

This book offers a new reading of Jonathan Edwards's virtue ethic that examines a range of qualities Edwards identifies as "virtues" and considers their importance for contemporary ethics. Each of Edwards's human virtues is "receptive" in nature: humans acquire the virtues through receiving divine grace, and therefore depend utterly on Edwards's God for virtue's acquisition. By contending that humans remain authentic moral agents even as they are unable to attain virtue apart from divine assistance, Edwards challenges contemporary conceptions of moral responsibility, which tend to emphasize human autonomy as a central part of accountability.

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“Given his overall importance, it is hardly surprising that Edwards’s ethical writings, including his theory of virtue, have received sustained attention. At the same time, however, much of the recent work on Edwards’s virtue ethics has minimized its distinctiveness, by assimilating it to more familiar Aristotelian approaches, or taking it out of the wider context of Edwards’s other work, or both. In this book, Elizabeth Cochran offers a bold and much-needed corrective. In her view, Edwards understands the virtues properly so called to be attributes of God, and to be attributes of human persons only in a secondary sense. In order to make the case for this interpretation, she draws on the full range of Edwards’s theological writings, in addition to considering the leading philosophical thinkers who helped to frame the context of his thought. By doing so, she shows Edwards to be a sophisticated moral thinker, important in his own context, and potentially an interlocutor in our own debates over the virtues. In particular, this study will be welcomed by those moral philosophers who have recently attempted to retrieve broadly Platonic, exemplarist theories of the virtues.”

—JEAN PORTER, UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME