

JONATHAN EDWARDS'S *END OF CREATION*: AN EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Edwards's *Dissertation Concerning the End for which God created the World*¹ is a treasure trove of resources and insights for contemporary philosophical theology—especially given his interest in resisting the erosion of the centrality of God in science, history, moral philosophy, and “true spirituality.” His concerns were—and still are—legitimate. In this paper I make common cause with Edwards by defending his *End of Creation* against criticisms grounded in a recurrent strategic error in interpretation. I will examine three such critical works.² William Wisner (1850) argues that Edwards's view of God and God's purpose in creation is inconsistent because God's making himself his end, as Edwards claims, entails both a deficiency in God and Neoplatonic emanationism, which contradict God's aseity and creation *ex nihilo*, respectively. Michael J. McClymond (1995) argues that Edwards's view of God as being normatively bound to regard each creature according to their inherent worth overrides God's freedom in creating and shows God to be inconsistent when he saves only the elect. James Beilby (2004) argues that Edwards's defense of his theses entails that God must demonstrate his glory. Since God's glory consists in the demonstration of attributes expressible only in creating, it follows that “to be who he is—He must create.”³ Beilby then observes that this entailment is inconsistent with Edwards's commitment to God's aseity and freedom in creation. I defend Edwards against these charges by showing that each of these scholars commits a strategic error in interpretation. Each of these theorists, while apparently ignoring Edwards's own explicit claims that a complete and trustworthy account of God's end and motive in creation requires scriptural revelation, draws almost exclusively from the chapter that Edwards devotes to

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¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings, The Works of Jonathan Edwards 8* (ed. Paul Ramsey; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

² William C. Wisner, “The End of God in Creation,” *American Bible Repository*, 3rd series, 6 (1850) 430–56. Michael J. McClymond, “Sinners in the Hands of a Virtuous God: Ethics and Divinity in Jonathan Edwards's *End of Creation*,” *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologiegeschichte* 2/1 (1995) 1–22. Reprinted in *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). James Beilby, “Divine Aseity, Divine Freedom: A Conceptual Problem for Edwardsian-Calvinism,” *JETS* 47 (2004) 647–58.

³ Beilby, “Divine Aseity” 654.

ascertaining what “reason teaches.”⁴ But what reason teaches provides only the first part of Edwards’s complete argument. Notice the difference between the claims: *God’s end in creation is X* and *Reason teaches that God’s end in creation is X*. Edwards should be understood to assert the latter. This is not to say that Edwards did not believe what he wrote about Reason’s “dictates,” but only to note that Edwards himself indicates that what Reason dictates on the matter is at best incomplete. Edwards deductively argues that *we must suppose* that a disposition in God moved him to create and that this disposition is related to God’s value for himself. Wisner, McClymond, and Beilby ignore Edwards on this count and do not consider the completion of his argument which he gleans from a careful and exhaustive examination of scriptural teaching on the matter. Each theorist then claims to expose some inconsistency in Edwards’s argument. Finally—and not coincidentally—Wisner and Beilby advocate positions which Edwards’s *End of Creation* was designed to refute in the first place. In short, each of these works exemplifies a strategic error: failure to notice, reconstruct, and treat Edwards’s argument in the first chapter as part of a rhetorical strategy pursued in the discourse of the age. This failure leads almost inexorably to systematic distortion of his particular claims.

I will argue two defensive theses. The first is that Edwards did not hold that God is normatively bound to value things according to their value. My second thesis is that Edwards’s view of the inexhaustible fullness and self-sufficiency of God grounds Edwards’s view of God’s end and motive in creating the world, and therefore does not entail pantheism or Neoplatonic emanationism. To establish these two theses, I briefly describe two features of the intellectual milieu within which Edwards worked that have not been adequately acknowledged in Edwards scholarship. In section three, I offer a brief exposition of Edwards’s argument in *End of Creation*, presenting evidence that, though Edwards was aware of the intellectual influences of his day, he was not taken in by them. In fact, he attempts to undermine their influence while working within the discourse shaped by their terms and concepts. In the fourth and final section of this paper, I discuss in detail the nature and genesis of these errors in Edwards scholarship.

II. TWO FEATURES OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Two features of the intellectual milieu within which Edwards found himself are crucial for understanding Edwards’s point and strategy in *End of Creation*. The first is the widespread belief in the *Euclidean Myth* and the second is the equally widespread apparent compulsion to answer the *Euthyphro Dilemma*—or at least show how one’s theory stands in relation to it. Consider the former first. Edwards worked within an intellectual climate characterized in part by a conviction that Euclid’s geometry exemplified the

⁴ For an informative discussion see Helen Petter Westra, “Jonathan Edwards and ‘What Reason Teaches,’” *JETS* 34 (1991) 495–503.

ideal of systematic and certain knowledge. Esteem for the axiomatic method, and the power of reason in general, was unwavering and pervasive. As René Descartes (1596–1650) confesses,

Those long chains of very simple and easy reasonings, which geometers customarily use to arrive at their most difficult demonstrations, had given me occasion to suppose that all the things which can fall under human knowledge are interconnected in the same way . . .⁵

This same attitude is revealed in the title of Baruch Spinoza's (1632–1677) *Ethics Demonstrated According to the Geometrical Order* (1677). Most telling, perhaps, is Andrew Ramsay's *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion Unfolded in a Geometrical Order* (1748–49).⁶ Though Euclid's intellectual achievement deserves much of the admiration it gets, there are, however, mythical dimensions to the high esteem in which it was held. The Euclidean Myth, simply put, is the belief that Euclid's *Elements* expresses objective and certain truths about the world, and therefore validates the use of the axiomatic method in other fields of inquiry. Not until the mid-19th century were these convictions called into question.

A second feature of philosophical theorizing in the eighteenth century is also crucial to understanding Edwards's *End of Creation*. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and afterward Christian theologians and philosophers—including the British moral theorists of late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—have been aware of the dilemma Socrates poses to the young man, Euthyphro: “Is an action right because God commands it, or does God command it because it is right?”⁷ Those who accept the dichotomy are led to conclude: Either the content of God's commands is arbitrary or there exists some standard to judge the moral status of actions other than God's commanding. Almost everyone who promulgated a moral theory took a position on the issue. Theories which support the first horn of the dilemma became known as “Divine Command Theories.” The rational intuitionists and the empirical sentimentalists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries usually stated their views in terms of the second “horn.” Some even subjected God's actions themselves to Reason's or Nature's dictates. It is this latter group that concerned Edwards.

An overview of theorists of this latter group will make this clear. The idea to look for is this: *Since God commands an action because it is right, there exists some standard to judge the moral status of actions other than God's commanding. Reason enables humans to discern those norms that guide even God's actions.* Those advocating this view include Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648) who claimed in *De Veritate* (1624) that one religious truth under-

⁵ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* V1 (trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 120.

⁶ 2 vols.; Glasgow: Robert Foulis, 1748–49. Edwards comments on this work in *Misc.* 1180, 1252, and 1253.

⁷ It should be noted that this is how these theorists understood the import of Socrates' query even though Socrates did not put it exactly this way in Plato's *Euthyphro*.

lies all religions and can be grasped by reason.⁸ Benjamin Whichcote, widely considered to be the “father” of Cambridge Platonism, promulgated this line of thinking and influenced Henry More (1614–1687). In his *Enchiridion Ethicum* (1667), More propounds twenty-three “self-evident” truths of morality. Again, the conviction is that Reason can grasp what is morally right. Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688) claims that

Moral Good and Evil, Just and Unjust, Honest and Dishonest . . . cannot be Arbitrary things, made by Will without nature; because it is Universally true, That things are what they are, not by Will but by Nature.⁹

Perhaps Samuel Clarke (1675–1729) and John Balguy (1686–1748) best exemplify my point. Clarke claims that

in matters of natural Reason and morality, that which is Holy and Good . . . is not therefore Holy and Good because 'tis commanded to be done, but is therefore commanded of God, because 'tis Holy and Good.¹⁰

John Balguy writes,

Tho' we are certainly obliged to do whatever appears to be the will of God, merely because it is his Will, and in consequence of that Right which He has to prescribe Laws to us; yet our Obligation to act conformably to Reason is even superior to this, because the Divine Will itself is certainly subject to the original Law or Rule of Action. . . .¹¹

In these examples we clearly see both of the influences mentioned earlier: admiration for the Euclidean achievement and compulsion to state one's moral theory in the terms of the *Euthyphro Dilemma*. I say that Jonathan Edwards was acutely aware of these features of eighteenth-century intellectual life and responded to the issues of the day in their discourse but from his radically God-centered convictions. He writes,

It hardly seems to me true to say, that the command of God is the prime ground of all the duty we owe to God. . . . A command of any being can't be the prime foundation of obligation, because there must be something prior, as reason why a command is obligatory, and why obedience is due to it; . . . There is something prior to God's command, that is the ground and reason why his command obliges.¹²

⁸ Cherbury was instrumental along with Grotius, the natural law theorist, in introducing Arminian thought to England. Natural law theory is an outworking of the second horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. This is probably one aspect of Arminian thought that Edwards opposed.

⁹ Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (1688 [1731]), in *British Moralists: Being Selections from Writers Principally of the Eighteenth Century* V2 (ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge; New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964) 247.

¹⁰ Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion* (1705), in *British Moralists* V2 32.

¹¹ John Balguy, *The Foundation of Moral Goodness* (1728), in *British Moralists* V2 76.

¹² *Miscellanies* 566. LAW. SIN. DUTY in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* 18, *The "Miscellanies" 501–832* (ed. Ava Chamberlain; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). See also *Miscellanies* 1042, 1045, and 1077, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* 20, *The "Miscellanies" 833–1152* (ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

Furthermore, Edwards polemically engaged ideas and trends that he thought were contrary to Scripture. In a letter written in 1757, a few months before his death, Edwards writes,

I have also written two other discourses, one on *God's End in Creating the World*; the other concerning *The Nature of True Virtue*. As it appeared to me, the modern opinions which prevail concerning these two things, stand very much as foundations of the fashionable scheme of divinity, which seems to have become almost universal. My discourse on virtue is principally designed against that notion of virtue maintained by My Lord Shaftesbury, [Francis] Hutcheson, and [George] Turnbull; which seems to be most in vogue at this day, so far as I can perceive; which notion is calculated to show that all mankind are naturally disposed to virtue, and are without any native depravity.¹³

Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), advocates a standard of morality to which even the rightness of God's laws and ways are subject.¹⁴ Francis Hutcheson (1696–1746) writes,

It must then first be suppos'd, that there is something in Actions which is apprehended absolutely; and this is Benevolence, or a Tendency to the publick natural happiness of rational Agents; and that our moral sense perceives this excellence; and then *we call the Laws of the DEITY good, when we imagine that they are contriv'd to promote the publick Good in the most effectual and impartial manner.* [emphasis added] . . . And the DEITY is call'd good, in a moral Sense, when we apprehend that his whole Providence tends to the universal Happiness of his Creatures . . .¹⁵

Hutcheson here refers to the deliverances of a "moral sense." Human happiness is the standard of morality against which even God's commands are judged. Moreover, Hutcheson's view entails that God's purpose in creation is human happiness without qualification. This entails a denial of election and suggests the conceptual necessity of libertarian free will. It, too, supports a view of redemption and spirituality—a "scheme of divinity" against which Edwards's *End of Creation* was opposed.

III. EDWARDS'S THESIS AND ARGUMENT IN *END OF CREATION*

In his *Dissertation on the End for Which God Created the World*, Jonathan Edwards argues that God's ultimate end in creation is his glory. He writes,

As there is an infinite fullness of all possible good in God, a fullness of every perfection, of all excellency and beauty, and of infinite happiness. And as this

¹³ "Letter to the Reverend Thomas Foxcroft" (Stockbridge, February 11, 1757), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* 16, *Letters and Personal Writings* (ed. George S. Claghorn; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 696.

¹⁴ Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit* (1712), in *British Moralists: Being Selections from Writers Principally of the Eighteenth Century* V1 (ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge; New York, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964) 3–7.

¹⁵ Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good* (1725), in *British Moralists* V1 158.

fullness is capable of communication or emanation *ad extra*; so it seems a thing amiable and valuable in itself that it should be communicated.¹⁶ God communicates himself to the *understanding* of the creature, in giving him the *knowledge* of his glory; and to the *will* of the creature, in giving him *holiness*, consisting primarily in the love of God; and in giving the creature *happiness*, chiefly consisting in *joy* in God. These are the sum of that emanation of divine fullness called in Scripture, *the glory of God*.¹⁷

I quote these two passages to underscore that, according to Jonathan Edwards, *God's glory—taken as the ultimate end to be achieved by God's creating—is God's own intra-Trinitarian life “dwelling within” some creatures by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit*. Edwards argues for this in his *End of Creation* which comprises two chapters and an introduction. He first carefully and fully defines his terms and introduces nine principles which function almost as axioms. In this he fully complies with the accepted Euclidean axiomatic method.¹⁸ Yet it would be a grave error to think that Edwards thought that objective and certain knowledge of God could thereby be gained because such knowledge is impossible by Reason; the knowledge that counts is God's own self-awareness. Rather, Edwards simply makes his case within the received discourse, while explicitly qualifying its conceptual content. Failure to appreciate Edwards's rhetoric and dialectic constitutes part of a strategic error in the interpretation of Edwards.

1. *Argument from Reason*. The first chapter of *End of Creation* is devoted to recounting what “Reason dictates.” Though the phrase, “Dictates of Reason,” was common coinage,¹⁹ I believe Edwards's use is attributable to his awareness of the widespread admiration and emulation of Euclid's achievement and to his awareness of the compulsion to answer the *Euthyphro Dilemma*. In Euclid, Reason dictates belief; in *Euthyphro*, Reason dictates moral propriety.²⁰ As John Balguy writes,

¹⁶ *End of Creation* 432,3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 529.

¹⁸ He also complies with the “Rules concerning demonstrations” given in the “Port-royal Logic”:

A true demonstration requires two things: one, that the content include only what is certain and indubitable; the other, that there is nothing defective in the form of the argument. Now we will certainly satisfy both of these if we observe the two rules we have laid down. The content will include only what is true and certain if all the propositions asserted as evidence are: Either definitions of words that have been explained, which, since they are arbitrary, cannot be disputed; Or axioms that have already been granted and should not be assumed if they are not clear and evident in themselves, by the 3rd rule; Or previously demonstrated propositions that have consequently become clear and evident by virtue of the demonstration . . . (Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *Logic of the Art of Thinking* [1683] [ed. Jill Vance Buroker; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996] 251).

¹⁹ E.g. John Locke, “Nothing that is contrary to, and inconsistent with the clear and self-evident Dictates of Reason, has a right to be urged, or assented to, as a matter of Faith” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*). See also Edwards on Reason in *Miscellanies* 1340.

²⁰ The idea of a standard of moral propriety existing eternally and uncreated is thus Platonic. (Perhaps its origins can be traced to ancient Greek religion depicted by Homer.) It seems to me that this idea is the conceptual predecessor of eighteenth-century “ideal observer theory” mentioned by Hutcheson and Smith.

The primary Dictate of Right Reason is, that every moral Agent intend the Good of the Whole, or aim at universal Good.²¹

Moreover, Edwards may be thinking of two different, but related modes in which Reason “dictates” what it does. In his frequent use of the phrase, “Reason dictates,” Edwards may be alluding, first, to the phenomenology of a sense of self-evidence and deductive inference. In both cases, our capacity to reason seems to force us to acknowledge what our cognitive capacities enable us to understand. We seem unable to resist. In the second mode, the phenomenology recedes into the background and logic stands forth. One *must* “suppose” whatever is self-evident and whatever is logically entailed by the propositions one takes for granted. One *may* “suppose” whatever is logically consistent with the propositions one takes for granted. One *may not* “suppose” whatever is logically contradictory to the propositions one takes for granted. Regardless of which mode Edwards may have had in mind, when interpreting the first chapter of *End of Creation* one should first identify what is being taken for granted. Then one should determine what ideas are entailed by, consistent with, or contradictory to them. Each deductive inference is, in this sense, something that “Reason dictates.” Edwards and his opponents take three propositions for granted. The first is:

(1) *God is inexhaustibly self-sufficient.*²²

As Edwards writes, “. . . God is infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, and independently glorious and happy. . . . I need not stand to produce the proofs of such a one, it being so universally allowed and maintained by such as call themselves christians.”²³ The second and third assumptions are these:

(2) *Creation is ex nihilo.*

(3) *God has an ultimate end in creation.*

Now let us ascertain what “Reason dictates.” In section one Edwards reasons deductively from (1) and (2) that *God’s ultimate end in creation cannot entail a deficiency in God*. Inexhaustible fullness cannot be deficient. No thing created out of nothing has anything to give its Creator that it did not first and fully receive. Thus, we may not suppose that God’s end in creation is to satisfy a deficiency. Denying this entails a denial of both assumptions. Second, given the very concepts entailed by assumption (3) *God has an ultimate end in creation*, God’s ultimate end in creation must be both (a) originally valuable in itself and (b) achievable by means of creating. Here he reasons from his “definitions” and “axioms.” By definition, an “end” (as it applies to the issue at hand) is a state of affairs to be achieved and sustained by acting. An “ultimate end” is a state of affairs valued for its own

²¹ John Balguy, *The Foundation of Moral Goodness* (1728), in *British Moralists* V2 98.

²² Edwards’s explanation for this inexhaustible fullness lies in his account of the Trinity. Edwards’s view of the Trinity is an essential aspect of his theology and, thus, essential to his view of God’s end and motive in creation. Edwards’s opponents, however, did not all hold to Trinitarian theology in general.

²³ *Ibid.* 420.

sake. Since “God’s ultimate end in creation” is a state of affairs achieved fundamentally by the act of creating and sustaining, the end to which it is subordinate had to have been valued by God before there was anything other than God. Edwards had stipulated his intent: “. . . when I speak of God’s ultimate end in the creation of the world, in the following discourse, I commonly mean in that highest sense, viz. the original ultimate end.”²⁴ However, no valuable thing existed before creation except God himself. Therefore, since God always achieves what he aims at, given God’s sufficiency, we *must suppose* that God’s ultimate end in creation, in general, must be something (about him) that (a) is originally valuable in itself and (b) is actually the consequence of creation. Denying this dictate entails denying the concepts in the central question taken for granted.

Edwards continues that the only thing that meets these conditions is an eternally increasing knowledge, holiness, and happiness in God’s glory in a society of beings. God’s attributes *per se*, the exercise of the attributes and the effects of the exercise in the mere existence of the natural world, all fail to meet the conditions “dictated” by reasoning from the assumptions. The mere existence of the creation fails to meet the conditions, first of all, because the very question treats it as a subordinate end. So, by use of the word “effects,” Edwards cannot be thought to refer to the creation. Consider also that if the simple “demonstration” of God’s attributes was Edwards’s view (as many of his critics have charged), he would be making a deductive error. Simply “demonstrating” his attributes does not, by itself, meet the qualifications that Edwards lists in section one. Therefore, Edwards clearly is not advocating “demonstration of attributes” as God’s ultimate end in creating the world. Rather, it is only God’s own knowledge, love, and joy extant in some human creatures that meets the conditions dictated by Reason. Edwards calls this an “emanation” to underscore that all things are from God, through him, and to him. Therefore, Edwards argues, we must suppose—in particular—that this “emanation” is God’s ultimate end in creation.

(Edwards’s view is not a form of Platonic emanationism. Edwards is deliberate and explicit that creation is *ex nihilo*.²⁵ This directly contradicts Plotinus’s Neoplatonism—conceptually indebted as it is to Plato’s *Parmenides*—which, in turn, entails the principle, *ex nihilo nihil fit*. Moreover, even though he read the Cambridge Platonist, John Smith, and sounds very much like Smith, Edwards holds that the reality of creature knowledge, love, and joy in God is an “emanation” strictly in the sense that these things are God’s own intra-Trinitarian knowledge, love, and joy “indwelling” some conscious agents by virtue of the Holy Spirit. This view is contrary to the view held by Smith and other Cambridge Platonists such as Benjamin Whichcote; Edwards is to Smith as Tuckney was to Whichcote. Thus, whereas the Cambridge

²⁴ *Ibid.* 413.

²⁵ This is confirmed elsewhere: “Not that the saints are made partakers of the essence of God, and so “Godded” with God, and “Christed” with Christ, according to the abominable and blasphemous language and notions of some hermetics; but, to use the scripture phrase, they are made partakers of God’s fullness (Eph. 3:17–19; John 1:16), that is, of God’s spiritual beauty and happiness.” *Treatise on Religious Affections*, in *Works* 2.203.

Platonists understood the “candle of the Lord”—which enlightens the mind—to be natural reason, Edwards’s “divine and supernatural light” is the Spirit-inspired sense of the excellency and reality of the things of God. Finally, heaven, in Edwards’s view, is not static, but rather a dynamic, eternal, asymptotic progression of the Creator-creature union.)

Moreover, given that God actually did create, we may suppose that a disposition in God moved him to create the world. In other words, we are entitled to think that there is an explanation for his creating even though it cannot be to satisfy a deficiency or to fulfill a duty. The only available explanation in general is one that posits a disposition or inclination to the act. The denial of this entails the denial of one of the assumptions. Edwards further explores Reason’s dictates in section three explaining that, since every facet of his ultimate end is something about himself, God—in making such an “emanation” of his glory his ultimate end—makes himself his ultimate end and thereby manifests infinite self-regard. Edwards further clarifies his position in section four by noting and rebutting four objections: that God’s making himself his end (1) is inconsistent with his self-sufficiency; (2) is selfish; (3) is unworthy of God; and (4) eliminates cause for creature gratitude.

To reiterate, by examining what “Reason Dictates,” one should not conclude that Edwards was captured by the *Euclidean Myth* or by any of the horns of the *Euthyphro Dilemma*. As he takes pains to make clear,

And in the first place, I would observe some things which reason seems to dictate in this matter. Indeed, this affair seems properly to be an affair of divine revelation. . . . Nevertheless, as in the disputes and wranglings which have been about this matter, those objections, which have chiefly been made use of against what I think the scriptures have truly revealed, have been from the pretended dictates of reason—I would in the first place soberly consider in a few things, what seems rational to be supposed concerning this affair; and then proceed to consider what light divine revelation give us in it.²⁶

Thus, Edwards takes pains to announce that his argument has two parts. Those who would critique Edwards’s views given in chapter one owe it to him also to take into consideration his argument from chapter two regarding what Scripture teaches.

2. Argument from Scripture. Edwards’s argument from Scripture in chapter two has seven sections. In section one Edwards simply notes several Scripture passages that seem to indicate that God makes himself his last end. But Scripture is not clear in the passages Edwards cites what that means and Edwards does not speculate. In section two he adduces twelve hermeneutical principles for ascertaining the meaning of Scripture’s indication that God is his last end. In section three Edwards cites particular texts of Scripture which show—in conjunction with the principles adduced in section two—that God’s glory is an ultimate end of the creation. Section four is

²⁶ *End of Creation* 419. Evidence for this is also given in the *Preface* by the editor, Samuel Hopkins.

devoted to citing Scripture which “leads us to suppose that God created the world for His Name, that his perfections be known, and for his praise.” All of the uses of these four terms are associated with some specific act of God in redemptive history—each denoting God’s end in so acting. In section five Edwards cites more Scripture to show that God created to communicate good to the creature. All of this so far might seem to suggest that God has multiple ends in creating: “for His Glory,” “for His Name’s sake,” “that He might be known,” “for the sake of His praise,” “for the good of the redeemed,” etc. One thing is clear, Scripture is saturated by multi-dimensional indications that God does act for a purpose. The structural unity of the Bible lies in its being a record of God’s acting²⁷ and his acting for a purpose. The end of God’s acting is the end of redemption.

The inductive nature of the second chapter stands in contrast to the deductive nature of the first. Each of the passages cited thus far is linked to something God had accomplished and each indicates the end or purpose of his doing so. One notices upon reading Edwards that Scripture is a forest of indicators that God does, in fact, act for a purpose and what that purpose is. One might say that the first chapter is “Euclidean” in tone; perhaps “Reason seeking understanding.” The second chapter is Augustinian or Anselmian in nature: “Faith seeking understanding.” In section six Edwards offers an account of the meaning of the terms, “Glory of God” and the “Name of God,” when used to denote God’s purpose. The idea of the weightiness of intra-Trinitarian glory is conveyed by the (transliterated) Hebrew, term, “kavod.” Section seven settles the question of whether God has several distinct ends in his creation of the world. Edwards writes,

For it appears, that all that is ever spoken of in the scripture as an ultimate end of God’s works, is included in that one phrase, *the glory of God*.²⁸

God’s ultimate end in creation is “the emanation and true external expression of God’s internal glory and fullness.” Jesus’ prayers recorded in John 17 that his followers would share the glory Jesus had with the Father before the world was created and Paul’s prayers in Ephesians that the saints would know the love of God and thereby be filled with God provided the scriptural content of his views given in chapter one. On these grounds—and much more—Edwards concludes,

It was this value for himself that caused him to value and seek that his internal glory should *flow forth* from himself.²⁹

So, both Reason and Scripture concur: God’s ultimate end in creation is his glory. This is to be understood as primarily as creatures knowing, treasuring, and finding highest joy in God solely by means of God’s indwelling them through the Holy Spirit for eternity. This is redemption. This is the end

²⁷ See James Hatch, “Progress of Redemption,” Columbia Bible College (unpublished course notes).

²⁸ *Ibid.* 526.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 532.

for which God created the world. It is crucial to acknowledge that Edwards's thesis and argument concerning the end for which God created the world has two parts: the second informed the first; the first is incomplete without the second. Both are required to understand Edwards's full view.

IV. ERRORS IN EDWARDS SCHOLARSHIP

Now we are in a position to appreciate the recurrent strategic error in Edwards scholarship. Clearly grasping the strategic error enables us to diagnose the cause of the subsidiary errors it generates.

1. *William C. Wisner*. Contrary to Edwards's thesis, William Wisner claims that "[t]he end of God in creation, then, as we think we have shown, is not in himself, but consists in the promotion of *creature holiness*, and that happiness which may appropriately be called the HAPPINESS OF HOLINESS."³⁰ Creature holiness, according to Wisner, is "admiration of, love toward, and delight in God, to the full extent of the powers of the creature, and love to self, and all creature intelligences, measured by their worth in the scale of being. In other words, it is *entire conformity* to the *moral law*, which consists in loving God with all the soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourself."³¹ Wisner explicitly positions his view in contradistinction to Edwards's: "We use the term *creature holiness*, and happiness, in opposition to the positions of Edwards, that this holiness and happiness are emanations from God in such a sense, that they are communicated to the creature from his fullness."³² Wisner's explicit aim is to promote his Arminian views. Creature holiness according to Wisner is the result of God's acts, but not—as Edwards has it—God's own holiness indwelling the creature by the Holy Spirit:

God, by the display he made of himself in the work of creation, intended to produce in the minds of his intelligent creatures . . . a true impression according to the intrinsic worth of beings in the scale of being.³³

However, the success of God in achieving his ultimate end in creation, on Wisner's account, depends on the quality of the minds upon which God acts. The mind must be "perfect in its organization, and undisturbed by adverse influences."³⁴ In other words, what explains the existence or occurrence of "creature holiness" depends on human beings. Edwards might be construed to hold a view like this. However, caution and care are called for. Edwards's

³⁰ Wisner [1850] 456. See also 445.

³¹ *Ibid.* 445.

³² *Ibid.* Notice the "principle of proportionate regard": holiness loves others "measured by their worth in the scale of being." Wisner offers no account of the standard of value against which the relative worth of objects is determined. Edwards alludes to a similar principle, but he also includes an account of the standard. We can only draw attention to this fact now. Later on, this difference will prove essential in defense of Edwards's views.

³³ *Ibid.* 454.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 445.

view is actually very different. Edwards distinguishes between human knowledge of God through God's manifestation of his attributes in his works and in Scripture and human knowledge of God as God's own self-awareness through the indwelling Holy Spirit. God's ultimate purpose in creation includes the latter. Furthermore, Edwards insists that failure to make this distinction underlies the "schemes of divinity" he opposes. My interest in this paper is not to weigh in on this particular debate about soteriology, but simply to point out how theorists have supported their own views by systematically misrepresenting Edwards's.

Wisner argues that "it is impossible to show that God is his own end in creation" because God's making himself his end, as Edwards claims, entails both a deficiency in God and Neoplatonic emanationism, which contradict God's aseity and creation *ex nihilo*, respectively.³⁵ Wisner pursues this line by distinguishing between *subjective* and *objective* ultimate ends:

The subjective end has reference to the feelings and desires of the agent or being, which are to be gratified by the selection and accomplishment of the objective end. It consists in the gratification of these feelings and desires. The objective end is the thing to be done or brought to pass, and to the accomplishment of which the agent is prompted by these feelings, affections, or desires.³⁶

On the basis of this distinction, Wisner claims that "the end of God in creation is not to be found in himself—that God is not his own end."³⁷ In other words, God cannot be God's own end objectively considered, because there is nothing objective about God that could possibly constitute an end objectively considered. There is no aspect of God's nature that could be an end to be achieved by God's acting. But this is where the strategic error of failing to see the rhetorical intent and careful deductive nature of Edwards's argument comes into play. Edwards clearly is aware of this possible construal:

Whatsoever is good and valuable in itself is worthy that God should value for itself, and on its own account; or which is the same thing, value it with an ultimate value or respect. It is therefore worthy to be ultimately sought by God, or made the last end of his action and operation; *if it be a thing of such a nature as to be properly capable of being attained in any divine operation*. For it may be supposed that some things, which are valuable and excellent in themselves, are not properly capable of being attained in any divine operation; because they do not remain to be attained; but their existence in all possible respects, must be conceived of as prior to any divine operation. Thus God's existence and infinite perfection, though infinitely valuable in themselves, and infinitely valued by God, yet can't be supposed to be the end of any divine operation.³⁸

Edwards proceeds carefully to argue that only God's own self-awareness, love, and happiness meet all the conditions for being God's ultimate end in creation. Though inexhaustible in God, such self-awareness, love, and joy can

³⁵ *Ibid.* 435.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 434.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *End of Creation* 421. Italics mine.

be viewed as constituting an end to be achieved and sustained in this sense: by there being creatures *ex nihilo* who experience such things given. However, diverted by his strategic failure to grasp the contours of Edwards's argument, Wisner fails to comprehend Edwards's position and extends his complaint:

Our objection to this language and sentiment is, that, without the author's intending it, they savor much of pantheism. The idea that creation is an emanation from God is not strictly true. It is a *production* of God, and a production out of nothing, not an emanation from him.³⁹

As Wisner puts it, if Edwards is correct, "we cannot suppose God to exist without those communications which emanate from him, and are based in the original tendencies of his nature."⁴⁰ But Edwards's view is clearly not pantheistic, because even though creature knowledge, holiness, and joy is God's own nature in the creature, the creature's essential being is *ex nihilo*. As Edwards puts it,

God communicates himself to the *understanding* of the creature, in giving him the *knowledge* of his glory; and to the *will* of the creature, in giving him *holiness*, consisting primarily in the love of God; and in giving the creature *happiness*, chiefly consisting in *joy* in God. These are the sum of that emanation of divine fullness called in scripture, *the glory of God*.⁴¹

Thus, God's own knowledge, love, and joy existing in the creature are God's glory "externalized. It is, in one sense, truly an emanation—God's own love is God's own love." However, Edwards also held the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.⁴² The being of the elect is solely dependent on—and nothing but—God's moment-by-moment will.

Moreover, Edwards does, in fact, make a distinction very much like Wisner's distinction between ends objectively considered and subjectively considered. Edwards distinguishes God's *end* in creation from God's *motive* in creation. As Edwards puts it,

God in his benevolence to his creatures, can't have his heart enlarged in such a manner as to take in beings that he finds, who are originally out of himself, distinct and independent. This can't be in an infinite being, who exists alone from eternity. But he, from his goodness, as it were enlarges himself in a more excellent and divine manner. This is by communicating and diffusing himself; and so instead of finding, making objects of his benevolence: not by taking into himself what he finds distinct from himself, and so partaking of their good, and being happy in them; but by flowing forth, and expressing himself in them, and making them to partake of him, and rejoicing in himself expressed in them, and communicated to them.⁴³

God's Trinitarian nature—the glory that obtained before the foundation of the world—provides both the motive and the purpose of God in creating.

³⁹ Wisner [1850] 446.

⁴⁰ Wisner [1850] 447.

⁴¹ *End of Creation* 529.

⁴² See note 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 461.

To reiterate the crucial point: Edwards's view essentially involves a distinction between "what moved God to create" and the "what God aimed at in creating." As Edwards puts it,

From this view it appears another way to be a thing in itself valuable, that there should be such things as the knowledge of God's glory in other beings, and an high esteem of it, love to it, and delight and complacency in it: this appears I say in another way, viz. as things that are but the emanations of God's own knowledge, holiness, and joy. . . . Therefore, to speak strictly according to truth, we may suppose, *that a disposition in God, as an original property of his nature, to an emanation of his own infinite fullness, was what excited him to create the world; and so, that the emanation itself was aimed at by him as a last end of the creation.*⁴⁴

Wisner's charge of inconsistency in Edwards, therefore, depends on his misinterpretation of Edwards which is due, in turn, to his committing a strategic interpretive error in the first place.

2. *Michael J. McClymond.* In his article, "Sinners in the Hands of a Virtuous God," Michael J. McClymond announces this:

My focus here will be on *End of Creation* and its argument that God is fully ethical according to the criteria of eighteenth-century moral philosophy. . . . I will show that *End of Creation* may be understood . . . as an implicit effort to understand God on the analogy of a well-bred aristocrat . . . [similar to] the "superior man" of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In order to ethicize God, Edwards had to anthropomorphize God.⁴⁵

With this claim in hand, he argues for three theses:

Edwards's ontological system of values in *End of Creation* engenders serious problems with respect to God's relation to the world, the freedom of God in creating, and the particularity of divine grace.⁴⁶

Does Edwards intend in *End of Creation* to justify God according to the standards of eighteenth-century moral philosophy? Is the value theory of *End of Creation* inconsistent with God's relation to the world, the freedom of God in creating or with the "particularity of divine grace"? Let us closely examine these claims.

McClymond claims that a "conceptual link" between *End of Creation* and *True Virtue* is the "principle of proportionate regard." Indeed it is. Edwards frequently uses the term and others such as "worthiness," "value," and "fitness." However, it is of the utmost importance to determine whether Edwards understood proportionate regard descriptively or normatively and, if both, which took priority. Understood normatively, the "principle" of proportionate regard is a moral requirement. Understood descriptively, the principle is a pattern of behavior. Thus, if a moral agent regards things proportionately

⁴⁴ Ibid. 433, 435.

⁴⁵ McClymond, "Sinners" 6.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

in a normative sense, the agent understands the principle of proportionate regard as a moral norm; showing proportionate regard is following a rule. The agent sees what is morally right and acts accordingly. On the other hand, if an agent's proportionate regard is a description, such regard may or may not be due to the agent's following a moral norm of some kind. McClymond does not specifically make this distinction in his account of Edwards's use of the notion. However, he does claim that Edwards viewed proportionate regard as moral norm that applies to God's actions—even God's creation of the world. McClymond writes,

It is noteworthy that Edwards applies this principle [i.e. of proportionate regard] to the Creator as well as creatures. God, no less than human beings, is *ethically bound* to take into account and respect the inherent worth of each of the entities he considers. The "principle of proportionate regard" gives Edwards permission to indulge in what might otherwise seem empty speculation regarding God's intentions in creating. . . . Just as God in creating is *bound* to give highest regard to what is highest in "worth," so it is with creatures as well, who are *morally bound* to the principle of "benevolence to Being in general."⁴⁷

Does Edwards believe that God is "ethically bound" to the "principle of proportionate regard" as McClymond thinks? In other words, does God create and sustain out of deference to some kind of duty tied in part to the "inherent worth" of the creature? I will argue that he did not.

McClymond is correct to note that, by and large, eighteenth-century thought tended to moralize Christianity. This tendency is due in part to the influence of the principle of proportionate regard promulgated by Samuel Clarke, Shaftesbury,⁴⁸ and others. Perhaps another passage from Clarke makes the case:

there is a fitness or suitableness of certain circumstances to certain persons and an unsuitableness of others founded in the nature of things and in the qualifications of persons, antecedent to will and to all arbitrary or positive appointment whatsoever. . . . There is, therefore, such a thing as fitness and unfitness, eternally, necessarily, and unchangeably in the nature and reason of things. . . . The supreme cause, therefore, and author of all things . . . must of necessity (meaning not a necessity of fate, but such a moral necessity as I before said was consistent with the most perfect liberty) *do always what he knows to be fittest to be done*. That is, he must act always according to the strictest rules of infinite goodness, justice, and truth, and all other moral perfections.⁴⁹

In other words, for Clarke, "Reason dictates" proportionate regard. But Edwards does not follow Clarke in this as McClymond claims. There is evidence from Edwards's *Miscellanies* that he rejects the notion that fitness

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 7. Italics mine.

⁴⁸ See Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal Ought: 1640–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 21.

⁴⁹ Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* § XII (1704), in *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings* (ed. Ezio Vailati; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 83–84.

obliges God.⁵⁰ However, since Edwards's views in *End of Creation* are being questioned, I will confine my arguments to the text accordingly. First, if Edwards had advocated the principle of proportionate regard, he would have been inadvertently lending credence to the moralizing of Christianity—the very social trend against which he expressed his opposition. Second, if Edwards had advocated the principle of proportionate regard, he would have been arguing that God values creation, because proportionate regard requires him to do so, given creation's value. In other words, Edwards would have to have held this proposition: *God values creation, because it is valuable*. But, in fact, Edwards held the converse: *Creation is valuable, because God values it*.⁵¹ There are several reasons that support my contention.

First, his argument in the first chapter, section two requires *Creation is valuable, because God values it*. Edwards argues that, given the very concepts implicit in the question at issue—What is God's ultimate end in creation?—God's ultimate end in creation must be both (a) originally valuable in itself and (b) achievable by means of creating. In section two of the same chapter Edwards looks for what things reason either permits, requires, or precludes to be supposed (i.e. what "Reason dictates") regarding God's ultimate end in creation. Edwards reports that we are looking for whatever is (1) originally intrinsically valuable and (2) actually the consequence of God's act of creation. Thus, the question then is this: what things meet these two conditions? Edwards notes that God's attributes are "in themselves excellent." So, one might suggest that this meets the conditions. God's attributes are indeed originally intrinsically valuable, but they are not the consequence of God's act of creation—they enable it; they consist in a "sufficiency" for it. Therefore, God's attributes *per se* do not meet the conditions dictated by Reason. That leaves the *exercise* of the attributes in creating and the *effects* of their exercise. Clearly, only the latter meets condition (2). That is, only the effects of the exercise of God's attributes are actually the consequence of creating. But then, how could the *effects* of the exercise of God's attributes be "originally, intrinsically valuable" since they did not exist before God created? As Edwards reiterates later on,

But yet this can't have any particular present or future created existence for its object; because it is prior to any such object, and the very source of the futurities of its existence. Nor is it really diverse from God's love to himself.⁵²

One cannot say "Creation is valuable" before creation even exists, for it has no actual present value to be weighed in the calculation. Still, creation itself must somehow meet the condition, since it is the only thing that could fit the second condition dictated by Reason. The only way the "effects" of God's creating can qualify to be God's end is God's valuing them in the first

⁵⁰ E.g. "1042. NATURAL AND MORAL FITNESS. JUSTIFICATION. . . I don't mean such a fitness as obliged God in any sense." *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* 20, *The "Miscellanies" 833–1152* (ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁵¹ Edwards may be playing this distinction off the similarity to the *Euthyphro Dilemma*.

⁵² *End of Creation* 439.

place. In other words, the effects of God's creating—i.e. creation itself in some sense—are valuable, solely because God values it. Creation is valuable, because God values it. This is the only logical possibility. But creation's value is as a subordinate end. The existence of creation is subordinate to God's own intra-Trinitarian life existing *ad extra* in some human beings for an eternity.

Another reason to think that Edwards holds that "creation is valuable because God values it" is this. In section three of the first chapter, Edwards argues that God's esteeming his attributes led him to value their exercise and, in turn, to the effects of their exercise. So, creation indeed is valuable, but "originally" so. Which is to say: creation's value is prospective; as God envisions it completed and subordinate to his ultimate purpose in creation. As Edwards put it,

his infinite love to and delight in himself will naturally cause him to value and delight in these things: or rather how a value to these things is implied in his value of that infinite fullness of good that is in himself.⁵³

Thus, according to Edwards, God's value for himself is the ground of his value for the effects of his attributes being exerted—which is the existence of everything.

There is another reason to deny that Edwards thought God observes the normative principle of proportionate regard. Supposing that God does observe proportionate regard presupposes the independent existence of such a requirement. The second horn of the *Euthyphro Dilemma* is correct if, and only if, God observes the normative principle of proportionate regard. This is just the thing Edwards supposed and refuted in his "Third Being" argument in the first chapter of *End of Creation*. According to Jonathan Edwards, God is the source of all normativity:

Thus I have gone upon the supposition of a third person, neither creator nor creature, but a disinterested person stepping in to judge of the concerns of both, and state what is most fit and proper between them. The thing supposed is impossible; but the case is nevertheless just the same as to what is most fit and suitable in itself. For it is most certainly proper for God to act, according to the greatest *fitness* in his proceedings; and he knows what the greatest *fitness* is, as much as if perfect rectitude were a distinct person to direct him. As therefore there is no third being, beside God and the created system, nor can be, so there is no need of any, seeing God himself is possessed of that perfect discernment and rectitude which have been supposed. It belongs to him as supreme arbiter, and to his infinite wisdom and rectitude, to state all rules and measures of proceedings.⁵⁴

Our examination of Edwards's argument in light of the influence of *Euthyphro* and *Euclid* reveals that Edwards was showing how—on widely accepted assumptions—God both makes himself his last end and is morally justified in doing so, but not as though God was following a rule. This result is

⁵³ *Ibid.* 436.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 425.

evident in the second section and in his response to the anticipated objection that Edwards's view makes God selfish. Edwards seems to argue as follows:

Suppose *proportionate regard* is the correct moral standard and let us apply it to God's actions. It follows that God is selfish only if (and to the extent that) he fails to value himself according to his proportionate value. But before creation, since God is Trinitarian love, God values himself, and since, creation is *ex nihilo*, God values himself infinitely. Therefore, God's actions are in accord with—though not in submission to—proportionate regard. Hence, God is not selfish.

Jonathan Edwards's view therefore is that creation is valuable, because God values it. Edwards does not hold that God shows proportionate regard in deference to the "dictates of Reason" as McClymond claims. However, on the basis of his misconstrual of Edwards, McClymond finds an inconsistency in Edwards's position: God's being bound to show proportionate regard is inconsistent with "Calvinistic particularism." Apparently, the normative principle of proportionate regard requires that all be saved. McClymond suggests that Wesley's Arminianism "was better attuned to the *Zeitgeist*"⁵⁵ and "Wesley's deity, to a greater degree than Edwards's, conformed to Hutcheson's moral ideal of 'universal impartial benevolence.'"⁵⁶ Perhaps so. I leave it to others to judge whether conformity to Hutcheson's moral ideal is something to be desired or not. Nevertheless, McClymond argues that Edwards's problems are rooted in God's being "bound to regard" each and every entity according to its measure of "existence" and "excellence."⁵⁷ Therefore, if God is bound by proportionate regard then, since all humans are intrinsically valuable, God must save all. But God saves only the elect. Thus, Edwards's views are incoherent. But Edwards does not advocate that the normative principle of proportionate regard obligates God. Since McClymond is mistaken about Edwards's views regarding God's being bound to moral dictates of Reason, his construal of the problems are mis-diagnosed. McClymond's attribution of inconsistency in Edwards is mistakenly foisted upon Edwards.

McClymond sees a second problem in *End of Creation*: it provides no explanation for why a self-sufficient God would freely create the world. According to McClymond, Edwards was addressing an issue that Christian theology "has perhaps never successfully resolved."⁵⁸ He claims,

Edwards's notion of the "emanative disposition" within God implies that God *needed* to create a world. Because creation derives from a "disposition" that Edwards calls "an original property of his nature," it seems that God had no choice but to create a world.⁵⁹

3. *James Beilby*. McClymond's complaint against Edwards's position is echoed by James Beilby in his recent article, "Divine Aseity, Divine Free-

⁵⁵ McClymond, "Sinners" 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 22.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 19.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

dom: A Conceptual Problem for Edwardsian-Calvinism." As Beilby sees it, Edwards's "conceptual problem" is that Edwards's account of God's end in creation needs to be reconciled to (1) "divine aseity and freedom in creation." However, any attempt to do so, according to Beilby, necessitates both (2) that "God's glory in creation consists in the demonstration of all of his attributes, including attributes not expressible without creation"; and (3) that "God must demonstrate his glory."⁶⁰ Beilby continues,

The incompatibility arises between (1) and *the conjunction of* (2) and (3), because if God must express his glory and his glory requires the expression of attributes expressible only in creating, then it follows that to express his glory—that is, according to Edwards, to be who he is—He must create.⁶¹

Beilby then surveys and finds wanting a "range of options" for those who would avoid the incompatibility. In sum, Beilby claims to discover an insurmountable inconsistency in Edwards's Calvinistic views and, like Wisner (and perhaps McClymond) recommends an Arminian alternative. Does Jonathan Edwards's view of God's ultimate end in creation entail that God creates out of pantheistic necessity—as Wisner argues; that God had no choice but to create—as McClymond wonders; that God must create to be who he is—as Beilby claims?

Some general remarks are in order. We should first note that, as Beilby admits in a footnote,⁶² his case is built almost entirely from the last section of the first chapter of *End of Creation*—a section in which Edwards anticipates and answers objections to his argument as it stands thus far in the work as a whole. However, Beilby makes no attempt to reconstruct Edwards's argument as it appears in the first sections of the first chapter, he ignores the second part of Edwards's argument from Scripture altogether, and he misconstrues the point and content of Edwards's anticipated objections. These omissions and misconstrual are compounded by their leading Beilby to fall into numerous other mistakes regarding Edwards's views. Beilby's construal misses, first, the deliberately limited base of assumptions from which Edwards argues in the first chapter. Beilby's construal misses the deliberate and conceptually careful, deductive nature of Edwards's argument. Beilby then is led to misrepresent the essential concepts involved, gets the conclusion wrong, and finally fails to appreciate the dialectical point of Edwards's argument in the first chapter. The net result is this: the argument that Beilby constructs and critiques is not Jonathan Edwards's.

Now let us reexamine only the prominent errors in Beilby's construal. Beilby gives the impression that he is recounting Edwards's view of God's ultimate end in creation: "In developing his account of God's purpose in creation, Edwards is clearly aware of the kind of objection I have raised."⁶³ However, Beilby offers no reconstruction or summary of Edwards's argument or even his thesis. Rather, he skips over Edwards's own argument to

⁶⁰ Beilby, "Divine Aseity" 654.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.* 650.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Edwards's list of objections: "He begins section four of chapter one in his *Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World* with this statement: 'Some may object against what has been said as being inconsistent with God's absolute independence and immutability.'⁶⁴ Beilby continues, "The argument Edwards seems to be addressing can be summarized as follows: If God's purpose in creation is to bring glory to himself, then there exists a deficiency in God and this deficiency is addressed by receiving glory from creation."⁶⁵ But this is not the objection Edwards is entertaining here. Furthermore, it is unreasonable to think that Edwards thought it could be, because Edwards so carefully ruled out God's acting to meet a deficiency in section one. By raising and responding to the objection in question, Edwards affords himself the opportunity to clarify his position. As Edwards notes, everyone involved in the question held to God's aseity and creation *ex nihilo*. But that is not what he anticipates. Here are Edwards's words:

Some may object against what has been said, as inconsistent with God's absolute independence and immutability: particularly the representation that has been made, as though God were inclined to a communication of his fulness and emanations of his own glory, as being his own most glorious and complete state. It may be thought that this don't well consist with God's being self-existent from all eternity; absolutely perfect in himself, in the possession of infinite and independent good. And that in general, to suppose that God makes himself his end, in the creation of the world, seems to suppose that he aims at some interest or happiness of his own, not easily reconcilable with his being happy, perfectly & infinitely happy in himself.⁶⁶

Edwards actually provides two forms of the objection: in particular and in general. The particular form is this:

God's being inclined to a communication of his fulness and emanations of his own glory, as being his own most glorious and complete state is inconsistent with his being complete in himself.

This form addresses the question of God's motivation apparently to become *more* than he was before creation. Beilby, in contrast, takes Edwards's view to involve God's "bringing glory to himself" to meet a deficiency. The general form of the objection is this:

To suppose that God makes himself his end seems to suppose that he aims at some happiness. But God's having a "happiness" at which to direct his efforts contradicts his being completely happy in himself.

Here, the objection is about God's end apparently *adding* happiness to complete happiness. Beilby then gives a second construal of the objection that Edwards anticipates:

Recall the two-part objection Edwards is addressing: (1) there exists a deficiency in God; and (2) this deficiency is addressed by receiving glory from creation.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 651.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *End of Creation* 445.

⁶⁷ Beilby, "Divine Aseity" 652.

But, again, this is not the objection that Edwards is addressing! The anticipated objection is that Edwards's own view (as it stood at the end of section three) seems inconsistent: How could God be moved to be *more* than he was before creation? The objection regards God's motivation, not God's end taken as a state of affairs. Furthermore, while Edwards poses the objection in terms of perfection (apparently) *adding to perfection*, Beilby sees it as perfection *meeting a deficiency*. Beilby, therefore, gets it wrong on two counts. This may seem like a quibble, for the two are logically related. However, explaining how perfect completeness could be moved to add to itself differs from the task of explaining the conceptual contradiction in thinking that perfect completeness acts from deficiency to achieve a state of affairs of completeness. If one seeks to expose the contradiction in *deficient perfection coming to satisfaction*, one cannot find a construal for *inexhaustible fullness extending fullness*. Conversely, pursuing an explanation for a motive for perfection (apparently) adding to perfection and completeness, as Edwards does, leads one to the concepts which clarify and resolve the apparent tension. In short, correctly interpreting Edwards here, therefore, requires a precise understanding of Edwards's argument as it stood at the point the objection was raised.

Moreover, Beilby's failure to find clarity on Edwards's argument as it stood developed at the end of section three accounts for three crucial errors in Beilby's critique. First, Beilby thinks Edwards's use of "communication" means "demonstration." But the sheer frequency and variety of Edwards's use of the term "communication" and his statements regarding what moved God to create controvert this notion. The primary cumulative sense of "communication," for Edwards, is more like the concept, "impartation." What God communicates, God imparts—namely, himself. However, this concept needs further qualification. Indeed, God's nature is "displayed" by his works on the analogy of an artist and his or her art. But this is temporal and subordinate, not ultimate. There is no "place" for God to go to accomplish this "display and communication," since God's being comprehends and transcends absolute space. It can only occur locatively "within" God. Thus, Edwards uses the Latin phrase *ad extra* primarily to indicate that the creatures which are involved in God's ultimate end are not of the same being as God. Rather, they are *ex nihilo*. The central concept is that of God's own nature "dwelling within" the elect for all eternity—this is due to God's communicating (imparting) himself to his creature. As Edwards puts it:

The thing signified by that name, "the glory of God," when spoken of as the supreme and ultimate end of the work of creation, and of all God's works, is the emanation and true external expression of God's internal glory and fullness. . . . The emanation or communication of the divine fullness, consisting in the knowledge of God, love to him, and joy in him, has relation indeed both to God and the creature: but it has relation to God as its fountain, as it is as emanation from God; and as the communication itself, or thing communicated, is something divine, something of God, something of his internal fullness; as the water in the stream is something of the fountain; and as the beams of the sun are something of the sun. And again, they have relation to God as they have respect to him as their object: for the knowledge communicated is the knowledge

of God; as so God is the object of the knowledge: and the love communicated, is the love of God; so God is the object of that love: and the happiness communicated, is joy in God; and so he is the object of the joy communicated. In the creature's knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; his fullness is received and returned. . . . So that the whole is *of* God, and *in* God, and *to* God; and he is the beginning, and the middle and end in this affair.⁶⁸

So, for Edwards, God's *ultimate* end signified by the term "glory" is not a kind of "show-and-tell," but an "indwelling"—and such that the thing indwells *of* God, *in* God, and *to* God. In other words, God's glory as his ultimate end in creation is God's self-awareness, love, and joy "extended," as it were, in created consciousness. Nothing is truly added to God—only "extended." Edwards's view thus does not entail an inconsistency.

Beilby's second salient interpretive error is revealed in his claim that Edwards's explanation of what moved God is due to God's being an "abundance—a surplus that must be distributed."⁶⁹ Beilby's choice of words suggests some kind of impersonal mechanical pressure chamber or organic bladder that needs release.⁷⁰ Let us briefly revisit Edwards's argument in order to appreciate the crude error in this. As we have noted, the assumptions shared by Edwards and by those whom he opposed are these: that (1) God is inexhaustibly self-sufficient; (2) creation is *ex nihilo*; and (3) God has an ultimate end in creation. As Edwards argues in chapter one of *End*, Reason "dictates"—on the ground of these assumptions—that

1. We must not suppose that God's ultimate end in creation is the meeting of some deficiency in himself, and
2. We must suppose, in general, that God's ultimate end in creation is (a) originally valuable in itself and (b) is actually the consequence of creation, and
3. We must suppose, in particular, that (a) God's ultimate end in creation is an emanation of his infinite fullness, and (b) a "*disposition in God, as an original property of his nature, to an emanation of his own infinite fullness, was what excited him to create the world.*"

Reason dictates supposition (3a) because the only thing that meets the conditions given in (2) is an eternally increasing knowledge, holiness, and happiness in God's glory in a society of beings. Reason dictates (3b) because God actually did create—but not out of duty or of practical necessity. The point is this: "Reason dictates" that we must suppose that there is an explanation for his creating even though it cannot be to satisfy a deficiency or to fulfill a duty. The only explanation available, given the assumptions mentioned, is to posit a disposition or inclination to the act based on God's

⁶⁸ *End of Creation* 527, 531.

⁶⁹ Beilby, "Divine Aseity."

⁷⁰ The objection has been raised and rebuked in the past. For example, Herman Bavinck writes, "The world, accordingly, did not arise from a need in God . . . [N]or is its origination due to an uncontrollable fullness (*plērōma*) in God . . ." *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation* (ed. John Bolt and John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) 435.

value for himself. Such a disposition or inclination is not identical to, nor does it entail, the notion of “abundance—a surplus that must be distributed” that Beilby illegitimately foists upon Edwards.

What, then, could account for this action on God's part? What motive or subjective end, therefore, could make sense of an “infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, and independently glorious and happy” God “going forth” from himself? What can make sense of God's “disposition to externalize” his glory? In chapter two of *End* Edwards harvests the bounty of Scripture regarding these questions. It must be emphasized that, for Edwards, Scripture informs reason and provides the content for Edwards's first-chapter claim regarding God's motive in creating. In other words, the content of God's disposition mentioned in chapter one is inductively inferred from a weight of evidence regarding what Scripture teaches.

A primary source for Edwards's account of God's motive is Jesus' own words recorded in the twelfth and seventeenth chapters of John's Gospel.⁷¹ Edwards underscores Jesus' value of God's glory. But the glory Jesus values is the intra-Trinitarian life he had with the Father before creation. The prospect of sentient creatures sharing in that glory is part of what motivated Jesus to endure the cross and despise its shame. Thus, Jesus' own value for intra-Trinitarian life provides the clue to an explanation for “what moved God to create.” In other words, Edwards's account of God's disposition to overflow is given by Jesus' treasuring his pre-creation intra-Trinitarian glory and Jesus' desire that the elect would share the intra-Trinitarian glory. Therefore, God's communicating himself is moved by God's valuing himself as intra-Trinitarian fullness. Edwards claims that the explanation for God's creating the world is the value of this glory,

It was this value for himself that caused him to value and seek that his internal glory should *flow forth* from himself.⁷²

But the glory that constitutes intra-Trinitarian life is at once both the end and the motive. To put it another way: Inexhaustible fullness of intra-Trinitarian life—out of value for itself—creates and redeems nothing-based beings to exist eternally solely by virtue of and for partaking in that life. This is the epitome of love.

Edwards thus offers a Scripture-informed explanation for the conjunction of God's “psychological aseity” and God's consequent creating, redeeming activity. Thus, Edwards now has a substantive account for what was only

⁷¹ As Edwards comments, “Christ was now going to Jerusalem, and expected in a few days there to be crucified: and the prospect of his last sufferings, in this near approach, was very terrible to him. Under this distress of mind, he supports himself with a prospect of what would be the consequence of his sufferings, viz. God's glory. Now, 'tis the end that supports the agent in any difficult work that he undertakes, and above all others, his ultimate and supreme end; for this is above all others valuable in his eyes; and so, sufficient to countervail the difficulty of the means. That is the end which is in itself agreeable and sweet to him, and which ultimately terminates his desires, is the center of rest and support; and so must be the fountain and sum of all the delight and comfort he has in his prospects, with respect to his work” (*End of Creation* 484).

⁷² *End of Creation* 532.

posited in the first chapter. Or better: Edwards's argument in the first chapter involves an implicit premise that there is an explanation and that is solely rooted in God's Trinitarian nature. But this account of God's motive is denigrated by construing it as "abundance" bursting forth willy-nilly as Beilby portrays it. As noted earlier, Edwards is no Neoplatonic emanationist; Edwards is a thoroughgoing biblical emanationist. Though the language is similar, the concepts are distinct. Had Beilby traced Edwards's entire argument in its context, he may have realized the importance of Edwards's emphasis on this assumption: *creation is ex nihilo*. If Beilby then had noticed the careful deductive nature of the first chapter and that denying the conclusion of a valid deductive argument entails a denial of at least one assumption, he would have seen that Edwards would have to deny that creation is *ex nihilo* to be numbered among the Neo-Platonists. But Beilby needs this misconstrual to make his case for inconsistency in Edwards.

Beilby's third major error lies in his claim that "Edwards lands himself in the trouble he does because he was willing to speculate about God's purpose in creation." Careful deduction from shared assumptions about God and creation (as Edwards proceeds in the first chapter) is not "speculation," especially when Edwards explicitly indicates his rationale and reservations. Careful and exhaustive induction from Scripture (as Edwards proceeds in the second chapter) is not speculation either. Furthermore, the speculations that Luther and Calvin address and discourage (to which Beilby alludes) were mentioned by Augustine and can be traced to reactions to Plotinus's Neoplatonism. A careful examination of Edwards's views with this background in place reveals that Edwards clearly avoided the pitfalls. However, failure to take Edwards's own statements about his two-stage argument regarding God's ultimate end in creation exemplifies a recurrent strategic error in interpretation. This explains Beilby's misconstrual of the objection Edwards addresses. When an objection is misinterpreted, one's comprehension of the rejoinder is likely to be distorted. Since Beilby's position depends on what Edwards's rejoinder entails, it is not surprising that he gets that wrong as well. As a consequence, Beilby's views are pervasively misinformed and misguided.

4. *Summation.* In sum, the criticisms that have been raised against Edwards by Wisner, McClymond, and Beilby are unfounded. These unfounded claims themselves are the result of a strategic error in interpreting *End of Creation*.⁷³ Correctly interpreting Edwards requires one to notice Edwards's awareness of and rhetorical mastery over those oriented to answer the *Euthyphro Dilemma* and under the spell of the *Euclidean Myth*. Clearly these two issues constitute an important and pervasive element of the milieu within

⁷³ These theorists are not alone. Bruce Reichenbach makes the same mistake in interpreting Edwards: "If, as Calvinist theologians maintain, God's chief end is to bring himself glory, and his ultimate end in creating is to communicate his good to his creation, could not God achieve these ends by creating superhuman beings?" "Evil and a Reformed view of God," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 24 (1988) 75.

which the debate over God's purpose in creation took place. Faithful interpretation of Edwards's two-stage argument in *End of Creation* then approaches the argument in the first chapter as a careful deductive tracing of the question of God's ultimate end in creation from common assumptions. Chapter two provides further content to the assertions and findings of the first chapter. This must be emphasized: *Whatever is revealed about Jesus' motives and values by his prayer in John 17 is part and parcel of God's motive in acting so that the intra-Trinitarian life be extant in some human beings for all eternity.* Failing to take notice of these is to commit a strategic error in interpreting Jonathan Edwards's *End of Creation*. It has led to the false attribution of pantheism, the false attribution that God obeys the moral dictates of Reason, and the false attribution that God's ultimate end is either the mere "demonstration" of his attributes or the "bringing of glory" to himself. Therefore the "inconsistency" charges against Edwards are likewise unfounded.

So far I have said little regarding the Arminian alternative advocated by Wisner and Beilby. Whether—and to what extent—their views are to be equated in content with the "spirituality" Edwards opposed is another question. Edwards's "Calvinist" view seems to be more like this: (1) Before there was anything, the mystery of the Triune God was centered in the mutual love between the Father and the Son. "God's glory" is the term for this. (2) Even though the creation reflects the majesty of God as art does its artist, the ultimate end of God's acts was to be God's own intra-Trinitarian life (i.e. God's own knowledge of himself, love for himself [holiness], and joy in himself) dwelling in some created beings by means of God's Spirit. (3) Jesus' own prayers show that his value for his life with the Father and its prospective "extension" to some human beings is the sole motivation behind the Triune God's creating and redeeming acts. "God acts for his glory" is the phrase that captures God's purpose and motive in creating. (4) It is, by definition, impossible for a human to generate such knowledge, holiness, and joy by any effort of will. Amazing grace! What Edwards writes elsewhere on this subject seems appropriate to repeat:

Yea, the least glimpse of the glory of God in the face of Christ doth more exalt and ennoble the soul, than all the knowledge of those that have the greatest speculative understanding of divinity without grace.⁷⁴

As Edwards might plead in his most irenic moments, Reason cannot deliver such a "glimpse," nor can moral effort produce such a Christ-ennobled soul. Schemes of divinity grounded epistemically in reason and morally in self-effort are therefore simply and gravely mistaken.

⁷⁴ "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* 17, *Sermons and Discourses 1730–1733* (ed. Mark Valeri; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 424.