklehursts of Victorian fiction, with their single-minded – indeed, one might say obsessive – anxieties about the “world,” reveal very little about the realities and inner complexities of nineteenth-century evangelicalism and its attitudes towards cultural pursuits like art. Evangelicals were not all guilty of what Dickens memorably referred to as “telescopic philanthropy.” Far from it. Like all good caricatures, such depictions suggest a portion of the truth, but they do so at the expense of any sense of intellectual nuance or any sense of the historical development specific to a given community. Nineteenth-century evangelicals, in fact, thought long and hard about the culture in which they lived, and for many, this meant thinking long and hard about the nature of art and aesthetics.

This study, therefore, seeks a more nuanced understanding of evangelicalism’s historical and philosophical engagement with the fine arts. It is an attempt not only to recover a largely forgotten tradition of evangelical discourse about the aesthetic but also to restore some idea of the peculiar complexities of this history. In doing so, this study builds on the work of a handful of other scholars who, in recent years, have begun in
different ways to challenge the popular narrative of evangelicalism’s relative
estrangement from the fine arts. Doreen Rosman – whose pioneering *Evangelicals and
Culture* (1984) was perhaps the first study to raise the possibility that the prevalent view
of evangelical suspicion of the fine arts might be open to scrutiny – has rightly criticized
the scholarly “tendency … to treat the [evangelical] movement as an unchanging entity,
assuming that the attitudes of any one generation are typical of all time.”

Focusing on

British evangelicals between 1790 and 1833, Rosman argues that evangelicalism enjoyed
during this time a comparably heightened period of cultural and aesthetic engagement.
Unlike first-generation evangelicals who largely perpetuated the aesthetic views of the
Puritans, a number of turn-of-the-century evangelicals adopted a favorable, albeit
extremely cautious, stance towards many “mainstream” cultural practices, including the
fine arts. However, this tentative receptivity to art and culture was, according to Rosman,
curiously short-lived, and she follows several other critics in seeing the remainder of the
nineteenth century as a period of steady decline for evangelical aesthetics:

Sympathetic and unsympathetic historians alike accept that the pre-Victorian generation was less philistine than that which followed. The latter, Ford K. Brown writes, “had lost to a distressing extent … the taste, culture and intellectual interest that had marked many of the dominant Evangelicals of Wilberforce’s generation” among whom “there was always a less bigoted Puritanism than developed at the end of the reform period and was a notable mark of the Bleak Age”. His admission provides both the incentive to and the justification for a study of evangelicals and culture between 1790 and 1833.

Yet while Rosman is correct to question monolithic accounts of evangelical
apitudes towards art, her claims for a hasty evangelical retreat into the aesthetic
backwaters of Victorian culture have proven to be short-sighted. Recent studies by David Morgan and Ryan K. Smith, for example, have demonstrated how nineteenth-century American Protestant interest in both visual representation and architecture actually intensified throughout the period rather than declined, and Graham Howes has noted a similar trajectory for British Protestantism.12 This interest in visual representation, as well as in other arts such as music and poetry, was supported and encouraged by a growing critical establishment whose base of operations was the vast array of religious periodicals funded and published by numerous evangelical denominations. This establishment – which included clergymen and academics (especially in America where evangelicalism had a strong influence on higher education) but also poets, artists, and an emerging class of “professional” critics and editors – supplied nineteenth-century evangelical readers with a wealth of critical material and exposed them to both the philosophical principles and the vocabulary of modern aesthetic discourse. In fact, the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century marked what was arguably a high point for evangelical reflections on art. Far from simply engaging in reactionary polemics against the dangers of fiction or the supposed visual excesses of Catholicism (though such polemics remained common-enough fare), critics writing in a vast array of denominational periodicals across the evangelical spectrum generated a robust and in some cases sophisticated body of philosophical criticism on a variety of aesthetic questions. They eagerly discussed and debated such topics as the nature of art, the relationship between art and Christianity, the role of art in society, the essence of beauty, and the psychological dynamics of creativity. Both the extent to which these critics
carried their speculations and the ardor with which they pursued them were largely unprecedented within evangelicalism prior to the nineteenth century. Art and aesthetics were accorded an intellectual and even spiritual value which they had rarely, if ever, enjoyed among the self-professed theological descendants of the Protestant Reformation.

**The Rise and Fall of “Evangelical Romanticism”**

This study, then, seeks to chart the rise of a self-conscious aesthetic discourse among evangelical Protestants and to map some of the main features of this evangelical theoretical landscape at the point of its greatest development during the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century. The central narrative of this essay chronicles the way in which Anglo-American evangelicals gradually moved away from the complicated, and often ambiguous, aesthetic legacy of their Puritan past towards a more extensive and urbane conception of art’s possibilities, as well as towards a greater appreciation of aesthetics as an important and legitimate field of inquiry. Initially, this process was slow-going. Despite what appears to have been a broadening of taste among many eighteenth-century evangelicals, early efforts at aesthetic theorizing were mostly restricted to a small company of innovators like Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and John Wesley (1703-1791). The writings of Edwards and Wesley are important early examples of the evolving aesthetic consciousness of Anglo-American evangelicals, but Edwards and Wesley aside, eighteenth-century evangelicals in general had little of theoretical significance to say about art. This lack of reflection on aesthetics may be attributed to a number of factors, including both the residual presence of various Puritan anxieties about
certain kinds of art and the scorching fires of revivalist fervor, which, in the early and
heady days of a movement, could often prove all-consuming. It is worth remembering,
too, that both our contemporary conception of the “fine arts” and what would eventually
become the discipline of modern philosophical aesthetics were themselves eighteenth-
century constructs. Over time, however, evangelicals, along with their non-evangelical
intellectual counterparts, learned to speak in the fledgling vocabulary of modern
aesthetics.

This gradual evolution of aesthetic interest among evangelicals was in large part a
result of evangelicalism’s contact with certain facets of Enlightenment thought – first the
doctrines of Locke and then, most significantly, the writings of the Scottish common
sense realists. Through exposure to such thinking, often encountered in college and
university classrooms (which, in America at least, were dominated by evangelical
professors well into the nineteenth century), educated evangelicals came to share their
age’s interest in the many problems of “mental philosophy.” Typically marking the
culmination of the college curriculum, the study of mental philosophy sought to
catalogue and analyze the powers and faculties of the human mind, among which were
such aesthetically-oriented faculties as the imagination and taste. Through the many
college courses and textbooks devoted to the examination of the human mind,
evangelicals came to see the fast-expanding field of aesthetics as a legitimate and worthy
form of scientific inquiry. Furthermore, as theories of faculty psychology stressed, a
proper education, and ultimately a fulfilling existence, consisted in a balanced attention to
the individual powers of mind. The study and appreciation of art and beauty therefore
came increasingly to be seen as an indispensable part of human experience.

The mental philosophy of the Enlightenment, among other factors, helped acclimatize evangelicals to the emerging discipline of aesthetics, but it was the critical tenets of romanticism – many of which were themselves outgrowths of Enlightenment theories of mind\(^\text{14}\) – that did most to shape the theoretical doctrines of evangelical writers throughout the nineteenth century. For this reason, the evangelical critical encounter with romantic aesthetics marks a central – perhaps the central – theme in the story which follows. Sometime around the 1830s, both the philosophy and style of romanticism began to exercise a profound influence on diverse segments of Anglo-American evangelicalism, affecting everything from homiletics to eschatology\(^\text{15}\). In the ensuing decades, evangelical conceptions of art and the aesthetic were also effectively romanticized, and it is no exaggeration to say that the theory and criticism published in evangelical venues throughout much of the nineteenth century was to a great extent either an extension of romantic critical theory or else a reaction to the perceived excesses of such theory. As one might expect, the degree of such romantic leanings varied from author to author and periodical to periodical. Some, guided by Coleridge and the spread of German idealist thought at mid-century, published full-scale idealist manifestos touting art as a vehicle of divinity and the artist as deep-seeing sage; others were content simply to laud the healing powers of beauty, to insist on the distinction between poetry and science, to look to the imagination as the apex of human powers, or to praise art’s potential as an agent for the shaping of individual and social virtue. And nearly ubiquitous was that most prized of romantic aesthetic principles – the belief that,
whatever else art is, it is essentially the *expression of human emotion*. Just as importantly, however, romanticism shaped the style and rhetoric of the aesthetic theory and criticism that appeared in the pages of nineteenth-century evangelical periodicals. Art, as well as the burgeoning industry of philosophical criticism, were treated with a “high seriousness” that likely would have surprised an earlier generation of evangelicals.

Of course, scholars and critics have at times pointed to just such a connection between romanticism and nineteenth-century evangelical Protestant approaches to art. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, for example, has described the influence of what she terms “Christian Romanticism” on the rise of visual art in the antebellum United States. Distinguishing Christian Romanticism from both the prior spirituality of the Great Awakening and the growing pantheistic tendencies of much Transcendentalist thought, Apostolos-Cappadona sees this unique brand of romanticism as critical to the formation of “a distinctive culture a keystone of which was the emergence of an identifiable American art.” Yet it seems to me that scholarly attention to the contributions made by romanticism to evangelical understandings of art and the aesthetic have been somewhat imperfect and restricted in scope. As helpful as Apostolos-Cappadona’s concept of Christian Romanticism is, it is limited by its disproportionate association with the liberal wing of American Protestantism. In fact, it appears that for Apostolos-Cappadona the two movements are virtually synonymous – an identification not uncommon in scholarly accounts of nineteenth-century American Protestant approaches to art. To be sure, scholars like David Morgan – whose brilliant socio-historical study of changing American Protestant attitudes to visual imagery in the nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries argues that both conservative and liberal understandings of art were shaped by romantic conceptions of nurture and “character formation” – have gone some way in correcting this imbalance. But scholarly treatments of romanticism’s effect on nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics have by and large emphasized the liberal tradition of Protestantism. In reality, however, the romantic aesthetic tradition affected even conservative evangelical understandings of art beginning in the 1830s, and even theologically “orthodox” evangelical periodicals, when they turned to discussions of aesthetics, bore the tell-tale marks of romantic critical theory.

Furthermore, scholarly accounts of romanticism’s contribution to Protestant conceptions of (visual) art in the nineteenth century have often focused largely on romantic, and especially Bushnellian, conceptions of “nurture” and the role such conceptions played in shaping Protestant understandings of art’s moral capacity to mold the character of individuals and of the nation. Thus for Apostolos-Cappadona, an emphasis on “nurture” is a key factor in distinguishing the spirituality of “Christian Romanticism” from the earlier spirituality of the Great Awakening. This focus has yielded vital insights into a key dimension of Victorian evangelical aesthetics, and it serves as a recurrent theme throughout this study as well. Nevertheless, even when it comes to notions of art’s socio-moral “influence” – an idea often associated with Bushnell’s theory of nurture, at least in the United States – Bushnell was as much a symptom as a cause. That is to say, although Bushnell no doubt helped to catalyze the idea of art’s influence, both conservative and liberal evangelical understandings of the moral power of art, as I argue in chapter 5, were also shaped by a broader moral-aesthetic
discourse that predated Bushnell. In addition, the chapters which follow also concentrate on several other areas of nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetic thought that have received less attention by scholars, and as a result, they offer what I believe to be a more expanded account of romanticism’s influence on evangelical aesthetics. By examining how contributors to evangelical periodicals treated such topics as the nature of art, the relationship between art and Christianity, the problems associated with aesthetic perception, and the powers of the imagination, among others, I hope to shed new light on some hitherto neglected areas of nineteenth-century evangelical thought. Doing so, moreover, will reveal just how systemic was the pressure which romanticism exerted on the theoretical criticism of many Victorian evangelicals.

Still, from one perspective it may come as no surprise that nineteenth-century evangelicals, when they began turning in earnest to theoretical considerations of art, embraced the principles of romantic criticism. As David E. Latané, Jr. observes, early-nineteenth-century criticism in general often amounted to little more than an “attempt to consolidate the innovations of the Romantics.” René Wellek, meanwhile, has called mid-Victorian theories of poetry “a remote derivative of popularized romanticism.” If such assessments are substantially true, as I believe they are, then it may seem something of a foregone conclusion that those Victorian evangelicals who decided to don the mantle of critic and take up their pens would have harbored romantic inclinations. Evangelicals were in fact participating fully in the cultural enterprises of their age. From another perspective, however, the willingness of evangelical critics to embrace romantic theories of art was in fact indicative of important theological and philosophical shifts at work.
within Anglo-American evangelicalism, for romantic aesthetic theory was itself implicated in a web of assumptions concerning the nature of God, of human beings, of language, and of the world that were potentially at odds with traditional Protestant doctrine. In contrast to traditional Protestant conceptions of the transcendence of God, the depravity of human beings, the necessity of supernatural regeneration, and the dangers of approaching God through humanly devised means, romanticism increasingly stressed the immanence of the “divine” in all things, the innate goodness of humankind, the power of natural “influence,” and the supreme value of human creativity. In the context of evangelical history, therefore, aesthetic discourse proved to be yet another arena in which the various liberalizing trends of the nineteenth century could be played out.

The full implications of these trends, however, took time to develop, and the aesthetic theory that appeared in the pages of nineteenth-century evangelical periodicals was not always and everywhere a simple codification of romanticism. Sometimes, of course, it was. But in other instances evangelical writers – especially the more theologically conservative ones – did not always swallow romanticism whole. On occasion, this evangelical resistance to aspects of romanticism took part in a larger Victorian reaction to romantic theory, as when the editor of the London Quarterly Review explicitly sided with Matthew Arnold’s Preface of 1853 against what he saw as the excesses of romantic expressivism (see chapter three). At other times, however, one can observe evangelical writers attempting to qualify some of the more minatory claims of romantic aesthetics by bringing to bear traditional and decidedly unromantic doctrines.
like the Fall, total depravity, and salvation through Christ alone. Such critics found themselves engaged in a complex process of appropriation and resistance, and indeed, Victorian evangelical critics are arguably at their most interesting in those moments when they attempted, with varying degrees of success, to balance orthodox theological concepts with romantic notions of art. It was in these moments that a unique effort at synthesis emerged, however briefly and however rarely. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, such efforts to moderate romantic aesthetics by imposing traditional doctrinal checks proved ultimately ineffectual. By the early decades of the twentieth century, many evangelicals had opted for one of two extremes: they had either abandoned traditional doctrine or they had abandoned philosophical reflection on aesthetics.

Yet it was not the theoretical tenets of “mainstream” romantic critics and artists alone that drove nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics. Evangelical thinking about art during the period was also shaped by evangelicalism’s continuing negotiations with both its own Puritan past and its longtime theological nemesis, Roman Catholicism. Thus another important motif in the present study is the process of de-puritanization which evangelicals underwent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In one sense, this process of de-puritanization was merely the undercurrent of the romanticizing trend noted above. As many evangelicals gradually departed from their earlier Calvinist theological roots, they increasingly welcomed romantic understandings of human nature and the divine. This theological de-puritanization, moreover, coincided with, and even enabled, a similar movement away from the perceived restraints of the Puritan religio-
aesthetic tradition. What is particularly significant about this process in its relation to aesthetics was its growing self-consciousness, not only among liberals but also among conservative and moderate evangelicals. Over the course of the nineteenth century, evangelicals more and more came to see the aesthetic legacy of Puritanism as the entity against which their own aesthetic thought was to be defined. At times, this self-conscious aesthetic de-puritanization necessitated some careful rhetorical maneuvering, especially among those conservative evangelicals who sought to retain some identification with Puritan theology and piety while distancing themselves aesthetically. But however this process took place, it was rarely neat and tidy, and even as many evangelicals struggled to repudiate what they construed as the negative aesthetic legacy of their Puritan predecessors, Puritan attitudes continued to guide and inform the way in which other evangelical writers thought about art and beauty.

The traditional evangelical distaste for all things Catholic also continued to impact evangelical conceptions of art in the nineteenth century, sometimes in surprising ways. Evangelicals, of course, were well aware of Catholicism’s claim to aesthetic supremacy – a claim which, prior to the Victorian period, evangelicals had been more or less happy to concede, wearing their taste for simplicity and their aversion to visual images in particular as badges of honor. Recent studies, however, have described shifting Protestant attitudes during the nineteenth century towards the visual, and towards art in general, in terms of a process of Protestant “Catholicization.” Morgan, for instance, has documented the movement among Protestants from a purely didactic use of visual imagery to a form of “devotional visual piety” akin to that practiced by Catholics.23
Smith has noted a similar evolution among American Protestants in their embrace of Gothic architecture. Intriguingly, Smith attributes this process of Catholicization not to a decline in anti-Catholic sentiments but rather to anti-Catholicism itself. Acutely aware of what many American Protestants perceived as a growing “Catholic threat,” Protestant denominations adopted one of its most potent, yet seemingly most superficial, components – its imposing physical presence.”

That is, in order to attract converts in an increasingly hostile religious free market, American Protestants assumed an “if-you-can’t-beat-‘em-join-‘em” sort of attitude. As we will see, both British and American evangelical critics were also on occasion more forthright in their aesthetic challenges to Catholicism, engaging in self-conscious attempts to assert the superiority of Protestant aesthetics and even to claim, in good Protestant (and Whig) fashion, that all that is good and true in modern aesthetics could be traced to the liberating effects of the Reformation. Yet whether the process was implicit or explicit, nineteenth-century evangelical Protestants were increasingly emboldened to challenge Catholicism’s traditional claim to aesthetic dominance.

The romantically inclined aesthetic theory and criticism which graced the pages of countless nineteenth-century evangelical periodicals was thus refined in various ways by traditionally evangelical concerns. Delineated broadly, this body of aesthetic theory may be described as “evangelical romanticism.” Though this term may be said to include many of those writers and artists characterized by Apostolos-Cappadona’s similar use of “Christian Romanticism,” I prefer “evangelical romanticism” both for its greater specificity and because it suggests that class of writers which, oddly enough, entertained
certain romantic notions of art even as they maintained relatively close ties to the spirituality of the Great Awakening. In addition to suggesting the aesthetic views of more theologically conservative evangelicals, the term evangelical romanticism is also intended to underscore the extent to which romantic theory informed evangelical understandings of a wide variety of aesthetic problems and their customary solutions. It was this evangelical romanticism which dominated the intense period of evangelical aesthetic theorizing between 1830 and 1900, and helped to shape both liberal and conservative notions of art long afterwards.

Ultimately, however, this mid-Victorian evangelical *pax aesthetica* was not to last, for as the nineteenth century drew to a close, evangelicals were forced to confront the harsh realities of secularization and modernism. Under the weight of new scientific and philosophical developments, the social and theological framework that had long sustained evangelicalism faltered at last, and as a result, the cultural influence which evangelicalism had enjoyed in both Britain and the United States began in the 1870s to enter a period of decline. By the turn of the century, the “evangelical united front” which had dominated so much of the nineteenth century was near collapse as the gathering forces of both fundamentalism and modernism were radically altering the evangelical landscape, and with it, evangelicalism’s relationship to aesthetics. In general terms, formal aesthetic discourse shared the fate of so many other evangelical intellectual and cultural pursuits in the early decades of the twentieth century, and for many of the same reasons. Art and aesthetics became predominantly the property of a liberal Protestant, and mostly urban, cultural elite, while fundamentalists largely ignored theoretical
discourse about the arts in order to turn their attention to the menace of modern science and the hermeneutic intricacies of premillennial catastrophe. As liberal Protestants continued to explore art’s spiritual possibilities and praise its cultural virtues in ever more expansive ways, conservatives for the most part abandoned aesthetics to a modernist intelligentsia. “Fundamentalists of the first half of [the twentieth century],” observes Roger Lundin, “wrote almost no essays of significance on the arts.”

This is not to suggest, of course, that fundamentalist evangelicals of the early twentieth century failed to appreciate art or even that they aligned themselves against the formal discourse of aesthetics per se. Fundamentalism itself was not a monolithic entity, but rather a mélange of diverse and sometimes disparate elements. In some cases, the absence of aesthetic discourse among fundamentalists was more the result of a narrowing of interests triggered by a small conglomerate of perceived threats (evolutionary theory, biblical criticism) than of any particular prejudice against art or beauty. In other cases, the strong populist element within fundamentalism was quick to see the excesses and pretensions of some fin-de-siècle and High Modernist aesthetics as a source of mockery and scorn, while it also rejected the growing tendency among liberal Protestants to conflate the aesthetic with the religious – a trend that had been gaining ground during the last third of the nineteenth century. Even so, there is evidence that when fundamentalists did think about art, they retained many of the commonplace assumptions that had defined the evangelical romanticism of the mid-nineteenth century. Consequently, though early-twentieth-century conservatives repudiated the more grandiose claims of liberals concerning art and largely discontinued the formal investigation of aesthetics cultivated
by their nineteenth-century predecessors, both liberals and conservatives remained, in some sense, the joint heirs of evangelical romanticism.

Some Definitions and Parameters
As the foregoing discussion suggests, the term “evangelicalism” can encompass any number of internal variations. One need only consider the multitude of denominations and sub-denominations that have at one time or another been associated with evangelicalism – Assemblies of God, Baptist, Congregationalist, Dutch Reformed, Episcopalian, Evangelical Anglican, Evangelical Free, German Reformed, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Nazarene, Plymouth Brethren, Presbyterian, and Restorationists, among others – to appreciate the complexities of such a label and the attendant problems of definition. Geographical and theological differences, meanwhile, only complicate the matter. It remains, therefore, to delineate as carefully as possible my use of the term “evangelical” and the methodological considerations that have determined the particular shape of this study.

Despite the reservations of some scholars regarding the usefulness of the term,28 most historians of religion continue to employ “evangelical” as a designation referring to a range of Protestant Christians who share certain basic convictions. In his important study, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, David Bebbington offers what has become the “more-or-less canonical”29 definition of this set of convictions. Evangelicals, according to Bebbington, typically exhibit four essential characteristics: “conversionism” (an emphasis on a specific moment of saving faith); “biblicism” (a belief in the Bible as the
inspired Word of God sufficient for matters of salvation and piety); “crucicentrism” (an insistence on the central importance of the Atonement); and “activism” (a desire to share the Gospel with others). At the same time, in his study *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, another eminent historian of North American Protestantism, Mark A. Noll, has opted for a more descriptive approach that examines evangelicalism in terms of a “history of interlocking institutions, personal networks, and common traditions.” By his own admission, Noll eschews a doctrinal classification, and in this his approach differs somewhat from Bebbington’s more theologically-oriented definition. Still, Noll’s strategy by no means excludes those Protestant Christians who would readily qualify as evangelicals under Bebbington’s rubric, and in fact, in the introduction to his recent *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, historian Timothy Larsen has suggested that perhaps the most fruitful way to establish the parameters of evangelicalism is to combine Bebbington’s definition with Noll’s. This combined approach is essentially that which has guided my own decisions throughout this study.

It is worth noting, however, that Noll’s more inclusive paradigm is especially helpful for a study such as this one in which so much of the primary source material is drawn from periodicals. As is well known, it was common practice for reviewers in the nineteenth century to publish their contributions anonymously – a practice which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to bring external considerations to bear on the precise orientation of individual writers who fail to make the kind of explicit theological statements that would allow one to place him or her firmly in a particular doctrinal camp.
One can, of course, draw useful conclusions about the theological implications of a given writer’s discussion of aesthetics, but the precise significance of such statements in relation to the individual writer remains unclear. Is the author’s doctrinal vagueness symptomatic of a changing theological position, or a personal crisis of faith perhaps? Is a writer doctrinally specific in other contexts while he or she remains vague when discussing aesthetics? If so, why? Such questions make a strictly theological definition of evangelicalism somewhat prohibitive for a study of this sort. In addition, it was sometimes the case that a known writer whose evangelical credentials might be in doubt according to a strict theological standard chose to publish his or her essays in a more theologically conservative periodical. In fact, many theologically conservative and moderate evangelical periodicals were far from rigidly authoritarian in their editorial policies, and they often served as spaces for intellectual debate and exchange. It seems absurd, therefore, to exclude such discussions from an assessment of evangelical aesthetics, if for no other reason than that a significant segment of theologically “legitimate” evangelicals would have been exposed to such thinking. If I have erred to one side, then, I have tended to lean towards Noll’s descriptive approach to delimiting evangelicalism.

Even so, this study does not treat all of the many sub-groups which may rightfully be said to fall under both Bebbington’s and Noll’s classifications. In denominational terms, the discussion which follows centers almost exclusively on the aesthetic theory of Baptists, Congregationalists, Evangelical Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians. This decision was due in part to the historical longevity of each of these groups. All either
predated the rise of modern evangelicalism in the eighteenth century (as in the case of Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians) or else were virtually identical with its earliest manifestations (as in the case of the Evangelical and Methodist movements within Anglicanism). All of these denominations, moreover, with the partial exception of Evangelical Anglicans, maintained a significant presence in both Britain and the United States from at least the eighteenth century. What is gained by attending to these particular groups is a clear focus on those individuals and institutions which arguably constitute the historical “center” of Anglo-American evangelicalism. What is lost, of course, is any detailed attention to the numerous other factions within evangelicalism – many of them developments of the nineteenth century – which, despite their greater distance from the historical “center,” influenced this center in important ways. I have not, for example, attempted any specific or extended examination of the aesthetics of the new sects that grew out of the Holiness movement which arose during the latter half of the nineteenth century, though the Holiness movement itself exerted an important influence on evangelical fundamentalism.34 I have also overlooked those denominations that emerged to a great extent as the result of factors peculiar to one side of the Atlantic or that otherwise lacked a significant transatlantic presence. I have given little or no attention, for instance, to those groups associated with the Restorationist movement inaugurated by Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell, which were in large part a product of the American West and the populist impulses of the new republic.35

One denomination, however, deserves special mention here, for although its absence from the British evangelical landscape and its often complicated relationship to
the American evangelical “center” render it an exception to the parameters sketched above, its early and sustained attention to aesthetics makes it of special interest to a study like this one. The German Reformed Church, whose intellectual base of operations was its seminary in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania under the guidance of John Williamson Nevin (1803-1886) and the German immigrant Philip Schaff (1819-1893), often sought to distance itself from the nineteenth-century evangelical mainstream. Mark A. Noll and Cassandra Niemczyk have referred to this body of Protestants as the “self-consciously reformed” – a term which reflects the critical stance often taken by theologians like Nevin and Schaff towards the “Methodistic” revivalism that characterized much of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. In contrast to what they saw as the individualism and emotionalism that plagued Finneyite revivalism, Nevin and Schaff advocated a confessional and communal version of Christianity rooted in historic creeds. They stressed an organic conception of the Church, liturgical forms of worship, and what they argued was a historically Reformed understanding of the Lord’s Supper – one which saw communion in sacramental rather than merely symbolic or Zwinglian terms. Not surprisingly, to many evangelical Protestant observers these positions smacked of Catholicism, and the influence of the Mercersburg theology remained limited throughout most of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the leading figures of the German Reformed Church remained in close contact with mainstream evangelicalism, if at times only by way of criticism. At other times, however, this contact was also personal, as is illustrated by the careers of Mercersburg’s two principal figures. Nevin was educated at Princeton under the guidance of Charles Hodge (1797-1878), the leading spokesman for
Old School Presbyterianism, while Schaff ultimately joined the faculty at Union Theological Seminary, where in 1867 he helped to found the American chapter of the Evangelical Alliance.  

The main organ of Mercersburg Seminary was the *Mercersburg Review* (later the *Reformed Quarterly Review*), which throughout the nineteenth century published numerous articles on aesthetics. What can be referred to as the “Mercersburg aesthetic” differed from the aesthetics of mainstream Anglo-American evangelicalism not so much in kind as in degree. Deeply influenced (due in part to close ethnic ties) by the latest currents of thought in contemporary Germany, the Mercersburg aesthetic embodied in even more consistent, and sometimes more sophisticated, terms than the rest of evangelicalism the insights of German idealist thinking. It was, as a result, perhaps somewhat less critical of certain romantic claims. Yet strangely enough, this same aesthetic could also prove more regular and more rigorous in its efforts to allow explicitly theological concerns to pose aesthetic questions and to guide aesthetic reflection. “We desire to show,” wrote E.E. Higbee in the *Mercersburg Review* in 1874, “how faith in Christ influences the imagination or phantasy…. ” In this way, the Mercersburg aesthetic sometimes more nearly approximated what we would today understand by “theological aesthetics,” or the application of systematic theology to the philosophical exploration of art – something which, in the nineteenth century, was as yet relatively rare. In its romantic orientation, however, the Mercersburg aesthetic was essentially consistent with much of the rest of Anglo-American evangelicalism, and for this reason, I have not scrupled – despite the German Reformed Church’s often critical relationship to the
evangelical mainstream – to include some discussion of it in the following pages.  

Ultimately, however, this study is less concerned with the differences which may have existed among various evangelical groups when it came to aesthetics than with the many ideas which they held in common. It may, of course, be quite possible, and even profitable, to speak – as in the case of the Mercersburg aesthetic – of a “Baptist aesthetic” or a “Methodist aesthetic,” and subtle variations in emphasis no doubt existed not only among denominations but also within denominations. A similar concession, moreover, may also bear upon what I consider to be another distinctive feature of the present study, namely, its somewhat ambitious transatlantic scope – a perspective conspicuously absent from other existing treatments of nineteenth-century Protestant aesthetics. The aesthetic views of British and American evangelicals, it is true, sometimes diverged as a consequence of the distinctive national identities of each, but only slightly so. On the one hand, the anxious awareness of America’s cultural inferiority to the Old World on the part of intellectuals in the early republic and the concomitant sense of a uniquely American cultural destiny are historical commonplaces, and American evangelical intellectuals, no less than their non-evangelical contemporaries, were keenly aware of the special burden which they, as American Christians, faced in helping to forge a distinctive culture for the new nation – a culture in which the fine arts were to occupy a special place. On the other hand, British evangelicals also cultivated their own version of religio-aesthetic nationalism which, if it differed in some of the particulars, was not dissimilar from its American cousin. Americans, furthermore, when it suited the needs of the moment, were quite happy to see themselves as the rightful literary heirs of the great
English tradition that included Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth, and thus competition with the Old World was based in part on the conception of a shared aesthetic past.

Evangelicalism, moreover, had been from its earliest days a transatlantic phenomenon par excellence, with British and American evangelicals maintaining a vast network of personal and ideological influence and exchange. Since the days of George Whitefield, evangelical preachers had regularly traversed the Atlantic to bring the fires of revival to their English-speaking brethren, a practice which continued throughout the nineteenth century. These transatlantic missionary tours at times resulted in large international movements, as in the case of the Keswick Higher Life Movement, which held its first conference in the Lake District of England in 1875 and was to have a far-reaching effect on twentieth-century evangelicalism in both Britain and the United States. During the nineteenth century, the close association between British and American evangelicals of various denominations was further facilitated by a growing commitment to nonsectarian cooperation. The Evangelical Alliance was founded in London in 1845, while a host of voluntary societies – many of them international in reach – helped to unite Anglo-American evangelicals under a common activist banner. Most important for this study, however, was the exchange of information carried on via the transatlantic circulation of a growing army of evangelical periodicals. In some cases, periodicals from one side of the Atlantic were republished unchanged and in their entirety on the other side of the Atlantic (e.g., the Christian Observer), while in other cases, selected excerpts were reprinted, often with approving editorial comments. In a few instances, as in the
case of the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, for example, evangelical periodicals intentionally cultivated a global perspective, publishing both original articles by British authors as well as reprints drawn from American evangelical magazines.

To be sure, such denominational and international evangelical cooperation was not always a smooth affair. The nineteenth century was rife with denominational splits, internal squabbles were known to plague cooperative ventures like the Evangelical Alliance almost from the beginning, and American-style revivalism was not always well received among more genteel British evangelicals.\(^{40}\) But in terms of aesthetics, this international and inter-denominational network of Anglo-American evangelicals – however shaky at times when it came to theology or politics – provided a shared discursive context in which the exchange of ideas and resources could flow freely and easily. Whatever the differences that existed between British and American evangelicals (or, for that matter, between northern and southern evangelicals in the United States),\(^{41}\) such differences were not, where aesthetic theory was concerned, as important as the similarities. Thus, while I have made an effort to note internal variations where such variations seem to qualify the main line of argument, I have for the most part focused on those aesthetic developments that were relatively consistent across both denominational and geographical boundaries.

There was, however, one other internal divide within nineteenth-century evangelicalism which has more important implications than either sectarianism or nationalism for the story that follows, namely, the widening rift between a “high” intellectual elite and a “low” populist majority. In his seminal study *The
Democratization of American Christianity, Nathan O. Hatch has described at length the profound effects which the wave of popular democratic sentiments that swept across the American Protestant landscape in the early years of the republic had on the contours of American Christianity. Those influenced by this populist movement tended to align themselves against the norms of “ecclesiastical institutions and high culture,” and the opposition that formed between the cultured few and the lowbrow many has continued to shape developments within American Protestantism at the deepest level well into the twenty-first century. “The resulting polarization in American Christianity,” writes Hatch, “is deeper and more pervasive than the most sharply defined theological debate.” For Hatch, this polarization of elite and populist elements is a distinctively American phenomenon, and there is little doubt that in a broad sense many American Protestants – and many American evangelicals in particular – have tended to gravitate toward populist extremes to a far greater extent than their more “respectable” British counterparts. Nevertheless, British evangelicals were not, at least where aesthetics and “culture” were concerned, entirely exempt from the kind of polarization that Hatch describes. In 1882, for example, the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes undertook to defend English Methodism against “One of the most deadly libels from which [it] has ever suffered,” namely, “the assumption that Methodism is antagonistic to culture and inconsistent with it.” To salvage Methodism, however, Hughes felt it necessary to distance Methodism from evangelicals within the Established Church. Methodism, argued Hughes, had been mistaken for “the Evangelical movement within the Establishment,” and, he was sorry to admit, “some of the leaders of the Evangelical party
in the Church of England did regard secular knowledge with suspicion, and did speak of
culture in terms of disparagement and dislike. Whatever the accuracy of Hughes’s
assessment – and there is indeed much here that is open to criticism – it was a tacit
acknowledgement of the cultural polarization within English evangelicalism.

For evangelicals, as for much of the rest of western culture during the nineteenth
century, art and aesthetics served both to reflect the elite/populist dichotomy and to
reinforce it. Indeed, it was during the period covered by this study that the split between
so-called high and low culture fully evolved. Art and aesthetics played a central role in
this process, and “Art” itself ultimately came to be taken as a crucial index of cultural
refinement. Popular art might be beneficial for escape or entertainment, but “serious”
art mattered, and those who could appreciate this latter kind of art were those who
wielded the cultural capital. The reasons for this split and for art’s contribution to it were
many; what concerns us here, however, is the fact that not only were a significant number
of nineteenth-century evangelicals complicit in fostering this split through their own
expanding institutions of theory and criticism but also that, as a result, evangelicals
themselves came to model this split. That is, evangelicals both accepted and
recapitulated the distinction between “high” and “low” art. The Methodist intellectual
Nathan Bangs, founding editor of the Christian Advocate, revealed something of this high
cultural sensibility when he criticized the popular tunes of the camp meeting, referring to
them contemptuously as “ditties” and claiming that they “possessed little of the spirit of
poetry and therefore added nothing to true intellectual taste.”

This observation, simple though it may seem, offers an important corrective to
those who would associate the history of evangelical taste almost entirely with what has come to be seen as “popular” or folk culture. The history of evangelical taste is not limited to the hymns and spirituals of the camp meeting, the cover art of religious weeklies, or the many coming-of-age religious novels whose lasting popularity has persisted even to the present, though obviously such artifacts constitute an important part of any such history. But to restrict one’s attention to these aspects of evangelicalism’s encounter with art and the aesthetic is to miss the bigger picture. In reality, many nineteenth-century evangelicals were just as likely to affirm Matthew Arnold’s view of “culture” as they were to denounce his view of religion. Anglo-American evangelical aesthetics has therefore been subject, for better or worse, to an ongoing dialectical struggle of the sort articulated by Hatch generally, and this study is in part an attempt to draw attention to the half of this dialectic that has often been overlooked and even to insist that this dialectic itself was, and continues to be, a perennial facet of evangelicalism’s approach to art. In fact, one important consequence of this observation is the broadened perspective it potentially brings to the rapidly expanding world of evangelical aesthetics in the twenty-first century – a world which in many ways remains a bifurcated one. Once again, a contingent of intellectual evangelicals has begun to pursue in earnest the philosophical investigation of art, even as another contingent remains committed to the aesthetics of popular mass culture. But as I hope this investigation makes clear, this bifurcation is nothing new; it is instead a part of the enduring aesthetic paradigm within which evangelicals have learned to think about art.

A word remains to be said about the periodical sources on which I have based the
following analysis. Over the past few decades, the study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century periodicals has become a fast-growing field, and rightly so. Periodicals during this period, as now, played an important part in the construction and perpetuation of various ideologies, and they shaped the exchange of ideas in profound ways. The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed a number of religious periodical “booms” in both Britain and the United States during which the quantity of religious publications increased dramatically. Between 1790 and 1825, the number of religious periodicals in Britain alone grew by four hundred percent, while the same period in the United States witnessed an explosion of popular print, much of it of a distinctly religious nature. The United States saw another sharp increase in the twenty years after the Civil War, as the number of religious publications grew by two hundred percent. Their widespread proliferation marked the dawn of mass media, and they served as key agents in the nineteenth-century Protestant effort in both Britain and America to establish not only individual “Christian nations” but also a wide-ranging Protestant “civilization,” which, as its supporters imagined, might eventually span the globe (see chapter 5).

Yet while this study occasionally makes use of some of the insights which the increased investigation of periodicals has afforded us, it is not itself primarily an examination of the kinds of cultural work done by the periodical form in the nineteenth century. It is, rather, an intellectual history of the aesthetic theory which appeared in these venues. Nor, I should add, have I given any extended consideration to the ways in which such characteristic periodical genres as the review or the article – or that other omnipresent periodical form, the reprinted excerpt – may have helped to shape either the
aesthetic theory itself or the reception of such theory. These are certainly important questions, but in the interests of manageability I have had to put them aside for the time being. I have, however, made an effort to survey a wide range of evangelical periodicals from both sides of the Atlantic (see Appendix B). Obviously, given the sheer quantity of Victorian weeklies, monthlies, and quarterlies, the following account is in the end based on a small percentage of extant sources, but I believe that these sources are, in fact, representative of the general bent of middle-class evangelical thinking about art during the nineteenth century.

The periodicals treated by this study also ranged from the self-consciously academic to the “popular.” The nineteenth century witnessed the dawn of mass media, but it also presided over a process of social and intellectual professionalization that resulted in the multiplication of specialized discourse communities, many of which published journals and periodicals that reflected their narrow, often academic interests. Just as with today’s publications, Victorian periodicals could position themselves at any number of points along this intellectual-popular spectrum. In some cases, it is even difficult to locate a given publication at a definite point on this continuum, for nineteenth-century periodicals sometimes occupied an ambiguous cultural space that was itself situated at the contact zone between the evolving high/low polarities described above. This seems to have been especially true of religious periodicals. As P. Mark Fackler and Charles H. Lippy have noted, it is not “always easy to classify [nineteenth-century] religious periodicals as being predominantly of academic or of general interest.” Some, like the Old School Presbyterian *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* or the
German Reformed *Mercersburg Review* – periodicals affiliated directly with institutions of higher education – were clearly written by, and aimed at, professional theologians and clergy. Such publications were the academic journals of their time, and they typically appeared on a quarterly or monthly basis. Others, like the Southern Baptist *Christian Index* or the Anglican *Record*, were directed at a more popular audience and so tended to be published weekly. A number of evangelical periodicals, however, occupied a kind of middle space, seeking to balance intellectual rigor with widespread appeal. As such, one of their primary functions was to mediate for non-academic or non-professional readers the ideas emanating from intellectual circles.$^{52}$ To mediate, of course, meant not only to translate and distill but also to filter and criticize.

The mediating function of such periodicals provides an important reminder that the high/low divide – despite its often profound ideological power – was, and is, a relatively fluid distinction. Still, a number of these periodicals were quite forthright about their efforts to expand the intellectual horizons of their readers – to move them, that is, more firmly in the direction of “high” culture. Two Methodist publications, for example, one American (the *Christian Advocate*) and one British (the *London Quarterly Review*), were founded out of a similar conviction on the part of their respective editors that too many Methodists were sorely lacking in intellectual sophistication.$^{53}$ Other periodicals, meanwhile, gradually altered their formats over the course of the century to reflect a more cosmopolitan perspective. Before the 1870s, for example, the British *Baptist Magazine* had been primarily devotional and theological in nature. In the December 1879 issue, however, the editors announced an expanded agenda, to
commence the following year, which called for substantial articles to be published in each issue related to matters “Devotional,” “Literary,” and “Scientific.” In fact, this newly stated agenda only made explicit what had already begun to occur, for the format of the Baptist Magazine had been undergoing subtle changes since the beginning of the 1870s, if not earlier. From 1880 onward, the Baptist Magazine carried on a more extensive interaction with intellectual culture – an interaction that included regular attention to aesthetic topics – and the same sort of trajectory is evident in other evangelical periodicals of the nineteenth century as well.54 Despite the fact that evangelical periodicals covered the spectrum from popular to intellectual, however, the aesthetic principles that informed the many essays and reviews published in these venues remained remarkably consistent, whether they targeted elite academics or the popular lay reader.

Of course, even if one is relatively certain of a specific publication’s popular status, it can still be difficult to determine the precise demographics of a given periodical’s audience. One can only speculate, for instance, as to whether any of the periodicals examined here would have made their way into working-class homes, and if so, how working-class men and women would have responded to articles on art and aesthetics. Yet these limitations aside, periodicals are well positioned to provide crucial insights into the middle-class nineteenth-century evangelical mind and its approach to aesthetics. If, on the one hand, these sources speak to the emergence among Anglo-American evangelicals of a professional, or quasi-professional, aesthetic discourse and thus to evangelicals’ rising participation in western culture’s institution of high art, they
also suggest something of the democratic impulse which, for a time at least, led writers and editors to the belief that art had consequences for the many.

**Mapping the Philosophical Aesthetic Landscape of Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism: Art and the “Protestant Ideology”**

This study follows a mixed chronological-topical approach. Chapter 2 introduces the story of nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics by offering an overview of the background leading up to 1830. Beginning with the “asymmetrical” religio-aesthetic legacy of the Puritans, this chapter traces in broad terms evangelicalism’s encounter with certain aspects of the Enlightenment and Enlightenment aesthetics. In doing so, it lays the necessary groundwork for understanding the romantic aesthetic discourse which flourished among evangelicals during the nineteenth century. This chapter is largely a work of historical synthesis, and I have relied on a number of excellent secondary accounts, especially in treating Puritan aesthetics. Given what I see to be nineteenth-century evangelicalism’s continuing dialogue with the Puritan tradition, I have also chosen – at the risk of taxing the patience of the specialist – to treat this tradition at some length. Those readers who are familiar with the complicated aesthetic legacy of the Puritans may wish to skip ahead either to the second half of this chapter, which sketches important eighteenth-century developments (mostly through a small number of close readings), or to the main body of the study.

Chapters 3-5 then transition to a more topical format in order to explore the ways in which evangelicals addressed a select number of important aesthetic issues in the years
between 1830 and 1900. Chapter 3 examines how evangelicals struggled to conceptualize and articulate the nature of art. Not only did many evangelical writers define art according to the expressivist principles adduced by major romantic critics and artists but some went even further in asserting, after Coleridge and the German idealists, that art is an embodiment of transcendent reality. Chapters 4 and 5 together take up the questions of art’s ultimate purpose and its relationship to other dimensions of human experience. Chapter 4 investigates the way in which evangelicals sought to formulate the relationship between art and Christianity. More hopeful than their Puritan forebears in their belief that art and religion could mutually enrich one another, many evangelicals saw art as being both limited and informed by Christianity. While some saw Christianity’s influence on art as operating at the level of aesthetic psychology, most evangelical writers saw art and religion as joint agents of moral, social, and even national refinement. Chapter 5 picks up on this program of religio-aesthetic and moral-aesthetic nationalism as it examines the ways that nineteenth-century evangelicals theorized the moral power of art – again in terms that followed lines of thought sketched by Enlightenment philosophers and romantic artists and critics – and the ways in which such ethico-aesthetic theories interacted with evangelical conceptions of the “Christian nation.” Not only was art to play a critical role in the shaping of such a nation (whether American or English) but art was also taken by some theorists as a reliable index to the moral and spiritual health of this nation.

Chapter 6 concludes the story by documenting the challenges faced by evangelical aesthetic thought in the last decades of the nineteenth and early decades of
the twentieth centuries. Even as the challenges posed by modern science and philosophy exerted an external pressure on many conservatives, narrowing considerably their field of intellectual output, developments within the late Victorian art world also exerted an internal pressure that drove some conservatives to abandon reflection on art and aesthetics. Liberals, on the other hand, who largely made peace with the forces of modernism, continued the aesthetic tradition that had, for most of the nineteenth century, been the province of nearly all evangelical Protestants. The result was a deep religio-aesthetic divide within Anglo-American evangelicalism that lasted well into the twentieth century.

Furthermore, the particular aesthetic issues treated in these chapters are generally of a certain type. In the preface to his *Short History* of aesthetics, Monroe C. Beardsley offers a useful tripartite scheme for helping to delineate the field of inquiry for any historian of aesthetics. To begin with, Beardsley observes, “one can ask particular questions about particular works.” What, for example, are the compositional features of a given painting? Secondly, one can also ask questions about the nature or qualities of specific artistic genres, as in What are the structural elements of a symphony? or What makes an ode an ode? Finally, “one can ask questions about criticism itself, about the terms it uses, its methods of investigation and argument, its underlying assumptions.” Questions such as What is Art? or In what sense is art “true”? fall within this final category, one that Beardsley terms “philosophical aesthetics.” It is with some of the questions of philosophical aesthetics and the ways in which evangelicals asked and answered them that much of the main body of this study is concerned. At the same time,
however, this study also attends to some of the issues related to what Beardsley elsewhere refers to as “psychological aesthetics,” or the study of “the causes and effects of works of art.” This attention to psychological aesthetics is necessary since so many nineteenth-century critics were themselves interested in questions of this sort.

Yet while thinking in terms of philosophical and psychological aesthetics is helpful in identifying those aesthetic questions that have been excluded from consideration, these categories themselves remain general ones. In deciding what to include in this study, therefore, I have had to be selective, sometimes ruthlessly so. There are many philosophical and psychological aesthetic questions that nineteenth-century evangelicals wrestled with that might have been included here but were not, or which appear only sporadically or tangentially throughout. I have touched only briefly, for instance, on evangelical conceptions of creativity, though there are many interesting connections between these conceptions and various theological concerns (e.g., the creativity of God, the autonomy of the individual, etc.). The same may be said for both evangelical understandings of “taste” – though once again, the idea of taste raises provocative theological questions about the role of depravity in aesthetic appreciation – and evangelical understandings of “nature,” an issue fraught with lingering ambiguities inherited from the Puritans.

The philosophical aesthetic questions which this study does focus on are those related to what may be referred to as the “Protestant ideology.” According to this ideology, which had its roots in Anglo-American Puritanism, Protestant Christianity, morality, and “civilization” were bound together in intricate and mutually supportive
ways. Over time, art and aesthetics were slowly grafted into this ideology, and it was art’s relationship to this ideology that in many ways fueled and enabled the rapid growth in aesthetic interest among nineteenth-century evangelicals. The chapters of this study, then, examine the various components of this ideology from different perspectives, while the study as a whole attempts to document art’s changing status in relation to this ideology.

A last word is in order concerning what this study is not. It is not intended as a piece of art history or as a critical history of evangelical art and literature. Scholarly studies of this kind would be worthy endeavors, and a number of scholars have already made important contributions along these lines. But the present effort is not of this type. My interest here is in the history of a theoretical discourse and its relationship to other similar kinds of discourses (e.g., theology and philosophy). It is a history of evangelical approaches to first principles, and consequently, references to specific poems, art works, and musical compositions appear sparingly throughout. This decision stems in part from a conviction that aesthetic theory is precisely that which evangelicals have sometimes been accused of lacking. Scholars have long recognized the importance of evangelical hymns, poems, novels, and music in the history of evangelicalism; what they have less often recognized is the existence of a substantial theoretical discourse underwriting such creative works.

Finally, in the interests of full scholarly disclosure it is worth mentioning here that I write as an evangelical in the Baptist tradition. This project is in many ways a deeply autobiographical one, and it began as an attempt both to come to terms with what seemed
to be evangelicalism’s conventional discomfort with, and general lack of interest in, art and aesthetics, and to place the recent explosion of evangelical interest in aesthetics in some kind of historical perspective. While I am for the most part encouraged by this fresh interest in the fine arts, what has seemed absent from the conversation is any sense of tradition, any sense of building on past gains or learning from past mistakes. Despite this personal investment, however, my objective throughout this study has been descriptive and historical rather than partisan, and though it is impossible for any human observer to rise completely above his or her ideological limitations, I have done my best to steer clear of polemics. Especially where art and aesthetics are concerned, it is all too easy to adopt silently, and sometimes uncritically, an aesthetic standard of judgment (frequently a High Modernist one) which one then uses either to champion or disparage a given group. I am not, I hope, uncritical of either the western aesthetic tradition or the ways in which evangelicals have at various times chosen to engage this tradition. My argument, therefore, is not an attempt to promote nineteenth-century evangelicals by proving that they were as aesthetically savvy as the romantics. In fact, from a personal standpoint I remain ambivalent about evangelicalism’s adoption of many of the tenets of High Romantic aesthetics. Rather, my desire is that this study will serve not only to enrich our understanding of a hitherto understudied aspect of nineteenth-century evangelicalism but also, in a much broader sense, to illuminate the problems and pitfalls, the discoveries and rewards, inherent in any human attempt to contemplate the holiness of beauty and the beauty of holiness.
NOTES


10 Rosman 9.

11 Ibid.


See James Engell’s remarks on the later eighteenth century: “Yet this wonderful period of the later eighteenth century [can be] seen … as the process of the Enlightenment’s transforming itself. The last thirty or forty years of the century constitute that time when the Enlightenment was creating Romanticism….” (The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism [1981; San Jose, CA: toExcel, 1999] ix). See, too, Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1946) and William Charvat, The Origins of American Critical Thought 1810-1835 (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936). It is also worth commenting, in the context of this project, on a debate that has arisen in recent romantic criticism regarding the relative weight that ought to be accorded to the common sense philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment and to German idealism in shaping the aesthetics and criticism of Anglo-American romanticism. A recent collection of essays edited by Gavin Budge argues that interpretations of British romanticism in terms of German idealism have dominated romantic scholarship for several decades. Budge and the other contributors, however, suggest that the early reception of German idealism, which he argues did not finally take hold in Britain until the 1860s and 1870s, was profoundly shaped by the common sense tradition. In general, then, he urges a renewed attention to the common sense roots of romantic thought. See Budge, “Introduction: Empiricism, Romanticism, and the Politics of Common Sense,” Romantic Empiricism: Poetics and the Philosophy of Common Sense, 1780-1830, ed. Budge (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007): 11-39. My own project is in many ways sympathetic with this viewpoint. I, too, see many aspects of romantic aesthetics as a development of Enlightenment emphases, and I agree with Budge that we would be remiss if we attempted to define romanticism solely in terms of German idealism, or if we overlooked the common sense context in which many German ideas were originally received. At the same time, however, it strikes me that he comes close at points to overstating his case. This is not the place for an extended critique of Budge’s assessment, but one example may be in order. Budge suggests that “In the absence of compelling evidence that British Romantic writers were well versed in German Idealist writings, most critics have followed M.H. Abrams’s critical methodology of exploring ‘striking analogues’ between British Romantic poetry and German Idealist philosophy,
particularly in relation to Wordsworth. The question may be legitimately posed, however, as to whether the ‘analogues’ Romantic critics have found really reflect the influence of German Idealism itself, or are products of the much more pervasive influence of Common Sense philosophy in Britain during the early nineteenth century” (23). In a genealogical sense, this is indeed a legitimate question. There is evidence, however, that at least some British writers were associating not only Coleridge but also Wordsworth with German thought as early as 1819. See, for example, the aptly titled *Common Sense: A Poem* (attributed to Charles Hughes Terrot), which offers a satirical look at the poetry of the time. In a note, the author writes: “Few poets have been more reviewed, or less read, than Wordsworth. He has a few idolaters … while the common run of readers and critics will scarcely allow him to be a poet at all. I hold with the million. Mr. Wordsworth has given us his notions of poetry in certain philosophical prefaces, *which have very much the air of translations from the German* (*Common Sense: A Poem* [Edinburgh: Printed for David Brown, 1819] 9 n.; italics mine). In the poem itself, the author also pokes fun at Coleridge, who “lives on opium, and … studies Kant” (8). See, too, the 1823 review of DeQuincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* in the *Eclectic Review*, in which the reviewer links DeQuincey with “Kant, Fichte, and Schelling” (Review of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, by Thomas DeQuincey, *Eclectic Review* 19 [Apr. 1823] 368).

Likewise, in 1847, an author in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* was commenting (after a brief discussion of the twin errors of materialism and idealism) on “the fatal consequences of our obstinate worship before the shrines of Kant and Goethe” (Gustave Masson, “On Romanticism, and On the Present State of French Literature,” *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* 3 [Mar. 1847] 264). It may have been that “Germanizing” the romantics was a convenient political ploy to dismiss them, and there is no doubt that idealist philosophy did not finally supplant common sense philosophy until the last third of the nineteenth century (and even then common sense held on among many evangelicals), but it seems incorrect to suggest that German influences were not afoot in British (and American) culture before mid-century. At the very least, then, those scholars who have seen in British romanticism the fingerprints of German thought were only articulating the sentiments of others in the 1820s. Consequently, my own project, while agreeing with Budge that common sense philosophy formed an important basis for romantic thought, remains committed
to the view that German idealist thought affected the common sense tradition just as the common sense tradition affected the early reception of German thought. Following David Bebbington (see the following note), I also see the romantic influence on evangelical thought beginning in the 1830s.


16 As Laurel Brake observes, Victorian critics were a self-conscious bunch as they struggled to define and re-define their field throughout the nineteenth century, essentially professionalizing it in the process. As Brake writes, “The self-consciousness of the Victorian critics and their preoccupation with their own critical practices and discourse indicate the perceived importance, at the time, of this mode of literary production” (“Literary Criticism and the Victorian Periodicals,” Yearbook of English Studies 16 [1986] 97).


18 Morgan esp. 3-13, 13-42, 270-92, and 305-38. Even Morgan, when it comes to “fine art,” tends to emphasize the liberal side of Protestantism, though he stresses that conservatives trailed the developments among progressives. In his The Visual Arts and Christianity in America: From the Colonial Period to the Present, new ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 63-64, John Dillenberger also gives very brief attention to articles published in the Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, though here, too, the account is mostly focused on liberals. The same applies generally to the treatment of American clergymen and their relationship to art in Harris.

19 Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) was an American Congregationalist clergyman who has often been identified as the father of American Protestant liberalism. He was profoundly influenced by the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and his thought stressed certain romantic themes like the poetic nature of religious language, an organic conception of society, and the importance of “nurture” in the development of the person. For a succinct and helpful introduction to Bushnell’s thought, see David L. Smith, Introduction,
Apostolos-Cappadona 1, 2. Specifically, “Christian Romanticism” differed from the spirituality of the Great Awakening by stressing the importance of “nurture,” while it differed from Transcendentalism in its “Christocentricity.” I would add, too, that “Christocentricity” is a general term, and a number of the figures Apostolos-Cappadona discusses advocated Christologies that were hardly consistent with evangelical orthodoxy.


Morgan 9.

Smith 10.

Although I was unaware of this fact when I first settled on the term “evangelical romanticism,” it is worth pointing out that in the title of her Ph.D. thesis completed in 1988 – which was eventually published as The Spirit and the Vision – Apostolos-Cappadona originally employed a term in place of “Christian Romanticism” that was much closer to my own: “Romantic Evangelicalism.” In the published version of her text, Apostolos-Cappadona does not offer any insights into her reasons for the change, though one may conjecture that it perhaps had something to do with the fact that her primary focus is on the liberal branch of American Protestantism.


For a case against the propriety of the term “evangelical,” see Donald W. Dayton, “Some Doubts about the Usefulness of the Category ‘Evangelical,’” The Variety of American Evangelicalism, ed. Donald W.

29 The phrase is that of George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, New ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 323 n. 10, in reference to Bebbington. See also Marsden’s new section, “Fundamentalism Yesterday and Today (2005)” 229-57, in which he offers his own helpful discussion of definitions.


33 The movement against anonymity in periodicals did not gain real momentum until the 1860s. See Brake 106ff.

34 Holiness teachings, which began as a movement within Methodism to return to Wesley’s emphasis on entire sanctification, eventually influenced a variety of evangelicals in both Britain and America, primarily through a transatlantic network of itinerant speakers (e.g., Robert and Hannah Pearsall Smith) and regular conventions held at Keswick in the Lake District. The Holiness movement was itself a manifestation of the romantic spirit at work among Anglo-American evangelicals, as David Bebbington has observed. See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* 151-80 and Marsden, *Fundamentalism* 72-101. I have not undertaken any extended exploration of the specific connections, if any, between Holiness teachings and specific aesthetic ideas.


38 Denominational difference were not, of course, the only variations within nineteenth-century evangelicalism. There were, for example, important racial divisions among evangelical Protestants, especially in the United States. Over the course of the nineteenth century, African Americans increasingly embraced a version of Protestantism that was, as Noll has observed, “overwhelmingly evangelical,” but the evangelicalism of African Americans “did not necessarily duplicate the religion of white [Protestants]” (America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002] 176-77). Furthermore, there is evidence that aesthetic principles were sometimes appropriated by white evangelicals for ideological and political purposes. Commenting in 1817 on a series of “camp meetings” he had witnessed in the Philadelphia area, John F. Watson, a Methodist, complained: “We have too, a growing evil, in the practice of singing in our places of public and society worship, merry airs, adapted from old songs, to hymns of our composing: often miserable as poetry, and senseless as matter, and most frequently composed and first sung by the illiterate blacks of the society” (qtd. in Hatch 155; see also 154-58 for a discussion of some of important features of black spirituals). In the minds of some whites, then, the “inferiority” of black Americans was reflected in the aesthetic shortcomings of their music. Terry Eagleton’s contention that “Aesthetics [was] born as a discourse of the body” is particularly suggestive in this context as one ponders the prospects of a racial tyranny that was aesthetic, as well as legal and economic (The Ideology of the Aesthetic [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990] 13). Regrettably, however, as useful as such an exploration would be, I have been unable to pursue it in any detail here.

39 See Richard Carwardine, Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America,

40 See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* 99 and Carwardine.

41 For a general discussion of similarities and differences between British and American evangelicals, see Bebbington, “Evangelicalism in Modern Britain and America: A Comparison.”

42 Hatch 5, 218-19.

43 This is not to suggest that the high/low divide among British evangelicals was the result of factors identical to those at work in America, though neither were these factors entirely dissimilar. Walter E. Houghton, for example, notes the anti-intellectualist strain that pervaded middle-class English thought at mid-century, a strain that he links explicitly to the spread of “democratic theories of popular sovereignty” following the French Revolution and to the rise of evangelicalism (96, 124ff.). Thus, even in England, the spread of democratic sentiments seems to have contributed in some measure to a division between “high” and “low” culture.


46 Qtd. in Hatch 202. Elsewhere, Hatch also quotes Philip Schaff, the Mercersburg theologian, who attacked early American gospel music as “a rude singing of the most vulgar street songs, so that it must be loathing to an educated man” (147).

47 Lynn S. Neal’s *Romancing God: Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) offers a fascinating account of the ways in which contemporary evangelical women approach popular religious novels. Neal also touches on the criticisms which such popular novels can evoke from more educated (male) evangelicals. In doing so, she implicitly draws attention, I believe, to the high/low cultural split which persists within evangelicalism. A good example of
this kind of negative aesthetic criticism of the popular (which, oddly enough, may count as a kind of popularized articulation of high cultural standards) is Franky Schaeffer’s *Addicted to Mediocrity*.

48 For a relatively early attempt to survey this growing field, see Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff, eds., *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* (Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1982).


52 Lippy vii.

53 The *Christian Advocate* was founded by Nathan Bangs, a Methodist intellectual. Its immediate forerunner was the *Zion’s Herald*, which, as Robert H. Krapohl writes, “reflected the growing conviction of MEC bishops that American Methodism must devote itself more fully to ‘the cultivation of the human mind’” (“Christian Advocate,” *Popular Religious Magazines of the United States* 101). In Krapohl’s view, the *Advocate* did not always live up to Bangs’s intellectual standard in later decades. He cites, for example, the *Advocate*’s resistance to the “theological education movement” in the 1840s (103). Nonetheless, the paper was founded with the express intent of expanding its readers’ intellectual horizons, an ideal that continued to be reflected in its broad-ranging content throughout the nineteenth century. The *London Quarterly Review*, founded in 1853, also sought greater intellectual substance. As Barbara J. Dunlap writes, “The *London Quarterly Review* from its inception put its readers in touch with most of the social


56 One article in particular, however, is worth mentioning here for the logic with which it approaches the idea of “nature,” its moral influence, and its aesthetic value. Writing in the *Eclectic Review* in 1814, John Foster outlined those points he believed would have to be included in a true “philosophy of nature.” See “Philosophy of Nature,” *Biographical, Literary, and Philosophical Essays: Contributed to the Eclectic Review* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1844): 303-16. Foster’s reflections show a critical awareness of the implications of romantic claims for nature, claims which many evangelicals would later come to embrace.
CHAPTER 2
ASYMMETRIES AND AMBIGUITIES: FROM PURITANISM TO EVANGELICAL ROMANTICISM

Since I have known God in a saving manner, painting, poetry, and music have had charms unknown to me before. I have received what I suppose is a taste for them; for religion has refined my mind, and made it susceptible of impressions from the sublime and beautiful.

– Henry Martyn (British evangelical missionary)

To appreciate fully the character and fate of evangelical aesthetics between 1830 and 1900, one must begin considerably earlier with the religio-aesthetic tradition of the Puritans. Evangelicalism, which traces its origins to the series of transatlantic revivals that shook the Anglo-American world in the 1730s and 1740s, was in many ways the direct recipient of the Puritan heritage of theology and piety. While Puritanism had the most immediate influence on those evangelical denominations that located themselves within the Reformed tradition, it played an important role in shaping the Wesleyan-Arminian heritage as well. John Wesley, who was the fountainhead of the Arminian strand of the evangelical tradition just as Jonathan Edwards was of the Calvinist strand, spoke highly of the Puritans as models of piety and intellect. He read widely among the Puritans, and he produced among his many characteristic abridgements a collection of “Extracts from the Works of the Puritans.” Early evangelicals shared with their Puritan
predecessors a number of important doctrinal and devotional emphases, including the necessity of conversion, the Reformation dictum of *sola Scriptura*, the real substitutionary work of Christ on the cross, and an introspective and heartfelt form of piety. Yet Puritanism also contributed to evangelicalism a complex, and often ambiguous, aesthetic legacy. When it came to the fine arts, beauty, and the imagination, the Puritans bequeathed to their evangelical descendants a complicated constellation of problems, latent possibilities, and limitations.

Under the influence of Enlightenment thought, however, eighteenth-century evangelicals began to depart from some aspects of this Puritan tradition even as they continued to be shaped by others. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, many educated evangelicals in particular had become interested in the relatively new “science” of aesthetics and had, as a result, come to see art as an invaluable component of human experience. This interest in the philosophical questions surrounding art only intensified as the aesthetic principles of major romantic critics and artists became widely disseminated after the 1830s. The Puritan tradition would continue to exert its influence, both positively and negatively, on evangelical theorizing about art even throughout the age of evangelical romanticism. As late as the 1880s, writers in evangelical periodicals were still reacting to the Puritan religio-aesthetic legacy and its implications. After the 1830s, however, among middle-class Anglo-American evangelicals the high status of art and the existence of a professional, or quasi-professional, critical establishment were all but secure.
The “Asymmetry” of the Puritan Religio-Aesthetic Tradition

Puritanism, as is well known, has often been criticized for its alleged hostility and skepticism towards the arts, beauty, and the imagination. Over the last few decades, a growing number of studies have sought a deeper understanding of Puritan aesthetics, demonstrating that the Puritans entertained far more complex and nuanced conceptions of art and the aesthetic than the traditional stereotype would suggest. Nevertheless, such studies have resulted not so much in a grand reversal of our earlier ideas of the Puritan religio-aesthetic legacy as in the addition of some necessary and important qualifications. If the Puritan tradition is not an exemplar of unmitigated anti-aesthetic sentiment, as unsympathetic critics might have us believe, neither are Puritan attitudes towards art, beauty, and the imagination likely to appear perfectly congenial to the modern observer. Perhaps the most felicitous description of the Puritan aesthetic legacy is to say that it is “mixed” – or, to borrow a term from aesthetics itself, “asymmetrical.” The social and theological context in which Anglo-American Puritanism evolved helped to forge an imagination which, even as it foreclosed on some aesthetic possibilities, succeeded in giving birth to others.

One clear manifestation of the Puritan tradition’s aesthetic “asymmetry” was its divergent approach to various artistic mediums and the discrepant values it seemed prepared to assign to each. The visual arts, for instance, fared poorly among English and American Puritans, though the Puritans were by no means the iconophobes that they are sometimes made out to be. It is difficult, in fact, to find among Puritan writers a blanket condemnation of visual representation, and many were quite willing to follow Calvin’s
lead in affirming that “sculpture and painting are gifts of God” (1.11.12). Still, anything approaching a sophisticated art culture was comparatively absent from Puritan society, and despite their many positive declarations in favor of the visual arts, such declarations tended not to generate an abundance of practical applications. This seeming lack of Puritan sponsorship of the visual arts has often been linked to the long and contentious debate over the proper role of religious images which had occupied Western Christendom off and on since the patristic period – a debate which was reignited first by the Lollards and most significantly by the Reformers. That Puritan convictions about the use of images owed much to the theological battles waged by Reformers like Zwingli and Calvin, and that these theological battles helped fashion Puritan attitudes about visual representation more generally, seems hardly disputable. Yet precisely because Puritan writers were so careful to distinguish what they took to be the proper and improper use of images, it is equally clear that these theological discussions of images cannot by themselves account for the particular quality of Puritan visual culture.

What the Reformers (with the notable exception of Luther) and Puritan divines agreed on was that images had no place in the context of worship. In A Reformed Catholic (1597), a careful exploration of the theological points on which Catholics and Protestants agreed and disagreed, William Perkins stated quite clearly the Reformed position on images in the church: “We [contrary to Rome] hold it unlawful for us to make any image, any way to represent the true God: or, to make any image of any thing in way of religion, to worship God much the less the creature thereby.” Perkins’s treatise is an important reminder that the Protestant case against images in the sanctuary, though it
rested on Scriptural and patristic precedents (both of which Protestant polemicists were quick to cite), was crystallized in the heat of Reformation controversies with Rome, and it is therefore not surprising that Puritan discussions of images often involved lengthy point-by-point refutations of perceived Catholic errors. This anti-Catholic polemical context in which the Protestant case against the use of images in worship was honed was itself significant in that it helped to reinforce the surprisingly durable notion that visual art was properly the province of Catholicism, or rather, that art was somehow not Protestant.

Protestant writers typically drew on a handful of inter-related arguments to justify their exclusion of images from the sanctuary, many of which showed remarkable staying-power among some conservative evangelical Protestants well into the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. At the heart of the Reformation-Puritan case was a deep and abiding concern to avoid the sin of idolatry. With regard to idolatry and the crafting of images, the Scriptural locus classicus was the Second Commandment, and Protestant writers invariably cited this passage, along with 1 John 5:21, as the first and last word on the subject. Though for the Reformers and Puritans this biblical prohibition was considered authoritative, many were nonetheless aware that there remained a certain degree of hermeneutic flexibility in this passage that Catholic theorists were wont to exploit. It is possible, for instance, to make any number of theoretical distinctions between an image and an idol or between idolatrous and non-idolatrous uses of an image, and in fact, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox understandings of religious imagery were, and are, based on just such elaborate distinctions (e.g., between latria and dulia, or
between an icon and an idol). The Reformation position, however, was rooted in an adamant refusal to allow distinctions of this sort. According to many Reformers and Puritans, any image used in the context of worship was by definition an idol. As Calvin bluntly put it: “God makes no comparisons between images, as if one were more, and another less befitting; he rejects, without exception, all shapes and pictures, and other symbols by which the superstitious imagine they can bring him near to them” (1.11.1). To the Reformers and Puritans, not all idols were images – there were, in fact, numerous forms of idolatry that had nothing to do with visual representation — but all images, at least in the context of worship, were idols.

The identification of all religious images as idols was often grounded in a robust conception of God’s radical transcendence – a conception which necessarily rendered any attempt at representation incomplete and therefore idolatrous. Because God is infinite spirit, it is impossible to contain Him in the finite, material form of an image, and to do so is to erect an idol. “So soon as the mind frames unto itself any form of God,” argued William Perkins in his *A Warning Against Idolatry* (1616), “(as when he is popishly conceived to be like an old man, sitting in heaven in a throne with a scepter in his hand) an idol is set up in the mind.” Similarly, the problem of representing the divine was raised directly by Richard Baxter in *The Catechising of Families* (1682), where he inquired, “Is it lawful to make any picture of God?,“ to which the appropriate answer is “No: For pictures are the Signs of Corporeal things, and it is Blasphemy to think God like a Bodily Substance….” To attempt to give form to that which transcends all form was, quite simply, sacrilege, for images “do as little beseem [God’s] endless glory, as a picture
of an Ape, or of a fool doth the excellency of an Emperor.”

In addition, the Puritan case against images rested on what has come to be called the “Regulative Principle.” First articulated by English Puritans, the Regulative Principle consisted of two complementary injunctions – one positive, one negative. On the positive side, the Regulative Principle held that true worshipers of God were required to abide by all of the regulations for worship that were explicitly ordered by Scripture. On the negative side, worshipers were also required to avoid anything which was not explicitly enjoined by Scripture. Thus, God Himself had prescribed once and for all in the pages of the Bible the acceptable forms of worship, and to depart from these forms was not only to stand in violation of God’s express commands but also to engage in idolatry. One “way of erecting an idol,” wrote Perkins, “is, when God is worshipped otherwise, and by other means, then [sic] he hath revealed in his word. For when men set up a devised worship, they set up also a devised God.”

Since Puritan writers could find no biblical precedent for the use of images in worship – not to mention the multiple proscriptions they cited – to introduce them would amount to idolatry. “[I]t is not his will,” Perkins flatly declared, “to accept the worship that is done to him in images….” Indeed, even when human artificers had comparatively good motivations, their efforts yielded nothing more than a feigned, and therefore, idolatrous image of God:

Again, an image of a feigned god, is a flat idol in the common judgement of all. Now the image, that is erected to the honour of the true God, is [also] an image of a feigned God. For God will not be honoured by any image of man’s appointing, though the honour be never so much directed to him in the mind and intention of man: and therefore the thing that is honour is indeed a god of a man’s devising, who will hear, be present, and
give his blessing in, at, and before images. Hence it follows, that the image which is supposed to be the image of God, is indeed the image, not of God, but of an idol: and every image of an idol is an idol. 

God, it is clear, does not particularly value human creativity in worship, and to imagine a God that does is itself to misrepresent God and, in effect, to create an idol. Accordingly, any representation of this image-welcoming deity would be nothing but an “image of an idol.” Moreover, as this passage suggests, the term “invention” took on a negative connotation in Puritan discussions of worship. “Our principal care and desire,” wrote John Cotton, “is to administer … the ordinances of Christ himself … in their native purity and simplicity, without any dressing or painting of human inventions.” Visual religious imagery was one such invention, and it would therefore be a grave error to introduce it into the sanctuary. Doing so would in fact signal a depraved desire to flaunt human imagination at the expense of God’s perfect ordinances.

Entailed in the Protestant rejection of religious images as idolatrous was a staunch denial of the visual – or at least the visual as constructed and “invented” by human agents – as a special conduit of the divine. God, Protestants believed, is simply not “present” in visual representations. To some extent this denial of the divine presence in the visual was an effect of the frequently noted Protestant campaign against the “magical” or superstitious medieval appropriation of relics and other “charged” objects, including images – a campaign which was itself an extension of the Reformed emphasis on God’s supremacy and transcendence. At the same time, as Perkins made clear, God’s absence from the religious image was also a function of God’s sovereign and mysterious will. In a discussion focused on rebutting the Catholic claim that the honoring of religious images
is analogous to honoring the image or seal of an earthly magistrate, Perkins highlighted a fundamental difference between the two cases – namely, that whereas an earthly prince wills the use of certain images as signs of his presence, God clearly does not, “and so are not images signs and monuments, either of God’s presence, or pleasure: because God will not be worshipped in them, by them, or at them; neither doth he bind his presence or his hearing of us to them.”\textsuperscript{16} Quite simply, God has freely opted out of the visual. In emptying the visual of God’s special presence, however, the Reformers and Puritans effectively relocated this presence elsewhere. As William A. Dyrness has observed, in the Reformed tradition God’s presence was to be sought not in the visual image but rather in the preached word and in the active lives of the faithful. This emphasis on God’s presence in word and life was in turn rooted in a differing theological conception of “the post-resurrection presence of God.” Whereas for Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians the body of Christ remains, in some sense, physically present even now – whether in the consecrated Host or in the icon – Calvin and his Puritan descendants believed that “Christ has taken his humanity with him to heaven.” As a result, the Holy Spirit works not through the bodily eye but through the eye of faith, which, paradoxically perhaps, depends in some measure upon the hearing of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{17} “If any man be yet desirous of images,” wrote Perkins in \textit{A Golden Chain} (1590), “he may have at hand the preaching of the Gospel, a lively image of Christ crucified.”\textsuperscript{18}

But what of the use in church settings of images which in no way purport to be direct or even symbolical representations of the Godhead? Would paintings, for example, that depict key events in the biblical narrative not constitute an appropriate application of
Gregory’s influential thesis that images are an educational tool for the unlearned? A number of Reformers and Puritans answered this question in the negative. Calvin, for example, though he granted that certain “historical” images may have some didactic value in general, insisted nonetheless that this didactic function must be exercised outside of the worship space. The problem for Calvin was the troubling gravitational pull of depravity, for even if historical images presented no special theological difficulties, the human propensity for idolatry was such that what began as a proper use would inevitably and immediately degenerate into abuse. “[W]e know too well from experience,” Calvin explained, “that the moment images appear in churches, idolatry has as it were raised its banner; because the folly of manhood cannot moderate itself, but forthwith falls away to superstitious worship” (1.11.13). Perkins also invoked, among other things, humanity’s apparently natural inclination for idolatry in his mission to refute those who try to circumvent the plain directive of the Second Commandment by claiming that although God may forbid us to represent Him in forms arising from our own imaginations, we are free to represent Him in those forms which have a clear Scriptural warrant (depicting the Holy Spirit as a dove, for example). The problem, however, is that whereas “God can at his pleasure avoid and cut off all occasions of idolatry, when he represents himself in visible forms; so men cannot do, as common experience declares.”¹⁹ Unlike God, who in His omnipotence can terminate representations when they threaten to become idolatrous, human beings are constitutionally unable to exercise such restraint. Thus, even if all other Scriptural and theoretical difficulties could be put to rest, Puritan writers still had the seemingly irrefutable facts of human psychology on their side.
Yet despite their strong stand on the use of images inside the church, the Reformers and Puritans in no way disavowed visual representation in general. Most writers, in fact, discriminated carefully between the “lawful” and “unlawful” use of images, while many likewise held forth the conviction that God had graciously bestowed the arts on humankind as a gift. As Calvin wrote:

I am not, however, so superstitious as to think that all visible representations of every kind are unlawful. But as sculpture and painting are gifts of God, what I insist for is, that both shall be used purely and lawfully – that gifts which the Lord as bestowed upon us, for his glory and our good, shall not be preposterously abused, no, shall not be perverted to our destruction.

Calvin went on to make a further distinction between “historical” representations, “which give a representation of events,” and “pictorial” representations, “which merely exhibit bodily shapes and figures.” The first type, as noted earlier, may be useful for teaching; the second, however, was “only fitted for amusement.” Calvin did not denounce amusement per se, though from the context it appears that he valued the utility associated with the didactic function of images more highly than those designed for mere pleasure. Furthermore, it was the latter sort of image which Calvin believed had primarily, and scandalously, adorned the walls of churches (1.11.12), and thus in drawing his distinctions Calvin discriminated not only between kinds of imagery but, as Dyrness points out, “between pleasure and worship.” For Calvin, whatever purely aesthetic pleasure was available to human beings had to be experienced outside the sanctuary.

Perkins, however, articulated in plain terms what was perhaps the central Puritan
distinction regarding images. This distinction was that between images used for religious purposes and those used for “civil” purposes. In *A Reformed Catholic*, Perkins found that Protestants could in fact agree with Catholics that visual representation is proper in the civil domain:

> We acknowledge the civil use of images as freely and truly as the Church of Rome doth. By *civil use* I understand that use which is made of them in the common societies of men, out of the appointed places of the solemn worship of God. And this to be lawful, it appeareth; because the arts of painting & graving are the ordinance of God: and to be skilful in them is the gift of God….

Perkins gave several examples of this appropriate civil function of imagery. Images may be used to beautify homes; they may be stamped on coins; they may be employed as a means of remembering deceased friends; and, following Calvin, they may serve to depict historical events, including those recounted in the Bible. Perkins even allowed that biblical histories “may be painted in private places.”21 In a sense, then, what the Puritans advocated was a firm separation of church and state in the domain of aesthetics.

This severing of visual art and human invention from the activities of the sanctuary would have lasting implications for the ways in which later evangelicals approached art and the aesthetic. Even into the nineteenth century, in fact, many conservative evangelicals reiterated the Puritan view that the worship space must be kept pure from religious imagery and all human accretions. By dissociating art from the spiritual center of communal life, the Puritans helped to create a channel through which future aesthetic developments would inevitably flow. Since the immediate religious
value and status of art in the context of worship was suspect, aesthetic theory and praxis would have to take place outside the holy of holies – in the “secular” domain. Initially, of course, the divide between sacred and secular, so commonplace for us today, barely existed in the minds of the Puritans. For the Puritans all of life was sacred, from participation in the Lord’s Supper to the plowing of fields. Consequently, to expel art from the sanctuary was not necessarily to desacralize it. What this expulsion did do, however, was ensure that for many decades to come art would have a certain kind of religious significance rather than another. If the descendants of the Puritans wished to cultivate art to a greater extent than the Puritans themselves (which they did), they would have to do so for the most part outside of the formal structures of the church. And whatever role they ultimately assigned to art would have to be something other than ecclesiastical.

Furthermore, later evangelical aestheticians would also be confronted with what might be termed the “problem of presence” (which, from another perspective, is really a problem of absence) in relation to the visual and to art in general. On the one hand, in the debate over religious imagery the Puritans had denied that images bear any special capacity to mediate the presence of God. On the other hand, all “lawful” uses of the visual – civil, historical, and ornamental – were by definition also devoid of God’s presence. Visual representations might be religious in the sense that they could be done to the glory of God, as with all morally upright activities, but they could not be religious in the sense of maintaining any intimate or singular contact with the divine. Whatever spiritual value art possessed was therefore a function of the artist’s motivation rather than
of art’s intrinsic status as a unique theological or ontological object, discourse, or mode of perception and production. As we will see, the aesthetic theories formulated in the pages of nineteenth-century evangelical periodicals, influenced as they were by different brands of romantic and idealist aesthetics, did much to blur the clear-sighted vision of the Puritans when it came to the problem of presence and the religious status of art. But neither could the more conservative evangelical thinkers fully escape the logic of their forefathers. The net result was that nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics was often a strange mix of conservative and progressive elements.

Yet the Reformation-Puritan debate over religious images cannot by itself account for what many have seen as the truncated nature of Puritan visual culture and its seemingly underwhelming support of the visual arts. For one thing, in distinguishing between the “civil” and religious uses of visual representation, Puritan writers had, in effect, constructed a space in which visual art could theoretically flourish, and to a certain extent it did. Indeed, the alleged visual sparseness of Puritan culture, like much about the Puritans, has often been misrepresented. The Puritans by no means existed in an imageless vacuum. Visual representations in the form of woodcuts or drawings – often with an accompanying “signification” or interpretation printed below – were common. In the early years of the Reformation, books and Bibles were typically published with a variety of illustrations, and even religious drama was tolerated for a time. Portrait painting was also a widely accepted practice. Two of the most successful English portrait painters of the sixteenth century, Hans Holbein and Nicholas Hilliard, were strongly influenced by the new Protestant attitudes and consequently developed aesthetics which reflected and
embodied this Reformation vision. The Puritan imagination also found visual expression in both gardens and new styles of architecture.\textsuperscript{24} Still, there is little question that the acceptable visual outlets in Anglo-American Puritan culture remained comparatively restricted and that the arts of painting and sculpture, for example, failed to develop even in the “civil” spaces of societies influenced by Puritanism as they did elsewhere. But why?

There is, it seems, no simple answer to this question, though historians have suggested several possible reasons for the phenomenon. Dyrness, for example, has traced this comparative lack of visual culture to both the “iconoclastic polemics” that seemed to intensify in England around 1580 and to the widespread popularity of Ramist logic, which replaced older, visual modes of perceiving the world with new diagrammatic schemas.\textsuperscript{25} In addition, Protestant conceptions of painting and other arts were also on occasion refracted through the lenses of social justice. If society is full of impoverished and suffering people, some reasoned, then how can one justify spending time and money on lavish paintings and other ornamentation? In some cases, such ethical considerations entered directly into the debates over the place of images in the church, as in the case of Martin Bucer. In \textit{A Treatise Declaring and Showing …that Pictures and other Images are not to be Suffered in the Temples and Churches of Christian Men} (translated into English in 1535), a work widely disseminated in England, Bucer chastised those who would overlook the poor and needy in favor of extravagant church décor: “For suche expenses which ought to have been made upo [sic] poore nedy folke (whom as beynge the very lyve image of God it was convenyent to have socoured and made our frendes
with our lyberalyte) we have wastefully bestowed upon styckes and stones." Bucer’s point is ultimately about proper stewardship. The social demands of poverty must take precedence over painting. To expend time and money on painting and sculpture rather than using it to alleviate the pain and suffering of fellow human beings seemed folly of the worst sort.

In strict terms, of course, Bucer’s argument was directed at the specifically religious use of images within the sanctuary. It is easy, however, to see how an argument of this sort could be potentially more sweeping than even the theological censure of religious images, which had managed amid the heat of sectarian polemics to carve out a theoretical space for the civil use of imagery. In this case, it was unlikely that painting of any sort could survive a head-to-head confrontation with human indigence when presented in such stark moral-economic terms. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for bread, will give him a portrait instead? Bucer’s socio-ethical anxieties regarding the value of visual art would continue to haunt subsequent Puritan and evangelical thinking about the arts. Should the committed evangelical spend his or her limited resources in support of the gospel missionary in Africa or in support of “cultural” development at home? To be sure, such a question may pose something of a false dilemma; many nineteenth-century evangelicals, at least, seem to have discovered a way to do both. But they (and some other socially conscious groups) were never quite able to put the question to rest.

Indeed, according to John Dillenberger, the strong moral cast of Puritanism in general may also have contributed to a corresponding devaluation of the imaginative
dimension of life. The Puritan emphasis on the moral potential inherent in all aspects of ordinary existence often translated into a decided preference for the humble, the simple, the useful, and the unadorned. Extravagant embellishment was in part an ethical problem since it suggested an unhealthy desire for ostentatious self-display and belied a preoccupation with this-worldly details. Dillenberger suggests, furthermore, that this penchant for the lowly can be traced back to a similar outlook among the Lollards – an outlook which early on received an added impetus from growing socio-economic distinctions. Lollardism was for the most part a lower-middle-class, Anglo-Saxon movement that stood over and against the cultural dominance of the Normans. In this context, visual art was associated with the power and riches of the ruling class and was therefore viewed with suspicion by the economically and religiously marginalized Lollards. The perspectives engendered by Lollard moralism and by these early class distinctions persisted, according to Dillenberger, into the seventeenth century, helping to shape Puritan attitudes towards the visual arts and to solidify the Puritan taste for simplicity.\textsuperscript{28}

Though the details of Dillenberger’s thesis are open to criticism – especially in terms of the neat, because somewhat loosely articulated, line of influence he sees extending from the Lollards to the Puritans\textsuperscript{29} – the Reformation-Puritan propensity to see visual stylistic qualities as expressive of moral qualities clearly played some role in shaping Puritan attitudes towards certain kinds of visual art, and perhaps towards visual art in general. Calvin, for example, insisted that even if one were to concede the idea that images may serve to instruct the illiterate, one would still be faced with the seeming
prodigality and indecency of many Catholic images: “For what are the pictures or statues
to which they append the names of saints, but exhibitions of the most shameless luxury or
obscenity? Were any one to dress himself after their model, he would deserve the
pillory” (1.11.7). Moreover, Dillenberger rightly reminds us that Puritan attitudes
towards visual art were by no means the sole result of theological or moral persuasions
but were also the product of socio-political factors as well. Whether finally a function of
the ethno-economic disparities faced by the Lollards or of the persecution and exile of the
Puritans in and from Laudian England, early Anglo-American Puritans had good reason
to associate the spectacle of visual art with the power structures from which they were in
a great measure excluded.

In fact, it appears that in contrast to the rest of continental Europe, general
exposure to the visual arts in England and America was curiously lacking. Most visual
art in England had been the property of monasteries, many of which suffered destruction
at the hands of both Henry VIII and Oliver Cromwell. “The result,” as Dillenberger
observes, “was that most individuals never encountered the visual arts ….” In contrast to
this, though continental Reformers likewise sought to exclude visual images from church
settings, much of the continental population nonetheless continued to interact with visual
art in other facets of life – a phenomenon which grew increasingly less common in
England after 1580. In England, what little visual art there was remained in the hands of
the wealthy aristocracy until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet even
the British gentry’s interest in painting and sculpture developed at a pace remarkably
slower than their continental counterparts. For much of the nineteenth century, in fact,
it was still relatively common for both English and American periodical writers to observe that while the English-speaking world seemed to have the upper hand in poetry and literature, it had only recently begun to make progress in the fields of painting and sculpture.31

In the end, however, definitive answers to Puritanism’s complicated attitudes toward visual art prove elusive. It seems likely that the restricted nature of Puritan visual culture resulted from the cumulative pressure exerted by several forces – theological, social, political, and moral – which together blunted and constrained the impact of the visual in Anglo-American society. Prior to the Reformation, art was primarily a religious venture. If artists themselves were not always theologically orthodox, the highest subjects remained the religious ones. Art itself was closely connected to worship, both for the creative artist and the viewer. At the same time, the Church took an active interest in the production and patronage of art, commissioning works to adorn the walls of its sanctuaries and amassing expansive (and expensive) collections in papal vaults. In excommunicating visual art, however, the Reformers created an axiological void. Protestant thinkers would be forced to discover a new significance for art – one that was not religious, or at least not religious in the same way. It was this complex and problematic attitude towards the visual which, specter-like, shadowed the thought of many eighteenth-century evangelicals and which continued to shape in more distant ways nineteenth-century evangelical conceptions of art and the aesthetic.

If the visual arts presented a special problem for the Puritans – a problem that provoked a dizzying array of distinctions and subtleties – the activity of the imagination
more generally posed similar difficulties. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the imagination had not yet undergone the romantic transvaluation which would effectively raise it to the status of aesthetic and metaphysical super-power, and it was believed by many Puritans that the imagination was a mental faculty particularly prone to deception. This capacity for deception threatened to interfere with the mind’s ability to apprehend truth, both natural and spiritual, and thus it was imperative that the imagination be handled with care. The root cause of the imagination’s corruption was of course the ever-present problem of human depravity. In A Treatise of Man’s Imaginations (1607), William Perkins identified the difficulty in stark terms: “so soone as [a person] beginneth to thinke, to reason or conceive of anything, so soone doth he imagine and conceive that which is evil … The minde and understanding part of man is naturally so corrupt, that so soone as he can use reason, he doth nothing but imagine that which is wicked, and against the Law of God.” It should be noted here, as Perry Miller reminds us, that for the Puritans no human faculty was beyond the reach of depravity, and as such, all aspects of the human personality were subject to the ebbs and flows of negative criticism based on the needs of the moment. But whereas caveats about the misuse of the reason, for example, were balanced by the high esteem in which the Puritans generally held this faculty, the imagination was less often the recipient of such positive regard. Indeed, the imagination in particular seemed to invite the cautionary admonitions of many a Puritan preacher.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the Puritans’ profound awareness of the far-reaching effects of depravity, many writers and preachers placed a high premium on the
capacity of the human mind to perceive the cosmos accurately. The Puritans typically upheld a form of epistemological realism in which the mind, when performing properly, was believed to have direct access to objects as they truly exist. (The Puritan affinity for Ramist logic lay in the system’s purported ability to render this objective reality in useful, schematic terms.) Thus Puritan writers allowed little or no distinction between the idea and the thing-in-itself; truth was a matter of the mind’s right correspondence to the object. As Miller observes: “The Puritans must be numbered among the very few men who have ever been certain that they had succeeded once and for all in performing this feat.”

If the Puritan confidence in the perceptive powers of the human mind strikes the modern reader as naïve, we must recall that this confidence was ultimately underwritten by the longstanding theological conviction that God was Creator of both the universe and the human mind, and thus there exists a fundamental accord between subject and object. Admittedly, sin could, and frequently did, interfere with this natural harmony, but once an individual had experienced the influx of saving grace, the mind was capable of functioning properly once again. Proper perception, furthermore, was itself a kind of obligation, for misperception amounted to a distortion of God’s Creation – which, significantly, was understood to be basically stable and complete – and thus, in a sense, of God Himself. Honoring God aright demanded that one correctly perceive His works as they are, not as one subjectively colors them.

Puritan concerns about the imagination were therefore founded upon a desire to maintain this epistemological ideal. The imagination was potentially dangerous because, given its special place in the human psychological apparatus, it could disrupt the normal
dynamics of natural perception. When appropriately bound to data gleaned from the senses, the imagination served its assigned purpose; when left to its own devices, however, the unbridled imagination had the power to lead reason astray, to incite the will and affections directly, and to conjure strange and contorted images lacking all correspondence with reality. Such imaginary constructs were nothing less than an affront to God since they constituted a deviation from God’s created order and betrayed discontent with His sovereign design. As Richard Sibbes complained, “The life of many men … is almost nothing else but a fancy; that which chiefly sets their wits awork and takes up most of their time is how to please their own imagination, which setteth up an excellency, within itself, in comparison of which it despiseth all true excellency and those things that are of most necessary consequence indeed.”

Just as most Puritans were self-professed literalists when it came to interpreting Scripture, Puritans like Sibbes also encouraged a sort of literalism of perception. Any departure from reality was indicative of a fevered brain. In fact, in both cases the motive for literalism was the same: a strong desire to submit to the reality which God had willed.

It is not difficult to grasp the particular constraints which a strict adherence to such a view can place on one’s conception of art and aesthetics. For one thing, this kind of literalism of perception would seem, at least initially, to lead quite naturally to an aesthetic which foregrounds a conception of art as mimesis. What better way to honor the God of Creation than to attend to the divine artistry in detail? At its most extreme, such an approach might yield some form of realism, even hyper-realism. It is perhaps no coincidence that realist painting thrived in seventeenth-century Holland, a country
heavily influenced by Calvinism. Nor is it particularly unexpected that when England eventually did turn its attention to visual art, portraits and landscape paintings were the genres at which it excelled. At the same time, this deference to God’s revelation in the created order (and, of course, in the Scriptures) tends to militate against “fiction” – or the “imaginative” in our contemporary sense – in all forms, whether visual or literary. On the one hand, then, there exists on this account a latent, and perhaps irreconcilable, tension between divine and human creativity. In the traditional debate over the precedence of nature or art, most Puritans would have unequivocally answered in favor of nature as the marvelous handiwork of God.

Strong cautionary statements about the risks associated with a wayward imagination were not, of course, unique to seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Puritans; rather, the Puritans were in many ways merely voicing the suppositions of their age. The Cartesians, for instance, had similarly granted the imagination a low place in the scale of intellectual value. What the Puritans sometimes added to this negative view, however, was a further, religious rationale for distrusting the imagination. According to some Puritan writers, for example, the imagination was subject to the immediate agency of the devil himself. It is not necessary for Satan to talk in “an audible voice” or to exhibit “things to our bodily eyes,” for he “hath a closer and more secret way of access to our Imaginations, in which he can represent the Images of things, and hold them before us.” Yet whether Satan was infiltrating the imagination directly or an individual’s innate sinfulness led inevitably to disorder and distortion, the imagination was prone to trickery. Careless exercise of the imagination not only caused the distortion
of natural perceptions but also produced ideas that were liable to be mistaken by the deceived or ignorant for genuine spiritual perceptions. It was this problem of authentic spiritual experience – and hence also of its possible counterfeits – which occupied Jonathan Edwards in his famous *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746).40

As in the case of visual art, however, the Puritan tradition once again manifested a certain asymmetry when it came to the imagination. Despite the often caustic criticisms which Puritan writers leveled against the imagination, it was not understood solely as a liability. Though given to deception, the imagination was, at the very least, a God-given faculty with an important (if somewhat prosaic) role to play in normal human psychology. A few Puritan writers, however, went further still in granting the imagination a special place in human experience. Edwards, whose view of the imagination in *Religious Affections* represented the negative side of the Puritan tradition, elsewhere allowed the imagination a more positive function in the contemplation of spiritual things: “Such is our nature that we cannot think about invisible things without a degree of imagination.” 41 Another such writer was Richard Sibbes.42 Though Sibbes, as we have seen, cautioned readers in *A Soul’s Conflict with Itself* against the dangers of living a life of pure fancy that ignored the realities of the world as God had created it, he also believed that it is possible for human beings to “make … fancy serviceable … in spiritual things.” For Sibbes, the imagination possessed the power to adorn truth in ways that not only made it more palatable to the human mind but also enabled it to move the affections. A verbal image, for example, as found in poetry and oratory, complements and even surpasses a propositional statement in its ability to engage the heart directly.
Puritan preachers frequently put this theory to good practical use, for despite the pains taken by preachers to let the text interpret itself, Puritan sermons were often saturated with rich constructs of verbal imagery designed to enliven the imaginations of the congregations. Edwards’s often-anthologized sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” is only the most famous example of the heights – or in this case, the depths – which Puritan verbal imagery could achieve. Thus, although many writers in the Puritan tradition may have chosen to stress the dangers of the imagination over its possibilities, this tradition was by no means uniform in its cautions or univocal in its criticisms.

The asymmetry of the Puritan tradition is perhaps most evident, however, in the generally favorable attitude of many Puritans towards other art forms in contrast to the visual. If visual art remained, in Dillenberger’s words, little more than “an appendage, not really expressive of humanity’s spirituality,” other arts fared much better. The predominantly auditory bearing of Puritan culture, together with Puritanism’s strong belief in the cultivation of the intellect, provided a context in which non-visual arts like music, and especially poetry, could develop. Of course, Puritan resistance to the theater is almost legendary, and many eighteenth-century Puritans were similarly suspicious of the century’s newest genre, the novel (though they were not alone in this). Generally, however, the Puritans “held to a belief in the poet’s high calling.” In addition to Milton, Puritan society could claim the likes of Anne Bradstreet, Michael Wigglesworth, and Edward Taylor, as well as a host of lesser known poets and writers. A taste for poetry, it seems, was not only common but was also considered a proper part of a liberal
education. In his popular manual for aspiring ministers, *Manuductio ad Ministerium*, Cotton Mather included a section on “Poetry and Style” in which he acknowledged that “Poetry … has from the very beginning been in such request, that I must needs recommend unto you some acquaintance with it.” Nor could Mather “wish” upon his divinity-student-readers “a soul that shall be wholly unpoetical.” If the Puritans can be said to have valued any art form above others, it is surely poetry that would claim the prize. Significantly, later romantic critics would also valorize poetry as the highest of the fine arts, though for reasons that differed from those of earlier Puritan writers. Yet such romantic claims for the supremacy of poetry no doubt resonated with those nineteenth-century evangelical critics who discovered in these claims new confirmation of an old truth.

Contrary to popular stereotypes of Puritan austerity, the Puritans also displayed a keen sensitivity for the beautiful. A recent study, for instance, has demonstrated the extent to which the concept of beauty informed Puritan notions of sin and conversion, while other recent studies have suggested that the visual surroundings of daily life in Puritan society were not nearly as colorless as has often been thought. It turns out, for example, that the plain white meetinghouses of New England – long taken as symbols of the drabness of Puritan culture – were at times painted in vibrant hues that included red, yellow, and green. But it was nature, however, which supplied most Puritans with an immediate occasion for the experience of beauty. Calvin had referred to the Creation as “this most beautiful theater,” comparing it also to “a large and splendid mansion gorgeously constructed and exquisitely furnished” (1.14.20), and many who followed in
the Reformed tradition agreed. Thomas Shepard took up Calvin’s metaphor of Creation as theater, insisting that the only possible response to this “stately theater of heaven and earth” is to “conclude … that the finger, arms, and wisdom of God hath been here.”

The poet Anne Bradstreet similarly confessed that when she beheld the “Trees all richly clad,” “Rapt were my senses at this delectable view.” The Puritans, then, were by no means insensitive to the splendors of nature, and they reveled in the universe as a spectacle of God’s glory.

Yet even as they marveled at the sensory beauty of God’s handiwork, many Puritan writers perpetuated the Christian-Platonic belief that such material beauty was but a faint shadow of a greater Beauty beyond. Ultimately, “the Puritan notion of beauty was firmly eschatological.” Only in heaven will human beings possess the capacity to perceive genuine Beauty. Earthly beauty thus frequently bespoke an absence, a falling short, which in turn engendered a longing for something greater. In this world, wrote John Owen, “the view of [Christ’s] beauty and glory does not last.” In a post-resurrection state, however, when all impediments have been removed forever, the redeemed will be granted “one pure act of spiritual sight in looking on the glory of Christ.”

It is a typical progression in Puritan writings to transition from a meditation on worldly beauty through a moment of awareness in which the writer recognizes its insufficiency to a final expression of longing for the religio-aesthetic completeness of the Beatific Vision. In some cases, the Puritans chose to sacrifice earthly beauty on the altar of heavenly glory, denigrating material beauty for its fleeting charms. In other cases, however, Puritan writers affirmed the legitimacy of material beauty even as they sought
to imagine something greater. According to Bradstreet, for instance, heavenly beauty was not an overturning of earthly beauty but rather its proliferation and fulfillment: “I wist not what to wish, yet sure thought I,/ If so much excellence abide below,/ How excellent is He that dwells on high,/ Whose power and beauty by His works we know?”

It is no exaggeration to say that an eschatological-aesthetic gaze – an apprehension of authentic Beauty – was the end for which many Puritans strived. It was this notion which Jonathan Edwards would most fully develop in the 1750s while in dialogue with Enlightenment aesthetics (see below).

Just as important for the later history of evangelical aesthetics, however, was Puritanism’s approach to “culture.” The Puritans advocated what was, on the whole, a proactive and positive stance towards culture. In H. Richard Niebuhr’s famous terms, Puritanism sought to “transform” culture rather than to withdraw from it. God was thought to rule over all dimensions of existence, not simply the formally or institutionally religious. As a result, there was, as we have seen, no real distinction between sacred and secular in Puritan society. Reformed thinkers stressed the spiritual potential in ordinary life and encouraged all members of society – not just the spiritual “elite” – to think theologically about their endeavors. The Puritans saw all areas of human society – government, philosophy, economics, family, and work – through Scriptural and theological lenses, seeking diligently to put into practice the Apostle Paul’s exhortation in his Epistle to the Colossians: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (3:17).

This Puritan emphasis on cultural transformation was itself part of a
comprehensive socio-religious vision which linked God, the individual, the church, and
the nation in a constellation of mutual obligation held together by the concept of the
covenant. The Puritans understood this concept of the covenant to be operative on a
variety of inter-related levels that extended from the individual through the local
congregation and finally to the nation. It was aboard the *Arbella* in 1630 en route to
Massachusetts that Governor John Winthrop articulated, in his oft-quoted address, a
theme that would have important consequences for numerous aspects of later American
culture:

> Thus stands the cause between God and us: we are entered into covenant
> with Him for this work; we have taken out a commission, the Lord hath
> given us leave to draw our own articles ....
> We shall find that the God of Israel is among us .... For we must
> consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are
> upon us.  

Winthrop’s statement has often been seen as the prototype for later expressions of
American exceptionalism, but the concept of a national covenant and the sense of
religious nationalism to which it tended were by no means foreign to English Puritanism.
Already in 1578, for example, the English preacher John Stockwood had observed that
God’s “great mercies towards us Englishmen above many other nations make his
judgments more heavy” for the very reason that “we are like unto the children of
Israel.” This kind of incipient religious nationalism would, oddly enough, provide an
important context for subsequent evangelical theorizing about art. If art could find no
legitimate place in the church proper, it could nevertheless aid in the development of, and
serve as an index to, a thoroughly Christian society.

Yet if the Puritan willingness to see all of culture as a potential space for Christian thought and service was theoretically applicable to serious reflection on art and the aesthetic, this application remained throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries more of a possibility than an actuality. For though the Puritans wrote poetry, played music, cultivated gardens, and even on occasion fashioned visual images, they rarely approached these activities with formal aesthetic concerns in mind. Beyond their theological proscription of images in the church or their musings on the imagination, the Puritans demonstrated little conscious interest in art as a source of special philosophical problems. As a result, Puritan culture lacked anything approximating a positive critical or aesthetic establishment. In one sense, of course, this general lack of a developed aesthetic discourse among the Puritans is not surprising given that such a discourse in its modern form was hardly prevalent in the seventeenth century, and it would be anachronistic to fault them for failing to participate in a mode of investigation which was only beginning to take shape in Anglo-American culture at large. Something approaching a bellettristic or aesthetic form of criticism did not appear in America, for example, until the middle of the eighteenth century. But the absence of such a discourse is significant nonetheless, for it is in part the emergence of such a self-conscious discourse among later evangelicals which distinguished them aesthetically from their Puritan predecessors.

This is not to suggest that either Puritan culture was completely bereft of assumptions concerning the nature and purpose of art or that such assumptions did not
occasionally find concrete expression among Puritan writers. But in fact it was the very nature of these assumptions which may have made the notion of aesthetics as a distinct field of inquiry – had they been able to conceive of such a thing – seem somewhat superfluous, for art as a mode of human activity was easily subsumed under the moral-theological rubric of “utility.” Indeed, when Puritan writers did gesture towards a more positive and reflective approach to art, they invariably stressed its utilitarian function. Both poetry and painting, for example, were useful for conveying doctrine in a pleasing manner, but the pleasure itself was ancillary to the truth conveyed. Art, therefore, was largely considered as a means to an end, and though writers like Sibbes were well aware of the heightened effects which something like the verbal images of poetic language could produce, Puritan writers rarely pursued in systematic fashion the questions raised by such observations. In addition, this emphasis on utility and on art’s subservience to some other end, whether social or religious, embodied the Puritan quest for humility, simplicity, and an art that did not delight in its own artistry. For most Puritans, art was something to be concealed rather than explored and celebrated. ⁶³

To be sure, a utilitarian view of art and a mature philosophical aesthetic discourse are by no means mutually exclusive, and in fact the utilitarian emphasis of Puritanism – which, it is worth noting, was in one form or another the dominant aesthetic tradition in the West until the late nineteenth century – would continue to exert its influence on evangelical aesthetics even as Victorian evangelicals helped to foster a theoretical establishment that even the most artistically-inclined Puritan could never have imagined. What separated the scattered and diffuse statements of the Puritans from the careful
aesthetic formulations of nineteenth-century evangelicals, however, was evangelicalism’s early affinity for certain aspects of Enlightenment thought.

New Beginnings: The Enlightenment and the Emergence of an Evangelical Aesthetic Discourse, 1730-1830

The evangelicalism that emerged during the 1730s and 1740s has often been depicted as a pietistic reaction to the dry rationalism and worldly preoccupations that are said to have characterized portions of both the American and British clerical establishments at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries. There is, of course, much truth to this view. Writing near the end of the century, William Wilberforce contrasted “the simple and poor,” who “are not liable to be puffed up by the intoxicating fumes of ambition and worldly grandeur,” with “the great and the learned,” who, though they may be capable of elaborate disquisitions on all matters of philosophy, are in danger of losing their souls. “[W]hat has been required,” Wilberforce maintained, “is not the perception of a subtle distinction, but a state and condition of heart.”64 Such statements, however, are rather too easily caricatured, and if eighteenth-century evangelicals generally sought to reassert the importance of feeling and piety in the practice of religion, many also saw the danger of doing so at the expense of intellect and reason.65 Far from being a simplistic and reactionary manifestation of emotionalism, evangelicalism was, as David Bebbington has argued, largely a product of the “high cultural environment” of the Enlightenment. “Its emergence,” writes Bebbington, “was itself an expression of the age of reason.”66
This close affiliation with the Enlightenment is crucial for understanding the shape and trajectory of evangelicalism throughout the eighteenth century, for the Enlightenment had widespread effects on diverse segments of evangelical thought, including aesthetics. Of course, the Enlightenment was itself a heterogeneous phenomenon, and Anglo-American evangelicals did not embrace all of its many manifestations with equal exuberance. As Henry May has suggested in The Enlightenment in America, the long eighteenth century recognized at least four distinct strands of Enlightenment thought – what May terms the “moderate,” “skeptical,” “revolutionary,” and “didactic” Enlightenments.67 While evangelicals of the period remained hostile to the skeptical and revolutionary forms advanced by Paine, Voltaire, Rousseau, and others, they readily accepted crucial aspects of, first, the moderate Enlightenment (represented primarily by the thought of Locke), and secondly, the didactic Enlightenment (represented by Scottish common sense realists like Thomas Reid [1710-1796] and Dugald Stewart [1753-1828]).68

By the middle third of the eighteenth century, the popularity of Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding was well established – before 1760 it had found its way into nine individual editions and four collections – and evangelicals, like the rest of the Anglo-American world, eagerly embraced its new philosophy.69 Wesley, for example, was a careful student of Locke, whose “‘epistemology’ of Christian experience,” as Richard E. Brantley has shown, was deeply indebted to Locke’s Essay.70 Wesley referred to this work as a “deep, solid, weighty treatise,” and it formed a regular part of the curriculum at the Kingswood School.71 The great clergyman and hymnodist,
Isaac Watts, echoed Wesley’s assessment, calling the insights of the *Essay* “worthy of Letters of Gold” and declaring Locke “the ingenious Director of modern Philosophy.” As a mentor and instructor of young ministers, Philip Doddridge likewise recommended the study of Locke throughout his lectures, thus helping to ensure the continuation of Lockean precepts into the next generation.\(^72\) Edwards also knew Locke well, and though Locke’s influence on Edwards has sometimes been overstated, the principles of the *Essay* served as a basis for important aspects of Edwards’s thought.\(^73\) Locke continued to influence the shape of evangelical thought throughout the eighteenth century, and even as late as 1863 the conservative Evangelical Anglican periodical, the *Record*, was still appealing to Locke as a bulwark against the growing threat of the “German Rationalists.”\(^74\)

Significantly, however, this same article also called on the “common sense” of Thomas Reid – a call that reflected the extent to which evangelicalism had also internalized the thinking of the didactic Enlightenment. In fact, it was this form of the Enlightenment, represented primarily by the philosophy of Scottish common sense realism, which would have the most enduring impact on Anglo-American evangelicalism. Common sense realism – the most famous advocates of which were Reid and Stewart, though many of its important elements can also be traced to Frances Hutcheson (1694-1747) – was in many ways a response to Lockean epistemology and its subsequent modifications at the hands of Berkeley and Hume. In broad terms, the Scottish philosophy argued for the immediate perception of external objects (against what they took to be Locke’s representationalist theory) and for the existence in the human mind of
certain intrinsic and self-evident concepts that were not the sole product of sensory experience, including, among others, those principles necessary for right moral action. Because of its positive view of human nature in the form of an innate moral sense, the Scottish philosophy initially met with a good deal of resistance among evangelicals, particularly those in the Reformed tradition (e.g., Jonathan Edwards) who held firmly to Augustinian-Puritan conceptions of original sin, the clear separation of regenerate and unregenerate (with different implications for each), and true morality as an outgrowth of saving grace. By the 1760s, however, this opposition had begun to crumble, and evangelicals embraced the principles of the new philosophy in rapid fashion. This was particularly true in revolutionary America where the ethical orientation of the Scottish system seemed to offer a means of safeguarding public morality at a time of social and political turmoil. Yet even before the outbreak of war, Scottish common sense realism had been institutionalized in America’s growing network of young colleges and universities, due largely to the influence of John Witherspoon, a Scottish Presbyterian who had arrived in 1768 to assume the presidency of Princeton. During his tenure at Princeton, Witherspoon preached the Scottish system in his course on mental and moral philosophy to the likes of James Madison and Samuel Stanhope Smith, and he further disseminated his ideas in the form of published lectures. Scottish common sense realism became the philosophy du jour not only for evangelicals but also for Americans in general until the 1830s, and in many cases, beyond.\(^{75}\)

During the eighteenth century, assumptions stemming from the moderate and didactic Enlightenments advanced among evangelicals on nearly every front. Whether
formulating religious, social, scientific, or political views, early evangelicals drew much of their inspiration from the principles of the Enlightenment. This evangelical openness to the new intellectual outlook of the moderate and didactic strands of the Enlightenment also constituted a substantial, though not necessarily decisive, break with important elements of the Puritan tradition. If the Puritan tradition continued to cast its shadow on emergent evangelicalism, this shadow was often dispelled by the dazzling beam of the Enlightenment. Many of the rifts, for example, which occurred in the eighteenth century as a result of evangelicalism’s fresh emphasis on revivalism over and against a strict adherence to the fine points of traditional doctrine can be understood on some level as disputes over whether Christians ought to embrace the new premises of Enlightenment thought. Do the time-tested creeds of Protestant Christendom represent fixed and stable truth, or is knowledge subject to historical development? Those groups, such as the Old Side Presbyterians in America or the Seceders in Scotland that rejected the progressive claims of the Enlightenment were content to perpetuate the doctrinal and confessional legacy of the Puritans. Those belonging to the new class of evangelicals, however, sought to engage the Enlightenment on its own ground and, in the process, found themselves being remade in its image.

This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in developing evangelical attitudes toward art and aesthetics. Indeed, the rise of evangelicalism and the rise of modern aesthetics were virtually contemporaneous phenomena. Both movements owed their ascendancy, at least in part, to the force of the Enlightenment. Though the Puritans, as we have seen, were not relentless antagonists of art and beauty, neither did they pursue
art and aesthetics with either philosophical rigor or zeal. Under the influence of the
Augustans, however, eighteenth-century evangelicals experienced something of a
revolution in aesthetic consciousness as they gradually came to perceive art and
aesthetics as sources of special appreciation and concern.

This revolution was evident first of all in the changing tastes of many
evangelicals, especially with respect to poetry. In keeping with the fashionable
sensibilities of the time, evangelicals enjoyed the poetry of, among others, Alexander
Pope, Jonathan Swift, and Edward Young.\(^78\) John Wesley likewise expressed his
admiration for the poems of Dr. Beattie, referring to him as “one of the best Poets of the
age” and wishing only that he possessed more of “the ease and simplicity of Mr. Pope.”\(^79\)
Evangelical preferences typically reflected the neoclassicism of the age, and like their
non-evangelical counterparts, evangelicals discovered in the ancients the exemplars of
literary craft. “[W]e should gain nothing,” insisted Robert Hall, a Baptist minister, “by
neglecting the unrivalled productions of genius left us by the ancients, but a deterioration
of taste….”\(^80\) Evangelical taste evolved in other areas as well. According to Doreen
Rosman, “The enjoyment and practice of music was widely regarded as a most
acceptable evangelical recreation.”\(^81\) Both Wesley and Jonathan Edwards took great
pleasure in singing, and they meditated at some length on the joys of music, though they
disagreed on precisely what constitutes musical excellence. (For Wesley, it was simple
unity; for Edwards, complex harmony.\(^82\) Edwards in particular appreciated music to
such an extent that he regarded it as a paragon of human intercourse and a foreshadowing
of the perfect love of heavenly society: “The best, most beautiful, and most perfect way
that we have of expressing a sweet concord of mind to each other, is by music. When I would form in my mind an idea of a society in the highest degree happy, I think of them as expressing their love, their joy, and the inward concord and harmony and spiritual beauty of their souls by sweetly singing to each other.”

This love of music was also shared by the Jowett family of Britain, whose patriarch Henry had been converted by the evangelistic efforts of George Whitefield. Henry’s son John often held musical performances in his home, while his brother Joseph, a Professor of Civil Law at Cambridge, staged regular performances at Trinity Hall. The evangelical interest in both poetry and music merged, of course, in what was perhaps eighteenth-century evangelicalism’s most enduring contribution to the religio-aesthetic culture of the period – its hymnody. As compositions, hymns are often valued by religious communities more for their religious or doctrinal content than for their formal aesthetic qualities; even so, the evangelical hymns of the eighteenth century embodied many of the stylistic features of the Augustans. The hymns of Charles Wesley, for example, though they have sometimes been read as proto-romantic in their lyrical subjectivity and their passionate expression of emotion, were, as Bebbington points out, more reflective of the formal standards of neoclassical decorum than of romantic spontaneity.

As these examples suggest, “correct taste” was becoming a matter of conscious concern among many eighteenth-century evangelicals. Unlike the Puritans, who cultivated, in Dyrness’s words, an aesthetic in which “beauty of the whole design would not have been either intended or excluded,” evangelicals under the influence of the Enlightenment began both to intend beauty and to lament its exclusion. Wesley, for
instance, could apparently justify the omission of some previously well received hymns from an updated edition of his *Pocket Hymn Book* on the basis of aesthetic considerations alone: “These I did not dare to palm upon the world, because fourteen of them appeared to me very flat and dull; fourteen more, mere prose, tagged with rhyme; and nine more to be grievous doggerel.” And though a friend had informed him that some of these thirty-seven pieces continued to be “hugely admired,” he replied that he was “sorry for it,” for “It will bring a deep reproach upon the judgment of the Methodists.” Wesley himself, however, would “not increase that reproach by countenancing, in any degree, such an insult both on religion and common sense.”

On rare occasions, evangelicals even attributed their new attention to matters of taste to the effects of Christianity itself. The British missionary Henry Martyn (1781-1812) went so far as to suggest that his evangelical conversion had supplied him with a fresh appreciation for the fine arts:

“Since I have known God in a saving manner, painting, poetry, and music have had charms unknown to me before. I have received what I suppose is a taste for them; for religion has refined my mind, and made it susceptible of impressions from the sublime and beautiful.”

Anyone familiar with the common refrains of eighteenth-century aesthetics will recognize in Martyn’s appeal to the dual categories of the sublime and beautiful the influence of Enlightenment thought. Martyn’s more intriguing suggestion, however, concerned the potential of evangelical Christianity, or rather the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, to alter one’s aesthetic perception. This was precisely the argument of Jonathan Edwards (see below), and it was to recur periodically in the writings of some nineteenth-century evangelical theorists as well.
Despite Martyn’s suggestive reflections, however, reflections which Martyn himself failed to develop, the revolution in evangelical taste was a gradual one. For much of the eighteenth century it proceeded largely by fits and starts. Though poetry was almost universally praised, evangelicals continued to denounce the evils of the theater. In the case of Hannah More (1745-1833), as we will see shortly, these denunciations could even assume a fresh urgency resulting from the epistemological premises of Enlightenment thinkers like Locke. Evangelicals also harbored deep suspicions towards the increasingly popular genre of the novel. Whatever the evolution of the novel may have paradoxically owed to certain tendencies in Puritan thought, it was not until the nineteenth century that a significant number of evangelicals saw fit to appropriate this genre for their own evangelistic and moralistic purposes. And for all the high praise which Wesley and Edwards bestowed upon music, there were still those who, like William Cowper, doubted its effects:

I believe that wine itself, though a man may be guilty of habitual intoxication, does not more to debauch or befool the natural understanding than music, always music; music in season and out of season, weakens and destroys the spiritual discernment, if it is not done in an unfeigned reverence to the worship of God, and with a design to assist the soul in the performance of it, which cannot be when it is the only occupation.

In fact, the eighteenth-century alteration in evangelical taste advanced for the most part along the lines laid down by the generic asymmetry of the Puritan tradition. Poetry, and to a certain extent music – art forms which the Puritans had also valued and practiced – received an added boost from evangelicalism’s exposure to Enlightenment sensibilities,
while the appreciation of other arts such as painting and sculpture developed more slowly. Above all, the Puritan tradition’s negative attitudes towards the use of images in the sanctuary continued among eighteenth-century evangelicals virtually unabated. As with the Puritans, moreover, this negative attitude was driven by evangelicalism’s staunch anti-Catholicism. 

Evidence of Puritanism’s general indifference to the visual persisted as well. In contrast to the multitude of critical pronouncements on poetry which appear throughout Wesley’s journals and letters, his reflections on painting and sculpture are but few. “Of pictures I do not pretend to be a judge,” he conceded in his journal after a visit to Hampton Court. And when, in the 1770s, President Witherspoon of Princeton purchased out of his own pocket a collection of prints for the university, the board of trustees (made up largely of clergymen) denied him any compensation for his troubles.

Yet evidence of the eighteenth-century evolution in evangelical aesthetic consciousness was not restricted solely to the level of taste, patronage, and consumption. Along with changes in evangelical taste came a newfound interest in, and awareness of, aesthetics as a philosophical problem, or rather a collection of philosophical problems. This emerging awareness was also a result of evangelicalism’s close connection to the moderate and didactic Enlightenments. The most significant early example of this interest was the work of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was an innovative thinker who was both profoundly shaped by, and profoundly critical of, many important trends in Enlightenment thought. He was familiar with, among many others, the writings of Locke, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume, and he often engaged them in creative ways. Typically, his objectives were traditional and Puritan (e.g., defending the doctrine of
original sin), but both the methodology and content of his arguments were also grounded in the philosophy of his day. Edwards explored a number of issues related to aesthetics, but by far the aesthetic concept which garnered his greatest attention was beauty, and throughout his many writings Edwards meditated at length on the nature of beauty, its place in human experience, and its purpose in the divine plan. Aesthetic concerns therefore occupied a central place in his thinking, and with unmatched theological and philosophical rigor Edwards produced what was perhaps the first genuine example of a sustained and self-conscious evangelical aesthetic discourse.

Edwards’s most extended treatment of beauty is found in his treatise *A Dissertation Concerning the Nature of True Virtue*, originally composed in 1755 and published posthumously ten years later. This treatment of beauty, however, as rich as it is, was hardly for its own sake. As the title of the work suggests, Edwards’s main concern was actually moral-theological, and the essay was in fact intended as a rejoinder to recent developments in eighteenth-century moral philosophy – particularly, the “moral sense” school of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. In broad terms, the moral sense school had posited a sentimentalist theory of ethics in which every human being was thought to be endowed with an internal “sense” capable of enacting spontaneous moral judgments. Human beings, therefore, were believed to possess a natural inclination towards the good. As noted earlier, however, this confidence in humanity’s innate ability to recognize and effect the good stood in stark contrast to Augustinian-Puritan notions of humanity’s intrinsic depravity. According to this traditional theological scheme, human beings were naturally incapable of any action that could be considered virtuous or meritorious in the
sight of God; “true virtue,” in Edwards’s typically eighteenth-century terminology, was possible only for those who had been redeemed by grace. Though Edwards found some aspects of the Hutchesonian ethical tradition compelling, he had no intention of abandoning his Augustinian roots, and thus the primary task which Edwards set for himself was to show his readers in what true virtue consists and to demonstrate that the capacity for such virtue is the sole property of the regenerate.

From the outset of the treatise, however, it is clear than any discussion of ethics must also involve the aesthetic, at least by way of analogy: “Therefore, I suppose, I shall not depart from the common opinion,” Edwards writes, “when I say, that virtue is the beauty of the qualities and exercises of the heart, or those actions which proceed from them.” To ask what true virtue is is essentially to ask what it is that “renders any habit, disposition, or exercise of the heart truly beautiful” (539). That a discussion of ethics would implicate the aesthetic was a reflection of the contemporary moral tradition, or “common opinion,” to which Edwards was responding. A centerpiece of Hutcheson’s ethical theory, for example, was the notion that human beings possess both a moral sense and an aesthetic sense which function in analogous fashion. “What is approved by this [moral] sense,” wrote Hutcheson in his Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy, “we count as right and beautiful, and call it virtue; what is condemned, we count as base and deformed and vicious.” Just as the aesthetic sense spontaneously and pleasurably perceives the beauty of a material object, so the moral sense spontaneously and pleasurably perceives and approves benevolent behavior. Yet not only are the operations of the two senses analogous but so are their respective objects of perception, for what
beauty and virtuous action have in common, according to the moral sense tradition, are the principles of symmetry and harmony. When, in the case of justice, for example, a criminal receives a punishment that accords with his crime or a victim is awarded proper compensation for the wrongs she endured, the moral sense takes pleasure in the perception of balanced and proportionate action. On this account, therefore, morality is largely a function of certain rudimentary aesthetic principles.97

Edwards by no means discounts this approach entirely. He is quite willing to allow that human beings possess a kind of moral sense grounded in an innate ability to recognize and take pleasure in orderly and harmonious conduct, which God has given to all people. This “natural” moral sense – which, in keeping with eighteenth-century moral philosophy, Edwards equates with “conscience” – is in fact indispensable to the proper functioning of society.98 What Edwards is unwilling to concede, however, is that natural conscience has anything to do with the exercise of true virtue. True virtue, he insists, must always have reference to God, and though he couches his thesis in the terminology of metaphysics rather than theology, it is clear that Edwards’s notion of virtue is finally theocentric: “True virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to Being in general. Or perhaps, to speak more accurately, it is that consent, propensity, and union of heart to being in general, which is immediately exercised in a general good will” (540). All will admit upon reflection, he believes, that on some level the object of one’s virtuous benevolence is the being of another. In rushing to the aid of a friend, for example, one is, in effect, willing the good of this friend’s being. But if such is the case, then it follows that “that Being who has most of being, or has the greatest share of existence … will have
the greatest share of the propensity and benevolent affections of the heart” (545-46).

This object, of course, is God himself, the “Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best” (550). To be sure, benevolence to being in general may lead to virtuous action towards “any one particular being” (541), but true virtue cannot begin at the level of the particular. To begin thus would be to accept mistakenly a part for the whole – to sacrifice the “highest good” to a merely local good (545). This had been the fundamental error of Hutcheson and his followers. “[I]t may be asserted in general,” declares Edwards, “that nothing is of the nature of true virtue, in which God is not the first and the last” (560).

Yet as his opening paragraphs make clear, Edwards also agreed with Hutcheson and with many eighteenth-century moralists in the belief that there is such a thing as the “beauty of virtue.” “That which is called ‘virtue,’” he writes, “is a certain kind of beautiful nature, form or quality” (619). However, as Norman Fiering observes, Edwards concluded that Hutcheson had erred by inverting the proper order of things and predicking moral judgments on a kind of aesthetic judgment: “Hutcheson’s close comparison of the aesthetic sense and the moral sense … reversed the order of the Creation and erroneously made the perception of material relations, such as regularity, equality, proportion, and symmetry, the prototype for the perception of intelligent ethical relationships.”99 Insofar as the mechanics of the natural conscience were concerned, Edwards concurred with Hutcheson’s analysis of the aesthetic, or quasi-aesthetic, grounds of ethics. But such an analysis, he believed, fails to get at the heart of true virtue. Instead, Edwards argues that aesthetic relationships are an embodiment or extension of ethical relationships, or, to put the matter in different but parallel terms, that
the formal beauty of material objects – what Edwards calls “secondary beauty” – is but a
dim reflection of a “primary” or “spiritual beauty,” which consists in the willing
“consent” of one being to another. In positing this aesthetics of charity – or, to use
Fiering’s phrase, this “aesthetics of consent” – Edwards effectively relegates Hutcheson’s
own aesthetics to the level of “secondary beauty,” just as he had demoted Hutcheson’s
moral sense to the level of natural conscience.¹⁰⁰ Let us, however, examine Edwards’s
theory of primary and secondary beauty more closely.

Edwards introduces the notion of spiritual beauty vis-à-vis a discussion regarding
the proper “object[s] of a virtuous benevolence.” The first of these, as we have already
noted, is “being in general” (545). In addition to being itself, however, there is a “second
object of a virtuous propensity of heart,” namely, “benevolent being.” When one not
only values the being of another but also recognizes in this being the existence of a like
benevolence to being in general, this recognition “draws forth greater love to him” (546).
Indeed, it is this benevolent disposition to being in general which one perceives in the
other that constitutes the beauty of this being: “all spiritual beauty lies in these virtuous
principles and acts [i.e., those which proceed from a love to being in general], so ‘tis
primarily on this account they are beautiful, viz. that they imply consent and union with
Being in general” (548). Beauty, then, is ultimately a moral and spiritual category. On
Edwards’s account, a person is most “beautiful” when he or she is most devoted to God,
that is, when he or she “does above all things seek the glory of God, and makes this [the]
supreme, governing, and ultimate end” (559). In fact, the epithet beautiful is applicable
in its highest sense only to those who demonstrate this love to being in general, for “This
is the primary and most essential beauty of everything that can justly be called by the name of virtue” (548).

No human being, however, can match the expanse of God’s own love towards being in general (as Edwards concludes, “divine virtue … must consist primarily in [God’s] love to himself” [557]), and thus if true beauty – i.e., moral or spiritual beauty – consists in benevolence to being in general, it is God himself who must be truly beautiful above all things: “For as God is infinitely the greatest being, so he is allowed to be infinitely the most beautiful and excellent…. God’s beauty is infinitely more valuable than that of all other beings…” (550-51). At the heart of Edwards’s moral-aesthetic system, then, is an emphasis on the disinterested apprehension of divine beauty. Disinterestedness, of course, was to become a staple ingredient in theories of aesthetic contemplation after Kant, but as David Morgan notes, Edwards’s version of disinterestedness “was not a state of dispassionate observation in the manner that Kant and others described … but an abandonment, founded on a self-denying impulse, of the soul into divine grace.” In Edwards’s view, one contemplates the beauty of God for His own sake, but this is not an affectively neutral act on the part of the percipient; to the contrary, one’s contemplation of God is full of desire and passion. This disinterested perception of God’s beauty, however, has no visual or formal component at all since to perceive the primary beauty of God is to perceive His infinite moral benevolence.101

In addition to primary or spiritual beauty, Edwards also acknowledges the existence of a “secondary and inferior kind of beauty” (561). This second category relates to the beauty of material forms, and it is “not peculiar to spiritual beings, but is
found even in inanimate things; which consists of a mutual consent and agreement of
different things, in form, manner, quantity, and visible end or design; called by the
various names of regularity, order, uniformity, symmetry, proportion, harmony, etc.”
(561-62). Edwards spends an entire chapter exploring the different kinds of secondary
beauty, and not surprisingly, his ideas are greatly indebted to Enlightenment theories on
the subject. As he himself acknowledges, secondary beauty is “the same that Mr.
Hutcheson, in his treatise on beauty, expresses by uniformity in the midst of variety”
(562). In the usual eighteenth-century fashion, Edwards extends this notion of secondary
beauty to encompass not only what we would think of as typical aesthetic relationships –
for example, those formal qualities of objects in art or nature – but also such “immaterial”
things as the “order of society” (568). Edwards clearly appreciates this secondary beauty,
despite its “inferiority” to authentic spiritual beauty, and the chapter in which he treats at
length the nature of this secondary beauty offers solid evidence of evangelicalism’s early
engagement with Enlightenment aesthetics. In the specific details of his analysis,
however, Edwards does little to improve upon the ideas of Hutcheson, and therefore these
specifics need not concern us here. Far more important is his conception of the
relationship between primary and secondary beauty.

According to Edwards, “all the beauty to be found throughout the whole creation”
– viz., all secondary beauty – “is but the reflection of the diffused beams of that Being
who hath an infinite fulness of brightness and glory” (550-51). All natural beauty is
somehow, therefore, a material embodiment of the divine benevolence – of the Beauty of
God himself. More specifically, the symmetry one discovers in a material object is a
concrete (though distant) reflection of the kind of “consent,” or harmonious love, shown by one spiritual being to another. The relationship of sides and angles in an equilateral triangle, for example, is an image of a person’s truly virtuous love to God and of God’s supremely virtuous love to people. “The reason,” writes Edwards, “or at least one reason, why God has made this kind of mutual agreement of things beautiful and grateful to those intelligent beings that perceive it probably is that there is in it some image of the true, spiritual original beauty, which has been spoken of: consisting in being’s consent to being, or the union of minds or spiritual beings in a mutual propensity and affection of heart” (564). Edwards thus held to an idealist conception of the relationship between material and spiritual beauty, and indeed, his hierarchy of beauty reflects a longstanding Christian-Platonic tradition. His conception owed much to both the Cambridge Platonists, with whose work Edwards was familiar, and to the views of Shaftesbury; nor was it inconsistent with those Puritan understandings of the beauty of heaven noted earlier. In this way, as Fiering points out, Edwards denied Hutcheson’s view that “the beauty of true virtue” is “reducible somehow to … ordinary aesthetic criteria or explicable by them.”102 Instead, aesthetic criteria are but earthly emblems of heavenly love.

It is worth attending briefly to one other conclusion which Edwards draws, if only in passing, from his idealist hierarchy of beauty since it hints at an idea that would later become widespread among both evangelical and non-evangelical aestheticians in the nineteenth century, though in a significantly altered form. Edwards hypothesizes that one reason God has established a hierarchy of beauty intelligible to human beings is because
of the sheer pleasure it brings God “to observe analogy in his works” (564). This hypothesis led Edwards to develop elsewhere elaborate typological readings of natural objects as “images of divine things.” But there is another reason aside from the divine joy in analogy which may help to explain God’s purpose in establishing such a hierarchy:

And here by the way, I would further observe, probably ‘tis with regard to this image or resemblance which secondary beauty has of true spiritual beauty that God has so constituted nature that the presenting of this inferior beauty, especially in those kinds of it which have the greatest resemblance of the primary beauty, as the harmony of sounds, and the beauties of nature, have a tendency to assist those whose hearts are under the influence of a truly virtuous temper, to dispose them to the exercises of divine love, and enliven in them a sense of spiritual beauty. (565)

The perception of secondary beauty, it seems, has the potential to increase one’s desire for the performance of true virtue. Natural beauty not only enlivens an individual’s apprehension of divine beauty but also helps to move him or her morally. Though Edwards does mention the “harmony of sounds” here, his primary reference – in keeping with a well established Puritan tradition – is to the beauties of nature. He does not, in short, develop systematically any special theory of the moral potential of human art, and in fact, aside from some illustrations drawn from music and architecture, the fine arts do not figure prominently in the treatise at all. But neither does Edwards exclude them, and in principle at least, he gestures towards a conception of art as a vehicle of moral and social influence.

At the same time, though, such a theory, in Edwards’s version of it, could apply only to “those whose hearts are under the influence of a truly virtuous temper.”
glimpse secondary beauty as a reflection of primary beauty requires that one be capable of first perceiving primary beauty itself. “It is impossible,” however, as Edwards contends, “that any one should truly relish this beauty, consisting in general benevolence, who has not that temper himself” (549). The perception of primary beauty, therefore, just like the exercise of true virtue, is available only to those who have been regenerated by divine grace. Human beings in their natural state can, of course, appreciate secondary beauty when they see it, but as Sang Hyun Lee points out, “even when man is experiencing the ‘inferior’ forms of resemblance, he is not grasping their true meaning, since he has no knowledge of the true ground of their beauty.” The mere appreciation of secondary beauty, moreover, has nothing to do with true virtue, or “truly virtuous taste.” “Who will affirm that a disposition to approve of the harmony of good music, or the beauty of a square, or equilateral triangle is the same with true holiness, or a truly virtuous disposition of mind?” (573). If there existed any necessary correlation between virtue and the mere ability to perceive secondary beauty, then one’s “delight in the beauty of squares, and cubes, and regular polygons in the regularity of buildings, and the beautiful figures in a piece of embroidery, would increase in proportion to [one’s] virtue; and would be raised to a great height in some eminently virtuous or holy men; but would be almost wholly lost in some others that are very vicious and lewd” (573). Secondary beauty – “Mr. Hutcheson’s” beauty – is available to all, though only the regenerate can appreciate it to its fullest extent. True beauty, however, is the sole province of the redeemed.

It is possible, I think, to imagine how an Edwardsean aesthetician might have
played out certain aspects of Edwards’s theory of beauty in the context of human art. It seems consistent with Edwards’s premises, for example, to suggest that when it comes to taste, one would have to talk in terms of a “two-tiered aesthetic.” Both the regenerate percipient and the unregenerate percipient would both be able to grasp the formal beauty of an art object, but only the regenerate percipient would be capable of “appreciating” this beauty fully as a reflection of divinity. The precise significance of a piece of art, therefore, would differ according to whether or not one is truly redeemed. In addition, for the regenerate at least, something like a theory of art’s salutary moral influence would be warranted. In fact, the status of art might actually rise on this account since it would be seen as a means of edification and of disposing one “to the exercises of divine love.” In appreciating the beauty of art one might better appreciate the beauty of God.

Whatever the possibilities of Edwards’s reflections for a full-fledged theory of the fine arts, however, his specific influence on the later history of evangelical aesthetics was strangely limited. The one element present in Edwards’s aesthetic thought that did survive into the nineteenth century, at least to some extent, was the emphasis on spiritual regeneration as a prerequisite both for full aesthetic contemplation and for the moral benefits of aesthetic experience. As we will see in chapters 3-5, one does occasionally meet with nineteenth-century evangelical critics who, following Edwards and Henry Martyn, posited some kind of connection between regeneration and taste. For the most part, however, eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century evangelicals failed to develop Edwards’s explicitly theological reflections on aesthetics in any systematic fashion.

Why evangelicals – especially those in America where Edwards loomed large as a
controversialist and then, briefly, as president of the College of New Jersey – failed to capitalize on the aesthetic insights of Edwards is difficult to say. One reason for this failure may have had to do with the fact that the immediate custodians of the Edwardsean theological tradition, theologians like Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy (both students of Edwards), opted to stress the moral dimensions of Edwards’s thought rather than the metaphysical, the aesthetic, or the broadly symbolic. This process arose in part from the felt need to ameliorate the “harsh” tenets of traditional Calvinism in response to the moral polemics of a growing legion of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century anti-Calvinist critics, and one can trace this movement in the United States through the New Divinity writings of Hopkins and Bellamy to the New Haven theology of Nathaniel Taylor and beyond. Thus, nothing like Edwards’s form of idealism would reappear in aesthetic contexts among evangelicals until the middle third of the nineteenth century, and then the direct source of such ideas was quite often not the theistic idealism of Edwards but rather the idealism of German philosophy, which, if it could at times be pressed into the service of Christianity, lacked the clear theological distinctions of Edwards’s system. On occasion, nineteenth-century evangelical critics posited something close to Edwards’s theistic idealism, but such occasions were infrequent, and Edwards himself was rarely, if ever, cited as a precedent. Indeed, one wonders if the metaphysical, Neo-Platonic aesthetics of Edwards were either too abstruse and impractical to be of much immediate use, or too at odds with the increasingly empiricist direction of contemporary Enlightenment aesthetics to hold any sway once the imposing presence of Edwards himself had passed from the scene. This disproportionate attention
to the moral aspect of the Edwardsean heritage even found expression in the decisions of Edwards’s later editors. There is evidence, for example, that when in subsequent decades the works of Edwards were reprinted, often in abridged form, the more “aesthetic” portions were sometimes eliminated. When the American Tract Society republished its edition of Edwards’s *Treatise on the Religious Affections* in the nineteenth century, absent were those passages which focused on “the disinterested contemplation of divine beauty.”

At the same time, however, this heightened focus on the ethical aspects of Edwards’s writings contributed, ironically, to the gradual deconstruction of Edwards’s entire system of morality. Whereas Edwards had attempted to co-opt Hutcheson’s ethico-aesthetic system in the interests of Calvinist orthodoxy, it was this Hutchesonian system which eventually came to displace for many evangelicals Edwards’s theory of “true virtue.” Nineteenth-century evangelical theologians, furthermore, also set about the business of retooling Reformed doctrines of the will, a process that facilitated the growing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century emphasis on moral freedom and human autonomy. For his part, Edwards had tried to appropriate the insights of modern aesthetics within a more or less orthodox system of Reformed theology. As this system gave way, however, so, too, did Edwards’s particular aesthetic insights, for in the end, Edwards’s aesthetic thought was inseparable from his theology. As evangelicals turned to the ethics and aesthetics of the Scottish philosophy, the peculiar religio-aesthetic theorizing of Edwards no doubt seemed like an exercise in obscurantism.

Still, Edwards’s methodical explorations into the aesthetics of beauty are an
important record of eighteenth-century evangelicalism’s growing attention to the
problems of philosophical aesthetics. And although Edwards’s specific contributions to
the later history of evangelical aesthetics were limited – indeed, his name rarely, if ever,
turns up in nineteenth-century evangelical discussions of art and beauty – his general
awareness of and receptivity to many of the developments in modern aesthetics helped to
establish a pattern of engagement for later evangelical theorists. Aesthetics had become a
serious philosophical and theological issue, and evangelicals would increasingly learn to
appreciate and value the importance of this kind of thinking.

Another example of this growing attention to aesthetic matters may be seen in the
fresh interest which writers such as John Wesley showed in issues of language and style.
Here, too, such interest was a direct consequence of evangelicalism’s internalization of
Enlightenment tenets. In his preface to A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People
Called Methodists (1780), Wesley addresses “the poetry” of the hymns which he and his
brother Charles have included in the volume to follow:

(1.) In these Hymns there is no doggerel, no botches, nothing put in to
patch up the rhyme, no feeble expletives. (2.) Here is nothing turgid or
bombast on the one hand, or low and creeping on the other. (3.) Here are
no cant expressions, no words without meaning. Those who impute this to
us know not what they say. We talk common sense, whether they
understand it or not, both in verse and prose, and use no word but in a
fixed and determinate sense. (4.) Here are, allow me to say, both the
purity, the strength, and the elegance of the English language, and, at the
same time, the utmost simplicity and plainness, suited to every capacity. 111

These are undoubtedly high claims for any poet or hymnodist to make, but issues of
accuracy aside, Wesley’s stylistic standards are consistent with those established by
Locke in Book III of his *Essay*. Since human language is susceptible to imprecision and abuse, Locke had urged “those who pretend seriously to search after or maintain truth … to study how they might deliver themselves without obscurity, doubtfulness, or equivocation” (3.11.3). The proper use of language demands, above all, clarity and accuracy. It is worth noting that Locke’s standards – though they sprang from empiricist premises rather than from theological or ethical considerations – were themselves congenial to the tradition of the Puritan “plain style,” a fact which may help to explain the relative ease with which evangelical writers took to such standards. Yet whatever the case, it is clear that Wesley derived his criteria for good poetic style from contemporary Lockean notions of linguistic exactness.

This emphasis on the precision expected of poetic diction stands in contrast to some later romantics who would value poetic language for its density and suggestiveness rather than for its clarity (not to mention those eighteenth-century theorists of the sublime who, like Burke, singled out linguistic obscurity as one prominent source of sublimity). If anything, in fact, Wesley was more rigorous in his application of the canons of Lockean diction than Locke himself, for what is most striking about this passage is Wesley’s attempt to apply these standards of plainness specifically to poetic style. For Locke, poetic language was precisely that species of discourse which relied for its effects on the playful, or metaphorical, use of language. It was, in effect, the intentional misuse of ordinary language for the purposes of pleasure, and it therefore represented the antithesis of the kind of scientific clarity and precision prescribed by Locke for the purposes of ordinary communication. This opposition between the poetic, or
metaphorical, and the empirical uses of language is evident in the oft-cited passage from the *Essay* on “wit” and “judgment,” in which Locke observes “that men who have a great deal of wit, and prompt memories, have not always the clearest judgment or deepest reason”:

For *wit* lying most in the assemblage of *ideas*, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; *judgment*, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from another, *ideas* wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another. This is a way of proceeding quite contrary to metaphor and allusion, wherein for the most part lies that entertainment and pleasantness of wit, which strikes so lively on the fancy, and therefore is so acceptable to all people: because its beauty appears at first sight, and there is required no labour of thought to examine what truth or reason there is in it. The mind, without looking any further, rests satisfied with the agreeableness of the picture and the gaiety of the fancy; and it is a kind of affront to go about to examine it by the severe rules of truth and good reason, whereby it appears that it consists in something that is not perfectly conformable to them. (2.11.2)

As Locke suggests, poetry (or wit) is, by definition, the opposite of clarity, and though he does not openly disparage poetry here – it is pleasant enough as far as it goes – neither does he hold it in particularly high esteem. Some writers during the period did explicitly criticize poetry for what they believed was its propensity to obscure the clear light of knowledge, but even those who did not move to such extremes felt pressure to measure their poetry by the Lockean rule.\(^{114}\) Clearly, Wesley belonged to this latter group, for what he seems to have prized was, in Lockean terms, a poetry that was closer to judgment than wit, that is, a poetry which conveyed to its readers and/or hearers a fixed and
determinate meaning in which the play of language was minimized and the communication of stable truth maximized. Given that Wesley’s chief creative outlet was hymnody rather than poetry of a more generally belletristic sort, it is not surprising perhaps that such a poetic would have appealed to him.

Yet just as important as any specific principles of style was the growing awareness among evangelicals of style itself as a distinct concern. Evangelicals were beginning to show an increased attention to the manner of literary objects as distinct (though not separate) from matters of content – if not quite for its own sake, then at least with an eye to the enjoyment which it seemed to afford. This interest in the pleasures of style was part of a gradual movement during the eighteenth century towards a conception of the “aesthetic” as a singular category of experience, and once again, it was Locke who helped to inaugurate this movement. As we have seen, Locke’s psycholinguistic distinction between the synthetic-metaphorical nature of wit and the analytic-literal nature of judgment contributed to the growing belief, earlier hinted at by Francis Bacon, that art and science constitute two discrete types of discourse. This idea would prove a mainstay of romantic aesthetics, manifesting itself in a series of related binaries (heart/head, imagination/understanding, emotion/intellect). At the same time, this distinction also prepared the way for the related notion that whereas science serves to advance the claims of knowledge, art exists primarily for the sake of pleasure. Art and poetry may still offer a kind knowledge, but their immediate end is thought to be a unique kind of experience.115

To be sure, Wesley’s theory of poetic diction as formulated in the preface to his
*Hymn Book* resists any simplistic dichotomy between science and art, or knowledge and pleasure. Indeed, his theory makes the task of distinguishing poetry in general from other “mundane” forms of communication problematic. If poetic language is to be held to the same standards of usage as other forms of discourse – if poetry must, in a sense, be “scientifically” precise – then it is not immediately clear what poetry *is* or how, and whether, poetry is unique.\(^{116}\) Nor is it perfectly clear on Wesley’s account how the sort of pleasure or experience offered by poetry differs, if at all, from other kinds of pleasure. This difficulty, however – if it is, in fact, a genuine difficulty – was by no means peculiar to Wesley but was instead typical of the didacticism of the age. The emphasis on poetry and art as a unique sort of (emotional) experience implied by Locke’s differentiation between wit and judgment took time to develop, not only among evangelicals but also within Anglo-American culture at large.\(^{117}\)

Nevertheless, other passages in Wesley’s writings suggest that he viewed stylistic beauty as an independent source of enjoyment which could be fruitfully, though perhaps not finally, distinguished from theological or ethical matters. We have already noted, for example, his decision to excise thirty-seven hymns from an updated edition of the *Pocket Hymn Book* not on the basis of inferior doctrine but solely on the basis of what Wesley believed to be their aesthetic shortcomings. Similarly, in one of his journal entries Wesley recorded his impressions of Homer’s *Iliad*, taking care to praise Homer for his craft and his “beauty of expression”: “What an amazing genius had this man! To write with such strength of thought, and beauty of expression, when he had none to go before him!” Significantly, after calling attention to the stylistic supremacy of Homer and even
alluding to him in the usual eighteenth-century fashion as a kind of “original genius,” Wesley moves almost immediately to a moral assessment of his work. In this, Homer fares considerably worse, for although “a vein of piety runs through his whole work, [even] in spite of his Pagan prejudices… one cannot but observe such improprieties intermixed, as are shocking to the last degree.”¹¹⁸ As with the Puritans, then, one’s final evaluation of an aesthetic object must include the moral. Wesley, however, is perhaps more willing than were many Puritans to hold the aesthetic and the moral qualities of an art object in temporary isolation. The quality of Homer’s expression is no less beautiful or authentic for the ethical improprieties which Wesley finds intermixed throughout.

As the writings of Edwards, Wesley, and others suggest, eighteenth-century evangelicals had begun to develop the kind of self-conscious aesthetic discourse that had been lacking among their Puritan predecessors. One of the most important factors serving to catalyze this growth was the psychological orientation of much eighteenth-century philosophy. The birth of evangelical aesthetics, as with so much of modern aesthetics generally, was largely a result of the eighteenth century’s systematic attempts to catalogue the individual powers of the human mind. This interest in the difficulties of “mental philosophy” and in the resulting theories of faculty psychology can be traced in part to the influence of Locke. In setting out to explore “the discerning faculties of a man, as they are employed about the objects which they have to do with” (1.1.2), Locke bequeathed to his descendants a methodology which, even as the precise details of his system gave way to the critiques of Hume, the Scottish realists, and finally to Kant, placed the philosophy of art on a new footing. Not only did he lay the groundwork for a
renewed consideration of such aesthetically significant powers as the imagination and taste but he also helped to ensure more broadly that human psychology would provide the intellectual context within which the problems of modern aesthetics would be thought for decades to come.\textsuperscript{119}

This methodology may have been particularly decisive in legitimating art, and the philosophical consideration of art, in the minds of those evangelicals whose sensibilities had been shaped by the aesthetic ambiguities of Puritanism, for the Enlightenment’s careful exploration of the powers of the human mind ultimately lent a kind of “scientific” sanction to the study of aesthetic questions. “Manifold are the advantages of criticism,” noted Lord Kames in his influential \textit{Elements of Criticism} (1762), “when… studied as a rational science.”\textsuperscript{120} Prior to the Darwinian controversies of the 1860s, evangelicals held “modern science” (and especially Bacon) in the highest esteem,\textsuperscript{121} and the idea that art was, paradoxically, a proper object of science, may have offered just the sort of rationale that some evangelicals needed to leave the aesthetic ambiguities of Puritanism behind. This is not to suggest, of course, that the scientific investigation of the aesthetic faculties of the human mind promptly dispensed with all Puritan anxieties concerning art or the imagination. In fact, many of the aesthetic concepts advanced by Enlightenment aestheticicians were themselves subject to ambiguity and were therefore just as capable of confirming Puritan prejudices as they were of displacing them. But what the new methodology allowed for was, at the very least, a modicum of critical distance, which, in light of the tenets of the new psychology itself, required that faculties like the imagination and taste, and the objects to which such faculties are directed, be granted
This psycho-aesthetic bent is evident, for example, in John Wesley’s essay, “Thoughts upon Taste,” first published in the December issue of the *Arminian Magazine* in 1780. The essay, as he notes, was occasioned by a reading of Alexander Gerard’s own “Essay on Taste,” which Wesley “entered upon … with great expectation” in light of Gerard’s established credentials as an expert on the subject (465). Gerard’s essay had originally appeared in 1759 after having been awarded a prize from the Edinburgh Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Sciences, Manufactures, and Agriculture – a fact to which Wesley alludes. A second edition was published in 1764, and a third edition was issued in 1780 (the year of Wesley’s essay), which included a new section on “the standard of taste.” Gerard’s essay has been called “the most elaborate investigation of the faculty of taste during the eighteenth century,” and it appears that it may have been this very elaborateness which frustrated Wesley. For although Wesley concedes that the book remains the best available on the subject, he nonetheless expresses disappointment with Gerard’s reflections: they are neither well organized nor “well digested,” and “there are assertions almost in every chapter, which are exceedingly disputable.” Yet his biggest complaint is that Gerard has failed to offer any “just definition of the subject” (465). It is possible for a reader to walk away from the text, Wesley claims, without having any clear answer to the question, “What is taste?” (466). The accuracy of this claim may be debatable, but Wesley’s call for precise definition is characteristic of his usual Lockean attitude toward linguistic precision. Wesley, moreover, was a master of abridgements, and thus the essay ought also to be read in light of his usual habit of
distilling information in order to make it available to a wider audience (recall its periodical origins).

The bulk of the essay, then, consists of Wesley’s attempt to clarify the nature of taste, to catalogue its various manifestations, and to offer suggestions for how it might be improved. In doing so, he retraces ground covered by other eighteenth-century philosophers of taste, though in a highly simplified form. He does not, for example, explore the nature of beauty, as Hutcheson and Gerard had done, and though in passing he distinguishes taste from both the “imagination” and “judgment,” he does not attempt a detailed examination of the relationship between taste and other powers of the mind. On the whole, his essay takes its bearings from the Hutchesonian tradition generally, though Addison turns out to be his most frequent point of reference. Following in the footsteps of Hutcheson, who, as we have seen, had expanded Locke’s sensory apparatus beyond the merely bodily to include both the moral and aesthetic “senses,” Wesley defines taste as “a faculty of the mind, analogous to the [physical] sense of taste.” It is “that internal sense which relishes and distinguishes its proper object.” “By relishes,” he continues, “I mean perceives with pleasure; for in the common acceptation of the word, we are not said to have a taste for displeasing, but only for pleasing objects.” For Wesley, then, taste appears to include both an affective and a cognitive element, though it is the experience of pleasure which ultimately distinguishes the operations of the taste from the operations of the understanding. Interestingly, Wesley seems actually to posit the existence of several tastes, or rather “species of taste.” If taste is directed to a “proper object” of pleasure, and there are, in fact, a variety of pleasing objects in the world, then there must
be different types of taste corresponding to different objects: “And as various as those objects are, so various are the species of taste” (466). Wesley plays somewhat freely with the term “object,” a point which introduces some possible confusion into his theory. At times Wesley seems to suggest that “object” may refer to individual, irreducible elements, i.e., to specific objects (“metaphysics” or “flowers, meadows, fields, or woods”). Throughout much of the essay, however, Wesley writes not about particular objects but about classes of objects. Thus he observes, for example (as both Hutcheson and Edwards had done), that some people have a taste for “objects of the understanding,” such as mathematical formulas or speculative ideas. Once again, such a taste does not consist in the mere cognitive apprehension of such formulas but rather in the special pleasure one takes in contemplating them: “when we say, a man has a taste for the mathematics, we mean by that expression, not only that he is capable of understanding them, but that he takes pleasure therein” (467). Here, though, “object” refers not to, say, a particular mathematical formula like the Pythagorean Theorem but rather to a certain type of object.

Wesley continues with this classification by types. In addition to objects of the understanding, Wesley isolates two other classes of objects, each of which appears to have its corresponding species of taste, or “internal sense.” The second species of taste is an aesthetic one, or “that which relates to the objects that gratify the imagination” (467). At this point, he relies heavily on the “ingenious thoughts of Mr. Addison,” particularly his “Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination” (466). Addison had suggested that the imagination takes pleasure in three sorts of objects – the grand, the novel, and the
beautiful – and Wesley follows this scheme exactly: “Thus we are accustomed to say, a man has a taste for grandeur, for novelty, or for beauty; meaning thereby, that he takes pleasure in grand, in new, or in beautiful objects, whether they are such by nature or by art.” Yet his use of Addison also represents, in the context of Wesley’s reading of Gerard, a reversion of sorts, for Gerard had posited a total of seven internal “senses.”

The first three were those corresponding to the classes of objects suggested by Addison – novelty, sublimity (Addison’s “grandeur”), and beauty – but Gerard had also assigned senses to imitation, harmony, ridicule, and virtue. Wesley appears, then, to prefer Addison’s simpler taxonomy to Gerard’s more expanded one. Even so, within Wesley’s tripartite, Addisonian system, it turns out, “there is an unbounded variety… some having a taste for grandeur, some for beauty. Some again, have a taste for one kind of beauty; and others for another. Some have a taste for the beauties of nature; others for those of art. The former for flowers, meadows, fields, or woods; the latter for painting or poetry” (467). Such an approach, if pushed to an extreme, could result in the theory that there exists a special taste or sense for every individual object. A rose, for example, may have a peculiar beauty of its own which distinguishes it from the beauty of a sunset, or, for that matter, from the distinctive beauty of a violet. In this case, one would have to speak in terms of a “rose-taste,” a “violet-taste,” and so on. That this was what Wesley had in mind, however, is doubtful. Gerard, too, had employed the word “taste” rather freely, using it to refer to both the internal senses individually, as well as to their coordinate action: “Any one of the internal senses, existing in vigour and perfection, forms a particular species of taste … but all of them must at once be vigorous, in order to
constitute taste in its just extent.” Thus, Wesley’s many “species of taste” are at least theoretically resolvable on some level into the single “faculty” of taste, though unlike Gerard, Wesley makes no effort to clarify the details of this resolution.

Finally, it is worth noting briefly that Wesley, like Edwards and the Hutchesonians, also accepts the existence of a moral sense, or a taste “whereby we relish the happiness of our fellow-creatures, even without any reflection on our own interest, without any reference to ourselves.” What is interesting, however, is that Wesley makes little effort in this essay to qualify this benevolism in light of the doctrines of grace or of original sin. Unlike Edwards, who went to great lengths to subordinate Hutcheson’s theory of the moral and aesthetic senses to his own system of divine grace, the most Wesley will venture on this score is that “there is something still in the human mind, in many, if not in all, (whether by nature, or from a higher principle,) which interests us in the welfare” of others (467). One ought not make too much of this perhaps. For one thing, Wesleyan Arminianism, as Calvinist critics frequently pointed out, left greater room for natural human abilities, and in this way Wesley’s reluctance to situate the moral sense definitively in the realm of grace or nature is not unexpected. Wesley had, moreover, earlier criticized Hutcheson along more Edwardsean lines. For our purposes, Wesley’s most important declaration regarding the moral sense may have been his proclamation of its superiority to the aesthetic sense. As with Edwards, and in fact with many in the eighteenth century, morality still trumped the aesthetic: “Is not this taste of infinitely more value, than a taste for any or all the pleasures of the imagination?” (467).
Wesley’s conception of taste, despite its potential to fracture into numerous particulars, is ultimately an objective one, as was Gerard’s. He is apparently untroubled by the problem of discrepant tastes which so exercised Hume. Each species of taste relishes what is “truly excellent in its kind” (468), and for this reason tastes can also be improved. The remainder of the essay is thus taken up with Wesley’s advice for the rectification of taste, and indeed the last portion of the treatise shifts to an almost exclusive focus on aesthetic taste. (One is left to wonder what counsel Wesley may have offered for the improvement of moral taste – something which, by his own premises, he should have done). Much of Wesley’s advice is typical eighteenth-century fare (read the ancient writers, talk with men of genius [469]), and need not concern us here. One passage, however, deserves comment. In discussing what he terms a “correct” or “fine taste” – one in which an individual “relishes whatever, either in the works of nature or of art, is truly excellent in its kind” (468) – Wesley asserts that Addison’s definition of fine taste must be revised. Addison had restricted the faculty of fine taste to the beauties of writing, but Wesley argues that this concept should be expanded to include anything that is beautiful in either nature or art. He then concludes: “Such a taste as this is much to be desired, and that on many accounts. It greatly increases those pleasures of life, which are not only innocent, but useful. It qualifies us to be of far greater service to our fellow-creatures” (468-69). For Wesley, it seems, aesthetic pleasure has become a force for good; it now has an important social and moral dimension. Unlike many Puritans, who tended to view aesthetic pleasure as an ancillary concern, or as a kind of added bonus above and beyond whatever the intellectual and rational benefits available in art, Wesley
appears to attribute socio-moral significance to pleasure itself. This idea, of course, was not unique to Wesley, and it was, by 1780, fairly widespread. Lord Kames, for example, had suggested as much in his *Elements of Criticism* (1762), a text whose popularity endured well into the nineteenth century. Edwards, as we have seen, also suggested something along these lines, though he was careful to qualify this suggestion, insisting that such a notion might only apply to those who, by the enabling power of grace, are capable of grasping primary beauty. Wesley, however, makes little or no attempt in this instance to restrict this idea to the regenerate. The socio-moral effects of art are at least potentially available to all, regardless of one’s state of grace. Though this lack of qualification on Wesley’s part may have been more a sin of omission rather than of commission, the suggestion of aesthetic pleasure as a means of cultivating morality apart from the intervention of divine grace would eventually play a decisive role in nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetic thought.

Wesley’s “Thoughts upon Taste” reflects the widespread eighteenth-century interest in aesthetic questions as a subset of problems in mental philosophy. By the end of the eighteenth century, this interest had assumed institutional form in college and university courses on “mental and moral philosophy.” In the United States, these courses, which were typically taught by college presidents and taken during one’s senior year, represented the pinnacle of a student’s academic career. The content of these courses, most of which was derived from the Scottish realists well into the nineteenth century (who, incidentally, were far more interested in aesthetics than Locke had ever been), addressed aesthetic problems such as beauty or imagination in terms of the
dynamics of mind. Textbooks, for example, customarily included sections on “taste” and “imagination,” which in turn led to discussions of beauty, sublimity, creativity, and a variety of artistic genres. Though it would still be some time before American instructors were delivering specialized lectures devoted wholly to aesthetics, as had been done in Germany since at least the turn of the century, it was in courses such as these that middle-class evangelicals would have first encountered the philosophical study of aesthetics.

Eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century British evangelicals would have likewise been exposed to the problems of aesthetics through courses on mental philosophy, though their institutional experiences were more varied as a result of the religious tests that were in place at Oxford and Cambridge well into the nineteenth century. Such tests, which excluded dissenters and nonconformists from taking degrees, were not finally abolished until 1871. One result of these tests, however, was the forging of closer ties between the universities of Scotland, where religious tests were non-existent, and the dissenting academies of England, particularly in the eighteenth century. As Anand C. Chitnis observes, “From the early eighteenth century the Scottish universities and the English dissenting communities demonstrated several common approaches.” During this period, the curriculum in English dissenting schools focused on the liberal arts. “As in the Scottish philosophy classes,” writes Chitnis, “for example those of Dugald Stewart at the end of the century, the emphasis was on the cultivation of moral and intellectual powers.” By the early nineteenth century, a number of dissenting academies had, for various reasons, moved away from the liberal arts curriculum that had
earlier defined them, but an important effect of this change was that more and more dissenters opted to study in Scotland itself. Thus British evangelicals, too, were directly influenced by the mental philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment.\(^{133}\)

The eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century study of mental philosophy also supplied evangelicals with one further ideological component which helped to place the study of art and aesthetics in a new light, namely, the concept of psychological “balance.” The faculty psychology of the day held that each human power ought to be cultivated to its fullest extent. Some powers (e.g., the passions), of course, might be rightfully subordinated to others (e.g., reason) in accordance with the natural constitution and proper regulation of the human mind, but no power or faculty ought to be ignored completely.\(^{134}\) In America, this criterion of mental balance was articulated clearly in the Yale Report of 1828. According to the Report, “as the bodily frame is brought to its highest perfection, not by one simple and uniform motion, but by a variety of exercises, so the mental faculties are expanded, and invigorated, and adapted to each other, by familiarity with different departments of science.” A proper education, noted the Report, sought “a proper balance of character.”\(^{135}\) As one of the foremost American institutions with close evangelical affiliations in the early nineteenth century, the logic of the Yale Report would have been familiar to a broad base of evangelical students. While the immediate intent of the Yale Report was to vindicate the continuing ideal of the liberal arts, and in particular, the study of the classics,\(^{136}\) its logic afforded a broad justification for the study and appreciation of the fine arts. The failure to cultivate the aesthetic dimension of the human personality would be to threaten the ideal of psychological
balance. As we will see in the next two chapters, nineteenth-century evangelicals not only appropriated this logic to defend the claims of art but also used it to point out the shortcomings of the Puritan aesthetic tradition.

Yet if, as I have argued, the moderate and didactic Enlightenments served to bring about a change in the aesthetic consciousness of eighteenth-century evangelicals, to shape many of their specific aesthetic ideas, and to normalize for them the philosophical study of art, it was also the case that Enlightenment doctrines could be used in some cases to reinforce timeworn Puritan suspicions. Terence Martin, for instance, has argued that the Scottish philosophy of common sense actually served, at least initially, to energize longstanding American anxieties concerning the exercise of the imagination. According to Martin, the widely shared distrust of fiction throughout much of the nineteenth century can be attributed in large part to the dominant metaphysics of common sense realism. In a similar vein, an interesting British example of the negative impact of Enlightenment principles on evangelical aesthetics is Hannah More’s “Preface to the Tragedies,” in which More draws implicitly on empiricist epistemology to shore up the traditional Puritan case against the evils of the theater. The Preface is arguably a complex piece of theory on many levels, and it speaks to a variety of tensions (e.g., between the moral and aesthetic) that would be well worth examining in their own right. Here, though, I want to draw attention to the psychological bases of More’s case against the theater and the way in which these bases, rooted in Enlightenment theories of mind, lent new weight to old antipathies.

The occasion of More’s Preface was her apparently controversial decision to
include in a volume of her collected works some tragic dramas composed early in her
career, prior to her conversion to evangelical Christianity. On the one hand, More wishes
to explain to those readers familiar with her later censures of the stage why she has
chosen to reprint such pieces. Her answer, in short, is that to suppress them would have
been perceived as “disingenuous.” On the other hand, More also sees this occasion as
an opportunity to express concisely the principled disapproval of the stage which
represents her mature position. She is not, however, simply interested in pointing out the
dangers inherent in “bad” plays, which, she believes, are already obvious to any virtuous
person; instead, she undertakes “the unpopular task of animadverting on the dangerous
effects of those which come under the description of good plays; for from those chiefly
arises the danger (if danger there be), to good people” (504). More, in short, wants to
demonstrate why even the good plays are bad. Her case in support of this unenviable
thesis draws on a range of arguments, some of which reiterate well established critiques
of the theater that any Puritan would have recognized. What may seem “good” to the
non-Christian, for example, may betray its true darkness to the renewed mind of the
redeemed (506). It is also necessary for those Christian viewers who would insist on
their exemption from the negative effects of the stage, or who would argue that to the
pure all things are pure, to recall their obligation to their weaker brothers and sisters not
to be a “stumbling-block” (510) – an argument made all the more poignant by More’s
suggestion that one’s observation of audience response (laughter, applause, etc.) is a
determining factor in how one processes the action onstage (506). Tragedy, moreover, is
a particularly dubious dramatic form in that it takes as its central principle the pagan ethic
of “honour” rather than the Christian virtues (504).

It is clear, however, that the bulk of More’s case rests on her psycho-aesthetic argument for the nefarious effects of witnessing a dramatic performance. Despite her passing assertion that tragedy as a genre is rooted in pagan morality, the danger of the stage lies for More almost entirely in its status as a sensory spectacle. In fact, she is perfectly willing to allow that the private reading of a play can be a beneficial experience for the reader; watching a play, however, involves serious risks: “I think, then, that there is a substantial difference between seeing and reading a dramatic composition; and that the objections which lie so strongly against the one, are not, at least in the same degree, applicable to the other.” But why does material that would otherwise be deemed “safe” if read in private constitute a danger when viewed as a performance? More’s implicit answer to this question has to do with the immediacy of the sensations – and of visual sensations in particular – experienced during a dramatic performance. Dramatic poetry “may be read with safety, because it can there be read with soberness. The most animated speeches subside into comparative tameness, and … produce no ruffle of the passions, no agitation of the senses, but merely afford a pleasant, and, it may be, a not unsalutary exercise to the imagination” (508). Whereas reading necessitates reflection and thus employs the reason, dramatic performances circumvent the reason and act immediately on the senses, dazzling and overwhelming them. Indeed, the difficulty with dramatic spectacles is their powerful but non-rational appeal to the passions, for they threaten to efface the kind of clear ideas expressed in propositional form that served as the gold standard for so many eighteenth-century thinkers.¹³⁹ Contrasting one’s
experience of listening to a sermon with one’s experience at the theater, More notes the
difference in their methods of presentation. Whereas the Sunday sermon offers
“humbling propositions,” it is the purpose of the theater “not only to preach, but to
personify doctrines…”:

Doctrines, not simply expressed, as those of the Sunday are, in the naked
form of axioms, principles, and precepts, but realized, embodied, made
alive, furnished with organs, clothed, decorated, brought into lively
discourse, into interesting action; enforced with all the energy of passion,
adorned with all the graces of language, and exhibited with every aid of
emphatical delivery, every attraction of appropriate gesture…. Is not the
competition too unequal? (508)

Such criticisms, of course, are not inconsistent with earlier Puritan attacks on the
stage. The influential Platonic-Augustinian tradition, moreover, had always viewed
indulgence of the bodily senses with profound suspicion. It is interesting in this light to
note the decision by the editor of the first American edition of More’s collected works to
append to her Preface the conclusion of Jeremy Collier’s “Short View of the Immorality
and Profaneness of the English Stage” (1699). In the opinion of the editor, it seems,
More’s critique carries on a noble tradition of anti-theatrical sentiments, and in fact there
is nothing in Collier’s conclusion that is at odds with the thrust of More’s argument. Like
More, Collier also observes that the stage “cherishes those passions, and rewards those
vices, which ‘tis the business of reason to discountenance” (qtd. in More 510). On one
level, then, More’s disapprobation is hardly surprising, and there is nothing particularly
novel in her intentions.

Yet More’s case is not merely a rehashing of time-tested religious arguments
against the stage; rather, it is a case deeply informed by its Enlightenment context. Her
contradistinction, for example, between “the naked form” of the sermon, which consists
of “axioms, principles, and precepts,” and the “semblance of real action” encountered in a
stage production that leads to “a kind of enchantment” (508), draws upon the sort of
science-art/intellect-emotion dichotomy suggested by Locke and others. The effect of
dramatic performances, according to More, is akin to Locke’s conception of the effects of
wit, in which “beauty appears at first sight, and there is required no labour of thought to
examine what truth or reason there is in it.” As does Locke, More isolates the aesthetic
(though her ultimate concern remains a moral one) – implicitly acknowledging its
singular affective power – only to locate its threat precisely in this power. This
paradoxical dynamic can be traced as far back as Plato, but its immediate incarnation in
the Preface is a direct result of eighteenth-century developments.

In the same way, More’s concern for the sensational dimension of dramatic
productions acquires much of its urgency from its subscription to an empiricist
philosophy of mind. Locke, as is well known, had argued in the Essay that all human
knowledge is originally a product of one’s experience. The human mind does not come
equipped with innate ideas but must instead gather information from the world around it.
Simple ideas, which serve as the basis for all our more complex ideas, are those which
the mind arrives at involuntarily via sensation, reflection, or both. Such simple ideas,
moreover, cannot be altered once they have been received by the mind: “These simple
ideas, when offered to the mind, the understanding can no more refuse to have, nor alter
when they are imprinted, nor blot them out and make new ones itself, than a mirror can
refuse, alter, or obliterate the images or ideas which the objects set before it do therein produce” (2.1.25). This model of empiricist psychology, in which the mind is passively subject to impressions from without, led in turn to the striking conclusion that “the personality is formed by its sensations,” and although Locke’s theory of the active composition of complex ideas may have preserved some room for agency in the intellectual process, human identity was, in a real sense, largely a product of sensory experience. In fact, this notion was reinforced by another of Locke’s famous postulates, the “association of ideas.” Some ideas, Locke believed, “have a natural correspondence and connexion with one another”; others, however, are connected solely as a result of chance or custom. It is one of the purposes of education to sever such habitual associations, for they have “such an influence and [are] of so great force to set us awry in our actions as well moral as natural, passions, reasonings, and notions themselves, that perhaps there is not any one thing that deserves more to be looked after” (2.33.5, 9).

It is not difficult to see how such a model of mind could serve to exacerbate traditional Christian anxieties regarding the senses. One could, in effect, be carried off to hell by the intensity of one’s perceptions and associations. Once confronted with a given sensory experience, one’s mind and personality would be inevitably shaped by the encounter. Since sensory impressions were received passively by the mind and, once there, could not be eliminated by any natural act, the only solution was to avoid such impressions altogether. More’s allegiance to this empiricist model, and her fears regarding its negative consequences for those who would frequent the playhouse, are clear:
We cannot be too often reminded, that we are, to an inconceivable degree, the creatures of habit. Our tempers are not principally governed, nor our characters formed, by single marked actions; nor is the colour of our lives principally determined by prominent, detached circumstances; but the character is gradually molded by a series of seemingly insignificant but constantly recurring practices, which, incorporated into our habits, become part of ourselves. (505)

Such habits, once formed, can “silently eat out the very heart and life of vigorous virtue” (505). This is a traditional Christian concern expressed in the framework of Enlightenment empiricism; it is, in a sense, an empiricized Christianity. Even as More’s “animadversions” perpetuate a legacy of Puritan castigation and critique, they inscribe at the same time many of the debates in Enlightenment epistemology and aesthetics. More’s Preface, furthermore, demonstrates how the effects of evangelicalism’s contact with the Enlightenment were not always immediate, nor especially revolutionary. Even aesthetic “developments” could be put to conservative uses.

As More’s Preface also suggests, the effects of the Enlightenment on evangelical aesthetic thought manifested themselves slowly and erratically over the course of the eighteenth century. In the last two decades of the eighteenth century, articles like Wesley’s “Thoughts upon Taste” were relatively scarce. On the one hand, of course, this is partially explainable by the fact that evangelicals were just beginning to awaken to the possibilities of the periodical form, and thus the absence of such articles is not necessarily a reliable measure of the state of evangelical aesthetic discourse. On the other hand, neither did evangelicals of the period generate much aesthetic reflection in other mediums – a point which suggests that evangelicals were still struggling to find a
philosophical voice when it came to art. Statements like Henry Martyn’s about the psycho-aesthetic effects of conversion, for all its suggestiveness, were exceedingly rare, and rarer still was the sort of explicitly theological reflection on aesthetics practiced by Edwards.

To a certain extent, this absence must be seen in the context of social history. In the United States, for example, evangelicals during the nationalist period were confronted with the task of negotiating the political aftermath of the Revolution. Those denominations, moreover, such as Baptists and Methodists, which had strong populist elements and which stood outside of the Congregationalist-Presbyterian establishment in New England, or which seemed to threaten in various ways the social stability of the dominant culture (as with Methodists in the South), were engaged in battles of their own that likely helped to squeeze out widespread interest in “cultural” pursuits that were easily associated with hegemonic control.141 Something similar may be said with regard to the socially suspect position of eighteenth-century Dissenters in Britain and of Methodism’s uncertain relationship to the power structures of the Anglican Church (though in this latter case there is some evidence that British Methodists were engaged during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in a full-scale attempt to achieve “respectability”142 – a phenomenon that may actually have contributed to British Methodism’s growing interest in aesthetics).

However, this absence must also be attributed in part to the residual influence of Puritan sensibilities on the minds of many evangelicals. “[I]t is not surprising,” wrote one early student of the Evangelical Movement in Britain, “to find Evangelicals deficient
in any appreciation of art and the aesthetic side of life. Some went further, and, with the Puritans, looked upon beauty as the snare of the evil one, a siren voice luring them from the strait path of righteousness.”143 That many eighteenth-century evangelicals persisted in such a mindset is undeniable. At the same time, however, such a statement does not represent the whole story. The difficulty with this view is not its absolute falsity but rather its failure to give due weight to eighteenth-century evangelicalism’s discontinuity with the Puritan religio-aesthetic tradition. The yeast of the Enlightenment may have been slow to exercise its leavening effects on evangelical aesthetics, but it was nonetheless sure for all that.144

In fact, the Enlightenment was instrumental in dislodging evangelicals from the strictures of the Puritan tradition and in leading evangelicals toward the mature aesthetic discourse that was to appear in evangelical periodicals of the mid-to-late nineteenth century. It is virtually impossible, for example, to account for a poem such as the following, which appeared in the pages of the *Arminian Magazine* in 1784, apart from the growing evangelical awareness of Enlightenment mental philosophy and its implications for aesthetics. Entitled “On Imagination,” this paean to the creative faculty – which participated in a well established eighteenth-century tradition of poetic reflections on the imagination dating back to Mark Akenside – would have been unthinkable to a Puritan writer only a century before:

> Thy various works, imperial Queen, we see,
> How bright their forms! how deckèd with pomp by thee!
Thy wondèrous acts in beautèous order stand,
And all attest how potent is thy hand.

Imagination! who can sing thy force?
Or who describe the swiftness of thy course?
Soaring through the air to find the bright abode,
The èmpyrèal palace of the thundèring God.

Such is thy powèr, nor are thine orders vain,
O thou leader of the mental train:
In full perfection all thy works are wrought,
And thine the sceptre o’er the realms of thought.145

“Leader of the mental train” suggests the anonymous poet’s familiarity with the associational and empiricist psychology of the Enlightenment, but such a poem – with its unqualified praise of the imagination as an “imperial Queen” capable of finding out “Thè èmpyrèal palace of the thundèring God” – also offers a foretaste of the romantic bent of so much later evangelical criticism and theory. In this way, this particular poem is a crucial, if unusual, example of evangelical aesthetics in transition, and it captures in miniature the very progression that I have sought to trace throughout this chapter.

Thanks to the Enlightenment, the Puritan tradition had been left behind, and the age of evangelical romanticism was beginning to dawn. “The Christian relaxes in the temperate
use of all the gifts of Providence,” wrote Wilberforce in 1797. “Imagination, and taste, and genius, and the beauties of creation, and the works of art, lie open to him.”

This same transition is also apparent in the growing number of essays and reviews devoted to philosophical criticism that appeared in early-nineteenth-century evangelical periodicals. During the first decade of the new century, the British *Eclectic Review* was founded, which was perhaps the first evangelical periodical to feature regular discussions of aesthetic topics. In the 1810s, essays and reviews treating aesthetics began to appear with increasing frequency in other periodicals as well. In 1812, the *Christian Observer*, the famous mouthpiece of the Clapham Sect, reviewed two tomes of (not surprisingly) Scottish aesthetics, Archibald Alison’s *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (reissued in 1811) and Dugald Stewart’s *Philosophical Essays*, which included lengthy sections on beauty and sublimity. The same decade also witnessed the publication of a protracted debate on the place of fiction and an inquiry into “Sacred Poetry.” By the 1820s, it was not uncommon to meet with articles on art and aesthetics in both British and American evangelical periodicals. As William Charvat has demonstrated, moreover, it was Scottish aesthetics which guided the critical perspective of these periodicals until the third decade of the nineteenth century. To be sure, the first three decades of the nineteenth century still proved to be slow going for some evangelical theorists and critics. As Doreen Rosman argues, though “the traditional charge of philistinism” is not quite applicable to British evangelicals between 1790 and 1830, “even … the most cultured evangelicals” found it difficult “to reconcile their enjoyment of the arts with their faith.”
After the 1830s, however, the small aesthetic sparks that had been lit by evangelicalism’s engagement with the Enlightenment were finally fanned into flame. Once again, the reason for this was partly a social one. As Noll observes of American evangelicals, “by the 1830s … a new era had begun. While the single-minded pietism that fueled early evangelical mobilization never passed away, it was increasingly joined by other concerns. The business of organizing Christian civilization took its place alongside the business of saving souls.”

British evangelicals, meanwhile, were similarly invested in the business of organizing Christian civilization – a main facet of which was the propagation of an aesthetic culture underwritten by the theoretical exploration of art. Here, at least, one portion of the Puritan tradition survived intact: the desire to construct a nation and a culture that was (Protestant) Christian through and through. For the Puritans, however, art had occupied no significant place in this vision, though its inclusion had, of course, always been a hypothetical possibility. This interest in organizing Christian civilization, moreover, coincided with, and was perhaps a reflection of, a growing desire for “respectability” among those denominations like the Baptists and Methodists who had traditionally occupied positions of “dissent,” broadly conceived. An increased interest in “high” aesthetic culture may be seen as one manifestation of this newfound longing for respectability.

Most importantly, though, it was during the 1830s that evangelicalism came under the new influence of romanticism, and the philosophical aesthetic discourse that now appeared regularly in the pages of numerous evangelical periodicals reflected and refracted this new romantic ideology. This romanticization of evangelical aesthetics
injected a new energy and a new confidence into the mature aesthetic discourse of evangelical writers and editors. At the same time, however, this romanticization was also in many ways an extension of the trends that we have traced throughout this chapter, for as Henry May has observed, the aesthetic legacy of the Scottish philosophy was itself a finally ambiguous one. It could lead, on the one hand, to the reinforcement of negative attitudes towards the imagination, while it could lead (and did lead), on the other, to that “imperial Queen” of romanticism – the Imagination (capital I). Guided by the vibrant light of the romantics, many evangelical critics also turned with new self-awareness against the Puritanism of their ancestors, and if they did not always denounce Puritanism in toto, they were quite content to throw the Puritan aesthetic tradition – or, rather, their own projections of it – under the bus in order to bolster their own aesthetic vision. It is to some of the main features of this new, de-puritanized “evangelical romanticism” as it flourished after 1830 that we now turn.
NOTES

1 In the Preface to Vol. 7 of this work, Wesley notes that “these excellent writers are not without their blemishes,” but “abundant recompense” is made for these blemishes “by the excellencies which may be observed in them” (“Preface to Extracts from the Works of the Puritans,” Grammars, Musical Works, Letters and Indexes, Vol. 14 of The Works of John Wesley, 3rd ed., 14 vols., [1872; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007] 228). All further references to pieces published in Wesley’s collected Works are cited by volume and page number.


7 Perkins, A Warning 686.


9 Perkins, A Warning 676.

11 Perkins, A Warning against Idolatry 674.

12 Ibid. 676.

13 Ibid. 687. See also 676.

14 Qtd. in Leland Ryken, Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1986) 123.


16 Perkins, A Warning 684.


19 Perkins, A Warning 676.

20 Dyrness 79. See further Dyrness’s entire discussion of Calvin’s view of images 76-80.

21 Perkins, A Reformed Catholic 587.


23 Similar questions, as is well known, arose in contemporaneous exchanges over the nature of the sacraments.

24 For an extended discussion of these developments, see Dyrness 90-141.


138
Qtd. in Dyrness 92.


Stephen Foster, one of the foremost historians of English and American Puritanism, casts serious doubt on the intimate connection which Dillenberger sees between the Lollards and Puritans. It is true, Foster observes, that heavily Lollard areas of Britain had a tendency to favor Puritanism later on, but as Foster contends, the differences were perhaps ultimately greater than the similarities. See Foster, The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700 (Chapel Hill, NC: 1991) 7-8. To his credit, Dillenberger himself acknowledges in an endnote the existence of a counter-argument, but declares that he “has not found [the] evidence or arguments convincing” (210 n. 1).

Dillenberger 12-13.


For a detailed discussion of Puritan psychology, see Miller, New England Mind 239-79, esp. 239-44.


Miller, New England Mind 257.
In reality, the confidence in objective apprehension inherent in Puritan epistemology foreshadowed a similar epistemological confidence in one branch of Enlightenment thought that would prove highly influential among British and American evangelicals in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – Scottish common sense realism.

Ibid. 257; Richard Sibbes, *The Soul’s Conflict*, qtd. in ibid. 258.

For a discussion of the influence of Calvinism on Dutch realism, as well as an overview of some of the critical difficulties in attributing the development of Dutch realism solely to this influence, see Dyrness 189-212, esp. 189 and 198.


Qtd. in Miller, *New England Mind* 257.


The analysis of Sibbes’s view of the imagination in this paragraph relies on Dyrness 168-71.

For a recent reading of Puritan homiletic theory, see Lisa M. Gordis, *Opening Scripture: Bible Reading and Interpretive Authority in Puritan New England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

As Leland Ryken notes, such sermons “were not as exclusively abstract, theological, and propositional as we tend to think. Once we grant the validity of the verbal image, it becomes clear that the Puritan worship service did not starve the imagination or even the senses of the worshiper” (125).

of sermons.

Dillenberger describes the situation in more detail as follows: “the English Protestant tradition had all the earmarks of a linguistic, hearing culture, in which the eyes were directed by being told what to see…. [T]he English produced a significant literature and molded theology totally by language, at the same time narrowing the horizons of visual perception. Seeing was not a mode of learning to be trusted in its own right” (15).


Timothy Edwards, father of Jonathan, was himself locally renowned as a versifier of some merit, though his poetry has since been lost to posterity. Major Roger Wolcott expressed his admiration for some of Timothy Edwards’s poems in the preface to his own Poetical Meditations (1725). See Wallace E. Anderson, “Editor’s Introduction,” Scientific and Philosophical Writings, by Jonathan Edwards, ed. Anderson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980) 4.


Wilson Brissett, “Beauty among the Puritans: Aesthetics and Subjectivity in Early New England,” Unpub. diss., University of Virginia, 2006; Dyrness 220. See also the studies which Dyrness cites here.


Dyrness 248.


Bradstreet, “Contemplations” ll. 9-12.


Noll, America’s God 35-36.
This paragraph relies on Noll’s discussion in *America’s God* 38-39. Though the idea of the covenant achieved a special centrality in the thought of New England, it had English precedents. See, for example, Miller, *The New England Mind* 476-77 and Long 213, as well as n. 60.


Qtd. in Michael McGiffert, “God’s Controversy with Jacobean England,” *American Historical Review* 88 (1983) 1152. As McGiffert notes, by the first decade of the seventeenth century, “the Judaic characterizing of God’s Englishness, and of England’s prominent place under divine watch and ward, had achieved the power of a paradigm. It was a commonplace of commonplaces – a simple matter of fact…” (1152). He also notes the existence of alternative paradigms (e.g., Assyria as an analogue for England), but such paradigms never achieved the widespread acceptance of the Israel-England typology (1155-56).

Miller, for instance, notes that in the case of poetry, it would be incorrect “to say that the Puritans developed a conscious theory by which they judged poets and fashioned verses of their own. On the contrary, most of them probably gave it little consideration as an art; they thought of it simply as a means to an end, and remained curiously indifferent to the quintessential breath and finer spirit of the poetic idiom” (“Poetry,” *The Puritans* 547). At the same time, Norman S. Grabo has argued, contrary to the usual view that literary criticism was largely non-existent prior to the nineteenth century, that literary historians ought to recognize the existence of a kind of “literary criticism” in the seventeenth century. Insofar as one holds a broad conception of literary criticism as the careful judging of texts – which, as far as I can tell, is essentially what Grabo is arguing for – it seems difficult to deny Grabo’s thesis. It is interesting to note, however, that Grabo describes early American criticism (especially that of the 1670s) as “largely unconscious, accidental, and unsystematic” (708). See Norman S. Grabo, “Running the Gauntlet: Seventeenth-Century Literary Criticism,” *ELH* 67 (2000): 697-715. What the Puritans lacked, I believe, in keeping with Miller, is any real sense of aesthetics as a self-conscious philosophical pursuit, as well as any “belletristic” notion of literature or of the fine arts.

63 Dyrness 191.


65 In fact, a careful reading of Wilberforce’s own statement provides an interesting gloss on this point. In this portion of the text, Wilberforce is defending evangelicals against the charge that they “are insisting on nice and abstruse distinctions in what is a matter of general concern” (67). The accusation of Wilberforce’s imagined interlocutor is that evangelicals are over-intellectualizing the issue, that is, with such “abstruse distinctions” they are placing salvation beyond the reach of the poor and humble. Wilberforce’s response is that salvation is precisely not a matter of head-knowledge alone but of the heart – something that is accessible even to the least educated person. The point, however, is that for all the usual charges of evangelical emotionalism, such emotionalism seemed to be, in Wilberforce’s case at least, a reaction to the opposite charges of evangelical intellectualism.

66 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism* 53.


69 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism* 53.


72 Watts, qtd. in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism* 54.

Bebbington, *Evangelicalism* 143.


For a specific discussion of some of the effects of these Enlightenment influences, see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism* 50-66, 69-74.

Ibid. 55.

Ibid. 67.

Qtd. in Bebbington, *Evangelicalism* 67.


Rosman 134-35.

Bebbington, *Evangelicalism* 67-68.

Dyrness 219.

John Wesley, Preface to *A Pocket Hymn Book, for the Use of Christians of All Denominations*, *Works* 14:343, 344. Elsewhere, Wesley concedes in a letter to Walter Churchey that “The Methodists in general have very little taste for any poems but those of a religious or a moral kind” (Letter CCCCXCII, 6 Dec. 1788, *Works* 12:437). Though it is difficult to tell from the context whether this is meant to be a judgment of any kind (positive or negative), my own sense is that there is a modicum of regret in this statement.


Qtd. in Davies 236. See also Rosman’s chapter on music, 134-46, which captures well the somewhat schizophrenic mindset which eighteenth-century evangelicals exhibited with regard to music.
Wesley, for instance, rehashes the traditional Puritan arguments on this point in *A Roman Catechism, Faithfully Drawn Out of the Allowed Writings of the Church of Rome, with a Reply Thereto*, *Works* 10:107-12. See also Davies 236-38.

---


97 Fiering 112, 108.

98 Marsden, *Edwards* 469.

99 Fiering 108.

100 Ibid. 80, 112, 114. The phrase “aesthetics of consent” appears on 114.

101 David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998) 29, 77. Morgan writes: “Edwards used the act of seeing beauty as a metaphor to convey the elements of desire and pleasure that resided in the contemplation of God’s inherent goodness” (77). Insofar as Morgan’s “act of seeing beauty” corresponds with Edwards’s “secondary beauty” and Morgan’s “metaphor” corresponds to Edwards’s theory of analogy, this statement is accurate. However, I do think that Edwards believed that primary beauty is a real quality of the Godhead, even though we can’t perceive this quality “literally.”

102 Fiering 113; see also 108-109.


104 Indeed, Alan Heimert has emphasized the centrality of Edwards’s conception of beauty to the Calvinist


106 This way of stating the matter underscores the objectivity of Edwards’s account of beauty. Obviously, many contemporary theorists would deny that any such thing as the “precise significance” of art exists.


108 One fairly common scholarly account of Edwards’s aesthetic legacy is that it went “underground,” or persisted in some general and vague sense, only to re-emerge in the Transcendentalism of Emerson or the poetic theology of Bushnell. There are a number of subtle variations of this narrative. See, for example, Erdt 83-93; Neil Harris, The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years 1790-1860 (New York: George Braziller, 1966) 171; Conrad Cherry, Nature and Religious Imagination: From Edwards to Bushnell (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980); and Richard E. Brantley, Coordinates of Anglo-American Romanticism: Wesley, Edwards, Carlyle & Emerson (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993). As a general account, the narrative is plausible enough, I think, though it seems difficult to reconstruct a precise genealogy, and it may underestimate the influence of non-indigenous (e.g., German) forms of thought in the nineteenth century. When we look at evangelicals specifically, however, the matter is more complicated. In the general account, Edwards’s theological aesthetics were essentially diluted over time until they arrived at the spiritualized aesthetics of the Transcendentalists. In this case, it is understandable why the precise theological demands of Edwards’s aesthetics would have been altered by those who did not share his theological orientation. The question for evangelicals, however, is why it is that they would not have pursued his system as it stood. Although it is possible to say that the aesthetic
idealism of some nineteenth-century evangelicals may be seen as the re-emergence of a (severely altered) Edwardsean idealism, Edwards himself rarely, if ever, constituted a specific reference point. For the history of evangelical aesthetics, then, it is difficult to see Edwards as the father of a specifically “Edwardsean school” of aesthetics (unlike in theology).

109 For one example of a more Edwardsean version of idealism, see the discussion on pp. 187-88 and also 421 n. 53.


111 John Wesley, Preface to A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People called Methodists, Works 14:341.


114 See Bate 38.

115 Beardsley, Short History 176-77. As Beardsley observes in relation to what he calls the “logical positivist thinking, launched by Locke”: “The Horatian injunctions, that poetry should please and instruct, now for the first time seem in danger of being split apart: for if the language that serves one of these ends best is destructive of the other, it would seem that they cannot both be done (well, at least) by the same discourse. It will be necessary to specialize.”

116 Of course, one possible answer to this question is that poetry is simply the same as versification – a
viewpoint that was not inconsistent with some neoclassical notions of poetry.

117 Beardsley, Short History 176.


120 Henry Home, Lord Kames, Elements of Criticism, ed. Peter Jones, 2 vols., Natural Law and Enlightenment Classics (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2005) 1:14. In his 1820 lectures, Hegel also took elaborate pains to justify the study of art as a “scientific” (that is, philosophical) endeavor. Relying on a kind of primitivist argument, Hegel contended that people in modern societies can no longer merely appreciate and experience art directly as could people in earlier societies. “What is now stimulated in us by works of art is, in addition to the fact of immediate enjoyment, our judgment. In other words we subject the content, and the means of presentation of the work of art, and the suitability and unsuitability of both, to the contemplation of our thought. A science of art is therefore a far more urgent necessity in our own days than in times in which art as art sufficed by itself alone to give complete satisfaction” (“Selections from The Philosophy of Fine Art,” trans. F.P.B. Osmaston, Philosophies of Art & Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger, ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns [1964; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976] 392).

121 See Bozeman.


123 Hipple 67.

124 However, Hipple also notes the persistence of Addison’s categorization throughout the eighteenth century (16).


126 Wesley offered the following criticism of Hutcheson in a 1772 journal entry: “In my way to Luton I read Mr. Hutcheson’s ‘Essay on the Passions.’ He is a beautiful writer; but his scheme cannot stand, unless the Bible falls. I know both from Scripture, reason, and experience, that his picture of man is not drawn from life. It is not true, that no man is capable of malice, or delight in giving pain; much less, that every man is virtuous, and remains so as long as he lives; nor does Scripture allow that any action is good which is done without any design to please God” (Journal entry for Thursday, 17 Dec. 1772, *Works* 3:485-86). This final phrase is precisely Edwards’s thesis in *The Nature of True Virtue*. See further Wesley’s sermon CV, “On Conscience,” *Works* 7:186-94, esp. 188-89.

127 See Hipple 69; Dickie 47.

128 See Terence Martin, *The Instructed Vision: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the Origins of American Fiction* (1961; New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969) 10-11. Describing the extent of Kames’s influence, Martin notes how his *Elements* inspired Benjamin Franklin, who met with Kames in Scotland in 1759, to embrace “the idea that a proper taste in the arts contributes to the improvement of morals” (10-11). (In a similar vein, Burke described beauty as “a social quality,” though he confessed he had no idea what its ultimate purpose is [see *Enquiry* 89]). For more on Kames’s influence on the evangelical aesthetic tradition, see chapter 5.

129 See also John Wesley, “Thoughts on Genius” (1787), *Works* 13:477-79. In 1872, Noah Porter articulated what was by then a truism in *The Elements of Intellectual Science* (an abridgement of his 1868 text *The Human Intellect*). Speaking of the relationship of aesthetics to psychology, Porter concluded: “The canons of taste are in the last analysis resolved by the facts of psychology” (*The Elements of Intellectual Science* [New York: Charles Scribner & Company, 1872] 8).

130 See Martin 13-32.

131 E.g., Friedrich Wilhelm von Schelling’s lectures on *The Philosophy of Art* delivered at Jena in 1802-03
and later, Hegel’s 1820 lectures at the University of Berlin. Similar lectures were being given in at least some American institutions by the early 1840s. A footnote to an article entitled “What Is Poetry?,” published in the *Mercersburg Review* in 1859, explains that the article is based on the “Notes of Lectures on Æsthetics by Dr. F.A. Rauch, President of Marshall College. Delivered to the Junior Class in 1841” (*Mercersburg Review* 11 [July 1859] 382).

132 For an account of the gradual elimination of these religious tests at Oxford over the course of the nineteenth century, see Charles Edward Mallet, *Modern Oxford* (1927; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968) 196-98, 256, 292-93, 325ff., 330-33, and 433-36. As Martha McMackin Garland points out, the situation at Cambridge differed slightly. Whereas Oxford required students to affirm the Thirty-Nine Articles at the start of matriculation, Cambridge did not. It did, however, require a statement of allegiance to the Church of England in order to receive a degree. This state of affairs resulted in a slightly higher proportion of dissenting students at Cambridge than at Oxford, though these students were often forced to retire without their degrees (*Cambridge Before Darwin: The Ideal of a Liberal Education, 1800-1860* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980] 71). There was, of course, a strong Anglican Evangelical presence at Cambridge during the first few decades of the nineteenth century under the guidance of Charles Simeon. For a brief account of the abolition of religious tests at Cambridge, see Garland 70-71.

133 See Chitnis 40-44. The quotations in this paragraph occur on pgs. 41 and 42.


136 See ibid. 81-82.

137 See Martin esp. 57-103.

More, in fact, was quite familiar with Locke’s theories and referred to him throughout her writings. In her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, for example, More singles out the “want of precise signification of … words” as “the cause of very obscure and uncertain notions” when reasoning about moral matters (*Works* 1:349). She then proceeds to quote Locke directly. Elsewhere, More employs Lockean psychology to justify the use of allegory and metaphor, particularly in the case of “the illiterate and uninformed”: “Little reaches the understanding of the mass but through this medium [i.e., the senses]. Their minds are not fitted for the reception of abstract truth. Dry argumentative instruction, therefore, is not proportioned to their capacity; the faculty by which a right conclusion is drawn, is, in them the most defective; they rather feel strongly than judge accurately: and their feelings are awakened by the impression made on their senses” (*Christian Morals*, *Works* 2:134). It is interesting to observe here that “dry argumentative instruction” – or what we might equate with didacticism – is viewed negatively when it comes to educating the “defective” masses who supposedly lack the ability to reason. By the nineteenth century, however, as we will see in chap. 5, this anti-didacticism had become generalized. Didacticism, in other words, became a negative idea where *everyone* was concerned, not simply the illiterate masses.


See Hatch 91.


As Gill observed in 1937, citing J.W. Draper, “the Methodists had little of the Puritans’ prejudice against art” (15). As I have argued here, I think such a statement applies in varying degrees to
evangelicalism in general.


146 Wilberforce, Practical View 237.


149 Rosman 246.

150 Noll, America’s God 183. This development, as Noll points out, was itself a rather ambiguous one, for evangelicals were also beginning to realize that their vision for a moral society was proving more difficult than they had first imagined (184-85). Still, this vision remained strong throughout much of the nineteenth century.

151 Ian Bradley, The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), provides a solid, if at times overstated, account of the effects of the evangelical efforts to shape the social and political topography of the British nation in the nineteenth century. His account of evangelicalism’s influence on art culture, however, tends to overemphasize evangelicalism’s role as an agent of censure – an emphasis which I believe is too one-sided (see, for instance, 37 and 98).

152 See Bebbington, Evangelicalism 103; “Evangelicalism in Modern Britain and America: A Comparison,” in Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States, ed. George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994) 189-91. It is worth noting, too, that the dating of my account parallels that of both Harris and Charvat in their discussions of American culture at large. This suggests that evangelicals did not lag behind the aesthetic developments in Anglo-American society, though this is not especially surprising in America where evangelical Protestantism constituted a virtual religious and theological establishment until the Civil War.
It is interesting to note that May’s assessment of America’s literary tastes focuses almost exclusively on Boston Unitarian culture, which he calls “the arbiter for the nation of literary taste” (352). May’s assessment of the Unitarian elite and its positive attitude toward literature, in particular, is quite right. It would be incorrect, however, to suggest that this positive attitude belonged solely to Unitarians; rather, a number of evangelical critics, as we will see, were not far behind Unitarian aesthetic developments. As late as 1821, during his senior year at Harvard, Ralph Waldo Emerson won an award for an essay championing the writings of the common sense philosophers, Reid and Stewart, over the new German philosophers (May 357). By the 1830s, evangelical critics were already speaking in noticeably romantic idioms about art and poetry.
Poetry is neither a formal investigation nor a logical demonstration of truth, but it is – if it be worthy of its name – its highest and most memorable expression. It seizes on all that is pure, beautiful, and good, dwells familiarly in the realm of the ideal, and connects it with the primary and universal instincts of the race.

—“The Poems of Lewis Morris,” *Baptist Magazine* (1890)

Near the conclusion of an 1867 review of E.S. Dallas’s treatise on aesthetics, *The Gay Science*, J.H. Rigg, a British Methodist who would later edit the *London Quarterly Review*, finally loses patience with what he takes to be Dallas’s inveterate predilection for the vague and mystical. According to Dallas, the glory of art is its “Secrecy,” for, as he contends, the “field of art is the unknown and unknowable.” In Rigg’s view, however, Dallas’s happy acquiescence to the impenetrable mystery of art leaves much to be desired:

Why has not Mr. Dallas long before this stage of his book come away from the haze of generalities, and defined with something like precision what the sphere of art includes? To say that it is the sphere of pleasure is but flourishing an unknown quantity before our eyes. What have poetry and the arts in common? Why may they be classed together? What are their common objects? What is the region which they occupy in common?²
While Rigg’s frustration is directed specifically at the peculiar vagaries of Dallas, the questions he raises represent a perennial difficulty in modern aesthetics, for any attempt to articulate a coherent philosophy of art must ultimately confront a single basic problem: how to understand and define *Art.* Or, as James Rogers bluntly frames the issue in the opening line of another article in the *London Quarterly Review*: “What is Art?”³

To the ears of some contemporary aestheticians, grand inquiries like these may sound suspiciously essentialist,⁴ but in the minds of countless nineteenth-century writers, both evangelical and non-evangelical, it was assumed that questions regarding the foundational nature of art might reasonably admit of an answer. This is not to suggest, of course, that Victorian writers were unaware of the difficulties associated with defining “Art” or that they approached the matter blithely. As the American Sidney Dyer observed in the *Baptist Quarterly*: “That there is such a thing as poetry, no one will for a moment question. We see it, we hear it, we feel it … but when we ask the critic what it is, a new confusion of tongues takes place, as the various schools give their conflicting responses.”⁵ Dyer’s allusion to Babel is surely an apt one, yet Babel aside, almost without exception these very same writers did not hesitate to venture their own definitions of art or poetry or painting, and even those authors who gingerly avoided raising the issue in explicit terms in the end formulated more or less distinct conceptions of the nature and function of art amid other speculations or amid the exigencies of practical criticism. Victorian articles and reviews abound with statements commencing with such tell-tale phrases as “Art is…,” “Poetry is…,” or “Music is…”

For evangelicals after the 1830s, art was increasingly a serious business. In her
study of British evangelical attitudes towards art and culture between 1790 and 1833, Doreen Rosman notes: “All the available evidence suggests that evangelicals approved of art both as an embellishment of society and as a profession proper for Christian pursuit.” Ultimately, however, she concludes that for evangelicals “Art might be a desirable embellishment of society but it was no more than an embellishment … a toy to be contrasted with true religious treasure.” Art could serve as a comparatively innocent source of pleasure suitable for relaxation or amusement, but aside from its diversionary and ornamental uses, it had very little to do with the serious side of life or pressing matters of eternal concern. Whether this perspective represented a majority-view among evangelicals or only a particular segment of a diverse population is difficult to say, and Rosman is careful to note the relative paucity of source material; but what is certain is that such a view of art contrasts sharply with the view later advocated by many evangelical writers at mid-century. Consider, for example, the rhapsodic conclusion to Rogers’s “The Science and Poetry of Art,” published in 1855:

for Art is not, nor ought to be regarded as, the frivolous embellishment of an idle and voluptuous existence, but the fine inspiration of a thoroughly accomplished understanding, – an understanding not severed from the heart, and commencing only with the rigid formalities and iron mechanisms of worldly science, “purchasing knowledge by the loss of power;” but fed, and warmed, and brightened, and endued with genial sagacity by the living soul that flows through and impregnates its whole substance and activity. As long as there are faculties in man which find their aliment and satisfaction in nothing else than ideal semblances of the good, the true, and the beautiful, so long will Art remain a profound necessity of human nature ….  

There is an unmistakable gravitas in this passage that would likely have surprised an
earlier generation of evangelicals trained to view the fine arts with either levity or indifference, if not downright hostility. No longer is art a “frivolous embellishment”; rather, it has become, as Rogers solemnly declares, “a profound necessity of human nature.” Playful adornment has given way to “fine inspiration” and a “living soul,” and art seems somehow to have descended from on high, “trailing clouds of glory” as it came.

Of course, a passage like this one represents one end of the evangelical spectrum of opinion concerning art. Not all nineteenth-century evangelicals abandoned an older view of art, nor were all evangelical suspicions that art was but fleeting and temporal allayed. Yet the fact that such a passage existed at all in the pages of a periodical like the London Quarterly Review points to a critical shift in evangelical conceptions of art. This shift, as we have seen, may be attributed largely to the general diffusion of, first, Enlightenment, and later, romantic ideas throughout the nineteenth-century Anglo-American world. Indeed, by the 1850s a number of evangelical critics in both Britain and America were avowed Coleridgeans (at least in aesthetics if not necessarily in theology) who asked and answered questions about the essence of art within a conceptual framework inherited from the British romantics and from moderate forms of German idealism. And even those evangelicals who proved unwilling to follow Coleridge into the ethereal regions of Teutonic speculation accepted as normative many another aesthetic doctrine derived from romantic poets and critics – most prominently, perhaps, the notion of art as self-expression. By the middle of the nineteenth century, evangelical aesthetics had, in effect, become romanticized, and as a result, the question, What is Art?, found for evangelicals both new significance and new answers.
Art as a Function of Mind: Evangelical Expressivism

M.H. Abrams has summed up the aesthetic orientation of romanticism as one in which theorists “pose and answer aesthetic questions in terms of the relation of art to the artist, rather than to external nature, or to the audience, or to the internal requirements of the work itself.” This tendency to think about art in terms of the mental processes of the artist was in many ways an extension of the empiricist mental philosophy of the Enlightenment. Romantic critics, however, introduced important innovations that led to revised understandings of the nature of art, the artist, and the imagination, and thus the romantic turn inward can also be seen as “a radical shift … in the alignment of aesthetic thinking.” Within a genetic theory of this sort, art necessarily becomes a function of the peculiar consciousness of the artist; whatever else it might be, it is invariably subjective. “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” wrote Wordsworth in the oft-quoted statement from his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. By the middle-third of the nineteenth century, many writers who embarked on a formal exploration of aesthetics in the pages of evangelical periodicals were operating squarely within this framework. In 1845, for example, an author reviewing Leigh Hunt’s *Imagination and Fancy* in the Congregationalist *British Quarterly Review* approved of Hunt’s “calling poetry ‘the utterance of a passion’” since “it refers us back at once to the poet’s mind.” James Rogers argued in a similar vein concerning art in general: “Thus we are thrown back upon the human mind, its powers and laws, both of perception and activity, for the origin of Art.” Even the Old School Presbyterian *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* – which, under the longtime editorship of Charles Hodge, was known for its tough
Reformed polemics and its longstanding allegiance to Baconianism\textsuperscript{12} – acknowledged the intrinsically subjective nature of art in terms of the special processes of human psychology. Though beauty is “an objective quality in nature,” it is nevertheless subject to alteration by the human mind, a process that reaches its culmination in art: “We have already stated how the apprehension of the objective beauty of nature is modified, when it comes to be blended with the thoughts and feelings of the mind itself. Now it is obvious that this subjective element must be more predominant in that class of beauties which it is the object of poetry, and of art generally, to reproduce.”\textsuperscript{13} This acceptance of the premise that aesthetic problems are best handled in the context of the powers and laws of the human mind affected evangelical understandings of the nature of art in significant ways.

To begin with, evangelicals gradually came to embrace and advocate the romantic doctrine of art – and especially poetry – as self-expression. As early as 1823, in fact, at least one evangelical periodical was gesturing towards the rudiments of an expressivist theory of poetry: “In treating of the imitative arts,” noted the Presbyterian \textit{Christian Advocate}, “poetry lays claim to a high place. It may be called the melody of the mind.”\textsuperscript{14}

Here, the writer attempts to walk a fine line between the classical and neoclassical conception of art as imitation and the more recent view of art as an outgrowth of the poet’s psyche. Poetry’s primary classification is still as a species of imitation, but imitation has itself commenced an inward turn. By the 1830s, the notion of art and poetry as self-expression was appearing with increasing frequency in many evangelical treatises and reviews. In his \textit{Lectures on General Literature, Poetry &c.} delivered in
1830 and 1831, James Montgomery, who was perhaps the nineteenth-century evangelical poet par excellence, defined poetry as “the shorthand of thought,” arguing that “Language… is a dead letter till the spirit within the poet himself breathes through it, gives it voice, and makes it audible to the very mind.” Language, Montgomery continued, must spring “from a full mind.”¹⁵ For a writer in the Eclectic Review, the best poetry arises “when hand, and head, and heart are all free to exercise spontaneous thought, and give utterance to unfettered feeling.”¹⁶ Evangelicals, it seems, were proving quite receptive to the introspective focus in aesthetic theory inaugurated by the romantics – a point, in fact, which was noticed by at least one contemporary observer. A “great change” has “taken place in modern poetry,” noted an author in the Quarterly Christian Spectator, a change “which [has] turned the eye of the poet from external objects to the world of passions within.” Poetry, the author avers, arises “in the deep and mystic recesses of the human soul,” and in a move that was as yet relatively rare among evangelicals in the United States in 1833, the author bows to contemporary German aesthetics by citing Friedrich von Schlegel’s view of poetry as consisting in “invention, expression and inspiration.”¹⁷

These statements from the 1830s serve as a valuable index to evangelicalism’s relationship to “mainstream” developments in transatlantic aesthetics. When one M.C.H., writing in the Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine in 1831, assured his audience that “It would be idle to argue that all poetry, of whatever class, must emanate from the original and inward music of the mind” because “On this point there can be no dispute,” he not only sounded remarkably like Hazlitt¹⁸ but was also two years ahead of John
Stuart Mill’s description of poetry as “the expression or uttering forth of feeling” in his essay “What Is Poetry?” By the time Mill published his thoughts on the nature of poetry, such thoughts had already become axiomatic, as M.C.H.’s refusal to enter into first principles on the matter makes clear. By the 1830s, then, many evangelicals were well beyond the point of expressing any hostility or apathy to art in general. It does not appear, moreover – in the case of poetic theory at least – that they were subject to the intellectual and cultural lag sometimes attributed to them. Rather, if Mill’s essay can be seen as evidence of the broad dissemination of romantic expressivism, then Anglo-American evangelicals appear to have kept time with their non-evangelical contemporaries.20

As the century progressed, the view that poetry and art are essentially an outpouring of the artist’s mind became standard fare among evangelical writers – the effusiveness with which this view was sometimes posited growing in proportion to its status as aesthetic truism.21 Upon his appointment to the Professorship of Rhetoric and English Language and Literature at Princeton College, James C. Welling delivered an inaugural address on “The True Sources of Literary Inspiration” (an address later published in the Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review in 1871) in which he plainly aspires to the same level of eloquence that he maintains can only come from within: “The well-head of eloquence, if it is to flow in copious and limpid streams, must gush up from the depths of the soul; the spray of the fountain that is fed by a force-pump glitters for a moment in the sun, and then runs dry. We can express only the Beauty and the Force that are in us – which we have made an integral part of our nature.”22 This fountain metaphor
(despite its oddly industrial reference to the force-pump), so typical of romantic
declarations on the nature of poetry and the poetic process, also underscores another key
element in the expressivist theory of art adopted by evangelical writers, namely, that art
and poetry are the expression of emotion. Poetry is not the enunciation of propositions,
doctrines, or abstract truths available to the reason or to scientific method but rather the
outpouring of the artist’s feelings, heart, imagination, or soul. “It has been well remarked
that ‘sentimental feeling is the first requisite in lyric poetry,’” observed the Christian
Spectator.\textsuperscript{23} The Methodist Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald agreed:
“Poetry is the offspring of a mind heated to an uncommon degree; it is a kind of spirit
thrown off in the effervescence of agitated feeling.”\textsuperscript{24} Yet it was an author in the British
Quarterly Review who perhaps best demonstrated the identification of poetry with
emotion:

\begin{quote}
We feel convinced that, so long as the human heart exults with rapture, or
droops with sorrow – palpitates with hope, or is overwhelmed with despair
– melts with love, or rages with jealousy – glows with anger, or is
maddened with revenge – is, in short, the subject of those innumerable
feelings to which it can find utterance only in the language of the bard – so
long will there be materials for poetry of the highest class.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

In a broad sense, when viewed against the backdrop of evangelical intellectual
history and piety, it is not particularly surprising that an aesthetic theory which
emphasized the centrality and sincerity of the emotions and of experience would have
seemed amenable to many nineteenth-century evangelicals. Since the time of the first
transatlantic revivals in the eighteenth century, evangelicals had stressed the importance
of heartfelt religion over and against a cold formalism. Evangelicalism was often
described as “vital religion,” or a “religion of the heart,” and though many evangelicals
took care to avoid simplistic dichotomies between the “heart” and “head,” passionate
commitment had always been at the center of evangelical identity. Passionate
commitment, furthermore, was also by definition personal commitment, and even the
most establishmentarian denominations had tended to stress the individualized nature of a
person’s encounter with God. In matters of faith, argued William Wilberforce in 1797,
“the point of importance is, the internal disposition of the mind.”26 This emphasis on
both sincere feeling and personal experience accounts to a great extent for the rich
tradition of evangelical hymnody – a tradition which, at least implicitly, had sought to
make room for individual creativity and expression. Evangelicals, for instance, had been
the first to abandon the regimented psalm-singing associated with Sternhold and Hopkins
in favor of original hymns.27 In addition, the pietistic stress on the necessity of vital faith
was also reinforced by evangelicalism’s early affiliation with the basic tenets of Lockean
epistemology, which helped to underscore even further the significance of individual
experience, while anticipations of certain aspects of expressivism could be found in the
writings of the leading proponents of the Scottish philosophy.28 Such observations may
thus help to explain in part why romantic notions of art as an expression of emotion met
with a welcome reception among many nineteenth-century evangelicals. Yet while an
indigenous openness to personal experience and heartfelt emotion, as well as a familiarity
with Enlightenment philosophy, may have provided fertile ground for some romantic
theories, it was the rising influence of romanticism and of romantic critical theory that
brought about the profound alterations in the critical thought and vocabulary of evangelical critics.

This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the evangelical willingness to see art anew in terms of the special principles of romantic psychology. It is important to recall that the expressivist theories advocated by prominent romantic poets and critics were rarely an entirely solipsistic affair. Poetry, that is, was not a matter of simple effusion, an unmitigated and unmodified eruption of the heart; rather, art and poetry were viewed as the special products of an interchange between the artist’s imagination and the world of sense perception. Blake, it is true, consistently deplored what he perceived as mind’s subservience to nature, and he undoubtedly came closest to conceiving of the relationship between nature and the imagination in unilateral terms. Yet Blake, however, was surely one of the more radical romantics in this regard, and it was left to Wordsworth to state what was a more moderate and perhaps more typical position of the British romantics. For Wordsworth, the mind-nature relationship was one of cooperation and “alliance”: empirical reality is never completely effaced but is instead “acted on and transformed by the feelings of the poet.”

In this respect, evangelical theorists were by and large Wordsworthian (and, as we will see, Coleridgean) rather than Blakean. That a significant number of mid-nineteenth-century evangelical critics nonetheless accepted the idea that art and poetry are the products of the mind’s special interaction with the objects of perception is abundantly clear. “The poet aims not merely to paint the scenes of nature, but to invest them with the thoughts and feelings which they excite in his own mind; and to clothe them with the
power of awakening sympathetic emotions in the bosom of others,” explained the
Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review in 1849.\textsuperscript{32} In a similar vein, “Personification is
the life of poetry,” argued the Methodist Christian Advocate and Journal: “The poet
looks upon nature, not with the philosopher, as composed of certain abstractions… but he
breathes upon them, and they quicken into personal life, and become objects, as it were,
of personal attachment.”\textsuperscript{33} At times, in fact, poetry in the abstract came close to being
defined not as a particular genre of writing, a peculiar use of language, or even the
specific aesthetic product generated by the artist’s emotional interaction with objective
reality but as the psychological relationship between mind and object itself. “The fact is,
the poetic principle does not so much exist in a given object, as in the point and light in
which we view it, and our capacity to draw on the powers of imagination to array the
imperfect and real with the semblance and perfections of an ideal existence.”\textsuperscript{34} Poetry
has here merged with, and even become, a special sort of hermeneutic, and though this
critic is yet far from Blake’s absolutism of the Imagination, the balance between mind
and nature has tipped in favor of the artist’s mind.

In granting preeminence to the transformative powers of the artist’s mind and
emotions, nineteenth-century evangelical critics were in effect modifying, and even
overturning, ideas that had long been held by many Puritans and eighteenth-century
evangelicals. For most Puritans, what had counted was an objective and accurate
apprehension of the natural world. An overly subjective interpretation of reality was a
sign not of imaginative genius but of a disordered fancy; it was a dangerous departure
from God’s created order.\textsuperscript{35} This principle served as a crucial guide in matters of
theology and philosophy, but many Puritans had also been reluctant to abrogate this standard entirely when it came to art. Though Puritan poetry was frequently loaded with a variety of metaphors and conceits, such figurative devices were often seen as an adornment of reality rather than as a reinterpretation of it. In other cases, Puritan writers had allowed that the imaginative adjustment of reality was essential to poetry, but as a result, they had simply treated it (not unlike Locke) as a species of play, which was acceptable in its place but was not to be taken seriously. Edward Leigh, for example, had defined poetry in *A Treatise of Religion & Learning* (1656) as “an art of deceit, which measureth expressions, not by the truth of the subject, but by the strength of the imagination working upon it.” He had even suggested that it “principally serves for venting extraordinary affections.” Yet for this reason it was best described as “the luxury of Learning.” By the 1830s, however, evangelical writers had united with the romantics in celebrating poetry and art for their ability to refashion the created order of God via the metamorphic power of the individual imagination. This re-creation, moreover, was no playful “luxury”; instead, it was a profoundly serious activity. Significantly, the Puritan emphasis on the objective apprehension of the natural world lived on until at least the 1860s in nineteenth-century evangelicalism’s commitment to common sense realism and Baconian science; art, however, had become, by definition, that which existed in opposition to this kind of scientific perception.

A frequent corollary of this understanding of art was the tendency to disparage, displace, or redefine one of the central concepts in the western aesthetic tradition: imitation, or mimesis. To be sure, the concept of imitation had never been a stable one –
one only need recall how quick Aristotle was to rethink Plato’s usage – but the term had nevertheless endured as a perennial presence in western aesthetics well into the eighteenth century. Romantic expressivist theories, however, did much to challenge the traditional stress on art as imitation. At times, theorists opposed imitation and expression absolutely, as when John Keble criticized Aristotle’s conception of poetry: “Aristotle… considered the essence of poetry to be *Imitation… Expression* we say, rather than *imitation.*” 37 Other romantics retained the term but revised its sense to fit more neatly within a theory that prioritized the artist’s mental contribution to the art object, as when Hazlitt suggested in Plotinian fashion that the poet mirrors the inner self. 38 In the main, though, imitation became useful as a purely negative term, as a means of signifying what true art is *not.* Though imitation had rarely been synonymous with ultra-realism or the precise duplication of empirical reality, in its juxtaposition to the forming powers of the active mind it now came to represent passivity and mechanism, and in a certain sense, mindlessness.

It is thus further evidence of the romantic influence on evangelical aesthetics – and on evangelical conceptions of the essence of art in particular – that many evangelical writers reiterated this negative conception of imitation in their descriptions of art. “The extensive province of Imitation is very sterile; – it produces nothing,” noted an allegorical foray into “The Empire of Poetry,” by Fontenelle, reprinted in 1831 in the Southern Baptist magazine, the *Christian Index.* 39 Genuine art is not a faithful reproduction of facts in which the mind of the artist reflects nature with mimetic precision; rather, the reverse is true. Nature is said to reflect the mind and emotions of the artist: “the highest
poetry is not that which most closely imitates nature in its descriptions; but which
suggests the highest thoughts and the purest emotions by its pictures of nature.”

Writing in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* in 1863, Joseph LeConte illustrated the
extent to which evangelical periodicals had come to embrace the view of art as an active
expression of mind and emotion, as well as the corresponding distaste for any theory that
smacked of mechanical passivity. Taken as a whole, LeConte’s aesthetic was far from
being an uncritical regurgitation of romantic expressivism. When it came to imitation,
however, his disdain was as poignant as any:

> Pure imitative art is mechanic art, and that, too, of the lowest kind. It
requires neither sense of beauty nor imagination, but only accurate
measurement. It exercises neither imagination nor feeling, but only the
understanding. The copyist of nature bears the same relation to the true
artist, which the ordinary manufacturer of the steam engine does to its
great inventor and creator, James Watt.

LeConte’s attack on imitation, so replete with the binaries central to romantic
aesthetics (imagination/understanding, mechanic/organic, feeling/intellect,
imitation/creation), exemplifies the tendency of one strand of the romantic tradition to
conceptualize imitation in terms that could serve as a useful foil for expressivist theories
– a move which ultimately stripped mimesis of the richer meaning it had held in classical
and neoclassical thought. Not all evangelical writers, however, were as rigid in their
repudiation of imitation as was LeConte; some opted instead to follow an alternative line
of romantic thought which sought to retain the notion of art as imitation by redefining it.
For LeConte, imitation and copy were clearly synonymous: both terms signified the sort
of facsimile that could be generated by the passive reception of sensory data. For those evangelicals who knew their Coleridge, however, the matter was not so simple. Coleridge had attempted to preserve the concept of imitation by linking it to the active powers of the Imagination. Imitation, in Coleridge’s sense, involved the conscious shaping power of the artist, whereas copy was nothing more than mechanical realism. At the same time, according to Coleridge, artists ought not imitate objects in all of their sensuous minutiae but must work instead to grasp their ideal essence or spirit. Following Coleridge, some evangelicals were in fact beginning to entertain the notion that perhaps art had transcendental significance.

**Art as Ideal: The Emergence of an Evangelical Aesthetic Idealism**

Whatever the idiosyncrasies marking the aesthetic theories of various evangelical authors, nearly all of them prior to the close of the nineteenth century were convinced that art was somehow “ideal.” For most nineteenth-century evangelical critics, in fact, the notion of the ideal was the *sine qua non* of any definition of art. “If there is one word by which we would test an artist or a critic, a single term in which we could sum up the essence of a mind, or the end and purpose of a life, it should be the word *ideal* …. And shall art alone be destitute of this vision and faculty divine?”

At other times, in keeping with the romantic preoccupation with the grounds of art in the mind of the artist, evangelical writers shifted their focus to the mental *process* of idealization: “Although real life is the source of inspiration, every true artist throws a certain degree of idealization into his work. Without this, it cannot be a work of art.” Yet whether the
emphasis was placed on the ideal as an object of perception or on the activity itself, evangelical critics were largely united in the belief that art is essentially ideal.

In insisting on art’s “ideal” character, evangelical critics were in one sense participating in a well established tradition of thinking about art. Like “imitation,” the concept of the “ideal” has a long history in western aesthetics. It has frequently been associated, for example, with the beauty of classical Greek sculpture, it guided the approach of early-sixteenth-century painters like Raphael, and it played a prominent role in the neoclassical theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Abrams explains, prior to the nineteenth century the term was often used to account for the departure of various art objects from the observable forms of nature. Specifically, the western tradition had typically discussed the ideal nature of art in terms of what Abrams calls the “empirical ideal.” There are several distinct, though related, versions of this idea within the western aesthetic tradition, but in general the empirical ideal refers to the representation of an object or entity, the particulars of which have been “reassembled to make a composite beauty, or filtered to reveal a central form or the common denominator of a type, or in some fashion culled or ornamented for the greater delight of the reader.”

Thus, an artist may paint a rose, for example, by combining the best characteristics of several individual roses existing in the material universe, or alternatively, the artist may render a rose by both excising the blemishes and accentuating the beauties of a single model. In this conception of the ideal, the emphasis is on what is taken to be always and everywhere the same – what is most general, universal, basic, familiar, and common to all members of a species as they exist in the world.
Rosman has noted a similar fascination with the ideal among British evangelical writers prior to 1830. Late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century evangelicals, she argues, harbored a deep “sympathy for classicism,” a point which suggests that these writers understood the ideal in a basically neoclassical, or empirical, sense.47 Yet even as these evangelical critics were busy sympathizing with the canons of neoclassical criticism and taste, other theorists, particularly in Germany, had begun to employ the term ideal in a much different sense. For German idealist philosophers like Schelling and Hegel, the ideal denoted something far more extensive than it had in the criticism of the British neoclassicists; or perhaps more precisely, the ideal took on a considerably different valence within the complicated context of post-Kantian metaphysics. These idealist systems generally posited the history of the universe as a teleological process in which the “Absolute” (variously defined as the identity of subjectivity and objectivity, as totality, or as “self-thinking Thought”) gradually aspired to greater self-consciousness. In order to achieve this ultimate state of self-awareness, the Absolute proceeded through a series of stages (again, variously defined) in which it manifested, or objectified, itself in nature and in the creative activity of humankind. In the broadest sense, “ideal” referred to subjective consciousness, mind, or “spirit” over and against objective nature, unconscious process, or the “real,” and it was through the evolution of human consciousness that the Absolute came to know itself. In some cases, however, as in the aesthetics of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), the ideal acquired a more specialized meaning. In Hegel’s aesthetics, the “Ideal” became a unique term signifying the material embodiment of the Idea, or the Absolute apprehended as beauty in art.48 It is important to
note that when it came to describing the practical techniques of idealization in the creation of art, German idealist philosophies did not always exclude the sorts of approaches implied by the “empirical ideal,” but the ideal itself became a far weightier concept metaphysically.

Careful attention to the manner in which a number of mid-nineteenth-century evangelical writers appropriated the term “ideal” makes it clear that evangelical understandings of the ideal had undergone an important transition since the period analyzed by Rosman. A growing number of evangelical critics had begun to appropriate the insights of idealist philosophy in their discussions of art. While some evangelical writers continued to employ “ideal” in a roughly neoclassical sense, for others the ideal had become associated with the transcendental, or the “spiritual”; it had, in short, become part and parcel of an aesthetic idealism.

The growth of aesthetic idealism among some Victorian evangelicals coincided with the general diffusion of German thought during the middle third of the nineteenth century. Before the 1830s, most British and American evangelicals, as we have seen, were committed philosophically to the principles of Scottish common sense realism. Evangelicals had found common sense realism to be an especially effective apologetic tool, for in its strong affirmation of a mind-independent reality, common sense realism enabled, in the words of Sydney Ahlstrom, “an all-out attack on both materialism and idealism, as well as the pantheism that either type of monistic analysis could lead to.” Furthermore, according to the principles of common sense realism, the universe not only exists independently of the consciousness of human beings but is also distinct from
(though not independent of) God Himself, a point that helped to reinforce traditional understandings “of God’s transcendence, and made revelation necessary.” Common sense philosophy would continue to play an important role in the thinking of many conservative evangelicals well into the twentieth century. Gradually, however, various forms of post-Kantian philosophy began to impact the thought patterns of some evangelicals. Idealism had already gained some traction in Britain through the writings of Coleridge, while Emerson and the Transcendentalists began advocating similar doctrines in America during the 1830s. In addition, German ideas were being brought to America by a growing number of prominent theologians and scholars who undertook advanced study in German universities, as well as by a steady stream of German immigrants. By the 1840s, favorable references to Kant were appearing in publications like the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, and by the 1850s German philosophy had made significant headway in the halls of both British and American academia and in many artistic circles. Writing in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* in 1851, one observer hailed Boston as the literary epicenter of America but also added: “in no spot on our continent is there so strong a German influence as at and around Boston.”

In some instances, therefore, the evangelical exposure to German thought was direct. It was not uncommon, especially during the latter half of the nineteenth century, for evangelical periodicals to review treatises published by German authors. At least one denomination, moreover, the German Reformed, remained in close contact with developments in Germany as a result of ethnic ties. When it came to aesthetics, however, it was German thought as transmitted by Coleridge that exercised the greatest influence.
on evangelical thought. Coleridge had been widely read in his native Britain, as well as in America – thanks in part to Congregationalist James Marsh’s 1829 American edition of Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection*, to which he appended a laudatory introduction, and to the publication in 1854 of *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by W.G.T. Shedd, a Presbyterian professor of church history at Andover Theological Seminary (and later Union Theological Seminary). In the United States, the influence of Coleridge’s thought was initially confined primarily to the Northeast until after the 1830s, but even the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* – long a bulwark of Scottish realism – was by the middle of the nineteenth century conceding the far-reaching effects of Coleridge and of idealist philosophy, and advocating its cautious investigation by students. “If any one author,” wrote a Princeton contributor in 1855, “has exercised a stronger moulding influence on a certain class of minds in our country, that have grown up within the last twenty years, than Coleridge, we have yet to learn who he is.” To be sure, not all denominations, or individuals within denominations, welcomed idealist philosophies to the same degree, but by the 1850s idealism had made significant inroads within evangelicalism, and Coleridge in particular had become the closest thing some evangelical critics had to a patron saint of aesthetics.

One of Coleridge’s more influential attempts to formulate the nature of art was his 1818 lecture “On Poesy or Art.” Grounded in the aesthetics of Friedrich Wilhelm von Schelling (1775-1854), this lecture marked a key moment in the Coleridgean mediation of German thought. Its brevity also made the lecture comparatively accessible, and evangelical critics seem in some cases to have borrowed directly from the terminology
and concepts utilized therein. “On Poesy or Art” therefore serves as an important backdrop for the emergence of an aesthetic idealism among evangelicals. Coleridge begins his lecture by advancing what was to become an oft-quoted definition of art, emphasizing art’s intermediate position between the ideal world of mind or “spirit” and the material world of sense. “Now Art … is the mediatress between, and the reconciler of nature and man. It is, therefore, the power of humanizing nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into everything which is the object of his contemplation…”56 The idea that art possesses both rational and material elements was a common feature of eighteenth-century British criticism – it can be traced back at least as far as Addison57 – but Coleridge’s understanding of this idea moves far beyond that of the eighteenth-century empiricists. For Coleridge, the essence of art lies in a subjective appropriation of objective reality, a passionate modification of the objects of perception. Art begins when the human mind is confronted by an image or images in nature; however, the human artist possesses the power to mold and recombine these images according to a unifying idea that originates within. Art, therefore, represents the fusion of the objective and subjective, or “the union and reconciliation of that which is nature with that which is exclusively human” (330).

As Coleridge makes clear, however, the artist’s “humanizing” of nature is neither a purely mechanical manipulation of sense data (in the empiricist tradition) nor a unilateral application of mind to matter. Though the ideas which the artist impresses upon nature originate somehow within the human mind, they are also, paradoxically, a consequence of the artist’s perception of the essence of nature itself. Artistic ideas,
therefore, are simultaneously a matter of both apprehension and projection, and art is
both imitation and expression. “We all know that art is the imitatress of nature,” declares
Coleridge (330). Immediately, however, he questions the meaning of both “imitate” and
“nature.” First, as noted above, there is a difference between “imitation” and “copy.” A
copy is akin to the imprint of a seal upon hot wax; an imitation, on the other hand – and
all genuine art is a form of imitation – involves a productive tension between likeness and
unlikeness. Too much likeness, as in the case of wax models of the human figure, results
in nothing but disgust since we find ourselves both jolted by the absence of life in a form
where we would normally expect to find it and frustrated by the realization that we have
been deceived. Proper imitation, by contrast, “begin[s] with an acknowledged total
difference, and then every touch of nature gives you the pleasure of an approximation to
truth” (331).

Secondly, Coleridge questions whether the artist must imitate everything in
nature. To this he replies that the artist must imitate only the beautiful. Coleridge’s
description of the beautiful occupies but a short paragraph, and it reads like a galloping
survey of western accounts of beauty from Plato to Kant. What is important, however, is
that Coleridge conceives of beauty, at least in the case of living entities, in non-formalist
terms – “in the living organic[,] beauty is not mere regularity of form” (331) – that is, it
exists independently of any single material embodiment. Art, then, does not imitate the
forms of nature (natura naturata) but rather the idea or essence (natura naturans) behind
it: “The artist must imitate that which is within the thing, that which is active through
form and figure, and discourses to us by symbols – the Natur-geist, or spirit of nature …
for so only can he hope to produce any work truly natural in the object and truly human in the effect” (333). Art is ideal, Coleridge contends, in that it embodies in an individual object a universal idea – an idea which, moreover, finds its incarnation via a process that is at the same time analogous to the grand forward motion of the Natur-geist operating in and through the dynamic development of nature. Indeed, “nature itself would give us the impression of a work of art, if we could see the thought which is present at once in the whole and in every part” (330).

How is it possible, though, for human beings to perceive the ideal, to grasp the inward essence of nature? Human beings, Coleridge suggests, can apprehend the inner spirit of nature because of the fundamental bond that exists “between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man” (332) – a theory Abrams has referred to as “psycho-natural parallelism,” though Coleridge himself preferred the term “consubstantiality.” For Coleridge, “to know is to resemble” (333) and hence the soul(s) of humankind must bear an ontological affinity to the spirit of nature and, in fact, to God Himself; to grasp the essence of nature is in part to recognize the spiritual kinship of all things. Such rhetoric, of course, can tend towards the solipsistic, as well as towards the monistic or pantheistic – criticisms frequently leveled against varieties of idealism in the nineteenth century, not least of all by evangelicals themselves. Coleridge, however, was no Berkeleyan, and he was well aware of the dangers inherent in an unrestrained and unqualified idealism. Following Schelling, his aim was to “reconcile” the objective and the subjective – a goal which ipso facto assumed that objective nature exists independently of the individual ego. “For of all we see, hear, feel, and touch the substance is and must be in ourselves,” writes
Coleridge. And yet, “there is no alternative in reason between the dreary (and thank
heaven! almost impossible) belief that everything around us is but a phantom, or that the
life which is in us is in them likewise…” (333). Too much likeness, after all, ends in
shock and disgust; for Coleridge, rather, it was about “likeness in the difference,
difference in the likeness, and a reconcilement of both in one” (331). Nor, it is worth
adding, was Coleridge a pantheist. It is true, as J. Robert Barth observes, that Coleridge
experienced an ongoing “conflict between his ‘dynamic philosophy’ and his Christian
faith,” but pantheism was a system that Coleridge “shunned all his life.”
Whatever pantheistic demons Coleridge may have wrestled with had apparently been exorcised
once and for all in the “Eolian Harp.” One wonders, in fact, whether it was Coleridge’s
reputation as a Christian thinker that helps to account for the relative ease with which
some evangelical writers took to Coleridge’s idealist aesthetics.

We are now in a better position to catch the Coleridgean echoes, not to mention
the wholesale borrowings, in the aesthetic theories of a number of evangelical authors
during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Two articles in particular, both published
in Britain in 1855 may serve to illustrate the extent to which evangelical periodicals had
become a forum for full-scale idealist manifestoes in the Coleridgean vein. The first of
these, Rogers’s “The Science and Poetry of Art,” which appeared in the London
Quarterly Review, does not mention Coleridge specifically, though the article is aglow
with Coleridgean concepts and turns of phrase – many of them seemingly lifted directly
from passages in “On Poesy or Art.” Consider, for instance, the article’s opening
paragraph:
What is Art? It is the ideal reflection of Nature. Not the mere literal imitation of its actual presentment; nor the production, by mechanical means, of effects supposed to be equivalent to those of Nature…. No: Art is the reflection or mimetic exhibition, of the appearances or sensible impressions of Nature, according to the *ideas, spirit, and design* of Nature.60

In its juxtaposition to the “ideal” – to the “ideas” and “spirit” of Nature – mimesis has undergone a process of “spiritualization.” Rogers, in fact, contrasts the spiritual imitation proper to genuine art with a “mere literal imitation” carried out by “mechanical means,” and he even goes so far as to give as his example “the coloured wax casts of Madame Tussaud” (403) – an illustration that differs only in its specificity from Coleridge’s reference to “waxen figures” as an instance of what he means by “copy.”

With this prologue in place, Rogers proceeds to develop a theory of aesthetic idealism akin to Coleridge’s. Art, he notes, is a product of the imaginative activity of the human mind. We are daily surrounded by the raw sensory materials that constitute the building blocks of art – sounds, lines, colors, etc. – but it requires the organizational facility of the human mind to transform these into art. “[S]ome intelligent act, as of selection, arrangement, and subordination, must be required to bring these scattered materials within the scope and dominion of Art.” It is to the dynamics of human psychology, Rogers contends, that we must therefore look “for the origin of Art” (404). Hence art is the embodiment of an idea that takes its rise, at least in part, in the imagination of the artist. It stands, as Coleridge had put it, “between a thought and a thing” (330). “Be the material what it may,” Rogers explains, “the subject first has a
place in the mind of the artist, whence it springs into outward existence, clothing itself with a sensuous form, which is but a transcript … of the form in which it arose in the imagination” (406). Art is thus once again an expression of the consciousness of the artist.

As with Coleridge, however, underlying this theory of the actualization of the ideal through form is a larger metaphysics of nature. If we could but discern it (a qualification also stipulated in “On Poesy or Art”), we would be able to see nature as the manifestation of “one cosmical idea.” We would be able to see it, that is, as a revelation of the mind of God. In one of his most obviously Coleridgean passages, Rogers articulates the metaphysical groundwork for his theory:

It would be an easy task to multiply examples of the manner in which every divine idea reveals itself in Nature. Every thought of God, in the mystic language of Philosophy, is a word, a self-substantiating fiat; at once purpose, and execution according to the purpose. Nature itself, in the highest sense, namely, that of a spiritual power, or Natur-geist, (natura naturus,) is but a phrase significant of that general idea or design of which the entire frame-work of phenomena (naturæ naturata) is the form, the organism, and result.

Once established, this basis serves as a model for the kind of human imaginative endeavor that gives birth to art. The term “Art,” Rogers observes, is most properly applied to those works of humankind that “are developed by a process analogous to that of Nature, – works wherein a central and sovereign idea is projected in a form which it prescribes and assumes for itself as its own proper heritage and nature …” (405). While the language here is clearly Coleridgean, it should be noted that it is at times difficult to
determine the author’s precise position concerning the metaphysical relationship between the *Natur-geist* he sees operating in nature and the similar *geist* he posits in the act of human creation. The difficulty turns on the word “analogous.” Unlike Coleridge, Rogers makes no explicit reference to any ontological affinity between the human spirit and the divine spirit at work in the world. Consequently, it is possible to read this article as a diluted form of Coleridgean idealism, one in which the author’s metaphysics of nature does not extend ontologically or transcendentally to human artistry but serves merely as a kind of picture or mirror-image of this process. Yet whether one understands Rogers’s metaphysics in a Platonic sense or not, it is clear that his theory of art draws deeply from the wells of Coleridgean aesthetics.

What this article in the *London Quarterly Review* left to its readers to infer, however, was made absolutely clear in another essay published the same year in the *Eclectic Review*. The essay, entitled “Art: Its Prospects and Aspirations,” opens by declaring the centrality of the ideal to a proper conception of art. Art is not mere imitation (and quite significantly, imitation is here associated, at least initially, with the approach of the Dutch realists) but is instead concerned with the depiction of what Sir Joshua Reynolds called “ideal beauty.” The writer, however, clearly means to move beyond Reynolds’s understanding of this idea, and though he quotes Reynolds’s Third Discourse at some length, what interests him is its “transcendental tendency” (131). Reynolds, in fact, is really more of a prefigurement of the author’s conception of ideal art than the reality. For the reality, it turns out, we must look to Coleridge:
Coleridge had a true and profound insight into the character of art when he defined a picture as an intermediate something between a thought and a thing. The thing and thought stand respectively for the outer world of matter and the inner world of mind. The thing or object is received and taken from visible nature into the inner mind of the artist, and there being elaborated and combined with his individual idiosyncrasy of thought and feeling, comes forth a second time into actual existence under the new and created form of art. The primary element, the raw material, is nature, the forming power is mind, and the ultimate product art. Nature enters the mind a fact, a reality, issues forth a fiction, a poem, an ideality. (132)

Significant here is not only the author’s understanding of art as a union of spirit and matter, which he supports by referring directly to Coleridge’s statement in “On Poesy or Art” that “art itself might be defined as of a middle quality between a thought and a thing,” but also the writer’s careful articulation of what one quickly recognizes as something akin to the psychological dynamics associated with Coleridge’s “secondary Imagination” as described in chapter 13 of the Biographia. Art is fundamentally creative, fresh, original; the artist is no slave to sense but possesses an “originating power” (133) that allows him or her to introduce something truly new into existence. Indeed, what gives art special value is precisely its ability to embody the human mind. “Art is not mere copyism of nature,” the writer contends, following the contours of Coleridge’s argument in “On Poesy or Art” exactly, “… but it is a new and creative principle in the world, operating on old materials, and out of existing elements fashioning a beauty and an excellence which nature strives after but never attains” (132).

Yet if art is essentially creative and expressive, in typical idealist fashion it is also a kind of heightened, even transcendental, perception; it is, in short, “imitation” in the Coleridgean sense of the term. The artist does not simply conjure the ideal, nor does he
or she cobble it together by way of mere association or abstraction; in contrast, it exists as a mind-independent entity waiting to be grasped by the artist: “The latent ideal is lying in partial concealment beneath each form and function; … the poet and artist … out of scattered fragments must complete the perfect whole … through imagination, calling into new birth the type which nature had all but lost” (138-39). The artist, then, sees through nature to its ideal form. As we will observe shortly, the author takes this conception of the “latent ideal” in an explicitly theological direction and in doing so plays something of an evangelical variation on Coleridge’s theme. At the same time, however, unlike Rogers, the writer in the Eclectic Review follows Coleridge directly in positing clearly the existence of a “psycho-natural parallelism,” or “consubstantiality,” as a means of underwriting the high epistemological claims of his theory:

The mind reads nature, as we have said, through kindred sympathy of spirit; and it is thus, through intimate communion with her essence, that man, by force of his creative power working in the spirit of nature and his own spirit, gives birth to beauteous forms which nature has not yet realized. If it be said that this is a departure from nature, we deny it; but rather its consummation and fulfillment. (133)

The author is careful here, as Coleridge was, to avoid the trap of hyper-subjectivism, but the metaphysical supposition of a common “spirit” operating in both objective nature and subjective consciousness – and thus, of the union of the ideal and the real, mind and nature, in and through the activity of the artist – is nevertheless clear.

The type of romantic idealism exemplified by these two articles continued to play a prominent role in evangelical definitions of art on both sides of the Atlantic for the
remainder of the nineteenth century. The view of art as a mediator between the
“spiritual” and material, for example, appeared with increasing regularity after the 1850s.
“[I]t is the mission of the artist,” declared the Mercersburg Review in 1859, “guided by a
genial imagination and the laws of taste, to shape and transform … rude material until it
is best adapted to represent the particular thought or idea, which has been fermenting in
his mind.” Art is unique, suggested an article published in the Presbyterian Quarterly
Review in 1862, precisely because of its hybrid nature: “[Art] lies between the rational
and the sensible, dealing with both, but giving a result that differs from both.” Even an
article on “Practical Aesthetics” published in the British Quarterly Review in 1880
eschewed the anticipated pragmatic direction of the title in favor of a romantic idealist
perspective (not surprising perhaps, given the fact that one of the volumes under review
is a text by Schiller): “In all ideal creations it is the interfusion of … spiritual qualities in
their due order of rank and superiority with the sensuous feelings, controlling and
controlled, which infused the unity of conception into the dead materials, until the whole
glows with the Promethean spark of creation.” Not unlike Shelley’s efforts in his
Defense to convert the Platonic into the supremely practical, “Practical Aesthetics” has
here become the Promethean and vice versa.

As with Coleridge and the author in the Eclectic Review, evangelical thinkers
were usually careful to avoid the pitfalls of an overly subjective idealism, taking pains to
affirm the objectivity of the ideal. “[N]ature … does not create the poetic fire,” insisted
William A. Knight in an admirable attempt to hold on to the balance between the
objective and subjective poles within the imaginative act. “It only evokes it from the
depths of the human spirit to which it has made appeal. Nor, on the other hand, does the poet project his own subjectivity upon nature, covering it with an ideal robe of glory that has been altogether wrought within himself. He is, before all things else, a seer.\textsuperscript{68}

Knight’s statement demonstrates the way in which a concern to preserve objectivity (with a little help from romantic conceptions of genius) could, somewhat ironically, generate rather exorbitant claims for the importance of art and the epistemological reaches of the artist. Still, though a concern for objectivity may have helped to assuage the epistemological anxieties of some writers, other evangelical theorists could prove as ambiguous as their non-evangelical counterparts when it came to specifying the nature of the ideal itself. While most were convinced the ideal realm was objective, some were apparently unsure as to precisely what the object was. This was especially true from the late 1870s onward as the rhetoric of romantic idealism became naturalized and as art and religion came increasingly to be seen as twin manifestations of humanity’s higher consciousness. It was not uncommon, for example, for writers to slip into a vague Platonic vocabulary when discussing the ideal realm and the transcendental nature of art:

Poetry is the language of mental or spiritual exaltation. The poet is lifted above the common level of human experience. He dwells amid permanent realities. He has the power of penetrating beneath the momentarily changing phenomenal form to apprehend the real and unchanging substance; of rising above the realm of the transient and the mutable into the changeless and the eternal…. [H]e who makes a loophole through which to look into the invisible world of truth, beauty, and spiritual forces is a poet. Poetry, then, is invisible and spiritual beauty shining in upon us through appropriate material forms.\textsuperscript{69}

Such is the opening salvo of an article on “Christian Lyric Poetry” published in 1879 in
the *Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review and Christian Ambassador*, an article that is at least as thinly Platonic as it is explicitly Christian. W.M. Reily, writing in 1881 in the *Reformed Quarterly Review*, displayed his Platonic credentials openly when he asserted that “the artist regards his object, not as a material thing, but as the reflection of an idea, and … this latter is of significance to him only in so far as it brings him nearer to the Idea of ideas, which Plato designates as Eternal and Divine.”

The following year, T.W. Hunt glided almost imperceptibly from the language of “God” to that of “the infinite” as he registered his support for Plato and Cousin: “Beauty centres in God and is worshipped in him. Art is the representation of the infinite, and must therefore be religious in character and aim.”

By 1893, a writer in the *Methodist Review* was employing the characteristic terminology of German idealism in referring to the “absolute”: “The absolute reveals itself to human intelligence by an appeal to our sense of the beautiful, while in art the mind seeks to imitate the beautiful in nature, and thus gropes after thoughts of the absolute. Thus do we find a basis for the metaphysical in aesthetics.”

Some evangelicals had, oddly enough, managed to find in art a basis for the metaphysical, though not always for the distinctively theological.

Yet not all evangelicals who accepted the basic parameters of an idealist aesthetics were satisfied by the sort of vague talk of the “absolute” exemplified by the writer in the *Methodist Review*. While some thinkers were content to speak of the transcendental, ideal reality embodied by art in somewhat ambiguous and impersonal terms, others took pains to adjust the principles of aesthetic idealism to the requirements of evangelical theological orthodoxy. “Man would be … in error were he to worship the
ideal,” insisted a writer in the *Presbyterian Quarterly Review*. “It is not the ‘good,’ the ‘beautiful’ and the ‘true’ that should bound the thoughts and measure the devotion of the soul.” The author, however, does not dismiss these ideals outright; rather, what he objects to is the tendency of idealist thought to treat these ideals as self-existent, impersonal abstractions. Christians, on the other hand, grasp these ideals in and through a *personal* God: “Worshipping him we apprehend and love these ideals; not as qualities which float in our own fancy, or seem to exist in some unseen altitude ‘very far away,’ but in conscious Deity – the creating, governing, loving God.” At the same time, the writer is anxious to deny extreme forms of idealism (e.g., Berkeley’s) which see the material world as entirely mind-dependent. Once these qualifications have been made clear, however, the author is free to advance a basically idealist conception of art. “If we love art, it is because within it is a beam from the source of beauty. If we love song, it is a symbol to the ear of utterance unheard – of life, love, care and Fatherhood in heaven.” In fact, by transferring “the doctrine of idealism to the Will of the Creator” – all reality is in essence a projection of God’s mind – the author secures for the material world a symbolic, even sacramental, status. Both nature and art become potential expressions of the personal God of the Bible. While not identical, the theistic – indeed, the explicitly *Christian* – idealism of this particular writer looks back in some ways to the thought of Jonathan Edwards.73

This writer’s effort to graft orthodox theological principles derived from revelation onto a system of aesthetics that is broadly idealist (or vice versa) suggests one way in which some evangelical writers sought to be philosophically progressive and
theologically conservative at the same time. For the writer in the Presbyterian Quarterly Review, idealism was tenable insofar as it could be rooted in the personality of the biblical God. For a different group of writers, however, idealism could be substantiated on the basis of another theological category: eschatology. The ideal does not merely exist as a supersensuous entity, a Platonic form, or a timeless idea in the divine consciousness but rather affords a shadowy vision of the heavenly existence that awaits the Christian. Located within a concrete history of redemption, art thus provides a glimpse of future perfection. “The last and highest use of poetry,” concludes an author in the Christian Observer in 1866, “is to breathe energy, by breathing inspiration into our languid and labouring existence, and to serve as a bright and blissful substitute for a lost Paradise. It brings back the glory that has departed, and calls in, before its time, the glory that is to come.”

At times, in fact, the artistic process and the activity of the imagination could themselves be characterized in terms of redemption, as in the case of the 1855 Eclectic Review piece examined above. In his discussion of landscape painting (which, the author declares, “is worthless if it be not ideal”), the writer considers the example of a tree. No perfect tree exists in nature, though “At its birth there was a certain ideal stamped on its nature, towards which … it has every moment of its life been tending.” It is the province of art and the artist to grasp this ideal where nature has failed: “By that insight which alone constitutes the artist [sic] mind, he must seize on the ideal, the essential and saving beauty, and working in the creative spirit of nature, remove the curse under which she labours, restoring a pristine excellence, or at least anticipating a future perfection.”

The process of idealization is therefore a mode of eschatological
perception as well as a means of restoring in percipients a sense of prelapsarian perfection. “The artist’s business is the idealisation of the actual, to show us nature as God made it, not as it is perverted by sin.”76 Ironically, it is the doctrine of the Fall – so central to evangelical theology – which for these writers assigns to art a deep significance and value. It is an aesthetic version of the felix culpa.77

**From Devilish to “the vision and the faculty divine”: The Imagination Reconsidered**

These discussions of artistic idealization in terms of redemption and eschatology suggest something of the transformation that had taken place in evangelical conceptions of the imagination since the time of the Puritans. For many Puritans, the imagination was a faculty that needed to be held at arm’s length, for it was liable to distort one’s natural and spiritual perceptions when not strictly controlled. Some positive notion of the imagination’s relationship to spiritual realities was not, to be sure, totally foreign to the Puritan tradition. Jonathan Edwards, we may recall, acknowledged the difficulty of contemplating the “invisible things” of religion “without a degree of imagination,” thus raising the possibility that the imagination may serve as an organ of spiritual perception, at least for those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and who submit to the revealed truths of Scripture.78 On the whole, though, such statements were frequently matched among the Puritans by those which cast the imagination in a negative light and warned of the dangers of overindulgence. Edwards himself not infrequently spoke of the imagination in this way. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, many evangelical critics had joined the romantic chorus in praise of the imagination not only as
a faculty of artistic creation but also as an organ of transcendental perception. “[W]e dare to claim for the true, childlike, humble imagination,” ventured the minister and novelist George MacDonald in the pages of the British Quarterly Review in 1867, “such an inward oneness with the laws of the universe that it possesses in itself an insight into the very nature of things.” MacDonald’s theory of the imagination, which he developed at great length, was no anomaly. It was attractive enough to evangelical readers, it seems, that a portion of the essay was reprinted two years later in another evangelical periodical, the Christian Ambassador. In fact, nothing perhaps illustrates the evangelical affinity for romantic aesthetics as clearly as the transition of the imagination in evangelical thought from “devilish” to, as Wordsworth put it in The Excursion, “the vision and the faculty divine.”

The shift among Anglo-American evangelicals from Puritan distrust to the romantic exaltation of the imagination as a sort of über-faculty capable of penetrating and embodying the spirit of nature and the cosmos was, on one level, yet another consequence of evangelicals’ investment in the mental philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment. During the latter half of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth century, the imagination went from being a chiefly associative and aggregative faculty that operated on stored sensory data according to the mechanical laws of mind identified by empirical philosophers to a creative and visionary faculty that possessed the ability to conjure up genuinely new ideas and to grasp intuitively the metaphysical unity of all things. Romantic theories of the imagination, therefore, were to some extent an offshoot of certain emphases in Enlightenment psychology, and
Scottish philosophers like Dugald Stewart, whose writings were familiar to most educated nineteenth-century evangelicals, were instrumental in developing such theories. Given the pervasiveness of the Scottish philosophy among evangelicals at the turn of the nineteenth century, it is little wonder, then, that evangelical thinking about the imagination more or less mirrored this same pattern of development.

Some idea of this development as it occurred under the auspices of the Scottish philosophy can be glimpsed in a review of Stewart’s *Philosophical Essays*, published in 1812 in the *Christian Observer*. Stewart, for his part, was well aware of the common prejudices against the imagination as a faculty prone to evil, especially during the formative years of childhood. In addressing these prejudices, Stewart offered one of his more provocative suggestions, namely, that the way to avoid an overactive and misguided imagination was not to eliminate completely all imaginative experiences during childhood (as many advised) but rather to train the imagination early through proper use. Stewart, in short, counseled *more* imagination, not less. (Interestingly, almost one hundred years later Edmund Gosse would speculate along similar lines that if his rigidly Calvinist parents had indulged his early desire for fictional tales, his own crisis of faith may have been in some measure averted or abated. 82) The reviewer in the *Christian Observer* finds this position especially appealing: “It deserves … to be seriously considered, whether the ordinary practice [of suppressing the imagination] has not been established upon contracted and erroneous views of human nature; and whether it does not, in effect, augment the evil which it proposes to correct.” 83 The reviewer is careful to note that he is not issuing a firm opinion at this point on the validity of Stewart’s views –
something he hopes to do later – but his tentative support of Stewart points to the increasing openness of some evangelical writers to the positive benefits of the imagination.

By the middle of the century, this tentative openness had been transformed among many evangelical critics into a full-fledged support, and it was in some measure the Scottish philosophy that continued to drive this metamorphosis. As late as 1861, a writer in the *Presbyterian Quarterly Review* was describing the function of the imagination in terms that closely resembled Stewart’s discussion in his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* – so closely, in fact, that the writer even pirates Stewart’s own example of Milton’s garden of Eden to illustrate the combining power of the imagination. The imagination, the author goes on to assert, is that “great faculty” involved in “the construction of new wholes…. She endows inanimate nature with life. She causes the motionless to move, the mute to speak, the passionless to beam with intelligence.” The imagination, moreover, is the idealizing faculty: “She makes the idea more than it is in art and nature, and then goes on to ideal beauty, which no art can compass, and no object in nature can fully realize. Thus the imagination gives more than is returned to her, and then goes on to the creation of ideal beauty which she does not expect to be fully realized.”

While this author’s discussion of the imagination is initially couched in the conventional terms of eighteenth-century empirical philosophy – something Wordsworth also did in his “Preface to Poems (1815),” much to the chagrin of Coleridge – the imagination ultimately finds itself knocking on heaven’s door. It is capable of conceiving (though art itself is not necessarily capable of embodying) a beauty that rises above the
imperfect beauty found on earth. Thus the imagination is a faculty of transcendent vision, of supra-worldly perception – or rather, it is almost such a faculty. For in this case, the writer’s theological convictions prompt him to stop short of granting the imagination full access to heaven; the imagination must be content for the moment merely to listen at the door: “The conception of the artist is imperfect. Measured according to certain imperfect standards, it may be considered perfect; but can it be that a being so depraved as man, living in an atmosphere so impure, and surrounded with objects so deformed, can have the highest ideas of beauty? It is not possible. The standard on earth and in heaven are different.” There remains, therefore, a fundamental gap between divine beauty and earthly beauty that cannot be bridged, even, it seems, for the redeemed. Earthly “perfection” is merely the culmination of earthly existence, not the beginning of heavenly “perfection”: “But who does not believe that in a redeemed state, with the spirit regenerated, and the physical world purified by fire, there will be visions of beauty, such as yet never have tenanted the human mind, and objects of beauty, such as yet have never greeted the human eye?” Even so, earthly beauty is not to be ignored. It is a gift of God intended for humankind alone, and in seeking the beautiful in art, we learn of the “benevolence” of God even as our nature is “refine[d] and elevate[d].”

The writer in the Presbyterian Quarterly Review was in many ways poised between an eighteenth-century conception of the imagination and a nineteenth-century one, or rather, his version of the romantic imagination was more Wordsworthian than Coleridgean. Yet even as he formulated the workings of the imagination according to the
empirical terminology of the Scottish Enlightenment, he was gesturing towards a Coleridgean understanding of the imagination as an organ of quasi-divine creation and spiritual insight. In fact, however, some evangelical writers had described the imagination in such terms even earlier. In 1849, the *Eclectic Review* invoked the increasingly popular distinction between Fancy and Imagination as a way to criticize James Fergusson’s understanding of poetry:

He does not see, that [poetry’s] office, in its highest and truest working, is the apprehension of *Truth* – of truth, of another order simply, from that of science: truth peculiar to itself, intangible, subtile; truth, of equal value with that apprehended by science, but of which science takes no cognizance. This misapprehension becomes very palpable, when he alludes to imagination, as discoursing ‘of golden mountains, eternal springs, shoreless seas, and such like things;’ and of man’s imaginings, as contradistinguished from ‘God’s truth.’ For, in fact, the essential imaginings of poetry are God’s truths: just as much as the law of gravitation. And that action of poetry to which he here makes particular allusion, forms but a very subordinate, secondary one; belongs to its outward vesture and symbolism; falls within the province of *fancy* not of actual imagination, at all.

The reviewer’s immediate point of reference for this distinction was Ruskin’s chapter on the “Penetrative Imagination” in volume 2 of *Modern Painters*, which had been published three years earlier, but the differentiation of Fancy and Imagination had originated in the late eighteenth century (Stewart, for instance, had posited a similar scheme in 1792) and had received its most famous romantic exposition in Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*. We have already observed a Coleridgean conception of the imagination at work in the *Eclectic Review* article published in 1855, and a number of direct references to Coleridge’s version of this distinction appear in evangelical
periodicals beginning in the 1860s. J.H. Rigg, for instance, explores both Coleridge’s and Wordsworth’s views of the imagination at some length in his review of Dallas’s *The Gay Science*. Coleridge, Rigg concedes, is hampered by “his obscurity,” as well as “the almost insane jargon of mysticism which mars his writings,” but if one is able to translate his insights “with a reference to the Platonic idealism with which Coleridge was so deeply imbued,” then “their meaning is worthy of respect.” Though Rigg is not uncritical of either, he ultimately concludes that where the imagination is concerned, “we shall perhaps find that Coleridge and Wordsworth have come nearer to the true idea appertaining to the word than any other authorities.” Significantly, however, the problem of depravity which had so exercised the writer in the *Presbyterian Quarterly Review* has been effectively muted, or else dropped altogether. Moving fairly seamlessly – perhaps too seamlessly, one might argue – from Platonic idealism to Christianity, Rigg casts Coleridge as a broadly Christian philosopher, who “according to his wont, appropriates Scriptural language to describe” earthly things “as ‘the example and shadow of heavenly things.’” The language is certainly not inconsistent with Edwardsean typology, and Rigg notes that such things may be “discerned by the illuminated soul,” but it is the Coleridgean Imagination rather than the Edwardsean “spiritual sense” that is held to be the source of such illumination: “Imagination, according to Coleridge’s philosophy, is the power of mind, the act, the quickening, the illumination, wherewith reason recognises in the outward and sensible the analogies of that which is spiritual, and thereby enables the understanding to gain a glimpse of their meaning.”

From the late 1860s onward, explicitly romantic statements regarding the powers
of the imagination were common in many evangelical periodicals. Henry N. Day, writing in the *American Presbyterian and Theological Review* in 1867, contrasted his own romantic theory of the imagination, in which the artist bodies forth ideal conceptions, or (as he phrased it in richly oxymoronic terms) “spirit-forms,” that rise from within, to older mechanical theories: “No genuine work of art was ever a patch-work of combination. No poet, in his artistic processes, ever summoned before him, by an act of reproductive memory, the forms which had been previously given him in his observations and studies, and then set himself to selecting and combining.” In truth, Day continues, “The artist shapes, he idealizes first; he first determines his artistic activity in a specific direction, and embodies it in a pure ideal, a proper spirit-form into which enters no matter…. For Day, in fact, material embodiment of this ideal was a secondary process – one that may or may not take place at all. Day’s prioritizing of the conceptual element over the material is typical of much romantic theory, though interestingly, his reflections also hint at some later twentieth-century arguments concerning the ontology of art, in which art is said to exist as a mental rather than a physical object. Furthermore, as the imagination gradually became less mechanical and material, it became ever more “spiritual.” Evangelical writers increasingly followed Coleridge, Ruskin, Emerson, and others in describing it in overtly religious terms. The *Congregationalist*, quoting Wordsworth, assured its readers in 1878 of the imagination’s spiritual import both in the present life and in the life to come: “we may be sure that ‘the vision and the faculty divine’ will also have to do with our life in God hereafter.” Three years later, W.M. Reily described the imagination, or “fancy” (he used the terms interchangeably), in the
pages of the *Reformed Quarterly* as follows: “one of the most legitimate and essential functions of the fancy is to see into the soul of nature, of which the universe is the full expression, but which is, in some sense, present and manifest in every part, that soul which must be regarded as the on-going and actualization of the divine creative word, and as such the revelation of the divine thought and will.” Not surprisingly, Reily’s article is liberally seasoned with references to Plato, Carlyle, Coleridge, Cousin, and Emerson, among others. It is a statement by James T. East in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* in 1900, however, that offers what is perhaps the best measure of the vast ground which the imagination had traversed even among theologically conservative evangelical thinkers over the course of the nineteenth century. “Any starving of the imagination would be a calamity,” East contended, “for ‘the very design of imagination is to domesticate us in another, that is, in a celestial nature.’” Interestingly, it is clear that East holds to a fairly orthodox understanding of Protestant doctrine. The God of which he speaks throughout is obviously the personal God of the Bible, not the “Absolute” of Fichte, Schelling, or Hegel, and he highlights the place of the atonement and of regeneration by the Holy Spirit in the life of Christians. Yet in addressing the nature of the imagination and of beauty, both earthly and heavenly, it is to Emerson that East turns, if only briefly. Even Emerson, it seems, had by the turn of the century been successfully baptized into the ranks of British Methodism.

Admittedly, not all nineteenth-century evangelical critics followed the general path charted here. Some theologically conservative writers, like the author in the *Presbyterian Quarterly Review*, continued to express reservations about overly inflated
views of the imagination that appeared to downplay or eliminate the need for grace as a prerequisite for spiritual perception. Such critics were perhaps more wary than East of making peace with the “spiritual” rhetoric of American Transcendentalism. Others continued to caution readers against the psychological dangers of an overactive imagination – an argument that showed extraordinary longevity, particularly in evangelical discussions of fiction. Still, the romantic evolution of the imagination among evangelical critics into a spiritual organ for perceiving ideal reality was significant both aesthetically and theologically. In terms of aesthetics proper, romantic theories of the imagination helped to elevate evangelical conceptions of both art and the artist. The imagination allowed one to “see into the life of things,” and thus art was not simply a species of ornament or recreation but rather a new type of “truth.” Art became something that was worth taking seriously. In theological terms, however, the imagination’s gradual conversion into a kind of spiritual instrument was indicative of the fact that traditional conceptions of grace and regeneration were growing obsolete among some members of the evangelical population. In fact, it is no coincidence that the rise of the evangelical romantic imagination paralleled the decline of Puritan understandings of the self as inherently depraved and subject to the sovereignty of God. Though often described in quasi-religious terms, the romantic imagination did not rely on supernatural grace in order to function as an organ of heightened perception. True, not all people were equally endowed with imaginative power – not everyone could perform at the level of Coleridge’s “Secondary Imagination” or Ruskin’s “Penetrative Imagination” – but the power of the imagination was nevertheless “natural” rather than supernatural in its
operations. Indeed, for Coleridge the Primary Imagination was so basic that simple perception was impossible without it. In many cases, of course, the objects of the imagination’s perception had themselves shifted into a “natural” register, with the result being something like Carlyle’s “natural supernaturalism.” In other cases, the imagination was seen as a truly metaphysical faculty whose objects of perception were the ideal forms of the divine. Now, however, rising above one’s earthbound state did not require a prior act of condescending grace on the part of God. The imagination had become, in the words of Ernest Lee Tuveson, “a means of grace.”

Furthermore, as a creative faculty the romantic imagination was rooted in basic assumptions about the nature of human freedom, assumptions that would have been scandalous to the Puritans and to Edwards. It is not insignificant, for example, that Coleridge spent a great deal of time defending the freedom of the will as the “spiritual” dimension of the human personality not subject to the mechanistic laws of nature. In fact, Coleridge was familiar with at least some of Edwards’s writings, and tellingly, his view of Edwards became increasingly negative over time. The artist had become a symbol of human autonomy, a being that possessed the ability to transcend the mechanical laws of nature and to “create” freely after the manner of God.

In first welcoming and subsequently disseminating romantic claims concerning the powers of the imagination, many nineteenth-century evangelical critics were thus moving swiftly away from the religio-aesthetic tradition of the Puritans. On the one hand, this meant an increased esteem for the imagination and the fine arts; on the other hand, it signaled the further dissolution of traditional Protestant orthodoxy.
Anti-Romantic Reactions: Evangelical “Classicism” and the “Terra Firma of Common-Sense”

One interesting measure of just how influential romantic views of art had become among many nineteenth-century evangelical critics is the strength of the reaction to such views exhibited by another segment of evangelical writers. Even as some evangelical critics were beginning to rely more heavily on the language of idealism, others were voicing doubts about some of the key tenets of romantic aesthetic theory. Some critics, for example, seem to have grown tired of what they perceived as the moral and aesthetic excesses to which the theory of expressivism had led. They were usually measured in their criticisms and rarely, if ever, objected to expressivism in toto. Rather, their strategy was to propose that self-expression, while indispensable to true art, was in the end subordinate to other, more important concerns. Ironically, one of these concerns was none other than the ideality of art. “[I]dealisation,” argued H. Buxton Forman in the London Quarterly Review, “must always be regarded as a higher function of art than mere expression.”98 Whereas a number of evangelical critics had followed Coleridge and other romantics in transcendentalizing the ideal, others (re)turned to a more “classical” conception of the ideal as a way to oppose the excesses of romantic expressivism. For these anti-romantics, the ideal functioned as a rallying point and a means of protesting what they saw as the growing subjectivism of much romantic art.

Joseph LeConte, for instance, provides a clear example of this sort of approach to the ideal. LeConte does not locate the ideal in simple opposition to self-expression but instead suggests that expression is subservient to the ideal. Expression is a necessary and
valuable ingredient in all good art, but for an art object to qualify as “high art,” it must also move beyond expression to something more essential: “Thus, we might briefly say that there are in all art, as well as in nature, two elements: the sensuous, or emotional, and the aesthetic. The first is sometimes called expression, life, power, passion, naturalness; the second, beauty, grace, unity, ideality. Now, in a high art the latter is always predominant; in a low art, the former is always predominant.” LeConte here encapsulates the conventionally “romantic” (expression, life, power, passion, naturalness) and “classical” (beauty, grace, unity, ideality) aesthetic virtues respectively, and though he ultimately grants priority to the latter, he nevertheless recognizes the fundamental importance of the former.

LeConte’s aesthetic represents a concerted effort to temper what the author sees as some of the more immoderate impulses within romantic aesthetics without entirely abandoning its central premises. An article published in 1854 in the London Quarterly Review, however, opted for a more aggressive line in arguing not only for the supremacy of the classical ideal over and against expressivism but also for the classical ideal over and against the kind of historical determinism which the author understood to be latent in the idealist theories of art and history that exerted such a profound influence on nineteenth-century thought. Appearing in the same publication only one year before Rogers’s heavily Coleridgean “The Science and Poetry of Art,” the timing of this article underscores the manner in which many evangelical periodicals, far from being one-dimensional or ideologically partisan, served as spaces of critical negotiation and ongoing debate. Authored by Thomas M’Nicholl, the editor of the Review, and entitled “Modern
Poetry: Its Genius and Tendencies,” this piece undertakes in the course of reviewing a volume of poems by Alexander Smith and the long poem *Balder* by Sydney Dobell “to offer some brief remarks upon the leading characteristics of modern poetry.” In general, M’Nicholl’s view of modern poetry is not particularly favorable. He concedes that “there is so much to elicit admiration” in recent verse, but insists, too, that there is “still more that is fatal.”

In its basic preference for aesthetic principles that run contrary to many of those advocated by writers in the romantic tradition (despite assurances from M’Nicholl that he genuinely values the efforts of Keats and Shelley), this article as a whole offers an interesting point of contrast to many of the developments we have observed thus far.

M’Nicholl sets out to counteract an idea of poetry that had gained currency as a result of the developing historical consciousness of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – the idea that poetry is a product of “the spirit of the age.” He admits that “true poetry may, in some faint degree, reflect the spirit of the age which gives it birth” (240), but ultimately his purpose is to drive home the fact that “the method of true art is not altered by the genius of an age” (241). The doctrine that poetry is an outgrowth of the *zeitgeist* – yet another partial byproduct of various German idealist theories of history – had been for some romantics an enabling idea. It was, in fact, preached rather easily at times in exultative or triumphalist tones, as when Shelley reveled with his usual rhetorical flamboyance in the thought that “Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration” who “are themselves perhaps the most sincerely astonished at its manifestations, for it is less their spirit than the spirit of the
For Shelley, the idea was finally an empowering one: the poet is a socially
relevant figure precisely because he is in tune with the pitch of time; he is poised at the
leading edge of progress. Clearly, however, there is an implicit determinism in the notion
that poets and artists are the unconscious conductors of the intellectual currents of an age,
and for M’Nicholl writing in 1854, the idea had become less of an empowering one and
more of an oppressive one. In fact, two developments stemming from this notion had
begun to trouble some Victorian critics. One of these was the claim that only poetry
which embodies the particular ethos of the age is “true” poetry. Only “modern” subjects,
that is, are fit subjects for authentic verse. What had seemed to Shelley an aesthetically
and politically liberating notion has here, in effect, been hardened into a poetic dogma
and transformed into a normative criterion. The other, perhaps darker, development was
the growing realization that to claim that poetry is a product of the spirit of the age was to
accept the historicist consequence that poetry could be nothing more than a product of its
age.

Over and against these perspectives, M’Nicholl turns to something like the
classical ideal to reaffirm the universality and objectivity of art:

The nature of art is essentially objective and constructive. A poem, like a
painting, is strictly a composition, whose materials – selected almost in
whatsoever place you will – are faithfully combined by the aesthetic
faculty, – a faculty that is neither wholly intellectual nor wholly moral,
that acts in great measure like instinct, but needs the co-operation of
science and intelligence. (241)

There is little here that would have troubled the staunchest of neoclassical critics. To
begin with, there is nothing transcendental about M’Nicholl’s understanding of the
dependent process: it is a matter of “composition” only, and though the author allows
room for a certain amount of “instinct” in the artistic process (common enough in
eighteenth-century theories of invention), his model is finally more akin to neoclassical
theories of association than to romantic conceptions of the creative imagination. (It is not
insignificant, in this respect, that M’Nicholl summons in support of his argument the
popular eighteenth-century dictum *ut pictura poesis* [“poetry is like a painting”] – a
dictum that had often been replaced by romantic critics in England and Germany with a
belief in the fundamental kinship of poetry and music.103) “Poetry,” he continues,
“depends far more on the essential than the accidental; on the permanent than the
temporary; on man himself than national costume or political conditions …. The best,
and even the most popular, poems in the world, are those which are least shaped or
coloured by the spirit of the author’s age” (241). There is, in short, little in art that is
personally subjective or historically relativistic. Art is universal and objective in the best
neoclassical sense of these terms.

Indeed, the article as a whole is something of an anti-romantic tour de force. Not
only does M’Nicholl stand firm on the classical ideal but he also seizes the opportunity to
ridicule the excesses of the Byronic poet and the pitfalls of expressivist theories:

It is evident that the modern bard esteems no ordinary theme deserving of
his song; and so he turns to glorify himself, and worship his own art by
way of exercising it. His rhapsody is all about genius, – its sorrows,
ecstasies, divinity, and might; what it can do if it only pleases, and what it
scorns to do for so miserable an audience as humanity can furnish. No
longer holding “the mirror up to Nature,” he sits and turns it fairly on
himself, and finds trace of thunder in every scar, and demon-beauty in every fantastic lock; the blue of his eye suggests (to him) the unutterable depths of heaven, and in the curl of his lip he reads and practises contempt for the paltry world of prose. (245)

So much for the extremes of romantic individualism. Near the end of the article, M’Nicholl drives home his point by issuing a stern warning to “the new generation of poets”: “But let the new generation of poets beware … how they permit the expressional parts of poetry to overlay its more substantial elements” (256). Poetry’s more substantial elements, of course, are those which reflect the general, universal, and ideal.

Viewed from the broader perspective of Victorian criticism, however, M’Nicholl (and LeConte as well) is far from being a lone voice of aesthetic conservatism or some kind of avatar of classicism. In fact, in his concluding paragraph, almost as an afterthought it seems, he tips his hand by referring the reader to the preface of a recently published volume of poems by one Matthew Arnold – the text now commonly referred to as the “Preface of 1853.” M’Nicholl suggests in addition that the reader also consult the preface to Henry Taylor’s “Philip van Artevelde.” Both of these essays, he informs us, “will teach [young poets] … how to avoid the false heroics of Byronic poetry,” and in this he is surely correct. In the Preface of 1853, for instance, Arnold insists on “the subordinate character of expression” in any theory of poetry and argues for the continuing validity of classical models. The ancients “knew what they wanted in Art, and we do not.” Action and subject matter, not expression, are the indispensable conditions of all good poetry. As one critic has put it, “Arnold’s Preface to the 1853 edition of his poems was basically a rejection of romantic subjectivism,” a rejection
clearly affirmed by M’Nicholl. Arnold and M’Nicholl are also consonant in their rejection of any theory that restricts the province of poetry to “modern subjects” alone, for Arnold is anxious to assure his readers that he has not eliminated “Empedocles” from the present volume of poems simply “in deference to the opinion which many critics of the present day appear to entertain against subjects chosen from distant times and countries: against the choice, in short, of any subjects but modern ones.”

Taylor’s preface is an even more pronounced attack on the excesses of romantic subjectivism. Byron and Shelley are explicitly denounced, and Taylor laments that wisdom, intellect, understanding, and truth have been rejected in favor of the intensity of feeling and the vibrancy of imagery. According to the modern school of verse against which Taylor argues, poetry “was to be, like music, a moving and enchanting art, acting upon the fancy, the affections, the passions, but scarcely connected with the intellectual faculties.”

Significantly, Taylor criticizes Byron for failing to represent the character of humankind in terms of the ideal: “There is nothing in them [Byron’s representations] of the mixture and modification, – nothing of the composite fabric which Nature has assigned to Man.”

Thus the classicism of M’Nicholl was a decidedly Victorian classicism – a reaction in part to the extremes of romanticism – that was gaining ground among some critics at mid-century. The formulation “Art is ideal,” when understood in its classical sense, seemed to provide a useful means of avoiding both the Scylla of hyper-subjectivism and the Charybdis of hyper-determinism that had become associated with certain romantic theories of art and history (and art in history), which continued to exert
such a profound influence on the evangelical mind at mid-century. In a sense, then, this writer’s recuperation of the classical ideal was both reactionary and progressive at the same time – a point which provides another, perhaps unexpected, piece of evidence that nineteenth-century evangelicals were far more aesthetically engaged than is sometimes believed. Nonetheless, this move demonstrates yet again how pervasive romantic assumptions about art had become.

M’Nicholl had criticized the extremes of romantic expressivism openly, and he had, indirectly at least, offered an alternative vision of the “ideal” that was largely stripped of the metaphysical drapery of German idealism. Some critics, however, opted for a more caustic and direct attack on the doctrines of idealism. Writing in the *Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review*, Henry J. Miller bewailed what he referred to as “The Teutonization of English Literature.” Not published until 1885, the article was a somewhat belated response to the influence of German thought on English aesthetics, and its satirical, dismissive tone gives it a decidedly reactionary quality. But it is a clear example of a targeted reply to the presumed intemperance of romantic aesthetic idealism. Especially interesting is Miller’s explicit juxtaposition of idealism, which he racializes as German and repeatedly characterizes in terms of ephemeral substances like “gas” and “vapor,” to common sense, which he identifies as essentially English and depicts as solid and grounded. “How comes it to pass,” he asks, “that we English, eminently a practical and hard-headed race, having once got our feet well planted on the good substantial *terra firma* of common-sense, have voluntarily stepped from our coign of vantage to trust ourselves to the unknown perils of the quaking bog of *a priori* mysticism?” Regrettably,
the English “have allowed a huge sea of Teutonism to submerge [them], every wave of which is highly charged with Transcendental gas.” Miller is, in effect, reaching back to what he imagines were the good old days (i.e., before the 1830s) of pre-romantic philosophy and art when the realist epistemology of Reid and Stewart reigned, and to his credit, his sense of the historical evolution of English thought is quite accurate. “[L]et us examine,” Miller suggests later in the essay, “any poem, novel, or essay of (say) the year 1823, side by side with a like composition of the year 1883, and we shall soon see what a wide gulf separates the two, both in conception and in execution.” The reasons for this difference are, for Miller, quite clear:

In the days of our fathers it was the fashion for our literati to bring to bear upon the consideration of any given subject, not only the resources of a wide and varied culture, but an inexhaustible fund of shrewd common-sense, an unqualified hatred of epicene or sentimentality and affectation, a power of taking broad views, a terseness and vigour in giving them expression, and a consummate generalship in marshalling their thoughts. In these degenerate days, since we have become thoroughly Teutonised, we have altered all that. English habits of thought have sunk, drenched and overwhelmed under the successive deluges of Kantism, Fichteism, Hegelism, and Schopenhaverism which have poured down upon us. A perpetual drizzle from the land of Vapourdom has soddened us to the bone. The tutelary genius of our literature, Ixion-like, has been embracing a cloud, and is chilled to the innermost marrow by the dampness of the encounter.

Thus he concludes, “No sublime, grandly imagined epic, no genuine drama, holding the mirror up to nature, not even a sweet, simply idyll, or the rudest of pulse-quickening lyrics, can exist in an atmosphere so rarefied.” Interestingly, even the transgressions of Byron fare comparatively well amid this suffocating miasma of German philosophy.
Whereas for M’Nicholl Byron had represented all that was wrong with English poetry, for Miller he becomes a touchstone of sincerity when contrasted with German thought. The self-expressions of Byron were at least somewhat genuine, but in German idealism “the magnified, attenuated, distorted ‘I’ is never in the ordinary moods of ordinary mortals. It is for ever high up in the clouds, or above them, amongst the Infinites. The only nouns it takes any cognizance of are the abstract ones. The vacant vision takes in the ideal afar off, but sees nothing of the actual close at hand.”\textsuperscript{109} Better the solid English ego of Byron than the diffuse transcendental ego of the Germans.

It is clear, however, that despite Miller’s passion (and at times his clever humor), his argument was too little too late, for his own editor felt it necessary to attach a brief footnote to the conclusion of his article, which served to cast doubt on Miller’s thesis: “While admitting there is more or less reason in Mr. Miller’s drastic criticism, we cannot help thinking his views somewhat extreme and one-sided. It, indeed, surprises us no little that a writer of such perspicacity and vigour can see nothing but gross and unmitigated evil in the Teutonization of English Literature.—ED.” Of course, if the editor’s footnote in one sense subverts Miller’s position, it only confirms it in another. English literature and aesthetic thought had in fact been “Teutonized,” and many evangelicals, like the editor of the \textit{Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review}, were far from seeing this development as a “gross and unmitigated evil.”\textsuperscript{110}
Aesthetic Apologies: The Question of Purpose and Art as a Unique Mode of Discourse

The question What is art? bears an intimate relationship to questions about the purpose and value of art in human experience and in society. A theory which views art in terms of embellishment or ornamentation will arrive at a radically different, and far more restricted, answer to the question, What are the ends of art?, than a theory which sees art as an embodiment of ideal reality or as an expression of the artist’s mind and emotions (or some combination thereof). Not surprisingly, as evangelical conceptions of the essence of art underwent a significant theoretical shift after the 1830s, so too did evangelical understandings of the value and purpose of art. Whereas many earlier evangelicals had valued art largely for its diversionary and didactic qualities, a number of nineteenth-century evangelical theorists came to see art as a unique mode of discourse capable of making a distinctive, and indeed an indispensable, contribution to life and society.

During the Victorian period, both evangelicals and non-evangelicals largely agreed that what could not be justified with reference either to morality or eternity could hardly be justified at all. (Even Oscar Wilde, who did his level best to overturn nearly the entirety of the western tradition’s answer to the question of art’s purpose, could not finally escape the question itself.) At the same time, this serious attention to the question of purpose grew in urgency as a result of the claims issuing from a growing sector of the Anglo-American world that art and poetry lacked all practical value. Utilitarians, for example, with whose aesthetic views evangelicals have sometimes been compared,
denounced all poetry as falsehood and sought, like Plato, to exile it from the republic.\textsuperscript{111} Rapid industrial and technological advancements, together with the spread of the scientific spirit into the deepest recesses of the Victorian psyche, compelled many to see art as little more than a plaything in contrast to the mighty achievements of science.\textsuperscript{112} Charles Darwin is perhaps only the most famous example of a nineteenth-century intellectual whose devotion to science engendered a corresponding distaste for the Shakespeare he had once enjoyed. Indeed, the social and intellectual progress so dear to the nineteenth century seemed by its very nature to entail the inevitable abandonment of art and poetry, as Macaulay famously argued.\textsuperscript{113}

In addition to these widespread cultural concerns regarding the purpose and value of art, evangelical critics in particular faced another set of complicating factors which made the consideration of art’s ends all the more crucial. The most important of these factors was the residual influence of Puritanism’s “asymmetrical” religio-aesthetic legacy, which left some evangelicals uncertain about art’s ultimate status. Other vestiges of this Puritan tradition received fresh emphasis within the context of nineteenth-century revivalism, merging with typically evangelical concerns to generate the potential for renewed doubts about the value of art. Was it possible to square a prolonged attention to aesthetics with the need for every individual to participate in evangelistic efforts for the salvation of souls, to engage in social activism (can there really be poetry amid so much poverty and vice?), and to use one’s time wisely in the light of eternity? Such considerations raised difficult questions about whether pursuing the fine arts was consistent with the kind of behavior befitting a committed evangelical. It is little wonder,
then, that in this context many nineteenth-century evangelical critics were forced to rethink and rearticulate the purpose and value of art.

Nineteenth-century evangelical defenders of art did not always agree on why art is valuable or on precisely how valuable it is; however, that they believed it to be valuable and to have an essential purpose in human life is abundantly clear. Though many took pains to qualify carefully the extent of art’s influence, few, if any, evangelical writers were inclined to suggest that art is fundamentally useless or that human existence would be just as good, or better, without it. In fact, many evangelical writers advanced robust claims for the necessity of art.

When it came to the question of art’s fundamental purpose, the western aesthetic tradition had for the most part relied for its answer on Horace’s well-known maxim, “to please and instruct.” A number of nineteenth-century evangelical critics took this principle as their starting-point, though depending on the individual perspective of the writer, critics sometimes leaned heavily to one its poles. Surprising, perhaps, given the puritanical stereotypes sometimes applied to evangelicals, is the extent to which many evangelicals stressed the pleasure end of the Horatian equation. As early as 1814, John Foster, writing in the *Eclectic Review*, betrayed some impatience with the text under review for having labored so thoroughly to defend the notion that the purpose of art is pleasure, something Foster takes to be self-evident: “Perhaps the main purpose is still no more than to maintain and illustrate the principle or position, that the immediate object of poetry is to please; on which point, if any one has continued sceptical, in despite of the loads of paper that have been wasted on this frivolous topic, it would have been perfectly
just to abandon him to the consequences of his obdurate perverseness.”

This commitment to pleasure as the primary end of art also led a number of evangelicals to reiterate the common distinction between the fine arts and the so-called mechanic arts, or between beauty and utility. The fine arts (poetry, music, painting, sculpture, etc.) were devoted to beauty and pleasure; the mechanic arts (e.g., carpentry) served directly practical ends. This distinction – a product of eighteenth-century aesthetics – was foundational to the concept of “high art,” and in affirming it evangelical critics were in effect locating themselves in the “elite” art world of the day. The conviction that a small cluster of human activities existed for the sake of human pleasure also registered the distance of nineteenth-century evangelical critics from their Puritan forbears. Though most evangelical writers were far from relinquishing a belief in art’s “utility,” the willingness of some evangelicals to see art in terms of the pleasure it affords constituted a marked departure from those Puritans for whom pleasure was an ancillary concern at best.

Still, few early-to-mid-century evangelicals advocated art for purely hedonistic reasons. Many who deferred to the classical dictum understood that the best art maintained a productive tension between pleasure and instruction:

The business of poetry, however, (and we affirm it unqualifiedly), being both to please and to profit, he who aims solely to please spends his strength upon fancy-articles, fit only for the bazaar-market: and he who aims solely to profit, at the peril of not pleasing, will lose his labour in proportion, because the reading public – “the few” as well as “the many” – will not please to be profited, unless they can profit by being pleased.
If anything, evangelical critics tended to stress the moral side of the equation by valuing art as a moral instrument. This was in keeping with the trajectory of much Victorian theory and criticism in general, though this emphasis ought to be seen as well within the context of evangelicalism’s aesthetic engagement with romanticism. It was in part the changed conception of art among evangelicals brought about by the general acceptance of romantic theory that enabled evangelicals to view art with a new degree of (moral) seriousness – a seriousness which in turn laid the groundwork for expanded claims concerning art’s purpose and value. If art is nothing more than embellishment, then it is difficult to see it in terms of anything more than amusement, something for which evangelicals had conventionally harbored rather ambivalent sentiments. Amusement, it seems, was a little like sleep: it provided a useful means of refreshment when confronted by the inevitable weaknesses of the human constitution, but the less of such refreshment one required the better. However, once evangelicals began to embrace the notion that art is something more than ornamentation or the playful use of language or color, they began at the same time to see it as more central to human experience. “They undoubtedly entertain a very mean and degrading opinion of the polite arts,” asserted the Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald in 1831, “who consider them merely as subservient to amusement, or at most, to that cultivation of mind which emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros. The history of the world evinces that they have all a much higher and more beneficial influence upon the disposition and happiness of man.” When it came to justifying art, the strategy of some evangelicals was not so much to alter their view of amusement – a fact made clear by J.H. Rigg’s insistence in 1867 that “we have
no right to indulge in mere amusement or pleasure, merely for the sake of amusement or pleasure”\(^\text{120}\) – as to alter their view of art. “Mere” amusement, in fact, was exactly that which true art is not. Writing in the New School *American Presbyterian and Theological Review* in 1867, Henry N. Day echoed Schelling’s claim that aesthetics represents the apex of philosophy:

> The philosophy of Beauty, of the embodiment of idea in matter, is the true philosophy of life – a philosophy of higher significance, of higher interest, of higher importance, than the abstract science of the real, or of the good – just as the embodiment of the soul in the body is more to us than the nature of the soul or the nature of the body, in themselves…. The science of the Beautiful, not only has a just claim to rank coordinately, on scientific grounds, with that of the True and that of the Good, but it is the culminating science of this most generic class of sciences – last in its development in the growth of philosophy, but highest and most important every way to us.\(^\text{121}\)

As a result of the romantic influence on evangelical aesthetics, however, evangelical conceptions of the *way* in which art serves as a moral instrument were subject to redefinition as well. “The true vocation of the poet,” suggested an author in the *Eclectic Review* in 1845, “unquestionably is to animate the human race in its progress from barbarism towards virtue and greatness. He is appointed by Providence to arouse to generous exertion, and to console in distress.”\(^\text{122}\) The rhetoric and tone are as important here as the sentiments. Art and poetry are moral instruments, to be sure, but there is nothing here to suggest instruction or didacticism in the classical sense; rather, the poet’s job is to “animate” and “arouse.” I will return to the relationship between art and morality in more detail in chapter five; for now, however, it is sufficient to note that
though most evangelicals stressed the moral role of art in society, a new understanding of this role had begun to emerge as a consequence of the diffusion of romantic principles.

From a theoretical standpoint, however, the Horatian answer to the question of art’s ends had always been potentially vulnerable to the attacks of both the positivist and the puritan. A potential difficulty with the classical formula concerns the issue of art’s *uniqueness*. Art, for instance, is not the only form of human discourse that can serve as a vehicle of morality; in fact, even if one grants that a primary objective of art is moral development, it is not immediately obvious that art provides the most effective means of cultivating this development. Would not the sermon, for instance, be a more efficient method of conveying moral truths? And if one takes Horace’s “instruction” to refer to something like scientific knowledge, then would not a scientific paper be more appropriate than poetry? The criterion of pleasure, it turns out, raises similarly difficult questions. Art may, in fact, be a source of pleasure, but then so are games, conversation, eating, and even (at least for the heavenly-minded) the sermon. Detractors of art, therefore, whether utilitarians or puritans, simply needed to suggest that art serves no *special* purpose in order to cast doubt on its ultimate value. A question facing nineteenth-century critics, then, was whether art is somehow unique, either in the ends to which it addresses itself, or, if it does in fact share an end (e.g., moral instruction) with another form of discourse, then in the mode by which it achieves this end. W.M. Reily stated the problem succinctly in the *Reformed Quarterly Review*: “Can necessity be predicated of art?... In other words, Is art an essential element in the divine order of the universe, or is it only by accident, it finds the place we see it assuming?”123
A number of evangelical critics did, in fact, make an effort to distinguish art from other forms of discourse. The theory that art operates in a peculiar way to advance the causes of morality was one such attempt. In many cases, however, it was the romantic understanding of art as a product of the emotions that provided the grounds for such a distinction. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a rather strict dichotomy between art and science had evolved in which art was viewed almost entirely in terms of feeling, while science was viewed wholly in terms of intellect or reason. Wordsworth, for instance, had made such a distinction in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. The proper opposite of poetry is not prose, as was commonly held, but rather “Matter of Fact, or Science.”\(^\text{124}\) By the middle of the nineteenth century, this distinction had become commonplace, and it is therefore not surprising that evangelical critics for the most part accepted it as normative. Henry Drummond, a close associate of Edward Irving in Britain, bluntly articulated this opposition between art and science in his *Letter to Thomas Phillips on the Connection between the Fine Arts and Religion, and the Means of Their Revival* (1840): “The number of persons who really love and really estimate the highest productions in the fine arts must be very small, for they are matters of feeling, and not of logic.”\(^\text{125}\)

This basic premise could be appropriated in a variety of ways. It was, for example, often taken to mean that since art is a product of the artist’s emotional interaction with the objects of perception, it offers a singular vision of reality, a special kind of “truth” different from the kind proffered by science. “The real mission of art,” claimed an article in the *Eclectic Review* in 1848, “is not that of a moralist or a
metaphysician; but the interpretation of truth, more subtile, and less readily conveyable; the truth appreciable by feeling, not by simple intellect.”\textsuperscript{126} Certain truths, or rather kinds of truth, are available only to the heart or the imagination, which are themselves organs of vision capable of grasping this special sort of knowledge. Indeed, aesthetic perception is not only emotional but also synthetic. Whereas science values a basically atomistic form of apprehension that breaks complex sense perceptions into elementary parts, aesthetic perception is holistic. “The artist has as keen an eye as the philosopher to penetrate the inner nature and truth of things,” noted the Merkersburg Review, though he or she accomplishes this “by a species of inspiration or intuition, and not by the hard study, and tedious experiments of the man of science.”\textsuperscript{127} This idea, of course, had its roots in the aesthetic speculations of the eighteenth-century British empiricists, a history evident in the terminology employed in an 1832 article in the Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald: “[I]t is the delight of poetry to combine and associate; of philosophy to separate and distinguish.”\textsuperscript{128} Ultimately, art’s holistic approach to the world grasps a knowledge that is finally irreducible and untranslatable: “But … how much is there in every susceptible heart, how much in every thoughtful mind, untranslatable into the technical idiom and common-place prose of every-day existence?”\textsuperscript{129}

The art/science binary also served to underwrite another kind of argument wielded in defense of art – what might be termed the whole-person argument. The whole-person argument was a direct result of the eighteenth-century interest in mental philosophy, combining as it did faculty psychology with assumptions about God’s
creative purposes to arrive at the conclusion that art addresses a special, God-given need within human beings. In its basic form, the logic of the argument typically ran as follows: Observation confirms that human beings possess some special faculty (taste, imagination, an aesthetic sense, etc.) which responds to beauty; one can assume that because it exists, God intended it to exist, i.e., He created it; because He created it, He must also have intended it to find at least partial fulfillment here on earth;¹³⁰ art is the proper means of this fulfillment. In a discussion of the “Poetical Elements of the Bible,” for example, an author in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* suggested that God chose to inspire the biblical writers to compose large portions of the Bible in poetry rather than prose precisely because poetry addresses a specific dimension of humankind’s psychological makeup: “There is no power or passion, no taste or sentiment, no instinct or aspiration of the soul of man, for which God has not made an adequate provision, to which he has not addressed an appropriate appeal.”¹³¹ Even more concise was the statement of John M. Titzel in the pages of the *Reformed Quarterly Review* in 1891. Our love of the beautiful has been given to us by God, argued Titzel, and “To gratify it properly can, therefore, never be wrong, but on the contrary, must always be commendable…. In the fact alone, therefore, that we have been endowed with the capacity for enjoying its productions, Art may be said to have its full justification.”¹³²

This, however, is not the extent of the argument. What makes this argument the *whole-person* argument is the added belief, rooted in the principle of psychological harmony that often accompanied the theory of mental faculties, that to deny this aspect of human nature is to endanger one’s psychic wholeness and sense of fulfillment.
“Undoubtedly, the best man, the most useful to his species,” suggested the *Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review and Christian Ambassador*, “is he whose character is most equally balanced; and the most complete life is that which has been lived, so to speak, symmetrically.”³³ In this context, art plays a crucial role in keeping one balanced. (Darwin’s self-confessed predicament is worth recalling here since it helps to demonstrate the possible appeal of this argument in context.) “[F]ine art is normal and necessary to man,” explained the *Methodist Quarterly Review* in 1874. “The æsthetic faculty is as actual and valid a part of man’s nature as is his reason or his ethical faculty. Without this faculty man must be an alien and stranger in the universe of beauty where he finds himself.”³⁴ The *British Quarterly Review* asserted that “aesthetic culture becomes of great value in widening our intellectual sympathies, and supplying us with a corrective to those systems, whether of philosophy or religion, which, imparting an exaggerated development to certain elements of human nature, at the expense of other kindred elements, deprive each of that expansion essential to the symmetry of the whole.”³⁵ Human fulfillment requires equal development of the whole person, and since taste, imagination, and the love of beauty are part of this person, art – that which makes a special address to these faculties – is, in fact, necessary. It is not difficult to appreciate the persuasive power, and thus the popularity, of the whole-person argument among nineteenth-century evangelical critics. Not only does it posit that art appeals to a particular aspect of the human character, thereby suggesting that it either does what nothing else can do or else does it better, but it also attributes this arrangement to the will of God Himself. “The Sun of righteousness has risen with healing in His wings for our
whole life,” declared E.E. Higbee in the *Mercersburg Review* in 1874.\textsuperscript{136} The argument thus gives divine sanction to art’s unique contribution to human existence.

Since the standard dictated by the whole-person argument was mental *balance*, the argument could also be used at times to caution against the over-development of the aesthetic faculty. Too much of the aesthetic was just as bad as too little. Balance, moreover, should not be confused with equality. True harmony might involve the proper subordination of some faculties to others. Thus, William G.T. Shedd, writing in 1864, warned that “The aesthetic nature, unlike the rational or the moral, may be too much developed. The development of the taste and imagination must be a *symmetrical one*, in order to be a just and true one…. The true proportion, in this instance, is a subordination of the imagination and taste to the purposes and aims of the rational and moral faculties.”\textsuperscript{137} Shedd’s statement was a fairly typical one, as we will see in the next chapter. Yet even though the aesthetic faculty might be subordinated, in the interests of balance, to the rational and moral, this same standard of balance also required that the demands of the aesthetic faculty be met fully.

The belief that art is somehow unique – whether in its means of moral formation, its mode of perception, its access to a special kind of knowledge, or its appeal to a particular mental faculty – could often lead to far-flung claims regarding the value and purposes of art. It was but a short hop from the idea that art is *different from* science to the belief that art is *better than* science. Already in Drummond one catches a hint of aesthetic elitism. Logic and science are for the masses; only the few can genuinely appreciate art. If the positivists tended to elevate science above “mere” art, evangelical
apologists for art sometimes followed Shelley down the path of zealous overcompensation. “Let it ever be borne in remembrance,” proclaimed a writer in the British Quarterly Review with something like prophetic ardor, “that, to the dry utilitarian, who looks only to the profit of the passing hour, – paintings and statues, as well as palaces and temples, are things which we can do without; probably in a famine or a plague the artist might be deemed among the most valueless members of the community, yet all of this, not because his works are below, but above price.”138 “Feeling is the mighty fact of life,” asserted another passionate protector of art in the Methodist Review. “He who would have ingress and egress with lives must feel. And the poets have felt. They among them wear the world on their heart.”139 In general, the frequency and magnitude of such claims among evangelical writers increased as the century progressed. Gradually, in fact, these earnest defenses of art began to carry some evangelicals, perhaps unwittingly, to the very edge of doctrinal propriety and beyond, as when an author in the Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review and Christian Ambassador mused in 1879 that the hymns of the Church may express a religious truth and faith that transcends the dry propositionalism of the historic creeds. “The heart is often more liberal and more orthodox than the head,” the author opined. And in an ecumenical gesture that no doubt would have seemed radical to many theologically conservative evangelicals, he displaced dogma and sectarian differences in favor of a “mere Christianity” of the heart mediated by “Christian Lyric Poetry.” The fact that even evangelicals had allowed non-evangelical hymns into their worship “must be accepted as indicating that there may be a faith of the heart deeper and more spiritual than that of the head. Our deepest convictions are not
always expressed in the creeds which we honestly profess.”\textsuperscript{140} This kind of claim, though still rare among conservative nineteenth-century evangelicals, was nonetheless little more than an extrapolation of the aesthetic principles embraced by evangelicals across the theological spectrum.

There were, of course, other arguments employed by Victorian evangelical critics in defense of art, some of which we will encounter in subsequent chapters. Whatever the details of their various arguments, however, nearly all evangelical theorists between 1830 and 1900 were convinced that art was worthy of defense. Art, surely, is more than mere amusement; rather, it has a vital role to play in human life and society. This conviction was largely an effect of the romantic influence on evangelical aesthetics, and it was reflected above all in the new \textit{tone} adopted by many evangelical apologists for art. Passion, urgency, conviction – these are the tonal qualities which mark many of the discussions of art in the evangelical periodicals of the era. Indeed, this generally heightened sensibility may finally have been one of romanticism’s more powerful legacies to nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics. Unlike many critics of the period, the Methodist painter James Smetham could not, in the end, admit that there was anything unique about art in contrast to science, and he offered what amounted to a modest and restrained defense of art. Yet even Smetham could not resist the heartfelt moment of descriptive fervor: “Knowledge and joy pour from [art] in a silent stream, wherever there are eyes to behold.”\textsuperscript{141}
NOTES

1 Rigg actually played an important role in the founding of the Review as well, which commenced publication in 1853, though he would not edit it until the 1880s. See Barbara J. Dunlap, “The London Quarterly and Holborn Review,” British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837-1913, ed. Alvin Sullivan, Historical Guides to the World’s Periodicals and Newspapers (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984) 203-209.


4 For a concise discussion of the many problems surrounding the definition of art, see Dabney Townsend, An Introduction to Aesthetics, Introducing Philosophy 5 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997) 39-52. It is also interesting to note in the context of this study that Nicolas Wolterstorff, perhaps the most sophisticated contemporary evangelical (Reformed) philosopher of aesthetics, rejects the notion that Art (capital A) has an “essential purpose.” See Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980) 4-8.


6 Doreen M. Rosman, Evangelicals and Culture (London: Croom Helm, 1984) 161, 162.


8 M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) 3. Abrams, of course, understands quite well that romanticism is both a continuation and a discontinuation of earlier aesthetic thought. Describing the limitations that attend any kind of intellectual history (including the present one), he writes: “To generalize about a large and complex intellectual movement is almost inevitably to lay down convenient simplifications which must be qualified in the sequel…. By shifting the focus and selecting the examples, we can readily show that romantic aesthetics was no less an instance of continuity than of revolution in intellectual history” (70).

10 “Leigh Hunt’s Imagination and Fancy,” British Quarterly Review 1 (May 1845) 571, 572.


17 “Influence of the Christian Religion on Poetry,” Quarterly Christian Spectator 5 (June 1833) 199, 198, 200. An author in the Methodist Review, whose timeliness perhaps leaves something to be desired, also took note of the subjective turn in nineteenth-century literature: “To-day a great change has taken place; drama and epic are out of date. All literature is subjective, and this subjectivity finds its expression in lyrical poetry and the novel” (L. Oscar Kuhns, “The Ancient and Modern Feeling for Nature,” Methodist Review 13 [Nov. 1897] 924).


20 For other examples of expressivist elements in evangelical discussions of art during the 1820s and 1830s,

21 One of the more dramatic examples of this point came from a writer in the Christian Observer who waxed Shelleyan in his description of the poet as one who “first sings to relieve himself, like the nightingale, having no other end than the pleasure of his own outpouring” (“Poetry and Its Uses,” Christian Observer 66 [1866] 116).


24 Robert Hall, “Poetry and Philosophy,” Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald 6 (22 June 1832) 169. The text of this article is an excerpt from a piece written by Robert Hall in 178[?] (the text of the date is corrupted). One assumes, of course, that the editors of the Christian Advocate found something appealing about this text in the context of the 1830s, though it is reprinted without any introduction or commentary. My suspicion, however, is that the stark opposition between art and science posited by Hall seemed particularly fitting at a period when evangelical critics were beginning to absorb in earnest romantic critical principles that stressed art’s connection to feeling. For this reason, I have cited it throughout as an 1830s piece. For more on the art/science dialectic, see page 45 below.


28 Thomas Reid, for example, though he is at some pains to stress the role of reflection and judgment in the artistic process – “the most perfect works of design are never extemporary” – notes that once the “fancy” has been “trained,” it may produce art objects with relative ease and spontaneity: “fancy has its original powers, which are very different in different persons; it has likewise more regular motions, to which it has been trained by a long course of discipline and exercise; and by which it may, _extempore_, and without much effort, produce things that have a considerable degree of beauty, regularity, and design” (*Essays on the Powers of the Human Mind; to which Are Added, an Essay on Quantity, and an Analysis of Aristotle’s Logic* [London: Printed for Thomas Tegg, Cheapside; R. Griffin & Co., Glasgow; and J. Cumming, Dublin, 1827] 220). Similarly, Reid later writes: “It is from the natural signs of the passions and dispositions of the mind that the human form derives its beauty; that painting, poetry, and music, derive their expression; that eloquence derives its greatest force, and conversation its greatest charm” (531). Such statements foreshadow some elements of later romantic theories.

29 This is a general way of stating a principle which in fact had a number of permutations within romantic criticism. Abrams identifies at least three basic ways in which writers understood the mind-object interaction: 1) in the simple terms of Locke’s secondary qualities; 2) as the addition by the mind of “feeling-tones and aesthetic qualities” to external objects in possession of all primary and secondary qualities; and 3) as the investment of “life, physiognomy, and passion into the universe” (62-4). The last of these, when “life” takes on an objective, metaphysical reality of its own (as in the case of the “ideal,” or a “world soul,” or something similar), can rather easily become a form of idealism, as it did with Coleridge and, as we will see below, with some evangelicals.

As Wordsworth writes in a famous passage of *The Prelude* (1850) concerning the “infant Babe”:

```
For feeling has to him imparted power
That through the growing faculties of sense
Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
Create, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds. (2.255-60)
```


Dyer, “Literary Criticism,” *Baptist Quarterly* 319. This statement bears a close relationship to J.S. Mill’s notion that “poetry is not in the object itself, nor in the scientific truth itself, but in the state of mind in which one and the other may be contemplated” (“What Is Poetry?” 107).

Tellingly, Perry Miller suggests the difference between typical Puritan views of the imagination and later romantic views. Having quoted Richard Sibbes’s cautions against “fancy,” Miller writes: “Passages of this sort make clear why to Puritans what we might call ‘romantic’ poetry, visions of supernal and unearthly loveliness, of beauties rising like Venus from the sea of imagination, were not only nonsense, but sinful.” As Miller further notes, “romance” and fiction were also suspect for similar reasons (*The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* [1939; Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982] 258).

37 Qtd. in Abrams 48.


41 LeConte actually subordinated expression to what might be described as more “classical” aesthetic values. See below.


45 Abrams 53.

46 See ibid. 35-42 for a more detailed discussion of the subvarieties of this idea. See also W. Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1946) 7-14. Abrams further identifies in the classical tradition something he calls the “transcendental ideal.” Abrams attempts to distinguish this notion as held by neo-classical critics like Reynolds from later romantic criticism by insisting that the transcendental ideal is rooted in the “nature of the external universe” (45), whereas romantics saw art having an “internal origin” (46). I, for one, find this distinction to be somewhat tenuous since various kinds of objective idealism, as I suggested in my discussion above, seem to me to affirm both the external, independent existence of the transcendental ideal and the internal origins of art. The difference between neoclassical conceptions of the transcendental ideal and say, Coleridge’s similar conception, if any, may lie in the nuances of the metaphysics involved in each kind of theory.

47 Rosman 178-79. It should be noted that Rosman does not undertake any extensive examination of evangelical understandings of the “ideal,” though she repeatedly links this notion to classicism and
neoclassicism. She also contends that “Far less attention was paid by the evangelical press to poets more centrally within the romantic tradition, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats” (180).

48 Hegel writes in The Philosophy of Fine Art: “the Idea, viewed as the beautiful in art, is not the Idea in the strict sense, that is as a metaphysical Logic apprehends it as the Absolute. It is rather the Idea as carried into concrete form in the direction of express realization, and as having entered into immediate an adequate unity with such reality. For the Idea as such, although it is both potentially and explicitly true, is only truth in its universality and not as yet presented in objective embodiment. The Idea as fine art, however, is the Idea with the more specific property of being essentially individual reality, in other words, an individual configuration of reality whose express function it is to make manifest the Idea – in its appearance. This amounts to the demand that the Idea and its formative configuration as concrete realization must be brought together under a mode of complete adequacy. The Idea so conceived, a reality, that is to say, moulded in conformity with the notional concept of the Idea, is the Ideal” (G.W.F. Hegel, The Philosophy of Fine Art, vol. 1, trans. F.P.B. Osmaston [London: G. Bell and Sons, 1920] 100). Cf. 209-14.


50 A concise statement of Emerson’s idealism is his section by this name in “Nature,” Nature, Addresses and Lectures, Centenary ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904) 47-60. Though there were many varieties of idealism in the nineteenth century, idealism may be described in general terms as a philosophy in which “mind” or “spirit” is the ultimate reality (and depending on the extent of one’s idealism, perhaps the only reality). It tends to emphasize the immanence of this mind in and/or behind all material things, and its philosophical vocabulary derives largely from Plato and other forms of mysticism. By aesthetic idealism, I mean this basic philosophy as it applies to art, and specifically, those systems of thought which see art as a central manifestation of “mind” or “spirit.”

51 See, for example, “Kant, and Kantism,” Methodist Quarterly Review 5 (Jan. 1845): 43-54. The author of this article is not, of course, uncritical of Kant but believes that on the whole many of the principles of Kant’s philosophy ought to be “disseminate[d] … far and wide” (53). For an account of the triumph of
idealist philosophy over common sense realism in the Congregationalist tradition and in much of American academia, see Kuklick, esp. 120-23, 132-41; for the Presbyterian encounter with German philosophy, see George M. Marsden, The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970) esp. chap. 7; for American Methodist engagements with such ideas, see Chiles. For details about the spread of romantic ideas among a variety of British evangelical denominations, see Bebbington, esp. chaps. 3-5.


54 Review of The Elements of Intellectual Philosophy, by Francis Wayland; A System of Intellectual Philosophy, by Asa Mahan; and Empirical Psychology; or, the Human Mind as Given in Consciousness, by Laurens P. Hickok, The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review 27 (Jan. 1855) 75.

55 Noll suggests, for example, that in America New School Presbyterians were “more open to influences from nineteenth-century Romantic or idealist thought” than were Old School Presbyterians (“Common Sense Traditions” 219 n. 10). In addition, Bebbington contends that in Britain, Anglican Evangelicals, perhaps due in part to their stronger ecclesiastical hierarchy, tended to resist romantic ideas longer than did Nonconformist denominations (see Evangelicalism in Modern Britain 143-44).  


58 Abrams 52. Abrams attributes this theory to Schelling, though he notes that Coleridge’s lecture is “grounded on Schelling’s metaphysics of a psycho-natural parallelism.” It is a matter of some debate as to whether one ought to read the metaphysics of Coleridge in a more or less Platonic sense – that is, in a sense in which the psycho-natural parallelism to which Abrams refers is taken in a kind of supernatural way. Abrams clearly resists this interpretation: “Coleridge, translating almost literally from Schelling, says that art imitates the *natura naturans*, the ‘spirit of nature’; but in context, this turns out to be a way of saying that the ‘idea,’ or generative element in poetic composition, accords with that in external nature, in such a way as to insure a likeness between the evolving principle of a poem and what is vital and organic in nature. Coleridge does not make special cognitive claims for poetry” (314). In contrast to Abrams, my own reading of Coleridge is closer to the interpretation of J. Robert Barth. Coleridge, I believe, was more genuinely Platonic than Abrams would allow, though this sort of Platonism also assumes the kind of analogous relationship between art and nature formulated by Abrams. Ultimately, how one reads Coleridge’s metaphysics depends on the way in which one interprets a phrase like “[one’s] own spirit, which has the same *ground* with nature” (italics mine), not only in the context of “On Poesy or Art” but also in the context of Coleridge’s thought as a whole. See J. Robert Barth, S.J., *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition*, 2nd ed., (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001) and *Romanticism and Transcendence: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Religious Imagination* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003) esp. 119-36. In the end, however, whether one takes Coleridge (and
his evangelical critical followers) in a genuinely Platonic sense or not matters very little to the thrust of my general argument. Either way, the influence of Coleridge and of idealist philosophy on evangelical aesthetics is clear.


60 Rogers, “Science and Poetry,” *London Quarterly Review* 403. For the remainder of the immediate discussion, page references will be noted parenthetically in the text.

61 “Hence nature itself would give us the impression of a work of art, if we could see the thought which is present at once in the whole and in every part” (330). It is interesting to note, however, that this particular line does not appear in the 1987 Princeton edition of the text, a version which more closely follows Coleridge’s original manuscript notes. It is a line that was apparently added by H.N. Coleridge (see Foakes 224 n. 26). Rogers, however, makes a stipulation akin to H.N.’s.

62 Alternatively, one might say that Rogers perhaps chooses to read Coleridge as Abrams does.

63 For the remainder of the immediate discussion, all page numbers will be cited parenthetically in the text.

64 Note also this later statement, which is equally Coleridgean in substance and language: “We are a finite microcosm of the infinite nature around us. We dwell in nature and nature in us, and art is the middle point in which each meets, coalescing in a result which is different from either, because it contains the attributes of both. Herein consists the true art philosophy, and the ultimate basis of all right criticism” (140).


67 “Practical Aesthetics,” *British Quarterly Review* 71 (Jan. 1880) 54. For some further statements along these lines, see “Aesthetics,” *Presbyterian Quarterly Review* 10 (July 1861) 27-29 (though see also the discussion of this article below); Knight, “A Contribution,” *British Quarterly Review* 185, 187; and W.M. Reily, “The Artist; The Seer and Minister of Beauty,” *Reformed Quarterly Review* (1881) 388.


1879) 129.


73 “Symbols of Thought,” Presbyterian Quarterly Review 625-29. The title of this article is significant in thinking about its relationship to Edwards. The author uses the romantic term “symbol,” but his thinking is not unlike Edwards’s notion of typology. See also Julian Ramsay’s later criticism of Shelley: “the lesson which, above all others, [Shelley’s poems] are calculated to teach is one which their author never consciously endeavored to inculcate – that man can only find the true end of his being in God, understanding that term not as it is understood by the Pantheist, but as representing a living, loving, personal Father” (“Percy Bysshe Shelley,” Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review [1889] 593-94). Ramsay does not attempt to strike any kind of balance between Christianity and idealism, but his statement shows the continuing desire to reject vague, pantheistic interpretations of God by romantic poets.


77 The idea that art somehow overcomes the chaos engendered by the Fall was not an entirely new idea. It has roots in the Renaissance, and the English critic John Dennis expressed one version of it in 1704: “The great design of Arts is to restore the decays that happen’d to Humane Nature by the Fall, by restoring Order” (The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, Contain’d in Some New Discoveries Never Made Before, Requisite for the Writing and Judging of Poems Surely [London: 1704] 6, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, O’Neill Library, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, 20 April 2009 <www.bc.edu/libraries>). Dennis conceives of this project as the gradual recovery of a lost cosmic order, but he does not suggest that this recovered order has any eschatological significance. Also, see the alternative view of James Smith, who writes: “[Art] may not, after all, be so much a lever to raise men from the fall, as one of his enjoyments when he has risen” (“Modern Sacred Art in England,” London Quarterly Review 18 [1862] 79).
78 See p. 140 n. 41.


82 In his Father and Son, Gosse writes: “Never in all my childhood, did anyone address to me the affecting preamble, ‘Once upon a time!’ I was told about missionaries, but never about pirates; I was familiar with humming-birds, but I had never heard of fairies. Jack the Giant-Killer, Rumpelstiltskin and Robin Hood were not of my acquaintance, and though I understood about wolves, Little Red Ridinghood was a stranger even by name. So far as my ‘dedication’ was concerned, I can but think that my parents were in error thus to exclude the imaginary from my outlook upon facts. They desired to make me truthful; the tendency was to make me positive and sceptical. Had they wrapped me in the soft folds of supernatural fancy, my mind might have been longer content to follow their traditions in an unquestioning spirit” (Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments, ed. Peter Abbs [1907; London: Penguin Books, 1989] 50). To translate Gosse’s narrative into the historical-philosophical terms of this project, Gosse’s parents were more or less committed to common sense realism, whereas Gosse himself was a budding romantic.


88 Rigg, Review, London Quarterly Review 160, 162, 161. See also “The Novel and Novel-Reading,” Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review 41 (Apr. 1869) 205 and Eugene Parsons, “Tennyson’s Art and Genius,” Baptist Quarterly Review 11 (Jan. 1889) 33-35. Interestingly, Parsons uses Ruskin’s terminology (the “penetrative imagination” [34]), but he also cites Coleridge on “esemplastic power” (35). Commentators have sometimes seen Jonathan Edwards’s notion of the “spiritual sense” in contrast to natural sense as a forerunner of the Coleridgean distinction between Imagination and Fancy. This was no doubt the case, though the differences between the two ideas are as important as, or more important than, the similarities. Nineteenth-century evangelicals were moving, at least in their aesthetic discourse, towards a Coleridgean understanding of spiritual perception as a function of the Imagination.

89 Henry N. Day, “The Nature of Beauty,” American Presbyterian and Theological Review 5 (July 1867) 410-11. By 1867, Day is clearly working in the philosophical tradition of the German idealists (in an earlier 1847 article, he claims to have just read Schiller; cf. Day, “Taste and Morals: – The Necessity of Aesthetic Culture to the Highest Moral Excellence,” American Biblical Repository and Classical Review [July 1847]: 524-46 and 400 n. 51). Like Schelling, he posits aesthetics as the highest level of philosophy (see below), and he also goes on to posit a threefold analytic division of “the revelation of the idea in its matter” (411) that bears some resemblance to Hegel’s scheme of symbolic, classical, and romantic art. Day writes: “It is obvious that this element – the revelation itself – may be viewed in three different aspects: 1, The revealing activity may regard more itself – its own procedure in the revelation; 2, It may regard more


94 This phrase is taken from Tuveson’s title, *Imagination as a Means of Grace: Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism*.

“In Coleridge’s aesthetics, no less than in his ethics and theology, the justification of free-will is a crux…”

(174).


100 Thomas M’Nicholl, “Modern Poetry: Its Genius and Tendencies,” London Quarterly Review 2 (1854) 238. All further page citations will be noted parenthetically in the text.


103 See Abrams 50, 88-94.

104 There is an extra vertical space before the concluding paragraph of this article, suggesting that it may have been a very late addition to the text. M’Nicholl speaks of Arnold’s volume as “very recently published” and admits that “had we met with it at an earlier period of our present writing, we should gladly have spared the reader some of our own remarks, and treated him to certain passages of quotation, in which
he would have found them more elegantly expressed” (257).


110 Ibid. 141.


112 Interestingly, Hegel rehearses many of the common objections to art – which might, without too much exaggeration, be summed up by saying that art is not serious – near the beginning of his lectures. See Hegel, *Philosophy of Fine Art* 4-5.

113 See Abrams 306 for a discussion of Macaulay in the context of the science/art dichotomy and Utilitarian critiques of poetry.

114 See the next chapter on the nexus of Religion and Art for a discussion of evangelical conceptions of art’s limitations.

See, for instance, Otheman, “The Moral Influence of the Fine Arts,” *Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review* 318; and “The Useful and the Beautiful,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* 29 (22 June 1854) 97. This latter is a reprint of an excerpt from Ruskin.

“Sacred Poetry,” *Eclectic Review* 443. A writer in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* even gave theological backing for the idea that beauty and utility exist in perfect harmony: “Beauty, not utility, is the immediate aim and end of fine art; but so has this universe been tempered together by Infinite Wisdom that, in their profoundest essence, these two are one and identical” (“Fine Art: Its Nature, Necessity, and Offices,” *Methodist Quarterly Review* 34 [1874] 233). Significantly, a portion of this article, including this passage, was republished four months later in Britain under the title, “Fine Art a Record of Civilization,” *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* 20 (Aug. 1874): 703-709.


Wordsworth, “Preface” 21n.

Henry Drummond, *Letter to Thomas Phillips, Esq., R.A., on the Connexion between the Fine Arts and Religion, and the Means of Their Revival* (London: Fraser, 1840) 43. Just how thoroughly this dialectic permeated the nineteenth-century mind can be seen in Edwards Amasa Park’s attempt to apply it to
theology and biblical interpretation in his famous address, “The Theology of the Intellect and That of the Feelings,” delivered in Boston in 1850 (American Philosophical Addresses, 1700-1900, ed. Joseph L. Blair, College Studies in American Culture 17 [New York: Columbia University Press, 1946]: 627-58). In addition, see J.D.T.’s remarks in the Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review and Christian Ambassador: “While physical science deals with the outward object alone, and seeks to explain the appearances of the material world by the properties of matter and by the laws to which they are subject – proceeding by experiment, analysis, induction, and deduction – efforts of the observing faculties and of the logical reason, poetry is occupied with the outward object as related to the soul of man, and works by a kind of imaginative synthesis rather than by bare intellectual analysis” (“Wordsworth’s Conception of Nature,” Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review and Christian Ambassador n.s. 6 [July 1884] 463). See also T.A., “What Is Poetry?” Mercersburg Review, where the author contends that the “proper antithesis” of Art is “in the idea of Science” (384). However, cf. Jonathan Smith’s attempt to problematize this dichotomy as it existed in the nineteenth century in Fact & Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

126 “English Schools of Art,” Eclectic Review 23 (Jan. 1848) 76.


This essay is a reprinted excerpt from Bernard and Lucy Barton, The Reliquary: by Bernard and Lucy Barton. With a Prefatory Appeal for Poetry and Poets (London: John W. Parker, 1836).

130 “Partial fulfillment here on earth” is a necessary qualification of this argument since it is not impossible that God could have created human beings with a desire or need that could only find its fulfillment eschatologically. This is precisely the logic, in fact, that virtually permeates the Christian tradition. Two examples of this kind of thinking, one ancient, one modern, are Augustine’s idea of the cor inquietum and C.S. Lewis’s argument in “The Weight of Glory,” in The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses (1949; San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001): 25-46.


“Unsymmetrical Lives,” Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review and Christian Ambassador n.s. 3 (1881) 519.

“Fine Art,” Methodist Quarterly Review 231.


Higbee, “Relation of Christianity to Art,” Mercersburg Review 342.


“Prospects of British Art,” British Quarterly Review 2 (Nov. 1845) 481.


Smetham, “Modern Sacred Art in England,” London Quarterly Review 72. Smetham’s article is a fine illustration of the way in which the peculiar tensions faced by evangelical apologists for art could prove difficult to surmount. On the one hand, Smetham is out to defend art, and specifically painting (given the continuing influence of the Puritan religio-aesthetic tradition, undoubtedly the most theologically problematic of the fine arts for evangelicals), from the common neo-Puritan charge that painting is a species of misrepresentation and falsehood (which, judging by the date of the article, had apparently not died out by the 1860s). In doing so, Smetham follows Ruskin in emphasizing that art is “a reproduction of essential facts” (58). He stresses, too, that “in pictures there is a direct and triumphant power of communicating knowledge” (56). In the end, then, he concludes that his argument “is not to be understood as special pleading on behalf of art, as compared with science and benevolence…. And whatever may be
said for art in respect of importance, may be said for science” (73). While this allows him to rescue art from the charge of falsehood, it forecloses on the possibility that art is unique in any way. Art is valuable for Smetham, but it is not *uniquely* valuable.
CHAPTER 4

WHAT HAS THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST TO DO WITH THE GOSPEL OF ART?

The province of taste in the matters of religion is a subject of a good deal of practical interest. It is a subtle matter, not generally well understood, and especially liable to be abused.

– “Esthetics in Religion,” Christian Advocate (1867)

Unlike the widening rift between science and religion which troubled many a late-Victorian intellectual, the ostensible tension between art and religion is an old one.

“What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?” Tertullian famously asked. Almost from the beginning, it seems, Christian thinkers had struggled with the question of what role, if any, art and “culture” ought to play in the lives of believers. As detractors throughout history have been fond of pointing out, the earliest Christians seemed to express little interest in art beyond a few rude and highly symbolic etchings on the walls of first-century catacombs, a fact which some have been quick to accept as evidence of an intrinsic antipathy between the worldly claims of art and the claims of undefiled religion. Moreover, the periodic eruption of iconoclastic movements in Christian history – first in the eighth century and again during the Protestant Reformation – serve as reminders of the way in which Christianity has been subject to repeated and unresolved tensions between aesthetics and faith, between the alternating convictions that beauty is a sacrament and beauty is a snare.
This ancient problem of art’s precise relationship to religion seems to have resurfaced in the nineteenth century with a new sense of urgency. As Hilary Fraser has noted, the nineteenth century “saw a proliferation of religio-aesthetic theories designed to reconcile the claims of Christianity and beauty, morality and art.” Although Fraser’s study does not address evangelicals specifically, it is clear that they, too, contributed their fair share to this proliferation. A brief survey of article titles drawn from denominational periodicals between 1830 and 1900 suggests just how preoccupied evangelical critics were with this longstanding question of art’s relationship to religion: “Influence of the Christian Religion on Poetry,” “The Necessity of a Religious Literature,” “Poetry: Its Social Uses and Religious Influences,” “Art and Religion,” “Esthetics in Religion,” “Christianity and the Fine Arts,” “Modern Literature and Christianity,” “Christianity and Art,” “The Relation of Art to Religion,” “Relationship of Christianity to Art,” “The Aesthetic in Religion,” and “Reciprocity of Art and Religion.”

Why exactly did nineteenth-century thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic – evangelical and non-evangelical – feel the need to theorize at such length the connections between religion and art? To some extent, such theorizing may simply have been a byproduct of an increased exposure to art itself, most notably to visual art, especially after the 1850s. As methods of transportation became more affordable and reliable in the nineteenth century, members of the British and American middle classes began traveling abroad to a wide variety of destinations, including continental Europe and the Holy Lands. Ministers, in fact, made up a significant proportion of these travelers. Such trips raised the aesthetic awareness of middle-class sightseers by bringing them face to face
with the great art of western culture. At the same time, for those who could not afford to leave home in search of art, art could often be brought home via new reproductive technologies that allowed the cheap and widespread dissemination of mass-produced prints. So-called high art could be found as never before on the covers of magazines and on numerous middle-class coffee tables. Many nineteenth-century evangelicals, it seems, were at last taking full advantage of the allowance made by Puritanism for the “civil” use of visual art, increasingly importing such art into the home as a means of domestic beautification. If Ruskin’s puritanically-minded mother still insisted on facing the family’s paintings towards the wall on Sundays, art nevertheless occupied a prominent place in the Ruskins’ evangelical home the other six days of the week. Such changes in the material conditions of aesthetic exposure may have led more thoughtful writers (like Ruskin himself) to question these developments in light of what the majority of Victorians agreed were humankind’s all-important religious duties.

A number of intellectual developments also contributed to a renewed interest in the relationship between art and religion. One may cite, among other factors, the dramatic claims on behalf of art by romantic theorists in England, Germany, and America, especially those which seemed to suggest a close link between religious and aesthetic perception. Such claims tended to blur conventional distinctions between the religious and the aesthetic, leading to fresh concerns about both the relations and the distinctions between the two. The emergence of what many perceived to be ritualist movements within the confines of Protestantism – most notably Tractarianism in Britain and the Mercersburg theology in the United States – also prompted a reconsideration of
the role of the aesthetic in worship and in church life. As Charles Spurgeon, the famous Baptist preacher, complained in 1876, “the gentlemen of aesthetic taste are aping the ritualism against which it should have been their first business to protest.” Meanwhile, the growing consolidation of aesthetics itself as a distinct field of inquiry may have led quite naturally to questions about art’s relationship to other dimensions of human experience, especially religion.

All of these developments contributed to a sense among many in the nineteenth century that the relationship between art and religion was in need of closer scrutiny. There was one other factor, however, which also lay behind this need to re-examine the nexus of art and religion, namely, the lingering influence of Puritanism. It is worth noting at the outset that this was not a strictly “evangelical” problem, narrowly considered. It was, after all, Matthew Arnold, who, marshaling his own version of the whole-person argument in which “true human perfection [is] a harmonious perfection,” singled out Hebraism-Puritanism-Nonconformism as the source of too many “incomplete and mutilated men” in both England and the United States. For Arnold, the persistent ethos of Puritanism was a widespread problem that threatened the best of national culture. Still, if the ghost of Puritanism haunted many a Victorian home, it was confessing evangelicals who arguably bore a special relationship to this spirit, as Arnold himself testified. For whether or not his assessment of Puritanism was just (ironically, it may have been too one-sided), Arnold was correct in seeing Nonconformists as the proper “successors and representatives of the Puritans.” As the rightful theological and pietistic heirs of Puritanism, Anglo-American evangelicals felt uniquely the weight of this
tradition and its ambivalent relationship to art.

As we saw in chapter 2, Puritanism had created a climate of uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the fine arts, which continued to influence eighteenth-century evangelicals even as a new aesthetic consciousness was beginning to dawn. Though by the middle of the nineteenth century much of this ambiguity had been dispelled, in part by the triumph of romanticism, some vestige of it, I think, can been seen underlying the proliferation of religio-aesthetic theories described by Fraser. What seems to have motivated evangelical critics’ formal interest in the question of art’s relationship to Christianity was, among other things, some residual anxiety about the potential for a true rapprochement. Consider, for instance, one Dr. Leyburn’s trepidatious preamble to an 1861 plea in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* for greater attention to the “esthetic element”: “I am aware that there are some persons who may think it almost profaning a religious newspaper to occupy even a small portion of it with gossip about art and artists; but they must excuse your correspondent if he cannot sympathize with them.”⁶ The problem here is that of a potentially fundamental – one might even say, universal – incompatibility between art and evangelical Christianity. Four years later, another author in the same periodical put the matter even more starkly: “Another cause of this neglect [of “esthetic culture”] is a misapprehension in regard to the relation between beauty and religion. In the minds of some, religion is dissociated from beauty, and high esthetic culture is regarded as wrong.”⁷ As we will see, nineteenth-century evangelical writers – or the more conservative ones at least – discovered new reasons to resurrect certain “puritanical” arguments as a means of fending off what they took to be some of the more
extreme implications of romanticism, but that is not the issue here. In these passages from the *Christian Advocate*, the problem is not one of excess but of outright rejection.

It is crucial to note, however, that for these critics in the *Christian Advocate*, and for a significant number of others, the specter of Puritanism had for the most part been reduced to a vague force “out there” among the evangelical masses. Whatever the puritanical proclivities of the ordinary evangelical on the street, so to speak, these writers, like Matthew Arnold, “cannot sympathize with them.” Clearly, an internal rift was emerging within evangelicalism itself between the educated proponents of “high” culture and the more popular-minded many, who (if we accept the above statements as an accurate representation of popular evangelical sentiments) persisted in their puritanical sensibilities and skepticism regarding art. An article on “Poetry and the Spiritual Life” published in the southern version of the *Methodist Review* in the mid-1890s offers some sense of just how deep this rift had become over the course of the nineteenth century. Recounting an episode not unlike the one described by Edmund Gosse in *Father and Son*, in which an evangelical orator at a London conference had referred to Shakespeare as “‘a lost soul now suffering for his sins in hell,’” Edwin Mims (M.A., an instructor at Cornell) explained how, after a young speaker at “one of the leading churches of Southern Methodism” had “referred incidentally to Shakespeare” during his talk, a controversy ensued when a “prominent member” of the church delivered a diatribe on the injurious effects of Shakespeare to religion and morality. Unfortunately for the speaker, he discovered, according to Mims, that “he was largely in the minority.” By contrast, Mims himself lamented this form of anti-aesthetic, or anti-cultural, religious populism,
arguing “that the Church has not realized what a valuable ally is to be found in the great poetry of the world.” It appears, then, that evangelical attitudes towards the question of art’s relationship to religion were also in part a function of this high/populist divide. Puritanical suspicions concerning art’s contaminating influence on religion remained alive in the minds of many “average” evangelicals, while those harbingers of evangelical “high esthetic culture” increasingly argued that the claims of art and the claims of religion need not be at odds.

When it came to the question of art’s relationship to Christianity, this growing faction of evangelical cultural elites differed from their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century predecessors in at least two ways. First, reconciliation (to use Fraser’s term) became the conscious objective of evangelical theorists. For many Puritans, and even for many eighteenth-century evangelicals, the tendency had been to elevate pure religion at the expense of art. Moreover, the question of art’s relationship to religion, if and when it surfaced as a conscious dispute, had been approached largely in negative terms, that is, the emphasis had been placed primarily on determining the proper religious limits of art. Images must not be used in the sanctuary, for example, nor should preachers draw attention to their homiletic craft through the use of excessive embellishments. Of course, the Puritan tradition did not altogether lack a body of more positive reflections on art’s connection to religion, but even these reflections were frequently boxed in by negative strictures. In short, Puritan writers were predominantly interested in “defending” religion, but they showed little special interest in “defending” art. By contrast, a number of mid-nineteenth-century evangelical critics typically set out to demonstrate the way(s)
in which art and religion might peacefully coexist. Even these “high” cultural critics, as
we will see, agreed with the Puritans that Christianity does impose some important limits
on art, but unlike many Puritans they also viewed the question of art’s relationship to
Christianity in the positive terms of mutual reciprocity. In fact, the second difference,
related to the first, was the newfound optimism with which many evangelical critics
approached this task of reconciliation. Though Christians throughout the centuries had
often found it difficult to maintain a healthy balance between the claims of art and the
claims of religion, many nineteenth-century critics held fast to the sanguine expectation
that they could succeed where others had failed. Art and Christianity, these critics were
convinced, might mutually enrich one another.

Of course, what I have thus far been referring to as “the question of art and
religion” is, from a theoretical standpoint, an assortment of closely related, though
distinct, sub-problems. Some of these sub-problems are more purely and technically
“aesthetic” in nature, others less so. There are phenomenological or philosophical
problems associated with aesthetic and religious perception, for example, or with the
capacity of art to represent transcendent reality, or with the metaphysical status of
Beauty. There are theological questions about God’s role as Creator, about the position
of art in the divine plan, or about whether art can rightly qualify as a consecrated
endeavor. These and many other issues comprise the enduring problem of art and
religion, broadly defined. Yet as with debates regarding the essential nature of art,
nineteenth-century discussions of the relationship between religion and art were often
carried on in unapologetically abstract terms. Though critics of the period argued over
any number of particulars that might fall under the general rubric of religion and art, nineteenth-century critics were not afraid to operate in the sometimes rarefied atmosphere of capitalized nouns. If in nineteenth-century treatises ART and RELIGION sometimes seem like personifications of two great social or ideological forces, it is because this is precisely the way many critics viewed them. “It has for many years been a general observation among literary persons, that the flowers of Parnassus cannot thrive in the garden of Religion,” remarked an author in the Christian Observer early in the century. Indeed, this critic’s rather clumsy attempt to formulate the matter in something like mythological terms captures nicely the Victorian penchant for viewing the problem of art and religion as a recurring historical conflict between two ahistorical modes of human consciousness. “It now hardly needs to be said,” wrote H.M. Du Bose in the southern Methodist Review late in the century, “that we hold it as an established fact that the two civilizations of the Jews and the Greeks represent specific tendencies – the one toward the ideals of faith, the other toward the ideals of art.” This dualistic scheme, of course, was not Du Bose’s at all but rather Matthew Arnold’s, a point which underscores how evangelical critics had, by century’s end, come to see the problem of religion and art in distinctively Victorian terms.

This chapter examines the ways in which Victorian evangelical critics attempted to theorize the relationship between art and Protestant Christianity. It begins by describing how evangelical critics came increasingly to define their own aesthetic views over and against what they believed to be those of the Reformation tradition, and in particular, the Puritans. Ironically, when it came to art, educated evangelicals sometimes
reiterated the anti-Puritan sentiments of many nineteenth-century intellectuals (sentiments which would ultimately find characteristic expression in the famous pronouncements of H.L. Mencken). What had begun in the 1730s and 1740s and had evolved slowly over the course of the eighteenth century now emerged as an overt and self-conscious position: Puritanism, in short, became for some evangelical writers a kind of aesthetic straw man that could be attacked as necessary. For some critics, these attacks were carefully confined to aesthetics, and the trick was to find a means of defending the Puritans’ theology and piety while repudiating their attitudes towards art. Other critics, however, showed little concern for Puritanism as a whole and attacked the Puritan religio-aesthetic tradition openly.

The chapter then turns to an analysis of some of the specific ways in which evangelical critics thought about the nexus of art and religion. In general terms, the religio-aesthetic ideal for many evangelicals was a “conciliatory” one in which art and religion were imagined as existing in a kind of productive tension. Many evangelical writers looked to walk a fine line between the extreme of Puritanism (or what they increasingly characterized as the extreme of Puritanism), in which art was portrayed as being in inherent conflict with Christianity, and the other extreme represented by the more grandiose forms of romanticism, in which art was associated with an unorthodox and doctrinally vague “spirituality” or “divinity.” Within this religio-aesthetic via media, moreover, a number of evangelical theorists argued that the proper relationship between orthodox Protestant Christianity and art is a subordinationist one. In this view, art was seen as both limited by Christianity and at the same time uniquely empowered by it.
Such a theory was no simple didacticism (though moral concerns remained at the center of evangelical conceptions of art); for many evangelical thinkers, the currents passing between art and Christianity ran far deeper than the conventional belief that art could serve as a means of teaching religious doctrines to the illiterate masses. Rather, Christianity was believed to provide both the psychological and social conditions for genuine art to flourish. It was the addition of this latter claim of empowerment that most clearly separated nineteenth-century evangelical conceptions of art’s relationship to Christianity from earlier Puritan conceptions. As we will see, however, this vision of religio-aesthetic harmony was often difficult to maintain in practice, and it was constantly in danger of being pulled apart both by the strong tug of the romantic principles that many evangelical critics had come to accept and by the gnawing sense among some that the dream of a Protestant culture, in which art would find its greatest fulfillment, was not to be.

**Aesthetic Skeletons in the Protestant Closet: Evangelicals and Protestant History**

Nineteenth-century evangelical critics were keenly aware of the fact that, when it came to art, there were some potentially embarrassing skeletons in the Protestant closet. In particular, three periods in Christian history were the source of a great deal of unease among those evangelical writers interested in defending the claim that art and religion are essentially compatible: the early church, the Reformation, and Puritanism. If one is tempted to say that these moments are tantamount to Protestant history en masse, one would not be far off the mark. For evangelicals, these were the theologically significant
periods of Christian history – the periods in which biblical Christianity was seen to exist in its purest form, free from the Romanist accretions and Scholastic subtleties of the Middle Ages. The difficulty, however, was that there appeared to be in each of these periods an inverse relationship between doctrinal purity and aesthetic interest. Art, it seemed, flourished most when Christianity was most polluted by error and worldliness, or, to put the matter in slightly different terms, the more aesthetically inclined Christianity became, the more religiously impure it became. “As Christianity became artistic,” argued T. Harwood Pattison in the *Baptist Quarterly Review*, “it became corrupt.” History thus offered prima facie evidence for the essential incompatibility of art and Protestant religion. A number of evangelical critics, however, confident in the belief that art and Christianity are not natural antagonists, rose to the challenge, and they set about the task of accounting for what seemed their substantial deviation from the attitudes of their forbears.

Nineteenth-century evangelicals developed a handful of key strategies for dealing with Protestantism’s putative historical aversion to the fine arts. One such strategy, applied to the period of the early church, was simply to suggest that the usual claims regarding the alleged anti-aesthetic prejudices of first-century Christians had been unduly exaggerated. “The new religion [i.e., Christianity],” claimed W.F. Taylor in the *Baptist Quarterly Review*, “did not array itself against the love of art. There is much to disprove the sweeping assertion that Christianity in its effort to crush paganism became bitterly hostile to those forms of beauty by which the pagan religion was taught.” One piece of evidence proffered by Taylor on this count was the plain fact that nowhere does the
Apostle Paul provide a scriptural condemnation of art, even in those passages in which one might most anticipate him doing so. Specifically, Taylor referred to Paul’s injunction in 1 Corinthians 8 to avoid meat sacrificed to idols, noting that “while he commanded abstinence from this meat for the sake of others, not a word did he say against the idol itself.” Taylor then shifted from a scriptural defense to a historical one, asserting that “there are abundant facts to show the prevalence of art among the gentile Christians in the earliest years of the Church.” Among these facts, Taylor cited what many detractors had seen as the proverbial exception that proved the rule – namely, the “decorations” painted in the catacombs of Rome – as well as the apparent acceptance of art by some of the Church Fathers, “of whom not all feared its effect upon the purity of the faith.” Not surprisingly, this particular tack seems not to have been common during the period. For one thing, it is doubtful that most readers would have been comfortable with a biblical interpretation that came dangerously close, however inadvertently, to a defense of idolatry; and though Taylor’s basic method of arguing from Scripture would have carried a good deal of weight among evangelicals, it is likely that a great majority of readers (especially those who continued to abide by some form of the Regulative Principle) would have found his argument from silence less than compelling. Taylor’s historical case, moreover, while correct enough in its basic facts, nevertheless leaves one with the inescapable impression that the author is grasping at straws.

A more nuanced, and more common, version of this tactic – used with respect to both the early church and the Reformation – was to argue that the early Christians and Reformers were not opposed to art in principle but only to its misuse. “The appropriation
of [music] to the service of vice,” asserted the Presbyterian Christian Advocate in 1823, “is a perfect perversion of its original purpose, for it was first used to express the devout feelings of the heart.”

With regard to the early church, James Smetham posited that although “early Christians … would not admit into their communion anyone who practised [art, and specifically painting]” – a stricture necessitated by art’s prior association with paganism – these same Christians “with unconscious inconsistency … carried in their hands lamps and vessels on which lyres, and palms, and lambs, and crowns were painted or embossed.” In doing so, the early church thus tacitly acknowledged art’s “essential principle.” What early Christians could not admit in practice, alleged Smetham, they nevertheless admitted in spirit. An article published in the Methodist Quarterly Review in 1877 applied a similar logic to the aesthetic views of the prominent Reformers. After surveying selected passages concerning art from the writings of major Reformation figures like Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, C.W. Bennett concluded that such passages “all go to show that with these earnest men there is a real appreciation of the beautiful – indeed, a true love of art. The whole force of their protest is directed against the shameful prostitution of sacred art to vulgar and unworthy ends….”

Indeed, nineteenth-century evangelical critics made good use of this argument, not only as a means of explaining what seemed to be the less-than-stellar historical record of Protestantism concerning the fine arts but also as a starting-point for their own attempts at religio-aesthetic reconciliation. If, historically, Protestantism had never rejected the arts per se, then there were no authoritative grounds for good Protestants to do so in the nineteenth century either.
The argument that Protestants had never in principle objected to the fine arts seemed plausible enough when brought to bear on the periods of the early church and the Reformation. At the very least, one could always point, as Taylor attempted to do, to the Roman catacombs, or rehearse the humanist credentials of Reformers like John Calvin. There was, too, at least one major exception among the Puritans that seemed to present the possibility of a similar kind of argument: John Milton. Thus, writing in 1841, an author in the *Eclectic Review* tried to draw a distinction between *kinds* of Puritans. Questioning those who had uncritically cast aside Shakespeare simply because he had written for the stage, the author blamed such prejudices on the exaggerated views of “‘precious Master [Philip] Stubbes,’ whose vagaries have contributed more to cast unmerited obloquy on the early Puritans than any abuse of their enemies; and who, mistaking want of taste for Christian zeal … recommends ‘Fox’s Book of Martyrs as the only legitimate ‘recreation’ for Christian men.” In contrast, Milton, who praised and admired Shakespeare, was in fact “a greater, a more consistent Puritan.”

The underlying issue, of course, is who constitutes the true Puritan exception – Stubbes or Milton – and we can only speculate as to how convincing readers of the *Eclectic Review* in 1841 found this argument. Yet Milton notwithstanding, the Puritans in general seemed to present a particularly difficult case. How was one to handle what appeared to be an open Puritan hostility to art and the aesthetic?

Neil Harris has noted that, when it came to art, mid-nineteenth-century American clergymen “seemed particularly concerned with repudiating what they considered was an unfortunate though historically necessary Puritan inheritance.” This was just as true of
British evangelicals as it was of American, and evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic set about this task in various ways. Surely one of the stranger attempts among nineteenth-century evangelicals to contend with the Puritan tradition was the effort made by some writers to aestheticize the Puritans themselves – to suggest, that is, that though the Puritans may have been averse to aesthetic pursuits, they themselves constituted a form of “living art” or “living poetry.” One example of this aestheticization of the Puritans was Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *The Minister’s Wooing* (1859). In this novel, Stowe casts as a central character the historical figure, Dr. Samuel Hopkins – one-time student of Jonathan Edwards and heir apparent of the Edwardsean theological legacy in America. Hopkins is in many ways a stern and imposing figure, spending countless hours locked up in his study wrestling with the nuances of Calvinist theology in the hopes of one day producing his own theological *magnum opus*. The cornerstone of his theology, and his own personal aspiration, is the concept of “disinterested benevolence.” According to this view, one must disinterestedly seek the glory of God and the greatest good in all things, even if this entails one’s own eternal damnation. Caring little for the preoccupations of this world, he is heavenly-minded to the point of forgetfulness, and aside from the great theological and ethical questions of the moment, it is only his unrequited love for the young (and highly idealized) character of Mary Scudder which moves him to action. He is almost, Stowe seems to imply, as unapproachable as the radically transcendent God he serves. Stowe’s aestheticization of the Puritans, however, extended beyond the mere fact of her choice of Samuel Hopkins as a main character for her story. For while the novel is in many ways critical of Hopkinsianism and of the
Puritans in general, Stowe nevertheless sees in the Puritan tradition and in the figure of Hopkins a certain “romance”: “you will find, if you will follow us, that there is as much romance burning under the snow-banks of cold Puritan preciseness as if Dr. Hopkins had been brought up to attend operas instead of metaphysical preaching, and Mary had been nourished on Byron’s poetry instead of ‘Edwards on the Affections.’” 21 The Puritans, Stowe suggests, harbored a “burning” poetical spirit even if this spirit did not manifest itself in the production of formal art objects. Underneath the Edwardsean exterior there lived an operatic and Byronic soul.

Nor was such a view confined to the more obviously aesthetic medium of fiction. This tendency to aestheticize the Puritans appeared in critical contexts as well. An author in the British Quarterly Review, for instance, while conceding that “Poetry declined” during the age of the Puritans, nonetheless undertook a defense of the Puritans which culminated in a kind of aesthetic appreciation of Puritan courage:

If the theatre was shut, the place of religious assemblies was open; if the brilliant creations of Shakespeare and the elder dramatists were viewed with devout horror, the songs of Zion and the sublime strains of prophet-bards resounded night and day both in the council and the field …. Future generations will testify to their worth, and pronounce upon their virtues. Truly their lives were a great epic. 22

A writer in the British Baptist Magazine of 1857 adopted a similar position: “Poetry in those old Puritans! Why not? They were men of like passions with ourselves. They loved, they married, they brought up children; they feared, they sinned, they sorrowed, they fought – they conquered. There was poetry enough in them, be sure, though they
acted it like men, instead of singing it like birds.” As these passages demonstrate, the aesthetic concept most often applied to the Puritans was that of sublimity. (Even Stowe, who favored the term “romance” in the passage cited above, tended towards a certain sublimity in her characterization of Hopkins and especially in her depiction of his ultimate willingness to relinquish his claims on Mary so that she can marry the wayward James.) Early British theorists of the sublime had often included great acts of moral courage and conquest in their lists of sublime objects, and consequently, the sublime provided a useful means of bridging the gap between aesthetics (which the Puritans seemed to lack) and morality (at which the Puritans excelled). By effectively “sublimating” the Puritans, evangelical critics could convert what appeared to be an aesthetic defeat into an aesthetic victory. The Puritans did not need to write poetry because they lived it. And while the Puritans may have been opposed in some measure to the fine arts, no one could justifiably claim that they were opposed to the aesthetic per se.

This argument was sometimes deployed in conjunction with another kind of argument, which proved to be one of the more popular ones among nineteenth-century evangelical writers seeking to overcome the difficulties of Protestant aesthetic history – what might be termed the “exigency argument.” Promoters of the exigency argument claimed that during periods of fierce theological crisis – viz., times during which the very truth of the Gospel was in danger of being perverted by error – it was permissible, even requisite, to employ extreme measures that would otherwise be unacceptable in times of peace. These extreme measures included the temporary suspension of aesthetic pursuits (which, again, were not in themselves necessarily hostile to religion) in the interests of an
all-encompassing defense of biblical truth. J. Milner Macmaster, for example, in an 1879 discussion of Milton in the *Baptist Magazine*, applied this argument to the Puritans:

> It requires some charity, some historic imagination, to judge these men aright. They made their mistakes, and were punished for them; but let it be remembered that a course of action which would be fanatical now may have been prudent then. When the Puritans rejected music, painting, and architecture as aids to religion, they were engaged in a death-struggle with a giant superstition, which had made the means the end.  

There was a strong undercurrent of anti-Catholicism in the exigency argument, as this passage attests. The “death-struggle” which evangelical critics like Macmaster nearly always had in mind was either the battle against paganism in the early church or, in the case of the Reformation and the era of Puritanism, the errors of Roman Catholicism (which, for many evangelicals, had a “pagan” quality of its own). Yet the brilliance of the exigency argument resided in the fact that it allowed evangelical critics to read the religio-aesthetic dynamics of key moments in Protestant history as an anomaly rather than as evidence of an intrinsic antinomy between art and evangelical Christianity. One could thus affirm the positive religious zeal of the Puritans, for instance, as universal and exemplary, while simultaneously dismissing their anti-aesthetic extremism as extremism, as a peculiarity of the historical context. “Now the Puritan spirit was evidently a healthy, natural, and necessary reaction against the abuses of the times…,” argued Joseph LeConte in the *Southern Presbyterian Review*. “But, like all reactions, it has gone much beyond the line of truth and the limits of reason.” Thus the exigency argument provided critics and readers with both a reason to appreciate the religious “extremism” of
the Puritans and a reason to move beyond this tradition when it came to aesthetics. Just as importantly, however, the presence – and presumably the persuasiveness – of this argument in the nineteenth-century evangelical mind helps to illuminate the later stance towards art taken by many fundamentalist evangelicals in the final decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries. For in the end, the exigency argument could cut both ways: if it could legitimate a departure from the Puritan aesthetic heritage in times of comparative theological harmony, it could just as easily warrant a fresh suspension of aesthetics during periods of renewed theological and cultural strife.

Still, the beauty of the exigency argument was that it provided what for most evangelical readers would have been a sensible explanation for the perceived aesthetic deficiency of Protestantism (and of Puritanism in particular) by placing its seeming anti-aesthetic extremism in a meaningful context. In its purest form, the exigency argument rested on a principle of proportionate action and reaction. Extreme threats called for similarly extreme responses. At times, however, some nineteenth-century evangelical critics ignored the delicate balance of the exigency argument in favor of a more overt and aggressive break with the Puritan aesthetic tradition. An author in the *Baptist Magazine* spoke plainly about what he took to be the aesthetic errors of Puritanism:

> The Puritan party made a mistake in their treatment of poetry, akin to that into which they fell when dealing with music and painting. They attacked the arts themselves, instead of confining their strictures to the abuse of them. They overlooked the fact that a true poem or a great picture appeals to the Divinely implanted instincts of man’s nature. So their efforts were unsuccessful. 27
Here, the writer wielded for the purposes of criticism the central premise of an argument which, as we have seen, had often been utilized by other evangelical authors in defense of the aesthetic views of both the early church and the Reformation. Whereas other critics had suggested that the Reformers, for instance, had not objected to the arts in principle but only to their misuse, this critic in the *Baptist Magazine* ventured the idea that this is precisely the crucial distinction which the Puritans had failed to make. At the same time, the author seems to have had in mind something like the whole-person argument discussed in the previous chapter. There exist “Divinely implanted instincts” in the minds of human beings which people ignore at their own peril. The Puritans, however, did just this. Thus, unlike Macmaster’s position in the *Baptist Magazine* a year earlier, which had effectively argued that the Puritans were operating under a special dispensation when it came to aesthetics, the general effect of this passage was to suggest that there was, in truth, no good reason for the anti-aesthetic extremism of the Puritans. They had made a mistake, plain and simple.

As this passage in the *Baptist Magazine* makes clear, there was, from the middle of the nineteenth century, an intensifying current of anti-Puritanism within evangelical aesthetics, whether expressed in the comparatively guarded framework of the exigency argument or announced in more transparently negative terms. Even the efforts of some critics to aestheticize the Puritans involved, in the end, a tacit admission that the Puritans had shunned both art itself and any kind of sympathetic critical discourse about the arts. Indeed, when it came to aesthetics, Puritanism served as the foil for Victorian evangelical thinkers in a way that the early church or the Reformation rarely did. By the end of the
century, it seems, some evangelicals were just as likely as Arnold to bemoan what they took to be the excesses of their Puritan forefathers. This anti-Puritan movement, moreover, took place at the levels of both theory and praxis. If one but looks to the specific characteristics (not to mention the sheer quantity) of the art objects produced by evangelicals during the nineteenth century – to the character of their hymns, to the Gothic influence on Protestant architecture, to the rash of sentimental novels – one can see tangible evidence of this de-puritanization. Even early twentieth-century fundamentalist evangelicals – who largely abandoned any serious interest in the philosophy of art and who sometimes viewed “high esthetic culture” with a certain amount of ambiguity – could welcome the efforts of a Warner Sallman to an extent that seventeenth-century Puritans, and even eighteenth-century evangelicals, never could have.

In fact, this aesthetic de-Puritanization can be seen in the context of a larger and more protracted process of theological reconsideration. As noted in chapter 2, the Calvinist theology of the Puritans had been under similar scrutiny since the eighteenth century even among historically Reformed denominations. Wesleyan Methodism, of course, had embraced Arminianism from its inception, but by the early decades of the nineteenth century even some staunchly Calvinist denominations had begun to alter their theological bearings in favor of what they took to be a softened version of Reformed theology. As evangelicals gradually moved away from the Puritans theologically, they also moved away from them aesthetically, and vice versa. In a broad sense, then, the gradual erosion of Puritan theological authority in the nineteenth century contributed to a milieu in which those critics interested in new aesthetic ventures could distance
themselves, albeit carefully in some cases, from the Puritan tradition without fear.

The extent to which Puritanism in particular had become the bugbear of nineteenth-century evangelical aestheticians may be seen by contrasting these attitudes with those of some evangelicals regarding the aesthetic legacy of the Reformation. Victorian evangelical critics were, quite frankly, divided when it came to the Reformation’s effects on art. While some felt compelled, as described above, to defend what they conceded were the excesses of the Reformation when it came to art, others took to the offensive and attempted to recast the Reformation as the engine driving the positive developments of modern aesthetics. Some evangelical writers asserted that, far from having had an impoverishing effect on art and aesthetics, the Reformation had actually *liberated* them. Not surprisingly, the target here was typically Roman Catholicism, and specifically, the Catholic claim to aesthetic superiority. “Roman Catholics,” noted an author in the *Eclectic Review*, “have always boasted that their religion has been uniformly and exclusively favourable to the growth and development of the Fine Arts.” This boast, however, was one which “Protestants have too easily received, and too quietly borne.”

C.W. Bennett recited the typical charges concretely and succinctly. Catholicism had always insisted “that Protestantism was greatly wanting in aesthetic susceptibility – indeed, that it was essentially iconoclastic in spirit; that it caused a fearful destruction of works of art in the times immediately following the great schism, and that it ushered in a period of fearful art decadence.” In response to such claims, evangelical critics argued that Roman Catholicism, with its rigid hierarchical and authoritarian structure, had in reality oppressed and retarded the development of art.
Freedom, these critics suggested, is the necessary condition for the blossoming of true art, and it was not until the Reformation abolished the medieval Catholic hegemony that such freedom could truly flourish. “It is capable of proof,” wrote T. Harwood Pattison in the *Baptist Quarterly Review*, “that only when the religion of the Caesar was in its decline, when the first stirrings of the Protestant Reformation were felt, did art learn the greatness of her might, and breathe the air of freedom.” Bennett agreed: “The Reformation, so far from being the *cause* of the decadence of sacred art, was a protest against the spirit which was destroying the very capacity for high art.” Contrary to the allegations of Catholic critics, the Reformation had in fact redeemed art from the bondage of Catholic oppression.

This argument is of special importance for a number of reasons. First, it suggests that a negative factor driving the increased aesthetic interest among nineteenth-century evangelicals was, as Ryan K. Smith has argued in his study of American Protestant architecture, anti-Catholicism. This increased interest was not, as has sometimes been thought, the result of an increasingly harmonious intercourse between Catholics and Protestants but rather an attempt on the part of evangelicals (and Protestants more generally) to prove their dominance. Paradoxically, as evangelicals inched closer to an arena of thought and practice in which Catholics were conventionally thought to have had the upper hand, they did so, at least in part, out of a desire to push back against Catholicism. Nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics was therefore poised, sometimes precariously, between the Puritans at one theological pole and Roman Catholics at the other. Secondly, the very fact that aesthetics had now emerged as a site of religious
contestation provides yet another measure of the significant aesthetic transformation within evangelicalism. For many Puritans and eighteenth-century evangelicals, the proscription of certain kinds of art – or at least their strict regulation – would have served as a marker of religious and theological superiority. The authentic Protestant would have shunned certain kinds of art not only as “worldly” but also as “idolatrous” and “Catholic.” By the nineteenth century, however, though caveats about the idolatrous potential of art and the aesthetic excesses of Catholicism persisted, the focus had in some measure shifted, and evangelicals were willing, even anxious, to meet Catholics head-to-head on the battleground of aesthetics. The objective was no longer to claim Protestantism’s religious supremacy via the rejection of aesthetics but to claim Protestantism’s religious supremacy via the embrace of aesthetics. Protestantism could be said to trump Catholicism, inter alia, insofar as it supplied the necessary conditions for the creation of authentic art.

Finally, it is of profound importance that those evangelical critics attempting to see something aesthetically positive in the Reformation tended by and large to characterize this positive contribution in terms of individual freedom, rather than, say, in terms of a unique theological contribution. Describing what he took to be the post-Reformation advances made by Protestants “Both in sacred and secular music,” Bennett attributed these advances to “that peculiar and darling principal of Protestantism – the unrestrained freedom of individual genius.” On the one hand, evangelicals were therefore perpetuating in the domain of aesthetics what has been famously termed a “whig” version of history. As we will see later on, this created in various ways an
intricate ideological web linking Protestant Christianity, aesthetics, narratives of progress, and even nationalism. For the present, however, it is sufficient to note that this propensity to celebrate individual freedom as a, or the, pivotal aesthetic legacy of the Reformation also coincided with and reinforced the romantic conceptions of art and creativity which nineteenth-century evangelicals had come to embrace. By reading the Reformation as the origin of that sort of individualism which may be said to underwrite the view of art as self-expression, such critics discovered implicit sanction for their (new) aesthetic views. Individual genius, it seems, was a deeply and thoroughly Protestant notion.37

Nineteenth-century evangelical critics, therefore, had taken to the offensive. In fact, when viewed against the backdrop of the Puritan tradition’s lack of positive interest in exploring or legitimating art, even evangelical “defenses” of the Protestant tradition amounted to a sort of offensive maneuver. Judging by the articles published in evangelical periodicals after the 1830s, educated evangelical Protestants had high hopes that evangelical Christianity could provide the necessary framework within which “high esthetic culture” could truly prosper.

Reconciliation, Subordination, and the Ideal of Productive Tension

When it came to theorizing the relationship between religion and art, many mid-nineteenth-century evangelical critics advocated what I have referred to as a “conciliatory” view. Such a view, in theory, holds that there is no intrinsic conflict between art and religion. As a writer in the Mercersburg Review put it in 1859, “[T]rue
Christianity is never hostile to the art of any nation or age, except as it is misapplied or untrue to itself.” If this proposition seems hardly shocking to modern readers, it is important to remember that the confidence with which Victorian evangelical writers supported this idea represents a leveling of many of the ambiguities of the Puritan tradition. For many Puritans, the question of art’s relationship to religion would have been surrounded by an aura of ambivalence. Yet it was not only the Puritans who found such a proposition dubious. Strangely enough, one of the most influential statements in history concerning the incompatibility of art (in this case, poetry) and religion came from the pen of a critic who was himself no Puritan in either his aesthetic or his religious views. Samuel Johnson had suggested in his “Life of Waller” that there can be no such thing as sacred poetry. This statement triggered a number of protests throughout the nineteenth century from evangelical (and non-evangelical) critics, and the indignation with which many evangelical writers challenged Johnson’s remark is proof positive that they saw no innate disharmony between the two. “Poetry and religion are too commonly supposed to be unfriendly to each other,” wrote an author in the Baptist Magazine in 1890. “Dr. Johnson is responsible for an opinion which seems to us as shallow as it is injurious, and which is held by many who repeat it as a mere parrot cry.” This statement marked the culmination of a long tradition of negative reaction by evangelical critics to Johnson’s statement. Historically, times may have existed when art and religion stood in opposition to one another, but there need be no inherent conflict between them.

That evangelicals were coming to embrace an ideal of harmonious co-existence between art and Christianity is especially apparent in the growing willingness of some
critics to defend the visual arts. As early as 1840, Henry Drummond had declared that painting is the highest of the fine arts: “In its power of acting directly upon the feelings of mankind at large, painting takes precedence of all the arts.” In general, statements like Drummond’s were less common before the 1850s and 1860s, and even after this time evangelical critics were more likely to grant precedence to poetry rather than to painting or sculpture. In part this was due to the comparative favor which poetry had always enjoyed in the Protestant tradition, even among the Puritans. “When we examine the history of the Phonetic arts – music, poetry, and oratory,” noted C.W. Bennett in 1877, “we find that the record of Protestantism is especially honourable….” But this tendency to see poetry as “the queen of the fine arts,” as John M. Titzel put it in the *Reformed Quarterly Review* in 1891, had also received an added impetus from romantic theory, which had often stressed the primacy of lyric poetry, both historically (the primitivist anthropology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries argued that poetry was the original language of humankind) and in order of importance. “Lyric poetry,” wrote Sidney Dyer in the *Baptist Quarterly* in 1867, “was the first in the order of time, and is yet held by every ninety-nine out of a hundred as first in importance…. [It is not] the result of reflection, but of passion or emotion. It expresses what is felt. It is but the outgushing of man’s emotional nature.” Despite this continued preference for poetry, however, evangelicals increasingly overcame their longstanding suspicions of the visual. This may have been due in some measure to the widespread influence of Ruskin, whose theory of painting urged a just representation of the “facts.” Such a theory no doubt resonated with some evangelicals’ ongoing attachment to common sense
philosophy, thus helping to defuse further evangelical anxieties regarding the visual. James Smetham, for instance, who undertook a lengthy defense of painting à la Ruskin in 1862, asserted that “There is no single man to whom art in England owes so much.” Smetham also praised the “preaching pictures” of Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelites, and called for more such “sacred art” in England. Clearly, even visual art and Protestant Christianity could now get along.

At the same time, however, many evangelical critics also held that art and religion exist in a hierarchical tension with one another. Put simply, art was seen as being, in a sense, subordinate to Christianity. “We must insist, therefore, first of all, that art should always be subordinate to religion,” declared T.H. Pattison in the Baptist Quarterly Review. As evangelical critics understood it, this relationship of subservience did not imply any diminution of value; rather, only when art was properly subordinate to the claims and directives of religion could it find its proper fulfillment. “All science, all politics, all art, all literature must lie low at the feet of religion, pure and undefiled, before they will find their true place and use,” explained Smetham. Echoes of the Augustinian ordo amoris and of the medieval “Great Chain of Being” are unmistakable here, and it was precisely the logic of these longstanding Christian-Platonic forms of thought which implicitly governed many nineteenth-century evangelical discussions of art’s connection to religion.

This notion of religio-aesthetic hierarchy thus supposed that religion bears simultaneously both a negative and positive relationship to art. On the one hand, religion acts in multiple ways as a kind of aesthetic horizon, establishing various limitations or
boundaries for art – the most basic of which is the assertion that art and religion are categorically distinct – and policing these boundaries accordingly. Zealous champions of art have at times associated this policing function with Puritanism (or with Plato for that matter), and of course, to a certain extent this is true. The extreme Platonic or Puritan view, was, in a sense, the religio-philosophical policing of art to the point of extinction. Yet the mere act of establishing religious boundaries for art’s social or metaphysical scope does not itself constitute Puritanism, or the puritanical. This is a critical point when it comes to understanding nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics. Not only was evangelical aesthetic thought assuming an increasingly romantic outlook but there was also a marked anti-Puritanism among a growing cadre of evangelical aestheticians. Thus any view which takes nineteenth-century evangelical strictures on art (e.g., that art is incapable of bringing about salvation) as evidence of an unmitigated Puritanism is ultimately amiss. Aspects of Puritanism may be said to have survived in the substance of the particular limitations which many evangelical theorists believed Christianity placed on art – there remained, for example, some genuine concern that art ought to take care not to slip into the sin of “idolatry” – but overall these limitations should be read in the context of the negative tension inherent in the subordinationist viewpoint to which many Victorian evangelicals aspired. The sheer quantity of ink which nineteenth-century evangelicals spilled on the question of art’s relationship to religion is enough to demonstrate that evangelicals were interested in far more than a by-then-familiar recitation of art’s dangers.

To be sure, many evangelical critics were in agreement that if art could not be
made subservient to religion, then it was art that would have to go. In this, at least, evangelicals seemed to be at one with their Puritan predecessors. But these statements, too, must be read in their nineteenth-century context. What often necessitated such statements regarding the abandonment of art as a theoretical possibility (though the entire subordinationist theory was in a sense designed to ensure that it was only a possibility) was the increasing tendency on the part of some progressive nineteenth-century intellectuals to see art as a point of contact with the “divine” that could be had apart from institutional and doctrinally-specific forms of Christianity. Many nineteenth-century evangelical writers were therefore engaged in a tenuous attempt to walk a razor-thin line between what amounted to a de-aestheticized spirituality and a hyper-spiritualized aesthetic. If romanticism had offered evangelicals a newly elevated conception of art, it also threatened at the same time to displace orthodox Christianity altogether – to destabilize the desired religio-aesthetic hierarchy. To appreciate this complex dynamic of evangelical appropriation and resistance, one must therefore read evangelical statements about the religious limits of art in the dual context of evangelical anti-Puritanism, on the one hand, and the sometimes exorbitant claims for art advanced by other prominent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers on the other. Whether it was the contention of German idealists that art was the key to repairing humanity’s alienation from the natural world or the suggestion by Matthew Arnold that poetry could serve as a substitute for lost religion, art assumed a religious, or quasi-religious, significance largely unparalleled prior to the nineteenth century. When seen in this light, statements that at first glance may appear puritanical and passé turn out to be a plea for moderation. A
number of evangelicals, then, were just as apt to protest the excesses of those thinkers who in various ways looked to art as a new kind of religion as they were to protest the excesses of the Puritan. In contrast to both the Puritan and those who would make of art a substitute for orthodox Christianity, many evangelical critics persevered in their faith – sometimes even in the face of evidence to the contrary – that art could indeed be made properly submissive to the yoke of Christianity and that, when it became so, human beings would then and only then know its true glory.

In fact, ostensibly “negative” statements about art’s limitations must always be read in the context of corresponding positive statements about the social, moral, religious, and aesthetic value and potential of art, and it is the existence of this positive pole which distinguishes a “conciliatory” view of art and religion from that of the extreme Puritan. For if in the subordinationist view Christianity in one sense limits art, it is also that which enables, informs, and gives art meaning. “Let the scholar settle the just subordination of literature to Christianity,” observed one critic in 1823, “then Christianity will approve and exalt his pursuits.” This same article, in fact, had earlier quoted Henry Martyn’s reflections on the way in which his conversion to Christianity had infused him with a deeper appreciation for art and beauty.\textsuperscript{51} Pattison expressed this seeming paradox in the \textit{Baptist Quarterly Review} in explicit terms: “Art, which, must be subordinate to religion, and limited by it, must also receive from it its constant inspiration.”\textsuperscript{52} This positive relationship could be, and was, formulated in a myriad of ways, but nearly all evangelical writers were agreed that it was Christianity which uniquely empowered art and allowed it to flourish. “Such is the nature of the principles of the Gospel,” noted a writer in the
American Baptist Magazine in 1835, “that they readily interweave themselves into every serious subject of thought, imparting a peculiar modification to all. Their presence or absence will give a very different aspect to everything that has relation to the important interests of time, and to our condition in the life which is to come.”

All cultural endeavors, argued E.E. Higbee in the Mercersburg Review in 1874, are subject to Christianity’s influence: “In fine, the whole realm of practical, theoretical, and aesthetical activity has felt its presence and power.” Thus, evangelical critics did far more than simply deny that there was any intrinsic hostility between art and religion; they actively asserted the positive relationship between the two.

For many evangelicals, then, the relationship between art and religion was finally an “uneven” one: just as the God of orthodox Christianity can do without human beings but human beings cannot do without God, so Christianity can do without art but art cannot, in the end, do without Christianity. When art assumes its assigned place in the great chain of religio-aesthetic being, then its value is extensive indeed; when, however, it presumes to disrupt this hierarchy, chaos is the predictable result. Such, at least, was the ideal conception of the relationship between religion and art envisioned by many nineteenth-century evangelical critics. In 1861, a contributor to the Presbyterian Quarterly Review captured this ideal of productive tension in an article on “Aesthetics.” Neither the puritanical nor a vague transcendentalist view of art ought to be indulged; rather, the truth lies in a golden mean, a hierarchical tension:

The example of our Puritan fathers should not be imitated .... [But also] We would not stimulate to the displacement of religion that we may
enthrone art …. But there is a happy mean to be preserved, in which the spiritual shall not be overborne by the purely aesthetic, and the aesthetic not wholly excluded from the higher spiritual. The predominant power is in religion. Aesthetics are subordinate.  

Of course, maintaining such a delicate balance in practice was oftentimes another matter altogether. By the 1870s and 1880s, this balance was beginning to break down as the divide between liberals, who were increasingly prepared to accept the romantic spiritualization of art, and conservatives widened. However, it is to an examination of some of the theoretical details associated with this ideal of productive tension to which we now turn, beginning with the notion of Christianity as aesthetic horizon.

**Maintaining the Religio-Aesthetic Balance I: Christianity as Aesthetic Horizon**

Evangelical discussions of the ways in which Christianity acts as a limiting factor on art tended to center on a handful of issues which, for the purposes of analysis, can be reduced to three general heads: (1) art and religion as distinct phenomenological entities; (2) art’s relationship to evangelical conceptions of salvation; and (3) art’s idolatrous potential. In the wake of various forms of romantic thought and amid the growing challenges to traditional orthodoxy issuing from scientific and philosophical quarters, the nineteenth century had witnessed a widespread reconsideration of each of these topics, either implicitly or explicitly, and had in many cases settled on less-than-orthodox solutions. Throughout much of the period, however, a number of evangelical critics fought to maintain more traditional positions on these issues. Yet even within such traditional defenses one can see that the ground was beginning to shift.
Art and Religion as Distinct Entities

The issue of art and religion as distinct phenomenological entities was at the core of the efforts of some evangelicals to resist the more grandiose implications of nineteenth-century romantic thought and to maintain a productive aesthetic balance between the opposite poles of Puritanism and extreme romanticism. Moreover, the position of many evangelical critics on this issue helps, in turn, to explain the positions which these writers adopted on the questions of art and salvation, and art and idolatry. In contrast to the tendency of a number of prominent nineteenth-century thinkers to blur the traditional distinctions between art and religion, a contingent of evangelical critics struggled to preserve the uniqueness of each.

As noted earlier, the nineteenth century witnessed a steady progression towards the conflation of art and religion – towards a propensity to see aesthetic experience as fundamentally religious and to see religion as fundamentally aesthetic. This development has a complex history of its own, but we may note here briefly that this religio-aesthetic merger manifested itself on at least three distinct though interconnected fronts. To begin with, there appeared a sophisticated body of post-Kantian aesthetic and philosophical thought which stressed the possibility of supersensuous, or transcendental perception. Schelling, for example, argued that the Absolute (which he increasingly identified with “God”) could be apprehended through an “intellectual intuition,” while Hegel believed that the nature of the Absolute could be revealed through logic. These systems both participated in, and fostered, the gradual process of immanentization which many scholars have observed in nineteenth-century thought. The world was now saturated with
“spirit” and “divinity,” and what had traditionally been a matter of grace, revelation, or faith entered the domain of metaphysics, intuition, and imagination. The eternal could be apprehended in the temporal, the infinite in the finite, the idea in form, and consequently, such systems accorded art an important place in the progressive self-awareness of Absolute Spirit. As we saw in the previous chapter, some evangelicals had already begun to move in this direction by the 1850s, sometimes with less-than-orthodox results, but in the middle-third of the century a significant number of evangelical critics were still wary of what they saw as the potential theological dangers inherent in this view.

Secondly, the conflation of art and religion emerged as a defensive strategy for preserving religion in the face of what seemed to be indisputable “scientific” evidence that the traditional factual claims of religion were false. If religion was not scientifically true, then perhaps it could still be valued for what Arnold called its “unconscious poetry.” It might, in short, be possible to “save” Christianity by aestheticizing it. Some within the evangelical tradition had themselves begun to adopt similar measures as a means of dealing with seemingly difficult or offensive doctrines. Though they did not carry their thinking to the extent which Arnold did, both Horace Bushnell and Edwards Amasa Park effectively turned to a more “poetic” understanding of evangelical Christianity in what they believed was a noble effort to sustain or preserve it. In doing so, they initiated a trend that would become a defining characteristic of one branch of liberal Protestantism around the turn of the twentieth century.

Finally, the fusion of art and religion transpired on a social level as well, that is, art and religion gradually came to be seen as exercising similar social functions. Already
in 1833, the _Christian Quarterly Spectator_ was suggesting that Christianity and poetry have similar ends: “The tendency and aim of Christianity is the same with the legitimate and highest efforts of poetry, – to interest man in man, – to lift him above the grossness of material things, – to spiritualize his nature, and fit him for a higher and nobler existence.”\(^{61}\) The idea became widespread that art and beauty could go some distance in elevating the poor and remedying social ills. For some thinkers, parks were just as important, if not more important, than preaching. In an essay published in 1882, for example, H.O. Barnett asked how it was that the poor could be raised up “to enjoy spiritual life.” Barnett, however, explicitly rejected the usual evangelical answer to this question. Preaching had failed, she argued, so new methods must be sought. Of the six new methods offered by Barnett, five of them were aesthetic in nature or had a strong aesthetic component. Specifically, the poor ought to be exposed to flowers, to high-class music, to afternoons in the country, to the stories of great lives, and to the Beauty of Art. “Picture galleries,” she contended, “can become mission halls for the degraded.” Elsewhere, Barnett did qualify her statement somewhat, admitting that “Pictures will not do everything. They will not save souls.”\(^{62}\) For Barnett, too, one senses that art was still a means to religion (though not in the evangelical sense) rather than an alternative form of religion. Still, she had nevertheless raised the possibility that art may be a viable alternative to preaching the Gospel – a scandalous suggestion for the vast majority of evangelicals. In fact, she had failed to mention the Gospel as conservative evangelicals would have understood it at all. If Barnett stopped short of equating aesthetic experience with salvation, she had issued a real challenge to traditional evangelical views. And
though many evangelicals would have agreed with Barnett that art can serve as a
meaningful source of moral and social refinement in elevating the affections of the
people, they would likely have been uncomfortable with the degree of faith which she
seemed to place in art at the relative expense of the Gospel.

Ultimately, however, each of these manifestations was made possible on some
level by a single underlying factor, namely, the readiness of so many in the nineteenth
century to define religion according to the criterion of *feeling*. It was Schleiermacher,
with his definition of religion as a “feeling of dependence,” who inaugurated the
nineteenth century’s formal philosophical reflection on this idea, though its roots can
doubtless be traced back to various forms of pietism and even, in a sense, to the Great
Awakening and to the Evangelical Revival. Revivalism itself may arguably have helped
to reinforce this notion on a practical level (though evangelical revivalists rarely, if ever,
relinquished doctrinal concerns completely). Whatever its origins, however, this
understanding of religion in terms of feeling is crucial because, as noted in the previous
chapter, there was an important axis of thought running through the nineteenth century
which pitted art against science as unique forms of discourse suited to the feelings and
the intellect respectively. Art was the discourse of emotion, science the discourse of
reason. Consequently, if religion, too, was more emotion than fact – recall here Arnold’s
claim that the emotion once attached to the failed facts of religion may be transferred to
the “ideas” of poetry — then it seemed that a natural alliance existed between art and
religion over and against science. In many cases, however, this natural alliance became
not an alliance but a oneness, as any attempt at a qualitative distinction between religious
and aesthetic emotions slipped into the background. Clive Bell’s *Art* (1914) may be seen as an endpoint in this relentless march towards religio-aesthetic oneness: art and religion alike “have the power of transporting men to superhuman ecstasies; both are means to unearthly states of mind. Art and religion belong to the same world … The kingdom of neither is of this world.”

Rudolf Otto’s painstaking efforts in *The Idea of the Holy* (1919) to untangle this religio-aesthetic knot of affectivity offers just one example of how widespread this fusion had become throughout the Anglo-Saxon world. In fact, much of the nineteenth-century debate between theological conservatives and theological liberals can be framed as a struggle over how one ought to locate religion on the art/science axis. Is religion closer to art/emotion or to science/intellect?

Evangelical critics did not dispute the art/science dichotomy; in fact, it was so deeply embedded in nineteenth-century ideology that it had in many cases passed beyond the limits of critical vision. Evangelicals, moreover, were far from denying that religion was addressed in large part to the heart. A number of evangelical writers, however, especially before the 1870s, did insist that there remained an important qualitative distinction between religious and aesthetic emotion. Edward Irving, for instance, despite his otherwise romantic leanings, nevertheless emphasized that “poetry, and philosophy, and science, and sentiment, and every other more noble function of the soul, cannot, in their own strength, exalt themselves into religion.” “We are always grieved when we see these imaginative Christians,” confessed the *Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald* in 1829. “They are certainly substituting the shadow for the substance. They feel a glow of imagination, and mistake it for the glow of devotion. They seem to
love God just as they love the mountain, or the waterfall, or any sublime object.” A letter to the editor of the *Christian Index* complained in 1832 of many people’s penchant for mistaking aesthetic for genuinely religious feeling: “Many apparently do not distinguish between the pleasure arising from mere taste, and that satisfaction derived solely from humility …. Their worship is more poetical than godly.” Indeed, “the pleasures of taste, are often mistaken for the spirit of devotion….” Henry N. Day, whose writings on aesthetics show a familiarity with many of the tenets of idealist thought, nevertheless decried in 1847 the “aesthetic mysticism” of the age: “Nor … are we the dupes of that philosophical mysticism which would identify the true artistic spirit with the religious sentiment; which, in true pantheistic consistency, recognises in every creative genius a real incarnation of the Deity, and only there ….” It was not the intent of such statements to deny that aesthetic experience could initiate religious feelings of devotion; evangelical writers were in fact strong advocates of the idea that an aesthetic appreciation of nature, for instance, could lead to enhanced worship of the Creator. Rather, the goal was to preserve what evangelicals understood to be a distinction in kind: aesthetic feelings might *lead* to religious feelings, but the two are not identical.

Thus theologically conservative writers, particularly those working within robust intellectual or confessional traditions, or those who remained close to the philosophy of Scottish common sense, such as the Old School Presbyterians at Princeton, fought hard to preserve an essential distinction between religion and art by affirming the “scientific” or cognitive content of religion. In his highly critical review of Horace Bushnell’s *God in Christ*, for example, Charles Hodge staunchly rejected Bushnell’s claim that “a great part
of [Christianity’s] dignity and efficacy consists in the artistic power of its form….”

Bushnell had argued at length for a non-dogmatic view of the Atonement. Not only does the work of Christ exceed the limits of human language but abstract doctrinal formulae are themselves incapable of truly moving the human spirit. Rather, the suffering of Christ acts as a kind of aesthetic object, apprehended by the feelings, which is intended to produce a subjective impression within us of the abiding love of God and of hope for the future. The “matter” of Christ’s work “does not lie in formulas of reason, and cannot be comprehended in them. It is more a poem than a treatise. It classes as a work of Art more than as a work of Science. It addresses the understanding, in great part, through the feeling or sensibility.”

For Hodge, by contrast, the doctrines of Christianity were more rational than aesthetic, while the effects of religion were the result of the Holy Spirit and of truth rather than of aesthetic perception or imagination:

It is among the first principles of the oracle of God, that regeneration and sanctification are not aesthetic effects produced through the imagination. They are moral and spiritual changes, wrought by the Holy Ghost, with and by the truth as revealed to the reason. The whole healthful power of the things of God over the feelings, depends upon their being true to the intellect. If we are affected by the revelation of God as a father, it is because he is a father, and not the picture of one. If we have peace through faith in the blood of Christ, it is because he is a propitiation for our sins in reality, and not in an artistic form merely.

Religion, according to Hodge, must be clearly distinguished from aesthetics. One cannot, as Hodge accused Bushnell of doing, reduce the supernatural power of religion to mere aesthetic effect.

The conservative evangelical insistence on a clear-cut distinction between
religious and aesthetic emotion, or between the modes by which religion and aesthetics operated, could, if extrapolated to its furthest extent, end in the total dissociation of the two. It could, in short, fall back into a kind of puritanical attempt to quarantine art. An article published in the *British Quarterly Review* in 1875, entitled “Religious Art,” came close to advocating just such an approach. The author’s thesis, somewhat shocking for its time, was that “religious art” is an “expression … entirely without meaning.” The author admitted that art had a divine origin but nonetheless scoffed at the notion that art itself could be, in any meaningful sense, religious: “Religion then, and art, though equally divine in origin and human in their sphere, are in their mode of influence and action totally distinct, and any purpose to combine the two must end in damage, failure, and confusion.”

This position was, however, exceedingly rare; rather, nineteenth-century evangelical critics most often clung to their optimistic conviction that art could, in fact, have a meaningful religious dimension without itself becoming religion and that religion could, in turn, work alongside, and in some cases through, the aesthetic without being reduced to the aesthetic. J.S. White noted in 1887, “it may be remarked that if religion has a sphere of its own, the converse must be equally true … that is to say, there is a wide field in which art may be exercised without any direct bearing on religion.” White’s observation suggests how the same logic used to safeguard the singularity of religion could, if spun a certain way, simultaneously supply the rationale for an incipient aestheticism. However, White himself had not yet relinquished the Victorian dream of wholeness. Analytical distinctions need not, and ought not, imply an actual separation: “But though distinct, they are not unrelated. There is no natural or necessary antagonism
between them.”

Bushnell’s error was not his suggestion that Christianity appealed to the senses or feelings but that it appealed only or predominantly to the senses or feelings. Thus, after Henry N. Day condemned the “aesthetic mysticism” of the age, he could nevertheless conclude that “it may be true for all this, that Christianity must work through the taste, as it must work through the intelligence.” And even Charles Hodge, who inclined heavily towards a “scientific” view of religion, acknowledged that “The revelations of God are addressed to the whole soul, to the reason, to the imagination, to the heart, and to the conscience.”

Art and Salvation

To some, the question of how art relates, if at all, to salvation would seem a strange inquiry indeed – a peculiar consequence of what appears to be evangelical Christianity’s preoccupation with the Atonement, with the process of conversion, or with the felt obligation to evangelize. However, for those conservative nineteenth-century evangelical critics who sought to maintain a productive tension between Christianity and art, the question was not only natural but – given the propensity of some influential Victorian thinkers to find in art and the aesthetic a substitute for what seemed a crumbling orthodoxy – necessary as well. Convinced that all are sinners in need of God’s redemptive grace, conservative evangelicals were, and are, committed to spreading the Good News of the Gospel that Christ’s death has atoned for sinners’ rebellion against God. Only those who are “converted” can hope to enter heaven. To the conscientious evangelical, there was no more important task in life than to share this basic message.
with others. For Victorian evangelicals, moreover, conversion also had an important social dimension. Political legislation and education could be helpful tools in the quest for social amelioration, but no such efforts would ultimately succeed if people’s hearts and minds remained hopelessly unregenerate. For this reason, as Perry Miller observed, revival “was the one clearly given truth” of nineteenth-century American society, and though British evangelicals, according to Richard Carwardine, sometimes viewed American-style revivalism with a healthy dose of skepticism, they hardly doubted the necessity of revival itself.\textsuperscript{78}

Given the prominence of conversionism within evangelicalism, then, it seems almost inevitable that sooner or later the question of art’s relationship to the sort of saving grace uniquely manifested in the moment of conversion would have arisen. This conversionist emphasis, furthermore, found itself increasingly in danger of being supplanted by “secularized” forms of salvation. Already in the late 1840s, for example, liberal-minded writers like Bushnell were rejecting the conversionist model of orthodox evangelicalism. In place of the traditional stress on a moment of decision, Bushnell substituted a theory of Christian “nurture,” in which the spiritual “characters” of children were thought to be unconsciously shaped by the ordinary domestic influences of family and society.\textsuperscript{79} Furthermore, as noted above, art was more and more being peddled as a panacea for all sorts of spiritual and social problems. It is therefore not surprising that a number of evangelical critics felt compelled to address the question of art’s relationship to salvation.

In contrast to those who saw art in salvific terms, many conservative evangelical
critics agreed that art and/or aesthetic experience did not, and could not, by themselves constitute a form of salvation.\textsuperscript{80} Art and beauty could serve a variety of noble ends, but they were incapable of accomplishing a work that is reserved for the Holy Spirit alone. To many evangelicals, the idea that art and the aesthetic were a form of salvation would have seemed downright naïve. The real human problem was \textit{sin}, and no art, however beautiful or arresting, could eliminate this blot or bring peace with God. An author in the \textit{London Quarterly Review} gave this position pointed expression in 1854. Reacting to the idea that “Only Art can elevate: the Gospel is Art,” he reiterated forcefully that the only Gospel is the Gospel of Christ:

\begin{quote}
Nature does not save man from sin and misery; nor Art; nor Civilization; nor Commerce…. As servants to a community, purified by a spiritual power, they are of priceless value, and indescribable ornament; but as lords of man’s heart, or the stay of his hope, they are usurpers, and their reign ends, as do usurpations…. Nothing is gospel for man that does not go into his nature, down to the root of his leaning to sin; and create within him a clean heart and a right spirit. Lover of Nature! lover of Art! lover of Civilization! lover of Commerce! we join you all. But if you would see the beauties you admire in the fairest posture, and wielding the utmost influence, join us in pointing all men, in great earnest, to Him who is “exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins,” – to make the individual “a new creature,” and the whole earth a land of rest.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

Similarly, in a telling article on the “Characteristics of Wordsworth’s Poetry” published in 1869, a writer in the \textit{Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine} somewhat reluctantly acknowledged that Wordsworth, despite his incontrovertible genius, had erred in attributing to Nature what can only be rightly attributed to God, namely, the granting of grace unto salvation: “He erred … in asserting for Nature a power which she does not
possess; a power to lead back, by her mere teachings and influences, man’s sinful, far-wandered spirit to truth, and God, and peace; a work this which only the good Spirit can do, and which He does by other and far different means.”

When viewed in the broad context of nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics, this statement is significant in that it registers the unwillingness of some evangelical critics to capitulate completely to mainstream romanticism. Victorian evangelicals may have been, to a great extent, “romantics” when it came to aesthetics, but until at least the 1870s, and often longer, many nonetheless clung to quite unromantic doctrines like the essential depravity of humankind and a belief in salvation through Christ alone. A number of evangelicals were in fact devoted readers of Wordsworth, but in the end they could not condone his theological vagueness nor sanction his tacit claim that the beauty of Nature in itself contains the power of salvation.

In fact, some evangelical critics seem to have stepped up their denial of art’s salvific potential as the century drew to a close, perhaps in response to the increasingly expansive claims of writers like Barnett. A number of articles from the early 1880s, for example, reiterate the point that there can be no salvation in art. Discussing “Christianity and Art” in the Christian Advocate in 1880, B. Hawley insisted that “The real wants of men on earth are to be met in Christ, who is the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person, and in the appointed and significant ordinances of Christianity.” W.J. Dawson, a critic in the Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine, thought he saw in Tennyson’s poem The Palace of Art a confirmation of this very idea. The poem, Dawson explained, testifies to the fact that “The need for some diviner salvation than art
can offer, haunts with persistent bitterness the human spirit sheltered in its selfish splendour.”

Even Henry J. Van Dyke, Jr., whose later espousal of theological liberalism in the 1890s led to trouble with the American Presbyterian hierarchy, still found it appropriate in 1883 to sound a similar refrain in the Princeton Review: “Nor can we hope to save this man, and such as he, by any moral ministry of art, however pure and strong. Poems and pictures will not deliver him from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light .... There must be first a quickening, an awakening, a new birth in the inner nature of man, so that he shall know the good, desire it, seek it....”

Barnett and Arnold notwithstanding, the idea that art could in any way redress the real spiritual problem of humankind – sin – was to many evangelicals not only misguided but dangerous.

Yet if conservative evangelical critics in particular firmly rejected the idea that one could find an alternative form of “salvation” in art, they were sometimes more ambiguous when it came to the related question of whether it was possible for art to play an effectual role in bringing sinners to Christ, that is, whether the Holy Spirit could work through art to convince a person of his or her need for salvation traditionally conceived. One article, published in the Eclectic Review in 1841, answered this question with a resounding, “Maybe.” The article – a review of The Administrative Economy of the Fine Arts in England by Edward Edwards and A Letter to Thomas Phillips, Esq., R.A., on the Connexion between the Fine Arts and Religion, and the Means of their Revival by Henry Drummond – rather tentatively allowed that art may, on occasion, serve as a locus of divine grace: “In the mere way of instrumentality, a glorious picture, a noble statue, a
magnificent edifice, or a sublime piece of music, may on some rare occasions have even reached the soul of a sinner. The Almighty who would have all men to be saved, is not limited in His operations.” The writer, however, was conscious of the fact that he was advancing a potentially controversial view of the matter. “We are fully aware that much difference of opinion may exist on this subject.” Several pages later he conceded that it is only “in very rare instances” that “the Holy Spirit of God has made use of certain exquisite productions to affect the understanding, or influence the heart.” Since God is sovereign and is therefore not restricted in His mode of operation, art may at times provide an occasion for the intervention of divine grace. On the whole, however, art, the author suggested, bears no reliable or consistent correlation to salvation. But why?

There were at least two reasons for this tendency to dissociate art and salvation. To begin with, the Eclectic Review writer criticized Edwards and Drummond for failing to keep in view “the usual means of promoting [true religion’s] success according to the word of God.” For evangelical Protestants, this “usual means” referred to the preaching of the Word itself. Drummond, for instance, had made the rather traditional claim that art could serve as a missionary tool, a means of instructing the “heathen,” the poor, and the illiterate. For good Protestants, however, this sounded an awful lot like Catholicism or Tractarianism, and in fact the writer accused Drummond of being “a zealous Puseyite.” Proclamation, not painting, was the means which God had sanctioned for the dissemination of the Gospel, and to introduce another method of evangelization was to substitute human methods for God-ordained ones. “Fancy him making all conceivable exertions for the benefit of the plastic arts at home, and the diffusion of christianity
abroad … in rendering the walls of the Islington seminary frescoed like catholic convents, or adding to the clergymen and schoolmasters in India, Jamaica, and New Zealand, a corps of artists from the Royal Academy!"\textsuperscript{88} Such a perspective, of course, echoed similar Puritan anxieties about the dangers of “invention,” as well as the Puritan desire to adhere strictly to the letter of Scripture (i.e., the Regulative Principle). Here, at least, it is evident that aspects of the Puritan tradition had survived intact. Indeed, many conservative evangelicals tended to see any means of conversion other than the biblically mandated one of preaching the Gospel as representative of the kind of extra-biblical accretions associated with Catholicism.\textsuperscript{89} “Religion is not taught by the painted semblances of Christ, but by the word and work of Christ Himself,” argued an author in the \textit{British Quarterly Review}.\textsuperscript{90} Consequently, though the Holy Spirit \textit{could} work through other means such as art, such means were not the appointed ones and were therefore undependable.

Even more important, however, was the reviewer’s apparent anxiety that even a theory which posits a wholly instrumental connection between art and salvation – one which sees art merely as an occasion for the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit rather than as an alternative form of redemption – may nevertheless slide imperceptibly into the belief that it is art itself which communicates grace. Or perhaps more accurately, the author expressed fear that the emotions generated in an aesthetic encounter may too easily, and too often, be confused with those which attend upon a genuine experience of supernatural grace. Once again, the problem was the potential conflation of art and religion. Noting the “enervating and ostentatious display of intellectual emotion” which
the British people, he believed, were too frequently guilty of when viewing works of fine art abroad, the reviewer cautioned readers against placing too much stock in this kind of experience:

Intellectualism is never to be despised, as we have repeatedly intimated; but neither must the fact be forgotten, that it may be, and generally is an entirely distinct affair, from the vitality of that knowledge which converts, and which alone saves a soul. We have seen the most secular and even sensual minds more deeply moved than we would venture to describe, before the Transfiguration of Raphael, in the Vatican … and yet these very individuals, when the spectacle has terminated, have returned like the dog to their own licentiousness again, or like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire! Such religious impressions, if deserving that name at all, are but the contortions of a corpse when in contact with the wires of a galvanic battery; the illusive and horrible imitations of a genuine quickening of the inner man!⁹¹

It is perhaps no coincidence here that “imitation” yet again connoted the absence of genuine “spirit.” The horror of the Coleridgean copy remained. But it was not now “spirit” in any vague Emersonian sense but the Holy Spirit of orthodox Christianity. The aesthetic apprehension which seemed at first blush to be the most vital of “spiritual” experiences could, in the end, turn out to be a religious Frankenstein.

Thus, a number of evangelicals sought to distance art and the aesthetic from the reception of what, in theological terms, is referred to as “efficacious grace” (also known as “special” or “saving grace”). Certainly aesthetic experience held no such power in itself, but neither was it a guaranteed site of such grace. Even the vision which art affords of the “ideal” was not, as an 1891 article in the Record made clear, sufficient for salvation. Noting a recent sermon preached by the Bishop of Manchester at Manchester
Cathedral, the *Record* pinpointed both the problem and the solution:

In the course of his sermon his Lordship said there was a particular form of self-worship which was very popular in the city of Manchester. “We do not want religion,” some people among us said; “we can ascend on the wing of art into the region of the beautiful and true.” God forbid that he should deny that art had the power of raising men into the sphere of the ideal, or that he should deny that art, if it be true and great, had the power of enlarging and purifying the emotions. But it was one thing to get a fugitive glimpse of the ideal, and a very difficult thing to make that the permanent influence in the formation of human character …. Generation after generation, as wealth increased, and, with it, luxury, lust, and pride, man needed … more than merely a fugitive glance at the ideal. He needed nothing less than the continual inflowing of the light, grace, and power of the Divine Spirit of wisdom and love, which Jesus came to embody in His own Person and to naturalize in our race.92

This perhaps helps to account for what, from a present-day viewpoint, may seem a curious omission in a number of mid-nineteenth-century evangelical discussions of art, namely, the absence of a clear *evangelistic* emphasis (in the traditional sense of this term). This stands in stark contrast to the rationale employed by many contemporary evangelical novelists, for example, who not infrequently cite evangelism as a primary objective of their writing.93 For many nineteenth-century evangelical critics, however, the correlation between art and salvation, or art and conversion, would have seemed, at best, a dubious one. Art could not accomplish what only Christianity can.

Yet even so, the strongly guarded contention by the author in the *Eclectic Review* suggests that the firm resistance to the idea of art’s salvific potential was in fact beginning to weaken. Why could art not, in rare instances, provide an occasion for efficacious grace? Further evidence of this weakening is apparent, for example, in an
article which appeared in 1876 in *The Sword and the Trowel; A Record of Combat with Sin and of Labour for the Lord*” – a publication founded by Charles Spurgeon.

Contemplating in true romantic form “The Advantages of Cultivating the Love of Nature,” one G. Rogers concluded that “It is impossible to cherish the love of nature and of sin at the same time…. What man on his way to gratify worldly ambition or to revenge an insult, could see any beauty in a landscape, or any glory in a setting sun?” This statement has something of an Edwardsean ring to it insofar as it implies that sin may interfere with the proper aesthetic perception of natural beauty. At the same time, however, it is clear from the context that Rogers also meant to suggest that natural beauty could itself play some role in mitigating sin: “*The moral influence of the love of nature is not less in its favour than its conduciveness to health and to mental refinement.*”

Significantly, the editor found himself conflicted on this point, and he inserted a footnote to this effect: “We are not quite sure of this [impossibility of loving sin and nature at the same time]: but our revered friend speaks for himself … and the exceptions to this rule must be very few, if indeed there be any.—ED.”94 The editor, it seems, may have been just as uncertain about his uncertainty as he was about Rogers’s thesis, yet this very ambivalence provides a clear indication of the ongoing tension between traditional evangelical orthodoxy and the claims of romantic aesthetics. The article from the *Record* cited above betrayed a similar ambiguity regarding the religious value of the “ideal,” so central to nineteenth-century conceptions of art. On the one hand, the author seems to allow that the ideal has real transcendent value. It is a true, though “fugitive,” glance into the supra-worldly, Platonic realm of “the beautiful and true.” On the other hand, this
fugitive glimpse is not itself a source of saving grace. This particular view of things was not, in fact, inconsistent with evangelical understandings of grace and salvation, and indeed the author in the *Record* was careful to maintain an implicit distinction between the doctrines of efficacious and “common” grace. The difficulty, however, was that not all critics were as theologically cautious as this one, and the belief that art is “ideal” was itself a factor in closing the gap between religion and art, thereby helping to bend and ultimately break the evangelical ideal of productive tension.

Complicating the question of art’s salvific potential, moreover, was the fact that some nineteenth-century evangelical critics had, since at least the 1840s, been chiseling away at the “problem of presence” which evangelical aesthetics had inherited from the Puritan tradition. Although conservative critics were disinclined to see art as an evangelistic tool, a growing number seemed willing to speak of art as a manifestation of God generally. Beauty, not only in nature (an idea that had long been accepted by Protestants) but also in human art, was a unique revelation of God. “All aesthetic beauty thus discovers a God – a being perfect in character, and worthy of universal homage and love…,” wrote Day in 1847. “It leads up in its own proper tendency, to the perfect living Creator and governor of all. It displays him to the soul with a power peculiar to itself; – not in the inanimate form of abstract influence and deduction; not in the repelling, overwhelming terrors of mere rigorous sovereignty and dominion; but in the bright, attractive, wooing character of a God of perfect loveliness.” The *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* concurred two years later: beauty “is the utterance of the divine, which gives its eloquence to the voice of nature. It is the expression of the divine, which
lends its highest effulgence to the beautiful in poetry and art.”97 Some critics, like James Smetham, continued to reiterate “that Divine power is no more inherent in [art] than in other modes of mere expression and communication,”98 but many evangelical critics were gradually learning to see art, if not as a means of accessing God’s saving grace, at least as a contact point with God Himself.99 “Why should not God reveal himself through inspired art as well as through inspired oratory and literature?” asked the Methodist Review in 1894.100 The question was largely rhetorical.

**Art and Idolatry**

It is in evangelical discussions of art and idolatry that the long shadow of the Puritan tradition may perhaps be glimpsed most readily. As we saw in chapter 2, the problem of art’s idolatrous potential had always lain at the heart of Protestant aesthetics. Since the Reformation, the charge that Catholicism’s patronage of the arts had plunged the Church into idolatry had been at the forefront of Protestant attacks on Roman Catholicism. On the one hand, nineteenth-century evangelical critics remained conscious of these dangers and thought it important to reiterate some of the traditional Protestant sanctions concerning art’s idolatrous potential. In fact, the campaign to avoid conflating art with religion was, in one sense, an attempt to avoid a certain kind of idolatry. On the other hand, these same critics largely denied that art itself – even painting and sculpture – was intrinsically idolatrous. Aesthetic idolatry remained an unfortunate theoretical possibility, especially in certain contexts, but this possibility ought not deter one from enjoying what the fine arts have to offer. If a number of conservative evangelical critics
repeated the substance of Puritan cautions about art’s capacity for idolatry, they were not about to shun art altogether. By the close of the century, a number of evangelicals, both liberals and conservatives, were even arguing for the introduction of art, or rather a certain *kind* of art, into their worship spaces.

By far the most typical caveat of nineteenth-century evangelical writers – one which they shared with the Puritans – concerned the issue of art’s capacity to represent God, or the divine. To attempt to represent God in art was sheer folly since no human being could apprehend God in His fullness. “The truth is,” wrote Pattison in the *Baptist Quarterly Review*, “that in religion, more than in any other study, science and art are alike powerless to fathom what is unfathomable, and to depict what will never submit to portraiture … Religion, so far from being helped, may be, and in many cases is, harmed by representation.”101 The *Eclectic Review* thought “the unhappy idea of representing God in a work of Art … a modern invention” since the early Christians had largely avoided images, and when they did employ them, they did so only symbolically.102 For many evangelical critics, this proscription applied not only to attempts to represent God the Father but also to representations of Christ as well. As David Morgan has noted, “Many clergy in late-nineteenth-century America” expressed “disappointment … in artistic depictions of Christ,” even though such depictions were increasingly common.103 “Christ is beyond the reach of art. The finite and restricted human mind and hand cannot efficiently describe Divinity in human form,” declared a writer in the *British Quarterly Review*.104 The *Christian Index* denounced all household paintings of Christ as being in bad taste, for “The infinite, divine perfections of Christ can not be represented upon
canvas, nor sculptured in marble and it is impious to attempt it.” For good measure, the periodical repeated its opinion in another article the following year: “No human artist can draw and paint the correct likeness of Christ as he was intended to be worshipped.” As Protestants had long been fond of arguing, the attempt to represent Christ “upon canvas” was idolatrous precisely because it was impossible to represent Him completely. A partial representation was a false one, and false representation was idolatrous. “Let no Christian today fancy that the subtle powers of idolatry are obsolete,” W.F. Taylor solemnly warned in the pages of the Baptist Quarterly Review. “When once we imagine pictures of Christ in any way stir the heart to faith and love, when they become a means of devotion, then it is inevitable that our conception of him will be influenced by the picture – that is, by the attributes of him which it reveals.” In the end, human beings must reconcile themselves to the fact that “The painter’s art cannot equal the Christian’s spiritual vision.”

Some critics were also conscious of the shortcomings of language when it came to representing or capturing spiritual realities. An author in the Christian Index, for instance, acknowledged that the “spirit which pervades the heart when engaged in offices of humiliation and prayer, can never be well expressed, by the feeble power of verse.” Another critic in the Eclectic Review questioned the wisdom of attempting to render Scripture in verse: “It cannot be denied, and it need not be concealed, that all attempts to versify portions of Holy Writ, must fail in the main purpose of poetry, which is, so to adorn or dignify its themes, that by the new light thrown upon them, they may be exalted beyond any previous conception of their beauty or their grandeur, which obtained in
ordinary minds.” “[D]ivine themes,” the author continued, “are necessarily degraded by human interpolations.” Nevertheless, such statements ought not to be read as a denial of the deep intercourse between art and religion. For the writer in the *Christian Index*, some religious feelings may be beyond expression. Poetry may be unable to render the heartfelt emotion experienced during prayer, but, the author insisted, poetry can capture the feeling of gratitude one feels after prayer. And for the author in the *Eclectic Review* – who initially sounded rather Johnsonian – it may be true that Scripture is degraded by versifying, but “human compositions are necessarily exalted by the felicitous introduction of sacred illusions.”

Christianity may improve art, though art may not improve on Christianity.

Some nineteenth-century critics also continued to caution readers against the “natural” tendency of human beings to love the Beauty of the art object rather than the God of Beauty. “Men are prone to idolatry,” argued the *Christian Index*, “and image worship is idolatry. The more perfect and beautiful the picture as a work of art the more danger in that direction.” B. Hawley warned readers of the *Christian Advocate* that “It is easier to reverence and adore what is seen than what is unseen; and all idolatry has its beginnings in a recognition and worship of secondary causes and visible causes, rather than of the unseen First Cause.”

Some critics continued to maintain as well, in keeping with the Puritans, that art had no place in the sanctuary. Arguably, it was this aspect of the Puritan tradition that had the most lasting impact on evangelical conceptions of art. The *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, for example, doubted sincerely that cathedrals had any place in the Protestant aesthetic:
We may imagine that our faith, in its higher spirituality, is above all visible symbolism except what we have in church and sacraments – we may fancy that we are capable of using indifferently all, any, or no art, and that we are far beyond the poetic period in these respects – but, notwithstanding all this, when we consider the native tendencies of our minds to form an idol, and the insidious sway which every religious symbolism has acquired over the hearts of its subjects, we cannot but tremble at the idea of the Protestant world generally making experiment with genuine cathedral art.

This article, in fact, went so far as to resuscitate the Puritan distinction between “religious” and “civil” images. Calling for the ejection of “whatever goes by the name of rich, gorgeous, [or] elegant … [from] our churches,” the author nevertheless allowed that such things may be appropriate for “civil style.”

It is worth noting, however, that while the distinction was descended directly from the Puritan tradition, even within “civil” space Puritan simplicity was no longer the norm.

Although nineteenth-century evangelical critics continued to counsel their readers to be wary of the idolatrous potential of art, it is clear that they were, on the whole, far less anxious than their predecessors about art’s idolatrous tendencies, or, perhaps more accurately, they were far more interested in arguing this problem away. What about the Second Commandment? asked a writer in the Presbyterian Christian Advocate in 1823. “This command,” the writer noted, “we have heard seriously urged against the whole of the engraver’s art.” But it must be remembered that this portion of the command “is coupled with the additional injunction, ‘thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them;’ and that it was to prevent this abuse, that the whole prohibition was given.”

Moreover, the author continued, “May it not be safely affirmed, that it is impossible not
to form in our minds, the images of interesting visible objects when absent”? Thus, an exhaustive application of this prohibition would seem not only to preclude the art of engraving but the action of the mind itself.\textsuperscript{112}

At the same time, as Morgan has described, American Protestant visual culture experienced an important shift after the 1860s. Instructional books for use in Sunday school classrooms, “picture cards” awarded to Sunday school students, and illustrated “lives of Christ” increasingly featured reproductions of religious fine art. American Protestants – primarily liberals, but also some conservatives – were well on their way to a “devotional” use of visual art once reserved for Catholics. British Protestants, as Graham Howes notes, were likewise welcoming “religious art” in ever greater numbers.\textsuperscript{113} J.S. White, writing in the \textit{Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review and Christian Ambassador} in 1887, reflected this trend. He conceded that all Protestants must reject the worship of pictures and images, “But it would be utterly irrational and unjust to condemn all religious art as bad and pernicious in its influence because of such vulgarities and inanities.“\textsuperscript{114} Victorian evangelical critics were, in short, relying once again on the use-misuse argument. It was not images per se that were problematic but only the worship of these images. What largely differentiated nineteenth-century evangelicals from their forbears was their optimistic belief that one could, in fact, live in a state of perfect tension between undervaluing and overvaluing art; i.e., one could appreciate and value images – even religious ones – without slipping inevitably into worshiping or misusing them. What for the Puritans had been a matter of near certainty was to nineteenth-century evangelicals only one possibility among many.
Indeed, by the 1880s some evangelicals were also calling for an increased attention to aesthetics inside the sanctuary. B. Hawley, for instance, remained cautious about art’s idolatrous possibilities, and he continued to reiterate the usual evangelical condemnations of Romanism. The question, however, was no longer whether art ought to play a role in Protestant worship but rather what kind of art Protestants should cultivate: “When, therefore, there is such a blending and use of art as to aid to intelligent, pure, and acceptable worship, whether it be painting, statuary, architecture, or music, it is well to cultivate and use it.”\textsuperscript{115} By 1902, the \textit{Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review} was close to suggesting that the aesthetic was essential for true worship: “A visible symbol reminding one of a far off love is a sacred tie which cannot easily be broken. The soul is assisted by sense …. Harmoniousness of design and taste assist reverent worship.” “True reverence,” the writer continued, “is the offspring of a correct imagination.”\textsuperscript{116} This writer, in fact, was dangerously close to inverting the religio-aesthetic hierarchy which so many mid-Victorian evangelicals had sought to maintain. To be sure, there were still many evangelicals who would have been uncomfortable with this sort of statement. Nevertheless, the religio-aesthetic topography had clearly changed, and anxieties about art’s idolatrous potential had been relegated to the corner of the map.

\textbf{Maintaining the Religio-Aesthetic Balance II: Christianity as Aesthetic Condition}\n
While many evangelical critics between 1830 and 1900 agreed that religion imposed certain restrictions on the practice and appreciation of art and the aesthetic, they were most enthusiastic in their proclamations that Christianity informed, enabled, and
empowered art – in short, in their belief that Christianity was a prerequisite, or condition, for genuine artistic production and valuation. Critics saw this relationship of empowerment as functioning in multiple ways on the levels of both (religious) psychology and socio-cultural ideology. Christianity’s aesthetic influence, that is, was understood to extend to both the individual mind and the milieu.

To begin with, some nineteenth-century evangelical writers believed Christianity had profound implications for aesthetic perception (aesthesis). Full aesthetic perception, argued a number of critics, is available only to the Christian – an idea that recalls Jonathan Edwards’s theory of aesthetic perception discussed in chapter 2. This was so because taste, like the other human faculties, is corrupted by sin. Sin, in fact, helped to explain the perennial difficulty of critics in fixing a universal “standard of taste.” “Were man in the primitive state of innocence, wisdom, and purity, in which he was first created,” suggested J.T.D. in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* in 1844, “probably there would be no difficulty in the case; for then his judgment would at once apprehend the propriety or impropriety, the suitability or the unfitness of things, and his pure and chaste habits of ratiocination and action would reject whatever was revolting to the most exalted standard of purity and propriety.”¹¹⁷ A similar viewpoint was articulated by the Rev. J.M.P. Otts in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* in 1866: “Taste is fallen, vitiated, darkened by sin. The ideal beauty was defaced and obscured by the fall…. The finer traces of the beautiful are with difficulty found in the shattered image; hence the great diversity in the details of the application of the fundamental principle of taste.”¹¹⁸

Since sin was held to be the root of the problem, only evangelical Christianity
could thoroughly cleanse “the doors of perception.” In an 1812 review of Archibald Alison’s *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* in the *Christian Observer*, for example, the reviewer noted Alison’s rather conventional position that “the cultivation of taste is calculated to promote religious sentiment” – a position that was reinforced by Alison’s heavily associationist psychology of beauty. That the appreciation of a sunset, for instance, might prompt one to praise the God who made it was a tradition as old as the Psalms – one which nearly all but the strictest atheist would have readily embraced in the nineteenth century. The writer in the *Christian Observer*, however, suggested that the religio-aesthetic chronology ought to be reversed: “[W]e endeavour to establish a far less dubious, and therefore more important, doctrine which is, the necessity of religion for the highest enjoyments of taste.” It is Christianity which empowers and shapes aesthetic perception, and in fact, the sort of aesthetic experience leading to devotion described by Alison is only possible to those whose perception has already been refined by grace and by Scripture. Wordsworth, noted a writer in the *Christian Spectator* in 1827, was unsurpassed in his descriptions of “the facts of natural Theology,” but he fell short of the “illimitable tract of eternity” because he overlooked the fact that Christian grace must, to some degree, precede perception: “It has long been a maxim with very respectable naturalists and poets that the contemplation of nature leads the mind intuitively to God. But why not reverse the process? Why not let the full light from eternity first pour upon the mind – before it fastens upon the wonders of the material creation?” Twenty-five years later, the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* implied in a similar vein that if one admits God’s grace into the picture, then and only then can the claims of
Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” have validity: “It is only when natural objects are bathed in the light of the Sun of Righteousness that the beholder can attain ‘A sense sublime/ Of something far more deeply interfused ….’ Nature has been looked on with other eyes by the sons of God, than by the common children of this world.”

“[R]eligion furnishes the conditions favorable to the full development of man’s aesthetic nature,” wrote an author in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* in 1865, and because of this, “He views the clover-field as the work of a divine Artist, and that Artist [as] his dearest friend.”

Hence, religion enables a certain kind of aesthetic perception which in turn enlivens religious experience.

While such critics argued that Christianity affects the mode of aesthetic perception, others suggested that Christianity alters the objects of perception, namely, by making the supersensible available to human apprehension. By extension, in expanding the possibilities of human perception, Christianity may also be said to expand the reach of art as well. In 1833, a writer in the *Quarterly Christian Spectator* strongly objected to the view sometimes expressed that religion stifles the poetic imagination. To the contrary, the effect of Christianity “is not to cramp or paralyze man’s intellectual powers, but to quicken and invigorate them. We may go still farther. It has given more than it has taken away: it has not circumscribed, but enlarged the field of poetic invention.” The influence of Christianity on poetry, the writer continued, “carries the poet beyond where the eye of sense can penetrate….”

Compared to the panoramic view which Christianity affords art and poetry, non-Christian art, by contrast, seems dull and circumscribed.
Such statements concerning the empowering effects of Christian faith on aesthetic perception continued in some quarters throughout the nineteenth century. As noted in the last chapter, however, the Edwardsean idea of a regenerated aesthetic vision gradually gave way to the “spiritualized” faculty of the romantic imagination, which possessed the power of “deep” insight irrespective of traditional grace. Whereas a number of evangelical critics before the 1870s had attempted to qualify Wordsworth’s claim to “see into the life of things” by bringing explicitly Christian theological considerations to bear, a less modified version of Wordsworthian romanticism eventually prevailed among many evangelicals during the last third of the nineteenth century.

For a time, however, the liberation of aesthetic perception at the hands of Christian faith also coincided with a similar liberation at the level of artistic production (poiesis). It was sometimes posited, for example, that those artists who had not themselves experienced a “saving faith” were doomed, when dealing with sacred subjects in particular, to produce art objects that lacked spiritual and aesthetic authenticity. Anyone can compose “secular” music, contended Thomas Hastings in 1844, “But in relation to religious subjects the case is far otherwise. Vital religion, though a precious reality to every one who embraces it, is not well understood by those who have never learned its nature by personal experience.” For Hastings, following Edwards, mere notional apprehension is not enough; indeed, mere notional apprehension of religious themes appears to lead to actual aesthetic blunders: “we hazzard nothing in saying, that the men whose lives are devoted to the secular drama are not the individuals who, in the oratorio, the sacred concert, the choir, or the organ loft, will enter, even with dramatic
propriety, into the sweetness and tender solemnity of religious themes.” If secular artists and performers could represent sacred subjects apart from genuine personal faith, “if expressive tones, with corresponding sentimentalities, are so easily obtained from the irreligious, .... why, let us at once invite the prima donnas into the choir, and all will soon be right.”125

As Hastings’s argument suggests, evangelical discussions of the effects of Christianity on poiesis were intimately linked, once again, to the romantic conception of art as an expression of emotion. Art is an outpouring of a person’s inner self. Only Christianity, however, can penetrate, expose, and heal the deepest recesses of the human soul; only Christianity is fully capable of rightly ordering our affections. In fact, it is the very subjectivity of art which makes it most alive to Christianity’s shaping power. A critic in the Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, writing in 1852, demonstrated how orthodox Christianity could, in a sense, improve upon Wordsworth’s conception of the proper object of the poet:

The soul of man, as Wordsworth has told us, is the “haunt and main region” of the poet’s study and the poet’s song. But the soul of man has depths which had never been sounded, sensibilities which had never been awakened, mysteries which had never been brought to light, and paths which the eye of man hand not pondered, until those depths were explored, those sensibilities stirred, those mysteries revealed, and those paths pointed out, by a supernatural revelation from God.126

A writer in the Christian Advocate and Journal even hinted that it was Christianity which had engendered the sort of romantic subjective lyricism with which nineteenth-century poetry had become almost entirely identified. “As to Christianity, its influence … in
modern poetry has been immense….” It had, in effect, “giv[en] value to the individual, and ma[de] his personal conviction a precious thing before God.”\textsuperscript{127} The implication here was that a poem like \textit{The Prelude}, with its assumption that the unique perspective of the individual poet may somehow translate into universal appeal, would have been utterly impossible apart from Christianity. The lyric voice, it would seem, owed its existence to Christianity.

Evangelical critics also saw Christianity operating at the socio-cultural level. As we will see in more detail in the next chapter, over the course of the nineteenth century art increasingly became part of a broad Protestant ideology which saw Christianity, morality, and “civilization” collaborating in intricate and mutually sustaining ways. One strand in this ideological web held that it is Christianity which helps to construct the kind of culture or civilization in which genuine art can prosper. The president of Yale, Noah Porter, writing on the topic of “Modern Literature and Christianity” in the \textit{Christian Advocate} in 1873, noted the way in which a nation’s or an epoch’s literature is inextricably bound to its religion:

\begin{quote}
It follows that if a people or an age is capable of literature, this literature must hold intimate relations to the religious faith and life of the people or the age ….. A religion which is founded in the nature of man and is adapted to his wants, which commends itself to his conscience and transforms and purifies the springs of his action, cannot but act for good on both the matter and form of literature.\textsuperscript{128}
\end{quote}

Or, as a writer in the \textit{Methodist Review} put it in 1894: “As soon as Christianity became a creative, regenerative, and formative power in society new literatures, new laws, new
Evangelical critics saw Christianity not only in terms of personal salvation but also as a progressive force of cultural renewal. Usually, it was evangelical Protestant Christianity in particular which these critics envisioned as supplying the means of cultural and aesthetic progress. As James Smetham posited, “One would think that the more pure the form of religion, the more complete would be the development of the entire range of human faculties. In science, in poetry, in general learning, Protestantism has justified this supposition.” Smetham regretted the fact that visual art had lagged behind these other advancements, but his faith in the strength of Protestant Christianity gave him hope that visual art, too, would eventually come into its own. Occasionally, however, critics in evangelical periodicals conceived of Christianity’s cultural influence in broader terms, as when, in 1895, William G. Beardmore allowed Catholic history a place in Christian art’s march of progress: “For more than six hundred years Christendom has been the foster-parent of the noblest and most enduring forms of art.”

In fact, this Victorian understanding of Christianity as an engine of progress was a natural extension of the longstanding Puritan and postmillennial emphasis on the transformation of culture. Postmillennialism fit well with Victorian myths of progress since it posited that the last age – the millennium – would be gradually ushered in not only by the proclamation of the gospel but also by the gradual reformation of society in accordance with God’s laws. By these means, the forces of darkness would ultimately be defeated and the pax Christiana would dawn, after which time Christ would return. As George Marsden has pointed out with regard to American evangelicals, especially prior
to the Civil War: “American evangelical postmillennialists saw signs of the approach of
the millennial age not only in the success of revivals and missions, but also in general
cultural progress.” Indeed, “evangelicals generally regarded almost any sort of progress
as evidence of the advance of the kingdom.” Art, as a valuable aspect of human
culture, was therefore swept up in this tide of Christian and cultural optimism. The
culture which Christianity fostered would in turn give rise to an art that would effectively
surpass all that had gone before. An author in the Presbyterian Quarterly Review, for
instance, reflected on the superiority of the art produced under the auspices of Christian
civilization to that produced by the Greeks. Recalling the moment he stood before
Thorwaldsen’s Christ in Copenhagen, the author wrote: “We felt, as we stood in its
presence, that Christianity had demonstrated her artistic supremacy, and that the Greek,
so great in the power of transcribing sensible objects, in setting forth form and sensuous
beauty, nay, in the ideal of the Divine, – must, after all, bow to the loftier spirituality
which our religion gives to art.” The Greek artist, the author continued, had “worshipped
form”; had he, however, known “the true God … his [art would have] been glorified by a
larger, purer conception.” In one way, this seems yet another incarnation of the
familiar eighteenth-century debate over the relative artistic status of the Ancients and
Moderns. The author in the Presbyterian Quarterly Review had clearly decided in favor
of the Moderns. Here, though, religion had become the deciding factor. Christianity, in
short, had provided modern western culture with a new form of the ideal which had,
almost inevitably, resulted in an art of which the Greeks, despite all of their pagan
splendor – or perhaps because of it – could not have dreamed.
The Religio-Aesthetic Ideal and Some Early Signs of Fatigue in the 1870s

Although many evangelical critics continued to see art as both limited and empowered by Protestant Christianity until the end of the nineteenth century – indeed, T. Harwood Pattison’s explicit statement of subordination in the *Baptist Quarterly Review* was issued in 1886 – beginning in the 1870s there were signs that this religio-aesthetic ideal was beginning to break down, in practice if not yet in theory. On the one hand, an expanding body of theological liberals had begun to identify Christianity almost entirely with moral and cultural progress. A majority of evangelicals before the 1870s had been willing to see cultural advancement as a function of Christian influence, but they insisted that Christianity and culture were distinct. Now, however, this distinction was evaporating: the postmillennial emphasis on cultural progress remained, but it was increasingly emptied of its transcendent, eschatological content. On the other hand, some conservative evangelicals were beginning to express doubts about whether Christianity was truly an agent of aesthetic empowerment, as so many nineteenth-century critics wanted to believe. At least some evangelical critics were no longer naively optimistic about the possibility of a religious-aesthetic-cultural synthesis.

Signs of this conservative fatigue can be seen in an article on “Christianity and the Fine Arts,” authored by the Rev. K. Colman and published in 1871 in the *Christian Advocate*. In this essay, Colman agrees that, in theory at least, Christianity ought to create a culture conducive to good art. In fact, he articulates this position with admirable clarity: “Christianity is the great teacher, and again the great civilizer. There cannot fail to be a close relation between general civilization and all its parts. Christianity is
civilization’s foundation, fine art its cornice and turrets, and there can be no uncertain connection between the two.” Still, Colman asks, “Is not the influence of Christianity upon fine art quite generally overestimated?” He then enumerates the many reasons for doubting the easy affinity of Christianity and art. To begin with, “The religion of the Bible is preeminently utilitarian,” by which Colman means that Christians ought to be about the practical business of saving souls and doing good. True, “Utility may recognize the importance of supplying a God-given craving after the beautiful, but it has thus far found more pressing human needs.” Furthermore, the doctrines of Christianity, with their “transcendent grandeur,” themselves supply in some measure our “longing for beauty.” Consequently, there is little need to turn to formal art objects to satisfy our innate aesthetic desires. Colman then proceeds to the problem of inverse proportion, that is, to the view that both historically and presently those nations most revered for their artistic achievements are those in which Christianity is most superficial. France and Italy, Colman believes, excel in art, but “Is the Christianity of these nations deeper than the skin of a political name?” After cataloguing the many difficulties which plague the thesis that Christian cultures consistently enable the fine arts to thrive, Colman next inquires whether history provides any evidence which supports this idea. He admits that Christianity has had some influence on music, oratory, poetry, and perhaps painting, but he denies that in the case of poetry and painting modern Christian art has truly surpassed the Ancients, and in the case of sculpture he declares that “Christian sculpture has never approached the ancient.”

In the end, Colman arrives at a conclusion remarkable for its ambivalence: “While
by developing civilization Christianity indirectly gives powerful aid to fine art, it has not greatly inspired it, has not stimulated it to the highest development known to history.”

The ambiguity of this statement reveals a first significant crack in the foundation of the nineteenth-century evangelical religio-aesthetic synthesis. Missing from Colman’s equation is any faith in *inevitability*. He remains quite sure that good art will not flourish *without* Christianity – “The fine arts and barbarism have only the relation of antagonism, while the Christian sun daguerreotypes fine art on the impressible human soul” – but he can offer no firm guarantee that good art will assuredly flourish *with* Christianity.†

Uncertainty has entered the picture. Oddly, though, it appears that Colman has not yet relinquished his optimism completely. Just as strangely ambiguous in this regard is Colman’s final paragraph, which it is worth quoting at length:

> The religion of the cross has not so purified the masses that they can *revel* in beauty without sinking in voluptuousness. Rich ornament in chancel or garb, in music or sermon, still attracts the worshiper from the Creator to the creature, from things heavenly to things earthly. The work is progressing; men are becoming holier; soon the energies now nobly spent in converting a world will make stepping-stones of perfected art, on which a pure worshipping spirit will ascend to the throne of God. Then such grand structures as have never yet gladdened the earth, all adorned with brush and chisel, will invite men heavenward; then music, making the past tame, worthless; then oratory which shall cause Whitefield and Simpson, Beecher and Spurgeon, Cicero and Demosthenes, to be forgotten, shall entrance the multitudes, and lift them to the very gates of the New Jerusalem.‡

Colman has, in effect, relocated his optimism, as well as the religious-aesthetic-cultural synthesis, to the more distant future – perhaps, even, to eschatological time. We are not, it turns out, nearly so far along the axis of progress as we may have thought. Indeed,
though Colman makes no attempt to articulate explicitly his own eschatology, and though the above passage may still be read in a postmillennial sense, much of his logic throughout the article bears a resemblance to the sort of reasoning about culture typically associated with premillennialism and, ultimately, with fundamentalism. It was during the 1870s and 1880s, in fact, when conservative evangelicals in both the United States and England began turning in significant numbers to premillennialism, and, especially in the United States, to dispensational premillennialism in particular – a development that would prove to be a critical factor in the rise of fundamentalism.¹³⁸ For Colman, many of the old Puritan fears about the “voluptuousness” of art have resurfaced. Moreover, a new sense of urgency governs Colman’s reflections, for though in one sense he has extended his religio-aesthetic timetable, he has, in another important sense, shortened it. The end is fast approaching, and “There are more urgent demands for Christian activity than the culture of art.”¹³⁹ In a world awash with the disorienting effects of urbanization and industrialization, a cheery faith in postmillennial progress was growing less and less compelling, and for some conservative evangelicals, a sustained attention investment in “the culture of art” was growing less and less urgent.¹⁴⁰

Colman’s article, however, with all its strange tensions and uncertainties, illustrates the early stages of a transition in evangelical thinking. Colman himself has not yet jettisoned completely the notion that Christianity is a critical source of cultural and even aesthetic renewal. He has merely begun the process of disjoining what many evangelicals in the nineteenth century had worked so hard to suture. Christianity has ceased to be a mighty agent of aesthetic empowerment and has been reduced instead to
little more than a minimal condition. Colman’s position was still something of an anomaly in 1871, but one can nevertheless glimpse in this position the makings of a deep religio-aesthetic divide. By the early decades of the twentieth century, liberal Protestants were no longer interested in the “limitations” which orthodox Christianity might impose on art. Art had become one more manifestation of the evolution of divine consciousness in human culture and history. For their part, fundamentalists were no longer interested in Christianity as a source of cultural and aesthetic renewal; indeed, they showed little interest in considering art’s relationship to Christianity in theoretical terms at all. The Victorian evangelical synthesis of orthodox Christianity and romantic aesthetics had at last been torn asunder.
NOTES


4 Charles Spurgeon, “The Power of Nonconformity,” The Sword and the Trowel: A Record of Combat with Sin and of Labour for the Lord (July 1876) 306. See also Howes 33-34.


7 “Esthetic Culture,” Christian Advocate and Journal 40 (7 Dec. 1865) 386.


Ironically, an even more radical version of this dilemma – the existence of an apparent correlation between aesthetics and the forces of secularization – emerged over the course of the nineteenth century, and evangelicals would once more feel the pressure to choose to some extent between art and faith. For more on this, see my “Concluding Unscientific Postscript.”


15 For more on the Regulative Principle, see 56-58.


18 C.W. Bennett, “Catholicism and Protestantism as Patrons of Christian Art,” Methodist Quarterly Review 29 (1877) 94.


20 Harris 301.


23 “The Poetry of Puritanism,” Baptist Magazine 49 (Feb. 1857) 101. This excerpt was reprinted from the North British Review, another evangelical periodical of the era.

24 See, for example, Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, eds., The Sublime: A Reader in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

25 J. Milner Macmaster, “Il Penseroso and L’ Allegro,” Baptist Magazine 71 (Apr. 1879) 171. Another clear statement of this argument had been made earlier in the pages of the Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review: “Protestant Christendom … finds no art to its hand. It has hitherto been above art. It has been doing battle for the truth…. But now, as the strong man in the period of his vigour, finds it well to go back
to the poetry of his youth, even so has the Protestant church arrived at that point of progress, where she may stop to recover the beauty which she was constrained to pass by, in the warfare of her early progress” (“Church Architecture,” Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review 27 [Oct. 1855] 625-26).


27 “Glimpses of Old English Life: Puritan and Actor,” Baptist Magazine 72 (Aug. 1880) 342. Samuel Harris, the Dwight Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale, deployed this argument almost as an afterthought in his The Kingdom of Christ on Earth – a text based on lectures that he had originally delivered in 1870 to students at Andover Seminary and which had also appeared in Bibliotheca Sacra. A Christian society, Harris argued, “does not exclude aesthetic culture. Its defectiveness in the Hebrew and the Puritan was the result of the incompleteness, rather than the completeness, of the moral life. It was because morality came in the awfulness of law, rather than in the freedom of Christian faith and love, and even as love, in the Puritan, concentrating attention on the conflict with wrongs and oppressions immediately urgent, so as to leave no time for the completeness of human culture” (The Kingdom of Christ on Earth: Twelve Lectures Delivered before the Theological Seminary, Andover [Andover, MA: Warren F. Draper, 1874] 176; italics mine).


29 See, among others, Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972) esp. parts 4 and 5; Noll, America’s God esp. chaps. 13-15; and David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (1989; Grand
Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992) esp. chaps. 4 and 5.


33 Bennett, “Catholicism and Protestantism,” *Methodist Quarterly Review* 94.

34 Smith, *Gothic Arches, Latin Crosses*.


37 If this argument seems strangely familiar, this is no doubt due to its resilience even among some contemporary critics. For example, Harold Bloom sees romanticism as being a fundamentally “Protestant” movement: “There is no more important point to be made about English Romantic poetry than this one, or indeed about English poetry in general, particularly since it has been deliberately obscured by most modern criticism. Though it is a displaced Protestantism, or a Protestantism astonishingly transformed by different kinds of humanism or naturalism, the poetry of the English Romantics is a kind of religious poetry, and the religion is in the Protestant line, though Calvin or Luther would have been horrified to contemplate it” (“Prometheus Rising: The Backgrounds of Romantic Poetry,” *The Visionary Company*, rev. ed. [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971] xvii). It is worth observing, too, that there is a certain irony to the fact that some nineteenth-century evangelicals chose to see the Reformation as the origin of “individual genius.” One of the interesting paradoxes of the Reformation was its championing of political freedom and individual conscience, and its simultaneous theological insistence on the bondage of the human will. To some extent, nineteenth-century evangelical critics understood the liberating effects of the Reformation on art in the former sense, that is, the Reformation created a political context in which art could exist apart from the dictates of the Church, thereby allowing creativity to develop. At the same time, though, romantic doctrines of creativity frequently presupposed autonomy of the human will. In celebrating “individual genius,” nineteenth-century evangelicals were effectively turning away from one aspect of their
Reformation heritage.


42 Bennett, “Catholicism and Protestantism” 86.


44 Sidney Dyer, “Literary Criticism,” Baptist Quarterly 1 (July 1867) 321. According to the speculations of this anthropology, primitive human beings in an uncivilized state, bereft of fully developed ratiocinative faculties, were thought to be largely subject to their raw desires and emotions. Because poetry is the language of emotion, it was therefore reasoned that the original language uttered by humankind must surely have taken the form of poetry rather than prose. For more on this, see Abrams 78-88. For other statements in evangelical periodicals that articulate this primitivist anthropology and its implications for art and poetry, see T.A., “What Is Poetry?,” Mercersburg Review 390; F.K. Levan, “National Literature,” Mercersburg Review 14 (Oct. 1867) 567; H. Buxton Forman, “Music and Poetry: Their Origin and Functions,” London

45 See Morgan for an account of this development from a socio-historical perspective.


47 Pattison, “The Relation of Art to Religion,” Baptist Quarterly Review 326. See also, for example, “Poetry and Its Uses,” Christian Observer 66 (1866) 119 and “Esthetics in Religion,” Christian Advocate 42 (13 June 1867) 188.


49 I am by no means suggesting that this view of art and religion was somehow unique to evangelicals in the nineteenth century. It was, in fact, true of many other Victorian thinkers as well, including, most notably, the theological arch-rivals of the evangelicals, the Tractarians. A typical nineteenth-century manner of expressing this idea in one of its forms was to say that art is the “handmaid of piety.” On the Tractarians, see G.B. Tennyson, Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) esp. chap. 1.

50 It should be noted, however, that this was not the only development which led evangelical critics to formulate a religio-aesthetic ultimatum. Early in the century, for example, one critic in the Eclectic Review made the rather more mundane argument that if poetry cannot help engaging in immorality and paganism, then poetry must go: “Even let [Poetry] die, if she cannot live without the company of pagan gods and goddesses. Let her pine and expire, if she cannot sustain Daniel’s experiment of abstinence from the wine of idolaters. It must be quite certain, that if poetry cannot do without irreligion, mankind can do without poetry” (J. Foster, “Dyer’s Poetics,” Eclectic Review 11 [Apr. 1814] 373).

51 B., “Influence of the Fine Arts,” Christian Advocate 116. The author quotes Martyn on p. 114. He then concludes: “There is nothing in religion of so forbidding a nature as to exclude us from the pleasures of taste, provided those pleasures be kept in subordination to her influence” (114). For Martyn’s quotation, see chapter 2.


55 Neil Harris has also noted the close connection between religion and art in nineteenth-century America, but his description of the connection at times veers closer to one of perfect equality than of subordination: “Art and religion were not merely compatible, but interdependent. While religion needed art to grasp the worshiper’s senses, to encourage his approach to the throne of God with the appropriate awful respect, artists required religion to reach their full potentialities; great art was impossible without a supporting consensus of belief” (149). Many conservative evangelicals, at least until the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century, would have frowned upon the notion that “religion needed art to grasp the worshiper’s senses,” though they would have affirmed the latter part of Harris’s formulation. Harris comes closer to the kind of formulation I have in mind on pp. 304-305, where he writes: “When pressed, of course, some clergymen were careful to place limits around their enthusiasm [for art]…. Poetry, music and art, as beautiful as they could be … required the guidance of religion….“ It is worth noting that Harris’s discussion is concerned primarily with liberal clergymen.

56 “Aesthetics,” *Presbyterian Quarterly Review* 10 (July 1861) 33. Significantly, a portion of this article in which this quotation appears was reprinted the following year as “Art and Religion,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* 37 (8 May 1862) 147. This cross-over from Presbyterian to Methodist periodicals demonstrates the inter-denominational solidarity on this issue.


58 I am obviously simplifying a very complex body of thought here. The point, however, is that these idealist systems increasingly saw Art in terms of a revelation of “spirit,” though the precise relationship of this “spirit” to traditional Christianity was, and is, a matter of dispute.


63 See Turner 196-99.

64 Arnold, “Study” 65.


66 See Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950). Otto’s text can be read as an index of, and a response to, the nineteenth-century tendency to collapse religion and aesthetics. His whole project, which is both working within and reacting to the Kantian tradition, is an attempt to (re)separate the religious from the aesthetic, the numinous from the sublime, by arguing for the existence of an a priori religious faculty in the mind. Religion and art, according to Otto, are therefore categorically distinct. Otto does not, however, relinquish the idea that religion is essentially a matter of
feeling. In fact, he modifies Schleiermacher’s definition, describing the essence of religion as “creature-feeling.” For Otto, though, this feeling is accompanied by a sense that the divine exists objectively; God, in short, is not simply a matter of human projection.


68 “Religion of the Imagination,” Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald 4 (16 Oct. 1829) 28. The article ends with the following lines: “It [the religion of the imagination] is a religion with the ‘last touchings and finishings of art, where infidels may be received without conversion, and where they may be converted with scarce a perceptible change in doctrine, heart, or life – where the thoughtless, the gay, the beautiful, and the dissipated, may float together down the stream to the sounds of music, and sleep the sleep of death, and wake not til their redemption has ceased for ever.”

69 An Episcopalian, Letter to the Editor of the Christian Index, Christian Index 6 (12 May 1832) 300.


75 J.S. White, “Religion and Art,” *Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review and Christian Ambassador* n.s. 9 (Jan. 1887) 128, 129.


77 Hodge, “Review of God in Christ,” *Essays and Reviews* 442.


79 See Morgan 270-75 for a discussion of Bushnell’s theory and its contribution to American Protestant ideas regarding the character-shaping power of the fine arts. However, see also the next chapter, in which I suggest that this idea also entered Protestant thought in both Britain and America through Enlightenment aestheticians like Lord Kames.

80 This view was, in fact, a longstanding one among evangelicals. Doreen Rosman notes a similar emphasis among British evangelicals between 1790 and 1833. See her *Evangelicals and Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1984) 195.


83 The same approach applied to Arnoldian conceptions of “culture,” which as the *Christian Advocate and Journal* put it in early 1862, was “a watchword of the age.” The problem was that “Culture can only develop native powers. It can never give new ones…. Those then who worship culture as the means of the highest human good must regard man as being in possession of powers, latent or partially developed, capable of ascending unaided the highest possible ranges of life, and placing him beyond the possibility of
being indebted to any other existence for benefits received, only as the astronomer is indebted to the stars for knowledge and the soldier to hardship for hardihood.” Indeed, this writer diagnosed the implications of Arnoldian culture exactly: “Ignoring conversion and depending on culture necessitates the assertion of the natural rectitude of the human heart…. It involves human supremacy – human perfectibility by human agencies. It denies God as an existence above and separate from man.” Nineteenth-century evangelicals were actually quite sympathetic to Arnoldian “culture” in general – “We would not decry culture – we only wish to find its place” – but many, like this author, repudiated its extremes (“Culture,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* 37 [30 Jan. 1862] 36).

84 B. Hawley, “Christianity and Art,” *Christian Advocate* 55 (1 July 1880) 419.


86 Henry J. Van Dyke, Jr., “Art and Ethics: In Some of Their Relations,” *Princeton Review* (Jan.-Jun. 1883) 104. Van Dyke, a Presbyterian minister, eventually became a Professor of English at Princeton University, a move which Ahlstrom suggests may have rescued him from a heresy trial. For more on Van Dyke’s liberal affinities, see Ahlstrom, *Religious History* 815.


88 Ibid. 249, 250, 251.

89 It is worth noting, too, that in addition to the principled anti-Catholicism deriving from the reviewer’s belief in preaching as the biblically appointed means of reaching the unconverted, there is also a more visceral anti-Catholicism at play here. This is undoubtedly a reaction to Drummond’s rather aggressive attack on the Reformation and its view of art. While Drummond is not uncritical of Catholicism, he tends to valorize Catholicism’s aesthetic sensibilities at the expense of Protestantism’s. In this sense, he perhaps represents an extreme version of the sort of evangelical anti-Puritanism described above. Whereas most evangelicals struggled to maintain an aesthetic balance between Puritanism and Catholicism, Drummond’s anti-Protestant aesthetic was so virulent that it virtually became a pro-Catholic aesthetic. See Drummond, *Letter to Thomas Phillips*.

fundamentalists would carry on this theme. See, for example, the remarks by Peter Thompson on 438.


92 “Art and Religion,” *The Record*, n.s. 10 (22 May 1891) 499.

93 See, for example, Neal 107-08, and Jan Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical Literary Culture and Contemporary Society* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997). This notion of an evangelistic aesthetic seems to be primarily associated with novelists. Might it perhaps be the case that novelists anxious to defend their chosen medium settled on evangelization as a means of deflecting negative criticism and securing an important religious rationale for the genre? The novel form also allows for a detailed depiction of the often protracted process of conversion, as well as a thoroughgoing exploration of ideas, thus making it potentially more suitable as an evangelistic tool than other forms of art.


95 The doctrine of common grace was developed to explain how it is that the unregenerate are still capable of manifesting some awareness of goodness, truth, and beauty, and how it is that there remains a certain modicum of order in a fallen world. Theologian Louis Berkhof hints at some connection between common grace and artistic beauty when, discussing the reasons for the doctrine, he writes: “What explanation can be given of the special gifts and talents with which the natural man is endowed, and of the development of science and art by those who are entirely devoid of the new life that is in Christ Jesus?” (*Systematic Theology*, new ed., new pref. Richard A. Muller [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996] 432).

Nevertheless, nineteenth-century evangelicals rarely imported the vocabulary of systematic theology into their discussions of aesthetics, so although it is fairly clear when critics are dissociating aesthetic experience or the aesthetic ideal from saving grace, it is difficult to translate the religious values of such aesthetic experiences into systematic theological terms. There are at least two ways one might read the religious status of aesthetic experience and the ideal in nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics: (1) One way, for instance, would be to see the vision of the ideal as a manifestation of common grace. Evangelicals acknowledged that the beauty of art was, to some extent, available to all regardless of one’s regenerate or unregenerate status. A complicating factor here, however, is the different values which Arminians and
Calvinists assigned to so-called common grace. The issue of what role, if any, common grace played in the
*ordo salutis* was hotly debated by both camps, with Calvinists sometimes chiding Arminians for suggesting
that it was common grace which enabled all people, rather than the elect only, to place their faith in Christ.

One might argue, then, that Arminianism played some role in collapsing the distance between art and
religion, and in opening the door for an immanent understanding of God’s grace in art; or (2) Charles
Hodge hinted at a second possible way of reading the aesthetic ideal. For Hodge, it was important to stress
the fact that grace in any form is distinct from what he calls “the influence of the truth,” one form of which
is the aesthetic. That is, the human mind was created to respond to the truth in a specific way; this
response, however, differs from the kind of supernatural influence prompted by divine intervention. “By
grace, therefore … is meant the influence of the Spirit of God on the minds of men. This is an influence of
the Holy Spirit distinct from, and accessory to the influence of the truth. There is a natural relation between
2 [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003] 655). Building on Hodge, then, one could say that art
need not have any relationship to grace; rather, it simply presents the percipient with a certain kind of truth
(aesthetic) to which the mind naturally responds. Presumably, then, this truth would be part and parcel of
God’s natural and providential (as opposed to gracious) operations.


97 Review of *Robert Burns; as a Poet, and as Man*, by Samuel Tyler, *Biblical Repertory and Princeton
Review* 21 (Apr. 1849) 258. See, too, the remarks in the *Christian Ambassador* regarding music: “And as
music is coeval, so, we may venture to affirm, it is also coextensive with the universe. The heaven of
heavens overflows with melody…. Music has its source in God. The Divine mind is the primal fountain
whence all the melody of the universe flows” (“Music: Its Uses, Secular and Sacred,” *Christian


99 Cf. Morgan’s account of this trajectory in relation to the visual arts among American Protestants in
*Protestants & Pictures*. According to Morgan, Protestants (particularly liberals, though also some
conservatives) had, by the end of the century, moved to the “devotional” use of images.

100 F.M. Bristol, “Reciprocity of Art and Religion,” Methodist Review 54 (1894) 707-708.


103 Morgan 298. See 292-304 for an extended discussion of the history and sociology surrounding the visual imagery that appeared in American “lives of Christ” between 1860 and 1900.


107 An Episcopalian, Letter to the Editor of the Christian Index 300. Emmett took an even more extreme position: “For merely human sentiment there are abundant means of facial utterance, but the religious sentiment is wholly expressionless” (“Religious Art,” London Quarterly Review 308). Emmett’s entire article, however, was comparatively extreme.

108 “Sacred Poetry,” Eclectic Review 1 (May 1837) 445, 446. See also the condemnation of “religious plays,” in the Baptist Magazine: “It cannot but blunt the mind to the deeper impressions that are desired, when sacred subjects are at any time thus brought down from the lofty position they ought to hold. The historical imagination of each may deal with them; but, when presented in outward show, they cannot but be vulgarised and held up to contempt. Especially this is true of the greatest subject of all. We can never think of the act of human redemption being represented in the form of a ‘play,’ without a feeling of shrinking and a sense of profanity” (“Religious Plays,” Baptist Magazine 73 [May 1881] 208).


110 Hawley, “Christianity and Art,” Christian Advocate 419.


113 Morgan 292ff; Howes 32ff.

115 Hawley, “Christianity and Art,” Christian Advocate 419.


119 William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Blake’s Poetry and Designs, ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979) 93 (Plate 14). It is probably unnecessary to add here that evangelicals did not share in Blake’s understanding of how the doors of perception ought to be cleansed.

120 “Alison on Taste,” Christian Observer 11 (1812) 102.


122 “Moral Æsthetics; or the Goodness of God in the Ornaments of the Universe,” Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review 24 (Jan. 1852) 43.

123 “Esthetic Culture,” Christian Advocate and Journal 386.


125 Thomas Hastings, “Sacred Music: Source of the Prevailing Abuses in Cultivation, and the only Practical Remedy,” American Biblical Repository and Classical Review 11 (Apr. 1844) 433, 435, 436. See also James Smetham’s comments regarding the sacred painter: “But from the sacred painter, of all others, we have a right to ask that infusion of the sacred spirit which alone can make his art the handmaid of religion. No man will ever paint well what he does not deeply feel: and in nothing does the inward temper of a man declare itself more plainly than in what he paints” (“Modern Sacred Art,” London Quarterly Review 60).

126 “National Literature, the Exponent of National Character,” Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review 24 (Apr. 1852) 224-25. C.W. Bennett made a similar argument with regard to music: “Music is eminently the
art of the emotions. As such it expresses the innermost feelings of the soul. But this inner world could not be moved the cold and cheerless system of heathenism, it could first be reached and stirred by the warmer and more genial influence of Christianity” (“Catholicism and Protestantism as Patrons of Christian Art,” Methodist Quarterly Review 86).


132 George Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 49, 50. See also Bebbington, who writes of British evangelicals: “The particular version of the belief [in a millennium] held in the Enlightenment era was uniformly postmillennial: the second coming of Christ, that is to say, would not take place until after the millennium. There would therefore be no sharp break from preceding history. Rather, the millennium would be the result of gradual improvement – a belief that shaded into the idea of progress” (Evangelicalism in Modern Britain 62).


134 On these changes in general, see Robert T. Handy, A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Marsden, Fundamentalism 50-51.


136 Noah Porter acknowledged a similar dynamic: “It does not necessarily follow that a very religious people or a religious era will necessarily produce a splendid literature” (“Modern Literature and Christianity,” Christian Advocate 346).


138 See Marsden, Fundamentalism 48-55; Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain 192.
Premillennialism on its own was not a new doctrine in the history of Christianity. Some version of it had been expressed by the Church Father Irenaeus in the second century. In the nineteenth century, it had also found some British advocates as early as the 1810s and 1820s, most prominently Edward Irving and Henry Drummond. However, during the eighteenth and first two-thirds of the nineteenth centuries, many Protestants had embraced a postmillennial view, as described above. What was new, moreover, was the dispensational premillennialism that arose near the end of the nineteenth century. Dispensational premillennialism – popularized by the British minister and cofounder of the Plymouth Brethren, John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), who also traveled extensively in the United States – taught that history is divided into distinct ages during which God was believed to approach human beings according to a unique covenantal plan. The present age, “the church age,” directly precedes the final dispensation in which Christ will return to establish a literal 1000-year reign on earth, and thus it is the responsibility of all believers to spread the message of salvation. Bebbington also makes a further distinction regarding premillennialism. “Historicist” premillennialism held that various biblical prophecies applied directly to the events of history, and thus historical events could be read as fulfillments of these prophecies; “futurist” premillennialism, however, of which Darby was a proponent, held that biblical prophecies referred to a series of events that would happen entirely in the future. Bebbington also suggests that late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century British evangelicals were more divided than their American counterparts when it came to adopting a standard version of premillennialism. The majority of American fundamentalist evangelicals embraced a futurist dispensational premillennialism. See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* 81-83, 85-86; “Evangelicalism in Modern Britain and America,” *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States*, ed. George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994) 196-97; and Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994) 121-22.


On the connections between industrialization and urbanization and the rise of premillennialism and/or fundamentalism, see, among others, James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative*.
Religion and the Quandary of Modernity (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983) 34 and
George M. Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism (Grand Rapids, MI: William B.
CHAPTER 5

AESTHETIC MINISTRATIONS: ART, MORALITY, AND THE CHRISTIAN NATION

The true vocation of the poet unquestionably is to animate the human race in its progress from barbarism towards virtue and greatness. He is appointed by Providence to arouse to generous exertion, and to console in distress.

– “Recent Poetry,” Eclectic Review (1845)

In 1835, the British Parliament selected fifteen of its members to form a special committee “to consider what measures ought to be adopted with regard to the native inhabitants of countries where British settlements are made … in order to secure to them the due observance of justice, and the protection of their rights; to promote the spread of civilization among them, and to lead to the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian religion.” A brief account of some of these proceedings was later published in an American periodical, the Baptist Missionary Magazine.¹ This published account, which provided an excerpt of the larger parliamentary dialogue, focused on the testimony of one Mr. Beecher, the Secretary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. At issue in Mr. Beecher’s statements before the committee, it seems, was a recurring question which had generated a good deal of debate among many nineteenth-century Protestants in both England and the United States. Should Anglo-American colonization efforts direct their energies first and foremost to the spread of “civilization” or to the spread of Protestant
Christianity? That is, must an indigenous population first be Christianized in order that it might subsequently be civilized, or vice versa?²

In answering this question, the Rev. Secretary Beecher (along with the editor of the *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, who gives Beecher his implicit support) is unequivocal:

My attention has long been directed to this subject, and the firm conviction of my mind that Christianity must precede civilization, is the result of the inquiries and observations which I have made. So far has my experience been from proving that civilization is necessary to prepare barbarous nations for the reception of the gospel, that is has led me to the conclusion that the only effectual way to civilize them is first to evangelize them. I regard Christianity as the parent of civilization, and am persuaded that true civilization cannot be produced without it.…

The problem, according to Beecher, is that not even the mighty achievements of British culture are capable of convincing “savages” to abandon their “superstitions” and the natural freedoms of a life unburdened by the trappings of English social customs:

“Civilized life is too tame, too insipid, to charm the roving barbarian, and his superstitions are generally found opposed to any change in his accustomed course of life.” Yet if Beecher’s statement seems like a rather startling admission of British cultural impotence in the face of the raw energy of the “roving barbarian,” his belief in the moral and intellectual superiority of English civilization remains essentially undiminished. For once “the higher motives of the gospel” are brought “to bear upon [the native] mind,” what Beecher calls “true civilization” will “invariably” follow. When the motive power of Protestant Christianity is applied from within, then the indigenous
inhabitants of foreign lands will, so the logic goes, spontaneously acknowledge the benefits of an Anglo-American culture that has itself emerged organically from its Christian soil. To further substantiate this conclusion, Beecher proceeded to read a letter to the parliamentary committee which he had received from another missionary by the name of John Evans. In this letter, Evans describes how a band of drunken, polygamist, misogynist, and idolatrous Canadian Indians, when once converted to Christianity, had immediately begun to appreciate and live by the values of white Protestant culture. Among the wealth of other evidence which he cites, Evans observes how “Tables, chairs, bedsteads, bed and window-hangings, and other necessaries, together with their regular family worship established in every house, morning and evening, proclaim, in language too forcible to be misunderstood, ‘Christianity and civilization go hand in hand.’”

During the very same year in which the British Parliament convened its special committee to consider the respective roles of Christianity and civilization in Britain’s many colonization projects across the globe, a young Methodist on the other side of the Atlantic delivered an address before the Boston Wesleyan Lyceum on “The Moral Influence of the Fine Arts.” Edward Otheman, who had begun his studies at the Wesleyan Academy in Wilbraham, Massachusetts under the direction of Dr. Wilbur Fisk (an early champion of American Methodist higher education), had gone on to attend Brown University, from which he graduated in 1831 after delivering an oration on the topic of “Consecrated Talent.” Upon returning to Massachusetts, Otheman had followed in the footsteps of his mentor, taking a position as Secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Common and Liberal Education and helping to found the Wesleyan
Lyceum in the summer of 1833. In a statement of purpose published in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, he had described the Lyceum’s intention “to advance the cause of education, especially among the Methodist denomination,” for “Education and religion,” he went on to proclaim, “are destined to take the whole world as their rightful possession.” Now, a short two years later, he stood before a Lyceum audience, urging an increased attention to the fine arts in what was apparently intended as his own theoretical contribution to worldwide Christian progress. In this lecture, which subsequently appeared in the *Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review*, Otheman sought to demonstrate that the fine arts, “as a class of human pursuits, and a source of human enjoyment,” ought “to be either extensively or partially patronized and cultivated.” Significantly, he intended to justify this thesis by showing that the “*native tendency*” of the fine arts “is favorable to morality,” both individual and social. Otheman was careful to note that he did not believe that the arts were “any thing more than aids to morality” – by which he presumably meant that art could not, by itself, reveal the content of the good – but he did “contend that, other things being equal, where they are cultivated in a proper manner there will be a more elevated, refined, elegant state of society….” Indeed, as he later argued in the same lecture, “The fine arts always accompany civilization, and seem to be one of its essential, but, certainly, one of its universal elements, both in ancient and modern times.” If Secretary Beecher had glimpsed the intrinsic connections among Christianity, morality, and civilization, Secretary Otheman had ostensibly glimpsed similar connections among civilization, morality, and the fine arts.
The interesting rhetorical and conceptual overlaps between Beecher’s testimony and Otheman’s lecture throw into relief the constituent elements – Christianity, morality, and “civilization” – of an identifiably Protestant ideology that permeated nearly every aspect of Anglo-American evangelical thought until at least the 1860s and in many cases beyond. Of course, the idea that a healthy civilization depended upon a broad-scale subscription to Protestant Christianity was hardly novel. Victorian evangelicals had inherited this notion from the Puritans, and it proved an especially durable one. What was novel among Victorian evangelicals, in contrast to the Puritans and to a number of eighteenth-century evangelicals, was the enhanced role which the fine arts came to play within the framework of this Protestant ideology. As described in the last chapter, many evangelical critics had come to believe that art was both a beneficiary and a tangible manifestation of a Christianity-inspired process of cultural evolution. Where Protestant religion established a sure foundation, the fine arts could, and would, flourish.

Yet the notion that a highly developed art world is a natural expression of a thoroughly Protestant culture represents but one dimension of the complex relationship that existed in the nineteenth-century evangelical mind among Christianity, “civilization,” and the fine arts. As many theorists of the period argued, if Protestant Christianity as a superior faith produced a superior civilization which in turn produced a superior art, it was also true that this superior art, once produced, could both help to secure the foundations of Christian civilization and contribute to its ongoing development. This contribution, furthermore, was understood primarily in terms of art’s perceived connection to that other pillar of the Protestant ideological edifice – “morality.”
As David Morgan has noted, it was during the “third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century that American artists, critics, and clergy came to regard the arts as fundamental to promoting national identity and assisting religion in fostering public manners and morals.” A similar idea existed in Britain as well. Art, it was widely held, possessed a special capacity to shape the moral constitution of individuals – it exerted, in Otheman’s typical nineteenth-century parlance, a vital “moral influence” – and since morality, as the proper bodying forth of an authentic Christianity, was viewed as the grounds upon which social stability depended, art itself gradually assumed the role of guardian of, and minister to, Protestant civilization. As the Eclectic Review proclaimed in 1845, “The true vocation of the poet unquestionably is to animate the human race in its progress from barbarism towards virtue and greatness.” The fate of Anglo-American civilization, and more narrowly of individual Protestant nations, was tied to a significant extent, and as never before, to the fate of art.

While it seems clear enough that such high claims for the fine arts as a collective engine of moral and cultural progress would not have occurred to most Puritans, it is tempting nevertheless to read, as some late Victorians did, the evangelical insistence that art cater to the interests of morality and society as evidence of a protracted Puritan moralism. In a general sense, this is true. The Puritans had stressed the interconnectedness of Christianity, morality, and culture, and they had always been willing to grant the “utility” and instructional value of arts such as poetry. But in fact, what drove the nineteenth-century evangelical discussion of art’s moral and social influence was not the Puritan conception of the didactic possibilities of art but rather, as
Morgan observes, the affective power of the arts to shape individual and national “character.” While this theory was well adapted to the socio-political needs of the period, it also exposed the shifting fault lines within the dominant Protestant ideology. Traditionally, Christianity proper had been carefully distinguished from both the morality and the civilization it was said to foster. Growing evangelical claims for the relative autonomy of art’s moral influence, however, suggested a blurring of these longstanding distinctions as, over the course of the nineteenth century, religion was gradually equated with morality and the progress of Christianity, once the “parent of civilization,” was ignored in favor of the progress of civilization alone. Indeed, already by the 1840s, evangelical critics, following in the footsteps of romantic poet-prophets, had begun to describe art in the evangelistic terms of “mission” and “ministry.” The liberal Gospel of Art was coming of age.

“Occult Pathos”: Art and the Tradition of Anti-Didactic Moralism

Victorian evangelical critics returned frequently to the topic of art’s potential to shape the moral character of both individuals and societies. A statement by an author in the Christian Spectator, for example, may substitute for numerous proclamations of a similar nature issued by evangelical writers throughout the nineteenth century. “A book of poetry,” the author observed in a discussion of Wordsworth in 1827, “should furnish substantial nourishment. It ought to enlighten us in our duty, and stimulate us to walk firmly in the path of virtue. Harmonious versification and true taste may please us, but permanent benefit is the legitimate aim of poetry.” That countless evangelical critics
would espouse a moral-instrumental view of art is not, perhaps, especially surprising. Morality, after all, was one thing at which nineteenth-century evangelicals – like the Puritans before them – seemed to excel. Whether their immediate goal was to abolish slavery, stamp out “popery,” preserve the Sabbath, or rid the world of the negative effects of hard drink, English and American evangelicals worked feverishly (often through a highly efficient network of voluntary societies) to cultivate personal purity, to “improve” the conduct of their fellow citizens, and to strengthen the social fabric of their respective nations. Moreover, as we saw in chapter 3, arguing for the positive moral effects of art was also a useful strategy for persuading more puritanically-minded readers that art ought, in Otheman’s words, “to be either extensively or partially patronized and cultivated.” As Otheman knew, if it could be shown not only that art posed no threat to morality but also that art was, in fact, conducive to morality, then fine art might be assured a permanent place among middle-class evangelicals.

For all of their insistence on the salutary moral effects of art, however, nineteenth-century evangelical critics spent a remarkable amount of time attacking the “didactic.” This movement away from the didactic in art and poetry, moreover, began relatively early and continued through the end of the century. In 1814, for example, a writer in the Eclectic Review was already questioning the merits of didactic (or “didascalic,” as the author under review would have it) poetry, suggesting that the very term “involves so apparent a contradiction (there being an obvious opposition between the demonstrations of reason applied to the reason, and the dreams of the imagination addressed to the imagination)....” In his Lectures on General Literature, Poetry, &c. (1830-31), James
Montgomery strongly criticized didactic poetry for its failure to equal prose as an effective mode of instruction, as well as for its cramped style: “It is the misfortune of didactic poetry, that for the purposes of teaching, it has not advantage over prose; and, in fact, from the difficulty of adapting the elegances of verse to commonplace details, it often falls lamentably short of common sense, in unnatural attempts to convey the simplest meanings in bloated verbiage.” In short, “in a didactic poem, the finest passages are those which are not didactic.” The *Eclectic Review* echoed Montgomery’s sentiments in 1848 when it expressed skepticism as to “whether art advances itself or the world much, by … stepping forth as a professed schoolmistress. The little good she is by these means enabled to effect, can be much more forcibly and adequately accomplished, and with infinitely less trouble in other more legitimate channels.” In 1859, a writer in the *Mercersburg Review* acknowledged the good intentions of so-called didactic poetry – poetry “so often recommended by those who have the interests of religion and morality at heart” – but denied that such productions qualified as genuine poetry: “Didactic poetry as such, that is poetry whose professed object is to teach or instruct … is not pure poetry, or at least not in its higher form.” Henry J. Van Dyke, Jr. summed up what was by then a well-established argument among many evangelical critics when, in 1883, he candidly declared: “Didacticism in art is false and impotent.”

Frequently, however, censures against the “didactic” in art were issued side by side with equally vehement statements defending the power (and the responsibility) of art to raise the moral consciousness of individuals and society. Thus Montgomery, for example, although he harbored a certain disdain for the didactic, nevertheless contended
– without any apparent sense of contradiction – that moral “profit” was essential to poetry: “Nothing can endure, even in this ‘naughty world,’ but virtue. To profit mankind a poet must please them; but unless he profits them, he will not please them long.”

Professor C.T. Winchester, writing in the *Christian Advocate* in 1882, agreed with Montgomery’s view, articulated fifty years earlier, that “Poetry … is not often didactic: the highest poetry never is.” But like Montgomery, Winchester also denied that art and morality could be separated, as in fact Wilde – to whom Winchester was directly responding – believed: “Th[e] doctrine, that there may be a morality good for society but irrelevant in art, is as pernicious as it is false. It is indeed, equally fatal to art and to morals.”

For many nineteenth-century evangelical critics, therefore, the issue was not *whether* art was an instrument of moral suasion – the vast majority insisted it was – but rather *how* art functioned in this capacity. Art, it seems, was required to exert a moral influence without at the same time being “didactic.”

In repudiating the didactic in art while simultaneously upholding art’s role as a moralizing force, Victorian evangelical theorists were participating in what was, by the middle third of the nineteenth century, a well established tradition of thought concerning the manner by which art was believed to facilitate the ethical interests of individuals and society. Broadly, this tradition of anti-didactic moralism held that art helps to strengthen morality not by way of a cognitive address to the intellect but rather through its ability to stretch the feelings of the percipient. In appealing directly to the intellect, didactic art, it was believed, relied upon abstract concepts, which, in the empiricist tradition following Locke, were thought to lack the emotional intensity of concrete sensations. Genuine art,
however, *exercises* our moral nature rather than instructs it; we are led to virtue by way of the feelings rather than the understanding. “High efforts of painting or sculpture, like those of poetry,” observed the *Eclectic Review* in 1848, “are full of purpose and significance to those whose perceptions are fine enough to detect such. But, those of the two former departments of universal art more especially; they are *suggestive*, not didactic, in their influence; their teaching rather to be *felt*, than *expressed*.” Art, that is, operates morally by way of what the Methodist painter James Smetham called, in a memorable phrase, an “occult pathos.” The precise context of Smetham’s remark was a discussion of Pre-Raphaelite painting, and he did not have the specifically moral power of art directly in mind, but the term is as apt as any in capturing the nature of art’s moral effect as nineteenth-century evangelical critics conceived it.  

What Smetham termed “occult pathos” was often referred to more simply in the nineteenth century as moral “influence.” In her classic study *The Feminization of American Culture*, Ann Douglas notes the prominent place which theories of literature’s moral influence enjoyed among both American women and northeastern clergymen between 1820 and 1875. Bound together socially by the fact that they “lacked power of any crudely tangible kind, … they were careful not to lay claim to it. Instead they wished to exert ‘influence,’ which they eulogized as a religious force.” For Douglas, this growing attention to influence was a consequence of “clerical” and “feminine disestablishment” – developments that forced both groups to compete anew in the marketplace of ideas, which they did by turning to the emerging “mass medium” of popular literature. Yet while disestablishment certainly supplied the socio-political

346
conditions in which theories of art and literature’s moral influence could thrive, it is important to note that disestablishment did not create such theories, nor did they flourish solely among the liberal clergymen and progressive women that Douglas describes. For one thing, as Morgan notes, “influence” was a concept embraced by a broad range of nineteenth-century American Protestants. The notion that art exerts a moral force by its direct appeal to the passions was entertained by conservative evangelicals as well as by Unitarians and other proto-liberals. At the same time, however, the theory of art’s moral influence was not simply an American phenomenon. The idea was just as prevalent in Britain, where a somewhat different set of political variables existed, as it was in post-disestablishment America.

Most importantly, though, the theory itself was originally a product of the high cultural environment of the Enlightenment, and in fact, it entered into the Anglo-American evangelical bloodstream, at least in part, via the diffusion of Scottish thought and, later, through romantic appropriations of this thought (e.g., through the poetry of Wordsworth). It is true, as Morgan has argued, that Bushnell’s ideas of “unconscious influence” and “nurture,” which Bushnell articulated in the late 1840s, helped to facilitate the American Protestant movement towards “the appreciation and use of fine art in religious character formation.” On the whole, his theory of nurture garnered much wider support from a cross-section of American evangelicals at mid-century than his more controversial musings on the poetic nature of theological language (though conservative writers did criticize certain aspects of Bushnell’s theory). But the idea of the affective moral (as opposed to the cognitive or didactic) influence of the fine arts was
an old one dating back to a number of eighteenth-century theories with whose work many educated evangelicals were conversant. Indeed, we have already seen the rudiments of this view in the writings of both Edwards and Wesley. It is worth noting, too, that the impact of Bushnell’s theory of nurture was severely limited in Britain until the early 1860s, when a reprint of *Christian Nurture* finally appeared. Yet nevertheless, British evangelicals had already begun to see the fine arts as agents of socio-moral development, not in didactic terms but in the terms of affective influence. Already in 1836, the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* had published an excerpt from Bernard and Lucy Barton’s *The Reliquary*, which included “An Appeal for Poetry and Poets” composed by Bernard. In this appeal, Barton argued that poetry, as the language of feeling, contains “much that tends to soften and humanize, and not less to elevate and spiritualize, our imperfect and fallen nature, much to check and counteract the deadening influence of a worldly spirit.” Consequently, without wishing to downplay either the socio-political factors that contributed to the increased desire for “influence” among nineteenth-century evangelicals or the importance of Christian “nurture,” I want to emphasize in the account which follows how evangelicals inherited this idea, and in particular its applicability to the fine arts, from the aesthetic thought of the eighteenth century.

The theory of anti-didactic moralism, of course, could be found in much of the poetry and criticism of the romantics. Wordsworth, Hazlitt, Hunt, and DeQuincey, for instance, all subscribed to some version of this tradition, as did Shelley, whose expression of this idea in his *Defense of Poetry* (originally drafted in 1821 but not published until 1840) may be taken as a representative romantic example: “The great
instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry strengthens that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.” When, according to Shelley, poets abandon their high calling to act “upon the cause” and instead focus on producing a particular moral effect – when, in other words, poets assume “a moral aim” by turning to the overtly didactic – “the effect of their poetry is diminished in exact proportion to the degree in which they compel us to advert to this purpose.”

28 It appears, then, that there is an inverse relationship between the didactic and the moral: the more didactic a poem is, the less morally efficacious it is.

Romantic writers like Shelley, however, were themselves extending a line of argument that had grown out of the aesthetic thought of the Enlightenment, and ultimately, out of the empiricist mental and moral philosophy to which this aesthetics was closely related. In his highly influential *Elements of Criticism* (1762), for example, Henry Home, Lord Kames had laid out a detailed psycho-affective theory of art’s moral influence, arguing “with entire satisfaction, that no occupation attaches a man more to his duty, than that of cultivating a taste in the fine arts.”

29 Kames was not the sole originator of what I am calling, with reference to the fine arts, anti-didactic moralism – this honor must go to the traditions of British empiricism and benevolist ethics more generally – nor were the idiosyncrasies of Kames’s particular theory shared by all, but his *Elements of Criticism* did offer a relatively precise psychological formulation of the way in which art was thought to act as a moral agent. His attempt at a comprehensive account of the principles underlying the science of criticism also made the *Elements* a popular choice in
college classrooms, especially in the United States, where it continued to appear in the curriculums of some smaller institutions until the time of the Civil War (in general, the text had disappeared from the standard reading lists of major universities by the fourth decade of the nineteenth century). When, for example, evangelical Wheaton College opened its doors in 1860, Kames’s text was still assigned reading for male undergraduates.\(^{30}\) There were, in fact, some thirty-one editions of the *Elements* published in the United States between 1796 and 1883. The library at Andover Seminary held five copies of its own.\(^{31}\) Thus Kames’s arguments had a widespread, and in many cases a direct, impact on evangelical understandings of the way in which art exerted a moral influence, and for this reason, it is worth examining his arguments in some detail.

Kames’s theory is rooted in the benevolist ethical tradition of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, which held that the springs of moral action are located in the emotional constitution of human beings. “It is a law in our nature,” Kames observes, “that we never act but by the impulse of desire; which in other words is saying, that passion, by the desire included in it, is what determines the will” (1:131; cf. 1:37). The word “passion” is important here, for Kames makes a technical distinction between passion and emotion, the latter being an “internal motion or agitation of the mind” that “passeth away without desire” (1:37).\(^{32}\) Passions, therefore, are those feelings which, accompanied by desire – to reward, to punish – motivate an individual to act. At the same time, in keeping with his empiricist philosophy of mind Kames holds that objects perceived either visually or aurally (but not through the other senses) have the power to raise within us both passions and emotions. Since, moreover, it is to the eye and ear that the fine arts predominantly
appeal, it seems that there exists an intimate connection between an appreciation for the fine arts and the moral action of the will. “The principles of the fine arts,” argues Kames, “appear in this view to open a direct avenue to the heart of man” (1:32).

This logic provides the basis for Kames’s more extended speculations on the moral power of the fine arts. Indeed, when it comes to formulating the precise psychological dynamics of his theory, Kames suggests at least two ways (one negative, one positive) in which art – or perhaps more accurately, a taste for art – works on the feelings and thereby contributes to the moral formation of human beings. First, Kames posits that a refined taste serves “to moderate the selfish affections: by sweetening and harmonizing the temper, it is a strong antidote to the turbulence of passion and violence of pursuit: it procures to a man so much mental enjoyment, that in order to be occupied, he is not tempted to deliver up his youth to hunting, gaming, drinking; nor his middle age to ambition; nor his old age to avarice” (1:16). There is in this argument something of the old notion that healthy amusement can occupy one’s mind and thus help to prevent one from engaging in more illicit behaviors. The same may be said of the related argument – one which the Puritans appreciated – that properly rational and intellectual pursuits can be a useful means of escaping the fleshly trap of sensual indulgence. This line of thought certainly forms a portion of Kames’s argument. Because of their unique position between the purely intellectual and the purely sensuous, “The pleasures of the eye and ear … are perfectly well qualified … to revive the spirits when sunk by sensual gratification” (1:12).

But what the fine arts also do, according to Kames, is assist a person in combating
selfishness by cultivating in him or her a heightened appreciation for the “agreeable” in others:

Pride and envy, two disgustful passions, find in the constitution no enemy more formidable than a delicate and discerning taste: the man upon whom nature and culture have bestowed this blessing, delight in the virtuous dispositions and actions of others: he loves to cherish them, and to publish them to the world: faults and failings, it is true, are to him no less obvious; but these he avoids, or removes out of sight, because they give him pain. (1:16)

Underlying this argument is the Hutchesonian premise that human beings possess an innate capacity for spontaneously valuing both the moral and the aesthetic – the good and the beautiful – and that a facility in one type of apprehension improves one’s facility in the other. The arts enable a person to experience agreeable feelings firsthand, and once one has learned to appreciate these agreeable feelings, one will be less apt to relish the disagreeable ones. The arts, then, regulate and harmonize the mind. This tempered state of mind, furthermore, is advantageous insofar as it leads naturally to greater social interaction. Gardening, for example, may become, on this score, an instrument of social benevolence: “The gaiety and harmony of mind it produceth, inclining the spectator to communicate his satisfaction to others, and to make them happy as he is himself, tend naturally to establish in him a habit of humanity and benevolence” (2:698-99). Aesthetic pleasure is therefore a propaedeutic to positive moral action.

For Kames, however, the moral influence of art goes beyond art’s capacity to keep bad passions at bay by replacing them with good ones; fine art also helps to develop what Kames refers to as “the sympathetic emotion of virtue” (1:50). This sympathetic
emotion of virtue holds a unique place in the affective economy of the Elements, and indeed, it is difficult to see how one could hold to a theory of art’s moral influence without some version of such a theory. According to Kames, it is virtually impossible to determine whether the sympathetic emotion of virtue is, technically speaking, an emotion or a passion. Kames is reluctant to call it an emotion “because it involves desire,” though he is equally reluctant to designate it a passion since it also “has no object” (1:48). It is, in short, a feeling which gives rise to an objectless desire. This formulation is in fact a rather ingenious solution to a problem that lies at the heart of any moral-instrumental conception of art that is at the same time anti-didactic, namely, how it is that the perception of a representation can lead to practical moral action on the part of the perceiver. What is it that allows us to transmute our admiration for, say, a virtuous act represented in a painting into our own concrete acts of goodness in real-world contexts?

Kames’s answer is the sympathetic emotion of virtue. When, for instance, a spectator observes the virtuous performance of another person, two feelings arise spontaneously: first, the spectator experiences esteem for the noble individual who performed the virtuous act, and secondly, the spectator also experiences the sympathetic emotion of virtue. “We approve every virtuous action, and bestow our affection on the author,” posits Kames, “but if virtuous actions produced no other effect upon us, good example would not have great influence.” If, that is, virtuous action prompted in us no other affection but gratitude or respect for the virtuous action itself, then ethical examples (whether in art or life) would have little consequence. However, “the sympathetic emotion under consideration bestows upon good example the utmost influence, by
prompting us to imitate what we admire” (1:49). Hence, the sympathetic emotion of virtue appears to consist, at least in part, in an intrinsic desire to reproduce in different contexts those actions which we perceive as ethically valuable. For Kames, moreover, the very objectlessness of the emotion of sympathetic virtue allows it a remarkable flexibility of application. We turn from our encounter with a virtuous representation or virtuous action charged with a heightened (if somewhat diffuse) sense of sympathetic emotion that drives us to locate a fit object for the further bestowal of our benevolence. Under the influence of the sympathetic emotion of virtue, the spectator “longs for proper objects upon which to exert this emotion,” and, Kames assures us, “This singular emotion will readily find an object to exert itself upon” (1:49, 51).

Perhaps most importantly, however, Kames indicates that the sympathetic emotion of virtue is also itself a kind of exercise of virtue, the repeated experience of which can lead to virtuous habits. The sympathetic emotion of virtue, argues Kames, never exists without producing some effect; because virtuous emotions of that sort, are in some degree an exercise of virtue; they are a mental exercise at least, if they appear not externally. And every exercise of virtue, internal and external, leads to habit; for a disposition or propensity of the mind, like a limb of the body, becomes stronger by exercise. Proper means, at the same time, being ever at hand to raise this sympathetic emotion, its frequent reiteration may, in a good measure, supply the want of a more complete exercise. Thus, by proper discipline, every person may acquire a settled habit of virtue …. (1:51; italics mine)

Thus, even when the sympathetic emotion of virtue does not lead immediately to concrete action of some kind, the sensation itself may be considered an internal act of virtue. Consequently, the more habitual this experience becomes through constant repetition, the
more virtuous one actually becomes. Indeed, Milton’s anxiety about the scant merits of a “fugitive and cloistered virtue” seems not to concern Kames much, and in fact, his whole theory suggests, at least hypothetically, that private aesthetic experience may constitute a more or less sufficient program for improving one’s morals.

As alluded to earlier, Kames’s particular theory of art’s moral influence was not the only one in circulation during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Like Kames’s, though, most of these theories stressed the moral role of “sympathy” and the imagination, as well as the ability of the arts to appeal to, and therefore to strengthen, these aspects of the human constitution. It was from these kinds of theories and from romantic offshoots of such theories, rather than from older, more “didactic” conceptions of art as an instrument of moral instruction, that many Victorian evangelical discussions of the moral influence of the fine arts took their cue. The genealogy of this line of thought was suggested in 1847 by a critic in the Methodist Quarterly Review who, in describing the psychology at play when a great poet arouses the passions of a reader, cited both Hazlitt and Wordsworth for support:

It is not the mere ability to recapitulate numerous beauties that give rank to the poet; it is not a solitary enthusiasm which enrages his own bosom that measures his genius; but, superadded to all this, the power of expression, whereby he warms the fancy and arouses the faculties of the reader. Not mere fluency of expression, but the “power of moving and infusing the warmth of his own rapt mind into that of his reader;” (Hazlitt;) the ability to conjure up in the minds of men “passions, which are, indeed, far from being the same as those produced by real events, but which yet do more strongly resemble those passions, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to find in themselves;” (Wordsworth;) the faculty of awakening, by his
descriptions of nature or of man, sensations nearly similar to those produced by the real object.\textsuperscript{37}

For many nineteenth-century evangelical critics, art was not primarily a vehicle of instruction or the presentation of Truth in a pleasing manner (as it had been for the Puritans), though of course it might involve this; rather, art was believed to condition morality by touching the springs of action – the feelings. Good art need not, indeed \textit{ought} not, preach, for it had at its disposal a more subtle magic. In fact, the distinction between the duties of the preacher and the duties of the poet appeared in the pages of the \textit{Christian Spectator} as early as 1825. In the second of three articles on “Lyric Poetry” – a genre which is also intended to include “psalmody” – the anonymous author notes the distinct spheres of influence held by the sermon and the poem: “The cultivation of that understanding and belief is exclusively the business of the preacher; after his duties are performed, it is within the province of psalmody to excite and animate the feelings and emotions which such doctrines are calculated to produce. Hence, a mere \textit{allusion} to them is sufficient to answer the purpose of musical expression.”\textsuperscript{38} In this particular case, the emotional power of poetry – a power the writer elsewhere describes as “calculated to move and purify our feelings and affections”\textsuperscript{39} – has not yet been severed completely from doctrinal formulae, for the excitement of psalmody still depends in some measure on the prior work of the preacher; but the necessity for religious poetry to deliver any kind of firm statement of doctrine has clearly been diminished. A “mere allusion” to such doctrine is enough, and while the author does “not say that instruction is entirely foreign to the object of psalmody,” neither does he “hesitate to say that it does not
constitute its chief design.\textsuperscript{40}

One of the more comprehensive attempts by a nineteenth-century evangelical writer to articulate a theory of art’s ethical power in the tradition of anti-didactic moralism was Edward Otheman’s lecture, cited earlier, on “The Moral Influence of the Fine Arts.” It is not unlikely that Otheman, who matriculated at Brown during the early years of Francis Wayland’s presidency, would have encountered Kames’s \textit{Elements} directly as part of the usual course of study,\textsuperscript{41} and in fact his argument shows a decidedly Kamesian bent. Otheman’s central purpose is to justify patronage of the fine arts, as the title of his lecture makes clear, on the basis of the powerful moral influence they are capable of wielding. Far from advocating art as a tool for instruction, however, Otheman grounds his case almost entirely on the Kamesian premise that art exercises the emotional nature of individuals:

That department of the mind over which the fine arts peculiarly and immediately preside, is an important one, and is, in fact, that over which morality and religion exercise their greatest control. It is the sensitive part of our nature – the passions and the emotions. And here we see the grand reason why their moral influence should be seriously considered, because they touch the springs of action …. (320)

Indeed, this particular passage is so deeply indebted to Kames in both content and rhetoric that it would no doubt qualify as plagiarism by modern standards. Like Kames, Otheman suggests that the fine arts bear a natural affinity to morality and religion since all three are rooted in the emotional constitution of human beings. The phrase “the sensitive part of our nature,” moreover, is lifted directly from the introduction to the
Elements (1:18), while the implicit distinction between the passions and the emotions betrays a further indebtedness to Kames. And though Kames receives no credit for having supplied the main outlines of Otheman’s arguments, it is precisely the Kamesian proposition that art operates directly on the human emotions – a proposition that is as potentially dangerous as it is promising – that leads Otheman to declare that art “is certainly a proper subject for the scrutiny and guardianship of the Christian and the philanthropist” (321).

In turning to the specifics of his case, Otheman differentiates two kinds of moral influence brought about by art – what he calls “original, native or inherent, and relative or derived” (321). Otheman’s choice of terminology here is interesting, for it parallels another common division found in Kames, Hutcheson, Hume, Smith, and others between “intrinsic” and “relative” beauty. According to these writers, intrinsic beauty was that which an object was thought to possess in itself by virtue of its formal properties. Relative beauty, by contrast, was seen as a function of an object’s perceived relationship to some end or purpose. Otheman’s slight innovation, then, is to speak in terms of inherent and relative moral influence rather than in terms of the intrinsic and relative beauty of conventional eighteenth-century discourse (he never explicitly refers to beauty in this particular context). It is clear, however, that the traditional distinction continues to underwrite his own system in various ways. Original and relative influence, Otheman notes, generally operate within the same art object, though “the latter influence must be, or may be made, far greater than the former, since into the latter can be thrown all the incentives to vice or virtue, all the elements of moral purity or corruption” (322). Despite
the typically superior power of relative influence, however, the bulk of the lecture is actually devoted to demonstrating the “native influence [of the fine arts] on individual and social morality” (323). His objective, therefore, is to establish the moral import of purely aesthetic experience. To this end, Otheman advances several arguments, three of which we will notice briefly here.

First, Otheman contends that the main object of the fine arts “is consistent with, and promotive of morality. This object is, in general, to please; in particular, to please by exciting the emotions of beauty and sublimity” (323). The primary purpose of art is pleasure, and Otheman suggests that this pleasure not only conduces to human happiness but also that pleasure itself is “a purpose not unworthy of, nor neglected by the Deity” (323). Following Kames once again, Otheman also sees aesthetic pleasure as preparing the way for morality and religion:

The mind, under the benignant influence of the charms of nature, is either softened or elevated, and is thus better prepared to attend to the lessons of religion, and, indeed, to be affected by the moral reflections which come from every point of the universe. And the same effect do the beauties of the fine arts produce on those who contemplate and admire them. (323-24)

In moderating and balancing our affections, aesthetic pleasure gives birth to a mental state that makes us better able to attend to truth and goodness. What’s more, beauty and sublimity – the particular feeling-states in which aesthetic pleasure is said to consist – have themselves been designed by God to contribute to moral improvement by way of their peculiar effects on the mind. As Otheman declares, “The moral effect of these
emotions is always good.” Drawing upon Kames, who had noted “that many emotions have some resemblance to their causes” (1:129), and the eighteenth-century aesthetic tradition generally, Otheman argues that internal mental states reflect external objects of perception. Beautiful objects cause “an expansion and complacence of mind,” while sublime objects lead to “mental elevation and vigor.” In either case, these mental agitations “are very far removed from the low and grovelling dispositions of vice. Indeed, a vicious man cannot have a full impression of the pure beauties of nature or of art.” As with Kames (not to mention Kames’s foremost disciple, Wordsworth), beauty and sublimity “insinuate themselves … in an agreeable, undefinable manner, into [one’s] heart, and insensibly mould [one’s] character.” Momentarily at least, art enables one to rise above the selfishness of “sensual gratification” in the interests of purer pleasures (324).

Otheman’s second point, as he himself observes, is really an extension of his first, for it amounts to a lengthier meditation on “the susceptibility of the human mind to imbibe the spirit of the scenes and circumstances by which it is employed and interested” (324). Otheman, in fact, is so empiricist in his psychology as to verge on absolute determinism. He does, it is true, allow room for the creative function of the imagination – which, as we will see shortly, he grants pride of place among the human faculties, following the romantics – but on the whole,

Most men are what they are more from the ideas which they receive from the world around them, than from those which they originate. Indeed, by far the greater number of our first ideas are suggested by surrounding persons and objects; and, excepting the faculties, by which we receive,
combine, and employ these ideas, and which, in some instances, create a world of their own, we grow up mere copies or imitations of what has already been.

Since the fine arts are marked by a singular vividness and intensity of presentation, it is therefore only natural to assume that they would have a powerful effect on our “character and deportment”: “How then is it possible for us to be unaffected by the fine arts, whenever seen, which appeal so powerfully and triumphantly to our taste and sentiments?” (325). What follows from this empiricist model of mind is a doctrine of sympathetic identification, again descended from eighteenth-century theories of sympathy,\textsuperscript{43} in which the passions represented in art are recreated in the minds of the beholder. “When art is thus successful,” writes Otheman, “we seem, sometimes, by beholding to become the beings which it represents. We feel the inspiration which they are made to feel, the same emotions and passions agitate our breast … till we are as wise as the wisest, good as the best” (326). Art enables us to experience vicariously what it feels like to be virtuous and in doing so allows us to become more virtuous in the process.

Central to this process, Otheman argues, is the imagination – a faculty which, beyond basic sensory perception, “has the widest and strongest control over men in general.” In fact, the imagination “is one of the chief instruments of the happiness or misery of man” (326). In these exalted claims for the centrality of the imagination in human life, Otheman is at one with the romantics, and indeed one recognizes in his conception of the imagination something very much akin to Wordsworth’s. For Otheman, the imagination is an organ of both creation and perception – or, as he puts it, of “genius” and “taste.” Its main value seems to lie in its ability to receive and store the
stimuli of perception (as presented by the fine arts) and to re-present these images to the mind once the original stimuli have faded: “Now the employment of either genius or taste in the fine arts rouses and stimulates the imagination, so that, even after this enjoyment, it is apt to form combinations of thought and sentiment similar to those on which it has been exercised through the senses” (326-27). It is through the imagination, therefore, that “the mind receive[s] a lasting impression – a fadeless hue, from those qualities which are presented to its perception. These ideas of the imagination have a powerful influence on all the character, and give their peculiar expression to the conduct” (327). Like Wordsworth’s “beauteous forms,” which he suggests have had “no slight or trivial influence/ On that best portion of a good man’s life,/ His little, nameless, unremembered, acts/ Of kindness and of love,” Otheman insists that “The forming of mental images of rare and exquisite natural or moral grace … always produces a good effect upon the character and manners” (327). Though such a development would no doubt have vexed a good many Puritans, both the fine arts and the imagination have assumed a prominent place in nineteenth-century theories of moral action.

A third argument for the original moral influence of the fine arts, and the final one we will examine here, concerns art’s purported ability to heighten our sensitivity to, and thus our concern for, the world around us. “The exercise or cultivation,” he writes, “which the study and examination of works of art give to the sensitive part of our nature, refines and improves our sensibilities, and thus renders us more easily and deeply affected by the scenes of real life.” Underwriting this notion of the transferability of feeling from aesthetic engagement to “real life” is a general conception of mental
sensitivity, also evident in Kames, that is applicable to a diverse range of experiences – moral, aesthetic, and religious. Otheman states this principle openly: “the cultivation of any power of the mind on a given subject prepares that power to be used more easily on every other subject; so, by a proper employment of our taste or sensibility in the fine arts, it becomes more readily excited in the common affairs of life” (327). Art helps to calibrate our emotional receptivity, and once calibrated, our finely tuned emotional constitution will naturally repel the immoral as distasteful. As Otheman observes, “persons of refined taste and genius abhor every thing vulgar and mean” (328).

Otheman’s lecture, though notable among evangelical writers for its comprehensiveness and for the relative philosophical precision with which its case for art’s moral influence is stated, was hardly unique in its general orientation. An ever increasing number of nineteenth-century evangelicals across the denominational and theological spectrum followed suit in arguing for the ethical significance of art in the language of anti-didactic moralism. Henry Drummond, for example, observed in his Letter to Thomas Phillips (1840) that “an increased feeling for the fine arts can really contribute to elevate the minds and characters of man…”45 P. Wells, writing for the Christian Advocate and Journal in 1849, urged that poetry might be “the means of effecting much real and practical good” precisely because “The mass of men decide, and act, from the impulse of the heart, rather than from the convictions of the head.”46 In a similar fashion, the Christian Observer pointed out that “There is, in fact, a humanising power in all true poetry …. As the nourisher of all human and sacred sympathies, the poet becomes a teacher of morality by being an inspirer of right feeling.”47 Such rhetoric, in
fact, could at times reach an astonishing pitch. No doubt one of the more extravagant claims on behalf of the moral power of poetry came from the pen of the Rev. S.D. Burchard, who accorded poetry, because of its direct appeal to the emotions, the honor of having sparked many of the greatest moral revolutions in history: “Our moral sensibilities are so arranged and attuned that true poetry will find its way to the heart and leave its impress there. Hence its influence, during all time, over the moral feelings and habits of men. Some of the grandest revolutions and changes that have signalized the world’s history have been effected through the instrumentality of poetry.”

This kind of claim, however, as bold as it was, was not without precedent. Dugald Stewart, for one, had speculated that “in … earlier periods of society, the rude compositions of the bard and the minstrel may have been instrumental in humanizing the minds of savage warriors, and accelerating the growth of cultivated manners.”

The logic of anti-didactic moralism also informed some evangelical discussions of the aesthetics of nature. Reflecting on “The Advantages of a Taste for the Beauties of Nature” in the pages of the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, one Dr. Percival observed how, “By a sweet contagion, the soul catches the harmony which it contemplates.... In this state we become susceptible of virtuous impressions from every surrounding object; [and] an equal and extensive benevolence is called forth into exertion.” Evangelical writers, especially when nature was the aesthetic object of choice, tended to move through nature to the Creator, just as the Puritans had. A “taste for natural beauty … elevates [us] to the love and admiration of that Being who is the author of all that is fair, sublime, and good in the creation.” In calling attention to the personal character of God,
evangelical writers like Percival also resisted the monistic tendencies which lay behind more radical romantic or transcendentalist conceptions of nature. But unlike the Puritans, the moral encounter with nature was more affective than rational: natural beauty “not only refines and humanizes, but dignifies and exalts the affections.” The appreciation of natural beauty was not simply an occasion for meditating upon the superior merits of heavenly beauty, nor was it, at least for Dr. Percival, a chance to read natural objects typologically as “images of divine things” in the manner of Edwards. One’s confrontation with beauty was instead a moment of transport in which a person was able to feel God and, at the same time, to feel morally empowered.

This clear articulation of art’s (and nature’s) moral influence in terms of an anti-didactic moralism drawn from the romantics and from Enlightenment writers like Kames highlights the distance, with regard to both ethics and aesthetics, which some evangelical cultural elites had traveled in less than a century. In the wake of the widespread dissemination of the benevolist tradition of Hutcheson, evangelicals had come to embrace an ethico-aesthetic theory that included both a more positive view of human nature (for his part, Kames was candid in declaring that “no man hath a propensity to vice as such” [1:51]) and a model of moral progress dependent on the power of a naturalistic, subterranean “influence” emanating from aesthetic experience. For Jonathan Edwards, the exercise of true virtue and the perception of primary beauty – as well as whatever moral or spiritual improvement might be derived from secondary beauty – were possible only for those who had been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit; for a theorist like Otheman, by contrast, virtue appears to be, at least in part, a natural product of
ordinary aesthetic exposure and education. In fact, John Foster’s reflections on the theory of anti-didactic moralism – in this case in relation to the aesthetic experience of nature – published only two decades earlier, are especially instructive here:

It would be a matter of very great interest to determine, under what conditions this influence of nature, where it does actually operate on the taste and imagination, shall also be salutary in a moral respect. It has been a favourite doctrine with many men of sensibility and genius, that these captivations of nature are absolutely and almost necessarily conducive to the moral rectitude of the mind; that they unconditionally tend to purify, to harmonize, and to exalt, the principles and affections. If the maintainers of this opinion, so kind to our nature, had not examined the human mind enough to know, from its very constitution, that in some modes and degrees of its depravity, it not only may fail to be corrected by the perception of these charms of nature, but may receive their influence so that it shall augment the depravity – it is strange that their faith was not shaken by the notorious fact, that many fine geniuses of the very class most alive to beauty and sublimity of nature, poets and painters, have been among the most profligate of men; – not to notice that the inhabitants of some of the most paradisiacal and romantic sections of the earth, are among the most basely corrupt of the whole human race.

Foster pinpoints the potential theological difficulty with the theory of anti-didacticism exactly. The Enlightenment proponents of this theory had been “so kind” – indeed, too kind – in their estimation of human nature.

What makes Otheman’s case in particular so revealing, however, is that such principles – which would eventually assume a far more controversial guise in the thought of liberal Protestants – appear to have co-existed, albeit tenuously and not altogether successfully, with an otherwise solid theological conservatism. Otheman was not, it seems, entirely unaware that on some level the anti-didactic moralism he so passionately advocated conceivably stood at odds, at least in its unqualified form, with the traditional
doctrine of depravity. In fact, his efforts to introduce conventional evangelical theological concerns into his basically Kamesian paradigm constitute some of the more illuminating, because ultimately ineffectual, moments in his lecture. At one point, for example, Otheman makes a suggestive reference to two types of genius – types which indicate a lingering consciousness of the Puritan distinction between the regenerate and unregenerate. With reference to his two kinds of relative influence, he writes: “Subjects and emotions are … the instruments which both depraved and consecrated genius employs to effect its purposes” (322). This passing distinction, however, remains undeveloped. Later on he raises the problem of the Fall explicitly as he formulates his principle of sympathetic identification. Our ability “to become the beings which [art] represents” also indicates within us a “desire of improving our condition, … that undefinable longing after something great and glorious, which, though perverted by the fall, still clings to our nature” (326). Once again, though, Otheman does not explore the possible consequences of this doctrine at any length, and in fact, his emphasis is primarily on that part of human nature which, he argues, remains untouched by the Fall. Perhaps his most concerted attempt to give due weight to the doctrine of depravity, however, arises during his treatment of the imagination. Otheman allows that “Under the influence of a depraved heart, this faculty is apt to be disordered in its aims and operations.” Yet even here he is quick to explain this problem away: “but God has wisely so ordained that it can be, and ordinarily is gratified with the exhibition of those qualities which are harmless, if they are not as holy, and contain as much earthly, if not as much heavenly purity, as the sublimer attributes of religion” (326; italics mine). That Otheman was a
Methodist (and therefore most likely an Arminian in theology) may help to explain his more positive view of human nature, but even conservative Arminians affirmed the reality of the Fall and acknowledged the extensive effects of depravity on the human personality. On the whole, then, Otheman is unwilling, or unable, to explore in any detail the underlying tensions between the moral implications of his aesthetics and his theology.

There were those evangelical writers who refused to accept casually the benevolist premises underlying the tradition of anti-didactic moralism; nor were they content to remain in Otheman’s state of unresolved tension, which seemed only to pay lip-service to important theological concerns. These writers continued to call attention to the potential incompatibility between an ethico-aesthetic system founded on a belief in the inherent goodness of human nature and an explicitly Christian system which, they argued, rightly confronted the implications of human depravity, and which located morality and moral action not in “sensibility” or “sentimentalism” alone but in the laws of God and the enabling power of grace. “Young persons,” noted an author in the Christian Advocate and Journal in 1836, “are too apt to think that sensibility of heart is in itself a meritorious trait of moral character. This I consider a serious misconception. In itself it is possessed of neither a virtuous nor reprehensible quality.”56 T.L., writing in the Mercersburg Review in 1857, blasted Dickens and Thackeray for belonging to that school of sentimental novelists whose character depictions are the result solely of the whims of the author – that is, whose “good men and women are good on no principle of goodness recognized by Christianity, or even in any sound ethical system” and whose “bad men are bad with an equal absence of all reason for being such, except the fancy of
the writer.” The problem, according to T.L., is that the characters of these novelists are the product not of a sober theological appraisal of reality, nor even a carefully reasoned ethical theory, but rather of feeling alone:

Ethical systems recognize a difference of culture and education. The Scriptures make a difference of faith, of discipleship, and, above all, of grace. Men may dislike the word and the idea. A difference of grace! they cannot bear the sound or the thought of it. But surely it is more rational than no ground of difference at all. With this school there is no such rational, to say nothing of any Scriptural ground. In fact, there is no reason in it; it is all feeling; good feeling on the one side, and bad feeling on the other. This difference, too, of goodness and badness, as thus presented, is simply another matter of feeling.…

Such novelists, moreover, have no place for the doctrine of Original Sin, “for all writers of this school, with hardly an exception, reject it as a most atrocious and man-libelling tenet.” Still others reiterated the Edwardsean premise that nature alone lacks the power of moral purification. To reap its spiritual rewards requires a preceding act of grace. “O, why is it,” asked the Rev. J. Wesley Horne in the Christian Advocate in 1872, “that so many of the sons of God – for whom all these things were made, that they might ‘ascend through nature up to nature’s God,’ their own heavenly Father and friend – see not, know not, commune not with these handiworks of His, though glowing all around them? Is it because ‘of the darkness that is in them?’” The only course of action, Horne counseled, was to “go to the good Physician, that he ‘may anoint their eyes with eye-salve that they may see….”

Theological critiques of this sort, however, became increasingly rare among evangelical aestheticians as the century progressed. Even before the 1870s and 1880s
when liberalism began to have a marked impact on evangelicalism, evangelicals of all
different varieties were quite prepared to grant art a significant share of power in shaping people’s
morality — not by virtue of its ability to transmit doctrine or communicate propositional
truth but rather by virtue of its ability to elevate the feelings. By the end of the century,
this theory would assume a prominent role in both liberal Protestant aesthetics and liberal
Protestant theology through the influence of such figures as Bushnell and Henry Ward
Beecher. It is evident, for example, in Beecher’s conception of the rapturous aesthetic
gaze — formulated in his Star Papers; or, Experiences of Art and Nature (1855) — in
which union with an aesthetic object yields a blessed, though unconscious, moral harvest:

The first merit of pictures is the effect which they can produce upon the
mind; — and the first step of a sensible man should be to receive
involuntary effects from them. Pleasure and inspiration first, analysis
afterward. The more perfectly one can abandon himself, the more true he
can be to his real feelings and impressions, the wiser he is. It is a glorious
thing to have a freshet in the soul! To have the better feelings overflow
their banks and carry out of the channel all the dull obstructions of
ordinary life. It reveals us to ourselves. It augments the sense of being.
In these higher moods of feeling there is intuitional moral instruction, to
the analysis of which the intellect comes afterward with slow steps.
Therefore, I said to the pictures, “I am here; I am yours; do what you will
with me; I am here to be intoxicated.” My feelings opened out to them as
flowers upon a southward slope would open to the morning sun, letting its
stimulation develop whatever was in them to be developed. They took me
at my word, and such another revel — such an ethereal intoxication, drunk
from the cup of heavenly beauty, I shall not have again, until I drink that
new wine of the Kingdom of Heaven!59

Such romantic reverie, of course, was increasingly becoming the stock-and-trade of
incipient liberals like Beecher; yet behind such reverie and the ethico-aesthetic theory on
which it was based stood, oddly enough, the likes of Edward Otheman, a conservative
Methodist. And alongside Beecher stood a whole body of evangelical romantic critics who, though they may have disagreed with Beecher’s evolving theological liberalism, would surely have recognized, and affirmed, his claims for the “intuitional moral instruction” afforded by art.

“Occult Pathos” Gone Wrong: Negative Influence, Sentimentality, and the Novel

While not all Victorian evangelicals theorized the ethical power of art in terms of anti-didactic moralism, the notion that art operated morally by way of some “occult pathos” seems to have dominated evangelical accounts of the matter for much of the nineteenth century. Such a theory of occult pathos, however, was not without its dangers, and consequently this notion, predictably perhaps, also engendered a substantial body of counter-discourse among some evangelical writers who, following in the footsteps of Hannah More’s “Preface to the Tragedies,” expressed concerns about the negative effects of art precisely because they had already internalized the psycho-aesthetic principle that art has direct access to the emotions and thus to the well-springs of human behavior. Put simply, the basic dilemma is that if one accepts the premise that art is capable of exerting an influence on the emotions in the interests of morality, then what is to stop it in particular cases from exerting an influence on the emotions in the interests of immorality?

Writing on “Music and Poetry” in the *London Quarterly Review* in 1872, the critic H. Buxton Forman captured this logic clearly. “[M]usic, poetry, and the rest of the fine arts,” he observed, possess “the power of importuning us with more or less definite influences for good.” The influence of music in particular is “vague, subtle, and
indirect,” and “It is thus a tremendous humanising agent in its possibilities.” Yet it is the very “fact that it can be abused as frightfully as other humanising agents can” which “adds importance to this function.”60 The power of music to humanize is also, paradoxically, its power to dehumanize. The possible extent of this dehumanizing influence was depicted graphically by another writer in the Christian Advocate in 1882: “The impure thoughts and images infused into the moral being by … unhallowed poetry, like certain poisons taken into the blood, may remain there for life ….” The only antidote to this pernicious “Influence of Demoralizing Art and Literature,” as the title of the article had it, was a “continual resort to Divine grace.”61 Broadly, of course, the dual potential of art for both good and evil is yet another incarnation of the paradox that prompted Plato to deny poets a place in the Republic: if poets weren’t so powerful, they wouldn’t need banishing. The same may be said about similar Puritan fears regarding the overactive imagination. But nevertheless, what sometimes appears on the surface to have been little more than a manifestation of the puritanical anxieties of a Victorian evangelical critic takes on a decidedly different valence when one recognizes in such a complaint a thoroughgoing acceptance of both contemporary aesthetics and the mental philosophy on which it was based. The well-known evangelical reluctance, for example, to sanction the novel – a reluctance that held on in some circles until the 1890s, if not longer – could lay claim, at least in part, to a respectable Enlightenment pedigree.

In fact, it is in nineteenth-century evangelical discussions of the novel that the dark side of anti-didactic moralism – the threat of negative influence – is perhaps most evident. Evangelical writers did at times include other art forms in their discussions of
negative influence, but more often than not the “fine arts” (a category to which the novel had to struggle, even among evangelical writers, to gain access\textsuperscript{62}) were imagined in positive terms, whereas the novel was seen as an aberration of sorts, both morally and aesthetically. “Novels,” as one critic put it in the \textit{Baptist Quarterly Review} in 1890, “are the weeds in Literature’s garden.”\textsuperscript{63} Indeed, as Terence Martin has pointed out, it was the novel \textit{as a genre} – rather than individual novels – which often attracted the criticism of evangelicals and non-evangelicals alike, and common nineteenth-century arguments against the genre ranged from doubts about the metaphysical status of fiction (an argument with Enlightenment roots in the Scottish philosophy but which also echoed earlier Puritan forms of epistemological realism) to doubts about whether the habit of novel-reading was consistent with the time constraints of those charged with the evangelization of the earth (another argument with Puritan roots).\textsuperscript{64} A thorough account of the way in which Victorian evangelicals gradually moved from a position of staunch resistance to the novel to one of acceptance – in which the novel was viewed not only as an admissible form of recreation but also, by some, as a species of genuine “Art” and by others as an evangelistic tool – would require a small volume of its own.\textsuperscript{65} Yet a brief examination of one line of critique in particular may serve to illustrate how evangelical fears about the immoral influence of art objects were in fact the natural corollary of a faith in art’s occult pathos.

In many cases, the alleged problem with the novel was one of emotional \textit{excess}, coupled with a belief in the propensity of this excess to lead to both a diminished desire for moral action in the real world and an increased desire for further emotional
stimulation – a set of ideas that came to be encapsulated in the term “sentimentality,” or what the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* labeled “the Gospel of Sentimentalism.”66 The novel’s ability to stimulate the emotions could, if not properly checked, lead quite easily to over-stimulation; this over-stimulation, in turn, was believed to initiate a process of desensitization that terminated in a general apathy for actual suffering. Sentimentality, in short, meant the relishing of feeling for its own sake. This sort of logic is evident, for example, in the arguments of one “Miranda,” who enumerated the risks of novel reading in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* in 1828:

Houses of distress, poverty, sickness, and death diversify the scenery of the moral world, calculated to touch the finer feelings of our natures, and cause the tear of sympathy to fill the eye. All these circumstances come within our daily observation; yet they are overlooked by those who feed their imaginations with fictitious woe, and cherish that luxury of grief which blunts the keenest sensibilities of the heart, and raises an insuperable barrier to moral excellences. Theatrical and novel characters shed an abundance of tears, yet they seldom fall upon the couch of distress to soothe the agonies of a heart riven from earth by affliction, or mingle with those which drop from the eye of the widow and the orphan, to mitigate their woes.67

An author in the *Record* made a similar case in 1862, though with considerably greater vitriol. Describing the mental condition of those he referred to as “slave[s] of imaginative literature,” the author lamented that “The toil that yields him no profit will continue to absorb his energies; and the mind, wearied with its shallow pursuits, and sickened with its own folly, will yet be cursed with a keener appetite for the garbage it feeds upon.”68 Tellingly, the anti-sentimentalist argument that novels deaden the moral sensibility by repeated over-stimulation of the emotions was still being cited in 1882 in
the pages of the *Christian Index*. In this latter case, the author did express some doubts about the merits of the argument, explaining that it seemed to him to be “rather theoretical,” but his clear need to speak to the argument nonetheless suggests the enduring popularity of this view among the novel’s evangelical detractors.

In reality, as a close reading of the foregoing examples would show, the case against sentimentality included many sub-varieties. Philosophers and critics, that is, delineated different means by which desensitization and moral dullness were said to occur. So, for example, it was sometimes posited that an indulgence in fictitious suffering weakened, through repeated exposure, human beings’ intrinsic sense of discomfort at the distresses of others. In other instances, the problem was said to lie in fiction’s tendency to idealize suffering – in its refusal to depict the harsh realities of the world. The natural effect of this romanticized outlook on readers was thought to be a maladjusted taste which, because of its acquired hyper-sensitivity, turned from the horrors of genuine suffering in its preference for the elegant and stylized presentations of literature. (This latter argument seems to have been designed with a certain sort of aesthete in mind, and it is therefore little wonder that when, in the 1880s, aestheticism grew in popularity, some critics viewed it as but the latest species of sentimentality. 70)

Yet whatever the exact details of these various philosophical accounts, it is clear that much of the anti-sentimentalist/anti-fictional discourse of nineteenth-century evangelicals, while by no means inconsistent with earlier Puritan anxieties concerning the wayward imagination, was not, as one might suppose, the sole product of a diffuse, vestigial Puritanism; rather, its immediate progenitor was the moral and mental
philosophy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was, after all, Dugald Stewart, the great codifier of Scottish common sense realism, who had explained with careful rigor the psychological principles that rendered the novel a deadly weapon, determining that “an habitual attention to exhibitions of fictitious distress, is in every view calculated to check our moral improvement.”71 Ironically (and for reasons that are beyond the scope of this study), the novel was thus initially a victim of the very psychology that had served to invest other types of art objects with a transformative moral power.

The anti-sentimentalist discourse which appeared in the pages of numerous nineteenth-century evangelical periodicals was in many cases a protest against what was perceived as an overextension or abuse of the established psycho-aesthetic system – because, as Kames had said, the fine arts “open a direct avenue to the heart of man” (1:32), one had to take care that this avenue was kept under strict surveillance – but it was a critique that nevertheless left the basic principles of this system intact.72 This stance was evident, for example, in one evangelical writer’s efforts in the Christian Advocate and Journal to introduce a new category into the discussion by differentiating between ordinary “sensibility” and the more menacing “super-sensibility”: “there is, perhaps, some danger lest we should substitute effeminacy of manners and sickly sentimentality for plain integrity and genuine sensibility. Our excessive fondness for novels and works of romance betrays vitiated feelings, as well as vitiated taste.” Such vitiated feelings could be classified as a form of “super-sensibility,” and novels and romances were particularly to blame for cultivating this super-sensibility, especially in unsuspecting

376
youth. Still, this same critic heartily supported the cultivation of what he called “genuine sensibility,” for “Such sensibility is the key-stone of all our social affections, the very cement of society, the well-spring of beneficence, and the true genius of poetry, painting, sculpture, and all the graces of the fine arts.”

Thus, “sentimentality” (and those objects like the novel which were believed to excite it) was morally dangerous because it threatened to disrupt the equilibrium of the reigning Hutchesonian ethico-aesthetic paradigm. “[M]ost books of fiction,” argued a writer in the Christian Index in 1885, “appeal almost exclusively to the emotional nature – to the feelings and passions – and these, in their turn, react upon the body, mind and morals, inducing courses of action which entail disease and ruin.” Sentimentality was, in effect, occult pathos gone berserk.

The specters of immoral influence and of sentimentalism, therefore, were perhaps the inevitable byproducts of an ethico-aesthetic theory that so closely linked moral action to the feelings and, in turn, saw in the fine arts a special means of tapping into these feelings directly. Yet as critics have long recognized, the complex rhetoric of nineteenth-century anti-sentimentalism was also a politically charged one, whether articulated by evangelicals or non-evangelicals. Anti-sentimentalism, for instance, was frequently a gendered discourse – one that was quick to equate sentimentalization with the feminine, or rather, with the “effeminate.” The Christian Advocate and Journal contributor quoted above who associated sentimentality with an “effeminacy of manners” was thus hardly atypical in his choice of verbiage. Sentimentality, furthermore, was often implicitly identified as an attribute of the “low” or “popular.” Fiction – the primary
offender – was regularly contrasted unfavorably with the superior art of poetry, and in fact, even evangelical critics sometimes rejected fiction on the basis of “aesthetic” considerations rather than, or in addition to, strictly moral ones.76 Such realities, however, merely help to underscore the fact that both anti-didactic moralism and the anti-sentimentalism it eventually spawned were predominantly the discourses of an educated elite. The same holds true for a significant portion of the anti-novel rhetoric propagated by nineteenth-century evangelical writers – rhetoric that has at various times been viewed as evidence of evangelicalism’s puritanical, anti-aesthetic, or anti-intellectual bias. In reality, however, the evangelical campaigns against sentimentalism and the novel suggest quite the opposite, namely, the existence of a privileged class of intellectuals and critics committed to both the emerging Anglo-American institution of high art and the maintenance of a specific type of Protestant society.77

Thanks to the principles of anti-didactic moralism, such mental faculties as the taste and the imagination had acquired for many educated Victorian evangelicals tensions analogous to those surrounding a present-day nuclear reactor. When utilized properly, such faculties could quite literally determine the fate of a nation. Taste, as one evangelical put it, “is susceptible of very high culture, – much higher than any of our external senses, and it exerts a strong and very direct influence on the rest of our being… If our taste could thus be elevated, how elevated would become our entire nature; mind, heart, and soul would all turn from the things of the earth to dwell on purer and higher things.”78 As we will see momentarily, it was this sort of religio-moral rectitude that many evangelicals believed was the key to a healthy Christian nation. When used
improperly, however, the results could be disastrous, both individually and socially.

Sentimental fiction, for instance, was not merely a personal vice; it threatened to subvert the entire social structure. “What in time,” asked a critic in the *Baptist Quarterly Review*, who was deeply troubled by the widespread popularity of the novel, “must be the effect upon the national character of so much pollution passing into the minds and souls, the hearts and consciences of our people, and filling them with false impressions and false sentiments?” Interestingly, this critic offered a characteristically evangelical response to his nightmarish vision of social collapse at the feet of the novel: he called for the founding of Novel Societies which, like the Temperance Society, could help to alleviate the social effects of rampant, fiction-induced intoxication. Given the psychological premises of many arguments against the novel, such a suggestion was not nearly as far-fetched as it may seem to many modern readers. As the writer himself put it, “The novel is to the mind what strong drink is to the body” – a warning that was as applicable to the body politic as it was to the individual reader.

“A mighty engine … for the elevation of the nation”: The Moral Influence of the Fine Arts in the Service of the Christian Nation

Evangelical thinking about aesthetics during the nineteenth century was profoundly implicated in the discourses of British and American nationalism, as well as in the still broader discourse of “civilization” – a term which often referred to the collective culture of Anglo-Saxon countries but which could also include more narrowly the values and institutions of a particular nation. Surveying the “Prospects of British Art” for the *British
Quarterly Review in 1845, one optimistic reviewer noted how art “is now for the first time becoming a thing for the people; not an object of worth to a fortunate few, but a mighty engine, if it shall yet be carried out in all its capabilities, for the elevation of the nation.” Whereas the fine arts had once been the province of wealthy aristocrats, they were at long last, in this democratic age, available for the benefit of the masses – an observation the accuracy of which found extensive confirmation in the growing number of museums, national galleries, and mass-produced prints available to the public over the course of the nineteenth century. This democratization of the fine arts, the reviewer believed, ought also to bring with it a new sense of obligation for the poet, musician, or painter, for if anything could inspire the British artist to reach beyond the “noblest efforts of bygone times,” it was “surely the consciousness that he is painting – not for a patron, but for a people – not as a mere higher-class decorator, adorning the mansions of the wealthy, but rather as a priest, ministering to the national mind.” Once art has ceased to be a mere “plaything” of the privileged upper-classes and has become an object for the “people,” its social importance expands dramatically. Accordingly, art’s mission – on which it was to embark with an almost religious solemnity (the nineteenth-century spiritualization of art was closely related to its democratization) – was to advance the interests of the nation; its objective, in short, was the securement of a stable society.

The nature and ramifications of the evangelical argument for art’s contribution to national stability and betterment, however, can only be fully understood within the context of evangelical conceptions of the “nation” itself. For evangelicals, and indeed even for many non-evangelicals, the “nation” and the “national mind” were far more than
merely secular political, ethnic, or geographical constructs, though of course they involved these. “Nation” was also an inherently spiritual and moral category, for Great Britain and the United States, many Victorians believed, were “Christian nations” (a designation which, to evangelicals, always meant “Protestant”). As a substantial body of scholarship has shown, Protestant Christianity was a key element in the national identities of both the United States and Britain well into the nineteenth century. To be “English” or to be “American” meant, on some level, to be Protestant. This idea had been handed down to Victorian evangelicals via the Puritans, and it survived in the popular imagination even after developments in the 1820s and 1830s (e.g., Catholic Emancipation in Britain in 1829 or disestablishment in America) had begun to erode the legal structures that lent political support to such an idea. As the Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review could still declare in 1852, “The most important element of national, as of individual character, is Christianity.” Protestantism, of course, was but one thread in the complex fabrics of these respective nationalisms, for as Tony Claydon and Ian McBride have cautioned with reference to Britain, “protestantism… always interacted with beliefs about the constitution, race, language, and relations between local and European culture.” But it was nevertheless a widely held belief that the United States and Britain were Protestant nations – a conviction which carried with it a common set of suppositions and implications in both countries. To be sure, important differences remained. Contrasting opinions about the value of religious establishment, for example, not only implied divergent conceptions of how best to safeguard the “Protestant character” of the two nations but also led to slightly different notions of exactly what that
character was.84 Yet such differences notwithstanding, both British and American Protestants shared the common conviction that the nations in which they lived were Christian nations, and they understood this concept in remarkably similar ways.85

The concept of the Christian nation embodied a network of fundamental assumptions about the role of both Protestant religion and morality in national life. As described in the last chapter, a majority of evangelical writers prior to the 1870s – as well as a significant number thereafter – saw Protestant Christianity not only as the revelation of God in Christ by which human beings could understand God’s plan for personal salvation but also as a powerful initiator of cultural development. “[T]he progress of Christianity,” wrote Otheman in the American Baptist Magazine in 1833, “is identified with the progress of political enjoyment and prosperity….”86 Christianity was thought to provide the necessary cultural conditions for material, social, and intellectual progress; it was, as Secretary Beecher put it in his testimony before the British Parliament in 1835, the “parent of civilization.” Without Protestantism, a nation would be incapable of thriving. “There are two pillars on which a nation’s strength and security rest,” declared the Rev. John Baker in 1856: “1. The possession and maintenance of the true religion. 2. The diffusion of that religion.”87 At the same time, however, the continued relationship between Christianity and culture, according to many Protestant thinkers, depended upon the work of a specially appointed intermediary. This intermediary was “morality.” As Robert Handy has observed, throughout much of the nineteenth century there “was virtually universal and consistent emphasis among Protestants,” evangelical or otherwise, that morality was “the all-important link between religion and civilization.”88
Proper moral behavior, as the fruit of an authentic Christianity, was seen as the crux of social stability, without which a culture or nation would inevitably crumble. Jesse Appleton, the Congregationalist president of Bowdoin College, captured this nineteenth-century Protestant emphasis on the interconnectedness of Christianity, morality, and civilization in an 1814 election sermon on the “True Sources of National Prosperity”:

Do you believe, that any State, community, or nation can be powerful, tranquil, and permanently happy, if their morals are extensively depraved? Would not the most alarming depravation of morals result from a general disbelief in the Christian religion? Would the happiness of families, would property or life be secure in a nation of deists? If Christianity is the most powerful guardian of morals, are you not, as civilians, bound to give your support and patronage?

In theory at least, morality was distinguishable from Christianity itself: it was the practical expression of a personal faith and, traditionally, of a regenerate heart. Similarly, Christianity, too, was distinguishable from the civilization it was said to engender. Traditional and progressive evangelicals would at last part ways over what may be seen as the collapse of these carefully drawn distinctions, but until the end of the nineteenth century nearly all evangelicals embraced the twin beliefs that Christianity was the “guardian of morals” and that morality was in turn the guardian of society.

In one sense, the idea that morality served the interests of social and national stability was understood simply in terms of the minimal ethical conditions requisite for the smooth functioning of human communities. One cannot reasonably expect to conduct business or live at peace with one’s neighbor for any length of time in an environment in which dishonesty and selfishness are the rule of thumb. In another sense, however, many
evangelicals believed that the stability, and indeed the very existence, of a nation was *spiritually* contingent upon a strict adherence to the Judeo-Christian moral code. Quite simply, if a nation did not abide by God’s laws, then it would face God’s judgment. This idea was yet another legacy of the Puritans, who had viewed the modern nation as existing in a covenant with God just as the Old Testament nation of Israel had. American Puritans, in particular, had frequently drawn parallels between their new American colony and the ancient Jewish nation. 90 Yet the belief that God judges nations, not just individuals, for their moral behavior was alive and well in the mid-nineteenth century in both the United States and England. The Rev. George Cubitt, for example, stated this principle concisely in a sermon entitled “National Prosperity Dependent on the Divine Blessing,” published in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* in 1831: “The favour and blessing of God can only be secured by national righteousness; while their forfeiture is the appointed penalty of obstinate national transgression.” 91 More than fifty years later, H.C. Westwood, writing in the *Christian Advocate*, could still attribute the national successes of England and the United States to Protestantism and morality: “These nations have reached their present important place in civilization and in virtue because they have fostered the religion of Jesus Christ, whose transcendent moral power is daily shown in the national life and government.” 92 Neither was it unusual for the abstract principle stated here by Cubitt and Westwood to find more concrete applications as well, as when Hugh MacNeile, an Irish Protestant and an early associate of Henry Drummond and Edward Irving, interpreted the outbreak of cholera in England in 1849 as God’s punishment for the Maynooth Act of 1845: “Against remonstrances, against the light of
revealed truth, in defiance of the plainest language of God’s law, England has persevered, ‘in a friendly and liberal spirit’, to encourage idolatry; and now in 1849, England stands aghast at a second visitation of the cholera. God is not mocked, whatsoever a nation soweth, that it shall reap.”93 The maintenance of both Protestant Christianity and Judeo-Christian morality, therefore, was quite literally a matter of national security, not to mention national prosperity and progress.

In an era in which national stability was believed to rest upon a strong national morality – whether viewed socially, spiritually, or both – the theory of art’s moral influence must have seemed a welcome ally to many evangelicals in both the United States and England. Indeed, the real endgame of the occult pathos theory was not the isolated moral benefits acquired by an individual as the result of a localized aesthetic experience but rather the collective benefits to the nation and to western civilization which the growing availability of such aesthetic experiences seemed to offer. This national impulse behind the philosophy of art’s moral influence had in fact been present from the beginning, occupying a prominent place in Kames’s *Elements*. “The Fine Arts,” he argued in his preface “To the King,” “have ever been encouraged by wise Princes, not singly for private amusement, but for their beneficial influence in society…. To promote the Fine Arts in Britain, has become of greater importance than is generally imagined” (1:3). Nineteenth-century evangelicals readily echoed Kames’s sentiments. Already in 1812, for example, in his *Lectures ... on the Subjects of Moral and Political Philosophy*, Samuel Stanhope Smith, president of the College of New Jersey and a strong proponent of the Scottish philosophy, had encouraged the cultivation of the fine arts for national
reasons. Discussing the human countenance as the highest expression of both beauty and goodness, Smith drew a parallel between the individual face and the face of the nation: “As the studies and pursuits of men have an influence on that character of soul which is transfused on the countenance by the habits of life, it is not unimportant to observe that the national physiognomy of any people may be greatly improved by the cultivation of the arts, and by the refinement of the manners of society.”

By the 1840s, this idea had taken a firm hold on the evangelical imagination. As Henry N. Day declared in 1847 in a quite sophisticated exploration of “The Necessity of Æsthetic Culture to the Highest Moral Excellence,” “The æsthetic element of our nature, that element which finds its employment and its gratification in the forms of things, as distinguished from their essences, is working in society now, with a force and prevalence that are giving character to the age, and are moulding the destiny of coming generations.” Whether this aesthetic element would, in the end, be a force for good or evil would depend on the concerted efforts of “the wise and good,” but for Day there was no denying that the fate of the nation was intimately linked to the fate of aesthetics.

In 1880, a writer in the *British Quarterly Review* continued to insist that “there must be some attempt to carry artistic beauty … into our homes, and knead its impressions into our daily life”: “By communing with the loftier types of excellence, nations as well as individuals are stimulated to constant efforts in the paths of social as well as moral regeneration.” Renewal might come about one person at a time – a theme that was typical of the evangelical emphasis on the transformation of the individual – but the final objective was the moral improvement of the nation.
When it came to singling out specific national vices that the fine arts were believed to be especially suited to combating, evangelical critics could, and did, sound very much like many of their non-evangelical contemporaries. Various forms of materialism, utilitarianism, commercialism, sensualism, and “worldliness,” topped the list – ideas, in short, which the proponents of Victorian high culture like Matthew Arnold classified as “Philistinism.” Day, for example, summarized what he called the “grosser tendencies and characteristics” of the age as follows: “…the prevalent disposition to subordinate the inward and spiritual to the outward and sensual; the enduring and changeless, to the immediate and transient; fixed rational principles living deep in the soul, to superficial impulsive and therefore vapid, spiritless feeling; [and] a subordination of spirit to sense….” In fact, art was frequently depicted as being locked in a life-and-death struggle with these social vices for the heart of the people. On the one hand, such tendencies were thought to herald the swift decline of the nation, of Anglo-American civilization, and even of art itself. Henry Drummond, for instance, lamented in 1840 what he saw as the English habit of judging all things by the standard of wealth, an observation which led him to conclude: “For the most part the English in these days seem totally incapable of estimating or of understanding the highest branches of the fine arts.” In 1854, the editors of the *Christian Advocate and Journal* called upon none other than John Ruskin to serve as a mouthpiece for the condemnation of what they saw as the dominant utilitarian spirit of the period. In a passage from volume two of his *Modern Painters*, which the editors of the *Advocate* entitled “The Useful and the Beautiful,” Ruskin describes how “people speak, in this working age … as if houses, and
lands, and food, and raiment, were alone useful, and as if sight, and thought, and
admiration, were all profitless; so that men insolently call themselves utilitarians, who
would turn if they had their way, themselves and their race into vegetables….”99 In a
similar vein, Eugene Parsons, taking stock in 1889 of Tennyson’s poetry and of the
nineteenth century as a whole, noted in the Baptist Quarterly Review that “The period to
which Tennyson belongs is not an age calculated to foster in a high degree poetic
greatness.” According to Parsons, Tennyson had done an admirable job (though not a
perfect one) in an age that was too given over to commercial, scientific, technological,
and material interests.100

On the other hand, art was also seen as a potent antidote to these woes. The
nineteenth century may have been too commercial for Parsons, but he could nevertheless
take comfort in the observation that there existed a “growing appreciation for the
beautiful in our age.”101 Specifically, art seemed to offer possibilities for social and
national renewal precisely because it appealed to the emotional, intellectual, and moral –
or what gradually came to be encapsulated in that vague catch-all term, “spiritual” –
dimensions of human beings over and against the crudely material. “It is a great thing in
the nineteenth century,” wrote Adeline E.H. Slicer, an art student who recorded her
European travels for the Christian Advocate in 1876, “to be able to love a picture – to be
so unworldly as to speak of a work of art with tears in the eyes. In this practical age to
bow reverently to a sentiment is part of the old world culture.”102 Slicer’s general
criticism of “this practical age” could at times find more pointed expression in a critic’s
concerns about the perceived character flaws of his or her individual nation, as when an
author in the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, writing in the early years of the Gilded Age, suggested that Americans “are one of the most thoroughly realistic and materialistic peoples of all history.” It was time, however, that Americans understood “that civilization is not wholly material and mechanical.” What the United States needed most was a vibrant art culture: “There is nothing which the intellectual life of America so needs, and begins to feel its need of, as an aesthetic inspiration. Nothing else of human origin can so smooth out the hard lines of our national character, and refine our national thought.”

Yet while British and American evangelicals at times expressed their respective versions of aesthetic and national exceptionalism, the belief that art served as an effective counterpoint to a variety of social and national vices was part of a mindset that spanned the Atlantic. The longstanding Protestant ideology, which linked Protestant Christianity, morality, and civilization, had found a new partner in the fine arts.

Viewed from the broad perspective of western social and intellectual history, it may be said that nineteenth-century Anglo-American evangelicals were therefore active participants in that process of social evolution described in different ways by Raymond Williams and Lawrence W. Levine, which saw the emergence of the modern conceptions of “culture” and “art” as responses to the demands of industrialized (and for Williams, democratic) life. Art, as an emotional and intellectual pursuit, seemed to offer a way out of the materialism and commercialism of contemporary industrialism. As one author stated at the end of the nineteenth century in an essay entitled “The Ministry of Art”: “Any influence, whether in art or life, that leads men away from the merely material,
from the mere facts of existence, should be commended.”\textsuperscript{106} It is important not to overlook the sweeping nature of this statement. The threat of materialism loomed so large that any non-material influence would suffice to counter its ill effects. Christianity, of course, had always denounced the extremes of materialism and sensualism, in principle if not always in practice, but after the 1820s and 1830s evangelicals had increasingly come to regard the fine arts as another influence capable of routing such evils. While the Puritans had not been unaware of the notion that the intellectual pursuit of an art like poetry could assist one in keeping the desires of the flesh at bay, to the Puritan mind “art” in general had more often represented the worldly, the sensual, and the material. The romantics, however, had succeeded in shifting the balance of the material and intellectual in art. Art was an expression of the infinite in the finite, the eternal in the temporal, and as such, it had become the solution to the very problems represented by its former self. Indeed, if the belief that the religio-moral pitfalls of sensualism and materialism can in fact be transcended by the sensual and material medium of art constitutes one of the more interesting paradoxes in western intellectual history, the nineteenth-century evangelical acceptance of this idea represents one of the most significant developments in the history of evangelical aesthetics more narrowly. “[W]e are to bear in mind,” wrote Henry N. Day, that the moral influence of æsthetic culture reaches men in their own sphere of sense. Imprisoned, as he is, in the flesh, it visits him in his prison, and with a gentle hand unrivets his fetters. It takes the wise in their own craftiness, and with the weapons of sense destroys the dominion of sense. The elevation and purification of men, instrumentally through their aesthetic culture, is thus a process fitted to their condition; adapted to
reach the soul without awakening its prejudices or its apprehensions; inviting and attracting in its outward character, and drawing under its influence, and effecting its work before the subject is hardly aware of its design.

Day was still theologically conservative enough to temper his faith in aesthetic culture with the insistence that “the only effectual cure” for a “depraved heart” is “the gospel,” but the religious, and more precisely the incarnational, language in this passage indicates that the evangelical romantic spiritualization of art was well underway. It was in part the desire to drive away the shared moral enemies of materialism, sensualism, and commercialism – enemies that threatened the stability of society and the nation – that led to the gradual fusion of art and religion among many liberals.

Thus for nineteenth-century evangelical critics, art’s influence acted as a “mighty engine … for the elevation of the nation,” serving to strengthen the moral fabric of society. But art, these same critics believed, was also a product of that society. It was, as a critic in the Eclectic Review put it in 1855, both “the means of mental advancement” and “the measure,” both “the agent of civilization” and its “product.” Art objects, suggested the article in the Methodist Quarterly Review which had pointed to the need for aesthetic inspiration in America, “are … expressions of the state of life and grade of development enjoyed by their creators. Hence comes the power of fine art as an expression and record of civilization…. The art-life of a people records and perpetuates their most secret thoughts, their sublimest aspirations.” As this writer’s use of the term “expression” suggests, such a theory was really a version of romantic expressivism extrapolated to the national level – an extrapolation made possible by the further
assumption that nations behave fundamentally like individuals. Just as people are said to possess unique personalities, so nations are said to possess unique characters of their own: “To pass from the proposition that the writings of an individual indicate his individual character, to the position that the literature of a nation is the exponent of the nation’s character,” explained the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* in 1852, “is only to pass from a lower and more limited generalization to one higher and larger.… The literature of a nation is the purest expression of the nation’s life.”

The premise that art and literature are an expression of the life of a nation has roots in both Enlightenment and romantic thought, though it is typically associated in its nineteenth-century form with the writings of A.W. Pugin, John Ruskin, and William Morris. In a general way, this proposition could be interpreted to mean that, as the handiwork of a specific people group residing in a given geographical region and climate, speaking a particular language, and governing itself by a distinctive set of principles, art was somehow capable of embodying the unique identity that resulted from these singular characteristics and institutions. “The literature of a particular period is the reflex of the agencies at work,” noted the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*. “It is the general resultant of the forces, operating on the nation’s mind at the time.” More specifically, however, as Ruskin argued, art was also an expression of the moral spirit of a nation: “The art of any country is the exponent of its social and political virtues. The art, or general productive and formative energy, of any country, is an exact exponent of its ethical life. You can have noble art only from noble persons, associated under laws fitted to their time and circumstances.” Ruskin’s theories in particular were well known
among Victorian evangelical critics, and these critics often spoke in markedly Ruskinian
terms when considering art’s relationship to the nation. Yet while Ruskin’s ideas may
have directly affected any number of mid-nineteenth-century evangelical writers, his
theories were as much a symptom as they were the cause of a larger intellectual trend.
For although Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris are the best-known proponents of this theory, it
was already appearing – albeit in a form that tended to focus on what was still the rather
loose category of “literature” – in the pages of some evangelical periodicals by the 1820s.
“The literary character of a people is their character as rational and reflective beings,”
suggested the Christian Spectator in 1825. The Christian Observer echoed this
sentiment four years later: “the character of a nation will always be found strictly
analogous to the character of its popular floating literature….” The art and literature of
a particular nation were thus seen as the natural outgrowths of that nation’s, and not
simply the individual artist’s, moral ethos.

A major consequence of this idea, of course, was that art and literature could
theoretically be utilized as reliable indexes to the moral health of a nation. If one needed
an accurate measurement of a given society’s moral well-being – and it is worth
reiterating here that moral well-being was understood to be an essential component in the
stability of the Christian nation – one only needed to examine that society’s artistic
output. “The advance of civilization is marked by the improvement of taste…,” observed
the Baptist Quarterly in 1881. “As mind improves, the love of the beautiful
increases.” By implication, then, the absence of, or a decline in, a love for the
beautiful would suggest a civilization in a state of moral and cultural disrepair. “There is
no surer index of the moral health of any society,” contended C.T. Winchester the following year, “than the imaginative literature it craves and produces.” J.S. White, who knew Ruskin’s writings and quoted them in support of his own arguments, likewise concluded in the *Primitive Methodist Quarterly and Christian Ambassador* that “art is the principal key to the history of nations, to their prevailing characteristics, to their sentiments and beliefs, to their mental and moral conditions generally.” No matter which cultures one examines, one will “find their art forever indicating their mental and moral, and even their social and political, tendencies as clearly and positively as do their science, their laws, and their letters.” Consequently, the state of a nation’s art and literature was a measuring-stick for the state of a nation’s morality and of its “progress” more generally: “The character of the national literature…,” the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* charged, “must of necessity vary, at the different periods of the nation’s progress or decline…. Thus the actual progress of a people may be inferred from the species of literature which it has produced, as well as from the success with which it has been cultivated.” A vibrant art culture suggested a vibrant moral life, which in turn suggested the continuation of God’s blessing on the nation; a diseased art, on the other hand, was evidence of a Christian nation on the decline.

Hence many Victorian evangelicals envisioned, in theory, a kind of repeating religious/moral/aesthetic circuit at work during the healthy periods of a nation – periods, that is, in which a nation’s people were firmly committed to both Protestant Christianity and Judeo-Christian morality. An environment suffused with Protestantism and morality would give birth to an art and literature that expressed the Protestant character of a
people. This art would, in return, help to nourish and invigorate the morality of the people, thereby helping to reinforce and perpetuate the social stability of the Christian nation. “The art of every country,” asserted an author in the Eclectic Review in 1848, “in all its developments, in painting as in poetry, should be the expression of national character, should take its form from the soil whence it springs, should reflect and develop the feelings of its own time, in order to lead and advance them.”

F.K. Levan, discussing “National Literature” in the Mercersburg Review in 1867, saw this “apparent paradox” clearly in the history of Greek literature and civilization: “Though an apparent paradox it is notwithstanding true, that as Hellenic civilization produced the literature we have been sketching, so this literature produced Hellenic civilization.” Yet this paradox was just as true for modern nations like Germany, Great Britain, and the United States – nations “united … in closer bonds” than were ancient nations by “[t]he spread of civilization and Christianity” – as it was for the Greeks. For the literature of modern nations, Germany and Britain especially, had “not only kept pace with their growth, but ha[d] also been a main cause of it.”

It is true, argued Yale’s president, Noah Porter, in 1873, that “The character and influence of a literature” depend in part on “the community whose opinions and culture it reflects.” It is also true, however, that “great writers do much more than reflect an age. They reach upon it and mold it by their individual influence and energy, as they instruct and elevate it, or delude or debase it.” Art and literature, evangelical critics believed, were both produced by, and producers of, the morality and mind of the Protestant Christian nation.

In one sense, then, art was for nineteenth-century evangelicals a conservative
social force. By exercising the moral feelings and sympathies of individual members of society, it helped to establish and maintain social intercourse and harmony. This moral stability was both a sign of divine favor and a hope of future blessings. Furthermore, since art was seen as an “expression” of the “national mind” and character, its development and the development of an accompanying aesthetic discourse helped to define and enforce this identity. In another sense, however, art was also a “progressive” force in that it represented the triumphant evolution of Anglo-American civilization.

Before the 1860s, this progress was, as we saw in chapter 4, viewed in postmillennial terms. Even after the 1860s, however, the narrative of postmillennial progress persisted among some conservative evangelicals and, in an increasingly secularized sense, among most liberals. Art, then, was both conservative and progressive at the same time, for, paradoxically, the idea of progress was often rooted in a fundamental conservatism. True progress was founded on social stability. At the same time, however, the occult pathos theory of art’s moral influence was implicated in a benevolist ethical theory that was odds with traditional evangelical doctrine. Ethico-aesthetic “sympathy” had come to replace the Puritan concept of the covenant as the binding agent of society.

Defending the Moral Influence Theory amid Growing Doubts: Challenges in the 1880s and 1890s

Evangelical support for the theory of art’s moral influence and for the role of the fine arts in the health and growth of the Christian nation continued in some quarters through the end of the nineteenth century and even into the early years of the twentieth. Beginning in
the late 1870s and early 1880s, however, the dominant Protestant ideology faced a new set of challenges that threatened to sever the bonds of art, morality, and society. The first of these challenges was the rise of aestheticism, which rapidly gained in popularity throughout the Anglo-American world in the early 1880s thanks to persuasive advocates such as Walter Pater, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, and Oscar Wilde. Wilde, in particular, whose irreverent personal behavior and whimsical style attracted widespread fascination, became the main representative of aestheticism in the minds of many, and his lecture tour of the United States in 1882 did much to raise the movement’s transatlantic profile. The popular dictum “art for art’s sake” claimed for the aesthetic a radical autonomy – “An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style,” mused Wilde in his famous preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) – and in doing so, it targeted the very heart of the Protestant ideology that had so long held sway over the Anglo-American evangelical mind and had presided over, and even facilitated, the rising interest in the fine arts among diverse segments of the evangelical population over the course of the nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, therefore, many evangelicals reacted vehemently to the doctrines of aestheticism. This was true for both conservative evangelicals and the growing number of liberals that had begun to make themselves heard in the last decades of the century. A second challenge, however, came from within evangelicalism itself. This challenge was the dawning awareness among some critics that for the nearly century’s-worth of theoretical support which art had been given in its role as a moral and social reformer, neither art nor society appeared to have much to show for it. Some evangelical theorists had begun to ask for tangible evidence of art’s moral
influence in society, and they increasingly found it wanting. Together, these two challenges, though radically different in origin and intent, called into question art’s status as an instrument of socio-moral improvement. Those evangelical critics who clung to a belief in the moral benefits of aesthetic appreciation fought hard to shore up the theory that had prevailed for much of the nineteenth century, but whether due to the alleged purity of the aesthetic or to rising anxieties about art’s actual moral record, art was progressively in danger of becoming, as Wilde liked to put it, “quite useless.”

History is often the story of unintended consequences. This is no less true in the case of aestheticism, which was in many ways a product of the very critical establishment it meant to subvert. Drawing on certain concepts in the Enlightenment and romantic aesthetic traditions (e.g., Kant’s disinterestedness, Shelley’s poet who “sings to cheer [his or her] own solitude” and pressing them to their extremes, aestheticism preached the ideal of “pure art” and the absolute freedom of the artist. In fact, some of the major emphases within nineteenth-century aesthetics – emphases which evangelicals themselves had been championing for a half-century or more – had helped to lay the groundwork for the fashionable aestheticism that peaked in the 1880s and 1890s. Evangelicals’ willingness, for example, to join Edgar Allan Poe in castigating what he called “the heresy of The Didactic” helped pave the way for the aestheticist notion of art’s essential amorality. In addition, evangelical support for the belief in the anti-commercialist potential of art, which had initially invested art with its prophetic moral power, eventually contributed (paradoxically) to the complete withdrawal of art and artist from any meaningful contact with the ordinary, workaday world. At least one
evangelical critic, to his credit, seemed to grasp this intellectual twist of fate:

We hear a great deal in these days about “art for art’s sake”.... Doubtless the phrase was first used as a protest against the degradation of art from the position of the beautiful mistress of genius to that of the slave of greed; but in the latter half of the nineteenth century “art for art’s sake” is used as a protest against the pure motive [i.e., morality] without which art is not art, but only the ghastly simulacrum of a living thing from which the vital principle has fled.¹³⁰

For this critic in the Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine, aestheticism was not so much a wrong impulse in any absolute sense as an impulse which, in the course of aesthetic history, had gone wrong. He clearly held firm to the romantic conviction that art must transcend base materialism, and insofar as the conception of a pure art may act as an ideal corrective to more mercenary conceptions of art (e.g., those associated with the sort of “kitsch” turned out for the sole purpose of financial profit), it may have originally served a useful purpose. Yet this passage, though the author may have realized it only dimly, also underscores the irony at work in late-nineteenth-century evangelical repudiations of aestheticism: evangelicals were in fact battling a monster that they had in some measure helped to create.

For the most part, however, evangelicals’ complicity in the rise of aestheticism was indirect – a result of their general backing and propagation of the romantic tradition of aesthetics. Yet aestheticist sentiments – or something like them – were not wholly alien even to the pages of evangelical periodicals. As early as 1845, an author reviewing Leigh Hunt’s Imagination and Fancy for the British Quarterly Review found himself grappling with the logic of decadence that was later to be popularized in the 1880s and
1890s. The reviewer wrestles with two distinct, though not unrelated, questions concerning the relationship between art and morality, both of which were to become talking-points for fin-de-siècle aesthetes. The first question, which can itself be broken down into two parts, is how, if at all, the personal morality of the artist relates to the creative process and how this creative process, in turn, relates to the artist’s obligations as an individual to society. In the context of the article, this question arises necessarily as a corollary to Hunt’s expressivist definition of poetry as “‘the utterance of a passion,’” to which the reviewer heartily subscribes. According to Hunt, *passio* may be defined as “‘suffering in a good sense,’” or the “‘ardent subjection of oneself to emotion.’” Thus it seems to follow that for a poet to express genuine emotion in his or her poetry, the poet must first experience things deeply. The difficulty, of course, is that there exist a great many morally dubious experiences. In a series of rhetorical questions, the author wryly parodies the decadent reasoning (perhaps best embodied more than forty years later in the figure of Dorian Gray\textsuperscript{131}) that seeks to rationalize illicit pursuits in the interests of almighty art:

> How far is the poet entitled to claim exemption from the ordinary rules of citizenship and decorum? If a man frequents profligate society, and you take him to task for doing so, and he answers, ‘O, I am a poet, and I wish to understand this particular phase of human nature,’ ought you to answer, ‘That quite alters the case, sir; I did not know you were a poet?’ If a man in your presence takes up his hat, and is for going out into a forest during a thunderstorm at night, telling you that he is a poet wishing to embrace the opportunity of understanding a thunderstorm, are you to sit still, and let the idiot go?

As a follower of Hunt’s expressivism and an evangelical romantic, the author by no
means denies that personal experience can provide a powerful incentive to great poetry:"
“It is questionable if passages written from poetical intuition [i.e., from imagining
situations not rooted in direct experience] can ever affect the heart so deeply as those
written from personal experience.” 132 Clearly, though, the author does not take the ideal
of experience in service to art as a license for immoral or anti-social behavior on the part
of the artist.

Yet this reviewer’s answer to the first question concerning art’s relationship to
morality – namely, that the claims of art do not exempt the artist from the claims of
personal morality – renders his answer to a second question all the more interesting. This
second question is whether art has any obligation to act as a moral instrument within
society. Later aesthetes like Wilde thought not, and, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, the
author in the British Quarterly Review seems to agree. Unlike “most authors,” whose
business it is “to produce the maximum of good effect upon society” – a responsibility
which requires them to engage in the controversies of the moment – artists are above the
fray and are therefore beholden to an ideal that transcends the vicissitudes of the moment.
“Art does not vary, like opinion,” claims the reviewer, “nor can a poem ever be
superseded, like a system of philosophy. Hence the poet ought to take delight in
perfecting his productions for their own sake, without condescending to think of them as
instruments for producing social effect.” 133 Art exists for its own sake, and to imagine
otherwise would require the artist to descend from his or her exalted status in order to
mingle with the masses. Although this critic in the British Quarterly Review is unwilling
to suspend the Judeo-Christian moral code for individual artists, he is quite willing to
allow that art is under no immediate obligation to serve the moral interests of society.\textsuperscript{134}

Such aestheticist, or quasi-aestheticist, declarations, however, constituted a minority tradition within nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics. The typical reaction to the aestheticism of the 1880s and 1890s was rather one of horror and disdain, and evangelical writers of all sorts were quick to sound the alarm. Already in 1878, J.C. Shairp was observing in the pages of the \textit{Princeton Review} that “The great poet, we are sometimes nowadays told, must be free from all moral prepossessions,” a position which he went on to counter at some length.\textsuperscript{135} By 1883, W.J. Dawson was reminding readers of the \textit{Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine} “how often of late years we have heard high critical authorities insisting that art must be loved for art’s sake, and that our common notions of morality are wholly opposed to art.”\textsuperscript{136} Other critics turned to more vivid language to describe the fast-growing phenomenon. It was not unusual, for example, for critics to employ the rhetoric of mental pathology or contagion to characterize the spread of aestheticism. “The word ‘aestheticism’ is one of the most prominent words of the hour,” wrote Theodore W. Hunt, Professor of Rhetoric and English Language at Princeton, in 1882. “The American nation, practical as it is, is for the time partially bewitched, and the craze must have its natural course.”\textsuperscript{137} Edwin Mims noted in the mid-90s how trendy – and, as a result, how potentially dangerous – \textit{l’art pour l’art} had become: “The expression, ‘Art for art’s sake,’ has become a proverbial one in our day….,” Were the impact of this line of thought confined to “the circles of dilettante artists who gather in the various Bohemian resorts, the evil might not be so far-reaching; but through magazines and books and papers the idea has spread….\textsuperscript{138} Evangelical critics were
united in the belief that the aestheticism which had rapidly infected the populations of Britain and America was in dire need of purging.

When it came to specifics, writers in evangelical periodicals attacked the notion of art’s autonomy on a number of fronts. A fairly common line of argument, for example, taking its cues from anti-fiction discourse, denounced aestheticism as a form of “sentimentality” or “sentimentalism.” In the case of Hunt, what characterized “the school of Wilde” was the total “absence of the intellectual element.” The sentimentalism of Wilde’s school represented the perversion of certain elements in the romantic aesthetic tradition which, if properly controlled, were good in their place, but if uncontrolled, led simply to nonsense. Thus romanticism had stressed the “emotive element” in the creative process, but what Hunt wanted was a renewed attention to the intellect and to truth:

It is true that the poetic art has to do largely with the imagination and the feelings, but these are the media only through which the thought of the poet expresses itself; and tho [sic] pleasure is said to be its final end, it is that kind of pleasure which arises from the reception of the truth in attractive forms. In all genuine poetry, as in the more substantial form of prose, truth is the subject matter, the love of the truth is the inspiring principle, and its expression to the world for the worthiest ends its final purpose.  

Hunt was by no means proposing a simple didactic conception of art, in which “intellect” and “truth” are synonymous with propositional content and art is judged by its ability to deliver this content successfully; nor was he rejecting the whole of the romantic tradition. He was, in fact – as other portions of his article make clear – a dedicated idealist, whose aesthetic heroes were Plato and Cousin (“Beauty centres in God and is worshipped in
him. Art is the representation of the infinite…”; “There is an ideal as well as a visible beauty filling the soul of him who contemplates it, and to the ever nearer realization of which the soul seeks to come”). Too great an emphasis on poetry as a species of feeling, however, leads, as Wilde well knew, to the idea of poetry’s near-total irrelevance, except as an occasion for raw pleasure. Mims articulated this same logic in his own critique of aestheticism: “It may be said that the popular conception of poetry [i.e., the aestheticist conception] is that it is characterized by a ‘poetic prettiness,’ nicety of phrase, jingle, sentimentality – a pretty good thing ‘to while away the tedium of a railway journey or to amuse a period of rest or convalescence’; it is ‘mere byplay.’”\footnote{140} Just as some critics condemned the novel for the inaction to which it supposedly led, so evangelical critics of aestheticism rejected the movement for its lack of practical application.

As Hunt’s article in particular suggests, however, sentimentalism was also a sign of psychological excess: it was the emotional dimension of the human personality stretched to a point that excluded all others. Aestheticism seemed bent on making a virtue of the very kind of psychic one-dimensionality that the time-tested whole-person argument had at one time helped evangelicals to overcome. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Shairp recommending the psychological wholeness of Shakespeare as a counteractant to the splintering effects of aestheticism: “Shakespeare, … being a whole natural man, ‘the moral, imaginative, and intellectual parts of him did not lie separate,’ but move at once and all together. Being wholly unembarrassed with aesthetic theories, ‘his poetical impulse and his moral feelings were one.’”\footnote{141} The great irony, of course, is that the argument which had once enabled evangelicals to temper what was seen as the
moral exclusivity of the Puritans, thus gaining for art a seat at the evangelical intellectual table, was now being forced to defend morality against the aesthetic exclusivity of Wilde and his followers.

Ultimately, however, the threat of fragmentation was not restricted to the individual psyche; rather, the real problem with aestheticism was the menace it posed to social stability. In tugging at one thread of the Protestant ideology – the link between art and morality – aestheticism threatened to unravel the entire Anglo-American social fabric. “[H]ere is the point at which the great danger of modern æstheticism lies,” wrote Hunt. “Pitiable as is its want of mental stamina, this is incidental in comparison with the untold harm that may accrue to the rising authors of a nation and to the people at large.”¹⁴² The Christian Advocate concurred: “Aestheticism is part of the great wave of sentimentality which has swept over the country of late years; and not whether a thing is best, most useful, most profitable to the race at large, but whether it is prettiest to look at according to the present taste, is the central canon of the aesthete’s religion.”¹⁴³ For Mims, too, the great poets throughout history had always had “the self-consciousness of prophets, and to them their mission was apostolic”: “When we read the truly great poets we feel that poetry is no longer a mere plaything, it is not a self-indulgence; it is a challenge to man’s higher spirit; it is the expression of life, and it speaks to life. Poetry has no excuse for being unless it does contribute to the life of man.”¹⁴⁴ In praising the essential uselessness of art, Wilde the provocateur knew quite well what he was attacking, just as evangelical members of the Victorian critical establishment knew quite well that they were being attacked.
Indeed, from the late eighteenth century onwards evangelicals had fought hard to justify art largely on the basis of its moral and social relevance, just as they had battled against the puritanical elements at work in their own tradition. It is little wonder, then, that evangelical critics reacted so strongly to an aestheticism that was threatening to disrupt the delicate balance which they had worked so long to achieve. This reaction, moreover, bridged the conservative/liberal theological divide that had begun to open up among evangelicals in the 1870s. If anything, the growing liberal faction within evangelicalism was even more outspoken in its defense of art’s intrinsic connection to morality than was the conservative. Increasingly, liberal Protestants had begun to see religion almost completely in terms of morality rather than in the traditional terms of doctrine or piety, while at the same time “civilization” was in the process of displacing orthodox Christianity as a locus of primary concern. Along with these developments came the gradual abandonment of the traditional understanding of the supernatural, which further contributed to an increased emphasis on this-worldly affairs. Morality and civilization, in short, were the centerpieces of the liberal agenda, and liberals were not about to relinquish the moral assistance that a long tradition of aesthetics had convinced them that art could provide. One of the staunchest critiques of aestheticism, in fact, came from the pen of Washington Gladden, who has earned a reputation as the father of the Social Gospel. Describing the conflict that inevitably arises between art and morality in advanced civilizations, Gladden concluded:

All men can then perceive that these two are rival kingdoms, and that each makes exclusive claims; that no man can make the one supreme without
rejecting the supremacy of the other. To be a Christian disciple, it is not necessary that one should abjure the pleasures of a refined taste, but it is necessary that he should make these pleasures subordinate and tributary to the service of God and men. The love of beauty is not denied to the Christian, but the love of righteousness and of humanity is with him the master passion.

Such a statement would no doubt have resonated with evangelicals of all kinds, conservatives as well as liberals (not to mention a broad swath of the Victorian population at large). Yet Gladden’s “Christianity” began and ended with a hearty dose of liberal morality, as he clarified elsewhere in the same article:

It is true that the supremacy of the ethical has not always been well understood by the professors of Christianity; its ritual and dogmatic elements have sometimes been unduly exalted, but the fact is there in the documents, and it has not been possible for the most perverse interpretation wholly to conceal it. At the end of nineteen Christian centuries we find this truth generally recognized among Christians, that the end of religion is right character; that no philosophy of Christianity will stand that does not make character the supreme thing.  

If character is “the supreme thing” – indeed, if a naturalistic understanding of morality and civilization is all there is – then liberals like Gladden could not afford to allow aestheticism to trample it down.

Evangelicals, of course, were by no means lone warriors in their campaign against the fashionable aestheticism of the 1880s and 1890s. Diverse figures ranging from Tennyson and Ruskin to Gilbert and Sullivan joined forces to condemn what was rightly perceived as an assault on the Victorian critical establishment. Mainstream Victorians, evangelical or otherwise, sensed the danger in Wilde’s new-fangled apologia for art.
which suggested that art’s sheer existence was its own justification. Thus the evangelical
denunciation of aestheticism in the 1880s was also part of what can be seen as the last
concerted effort by the Victorian critical establishment to defend its longstanding vision
of art’s social obligation. By the same token, however, the evangelical backlash against
the notion of “pure art” serves to confirm not only evangelicals’ status as card-carrying
members of this critical establishment but also the establishment’s role as a longtime
servant to the Protestant ideology. This ideology, which saw Christianity, morality, art,
and civilization as functioning in intricate and mutually supportive ways, would never
wholly die out, at least in certain circles, but the increasing vogue of aestheticism in the
1880s and 1890s signaled nonetheless that this ideology was in fact beginning to exhaust
itself.

Another sign of this exhaustion, however, came from a small band of critics who
began to ask tough questions about art’s real-world performance as a source of moral
influence. Interestingly, this fresh critical approach to the conventional wisdom also
emerged in the 1880s. “What is the true way to determine the influence of art upon
morals?” asked Dr. Buckley in the *Christian Advocate* in 1885. Dr. Buckley, who had
traveled through Europe in search of an answer, went on to relate his decision to use
Germany as a test case: “In Germany, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, the
ornamentation of parks and gardens, and the drama, reach an unsurpassed modern
development, and there moral and social conditions must throw light upon the relation of
art to morals.” Unfortunately, however, “It is here that perplexing questions spring up.”
For according to Dr. Buckley, late-nineteenth-century Germany was a country enslaved
to sensualism. In particular, he cited the prevalent public display of the “Nude in Art,” which he linked to all sorts of debauched behavior, including “unchastity” leading to a high percentage of out-of-wedlock births, the poor treatment of women, and a general “licentiousness.” Furthermore, in Germany, he continued, “Art and amusements are, practically, substitutes for religion to a large extent” – so much so that any preacher who speaks out against this is like “the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” In the end, Dr. Buckley strongly disavowed art’s capacity to exert any kind of meaningful moral influence in society:

The conclusions compelled by these facts are that art cannot be relied on as a moral force. It does not instruct the conscience nor strengthen its foundations. It educates, refines, it may raise a people from barbarism, but it cannot be depended on to prevent or diminish immorality. The extremes of refinement and coarseness may exist in the same person or the same nation. When the mind is drawn toward the contemplation of art it is elevated; but when it is turned toward the gratification of passion it may and will yield unless the conscience, instructed and sanctioned by religion, restrains it.

Though Buckley was far from denying that art may exercise some kind of positive influence in certain cases (a fine taste may certainly be counted upon to raise one above the “barbaric”), his article in general constituted a profound reappraisal of nearly a half-century of evangelical thinking about the morality of art. Art had been virtually stripped of its paradoxical power to transcend sensualism, and it had become instead, in Buckley’s view, a major source of this sensualism. At the same time, the pervasive art-worship he perceived all around him did nothing to heighten morality but only served to “weaken the springs of morality.”

147
For better or worse, art was, for some evangelicals, no longer a dependable ally in the quest to nourish morality and, through this, to insure the security and progress of the Christian nation. This change coincided with a period of growing detachment from social and political concerns among conservative evangelicals – a development that eventually led to what has been called the “Great Reversal” of the early decades of the twentieth century, in which fundamentalists abandoned social concerns almost completely.  

Others would continue to advocate the socio-moral “mission” of art – a mission so thoroughly articulated by the young Methodist, Edward Otheman, back in 1835 – well into the twentieth century. These “others” were increasingly to be found in the liberal wing of evangelicalism. Between the 1820s and the 1880s, however, the theory of art’s moral influence was the province of a wide range of evangelicals, all of whom would have subscribed heartily to the aesthetic creed of W.J. Dawson in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*: “The world asks that its poets shall be prophets; that its singers shall be believers; that their inspiration shall be drawn from above, else it were better that their gift died with them, and their song were never sung.”
NOTES


3 “Testimony,” *Baptist Missionary Magazine* 291, 292, 293, 294-95. In a discussion of Mary Shelley’s “Critique of Empire in *Frankenstein*,” Elizabeth A. Bohls argues that Shelley’s “critical deployment of aesthetics reveals it to be an imperial discourse – one of the languages of high culture, seemingly far removed from the practical tasks of empire, but actually helping produce imperial subjects to carry out those tasks” (“Standards of Taste, Discourses of ‘Race,’ and the Aesthetic Education of a Monster: Critique of Empire in *Frankenstein*,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 18 [Nov. 1994] 25). Though beyond the scope of this study, it would be fruitful, I think, to take a closer look at the place of aesthetics in international Protestant missionary enterprises, not only in terms of art’s role as a “civilizing” agent but also in terms of the ways in which Protestant missionaries responded to the art objects of indigenous cultures.


(July 1835) 318, 319, 330. All further citations will be noted parenthetically in the text.

6 See Handy.


9 See Morgan 268-92 for an extended discussion of the transition among American Protestants (primarily liberals but also later conservatives) from a “didactic” form of “visual piety” to a “devotional” one. As will become clear, while my own narrative parallels Morgan’s in a number of ways, I argue the grounds for this idea had been laid long before in the aesthetics and criticism of the Enlightenment – something Morgan does not discuss.


11 As will no doubt be made clear in the ensuing discussion, what I am calling “anti-didactic moralism” is sometimes referred to as a “sentimentalist” theory of art and ethics. I have chosen to substitute my own term, however, in an attempt to avoid getting entangled in all of the complex connotations surrounding the term “sentimental.” The term “anti-didactic moralism,” moreover, helps to underscore the fact that evangelicals were often strong opponents of the didactic in art, a concept with which they are often implicitly associated.

12 “Remarks upon Wordsworth’s Poetry,” Christian Spectator 1 (May 1827) 244.

13 “Busby’s Lucretius,” Eclectic Review 11 (Mar. 1814) 279. See also the comments in the Christian Spectator in 1822: “The great secret of poetry is to translate abstract language into visible images. The didactic author speaks to the mind; but the poet, as much as possible, to the eye” (Orbilius, “To the Editor of the Christian Spectator,” Christian Spectator 4 [1 Feb. 1822] 80).

Interestingly, despite the phrase Smetham himself speaks of paintings in terms of “preaching,” which was precisely what committed anti-didactic moralists would have denied. Nevertheless, the phrase is a suggestive one and so I have adopted it here. This notion of art’s role as an agent of morality remains a part of contemporary aesthetic debates. See, for example, Noël Carrol, “Art and the Moral Realm,” *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, ed. Peter Kivy (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004): 126-51. For a modern critique of this kind of position, see Lester H. Hunt, “Sentiment and Sympathy,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62 (Autumn 2004): 339-54.


23 David Morgan, *Protestants & Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 19-24, esp. 22-23. Like Douglas and Apostolos-Cappadona, however, Morgan also advances a primarily extrinsic, socio-political explanation for the popularity of “influence”: “the idea of influence addressed the fractious, entropic energies of democracy that frightened mainline Protestants” (23). It is worth noting, too, that there were, in fact, various theories of influence in circulation during the nineteenth century. Thus Charles Hodge, for example, could agree with Bushnell that “influence” and “nurture” were essential ingredients in the Christian home, but whereas
Bushnell depicted influence as a naturalistic, unconscious force (at least according to Hodge). Hodge insisted that the kind of influence, say, exerted by a parent on his or her child was efficacious because it had been established by God. Influence “worked,” in other words, because it was God-ordained, not because it happened “naturally.” See Charles Hodge, Review of Discourses on Christian Nurture, by Horace Bushnell, Dr. Tyler’s Letter to Dr. Bushnell on Christian Nurture, and An Argument for “Discourses on Christian Nurture,” addressed to the Publishing Committee of the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, by Horace Bushnell, Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review 19 (Oct. 1847): 502-39. For a comparison of Hodge’s and Bushnell’s ideas of nurture in the context of debates over infant baptism, see James Hastings Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961) 239-44.


25 Bushnell actually delivered his address on the “Influence of Example” (later “Unconscious Influence”) in London in 1846, but the impact seems to have been minimal among British evangelicals. An article in the Eclectic Review published in 1861 mentions the British reprint of Christian Nurture. See “A Church for Children,” Eclectic Review 5 (June 1861) 607 n. In 1862, a writer in the London Quarterly Review observed that “Dr. Bushnell has, within a year or two, come to be extensively known and much admired in this country” (Rev. of Nature and the Supernatural, as Together Constituting the One System of God, by Horace Bushnell, London Quarterly Review 18 [Apr. 1862] 100). By the 1880s, many British evangelicals, especially liberal ones, had come to speak highly of Bushnell.


28 Percy Bysshe Shelley, A Defense of Poetry, in Shelley’s Poetry and Prose, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977) 488. Ironically, Shelley’s argument for the moral power of poetry is founded on a version of moral relativism. He was acutely aware of the historical fluctuation of ethical norms and was therefore deeply concerned to avoid what he took to be the pitfall of moral parochialism. According to Shelley, one problem with didacticism is that it is closely linked to the moral norms of a given time and place. Thus, didactic poetry necessarily lacks any kind of enduring social influence because it is constrained by the mores of a given cultural context. The Imagination, however, is the organ of sympathy, which (following the benevolutist school of the eighteenth century) is at the center of all socio-moral behavior. Sympathy, moreover, is allegedly an innate characteristic of human nature, and it therefore transcends the particulars of any given moral code. Interestingly, then, Shelley arrives at a theory of poetry’s universal moral influence that is grounded on a historicist conception of moral content.

29 Henry Home, Lord Kames, Elements of Criticism, ed. Peter Jones, 2 vols., Natural Law and Enlightenment Classics (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2005) 1:17. All further citations will be noted parenthetically in the text.


31 William Charvat, The Origins of American Critical Thought 1810-1835 (Philadelphia, PA: University of
An emotion, however, could be converted into a passion depending on the strength of one’s impressions (1:38).

This roving quality of sympathetic emotion also suggests to Kames that even non-representational art is capable of exerting a positive moral influence above and beyond its already substantial role in harmonizing the mind and passions: “The emotions raised by music independent of words, must be all of this nature: courage roused by martial music performed upon instruments without a voice, cannot be directed to any object; nor can grief or pity raised by melancholy music of the same kind have an object” (1:50). A triumphant march, for instance, will raise within us feelings of boldness and courage, which we subsequently – and necessarily, it would seem – seek occasions to display.


There is one final aspect of Kames’s argument that deserves mention, namely, his defense of fictional representation. This argument is crucial since it extends art’s moral reach to include not merely the realistic but also the purely imaginary; thus, fictional tales or images may offer a boost to the moral sensibilities just as much as those which are purportedly based on fact. In brief, Kames’s theory rests on a distinction between what he calls “ideal presence,” on the one hand, and what he calls “real presence” and “reflective remembrance” on the other. Ideal presence, Kames suggests, may be compared to “a waking dream,” for an object that is ideally present to the mental eye “vaniseth the moment we reflect upon our present situation.” Real presence, by contrast, “commands our belief, not only during the direct perception, but in reflecting afterwards on the object.” Reflective remembrance, in turn, occurs when one recalls a past event indistinctly, “barely reflecting or remembering that [one] was an eye-witness” (1:68). Ideal presence, therefore, is the internal perception of an image that presents itself vividly to the mind such that it appears, temporarily, to be real. Once reflection enters, however, we become aware of the unreality of the image, and thus ideal presence does not ultimately command our belief as real presence does. Yet while it lasts,
ideal presence has the ability to affect our passions and emotions just as real presence does: “ideal presence supplies the want of real presence; and in idea we perceive persons acting and suffering, precisely as in an original survey: if our sympathy be engaged by the latter, it must also in some degree be engaged by the former, especially if the distinctness of the ideal presence approach to that of real presence” (1:69). In fact, even true events that happened in the past are available to us only through ideal presence, for “even genuine history has no command over our passions but by ideal presence only; and consequently … in this respect it stands upon the same footing with fable” (1:71). As a result, all fine art, whether based on fact or fable, whether representational or non-representational, discovers in Kames’s scheme a direct avenue to the heart of human beings, and thus, for Kames, the seat of all morality.

Burke, for example, distinguished between a “clear expression” and a “strong expression,” noting that “The former regards the understanding; the latter belongs to the passions.” He then concludes that “We yield to sympathy, what we refuse to description” (A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings, ed. David Womersley [1757; London: Penguin Books, 1998] 198). Likewise, in his Essay on Taste, Alexander Gerard noted how, by virtue of the association of ideas, we may sympathize with what we see – e.g., with a scene in a drama – to such an extent that the we can recreate the passions of another in our own minds: “From the fitness of associated perceptions to communicate their qualities, particularly their strength or vivacity to each other, arises, in a great measure, the force of sympathy, which enlivens our ideas of the passions infused by it to such a pitch, as in a manner converts them into the passions themselves, and which affects the perceptions of taste in many instances….” (Essay on Taste. To Which Is Now Added Part Fourth, of the Standard of Taste; with Observations Concerning the Imitative Nature of Poetry, 3rd ed. [Edinburgh, 1780] 160 [3.1], Eighteenth Century Collections Online, O’Neill Library, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, 30 Apr. 2009 <http://www.bc.edu/libraries>). See also Charvat 57 for a discussion of Thomas Campbell.


418

“Lyric Poetry,” *Christian Spectator* 7 (1 July 1825) 358.

“Lyric Poetry,” *Christian Spectator* 7 (1 Aug. 1825) 411. It is interesting, in this context, to observe the statements of a writer in the *Baptist Magazine* near the end of the century: “We readily allow that hymns are not to be the vehicle of theological argument.… Hymns should not be aggressively dogmatic, argumentative, dryly didactic, or unduly hortatory.…” However, the writer does go on to insist that “it is absurd to say that they should not be theological. Theology and poetry are not antagonists; and, though we would not ignore the distinction between theology and religion, we contend that theology, so far as it is true and real, will intertwine itself with all that is deepest and best in a man’s nature” (“The Study of Hymnology,” *Baptist Magazine* 84 [May 1892] 230-31).

Otheman, in fact, attended Brown University (he graduated in 1831) during a period of years that witnessed an important curricular shift in which Kames was ultimately jettisoned. Even if Otheman did not read Kames as a part of his normal course of study, however, he was almost certainly in contact with those who knew Kames well. See Walter C. Bronson, *The History of Brown University 1764-1914* (Providence, RI: Brown University, 1914) 204-17.

It is evident, for example, that his original influence is dependent upon the immediate appreciation of the formal attributes of a given work. Describing a French painting of Cain and Abel, Otheman singles out what might be called the properly aesthetic qualities of the piece: “Now who can look on that perfectly natural coloring, that accurate delineation of features and expression, that admirable perspective, every object, every part standing up from the canvass as though it were the living scene itself, without feeling an electric thrill of delight. This is the spontaneous homage which taste pays to genius; and is the effect produced by the fine design and painting of the picture, or by the original, inherent influence of this specimen of art” (322). In contrast to original influence, however, “relative influence flows from two sources; one, the subject which they [i.e., the fine arts] treat of or exhibit, the other, the faculty, passion or emotion which they are intended to excite” (321). What Otheman means by the former category is plain enough: the artist chooses to depict a specific scene or event, which may be of greater or lesser moral interest to the viewer: “We think of the causes at work, the characters displayed, and other circumstances
exhibited in the scene, and thus this subject suggests considerations calculated to produce a good moral
effect.” By the latter category, Otheman seems to have in mind something like the ability of a given art
object to appeal intentionally to a specific set of emotions. The picture of Cain and Abel, he observes, “is
addressed to several emotions in the beholder, such as commiseration for the innocent victim of revenge,
abhorrence of the crime, and disgust at the indulgence of a malevolent disposition.” The effects of this
latter sort of relative influence are not the same as the aesthetic pleasure induced by original influence since
they are a) founded upon some conception of purpose and of the art object’s successful attainment of this
purpose, and b) beholden on some level to the content, or subject, of the art object. In short, this second
kind of relative influence consists in “the adaptation of the picture to excite these emotions” (322; italics
mine). As with the relative beauty of conventional Enlightenment aesthetics, both types of Otheman’s
relative influence also involve an intellectual, or reflective, component.

43 For more on “sympathy” in the eighteenth century, see James Engell, The Creative Imagination:
Enlightenment to Romanticism (1981; San Jose, CA: toExcel, 1999) 143-60.

44 William Wordsworth, “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of

45 Henry Drummond, Letter to Thomas Phillips, Esq., R.A., on the Connexion between the Fine Arts and
Religion, and the Means of Their Revival (London: Fraser, 1840) 44.


49 Dugald Stewart, Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, Vol. 1, to Which Is Prefixed,
Introduction and Part First of the Outlines of Moral Philosophy. With Many New and Important Additions,

50 Cf. the discussion of Transcendentalist and Christian Romantic conceptions of nature in Apostolos-
Cappadona 58-59.


53 One possible exception to this observation was Henry N. Day, who used patently Edwardsean language in discussing the moral influence of the aesthetic, though interestingly, he also cites Kames on another matter. Consider this passage: “As the bodily eye discerns, through the impressions made on its retina, these physical properties, so the mental eye, we should rather say the rational eye, sees through these animal sensations, something that belongs, not to the sphere of sense – something that belongs to its own moral world. The brightness, purity, and peace it sees, are, subjectively, emotions, not sensations; and, objectively, they are images of rational, moral properties, not of physical properties of color and extension. They are what the brute cannot discern. The mere natural man, even, discerns them not, for they are only spiritually discerned. They are apprehended by a spiritual sense. But they are there—that moral brightness, purity, peace; as truly as the ideas of them are in those verbal designations. Those physical properties are, like the names of them, the symbols of the spiritual” (“Taste and Morals,” American Biblical Repository and Classical Review 538; italics mine). Day continues: “an absolute objective beauty lies in the moral world. All such beauty is moral in its essential nature; and, so far as it is studied, it will exert on the admiring student, the influence – the assimilating and moulding influence, of a purely moral subject” (539). Day maintains a theory of moral influence, but like Edwards, he stipulates the existence of a “spiritual sense” that can apprehend the transcendent moral beauty of which the physical universe is but a dim reflection. At the same time, however, Day comes quite close, despite his insistence that only the gospel can provide a true remedy for human depravity (533), to describing the Atonement and other doctrines in the aesthetic manner of liberals (542-43). See also p. 238 n. 89, as well as chap. 6.


55 What extant sources there are would seem to suggest that, over the course of his long life (he died in
Otheman avoided the gathering forces of theological liberalism at work among Anglo-American evangelicals, and among New England evangelicals in particular. See, for example, his article, “An Interesting Scene,” *Zion’s Herald* 50 (10 July 1873) 1, in which he writes: “‘Christ and him crucified’ is the world’s hope. Science, literature, philosophy, are important and useful; but to meet the claims of the divine law of righteousness, to come near to the heart of God, to find sympathy with Him, and be filled with His Spirit, nothing will answer but ‘Christ crucified,’ whose blood alone cleanses from all sin, and ‘who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.’”

George Marsden identifies the “[s]everal tendencies of emerging American liberalism” in the nineteenth century as follows: “First, the progress of the Kingdom of God is identified with the progress of civilization, especially in science and morality [to which I would also add, in Art]. Second, morality has become the essence of religion and is indeed virtually equated with it. Third, the supernatural is no longer clearly separated from the natural, but rather manifests itself only in the natural” (*Fundamentalism and American Culture*, New ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006] 24). See also *Horace Bushnell: Selected Writings on Language, Religion, and American Culture*, ed. David L. Smith, AAR Studies in Religion 33 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press) esp. 95-114. The excerpts reprinted here originally appeared in the mid-1840s.

“Sensibility,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* 10 (15 July 1836) 188. I cite this example here because the author directly questions the moral status of sensibility. However, the writer also leaves room for a sensibility guided by Christianity and sound reason: “Sensibility, when under the discipline of a sound judgment, eminently conduces to usefulness and happiness; but unschooled by a severe restraining force within, it often wrings the cords of the soul with torture inexpressible” (188). In one sense, then, this writer represents another version of the sensibility/super-sensibility distinction discussed below (see pp. 377-78). He does not so much reject the tradition as modify it. Still, this writer implicitly interrogates sensibility in a way that other writers do not.

rather than by logic and Scripture. Another example of this sort of critique, though one which does not so much substitute God’s grace for sentiment as it does sheer will-power, is “Periodical Literature,” Christian Ambassador: A Quarterly Review, and Journal of Theological Literature 3 (Feb. 1865): “The capital fault of Dickens – a fault running through the whole of his writings – consists in making virtue appear to be something constitutional, something that grows spontaneously from a genial soil, without effort or struggle on the part of the virtuous individual” (67). Nevertheless, at stake here on some level is the nature of humankind’s moral disposition: are human beings naturally inclined towards virtue or vice?


65 In fact, a great deal of useful work has been done on the history of evangelical understandings of fiction, though much of it exists in scattered form as brief chapters in larger works devoted to other (in some cases, non-evangelical) concerns. To my knowledge, no one has yet attempted a full-length study focused entirely on this topic. See, for example, Martin, The Instructed Vision; John O. Waller, “The Methodist


68 The Record (17 Mar. 1862) 2.


For more on the evangelical perception of aestheticism as another version of sentimentality, see below 384-87.

71 Stewart, Elements 465. See 463-66 for Stewart’s full discussion of the dangers of fiction. Stewart, in fact, made both of the arguments sketched earlier in this paragraph. Charvat 23-26 notes the early nineteenth-century American critical opposition to sentimentalism, and especially to “egotism,” as well.

72 For this reason, it is also important not to confuse this psychological critique of sentimentality and of its primary agent, the novel, with the kind of theological critique of benevolism – or sentimentalism as a
theory of ethics – described above. This latter theological critique struck at the root of benevolism, questioning its very premises.


75 See Douglas.

76 See, for example, “Novels and Novel Reading,” Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review 204-206, 221-22. Interestingly, the author invokes Coleridge’s distinction between the Imagination and Fancy as a critical tool by which to judge the novel as a species of art. See, too, the following remark by J.P. Barnett, which draws an implicit distinction between the novel and (high) “artistic truth,” between the novelist and the genuine artist: “In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred of the works of fiction which are current, life is painted, not as it really is, but as the novelist prefers to conceive of it; and he conceives of it as he does, not in the spirit of the conscientious artist, but for the sake of the sensationalism which he can crowd into it both for himself and his readers – a sensationalism which he knows will liberally pay him in hard cash. He writes about society, trade, friendship, love, marriage, joy and sorrow, hope and fear, right and wrong, life and death, not in the sober and substantial fact, not even in that of artistic truth, but rather in the fierce glare of romance” (“Novels and Novel Reading,” Baptist Magazine [Nov. 1882] 501). Note also the suggestion that the novel and the novelist are slaves to the marketplace. Fine art, however, was increasingly being viewed as capable of standing above base commercialization.

77 This observation, I want to suggest, is absolutely crucial in the context of Lynn S. Neal’s recent discussion of the “evangelical aesthetic” of twenty-first-century America, which she describes in terms of four core emphases: “mediocrity, predictability, utility, and sentimentality” (190). The difficulty is not in claiming that this sort of evangelical aesthetic exists in contemporary America, nor even that it represents
the dominant evangelical approach to art; but it is important to keep in mind that this particular aesthetic marks the culmination of only one strain of the evangelical aesthetic tradition. Even as nineteenth-century evangelical novelists were embracing the American tradition of the sentimentalist novel – a trend that fit well with the stress which revivalist piety placed on the feelings – nineteenth-century evangelical critics were taking a stand as some of the most outspoken opponents of sentimentalism.

78 “Novel Reading,” Christian Index (1885) 2.
80 “Prospects of British Art,” British Quarterly Review 2 (Nov. 1845) 467, 478.
evangelicals in particular, the case was even more complex since many evangelicals were in fact
Nonconformists. Often, though, those evangelicals outside of the Anglican establishment were eager to
demonstrate that their apparent sectarianism did not pose a threat to national identity. Sometimes they even
went out of their way to demonstrate that their specific brand of evangelical religion was indispensable to
both national progress and national identity. See, for example, “An Essay on the National Importance of
Methodism,” *Eclectic Review* 7 (Feb. 1832): 97-145. As the author declares, “So great is the separate
importance of Methodism and of evangelical Dissent, that the influence of neither could be spared, without
the most imminent danger to the vital interests of the State” (125). Wolfe also provides another good
example of the ways in which British and American Protestants handled a common sentiment – in this case,
anti-Catholicism – in slightly different ways. While British and American Protestants alike saw Roman
Catholicism as an imminent threat to their respective “national mind[s]” (to borrow a phrase from the
writer in the *British Quarterly Review* quoted above), British Protestants could align Catholics with “the
forces of democratic revolution” while American Protestants tended to see them as “agent[s] of
monarchical absolutism” (304). Also relevant here is the argument advanced by Mark A. Noll, among
others, that the merger of republicanism and Christianity constituted an “American exception.” See Noll,
*America’s God* 53-72.

85 In fact, it is worth pointing out that the mutual recognition of Great Britain and the United States as
Christian nations with a shared religious heritage, a common evangelistic mission, and a joint opposition to
the threat of “papal aggression” by Protestants in both countries could at times lead not to the concentration
of distinct national identities but rather to a sense of trans-national unity that was religious and at the same
time broadly ideological. Thus N. Murray, delivering an address in New York in 1851 on *The Decline of
Popery and Its Causes*, envisioned the worldwide defeat of Roman Catholicism not merely in theological
terms but in terms of a complete eradication of Catholic culture at the hands of an ascendant Anglo-
American Protestantism as manifested by everything from empire to industry: “What mean the vast
enterprise, skill and industry of Britain – her extended commerce – her empire, upon which the sun never
sets – her laws, extended over millions of India – her protection of the right wherever her flag floats? …
They show the advance of Protestantism. What mean the rising cities of these free states … those rapidly multiplying churches for the worship of God in every direction … the building of cities and churches by the waves of the Pacific, and where, until recently, nothing in the way of religion dare be lisped save popish mummeries. They mark the advance of Protestantism” (qtd. in Wolfe 307). See also Handy 110. During periods of political and economic turmoil between the two countries, this feeling of international Protestant unity could prove vulnerable to other non-religious allegiances – as in the years surrounding the War of 1812, for instance (see Kermes 101-103) – but Murray’s sentiments were hardly unusual in the nineteenth century. Along with Secretary Beecher of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, Victorian Protestants frequently predicted the advance of Protestant “civilization” – a term which was often used as a moniker for a set of broadly Protestant, Anglo-American values and institutions. In general, however, Protestantism’s ability to generate a transatlantic *esprit de corps* did not mean the effacement of discrete American and British identities (each of which saw Protestant Christianity as central to its identity); rather, just as a Protestant nation was imagined as a conglomeration of Protestant individuals, so Protestant “civilization” was understood to subsist and advance through the efforts and contributions of like-minded Christian nations.


88 Handy 32. See also Kermes 195.

89 Jesse Appleton, “True Sources of National Prosperity,” *The Works of Rev. Jesse Appleton, D.D., Late President of Bowdoin College, Embracing His Course of Theological Lectures, His Academic Addresses, and a Selection from His Sermons: with a Memoir of His Life and Character*, vol. 2 (Andover, MA: Gould and Newman, 1836) 305, qtd. in Handy 32. Frank E. Sickels, writing in the *New York Evangelist* in 1901, provides a late example of this idea: “There is no man who thinks and does not know that the development of a nation and the quantity and quality of its accomplishments along the lines of material, aesthetic and intellectual progress are essentially matters of human character; and who does not also know that character

90 See chapter 2 of the present study. This notion was not confined to America alone, however. The idea had also existed in Britain since the fourteenth century (Clark 270).

91 Rev. George Cubitt, “National Prosperity Dependent on the Divine Blessing: A Sermon,” Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine 10 (Aug. 1831) 525. The sermon was reprinted in two parts, and this quotation appears in Part 2. The first part of the sermon was printed in the previous month’s issue, pp. 459-71. See also the reprinted sermon by Peter Peckard, “National Crimes the Cause of National Punishments: A Discourse, Delivered in the Cathedral Church of Peterborough, on the Fast-Day, February 25th, 1795,” Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine 7 (Aug. 1861) 687-95, which dealt with the abolition of slavery. In a footnote, the editors observe that slavery has been eradicated in Europe and most of the world while noting that there remains “one flagrant exception” (687 n.). They also explain that although the events of slavery are in the past, “the time to draw wisdom from them is always present” (688 n.).

92 H.C. Westwood, “Art as a Moral Reformer,” Christian Advocate 60 (9 July 1885) 438. Despite the title of this article, Westwood actually casts doubt on art’s capacity for moral influence, though he remains a staunch advocate of the Protestant ideology linking Protestantism, morality, and civilization.

93 Qtd. in Wolfe 297. For a short biographical sketch of MacNeile, see Wolfe 296-97. The Maynooth Act of 1845 increased the amount of money granted by the British government to the Roman Catholic college in Maynooth, Ireland from £9,000 to £27,000. For a brief account of this decision, see Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966) 222-24.

94 Samuel Stanhope Smith, The Lectures, Corrected and Improved, which Have Been Delivered for a Series of Years, in the College of New Jersey; On the Subjects of Moral and Political Philosophy, vol. 1 (New York: Whiting and Watson, 1812) 202-203. See also Smith’s further discussion of the moral influence of the fine arts, 207ff., which reflects, in encyclopedic fashion, the prevalent ideas in Enlightenment aesthetics. Describing the effects of sculpture and painting, for example, Smith writes: “Both these arts may reach even the interior of the soul by giving to the features, the attitudes and gestures of their
characters, those lively and expressive traits which never fail to develop, to the nice observer and copier of human nature, the emotions and sentiments of the mind” (210).


96 “Practical Aesthetics,” British Quarterly Review 71 (Jan. 1880) 49, 55.


98 Drummond 29.


100 Eugene Parsons, “Tennyson’s Art and Genius,” Baptist Quarterly Review 11 (Jan. 1889) 43.

101 Ibid. 46.


103 “Fine Art: Its Nature, Necessities, and Offices,” Methodist Quarterly Review 26 (Apr. 1874) 241. Interestingly, this article was also published in Britain the same year in a slightly edited and abbreviated form as “Fine Art a Record of Civilization,” Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine 20 (Aug. 1874): 702-708. As one might expect, the concluding section devoted to the need for a specifically American art culture was eliminated.


108 Thus, for example, see Joseph LeConte, who writes: “The true mission of art, like religion, is, by subduing somewhat the sensuous and emotional, and strengthening the higher faculties – the imagination, the sense of beauty, etc. – to set these latter free; to pluck the soul from the miry clay, that it may take is upward flight. The state of mind, then, which it is the object of high art to produce, is one in which the senses, passions, or emotions are powerfully impressed, but the intellect equally or still more so…” (“On the Nature and Uses of Art,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 15 [Jan. 1863] 322).

109 “Art: Its Aspirations and Prospects,” *Eclectic Review* 9 (Feb. 1855) 144. The full quotation, the terms of which I have rearranged slightly to fit the structure of my own discussion, reads as follows: “Art [its detractors claim] is now only an interlude in life’s more serious drama. This is a great mistake; for she is not only the measure but the means of mental advancement, not only the product but the agent of civilization.”


111 “National Literature, the Exponent of National Character,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 24 (Apr. 1852) 205, 206. “Literature,” of course, was a category which, in 1852, was not yet restricted to works of an “imaginative” type. It included poetry and fiction but also works of history, oratory, theology, philosophy, etc. Nevertheless, I believe we can reasonably take these comments to apply to Art in general. The fine arts were merely another instance of the phenomenon noted here, not an exception.

112 See Williams 137-61. As Williams reminds us, “An essential hypothesis in the development of the idea of culture is that the art of a period is closely and necessarily related to the generally prevalent ‘way of life,’
and further that, in consequence, aesthetic, moral, and social judgments are closely interrelated. Such a hypothesis is now so generally accepted, as a matter of intellectual habit, that it is not always easy to remember that it is, essentially, a product of the intellectual history of the nineteenth century” (137).


120 F.M. Bristol, “Reciprocity of Art and Religion,” Methodist Review 54 (Sep. 1894) 697-98.


125 As Morgan writes, “Postmillennialism survived, but in transmuted form” (10).


127 Wilde 4.

128 For Kant’s treatment of disinterestedness, see his Critique of Judgment, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987) 44-53 (1.1.1-5); Shelley, Defense 486.


In *Dorian Gray*, Wilde expresses this general credo thus: “Yes: there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new Hedonism that was to recreate life, and to save it from that harsh uncomely puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival. It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly; yet, it was never to accept any theory or system that would involved the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience, sweet or bitter as they might be. Of the asceticism that deadens the senses, as of the vulgar profligacy that dulls them, it was to know nothing. But it was to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment” (99).


Oddly enough, it may be the author’s very unwillingness to suspend the moral code for the individual artist that allows him the freedom to deny art’s obligations to society: if an artist is a morally upright person individually, there is no need to fear that the productions which issue from his or her hand will be in any way immoral. Consequently, the question of morality becomes a moot point, and both the artist and society are free to concentrate on art for “its own sake.” For a much later example of praise for an aestheticist position by an evangelical critic, see “English Sacred Song,” *Baptist Magazine* 82 (Jan. 1890) 10: “In view of the prevalent opinion in literary and aesthetic circles, it is encouraging to read Mr. Palgrave’s account that his first aim [in compiling ‘The Treasury of Sacred Song,’ under review here] has been to offer poetry for poetry’s sake.” Once again, however, this kind of approach was relatively rare among evangelicals.


“The True Notion of the Picturesque,” *Christian Advocate* 58 (15 Nov. 1883) 726.

Mims, “Poetry,” *Methodist Review* [south] 390, 391. See also the following passage from a letter written by a British evangelical, the Rev. J. Hunt Cooke, to the *Watchman*, a conservative Baptist periodical published in the United States: “Considering the great and subtle influences of art, the assertion to artists that it has nothing to do with morality ought to be severely reprehended. The painter of an impure picture may influence an untold number of our young people for evil. The painter of a wholly good picture opens a fountain of blessing, perhaps for generations to come. We need to have Art baptized into Christianity” (“London Letter,” *Watchman* 76 [22 Aug. 1895] 8).


See Morgan’s discussion of “Religious Art and the Formation of Character,” esp. 305-26, which focuses on the growing emphasis, particularly among liberal American Protestants near the end of the nineteenth century, on images “as a powerful technology for shaping attitudes in light of the nonrational foundation of the personality. For many liberal Protestants the sort of imagery that was appropriate for this appeal to the affective side of humans was fine art” (326). Morgan, furthermore, contrasts this liberal attention to the
affective side of human beings to the “rationalistic tradition of the eighteenth-century,” which he identifies with Reformed Christianity and the Scottish Enlightenment. As noted earlier, my own account in this chapter offers a slight corrective to Morgan’s argument. Though Morgan acknowledges the prevalence of “moral influence” among American Protestants from at least the 1820s, he seems to suggest that its applicability to fine art only arose at the very end of the nineteenth century among liberal Protestants. In contrast to this, I have suggested that the notion of art’s moral influence developed intrinsically out of the very Enlightenment thought he juxtaposes to late-nineteenth-century liberal Protestant ideas of influence.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

THE RELIGIO-AESTHETIC DIVIDE OF THE 1890s AND BEYOND: ART, AESTHETICS, AND THE FUNDAMENTALIST-MODERNIST CONTROVERSY

It is not the character of Christ that is the revelation of God; that is too aesthetic a position for the final and requisite religion….


By the last decade of the nineteenth century, evangelical Protestantism, which had helped to shape the religious and cultural landscapes of both the United States and Britain since the eighteenth century, found itself on shaky ground.¹ To the casual observer, evangelicalism no doubt looked much as it always had. Evangelicals continued to extol the virtues of the “Christian nation,” and their missionary efforts both at home and abroad remained largely undaunted. To many onlookers, in fact, it must have seemed like business as usual, for in the period between 1860 and 1900, Protestant churches in the United States actually witnessed a threefold increase in membership. Behind this gilded façade, however, evangelicals were struggling to make sense of the new social and intellectual challenges of modernity, which, since the 1860s and 1870s, had been chipping away at the foundations of the evangelical edifice. Darwin’s theory of evolution and German Higher Criticism had combined to cast doubt on the historicity and inerrancy of Scripture; rapid urbanization had led to the erosion of rural networks that had long
provided social support for traditional religious values; and a general process of secularization had begun to transform institutions (e.g., the university) that had once maintained close ties to orthodox Protestant Christianity. As the turn of the twentieth century approached, there emerged among evangelicals increasingly fierce disagreement about the most effective means of addressing these challenges. For some, the appropriate strategy was to defend “traditional” values, even if this meant separating from “mainstream” culture; for others, the most reasonable response to modernity was not rejection but accommodation. What became known as the “Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy,” which reached its height of conflict in the 1920s, resulted in a radical reconfiguration of Anglo-American evangelicalism – intellectually, socially, and theologically – the impact of which continues to this day.

Disputes between fundamentalist and modernist factions were not distributed evenly across the many subgroups that comprised Anglo-American evangelicalism in the early decades of the twentieth century. Fundamentalism, for example, as David Bebbington has observed, was more pronounced among American evangelicals than it was among the British, who often responded differently to perceived religio-cultural threats such as Darwinism. In America, moreover, the controversy affected some denominations more than others. Its effects were strongest among Northern Baptists, who lacked a central governing authority with the power to enforce a particular theological viewpoint, and Northern Presbyterians, whose ranks included a number of high profile advocates for fundamentalist causes (e.g., William Jennings Bryan). In general, the controversy was less heated, though not entirely absent, among Northern
Methodists, while it had little to no impact on the majority of Congregationalists, many of whom had embraced theological liberalism long before. Southern evangelicalism was, for the most part, a stronghold of theological conservatism, and consequently, most denominations were quick to sympathize with the fundamentalist position. At the same time, the influence of modernism was, in the first few decades of the twentieth century, confined largely to the universities, its appeal being predominantly to elite northern intellectuals. Fundamentalism, by contrast, had a more populist orientation and therefore made notable inroads among local congregations. Despite such differences, however, the effects of the controversy were felt across a wide cross-section of evangelicalism. As James Davison Hunter writes, “[I]t is now clear that the period from just before the turn of the century through the end of World War I was a most decisive one for American Protestantism. By 1919, it was clear even to the man on the street that a bifurcation had emerged within American Protestantism.” Even in England, where evangelicals sometimes expressed confusion over the struggles of their American counterparts, the battle between conservatives and liberals was real enough. Noting the rise of fundamentalism in America, one Scottish writer conceded in 1924 that “fundamentalism” was not a word widely used in Britain, though nevertheless, “the thing which the uncomely word describes is not unfamiliar to us here.” By 1927, one British periodical had renamed itself The Fundamentalist.

Though they quickly came to anathematize one another, fundamentalists and modernists were in fact cut from the same evangelical cloth. Both parties believed strongly that they were preserving the truths of Christianity in the face of new threats.
Each group, however, tended to emphasize different aspects of the nineteenth-century evangelical tradition. Fundamentalism, which George Marsden has defined as “militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism,” brought together aspects of revivalism, common sense realism, traditional Judeo-Christian morality, and biblical literalism.

Added to these elements were two other late-nineteenth-century theological developments: dispensational premillennialism and holiness teachings (particularly of the Keswick variety). Both of these developments stressed, in different ways, a kind of otherworldly perspective and as a result encouraged a retreat from the sort of cultural engagement that had characterized nineteenth-century evangelicalism. While fundamentalists did not abandon all concern for social and national welfare – in fact, their attitudes towards the nation were at times rather ambiguous – they tended to accentuate the individual, the supernatural, and the ahistorical. Modernism, on the other hand, perpetuated the social and ethical consciousness of the nineteenth-century evangelical tradition. What modernists emphasized, following early liberalizers like Horace Bushnell, was the immanence of God in the progress of human culture. The most effective response to the crises that modernity posed was not simply to rehash what were seen as tired and powerless dogmas but rather to translate the essential truths of Christianity into a more contemporary idiom (which for modernists almost always meant a socio-ethical one). Mocking what he took to be the shortcomings of the fundamentalist solution to the social woes of the twentieth century, Shailer Mathews, a prominent defender of liberal Protestantism and dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School, wrote in *The Faith of Modernism* (1924): “The world needs new control of nature and
society and is told that the Bible is verbally inerrant. It needs a means of composing class strife, and is told to believe in the substitutionary atonement. It needs faith in the divine presence in human affairs and is told it must accept the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.10

For modernists, Christianity’s potential resided primarily in its ethical contribution to social transformation, and indeed modernists were instrumental in advancing the Social Gospel in the closing decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries – a movement which fundamentalists, for their part, prided themselves on rejecting. Ultimately, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy marked the collapse of the relative unity and cooperation that had typified nineteenth-century evangelicalism. Modernists accused fundamentalists of sticking their heads in the sand, while fundamentalists accused modernists of distorting the faith beyond all recognition.11

In the end, the social and theological rift that developed had serious implications for the ways in which evangelicals approached a range of cultural and intellectual activities, including science, politics, and the fine arts.12

In this concluding chapter, I would like to examine the relationship between the evangelical aesthetic tradition that we have been tracing throughout this study and the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century. Historians and scholars have frequently discussed the effects of this controversy on different aspects of evangelical thought, including science, politics, and “culture” in general; however, the impact of this debate on the tradition of evangelical aesthetics in particular has received far less attention.13 Yet the struggle between liberals and conservatives marked a significant turning-point in the history of evangelical aesthetics, as it did for evangelical
thought in general. Specifically, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy signaled a breakdown of the evangelical romantic consensus regarding art and aesthetics, and the Protestant ideology as a whole, which had prevailed since at least the 1830s. No longer did a broad coalition of Anglo-American evangelicals agree on the value of the fine arts, either for their own sake or for their service to Protestant culture, nor could evangelicals agree on the importance of thinking philosophically about aesthetics. The widespread interest in the arts and in aesthetic theory that had been a hallmark of nineteenth-century evangelicalism became, in many quarters, a thing of the past. An ideological chasm – a chasm not only religious but also aesthetic in nature – had begun to open up between fundamentalists and modernists; the evangelical pax aesthetica of the nineteenth century was at its end.

**Liberal Protestants, Evangelical Romanticism, and the Protestant Ideology**

From one perspective, liberal Protestants were more obviously the torchbearers of both the Protestant ideology and the aesthetic tradition of evangelical romanticism. Art and culture remained an important part of their agenda. In an address delivered in 1912 on the topic of “Gospel and Culture,” J.R. Darbyshire, vice-principal of Ridley Hall, bemoaned the fact that evangelicals, in his view, were still far too preoccupied with preaching a “traditional” gospel to the detriment of cultural pursuits: “We must be forever so presenting the Gospel to the unlearned in terms of a traditional phraseology if we are to be recognized as Evangelical, that we have not time to feed the thoughtful, inspires the ambitious, and shew the glory of consecrating the secular.” Accordingly, Darbyshire
called for greater evangelical attention to arts and letters.\textsuperscript{14} In particular, liberal Protestants continued to emphasize many of the key themes of nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics, including art’s essential connection to religion, its capacity for moral influence, and its role in the progress of Protestant civilization. In fact, the aesthetics of liberal Protestantism represented the final triumph of the romanticizing trend in evangelical aesthetics that we have traced throughout this study. Whereas mid-nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics had been marked by various attempts to negotiate, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, between the principles of romantic aesthetic theory (which were themselves grounded on romantic views of the world, the human personality, etc.) and the claims of orthodox Christianity, liberal aesthetics escaped this tension by denying or adjusting the claims of traditional Protestant faith. This is not especially surprising given the fact that theological liberalism was itself an outgrowth of the romantic impulse in Anglo-American Protestantism. Often taking its inspiration from such thinkers as Hegel, Schleiermacher, Coleridge, and Bushnell, liberalism tended to stress the presence of God in all things, the union of the subjective and the objective, and “consubstantiality” of the natural and supernatural.\textsuperscript{15} “God” was no longer the personal deity of orthodox Christian theology but the “force” or, to borrow Thomas Hardy’s terminology, the “Immanent Will” at work in the universe and in human culture, while the essence of religion was to be found in “religious experience” or in fidelity to an ethical ideal (e.g., sacrificial love) rather than in the revealed truths of Scripture or an established system of doctrines. Since, moreover, the “divine” was present in all human beings, people could access this divinity or aspire to a high moral
standard on their own. Individual conversion or regeneration by the Holy Spirit were no longer prerequisites for holy living or authentic spiritual experience. Working within this sort of theological and philosophical context, liberal Protestants were free to embrace the full romantic potential of art – spiritually, morally, and socially.

One of the most important aspects of liberal thought in the early twentieth century was the close relationship that a number of writers perceived between aesthetic and religious experience. Indeed, many thinkers had come to see aesthetic and religious experience as virtually identical. This notion had gradually evolved over the course of the nineteenth century from its origins in German idealism, though, as we saw in chapter 4, many Victorian evangelical critics had strongly resisted it, especially before the 1870s and 1880s, favoring instead a subordinationist model that held Christianity and art in a hierarchical tension and kept religious and aesthetic experience phenomenologically distinct. Now, however, the seeds planted by early innovators like Bushnell and H.W. Beecher had fully matured, and many liberal Protestants accepted the fusion of the aesthetic and religious as a mere matter of course.

Commentators have often discussed this fusion as a single phenomenon, but for the sake of precision, it may be helpful to distinguish two ways in which this phenomenon manifested itself, both of which found liberal Protestant advocates. The first of these was the spiritualization of art, which held that aesthetic appreciation constitutes a form of religious experience and/or that art objects can serve as a manifestation of, or a point of contact with, the divine. “Something like a Religion of Culture,” writes James Turner, “flourished [near the end of the nineteenth century] on
both sides of the Atlantic, without much regard to traditional religious beliefs. Art museums and concert halls became, in the then-current phrase, temples of culture.” As Turner points out, progressive evangelicals like Beecher and Bushnell had contributed to the rise of this Religion of Culture, as had the revivelist tradition’s emphasis on “feeling” generally.16 But a wide range of evangelicals – not only controversial figures like Beecher and Bushnell – had also contributed to this development more specifically. There were, as we have seen, antecedents within nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetic discourse, such as, among others, the idealist philosophies of art sketched in chapter 3. The second way was the aestheticization of religion.17 This aestheticization took a number of forms, ranging from the Christ-as-Artist cult that was popular around the turn of the century to revised understandings of biblical inspiration. The British Methodist, J.A. Chapman, for instance, compared biblical to aesthetic inspiration, formulating it as “that which yields insight into beauty, truth, goodness, and God.” The effects of the Bible differed little, if at all, from the effects of good music or poetry.18 Its most important manifestation, however, concerned the nature of religion itself. Religion was believed to be essentially “aesthetic” – that is, religious doctrines, for instance, were best understood not as fixed propositional formulas that appeal to the intellect but rather as suggestive “poetic” utterances that appeal to the emotions and to intuition. Behind this view stood a long line of writers, most notably Coleridge and Bushnell. These two varieties of religio-aesthetic fusion, of course, were closely related to one another – what they held in common was the assumption that the “aesthetic” (and hence the “religious”) is primarily affective rather than cognitive – and twentieth-century liberals to some extent
embraced both.

When it came to the spiritualization of art, liberals were at times careful to avoid the notion that they were “worshiping” art or culture themselves, though an increasing number of turn-of-the-century liberals did counsel an enhanced attention to the aesthetic within worship.¹⁹ Longstanding Puritan-evangelical concerns about the idolatry of art and the supremacy of God exerted enough of a residual pressure to prevent such art-worship, at least in theory. For this reason, some liberal Protestants also stopped short of the position taken by Matthew Arnold and by other late-Victorian agnostics, namely, that art can serve as a valid substitute for religion. Most liberals did not advocate the erection of a Church of Art to replace institutional Protestantism (though many believed that existing church buildings ought to be more artistic); rather, liberals emphasized, following some mid-nineteenth-century evangelical idealists, that art is an expression of the divine mind, a manifestation of the “ideal.” In *The Evolution of Christianity* (1892), Lyman Abbot, the influential preacher and writer who succeeded H.W. Beecher at the Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, described art, and in fact all human activity, as an expression of both the “divine artist” and the universal human search for the “Infinite”:

> The cry of the human being from the earliest age – the cry of Job, “Oh that I knew where I might find him!” – is still the cry of humanity. All history is the search after God. All science, whether the scientist knows it or not, is the thinking of the thoughts of God after him, the trying to find him. All art is the search after the ideal art as it exists in some true, divine artist…. All men have at the hearts of them more or less of this hunger and desire to know the Infinite and the Eternal.²⁰

For Abbot, artistic creation is a search for God, while art is a record of the religious
consciousness of humanity and thus, by extension, a reflection of Infinite Consciousness itself. Viewed against the backdrop of evangelical aesthetic history, this suggestion that there exists in art objects a divine plenitude represented a complete reversal of the Puritan position. The problem of presence, which the Reformers and Puritans had bequeathed to Protestant aesthetics, was no more. The cost of resolving the “problem,” however, was the Puritan conception of the radical transcendence of God.

Perhaps even more central to the liberal Protestant worldview than the spiritualization of art, however, was the aestheticization of religion. It is worth reiterating that aestheticization was for the most part a defensive measure undertaken in an effort to protect Christianity from the onslaught of modern science. Whereas many fundamentalists, as we will see, opted to defend Christianity by meeting science on its own ground, many liberals turned to inherited aesthetic concepts in an attempt to place religion beyond the reach of science. As the tradition of western aesthetics had long held, art and science offer distinct approaches to the world, and as a result, art is immune to scientific analysis. Religious experience, many liberals argued, is like aesthetic experience, and therefore religion, too, is immune to the assaults of modern science. In an article published in the *Biblical World* in 1913, Walter Sargent, a Professor of Fine and Industrial Art at the University of Chicago, advanced a slightly different, but complementary, version of this argument. Sargent takes as his operating assumption the idea that religion and science constitute two different modes of apprehending reality. Whereas science “regards as knowledge only those matters which have been conclusively demonstrated by an impartial analysis of all the available facts,” religion relies on “an
immediate sympathetic response between the individual and his surroundings.” Sargent was keenly aware that intuitive claims of the religious sort are not easily verifiable according to scientific standards. If, however, one could point to another, widely accepted example “where ranges of experience apparently closed to scientific approach had been opened up by immediate emotional response,” then such an example “would help to authenticate the kind of experience which religion claims.” This other range of experience, of course, was the fine arts: “The fine arts also tend to quicken a highly complex type of emotional life and thus to refine those powers of sympathetic response which alone are capable of knowing God….” For Sargent, the phenomenology of aesthetic experience lent credence to the phenomenology of religious experience.

It is important to note that it was not the intent of most liberals to reduce religion entirely to the subjective, or to what Paul Tillich later called the “emotionalistic distortion” of faith, though conservatives often accused them of doing so. Most liberals believed they were making epistemological claims about how one encounters the divine – e.g., through feeling or sympathy – claims which already assumed the objective reality of the divine object. Hence liberals were at times sensitive to the dangers of hyper-subjectivism, much as some mid-nineteenth-century aesthetic idealists had been. This sensitivity is evident, for example, in an article written by the liberal Baptist minister, Harry Emerson Fosdick. Entitled “Yes, But Religion Is an Art!,” the essay appeared in Harper’s Monthly Magazine in January of 1931. Interestingly, Fosdick rehearses, almost as if he had been the first to do so, many of the themes that had been a mainstay of evangelical aesthetics since the nineteenth century. He laments the aesthetic vacuity of
the Protestant tradition, warns against the dangers of trying to address this lack by flying to Rome, and calls for greater attention among contemporary Protestants to art and beauty. His central concern, however, is with the faith-killing effects of modern science. Fosdick’s prescribed antidote to the poison of science is, rather predictably, to recognize religion as an “art.” “No folly of religion…,” he claims, “could be more ruinous than the endeavor to jam itself within the categories and vocabulary of contemporary science. What religion most wants to say must be put into artistic vehicles.” Fosdick is conscious, however, that this view is particularly susceptible to the critique that “religion is altogether subjective, that no objective cosmic reality corresponds with our similes….” To this, he replies that there are other kinds of “truth” than the scientific: “it seems clear that a scientific description never tells the whole truth about anything.” Science does not exhaust reality. One must also cultivate religio-aesthetic “truth” – or an objective truth subjectively apprehended. In spite of Fosdick’s efforts to ward off accusations of solipsism and subjectivism, however, there is no denying that in the end liberal epistemological claims were not really separable from liberal theological claims regarding the nature of God’s self-revelation and therefore of God himself. In theological terms, the crucial question is not simply whether a metaphysical object exists really and absolutely but also what the nature of this object is. Claims about epistemology were (and are) inextricably linked to claims about ontology, so while Fosdick and some other liberals may have wished to avoid the pitfall of a thoroughgoing monism, most were far from maintaining anything like a traditional conception of the personhood of God.

Turn-of-the-century liberal Protestants also continued to insist on the essential
connection between art and morality that had been a key feature of nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics. Over the course of the nineteenth century, many Anglo-Americans had come to understand “religion” in terms of morality rather than in terms of doctrine or traditional forms of piety, and liberalism represented a culmination of this evolution. Nineteenth-century theories of art’s moral influence had played a role in this evolution by reinforcing the belief that moral cultivation was a function not of a supernatural process of regeneration and sanctification but of “natural” psychological, aesthetic, and moral laws. It is not surprising, therefore, given the stress which they placed on morality and social progress, that liberal Protestants would continue to propagate such theories. In his *Protestants & Pictures*, David Morgan offers a detailed account of early-twentieth-century American liberal Protestantism’s emphasis on “character formation” and the role of the fine arts in such formation. As Morgan explains, turn-of-the-century liberals perpetuated a belief in social and national progress, at the center of which was a vision of “character” cultivation and personal and collective “self-realization.” Drawing on older Bushnellian ideas of nurture, as well as contemporary theories in the fields of religious psychology and pedagogy which “stressed the developmental structure of character formation and the emergence of personal identity,” liberals argued for the importance of developing strong moral character as a way of ensuring the stability and progress of society. This liberal Protestant emphasis on morality and character formation also led to a renewed commitment to religious education and educational reform, and liberals introduced a number of important changes to the established system of religious education. Among
liberal Protestants, there was a “shift … from teaching the Bible to forming ‘religious persons,’” and along with this shift came an increased attention to the fine arts. Whereas older Sunday School curriculums had utilized visual imagery primarily as a means of illustrating a lesson, new liberal curriculums encouraged appreciation of the fine arts as a means of promoting the development of “religious persons.” The introduction of new technologies of visual reproduction near the end of the nineteenth century – in particular, the “halftone” – provided material support for such policies by enabling greater public exposure to the fine arts.25

Yet while liberals availed themselves of new technologies and turn-of-the-century theories, and while they advocated a heightened attention to art within both the sanctuary and the classroom, they were at the same time playing variations on themes inherited from nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetic discourse. In suggesting that fine art hones the moral character and that it does so not didactically but affectively, liberal Protestants were more or less extending the tradition of anti-didactic moralism that had dominated Victorian evangelical aesthetic thought. Writing in the *Christian Century* in 1909 on the topic of “the Religious Significance of Poetry,” Marietta Neff employed terminology that would not have been unfamiliar to Edward Otheman, nor to countless other nineteenth-century evangelical critics:

> But if the function of poetry be after all the religious function of stirring high passion, of making the heart sensitive to the finer issues of life, of speaking to the listening soul with voices that are not heard on earth forever save in dreams – if these appeals constitute the function of poetry, then indeed its essence must be not a ponderous didacticism, but even so frail and fleeting a thing as beauty like the poignant fairness of moonlight
waters, or of silvery pools under the sun of early winter, or of blue lakes at peace with the blue sky; even, moreover, beauty as vast and terrible as the surge and thunder of multitudinous seas.26

If Neff’s understanding of the non-didactic function of poetry differed at all from some of its nineteenth-century evangelical predecessors, it did so by virtue of the fact that is was underwritten by a comprehensive ontological diagnosis of the final impenetrability of reality. “The fundamental objection to didacticism in literature,” noted Neff in the opening line of her article, “is not … any subjective criterion of taste, but the simplest of logical principles – that life is larger than anything one can say about it, experience more complex than any formula ….” Thus, Neff concluded, “Things that are generally accepted are generally wrong; truths that can be reduced to a proposition have lost their vitality.” Such ideas were by no means foreign to certain strands of the romantic tradition of philosophy and aesthetics, and many nineteenth-century evangelicals would certainly have supported on some level the notion of extra-propositional truths, but a significant number would also have shied away from accepting this kind of statement as an exhaustive account of reality. It was simply not consistent with the common sense epistemological tradition within which many evangelicals had operated since the eighteenth century. Twentieth-century liberals such as Neff, however, were pressing the legacy of anti-didactic moralism to its romantic extreme.

Furthermore, the liberal Protestant ideal of character formation and the role of the aesthetic in this formation echoed aspects of the whole-person argument that had long served as the basis for a liberal arts model of education and had also been instrumental in drawing the attention of evangelicals to a more sustained consideration of the aesthetic
dimension of life. This is not to suggest that liberals were merely traversing old ground. Their real innovation was to make person-formation, rather than doctrinal instruction, the goal of religious education, though they also believed general education ought to be broadly “religious” as well. In either case, they were nonetheless drawing upon a network of established assumptions that had long been a part of evangelical aesthetic discourse. Writing on “The Religious Ideal in Education” for the liberal Protestant *Outlook* in 1911, Charles W. Eliot, President Emeritus of Harvard, pointed to the importance of beauty and the fine arts in fulfilling the religious ideal of his title:

> The sense of the beautiful or the lovely is … something which should be developed and cultivated throughout all education. Through all school life the utmost pains should be taken to stimulate in every child love of the beautiful, to keep the sentiment pure and noble, and to give the child through its gratification genuine joy and a satisfaction which will increase as the child’s whole nature develops, and will mount as life goes on. This sentiment is an important element in the spirit of man. Fed through the bodily senses, it is essentially an ethereal and religious delight.\(^{27}\)

Indeed, when liberal Protestants discussed the moral potential of art and the aesthetic, such discussions often appeared in an educational context. Noting the growing public attendance at art galleries on Sundays, the *Biblical World* suggested in 1913 that “pastors and Sunday-school teachers would do well to make a study, not only of the picture galleries in great cities, but of the numerous prints which may represent these to those who are remote from them.” The *Biblical World* did express a wish that “more could be done to make more effective in the inspiration of definite religious thought and ideal this Sunday afternoon ministry of art to the public,” but it ultimately commended the
educational value of this “ministry” nonetheless. “Art has yet to make its strongest appeal in religious education…. It is our own fault if we do not make use of it.” Art as “ministry,” moreover, had been a common turn-of-phrase among evangelical critics since the 1840s.

Liberal Protestants, then, remained committed to a vision of art’s vital role within a broad Protestant ideology that linked religion, morality, and the progress of Anglo-American civilization. They were the spokespeople for an Arnoldian model of “culture,” which they saw as the key to social stability and evolution, and as a manifestation of the developing Kingdom of God. To be sure, some liberals managed to refrain from following Arnold in completely overturning the hierarchical relationship between Christianity and culture that had prevailed, at least in theory, among many nineteenth-century evangelicals. But it was nevertheless clear that culture had become the primary focal point for many Anglo-American liberals. On the one hand, this ensured an ongoing interest in art and aesthetics among liberal Protestants since art continued to be seen as an index to cultural progress, which was itself an embodiment of the divine. As Josiah Strong argued in *The New Era; or, the Coming Kingdom* (1893), artistic development (among other things) “helps to prepare the way for the full coming of the Kingdom”: “When men generally have risen to a consciousness of God, the discoveries of science, legislation, business, manufactures, agriculture, art – all human activities will enter into the harmony of the divine plans for perfecting the race, not because they are overruled by infinite wisdom, but because men consciously and intelligently co-labor with God to this glorious end.” On the other hand, this enduring esteem for art and aesthetics flourished
Conservative Evangelicals and the Return of Ambivalence

In contrast to liberals, conservative evangelicals in the early decades of the twentieth century presented a somewhat more complex picture. Viewed against the backdrop of the history of evangelical aesthetics that we have been tracing, fundamentalism marked, in one sense, a return to the ambivalence that had been a defining characteristic of the Puritan aesthetic tradition. On the one hand, many conservatives withdrew from any active participation in the critical establishment of the early twentieth century. The primary symptom of this withdrawal was the general abandonment by fundamentalists—and fundamentalist-run periodicals—of the sort of critical reflection on the arts that had been a perennial feature of the denominational journals and magazines published between the 1830s and 1890s. We may recall Roger Lundin’s conclusion, based on an extensive survey of early American fundamentalist publications: “Fundamentalists of the first half of [the twentieth century] wrote almost no essays of significance on the arts.”\(^{31}\) On the other hand, at least some fundamentalists, it seems, also held on to a number of assumptions concerning art and the aesthetic, which they had inherited from the evangelical aesthetic tradition of the nineteenth century. Paradoxically, then, even as early-twentieth-century conservatives pulled away from the Anglo-American “institution of high art” that Victorian evangelicals had helped to foster, they nevertheless continued to perpetuate—though in sometimes subtle ways and/or slightly altered forms—some of the aesthetic principles of their predecessors. Both liberals and conservatives, therefore,
can be variously seen as the rightful heirs of the evangelical romantic tradition of aesthetics.

The exodus of conservative evangelicals from the twentieth-century critical establishment and the corresponding decline of critical interest in the arts that followed were the result of several determinants working in tandem. To an extent, this withdrawal may be attributed to many of the same factors that prompted conservative evangelicals to turn their backs on other sorts of cultural and intellectual pursuits – factors, that is, which had nothing directly to do with art or aesthetics per se. Thus, for instance, the substitution of a premillennial eschatology during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries for the postmillennial eschatology that had dominated evangelical thought until the middle of the nineteenth century helped to promote among fundamentalists a heightened sense of social disillusionment. As we saw in chapter 4, the master narrative of postmillennialism had been one of inexorable cultural progress; the master narrative of premillennialism, by contrast, was one of inexorable cultural decline. Society was speeding towards its God-appointed doom, and the only proper response was to step up evangelistic efforts in order that as many souls as possible might be saved. Art, whatever its intrinsic merits, could in this context amount to little more than a distraction. The growing pessimism of some conservatives was reflected in late-nineteenth-century evangelical doubts about the social potential of art (see chapters 4 and 5). Society was fast becoming a lost cause, and the only hope was individual salvation. What was needed for this kind of personal salvation was the Gospel of Christ, not the Gospel of Art.
Aesthetic theorizing was also a victim of what can be seen as the critical
narrowness of fundamentalism. To some degree, aesthetics was simply a casualty of the
shift in vision that occurred as fundamentalists restricted their attention to a limited
number of pressing issues. Most prominent among these issues was Darwin’s theory of
evolution, which many fundamentalists viewed as a direct challenge to Christian
orthodoxy. The defense of biblical inerrancy was also high on the list of fundamentalist
concerns, as was the preservation of a traditional, supernatural understanding of such
Christian doctrines as the Incarnation and the Atonement. In concentrating their efforts
almost exclusively on a handful of concerns, fundamentalists were in effect resurrecting
the logic at the heart of the exigency argument. Nineteenth-century evangelicals had
identified the rationale behind this argument as a way to honor the Puritans while
lobbying for their own departure from the Puritan aesthetic tradition. Implicit in this
argument, however, had always been, ironically, the dispensability of art; now,
fundamentalists were putting this logic into practice as they suspended their interest in
aesthetic theory to tend to the more urgent business of defending the faith against
theological liberals. Furthermore, in pursuing this line of thought, many fundamentalists
were also effectively surrendering the ideal of wholeness that had characterized, and even
helped to justify, the aesthetic thought of nineteenth-century evangelicals. Gone was any
widespread concern for the standard of balance and harmony that had informed Victorian
evangelical conceptions of both the human personality and society, and which had
stressed the importance of the aesthetic in attaining this standard. Indeed, it is no small
irony that fundamentalists and aesthetes could agree on one point: art and religion need
not associate with one another.

This narrowing of vision was also reflected in the content and outlook of many conservative evangelical periodicals during the early decades of the twentieth century. Though evangelicals had always sponsored a multitude of popular and narrowly focused periodicals devoted to various religious concerns – e.g., news from the mission field – a sizable company of nineteenth-century evangelical publications, as we have seen, had developed formats that encouraged thoughtful reflection on a range of cultural issues. This was in keeping with the Victorian evangelical vision of a thoroughly Christian civilization, and periodicals that surveyed a wide cultural terrain were instrumental in propagating this vision. In some instances, periodicals that had long concentrated on specialized religious topics (the *Baptist Magazine*, for example) had gradually expanded their editorial policies to include topics of general cultural interest, while a number of other periodicals had been founded with the express purpose of educating and refining the intellects of their readers. If, generally speaking, the nineteenth-century trend among evangelical periodicals had been toward cosmopolitanism and intellectual engagement, the trend among twentieth-century fundamentalists was in the opposite direction. The content of many fundamentalist periodicals was devoted almost entirely to articles dealing with evolutionary theory, biblical criticism, and the interpretation of prophecy, along with other religious and devotional matter. Such periodicals became, from one perspective, more and more esoteric and isolated from the concerns of mainstream culture. Once again, the contrast with liberals here is instructive. Not only did many liberal Protestant periodicals continue to publish articles on art and aesthetics but liberal
Protestants also remained actively engaged with the broader culture. It is not insignificant that a liberal minister like Fosdick could find a hearing among the readers of a periodical such as *Harper’s*. At the same time, as we have seen in various ways throughout this study, conservative voices were progressively marginalized even within some periodicals that had once served as a forum for conservative and moderate thought. Certain periodicals, that is to say, fostered and reflected the liberalization of evangelicalism during the early twentieth century. The *Methodist Review*, for example, which published writers who entertained identifiably conservative viewpoints on various theological issues into the 1910s, thereafter increasingly reflected the influence of modernist thought until its eventual dissolution in 1931 (though writers sometimes tried to walk a fine line between the two). One of its final issues contained an article by none other than Shailer Mathews.\(^{33}\) As conservatives gradually assumed the status of “cognitive minority” – to use James Davison Hunter’s phrase\(^ {34}\) – in relation to Anglo-American culture at large, they lost the ability, and sometimes the will, to speak authoritatively about cultural topics to a modern society with which they were increasingly at odds.

Closely related to this narrowing of interests was what many scholars have described as fundamentalism’s anti-intellectualism, which may also have contributed in a general way to a decline in aesthetic philosophizing among conservative evangelicals. Anti-intellectualism, of course, is a sticky term since it is always predicated to a greater or lesser degree on one’s ideological commitments regarding what counts as “intellectual.” Many fundamentalists, for example, believed that they were merely being
intellectually honest in calling attention to what they took to be the flaws in evolutionary theory or the interpretive missteps of the Higher Criticism. Often, in fact, as Marsden has argued, fundamentalists attempted to combat evolutionary theory not on the grounds of an uncritical acceptance of Genesis but rather on the grounds of science itself – or more precisely, on the grounds of the Baconian, common sense tradition of scientific inquiry to which fundamentalists remained committed. They were convinced, that is, that evolution was simply bad science, just as many were also convinced that German biblical criticism was simply bad hermeneutics. Still, if anti-intellectualism is understood in terms of a self-conscious opposition to the perspectives of a predominantly liberal intelligentsia or to the influential worldviews emanating from largely secularized universities, then many fundamentalists were certainly anti-intellectual in orientation. As Marsden notes, fundamentalists frequently found humor in the “suggestion that the ancestors of Ph.D.s were monkeys and baboons” (for an extra laugh, they would sometimes list the initials associated with advanced degrees as “D.D., Ph.D., L.L.D., Litt.D., A.S.S.”). To the intricate theories issuing from the universities concerning the origins of the earth or of the biblical records, fundamentalists opposed the time-tested canons of common sense reasoning, which stressed the ability of the common person to apprehend the facts. The trouble, therefore, was not so much with education itself as it was with an education that taught one to overlook what fundamentalists claimed was simple data. Their loyal adherence to the epistemological claims of common sense realism consequently drove fundamentalists in an increasingly populist direction, while their repeated skirmishes with the modernist academics that were occupying seats of higher learning in ever greater
numbers further intensified their anti-intellectual stance. This growing polarization between fundamentalists and modernist intellectual elites may have contributed, at least obliquely, to a diminution of interest among fundamentalists in aesthetics as a formal philosophical discourse.

Yet while these types of non-aesthetic factors exerted a kind of external pressure on fundamentalists that sped their withdrawal from the twentieth-century critical establishment and contributed to a decline in aesthetic theorizing, there were a number of internal developments at work within the aesthetic thought, and within the art world generally, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that may also have helped to raise suspicions among some fundamentalists about the relative value of art and aesthetics. Most important was the near-fusion of aesthetic and religious experience that had followed in the wake of romanticism. The majority of nineteenth-century evangelical critics, as we have seen throughout this study, had eagerly embraced romantic notions of art, which had variously emphasized the immanent “spirit” at work in the fine arts, whether this spirit was the spirit of the individual mind, the nation, God, Beauty, or simply the “age.” The end result was a conflation of the religious and the aesthetic. Liberal Protestants, as we have seen, increasingly welcomed this union of art and religion, as did many late-Victorian and modernist artists and thinkers who claimed little or no allegiance to Christianity. To conservatives, however, either manifestation of this phenomenon – the spiritualization of art or the aestheticization of religion – seemed repulsive, for both trends threatened in their respective ways to substitute a bastardized form of Christianity for the Protestant orthodoxy of old. Moderate and conservative
Theorists had of course been struggling to resist these developments since the middle of the nineteenth century, but with little success. By the dawn of the twentieth century, both the spiritualization of art and the aestheticization of Christianity had made considerable headway among Anglo-American evangelicals, and traditionalists, it seems, had had enough.

A pair of articles published in the *Methodist Review* during the first two decades of the twentieth century serves to highlight the mounting frustration of conservatives with the spiritualization of art that was increasingly in vogue throughout the evangelical world at the turn of the century. Writing in 1908, Peter Thompson betrayed signs of exasperation with those Beecheresque preachers who would replace a clear presentation of the Gospel with appeals to a congregation’s taste:

> Ministers of other communions, not less devoted than we are, may think their commission is to reach the human heart through the medium of an ornate ritual, and by developing the holiest and best in humanity through aesthetic forms of worship; we feel that our high calling is to preach the Word; that our first business is to declare the unsearchable riches of Christ. Our fundamental conception of a minister’s work is that of preaching.\(^{37}\)

In the same way, a 1917 article on the “Substitutes for Christianity” described the new “religious” spirit that seemed to be sweeping across Europe and America. While this general tendency towards the “religious” was useful in counteracting “aggressive naturalism” and materialism, it was not to be confused with Christianity proper: “To be ‘for religion,’” the author observed, “is not always to be for Christ. Even Antichrist is not anti-religion.” Among the many “religious” replacements for Christianity was “the
aesthetic substitute for religion”: “This idea is that the satisfaction and ennobling of life is to be sought not in the worship of a postulate Deity, but by means of the beautiful in nature and art.” Such substitutes, however, “radically pervert biblical and historical Christianity.”

In warning against the dangers of accepting art and aesthetic experience as substitutes for religion, conservatives were in one sense sounding a familiar Protestant alarm regarding the idolatrous potential of art – an alarm that had become much less clamorous over the course of the nineteenth century but which had never been fully suppressed. What appeared to conservatives to be the growing “worship of art” at the turn of the century, however, prompted them to take up the old call with a renewed sense of urgency.

Yet if conservative evangelicals objected to the spiritualization of art, they reacted even more virulently to the aestheticization of Christianity because of the immediate challenge this aestheticization posed to orthodox understandings of Christian doctrine.

For many liberal Protestants, who were working in the tradition of Bushnell, theology was best understood as a form of “poetic” language, not as scientific description. A doctrine such as the Atonement, for instance, was not to be valued objectively for its alleged role in any literal redemption of humanity from the bondage of sin but rather subjectively (i.e., aesthetically) for its power as a moral example. This view of the Atonement had come to be known – in what is perhaps the most poignant example of the way in which theology, morality, and aesthetics had commingled over the course of the nineteenth century – as the “moral-influence theory.”

Tellingly, this moral-influence theory was the object of a direct attack in an essay on “The Atonement” published in the
third volume of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (1910-15), a collection of essays (written by both American and British evangelicals) that was eventually seen by many as a kind of fundamentalist manifesto. Summarizing the moral-influence theory, Professor Franklin Johnson of Chicago wrote: “the sole mission of Christ was to reveal the love of God in a way so moving as to melt the heart and induce men to forsake sin.”

The problem with this theory, argued Johnson, himself a proponent of a more traditional substitutionary view of the Atonement, is that it “makes the death of Christ predominantly scenic, spectacular, an effort to display the love of God rather than an offering to God in its nature necessary for the salvation of man” (italics mine). The visual metaphors in this statement underscore the aesthetic dimension of the liberal position. The chief power of the Atonement was thought to derive from its status as a species of the sublime or beautiful, and in fact, such a conception amounted to little more than Otheman’s Kamesian theory applied to the Crucifixion. As long as the idea of ethico-aesthetic influence had been confined to the field of aesthetics proper, it had presented comparatively minor difficulties for evangelical orthodoxy; once this theory had seeped into the discipline of theology, however, it threatened to undermine everything which, according to fundamentalists, made Christianity uniquely what it was. Johnson did not wish to deny that the Crucifixion is worthy of imitation – that it does in fact possess a moral-aesthetic dimension – nor, for that matter, did he hold any grudge against the aesthetic per se. Indeed, with no little irony, he ultimately suggested that the moral-influence theory of the Atonement was deficient not only on theological and scriptural grounds but also on aesthetic and moral ones: “The man who dies to rescue one
whom he loves from death is remembered with tears of reverence and gratitude; the man who puts himself to death to show that he loves is remembered with horror. Even on its own terms, the moral-influence theory of the Atonement, Johnson implied, qualifies as bad theater. Still, too much emphasis on the aesthetic aspect of the Atonement threatened to obscure its status as a real substitutionary transaction between God and Christ on behalf of human beings.

While Johnson was careful to avoid an indiscriminate attack on the “aesthetic,” it seems clear that the aesthetic did not escape the conservative opposition to the liberal aestheticization of religion entirely unscathed. To a large extent what the fundamentalists were attempting to recoup was the cognitive, objective content of Christianity – a content that had arguably been on the run since the late eighteenth century. The substance and style of the conservative arguments were themselves nothing new. (Johnson’s criticism of the moral-influence theory sounded remarkably like Charles Hodge’s criticism of Bushnell.) They were yet another legacy of the Baconian scientific tradition that had dominated evangelical thought at the turn of the nineteenth century. Yet one, perhaps unintended, consequence of this attempt to defend the objectivity of Christian doctrine against the modernists’ aesthetic interpretation of the faith was that the word “aesthetic” itself became tarnished. In certain contexts at least, “aesthetic” had begun to acquire pejorative connotations. Something of this growing negativity towards the term can be glimpsed in P.T. Forsyth’s reaction, published in the London Quarterly Review in 1904 as “The Need for a Positive Gospel,” to a liberal creed adopted unanimously (and quite democratically) by the Bowdoin College Class of 1903. Forsyth, once a rising star in the
liberal Congregationalist establishment of late-Victorian Britain, had gradually moved in
the direction of a more traditional understanding of Christianity, and he was now taking
aim at those liberals who had “nothing to say of sin, faith, or repentance; nothing of
salvation, redemption, or reconciliation.” What human beings are most in need of,
insisted Forsyth, is the forgiveness of sin, a power that rests solely “in the revelation
which forgives. It resides in the gospel, in the act of deliverance, in the person of the
Redeemer.” Liberals, by contrast, made too much of the “character” of Christ at the
expense of his “person”: “It is not the character of Christ that is the revelation of God;
that is too aesthetic a position for the final and requisite religion…. Christ came not as a
spectacle, ethical or spiritual, but as an agent and a power.”\(^{41}\) Clearly, “aesthetic” has
here become a kind of shorthand for “heterodox.” To conservatives, the Cross was more
than a mere “spectacle,” and they repeatedly expressed consternation at the fact that,
instead of claiming for themselves the power of the Cross, liberals seemed content merely
to gaze at its beauty as they would a fine painting.

Yet while the “aesthetic” appears to have suffered in the minds of some
conservatives as a result of its alleged theological misapplication by liberals, one must be
wary of overstressing this point. For one thing, modernists, too, were quite capable of
using “aesthetic” as a negative term when it suited their agenda. Describing (in what
were by then rather conventional terms) the inability of an age given over to
“commercialism” to comprehend Jesus’ ethic of love as manifested on the Cross, Shailer
Mathews inquired: “For how is it possible for an age that honors the victories of force to
appreciate, in anything more than an æsthetic way, the victories of the cross?”\(^{42}\) For
fundamentalists, it was the liberals who misguidedly approached the Cross in aesthetic terms; for Mathews, it was the robber barons and the captains of industry. In both instances, however, “aesthetic” signified the opposite of some reality associated with the Cross – for conservatives, an act of atonement; for liberals, a moral example worthy of imitation. At the same time, even for many fundamentalists the problem was not so much with the aesthetic taken on its own terms as it was with the aesthetic imported into the domain of theological reasoning – or more precisely, with the aesthetic imported carelessly into the domain of the theological. For there was, it seems, a proper application of the aesthetic to the theological. Forsyth, after criticizing a “too aesthetic” interpretation of the character of Christ – and Forsyth’s qualifying adverb is not irrelevant here – proceeded, much like Johnson, to draw upon an aesthetic analogy, the effect of which was to suggest once again that liberals were inept aestheticians as well as inept theologians (interestingly, for both Johnson and Forsyth the appropriate artistic genre for the Crucifixion seems to have been the drama): “A gospel is not a novel but a drama; it is not an exhibition of divine character or psychology, but the achievement of an act final for human destiny, central for human history, relevant to all thought, and exhaustive for God’s heart and will.”

From one perspective, what fundamentalists were implicitly attempting to do was to protect the subordinationist model of the religious and the aesthetic that many nineteenth-century evangelical writers had proposed. They were not denying that Christianity has an aesthetic dimension; they were merely protesting the notion that Christianity could be reduced to this dimension. Art might serve Christianity, but it could never be Christianity. Still, the constant need for conservatives to deflect
interpretations of Christianity that appeared to relish the Cross wholly for its “poetry” seems to have taken its toll on conservative attitudes towards the “aesthetic.”

Indeed, this toll on the aesthetic may also have been the result of conservatives’ growing discomfort with the unapologetically social focus of liberal Protestantism at the expense of doctrinal concerns. Whereas nineteenth-century evangelicals had understood social activism to be the logical outworking of a converted heart, the Social Gospel of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries stressed the primacy of moral action apart from a strict adherence to traditional doctrinal formulae. Social rather than salvific transformation was at the center of the Social Gospel. This emphasis on the here-and-now seems to have rekindled longstanding anxieties among some conservatives regarding the dangers of being too earthly-minded (anxieties that were already acute among those committed to a premillennial eschatology). “The adversary the Church has most to fear,” suggested the Watchman in 1896, “is worldliness.” Worldliness was defined as anything that draws one’s attention away from the genuine spiritual truths of Christianity: “We do not use the term ‘worldliness’ in any cant sense. We mean by it a complacent satisfaction in the pursuit of physical comfort and pleasure, a disposition that bounds the horizon of the spirit by the narrow arc of what appeals to the physical, the intellectual or aesthetic faculties.” The aesthetic, which had been viewed by many nineteenth-century evangelical critics as a potential antidote to the commercialism and materialism so rampant in modern industrialized societies, was once more becoming an ally of “worldliness” rather than its sworn foe. This reversal was due in part to the adamant refusal on the part of conservatives to entertain broad, and often ambiguous, conceptions
of the “spiritual” as referring to all-things-non-material. If “spiritual” is interpreted generally to include “intellect,” “mind,” or “feeling,” then it is expansive enough to encompass the “aesthetic”; once it is limited to traditional Christian understandings of the supernatural, however, the “spiritual” becomes the transcendent category of the “wholly other” – a category that stands opposed to the earthly categories of “the physical, intellectual or aesthetic.” Most revealing, however, is the Watchman’s linking of this worldliness to those liberal Christians who seemed to prioritize the social over the spiritual: “The purely philanthropic, humanitarian directions in which so many of our churches are spending their most strenuous efforts are a witness to the truth of our observations.” Attention to matters of salvation need not entail the neglect of the body, but “The [liberal] zeal for ameliorating untoward conditions of life far outruns the desire for winning men to a life of fellowship with God.” In defending orthodox understandings of the spiritual against liberal Protestantism’s putatively disproportionate concern for this world, some conservatives, it seems, may have been impelled to dwell anew on the dubious materiality of art.

In addition to the threats to orthodoxy posed by the “aesthetic,” certain features of the turn-of-the-century art world itself may also have helped to drive fundamentalists away from active involvement in the Anglo-American culture of high art. Evidence suggests that many conservative evangelicals were coming more and more to view the art world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a citadel of immorality. Wherever they looked, conservatives discovered the signs of moral degradation. The popularity of the aesthetes and decadents, for example, had continued to swell, even in
spite (or perhaps in part because) of Wilde’s criminal trial and subsequent imprisonment in 1895. Not surprisingly, evangelical periodicals were still publishing condemnations of aestheticism into the first decade of the twentieth century, and Wilde remained the poster-child for the moral bankruptcy to which artists, as a class, seemed prone. Criticizing aestheticism, however, had become a kind of rearguard action, and it was yet another sign that the modern world was beginning to pass conservatives by. Progressive artists, moreover, had begun increasingly to pursue artistic subjects that stood at odds with the strict codes of Victorian morality to which conservatives adhered. Conservative evangelical critics, to cite one prominent example, had been complaining since the 1870s about the growing number of “nudes” on display in galleries and museums throughout the United States and Europe. As a British critic in the *Baptist Magazine* expressed it in 1890:

> The talk about “the exigencies of art” is sheer nonsense, and it is time we remembered the exigencies of religion and morality. “Reverent gaze” there may be: “to the pure all things are pure”; but who that knows human nature can look without apprehension on the matter-of-course way in which it is taken for granted in artistic circles that these exhibitions of “the nude” are the highest form of art, and must be secured at all costs? To us they are indicative of a corrupt taste, and of a degradation which cannot be too strenuously resisted. The increase of pictures of this class in the Royal Academy is simply disgusting.⁴⁷

“Reverent gaze,” of course, was another (interestingly “religious”) term for the supposed “disinterestedness” of aesthetic contemplation. Many conservative evangelicals, however, had little room for such theoretical constructs when it came to nudes, for the one “that knows human nature” knows the difficulty, if not the sheer impossibility, of a
depraved human being beholding the nakedness of another with anything approximating a “pure,” de-sexualized gaze. Disciples of Hegel, symbolists, and other early-twentieth-century experimentalists might have seen “the nude” as the highest expression of the human form and spirit, but conservative evangelicals had a difficult time seeing the cultural prevalence of “the nude” as anything other than a deviant sexuality run amok.

As the early-twentieth-century art world did its best to cast off the last vestiges of its Victorian sensibilities, fundamentalists, who remained invested in these sensibilities, increasingly perceived the behavior and attitudes of artists as immoral, eccentric, and pretentious. Many high modernist artists may have approached their Art with great seriousness, but such earnestness only helped to bring out the underlying populism of some fundamentalists. Fundamentalist evangelicals were not above the use of sarcasm when it came to modern science’s suggestion that Ph.D.s were the sons and daughters of apes, and the same was true when it came to the ease with which much of the modern art world seemed prepared to flout the rules of common decency, whether the goal was High Art or the subversion of High Art. An idea of just how irksome the art world and its values had become to some fundamentalists may be glimpsed in a rather humorous account of a band of nude female revelers who visited themselves upon the small town of Rock Island, Illinois one fateful night in 1919. The account, which appeared in the American fundamentalist periodical the Searchlight, is worth quoting at length:

The good people of Rock Island are not especially “sot” against dancing, but they have not yet arrived at that plane of aesthetic culture which tolerates the gamboling of woodland nymphs, clad only in scintillating moonbeams, amid the town’s glades and dells.
Recently, a number of young women here became inoculated with the
craze for classic terpsichore distinguished from other forms of dancing
chiefly by an absence of clothing and conventionalities.

All might have gone well had the young women confined their Grecian
revels in a house, with the shades down, but this they would not do
because they felt it did not coincide with the principles of true art. Full
expression of self they decided required that they go a-gamboling in Rock
Island’s great out-of-doors.

Hence it was that a dignified deacon of one of the town’s leading
churches had his sensibilities shocked severely last night when on
chancing to look from his window, he observed three September Morns
flitting about from bush to bush in what was afterward described as
“Dancing to the Pipes of Pan.” He promptly sent for a constable.

The constable ensconced from a point of vantage, is said to have taken
considerable time in completing his observations in the interest of getting
legal evidence, but no matter. The upshot was that he rudely stepped into
the classic tableau and pinched the dancers.

“Forty days in jail,” was the sentence of an unsympathetic judge this
morning. “We will have no shimmy shaking in Rock Island.”

The humor, of course, derives not so much from the event itself, which on its own is
merely a pretty piece of juvenile stupidity, but rather from the reporter’s ironic narration,
which through a series of metaphors and allusions links the dancing girls to the art culture
of ancient Greece. The girls, as a result, appear as a bunch of pagan sensualists, but just
as much as the actions of the girls themselves, the target of the writer’s mockery is the
kind of “aesthetic culture” and the sort of “principles of true art” that would presume to
authorize such behavior. The entire account is, in effect, a reductio ad absurdum. If the
highest value of modern aesthetic culture is the “full expression of self,” then it is not
unreasonable to expect, so the writer suggests, that such bacchanalian displays – such
“shimmy shaking” – may soon be the norm in small towns everywhere. The implicit
contrast between small-town rural America and high Hellenic culture is, in fact, part of
the point.
To be sure, the supposed moral laxity of art and of the modern art world was not a uniquely conservative dilemma. Liberal Protestants also frowned upon any so-called “principles of true art” that sought to rationalize illicit behavior in the name of aesthetic inspiration. Ethics were a crucial part of the modernist enterprise. “I warn you,” wrote H.W. Beecher in his *Addresses to Young Men*, “with yet more solemn emphasis, against EVIL BOOKS and EVIL PICTURES.” A reviewer in *Outlook* (a periodical first edited by Beecher and later by Abbot) put it in more positive terms: “Art … can justify itself only so far as it promotes wholesome thought and conduct.” Unlike many conservatives, however, liberal Protestants also retained a more positive conception of art’s spiritual and social possibilities, as well as a higher degree of sympathy with intellectual and cultural elites, which together may have helped to militate against an overly narrow view of the art world as a bastion of immorality, idiosyncrasy, and condescension.

Whatever the case, it appears to have been the cumulative effect of a variety of factors, both internal and external to the world of aesthetics, which drove a significant number of fundamentalists to retreat from the Anglo-American institution of high art and to abandon the critical thinking about aesthetics that had been an important feature of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. Feeling increasingly alienated by the turn-of-the-century art world, while at the same time feeling increasingly embattled by the claims of both modern scientists and liberal Christians, many conservatives gradually lost the will to spend whatever cultural and philosophical capital they possessed on behalf of art. Such capital, they believed, could be better spent in defending the doctrines of orthodox Protestantism against the scientific threats of Darwinism and Higher Criticism.
Significantly, it may actually have been fundamentalism’s affinity for Baconian science that helped to bring about the sort of critical myopia that, to a great extent, led to the exclusion of aesthetics. Science, many conservatives believed, dealt with “facts,” and therefore bad science could be overcome with better science. Once the true facts about the fossil record had been gathered, Darwinian evolution – which was, after all, only a theory – would be proven wrong. Art, in contrast, as the nineteenth-century aesthetic tradition had repeatedly stressed, was subjective. *De gustibus non est disputandum.*

Many fundamentalists, therefore, may have chosen to concentrate their energies on an area of controversy purportedly governed by the rules of scientific “proof” and which therefore seemed to offer reasonable prospects for success. The result, however, was that where aesthetic theory and the aesthetic establishment were concerned, many fundamentalist evangelicals looked more like the Puritans than like their immediate predecessors.⁵³

Yet this retreat from aesthetics on the part of many conservative evangelicals in the early decades of the twentieth century is only half the story. No human community can be completely *a*-aesthetic in practice, nor is it possible for any subculture to be wholly devoid of some reflection on the arts, even if such “reflection” involves little more than thinking about why art is not worth thinking about. This relative withdrawal by conservative evangelicals from the modernist critical establishment and from the questions of philosophical criticism, therefore, should not be misconstrued as evidence of an unqualified bias against the fine arts themselves or against the aesthetic dimension of life. We have already observed, for example, how Johnson’s and Forsyth’s cases against
a “too aesthetic” interpretation of Christ and the Atonement were themselves grounded, in part, on aesthetic premises. There were, moreover, some notable exceptions to the generalization that conservative evangelicals failed to endorse the arts. Even among fundamentalists there remained a small contingent of thinkers who continued to press upon those who would listen the importance of a critical engagement with art and culture.

One such thinker was J. Gresham Machen, a southern Presbyterian whose *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) – in which he argued that liberal Christianity was in fact no Christianity at all insofar as it did violence to the historic faith – became a central document in the history of American fundamentalism. Since his death in 1937, Machen has frequently been caricatured by friends and foes alike. In reality, however, Machen was a complex figure who resists easy classification. Though he was instrumental in articulating a rationale for the separatism that proved to be a key feature of fundamentalist churches, and though he felt it his duty to defend traditional Reformed Christianity against what he saw as modernist dilutions, Machen strongly opposed other aspects of the fundamentalist movement. As George Marsden explains, “He did not like being called a fundamentalist, he was an intellectual, he was ill-at-ease with the emotionalism and oversimplifications of revival meetings, … and he declined to join the antievolution crusade.”54 In contrast to both those liberals who would make Christianity synonymous with the advancement of civilization and those fundamentalists who would spurn any interaction with mainstream culture in order to safeguard Christian orthodoxy, Machen fought to preserve the Reformed understanding of culture that had served as the foundation on which nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics had been built.
Addressing the students at Princeton Seminary in the fall of 1912, Machen explicitly affirmed a subordinationist view of “Christianity and Culture,” which, as he made clear, must include the cultivation of the arts:

Are then Christianity and culture in a conflict that is to be settled only by the destruction of one or the other of the contending forces? A third solution, fortunately, is possible – namely, consecration. Instead of destroying the arts and sciences or being indifferent to them, let us cultivate them with all the enthusiasm of the veriest humanist, but at the same time consecrate them to the service of our God. Instead of stifling the pleasures afforded by the acquisition of knowledge or by the appreciation of what is beautiful, let us accept these pleasures as the gifts of a heavenly Father. Instead of obliterating the distinction between the kingdom and the world, or on the other hand withdrawing from the world into a sort of modernized intellectual monasticism, let us go forth joyfully, enthusiastically to make the world subject to God.  

Machen’s overarching conception of the relationship between Christianity and culture is at least as old as Calvin, just as his willingness to see the “arts” and “the appreciation of what is beautiful” as indisputable components of this conception also reveal him to be a faithful recipient of the nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetic tradition. He was perhaps the last great representative of the evangelical intellectual culture of the Victorian era, which had located art in the context of a holistic Protestant ideology and had argued for this ideology in a systematic fashion. For Machen, too, as we will see in a moment, genuinely “high art” was not something to be scorned but something to be admired and protected. Unlike some fundamentalists, he was no populist; rather, he was an intellectual who found a way to speak on behalf of “culture” even as he spoke on behalf of American fundamentalism.
Machen’s outspoken and carefully reasoned support for art and culture, however, was fast becoming atypical: it was the exception that proved the rule. A growing number of conservatives no longer shared Machen’s – and nineteenth-century evangelicism’s – faith in the possibility of a healthy rapport between Christianity and culture, and art and aesthetics tended to be left by the wayside. Even so, it is rare to meet with fundamentalists openly berating art per se, despite their sometimes disparaging references to the “aesthetic,” and though formal reflection on the fine arts declined relative to the high level of critical activity among evangelicals during the nineteenth century, many of the aesthetic suppositions of the evangelical romantic tradition nevertheless appear to have remained intact, even among fundamentalists. Critical theorizing may have largely disappeared, but theory itself did not. Indeed, on one level it is not particularly surprising that the evangelical romantic tradition would persist as a kind of undercurrent in fundamentalist thought since it is most often through participation in critical debate that ideas evolve and mature. By ceasing to think consciously and systematically about the fine arts, fundamentalists were effectively putting the principles of a received tradition on ice. Henceforth, the critical assumptions of this tradition were more likely to take the form of the casual reference or the short passage tucked neatly into a discussion of some other topic rather than the extended aesthetic treatise or review (though one still encounters more extended discussions on occasion), but even casual references – perhaps especially casual references – are themselves always already implicated in a network of theoretical assumptions.

One can catch, for example, romantic expressivist assumptions at work in an
interesting discussion of John Henry Newman’s hymn “Lead Kindly Light,” published, oddly enough, in a conservative American periodical, the Bible Student and Teacher, in 1908. It is worth noting that the Bible Student and Teacher was in some ways a periodical in transition. Affiliated with the Bible League of North America, it was initially run by Presbyterian academics, though the periodical’s makeup quickly expanded to include those of a dispensational persuasion from a variety of evangelical denominations. In 1913, it was renamed the Bible Champion, and it accordingly adopted a somewhat more populist outlook. This periodical, however, provides an interesting glimpse of at least one branch of conservative evangelical thought during the early part of the twentieth century. The article in question, entitled “‘Reading Into’ a Hymn: On a Recent Criticism of ‘Lead Kindly Light,’ was, as the author observed, occasioned by “a series of articles” recently published in the Sunday School Times. This series of articles, the author alleged, had committed serious errors of interpretation in relation to Newman’s hymn, and it was the purpose of the present article to warn against the dangers of even the most well-intentioned eisegesis. The article begins, however, with a revealing attempt to formulate the essence of hymns as aesthetic objects:

A hymn may or may not be poetry, judged by the strict canons of the poetic art. But, to serve its purpose and justify its creation a hymn must have an indefinable something that throbs the heart, thrills the imagination, touches the longings, uplifts the soul. Simplicity, nay even a certain naiveté, in an attempt to express deep religious feelings; a reaching out and after God; a trustfulness in Him and His love; and an assured and buoyant belief in the immortality of the soul, – these are some of the essential expressings of hymns, keyed in their appropriate notes of joy or of sadness or of semi-tones. How great an influence can a simple hymn exert! It becomes a multum in parvo volume of emotion and aspiration,
Clearly, romantic notions of art as an expression of emotion, as well as of art’s capacity to exert an empowering “influence” by way of the feelings, were alive and well within the pages of at least some conservative periodicals during the early part of the twentieth century.

A second article in the *Bible Student and Teacher*, published two years later, suggests that not all conservative evangelicals had yet relinquished the ideal of psychic wholeness either, nor the conviction that the aesthetic plays an indispensable part in achieving this wholeness. (This article, in fact, might well be classed with Machen as another example of an attempt by an early-twentieth-century conservative evangelical to think explicitly and systematically about an aesthetic topic.) In “The Beauty of Heaven,” the Rev. Horace C. Stanton described with great fervor the “aesthetic sense” and the intrinsic longing for beauty that all human beings are said to possess: “Beauty is a thing which the heart naturally craves. As much as there is a mathematical faculty which desires accuracy in calculation and a moral instinct which appreciates the right, there is also an æsthetic sense which desires beauty.” This is precisely the sort of Platonic-triad-turned-faculty-psychology scheme that had been central to modern aesthetic thought since the eighteenth century, and it is therefore little wonder that both Plato and Edmund Burke, among others, receive mention. To ignore any one of these cardinal values – truth, goodness, or beauty – is to fall short of being fully human; it is to lack “culture” in the Arnoldian sense. “Any person who has not this love for beauty,” Stanton later writes,
“is regarded by us as deficient in an important element of mental culture. But, if he possess [sic] this instinct in a high degree, we concede that he has at least a certain type of cultivation.” As the title of the article makes clear, Stanton’s primary concern is with the perfect “beauties of Heaven” that “shall never be exhausted,” and to this end, his focus is more otherworldly than worldly – a theme that fit well perhaps with the sense of disenchantment that many conservatives had come to feel towards the modern world. Yet Stanton does not ignore worldly beauty entirely. For him, as for Anne Bradstreet nearly three centuries earlier, the beauties of heaven do not efface the beauties of earth but rather give them meaning as a foretaste of what is to come. It is true that the beauty of heaven “goes vastly beyond our fondest imaginations,” but Stanton also portrays this heavenly beauty as a fulfillment of our desire for earthly beauty. In fact, the proper way to prepare for the beauties of heaven is to cultivate the beauties of earth:

There are many ambitions of this world, that may be realized, or may not. The desire for high education, marriage, wealth, fame, health, social position, political success and things like these, may be gratified; or may not. But we need never fail to reach the abode of beauty by and by, and to find satisfaction there. How inspiring the thought, that, when these lower struggles and conflicts are overpast, we shall enter such an abode as that which awaits us! Those whose environment on earth has most lacked for beauty, and those who have revelled in it most, may enjoy dreams unrestrained about the beauty that is to come. And if, in the city where the ransomed dwell, there is such beauty, what a stimulus it should be to us to cultivate beauty in manners, in speech, in spirit, and in everything that pertains to our life! What a failing in our duty, if we do not cultivate all beauty now!59

Not unlike Keats, who compared the Imagination to “Adam’s dream” and speculated that “we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth
repeated in a finer tone;”⁶⁰ Stanton saw the beauty of heaven as an intensification and culmination of the beauty of earth. Furthermore, Stanton’s argument for the present vitality of the aesthetic (rather than simply its eventual eschatological completion) and his continued fidelity to the ideal of the “cultured” individual point to the enduring influence of the evangelical aesthetic tradition of the nineteenth century on some fundamentalists.

Another important idea that some fundamentalists carried over from the evangelical romantic tradition was the notion that art is an expression of the moral health of an age or civilization. Now, however, when conservatives gazed into their aesthetic crystal balls, they were more likely to see an age of moral ruin rather than one of splendor and progress. In 1919, the Searchlight quoted approvingly a Roman Catholic bishop who had glimpsed in the state of America’s art the seeds of national destruction: “‘We are living in a decadent age, our music, literature and poetry, theaters and art all bear the stigma of degeneracy. The world is rushing back to paganism, divorcing itself from Christ more each day.’” As if to impress upon its readers the gravity of this verdict, the Searchlight added: “When a Roman Catholic Bishop condemns public amusements, it is time the rest of the folks were sitting up and taking notice.”⁶¹ Machen, writing in 1931, also saw the art of the twentieth century as clear evidence of the “appalling spiritual decline which has come over the world within the last fifty years”: “High poetry, for the most part, is silent; art is either imitative or bizarre. There is advance in material things, but in the higher ranges of the human mind an amazing sterility has fallen on the world.”⁶² It was this very principle that helped, in part, to fuel the conservative criticisms of the modernist art world described earlier. If the perceived moral and spiritual
corruption of the art world had been taken simply as an indication of the devolution of art itself, this devolution, though regrettable, may have seemed manageable. The corruption of the art world and of art, however, was seen by some fundamentalists as symptomatic of a much broader social and moral decline. The state of the nation’s art became yet one more confirmation of the coming apocalypse, though ironically, it was the aesthetic theory of the nineteenth century that in some measure enabled fundamentalists to draw this conclusion.

Probably the greatest legacy, however, which the nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetic tradition bestowed upon at least some fundamentalists – a legacy that surfaces, for example, in Machen’s reference to “high poetry” – was the concept of “high art.” Admittedly, as observed above, fundamentalist evangelicals at times expressed their mounting displeasure with the twentieth-century art world and its products in decidedly populist terms – terms that could sound very much like a blanket condemnation of the whole notion of high art. Yet in some cases it was the ideal of high art itself that drove conservative critiques of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century art. Some conservatives, that is, criticized progressive art not only for its moral turpitude but also for the way in which it seemed to fall short of what were believed to be the highest aesthetic standards. One relatively early example of this attitude can be seen in evangelical censures of those artistic movements near the turn of the century – the Expressionists in painting or the literary naturalists, for example – that seemed bent on tracking down the “real” in all of its shocking ugliness. Robert Waters, lambasting the “so-called Realists” in the *Christian Advocate* in 1888 for being a “contagious disease,”
described them as follows:

Not a taste for the good and the pure; not an eye for the beautiful, the noble, and the sublime; but a nose for the foul, the hateful, and the mean – that is their characteristic. Prowling around among degraded men and still more degraded women, the residuum of humanity, they rake up a mass of maggoty, foul, and putrid matter, stir it up with a spice of sugar and salt, dub it with a fair name, and send it out to the world as a work of art!\(^{63}\)

This passage is itself a marvelous specimen of grotesque description, but Waters’s indignation here, it is important to observe, is aimed at both the moral and the aesthetic. It is not only the conscience that ought to be offended by the “prowling” naturalists who offer up images of a “degraded” humanity for ordinary, middle-class consumption but also the aesthetic sense. The productions of the naturalists – their “mass of maggoty, foul, and putrid matter” – are, by Waters’s standards, nothing but pseudo-art. Merely giving one’s creation “a fair name” does not automatically convert it into “a work of art.” Of course, the negative response to such turn-of-the-century movements – not to mention to later “extremist movements” like the Dadaists, for example – was hardly confined to evangelicals. In a broad sense, the growth of these movements, a number of which set out consciously to subvert the very notion of “high art,” marked the dissolution of the Romantic-Victorian concept of the “ideal” – both of beauty and of morality – and public resistance was therefore widespread.\(^{64}\) But recognizing this point only underscores the fact that the conservative evangelical reaction to some of the artistic innovations of the early twentieth century cannot be attributed to mere prudishness; rather, it was the result of a keen sense of aesthetic dissatisfaction and a growing consciousness that so-called
high art was not quite high enough.65

That this sort of aesthetic critique persisted among some conservative evangelicals well into the twentieth century is made clear in yet another passage from one of Machen’s essays, “The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age,” first published in 1933. In this essay, Machen argues that while the “new age” mistakenly believes that whatever it “favors is always really new,” there are, in fact, “old things which ought to remain.” Among these old things, he believes, are “the literary and artistic achievements of past generations”:

Those are things which the new age ought to retain, at least until the new age can produce something to put in their place, and that it has signally failed to do. I am well aware that when I say to the new age that Homer is still worth reading, or that the Cathedral of Amiens is superior to any of the achievements of the art nouveau, I am making assertions which it would be difficult for me to prove. There is no disputing about tastes. Yet, after all, until the artistic impulse is eradicated more thoroughly from human life than has so far been done even by the best efforts of the metallic civilization of our day, we cannot get rid of the categories of good and bad or high and low in the field of art. But when we pay attention to those categories, it becomes evident at once that we are living today in a drab and decadent age, and that a really new impulse will probably come, as it has come so many times before, only through a rediscovery of the glories of the past.66

One could, from a theoretical standpoint, quarrel with any number of ideas in this passage, just as one could quarrel with the very notion of “high art” itself. The point, however, is that the concept of high art – a concept evangelical critics and periodicals had helped to foster over the course of the nineteenth century – remained for some fundamentalists an important criterion for evaluating the art objects of the twentieth
century. Indeed, from one perspective, the idea that fundamentalists would embrace and perpetuate the distinction between high and low art – even when they themselves rarely produced art objects that most observers would want to locate on the former side of this divide – is not terribly surprising. For the category of “high art,” insofar as it looks paradoxically to the past to substantiate its own supposedly transhistorical character, is an inherently “conservative” category socially. It suggests, theoretically, the existence of an axiological absolute, however difficult it may be to substantiate this absolute in reality (interestingly, Machen’s position is almost Kantian in its suggestion of something like “subjective universality”\(^67\)). Thus, it always remains, at least potentially, a means of passing judgment on the “new” and innovative. Yet however one ultimately reads the fundamentalist affinity for the concept of high art, it points to the fact that even twentieth-century fundamentalist evangelicals were in various ways the heirs of the evangelical romantic tradition.

The preceding analysis obviously fails to do full justice to the complexities of fundamentalism’s ongoing relationship to the evangelical aesthetic tradition, and I have had to settle here for being suggestive rather than exhaustive. Much work remains to be done on the nuances of fundamentalist aesthetics. In the broadest of terms, however, I have attempted to argue both that specific aesthetic concepts (e.g., expressivism, influence, the aesthetic as a necessary component of psychological wholeness, art as a social index) were carried over to fundamentalism, albeit in a loose and unsystematic fashion, from the tradition of evangelical romanticism and that there remained as well, even among fundamentalists, a crucial divide between the “high” and the “low” when it
came to art. This last claim would become even clearer—though it might also prove subject to further qualification—were one to undertake an extensive study of the various art objects actually produced by fundamentalists, for what one would discover, I think, is that many of the poems, hymns, novels, and paintings created by fundamentalist artists throughout the twentieth century in fact bear the marks of the sentimentalist tradition of the nineteenth century. (The well-known paintings of Jesus by Warner Sallman come immediately to mind, as do the evangelical romance novels discussed at length in Lynn S. Neal’s recent book, *Romancing God.*) In a way, acknowledging the sentimentalist bent of much fundamentalist “art” only confirms in yet another way the romantic lineage of fundamentalist aesthetics, for sentimentalism was to some extent an outgrowth of the moral-aesthetic theories of the Enlightenment and romanticism, though it was, as we have seen, a development which a large body of nineteenth-century critics, evangelical and otherwise, had tried to prevent. Yet sentimentalism, with all of its ties to the “popular” and the “low,” was only one outgrowth of the romantic tradition, for while this tradition led on the one hand to the “sentimental” and “low,” it led on the other to the “serious” and “high.” And just as a large body of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century artists and critics became heirs to this latter half of the romantic tradition, so too did some fundamentalists. Indeed, it is this latter side, and the philosophical aesthetics that were generated in support of this side, that I have consistently tried to emphasize throughout this study since it this side that has most often been overlooked in the history of evangelical aesthetics.

At the same time, recognizing the continuing influence of the “high” side of the
nineteenth-century evangelical romantic tradition even among some fundamentalists may help to explain more thoroughly the prevalence of the “high romantic” views of art which Roger Lundin has noticed among many contemporary, post-fundamentalist evangelicals.

In explaining this phenomenon, Lundin points to the nineteenth-century shift in evangelical attitudes towards culture (from a position of early engagement to one of fundamentalist suspicion), but he ultimately stops short of offering a thoroughgoing historical account of modern evangelicalism’s attraction to romantic aesthetics. His explanation for the romantic character of much present-day evangelical thinking about the arts seems to turn largely on a set of ahistorical (though certainly correct) commonalities between fundamentalism and romanticism. There was, for instance, a “distinctly Protestant tone” to “a great deal of romanticism.” Moreover, both romantics and fundamentalists held similar “perceptions of culture,” viewing “themselves as the rightful proprietors of a world from which they had been displaced.” Thus, concludes Lundin, “In retrospect, it seems quite logical that when we as evangelical students of culture began to emerge from the dusky passageways of fundamentalism, our eyes would be dazzled by the enchanting romantic tradition … [R]omantic theory has offered an appealing sight to those of us whose aesthetic lenses have been ground … in the shop of American fundamentalism.”

If the above analysis is correct, however, then it points to the existence of a more direct line of influence extending from the romantic evangelical aesthetics of the nineteenth century to the romantically-inclined aesthetics of contemporary evangelicalism observed by Lundin. Though fundamentalists did turn away from the kind of explicit aesthetic theorizing promoted by nineteenth-century
evangelicals in order to defend what they saw as an endangered Gospel, they also carried over some of the less obviously threatening romantic assumptions about art (e.g., expressivism) propagated by their predecessors. Yet however one finally understands the aesthetic posture of fundamentalism, it remains true that evangelicals on both sides of the fundamentalist divide have interacted in complex ways, either consciously or unconsciously, for better or for worse, with the heart of the romantic aesthetic tradition.

**Concluding Unscientific Postscript: Theology, Aesthetics, and Secularization**

As stated at the outset, my objective throughout this study has been twofold: 1) to chart the evolution of a critical aesthetic discourse among Anglo-American evangelicals as it emerged from the religio-aesthetic tradition of the Puritans in the eighteenth century until its eventual fracturing during the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century; and 2) to describe in detail how evangelicals conceived of art and its relationship to other facets of the Protestant ideology during what I have argued was the “high point” of the evangelical aesthetic tradition prior to the late twentieth century. This high point, gauged roughly by the twin variables of critical sophistication and a sustained level of interest within a significant cross-section of the Anglo-American evangelical population, occurred between 1830 and 1900. Before this period, some evangelicals were already engaging various developments in the modern aesthetic thought that had grown out of the Enlightenment, but it was not until the nineteenth century, when aspects of the Enlightenment aesthetic tradition evolved into the aesthetics of romanticism that evangelicals became full and active participants in the growing critical establishment.
The evangelical aesthetic discourse that appeared in the pages of numerous nineteenth-century denominational periodicals was characterized by a prolonged engagement with the aesthetic theories of romanticism. Evangelical critics accepted many of the basic premises of these theories, in spite of the fact that some of these premises, as I have suggested, posed subtle difficulties for traditional Protestant doctrines. When, at the conclusion of the nineteenth-century, Anglo-American evangelicalism splintered into conservative and liberal factions, the nineteenth-century evangelical consensus regarding the value of art and of aesthetic philosophizing effectively came to an end, though both liberals and conservatives perpetuated elements of the nineteenth-century tradition.

It remains, I think, to say a brief word about the shape of the preceding narrative and about the potential implications of this narrative for contemporary evangelical thinking about the fine arts. Though I have tried to provide as neutral an account of the evolution of evangelical aesthetic thought as is humanly possible, I am nevertheless conscious of the fact that I have not perhaps been entirely successful in doing so. What from one perspective is an evolution is from another perspective a devolution. This tension is evident to some degree in the two ways that I have tended to describe the intellectual movement in evangelical aesthetics throughout the time period covered by this study, and in particular, during the period from 1830-1900: romanticization (which suggests a movement towards something) and de-puritanization (which suggests a movement away from something). There is another term, however, which, though I have used it sparingly, has in many ways been at the very heart of the foregoing narrative. This term is secularization.
Just how to define secularization is a matter of ongoing debate. Charles Taylor, for example, in his voluminous book *A Secular Age*, has recently identified three possibilities for understanding “secularization.” The sense in which I want to use secularization here, however, is a rather mundane and frankly conservative one, namely, as a term that describes the gradual departure of a given faith community from a body of doctrinal convictions that were embraced (at least outwardly, if not always inwardly) by the vast majority of the earlier members of this community. The process of secularization I have in mind could be articulated in traditional terms as a movement from theological “orthodoxy” to “heterodoxy.” Sometimes, as in the case of liberal Protestants, this movement towards “heterodoxy” may really amount to a kind of anti-doctrinalism, or a distaste or discomfort with doctrine qua doctrine (though, as conservatives would no doubt point out, this is itself a kind of doctrine). Yet whatever the case, if we adopt this definition of secularization, it is obvious that the changes in evangelical aesthetic discourse described in this study took place against the backdrop of a steady process of theological drift among Anglo-American evangelicals. Of course, the observation that the nineteenth century was a period of profound theological changes is nothing to write home about, but it may be worth considering for a moment the relationship between this process of secularization and the development of an aesthetic discourse by evangelicals.

To begin with, we might ask to what extent nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetic discourse contributed to secularization. Did thinking about art advance the sort of doctrinal drift that was characteristic of Victorian theological history? It is clear, I
think, that aesthetics did not cause this drift. The cultural and theological transition to
modernism was not driven by any single factor, much less by aesthetics itself.
Nevertheless, nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetic discourse may be seen as yet
another locus of dispute, as an influential space in which “heterodox” ideas could be
broadcast and played out. Widespread notions of art’s ordinary moral influence, for
example, continued to chip away slowly at theological ideas about depravity and the need
for a supernatural act of intervention by the Holy Spirit. Conversion, many came to
believe, was simply too unreliable as a social stabilizer, and although critics frequently
noted that not all people are capable of achieving the same level of taste, the idea that
aesthetic appreciation could foster morality at least seemed to place a solution to the
problem of social stability within reach. Taste, after all, could always be “cultivated” by
education. To take one more example, the aesthetic thought of the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries had helped to drive home a divide between the intellectual and the
affective, between reason and feeling. When orthodox doctrines came under scientific
attack in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, an apparent solution to the dilemma was
therefore ready and waiting. Aesthetic theory was able to provide, at least in part, an
answer to the ostensible conflict between religious faith and modern science.

In writing about history, however, one is not infrequently confronted with the
classic conundrum of the chicken and the egg, and it is no different in this case. For
while nineteenth-century evangelical thinking about the arts may have helped to nudge
forward the process of theological drift, it was at the same time symptomatic of this drift.
That is, Victorian evangelical aesthetics was to some extent enabled by certain
theological changes, which it then helped to reinforce. As I have tried to suggest throughout this study, nineteenth-century evangelical aesthetics was made possible in part by the disintegration of the Reformed theological tradition. Of course, the Puritans also bequeathed to their evangelical descendants some key elements – most notably, a positive view of “culture” – without which Victorian evangelical thinking about the arts could not have evolved. At the same time, though, the romantic character of evangelical aesthetics was enabled by a turn away from the theology of the Puritans, which had stressed the total depravity of humankind, the radical transcendence of God, the impossibility of communing with the divine apart from grace, the importance of carefully formulated doctrine, and the reliability of a theological language that corresponded closely with the transcendent reality it sought to describe. The ideas that dominated the evangelical aesthetics of the nineteenth century – ideas of art’s “natural” moral influence, of human art objects as a (possible) expression of the divine mind, of the transcendental potential of the Imagination, of the new authority ascribed to the subjective mediation of the world – could never have flourished among the Puritans. To be sure, certain emphases in Puritan theology continued to influence evangelical aesthetics in various ways throughout the nineteenth century – many evangelicals, as we have seen, continued to defend a more traditional view of God’s personhood and transcendence, as well as a subordinationist conception of Christianity and art – but on the whole evangelical aesthetics was built on the ruins of Puritan orthodoxy. In this instance, Wallace Stevens’s famous line, “Death is the mother of beauty,” was quite literally the case.

For those in the liberal tradition of evangelicalism or for other “neutral
observers,” this narrative may not raise any special difficulties; however, for those of us who would associate ourselves with the theologically conservative wing of evangelicalism (though not necessarily with either Puritanism or fundamentalism), this narrative seems to present a rather grim picture. In chapter 4, I discussed what I referred to as the problem of inverse proportion, which some evangelical critics believed they had seen at work throughout the history of Christianity and art, and which some claimed to see anew during the decadent years of the fin-de-siècle. T. Harwood Pattison, writing in the *Baptist Quarterly Review* in 1887, stated this problem succinctly: “As Christianity became artistic, it became corrupt.”

Looking back over the shape of the preceding narrative, it seems to me that in many ways this story confirms Pattison’s anxieties. As evangelical interest in aesthetics grew, evangelicalism, like much of the rest of western culture, was undergoing a steady process of secularization. This secularization did not always affect evangelicals in the same way everywhere, of course, just as not all evangelicals were equally interested in aesthetics, but in general, the observation remains true.

The question, then, is whether the problem of inverse proportion ought to be accepted, perhaps reluctantly, as some kind of “law” – as evangelical Christianity *becomes* artistic, it *becomes* corrupt – in which case the lesson of this study for contemporary evangelical aestheticians is to pack up their bags and go home, or whether the problem of inverse proportion is merely an unfortunate feature of evangelical aesthetic history before the twentieth century. Given the way I have posed this question, it is no doubt evident that I lean towards the latter. In this case, however, we are
immediately faced with a new sort of question. Recently, as I was nearing the
completion of this study, I was privileged to speak briefly about some aspects of this
project with Professor Roger Lundin, who gave pointed expression to this new sort of
question. What, if anything, he asked (and here I’m paraphrasing), could have prevented
the kind of aesthetic collapse among conservative evangelicals that both he and I have
described?

Such a question, though obviously speculative, is crucial. One way to approach
this question is to ask what those nineteenth-century evangelicals who sought to think
deeply and critically about art did “wrong.” The answer, I think, at least in part, is that
they failed to bring the disciplines of systematic theology and aesthetics into meaningful
conversation with one another in a consistent way. This may seem a strange diagnosis,
especially after I have tried to emphasize the theological context of evangelical aesthetic
thought. Have I not argued, for example, that evangelicals posited a subordinationist
relationship between Christianity and art? I have, moreover, suggested throughout that
systematicity, or a certain philosophical self-consciousness, was what helped to
distinguish the evangelical aesthetics of the nineteenth century from most of what came
before. But of course one can be dead wrong in a quite systematic fashion, and this, I
submit, was a large part of the problem with the evangelical aesthetics of the Victorian
period. Indeed, when I first began work on this project, I had a vague expectation that I
would discover in the pages of nineteenth-century evangelical periodicals a precursor to
the contemporary discipline of “theological aesthetics.” Surely if anyone was thinking
about art from the perspective of traditional doctrine it would be the evangelicals, or so I
thought. Such an expectation may reveal as much about my woeful lack of knowledge regarding my own tradition as anything, but it quickly became apparent that “theological aesthetics” was not an accurate description of much of what evangelicals were writing when it came to the fine arts. Certainly, as I have stressed throughout, there were evangelical writers who “pushed back,” at least for a time, against the more extreme implications of the romantic principles that were underwriting much nineteenth-century aesthetic thought. There were also some writers, such as E.E. Higbee in the Mercersburg Review, who approached the topic of aesthetics from a specifically Christological vantage-point and were thus closer to the kind of theological aesthetics I have in mind. But much of the pushing back which nineteenth-century evangelicals did tended to bring theology in primarily by way of qualification, not as a necessary starting-point for positive, constructive thinking. In short, too few evangelical writers were beginning with theological categories and then asking what kind of theory of art might be derived from these categories – they were not, as a colleague once put it, “letting theology ask the questions” – rather, they were drawing uncritically on Enlightenment and romantic theories and then, sometimes, noting that theological concerns might alter these theories to a degree. As with any generalization, there were notable exceptions, to be sure, but such exceptions were rarer than I, for one, would have hoped. Furthermore, on some level we are back to the proverbial chicken and egg, for certain social and theological changes were already afoot in the early nineteenth century which had fostered an Anglo-American evangelicalism that was consciously non-sectarian and increasingly non-dogmatic (“the Bible alone” was the rallying cry of a large segment of nineteenth-century
evangelicalism, especially in America\textsuperscript{76}). Consequently, it is not surprising that nineteenth-century evangelicals would have failed to be rigorously theological in their approach to art since they were in effect becoming less theologically rigorous in general.

To be clear, I am speaking here primarily about method, not about substance. I am not prepared at this point to suggest what kind of aesthetic theory a rigorous theological attention to art might yield. I suspect it could yield many plausible theories, as in fact it has already begun to do. Evangelicals have once again returned to a systematic investigation of the arts, and unlike the explorations of many nineteenth-century evangelicals, this investigation is in many cases proceeding along distinctly theological lines. I would also add here that I should not be misunderstood to mean that something like a romantic view of art is incompatible a priori with orthodox evangelical Protestantism. Any serious attention to the aesthetics of Jonathan Edwards, or to certain iterations of the “Mercersburg aesthetic,” would suggest the fallacy of this idea. To be sure, one might find good reason to reject Edwards’s aesthetic on any number of philosophical or theological grounds (not to mention the heavily Hegelian inflections of the Mercersburg aesthetic). Not even Edwards’s immediate theological heirs were willing to follow him either in his aesthetic musings or in his peculiar system of theistic idealism. But the very existence of a theory like Edwards’s is enough to demonstrate that orthodox Christianity and certain kinds of “romantic” thought are not always necessarily at odds. Yet however one judges the content of Edwards’s aesthetics, it is precisely an Edwardsean-style methodology that I am here commending. Indeed, with the recent resurgence of Calvinism in many evangelical circles, Edwards is once again being looked
at with fresh eyes, and evangelical aesthetic thought can only stand to benefit from his example. As Mark A. Noll opines near the conclusion of his book *America’s God*, a book that has appeared and reappeared throughout this study, if he “had to recommend only one American theologian for the purposes of understanding God, the self, and the world as they really are,” that theologian would be Edwards. To this I would add that if one wants to understand not only how the history of evangelical aesthetics went “wrong” but also how it might once again go “right,” one could do far worse than to look to Edwards. For this reason, I find that I cannot resist the urge to conclude this study by citing a remark – a remark Noll also cites – by the Rev. Israel Holly, who, during a period of heated theological dispute in 1770, proclaimed: “Sir, if I was to engage with you in controversy, I would say, *Read Edwards!* And if you wrote again, I would tell you to *Read Edwards!* And if you wrote again, I would still tell you to *Read Edwards!*”77
NOTES


2 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism* 13-17.

3 Again, this is something of a generalization. As historians have pointed out, and as I myself argue later in this chapter regarding various emphases in aesthetics, fundamentalism also involved some adjustments to modern life. See Noll, *History* 381 and Bebbington 183-84.
4 Bebbington 207, 221-23.
5 Szasz 467-77.
6 Noll, History 374.
7 Hunter 32.
8 Qtd. in Bebbington 182. The periodical, as Bebbington notes, was “the journal of the Wesley Bible Union.” He goes on to conclude: “It is therefore quite mistaken to hold (as it sometimes has been held) that Britain escaped a Fundamentalist controversy” (182). The controversy, however, as Bebbington also points out, was somewhat more restrained than its American counterpart.
9 Marsden, Fundamentalism 4.
10 Qtd. in Noll, History 375-76.
11 The classic statement of the fundamentalist position was J. Gresham Machen’s Christianity and Liberalism (1923), in which he argued that “our principal concern just now is to show that the liberal attempt at reconciling Christianity with modern science has really relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity, so that what remains is in essentials only that same indefinite type of religious aspiration which was in the world before Christianity came upon the scene” (in Mathisen 447). For more on Machen, see below.
12 See Noll’s discussion of politics and science in Scandal 149-208. Noll mentions the fine arts, but he does not discuss them in any detail.
14 Qtd. in Bebbington 199-200.
15 See Ahlstrom 780-81. Ahlstrom uses the phrase, “the natural and the supernatural were consubstantial,” citing Bushnell (780), though of course Bushnell had taken the word “consubstantial” from Coleridge. (The first recorded use of the word in English as a theological reference to Christ being “one in substance” with the Father dates back to William Caxton’s The Golden Legende in 1483 [Oxford English Dictionary,
def. 1b].)


17 There is a certain historical irony to this development if, as M.H. Abrams has argued, aesthetic theory is itself often comprised of concepts that have migrated from other disciplines such as theology. See M.H. Abrams, Preface, in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) viii.

18 Qtd. in Bebbington 183. The idea of Christ-as-Artist or Christ-as-Poet appeared frequently around the turn-of-the-century, and it was obviously connected to the growing emphasis on Christ as the consummate human being rather than Christ as the God-Man or as mediator between a sinful humanity and a holy God. The concept appears, for instance, in Oscar Wilde’s *De Profundis*, where he suggests that “Christ’s place indeed is with the poets” (*Oscar Wilde: Collected Works* [New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006] 1085). For a direct response to Wilde’s aestheticization of Christ, see “A Romantic Christ,” *Methodist Review* (Sep. 1907): 788-801. For a liberal Protestant statement of the Christ-as-Artist theme, see Edward B. Pollard, “Aesthetic and Imaginative Elements in the Words of Jesus,” *Biblical World* 30 (Nov. 1907): 339-45.


21 Walter Sargent, “One Contribution which Art Makes to Religion,” *Biblical World* 41 (June 1913) 359, 362, 363, 365. Many liberals were themselves instrumental in cultivating a “scientific” approach to religion. In fact, what Sargent is after is a way to verify religion on something like scientific grounds,
which, ironically, can be done by admitting that religion is not, a priori, scientific but rather aesthetic. Throughout this chapter, I am concentrating on those liberals who aestheticized religion, but it is important to remember that this strategy was very often undertaken as a way to fend off the more scientifically-inclined branch of modernism.

22 Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958) 38-40. Tillich writes: “Faith as the state of ultimate concern claims the whole man and cannot be restricted to the subjectivity of mere feeling” (39). Tillich, of course, was himself working in the liberal tradition of Protestantism.


24 Not all liberals were quite so concerned about this kind of monism, either. The Rev. R.J. Campbell, minister of the City Temple in London, went so far as to claim in *The New Theology* (1907) that the human and the divine are “fundamentally and essentially one” (qtd. in Bebbington, 198).

25 Morgan 305-37, esp. 305-11, 315, 324. The quotations from Morgan in this paragraph occur on p. 315. Historian Sydney Ahlstrom suggested that attention to religious education was a defining characteristic of liberal Protestantism (781).


29 For Arnold, religion was a part or expression of culture rather than an engine of culture. After arguing in
Culture and Anarchy that religion and culture are united in a single aim, namely, humankind’s drive for perfection, Arnold ultimately goes on to place culture above religion: “But, finally, perfection, – as culture, from a thorough disinterested study of human nature and human experience learns to conceive it, – is a harmonious expansion of all the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature, and is not consistent with the over-development of any one power at the expense of the rest. Here culture goes beyond religion, as religion is generally conceived by us” (Culture and Anarchy, ed. J. Dover Wilson [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963] 48; italics mine). Religion, for Arnold, remains fragmentary; only culture affords a vision of the whole.


31 Lundin 144.

32 See the essays in The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth, 2 vols., ed. R.A. Torrey, A.C. Dixon, et al. (1917; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003). The pagination of this reprint follows the original four-volume structure, and I have therefore cited individual essays in keeping with the original volume numbers.

33 See Shailer Mathews, “Business as the Maker of Morals,” Methodist Review 47 (May 1931): 407-17. For some examples of articles that attempt to balance the claims of conservatives and liberals (though not necessarily to great effect), see James H. Snowden, “Modernism in the Bible,” Methodist Review 44 (July 1928): 487-99; “An Aggressive Christianity,” Methodist Review 44 (Jan. 1928): 131-32; and “Fundamentalism and Modernism,” Methodist Review 42 (May 1927): 483-85. My reading of the trajectory of the Methodist Review is a generalization, and there were of course exceptions. For a brief discussion of conservative reactions in the Methodist Review to liberal biblical criticism during the 1890s, see Robert E. Chiles, Theological Transition in American Methodism, 1790-1935 (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983) 69-71. Chiles, however, notes “the extent to which Methodism was dominated by liberalism in the first third of the twentieth century” (71). Other American periodicals that followed the general liberalizing trend were the Princeton Review (formerly the Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review) and the Christian Advocate.
Hunter 34ff; however, cf. Marsden, *Fundamentalism* 6-7, who describes fundamentalism “in terms of the establishment-or-outsider paradox.” Fundamentalists, Marsden suggests, possessed a “strikingly paradoxical tendency to identify sometimes with the ‘establishment’ and sometimes with the ‘outsiders’” (6).


A recent article by Brendan Cole on Jean Delville’s *La Mission de l’Art* (1905) provides a useful example of the pervasiveness of this trend at the turn of the twentieth century. Cole notes that Delville’s text “is a passionate statement of the view that art is a spiritual activity. This is a perspective which was almost taken for granted in the late nineteenth-century … and is usually referred to in an entirely unselfconscious manner by writers and artists of the fin-de-siècle” (“Jean Delville’s *La Mission de l’Art*: Hegelian Echoes in Fin-de-siècle Idealism,” *Religion and the Arts* 11 [2007] 339).

Peter Thompson, “The Minister in His Study,” *Methodist Review* (Sep. 1908) 771. In 1897, Thomas G. Selby had similarly warned of the dangers of substituting art and civilization for God: “We are in daily peril of making our civilizations a stop-gap for an unloved God…. We turn weary, longing eyes to our arts and sciences, and expect at their hands blessings which should be sought on our knees from God alone” (“Irreligious Civilizations,” *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* 120 [May 1897] 327). Selby hoped, however, that British civilization might still be able to cling fast to Christianity, in which case he believed it would surely be a light unto the world.


Of course, not all liberals accepted this particular view of the Atonement. Whatever their theory of the Atonement, however, liberals downplayed the literal substitutionary or propitiatory nature of the event.


P.T. Forsyth, “The Need for a Positive Gospel,” *London Quarterly Review* 11 (Jan. 1904) 65, 82; the italics, except for “person,” are mine. The Bowdoin creed was, according to Forsyth, drafted under the direction of President Hyde, “a liberal Congregational clergyman and Hegelian thinker.” The first article of this creed, as reported by Forsyth, reads as follows: “I believe in one God, present in nature as law, in
science as truth, in art as beauty, in history as justice, in society as sympathy, in conscience as duty, and
supremely in Christ as our highest ideal’’ (64). For more on Forsyth, see “Forsyth, Peter Taylor,”
Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals, ed. Timothy Larsen, David Bebbington, and Mark A. Noll

44 Marsden, Fundamentalism 92.

45 This view should not be mistaken for a blanket denial of some form of “sacramentalism,” in which God,
understood in an orthodox Christian sense as a Person, is thought to manifest Himself through art. Insofar
as orthodox sacramentalism emphasizes the transcendence of God made immanent, it too locates the
“spiritual” in a supernatural domain. Sacramentalism is the natural infused with the supernatural. To be
sure, most fundamentalists did not opt for this view, probably for at least two reasons: a) many forms of
Protestantism lacked a robust sacramental system of the sort found in Roman Catholicism; and b)
depending on the theological rigor of a given author, there can at times be a fine line between orthodox
sacramentalism and the kind of romantic idealism that had become a mainstay of much nineteenth-century
aesthetic thought, and fundamentalists were clearly reacting to the perceived abuses of this latter system.
My point here, though, is simply that fundamentalists insisted that the “spiritual” is a genuinely
transcendent category rather than the kind of natural, wholly immanent category many romantics had made
it. What fundamentalists were actively resisting was any conception of “natural supernaturalism.”
46 “The Foe of the Church,” Watchman 77 (31 Dec. 1896) 7. Interestingly, this author is no rigid
fundamentalist. The article begins with the observation that “it is impossible to hold that the theory of
evolution is necessarily hostile to faith.”
47 “Mr. Browning’s ‘Asolando,’” Baptist Magazine 82 (Apr. 1890) 176. See also the untitled passage in the
New York Evangelist 58 (3 Mar. 1887): 2, which quotes an account, published in the Baptist Weekly, of a
sermon attacking works of art that “are full of illicit suggestion.”
48 I am merely stating in brief the conservative position; however, there are numerous questions
surrounding this issue, both historical and theoretical, that would be interesting to pursue elsewhere. To take one historical example, it is intriguing to note that the fine arts departments in many contemporary evangelical colleges ask students to conduct artistic studies of nude models. Doing so, however, sometimes requires elaborate statements of justification – a sign that evangelicals remain tenuously positioned between the claims of aesthetic theory and the claims of traditional Judeo-Christian morality. See, for example, Bruce Herman, “Art Policy on Nude Models” and James Zingarelli, “On the Nude in Art,” Gordon College, Wenham, MA, 2 April 2009 <http://www.gordon.edu/academics/art_nudemodels>. Clearly, there is an interesting history here that would be worth tracing. At the same time, by way of clarification, I think one must be careful with a term like “sexualized.” Certainly not all “sexualized” gazes in all contexts can be equated with “bad” or “degrading.” Not even the most diehard fundamentalists would have believed this. Thus, there is, I would argue, something like a “pure sexualized gaze.” What conservatives were cautioning against was a) misdirected desire, not sexuality or desire per se; b) the uncritical acceptance of Art as a justification for this misdirected desire; and c) a refusal to appreciate the gravity of humankind’s sinful predicament. In any case, to dismiss evangelical reactions to “the nude” as simply “puritanical” is, I would argue, theoretically reductive insofar as it ignores serious debates about the nature of the human condition and of “disinterestedness.” Also, see n. 66.


53 There were, however, a number of differences between the Puritans and fundamentalists as well. Most importantly, the Puritans had a largely positive view of culture in general, whereas the fundamentalists had a negative view. Though art held a marginal position in the thinking of both groups, it held this position for somewhat different reasons.

54 Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism 182. For a careful discussion of Machen, see the final chapter
in this volume.


56 Machen is the best-known representative of this more intellectually-inclined segment of fundamentalism, but one does meet with other examples of conservative attempts to achieve a rapprochement between Christianity and culture, if not always between Christianity and art specifically. See, for example, W.M. Lisle, “Christianity and Culture: Their Divorce and Reconciliation,” Bible Student and Teacher 5 (Sep. 1906): 169-82. Lisle, a minister from West Newton, MA, also tries to strike a balance between liberal and fundamentalist views of culture, though he does not discuss art directly, except to note that “Maps and models of art and architecture charge … college halls with the atmosphere of Greece and Rome.” Lisle does not condemn student exposure to the “Ancient paganism” such maps and models represent, but he does counsel “wise caution” in approaching them (171).

57 See Marsden, Fundamentalism 118.

58 D. Havelock Fisher, “‘Reading Into’ a Hymn: On a Recent Criticism of ‘Lead Kindly Light,’ Bible Student and Teacher 9 (Nov. 1908) 279.


62 J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Liberty,” Selected Shorter Writings 357.

63 Robert Waters, “Genius in Action: The Realists,” Christian Advocate 63 (18 Oct. 1888) 687. This article was part of an ongoing series on art authored by Waters.


65 Interestingly, it was an explicit realism that also provided the basis for some critics’ objections to the
“nude.” As a piece in the *Christian Advocate* (reprinted from *Appleton’s Journal*) explained in 1878:

“What object there can be in representing nude figures, not intended for nor considered as types of ideal perfection, but as portraits, it would be hard to say…. And we tell [Manet] that his nudities have nothing in common with the primary and ultimate objects of all art worthy of the name; they do not enlarge our conception of the beautiful…. His realism, totally misplaced, gives no impulse to the imagination other than that which is communicated by all erotic pictures…. But the true, alike in painting, in sculpture, and in literature, is the direct opposite of all this” (‘Nude Exhibitions in Art,’” *Christian Advocate* 53 [29 Aug. 1878] 550). See also Henry J. Van Dyke, Jr., ‘Art and Ethics: In Some of Their Relations,” *Princeton Review* (Jan.-June 1883) 105.


68 In addition to the revivalist tradition in general, the immediate theological contribution to fundamentalist sentimentalism was of course the holiness movement. Bebbington, for example, notes the connection between romanticism, American transcendentalism, and the holiness movement, and he describes how Keswick spirituality was often condemned for being “all gush and no sinew” (167).

69 An article in the *Bible Student and Teacher*, for instance, rehearses all of the classic arguments against the novel, including the argument that novel-reading leads to a “mawkish sentimentalism.” See “Wise Words to Novel-Readers,” *Bible Student and Teacher* 8 (May 1908): 358-60.

70 Lundin 142, 144. Of course, a thorough account of twentieth-century neo-evangelical approaches to the aesthetic and the relationship of these approaches to the romantic tradition is beyond the scope of this study. However, in a recent conversation with Professor Lundin, he pointed to the instrumental role played by Professor Clyde S. Kilby (mentioned in the introduction to this study) in rekindling the interest of post-fundamentalist evangelicals in the arts. Kilby, who taught romantic poetry, also carried on an extensive correspondence with C.S. Lewis, whose own works would necessarily play a key part in any discussion of
twentieth-century neo-evangelical aesthetics. Lewis himself might best be described as a “neo-romantic,” and his works have become hugely influential among a wide range of contemporary evangelicals. I’m inclined to believe, however, as I’ve argued here, that both Kilby and the “Lewis Factor” marked the re-emergence of an old sympathy rather than the birth of a genuinely new one.


72 Many in the Reformed tradition would no doubt see the rise of Methodism, with its clear Arminian orientation, as a first step in the process of secularization I am discussing. While I see this point, I am not interested in pressing it here.


75 I am grateful to Ryan J. Jack McDermott for phrasing the issue in a way that has stuck with me.


77 Noll 444; Holly, qtd. in ibid.
APPENDIX A

A NOTE ON PERIODICAL CITATIONS

The development of electronic databases has made locating and accessing the periodical material used for this study much easier than it would have been even ten or twenty years ago, and I have benefited greatly from the availability of such databases through the O’Neill Library, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA. Two databases in particular, the American Periodicals Series (published by ProQuest Information and Learning Company) and the British Periodicals Online (Collections I and II, published by ProQuest Chadwyck-Healey), were invaluable to me throughout this project. Given the number of periodical articles cited, however, identifying the requisite database information for individual citations would have proven too cumbersome and distracting. For this reason, I have cited all periodical material in a conventional format without reference to its digital or non-digital origins; however, please see Appendix B for a select list of periodicals used for this study, many of which may be accessed through the two databases noted above. In addition, I have opted in most instances to cite reviews using the short titles often found at the tops of consecutive pages in many periodicals. In a number of cases, these short titles (or some variation thereof) are also those listed in major periodical indexes, whether traditional or electronic. In the notes and in the Works Cited, I have therefore avoided using the format “Rev. of …” except in those cases in which no short titles exist. Finally, I have adopted a uniform system of citation for all periodical material: Author Name, Title, Periodical Name Vol. # (Date), Pg. #s.
## APPENDIX B

### SELECTED PERIODICAL SOURCES CONSULTED*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Denomination/Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Baptist Magazine†</td>
<td>Baptist/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist Magazine</td>
<td>Baptist/GB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist Quarterly (also Baptist Quarterly† Review and Baptist Review)</td>
<td>Baptist/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review†</td>
<td>Presbyterian (Old School)/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical World†</td>
<td>Baptist/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Quarterly Review‡</td>
<td>Congregationalist/GB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Advocate†</td>
<td>Presbyterian/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Advocate† (also Christian Advocate and Journal, Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald)</td>
<td>Methodist/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Index†</td>
<td>Southern Baptist/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Observer†</td>
<td>Anglican/GB (also US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Spectator† (also Quarterly Christian Spectator and later American Biblical Repository and Classical Review)</td>
<td>Congregationalist/ Presbyterian/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eclectic Review‡</td>
<td>Congregationalist/GB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Quarterly Review‡ (also London Review and London Quarterly and Holborn Review)</td>
<td>Methodist/GB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodical</td>
<td>Date/Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercersburg Review† (also Reformed Quarterly Review)</td>
<td>German Reformed/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist Magazine† (also Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review, Methodist Quarterly Review, and Methodist Review)</td>
<td>Methodist/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist Review [South]</td>
<td>Southern Methodist/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian Quarterly Review (also later American Presbyterian and Theological Review and American Presbyterian Review)</td>
<td>Presbyterian/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review (also Christian Ambassador and Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review and Christian Ambassador)</td>
<td>Primitive Methodist/GB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record</td>
<td>Anglican/GB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Presbyterian Review</td>
<td>Presbyterian/US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine‡ (also Arminian Magazine)</td>
<td>Methodist/GB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This is a representative list. For other periodicals cited in this study, please consult the notes and/or the Works Cited page.

† Available in whole or in part in the American Periodicals Series Database, published by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

‡ Available in whole or in part in the British Periodicals Online Database, Collections I and II, published by ProQuest Chadwyck-Healey.
WORKS CITED

Primary Sources


“Art and Religion.” The Record, n.s. 10 (22 May 1891): 499.


A.S.E. “Remarks upon Wordsworth’s Poetry.” Christian Spectator 1 (May 1827): 244-47.


2008 <http://bc.edu/libraries>.


Buckley, Dr. “Art and Morals in Art Centers.” *Christian Advocate* 60 (12 Mar. 1885): 166-67.


-----.. “Unconscious Influence.” *Sermons for the New Life* (New York: Charles Scribner,


-----.“On Poesy or Art.” *Notes and Lectures upon Shakespeare and Some of the Old
Poets and Dramatists with Other Literary Remains. Ed. H.N. Coleridge. New

-----.


-----.

“National Prosperity Dependent on the Divine Blessing: A Sermon.” Wesleyan-


357-78.


-----.


The Editor [J.P. Barnett]. “Novels and Novel Reading: A Familiar Address to the

-----.

“Novels and Novel Reading: A Familiar Address to the Young.” *Baptist Magazine* 74 (Sep. 1882): 415-19.

-----.


-----.

“Novels and Novel Reading: A Familiar Address to the Young.” *Baptist Magazine* 74 (Nov. 1882): 498-503.

“Editorial Comment.” *Zion’s Herald* 63 (17 Mar. 1886): 84


-----.


-----.


-----.


-----.


-----.

Works.


“Esthetics in Religion.” *Christian Advocate* 42 (13 June 1867): 188.


Fisher, D. Havelock. “‘Reading Into’ a Hymn: On a Recent Criticism of ‘Lead Kindly Light.’” *Bible Student and Teacher* 9 (Nov. 1908): 279-82.


<http://www.bc.edu/libraries>.


Hazlitt, William. “Introductory – On Poetry in General.” The Selected Writings of
165-80.


Higbee, E.E. “The Relation of Christianity to Art.” Mercersburg Review 21 (July 1874):
341-73.

Historical Catalogue of Brown University. Providence, RI: Brown University, 1914.

Hodge, Charles. Review of Discourses on Christian Nurture, by Horace Bushnell, Dr.
Tyler’s Letter to Dr. Bushnell on Christian Nurture, and An Argument for
“Discourses on Christian Nurture,” Addressed to the Publishing Committee of
the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, by Horace Bushnell. Biblical


“How the Fine Arts of Europe Are Being Perfected in the New World.” Christian
Advocate 48 (17 Apr. 1873): 127.


J.D.T. “Wordsworth’s Conception of Nature.” Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review and Christian Ambassador n.s. 6 (July 1884): 462-76.


Lisle, W.M. “Christianity and Culture: Their Divorce and Reconciliation.” *Bible Student and Teacher* 5 (Sep. 1906): 169-82.


-----.*Christian Spectator* 7 (1 Aug. 1825): 408-11.


-----. “Christianity and Liberty.” *Selected Shorter Writings*. Ed. D.G. Hart.


-----. “The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age.” *Selected Shorter Writings*.


      168-73.


      72-96.


-----.


-----.


-----.


“Moral Aesthetics; or the Goodness of God in the Ornaments of the Universe.” *Biblical*


“Mr. Browning’s ‘Asolando.’” *Baptist Magazine* 82 (Apr. 1890): 175-78.


“Nature Guiding Up to God.” *Christian Index* 7 (29 Sep. 1832): 204-205.


<http://bc.edu/libraries>.


<http://bc.edu/libraries>.


<http://bc.edu/libraries>.


“Pictures.” *Christian Index* 60 (22 June 1882): 12.


Pollard, Edward B. “Aesthetic and Imaginative Elements in the Words of Jesus.”


Ramsay, Julian. “Percy Bysshe Shelley.” *Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review* n.s. 11


“Sensibility.” *Christian Advocate and Journal* 10 (15 July 1836): 188.


“The True Notion of the Picturesque.” *Christian Advocate* 58 (15 Nov. 1883): 726.


“Wise Words to Novel-Readers.” *Bible Student and Teacher* 8 (May 1908): 358-60.


**Secondary Sources**


-----. *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism.* 2nd ed. Indianapolis, IN:


-----, “The Trials of the Chosen Peoples: Recent Interpretations of Protestantism and National Identity in Britain and Ireland.” *Protestantism* 3-29.


Dayton, Donald W. “Some Doubts about the Usefulness of the Category ‘Evangelical.’” Dayton and Johnston 245-51.


Dunlap, Barbara J. “The London Quarterly and Holborn Review.” *British Literary


Howes, Graham. *The Art of the Sacred: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Art and


McCasland, D.C. “Chambers, Oswald.” Larsen, Bebbington, and Noll 141-43.


Mihelj, Sabina. “‘Faith in nation comes in different guises’: Modernist Versions of

Miller, Perry. *The Life of the Mind in America from the Revolution to the Civil War.*

-----.


-----.


-----.


-----.


553


Pincus, Steven. “‘To protect English liberties’: The English Nationalist Revolution of 1688-1689.” Claydon and McBride, Protestantism 75-104.


