historical work in the political aspects of his ministry, and by examining a liberal dose of his sermon texts. From these sermons McDermott demonstrates that Edwards was more condemnatory of the Northampton congregation than would be expected if the thousand year reign of Christ was to spring out of their midst.

The historical work shows Edwards's personal involvement in practical social problems, as well as his non-conformist political views. The author takes stock of Edwards's systematic power by drawing the connection between his ontology and his social ethic. Edwards was a thinker of connection, of metaphysical continuity, despite his Lockean beginnings. The view he formulates prefigures Peirce's agapism. The author does not trace out Edwards's philosophical roots or his radical breaks with those roots. John Smith's Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher makes clear the connection with the British tradition and the innovations that inspired classical American philosophy, such as his notion of "transitive practical acts." (99)

McDermott's book is even-handed when dealing with controversial points of interpretation or historical questions. His treatment of theological issues and interpretations is clear and free of jargon although he neglects to link these disputes clearly with their contemporary offspring. McDermott does not reinsert Edwards into the current civil religion conversation as much as he could have. The major weakness of this book is the conclusion that Edwards was myopic and overly optimistic in his belief that the Catholic world would crumble and that the increasing number of people experiencing a regenerating conversion would well up into a world historical movement. Edwards's optimism was thoroughly couched in the realization of the limits of sinful humanity. But optimism is more a matter of the content that inspires confidence than the reality that content opposes. To look now on Edwards's predictions as "overly optimistic" is to miss the point of his optimism altogether; God's will incarnate in human activity is possible, because human nature can change. What would American philosophy be without this optimism that looks past history to the possibility of radical transformation?

Penn State Roger Ward


In the one hundred and thirty odd years since his death, Henry David Thoreau has acquired an almost mythic status in American letters. Thousands of his admirers revere him as a man who dared to walk to the beat of a different drum by rejecting the conventional lifestyles and values of his day, retiring to the silent shores of Walden Pond, and preforming a grand experiment in self-exploration to determine once and for all if life is worth living. He is regarded as a seer, a sage, a devotee of the
life of the spirit. He, along with certain other nineteenth
century figures (Nietzsche, of course, comes to mind) comes
across as prophet who appears not to breathe the same air as the
rest of us. This after all, is the way Thoreau subtly advertised
himself in his writings, and most of his readers take him at his
word. What you read is what there is.

Steven Fink's books is an attempt to draw a distinction
between the self-advertised Thoreau and what might be referred to
as the "real" Thoreau. The former portrays himself as a prophet-
ic recluse who retreats from a society which imperils his autono-
my and integrity. But the "real" Thoreau, claims Fink, was a
deeply ambitious individual who "desired not to withdraw from
American society but to forge for himself a distinctive place in
it" (p. 4)—the place of a sage, a seer, an oracle. Publishing
was the means by which Thoreau sought to achieve this goal. It
as "the descent necessary to the fulfillment of his prophetic
role." (p. 4). This rather cold-blooded approach need not, howev-
er, paint Thoreau as a scheming glory hound. Fink admits that
Thoreau's development as a professional writer and prophet cen-
tered around the quest to find a mode of expression that would
attract an audience as well as express what he, Thoreau, wanted
to say. But it is certainly the case that Thoreau comes across
in Fink's dissection as something of a young Turk in search of
admiration and success, a man on the rise who is not above
stretching his personal integrity in order to get where he wants
to go. (Fink, for example, makes much of the fact that one of
Thoreau's most popular lectures on the lyceum circuit, which he
delivered time and again, was "Life Without Principle," in which
the Concord prophet orphically declares that to make money as "a
writer or lecturer" one must "go down perpendicularly." Fink
sees this as just one instance in which Thoreau is willing to
ignore his own advice in the pursuit of celebrity.)

Fink's main point, then, is that Thoreau the man ought not
to be conflated with Thoreau the writer. Whatever the former may
have been, the latter was deliberate and self-conscious in his
search for fame. In tracing the development of Thoreau's quest
for the reputation of prophet, Fink focuses on the period he
takes to be Thoreau's apprenticeship: the years between his 1837
graduation for Harvard and the 1849 publication of his first
book, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers. Fink is more
interested in the context of the writing Thoreau did during this
period than its content: the sorts of publications Thoreau wrote
for, the audiences he wanted to address, the current popular
literary fashions—the travelogue, the character sketch, and so
on—he hoped to connect with. When he met with repeated failure
in his attempts to acquire a reputation among his contemporaries,
he finally aimed for a different audience: posterity.

In the process of fleshing all this out, Fink sheds some
interesting light on the idiosyncrasies of nineteenth century
American literary markets and publishing practices. He also
provides us with some detailed accounts of the genesis of essays
such as the "Natural History of Massachusetts" or "A Winter
Walk. Finally, his book fills in some biographical detail that any admirer of Thoreau will welcome. Still, one can't help but ask what, ultimately, the point of all this is. Does Fink's rather untraditional portrait reveal anything new about the substance of Thoreau's thought that would call for a reappraisal of it? Has his historicist account shed new light on what Thoreau actually says in his published work? A postmodernist who denies that a text can be appreciated unless its context and background is dissected would perhaps answer in the affirmative. Readers (like myself) less sympathetic with postmodernism's penchant for contextual reductionism will have to disagree. One can applaud Fink's efforts to strip away some of the hagiographical filigree that has encrusted Thoreau over the years without following him in his strategy of focusing on context at the expense of content. Such an exercise is interesting, but philosophically rather irrelevant.

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If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.
Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

These are words written by Thoreau himself which I have often thought serve to provide an accurate summary of his own life and action. They also provide in the present case quite an accurate description of the biographer and original author of this book, Henry S. Salt. He too was very much of an individualist who surrendered his mastership at Eton in the 1880s to devote himself to the many causes that attracted him. Among others, these included conservationism, vegetarianism, socialism, animals' rights, and prison reform. He continued to publish widely in these fields well into the 1930s.

The book is unique in that its editors have produced an edition of the third version of Salt's life of Thoreau. This particular text has never before been published. It offers Salt's final reading of Thoreau based on important works published up to 1908, including Thoreau's complete Journal. As such it enhances and improves the 1896 version. How this came to fruition is described in considerable detail by the editors. It is really quite remarkable how this biography stands up in and to a contemporary setting. The book helps as well to highlight the importance of Salt himself in contributing to the appreciation of Thoreau's ideas and to the uniqueness of his person. It also helps to clarify the relationship between Thoreau and Emerson, and especially to illustrate that Thoreau was no mere follower of