

An Examination of Jonathan Edwards' Theological Method Concerning the Problem of Reprobation

by

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Abstract

Contemporary Christianity is doctrinally diverse, and ecumenical engagement among Christians means this diversity is encountered regularly. This raises questions about how Christians decide which theological positions to personally affirm, and the reasons behind these choices. As an example of such a choice, this study investigates why Jonathan Edwards defended the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination despite his initial aversion to it as a youth.

The introduction assesses current perspectives on Edwards' theology which debate Edwards' theological method and shows there is no consensus on why he affirmed double predestination. Chapter 1 analyzes how predestination fits within Edwards' larger theological worldview, and identifies several contradictions which suggest that he did not affirm it because of theological consistency. Chapter 2 examines Edwards' philosophical arguments for God's ultimate determination of all creaturely choices, as well as Edwards' attempt to ethically defend God's condemnation of the reprobate to hell. However, Edwards' philosophy and ethical theory do not resolve the logical inconsistencies shown in chapter 1, and instead create a significant challenge for theodicy. Chapter 3 investigates Edwards' scriptural arguments related to double predestination and also analyzes Edwards' attempt to uphold God's goodness despite Edwards'

philosophical determinism. Chapter 4 explores Edwards' religious upbringing and personal spiritual experiences that inspired his belief in irresistible grace—a key part of his deterministic understanding of Christian conversion. Chapter 5 examines Edwards' personal historical context in his Puritan society which was facing a challenge from Arminian understandings of the gospel.

In chapter 6 I conclude that Edwards' concern to uphold the traditional Protestant belief in justification by faith alone and God's grace alone against then-contemporary Arminian moralistic or legalistic alternatives is likely the reason he affirmed double predestination. However, the legacy of Edwards' views on predestination indicates it did not have enduring value outside of his devoted followers, likely because it was not able to address Arminian critiques regarding theodicy. Contemporary Arminians are challenged by Edwards to avoid synergistic soteriology, while contemporary Calvinists are challenged by this study to avoid implying that God is the ultimate cause of sin and reprobation, while debating one another with mutual respect.

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Introduction

Contemporary Christianity encompasses an abundance of diverse doctrinal positions held by various denominations and individuals. In the past, when communication and travel were more limited, these differences may sometimes have been less frequently encountered, and thus less well-understood. Yet today, Christians of every persuasion engage with each other, discussing differences in beliefs and practices in multi-denominational seminars, online, and in other ecumenical Christian forums. Some publishers have capitalized on this situation by creating books detailing multiple perspectives on particular Christian doctrines, leaving it up to readers to choose whichever view they find most personally persuasive.¹

This situation raises questions such as: how do Christians today decide which of the diverse theological positions available they will personally choose to believe? Why are some Christians persuaded by one view, while others are equally convinced of an alternate view? How do individuals come to hold the theological views they do, and what are the reasons behind these doctrinal commitments? These questions have spurred this particular study into how and why the eighteenth-century American pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) came to his position that God predestines every person to an eternity either in heaven (election) or hell (reprobation), and that individuals cannot change their personal destinies. This view is commonly known as “double predestination.”²

It is argued that “of all traditional Christian doctrines, few, if any, have caused as much controversy as this question of whether a person’s fate in either heaven or hell is sealed from the

¹ See the Counterpoints Bible & Theology series, edited by Stanley N. Gundry for Zondervan, the Spectrum Multiview Books series published by IVP Academic, and the Perspectives On series edited by Leonard G. Gloss for B & H Publishing Group.

² Peter J. Thuesen defines double predestination as “the idea that both election and reprobation are in some sense decreed by God” (Peter J. Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2009], 221). Some argue that there is such a thing as “single predestination” which affirms election without a corresponding decree of reprobation, but I agree that ‘single’ predestination “can be consistently maintained only within the framework of universalism or some sort of qualified Arminianism. If particular election is to be maintained and if the notion that all salvation is ultimately based upon that particular election is to be maintained, then we must speak of double predestination” (R. C. Sproul, “‘Double’ Predestination,” *Ligonier Ministries*, accessed Mar. 17, 2021, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/double-predestination/>).

beginning of time.”³ As a result, there has never been a Christian consensus on the doctrine of predestination,⁴ although several alternative approaches exist. Predestination remains a divisive issue among Christians primarily because some strongly assert that a belief in God’s eternal predestination of individuals to hell is not compatible with belief in God’s goodness.⁵ Thus, it is a key issue for *theodicy*: the attempt to justify or defend belief in God’s existence and goodness despite the existence of evil and suffering.⁶

Even today, books at both the scholarly and popular levels continue to be written defending particular views on predestination and criticizing their opponents’ views.⁷ Authors on every side

³ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 4.

⁴ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 4. Thuesen offers a historical summary of Christian thought regarding predestination on pp. 17–43. Another historical overview of the development of several Christian positions regarding God’s providence and human free will, which is a critical part of the predestination issue, is by Dennis W. Jowers, “Introduction,” in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Dennis W. Jowers (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 11–22.

⁵ For example, Clark Pinnock claims “the idea of everlasting torment (especially if it is linked to soteriological predestination) raises the problem of evil to impossible dimensions . . . if Christians want to hold that God created some people to be tortured in hell forever, then the apologetic task in relation to theodicy is just hopeless” (Clark H. Pinnock, “The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent,” *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 2 [1990]: 253–254). Susan Neiman believes that the eternal suffering of the damned is the largest problem for theodicy, for it outweighs all suffering in this temporal world. She argues that if God predestines individuals to eternal suffering, then God is more evil than the worst human tyrants (Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002], 19–20, 125). Past theologians have thought similarly. For example, John Wesley argued that double predestination is blasphemous because it makes Jesus’ offer of salvation to all people a lie, and if God cruelly condemns creatures to hell apart from their free choice then God is worse than Satan (John Wesley, “Free Grace,” in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 3: Sermons*, ed. Albert Outler and Frank Baker [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975], 554–557). James Arminius also argued in his work “A Declaration of the Sentiments of James Arminius” that double predestination is contrary to God’s wisdom, justice, and goodness, among other issues (James Arminius, *Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will, and the Nature of God*, ed. John D. Wagner [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011], 40–41).

⁶ Richard Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning: Contemporary Responses to the Problem of Pain* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2014), 20.

⁷ A small selection of books on this debate over the last twenty years or so include: David Basinger and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, Spectrum Multiview Books (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986); Chad Owen Brand, ed., *Perspectives On Election: 5 Views*, Leonard G. Gloss series ed. (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006); Dennis W. Jowers and Stanley N. Gundry, eds., *Four Views on Divine Providence*, Counterpoints Bible & Theology series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); Clark Pinnock, ed. *The Grace of God And The Will of Man* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1995); Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, eds., *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge and Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000); Samuel C. Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007); Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of*

are able to interpret Scripture in a way that appears to support their preferred perspective. Therefore, this debate is an example of a major area in Christian doctrine in which individuals choose one perspective over another, and where the question cannot simply be resolved by appealing to Scripture. Why Christians hold the perspectives that they do regarding predestination must then ultimately involve other factors beyond Scripture. Exploring what these factors may be and how they influence individuals' theological beliefs could help contribute to mutual understanding among Christians of differing theological convictions. Jonathan Edwards is both a suitable and fascinating subject for this study due to his detailed and wide-ranging thought, as well as his notability as a significant Christian thinker who came to strongly defend double predestination despite initially claiming it was a "horrible doctrine."⁸

Introduction to Edwards' Life and Theology

It could be argued that studying Jonathan Edwards' thought on any topic is a useful and interesting endeavor, for Edwards is credited with being "the most influential American-born theologian of the 18th century."⁹ His philosophical achievements have even led some to call him "America's Hegel."¹⁰ His work on metaphysics, ethics, and psychology, in addition to theology still attracts interest from Christian intellectuals and scholars beyond just the Reformed tradition,

God's Sovereignty and Free Will, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2010); Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); Michael Horton, *For Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); Jerry L. Walls, *Does God Love Everyone? The Heart of What is Wrong with Calvinism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016).

⁸ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 16, Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 792.

John Calvin also defended double predestination while admitting that the decree of reprobation is "dreadful indeed" (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960], 3.23.7 p. 955), yet Calvin does not appear to have struggled with the doctrine as Edwards did.

⁹ Allen C. Guelzo, "Edwards, Jonathan," in *Encyclopedia of Christianity, Vol. 2*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and David B. Barrett (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 68.

¹⁰ Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3.

making him “one of the most widely read major theologians today.”¹¹

These accolades may be surprising to those who are only familiar with Edwards’ most (in)famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”¹² This sermon is considered the peak of Edwards’ artistic approach to preaching, and is included in anthologies of American literature commonly read in high school and college by many students. Yet this sermon has also given Edwards a reputation of being a “fire and brimstone” preacher, even as historians point out that this work is not representative of Edwards’ thought or sermons as a whole.¹³ In contrast, scholars have commended Edwards for his profound thought, and his sermons have been acclaimed as “perhaps the greatest preaching, or sermon compositions, in American history.”¹⁴

During his pastoral ministry, Edwards became known for his work defending the Great Awakening revivals which occurred across New England in 1734–1735 and 1740–1742.¹⁵ After the first revival, Edwards wrote *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1738),¹⁶ which described this revival in his own congregation. This work became a literary classic and had a direct influence on John Wesley.¹⁷ Further works from Edwards about the revivals include *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742) and *A Treatise on the Religious Affections* (1746). These writings were based on his experiences during

¹¹ Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 15; Mark A. Noll, “Edwards, Jonathan,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 145, 147.

¹² Harry S. Stout, introductory comments to “Sinners In the Hands of an Angry God,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 22, Sermons and Discourses, 1739–1742*, ed. Harry S. Stout (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 400.

¹³ Stout, introductory comments to “Sinners In the Hands of an Angry God,” in WJE 22: 402; George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 501.

¹⁴ George S. Claghorn, “Introduction,” in WJE 16: 3.

¹⁵ Noll, “Edwards, Jonathan,” 145.

¹⁶ Noll, “Edwards, Jonathan,” 146; Guelzo, “Edwards, Jonathan,” 68.

¹⁷ Paul K. Conkin, “Edwards, Jonathan,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Patte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 360; C. C. Goen, “12. Note on the Texts,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 4, The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 91; Marsden, 333.

the revivals and explored his concern with distinguishing true and false religious experiences, and also reveal his interest in identifying the characteristics of someone who is truly saved.¹⁸

Another of his memorable works regarding spirituality is *The Diary of David Brainerd* (1749), which Edwards edited. Edwards held up the life of Brainerd, a missionary friend of Edwards' family, as an ideal of "revitalized spirituality." This work has never been out of print since it was first published, and was a major influence on the nineteenth-century American and English protestant missionary movement.¹⁹ These works, among others, have led Edwards to be called "the single most influential practical activist in shaping the contours of American evangelicalism."²⁰ He was appreciated by twentieth-century evangelicals for his work in defending the sincerity of evangelical religious sentimentality, and for inspiring American evangelicals to take a greater interest in intellectual study.²¹

Yet in addition to being considered a great theologian, philosopher, and pastor, Edwards is particularly interesting to study on the topic of predestination as it relates to the earlier questions about why some Christians choose the positions they do. This is because as a youth, Edwards struggled with the doctrine of God's sovereignty, and especially double predestination. He wrote that "from my childhood up, my mind had been wont to be full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased; leaving them eternally to perish, and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me."²² However, during his college years Edwards experienced a "wonderful alteration" in his mind regarding the doctrine of God's sovereignty,

¹⁸ Noll, "Edwards, Jonathan," 146.

¹⁹ Noll, "Edwards, Jonathan," 145; Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 15. Douglas A. Sweeney, "Evangelical Tradition in America," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 223. Marsden traces the influence of Edwards' accounts of local revivals on Isaac Watts and George Whitefield (Marsden, 170–173, 203–205).

²⁰ Guelzo, "Edwards, Jonathan," 70. Crisp calls Edwards a "founding father" of modern evangelicalism (Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 15).

²¹ Guelzo, "Edwards, Jonathan," 67–68.

²² Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 791–792.

so that I scarce ever have found so much as the rising of an objection against God's sovereignty, in the most absolute sense, in showing mercy on whom he will show mercy, and hardening and eternally damning whom he will. . . . I have often since, not only had a conviction, but a *delightful* conviction. The doctrine of God's sovereignty has very often appeared, an exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet doctrine to me: and absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God.²³

Edwards claims he was unable to clearly identify a specific reason for this change of opinion.²⁴ Exploring this mystery of why Edwards changed his mind on predestination may provide insight into those earlier questions regarding why Christians choose to believe what they do on theological issues when a number of positions are seemingly arguable and have been defended by thoughtful Christians throughout history.

This question is especially interesting because in New England at the time, there were some Arminians who held a position on predestination which would have been more compatible with Edwards' initial distaste for the traditional Puritan view.²⁵ Furthermore, Edwards was aware of such views through his studies at Yale.²⁶ Why Edwards did not side with the Arminians when it seems that they offered a solution to his youthful concerns is an important question to be explored in this study.

What is even more surprising is that rather than converting to Arminianism, Edwards became concerned with defending his new position on God's sovereignty *against* the Arminians. God's sovereign determination of all things, including individuals' eternal destinies became a lifelong theme in his works, beginning with his master's degree oration in 1723 in which he took a public stand against Arminianism.²⁷ In his Boston public lecture on July 8, 1732, titled "God Glorified

²³ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 792.

²⁴ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 792.

²⁵ Throughout this study I use the term "Puritan" inclusively and neutrally to designate the Calvinist and predestinarian English movement, both inside and outside of the Church of England.

²⁶ Marsden, 87.

²⁷ George G. Levesque, introduction to "Quæstio: Peccator Non Iustificatur Coram Deo Nisi Per Iustitiam Christi Fide Apprehensam," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 14, Sermons and Discourses 1723–1729*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 51; Marsden, 87, 90–91.

in Man's Dependence," he again publicly criticized Arminianism.²⁸ This lecture became Edwards' first publication.

Edwards became increasingly distressed as the Enlightenment emphasis on reason bolstered the case for Arminianism and helped to popularize this view throughout New England.²⁹ These developments moved him to write his two most famous works: *Freedom of the Will* (1754), considered to be his *magnum opus*,³⁰ and *Original Sin* (1758). His goal, as one scholar writes, was, "to reestablish Calvinism's international intellectual respectability."³¹ Edwards intended to defend Calvinism against criticisms from common sense and Enlightenment rationality by showing that Calvinism was ultimately more reasonable than Arminianism.³² This would be done by disproving what he called the "almost inconceivably pernicious" idea that libertarian free will is necessary for people to be held morally accountable for their actions.³³

At the end of *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards argues outright for double predestination: that God only ever planned to save select people through Christ, that these are only a subset of all people

²⁸ Marsden, 140–141.

²⁹ Marsden, 435–436.

³⁰ The Yale editors of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* note that they chose *Freedom of the Will* for the first volume because "it is the work through which his fame has been most widely spread abroad, even to the multitudes who have known the book only by hearsay" (Perry Miller, "General Editor's Note," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 1, Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008], iv).

³¹ Marsden, 436. Edwards does not use these precise words, but the sentiment is there in one of his letters to Rev. John Erskine where Edwards says he is writing on the Arminian controversy, "endeavoring to demonstrate their most palpable inconsistency and absurdity; endeavoring also to bring the late, great objections and outcries against the Calvinistic divinity, from these topics, to the test of the strictest reasoning. And particularly that grand objection, in which the modern writers have so much gloried, and so long triumphed, with so great a degree of insult towards the most excellent divines and, in effect, against the gospel of Jesus Christ, viz. that the Calvinistic notions of God's moral government are contrary to the common sense of mankind" (Edwards, "151. To the Reverend John Erskine," in WJE 16: 491).

³² Marsden, 437. It should be noted that Edwards used the term "Arminian" to group together a variety of authors who advocated for libertarian free will, and were likely not as unified as Edwards sometimes makes them appear (Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and its British Context* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981], 292–293).

³³ Marsden, 437–438. This term "almost inconceivably pernicious" is Edwards' own, from Edwards, "228. Letter to John Erskine," in WJE 16: 719.

ever created, and that who is saved depends entirely on God's eternal decree.³⁴ Thus, his entire book could be seen as a justification of double predestination by explaining how God can justly send people to hell despite the fact that people have no real ability to avoid sin. Indeed, Edwards sees the philosophical question of free will as fundamental to several key Calvinist doctrines. In *Original Sin*, Edwards says that if the Arminians could refute his arguments against the self-determining power of the will, then they could rightly reject all of the Reformed doctrines of "original sin, the sovereignty of grace, election, redemption, conversion, the efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit, the nature of saving faith, perseverance of the saints, and other principles of the like kind."³⁵ In his works, Edwards defends these traditional Calvinist ideas, including that all people are sinners who deserve an eternity in hell, in part because God holds all people guilty of Adam's first sin; that a person's only hope for salvation is through personal faith in Christ; and that everything which occurs, whether good or bad, is God's will and ultimately glorifies God.

Edwards' thought on the controversial issue of predestination is significant, for *Freedom of the Will* became extremely influential in American Calvinism.³⁶ His careful and detailed analysis of human free will is said to have "made this work a landmark for theologians in America and Scotland for over a century,"³⁷ so much so that his theological determinism nearly became identified with Reformed theology.³⁸ This is why he has been called "the most formidable defender of Calvinism in the history of North America."³⁹ Edwards is still considered an authority by a minority of theologians who defend similar commitments today. Yet Edwards'

³⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 1, ed. Paul Ramsey (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 435.

³⁵ Edwards, *Original Sin*, *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 3, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 376.

³⁶ Marsden, 446.

³⁷ Noll, "Edwards, Jonathan," 146; Marsden, 446. See also Allen C. Guelzo's analysis of the influence of Edwards' doctrine of free will in subsequent American theology in *Edwards on the Will: A Century of Theological Debate* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989).

³⁸ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 93–94.

³⁹ Noll, "Edwards, Jonathan," 145.

popularity may be increasing once again due to a recent resurgence of Calvinism in contemporary American evangelicalism.⁴⁰

As discussed earlier, Edwards is known for more than just his role in this theological debate over predestination. What then is the place of predestination in Edwards' theological worldview as a whole? In Edwards' sermons, private notebooks, letters, and published works, his interests are shown to include topics as diverse as typological biblical interpretation, the nature of spiritual and physical beauty, ethics, the role of other religions in the world, and God's providence in history. Various elements of Edwards' thought have been emphasized by scholars, and this has given rise to many different interpretations of Edwards and debates over what was the center of his theology, or if there even is such a center at all.⁴¹

His broad range of interests have inspired the authors of a recent major volume on Edwards' theology to compare his work to a symphony, whose different elements may stand out to different readers, or may be more or less dominant in certain portions of his writings. Five

⁴⁰ Eric J. Lehner, *Marks of Saving Grace: Theological Method and the Doctrine of Assurance in Jonathan Edwards' A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2016), xxix, referring to Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008). Hansen believes the popularity of Calvinism is growing especially at leading evangelical seminaries such as Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. These new young Calvinists "have once again brought the perennial debate about God's sovereignty and humans' free will to the forefront" (Collin Hansen, "Young, Restless, Reformed: Calvinism is Making a Comeback—and Shaking Up the Church," *Christianity Today* [September 2006]: 33). This movement is also influenced by popular evangelical leaders such as Timothy Keller, John MacArthur, Al Mohler and others, as well as various ministries and organizations (Hansen, 35). In his book, Hansen "attempts to chronicle the historical, theological, and cultural roots of this phenomenon by devoting each of his chapters to one of its epicenters, including the Passion conferences, John Piper and his Bethlehem Baptist Church, the legacy of Jonathan Edwards, the immediate history and role of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary within the broader Southern Baptist Convention, the New Attitude Conference, et al." (Daniel Castelo, "Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists," *Pneuma* 32, no. 2 [2010], 295).

⁴¹ Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8–9; Lehner, 260. Some have suggested the center of his thought was Edwards' trinitarianism, such as Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: the Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) and Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Others say it was Edwards' dispositional ontology; see Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). Another possibility is that it was Edwards' theocentric spiritual 'vision' of reality, as suggested by John J. Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality: The Relationship of God to the World, Redemption History, and the Reprobate* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012). Robert Jenson suggests all of Edwards' theology springs from his vision of God's beauty/holiness (Jenson, *America's Theologian*, 15–17).

sections of this Edwardsean symphony are proposed. The first is “trinitarian communication,” where Edwards explains God’s purpose in creating the world as being the self-communication of God’s triune beauty. The second is “creaturely participation,” closely related to the first, where God’s creatures participate in God’s self-communication by knowing and loving God. The third is “necessitarian dispositionalism,” where Edwards makes use of his deterministic theory of dispositions to explain why people act the way they do, and how God controls the world. The fourth is “theocentric voluntarism,” which is his Calvinistic emphasis on God’s sovereignty. The fifth is “harmonious constitutionalism,” where he believes that all things are interrelated in history and providence in a network of harmonious relationships according to God’s design.⁴² All of these theological themes will appear in this investigation into Edwards’ doctrine of predestination, which indicates that predestination is not an insignificant component of his theological worldview.

In sum, Edwards is a significant American theologian whose views on predestination are still worth investigating, not only because of the minor but growing pockets of Christians who still appreciate his thought, but because of his larger role in shaping American evangelicalism. In deepening our understanding of the factors which influenced Edwards’ views on predestination and why he changed his mind on the subject, perhaps greater clarity can be brought to the discussion of predestination between contemporary Arminians and Calvinists as to what each is defending and why. This debate, in both its historical and contemporary forms, provides an excellent example of Christians choosing among competing theological positions. I hope this case-study of Jonathan Edwards may be a starting-point for exploring the broader questions identified at the beginning of this study.

⁴² McClymond and McDermott, 1–9.

Scholarly Assessment of Edwards' Theological Method With Reference to Predestination and Theodicy

How Edwards did theology is an area of study which has not been extensively explored in detail,⁴³ although the question has been touched on by scholars, especially in regard to the topic of double predestination in Edwards' thought. Primarily, scholarly assessments of Edwards' theological method fall into two groups. The first group believes that Edwards adjusted his theology according to pastoral situations and made use of whatever sources he found useful which resulted in some inconsistencies, especially on the issues of predestination and theodicy. The second group argues that Edwards was a ruthlessly rational and logical systematic theologian who had an integrated philosophical and theological method, with the result that Edwards' views on sin, hell, and reprobation are ultimately consistent with his overarching biblical and rational Christian worldview.

Among those in the first group, Edwards is called an "open systems" thinker who approached most of his thought as an experimental work-in-progress, refining his ideas through writing, and making modifications upon gaining new insights, while returning repeatedly to his favourite themes.⁴⁴ He was not afraid to make use of whatever ideas he felt were useful, regardless of the source, causing one author to liken him to an "intellectual magpie."⁴⁵ Some have described his resulting theology as "unsystematic" or even "ad hoc," due to Edwards' practice of exploring

⁴³ One attempt to examine Edwards' theological method is Eric J. Lehner, *Marks of Saving Grace: Theological Method and the Doctrine of Assurance in Jonathan Edwards' A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2016) which argues that in this work Edwards' used a foundationalist epistemology as well as a "regulated matrix" of three key sources comprised of philosophy, history, and Scripture (Lehner, xxx, 261). He argues that Edwards used philosophy to illustrate ideas derived from Scripture, and concludes that Scripture was the most important source used in *Religious Affections* (Lehner, 262). Another shorter study of Edwards' theological method is found in Morgan, "The Application of Jonathan Edwards's Theological Method to Annihilationism in Contemporary Evangelicalism," 123–139. Morgan contends that Edwards' arguments for endless torment in hell are primarily driven by his views of God's sovereignty and the nature of sin. McClymond and McDermott also comment on Edwards' theological method in *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. They suggest that Edwards had a lesser role for tradition (722), although he would build on it using reason (12), and would also consider personal spiritual experience (79, 156, 727).

⁴⁴ McClymond and McDermott, 9–10.

⁴⁵ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 4.

various themes according to his immediate pastoral context. This has been proposed as a source of some of the perplexities in Edwards' thought.⁴⁶

These perplexities, especially on challenging subjects such as theodicy and predestination, have led some to say that "most students of Edwards' theology seem to believe there is some sort of a contradiction at the heart of it."⁴⁷ A number of scholars argue that Edwards' views on reprobation do not cohere with several other important themes in his theology. In particular, Edwards' doctrines of reprobation and hell have been labelled as being "discordant" with his doctrines of creation, providence, and redemption, and are accused of lacking correspondence with the biblical texts.⁴⁸

For example, Edwards asserts that God creates intelligent creatures in order for them to know, love, and rejoice in God's beauty, including God's triune "perfections" of the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹ Yet, when Edwards discusses sin, hell, and reprobation, he neglects his trinitarian emphasis on love, beauty, and the purpose of creation, and only mentions the singular "God."⁵⁰ Here, Edwards turns to themes of God demonstrating God's justice and holiness by punishing the reprobate in hell, which is necessary for God's complete self-glorification.⁵¹ This implies that

⁴⁶ Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 15, 50, 184. She claims that Edwards' writings "do not reflect the same concern for coherence evident in modern 'systematic' or even 'dogmatic' theologies. Edwards was deeply steeped in Scripture and explored diverse biblical genres and images beyond any easy harmonization. His immediate pastoral context often defined the contours of his approach to scriptural texts and his treatment of theological themes. . . . Unlike contemporary narrative theologians, Edwards appeared unconcerned to render a coherent biblical portrait of God or Christ" (184).

More critically, the first doctoral dissertation on Edwards in 1899 "characterizes his style as 'thinking aloud,'" (M. X. Lesser, "Edwards in American Culture," in Stein, 284).

⁴⁷ Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 245.

⁴⁸ Holmes, 242–243, 252. George A. Gordon identified the issue of predestination as the "fundamental inconsistency" in Edwards' thought, which contradicts God's love for all humanity (George A. Gordon, "The Significance of Jonathan Edwards for Today," *Congregationalist* (1891–1901) 85, no. 26 [June 1900]: 945).

⁴⁹ Strobel, 154; Holmes, 41.

⁵⁰ Holmes, 218, 222–223; Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 132–133, 176–177, 187–188.

⁵¹ Holmes, 128.

God actually *needs* the Fall, sin, and evil to occur, which causes problems for theodicy given Edwards' deterministic positions on human free will, God's sovereignty, and original sin.⁵²

Furthermore, some say that Edwards seems to forget the cross of Christ as the “tonic note” of God's harmonious and beautiful plan of redemption, and as the full revelation of God's justice and wrath at sin.⁵³ Reprobation has also been questioned as to how well it fits within Edwards' system of ethics, which implies that reprobates should be simultaneously loved (as God's creatures) and hated (for their sin).⁵⁴ Edwards' emphasis on God as love is also possibly inconsistent with Edwards' claim that God will act without love towards the reprobate.⁵⁵ Recognition of these sorts of difficulties with reprobation is not new in studies of Edwards' theology, for even Edwards' immediate theological followers, Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy, did not accept Edwards' views on reprobation,⁵⁶ which slowly fell out of favour with his society.⁵⁷

These criticisms are perplexing, considering that other scholars have portrayed Edwards as a careful thinker who was unsatisfied with inconsistency,⁵⁸ and who frequently raised this charge against his theological opponents.⁵⁹ Scholars in this second category highlight the “rational”

⁵² Holmes, 130–131, 227, 220–222, 231–233.

⁵³ Holmes, 163, 234, 247.

⁵⁴ Holmes, 195.

⁵⁵ Thomas B. Talbott, “Universal Reconciliation and the Inclusive Nature of Election,” in *Perspectives on Election*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), 210.

⁵⁶ C. C. Goen, “Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology,” in *Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards*, ed. William J. Scheick (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1980), 162–163; Joseph A. Conforti, “Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity: Theology, Ethics, and Social Reform in Eighteenth-Century New England,” in Scheick, 227–228.

⁵⁷ In general, “even Edwards's own theological tradition distanced itself from his severe particularism, which included child depravity and infant damnation” (Bombaro, 5).

⁵⁸ Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 53, 192; McClymond and McDermott, 10.

⁵⁹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 376–377, 379; Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 437–438; Edwards, “Misrepresentations Corrected and Truth Vindicated,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 12, Ecclesiastical Writings*, ed. David D. Hall (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 351.

element of Edwards' theology, claiming that Edwards desired to have a "reasonable solution for every doctrine of Christianity."⁶⁰ He supposedly believed that everything God does is rational and compatible with the best of Enlightenment philosophy and Newtonian science.⁶¹

Furthermore, human rationality was part of what it meant to be made in the image of God, and so reason was a noble faculty.⁶² At one time Edwards even desired to write a "Rational Account of Christianity" due to his belief that Christianity needed to be reasonable in order to be valid.⁶³ It has been suggested that "he considered the rationalistic method the cornerstone of his mental powers."⁶⁴ Edwards absorbed and made use of the philosophical ideas of other Enlightenment thinkers, showing that he "was not indifferent to philosophical concerns."⁶⁵

In contrast to the earlier portrait of Edwards as an unsystematic thinker, some scholars have argued that Edwards used three approaches to his work: apologetical, exegetical/theological, and philosophical, at various times and for different purposes. However, "no one approach is to be understood as unconnected and particulate"; instead, they claim these approaches "for the most part form a highly integrated, interdependent method."⁶⁶ Those who focus on this 'rational' Edwards describe him as not just a theologian, a Puritan minister, or a philosopher, but as a combination of all three: "a New England Puritan philosophical theologian."⁶⁷ This description

⁶⁰ Bombaro, 292.

⁶¹ Bombaro, 33–35.

⁶² Gerald R. McDermott, "Was Jonathan Edwards an Evangelical? Scripture and Tradition in America's Theologian" in *Jonathan Edwards & Scripture: Biblical Exegesis in British North America*, ed. David P. Barshinger and Douglas A. Sweeney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 240.

⁶³ Bombaro, 294. Edwards' confidence in metaphysics and reason can be seen in how he attempted to argue for the Trinity on the basis of "naked reason" even apart from Scripture (Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 51, referring to Edwards "Miscellanies," entry no. 94 in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 13, The "Miscellanies": Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, ed. Harry S. Stout [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008], 257).

⁶⁴ Bombaro, 294.

⁶⁵ Bombaro, 294.

⁶⁶ Bombaro, 20.

⁶⁷ Bombaro, 20.

reflects Edwards' "extraordinary confidence that the truths of faith and of reason are one."⁶⁸ It is true that Edwards made some startling claims about the role of philosophy in theology. For example, he claimed that

We can have no proof, that is properly demonstrative, of any one proposition, relating to the being and nature of God, his creation of the world, the dependence of all things on him, the nature of bodies or spirits, the nature of our own souls, or any of the great truths of morality and natural religion but what is metaphysical.⁶⁹

Edwards also argued that even if people think that Scripture teaches unreasonable or absurd doctrines, "when they are most carefully and strictly examined, [these doctrines] appear to be exactly agreeable to the most demonstrable, certain, and natural dictates of reason."⁷⁰

It has been suggested that later in his life Edwards moved beyond this "rationalistic" method to focus on the divine revelation of spiritual truths to the individual's mind through the "spiritual sense."⁷¹ Yet, it was precisely at this time when Edwards wrote his major works attempting to refute Arminianism, where he continued to make use of abstract philosophical concepts to defend and explain his Calvinistic worldview.⁷²

Despite Edwards' emphasis on reason and metaphysics, the particular combination of philosophical elements he made use of has been critiqued as resulting in a serious issue for theodicy.⁷³ His philosophy included idealism (the world is composed of God's ideas and not material reality), occasionalism (created beings have no causal power of their own; all is caused

⁶⁸ Paul Ramsey, "Editor's Introduction" in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 8, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 6n5.

⁶⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 424.

⁷⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 439.

⁷¹ Bombaro, 294–295.

⁷² Crisp, *God and Creation*, 192.

⁷³ Oliver D. Crisp has written several works criticizing Edwards' metaphysics as it relates to theodicy, such as his *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), and *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015). It should be noted that Crisp is part of the Reformed tradition, demonstrating that the problems that scholars perceive in Edwards' thought are not due only to their commitment to alternative Christian traditions.

by God's own action), and continuous creation (God is eternally re-creating the world every moment, leading to a series of instantaneous worlds distinguished from one another by incremental changes which give the illusion of the progression of time). In this system, it can be argued that God is the only cause of all creaturely action, and thus there can be no moral responsibility for sin or evil on the part of any creature. This claim raises questions regarding the justice of God's predestination of the reprobate to hell for sins that God had determined they would do, and which they could not avoid doing, and which ultimately (given the doctrine of continuous creation) they did not even exist long enough to fully perform. This challenge is not new, for authors began critiquing Edwards' philosophical views on free will within decades of his death.⁷⁴

It is perplexing how Edwards, as a Christian who upheld God's goodness, holiness, and justice, either did not realize that there was such a problem with his views, or did not seem interested in attempting to solve—or at least to minimize—this problem. This is particularly true considering how Edwards likely knew of these sorts of objections due to his initial dislike of the doctrine of double predestination. While issues of theodicy have been raised with respect to other deterministic theologians such as John Calvin, Martin Luther, Thomas Aquinas, and Augustine, it has been argued that the problem is exacerbated in Edwards precisely because of these unique philosophical elements.⁷⁵ Edwards would not have been indifferent towards such an accusation, for he attempted to defend God's goodness, and did not want God to be seen as the 'positive' cause of evil, but only a 'permitter' of evil.⁷⁶ Edwards also argued that good and evil are objective standards, and furthermore, God's standards of goodness and human standards of goodness agree, so that it cannot be true that something which humans consider morally evil is

⁷⁴ James Dana, *An Examination of the Late Reverend President Edwards's Enquiry on Freedom of Will* (Boston, MA: David Kneeland, 1770); James Dana, *The Examination of the Late Rev'd President Edwards's Enquiry on Freedom of the Will Continued* (New Haven, CT: Thomas & Samuel Green, 1773); Daniel Denison Whedon, *The Freedom of the Will As a Basis of Human Responsibility and a Divine Government* (New York, Carlton & Porter, 1864); John L. Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism: Compared as to Election, Reprobation, Justification, and Related Doctrines* (Columbia, SC: W. J. Duffie, 1890).

⁷⁵ Holmes, 270.

⁷⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 403–412.

considered to be morally good by God.⁷⁷

Against those who point out these problems with Edwards' philosophy, some scholars have attempted to defend Edwards' views on reprobation as being consistent within his own philosophical framework, or as providing a compelling defense of traditional Christian beliefs about sin and hell. But these defenses of Edwards' views on sin and hell do not consider the larger framework of Edwards' philosophy, and so I believe they do not persuasively address the problem of how reprobation fits into Edwards' system as a whole.⁷⁸

The most recent significant attempt to defend Edwards by claiming that his views of reprobation and hell are consistent within the rest of his system has been made by John J. Bombaro.⁷⁹

Bombaro has three main arguments regarding Edwards' belief as to how the reprobate glorify God, and thereby fulfill God's purpose for creating intelligent creatures. First, all humans, whether elect or reprobate, are made in the image of God and thus reflect God's beauty to some extent.⁸⁰ Second, in perceiving the universe during their temporal lives, the reprobate still perceive some ideas about God which God communicates to them, and thus are able to perceive God's glory and beauty in some measure, fulfilling God's purpose for creaturely perception.⁸¹ And finally, the reprobate eternally perceive and make manifest certain attributes of God, such as God's justice and wrath at sin, which are necessary in order for God to be fully glorified to the

⁷⁷ Edwards, "Dissertation II: The Nature of True Virtue," in WJE 8: 622–627, henceforth cited as "True Virtue."

⁷⁸ Bruce W. Davidson, "Reasonable Damnation: How Jonathan Edwards Argued for the Rationality of Hell," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no. 1 (March 1995): 47–56; Bruce W. Davidson, "Glorious Damnation: Hell as an Essential Element in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, no. 4 (Dec 2011): 809–822; Christopher William Morgan, "The Application of Jonathan Edwards's Theological Method to Annihilationism in Contemporary Evangelicalism," (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999), 123–139; B. Hoon Woo, "Is God the Author of Sin?—Jonathan Edwards's Theodicy," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no.1 (2014): 98–123; Joseph Prud'homme and James Schelberg "Disposition, Potentiality, and Beauty in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Defense of His Great Doctrine of Original Sin," *American Theological Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (January 2012): 25–53.

⁷⁹ John J. Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality: The Relationship of God to the World, Redemption History, and the Reprobate* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 19. I have not seen significant interaction with Bombaro's arguments among Jonathan Edwards scholars.

⁸⁰ Bombaro, 14.

⁸¹ Bombaro, 15.

elect, and for God's character to be maximally beautiful.⁸²

These suggestions will be examined in further detail in chapter 1 where I consider whether Edwards' views are as consistent as Bombaro portrays them to be. This question is an important one for this study, for if Edwards' views on reprobation are logically and philosophically consistent, then there is no need to look for further explanations as to the source of his beliefs. Yet, if it can be shown that Edwards remains inconsistent on reprobation, this raises the possibility that Edwards was influenced by other factors beyond logic or philosophy.

Such factors are further revealed as a possibility when one examines Edwards' own defense of his philosophical conclusions. When Edwards feared the possibility that these philosophical arguments were insufficient, he turned against reason and began pleading for his opponents to have "common sense" and to humbly trust Scripture or God's "arbitrary" will.⁸³ When these appeals were also unconvincing, we will see how Edwards ultimately resorts to his theory of spiritual perception to explain why some people are unable to perceive the spiritual truths of reality in the same way he does.⁸⁴

This appeal to various sources of authority corresponds with my earlier assertion that other factors beyond Scripture must be motivating Christians to choose the positions that they do on the issue of predestination. Albert Outler's description of the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" provides a useful organizational framework for these factors which include reason, tradition, and experience in addition to Scripture.⁸⁵ It seems to me that these four categories comprise all the

⁸² Bombaro, 24.

⁸³ Pauw notes that "in the heat of Edwards's polemics against antitrinitarians, rash confidence sometimes gave way to an equally strategic insistence on the frailty of human reason" and the need for divine revelation (Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 53, cf. 54–55). This sudden switch appears to be a debate strategy that Edwards used not just against Arminians. Strobel also notes that in Edwards' "Discourse on the Trinity," Edwards begins with philosophy and reason and only uses Scripture as supporting material (Strobel, 56–57), and then, if pushed, will appeal to tradition, and finally, to 'mystery' (Strobel, 64–65). This is a pattern I have noticed also in *Freedom of the Will*, as well as *Original Sin*.

⁸⁴ Bombaro, 230–231, 292–293.

⁸⁵ The term "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" was invented by Albert Outler in the 1960s as a way to describe John Wesley's theological method of using four sources of authority: Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience (Donald

possible sources that a Christian may appeal to when forming theological conclusions.⁸⁶ This study will demonstrate that Edwards' arguments for why God predestines some individuals to eternal torment reveal that he was influenced by all four sources: Scripture, philosophy/reason, Puritan tradition/history, and his personal experience. In examining how these sources interacted in Edwards' thought, I will make use of Nancey Murphy's theological application of Imre Lakatos' definition of a scientific research program. This definition will be useful in order to attempt to determine which of these four source(s) may have been the most significant factor in Edwards' beliefs regarding double predestination.

The influence of Edwards' Puritan community on the young Edwards will be a critical part of this investigation. This influence will be examined using theories of personal religious and moral development proposed by experts including Walter E. Conn, James Fowler, and Bernard Lonergan. I will also make use of the work of James William McClendon Jr. and James M. Smith on the nature of convictions and conviction sets within religious communities, along with insights from Hans-Georg Gadamer regarding how a community's traditional pre-understandings shape how individuals within that community read religious texts. Such analysis will reveal the tensions which Edwards was subjected to as a young adult at the time when he was nearly ready to embark on his ministerial career, in a culture which was being increasingly challenged by an alternative Arminian theological tradition and community. How and why Edwards made the choice he did between these two competing religious traditions will be key for understanding Edwards' final position on double predestination.

Additionally, despite the aforementioned critiques of Edwards' views on reprobation, no scholar has offered an in-depth analysis of *why* Edwards chose to affirm double predestination.⁸⁷ Only

A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990], 22).

⁸⁶ I do not make any arguments regarding how these sources should interact or which should be primary. I am using the Quadrilateral only as a way to organize the influences on Edwards' theology.

⁸⁷ Even the authors of the two most in-depth works on Edwards' views of predestination specifically say they do not explore the reason(s) behind his views. Holmes says "My discussion, I suggest, illuminates the nature of this flaw; it does not explain its origin" (Holmes, 247). Likewise, Bombaro says that "it is not within the proposed purview of

brief suggestions have been made in passing, and of these, there is no consensus. Perhaps Edwards simply held to his traditional Calvinist Puritan upbringing.⁸⁸ Perhaps, even if Edwards knew there was a problem with his theology in regard to hell and reprobation, he found the doctrines evangelically useful in his preaching.⁸⁹ Perhaps his use of a particular model of the Trinity was why his theology sometimes “drifted into treacherous waters of trinitarian discord and pitiless divine vengeance.”⁹⁰ Perhaps he was convinced of irresistible grace due to his personal conversion experience.⁹¹ Perhaps it was his belief that Enlightenment philosophy threatened Calvinist orthodoxy.⁹² Perhaps it was the tension between Edwards’ Augustinianism and pantheism, or his mysticism.⁹³ Or, perhaps Edwards simply saw this understanding revealed in Scripture.⁹⁴ These diverse suggestions show that an in-depth study of the reasons behind Edwards’ affirmation of double predestination is needed.

As a result of this analysis, this study will not only make a useful contribution to scholarship on Edwards’ theological method and his personal religious development, but it will also provide a possible answer to the perplexing question of why Edwards had his sudden youthful change of

this study to trace the historical circumstances or intellectual influences that may or may not have caused Edwards to think the way he did on each and every occasion” (Bombaro, 20).

⁸⁸ Holmes, 215; Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 187–191; Bombaro, 30; Crisp, *God and Creation*, 192.

⁸⁹ Holmes, 247, 217.

⁹⁰ Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 187–188. A rebuttal to this idea is offered by Strobel, who says Edwards’ use of two different models of the Trinity are consistent, and thus did not cause Edwards’ theology on sin, hell, and reprobation to go astray (Strobel, 27–28, 39–50, 59–64, 68–69). Yet Strobel recognizes the problem with these issues in Edwards’ theology, for Strobel specifically chooses to not address how sin, hell, or reprobation fit into his understanding of Edwards’ theology as a whole (Strobel, 12).

⁹¹ Bombaro, 21, 38.

⁹² Bombaro, 32–36.

⁹³ Riley, “Jonathan Edwards,” in Scheick, 109–110, suggests the flaw in Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will* is due to tension between Augustinism and pantheism, which “make its whole structure insecure to the highest pinnacle,” undermining Edwards’ argument for double predestination which comes at the end of this work. Later in the same work Riley suggests there is an ongoing tension between Edwards’ mysticism and his Calvinism which leads to inconsistencies when Edwards attempts to blend an “Arminian” perspective on why God creates the world with the “Calvinistic” emphasis on creation as revealing God’s glory (115–116).

⁹⁴ Riley, “Jonathan Edwards,” in Scheick, 92–93; Davidson, “Glorious Damnation,” 817; Woo, “Is God the Author of Sin?” 117, 123; Marsden, 478.

mind regarding the doctrine of predestination, and why he continued to affirm it despite the logical contradictions within his thought and the difficulties for theodicy his position creates.

In addition, the wealth of material provided by Edwards makes possible a detailed examination of the reasons this thoughtful and intelligent Christian came to the position he did on a difficult and controversial subject. Such an examination may inspire contemporary Christians to consider the reasons behind our own beliefs, as a possible means toward encouraging dialogue and enabling greater mutual understanding on complex theological topics.

The Structure of This Study

Throughout this investigation, the different elements of Edwards' thought that have been touched on in this introduction will be revisited. The "unsystematic" nature of Edwards' theology will become apparent as major themes in his theology and his defense of double predestination come into tension and even contradiction with one another. His "rational" attempts to disprove indeterministic free will, and his argument that God must have absolute control over everything in order to be sovereign, will reappear in several different ways. Edwards' criticisms of Arminianism will be heard numerous times. Finally, as a pastor, Edwards' frequent use of Scripture and his appeals to personal spiritual experiences as confirming the reality of double predestination will not be unexpected. Some of the possibly "unpalatable" conclusions of Edwards' views on predestination will also be highlighted as part of the mystery surrounding his beliefs on this topic.⁹⁵

Chapter 1 will begin with an examination of Edwards' most comprehensive understanding of God's purpose for creating the world and for all that God ordains to occur in the world, including election and reprobation. I will show that Edwards had two different perspectives on God's dealings with humanity. One perspective highlights God's triune nature of perfect love, beauty, and glory as expressed through God's wonderful attributes which are revealed through God's gracious redemption of sinful creatures. God's redeemed creatures thus know, love, and rejoice

⁹⁵ Crisp, *God and Creation*, 192.

in God for all eternity, and God rejoices in their eternal happiness. The other perspective depicts an absolutely sovereign God who, for the sake of glorifying himself, has the right to predestine most of God's creatures to hell in order to demonstrate God's wrath at sin. Here, only a minimal number of elect are necessary in order to praise God's justice as they admire the eternal torment of the reprobate.

Suggestions for how these two perspectives are potentially compatible will be examined and assessed by comparing them with claims made by Edwards elsewhere in his corpus. However, the tension between these two perspectives suggests that Edwards' position on reprobation is not simply a logical deduction in the context of his larger theocentric worldview. Evidently, there must be factors beyond logic that influenced Edwards' commitment to this particular doctrine. Chapters 2–5 will examine components of Edwards' arguments related to double predestination. These will be broadly organized according to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, in the order of Reason, then Scripture, followed by Experience, and culminating with Tradition. In chapter 6, an analysis of all these factors will be undertaken in hope of determining which one(s) may have been the most decisive reason(s) for Edwards' perplexing change of mind on predestination.

Chapter 1

Predestination in Edwards' Theocentric Worldview

According to Jonathan Edwards, all of God's works are ultimately related to the reason God created the world. In this chapter I will examine Edwards' overarching beliefs about God's purpose for creation, and will discuss the role of election and reprobation as they relate to this purpose, with reference to major themes in Edwards' thought. These include his views on the glory of God, redemption, human happiness, sin, hell, and God's wrath.

The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether Edwards' views on predestination are as consistent with his overall worldview as some scholars have claimed. Incompatibilities or tensions in his thought would indicate that more factors than simple logical or philosophical consistency have influenced Edwards' views on predestination. In this chapter I will begin to identify some of these possible factors, which will be explored in more detail in subsequent chapters.

1.1 God's Purpose in Creating The World

Edwards believes that there is a purpose behind absolutely everything God has created. He asserts, "I think it would be unreasonable to suppose, that God made one atom in vain, or without any end or motive."¹ That purpose is proposed in Edwards' work "Concerning the End for Which God Created the World," which for brevity I will refer to as "End of Creation."²

Edwards begins by defining different sorts of 'ends' or purposes. An 'ultimate end' is "that which the agent seeks in what he does for its own sake; that he has respect to, as what he loves,

¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 392.

² The full title is "Dissertation I: Concerning the End for Which God Created the World," in WJE 8: 405, henceforth cited as "End of Creation." Even though "End of Creation" was written in 1754, "Edwards had been articulating the idea since 1723, if not before. See 'Miscellanies,' nos. 87, 92, and 107b in WJE 13" (Bombaro, 13n46). Bombaro claims that the idea of God's glorification through self-communication as articulated in "End of Creation," "lies at the heart of Edwards' theocentric worldview" and is the "bedrock of Edwards' vision of reality" (Bombaro, 3, 12). Marsden agrees, saying that "End of Creation" "might be seen as the logical starting point for all his thinking" (Marsden, 460). Other scholars also see this work as the center of Edwards' thought (McClymond and McDermott, 208). This makes it an ideal place to begin an examination of Edwards' worldview.

values and takes pleasure in on its own account, and not merely as a means of a further end.”³ Edwards believes that God has only one ultimate end, which God intends in all that God does, including the initial creation of the universe. Whatever it was that motivated God to create, it must have been something “that was originally agreeable to him in itself considered.”⁴ God also cannot have been moved to create by anything that God only pursues after the world was already created, such as God’s “love of justice, and hatred of injustice,” or God’s faithfulness to God’s creatures.⁵ Instead, Edwards asserts that God’s purpose for creating the world was identical to the ultimate purpose behind all of God’s acts of providence.⁶

Additionally, God cannot be said to gain happiness or completion from creating, for Edwards presupposes that God is “infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, and independently glorious and happy,” such that no creature can increase or decrease God’s happiness.⁷ Presumably, this would be because, as per Edwards’ “Discourse on the Trinity,” God is perfectly happy and glorified within himself through God’s perfect Idea of himself (i.e., the Son) and God’s perfect Love of that perfect Idea of himself (i.e., the Holy Spirit).⁸ Essentially, creation is dependent on God; God is not dependent on creation.⁹ Yet God’s purpose for creating must have been to achieve something that God infinitely valued, which God did not already possess, and which was actually attainable through creation.¹⁰

³ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 405.

⁴ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 412.

⁵ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 412–413.

⁶ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 414, 470–471.

⁷ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 420.

⁸ Edwards, “Discourse on the Trinity,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 21, Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 131.

⁹ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 420.

¹⁰ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 421, 469.

Furthermore, Edwards believes that the only thing that would be *worthy* of being God's ultimate end is God's respect or love of God's own self, for God is "infinitely the greatest and best of beings," such that "all things else, with regard to worthiness, importance and excellence, are perfectly as nothing in comparison."¹¹ The terms 'worthiness,' 'importance,' and 'excellence' are equivalent to Edwards' definition of God's 'glory.'¹² Edwards believes it would be improper for God to value things out of proportion to their nature, and thus, it is morally right for God to love, respect, and value himself and his glory more than all the rest of creation.¹³ God's glory, as God's 'ultimate end,' is thus what God seeks in all of his "actions and proceedings . . . whether creating, preserving, using, disposing, changing, or destroying."¹⁴

Edwards argues that this claim is supported by Scripture in verses where God is spoken of as the 'beginning and end' of creation or as the 'first and last,' which Edwards interprets as saying that God is the 'first cause' of the universe and also the 'last cause' (i.e., purpose) for which the universe is made.¹⁵ How then does God regard and value himself and his glory through creating the universe? What can creation possibly contribute to God if God is already self-sufficient and perfectly happy?

¹¹ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 421.

¹² Edwards says that 'glory' in Scripture "very commonly signifies excellency, or great valuableness, dignity, or worthiness of regard," which would make it a synonym for all these terms (Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 513). Or again, glory "implies the view or knowledge of God's excellency" and thus, God's honor (WJE 8: 521) and praise (WJE 8: 522), and is often identical to God's 'name' (WJE 8: 523–524). Alternatively, when applied to people, Edwards says 'glory' "is often put for a great height of happiness and prosperity and fullness of good in general" (WJE 8: 515). Edwards translates the biblical Hebrew word *kabod* and Greek word *doxa* as meaning 'heavy,' 'dense,' or 'great' (WJE 8: 513ff.). He also refers to images of light. When these are applied to God, Edwards assumes these terms are metaphors for God's internal glory: "what can be thought of, that so naturally and aptly represents the emanation of the internal glory of God; or the flowing forth, and abundant communication of that infinite fullness of good that is in God? Light is very often in Scripture put for comfort, joy, happiness and for good in general" (WJE 8: 521).

¹³ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 421–422.

¹⁴ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 424.

¹⁵ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 467. Edwards refers to Isa. 44:6, 48:12; Rev. 1:8, 1:11; and Rom. 11:36 regarding God as the 'first cause' of the universe. For God as the 'last cause' he cites Col. 1:16 and Heb. 2:10. As will be shown in the next chapter, Edwards often appeals to causality as an important part of his theological arguments.

1.2 Creation Reveals God's Attributes

Edwards argues that if God had never created anything, then certain attributes of God would never have been exercised. These include “the power of God, which is a sufficiency in him to produce great effects,” as well as God’s wisdom, prudence, justice, goodness, and truth.¹⁶ It is true that “God might have known as perfectly that he possessed these attributes, if they had never been exerted or expressed in any effect.”¹⁷ However, if these attributes are good, then it is good for them to be exercised, and “as God therefore esteems these attributes themselves valuable, and delights in them, so . . . he delights in their proper exercise and expression.”¹⁸

It is also “fit” or “proper” that these attributes of God and their exercise should be “seen by other beings besides himself,” because otherwise it is the same “as if they were not.”¹⁹ Why this matters is unclear, for surely God would still know about his own attributes. Nevertheless, Edwards returns to the claim that it is good for God’s attributes to be exercised, known, valued, and loved by God’s creatures for all eternity, partly because “existence is more worthy than defect and nonentity,” and therefore, creaturely knowledge and love of God’s attributes is the most “worthy” thing that could exist.²⁰ As a result, Edwards compares God to a “fountain” of “all possible good,” perfection, excellency, beauty, and happiness, which “is capable of communication or emanation *ad extra*” by “flowing forth” into creation when God’s attributes are known and loved by creatures.²¹

Edwards summarizes the argument he has made so far:

¹⁶ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 429.

¹⁷ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 429.

¹⁸ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 429–430. See also 437, 527.

¹⁹ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 431. He appeals to Ps. 88:10–12 (mis-referenced as 18–19); Ps. 30:9; Ps. 115:17–18, and Isa. 38:18–19 to argue that if God destroys God’s own people then God’s glory will not be perceived, or at least, not by them (WJE 8: 496, 500).

²⁰ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 431–432.

²¹ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 433. Edwards’ concept of God ‘emanating’ into creation and the philosophical/theological consequences of this will be further examined in chapter 2.

It appears reasonable to suppose that it was what God had respect to as an ultimate end of his creating the world, to communicate of his own infinite fullness of good; or rather it was his last end, that there might be a glorious and abundant emanation of his infinite fullness of good *ad extra*, or without himself, and the disposition to communicate himself or diffuse his own *fullness*, which we must conceive of as being originally in God as a perfection of his nature, was what moved him to create the world.²²

In a way, God might be compared to an artist, who has within himself the “disposition” to paint a self-portrait in order for others to view, appreciate, and rejoice in him, which pleases him. Unlike a human artist, however, God also creates viewers who eternally rejoice in God’s self-revelation.

Yet this is not a “selfish”²³ or “unworthy”²⁴ motive for God. If it is fit for God to love and value himself and his glory, then it is also fit for God to value the knowing and loving of himself and his glory by others, since a person who loves himself or herself will love being loved by others as well.²⁵ To Edwards, God’s love for himself is God’s holiness: “For a being that loves himself, necessarily loves Love to himself. If holiness in God consist chiefly in love to himself, holiness in the creature must chiefly consist in love to him. And if God loves holiness in himself, he must love it in the creature.”²⁶ So Edwards says that God delights in and values intelligent creatures having knowledge of God’s self. God also delights in creatures being holy as God is holy, where holiness means that creatures love God, which involves “an high esteem of God, admiration of his perfections, complacency in them, and praise of them,” as well as “the heart’s exalting, magnifying, or glorifying God.”²⁷ God gives the Holy Spirit to indwell his elect creatures, which enables them to spiritually perceive God.²⁸ In this way, God “communicates” God’s own knowledge of himself as well as God’s holiness (i.e., love of himself) to creatures who are

²² Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 433–434, emphasis his.

²³ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 450–451.

²⁴ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 457–458.

²⁵ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 432, 437, 455.

²⁶ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 455–456.

²⁷ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 441–442.

²⁸ This concept will be further examined in chapter 4.

designed to know and love God. Such creatures then experience God's own joy and happiness, which results from knowing and loving God.²⁹ In summary, in God's glorifying of himself, creatures receive three things: knowledge of God, love of God (i.e. holiness), and true happiness.

Edwards says that God's Law is identical to God's purpose for creating, because "his will, as a lawgiver, must agree with his will as a Creator."³⁰ Therefore, God's Law is also identical to God's glory, since Scripture "requires of men that they should desire and seek God's glory as their highest and last end in what they do."³¹ It is therefore moral creatures' duty to "fall in with" the reason they were made, which is to follow God's revealed Law.³² This means it is the elect who fulfill God's purpose for creation through their "spirit of piety and goodness."³³

²⁹ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 433, 441–442, see also WJE 8: 527–531.

³⁰ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 473. Edwards cites scriptural evidence that God's purpose in creation is God's own glory in Isa. 43:6–7, 48:11, 60:21, 61:3; Rom. 11:36 (WJE 8: 475–477); Eph. 1:5–6; John 17:10; 2 Thess. 1:10–12 (WJE 8: 478); Phil. 1:10–11; John 15:8, and more (WJE 8: 478–479).

³¹ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 481. Edwards cites verses such as 1 Cor. 10:31 and 1 Pet. 4:11. Edwards argues that Christian virtue glorifies God, citing Matt. 5:16 and 1 Pet. 2:12 (WJE 8: 479).

³² Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 473.

³³ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 473. What Edwards means by "goodness" should be clarified. At one point, Edwards says that God makes moral agents simply as "utensils" which are "good" when they "are fitted to the end they are designed for" (WJE 8: 472), which could seem to justify reprobation especially if combined with Rom. 9:22.

However, later Edwards clarifies that "the glory of God appears, by the account given in the Word of God, to be that end or event in the earnest desires of which, and in their delight in which, the best part of the moral world, and when in their best frames, do most naturally express the direct tendency of the spirit of true goodness, and give vent to the virtuous and pious affections of their heart, and do most properly and directly testify their supreme respect to their Creator" (WJE 8: 482). Edwards repeats this idea, claiming "that which is the chief end to which *good* created moral agents *in being good* are fitted, *this* is the chief end of [all] moral agents . . . and consequently of the creation in general" (WJE 8: 472, emphasis and brackets mine).

From these statements, it does not seem that Edwards is simply equating 'goodness' with 'ontological existence' or as 'suitability for its purpose,' as Aquinas sometimes does (Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, [New York: Oxford University Press, 2011], 32–33), since in these statements Edwards insists that 'goodness' is the same as moral virtue. For example, Edwards claims that what Scripture says is the "main end of the *goodness* of the *good* part of the moral world, so that the respect and relation *their virtue or goodness* has to that end, is what chiefly makes it valuable and desirable; I say, we may well suppose that to be the thing, which is God's last end in the creation of the moral world; and so . . . of the whole world" (Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 473). This is essentially the same as saying the purpose of 'good created moral agents in being good' is to know and love God. I believe this leaves no room in Edwards' thought to say that reprobates are 'good' moral agents by sinning and thus being fitted to their end of being thrown into hell for God's glory. Edwards also alludes to Paul's argument in Rom. 3:7 that even if sin leads to God's glory, it would not mean the sinner could be considered good or virtuous (Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 479–480).

Despite Edwards' earlier assertion that creation adds nothing to God's happiness, Edwards also says that "God looks on the communication of himself, and the emanation of the infinite glory and good that are in himself to belong to the fullness and completeness of himself, as though he were not in his most complete and glorious state without it."³⁴ Therefore, "the glory of God is a thing that is actually the result and consequence of the creation of the world. And from what has been already observed, it appears that 'tis what God seeks as good, valuable and excellent in himself."³⁵ Yet Edwards tries to avoid implying that God actually *gets* something out of creation, by insisting that in reality, the joy that God receives from creation is *the same* joy that God had in himself all along.³⁶ This raises the question of why God would create at all, other than to exercise God's attributes. Regardless of whether Edwards' ideas about the reason for God's creation of the world are deemed persuasive, these provide the overall framework within which Edwards' thoughts about election and reprobation need to be understood.

1.3 Reprobation in Edwards' Theocentric Worldview

Based on the aforementioned discussion, election is thoroughly compatible with Edwards' claim that God created the world of intelligent creatures to know and love God, resulting in creatures becoming both holy and truly happy. This is certainly the destiny of the elect in heaven. It is more difficult, however, to understand how reprobation is compatible with such a scheme. John J. Bombaro has suggested several explanations for how Edwards may have believed that reprobation was consistent with his theocentric worldview. I will examine these explanations to determine whether tensions and contradictions remain in Edwards' thought regarding reprobation. Additionally, if in the course of this examination it appears that there is no reason that God *must* create any reprobate at all according to Edwards' worldview, then it becomes more likely that the reason Edwards believed in double predestination stemmed from something beyond a consistent following of the implications of his theocentric understanding of reality.

³⁴ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 439.

³⁵ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 492.

³⁶ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 446.

First, Bombaro suggests there is a possibility that Edwards thought the reprobate bring glory to God simply by existing as images of God, thus reflecting God's beauty to some extent. This reflection is not found in the reprobates' moral virtue, but rather is found in their inherent mental structure which reflects God's nature.³⁷ God's reflection appears in the reprobate in two ways: 1) the reprobates' disposition of 'self-love,' and 2) the reprobates' psychological makeup.

In the first way, Edwards believed that all humans have a disposition to love themselves, which is why we desire our own continued existence and happiness. Human self-love thus reflects God's own self-love.³⁸ In the second way, Edwards believed there is an image or echo of the Trinity in human psychology, for he believed that humans are composed of three parts: being, mind, and will. These components are comparable to the Trinity, understood as God the Father (i.e., God's being), the Son (i.e., God's knowledge of himself), and the Holy Spirit (i.e., God's will or love of himself).³⁹ However, I believe these two creaturely reflections of God's nature cannot explain the role of the reprobate in Edwards' thought, for if the reprobate reflect God's nature (and thus God's glory) in these two ways, then so do the elect. Therefore, reprobates being made in the image of God does not bring any unique glory to God's triune self which could explain why God would choose to create them *qua* reprobate.

³⁷ Bombaro, 14.

³⁸ Bombaro, 150–152. Bombaro says "self-love is part of the very essence of human being. 'Being's consent to its own being' is synonymous with being disposed to be, or being loving existence, or (which is the same thing) the self-love of a human being" (Bombaro, 152, referring to Edwards, "The Mind," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 6, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008], 337). Then, "excellence" or "love" occurs as human beings have a mental disposition to consent to "being," such that "excellence, in terms of intelligent existence, is in fact the truest sense in which man exists as the image of God" (Bombaro, 152). Stephen Daniel also argues that Edwards thought that self-love is not just affection for oneself, but arises necessarily from an intelligent perceiving being's existence (Stephen H. Daniel, *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards: A Study in Divine Semiotics* [Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994], 183).

See more in Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 381, where Edwards says, "when God made man at first, he implanted in him two kinds of principles. There was an inferior kind, which may be called natural, being the principles of mere human nature; such as self-love . . . in which his love to his own liberty, honor and pleasure, were exercised." Edwards makes no mention of love of self-existence here, but presumably, to love one's happiness and pleasure likely involves a desire to preserve one's own existence insofar as it enables these things.

³⁹ Bombaro, 153, referring to Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21: 113–114, 121, and "Miscellanies," no. 362, in WJE 13: 435. See also Bombaro, 164–166 where he refers to Edwards, "Miscellanies," nos. 259 and 308 in WJE 13: 367 and 392–393.

Furthermore, if it is God's purpose to create more images of himself, then it would seem that the elect reflect the image of God far more accurately than the reprobate do. Edwards himself believes that it was only when Adam had both a self-love principle *and* the indwelling Holy Spirit as the principle of supernatural love for God that Adam was holy, and thus, truly reflected the image of God.⁴⁰ If God is glorified by having a greater number of accurate echoes of God's image in the universe, then it would seem that God should create only the elect, who know and love God through Christ and the Holy Spirit, and who act in holy ways just as God does.⁴¹

Bombaro suggests another way that the reprobate may glorify God. If God wants intelligent beings to perceive God's handiwork in creation and providence, then perhaps the reprobate, through perceiving the world during their earthly lives, thus perceive something of God's glory and beauty, and thereby fulfill God's purpose.⁴² But again, this means that *any* intelligent creature would fulfill God's purpose, including the elect. Moreover, if Bombaro's claim were true, then the value ascribed to any creature by God would depend on how *accurately or truthfully* that creature perceives God through creation or providence.⁴³ Because the reprobate lack the disposition of the Holy Spirit, they do not have the spiritual perception that enables the elect to see God's glory in everything, and so the reprobate perceive *much less* of God than the elect do.⁴⁴ This lack of spiritual perception leads reprobate minds to make improper and incorrect

⁴⁰ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 381–382. Bombaro himself says, “holiness in man is man’s ineffably profound fitness to image forth God’s glorious being through everlasting knowledge, joy, and happiness in God” (Bombaro, 204). Pauw agrees that to Edwards, “God’s perfect knowledge and love are extended beyond the society of the Trinity into the world through the indwelling of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of believers” (Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 86).

⁴¹ Echoing Lev. 11:45, 20:26 and 1 Pet. 1:15–16.

⁴² Bombaro, 15; see also 114, 137, 186–188.

⁴³ Bombaro, 16, see more on 64–65, and 219–220 where Bombaro refers to Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 777 in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 18, The “Miscellanies,” Entry Nos. 501–832*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 428.

⁴⁴ Edwards appeals to 1 Cor. 2:14; 1 John 3:6; 3 John 11; John 6:40; John 14:19; Matt. 11:27, and more to say that the reprobate cannot truly see God (Edwards, *Religious Affections, Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 2*, ed. Paul Ramsey [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008], 270). See more about the reprobates’ lack of perception of God in Bombaro, 22–23, 44–46, 49–51, 64–65, 219, 221. Edwards’ sermon “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate” in WJE 14: 67–96 is also very applicable, as well as

connections between ideas and reality, especially regarding the reality of God's existence and glory.⁴⁵ While Romans 1 suggests that the reprobate can perceive something of God through nature, Edwards says that they suppress and reject what they do see as untrue, as per Romans 1:18.⁴⁶ Additionally, even if the reprobate can perceive the natural beauty of creation, they do not see the reality of God behind it, nor glorify God for it.⁴⁷

Bombaro proposes other sources of divine revelation that the reprobate might have access to.⁴⁸ These could include faint recollections of divine revelation which have been passed down from ancient sources such as Adam or the biblical patriarchs.⁴⁹ However, Edwards also held the belief that God specifically *withdrew* the clearest divine revelation or 'external' call to salvation from the 'heathen' nations as a form of divine judgment upon them.⁵⁰ This raises questions regarding how well these other sources of revelation can actually reveal God to the reprobate, if God specifically intends for the reprobate to be deprived of God's revelation as a punishment. I believe one must conclude that without spiritual perception, the reprobate do not seem able to

his later "A Divine and Supernatural Light" in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 17, Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, ed. Mark Valeri (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 408–426.

⁴⁵ Bombaro, 51–52, referring to Edwards, "The Mind," nos. 10, 15, and 71 in WJE 6: 342, 344–345, 385.

⁴⁶ Bombaro, 65. Bombaro refers to Edwards' sermon "Nakedness of Job," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 10, Sermons and Discourses 1720–1723*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 406 where Edwards claims that unregenerate people do not perceive the "reality" of death, for if they did, they would act differently. So even if Edwards allowed that nature is full of 'types' which communicate things of God to the elect, the reprobate are blind to these types (Bombaro, 68, referring to Edwards, "Types of the Messiah," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 11, Typological Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, Mason I. Lowance Jr., and David H. Watters [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008], 192). Here in "Types of the Messiah" Edwards does imply that the types are made for God's people, but he does not mention the reprobates' 'blindness' per se. More on the effects of spiritual perception or lack thereof will be discussed in chapter 4, section 4.1.

⁴⁷ Bombaro, 64–65, 223.

⁴⁸ Bombaro suggests other possible sources of divine revelation open to all people including: time, reason/reflection, society/community, and history (Bombaro, 189, 204, 219, 221–224, 286).

⁴⁹ Yet people in non-Christian cultures, despite having access to some truths of divine revelation handed down from ancient sources such as Adam or the patriarchs, have denied or distorted these truths through their unregenerate reason (Bombaro, 262, citing Edwards, "Miscellanies," nos. 959, 986, and 1020 in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 20, The "Miscellanies," 833–1152*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008], 239, 309–311, 351).

⁵⁰ Bombaro, 269–270, 276, 278–280.

fulfill God's purpose for intelligent beings to perceive God's attributes or glory, at least during the reprobates' earthly lives.

Yet what about the reprobates' perception of God in eternity? Edwards says that God will make the reprobate perceive God's 'natural' attributes at the final judgment and in hell for all eternity, and thus Edwards claims this will cause the reprobate to see some aspects of God's 'glory,'⁵¹ such as God's "perfect hatred and wrathful power."⁵² This perception will finally seem 'real' to them, because as summarized by Bombaro, "the Spirit of God makes the minds of separated souls in hell more acute, like 'lightning,' that they may experience unencumbered and precise sensations of mind."⁵³ However, this possibility raises the question of whether the perception of

⁵¹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 263–264.

⁵² Bombaro, 223, referring to Edwards, "Heaven is a World of Love," in WJE 8: 390.

⁵³ Bombaro, 226. Bombaro claims that in hell, the reprobate will be given some sort of "spiritual sight and knowledge" by the Holy Spirit so that this punishment will at least "seem real" to them (Bombaro, 226, referring to Edwards, "The Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable and Intolerable," in *Banner-Works 2*: 79. This sermon is available in Edward Hickman, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards With A Memoir by Sereno Dwight*, Vol. 2 [Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974], 78–80, accessed Mar. 17, 2021, beginning from https://ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works2/works2/Page_78.html). Additionally, Bombaro argues, "the Spirit acts not only upon the reprobate, but also in them. Edwards . . . repeatedly speaks of the non-covenantal, non-regenerative influence of the Spirit upon the 'natural sensibilities' of natural-men and reprobates during times of revival. The same idea carries over in hell but with an intensification of sensibility for the damned not sporadically, but for all eternity" (Bombaro, 230, referring to Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 206–9, 215, 220, and Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 662 in WJE 18: 200).

Yet it would seem that this influence of the Holy Spirit on the reprobate in hell is not true 'spiritual perception' according to Edwards, for otherwise the reprobate would finally see God's loveliness and excellency and would love God and holiness; see the effects of true 'spiritual perception' in chapter 4, in contrast with how Edwards says the reprobate will continue to sin in hell (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 426). Also, if the reprobate did gain real 'spiritual perception' and truly saw God's glory, then it would cause them to love God just as it does for the elect, but presumably, the reprobate would remain in hell. If so, then ironically the reprobate would demonstrate what was later considered to be the peak of Puritan piety: the idea that one should be willing to be sent to hell for God's glory. Bombaro refers to Samuel Hopkins' pamphlet *A Dialogue between A Calvinist and Semi-Calvinists in Sketches of the life of the late Rev. Samuel Hopkins* as one major source of this idea (Bombaro, 170, see also Joseph A. Conforti, "Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity: Theology, Ethics, and Social Reform in Eighteenth-Century New England," in Scheick, 229–230). This absurdity indicates that no matter what the reprobate might perceive of God in hell, it is highly unlikely that Edwards believed they would perceive God's true glory, which is God's beauty or excellency, and thus, as per my argument here, the reprobate are useless to serve God's purposes of glorifying himself in this way.

As a historical comment, it should be noted that the concept of being willing to be sent to hell for God's glory was not just a Puritan idea. It was found also in the Abelardians, Madame Guyon, Abbe Fenelon, and may have connections to Protestant "rigorists" like Martin Luther and John Calvin, who were suspicious of appealing to self-love to motivate people to seek eternal happiness in heaven, unlike Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, and Nathaniel Taylor (Douglas A. Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* [New

God's 'natural' attributes alone is sufficient to fulfill God's purpose for creating the reprobate.

Edwards appears to answer in the negative:

This shows the glory of all God's works, both of creation and providence: for 'tis the special glory of them, that God's holiness, righteousness, faithfulness and goodness are so manifested in them; and *without these moral perfections, there would be no glory in that power and skill with which they are wrought*. The glorifying of God's moral perfections, is the special end of all the works of God's hands.⁵⁴

As shown in this excerpt, without any sense of God's 'moral' attributes, such as God's goodness, holiness, righteousness, and faithfulness, Edwards believes that there is *no* sense of God's glory or beauty. Edwards clearly admits that the most beautiful aspect of God is God's moral attribute of holiness, because without this, there would be no goodness found in any of the rest of God's attributes: "A true love to God must begin with a delight in his holiness, and not with a delight in any other attribute; for *no other attribute is truly lovely without this*."⁵⁵ No other attribute besides God's moral beauty will cause someone to love or glorify God.⁵⁶ Edwards cites many biblical verses which suggest that God's glory is specifically found in Christ, whose glory is seen only through the spiritual perception that is given to the elect.⁵⁷ Thus, whatever perception of God the reprobate might have in hell, they do not see *anything* of God's true spiritual glory or beauty, and

York: Oxford University Press, 2003], 115–116; Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion, With Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950], 271–275). An echo of this idea may perhaps be found in Rom. 9:3.

⁵⁴ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 273, emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 257, emphasis mine. Edwards argues that unless a person sees God's moral beauty, they effectively see nothing and know nothing of God, and are as good as blind, deaf, and dead. (Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 274).

⁵⁶ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 264.

⁵⁷ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 271. Bombaro admits that "since, in Edwards, only Christ possesses full and acceptable knowledge of God and the Spirit right love of God, then anyone who affectionally cognizes the beauty of God must participate in His essential love and knowledge of Himself, that is, they must have ontological union with God in Christ through the Spirit" (Bombaro, 49, see also 65). The reprobate who lack the disposition of the Holy Spirit are therefore "devoid" of any ideas of God's excellency (Bombaro, 51–52). At one point Bombaro clearly says that "intelligent creatures are useless unless their end is 'to behold [later, 'perceive'] and admire . . . God'" (Bombaro, 47 citing Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. gg in WJE 13: 185). The only way that Bombaro could prevent this statement from contradicting his overall argument about the role of the reprobate in Edwards' thought would be to split up 'perceive' from 'admire,' so that while all beings perceive God, only some (the elect) admire God.

therefore, they do not truly know or love God.⁵⁸ This means the reprobate cannot glorify God, and thus, they cannot fulfill God's purpose for creating the world, according to Edwards.⁵⁹

Edwards even admits that "God is glorified not only by his glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in, *when those that see it delight in it: God is more glorified than if they only see it*; his glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart."⁶⁰

Therefore, God's maximal glory should be achieved when all intelligent creatures both know *and* love God, and so Bombaro's argument for the role of reprobation in Edwards' thought seems to be refuted by Edwards himself. Why Edwards would believe that God should create any creatures who either do not fully know God or do not love God is thus quite perplexing.

Thus far, the place for reprobation in Edwards' worldview is not clear. But perhaps reprobation could be explained as a consistent part of his worldview if Edwards believed that it revealed a necessary part of God's beauty and glory, without which God would not be fully glorified.

1.4 God's Glory Is God's Beauty

Edwards asserts that "God's nature, or the divinity, is infinitely excellent; yea 'tis infinite beauty, brightness, *and glory itself*."⁶¹ This raises several questions: what is it about God's nature that is glorious? What is it that makes God worthy of being loved and delighted in by the elect? And is

⁵⁸ Roland André Delattre says that Edwards thought 'natural men' without the disposition of the Holy Spirit could see God's moral attributes, but they would not see them as beautiful or loveable (Delattre, "Beauty and Theology: A Reappraisal of Jonathan Edwards," in Scheick, 144–145, referring to Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 263–264). Yet, to Edwards, God's 'beauty' is God's glory (as shown in the next section) and so unless the reprobate perceive these attributes as beautiful, God is not glorified by them. Delattre agrees (Delattre, 146).

⁵⁹ One might argue that the reprobate and the elect are not the same sort of creature and so are not created for the same end. Holmes has argued that defining humanity teleologically would mean that because the elect and reprobate are created for different ends, then the reprobate would not be the same sort of human as the elect (Holmes, 156–157, 159). However, "it can never be legitimate theologically to suggest that there are two humanities" (169). Indeed, Edwards specifically ties the joy of the elect to the fact that the reprobate in hell are the same "species" as the elect, thus making the elect more grateful for their salvation (Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 279 in WJE 13: 379). Therefore, Edwards cannot say that the elect and reprobate are entirely different types of creature, and he should affirm that both are made for the same 'end' of knowing and loving God. This is the impression one gets from reading "End of Creation," where reprobation and God's judgment on sin are entirely absent until 85 pages in. There is no hint until that point that Edwards is only talking about God's purpose for the elect.

⁶⁰ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 448 in WJE 13: 495, emphasis mine.

⁶¹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 242, emphasis mine.

there any way that God might require the existence of reprobate intelligent creatures in order to fully reveal God's glory/beauty? After all, thus far, it seems that God should create only the elect, who will know and love God and fulfill God's purpose for creation.

It is argued that beauty is "fundamental to Edwards' understanding of divine being."⁶² Edwards believed that physical beauty is based upon relations or proportions.⁶³ For example, a piece of music or architecture appears beautiful because of the complex proportionate relationships between its parts.⁶⁴ In contrast, randomness and disproportionate relationships are perceived as ugly.⁶⁵ Furthermore, a greater number of complex proportions results in greater beauty.⁶⁶ For example, a piece of classical music has more complex relationships among the notes than a child's nursery rhyme does. This understanding of physical beauty as proportionate relationships seems to be the basis for Edwards' theory of 'spiritual beauty.'⁶⁷

⁶² Delattre, 136.

⁶³ He says that physical beauty "consists in 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." (Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 561–562). It is suggested that Edwards adopted this idea of 'excellency' or beauty from the Third Earl of Shaftesbury who wrote: "all excellency is harmony, symmetry or proportion" (Bombaro, 59, referring to Shaftesbury, *Characteristiks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Vol. 2 [London, 1711], 12). Delattre notes that Edwards' emphasis on beauty may have come from his Puritan tradition which was "rich in resources for just such a development by virtue of Puritanism's unprecedented stress on immediate experience and its aesthetic and even sensual vocabulary for expressing that experience" (Delattre, 142). Edwards was personally moved by physical beauty, as will be discussed in chapter 4. Edwards' philosophy of beauty will also be further examined in chapter 2.

⁶⁴ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 565.

⁶⁵ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 567–568.

⁶⁶ Edwards asserts "the greater the variety is, in equal uniformity, the greater the beauty: which is no more than to say, the more there are of different mutually agreeing things, the greater is the beauty. And the reason of that is because 'tis more considerable to have many things consent one with another than a few only" (Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 562–563). See also Edwards, "The Mind," in WJE 6: 333–334 where he compares 'simple' beauty with 'complex' beauty. Delattre notes that Edwards believed his understanding of beauty was "objective," not "subjective" (Delattre, 139), yet Edwards' claim about complex beauty being greater than simple beauty does indeed appear to be subjective, for some people find simplicity more beautiful than complexity.

⁶⁷ Edwards, "The Mind," in WJE 6: 332–338. Despite calling physical beauty 'secondary' beauty (whereas moral or spiritual beauty is 'primary' beauty), it seems that the basis for Edwards' claims about 'primary' spiritual beauty are actually his observations about 'secondary' physical beauty. Edwards theorizes 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

Spiritual beauty, ‘virtue,’ or ‘excellency’ arises from ‘proportionate’ relationships, which are defined by the “consent of being to being” where “the more the consent is, and the more extensive, the greater is the excellency.”⁶⁸ “Consent,” has the same meaning as “love,”⁶⁹ according to Edwards’ theology of the Trinity. Edwards asserts that “one alone, without any reference to any more, cannot be excellent; for in such case there can be no manner of relation no way, and therefore, no such thing as consent.”⁷⁰ “Therefore, if God is excellent, there must be a plurality in God; otherwise, there can be no consent in him.”⁷¹ Indeed, Edwards says the fact that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) “shows that there are more persons than one in the Deity: for it shows love to be essential and necessary to the Deity, so that his nature consists in it.”⁷² As a result of these claims, it is clear that the concepts of proportionate relationships, consent, love, beauty, excellency, and glory are all nearly identical in Edwards’ thought.

Similar to Edwards’ claim about physical beauty, spiritual beauty increases when there are a greater number of loving relationships among beings. This idea relates to his argument that virtuous ethical behavior involves loving all other beings that exist, for this results in the greatest number of loving relationships possible, and thus, the most spiritual beauty.⁷³ Edwards defines

them a sense of spiritual beauty” (Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 565). See also footnote 63 above.

As shown here, Edwards does seem to extrapolate from physical beauty to spiritual beauty, and not vice-versa (contra Bombaro, 61). Terms such as “harmony,” “symmetry,” or “proportion” primarily refer to physical features which can be extended metaphorically as the ‘harmony’ of peaceful relationships or the ‘proportion’ of loving others who love us (Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 568–569). However, these metaphors only make sense to us because we are already familiar with the physical reality of symmetry or the audible experience of harmony. Edwards even seems to admit this in Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 203 in WJE 11: 125–126. Therefore, even if God created physical beauty as an example of the spiritual beauty of love, it seems that Edwards’ theory was derived first from his views of physical beauty (Clyde A. Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature: An Interpretative Essay* [Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1987], 47–48, 53, 117). However, Edwards notes that just because someone appreciates physical beauty, it does not guarantee that they will appreciate spiritual beauty, and vice versa (Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 573–574).

⁶⁸ Bombaro, 60, quoting from Edwards, “The Mind,” in WJE 6: 336.

⁶⁹ Bombaro, 60–62; Delattre, 139.

⁷⁰ Edwards, “The Mind,” in WJE 6: 337.

⁷¹ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 117 in WJE 13: 284.

⁷² Edwards, “Discourse on the Trinity,” in WJE 21: 113–114.

⁷³ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 540, 548–549.

‘love’ as “that affection or propensity of the heart to any being, which causes it to incline to its well-being, or disposes it to desire and take pleasure in its happiness.”⁷⁴ Love for a smaller group of people, while having the appearance of virtue, is not truly virtuous if it causes someone to hate or oppose the well-being of others.⁷⁵ For example, in war, individuals’ love for their own people or country can lead them to desire the destruction of others, and thus, this love is not truly virtuous.⁷⁶ Edwards’ theory of spiritual beauty would seem to imply that God is beautiful because, in addition to God’s beautiful intra-trinitarian relationships, God also loves all created

⁷⁴ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 542. It should be noted that Edwards defines two types of love: love of ‘benevolence’ and love of ‘complacence.’ The definition given above is for ‘love of benevolence,’ which is love that is given without considering a being’s spiritual beauty or true virtue, whereas ‘love of complacence’ is defined as love for a being because of that being’s spiritual beauty or true virtue (WJE 8: 543). Love of complacence is not relevant for my discussion of spiritual beauty in God or the elect because Edwards argues “it is a plain inconsistency to suppose that virtue primarily consists in any love to its object for its beauty” (WJE 8: 543–544). Indeed, it is only love for ‘Being in general’ (i.e., love of benevolence) that is the cause of spiritual beauty/true virtue in any being, which would form a ground for love of complacence to be exercised toward that being (WJE 8: 547–548).

One might question Edwards’ definition of love vis-à-vis Scripture, which portrays love as involving self-sacrifice, such as in John 3:16, 15:13, 1 John 4:10, Gal. 2:20, and Eph. 5:25. These verses are cited by Edwards in “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 504–505, but only as proof that God’s purpose in creating and creaturely happiness are identical. In *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 354, Edwards also mentions 1 John 4:10, but only as proof that humanity needs a savior. His sermon “Love, the Sum of All Virtue,” in WJE 8 is based on 1 Cor. 13:1–3 (where this verse seems to distinguish between love and self-sacrifice), and argues that love is a “divine temper” in the heart, produced by the Holy Spirit (WJE 8: 133), which leads to certain actions such as obeying, honoring, trusting God (WJE 8: 134), character traits of gratitude and humility (WJE 8: 134–135), and towards neighbors, duty, justice, honor, truth, meekness, gentleness, etc. (WJE 8: 135–136), summed up as treating others as we would want to be treated (WJE 8: 136–139). A brief mention of self-sacrifice with reference to 1 John 3:16–19 is also made in this sermon (WJE 8: 142), but without detailed comment. God’s love for Christ and Christ’s love for God are also discussed here, but mostly in terms of Christ honoring God through obedient suffering, and God honoring Christ by appointing him authority (WJE 8: 144). Finally, Rom. 5:7–8 and John 15:13 are cited as examples of God’s love for the elect, but again, without much comment (WJE 8: 144–145). Love for enemies is mentioned near the very end of this sermon in reference to Matt. 5:44 (WJE 8: 147). Another sermon by Edwards titled “Long-Suffering and Kindness” cites several further verses about doing good to all people (WJE 8: 210). Therefore, Edwards was evidently aware of these verses, but they do not appear to have influenced his definition of love. Indeed, as will be shown in chapter 2, these verses seem to conflict with his ethical philosophy, which argues that those who are opposed to God deserve to be hated instead of loved.

⁷⁵ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 540. This is an ethical application of Edwards’ distinction between ‘general’ and ‘particular’ beauty. ‘Particular’ beauty means a thing is beautiful when considered only in a limited context, but ‘general’ beauty means that a thing “appears beautiful when viewed most perfectly, comprehensively and universally, with regard to all its tendencies, and its connections with everything it stands related to.” Thus, ‘general’ beauty is greater than ‘particular’ beauty, which can be “very discordant and disagreeable” when considered with respect to the whole (WJE 8: 540).

⁷⁶ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 611.

beings and desires their well-being and happiness.⁷⁷ If so, then why would God predestine anyone to hell?

A possible answer may also be found in reference to Edwards' theory of beauty. When considering physical beauty, Edwards notes that the achievement of a greater number of proportionate relationships—and thus more 'complex' or greater beauty—may require the omission of some 'simple' or lesser beauties. For example, although symmetry is an instance of beauty, artists sometimes sacrifice symmetry for greater complexity which produces overall greater beauty.⁷⁸ It is this idea that has inspired Bombaro's claim that in Edwards' thought the reprobate represent unavoidable "irregularities" or "deformities" within God's beautifully complex being.⁷⁹ Supposedly, this means that for God's beautiful character to be completely revealed, God must demonstrate God's wrath and hatred of sin, and thus reprobation and hell are necessary for God's complete glorification.⁸⁰ Without revealing such "complexities" of God's character, God would not be perceived as maximally beautiful or glorious.⁸¹ For example, Edwards says "'tis necessary that God's awful majesty, his authority and dreadful greatness, justice and holiness should be manifested. But this could not be unless sin and punishment had been decreed. . . . The shining forth of God's glory would be very imperfect . . . without them."⁸² Therefore, even if it would be 'beautiful' for God to save everyone, doing so would prevent God from revealing God's true, full, complex beauty, which would mean that God would not fully achieve God's purpose of having all of God's attributes be seen and loved eternally by the elect. This, then, is supposedly why Edwards believed that God chooses to predestine some people to

⁷⁷ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 542.

⁷⁸ Edwards, "The Mind," in WJE 6: 334.

⁷⁹ Bombaro, 178–179. Yet Bombaro does not cite a specific source from Edwards where either these terms or this claim may be found. Bombaro admits that this claim that God needs "irregularities" or "deformities" within God's character is "shocking," given Edwards' Reformed background, yet Bombaro notes that Edwards' idea is similar to the views of both Augustine and Aquinas, who said that even if some state of affairs can be judged as 'good' overall, it might not be 'good' in every detail (Bombaro, 179).

⁸⁰ Bombaro, 179, 223–224.

⁸¹ Bombaro, 179, 208.

⁸² Bombaro, 208; Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 348 in WJE 13: 419–420.

hell. Although this argument may initially seem plausible, Edwards has two further explanations regarding what makes God beautiful, and each of these show that in Edwards' scheme there should be no need for reprobation in order to fully reveal God's beauty/glory to the elect.

1.4.1 First Explanation of God's Beauty: The Conjunction of Christ's Attributes

Let us return to the explanation Edwards gives in "End of Creation," that God is glorified when the elect see and know God's attributes, and that this makes the elect truly happy. Presumably, this means that *all* of God's attributes must be revealed to the elect in order for God to be *fully* glorified and for the elect to be *most* happy. In this same line of thought, Edwards' first explanation of God's beauty claims that God's beauty derives from the particular combination of diverse attributes which exist in God's character. One example of this appears in Edwards' sermon "The Excellency of Christ." Here, Edwards says that Christ is glorious due to his "admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies" which normally appear to be "incompatible," in the sense of both existing within the same subject and/or both being exercised toward humanity.⁸³

Some combinations of such attributes include: infinite greatness and infinite condescension; infinite justice and infinite mercy; infinite glory and infinite humility; infinite majesty and "transcendent meekness"; being infinitely worthy of love yet patient under undue suffering; obedience and supreme domination; absolute sovereignty and perfect resignation; self-sufficiency and perfect trust in God.⁸⁴ Additionally, these attributes amplify one another, so that God's goodness makes God's greatness become "glorious and adorable," whereas God's greatness makes God's goodness even more valued.⁸⁵ Similarly, God's "condescension and compassions endear his majesty, power, and dominion, and render those attributes pleasant, that

⁸³ Edwards, "The Excellency of Christ," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 19, Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, ed. M. X. Lesser (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 565.

⁸⁴ Edwards, "The Excellency of Christ," in WJE 19: 566–572.

⁸⁵ Edwards, "The Excellency of Christ," in WJE 19: 588.

would otherwise be only terrible.”⁸⁶ Edwards believes that it is impossible to invent any better combination of attributes, for Christ’s character already includes everything that a Christian could wish for.⁸⁷ It is this combination of attributes that, to Edwards, makes Christ worthy of love,⁸⁸ and presumably, beautiful and glorious. This definition of Christ’s beauty is consistent with Edwards’ earlier proposal that beauty is greatest when there are the greatest number of proportionate relationships—in this case, relationships among Christ’s diverse attributes.

Presumably, in accord with this view, predestination would show a conjunction of Christ’s self-sacrificing love for the elect, juxtaposed with his infinite and terrible wrath at the reprobate. However, what if there were some other way that these attributes could be revealed? In *Religious Affections*, Edwards argues that Christ’s death manifests all of God’s attributes most clearly and perfectly:

The *glory and beauty* of the blessed Jehovah, which is most worthy in itself, to be the object of our admiration and love, is there exhibited in *the most affecting manner that can be conceived of*, as it appears shining in all its luster, in the face of an incarnate, infinitely loving, meek, compassionate, dying Redeemer. *All the virtues of the Lamb of God, his humility, patience, meekness, submission, obedience, love and compassion, are exhibited to our view, in a manner the most tending to move our affections, of any that can be imagined*; as they all had their greatest trial, and their *highest exercise*, and so their *brightest manifestation*, when he was in the most affecting circumstances; even when he was under his last sufferings, those unutterable and unparalleled sufferings, he endured, from his tender love and pity to us. *There also, the hateful nature of our sins is manifested in the most affecting manner possible*; as we see the dreadful effects of them, in what our Redeemer, who undertook to answer for us, suffered for them. And there we have *the most affecting manifestations of God’s hatred of sin, and his wrath and justice in punishing it*; as we see his justice in the strictness and inflexibleness of it, and his wrath in its terribleness, in so dreadfully punishing our sins, in One who was infinitely dear to him, and loving to us.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” in WJE 19: 589.

⁸⁷ Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” in WJE 19: 585–588.

⁸⁸ Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” in WJE 19: 588.

⁸⁹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 123–124, emphasis mine. This line of thought can also be seen in Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 777 in WJE 18: 430.

It seems then that there should be no need for hell or reprobation to glorify the attributes of God's justice, wrath, and hatred of sin, if these have been already demonstrated in "the most affecting manner possible" on the cross.⁹⁰ Some have argued that Edwards thought that hell is still necessary because the cross was a temporary event, and God's attributes must be demonstrated *eternally*.⁹¹ However, it would seem that the cross will indeed be eternally demonstrated to the elect through Christ continuing to bear its wounds in his resurrected body.⁹² Edwards affirms that in heaven the saints will be even more "affected" than they are now when they contemplate God's perfections and works, of which Christ's death is the pinnacle.⁹³ Edwards specifically says that God's work of redemption which reveals God's love will be eternally contemplated, praised, and discussed by the saints and angels in heaven.⁹⁴

Therefore, it seems implausible that the elect would ever forget that the reason they are in heaven is because of Christ's death for them, which, whenever they consider it, would bring to mind God's love, mercy, and justice, as well as God's hatred and wrath at sin, and all those attributes which Edwards asserts are shown in Christ's death. This would then inspire their eternal praise and love of God. As a result, the elect should have no need for a vision of hell, which would only be less affecting than contemplating the death of Christ.⁹⁵

One further objection to the cross being sufficient to demonstrate God's attributes of wrath and

⁹⁰ Holmes also makes the point that if the judgment of God on sin and the horror of hell must be seen, then Christ's death on the cross and descent into hell should provide enough of a demonstration (Holmes, 234). Edwards may hint at this idea in a sermon when he says that in Christ's death, God demonstrated God's full resentment at sin "as much as if the sinner was eternally damned" (Edwards, "None Are Saved by Their Own Righteousness," in WJE 14: 336).

⁹¹ Bombaro, 224, referring to Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 662 in WJE 18: 200. See also Bombaro, 227 and Davidson, "Glorious Damnation," 817.

⁹² As per John 20:27, Luke 24:39, and Rev. 5:6. Holmes agrees with this idea (Holmes, 234).

⁹³ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 130.

⁹⁴ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 777 in WJE 18: 431.

⁹⁵ A further reply could be made by referring to Edwards' philosophy of idealism, more of which will be discussed in chapter 2. In this view, all reality is composed of God's thoughts, and God thinks the same thoughts eternally. If this is so, then Christ *does* experience the Cross eternally in God's mind, which defines reality. An eternal hell is therefore unnecessary for God to eternally exercise God's attributes. A similar claim could be made, minus the idealism, if one argues that God exists outside of time and thus experiences and acts in all of history simultaneously.

justice may be the claim that in double predestination, Christ only experiences God's wrath for the elect.⁹⁶ This would mean that the remainder of God's wrath would have to be demonstrated or satisfied in hell by being poured out on the reprobate themselves. Yet, this too seems unnecessary in Edwards' view, for at one point Edwards admits that "there is merit enough in Christ to purchase heavenly happiness for millions of millions, for all men that ever were, are, or shall be."⁹⁷ So it does not seem that Edwards thought that Christ's death was insufficient to fully demonstrate God's wrath at sin or God's justice in punishing sinners, if it was sufficient to theoretically save everyone. Therefore, it seems that at this point in Edwards' thought, hell and reprobation are unnecessary for the full and eternal revelation of God's attributes.

1.4.2 Second Explanation of God's Beauty: God's Perfect Triune Love and Holiness

A confirmation of the claim that hell and reprobation are unnecessary for God to be fully glorified in Edwards' thought can be also demonstrated through a further explanation of God's spiritual beauty. This alternate perspective in Edwards' thought eliminates the need for God to eternally display a variety of diverse attributes at all.

Edwards defines God's spiritual beauty as God's virtue, which "must consist primarily in love to himself, or in the mutual love and friendship which subsists eternally and necessarily between the several persons in the Godhead, or that infinitely strong propensity there is in these divine persons one to another."⁹⁸ In his "Discourse on the Trinity," Edwards discusses God as God exists in God's intra-trinitarian self. God consists of God's own being (i.e., the Father), God's perfect idea/knowledge/understanding of himself (i.e., the Son), and God's perfect love/delight for that perfect idea of himself (i.e., the Holy Spirit).⁹⁹ Because in Edwards' philosophy of idealism a perfect idea of a thing effectively *becomes* that thing, God's eternally perfect idea of

⁹⁶ Bombaro, 224.

⁹⁷ Edwards, "The Many Mansions," in WJE 19: 739.

⁹⁸ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 557.

⁹⁹ Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21: 131.

himself and God's love for himself eternally generates the Son and the Spirit, who are "substantial ideas" and thus "truly God," for "that which is the express perfect image of God, and in every respect like him, is God to all intents and purposes, because there is nothing wanting."¹⁰⁰ As Strobel explains, "the Father gazes upon himself, or his perfect idea (Son) and the Son gazes back, spirating perfect happiness (Holy Spirit)."¹⁰¹ Thus, Edwards can say that love is "essential and necessary to the Deity, so that his nature consists in it."¹⁰²

Furthermore, because Edwards assents to the *actus purus* theory, where in God "there is no distinction of substance and act, but it is wholly substance and wholly act,"¹⁰³ Edwards proposes that the "eternal and most perfect and essential act of the divine nature, wherein the Godhead acts to an infinite degree and in the most perfect manner possible" is when "the divine essence itself flows out and is as it were breathed forth in love and joy."¹⁰⁴ Thus, to Edwards, God's most perfect, essential, and infinite act is love, whether within the Trinity, or in God's relationship to creatures. As long as this love is revealed, God's entire will and being is revealed.

Additionally, there are no other real 'attributes' in God besides the perfect knowledge of and love for God's triune self. This is confirmed when Edwards says that anything else besides God's idea and love—such as God's infinity, eternity, immutability, omnipresence, or right to supreme authority—are "mere modes or relations of existence" of God.¹⁰⁵ All other 'attributes' such as God's wisdom, omniscience, and understanding are the same as God's idea/will, whereas God's omnipotence, holiness, justice, goodness, mercy, and grace are the same as God's love.¹⁰⁶ Edwards repeats this idea in "End of Creation," where he writes:

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21: 114–116.

¹⁰¹ Strobel, 26–27.

¹⁰² Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21: 113–114. As per 1 John 4:8, 16.

¹⁰³ Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21: 116.

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21: 121.

¹⁰⁵ Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21: 131–132.

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21: 131.

The whole of God's internal good or glory, is in these three things, viz. his infinite knowledge; his infinite virtue or holiness, and his infinite joy and happiness. Indeed there are a great many attributes in God, according to our way of conceiving or talking of them: but all may be reduced to these; or to the degree, circumstances and relations of these. . . . And therefore the external glory of God consists in the communication of these.¹⁰⁷

What then has become of Edwards' earlier claims that God has a variety of 'attributes' that sometimes seem incompatible? A solution may be found in Edwards' assertion that:

love is not only one of the affections, but it is the first and chief of the affections, and the fountain of all the affections. From love arises hatred of those things which are contrary to what we love, or which oppose and thwart us in those things that we delight in: and from the various exercises of love and hatred . . . arise all those other affections of desire, hope, fear, joy, grief, gratitude, anger, etc. From a vigorous, affectionate, and fervent love to God, will necessarily arise other religious affections: hence will arise an intense hatred and abhorrence of sin, fear of sin, and a dread of God's displeasure, gratitude to God for his goodness, complacency and joy in God when God is graciously and sensibly present, and grief when he is absent, and a joyful hope when a future enjoyment of God is expected, and fervent zeal for the glory of God. And in like manner, from a fervent love to men, will arise all other virtuous affections towards men.¹⁰⁸

In the above quote, Edwards is specifically discussing human affections, yet it would seem that this should apply equally to God, who is perfect love.¹⁰⁹ If so, then Edwards can convincingly explain why a God of pure love hates sin and evil, and why God would desire to punish and destroy it. However, if these 'negative' attributes are only derived from God's love when it

¹⁰⁷ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 528, emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁸ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 107–108. See also 106, 150–151.

¹⁰⁹ Pauw says that Edwards never tried to argue that all the attributes of Christ are identical to the divine essence (Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 84), as I am attempting to demonstrate here, because she says Edwards believed that God's 'understanding' and 'love' are separate divine Persons (72). However, Strobel shows that Edwards did not maintain these attributes as separate Persons. Instead, by using the idea of perichoresis, each Person of the Trinity indwells one another, and knows and loves each other (Strobel, 28, 40. See also Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21: 133–134). This makes God a three-way self-relationship of knowledge and love. It seems fair then to say that Edwards would affirm that God is love, from which all other attributes of God are derived. For example, Edwards says, "we find no other attributes of which it is said that they are God in Scripture, or that God is they, but Λογος and Αγαπε, the reason and the love of God (John 1:1 and 1 John 4:8, 1 John 4:16)" (Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," WJE 21: 132). Yet even these are not separate, for "God loves the understanding and the understanding also flows out in love, so that the divine understanding is in the Deity subsisting in love" (Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," WJE 21: 133).

encounters sin and evil, then there is no separate attribute of ‘hatred of sin,’ ‘wrath,’ or ‘justice’ that needs to be eternally displayed to the elect in order for God to be most glorified, and for the elect to fully know and rejoice in God. It seems then that Edwards could have said that God can be fully glorified by the elect eternally witnessing and praising God’s perfect love, even if there were no sin or evil to punish in hell. This view of God’s beauty would also negate any argument that God needs the Fall and the resultant sin and evil in the world in order for God to be fully glorified.

However, might there be something in God’s ‘natural’ attributes that Edwards thought might require God to predestine someone to hell? In “End of Creation,” Edwards praises God’s attributes, such as “his wisdom in wise designs and well-contrived works, his power in great effects, his justice in acts of righteousness, his goodness in communicating happiness; and so his showing forth the glory of his own nature.”¹¹⁰ Yet as seen earlier, Edwards maintains that the most beautiful aspect of God is God’s ‘moral’ attribute of holiness, because without this, there would be no goodness in any of the rest of God’s attributes: “A true love to God must begin with a delight in his holiness, and not with a delight in any other attribute; for no other attribute is truly lovely without this.”¹¹¹ Edwards ties God’s ‘moral’ attributes such as God’s holiness to God’s ‘natural’ attributes when Edwards explains: “his moral attributes can’t be without his natural attributes: for infinite holiness supposes infinite wisdom, and an infinite capacity and greatness; and all the attributes of God do as it were imply one another.”¹¹²

In sum, even these ‘natural’ attributes of God’s wisdom, power, or skill in creating the world or punishing the reprobate do not glorify God apart from God’s perfect love and goodness. There is therefore no ‘natural’ attribute of God separate from God’s love that remains to be demonstrated to the elect which could form the basis of an explanation as to why God would create any reprobate individuals.

¹¹⁰ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 447.

¹¹¹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 257. See also WJE 2: 273 quoted on p.34 above.

¹¹² Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 256–257.

Therefore, according to Edwards' own trinitarian thought and reflection on God's character as perfect love, there does not appear to be anything in God's nature or character that would require reprobation in order for God to be maximally beautiful or glorious. Instead, God's glory is fully revealed in God's perfect intra-trinitarian nature of love, which is the fountain of all the rest of God's attributes. This means that God's character as perfect love would be eternally perceived by the elect even if one or more attributes were not exercised eternally. Additionally, all of God's attributes have already been shown in the most perfect and 'affecting' manner possible through Christ's death on the cross, which will be eternally remembered by the elect, and thus, hell is unnecessary for glorifying God. Why then would Edwards insist that God creates some people solely to punish them in hell for all eternity? Based on Edwards' own statements shown thus far, such a belief seems entirely mystifying.

1.5 God's Glory and Creaturely Happiness are Identical

This mystery of why Edwards affirmed double predestination is even greater, for there is one more major way that the reason for which Edwards says God created the world seems to be fundamentally inconsistent with reprobation. Edwards repeatedly insists that God's goodness is shown "in communicating happiness" to creatures.¹¹³ In fact, Edwards claims that God's glory and creaturely happiness are *identical*; in God seeking God's own glory, God also seeks God's creatures' true happiness:

Their excellency and happiness is nothing but the emanation and expression of God's glory: God in seeking their glory and happiness, seeks himself: and in seeking himself, i.e. himself diffused and expressed (which he delights in, as he delights in his own beauty and fullness), he seeks their glory and happiness.¹¹⁴

Edwards says a creature's true happiness consists in knowing and loving God, perceiving God's beauty and glory, and rejoicing in God as the creature's "supreme end."¹¹⁵ This will occur ultimately in heaven, which will be a society of perfect love between the elect, angels, and the

¹¹³ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 447.

¹¹⁴ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 459.

¹¹⁵ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 533.

Trinity.¹¹⁶ There, the elect will perfectly love all other beings, and will be perfectly loved in return,¹¹⁷ fulfilling Edwards' definition of true virtue.¹¹⁸ Edwards believed that the elect will grow in their knowledge and love of God for all eternity, becoming progressively happier and closer to God, and God will be even more glorified.¹¹⁹ It is therefore in God's own interest to ensure that God's creatures are eternally happy, and God will continue to bless God's elect creatures with infinite good.¹²⁰

Elect individuals will also rejoice in each other's happiness, for "such is every saint's love to other saints that it, as it were, makes that glory, which he sees other saints enjoy, his own. He so rejoices in it that they enjoy such glory, that it is in some respects to him as if he, himself, enjoyed it."¹²¹ This is reminiscent of how, for Edwards, a more extensive network of mutually-loving relationships leads to more spiritual beauty,¹²² because it is "more considerable to have many things consent one with another than a few only."¹²³ As a result, it would seem that the elect should rejoice in as many people as possible joining this vast network of loving relationships, in order to increase the beauty of the perfect heavenly society and simultaneously increase the elect's eternal happiness.

In sum, Edwards affirms that both God and the saints have a personal interest in people being as eternally happy as possible, and they should therefore desire for as many people as possible to

¹¹⁶ Edwards, "Heaven is a World of Love," in WJE 8: 373–374.

¹¹⁷ Edwards, "Heaven is a World of Love," in WJE 8: 370–371.

¹¹⁸ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 541–542. See p. 37–38 above.

¹¹⁹ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 443, 533–536.

¹²⁰ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 536.

¹²¹ Edwards, "Heaven is a World of Love," in WJE 8: 382. See also Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 546 where Edwards says "When anyone under the influence of general benevolence sees another being possessed of the like general benevolence, this attaches his heart to him, and draws forth greater love to him, than merely his having existence."

¹²² Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 548.

¹²³ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 562–563.

come to know and love God. Yet, it should be noted that Edwards specifies that the elect do not praise God's glory simply as a means of selfishly achieving their own happiness, but instead they rejoice in God's glory for its own sake, just as how Christ only sought to be glorified so that the Father could be glorified.¹²⁴ Therefore, God's interests are not at odds with the interests of God's creatures, as Edwards clearly says:

God's seeking himself in the creation of the world, in the manner which has been supposed, is so far from being inconsistent with the good of his creatures, or any possibility of being so, that it is a kind of regard to himself that inclines him to seek the good of his creature.¹²⁵

Because Edwards believes that God has only one ultimate end in creating the world, even though it is mentioned alternatively as either "God's glory" or "creaturely happiness," these things are only "the same whole viewed in various lights, or in its different respects and relations."¹²⁶ Effectively, to Edwards, God's glory and creaturely happiness are essentially just different names for the same thing, or two sides of the same coin.¹²⁷ Returning to the earlier God-as-artist metaphor, now we might say the audience not only knows and loves the artist through the artist's beautiful self-portrait, but knowing and loving the artist makes the audience just as perfectly happy as the artist himself, which also makes the artist happy.

Edwards believes that this theme of God's glory being identical to creaturely happiness is apparent in Scripture.¹²⁸ For example, he argues: "the Scripture everywhere represents concerning Christ, as though the great things that he did and suffered, were in the most direct and proper sense, from exceeding love to us; and not as one may show kindness to a person to whose

¹²⁴ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 483–484, with reference to John 17:1.

¹²⁵ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 452.

¹²⁶ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 526. See also WJE 8: 531.

¹²⁷ Thus, I believe we should reject any interpretations of God's glory in Edwards' thought which maintain that God's glory and human happiness are independent. An example of such an interpretation is found when Bombaro argues that in Edwards opinion, "whether man enjoys God or not does not detract from the fact that God most definitely will glorify Himself in, by, and through man" (Bombaro, 127).

¹²⁸ Edwards refers to verses such as John 3:16, 1 John 4:9–10, and Eph. 2:4 (Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 505).

interest, simply and in itself considered, he is entirely indifferent.”¹²⁹ If God’s love for humanity was only for the sake of some higher goal, then sending Christ into the world would ultimately be for the purpose of *that* goal, and not out of God’s love for humanity.¹³⁰ Edwards says that Scripture shows that communicating happiness and goodness to creatures is “what is in itself pleasing to God,” unlike God’s lesser purposes such as “executing justice in punishing the sins of men; which God is inclined to as fit and necessary in certain cases, and on the account of good ends attained by it.”¹³¹ Based on this, punishing sinners in hell is only a secondary end, and is not what God rejoices in *in itself*. Edwards confirms this when he says that in Scripture, “God is often spoken of as exercising goodness and showing mercy, with delight, in a manner quite different, and opposite to that of his executing wrath. For the latter is spoken of as what God proceeds to with backwardness and reluctance, the misery of the creature being not agreeable to him on its own account.”¹³² Edwards acknowledges that Scripture says that God takes no pleasure in God’s creatures dying, but wants all to repent and be saved.¹³³

Why Edwards does not say that God will save everyone, then, is perplexing, according to the logic of Edwards’ theory about God’s purposes for creation. One might say that God *wants* to save everyone, but for some reason *cannot*. However, Edwards refutes this possibility:

God would be less happy, if he was less good. . . . And he would be less happy, if it were possible for him to be hindered in the exercise of his goodness and his other perfections in their proper effects. But he has complete happiness, because he has these perfections, and can’t be hindered in exercising and displaying them in their proper effects.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 505.

¹³⁰ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 504–505.

¹³¹ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 503.

¹³² Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 503. Edwards support this claim by citing Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8; Ps. 145:8; and Mic. 7:18 (WJE 8: 503–504).

¹³³ Edwards cites Ezek. 18:32, 33:11, and 2 Pet. 3:9 (Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 503–504). In a sermon where Edwards repeats these verses, he says “surely it would be horrid presumption in us to call this in question, after God has sworn by his life to the truth of it” (Edwards, “The Dreadful Silence of the Lord,” in WJE 19: 111).

¹³⁴ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 447, emphasis mine.

So it cannot be any outside force or limitation that prevents God from acting in maximally-good ways towards God's creatures by redeeming them all, which would promote their happiness and God's glory. As will be shown in the next two chapters, Edwards believes that there is nothing that can prevent God from acting in the way God desires, and nothing which can make God less happy. Therefore, according to Edwards' own thought as discussed thus far, it seems that God's will should be to redeem as many creatures as possible, so that they can know and love God, and thereby increase the happiness of God's beloved creatures as well as God's glory.¹³⁵ There appears to be no logical need for reprobation in Edwards' understanding of God's purposes.

1.5.1 An Excursus on the Reprobates' Alleged 'Happiness'

One attempt by Bombaro to make Edwards' thought on creaturely happiness compatible with reprobation claims that the reprobate do retain some level of 'happiness,' even in hell. This argument, however, can also be refuted by Edwards' own words.

In Edwards' first entry in his notebook titled "The Mind," Edwards proposes that humans have three types of relations: to themselves, to others, and to God (i.e., 'Being-in-general').¹³⁶ Human happiness is thus supposedly found in having consenting/loving relationships on all three levels.¹³⁷ However, the reprobate do not love God, and Edwards believes that those without true virtue only love others insofar as they benefit in some way from the other, which is really only an instance of self-love.¹³⁸ Thus, already, two of these three categories seem to be eliminated as

¹³⁵ Pauw agrees that "There seems to be a universalist logic at work in Edwards' trinitarian theology of creation" which "could have funded a deep and expansive theology of cosmic redemption" (Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 130–132).

¹³⁶ "Happiness, strictly, consists in the perception of these three things: of the consent of being to its own being; of its own consent to being; and of being's consent to being" (Edwards, "The Mind," in WJE 6: 338).

¹³⁷ Bombaro, 133–134.

¹³⁸ Bombaro, 139, based on Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 821 in WJE 18: 532–33. Here, Edwards says "A natural [man] may love others, but 'tis some way or other as appendages and appurtenances to himself. But a spiritual man loves others as of God, or in God, or some way related to him" (WJE 18: 533). Edwards gives an example of a group of thieves being grateful and kind to a person who notifies them of a potential raid on the thieves' lair by authorities, but this gratitude and kindness is driven only by self-love (Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 583). A similar argument appears when Edwards argues that people naturally love others who love them, but "there is no more virtue in a man's thus loving his friends merely from self-love than there is in self-love itself, the principle

potential sources of ‘happiness’ for the reprobate. All that remains as a possible source of happiness for the reprobate is their love for themselves.

The concept that people are made to be happy has a long history in Christian thought, going back to Augustine, who said true happiness was found in a relationship with God.¹³⁹ This would be compatible with the claims Edwards has already made about human happiness and God’s glory being identical. Yet Bombaro claims that Edwards thought that God has designed all humans to love and consent to their own existence and to desire it to continue.¹⁴⁰ For example, Edwards once proposed that a person’s “soul abhors annihilation, wherein it must be discontinued.”¹⁴¹ It is claimed that Edwards believed that this inherent self-love principle in humanity is part of being made in the image of God,¹⁴² for just as God knows and loves himself, so humans also know and love themselves.¹⁴³ This love of self-existence is supposedly deemed by Edwards to be an instance of creaturely ‘happiness,’ or God’s glory, and thus, it is a way that even the bare existence of the reprobate individual in hell may glorify God.¹⁴⁴

from whence it proceeds” (WJE 8: 579). Edwards ties many instances of what may appear to be love for others back to self-love, even in families (WJE 8: 584). Not only this, but Edwards argues that even if the reprobate love their families and friends yet do not love God, then this love for a smaller group is not only not virtuous, but it will necessarily lead to opposition and enmity with God and all others (WJE 8: 555–556).

¹³⁹ Bombaro, 169, citing Augustine, “The City of God” in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff, Vols. 1–14 [1886], reprint (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 2: 1.

¹⁴⁰ Bombaro, 136, 145, 148.

¹⁴¹ Bombaro, 148, citing Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 99 in WJE 13: 268.

¹⁴² Bombaro, 140–141. Bombaro believes Edwards took this idea from his uncle Solomon Stoddard’s preaching, which included two types of ‘self-love,’ one virtuous and another sinful or ‘improper.’ This idea appeared in a number of other Puritan thinkers such as William Perkins, William Ames, and Thomas Watson (Bombaro, 144).

¹⁴³ Bombaro, 151. The reader may wish to revisit the earlier discussion on pp. 30–31 above.

¹⁴⁴ Bombaro, 148–149. Perhaps Bombaro says this because, as we will see in the next chapter, any being that exists is really only God’s own idea of such a being, and by consenting to God’s idea of themselves, perhaps in some way, the reprobate are inadvertently ‘consenting’ to God’s existence. This seems to be what Bombaro means when he proposes that “for any given man to exist is for him to inescapably consent to ‘Being in general’ *qua* being; for without ‘being’s consent to its own being,’ a human being would theoretically be contrary to its own being and cease to exist, that is, it would not have the disposition that distinguishes human being as such” (Bombaro, 148). Then Bombaro claims that “Edwards teaches that an entity’s consent to being’ constitutes mental excellence and, therefore, it exhibits an instance of *ad extra* divine beauty. . . . As long as a human being exists, this instance of excellence is manifest” and God is glorified (Bombaro, 149).

However, this claim that all humans love their own existence appears untrue, for people who attempt suicide do not seem to consent to or love their own continued existence.¹⁴⁵ Edwards should have been familiar with this as a result of the suicide of his uncle, Joseph Hawley II. Apparently under the influence of deep melancholy and terror, Hawley slit his own throat at the peak of the revivals in Northampton, perhaps believing that he was not elect. Several others in the region also attempted to kill themselves around this time.¹⁴⁶ Even if Edwards' earliest notebook suggests that he had naïvely held the idea that all people love their own existence and desire to continue it at all costs, it would seem surprising for Edwards to have continued to believe this after such an event.

Once we consider Edwards' views on hell, it appears even more unlikely that the reprobate should love their continuing existence. As summarized by McClymond and McDermott, "most of Edwards' descriptions of suffering in hell used language suggesting physical pain. There was to be no resting place or cooling stream or fountain, 'not so much as a drop of water to cool the tongue.' There would be no place to 'take a breath for one minute.' The heat would be one thousand times hotter than any ordinary fire."¹⁴⁷ The reprobate must also endure the infinite hatred and anger of God, who is ever-present in hell, according to Edwards' interpretation of Revelation 14:10.¹⁴⁸ This torment continues eternally, as Edwards warns:

It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity: there will be no end to this exquisite horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your soul; and you will

¹⁴⁵ There may be many reasons why a suicidal person would choose to die, however, the fact that people do sometimes make such a choice proves that there is no inherent self-love principle which drives people to desire to preserve their own existence at all costs.

¹⁴⁶ Marsden, 163–169. Marsden notes that Edwards' preaching was quite harsh at times and suggests that it could have been a contributing factor to these individuals' despair, although Marsden does not directly link these suicides to any of Edwards' sermons.

¹⁴⁷ McClymond and McDermott, 568.

¹⁴⁸ McClymond and McDermott, 568, citing Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 232 in WJE 13: 349–350. See also Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 23, The "Miscellanies,"*: Entry Nos. 1153–1360, ed. Douglas A. Sweeney (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 584–585.

absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all; you will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance; and then when you have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains. So that your punishment will indeed be infinite.¹⁴⁹

If the option of non-existence were offered to the reprobate in such a hell, why would they not choose that option, if even in this earthly life, suffering sometimes becomes so intolerable that individuals decide they would rather die?¹⁵⁰ Therefore, it seems implausible to claim that the reprobate in hell could have any ‘happiness’ derived from loving their continued existence, which contributes anything to God’s glory.

There is a further reason why it seems doubtful that Edwards would have believed that the reprobates’ self-love contributes to God’s glory, contra Bombaro. According to Edwards, it is the bare self-love principle built into human nature which, when not regulated by love for God, is the essence and origin of sin.¹⁵¹ Edwards says that the reprobate have within themselves the “corrupt principles” that “are seeds of hell fire.” Subsequent to the Fall, “the [human] heart is now a sink of sin, so, if sin was not restrained, it would immediately turn the soul into a fiery oven, or a furnace of fire and brimstone.”¹⁵² Furthermore, “sin is the ruin and misery of the soul; it is destructive in its nature; and if God should leave it without restraint, there would need nothing else to make the soul perfectly miserable.”¹⁵³ Edwards also believed that those in hell will continually sin, and so become infinitely miserable.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” in WJE 22: 415.

¹⁵⁰ Contra Bombaro’s argument, I suggest that if personal happiness drops below some individually-variable minimally-acceptable level then people start to desire non-existence. Thus, it is actually happiness that makes people love or consent to their self-existence, and not self-existence itself that leads to happiness.

¹⁵¹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 38. More on this theme will be explored in chapter 3 when we examine Edwards’ views on the Fall.

¹⁵² Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” in WJE 22: 407.

¹⁵³ Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” in WJE 22: 407.

¹⁵⁴ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 598.

Given all the above, it simply cannot be plausible to claim that Edwards thought that the self-love principle is the image of God in humanity if he asserts that this principle, when unregulated by love for God, leads to instant, automatic, and constant sin, which is what God opposes and detests. Furthermore, Edwards actually says that it is the self-love principle *itself* which will torment the reprobate in hell for all eternity. This is because the self-love principle makes people love being loved by others, and also hate being hated by others, but in hell the reprobate will be shown continual expressions of God's "hatred and contempt and wrath."¹⁵⁵

In sum, it seems extremely unlikely that Edwards would have thought that the reprobate in hell would be even minimally happy; least of all because they possess a 'self-love' principle which makes them love their own continued existence. Even if this were true, the elect in heaven would still be far more happy. Thus, I believe that Bombaro's attempt at harmonizing Edwards' thought on reprobation with Edwards' theory about why God creates the world is not persuasive or plausible. Therefore, the question of why Edwards believed in double predestination, despite its apparent incompatibility with other areas of his thought, remains unclear.

1.6 God Glorified by Redemption

It is useful to give a short summary of Edwards' argument so far. God, who is a triune being of perfect self-knowledge and self-love, creates intelligent moral creatures so that God can communicate to them God's own knowledge and love of himself. God does this by exercising and thus revealing God's attributes to God's creatures through creation and providence, so that these creatures will also know and love God. This leads them to praise God, to delight in God, and to act in holy/loving ways, which simultaneously glorify God. This continues eternally in heaven, where redeemed creatures will rejoice in their love for God and for one another, and God will also rejoice in this. Thus far, Edwards' answer regarding why God would create the world and Edwards' understanding of God's character both appear quite compelling.

¹⁵⁵ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 578.

Edwards' attempt to incorporate reprobation into his worldview begins in his specific claims about exactly *how* God fully reveals God's glory to God's creatures. This is through God's work of redemption. Edwards believed that the work of redemption is the greatest and most glorious of all of God's works:

Such a work is in its nature and kind, the most glorious of any work of God whatsoever; and is always so spoken of in Scripture. It is the work of redemption (the great end of all other works of God, and of which the work of creation was but a shadow) in the event, success and end of it: it is the work of new creation, that is infinitely more glorious than the old.¹⁵⁶

In "End of Creation," Edwards confirms that all things are ultimately ordered around God's plan of redemption: "'tis evident that the glory of God is the ultimate end of the work of redemption—which is the chief work of providence towards the moral world, as is abundantly manifest from Scripture: the whole universe being put in subjection to Jesus Christ . . . that all things may be ordered by him, in subservience to the great designs of his redemption."¹⁵⁷

Edwards sees evidence for this claim in verses of Scripture where Christ speaks of his purpose in coming to redeem humanity as being for God's glory.¹⁵⁸ As described earlier, all God's glorious attributes are revealed to the elect in Christ's death on the cross. Elsewhere, Edwards says that "God's name is in like manner spoken of as the end of his acts of goodness towards the good part of the moral world, and of his works of mercy and salvation towards his people."¹⁵⁹ God's goodness is particularly shown in the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of God's people.¹⁶⁰ This centrality of redemption in Edwards' thought is widely recognized by other scholars.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in WJE 4: 344–345.

¹⁵⁷ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 488.

¹⁵⁸ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 485–486. Among the verses Edwards cites are John 7:18, 12:27–28 (WJE 8: 285–286), Phil. 2:6–11, Eph. 1:3–6 (WJE 8: 486–487, 498–499), and Phil. 1:6–14 (WJE 8: 501).

¹⁵⁹ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 493.

¹⁶⁰ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 493–494. Here Edwards cites 1 John 2:12; Ps. 25:11, 79:9, 106:8; 2 Sam. 7:23, and other verses.

¹⁶¹ Bombaro, 54, 88–89, 209; Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 104–107, 120; Strobel, 154; Holmes, 112–116.

Redemption is only possible if there is something for the elect to be redeemed from. This line of thought shows why, in Edwards' scheme, despite God's beauty being found in God's triune nature of perfect love, and God's glory and creaturely happiness being identical, God would ordain the Fall, as well as the rebellion of Satan and the fallen angels, and all the sin and evil of this world, culminating in the crucifixion of God's own incarnate Son to redeem the elect and save them from experiencing God's wrath at their sin. In return, Edwards claims that the elect will be "exalted to a far greater degree of dignity, felicity, and glory, than would have been due for Adam's obedience; for aught I know, many thousand times so great."¹⁶² Therefore, it is actually to the *benefit* of the elect for humanity to fall and be redeemed, than to never fall into sin at all.

1.6.1 Corporate or Individual Redemption?

However, this raises the question of whether Edwards believes that God is glorified by redemption in a corporate sense (i.e., God is glorified when he redeems the Church or the elect as a whole) or in an individual sense (i.e., God is glorified when he redeems any individual being). The answer seems clear when Edwards says that Scripture teaches that "the conversion of one soul" is the most glorious of God's works for it reveals God's power and grace, and leads to the greatest human happiness.¹⁶³ Therefore, Edwards thought it is not only the redemption of some

¹⁶² Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 259–260. He also claims that the benefit the elect receive through Christ is "far greater than the misery which comes by the first Adam, and abounding beyond it" (WJE 3: 336). Pauw says that Edwards believed that the Fall makes it possible for redeemed creatures to be united more closely with God than would have been possible without the Fall, which means they will ultimately be happier than if there were no Fall (Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 138, referring to Sereno E. Dwight, ed., *The Works of President Edwards with a Memoir of His Life*, Vol. 7 [New York: S. Converse, 1829–30], 94). As far as I can tell, the source cited here by Pauw is Edwards' sermon on Eph. 3:10, titled "The Wisdom of God Displayed in the Way of Salvation," which is not available through the Yale collection but can be found in Edward Hickman, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards With A Memoir by Sereno Dwight*, Vol. 2 [Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974], 141–156, accessed Jan. 4, 2021, https://ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works2/works2/Page_141.html. Throughout this sermon, but especially on pages 150–151 Edwards makes many arguments for how humanity benefits from the Fall. A similar argument appears in Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 103 in WJE 13: 271–272 where Edwards discusses humans being united to Christ and thus raised above the status of angels. See also "Miscellanies," no. 156 in WJE 13: 304, where Edwards says "but their fall has been the occasion of their being advanced to much greater dignity than before, brought much nearer to God, far more nearly united to him, [and] are become his members, his spouse, and in many respects more honored than the angels" (McClymond and McDermott, 280–283). Edwards argues that the Fall of Satan and demons also benefitted the elect angels (McClymond and McDermott, 286).

¹⁶³ Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in WJE 4: 344–345.

portion of humanity which reveals God's glory—it is actually the redemption of each individual soul that is most glorifying to God.

Edwards affirms that the elect rejoice when God saves any individual: “The church of Christ is called upon greatly to rejoice, when at any time Christ remarkably appears, coming to his church to carry on the work of salvation, to enlarge his own kingdom, and *to deliver poor souls out of the pit.*”¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, Edwards asserted that it is specifically the large number of people that were saved which made God's work during the Great Awakening revivals so glorious: “The work is *very glorious in the great numbers* that have to appearance, been turned from sin to God, and so delivered from a wretched captivity to sin and Satan, saved from everlasting burnings, and made heirs of eternal glory.”¹⁶⁵ God is also glorified in the suddenness of conversions, the lasting effect of these conversions, and the great heights of spiritual joy and light which God gives to these new converts.¹⁶⁶ Based on all of these claims, it seems that greater numbers of people being redeemed should mean more glory for God. Why should God predestine any human to hell, if it is *the most* glorious work that God could ever do to save them instead?

1.6.2 Election Is Based on God's Wisdom

Thus far, there is still no explanation for how or why Edwards believed that reprobation fulfills any of God's purposes as described in “End of Creation.” However, the positive side of predestination (i.e., election) does appear as part of God's purpose for creating the world as described in Edwards' “Discourse On The Trinity.” Here, Edwards explains that the world was made specifically for Christ, so that he could choose the elect as his bride:

The love of God as it flows forth *ad extra* is *wholly determined and directed by divine wisdom*, so that *those only are the objects of it that divine wisdom chooses*. So that the creation of the world is to gratify divine love as that is exercised by divine wisdom. But Christ is divine wisdom, so that the world is made to gratify divine love as exercised by Christ, or to gratify the love that is in Christ's heart, or to provide a spouse for Christ—

¹⁶⁴ Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival,” in WJE 4: 351–352, emphasis mine.

¹⁶⁵ Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival,” in WJE 4: 345, emphasis mine.

¹⁶⁶ Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival,” in WJE 4: 346.

those creatures *which wisdom chooses for the object of divine love as Christ's elect spouse, and especially those elect creatures that wisdom chiefly pitches upon and makes the end of the rest.*¹⁶⁷

Now Edwards' system begins to become more exclusive. God only redeems those creatures whom God's perfect wisdom determines will become part of Christ's elect spouse.¹⁶⁸ In *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards repeats this claim that God's choice of elect individuals is based on wisdom,¹⁶⁹ yet here Edwards attempts to explain what that wise reason may be. He finds a hint in Paul's statement that Paul was the "chief" of sinners and that God chose him to show God's mercy.¹⁷⁰ From this, Edwards speculates that

God may choose this object rather than another, as having a superior fitness to answer the ends, designs and inclinations of his goodness; being more sinful, and so more miserable and necessitous than others; the inclinations of infinite mercy and benevolence may be more gratified, and the gracious design of God's sending his Son into the world may be more abundantly answered, in the exercises of mercy towards such an object, rather than another.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21: 152. This theme of Christ delighting in the Church as his bride appears in Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 505, but there is no hint that God chooses only specific people to be part of that bride until p. 509 where Edwards suddenly mentions eternal damnation.

¹⁶⁸ Pauw shows how this theme relates back to God's triune nature, for the Son also has a desire to 'communicate' himself, just as the Father did in begetting the Son, and so the Father creates the world for the Son which then allows the Son to act as the "everlasting Father" of creation (Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 129, referring to Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 104, in WJE 13: 273).

¹⁶⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 394.

¹⁷⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 394, referring to 1 Tim. 1:15–16.

¹⁷¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 395. In comparison, John Calvin said that the elect are no better or worse than the reprobate, and did not offer any reason why God should choose one individual and not another besides God's own "incomprehensible judgment" (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960], quote from 3.21.7 p. 931, see also 3.22.2 to 3.22.11 pp. 934–947). However, the idea that there may be *some* reason why God chose an individual could lead to pride on the part of the elect individual. Conversely, if there truly were no reason at all for why one was elect, it would mean the elect could only attribute their election to pure luck, which would be a troubling thought. While Edwards does occasionally appeal to God's "arbitrariness" (Bombaro, 230–231, 292–295), Bombaro notes that to Edwards, "arbitrary" did not mean "capricious" (i.e., impulsive, unpredictable, or random), and meant instead that it was simply a matter of God's will which is not tied to any rules or laws but God's own wisdom (Bombaro, 56n9, see also 158, in reference to Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 1263 in WJE 23: 202–203, and no. 11 in WJE 13: 189–191). However, Edwards does say that intelligent creatures have "power to order the inferior creatures, and to destroy them at their pleasure" as an image of the all-powerful 'First Cause' (i.e., God), which could indeed seem capricious (Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 896 in WJE 20: 154–155).

Since all humans are sinful, then God's mercy and benevolence would be shown by redeeming any individual. Presumably, there must be some reason why Edwards thinks that God deems it wise only to redeem some, and not all, of God's sinful creatures. However, if God only wants *some* particular people to be redeemed, then it is unclear why God creates *any* people who are not going to be redeemed, if it is truly through *redemption* that God is most glorified.

At one point, Edwards appears to hint that God's wise choice to save some people, but not all, could be in order to prove that God's grace is free and sovereign. Edwards insists that everything that God does is "so as greatly to show his justice and his goodness, magnify his grace, *and manifest the sovereignty and freeness of it*, and the absolute dependence of all on him."¹⁷² This is reminiscent of John Calvin, who argued that "the very inequality of his grace proves that it is free," because to elect everyone would be for God to "bind himself by a set law to call all men equally."¹⁷³ Furthermore, Calvin thought that "God, to show forth his *liberality* more fully in such a glorious gift, does not bestow it upon all indiscriminately, but by a singular privilege gives it to those to whom he will."¹⁷⁴ So it seems that Calvin believed that God cannot elect everyone or God would undermine God's grace as being 'freely' given, since God would be obliged to give it to all people equally.

Edwards might have had something similar to Calvin's claims in mind. Yet if so, this seems incompatible with Edwards' assertion that God would be less happy if anything forced God to not be as good to creatures as God desired.¹⁷⁵ Such a constraint on God's choice of who to redeem would indeed seem to place a limit on God's goodness, which conflicts with Edwards' belief that God desires creatures' happiness, which is identical to God's glory. This would also bring into question all that Edwards has asserted about it being *redemption* that is the greatest and most glorious of God's works, and not election.

¹⁷² Edwards, "End of Creation, " in WJE 8: 475, emphasis mine.

¹⁷³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21.6 p. 929 and 3.22.10 p. 944.

¹⁷⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.35 p. 583, emphasis mine.

¹⁷⁵ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 447.

1.7 God Also Glorified by Reprobation

Nonetheless, Edwards' scheme contains another element which is entirely opposed to all of his previous claims that 1) God's ultimate purpose is to reveal God's beautiful triune nature of perfect love to intelligent, moral creatures who know and love God and rejoice in holiness; 2) God's glory and creaturely happiness are identical, and; 3) God is most glorified by the redemption of a large number of individual sinful creatures. All of these claims would seem to lead to the conclusion that God would be most glorified if God redeems everyone. However, according to Edwards, God's maximal glory and the elect's happiness actually requires most people to be predestined to hell.

Edwards claims, "God has the actual salvation or redemption of a certain number in his proper, absolute design, and of a certain number only."¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, Edwards believes Scripture reveals that the number of those saved will be *very few*.¹⁷⁷ He argues

The *exceeding smallness* of the number of true saints, compared with the whole world, appears by the representations often made of them as distinguished from the world; in which they are spoken of as called and chosen out of the world; redeemed from the earth, redeemed from among men; as being those that are of God, while the whole world lieth in wickedness, and the like.¹⁷⁸

Based on Ecclesiastes 7:25–29, Edwards argues that there may be only one elect for every thousand people who are reprobate.¹⁷⁹ He claims that the rarity of salvation shows that salvation

¹⁷⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 435.

¹⁷⁷ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 161–162. Edwards refers to verses like Matt. 7:13–14, Matt. 22:14, Luke 13:23–24, and Prov. 20:6.

¹⁷⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 161–162, emphasis mine.

¹⁷⁹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 162. But Edwards neglects to comment on v.28 "but not a woman among all these I have found," in relation to his interpretation of the first half of this verse.

Marsden notes that the problem of how God could be loving if most people end up in hell was a concern for Edwards and his followers. One solution might be to say that the number of elect will vastly outnumber the reprobate, such as Joseph Bellamy's estimate of 17,000 elect for every 1 reprobate (Marsden, 336). During the revivals Edwards seemed optimistic about the number of people that might be saved during the Millennial reign of Christ as shown in Edwards, "An Humble Attempt," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 5, Apocalyptic Writings*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 342–343 (Marsden, 335). However, based on Edwards' references to Scripture which talk about the very few that will finally be saved, and

is due to God's "divine power and sovereign will," and is not a result of human nature or ability.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, Edwards approves of the idea that "election seems to denote a choosing out one or a few out of many, a choosing a portion out of the common mass, but if the multitude or mass itself was taken, and only a few distinguished ones left, this could hardly be called an election."¹⁸¹ Additionally, Edwards does not believe that God only "passes over" some people for salvation, but affirms, as one scholar says, "'double particular election,' which asserts that God has a positive elective purpose to damn certain individuals."¹⁸² This has led another scholar to call Edwards' vision of most of God's creatures being predestined to eternal hell a "cosmic holocaust."¹⁸³ For what reason would God predestine most of God's creatures to hell, contrary to God's desire for creatures to know and love God and be eternally happy in rejoicing in God? If God seeks God's own glory in all things, then how does reprobation glorify God?

The answer may be found in Edwards' belief that God's glory is *also* revealed when God judges and punishes creaturely sin. Edwards says that in Scripture, "the judgments God executes on the wicked are spoken of as being for the sake of his name, in like manner as for his glory."¹⁸⁴ This glory will be seen at the final judgment when God's justice is revealed.¹⁸⁵ Edwards interprets

considering that this idea is still found in his major work *Original Sin* that was published near the end of his life, I cannot agree with Marsden's assessment that the mature Edwards would have affirmed that "since the overwhelming majority of all humans that ever lived would live during the millennium and virtually all of those would be redeemed, the percentage of humans damned would be tiny" (Marsden, 335).

¹⁸⁰ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 520 in WJE 18: 65.

¹⁸¹ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 520 in WJE 18: 65.

¹⁸² Bombaro, 2n5, with reference to Edwards' manuscript sermon on Rev. 14:15 (Jan. 1744), available in the "General MSS 151" catalog of the Jonathan Edwards Collection at Beinecke Library, Yale University. I do not have access to this document, but similar sentiment appears in Edwards' sermon "636. Rev. 14:14–20" in WJE 38, such as when Edwards says that both the elect and reprobate are God's creations as per Prov. 16:4.

¹⁸³ Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 132. She writes that in Edwards' theology, "instead of a cosmic redemption, there is a cosmic holocaust: the earth created by God is annihilated in a paroxysm of apocalyptic violence, and the vast majority of God's creatures are eternally bereft of the communications of God's goodness and love that were God's end in creation."

¹⁸⁴ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 495–496. Verses cited by Edwards include Exod. 9:16, and Neh. 9:10. Additional verses include Exod. 14:17, Ezek. 28:22, 39:13, Rom. 9:22–23, and 2 Thess. 1:9–10 (WJE 8: 490–491).

¹⁸⁵ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 499.

Deuteronomy 28:63: “the Lord will rejoice over you, to destroy you,” and Ezekiel 5:13: “then shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted,” as teaching that God takes pleasure in punishing sin.¹⁸⁶ Edwards also used Proverbs 16:4 to argue that even wicked people and the reprobate are made to serve God’s purposes.¹⁸⁷ At one point, Edwards even describes Christ’s ‘majesty’ as incorporating elements of violence, natural disasters, death, and punishing the wicked with eternal destruction.¹⁸⁸

Therefore, God’s judgment of sinners also increases the elect’s happiness, because the elect love God’s glory. Edwards writes, “God’s judgments on the wicked world, and also their eternal damnation in the world to come, are spoken of as being for the happiness of God’s people. So are his judgments on them in this world.”¹⁸⁹ Romans 9:22–23 are especially important verses for Edwards, which he thinks prove that God’s glory “is spoken of as the end of the eternal damnation of the wicked, and also the eternal happiness of the righteous.”¹⁹⁰ Expanding on this verse, Edwards says, “another reason of the destruction of the wicked, viz. the showing the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy; in higher degrees of their glory and happiness, in an advancement of their relish of their own enjoyments, and greater sense of their value, and of God’s free grace in the bestowment.”¹⁹¹ The elect rejoice not because they take pleasure in the collective misery of the damned in itself, just as God does not, but the elect rejoice because hell reveals God’s justice, which they love, as does God.¹⁹² Edwards vividly describes such a scenario of the elect rejoicing in the punishment of the damned when he warns his potentially-reprobate parishioners:

¹⁸⁶ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 503.

¹⁸⁷ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 581 in WJE 18: 117. See also “Miscellanies,” no. 586 in WJE 18: 121, where he references Col. 1:16 and Rev. 4:11 to prove the same point.

¹⁸⁸ Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” in WJE 19: 569.

¹⁸⁹ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 509. He cites verses such as Isa. 43:3–4 and Ps. 136:10–20.

¹⁹⁰ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 498, 509.

¹⁹¹ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 509.

¹⁹² This is discussed by Paul Ramsey, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 509n3. Ramsey also points to Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 461 in WJE 13: 502–503 where this is affirmed.

Thus it will be with you that are in an unconverted state, if you continue in it; the infinite might, and majesty and terribleness of the omnipotent God shall be magnified upon you, in the ineffable strength of your torments: you shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and when you shall be in this state of suffering, the glorious inhabitants of heaven shall go forth and look on the awful spectacle, that they may see what the wrath and fierceness of the Almighty is, and when they have seen it, they will fall down and adore that great power and majesty.¹⁹³

In his “Miscellanies,” Edwards argues that having fewer elect will actually make those elect *happier*, as “every time they think how narrow their escape was, they will prize the blessing of life the more.”¹⁹⁴ This is reminiscent of earlier where Edwards argued that God only saves a few creatures in order to show that God’s grace is free and sovereign, and presumably, more precious and glorious. Yet, as one scholar notes, if so few people are to be saved, then it would seem that “mercy, not judgment, is God’s ‘strange work.’”¹⁹⁵

Therefore, it has been demonstrated that in Edwards’ mind there are apparently *two* factors that contribute to God’s glory and the elect’s happiness: 1) God’s gracious redemption of the elect who will be eternally happy and praise God forever; and 2) the exhibition of God’s justice,

¹⁹³ Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” in WJE 22: 415. Holmes notes that other sermons where Edwards makes similar comments about the elect looking down on the damned in hell and rejoicing can be found in “Wicked Men Useful in their Destruction Only,” “Wrath Upon the Wicked to the Uttermost,” “The End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous,” and “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners” (Holmes, 213, 216). Only the last of these sermons is available in WJE 19: 336–376. The others can be found in Hickman, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards with a memoir by Sereno Dwight*, Vol. 2, 122–129, 207–212, or else, unedited versions of these appear to be found in: “332. Sermon on Ezek. 15:2–4,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 49, Sermons, Series II, 1734* (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008); “359. Sermon on I Thess. 2:16,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 50, Sermons, Series II, 1735* (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008); and “277. Sermon on Rev. 18:20,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 48, Sermons, Series II, 1733* (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), respectively. Another instance of the same theme is in Edwards, “Eternity of Hell Torments,” in Hickman, 87, or the unedited version in Edwards, “509. Sermon on Matt. 25:46,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 54, Sermons, Series II, 1739* (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008).

¹⁹⁴ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 520 in WJE 18: 66. Here, Edwards compares the world to a sinking ship, saying that the elect are more grateful to be saved out of the wreckage of the ship, than they would be if God saved the entire ship. Yet I believe this is contrary to Luke 15:7 which says heaven rejoices over *every* sinner that repents, presumably, with no diminishing returns as more people repent. This claim that the elect will be happier to be only a few also conflicts with how Edwards claims that the elect will rejoice in one another’s glory and virtue, which implies that more elect would lead to more rejoicing, and so Edwards’ own thought seems mixed on this subject.

¹⁹⁵ Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 140, referring to Edwards’ “Miscellanies,” no. 520 in WJE 18: 65. She may have Isa. 28:21 in mind, where judgment or destruction is spoken of as God’s “strange” and “alien” work (ESV), meaning that which God is less inclined toward or does more rarely.

hatred of sin, and wrathful power through eternal punishment of the reprobate in hell. This is despite how the attributes of God that Edwards claims are revealed in reprobation are also revealed to the elect through Christ's death on the cross, making reprobation redundant.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, it is worth exploring the implications of his claim that God is glorified in two ways: through the redemption of the elect, and through the damnation of the reprobate.

Presumably, in order to maximally achieve God's ultimate purpose in creation, God must balance these two factors of election and reprobation in such a way that God's glory and the happiness of the elect is maximized. I believe this argument would be the final logical defense of such a double predestinarian scheme, and is compatible with the interpretation that, "for Edwards, God decrees what is best and most desirable to Himself. God has sufficient reason for this world—His own maximal glory, which, in the end, makes this the best world."¹⁹⁷ A similar

¹⁹⁶ Holmes asserts that "on the basis of the gospel story we simply cannot accept that God glorifies Himself in two equal and opposite ways, in the display of His justice and the display of His grace" (Holmes, 239). Holmes argues that Edwards violates Luther's challenge that theologians must always tie God's glory to Christ's suffering on the cross in order to be true theologians (Holmes, 235 and 76, citing Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation*, Thesis 20).

¹⁹⁷ Bombaro, 230–231, citing Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 348 in WJE 13: 419–421. There is no direct reference to the terms 'maximize' or 'best world' by Edwards in this text, however, it is worth considering where this logic of 'maximizing' God's glory in a 'best' world leads, by a thought experiment.

We might imagine that in eternity past, God considered different sorts of worlds that God might choose to create, with the goal of creating the 'best' one which produces the most glory for himself. If God must balance the two factors of election and reprobation to achieve an outcome of maximal glory, then we might imagine that as part of God's eternal decrees, God would have to determine the ideal ratio of elect to reprobate to create in this 'best' world. For, if there were no difference in the glory that God would get from different ratios of elect to reprobate, then there would be no distinctly 'best' world, and God might as well save everyone, in order to make heaven that amazing "world of love" for the elect. So, if there is only one 'best' world containing a particular ratio of elect to reprobate creatures, it seems that to create such a world, God could shift the ratio in favor of increasing the number of elect creatures only until there comes some point where if God were to create one more elect creature or one less reprobate creature, it would actually *decrease* God's glory and the elect's happiness. This unexpected result would seem to be the only case which is compatible with Edwards' claim that God creates very few elect, even though it contradicts all that Edwards has argued in the earlier portions of this chapter, and raises significant questions for theodicy.

One may object that this is to think of God's glory quantitatively instead of qualitatively. However, I believe such a mindset is the only one which could logically justify why God does not save one more person in a deterministic scheme such as Edwards'. Such a 'quantitative' mindset as shown by an obsession with measurement increased in Western European culture beginning around 1275 to 1325, and had become prevalent in the sixteenth century (Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250–1600* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 1–18). Marsden notes that eighteenth-century philosophers were regularly "determining God's character by gauging what sort of universe would maximize human happiness," (Marsden, 460–462, quote from 462). Thus it may not have been out of place for Edwards or other contemporary theologians to think of God's glory or human happiness in quantitative ways.

thought appears when Edwards discusses the final judgment and writes, “the glory of Jehovah is evidently here spoken of as that which he had regard to, as his highest and ultimate end; which therefore he could not fail of; but must take place everywhere, and in every case, through all parts of his dominion, *whatever became of men*.”¹⁹⁸ If so, then what has become of Edwards’ claim that God’s interests are the same as those of God’s creatures? Edwards clearly argues that

in created beings, a regard to self-interest may properly be set in opposition to the public welfare; because the private interest of one person may be inconsistent with the public good. . . . Hence his private interest may be regarded and pursued in opposition to the public. *But this can’t be with respect to the Supreme Being, the Author and Head of the whole system: on whom all absolutely depend; who is the fountain of being and good to the whole. It is more absurd to suppose that his interest should be opposite to the interest of the universal system, than that the welfare of the head, heart and vitals of the natural body should be opposite to the welfare of the body.*¹⁹⁹

However, with respect to reprobation, Edwards seems to argue the exact opposite of this. Surely, the predestination of most creatures to eternal torment in hell would be contrary to the happiness of the majority of God’s creatures—even if those few that are saved are made so extraordinarily happy by this situation that ‘net’ creaturely happiness is positive. Now, instead of God rejoicing in creaturely happiness, it appears that it is only because God needs some way of transforming the horror of hell into praise of himself that God requires any elect creatures at all; if God *could* get maximum glory from predestining every creature to hell, it seems nothing would prevent God from doing so.

Edwards was aware of potential negative criticisms of the implications of double predestination in regard to God’s character, since Edwards objected to this doctrine as a youth.²⁰⁰ Such

¹⁹⁸ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 490, emphasis mine.

¹⁹⁹ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 451–452, emphasis mine. If one argued that God only cares about the happiness of God’s *elect* creatures, perhaps as suggested by Edwards’ quote “the interest of the creature is, as it were, God’s own interest, in proportion to the degree of their relation and union to God” (Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 443), the paragraph cited above would seem to contradict this claim. As will be shown in chapter 2, Edwards attempts to argue that God can justly make use of God’s creatures in whatever manner God wants to, simply because God infinitely outweighs all the rest of creation in worthiness. However, this is not consistent with Edwards’ claim that God’s glory is identical the happiness of God’s creatures.

²⁰⁰ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 791–792. More on this topic will be discussed in chapter 4.

objections may have been similar to those outlined by Pierre Bayle. In 1697, while commenting on the problem of the origin of evil, Bayle argued:

if you say that God has permitted sin in order to manifest his wisdom, which shines forth more in the midst of the disorders that man's wickedness produces every day than it would in a state of innocence, you will be answered that this is to compare God either to a father who allows his children to break their legs so that he can show everyone his great skill in mending their broken bones, or to a king who allows seditions and disorders to develop through his kingdom so that he can gain glory by overcoming them.²⁰¹

Bayle assumed that most people would not think of such a father or a king as good, and claimed that if God ordained or allowed the Fall (and all of its concomitant sins, misfortunes, and eternal torment of the reprobate), in order to magnify some part of God's character, then God must be partly evil, and God must love sin and evil just as much as God loves holiness.²⁰² If God acted in such ways, instead of being the "fountain of infinite good" as Edwards claims, God would indeed seem to be, as Edwards puts it, "an infinite evil," in which case "we ourselves had better never have been" and "there had better have been no being" at all.²⁰³ The implications of Edwards' views of reprobation for God's character and behavior do appear to be, in the end, "profoundly unsettling."²⁰⁴

1.8 Conclusion to Chapter 1

A stark contrast exists between the two alternate perspectives of God in Edwards' thought that have been explored in this chapter.

²⁰¹ Pierre Bayle, "Paulicians," in *Historical and Critical Dictionary Selections*, trans. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 175–176. As will be shown chapters 2 and 3, Edwards' idea of God is even more difficult than Bayle's description here, for to Edwards, God doesn't simply allow these things to happen, but actively causes them to happen.

²⁰² Bayle, 185.

²⁰³ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 274. For the reprobate, this statement would certainly seem to be true.

²⁰⁴ Bombaro, 293.

Edwards offers a wonderful concept of God's beauty and glory as derived from God's intra-trinitarian nature of perfect love. This love produces all of God's diverse attributes which are perfectly revealed through Christ dying on the cross for the sake of the redemption of God's creatures. Elect creatures thus know, love, and rejoice in God for all eternity, and God rejoices in their eternal happiness and holiness. Yet Edwards also creates a potentially troubling argument that God has the right to predestine most creatures to hell so that God can demonstrate God's wrath at sin and reveal God's justice to the elect. In this scenario, only a minimal number of elect creatures are necessary in order to convert the torment of hell into praise of God. This occurs as the elect observe the eternal torment of the reprobate, which elicits joy and gratitude that God chose to spare the elect from the same fate.

These two concepts of God are, at the very least, at odds with one another. At worst, they may be entirely incompatible. As a result, this analysis appears to support the characterization of Edwards as an "unsystematic" theological thinker, rather than a ruthlessly logical and entirely consistent philosopher—at least in regard to the issue of double predestination.

What is especially perplexing is that Edwards seems to have had the resources within his own thought that could lead to conclusions which would not logically require reprobation at all. Despite this, his interpretations of certain passages of Scripture convince him that not all—indeed, very *few*—will ultimately be saved. Yet in attempting to incorporate reprobation into his system, it seems that Edwards becomes caught in a conceptual conundrum which raises significant questions about God's goodness. Why then did Edwards not seek alternate understandings of Scripture which may have reduced the severity of this difficulty,²⁰⁵ or at least, may have reduced the incompatibilities within his own thought?

Having identified the problems with Edwards' views on reprobation, in the rest of this study I will explore Edwards' defense of double predestination in more detail. His arguments will be

²⁰⁵ It is not my purpose here to claim that there is a clear solution to predestination's problematic implications for God's goodness, for even Arminians and open theists must face the question of how God can be good if God allows some people to freely reject him yet imposes eternal negative consequences upon them as a result. Nevertheless, proponents of these systems often argue that their views at least reduce the difficulties for theodicy as compared with deterministic systems, such as the one proposed by Edwards which we will examine shortly.

grouped under the broad categories of Scripture, Reason, Tradition, and Experience.

This investigation will begin with the category of Reason, and will focus on the philosophical elements of Edwards' worldview, including his understanding of the nature of reality, causality, and human free will; his apologetic defenses for God's existence and sovereignty; and his philosophy of ethics. Some influence of these elements has already been mentioned in passing, yet further consideration of them in greater detail will be necessary. If these elements can restore consistency to Edwards' views on reprobation, then perhaps the portrayal of Edwards as a purely rational philosopher-theologian can be vindicated. If not, then the answer to the origin of Edwards' discordant beliefs on reprobation must lie elsewhere: in his understanding of God as revealed in Scripture, in Edwards' personal spiritual experiences, or the influence of Edwards' Puritan culture and theological tradition.

Chapter 2

Edwards' Philosophical Arguments for Double Predestination

The importance of reason and philosophy to Edwards has already been seen briefly in the Introduction. This chapter will focus on Edwards' arguments related to reprobation which are based primarily on his philosophical ideas about reality. Part of the purpose of this chapter will be to see if Edwards' philosophy can explain how reprobation is compatible with his beliefs about why God created the world, or with his notions of God's goodness. If it cannot, then this is a significant clue that he affirmed double predestination for reasons other than logical or philosophical consistency.

This chapter addresses two major topics in Edwards' thought. First, it will revisit Edwards' philosophy of beauty and virtue in order to show how he used these concepts to attempt to justify God's hatred of the reprobate, and prove the justice of their eternal punishment in hell. His argument will then be assessed for self-consistency, compatibility with Scripture and the Christian gospel, and congruence with Christian spirituality. If it satisfies these criteria, Edwards will have shown that God's decree of reprobation is logical, Biblical, virtuous, and praiseworthy.

Second, this chapter will examine Edwards' metaphysical understanding about reality and God's relation to it, which he built upon his philosophy of causality. Causality has already been mentioned in chapter 1 as an important factor in Edwards' interpretation of Scripture, such as when Edwards labels God as both the 'first' and 'last' cause of the world. Edwards' ideas about causality also influence his ideas about decision-making and epistemology, both of which appear to be purely philosophical arguments unrelated to any particular theological convictions.

However, Edwards' theological beliefs do seem to be an underlying motive for his ideas about causality, because Edwards argues that without a strong belief in cause and effect, it would be impossible to prove the existence of God. Additionally, Edwards uses his philosophy of causality to support his understanding of God's complete control over all creation. Yet I will show that Edwards' philosophy of causality changes depending on which theological doctrine he is attempting to defend. This hints that his philosophy of causality is not the fundamental philosophical ground for his belief in double predestination. This claim that Edwards' belief in double predestination does not rest on Edwards' philosophical thought will be further proven by

demonstrating that Edwards' philosophical metaphysics not only negates his explanation for why God created the world, but also undermines his ethical argument for the justice of reprobation.

2.1 Edwards' Ethical Defense of Reprobation

In chapter 1, it was shown that Edwards seems to derive his understanding of spiritual beauty and true virtue from his observations about physical beauty. This section will show how Edwards also attempts to use this theme in a philosophical argument defending the justice of reprobation.

As a brief recap of what we have seen in chapter 1, Edwards defines beauty as “proportionate” (i.e., loving) relationships, where a greater number of such relationships leads to greater beauty. This means that ultimately, *true virtue* or *spiritual beauty* is “benevolence to Being in general. . . . that consent, propensity and union of heart to Being in general, that is immediately exercised in a general good will”¹ and thus seeks Being in general’s “highest good.”² By ‘Being in general,’ Edwards means the “universal system of existence,” the “great whole” of everything that exists in the universe;³ yet he later restricts this to all intelligent creatures who have perception and will.⁴ As seen in chapter 1, this could lead to the claim that the truly virtuous person rejoices in the virtue and happiness of all other beings.

However, Edwards allows that the good of ‘Being in general’ is sometimes opposed to the good of individual creatures, especially creatures who are themselves opposed to the good of ‘Being in

¹ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 540.

² Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 545.

³ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 541. Bombaro notes that Edwards identified God with ‘Being in general’ at a young age (Bombaro, 76, referring to Edwards, “The Mind,” nos. 1 and 45 in WJE 6: 332–38, 362–64). Norman Fiering agrees that to Edwards, as for Malebranche, God is the sole self-sufficient ‘being’ who is the source of all other created beings; Edwards used the term ‘Being in general’ to refer to God and all the rest of creation combined. Fiering notes this phrase ‘Being in general’ is used in seventeenth-century English translations of Malebranche, and that similar concepts were expressed by other writers, such as the Scholastic *ens commune* and Shaftesbury’s ‘great Whole’ (Fiering, 325–327). There is a possibility that Edwards read Malebranche’s book *The Search After Truth*, as this was an extremely influential work at the time (Fiering, 44–47). However, Fiering cautions that it is difficult to determine where Edwards first read an idea unless Edwards specifically cites a source, and that clear references to sources are less frequent in Edwards’ earliest writings (Fiering, 45–46).

⁴ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 542. Why Edwards makes this distinction is understandable given his metaphysical views of reality which will be discussed later in this chapter.

general.’ He proposes that

the first object of a virtuous benevolence is Being, simply considered: and if Being, simply considered, be its object, then Being in general is its object; and the thing it has an ultimate propensity to, is the highest good of Being in general. And it will seek the good of every individual being *unless it be conceived as not consistent with the highest good of Being in general. In which case the good of a particular being, or some beings, may be given up for the sake of the highest good of Being in general.* And particularly if there be any being that is looked upon as statedly and irreclaimably opposite and an enemy to Being in general, then consent and adherence to Being in general will *induce the truly virtuous heart to forsake that being, and to oppose it.*⁵

So far, this argument may be plausible, and echoes Edwards’ idea about how God’s intra-trinitarian nature of pure love results in God’s hatred of sin and evil. However, now God is said to not only hate sin and evil in the abstract, but actually hate sinful or evil individual beings themselves.⁶

Edwards proposes two criteria to assess how much love any being is worthy of receiving from a truly virtuous person. First, if a truly virtuous person loves all ‘being,’ then, according to Edwards, whatever being has the “greatest share of existence” will deserve the most love and benevolence from such a virtuous person.⁷ Second, those beings who love ‘Being in general’ also deserve more love, because a virtuous person values love for ‘Being in general.’⁸ It is now possible to determine how much any being deserves to be loved by multiplying that being’s

⁵ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 545, emphasis mine.

⁶ Edwards does not cite any evidence for this claim in “True Virtue”; however, elsewhere he quotes Ps. 139:21–22: “do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? And am I not grieved with them that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred” (Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 129). While Edwards was discussing something different in that context, perhaps Edwards had this verse in mind here also.

⁷ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 545–546. Philip Quinn notes that the idea that different beings have different degrees of existence “is an idea to which Edwards is firmly wedded,” and was part of the popular metaphysical idea of the ‘Great Chain of Being,’ although many philosophers now find this concept unintelligible (Philip L. Quinn, “The Master Argument of the Nature of True Virtue,” in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003], 89–90). The idea of the ‘Great Chain of Being’ was that all forms of life could be ordered on a scale from the least to the greatest according to the similarities and differences between them. This idea originated with Plato and Aristotle and was widely accepted in the eighteenth century by all sorts of thinkers including philosophers, scientists, theologians, and poets (Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009], 183–185).

⁸ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 546–547.

degree of existence with that being's degree of spiritual beauty.⁹ This 'calculation' would also consider the good of millions of beings as having more importance than the good of a single individual, provided that these beings are equal in terms of goodness and degree of existence.¹⁰

As a result, Edwards concludes that it is God who ultimately deserves to be loved the most, for God is "infinitely the greatest and best of beings."¹¹ God has the greatest share of existence, in comparison to which, all the rest of creation is as "nothing,"¹² and God also has the most spiritual beauty, due to God's perfect moral holiness/goodness.¹³ Presumably, even though God makes up an infinitely great portion of 'Being in general,' an infinitely tiny portion of true virtue would also consist in loving fellow creatures.

Thus, Edwards has derived a philosophically-based system of ethics,¹⁴ which aligns with Jesus' commandments to love God and love others (Matthew 22:37–40), albeit one where love for God *infinitely outweighs* love for others. This claim is critical for justifying reprobation in Edwards' ethical system, since therefore the good of creatures can be sacrificed if God's happiness/glory requires it. While it is selfish for creatures to seek their own self-interest at the expense of others, Edwards theorizes that "if self were indeed all, and so more considerable than all the world besides, there would be no ill desert in his regarding himself above all, and making all other interests give place to private interest."¹⁵ Since this is exactly the case for God, then according to Edwards, God is not selfish in seeking his own happiness even if it comes at the expense of his

⁹ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 548, 571; Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 423–424. God's love also goes out to other created beings according to this standard (Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 557).

¹⁰ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 423.

¹¹ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 550.

¹² Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 554; Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 424. Yet as Quinn notes, this does not mean that the rest of creation actually *is* nothing, and Quinn agrees that Edwards' term "Being in general" refers to both God and creation combined (Quinn, 94).

¹³ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 550–551, 553.

¹⁴ Edwards' argument in "True Virtue" chapter 1 is conducted "almost entirely in purely philosophical terms," except for where he appeals to Scripture and other theologians regarding the concept of love (Quinn, 80).

¹⁵ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 614; Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 450–451.

creatures, as it does in reprobation.¹⁶

Presumably, this would make reprobation ‘just’ in Edwards’ opinion, even if the reprobate were entirely innocent and had never sinned.¹⁷ Yet Edwards avoids answering this question when he says, “’tis needless, elaborately to consider, whether God may not, consistent with his perfections, by absolute sovereignty, bring so great a calamity on mankind when perfectly innocent. It is sufficient, if we have good evidence from Scripture, that ’tis not agreeable to God’s manner of dealing with mankind, so to do.”¹⁸ Therefore, although Edwards’ philosophical system of ethics could appear to justify supralapsarian predestination, Edwards is not willing to affirm this because of his understanding of Scripture. In chapter 1, it was shown that Edwards believes that one purpose of hell is to showcase God’s justice, which the elect rejoice in. This means that God’s eternal choice to predestine the reprobate to hell must be on account of their sins, or else it would be unjust. Edwards recognizes this when he claims that,

God, in the decree of election, is justly to be considered as decreeing the creature’s eternal happiness antecedent to any foresight of good works, in a sense wherein he does not, in reprobation, decree the creature’s eternal misery antecedent to any foresight of sin: because the being of sin is supposed in the first things in order in the decree of reprobation, which is that God will glorify his vindictive justice; but the very notion of revenging justice simply considered supposes a fault to be revenged.¹⁹

¹⁶ As already shown in chapter 1 pp. 38 and 51n138, Edwards believed that love which is limited to only some beings is not truly virtuous. If so, then if God’s love is limited to only God’s self and the elect, it would mean that God would not be truly virtuous. This requires Edwards to make the above excuse that it is virtuous for God to be ‘selfish’ even though it is not virtuous for humans, because God is infinitely greater than everyone else.

¹⁷ Edwards says that intelligent creatures have “power to order the inferior creatures, and to destroy them at their pleasure,” as an image of the all-powerful ‘First Cause’ (i.e., God) (Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 896 in WJE 20: 154–155). This would seem to endorse the idea of God having the right to destroy innocent creatures for God’s own pleasure, if God so decided.

¹⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 206. He cites supporting verses such as Gen. 20:4 (WJE 3: 209), Gen. 18:25 (WJE 3: 216), and many more (WJE 3: 216–217).

¹⁹ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 700 in WJE 18: 282–283. A similar line is repeated in no. 704 in WJE 18: 315–316. However, given Edwards’ views on decision-making which will be discussed later in this chapter, God is ultimately in control of creatures’ choices to sin, and God also orchestrated the Fall, as will be demonstrated in chapter 3. Thus, Holmes says that Edwards “must be described as uncompromisingly supralapsarian after all” because “God’s first thought is emphatically that He will redeem, not that He will create” (Holmes, 131). Bombaro concurs (Bombaro, 209). This would seem to reopen the question of God’s justice in regard to reprobation.

Therefore, Edwards must explain why the reprobate deserve God's wrath. Edwards argues there is a sort of 'beauty' or 'harmony' in people receiving evil in proportion to the evil they commit.²⁰ He believes this is consistent with an inherent sense of justice that all people have, due to the natural self-love principle, which causes us to love those who love us and do good to us, and to desire that those who have hurt us suffer as we have suffered.²¹

What harm then have the reprobate done to God to deserve the infinite wrath which God will inflict upon them in hell? In *Original Sin*, Edwards argues that a sin against God is "infinitely heinous," because "the heinousness of this must rise in some proportion to the obligation we are under to regard the Divine Being; and that must be in some proportion to his worthiness of regard; which doubtless is infinitely beyond the worthiness of any of our fellow creatures."²² To support this claim, Edwards appeals to "metaphysics," and also the "plain fact" that according to God's revealed law, a person who sins even only once "is exposed to be wholly cast out of favor with God, and subjected to his curse, to be utterly and eternally destroyed."²³

To illustrate, Edwards compares a sinner to a servant who could not be said to be a good servant just because on most occasions he does his duties properly, but sometimes spits in his master's face. Nor would a wife who is usually faithful but occasionally commits adultery be considered a good wife. The sinner's case with God is infinitely worse than these examples, and so sinners' acts of disobedience infinitely outweigh any good that sinners do.²⁴ The reprobate also sin

²⁰ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 569. Edwards' opinion on the beauty of justice continues on pp. 570–572.

²¹ Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 582, 587, 594; Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 527 in WJE 18: 70 and no. 866 in WJE 20: 107. This sense of 'justice' regarding eternal torment for sin was also felt by Sarah Edwards during some of her spiritual experiences (Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in WJE 4: 336).

²² Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 130. If anyone argues that creaturely love for God should be credited with infinite merit, Edwards denies this, saying that giving someone what they are owed is not meritorious or praiseworthy (WJE 3: 130). Edwards makes a similar argument in "Miscellanies," no. 713 in WJE 18: 343–344, which Holmes notes is reminiscent of Aquinas' argument in his *Summa Theologica*, Supp. q. 99 art. 1 *responsio*, but Holmes says Edwards seems to come to the same conclusion "presumably independently" from Aquinas (Holmes, 220).

²³ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 130–131. No verses are cited here, although James 2:10 might come to mind.

²⁴ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 133. Holmes also refers to Edwards, "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners" sermon in WJE 19, and Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 713 in WJE 18: 343–344 (Holmes, 219).

because they neglect good deeds (Matthew 25:41–46) and lack love for Jesus (1 Corinthians 16:22).²⁵ Even not loving God *as much as one should* within one's finite capacities is condemnable.²⁶ Furthermore, Edwards believes that after the reprobate's judgment by God,

the sin and wickedness of their heart will come to its highest dominion and completest exercise; that they shall be wholly left of God, and given up to their wickedness, even as the devils are! When God has done waiting on sinners, and his Spirit done striving with them, he will not restrain their wickedness as he does now. But sin shall then rage in their hearts, as a fire no longer restrained or kept under.²⁷

As a result, the reprobate will continue to sin forever in hell: “for, God's continuing in being the devil, and others that are finally given up to wickedness, will be attended, most certainly and infallibly, with an eternal series of the most hateful and horrid wickedness.”²⁸ Therefore, they will continually deserve more punishment.²⁹

In sum, Edwards' theory of true virtue which begins with love for all beings as shown by doing good to them, ironically leads to the conclusion that it is right for God (and the elect) to infinitely hate the reprobate,³⁰ and that it is just for God to torment the reprobate forever. However, this claim that someone who is truly virtuous should hate any other being conflicts with Edwards' initial assertion that the truly virtuous person should love all other beings. Edwards also insists

²⁵ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 139.

²⁶ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 140–141, 143–144. Although it is questionable whether the reprobate have a natural ability to love God, if God has determined to not give them the disposition of the Holy Spirit which causes love for God. More about dispositions and their effect upon creatures' love for God will be discussed in chapter 4.

²⁷ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 598.

²⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 426.

²⁹ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” nos. 557, 559, and 574 in WJE 18: 101, 102, and 113. In no. 574, Edwards argues that the reprobate will primarily sin through their ongoing hatred of God as a result of the punishment they suffer in hell, and this hatred in turn deserves more punishment. Thus, justice “never can be actually satisfied in your damnation; but it is actually satisfied in Christ” (Edwards, “The Eternity of Hell Torments,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards With A Memoir by Sereno Dwight*, Vol. 2, ed. Hickman, 89). We may then wonder how eternal punishment of the reprobate can demonstrate God's justice as per chapter 1.

³⁰ “If God's children knew that others were reprobates, it would not be required of them to love them; we may hate those that we know God hates; as 'tis lawful to hate the Devil, and as the saints at the Day of Judgment will hate the wicked” (Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival,” in WJE 4: 476). See also Edwards, WJE 23: 583–584 where he argues that neither God nor the elect will have any pity or love for the damned.

that no act can be considered morally upright unless it proceeds from a principle of love, which fulfills God's entire Law.³¹ Based on both of these points, it would seem that the truly virtuous person (and God) should *love* the reprobate.³²

Further evidence that love for 'Being in general' should include love for enemies is seen in the spiritual experiences of Edwards' wife Sarah. Edwards documented her experience as an example of remarkable piety and love for God.³³ As part of her experiences, Sarah felt

an universal benevolence to mankind, with a longing as it were to embrace the whole world in the arms of pity and love; ideas of suffering from enemies the utmost conceivable rage and cruelty, with a disposition felt to fervent love and pity in such a case, so far as it could be realized in thought; fainting with pity to the world that lies in ignorance and wickedness; sometimes a disposition felt to a life given up to mourning alone in a wilderness over a lost and miserable world; compassion towards them being often to that degree, that would allow of no support or rest, but in going to God, and pouring out the soul in prayer for them.³⁴

This description seems much more like true love for 'Being in general' because it includes compassion for the lost and sinful world and love for enemies, even those who might cause one to suffer.³⁵ Indeed, such a conclusion seems to be necessary based on Jesus' words in Luke 6:32

³¹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 226; Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 103.

³² This contradiction has been noted by other scholars (Holmes, 195–196; Talbott, "Universal Reconciliation and the Inclusive Nature of Election," in Brand, 210). Quinn also believes that Edwards' ethics should include love for enemies simply because they exist (Quinn, 96).

³³ Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in WJE 4: 331–341. Her notable experiences began on January 20, 1742, when Edwards was out of town, and lasted for two weeks (James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986], 118–120; Marsden, 240–248). Sarah's version of her experiences can be read in Sarah Pierpont Edwards, "The Narrative of Sarah Pierpont Edwards," in WJE 41.

³⁴ Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in WJE 4: 338. Sarah became "entirely willing that even the reprehensible Williams of Hadley, who happened to be the next scheduled pulpit visitor in Jonathan's absence, should be the instrument of God in conversions there, willing that even he should be more successful than her husband" (McClendon, *Ethics*, 120). She also believed she would love Edwards and continue her acts of duty towards him even in the theoretical possibility that he would turn cruel towards her and whip her (Marsden, 246, citing Sarah Pierpont Edwards, "The Narrative of Sarah Pierpont Edwards," in WJE 41, where this thought may be found at the end of the document just above the endnotes).

³⁵ Sarah wrote, "I thought, if I were surrounded by enemies, who were venting their malice and cruelty upon me, in tormenting me, it would still be impossible that I should cherish any feelings towards them but those of love, and pity and ardent desires for their happiness" (Sarah Pierpont Edwards, "The Narrative of Sarah Pierpont Edwards," in

and Matthew 5:46–47 that it is not virtuous to only love those who return our love.³⁶ If enemies were included among those that the truly virtuous should love, this would seem to harmonize with biblical verses which state that God loved people before they loved him (1 John 4:10, 19), and that Christ died for people while they were his enemies (Romans 5:10).

Edwards notes that, “I have observed from time to time that in pure love to others (i.e., love not arising from self-love) there’s a union of the heart with others; a kind of enlargement of the mind, whereby it so extends itself as to take others into a man’s self: and therefore it implies a disposition to feel, to desire, and to act as though others were one with ourselves.”³⁷ No mention is made of this love applying only to those who are equal or greater in personal virtue than oneself. Furthermore, Edwards says that a truly virtuous person takes pleasure in the happiness of others—presumably, regardless of whether the other loves ‘Being in general’ or not.³⁸ In his sermon “Love, the Sum of All Virtue” Edwards includes a short paragraph on love for enemies based on Matthew 5:44,³⁹ but it seems this idea did not influence his ethical philosophy.⁴⁰

WJE 41). What implications might her experience have for the validity of Edwards’ theological claims about the virtues of love and hatred? James Wm. McClendon Jr. argues that “the content of the Christian faith, or for that matter any faith that must be lived out, not just thought out, is best expressed in the shared lives of its believers; without such lives, that faith is dead. These lives in their integrity and compelling power do not just illustrate, but test and verify (or by their absence or failure falsify) the set of religious convictions that they embody” (McClendon, *Ethics*, 110–111). If so, then perhaps Sarah’s lived experience of love for ‘Being in general’ as including love for enemies should be regarded as more authoritative than Edwards’ speculation that a virtuous person may hate others.

McClendon suggests that Edwards’ theory of true virtue may have been inspired by Sarah’s experiences (McClendon, *Ethics*, 124–126). Yet as noted in chapter 1, Edwards’ theory has much earlier origins in his ideas of physical beauty as found in his “The Mind” notebook, and so McClendon’s suggestion seems unlikely. It is interesting that while Edwards talks much of God’s beauty and his own love for God in his “Personal Narrative,” Edwards never describes being personally overcome with “love to all mankind” as Sarah did (McClendon, *Ethics*, 126–127). Yet McClendon and others identify love as Edwards’ “organizing principle or key” in his theology (McClendon, *Ethics*, 129–131). As a result, Edwards’ belief that God and the elect hate the reprobate is perplexing.

³⁶ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 106–107.

³⁷ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 589.

³⁸ Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 577.

³⁹ Edwards, “Love, the Sum of All Virtue,” in WJE 8: 147.

⁴⁰ There is one sentence on love for enemies in “True Virtue,” where he writes, “man’s loving his enemies is an evidence of a high degree of benevolence of temper” (Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 587). Yet he does not connect this thought to his insistence that those who oppose ‘Being in general’ should be hated, and no further comment is given regarding love for enemies. In his “Charity and Its Fruits” sermon series, Edwards commends

Holbrook notes that Edwards' mature philosophy of ethics which advocates for love to be shown only to those who are already virtuous thus "stands at complete odds with the Christian message of salvation."⁴¹ Edwards might reply that he only meant that *in this life* Christians should act in loving ways towards all others simply because it is not clear who is elect and who is reprobate, although hatred of the reprobate will be acceptable in the afterlife.⁴² However, this rebuttal does not work in defense of God, whom Edwards affirms knows the future and determines who is elect and who is reprobate. Rather than solving the conundrum, this inconsistency in Edwards' ethical theory seems reminiscent of the issue revealed in chapter 1, where we saw Edwards simultaneously affirm that both God and the elect would be more happy if more people are saved, and also that God and the elect rejoice at seeing the reprobate being tortured in hell.

However, one key issue has not yet been addressed, and that is how God determines that the reprobate will actually sin, in order for God's condemnation of them to hell to be just. Edwards' explanation involves his philosophical views of causality, decision-making, God's sovereignty, and the nature of created reality, which is the second topic in this chapter.

2.2 Edwards' Arguments for Divine Determinism from Causality

Edwards proclaims that "nothing ever comes to pass without a cause," or more specifically, things which are not self-existent and eternal (i.e., everything except God) must have causes.⁴³ He defines a cause as "any antecedent with which a consequent event is so connected, that it truly belongs to the reason why the proposition which affirms that event, is true; whether it has any positive influence, or not."⁴⁴ This is a rather all-encompassing definition of a cause, wherein

people who do not take revenge on those who mistreat them but instead continue to do good towards enemies, and says we should not return evil for evil (Edwards, "Long-Suffering and Kindness," in WJE 8: 189, 211). Christians should love their enemies and do good to them because our enemies are made in the image of God (Edwards, "Long-Suffering and Kindness," in WJE 8: 209–210). Elsewhere, he mentions that love should be directed to "all mankind," and not just the truly virtuous (Edwards, "Love the Sum of All Virtue," in WJE 8: 145).

⁴¹ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 106.

⁴² Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in WJE 4: 476.

⁴³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 181.

⁴⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 180–181.

anything that has any connection to an event (i.e., an effect), either positively or negatively, is labelled by Edwards as a ‘cause’ of that event. This is because Edwards rejects the possibility of ‘contingent’ events, which he defines as events that are not tied to any particular cause. He proposes that “if there are some events which are not necessarily connected with their causes, then it will follow, that there are some things which come to pass without any cause” or without any reason for why they occur.⁴⁵ It appears that Edwards cannot imagine how, in some cases, a cause could lead to an effect while in other cases, the same cause does not produce the same effect.⁴⁶ If this situation were to ever occur, he says, then all it would show is that a particular cause is not the *true* cause of the observed effect.⁴⁷ Therefore, he concludes that there is no such thing as a contingent effect.⁴⁸ Edwards believes this so strongly that he claims that the idea that anything can come into existence without a necessary cause is “repugnant to reason” and an “absurdity.”⁴⁹

Causality therefore plays a key role in Edwards’ views of epistemology. Edwards argues that the only way we can make any sense of the world is through the concept of cause and effect.⁵⁰ For example, a bodily sensation like touch leads us to infer that something was the cause of this sensation, and therefore we conclude that we have touched something.⁵¹ Or because we remember something, we presume that our memory was caused by past ideas and sensations.⁵²

⁴⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 214

⁴⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 214.

⁴⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 215.

⁴⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 216.

⁴⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 185, 187. His conviction that this understanding of causality is intuitive appears early on in Edwards’ writings: “when we therefore see anything begin to be, we intuitively know there is a cause of it” (Edwards, “The Mind,” no. 54 in WJE 6: 370). Edwards likely learned these early views on causality from reading *The Art of Thinking* (also referred to as the Port-Royal Logic) during his early college career (Leon Howard, “The Creative Imagination of a College Rebel: Jonathan Edwards’ Undergraduate Writings,” *Early American Literature* 5, no. 3 [Winter, 1971]: 52–53).

⁵⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 181–183.

⁵¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 183.

⁵² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 183.

Additionally, there are two further arguments which Edwards makes for his understanding of deterministic causality. One of these comes from his understanding of how we make decisions, and the second is from his desire to uphold God as the creator of the universe.

2.2.1 Edwards' Arguments for Causality from Decision-Making

More support for Edwards' claim that nothing ever happens without a cause comes from how he understands the process of decision-making. Edwards' goal in *Freedom of the Will* was to disprove the Arminian view of free will.⁵³ Arminians insisted that people have full control over their own volitions, such that there are never any influences so strong that a person is forced to act in only one way. Arminians rejected the Calvinist view of double predestination, for it would involve God intentionally putting the reprobate in a situation where they could not avoid sin and could not believe the gospel, and then punishing them eternally for that inability. To the Arminians, this appeared unjust and immoral.⁵⁴ As a result, the Arminians of Edwards' time rejected the idea that sin was unavoidable, and also rejected the idea that God could hold anyone accountable for a choice if it were impossible for a person to choose differently.⁵⁵

In contrast, Edwards argued that the human will is not free to determine itself, because if it were, then there would be no cause that could explain why a person's will chooses one way or another. This is the starting point of his entire investigation in *Freedom of the Will*. He asks, "what influences, directs, or determines the mind or will to come to such a conclusion or choice as it does? Or what is the cause, ground or reason, why it concludes thus, and not otherwise?"⁵⁶

⁵³ Marsden, 437; Edwards, "228. To the Reverend John Erskine" in WJE 16: 719.

⁵⁴ In Edwards' time there was a "widespread belief that strict adherence to the doctrine of divine sovereignty, including predestination, vitiated moral accountability in both human and divine affairs" (Fiering, 261–262, 314). This had been an issue for ancient philosophers and the early church, but became more important after Hobbes' work (Fiering, 262n2). The question of how God could be morally justified in condemning sinners whom God had determined would sin "was a constant difficulty for Calvinists in general in the eighteenth century" (Fiering, 292).

⁵⁵ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 356–357; Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 297–298. More about Arminians' beliefs will be discussed in chapter 5.

⁵⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 178.

One possibility is that there is *no cause* at all to explain people's choices—except, as seen earlier, Edwards rejects the idea that anything can happen without a cause. He refutes a similar claim when his opponents argue that choices can be made from a state of indifference (that is, without any inclination or motive). Edwards says this is a contradiction; the will cannot choose to do something while remaining perfectly indifferent to each course of action, for “the will's beginning to act is the very same thing as its beginning to choose or prefer,”⁵⁷ and if the will is beginning to choose or prefer, then it is no longer indifferent.⁵⁸ Or in other words, “to say that when it is indifferent, it can do as it pleases, is to say that it can follow its pleasure, when it has no pleasure to follow.”⁵⁹ Instead, Edwards insists there must always be a reason behind every choice.⁶⁰

What about when people *do* seem to choose one thing over another, even when one option is just as good as another? This, it seems, would prove that people can indeed make a choice when in a state of indifference. Yet Edwards makes a plausible argument that this never occurs. For example, imagine that I choose to eat an egg for breakfast. I open the carton, and need to choose which egg among the other identical eggs I will take out to cook. In this case, Edwards would say that I am not so much choosing which one of the identical eggs to take, as simply choosing to

⁵⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 197.

⁵⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 195–197, 204–205.

⁵⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 198.

⁶⁰ The concept of freedom as ‘indifference’ was only one of the several alternative philosophical views of freedom which were advocated for by various authors both before and during Edwards’ lifetime. Fiering traces some of this debate and outlines different philosophies of freedom in his work *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought and Its British Context*. The ‘Thomist-intellectualist’ view held by most Protestants and Catholics asserted that freedom involved being able to make a rational decision un-influenced by inner compulsions or external constraints (Fiering, 264–266). The ‘Scholastic-voluntarist’ position most often held by Jesuits affirmed ‘freedom of indifference’ and asserted that a person could choose completely independently of all influences upon them (Fiering, 266–268). The ‘Augustinian-voluntarists’ believed that freedom involved being able to do what one’s heart most desired to do, and claimed a person’s heart was oriented either toward God or toward self, such that its orientation could not be changed apart from God’s grace (Fiering, 268–271). This last view was commonly held by Puritans, such as John Owen, and accorded with Martin Luther’s concept of freedom (Fiering, 268–269). This last category is where Fiering places Edwards, noting that “Edwards’s theory of the will combined diverse elements from the past: Augustinian principles such as those held by [Theophilus] Gale, many seventeenth-century Puritans, and Malebranche; certain metaphysical and psychological ideas resembling those expounded by Hobbes, Locke, and Collins; and the orthodox tenets of Calvinism on foreordination” (Fiering, 283).

take *an* egg. Next, I choose some method of selecting one, such as which one I happen to lay eyes on first, or which one my finger happens to touch first, and then I choose to follow through and actually pick up that particular egg.⁶¹ Thus, Edwards can explain how an apparently random choice occurs without admitting that choices can be made without a cause.

If there must be a cause or reason behind every choice, a second possibility could be that the will determines itself. Yet Edwards says that “there is noway [sic] that the will can determine an act of the will, than by willing that act of the will, or, which is the same thing, choosing it. So that here must be two acts of the will in the case, one going before another, one conversant about the other, and the latter the object of the former, and chosen by the former.”⁶² This would continue into eternity past. For example, according to Edwards, if I choose to eat an apple, I must first choose to choose to eat the apple, and before that, to choose to choose to choose to eat the apple, and so on infinitely.⁶³ This would mean an individual would require an infinite chain of decisions (and thus, infinite time) to make any choice.⁶⁴ Since decisions do not require infinite time, Edwards believes the chain of choices must be finite, and therefore, it must end with a cause that is not chosen by the will. Since in Edwards’ thought, each choice must be *caused* by something, there is no room anywhere in this chain of decisions for any choice which was not wholly caused or determined by the previous choice. Thus, he concludes that the Arminian idea of a self-determining will is impossible.⁶⁵

It is interesting that Edwards also sees the inherent tendency of all people to sin as disproving the Arminian view of free will, because he believes there would not be so much constant sin in the world if people could freely choose to avoid it:

⁶¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 198–199. Edwards’ illustration involves a person choosing to put a finger on a square of a chessboard, but I have chosen to use this example which I think is more common, and is similar to an example which Edwards mentions briefly regarding choosing between two identical cakes or eggs (WJE 1: 52).

⁶² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 190 more on 226–227.

⁶³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 194, 230–231, 235–236. The example of eating apples is my own.

⁶⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 235–236.

⁶⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 238, also 345, 414.

the notion of liberty of will, in this [Arminian] sense, implies perfect freedom from everything that should previously fix, bind or determine it; that it may be left to be fixed and determined wholly by itself: therefore, its determinations must be previously altogether unfixed. And can that which is so unfixed, so contingent, be a cause sufficient to account for an effect, in such a manner and to such a degree, permanent, fixed and constant?⁶⁶

So Edwards thinks that if people have a tendency to constantly sin, then it must mean that the human will is somehow inclined or determined towards sin in a way that is not freely chosen.

Therefore, the third and only remaining possibility is that each choice is caused by something unchosen. Edwards claims, “if the will don’t cause and determine the act by choice, it don’t cause or determine it at all; for that which is not determined by choice, is not determined voluntarily or willingly.”⁶⁷ What, then, *is* this first unchosen cause behind any decision? Edwards proposes that “the soul always wills or chooses that which, in the present view of the mind, considered in the whole of that view, and all that belongs to it, appears most agreeable.”⁶⁸ This becomes the causal ‘motive’ for our decision.

According to Edwards, the process of making a decision begins with the mind perceiving the current situation and predicting the likely outcome of each possible course of action. The will then chooses whichever action is deemed to produce the greatest amount of pleasure. Edwards believes that it is contradictory for someone to choose something that they do not believe is in their best interest,⁶⁹ and therefore he labels whatever motive someone chooses to act on as the “strongest” motive. Edwards claims the will always chooses to act on what is the strongest

⁶⁶ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 195.

⁶⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 190.

⁶⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 217. More about Edwards’ thought on the interaction between the understanding and the will can be found in *Religious Affections*, where he specifies that there are only two faculties of the soul: the understanding, which perceives and judges things, and the will/mind/heart/inclination which is what makes people pleased/displeased with things (Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 96). Edwards labels the strongest inclinations as “affections,” which include love, hatred, fear, hope, etc., and says these are “the springs” of human action (Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 101).

⁶⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 217.

motive, because he thinks it is absurd to say a person would ever act on a weaker motive, since there would be no cause to explain why the weaker motive was chosen over the stronger one.⁷⁰

However, Edwards says that what is discerned to be in an individual's best interest, and thus, what becomes their strongest motive, is not chosen by the will, for if it were, it would again lead to an infinite series of choices regarding what information is chosen to consider when making a decision.⁷¹ Alternatively, if one were to say that the will is entirely independent from the mind's rational understanding, this would mean that people act irrationally, which would make it pointless to attempt to influence a person's actions with arguments from evidence or reason,⁷² or by commands, threats, and promises.⁷³ Edwards rejects this possibility, and so he is unmoved by Arminian appeals to all the commands, invitations, promises, and threats in Scripture as evidence of human free will, because he says that even though these things are found in Scripture, this does not prove that the Arminian view of decision-making is correct.⁷⁴ Instead, Edwards would prefer the Arminians to prove their theory of free will entirely apart from Scripture:

let them first make manifest the things in question, which they suppose and take for granted, and show them to be consistent with themselves, and produce clear evidence of their truth; and they have gained their point, as all will confess, without bringing one scripture. For none denies, that there are commands, counsels, promises, threatenings, etc., in the Bible. But unless they do these things, their multiplying such texts of Scripture is insignificant and vain.⁷⁵

Edwards is so confident that the Arminian view of free will is incoherent that even if it were taught in Scripture, it "would be the greatest of all difficulties that attend the Scriptures."⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 142, 231–232.

⁷¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 223, 227, 229.

⁷² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 223–224, 272.

⁷³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 304.

⁷⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 419–420.

⁷⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 418–419.

⁷⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 439.

Therefore, at least on this topic of decision-making, it seems that Edwards prefers philosophy over Scripture. Edwards first wants a rational theory of how free will works, and then to show how Scripture supports it, instead of working from Scripture back to a theory about free will.

2.2.2 Edwards' Arguments for Causality from Apologetics

A further reason why Edwards insists on defending his understanding of causality is because he believes that it is the only way to apologetically argue for the existence of God. He claims,

the doctrine of necessity, which supposes a necessary connection of all events, on some antecedent ground and reason of their existence, *is the only medium we have to prove the being of God*. And the contrary doctrine of contingency, even as maintained by Arminians (which certainly implies or infers, that events may come into existence, or begin to be, without dependence on anything foregoing, as their cause, ground or reason) takes away all proof of the being of God; which proof is summarily expressed by the Apostle, in Romans 1:20.⁷⁷

In contrast, Edwards fears that if there were “no absurdity or difficulty in supposing one thing to start out of nonexistence, into being, of itself without a cause; then there is no absurdity or difficulty in supposing the same of millions of millions.”⁷⁸ This would include any volitions that come into existence without a determining cause.⁷⁹ Then, the problem is, if

we begin to maintain, that things may come into existence, and begin to be . . . of themselves, without any cause; all our means of ascending in our arguing from the creature to the Creator, and all our evidence of the being of God, is cut off at one blow. In this case, we can't prove that there is a God, either from the being of the world, and the creatures in it, or from the manner of their being, their order, beauty and use.⁸⁰

Based on this, it seems that Edwards believes that if there was anything besides God that did not have a cause, including individuals' choices, then it would annul any basis for the belief that there must be a Creator of the universe. Edwards' desire to philosophically defend the existence

⁷⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 420, emphasis mine.

⁷⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 183.

⁷⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 183–184.

⁸⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 182–183.

of God is understandable, because apologetic arguments for God as creator of the universe were becoming increasingly called for at the time when Edwards lived.⁸¹

Yet there was more at stake for Edwards than being able to prove that there was a creator God. Thomas Hobbes had argued that all that exists is material reality, leaving no place for God or other spirits unless these could also be understood as material. Materialism attempted to explain the entire universe as an autonomous system dependent only on the laws of physics and physical matter, but “such a view was, at least in the popular mind, an invitation to irreligion and immorality.”⁸² However, the influence of newly-developed theories of atoms and mathematical laws of nature were making materialism an attractive philosophy to intellectuals.⁸³ Bishop George Berkeley perceived this as a threat, claiming that “matter once allow’d I defy any man to prove that God is not matter,” and in response, he took the unusual step of arguing that matter does not exist.⁸⁴ Some philosopher-scientists such as Descartes and Henry More did take up the challenge to prove that matter was not the only reality.⁸⁵ Yet explaining *how* God or spirits could interact with physical matter proved difficult, for,

if causation is held to operate only within a substance-world, then the mental and spiritual world can have no effect upon the material world, and its separate reality is of little relevance. God or other spirits can have no effect upon the physical realm, and even the human soul or mind cannot affect its body. If, by contrast, causation operates across substance-worlds, then the one undoubted philosophical success of the day, the discovery of regular universal scientific laws, is placed in jeopardy, as the movements of material bodies no longer form a closed system.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 40.

⁸² Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 40.

⁸³ Holmes, 82–83; Wallace E. Anderson, “The Refutation of Materialism,” in WJE 6: 54–56.

⁸⁴ Holmes, 83, citing George Berkeley, *Works in 9 Vols.*, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948–57), 1: 77.

⁸⁵ Holmes, 82; Anderson, “The Refutation of Materialism,” in WJE 6: 57.

⁸⁶ Holmes, 82–83. Kathryn Tanner has noted that this question of how a transcendent, spiritual, unchanging God can interact with a created, changeable physical reality goes back to the Greeks, whose solution was to say that the two realms could interact only through a long chain of intermediaries (Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* [New York; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988], 39–45).

Edwards became interested in this problem through his reading of English philosophers who were critical of Hobbes, such as Henry More and Isaac Newton.⁸⁷

Like them, he [Edwards] was an advocate of the sciences, their procedures, and their well-established conclusions. Also like them, he recognized the threat of materialism to orthodox Christian natural theology, and joined his efforts to theirs to establish by argument the reality and the spiritual nature of God, and to show how the finite world, even as understood in the sciences, depends upon God's infinite wisdom and the free and purposeful exercise of his infinite will for its creation and preservation.⁸⁸

Such an approach would also refute the deists, who believed that although God created the world, God then left it alone to run according to natural laws without further intervention.⁸⁹

Edwards' desire to defend God's involvement in and governance of the world is a key theme which appears in several of his major works as well as his personal writings. This brings our discussion to the topic of what Edwards believes about God's sovereignty, and to how Edwards attempts to reconcile God's sovereignty with his understanding of cause and effect.

2.3 Edwards' Understanding of God's Sovereignty and Causality

In a surprising move, Edwards argues for God's sovereignty not from Scripture, but from his philosophical beliefs about causality. He defines God's sovereignty as:

supreme, universal, and infinite *power*; whereby he is able to do what he pleases, without control, without any confinement of that power, without any subjection in the least measure to any other power; and so without any hindrance or restraint, that it should be either impossible, or at all difficult, for him to accomplish his will.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Anderson, "The Refutation of Materialism," in WJE 6: 54; Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 40.

⁸⁸ Anderson, "The Refutation of Materialism," in WJE 6: 54.

⁸⁹ Bombaro, 69.

⁹⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 378–380, emphasis his. Further specifications follow, such as that God has supreme authority to do whatever God wills, and that God's will is not constrained or guided by anything other than God's perfect wisdom. For this last point he appeals to Isa. 40:14 (WJE 1: 380).

Elsewhere, Edwards makes similar claims on the basis of his understanding of God's omnipotence: "every being had rather things should be according to his will than not; and therefore, if things ben't [are not] according to his will, it must be for want of power. It can't be for want of will, by supposition; it must therefore be for want of sufficiency. . . . But this cannot be the case of a being of infinite power and infinite wisdom" (Edwards, "Part V:

Edwards cites no biblical evidence to prove or support this definition. This absence is curious given the importance he places upon God's sovereignty in his autobiographical "Personal Narrative." There, Edwards admits his strong personal feelings regarding the doctrine of God's sovereignty. He writes, "the doctrine of God's sovereignty has very often appeared, an exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet doctrine to me: and absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God."⁹¹ He considers absolute sovereignty to be a "great part" of God's glory.⁹² Furthermore, to Edwards, God's sovereignty specifically includes the doctrine of double predestination.⁹³

Therefore, Edwards needs to explain how God exercises this all-controlling sovereignty within his philosophical framework of deterministic causality. Edwards argues that every single event in the world is traceable back to the very first cause, which is God's own action:

all events whatsoever are necessarily connected with something foregoing, either positive or negative, which is the ground of its existence. It follows therefore, that the whole series of events is thus connected with something in the state of things, either positive or negative, which is original in the series; i.e. something which is connected with nothing preceding that, but God's own immediate conduct, either his acting or forbearing to act. From whence it follows, that as God designedly orders his own conduct, and its connected consequences, it must necessarily be, that he designedly orders all things.⁹⁴

"All things" includes the causes behind human volitions, for "God orders all events, *and the volitions of moral agents amongst others*, by such a decisive disposal, that the events are infallibly connected with his disposal."⁹⁵ God orders events by creating laws of cause and effect:

Predestination," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 27, "Controversies" Notebook [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008]).

⁹¹ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 792.

⁹² Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 799.

⁹³ "the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased" (Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 792).

⁹⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 432.

⁹⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 434, emphasis mine. Edwards specifies that God controls moral agents' volitions either by "positive influence or permission" (WJE 1: 433). More of Edwards' claims about the difference between 'permission' and 'positive influence' will be discussed in chapter 3, section 3.5 where I will examine whether such a distinction is plausible given Edwards' deterministic worldview.

“the very being of created things depends on laws, or stated methods fixed by God, of events following one another.”⁹⁶ Edwards calls these laws “dispositions.”⁹⁷ The law of gravity would be an example of one such disposition, but these laws or dispositions go beyond just physical laws of nature. Living creatures also operate according to complex sets of law-like dispositions that are just as regular and predictable as the laws of nature.⁹⁸

Therefore, according to Edwards, all reality is driven by a network of law-like dispositions of cause and effect. Yet because God creates these laws, God knows how they all will interact. God is also in control of the initial conditions of the universe. As a result of these two factors, God has full control over the universe, and God also has full foreknowledge of all future events.⁹⁹ Today, this might be compared to a computer game where every interaction that occurs within the simulation is in accordance with the programmed equations and logical statements written by the game’s creator, which means that nothing which the creator did not desire or intend could ever happen in the game (at least, in theory). This concept of divinely-created dispositions fulfills Edwards’ goal of upholding the reality of Newtonian physics while maintaining God’s sovereignty over all creation.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Edwards, “Subjects to be Handled in the Treatise on the Mind,” in WJE 6: 392. See also Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 1263 in WJE 23: 202–204.

⁹⁷ For example, Edwards wrote “the way we come by the idea of any such thing as disposition or tendency, is by observing what is constant or general in event; especially under a great variety of circumstances; and above all, when the effect or event continues the same through great and various opposition, much and manifold force and means used to the contrary not prevailing to hinder the effect” (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 108).

⁹⁸ Bombaro, 119–120, referring to Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 48 as well as Edwards, “Subjects to be Handled in the Treatise on the Mind,” in WJE 6: 391–392. Here Edwards says “it is laws that constitute all permanent being in created things, both corporeal and spiritual” (WJE 6: 391). Bombaro also cites Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 241 in WJE 13: 358 where Edwards says the soul’s “essence consists in powers and habits.”

⁹⁹ Bombaro, 111, based on Edwards, “The Mind,” no. 34 in WJE 6: 353–354. More of Edwards’ views on God’s foreknowledge will be examined in chapter 3.

¹⁰⁰ It is interesting that as scientific understanding of reality has progressed, the latest theories of quantum physics suggest that there is uncertainty and unpredictability at the most fundamental level of reality. Some theologians claim this endorses the idea of the ‘openness’ of God and allows for God’s creation to have genuine freedom (Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001], 130–131; Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction To the Open View of God* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000], 45–46). Thus, it seems it is not unusual for theologians to believe that their understanding of

The source from which Edwards got this idea of dispositions is unclear. Other Reformed and Puritan theologians such as William Ames, John Owen, Thomas Shepard, and even John Calvin used the concept of dispositions, which meant that such an idea was “entirely permissible” within Edwards’ tradition.¹⁰¹ Edwards was likely exposed to the idea of dispositions from authors such as these through his studies at Yale where he had access to the philosophical and theological resources available in the Dummer library collection.¹⁰² It is suggested that

this conviction [about the dispositional nature of reality] emerged from his analysis of (1) God’s relation to the world, which he perceived to be so purposeful, ordered, and consistent as to be law-like; (2) his understanding of Newtonian physics, in which the world’s phenomena were understood to be mechanistic and law-like; and (3) his grasp of biblical anthropology and eschatological fulfillment.¹⁰³

It seems that a major reason Edwards thought that God must have absolute control over everything is because Edwards believed in a sort of ‘butterfly-effect’ causality. Based on Newton’s laws of motion and gravitation, Edwards argues that,

the influence of the least particle may . . . have such effect on something in the constitution of some human body, as to cause another thought to arise in the mind at a certain time, than otherwise would have been; which, in length of time (yea, and that not very great), might occasion a vast alteration through the whole world of mankind. And so innumerable other ways might be mentioned, wherein the least assignable alteration may possibly be attended with great consequences.¹⁰⁴

God is endorsed by contemporary scientific understandings of the created world. This is not to say that one view of providence is more ‘scientific’ than others, for science is always being updated and theories come into favour and fall out of favour again, and there is no guarantee that these modern authors are any more correct than Edwards was simply because they are appealing to physics as it is currently understood.

¹⁰¹ Bombaro, 107; Lee, 22–25. See, for example the use of the term “disposition” in Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.8 p. 552, where Calvin says faith is “more of the heart than of the brain, and more of the disposition than of the understanding.” Calvin also says the disposition is the source of a person’s works (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.1 p. 769) and that “it is a very hard and difficult thing to put off ourselves and to depart from our inborn disposition” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.8 p. 600). Calvin cites several Bible verses which he believes support the idea that people are driven by inner dispositions or inclinations which are nevertheless under God’s control, such as Jer. 10:23, Prov. 16:1, 9, and Prov. 20:24 (Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.6 pp. 204–205).

¹⁰² Bombaro, 107.

¹⁰³ Bombaro, 106, brackets mine.

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 393. The term ‘butterfly-effect’ refers to deterministic non-linear systems that display the mathematical property of “sensitive dependence” where a tiny variation in initial conditions can

Essentially, if God were not in full control of even something as insignificant as the motion of the tiniest particles of matter, it seems Edwards believed they could possibly thwart God's entire purpose for the universe. If that were to happen, then God would presumably be very unhappy.

However, the possibility that God could ever be unhappy with some state of things in the world is inconceivable to Edwards. He asserts that "God is a perfectly happy Being, in the most absolute and highest sense possible" according to "maxims of plain truth, and indisputable evidence."¹⁰⁵ Yet Edwards does not provide any such evidence. Elsewhere, he asserts that "it is evident, by both Scripture and reason, that God is infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, and independently glorious and happy: that he stands in no need of, cannot be profited by, or receive anything from the creature; or be truly hurt, or be the subject of any sufferings or impair of his glory and felicity from any other being."¹⁰⁶ He claims that there is nothing that can cause God any unhappiness, pain, grief, or trouble—not even things that appear to go against God's will such as sin or evil.¹⁰⁷ Otherwise, Edwards claims that if God *truly* infinitely hated sin, then God would become infinitely miserable at the occurrence of each sin,¹⁰⁸ and Edwards has already rejected this outcome as impossible. Indeed, Edwards asserts that not even sin or evil disturb the perfect operations of the universe, and as a result, the universe acts as if it were one being,

cause dramatic changes in outcome. If the weather were such a system, a flap of a butterfly's wings in Argentina might cause a tornado in Texas (Robert Bishop, "Chaos," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/chaos/>).

Holbrook points to Edwards, "The Mind," in WJE 6: 357–358, and suggests that Edwards may have found support for his idea, or at least would have had "deepest sympathy for" John Henry Bisterfield's claim that "no being is solitary; all being is symbiotic" (Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 46; Fiering, 70–71, 78).

¹⁰⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 409.

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 420. However, it seems that some Bible verses could refute this claim, such as when God grieves (Gen. 6:6) or is angry (Exod. 4:14). Those who argue for divine impassibility explain these verses as a true appearance of God's unchangeable nature as perfect love expressing itself in different ways depending on the situation (Thomas G. Weinady, "Does God Suffer?" *First Things* [Nov. 2001]: 37, 40), yet I doubt they would phrase it as God being "unchangeably happy."

¹⁰⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 409.

¹⁰⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 409–410. As will be shown in chapter 3, section 3.2 on God's foreknowledge and chapter 3, section 3.5 on theodicy, the reason Edwards believes that God is not made unhappy at the occurrence of sin is because God has ordained sin in order to bring greater good from it.

moved by one will. Edwards says that an “impartial arbiter” who is perfectly wise and just, would conclude that

the whole universe, including all creatures animate and inanimate, in all its actings, proceedings, revolutions, and entire series of events, should proceed from a regard and with a view to God, as the supreme and last end of all: that every wheel, both great and small, in all its rotations, should move with a constant invariable regard to him as the ultimate end of all; *as perfectly and uniformly as if the whole system were animated and directed by one common soul*: or, as if such an arbiter as I have before supposed, one possessed of perfect wisdom and rectitude, became the common soul of the universe, and actuated and governed it in all its motions.¹⁰⁹

In sum, Edwards believes that for God to be completely happy, God must be absolutely sovereign over all creation, which he interprets as meaning that God must control everything down to the motion of the tiniest particles of matter through the use of law-like dispositions.

It seems that Edwards has fallen into the one-sided theological error where “God’s sovereignty excludes talk of the creature’s own power and freedom,”¹¹⁰ for as shown in the above quote, creatures have been reduced to ‘wheels’ within God’s machine of creation and are actuated by God as effectually as if they were inanimate objects.¹¹¹ In such a situation, any attempt to preserve room for creaturely freedom or agency becomes incoherent and unintelligible.¹¹² However, in Edwards’ opinion, God’s absolute control over creation is justified because all creation is dependent upon God:

¹⁰⁹ Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 424–425, emphasis mine. See also Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 651 in WJE 18: 191–192, and Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 154 in WJE 11: 104.

¹¹⁰ Tanner, 123. Holbrook notes that Edwards’ “belief in the structured, hierarchical order of nature” which ensured it proceeds entirely with ‘regard’ to God reveals that Edwards normally thought of nature as unaffected by the Fall—in contrast to other contemporary authors such as Thomas Burnet, who saw the world as if it were a great ruin (Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 39). See more on this point in chapter 4, section 4.4.2, p.211n223.

¹¹¹ At one point, Edwards talks of creation being God’s “machine” or a “chariot” that God rides in, based on an allegorization of Ezekiel chapter 1 (Edwards, “End of Creation,” in WJE 8: 508). See also Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 89 in WJE 11: 86.

¹¹² Tanner, 122.

as he is God over all, to whom all are properly subordinate, and *on whom all depend*, worthy to reign as supreme head with absolute and universal dominion; so it is fit that he should be so regarded by all and in all proceedings and effects through the whole system: that this universality of things in their whole compass and series should look to him and respect him in such a manner as that respect to him should reign over all respect to other things, and that regard to creatures should universally be subordinate and subject.¹¹³

So it seems that Edwards believes that God's superiority over creation gives God the right to dispose of creation however God chooses. This claim echoes Edwards' attempt to justify God's treatment of the reprobate as discussed earlier in this chapter. Although some aspects of Edwards' philosophy of causality and God's sovereignty seem to support Edwards' ethical theory, significant questions remain about the justice of reprobation in such a system. As will be seen in the next section, Edwards' philosophical use of idealism, occasionalism, and continuous creation do not solve but actually exacerbate this problem in Edwards' theology.

2.4 Edwards' Idealism and Causality

There are two more features of Edwards' conception of reality which must be considered in order to obtain a full understanding of his thought regarding causality and God's sovereignty: *occasionalism*, and *continuous creation*. Ultimately, both of these are elements of Edwards' metaphysical *idealism*, which he uses to refute materialism as well as to defend certain theological doctrines. These features, however, undermine Edwards' argument for why God created the world and also contradict Edwards' previously-stated beliefs about causality. These problems suggest that Edwards defends his deterministic view of reality, including double predestination, for reasons other than because he has created an entirely self-consistent and non-contradictory philosophical or theological system.

2.4.1 Continuous Creation and Occasionalism

Continuous creation, occasionalism, and idealism are conceptually intertwined; however, this exposition will begin with the concept of continuous creation. Edwards claims that "God's

¹¹³ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 424, emphasis mine.

preserving created things in being is perfectly equivalent to a *continued creation*, or to his creating those things out of nothing at *each moment* of their existence,” such that “the existence of each created person and thing, at each moment of it, be from the immediate *continued* creation of God.”¹¹⁴ In a particularly illuminating passage, Edwards again appeals to causality as justification for this claim:

That God does, by his immediate power, uphold every created substance in being, will be manifest, if we consider, that their present existence is a *dependent* existence, and therefore is an *effect*, and must have some *cause*: and the cause must be one of these two: either the *antecedent existence* of the same substance, or else the *power of the Creator*. But it can't be the antecedent existence of the same substance. For instance, the existence of the body of the moon at this present moment, can't be the effect of its existence at the last foregoing moment. For not only was what existed the last moment, no active cause, but wholly a passive thing; but this also is to be considered, that no cause can produce effects in a *time* and *place* in which itself is not. 'Tis plain, nothing can exert itself, or operate, when and where it is not existing. But the moon's past existence was neither where nor when its present existence is. In point of time, what is past entirely ceases, when present existence begins; otherwise it would not be past. The past moment is ceased and gone, when the present moment takes place; and does no more coexist with it, than does any other moment that had ceased twenty years ago. Nor could the past existence of the particles of this moving body produce effects in any other place, than where it then was.¹¹⁵

In sum, Edwards rejects the idea that any created thing could be the cause of its own subsequent existence in either time or space. Instead, his solution is to say that each successive moment of physical existence is created *ex nihilo* by God. Edwards claims, “it will follow from what has been observed, that God's upholding created substance, or causing its existence in each successive moment, is altogether equivalent to *an immediate production out of nothing*, at each moment. Because its existence at this moment is not merely in part from God, but wholly from him; and not in any part, or degree, from its antecedent existence.”¹¹⁶ What Edwards means by ‘equivalent’ is not just that created things are equally as dependent upon God's continuing

¹¹⁴ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 401, emphasis his. See more on 402.

¹¹⁵ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 400, emphasis his.

¹¹⁶ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 402, emphasis his. Edwards even insists that having a new thought is a proof of God, for the same reasons (Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 267 in WJE 13: 373).

preservation *as if* God created them out of nothing each moment. Instead, he argues that God actually *does* re-create them each moment, because, “I suppose, that an effect which is produced, every moment, by a new action or exertion of power, must be a *new* effect in each moment, and not absolutely and numerically the same with that which existed in preceding moments.”¹¹⁷ Essentially, according to Edwards, God preserves created objects by, each moment, re-exerting God’s power to re-create the object, which is distinguished from the power by which God created these things during the last instant of their existence. This would mean that reality is not continuous, but resembles discrete frames in a movie film, re-created each moment by a new act of God.¹¹⁸ As a result, Edwards allows that present existence can be thought of as an effect of past existence, but only in appearance.¹¹⁹

Edwards seems to base his argument for continuous creation on a presupposition that God actually *does* recreate all things in existence every moment, for otherwise, Edwards believes they would fall into non-existence.¹²⁰ He refers to a few examples from nature, such as the images we see being renewed moment-by-moment as new “rays of light” hit our eyes; Edwards extrapolates to say that the same is true for the physical existence of reality.¹²¹ He says it is “hard to know what they mean” when people suggest that once God gives something existence, it is no longer dependent on God’s sustaining power.¹²² Again, Edwards may have argued this to refute the materialists who denied the need for a creator of the universe, for if Edwards had admitted that a thing could be the antecedent cause of its own existence, then the materialists could have argued that matter was eternal and thus a creator God was unnecessary.

¹¹⁷ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 402. This is not a new insight for Edwards. In one of his earliest works, Edwards attempts to prove that “the constant exercise of the infinite power of God is necessary to preserve bodies in being,” and he believes this is “an incontestable argument for the being of God” (Edwards, “On Atoms,” in WJE 6: 214). Crisp notes that Descartes appears to have endorsed a very similar position (Oliver D. Crisp, “How ‘Occasional’ was Edwards’s Occasionalism?” in *Jonathan Edwards Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Helm and Crisp, 63).

¹¹⁸ Bombaro, 158; Crisp, *God and Creation*, 162; Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin*, 131.

¹¹⁹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 401.

¹²⁰ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 401–402. No evidence is cited for these claims.

¹²¹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 402. See also Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 125a in WJE 13: 288.

¹²² Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 402.

However, Edwards' new claim that a cause can only have effects in the same time and place as the cause itself exists overturns Edwards' prior reasoning about causality. Earlier, Edwards insisted that a cause must always be temporally prior to an effect, so that there is no such thing as backwards causation.¹²³ He used this argument to claim that the will cannot be self-determined, but must be determined by an earlier unchosen cause. However, now, if cause and effect can *only* coincide in both time *and* space, then the idea that the will's choices are the simultaneous cause and effect of its own decisions appears sound.

Therefore, it seems that Edwards has moved away from the earlier arguments about causality and dispositions that he made in *Freedom of the Will*. There, Edwards argued that the God-given dispositions which define all created things are the cause of all natural effects, and even personal choices. Yet in his subsequent work, *Original Sin*, Edwards appeals to the views of George Turnbull, and even Edwards' Arminian opponent John Taylor, to maintain that these dispositions or laws do not really exist. According to this later perspective, dispositions or laws of nature are only God exercising his power in such consistent ways that it appears *as if* there were such a law.¹²⁴ Edwards writes, "all habits [are] only a law that God has fixed, that such actions upon such occasions should be exerted."¹²⁵ Thus, this concept is called *occasionalism*. According to Edwards' theory, depending on the situation, God exerts his power in accordance with the law-like dispositions that God has decided to apply to every object, in order to produce effects in the world.¹²⁶ Because of this, Edwards now approves of his Arminian opponent's idea that "God, the original of all being, is the ONLY cause of all natural effects."¹²⁷ Unfortunately, by upholding God's total sovereignty over all things to the extent that God becomes the only cause behind all

¹²³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 346.

¹²⁴ He quotes George Turnbull's *Moral Philosophy* which says "it is the will of the mind that is the first cause, that gives a subsistence and efficacy to all those laws, who is the efficient cause that produces the phenomena, which appear in analogy, harmony and agreement, according to these laws" (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 399). See also Bombaro, 109–110, and Crisp, "How 'Occasional' was Edwards's Occasionalism?" 73–75.

¹²⁵ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 241 in WJE 13: 357–358.

¹²⁶ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 170–171; Bombaro, 113, 115–117.

¹²⁷ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 401, capitalization his.

events, Edwards has denied all causal agency to created things. This is an error which theologians can make if they over-emphasize God's transcendence, and especially if they endorse the concept of occasionalism.¹²⁸

When taken together, Edwards' *occasionalism* and *continuous creation* lead to a view of reality in which, for every new moment, God creates a brand-new universe that is completely distinct from the universes that came before it. This new universe differs from the previous one only by tiny incremental changes which give the appearance of causality, laws of nature, and creaturely agency.

In addition to his desire to refute materialism, there is another reason Edwards defends the idea of continuous creation. It is a key part of his argument that God is righteous when he holds all people guilty of the first sin of Adam and Eve, and thus, it is an important part of maintaining God's justice in reprobation. Convinced of this reality from Scripture,¹²⁹ Edwards declares it to be a "plain fact" that God treats Adam's descendants as identical to Adam, and claims that theologians either have to explain this or simply accept it.¹³⁰ He attempts the former.

Initially, Edwards uses a biological explanation, comparing Adam to a corrupt acorn, which then grows in time to produce a corrupt tree of all the rest of humanity, who are essentially a continuation of Adam's own being.¹³¹ Edwards also claims that this understanding of individuals being culpable for the sins of their ancestors was "natural" to the Israelites and other ancient peoples who had not "refined their notions by metaphysical principles."¹³² However, Edwards

¹²⁸ Tanner, 86.

¹²⁹ He cites verses such as Rom. 5:16, 18, and 19 as evidence (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 248, 310).

¹³⁰ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 394–395.

¹³¹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 385–386, 389, 391. Edwards argues that it was God's wise choice to constitute humanity so that all who are descended from Adam inherit his traits, as it is throughout nature (WJE 3: 406). Edwards cites "Stapferus" (Johann Friedrich Stapfer) as a source of this tree analogy (WJE 3: 391).

¹³² Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 398–399. However, the Israelites' acknowledgement of the sins of their ancestors could be explained by reference to God's covenant with Israel as a distinct people under corporate obligation to follow God's law, instead of being only due to biological descent.

seems to recognize the flaw with this argument when he attempts to explain why the sins of other human ancestors are not also passed on to their descendants. He claims that the nature of each person's union with Adam is different than their union with other ancestors, which is why the Bible says that children should not be punished for the sin of their parents, citing Ezekiel 18:1–20.¹³³ Edwards claims these verses have nothing to do with the doctrine of original sin.¹³⁴ Therefore, in order to defend the idea of original sin, Edwards wants to maintain two conflicting ideas: 1) that all humanity is united with Adam for the purposes of transmitting sin and guilt, and yet 2) children are not united with *their* parents for the purposes of transmitting sin and guilt.

How does Edwards explain such a situation? He says, “some things, being most simply considered, are entirely distinct, and very diverse; which yet are so united by the established law of the Creator, in some respects and with regard to some purposes and effects, that by virtue of that establishment it is with them as if they were one.”¹³⁵ After all, Edwards asserts that the adult human body is not constituted of the same substance as when it was a child, since “the greater part of the substance [has] probably changed scores (if not hundreds) of times.”¹³⁶ Yet God is pleased to deal with it as one body due to God's “sovereign, arbitrary constitution.”¹³⁷ Edwards then proceeds to say that the same is true for human memory, continuity of consciousness, and even the soul itself, which is the basis of personal identity: “for if same consciousness be one thing necessary to personal identity, and this depends on God's sovereign constitution, it will still follow, that personal identity depends on God's sovereign constitution.”¹³⁸ For example, in Edwards' view of reality, the version of myself who wrote the previous sentence is not the same being who wrote this sentence. I have no connection to the prior versions of myself either through continuity of physical substance, or through cause and effect. My memories of past

¹³³ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 408.

¹³⁴ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 409.

¹³⁵ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 397.

¹³⁶ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 398.

¹³⁷ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 398.

¹³⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 399.

events are re-created along with each successive version of myself so that it appears to me that there has been continuity of consciousness—that I have actually experienced all the things in the past that I remember—even though I have really only existed for less than the time it takes to push down one key on my keyboard.¹³⁹

How then can God hold a person accountable for the sins committed by past versions of themselves, who were not actually the same physical being? Edwards asserts that God ‘arbitrarily’ decides to constitute individuals’ identities such that God considers each newly-created person to be ‘one’ with past versions of themselves.¹⁴⁰ If this is how God constitutes the personal identity of an individual being, then it is no different for God to ‘arbitrarily’ consider each person to be ‘one’ with Adam. Because God’s will determines truth, each person truly *is* ‘one’ with Adam, and as a result, God can rightly hold all people accountable for Adam’s sin.¹⁴¹

Out of concern that someone might question his philosophy or metaphysics on this point, Edwards simply says that his claim that God treats all people as equally guilty of Adam’s sin is “apparent and undeniable,” because it is “plainly and fully taught in his Holy Word,” and “abundantly confirmed by what is found in the experience of mankind in all ages.”¹⁴² Therefore, he argues that critics should stop claiming that it is unjust for God to treat people this way.¹⁴³ This situation is justified due to the “good ends obtained, or useful consequences of such a constitution.”¹⁴⁴ For example, he believes the doctrine of original sin teaches people that they need to have their sin remedied by Christ in order to avoid final shame and everlasting contempt. Additionally, he says that it leads to humility and mutual compassion which should in turn lead to mercy, patience, long-suffering, gentleness, and forgiveness, whereas denying this doctrine

¹³⁹ This example is inspired by my reading of Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin*, 132.

¹⁴⁰ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 402–403.

¹⁴¹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 404.

¹⁴² Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 409.

¹⁴³ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 409.

¹⁴⁴ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 406.

leads to pride and judgment of others as worse sinners.¹⁴⁵ If this is still unconvincing, Edwards finally argues that this ‘arbitrary’ constitution is based on God’s wisdom, which makes it right and beyond questioning.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, despite this philosophical speculation, it seems Edwards has returned to his first suggestion that people should simply accept God’s wisdom and not try to explain this mystery, after all.

2.4.2 Idealism

As seen thus far, Edwards’ understanding of reality is rather counter-intuitive. His explanation for how reality is perceived as continuous although the universe is being re-created every moment depends upon a third component of Edwards’ worldview, which is called *idealism*. This is the belief that there is no real physical reality; only ideas actually exist. In this section I will show that ultimately, in Edwards’ view, idealism means that nothing exists other than God. Thus, idealism negates Edwards’ entire argument about God creating other beings for the purpose of having them come to know and love God, which was discussed in chapter 1. As a result, I will conclude that reprobation is not a necessary deduction from Edwards’ philosophical views of causality and the nature of reality.

The question of what matter actually *is* goes back to the ancient Greeks, and has continued to the modern era. Some believed that matter was a hard, impenetrable material. Others, like Berkeley, used Locke’s claim that we do not experience reality itself to argue that there is no real physical matter: our minds perceive only ideas, which are our entire reality.¹⁴⁷ Like Locke and Berkeley, Edwards also argued that “an absolutely perfect idea of a thing is the very thing, for it wants nothing that is in the thing, substance nor nothing else.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, a perfect idea is indistinguishable from reality. Yet the consensus among scholars is that Edwards developed his

¹⁴⁵ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 424.

¹⁴⁶ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 406.

¹⁴⁷ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 41.

¹⁴⁸ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 94 in WJE 13: 258; Edwards, “Discourse on the Trinity,” in WJE 21: 114–118.

idealism independently from Berkeley.¹⁴⁹

Edwards' early essay "On Being" may reveal the origin of his idealistic thought. It begins with a few speculations about reality. First, he claims that it is impossible for human minds to conceive of absolute nothingness, therefore, "it is necessary some being should eternally be."¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, because it is just as difficult to think of there being 'nothing' in one place, even if there is something in another place, he now says "this necessary, eternal being must be infinite and omnipresent." The only thing which Edwards believes meets these criteria is 'space' itself. Thus, Edwards boldly concludes that space is "necessary, eternal, infinite, and omnipresent," and therefore, "space is God."¹⁵¹ Yet in what sense does Edwards mean this?

Edwards muses, "how doth it grate upon the mind, to think that something should be from all eternity, and nothing all the while be conscious of it."¹⁵² He claims that "nothing has any existence anywhere else but in consciousness . . . nowhere else but either in created or uncreated consciousness."¹⁵³ Edwards attempts to prove this claim through a thought experiment. He imagines a universe without light, motion, or beings capable of perception. Without motion, Edwards asserts, there is no solidity of any bodies, since he defines solidity as resistance to force, and "there can be no resistance if there is no motion."¹⁵⁴ He believes that such a universe would

¹⁴⁹ Bombaro refers to the "Editor's introduction," by Harry S. Stout in WJE 13: 46–47 which says that while Edwards' idealism seems similar to that of Locke and Berkeley, he developed it independently based on his own conclusions about matter and God's work. Bombaro says this position "has now become the consensus among scholars" (Bombaro, 16n59). Pauw agrees (Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 52n123). Holmes states that attempts to prove that Edwards was dependent on Berkeley have generally failed, and "rather, a common theistic appropriation of the ideas of such philosophers as Locke, Malebranche and Bayle is assumed" (Holmes, 94). Some history of this debate over the source of Edwards' idealism can be found in WJE 6: 76n3. Bombaro traces some later development of Edwards' idealism in Edwards, "Miscellanies," entries nos. gg, kk, ll, and pp in WJE 13, which reaffirm Edwards' idealistic conclusions from "Of Being" and "The Mind" in WJE 6 (Bombaro, 47).

¹⁵⁰ Edwards, "On Being," in WJE 6: 202.

¹⁵¹ Edwards, "On Being," in WJE 6: 203.

¹⁵² Edwards, "On Being," in WJE 6: 203.

¹⁵³ Edwards, "On Being," in WJE 6: 204, 206.

¹⁵⁴ Edwards, "On Being," in WJE 6: 205.

be distinguishable from “the void” only because it exists in God’s mind.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, “we see that a world without motion can exist nowhere else but in the mind either infinite or finite.”¹⁵⁶ As a result, Edwards says that only “spirits” or “beings which have knowledge and consciousness” are “real and substantial beings” or are “properly substance.”¹⁵⁷

In “The Mind,” Edwards wrestles further with the concepts of beings, substances, minds, and ideas. Edwards asserts that substance is only “the infinitely exact and precise and perfectly stable idea in God’s mind, together with his stable will that the same shall gradually be communicated to us, and to other minds, according to certain fixed and exact established methods and laws.”¹⁵⁸ Human bodies—and brains too—are only ideas in God’s mind: “the brain exists only mentally . . . ’tis nothing but the connection of the operations of the soul with these and those modes of its own ideas, or those mental acts of the Deity.”¹⁵⁹

According to Edwards, a ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’ is identified with consciousness: “a mind or spirit is nothing else but consciousness, and what is included in it. The same consciousness is to all intents and purposes the very same spirit or substance.”¹⁶⁰ Edwards’ stance on occasionalism and continuous creation necessitate that all the ideas in any created being’s mind, and even that mind itself, are re-created every moment by God in a series that causes these ideas to be perceived as if

¹⁵⁵ Edwards, “On Being,” in WJE 6: 205–206.

¹⁵⁶ Edwards, “On Being,” in WJE 6: 206.

¹⁵⁷ Edwards, “On Being,” in WJE 6: 206. Yet clearly the universe does have light and motion, so it is difficult to understand what Edwards gains by this thought experiment.

¹⁵⁸ Edwards, “The Mind,” in WJE 6: 344. See also p. 355.

¹⁵⁹ Edwards, “The Mind,” in WJE 6: 355. Holbrook notes that Edwards’ idealistic philosophy meant that Edwards had difficulty explaining the role of the physical brain and sense organs if they, too, are simply ideas (Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 62–65). Presumably, to be consistent, Edwards would say that God chooses to communicate to our minds that we experience perceptions according to how God imagines our sense organs function and what stimuli God imagines are detected through the sense organs. However, Edwards rejects this idea near the end of his life, when he says the concept of non-physical sense organs is “a seeming inconsistency with reason” (Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 1340 in WJE 23: 363).

¹⁶⁰ Edwards, “The Mind,” in WJE 6: 342–343.

they were in accordance with the laws of nature, such as cause and effect.¹⁶¹ Therefore, Edwards clarifies that “what we call spirit is nothing but a composition and series of perceptions.”¹⁶² Or, as another scholar says, “God communicates an idea of a particular existence that reflects upon itself and constitutes ‘the substance of the soul.’”¹⁶³

However, Edwards says that in reality, “things as to God exist from all eternity alike. That is, the idea is always the same, and after the same mode.”¹⁶⁴ He speculates that this is because God’s ideas are perfect, and so presumably are not incomplete, and thus God has no succession.¹⁶⁵

In sum, to Edwards, God’s thoughts are eternally static, and God’s thoughts contain that infinite series of events which all created consciousnesses experience, including eternal existence in heaven for the elect, and hell for the reprobate.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, Edwards can say not only that truth is “an agreement of our ideas with that series in God,” but also “God and real existence are the same.”¹⁶⁷ Essentially, to Edwards, the only thing which truly exists is God: “hence we learn how properly it may be said that God is, and that there is none else, and how proper are these names of the Deity: ‘Jehovah’ and ‘I Am That I Am.’”¹⁶⁸ Concerning Edwards’ claim that God is space,

¹⁶¹ Edwards, “The Mind,” in WJE 6: 354–355. Yet because everything still operates “as if” cause and effect is true and “as if” physical reality exists, the value of upholding idealism is questionable (Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 62). I agree that idealism has no real advantage for Christian belief or practice unless one finds it necessary to offer a philosophical alternative to materialism.

¹⁶² Edwards, “Notes on Knowledge and Existence,” in WJE 6: 398.

¹⁶³ Bombaro, 157. At one point Edwards argues “the being of the Creatures is not some thing added to that of the Creatour [sic] . . . for they are but Communications from him. Communications of being ben’t [are not] additions of Being” (Edwards, “706. Sermon on Rom. 1:20,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 61, *Sermons, Series II, 1743* [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008]).

¹⁶⁴ Edwards, “The Mind,” in WJE 6: 355.

¹⁶⁵ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 94 in WJE 13: 258.

¹⁶⁶ As Bombaro explains, “God, therefore, does not create within the boundaries of time, but rather God invents and communicates the idea of time to intelligent minds, which, in turn, perceive some sequential rhythm of existence. But in God’s mind, the series or sequence is but one changeless idea” (Bombaro, 91, see also 111–112).

¹⁶⁷ Edwards, “The Mind,” in WJE 6: 344–345.

¹⁶⁸ Edwards, “The Mind,” in WJE 6: 344–345. Bombaro agrees that to Edwards, God is the “only real being” (Bombaro, 100), and notes that statements similar to this appear throughout Edwards’ writings, such as when

Edwards now says, “space, as has been already observed, is a necessary being (if it may be called a being); and yet we have also shewn that all existence is mental, that the existence of all exterior things is ideal. Therefore it is a necessary being only as it is a necessary idea.”¹⁶⁹ God’s eternal thoughts are thus the one single ‘necessary idea’ which gives existence to everything else. In effect, as one scholar says, “existence is, for created realities, the condition of being present to the mind of God.”¹⁷⁰ This idea extends also to the Trinity, for Edwards argued that even the Son and the Spirit are ideas in God’s mind.¹⁷¹ Therefore, Edwards argues that God’s essence is identical with God’s eternal thought about God’s own self:

God’s knowledge of himself includes the knowledge of all things; and that he knows, and from eternity knew, all things by the looking on himself and by the idea of himself, because he is virtually all things; so that all God’s knowledge is the idea of himself. But yet it would suppose imperfection in God, to suppose that God’s idea of himself is anything different from himself.¹⁷²

Thus, God only has one real idea, which is the idea of himself, which is God’s essence.¹⁷³ In conclusion, according to Edwards, God the Father is a necessary, eternal idea, which generates the rest of the Trinity and the entire history of created reality and all creatures within it.

Edwards’ philosophical idealism endured throughout his life, for around 1756–1757 he wrote a piece called “Notes on Knowledge and Existence,” which reaffirms that there is no real substance other than God/God’s knowledge.¹⁷⁴ While this perspective does certainly refute

Edwards writes “God is the sum of all being, and there is no being without his being; all things are in him, and he in all” (Bombaro, 80, citing Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 880 in WJE 20: 122).

¹⁶⁹ Edwards, “The Mind,” in WJE 6: 341. This means that “‘space’—the substratum wherein things ‘move and have their being’ . . . is the mind of God, apart from whose knowledge nothing can exist” (Holmes, 88).

¹⁷⁰ Holmes, 92–93. Holbrook says that to Edwards, “a spiritual being, it seems, could only create a spiritual world” (Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 82, based on Edwards, “Apocalypse Series,” in WJE 5: 166–167).

¹⁷¹ Edwards, “Discourse on the Trinity,” in WJE 21: 131; Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 94, in WJE 13: 258.

¹⁷² Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 94 in WJE 13: 257.

¹⁷³ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 94 in WJE 13: 258.

¹⁷⁴ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 62; Edwards, “Notes on Knowledge and Existence,” in WJE 6: 37, 398.

materialism, unfortunately, it potentially leads to several important theological problems for Edwards' philosophy. In particular, it undermines Edwards' argument in chapter 1 regarding the reason God created the world, and why God would predestine anyone to hell.

2.5 Problems with Edwards' Philosophical Views of Reality

As has been shown, Edwards' assumptions about causality lead Edwards to affirm that all reality is created and controlled by God, including the 'free' choices of all intelligent creatures. In his attempt to refute materialism and defend the idea of original sin, Edwards created an understanding of reality in which all existence, including every created mind, is composed of God's own thoughts, communicated to these minds moment-by-moment in a discrete sequence which gives the appearance of causality and natural laws, but is in reality fully determined by God's will and upheld by God's own power and agency. This may indeed be an irrefutable response to materialism, and is a creative explanation for how God creates the world from nothing and interacts with it, yet upholds the relative status of the laws of nature and leaves room for miracles. But such a system creates several important theological problems for Edwards who aspired to uphold traditional affirmations of God's goodness, justice, and divine simplicity.

Because Edwards clearly says that created minds only exist within God's own mind as God's ideas, the Reformed analytical theologian Oliver Crisp says that Edwards' views go beyond 'anti-realism' or idealism, and seem to be some form of panentheism or pantheism.¹⁷⁵

Panentheism is the idea that God somehow "includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part exists in Him, but His Being is more than, and not exhausted by, the universe;" whereas in pantheism, "God is immanent in or identical with the universe . . . God is everything and everything is God."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Crisp, *God and Creation*, 148–151.

¹⁷⁶ Crisp, *God and Creation*, 140, citing F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1213. Crisp's definition of pantheism comes from the Oxford English Dictionary online, "pantheism, n.," <https://dictionary.oed.com>, accessed March 10, 2010.

Dermot Moran notes that the term 'pantheism' was first coined by the Irish philosopher John Toland in 1704–1705, but later in the eighteenth century it was used as a pejorative and was seen as near-identical to atheism, especially in the work of Spinoza. Pantheism was condemned as a heresy by Pope Pius IX in 1861 (Dermot Moran, "Pantheism from John Scottus Eriugena to Nicholas of Cusa," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64, no. 1

In an earlier work, Crisp labelled Edwards' position as panentheism, wherein God creates separate minds/souls that experience reality by receiving God's projected thoughts about reality; both God's thoughts and the created souls are separate from God's own being.¹⁷⁷ Holbrook agrees that Edwards was aiming at something like panentheism, but suggests that Edwards had difficulties articulating this consistently.¹⁷⁸ Holbrook asserts that Edwards occasionally contradicted himself, sometimes insisting that spirits were "real substance," and other times saying that the only real substance is God.¹⁷⁹ Crisp admits that at times Edwards made "unguarded" statements that seem to endorse pantheism, but Crisp believes that in Edwards' mature thought, as expressed in "End of Creation," he settled for panentheism.¹⁸⁰ Yet Holbrook insists that Edwards could not have accepted the pantheistic implications of his philosophy of idealism,¹⁸¹ for logically,

if ideas alone are real, not matter, and nature is understood as a system of mutually implicative ideas, then nature is not only possessed of real existence, but is God. But that conclusion jars with Edwards's conviction that nature was an inferior realm of

[Winter, 1990], 132n2).

It could be argued that there is a line of 'pantheistic' or 'panentheistic' thought in 'Neoplatonistic' Christian authors such as Dionysius the Aeropagite, Augustine, John Scotus Eriugena, Thomas Aquinas, and Nicholas of Cusa, who all agreed that God has no 'external' relations to anything outside himself, and God has no 'accidents,' which means that creation "must be one with the Godhead itself, or belongs to an internal relation" (Moran, 137). These theologians appealed to verses of Scripture such as 1 Cor. 15:28, Col. 1:16–17, Rom. 11:36, and John 1:3–4 as support for this apparent pantheism/panentheism (Moran, 133n4). However, Moran notes that this Christian pantheistic 'tradition' makes strong use of the claim that God is better spoken about through negation, such that "these authors do not intend even in the remotest way to assert a link between God and creation, far less a pantheism—an identity of God and creation"—and instead their pantheistic statements are part of "a search for a divine language beyond declarative propositional structure" (Moran, 138). Whether Edwards would fit in this tradition is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

¹⁷⁷ Crisp, *God and Creation*, 142, 161–163; Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 78. Yet later in this work Crisp argues that if Edwards were consistent he would either have had to give up divine simplicity or "embrace pantheism" (Crisp, *Edwards Among the Theologians*, 167).

¹⁷⁸ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 44–45.

¹⁷⁹ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 42–43.

¹⁸⁰ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 173. As shown in Edwards, "Notes on Knowledge and Existence," in WJE 6: 398, the mature Edwards still makes some of those "unguarded" comments, and thus, I do not think they can be so easily dismissed as simply immature speculations or accidental statements. Bombaro agrees that Edwards' pantheistic statements appear throughout Edwards' writings (Bombaro, 80).

¹⁸¹ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 44.

shadows and images that reflected the superior supernatural world in which it did not participate. Nature could not then be identified with God or [be] considered to have real existence. . . . Edwards's dilemma was that he could not accept nature as illusory, but neither could he admit that nature enjoyed some other kind of reality than that represented by the identification of God and real existence.¹⁸²

At the very least, Edwards' philosophical idealism would seem to raise theological questions about what it means for God to "create" the universe, or what it would mean for God to become incarnate as the human Jesus, if matter does not actually exist.¹⁸³

Yet in a later work, Crisp argues that Edwards' panentheism, when combined with Edwards' occasionalism and his affirmations of divine simplicity, finally collapses into pantheism after all. For as Crisp says, even if "creation is a set of 'stable' divine ideas that are communicated by God, or emanated by him ad extra, so that the world is the 'overflow' of the divine nature in some shadowy existence outside God. . . . it is still the case that God has a set of ideas about the creation that are identical to each other and to the divine nature."¹⁸⁴ Crisp believes that the only way that Edwards could have avoided pantheism would have been to admit that God is not metaphysically simple, which would have returned Edwards to panentheism.¹⁸⁵ However, given Edwards' Christian context and tradition, Crisp suspects this would not have been "particularly palatable" to Edwards.¹⁸⁶ Other scholars have reached the same conclusion that Edwards'

¹⁸² Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 43–44.

¹⁸³ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 71. Crisp agrees that Edwards' view leads to an "impoverished doctrine of creation," which is unconvincing to Christians who have not accepted Neoplatonism (Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 175).

¹⁸⁴ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 175.

¹⁸⁵ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 167–168, 174–175. In this work Crisp documents a number of places where Edwards does affirm divine simplicity (Crisp, 170). But panentheism requires a God with multiple parts—"that aspect of his nature which is independent of the creation; and the creation which is the necessary product of his creative nature"—for without this, "creation is identical to the divine nature," which is pantheism (Crisp, 175). See also Crisp, *God and Creation*, 160–161.

¹⁸⁶ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 167. Crisp suggests that "the deep structures of Edwards's metaphysics appear to present him with a real difficulty which he cannot escape without embracing significant theological revision to his doctrine of God in a manner incompatible with the classical theism of his heritage and schooling" (168). Pauw notes that "virtually all the Reformed scholastic and Puritan theologies with which Edwards was familiar upheld divine simplicity" (Amy Plantinga Pauw, "'One Alone Cannot be Excellent': Edwards on Divine Simplicity," in *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Helm and Crisp, 118).

metaphysics is ultimately pantheistic.¹⁸⁷ Crisp suggests that Edwards was possibly unaware that his metaphysics led to this theological dilemma.¹⁸⁸

However, even if Edwards had compromised on divine simplicity and endorsed a sort of panentheism, it would not have solved Edwards' theodicy problem. His doctrines of continuous creation and occasionalism still imply "the unpleasant and unorthodox consequence that God is the cause of (at least) the overwhelming majority of creaturely evil."¹⁸⁹ Continuous creation raises a problem for theodicy because if each being only exists for an instant, then they do not exist long enough to fully complete one sinful or evil action. It would be questionable how such beings could be held responsible for any sinful action,¹⁹⁰ and justly punished in hell accordingly. This difficulty increases when it is noted that in continuous creation "there are no immanent causal relations between the different stages of a four-dimensional entity that are not directly and immediately caused by God."¹⁹¹ Edwards' occasionalism also raises difficulties, because Edwards appears to make a number of potentially conflicting claims: 1) God is the only causal agent; 2) God is the only moral agent (since no creature exists long enough to commit one moral action); and 3) God is "causally but not morally responsible for evil."¹⁹² How these are to be consistently reconciled is unclear.

¹⁸⁷ Crisp, *God and Creation*, 161. Here, Crisp cites John Cooper who labels Edwards' thought as "panentheism that borders on Spinozan pantheism," referring to John W. Cooper, *Panentheism, the Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 77. Charles Hodge also agrees that Edwards' thought on continuous creation and occasionalism mean that Edwards' philosophy "is essentially pantheistic" (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 [New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1874], 220). Arthur B. Crabtree and Douglas J. Elwood have also labelled Edwards' thought as pantheistic (Bombaro, 80, citing Crabtree's work *Jonathan Edwards' s View of Man: A Study in Eighteenth –Century Calvinism* [Wallington, UK: Religious Education, 1948], 17–18, and Elwood's *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1960], 22–29).

¹⁸⁸ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 168.

¹⁸⁹ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 179.

¹⁹⁰ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 177, 179; Crisp, *The Metaphysics of Sin*, 132–133. Crisp cites Philip L. Quinn's article "Divine Conservation, Continuous Creation, and Human Action," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, Alfred J. Freddoso ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 66, as saying it is a "charming irony" that the continuous creation and occasionalism which Edwards used to defend the justice of God holding all people guilty of Adam's sin actually undermines this justice.

¹⁹¹ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 178.

¹⁹² Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 177.

Even if Edwards had abandoned the philosophies of idealism and continuous creation, there remains a further serious problem with Edwards' occasionalism, for "a consistent theological occasionalist should affirm that nothing but God exists."¹⁹³ Thus, to maintain this would have returned Edwards to pantheism. If Edwards had rejected occasionalism, then he would have needed to find an alternate explanation for how the guilt of original sin transfers to every human being. Yet, even rejecting occasionalism would not have saved his metaphysics unless he had also rejected God's total determination of all things, for, as Kathryn Tanner says, "if no created being actually exists in any respect apart from its determination by divine agency, then . . . contingency and created freedom are just appearances to be corrected by the knowledge of God's universally effective agency."¹⁹⁴ This determinism would also mean that there is no real creaturely agency, and thus sin and evil are God's own actions.

How then could God's justice be shown if those predestined to hell could do nothing other than what God had eternally determined they would do?¹⁹⁵ While Edwards' attempted defense—that any beings who are opposed to loving God deserve to be forsaken—would work within a system that included genuine creaturely autonomy, it does not work within Edwards' larger philosophical and theological system, because in his system, God is ultimately the one responsible for choosing to make the reprobate rebel against him.¹⁹⁶ This problem will be further examined in chapter 3, where we discuss Edwards' arguments that it was also God's choice to put Adam and Eve in a position where they were guaranteed to sin.

¹⁹³ Tanner, 86. See also Crisp, *The Metaphysics of Sin*, 131–132. Crisp agrees with Tanner, saying that occasionalism means not only that God causes creatures 'external' actions, but is also the cause of creatures' intentions to act, which is exactly what we saw Edwards argue earlier in section 2.2.1 on deterministic decision-making (Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 171).

¹⁹⁴ Tanner, 151. Therefore, "when it seems one can hold on to traditional claims for divine sovereignty only at the cost of the creature's own integrity, most theologians, with good reason, choose not to do so" (Tanner, 123).

¹⁹⁵ This was a major objection of the Arminians even before Edwards' time. Of course, in *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards does attempt to argue that a person is morally responsible despite their actions being fully determined by God. This argument will be examined in chapter 3 since it is an argument based primarily on Scripture.

¹⁹⁶ Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards and the Doctrine of Hell," 25. Holmes agrees (Holmes, 221).

Edwards' philosophy raises questions not only about the 'negative' side of reprobation, but also about the 'positive' side of election. In chapter 1 it was shown how Edwards argued that God created the world so that God can manifest God's self *ad extra* to creatures who thereby know and love God, and in this, God is glorified. If idealism were true, God being glorified *ad extra* simply translates to God being glorified "in the minds of intelligent perceivers."¹⁹⁷ This in itself is not inherently problematic, except, as shown in the section above, a consistent combination of Edwards' statements about the relationship between God's mind and creaturely minds leads to a conclusion that "even the idea of those [created] minds is not to be thought of as perfectly outside of the mind of God; they too are ideas prior to God about how God might be *ad extra*. Thus when God conceives of Himself *ad extra* in/through those minds, He must also somehow conceive of Himself *as* those minds."¹⁹⁸ Once again, this returns Edwards to pantheism, for if creatures exist only as ideas in God's mind, and all that exists are God's ideas about reality, and God is himself the sole 'necessary idea,' then it should seem there is nothing truly *ad extra* to God at all. God does not have any external audience to view his glory, or to praise and love God.

Edwards also claimed that love/consent requires plurality, for "one alone cannot be excellent."¹⁹⁹ If all that exists can be reduced to God the Father's eternally necessary and unchanging thoughts about himself, then it would seem that God is only 'one' and cannot be love in himself.²⁰⁰ God also cannot receive real love from his creatures who are not truly separate beings from God. Edwards at one point admits that "two beings can agree one with another in nothing else but relation; because otherwise the notion of their twoness (duality) is destroyed and they become one."²⁰¹ Holbrook argues that "this principle, if consistently adhered to in respect to bodies and minds and man's relation to God leads inexorably to the conclusion that reality must itself be

¹⁹⁷ Bombaro, 99, emphasis his.

¹⁹⁸ Bombaro, 99, see also 81–84.

¹⁹⁹ Edwards, "The Mind," in WJE 6: 337.

²⁰⁰ As discussed in chapter 1 regarding Edwards' views on beauty and consenting/loving relationships which require plurality, such as within the Trinity itself (see pp. 37–38).

²⁰¹ Edwards, "The Mind," in WJE 6: 335.

composed of at least two kinds of existence.”²⁰² For God to be love, and for there to be any truly loving relationships between God and creatures, or among creatures themselves, then according to Edwards’ own philosophy of beauty/consent/love, they must actually be distinct beings. Presumably, such distinct beings could not be fully determined by God’s will, for if they were, there would be no real relationship possible between God and his creatures, and creaturely love for God would collapse into God loving himself. Or, as Charles Hodge says, it would mean that “the universe is only the self-manifestation of God.”²⁰³ How this self-love or self-manifestation would glorify God *ad extra* is unclear. At best, instead of the analogy of God being like an artist who paints a self-portrait for others to view and rejoice in, the artist is seen to be simply looking at himself in a mirror and being pleased with himself.

Therefore, in addressing the realities of both love and evil, Edwards’ metaphysics seem to undermine his arguments for why God would create the world, for how God is love, for how creatures can love God, and for how God is not the source of all evil, sin, and suffering in the world. His metaphysics also cannot answer the question of how it is just for God to predestine the reprobate to hell. Even rejecting several key parts of Edwards’ philosophical worldview would not necessarily have solved these problems if Edwards insisted on maintaining his belief in the divine determination of creatures’ wills.

2.6 Conclusion to Chapter 2

While one can appreciate Edwards’ philosophical creativity and admire his desire to defend Christianity from challenges that it faced in his day, it does not seem that Edwards has created a philosophical system which is self-consistent and in accord with his ethical theory, his philosophy of beauty/love, and his assertions about why God would create the world. Furthermore, while Edwards almost succeeded in creating a philosophically-based theory of ethics which aligns with the biblical command to love God and love one another, his theory also leads to contradictory conclusions about whether the reprobate should be loved or hated by God

²⁰² Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 59.

²⁰³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1874), 220.

and by truly virtuous individuals. It is also unclear how Edwards' ethical theory can be combined with Edwards' views of deterministic reality so as to uphold the justice of God, which, as argued in chapter 1, is precisely what Edwards believed reprobation and hell are supposed to reveal about God.

Perhaps some of these difficulties arise because Edwards changes his philosophical assertions depending on which doctrine he is attempting to defend. As seen earlier, in *Freedom of the Will*, he initially claims that causes always precede effects, and thus, decisions are made based upon unchosen 'dispositions,' in order to disprove the concept of free will and uphold God's determination of all things. Yet in *Original Sin*, Edwards claims that causes and effects must be simultaneous, and he relies upon occasionalism and continuous creation to explain how God can justly hold people accountable for Adam and Eve's first sin. All these difficulties indicate that Edwards' beliefs about reprobation are not entirely driven by his philosophical views about reality or ethics. Instead, it seems that Edwards uses philosophy primarily to refute his theological opponents.

Therefore, it appears that many of the philosophical and ethical ideas that Edwards proposes, based upon "the most demonstrable, certain, and natural dictates of reason," as he might say,²⁰⁴ are in fact attempts to support and defend Calvinistic doctrines which he felt were being challenged. These included God's sovereignty (defined as God's absolute and meticulous control over everything), God's creation and preservation of the world, original sin, and the justice of eternal torment in hell. All of these are critical components of his understanding of double predestination. The next chapter will examine Edwards' interpretation of Scripture, which may prove to be the source of these ideas in Edwards' thought.

²⁰⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 439.

Chapter 3

Edwards' Scriptural Defense of Double Predestination

As shown in the previous chapter, Edwards constructed a deterministic worldview based almost solely on his philosophies of causality, in order to uphold his theological understanding of God's sovereignty and original sin. However, the source of these theological ideas in Edwards' thought has not yet been explored.

This chapter will examine Edwards' major supporting arguments for double predestination which appeal to specific Bible verses, theological concepts, or entire biblical narratives. He uses these primarily to attempt to defend his understanding of God's sovereignty against Arminian objections and concerns about the nature of free will and moral responsibility. He also turns to Scripture to defend God's justice and goodness, despite Edwards' willingness to admit that God's absolute sovereignty does make God the "author of sin" in some sense.

However, this analysis will reveal that Edwards' readings of Scripture on these topics also appear to have been strongly influenced by his beliefs about causality and God's sovereignty seen in the previous chapter. Furthermore, ongoing philosophical difficulties, along with a few perplexing uses of Scripture, hint that neither his reading of Scripture nor his philosophy are likely the ultimate reason behind Edwards' deterministic worldview. Yet before engaging these topics, it is worth examining Edwards' views of the Bible and how he believed it should relate to theology, history, and human reason.

3.1 Introduction to Edwards on Scripture

Jonathan Edwards said that he had "the greatest delight in the holy Scriptures, of any book whatsoever."¹ Over his thirty-five-year career as a pastor, Edwards preached on verses from almost every book of the Bible and kept many notebooks on biblical interpretation.² Despite

¹ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 797. For Edwards, "Scripture" meant the Protestant canon of the Old and New Testaments (David P. Barshinger and Douglas A. Sweeney eds., *Jonathan Edwards & Scripture: Biblical Exegesis in British North America* [New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018], 1n1).

² Douglas A. Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 12.

these facts, Edwards' use of Scripture has not yet been a major area of study. Modern scholars generally have focused on his philosophy, metaphysics, or ethics, and have not appreciated his "supernatural biblicism and penchant for 'Scripture proofs'" which have caused some to label him a "premodern fundamentalist."³

It is true that Edwards shared certain 'premodern' assumptions about Scripture, such as that the texts were "not contradictory, incoherent, superfluous, implausible, or inappropriate," and that Scripture was the source of all truth.⁴ It must be considered that "Edwards lived in a thoroughly biblical culture in which the Bible informed every aspect of society, from family patterns in the home to the way in which people viewed events on the grand stage of politics and warfare."⁵ Scripture was at the centre of religious, social, and political life in Puritan New England. Long sermons were preached in church meetings where Scripture was also read aloud. Teaching

³ David W. Kling, "Jonathan Edwards, the Bible, and Conversion," in Barshinger and Sweeney, 213. Barshinger says that Edwards' use of Scripture is "one of the most important and fruitful areas of research in Jonathan Edwards studies today—much work admittedly remains to be done" (David P. Barshinger, "Introduction," in Barshinger and Sweeney, 12–13). Sweeney adds that in 2003, three-hundred years after Edwards' birth, "less than half of one percent of the scholarship devoted to him treated what he took to be his chief occupation: the interpretation of Scripture" (Douglas. A. Sweeney, "Conclusion," in Barshinger and Sweeney, 249).

In M. X. Lesser, *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729–2005* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008) there are no entries under the subjects of "Bible," "Revelation," "Scripture," or even "Word of God," although it does have one for "Biblicism," and a few entries for "Hermeneutics" and "Typology." This list is no longer comprehensive as it was published in 2005. Still, in 2016, Sweeney notes that "Edwards' engagement with the Bible is discussed from time to time in works devoted to other themes. Nevertheless, and overall, it [Lesser's work] does reflect the relative scarcity of scholarship on Edwards the exegete" (Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 8).

Some of the earliest works on Edwards and Scripture include Stephen J. Stein's introductions to "Notes on the Apocalypse" in WJE 5, "Notes on Scripture" in WJE 15, and the "Blank Bible" in WJE 24. Others of recent significance include Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002); Stephen R. C. Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards' Bible: The Relationship of the Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013); David P. Barshinger, *Jonathan Edwards and the Psalms: A Redemptive-Historical Vision of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Shorter studies may be found in Stephen J. Stein, "The Quest for the Spiritual Sense: The Biblical Hermeneutics of Jonathan Edwards," *Harvard Theological Review* 70, no. 1–2 (1977): 99–113; Ted Rivera, "Jonathan Edwards's 'Hermeneutic': A Case Study of the Sermon 'Christian Knowledge,'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (2006): 273–86; David Barshinger, "'The Only Rule of Our Faith and Practice': Jonathan Edwards's Interpretation of the Book of Isaiah as a Case Study of His Exegetical Boundaries," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 4 (2009): 811–29; McClymond and McDermott, 167–180.

⁴ Stephen J. Stein, "Editor's Introduction," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 15*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 5.

⁵ Barshinger, "Introduction," in Barshinger and Sweeney, 7.

children to read so that they could read the Bible for themselves was a high priority.⁶ Edwards received such instruction from his parents, especially his father Timothy, who was a Puritan pastor,⁷ and the youthful Edwards resolved to study and know Scripture.⁸ He reaffirmed this commitment when he graduated from divinity college: “It was implied in my ordination vows that I would study the Scriptures; that I would make the Word of God, and not the word of any man, my rule in teaching my people; and that I would do my utmost to know what was the counsel of God, and to declare it.”⁹

Edwards arranged his schedule to have as much time for this as possible. He usually woke up at four or five in the morning and spent up to twelve or thirteen hours in his study where he would read the Bible, pray, write, and take notes for his theological projects.¹⁰ He prioritized his study even at potential cost to his own health,¹¹ while neglecting pastoral visitations and depending on his wife Sarah and hired servants or slaves to manage the household.¹²

Edwards interacted with Scripture on a daily basis in almost every aspect of his life, including his work and both his private and family devotions.¹³ He studied the Bible while filling detailed cross-referenced notebooks with his insights, and spent most of his study time “composing closely reasoned pieces that evaluated the strong and weak points of a given proposition, argued

⁶ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 20–21. Beginning in 1642, it was legally mandated that parents in Massachusetts teach their children to read and to understand the basics of religion and civil laws, or, once a town grew large enough, to send their children to a community school for this purpose (Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976], 181).

⁷ Marsden, 17–29, 24–27. Edwards’ upbringing and its impact on him will be explored in greater detail in chapter 4.

⁸ Edwards, “Resolutions,” in WJE 16: 755; Edwards, “Diary,” in WJE 16: 779.

⁹ Edwards, “Narrative of Communion Controversy,” in WJE 12: 565.

¹⁰ Marsden, 133; Paul Ramsey, “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE 1: 7.

¹¹ Timothy Cutler worried that even as a college student, Edwards studied so intensely and ate so little that it was taking a physical toll on Edwards’ appearance (Marsden, 193). Edwards admitted he would work through dinner occasionally (Marsden, 135, citing Edwards, “Diary,” entry from January 22, 1734 in WJE 16: 789).

¹² Marsden, 134–135.

¹³ Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, “Language of the Heart: The Bible in Jonathan Edwards’ Personal Life and Spiritual Practice,” in Barshinger and Sweeney, 68.

its pros and cons, and responded to objections.”¹⁴ He took a pen and paper with him even when he went out to walk in nature for exercise, prayer, or contemplation.¹⁵ Yet what is noticeably absent in all of these writings is any detailed discussion of how he believed one should correctly interpret Scripture.¹⁶

Edwards did warn his congregation to not take verses out of context and apply them to their own situations as personal “immediate revelation,”¹⁷ but this is not quite the same as warning them to avoid “proof-texting,”¹⁸ which appears to be how Edwards often works with Scripture.¹⁹ Since Edwards was so well-versed in Scripture, he likely knew by heart the context from which he was drawing. Yet in his major published works, he rarely analyzes a verse in detail and usually quotes a string of verses that he believes prove his point,²⁰ apparently after a face-value reading

¹⁴ Crisp, *Edwards Among the Theologians*, 3–4; Stephen R. C. Nichols, “Jonathan Edwards’ Principles of Interpreting Scripture,” in Barshinger and Sweeney, 37; Kenneth P. Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards’s Scriptural Practices,” in Barshinger and Sweeney, 15–18; quote from McClymond and McDermott, 10.

¹⁵ Marsden, 135–136.

¹⁶ Nichols in Barshinger and Sweeney, 32. Sweeney notes that Edwards never wrote a commentary in which these issues might have been discussed in more detail (Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 16). In contrast, Stephen Stein believes that Edwards’ notebooks effectively “form a loosely structured network of commentary” (Stephen J. Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE 15: 3).

¹⁷ Nichols in Barshinger and Sweeney, 36, referring to Edwards, “Extraordinary Gifts Of The Spirit Are Inferior To Graces Of The Spirit,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 25, *Sermons and Discourses, 1743–1758*, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008], 305–306).

¹⁸ One definition of proof-texting is “the practice of pulling an authoritative text out of its original context to impose upon it a meaning that advances the interpreter’s thesis” (James M. Reese, “The Pitfalls of Proof-Texting,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 13, no. 4 [Nov. 1983]: 121). Yet others note that “traditionally, ‘proof texts’ (*dicta probantia*) were parenthetical references or footnote/endnote references to biblical passages that undergird some doctrinal claim,” and may not be inherently problematic as some biblical scholars claim, although proof-texting can be abused if one is ignoring the greater context and genre of the verses in question (R. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, “In Defense of Proof-Texting,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, no. 3 [Sep. 2011]: 589).

¹⁹ Edwards’ use of Scripture as ‘proof texts’ to support his ideas which are derived from more philosophical speculation has caused some concern that he was not a true “Enlightenment thinker” (Bombaro, 17–18).

²⁰ When Edwards offered large numbers of verses as scriptural proofs, he tended to organize them not canonically but by some other criteria such as order of relevance or how they related best to one another (Minkema in Barshinger and Sweeney, 19).

of them and without detailed comment on their greater context, genre, or canonical location.²¹ He seems to simply assume that his readers will interpret these verses in the same way he does. When addressing others in his Puritan society, this may have been a relatively safe assumption. However, as will be shown in this chapter, this approach may not be as convincing when attempting to refute his opponents who accepted different philosophical frameworks.

Furthermore, what is noteworthy about Edwards' exegesis in comparison to modern biblical commentators is that Edwards generally gives little consideration to factors such as authorship or the date of composition for a text, uses of earlier source materials or possible later editing, literary genre, where a passage fits within the overall canon, or comparisons with extra-biblical literature. Granted, these sorts of 'critical' concerns were just beginning to be discussed by authors in the century before Edwards was born, and were controversial.²² Difficulties in scriptural interpretation and questions about the authorship of biblical books were noted by earlier theologians such as Calvin and Augustine, but these authors took for granted the inspiration of Scripture and accepted its truthfulness.²³ Edwards seems to approach Scripture in line with these earlier authors, yet with an awareness of the challenges to Scripture from the

²¹ It could be argued that other authors did similarly; for example, Calvin in his *Institutes*. Yet unlike Edwards, Calvin also produced detailed Bible commentaries which allow scholars to see the more detailed biblical exegesis that supported his particular way of using a verse (Allen and Swain, 602). This is not to say that Edwards did not have justification for his use of particular verses, only that he did not often explicitly show this in his writings.

²² The origin of critical biblical scholarship is often attributed to Baruch/Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) in his work *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), which despite being banned and Spinoza being expelled from his Jewish synagogue, was picked up by deists and others such as Richard Simon (1638–1712), John Toland (1670–1722), and Matthew Tindal (1657–1733) who questioned the authorship of the Pentateuch and desired to uphold reason or experience as judges over Scripture (Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018], 115; Mark S. Gignilliat, *A Brief History of Old Testament Criticism: From Benedict Spinoza to Brevard Childs* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012], 15–16; Peter J. Thuesen, "The Reasonableness of Christianity," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 26, *Catalogue of Books*, ed. Peter J. Thuesen [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008], 55–59; Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2000], 18–33). Other voices in the same critical stream included John Locke, and Pierre Bayle (Marsden, 475). A few authors such as Thomas Hobbes and Isaac La Peyrère had begun to question the historical nature and claims of the Bible even earlier (Gignilliat, 15; Marsden, 475–476).

²³ Gignilliat, 26–27.

critics and a desire to defend the Bible's accuracy.²⁴

On the whole, Edwards believed that “the Scriptures are written for us in these ages, on whom the ends of the world are come, yea, were designed chiefly for the later age of the world, in which they shall have their chief and, comparatively, almost all their effect; and they were written for God's people in these ages, of whom at least 99 in an hundred must be supposed incapable of such knowledge” of the original languages and ‘critical’ concerns.²⁵ He believed that God does not require the use of ‘critical’ methods to discover the true meaning of Scripture. Instead, the true meaning was to be found in the straightforward reading of a text according to how most people in all ages would understand it.²⁶

This uncritical approach applied to his understanding of history as well. Although some at the time tried to separate history from theology, Edwards attempted to show how history (both biblical and secular) was part of God's providential plan, and thus was a source of divine revelation.²⁷ He even wanted to write a three-part book titled “A History of the Work of Redemption,” which would be

a body of divinity in an entire new method, being thrown into the form of an history, considering the affair of Christian theology, as the whole of it, in each part, stands in reference to the great work of redemption by Jesus Christ; which I suppose is to be the grand design of all God's designs, and the *summum* and *ultimum* of all the divine operations and degrees; particularly considering all parts of the grand scheme in their historical order.²⁸

²⁴ Edwards' “Notes on Scripture” entry no. 416 in WJE 15: 423–469 touches on some of these critical concerns such as whether later authors had written the Pentateuch and attributed it to Moses. Edwards looked at cross-references within the Bible itself and with other ancient authors to attempt to prove its historical authenticity (Minkema in Barshinger and Sweeney, 25). See also Marsden, 475 and Rivera, 283–284. Rivera refers to Robert Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002) as showing that Edwards was “indisputably well aware of critical schools of thought” regarding biblical interpretation (Rivera, 283).

²⁵ Edwards, “Efficacious Grace, Book II,” in WJE 21: 232.

²⁶ Edwards, “Efficacious Grace, Book II,” in WJE 21: 237; Marsden, 479.

²⁷ Marsden, 486–487.

²⁸ Edwards, “230. To the Trustees of the College of New Jersey,” in WJE 16: 727–728.

This book would likely have been built on his sermon series of the same name, whose purpose was to teach his parishioners to see their lives and all history as part of the grand story of God redeeming the world through Christ, in which the historical narratives of Scripture and recorded history outside of Scripture were seen as being continuous.²⁹ There does not seem to be any hint that Edwards believed that the events recorded in Scripture were not real historical events.³⁰

It seems likely that Edwards' uncritical approach to Scripture was strongly influenced by his community's assumptions about the Bible and how it was to relate to theology. Douglas Sweeney, the author of a recent major volume on Edwards' use of Scripture, suggests that "Edwards did theology as a Calvinistic pastor. He interpreted the Bible with confessional commitments. He believed that this was the best way to exegete its meaning," and therefore "the doctrines of the Bible, more than isolated verses, shaped Edwards' exegesis most profoundly."³¹ However, the doctrines that Edwards saw in Scripture were themselves likely influenced by the doctrines which he had been taught were to be found in Scripture, according to both his father and his Puritan community. Therefore, what Edwards heard others in his community saying about God and the world would have influenced the development of his own theology. Likewise, the manner in which others in his community used and interpreted Scripture would have served as examples for him to learn from and adopt in his own work.³²

In particular, Edwards was influenced by his reading of a variety of earlier authors, including Samuel Mather, Peter van Mastricht, Francis Turretin, and Johann Friedrich Stapfer, as well as John Calvin.³³ In *Religious Affections*, Edwards "drew explicitly on sixteen previous Puritan and

²⁹ Marsden, 193–195. Peter Gay says Edwards follows "in the tradition of Augustine" for Edwards periodizes history in a way that "perfectly expresses, his theory of historical causation and historical purpose" (Peter Gay, *A Loss of Mastery: Puritan Historians in Colonial America* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966], 94–95).

³⁰ Gay says that Edwards thought the Bible was the only accurate and most 'sublime' historical work (Gay, 96).

³¹ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 195 and 218. Marsden agrees that Edwards did not study the Bible in isolation but worked within a tradition of interpretation (Marsden, 474).

³² Further influence of Edwards' community on his interpretation of Scripture will be discussed in chapter 5.

³³ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 18, 24.

Dissenting theologians who were within the larger orthodox tradition.”³⁴ He studied in the original languages with strong reliance on the use of other scholars’ lexicons, concordances, and translations.³⁵ Some authors who influenced his biblical interpretation included Matthew Poole, Philip Doddridge, Matthew Henry, Arthur Bedford, John Owen, and Humphrey Prideaux. These authors “rarely played as great a role in shaping his scholarly agenda [as John Locke, Bishop George Berkeley, and Isaac Newton], but they played a greater role in its execution. He spent decades, quite literally, poring over their biblical writings, doing his most important work with them at hand.”³⁶

Yet Edwards would not have wanted to admit that he believed something just because he read it in these authors’ works. As he wrote in his preface to *Freedom of the Will*, “I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them; and cannot justly be charged with believing in everything just as he taught.”³⁷ Edwards felt free to work in creative new ways, building upon tradition and even departing from it at times.³⁸ Edwards even questioned and attempted to change his grandfather Solomon Stoddard’s ‘tradition’ during the communion controversy. Ironically, Edwards’ action was taken on the basis of his grandfather’s own principle: “he, who believes principles because our forefathers affirm them, makes idols of them; and it would be no humility but baseness of spirit, for us to judge

³⁴ Gerald R. McDermott, “Was Jonathan Edwards an Evangelical? Scripture and Tradition in America’s Theologian” in Barshinger and Sweeney, 247, citing Paul Ramsey, “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE 2: 52–74.

³⁵ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 14–16. Yet “Edwards’ skill with biblical languages is difficult to assess. He never published a standard commentary. Nor did he often function as an independent translator. His exegetical manuscripts contain scores of references to Hebrew and Greek terms, with frequent notes on their translation. Given the aids at his disposal, though, one might well conclude that Edwards learned to read the Bible in the original languages but usually leaned on other scholars when he faced technical matters of translation” (16).

³⁶ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 7; Marsden, 474, quote from Sweeney. Some of the commentaries by these authors which Edwards owned are listed in Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 18 and also in Nichols in Barshinger and Sweeney, 33. Other important influences on Edwards included Thomas Manton, Cotton Mather, William Bates, Anthony Burgess, John Evans, John Flavel, Thomas Hall, William Perkins, Samuel Willard, John Winthrop, John Gill, Isaac Watts, Nathaniel Lardner, Richard Bentley, Samuel Clarke, James Hervey, Richard Kidder, Thomas Sherlock, and William Warburton (Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 22–25).

³⁷ Edwards, “Author’s Preface,” in *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 131.

³⁸ Crisp, *Edwards Among the Theologians*, xvii–xviii, 3.

ourselves incapable of examining principles which have been handed down to us. If we are any wise fit to open the mysteries of the gospel, we are capable of judging in these matters.”³⁹

This willingness to question tradition may have rested on his belief that God intended for Scripture to stand alone, without requiring one to make reference to additional sources such as the writings of the early Church fathers, in order to understand its meaning.⁴⁰ Edwards had a very high view of Scripture, calling it “divine” and “unerring,” and believed it contained the very “Word of God,” given verbatim to the original authors—a common belief in his time.⁴¹ To Edwards, Scripture is “the fountain whence all knowledge in divinity must be derived,”⁴² for it alone is a “sufficient, perfect, and infallible rule” given by God.⁴³ While other sources such as history, reason, experience, or other authors may provide some insight, “the manifest design of God in the Scripture, is to speak so plainly as that the interpretation should be more independent than that of any other book which is ever to be remembered, and should always be of great weight with us in our interpretation of the Scripture; and so we should chiefly interpret Scripture by Scripture.”⁴⁴ He affirmed that “it must be the Scripture at last that must determine us. That way . . . the scale is turned by the Scriptures alone, that way must we be determined; and we ought to look upon the matter as undetermined, till it is determined by Scripture alone.”⁴⁵ This in itself, though, is a ‘traditional’ stance frequently found in Reformed theology, and was affirmed by earlier Puritan theologians such as William Perkins and Richard Bernard.⁴⁶

³⁹ Edwards, “Narrative of Communion Controversy,” in WJE 12: 565.

⁴⁰ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 535 in WJE 18: 78–80. It is thus ironic that Edwards criticizes his Arminian opponents for differing from the early church fathers (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 437–438).

⁴¹ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 4, 28–29.

⁴² Edwards, “525. Sermon on Heb. 5:12, Christian Knowledge,” in WJE 54.

⁴³ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 828 in WJE 18: 539.

⁴⁴ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 828 in WJE 18: 538–539.

⁴⁵ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 535 in WJE 18: 80. This principle is enshrined in the Westminster Confession of Faith, section 1.9, and was “fundamental” to Edwards’ exegesis (Nichols in Barshinger and Sweeney, 34–35).

⁴⁶ Barshinger, “Introduction,” in Barshinger and Sweeney, 13; Nichols in Barshinger and Sweeney, 35. Crisp notes that along with ‘sola scriptura’ which has traditionally been affirmed by Reformed theology, Reformation traditions

Additionally, Edwards' confidence in the inerrancy of Scripture may have been supported by his deterministic philosophy of reality in which God is in total control of all things, including the writing of Scripture. The authors of Scripture would have been unable to add or omit anything without God's approval.⁴⁷ This ensured that, despite being written by many authors, the Bible had an overall "harmony" to it which reflected God's own internal harmony, proportion, and beauty.⁴⁸ To Edwards, this harmony is evidence that the Bible is the "work of a divine mind."⁴⁹ This harmony might only become apparent after one has become very familiar with Scripture,⁵⁰ when such harmony could almost be *felt* by a person, as Edwards testifies in his "Personal Narrative."⁵¹ Some things that Edwards referred to as demonstrating the Bible's harmony were fulfilled prophecies (particularly those fulfilled by Jesus as the Messiah), typology, and the internal consistency of various doctrines which all pointed towards Scripture's main theme of redemption through Jesus Christ.⁵² Yet Edwards had his own list of favourite verses and biblical books which he turned to more frequently than others.⁵³ Edwards is also known for his typological or figural readings of Scripture, which will be explored in the next chapter.

are also specifically confessional and Edwards was willing to affirm these confessions (Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 1–2).

⁴⁷ Nichols notes that Edwards often referred to the authors of Scripture only as 'penmen' who may have not known the full meaning of what they were writing (Nichols in Barshinger and Sweeney, 42, referring to Edwards, "Notes on Scripture," no. 118 in WJE 15: 83).

⁴⁸ Nichols in Barshinger and Sweeney, 34.

⁴⁹ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 333 in WJE 13: 410.

⁵⁰ Nichols in Barshinger and Sweeney, 39; Edwards, "A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate," in WJE 14: 95.

⁵¹ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 797.

⁵² Marsden, 480–482.

⁵³ For example, most entries in Edwards' "Blank Bible" cite Genesis, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Matthew, Romans, and Revelation, but for sermons he mostly preached most from Matthew, Luke, Isaiah, Psalms, John, 1 Corinthians, Proverbs, and Romans (Minkema in Barshinger and Sweeney, 20–21). Edwards lists some personal favourite verses as including 1 Tim. 1:17, Song. 2:1, and Ps. 119:28 (Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 792–794). Elsewhere, he holds up Rom. 3:19 as most useful to prove that it would be just for God to condemn and reject all people if God so desired (Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative," in WJE 4: 168). This verse was the basis for his sermon "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners," and was one of his most frequently cited verses throughout his corpus. His most preached-upon text was 2 Cor. 4:18, although others such as Prov. 5:11–13, Eccl. 9:10, 2 Pet. 1:19,

Despite Edwards' trust in Scripture's inerrancy and divine inspiration, and his conviction that Scripture should be interpreted according to Scripture, this chapter will highlight a few instances where Edwards struggles with verses which may not support his preferred interpretations.⁵⁴

Other commentators have also taken issue with Edwards' interpretations of Scripture at times. For example, Garth Pauley wrote that Edwards' doctrines were "not always soundly gathered out of the biblical text."⁵⁵ Dane Ortlund suggested that Edwards' method "sometimes caused him to import meaning into rather than export meaning out of the text."⁵⁶ This may be supported by how Edwards created lists of doctrines to be preached in sermons even *before* he had found a suitably-supportive biblical text.⁵⁷

Edwards admitted that studying Scripture was difficult and required hard work, and that the Church had not yet discovered all that God had given humanity to know in the Bible.⁵⁸ Thus it seems unlikely that Edwards would have held his interpretations to be the final word on any particular verse. Yet it would also seem unlikely that Edwards would admit that the Holy Spirit had ever led him (or any other historical or contemporary commentators he believed were guided

Isa. 53:3, Ezek. 22:14, John 8:12, 1 Cor. 3:18, 1 Cor. 6:19–20, 1 Pet. 1:8, and Gal. 2:20 were also repeated favourites (Minkema in Barshinger and Sweeney, 20–21).

⁵⁴ As will be seen both in this chapter and the next, Edwards tends to ignore verses which disagree with his perspective and does not reinterpret or offer explanations for them, contra Sweeney who claims that Edwards "tried to be clear about the parts of sacred Scripture that did not fit neatly in his system" (Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 218). Stein argues that Edwards at times attempts such harmonization for some topics or verses, such as when "he reconciled differences among parallel texts by resorting to linguistic and syntactical arguments, as in the case of the disparate accounts of Jesus' passage through Jericho (Matthew 20, Mark 10, and Luke 18)" (Stein, "Editor's Introduction," in WJE 15: 6). However, it seems that in Edwards' published works where he attempts to refute the Arminians and other opponents he tends not to spend time harmonizing verses that could undermine Edwards' position. Nichols agrees that Edwards' principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture was "easily overlooked when confronted with the occasionally surprising results of his interpretation" (Nichols in Barshinger and Sweeney, 35).

⁵⁵ Garth E. Pauley, "Soundly Gathered Out of the Text? Biblical Interpretation in 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,'" *Westminster Theological Journal* 76, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 117.

⁵⁶ Dane C. Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 189, as cited in Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 195.

⁵⁷ For example, "the kernel for *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* appears as a reminder to formulate a 'doctrine from some text that there is nothing that keeps wicked men every moment out of hell but God's sovereign pleasure'" (Minkema in Barshinger and Sweeney, 26–27). At first he chose Deut. 32:35 but later switched to the better-fitting Ps. 7:11 (Minkema in Barshinger and Sweeney, 26–27; Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 195; Pauley, 103).

⁵⁸ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 5. He cites Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 351 in WJE 13: 426–427.

by the Holy Spirit) to an entirely wrong interpretation, even if there were greater depths to Scripture than they had yet discovered.⁵⁹

This chapter will show how Edwards often attempts to defend his interpretation of Scripture by appeals to other sources such as philosophy, causality, common sense, history, and everyday experience. This may be a clue that Edwards realizes that his interpretations of Scripture are not as indisputable as he would like them to be. For example, in *Freedom of the Will* he lists several other important criteria beyond Scripture by which he wants to judge the Arminian argument, including “common sense,” “consistency,” and “reason.”⁶⁰ In *Original Sin*, although he begins by listing a variety of verses about humanity’s sinful condition, he quickly turns to arguments from causality and history.⁶¹ In many of Edwards’ treatises he also begins his argument from philosophy or reason, and only later turns to Scripture as a secondary support. This pattern appears in *Freedom of the Will*, “End of Creation,” and “True Virtue,” perhaps because in these works he is attempting to refute his opponents on their own philosophical grounds.⁶² In “Discourse on the Trinity,” Edwards begins with philosophy and reason, only using Scripture as supporting material. He then resorts to appeals to tradition, and finally, to “mystery.”⁶³ In

⁵⁹ Stein, “The Quest for the Spiritual Sense,” 109. Stein refers to Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 204 in WJE 13: 340 where Edwards says that without the Holy Spirit’s illumination, Scripture is a “dead letter.” More on the influence of the Holy Spirit in helping individuals discern divine truth will be discussed in chapter 4, section 4.1.

⁶⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 437–438.

⁶¹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 121–123, 164–184.

⁶² Minkema says that when Edwards began a work with ‘reason’ rather than Scripture “this did not mark a move away from the primacy of the revealed Word for Edwards, but rather was a means, first, of battling with their own weapons the moral-sense philosophers, who saw the end of creation as human happiness; and second, of culminating his argument in Scripture over against ‘the pretended dictates of reason’” (Minkema in Barshinger and Sweeney, 21). Edwards’ method of taking on his opponents on their own ground is something that William Danaher has also noted: in his treatises against antitrinitarians, Edwards appeals to God’s “classical” attributes such as omnipotence and omniscience, rather than to God’s triune being as revealed in Scripture or doctrine (William J. Danaher Jr., *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004], 157–158).

⁶³ Strobel, 56–57, 64–65; Edwards, “Discourse on the Trinity,” in WJE 21: 139. Marsden believes that Edwards accepted that there were some things in Scripture that were mysterious and could not be fully explained by reason even if they were not entirely “unreasonable.” In fact, Edwards thought such mystery should be *expected* when dealing with divine revelation about spiritual things (Marsden, 477–478; Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 1340 in WJE 23: 367–368, 372–374; McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 80–86).

general, Edwards held that ‘reason’ was the “highest” and “noblest” faculty that God had given to humans, and, he argued that, in theory, reason alone could discover many truths about God.⁶⁴ Yet “in the heat of Edwards’s polemics against antitrinitarians, rash confidence sometimes gave way to an equally strategic insistence on the frailty of human reason” and the need for divine revelation.⁶⁵ In contrast to the deists’ assertions that reason should judge Scripture, Edwards believed that it was only once one had received divine illumination from the indwelling Holy Spirit at conversion, combined with the divine revelation found in Scripture, that the human faculty of reason could function more-or-less accurately.⁶⁶

In sum, Edwards’ views on Scripture are complex. While believing in its inspiration and truth, this claim rests not only on a foundation of Puritan tradition that Edwards learned from his community and favorite authors, but is also supported by Edwards’ philosophical beliefs about God’s sovereignty and omnipotence. This confidence, combined with his trust in the Holy Spirit’s spiritual illumination, plus his community’s high respect for Scripture, may have allowed him to make a less-critical use of Scripture than would be convincing to modern biblical scholars or to Edwards’ own theological opponents. Perhaps this is ultimately why, when defending his views, he appeals to other sources of authority such as reason, history, common sense, and so forth, sometimes in different orders of priority.

As will be seen in this chapter, Edwards’ readings of particular verses are strongly influenced by his deterministic philosophical assumptions. His case is weakened by his failure to convincingly harmonize or address verses which may appear to conflict with his assertions, as well as his supporting philosophical arguments which are sometimes unnecessary, illogical, or internally inconsistent. All these factors seem to indicate that Edwards’ beliefs about double predestination are influenced by more than simply Scripture alone.

⁶⁴ McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 56–61.

⁶⁵ Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 53, 54–55. For more about Edwards’ views on the relationship between human reason and divine revelation, see McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 55–70.

⁶⁶ McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 62–63, 70–76.

3.2 God's Foreknowledge Precludes Contingency

After presenting his case for why a self-determining will is philosophically incoherent in the first third of *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards turns to Scripture to show that divine foreknowledge of free actions is evidence that the Arminian concept of free will is impossible.⁶⁷ God's foreknowledge of free actions was not something that Arminians doubted. However, Edwards thinks he can best them in his explanation of how God's foreknowledge works, which depends strongly on his assumptions regarding causality.

Edwards believes that God's foreknowledge is important for the doctrine of predestination, according to his interpretation of verses such as Ephesians 1:4, 1 Peter 1:2 and 1:20, 2 Timothy 1:9, Ephesians 3:11, Titus 1:2, and Romans 8:29. Based on these, Edwards claims,

if God did not foreknow the fall of man, nor the redemption by Jesus Christ, nor the volitions of man since the fall; then he did not foreknow the saints in any sense; neither as particular persons, nor as societies or nations; either by election, or mere foresight of their virtue or good works; or any foresight of anything about them relating to their salvation; or any benefit they have by Christ, or any manner of concern of theirs with a Redeemer.⁶⁸

Even apart from God's sovereign decree, Edwards insists God's foreknowledge alone is enough to prove that God only intends to save some people, because it is impossible for God to aim to achieve something which God perfectly foreknows will not be achieved. Essentially, because God foreknows that not everyone will be saved, God cannot actually attempt to save everyone.⁶⁹ Edwards is confident that Scripture portrays God as perfectly foreknowing all of God's own future actions. He writes, "nothing is more impossible than that the immutable God should be changed, by the succession of time; who comprehends all things, from eternity to eternity, in one, most perfect, an unalterable view; so that his whole eternal duration is *vitae interminabilis*,

⁶⁷ In *Freedom of the Will*, there is no mention of Scripture or theology until part 2, section 11.

⁶⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 252–253.

⁶⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 435. This is rather a strange argument for Edwards to be making, given that he believes God not only knows that not all people will be saved, but according to Edwards, God has actually planned and ordained for most people to be lost for God's glory and the happiness of the saints, as per chapter 1.

tota, simul, and perfecta possessio.”⁷⁰ If God did not foreknow the future, then God would have to constantly re-adjust his plans,⁷¹ thereby threatening God’s immutability, which Edwards sees endorsed by verses such as Malachi 3:6, Exodus 3:14, and Job 23:13–14.⁷² Edwards argues that “all God’s works, all that he has ever to do, the whole scheme and series of his operations, are from the beginning perfectly in his view,” based on verses which say that humans cannot alter or thwart God’s purposes.⁷³ Edwards also appeals to Acts 15:18: “known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”⁷⁴ Therefore, Edwards believes that God knows, from eternity past, exactly who he will save, and who he will damn.

However, Edwards’ main argument against the Arminian view of free will comes from biblical prophecy.⁷⁵ He refers to many detailed prophecies of Scripture, including Pharaoh’s refusals to let the Israelites leave Egypt, and the moral conduct of several other individuals including Josiah, Ahab, Hazael, Cyrus, Antiochus Epiphanes, Judas, and Peter. Edwards also appeals to biblical prophecies about the Israelites moving down into Egypt which depended on the moral actions of Joseph’s brothers, and the crucifixion of Christ which depended on the moral actions of Judas and the religious leaders.⁷⁶ From these examples, Edwards concludes that

unless God foreknow[s] the future acts of men’s wills, and their behavior as moral agents, all those great things which are foretold both in Old Testament and New concerning the erection, establishment, and universal extent of the kingdom of the Messiah, were predicted and promised while God was in ignorance whether any of these things would come to pass or no, and did but guess at them.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 268.

⁷¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 253.

⁷² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 254.

⁷³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 254. He cites Isa. 14:27, 46:10, Job 42:2, Prov. 19:21, Ps. 33:10–11, and Eccl. 3:14.

⁷⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 251. It appears Edwards’ quote here is from the KJV.

⁷⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 239.

⁷⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 240–245.

⁷⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 246.

Edwards fears that without perfect foreknowledge, it would be uncertain if God would ever achieve all of God's promises,⁷⁸ and these would be "always liable to be broken."⁷⁹ If this were possible, then God's foreknowledge, which is part of God's "peculiar glory" and which sets God apart from idols, would be threatened.⁸⁰ Yet in *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards never mentions or attempts to explain instances in Scripture where prophecies are not fulfilled perfectly, or where God appears to change his plans.⁸¹ It seems that Edwards assumes that there were no alternative ways that God could have achieved God's plans, such that history could not have turned out any differently, in any tiny detail, from the way it has actually occurred. Edwards also does not discuss the extent of God's own sovereign influence or intervention in directing the path of world history apart from foreknowledge.

For example, Edwards refers to how Darius became king of Persia as a result of an agreement among conspirators that whoever's horse neighed first the next morning would be king. Edwards elaborates on how he believes that this seemingly random event was critical for future events of

⁷⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 247, 251–252 .

⁷⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 253.

⁸⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 252. He cites Isa. 41:22, 43:9–10, 44:8, 45:21, 46:10, 48:14, and Matt. 24:35.

⁸¹ For example, in 2 Kgs. 22:20, Huldah prophesies that King Josiah will die in peace, but Josiah actually dies in battle against the Egyptians (2 Kgs. 23:28–30). Regarding God's changes of mind, one could consider God's response to Hezekiah's prayer (2 Kgs. 20:1–6), Moses' intercession against God's plan to destroy the Israelites and create a new chosen people through Moses (Exod. 32: 10–14), or the well-known instance where God relents from destroying Nineveh as prophesied (Jonah 3:10).

Edwards did preach a sermon on Jonah 3:10 but frequently calls God's statement about the destruction of Nineveh a "warning" or "threatening" and not a "prophecy," but he does admit that God mercifully "relented" from what God had said he was going to do to Nineveh (Edwards, "46. Sermon on Jonah 3:10," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 42, *Sermons, Series II, 1723–1727* [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008]; also see Edwards "The Eternity of Hell Torments," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards With A Memoir by Sereno Dwight*, Volume 2. ed. Hickman, 87). Edwards also interprets Isaiah's message to Hezekiah about Hezekiah's upcoming death not as "an absolute prediction of his death" but only as "notice that his sickness was unto death" (Edwards, "203. Sermon on II Kgs 20:1–3," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 46, *Sermons, Series II, 1731–1732* [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008]). Yet apparently Edwards does not feel the need to defend or explain these instances in *Freedom of the Will*, although it would certainly be relevant. In his sermon on Matt. 24:35, Edwards claims that "Gods word never fails in his Predictions. however strange and Unlikely Yet he will Certainly see them Accomplished first or last to a tittle," [capitalization and punctuation sic] and cites many examples. Yet Edwards wants to allow room for "conditional" threats which may or may not be fulfilled. Despite this, later Edwards returns to the idea that because of God's foreknowledge, it is impossible for God to change his mind about things that he either threatens or promises (Edwards, "50. Sermon on Matt. 24:35," in WJE 42).

Bible prophecy, because he claims that one minor change could have altered the entire course of world history.⁸² Yet presumably, God's omnipotence could have ensured the same outcome even without foreknowledge (e.g., God could have chosen to directly cause the horse to neigh). Thus, even if Edwards is right in his belief that God could not have achieved his goals with anyone but Darius as king, this example does not necessarily prove that God has perfect foreknowledge. It does, however, reveal that Edwards' philosophy of causality is a major factor in his interpretation of this event as having a critical role in salvation history.

There is another example of Edwards' reading of Scripture which seems to be clearly influenced by his understanding of God's foreknowledge. In *Religious Affections*, Edwards writes

when God tempted or tried Abraham with that difficult command of offering up his son, it was not for his satisfaction, whether he feared God or no, but for Abraham's own greater satisfaction and comfort, and the more clear manifestation of the favor of God to him. When Abraham had proved faithful under this trial, God says to him, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" [Genesis 22:12]. Which plainly implies that in this practical exercise of Abraham's grace under this trial, was a clearer evidence of the truth of his grace, than ever was before; and the greatest evidence to Abraham's conscience . . . of his being upright in the sight of his Judge.⁸³

In the above quote, Edwards never comments on how in the biblical text it is God who says "now *I* know that thou fearest God"; instead Edwards focuses entirely on the test as being evidence to *Abraham's* conscience. It appears that, in his exegesis, Edwards assumes that God foreknew that Abraham would pass the test. As a result, Edwards proclaims that any Christian's trials "are not for his [God's] information, but for ours."⁸⁴ This may indeed be a traditional interpretation of this passage, but it shows that Edwards' interpretation is influenced by factors other than the words of the text itself.

⁸² He speculates that "if this had not been, probably his successor would not have been the same, and all the circumstances of the Persian empire might have been far otherwise. And then perhaps Alexander might never have conquered that empire. And then probably the circumstances of the world in all succeeding ages, might have been vastly otherwise" (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 249). This is an application of Edwards' 'butterfly effect' argument discussed in chapter 2, section 2.3.

⁸³ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 431–432.

⁸⁴ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 432.

An even clearer example of Edwards allowing his beliefs about God's foreknowledge to override the words of Scripture can be seen when Edwards pits Scripture *against* Scripture, despite his insistence that Scripture should be compared with Scripture to determine its meaning. This occurs when he says that if God did not have perfect foreknowledge of all future events, then we would have to take Genesis 6:6 and 1 Samuel 15:11 literally when they say that God repents of some of his actions, and this might mean that God would repent of other yet-future actions. Edwards rejects what he calls the "literal sense" of these verses because other verses such as Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29 say that God does not repent. Edwards fears that if God did not foreknow the future, then as indicated by Genesis 6:6 and 1 Samuel 15:11, it would mean

God is liable to repent and be grieved at his heart, in a literal sense, continually; and is always exposed to an infinite number of real disappointments in his governing the world; and to manifold, constant, great perplexity and vexation: but this is not very consistent with his title of 'God overall, blessed for evermore'; which represents him as possessed of perfect, constant and uninterrupted tranquility and felicity, as God over the universe, and in his management of the affairs of the world, as supreme and universal ruler.⁸⁵

Indeed, Edwards thinks that if God lacked foreknowledge it would mean that humans have the power to "disappoint God, break his measures, make him continually to change his mind, subject him to vexation, and bring him into confusion."⁸⁶ He portrays those who doubt God's foreknowledge as believing that God must be disappointed by the rebellion of both humans and angels (and all the evil that happens in the world as a result), and as fearing that God might potentially be disappointed again if God's salvation plan does not turn out to be as successful as God desires.⁸⁷ Edwards claims it is "represented often in Scripture, that God who made the world for himself, and created it for his pleasure, would infallibly obtain his end in the creation. . . . But these things are not consistent with God's being so liable to be disappointed in all his works, nor indeed with his failing of his end in anything that he has undertaken, or done."⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 253. He cites Rom. 1:25, 9:5; 2 Cor. 11:31; and 1 Tim. 6:15.

⁸⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 254.

⁸⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 255–256.

⁸⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 256.

Yet even open theists can affirm this above quotation through their claim that because of God's omnipotence and wisdom, God is guaranteed to achieve all his ultimate ends even without perfect foreknowledge, although for a finite amount of time not everything may go exactly how God would ideally want it to.⁸⁹ In contrast, Edwards seems to believe that God's happiness must be *continual* and *maximal*, regardless of the sin and evil in the world. Yet this claim that God is always maximally happy seems to contradict numerous verses which support the idea that sinful humans often vex and disappoint God,⁹⁰ and Edwards often mentions God's anger at sin in his own writings. How Edwards believes that God's anger may be reconciled with God's unchangeable happiness will be examined later in the section on theodicy. For now, it is significant that instead of reinterpreting Genesis 6:6 and 1 Samuel 15:11 to fit his assertions, in *Freedom of the Will* Edwards simply leaves these verses without comment.⁹¹

As shown here, Edwards seems to be struggling with the apparently-conflicting witness of Scripture on the topic of God's foreknowledge. He chooses to discount or ignore verses which he believes conflict with his convictions about God's foreknowledge, while taking others at face value. These examples show that at times, Edwards' reading of Scripture is more influenced by his assumptions about God's foreknowledge and what level of control God needs in order to bring about God's promises, than the words of Scripture themselves.⁹²

⁸⁹ For example, Clark H. Pinnock writes "God sets goals for creation and redemption and realizes them ad hoc in history. If Plan A fails, God is ready with Plan B" (Clark Pinnock, "Systematic Theology" in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994], 113). Gregory Boyd believes that God's wisdom allows God to have many such 'backup plans' which allow God to still achieve his ultimate purposes in history despite human and demonic free will (Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 106).

I do not mean to enter into the debate surrounding open theism here; these authors are cited simply to show that perhaps even if temporarily everything does not occur as God intends, it would not be as utterly disastrous as Edwards seems to assume it would be, as it relates to God achieving God's final goals. Therefore, it seems possible that Edwards' view of 'butterfly effect' causality is once again influencing his statement in the above quotation.

⁹⁰ E.g., Jesus' lament in Matt. 23:37 and disappointment in Mark. 6:5–6; God's anger in Exod. 4:14, Num. 11:1, 11:33; and God's many complaints about his "stubborn" people such as in Jer. 6:28, Jer. 13:10, and Isa. 65:1–7.

⁹¹ Edwards does cite Gen. 6:6 elsewhere seemingly at face value, but not in the context of this issue (Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 551 in WJE 18: 96; Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 164). I cannot find any further references to 1 Sam. 15:11 in Edwards' works.

⁹² These examples would seem to show that at least in some instances, Edwards does not follow his own advice to ministers to not make their own reason the judge of Scripture in a way that avoids careful exegesis (Kenneth P.

Edwards' arguments about God's foreknowledge are especially interesting given Edwards' philosophical view of God as timelessly thinking all thoughts about all instances of history in the world simultaneously, and God actually being the final and *only* cause behind all of these events as shown in chapter 2. If this were true, then it seems difficult to understand Edwards' concern about proving the existence of God's foreknowledge when, even without foreknowledge at all, it should seem that as the first and only cause behind all events, God would be able to control situations such as Darius' horse neighing, and thus could prophesy about them.⁹³ It thus seems reasonable to conclude that Edwards finds the concept of God's foreknowledge useful primarily in order to attack his Arminian opponents. In the next section we shall see how he does this by using his philosophy of causality to explain why the things that God foreknows must be necessary and not contingent.

Minkema and Richard A. Bailey, eds., "Reason, Revelation, and Preaching: An Unpublished Ordination Sermon by Jonathan Edwards," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 [Summer 1999]: 27; Rivera, "Jonathan Edwards's Hermeneutic," 279).

⁹³ Edwards rejects this possibility because he argues that if God did not have foreknowledge, then while God could prophesy about the things that God himself would cause, God still requires foreknowledge in order to prophesy about the existence of the situations themselves in which God will intervene (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 250–251). However, in Edwards' system, these situations would be just as equally under God's control due to God's all-determining causative power, and thus God would be equally able to foreknow and prophesy about them.

Yet philosophically, it would seem that God's providence requires God to have foreknowledge not only of what *will* happen, but also of how things would turn out differently depending on God's intervention or lack thereof, and thus requires at least a form of middle knowledge (William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994], 149–150; William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987], 135–136).

However, the possibility of middle knowledge depends upon God's perfect foreknowledge of what people *will do* in various scenarios, which implies a form of determinism, in that there is no chance a person may act differently from how God knows they certainly will act in any situation. In this view, God simply lines up the situations in which he places everyone to produce the desired outcome of history (Hasker, 144–146, although this is not agreed upon by all adherents of middle knowledge. See a rebuttal that middle knowledge is not deterministic in Craig, 138–145). Thus, a world in which God has middle knowledge would not be all that different from Edwards' deterministic worldview. However, Edwards would likely reject the concept of divine middle knowledge, since Edwards argues that if God has knowledge about the future before God decrees anything about the future, then God's sovereignty is at risk since God would have to accommodate himself to these foreknown future events (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 395–396). Presumably, middle-knowledge would mean that God's selection of who is saved and who is damned would be limited by the foreknown choices of God's creatures, for God may not be able to arrange everyone's situations in a way that everyone who God wishes to be saved are actually saved. For example, Craig appeals to middle knowledge to argue that some people are predestined to hell as an unavoidable aspect of the world that God wanted to create, and that God could not create a world where no one ends up in hell (Craig, 136–137, 145–151). This makes it sound as if God has less control regarding people's eternal destinies than Edwards would have likely desired, given his affinity for God's sovereignty (Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 792, 799).

3.2.1 Causality Necessary for Divine Foreknowledge

Edwards says that since God's knowledge of the future existed in the past, and since the past is 'necessary' because it cannot be changed, then God's foreknowledge of the future is also necessary and cannot be changed.⁹⁴ Since God's foreknowledge cannot be incorrect, then the events that God foreknows cannot possibly be contingent but *must* happen just as God foreknows.⁹⁵ Edwards confidently concludes that "there is no geometrical theorem or proposition whatsoever, more capable of strict demonstration, than that God's certain prescience of the volitions of moral agents is inconsistent with such a contingency of these events, as is without all necessity."⁹⁶

However, according to Edwards, it is not God's knowledge of an event *per se* that is the *cause* of the event occurring,⁹⁷ for the true cause is the preceding chain of events. Therefore, in order to make accurate prophecies, Edwards argues that God must accurately know the endless effects which issue from every choice ever made by moral agents.⁹⁸ To not foreknow the outcome of

⁹⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 257.

⁹⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 257–258. He says "to say the foreknowledge is certain and infallible, and yet the connection of the event with that foreknowledge is not indissoluble, but dissoluble and fallible, is very absurd" (WJE 1: 258), and therefore "future events are always in God's view as evident, clear, sure, and necessary, as if they already were" (WJE 1: 267). See also Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 1234 in WJE 23: 167 for a similar argument.

Edwards' claims here are similar to those made by open theists today who say that God must not have perfect foreknowledge of future free actions, because if God foreknew them, then it would make these actions necessary and thus not free (e.g., Clark H. Pinnock, "Clark Pinnock's Response," in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 1986], 137–138). This argument was also made by the English Socinian John Biddle in the century before Edwards (Dewey D. Wallace Jr., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology 1625–1695* [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982], 151), and goes back at least as far as Cicero's works *De fato* and *De divinatione* (James Wetzel, "Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001], 50). Yet Edwards infers the opposite—that *because* God has perfect foreknowledge of all future 'free' actions and still holds people accountable, then God's foreknowledge is compatible with 'human liberty,' at least, as Edwards understands it (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 261–262).

⁹⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 268–269.

⁹⁷ "Infallible foreknowledge may *prove* the necessity of the event foreknown, and yet not be the thing which *causes* the necessity" (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 263, emphasis his).

⁹⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 239–240.

even one choice would hide all the effects of that choice from God, and given all the infinite interactions of this one choice on the subsequent choices of others, it would make God unable to predict or foretell *anything* about the future.⁹⁹ This is again due to Edwards' belief in 'butterfly-effect' causality, where one small event may vastly change the future.¹⁰⁰

A surprising feature of Edwards' understanding of God's foreknowledge is how Edwards argues that the only way God can foreknow future events is if there is "evidence" for such foreknowledge, for "no understanding, created or increated [sic], can see evidence where there is none."¹⁰¹ There are only two sorts of evidence that Edwards believes are possible: 1) either something is self-evident, or 2) something is evident due to its connection with something else. Yet future events are clearly not self-evident.¹⁰² Therefore, the only way that God can perfectly foreknow the future is if all future events are necessarily connected to past ones, in a way that there is no contingency involved: "For certainty of knowledge is nothing else but knowing or discerning the certainty there is in the things themselves which are known. Therefore there must be a certainty in things to be a ground of certainty of knowledge, and to render things capable of being known to be certain."¹⁰³

If any future event were truly contingent, Edwards believes that there would be no evidence by which God could predict it, for the event would not be necessarily linked to the chain of causes that came before it. This includes human decisions, which, if they were contingent as the Arminians believed, then "God not only can't foreknow any of the future moral actions of his

⁹⁹ Edwards' argument here may be illustrated by a table of billiard balls which represent "a vast web of interrelated causes and effects," including human decisions. Supposedly, "if God does not foreknow the [movement of the] first cue ball (or human choice/deed as the case may be) on which all its subsequent effects depend, he cannot know the latter or the subsequent effects they each cause" (C. Samuel Storms, "Open Theism in the Hands of an Angry Puritan: Jonathan Edwards on Divine Foreknowledge," in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. D. G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, Stephen J. Nichols [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003], 119).

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 248.

¹⁰¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 259.

¹⁰² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 259.

¹⁰³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 264.

creatures, but he can make no conjecture, can give no probable guess concerning them.”¹⁰⁴

Edwards rejects as “ridiculous” the idea that God can know contingent events in some way that humans cannot understand.¹⁰⁵

So it seems that Edwards actually has two different explanations for how God’s foreknowledge functions. The first is that God is immutable and knows all things simultaneously due to God’s timeless nature. The second is that God knows all of the links between cause and effect, and can thus infer how all things will interact in order to perfectly predict how the future will unfold. Either explanation alone would seem to be sufficient. A third explanation may be found in his philosophy about God being the ultimate cause behind all things, which would logically mean that God’s foreknowledge is altogether unnecessary.

Due to this variety of explanations, it does not seem that Edwards has settled on one particular explanation of foreknowledge as being most biblical. Instead, it appears that his scriptural arguments regarding God’s foreknowledge are primarily an attempt to bolster his deterministic views of causality against Arminian criticism. Yet Edwards’ interpretation of Scripture on the topics of bible prophecy and God’s foreknowledge are clearly influenced by his philosophical assumptions about God’s sovereignty and causality. As a result, it does not appear that Edwards’ appeals to his varying philosophies of how God’s foreknowledge operates would be persuasive enough to refute the Arminians, who would simply disagree with Edwards’ deterministic assumptions.

3.3 God’s Character Proves that Necessity is Compatible with Moral Praiseworthiness

The debate between Edwards and the Arminians over the nature of free will was not simply a philosophical exercise. The question was whether it was ultimately right for God to hold people morally accountable for their ‘necessary’ and thus unavoidable decisions. The Arminians argued that if people’s choices were such that they could not choose differently, then people could

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 333.

¹⁰⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 261.

neither be held responsible for those choices nor be praised or blamed for them.¹⁰⁶ Regarding predestination, if the reprobate cannot choose to believe in Christ and cannot choose to avoid sin, Arminians would deny that God can justly hold them morally responsible for these failures.

Edwards moves to refute this Arminian argument by appealing to the scripturally-revealed characters of God and Christ. Since God is perfectly holy (as revealed in Scripture), then God cannot act in an unholy manner, yet God's holy nature and actions are still praiseworthy. Whereas according to the Arminians' own principle, if God must always act in holy ways, then God would not deserve praise for God's goodness.¹⁰⁷ Although Edwards does not appeal to any particular verse, he asserts that "to bring texts of Scripture, wherein God is represented as in every respect, in the highest manner virtuous, and supremely praiseworthy, would be endless, and is altogether needless to such as have been brought up under the light of the gospel."¹⁰⁸ He says God is "everywhere represented in Scripture" as having such holiness, beauty, perfection, and virtue, that he is worthy to be loved, honored, and praised above every other creature.¹⁰⁹

Edwards also appeals to common sense to say that God has the highest possible freedom, even though God necessarily acts in holy ways which are praiseworthy and perfectly virtuous.¹¹⁰ Edwards attributes God's actions to "the perfection of his understanding, as the foundation of his wise purposes and decrees; the holiness of his nature, as the cause and reason of his holy determinations."¹¹¹ This perfection and holiness ensures that God always chooses what is "wisest and best," and this is not a restriction of God's sovereignty, for God's sovereignty "is his ability and authority to do whatever pleases him."¹¹² Additionally, "the reason why it is not

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 277.

¹⁰⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 278, 382.

¹⁰⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 278.

¹⁰⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 278.

¹¹⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 364.

¹¹¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 376, see also 418.

¹¹² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 377, 378.

dishonorable, to be necessarily *most* holy, is, because holiness in itself is an excellent and honorable thing. For the same reason, it is no dishonor to be necessarily *most* wise, and in every case to act most wisely . . . for wisdom is also in itself excellent and honorable.”¹¹³ He seems to fear that if God had freedom to act in ways either less holy or less wise, then it would make God less trustworthy. Alternatively, if the Arminians insist that God *does* always act ‘necessarily’ in perfect holiness, then according to their own principles, God would not be morally praiseworthy for his holiness, since God could not do otherwise.¹¹⁴ Thus, Edwards believes that the Arminians’ principles of free will trap them between two equally unpleasant options.

To further argue his point, Edwards considers the character of Jesus Christ, claiming that, based on biblical prophecies about the Messiah’s success, “his holy behavior was necessary; or that it was impossible that it should be otherwise,” and yet, Jesus is considered virtuous and praiseworthy for his actions.¹¹⁵ Edwards argues:

The same thing is evident from all the promises which God made to the Messiah, of his future glory, kingdom and success, in his office and character of a Mediator: which glory could not have been obtained, if his holiness had failed, and he had been guilty of sin. God’s absolute promise of any things makes the things promised *necessary*, and their failing to take place absolutely *impossible*.¹¹⁶

He repeats something very similar just a few pages later as it relates to predestination:

God could not decree before the foundation of the world, to save all that should believe in, and obey Christ, unless he had absolutely decreed that salvation should be provided, and effectually wrought out by Christ. And since (as the Arminians themselves strenuously maintain) a decree of God infers necessity; hence it became necessary that Christ should persevere, and actually work out salvation for us, and that he should not fail by the commission of sin.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 381, emphasis his.

¹¹⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 417–418.

¹¹⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 281–287, quote from 281. He cites Isa. 42:1–8, 49:7–9, and 50:5–9, among other verses. See also Edwards, “Prophecies of the Messiah,” in WJE 30.

¹¹⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 283, emphasis his.

¹¹⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 286.

This seems to be an expanded case of Edwards' earlier argument that God foreknows future 'free' actions which are certain to occur exactly as God foreknows, and yet this does not reduce these actions' moral value.

However, it seems that even without foreknowledge it could still be possible for God to guarantee that Christ would be sinless because Jesus had both a human and a divine nature, whereas all other humans do not.¹¹⁸ Thus, it could be that it was not God's 'foreknowledge' or even eternal 'knowledge' of Christ's success which ensured Christ would succeed, but the fact that Christ was the Son of God incarnate. Yet in this portion of *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards never once mentions the fact that Christ had a divine nature which enabled his sinlessness. However, Edwards does assert that "God had promised so effectually to preserve and up hold him by his Spirit, under all his temptations, that he should not fail of reaching the end for which he came into the world,"¹¹⁹ which should be a sufficient guarantee that Christ would not fail.

It may also seem that God giving Christ the Holy Spirit in order to prevent him from sinning proves that Christ was a special case and so was not exactly comparable to all other humans in terms of the nature of his free will.¹²⁰ Yet Edwards says, "I look upon it as a point clearly and absolutely determining the controversy between Calvinists and Arminians, concerning the necessity of such a freedom of will as is insisted on by the latter, in order to moral agency, virtue,

¹¹⁸ As affirmed by the early church fathers in several of the ecumenical councils and also affirmed by many Christians throughout church history, as shown in various creeds and confessions of faith. For Puritans like Edwards, this would have been the Westminster Confession, where Jesus' divine nature and anointing of the Holy Spirit are affirmed as that which enabled Christ to fulfill the office of mediator (Westminster Confession, chapter 8, section 3 in the original text of 1646, from the manuscript of Cornelius Burges as published in the modern critical edition of 1937 by S. W. Carruthers, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-confession-faith/>).

¹¹⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 281.

¹²⁰ Edwards seems to agree with Whitby that Christ was in an actual state of trial during his earthly life, as Adam was initially (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 293). However, given Edwards' account of how the Fall occurred, which will be examined in the next section, it would seem that the situation of the first Adam and last Adam are not identical, for Christ was given the upholding influence of the Holy Spirit which guaranteed that he would not sin, which Adam and Eve lacked. I would agree with Edwards that Christ was in a state of trial, since Edwards equates 'trial' with 'temptation' (WJE 1: 293) and Scripture clearly shows that Christ was tempted in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11, Mark 1:12–13), and Christ also was tempted to abandon his mission in Gethsemane (Luke 22:39–46 and parallels in Mark 14 and Matt. 26), but as Edwards admits, if Christ so had the Holy Spirit that he could not sin, then clearly, he could be tempted without actually having the ability to sin (WJE 1: 281).

command or prohibition, promise or threatening, reward or punishment, praise or dispraise, merit or demerit.”¹²¹ He then proceeds to quote several Bible verses to prove that Christ was the proper recipient of God’s commands and rewards.¹²² Edwards says it would be “strange” to think that all of Christ’s holy actions were not praiseworthy or virtuous simply because he could not sin.¹²³ Indeed, after referring to additional verses which directly link the Messiah’s rewards to His righteousness, Edwards concludes that “there is no room to pretend, that the glorious benefits bestowed in consequence of Christ’s obedience, are not properly of the nature of a reward.”¹²⁴

Therefore, Edwards argues that Christ is biblical proof that at least one person was still morally virtuous and praiseworthy, the proper subject of commands, and a rightful recipient of rewards, even when his will was determined in such a way that he could not avoid being good or holy. Edwards would likely agree that “if God’s freedom consists in the freedom to be who He is, then we cannot claim for ourselves any ‘higher’ freedom.”¹²⁵ Essentially, Edwards’ argument can be summarized as: if Christ was free but also holy, then freedom is compatible with necessity; thus, all of the elect whom God determines will necessarily act in holy ways are properly rewardable. The next section will examine how Edwards makes the corresponding argument, that Scripture shows those who necessarily sin are still morally blameworthy.

3.4 Original Sin Proves that Necessity is Compatible with Moral Blameworthiness

The doctrine of original sin is a key component of Edwards’ predestinarian scheme, for in order to justify God’s righteousness in predestination, Edwards must explain how the reprobate are

¹²¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 289.

¹²² He cites John 15:10, 12:49–50, 14:31, Rom. 5:19, Heb. 5:8, Isa. 53:10–12, Ps. 2, Ps. 110, Isa. 49:7–9, Heb. 12:1–2, and more (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 289–290).

¹²³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 290.

¹²⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 293. He cites Rev. 5:8–12, Isa. 53:11–12, Phil. 2:7–9, Ps. 45:7 (WJE 1: 292–293).

¹²⁵ Holmes, 155. Yet it can be argued that Edwards’ argument that God is determined to act the way God does by God’s own nature is “plainly incompatible” with Edwards’ emphasis on God’s sovereign unconditional freedom in election and reprobation (Alexander V. G. Allen, “The Freedom of the Will,” in Scheick, 95).

responsible for the sins which God predestined them to commit.¹²⁶ Edwards also has to explain how Adam and Eve were responsible for their first sin, since Edwards argues that they were also predestined to sin in order to provide the context for redemption history. Finally, he must address why it is just for God to punish all of Adam and Eve's descendants for this sin. Edwards' philosophical arguments for the justice of hell and the imputation of original sin have been examined already in chapter 2, but it is illuminating to also examine his scriptural exegesis, which reveals that Edwards' philosophy of decision-making influences his interpretation of the story of the Fall as recorded in Genesis 3.

3.4.1 Edwards' Scriptural and Experiential Evidence for the Doctrine of Original Sin

Edwards begins *Original Sin* by attempting to prove that all people are sinners who deserve God's wrath. He appeals to Scripture to show that all people sin,¹²⁷ including Christians,¹²⁸ and that sin is justly punishable by eternal destruction (the second death).¹²⁹ He also cites many examples of wickedness throughout the biblical narratives and in church history.¹³⁰ Finally, he makes extended reference to Romans 5:12–21 as proving that the corruption of all people is due to Adam's first sin, arguing that this is how the Church has always interpreted it.¹³¹ He also refers to Christ's words that he came for those who are 'sick' and 'lost,' as proving that everyone is a sinner in need of being born again.¹³² Edwards proclaims that the doctrine is taught in a sufficient number of scriptural texts, "with great plainness," to the extent that "there are few, if

¹²⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 432–433.

¹²⁷ He refers to Eccl. 7:20, Job 9:2–3, Ps. 143:2, Rom. 3:19–20, 1 John 1:7–10, Gal. 2:16, Exod. 30:11–16, and more (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 114–115, 262–267, 274–279, 283–286, 428–429).

¹²⁸ Such as Heb. 12:6–8, James 3:2, Prov. 20:9, Eccl. 7:20, 9:3, and Gen. 6:3–12 (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 137–138, 163, 164).

¹²⁹ Gal. 3:10, 3:22, 2:16–17, Rom. 4:14, 2 Cor. 3:6–9 (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 115).

¹³⁰ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 164–166, 166–167, 169–182, 183–184.

¹³¹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 344–346, 348.

¹³² Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 428–429, citing Matt. 9:12, 18:11, and Luke 19:10.

any, doctrines of revelation, taught more plainly and expressly.”¹³³ Yet he says that even if it were spoken of only infrequently and less plainly, we would still be obliged to believe it;¹³⁴ presumably, because of Edwards’ high view of Scripture as divinely inspired and inerrant.

In *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards explains how the Arminian theologian Daniel Whitby appeals to Augustine’s and Origen’s ideas in order to support the Arminian claim that people are not guilty for doing that which they cannot avoid.¹³⁵ In response, Edwards appeals to Scripture which speaks about God abandoning people to their own sinful desires and then still considering them guilty of these sins.¹³⁶ This is an interesting instance of Edwards using Scripture to override Whitby’s appeal to tradition. Edwards proclaims that the Arminian understanding has “not one word of it in the whole Bible.”¹³⁷ In *Original Sin*, he claims the Arminians have arrogantly re-interpreted Paul’s writings against the plain reading and traditional exposition of these verses. He rejects the Arminian claim that all earlier interpreters of Scripture prior to the recent “age of light and liberty” misunderstood Paul.¹³⁸ Yet he does so somewhat ironically, given his dismissal of Whitby’s use of Augustine and Origen. Edwards then appeals to a variety of other historical authors who he believes endorsed the doctrine of original sin, including historical rabbis, some verses in the Apocrypha, and even Plato and other Greek philosophers.¹³⁹ Given Edwards’ apparent preference for Scripture over tradition, it is unclear why he believes that appealing to these historical authors strengthens his case. At times, he appears to be suspicious of people who claim to have had a new revelation that no one else in church history has seen in Scripture.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 427.

¹³⁴ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 427.

¹³⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 295.

¹³⁶ Acts 7:42, Rom. 1:24–28, Ps. 81:12, and the example of Judas (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 295–296).

¹³⁷ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 433.

¹³⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 435–436.

¹³⁹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 429.

¹⁴⁰ Edwards, “Extraordinary Gifts Of The Spirit Are Inferior To Graces Of The Spirit,” in WJE 25: 308–309.

Perhaps Edwards thinks that if a belief is confirmed not just in Scripture but also by tradition, and even by non-Christian philosophers, then he has three sources of authority on his side: Scripture, at least some tradition, and philosophy. Yet surely Whitby would say the same.

It is not surprising to see Edwards appeal once more to his philosophical understanding of causality: “the natural dictate of reason shows, that where there is an effect, there is a cause, and a cause sufficient for the effect; because, if it were not sufficient, it would not be effectual: and that therefore, where there is a stated prevalence of the effect, there is a stated prevalence in the cause: a steady effect argues a steady cause.”¹⁴¹ He also appeals to historical experience to argue that if there has never been a case of a single person besides Christ who has managed to avoid all sin, despite the diverse circumstances in which people have lived, then he believes that it objectively proves that people have an inherent tendency to sin.¹⁴² The historical fact that all nations quickly fell into idolatry and remained there for many ages until God graciously brought them the gospel also shows that there is some “depraved disposition, natural to all mankind.”¹⁴³ He argues,

These things clearly determine the point, concerning the tendency of man’s nature to wickedness; if we may be allowed to proceed according to such *rules and methods of reasoning*, as are universally made use of, and never denied, or doubted to be good and sure, in experimental *philosophy*; or may reason from *experience and facts*, in that manner which *common sense* leads all mankind to in other cases. If *experience and trial* will evince anything at all concerning the natural disposition of the hearts of mankind, one would think the experience of so many ages as have elapsed since the beginning of the world, and the trial as it were made by hundreds of different nations together, for so long a time, should be sufficient to convince all, that wickedness is agreeable to the nature of mankind in its present state.¹⁴⁴

Note the italicized sources which Edwards appeals to in the above quote: reason/philosophy, experience/trial/facts, and common sense. From all this, he concludes that all humans are

¹⁴¹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 121.

¹⁴² Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 121–122, 124–125.

¹⁴³ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 148.

¹⁴⁴ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 167–168, emphasis mine.

naturally subject to some unchosen tendency which necessarily leads to sin.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, he asserts that since this tendency alone would lead to continual sin, then the only reason we do not see continual sin in our daily lives and history of the world is because God's grace intervenes.¹⁴⁶ Thus, contra the Arminians, Edwards believes that Scripture, history, some tradition, philosophy, experience, and common sense all show that God holds people blameworthy for their unavoidable sins.

However, Edwards goes further, and believes that it is not just for particular sins that God blames people, but even having an inborn *tendency* to sin is enough for God to justly condemn someone.¹⁴⁷ He also appeals to many Bible verses that portray humans as being sinful from their youth and even from birth,¹⁴⁸ although later he admits that "those who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" in Romans 5:14 are traditionally interpreted as infants who have not yet personally sinned.¹⁴⁹

Yet seemingly contrary to this last point, Edwards also insists that all people immediately transgress God's law as soon as they are capable of doing so, because otherwise, he fears that there might be a situation where someone dies who has not yet personally sinned and could be considered righteous,¹⁵⁰ and thus would not need Christ's redemption.¹⁵¹ These are just a few interesting examples of how Edwards' exegesis is not entirely self-consistent on this topic.

¹⁴⁵ "All mankind have such a propensity; yea, one of the highest kind, a propensity that is *invincible* or a tendency which really amounts to a fixed constant unfailing *necessity*" (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 123, emphasis his).

¹⁴⁶ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 136–137.

¹⁴⁷ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 129, 140. At one point, Edwards compares a child to a young viper which still has a "malignant nature, though incapable of doing a malignant action, and at present appearing [as] a harmless creature" (WJE 3: 423).

¹⁴⁸ Edwards argues this teaching is found in Prov. 22:15, Gen. 8:21, Ps. 58:3, and Job 25:4 (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 265–270).

¹⁴⁹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 342–343.

¹⁵⁰ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 134–135.

¹⁵¹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 353–354. In his "Miscellanies," no. n in WJE 13: 169–170, he argues "one of these two things are certainly true, and self-evidently so: either that it is most just, exceeding just, that God should take the soul of a new-born infant and cast it into eternal torments, or else that those infants that are saved are not

In sum, Edwards is convinced from Scripture, as well as from a variety of other sources, that although people cannot avoid sinning, God still holds them accountable for their sins. He seems to be assured that God's judgment on this matter must be just and correct since, as discussed in the previous section, God necessarily acts in holy ways.

3.4.2 The Justice of Holding Someone Morally Responsible Who Cannot Do Otherwise

If Edwards has proven the point that all people have been corrupted by Adam's sin and are now unable to entirely avoid sin of their own free will, then logically, "if we have it not in our power to be innocent, then we have it not in our power to be blameless; and if so, we are under a necessity of being blameworthy. And how does this consist with what he [Whitby] so often asserts, that necessity is inconsistent with blame or praise?"¹⁵²

However, Edwards still has to make his own positive argument for why someone who is unable to avoid sin is nonetheless morally responsible for that sin. While he could say that this is what Scripture teaches and that settles the matter, Edwards does not do this. Once again, Edwards moves to support his scriptural understanding with philosophy. In this case, his solution is to make a philosophical distinction between 'natural' necessity and 'moral' necessity. Edwards defines *natural necessity* as when a person's actions are constrained by physical external factors,¹⁵³ whereas *moral necessity* is where a person is unable to will themselves to act in a particular way, due to their moral "habits and dispositions of the heart."¹⁵⁴

saved by the death of Christ." The possibility of anyone being saved apart from Christ's death appears to be the problem that Edwards is trying to avoid here in two different ways: 1) by arguing that people are condemnable for both their unchosen inborn sinful tendency, and 2) for their own immediate sins, although the latter would seem unnecessary given the former.

¹⁵² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, (1754; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2012), 137. A typo means the last part of this quotation is visible on the online version of WJE 1: 300, but the first part of the sentence is missing.

¹⁵³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 156, 350–352.

¹⁵⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 156–157, 305, 353–354, 359–360. Edwards took this distinction between moral and natural necessity from Samuel Clarke, in an attempt to avoid "Hobbesian-type materialistic determinism" (Fiering, 286; more on 304–305). Leibniz also makes use of the concept moral necessity in a similar way, and the idea was also known to many earlier scholastic thinkers going as far back as Thomas Aquinas (Michael J. Murray, "Pre-Leibnizian Moral Necessity," *The Leibniz Review* 14 [2004]: 1–28).

He illustrates this distinction through a story about two criminals in jail. The king promises that if each man would only come and kneel before him and beg to be forgiven, then the king will pardon him. Natural necessity is exemplified by one prisoner who has a desire to do so, but is restrained by the physical bars of his jail cell. The other criminal, illustrating moral necessity, is in an unlocked cell, and could certainly do as the king desires, but does not have the will to do so because he hates the king. Edwards appeals to common sense to explain that the first criminal should not be blamed for his inability to follow the king's request, but the second should be considered blameworthy.¹⁵⁵

Additionally, Edwards refers to the idea of a person who has developed a sinful habit.¹⁵⁶ If the Arminians are correct, Edwards says, then each time this person engages in their habitual sinful behavior, they would be less guilty than a person who commits the same sin without having such a habit, for the habitual sinner would be less able to avoid the sin.¹⁵⁷ Yet in reality, Edwards says that the habitual sinner's "moral inability, consisting in the strength of his evil inclination, is the very thing wherein his wickedness consists; and yet according to Arminian principles, it must be a thing inconsistent with wickedness; and by how much the more he has of it, by so much is he the further from wickedness."¹⁵⁸ Edwards fears that "these [Arminian] notions . . . will directly lead men to justify the vilest acts and practices, from the strength of their wicked inclinations of all sorts; strong inclinations inducing a moral necessity."¹⁵⁹ Therefore, Edwards concludes that a strong inclination toward sin does not detract from a person's blame-worthiness, because if it did, then hardened sinners would be less blameworthy, which is contrary to both Scripture and common sense.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 362–363.

¹⁵⁶ At the time the term 'habit' did not mean "automatic behavior, such as a mechanical rut or routine that one cannot 'kick'." Instead, "a habit was understood to be an acquired power of the soul that gave a person facility and consistency in some activity" (Fiering, 309).

¹⁵⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 323, 325–326. See also 297–298.

¹⁵⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 309.

¹⁵⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 421.

¹⁶⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 325–326, 359–361.

3.4.3 The Basis of Virtue and Vice

Perhaps out of concern that such distinctions are not convincing enough, Edwards makes another argument for why sinners are blameworthy for their sins.

The Arminians, he claims, believe that a person can only be praise- or blame-worthy if that person has control over their inner dispositions which influence their outer actions.¹⁶¹ But Edwards appeals to his philosophy of decision-making, saying that this is an “absurdity” because it would push the blame for any sin back onto the infinite chain of sinful choices which led that person to sin. But an infinite chain of decisions is impossible, and so the reason for any choice must end with an unchosen cause, such as a personal disposition.¹⁶² Instead, Edwards argues it is the *nature* of the person’s volitions or dispositions—regardless of the cause—which makes their actions worthy of praise or blame.¹⁶³ For example, “ingratitude is hateful and worthy of dispraise, according to common sense; not because something as bad, or worse than ingratitude, was the cause that produced it; but because it is hateful in itself, by its own inherent deformity.”¹⁶⁴ He suspects the Arminians have become confused because

it is indeed a very plain dictate of common sense, that it is so with respect to all *outward actions*, and sensible motions of the body; that the moral good or evil of ’em does not lie at all in the motions themselves; which taken by themselves, are nothing of a moral nature; and the essence of all the moral good or evil that concerns them, lies in those internal dispositions and volitions which are the cause of them.¹⁶⁵

In *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards provides no reason for this claim besides “common sense.”¹⁶⁶ In *Original Sin*, he claims that, according to Francis Hutcheson and George Turnbull, “this is the general notion, not that principles derive their goodness from actions, but that actions derive their

¹⁶¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 337–339.

¹⁶² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 337–339; Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 377–378.

¹⁶³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 337.

¹⁶⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 340.

¹⁶⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 341, emphasis his.

¹⁶⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 341–342.

goodness from the principles whence they proceed,” and boldly proclaims this is “agreeable to the nature of things, and the voice of human sense and reason” according to all people in all nations and times.¹⁶⁷ Insight into Edwards’ reasoning here may be found in his argument that even if a person had to first make a choice to gain a virtuous ‘principle’ in order to make further virtuous choices, it would be impossible to label that first choice itself as virtuous, for that choice itself did not proceed from a virtuous principle. But he believes that this outcome would be “a contradiction to the nature of things, as judged of by the common sense of mankind,” for if it were possible, the choice to gain a virtuous principle should be considered virtuous.¹⁶⁸ Thus, he believes the Arminians cannot be correct in their understanding of morality.

Since Edwards wants to hold people accountable not for their outer actions but rather for the nature of their unchosen inner volitions, he then has to explain why this is so.¹⁶⁹ He thinks that a person is responsible simply due to being “the immediate agent” who has a sinful volition,¹⁷⁰ because it is the person’s own “will” or “heart” which is sinful. For example, Adam was guilty of the first sin because “his heart was in it” and he did it with the “full consent” of his heart.¹⁷¹

Edwards makes frequent appeals to common sense, or the beliefs of “common people,” and even children, who he says naturally hold people accountable for their actions and volitions without having to go through metaphysical speculation about what determines the will.¹⁷² He blames

¹⁶⁷ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 224–225.

¹⁶⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 224, 226. Presumably, Edwards would also appeal to his philosophy of decision-making to argue that if a person has to make a choice to gain a virtuous principle, then there is no way to explain the cause of that choice, since clearly, it could not have been made because of a virtuous principle.

¹⁶⁹ Fiering notes that holding people accountable for inner volitions is unintuitive because in criminal courts, people are judged based on their outer actions and are not punished for their inner desires (Fiering, 319). Whether it is just for God to hold people accountable and punish them for these unchosen feelings is debateable (Fiering, 320–321).

¹⁷⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 342. A clear quote is “he is to blame for it, because his will is IN IT: so far as the will is *in it*, blame is *in it*, and no further” (WJE 1: 427, emphasis and capitalization his).

¹⁷¹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, 390–391. In Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 423, Edwards mentions a source for this idea when he cites Dr. Philip Doddridge. In a footnote, editor Paul Ramsey refers to Doddridge’s sermon “The Scripture Doctrine of Salvation by Grace Through Faith,” in *Practical discourses on regeneration, in ten sermons preach’d at Northampton; to which are added, two sermons on salvation by grace through faith* (London, 1742), 11.

¹⁷² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 357–358, 427–428.

Arminians for having “darkened their own minds with confused metaphysical speculation, and abstruse and ambiguous terms.”¹⁷³ In so doing, it appears that Edwards is prioritizing common sense over philosophy when that philosophy does not support his preferred view. Edwards argues that holding people accountable for their sinful dispositions would not be objected to so strongly if the punishment were small. However,

they that argue against the justice of damning men for those things that are thus necessary, seem to make their argument the stronger, by setting forth the greatness of the punishment in strong expressions: “That a man should be cast into eternal burnings, that he should be made to fry in hell to all eternity, for those things which he had no power to avoid, and was under a fatal, unfrustrable, invincible necessity of doing.”¹⁷⁴

He says that if the Arminians want to refute this idea, then they need to disprove common sense by use of philosophical arguments, although Edwards earlier prioritized common sense over philosophy.¹⁷⁵ Yet concerning the role of “tradition,” Edwards seems to discount historical philosophy as having any important role in this debate, since he says that the Arminians accuse the Calvinists of being Stoics, while simultaneously appealing to the Stoics when their philosophy agrees with Arminian ideas.¹⁷⁶ Edwards also rejects the accusation that he has been influenced by Hobbes’ philosophy, and says the fact that some other person once held to an idea does not determine its truthfulness.¹⁷⁷

In conclusion, this is how Edwards justifies God’s actions of punishing the reprobate in hell despite the reprobate being unable to avoid sinning. As seen here, this conviction is initially

¹⁷³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 359.

¹⁷⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 356.

¹⁷⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 363, 428. He then disparages the Arminians’ philosophical use of certain terms, which he claims negatively impacts all their interpretation of Scripture and reason (WJE 1: 363). Additionally, Edwards’ appeal to common sense contradicts Edwards’ epistemology as will be discussed in chapter 4, for if only those to whom God gives ‘spiritual perception’ can see the truth of reality, then only the elect person’s opinion should be credible. Yet if Edwards believed that most people in his society needed to be truly converted to Christianity, then the value of the average person’s opinion in any theological argument would be questionable (Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 73–74).

¹⁷⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 372–373.

¹⁷⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 374.

derived from Scripture, but Edwards appeals to many other sources of authority to support his biblical interpretation, apparently choosing those sources which agree with his argument and rejecting those which do not, ad hoc, during his debate.

3.4.4 The Cause of the First Sin

Now it is time to examine Edwards' defense of God's justice in regard to the origin of humanity's unchosen sinful inclination. This is based on his reading of Genesis 1–3, combined with his philosophy of dispositions and decision-making. He writes,

when God made man at first, he implanted in him two kinds of principles. There was an *inferior* kind, which may be called *natural*, being the principles of mere human nature; such as self-love, with those natural appetites and passions, which belong to the nature of man, in which his love to his own liberty, honor and pleasure, were exercised: these when alone, and left to themselves, are what the Scriptures sometimes call *flesh*. Besides these, there were *superior principles*, that were spiritual, holy and divine, summarily comprehended in divine love; wherein consisted the spiritual image of God, and man's righteousness and true holiness; which are called in Scripture the *divine nature*.¹⁷⁸

While only the 'inferior' principles are necessary and essential for humans to be considered human, it was God's intention for the 'superior' principles to rule over the 'inferior' principles,¹⁷⁹ which would have guaranteed that Adam would persist in holiness and virtue. Edwards believed that originally, in Adam "the principles of human nature should be so balanced, that the consequence should be no propensity to sin."¹⁸⁰ Adam was entirely righteous, innocent, and had an inherent inclination or disposition to do what was right, i.e., to love God.¹⁸¹ In addition to these "superior principles" or "holy disposition," there was a component of correct

¹⁷⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 381, emphasis his.

¹⁷⁹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 381–382.

¹⁸⁰ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 203. Presumably, what Edwards says about Adam would apply equally to Eve; however, for brevity, I will use Edwards' convention and refer only to Adam. I do not find any hint that Edwards blames Eve more than Adam for the first sin, or that Edwards thinks that Eve's nature or principles were in any way different from Adam's.

¹⁸¹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 229–230. These superior or inferior 'principles' can be equated with Edwards' philosophical concept of the 'disposition' which drives human decision-making, since the terms 'principles,' 'dispositions,' and 'affections' are used interchangeably by Edwards (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 231, 146).

thinking about God which Adam possessed, for true love of God “must arise from some knowledge, sense and conviction of his worthiness of supreme respect.”¹⁸² Therefore, originally, Adam’s love for God must have been a result of his correct understanding of God’s worthiness and excellence, as well as being in possession of the divinely-given ‘superior’ principle of love for God which overruled the inherently-human ‘inferior’ self-love principle.

How then does Edwards think that the first sin occurred? He rejects the Arminian idea that Adam sinned because Adam had a previous sinful volition which caused the sinful volition to eat from the tree, for this leads back to the impossible infinite chain of choices. Once more, because of Edwards’ views on causality, he insists that the first sinful volition cannot have produced itself. The sinful volition also could not have occurred by accident, for then Adam could not be properly blamed for it.¹⁸³ Instead, Edwards argues that sin happened when humanity’s inferior principles somehow became unregulated by the superior principle of love for God:

The inferior principles of self-love and natural appetite, which were given only to serve, being alone, and left to themselves, of course became reigning principles; having no superior principles to regulate or control them, they became absolute masters of the heart. The immediate consequence of which was a *fatal catastrophe*, a turning of all things upside down, and the succession of a state of the most odious and dreadful confusion.¹⁸⁴

However, Edwards has two conflicting explanations for how this occurred. Initially, Edwards says that Adam sinned when he was deprived of the Holy Spirit: “Man’s nature, being *left to itself, forsaken* of the Spirit of God, as it was when man fell, and consequently forsaken of divine and holy principles, of itself became exceeding corrupt, utterly depraved and ruined.”¹⁸⁵ Yet if Adam could only sin because God removed the superior principle which otherwise would have

¹⁸² Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 146.

¹⁸³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 414.

¹⁸⁴ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 382, emphasis his. It should be noted that Edwards does not believe that this self-love principle is entirely evil, for it can also explain certain aspects of humanity such as pity, gratitude, and parental affection towards children, and thus was designed to contribute to the overall good of the world, provided it was well-regulated (Edwards, “True Virtue,” in WJE 8: 616).

¹⁸⁵ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 279, emphasis mine.

enabled Adam to obey God, and the inferior principle is so designed by God such that if it is not governed by the superior principle it automatically becomes self-interested and sinful, then how could Adam be properly blamed for his sin? Perhaps realizing this problem, Edwards provides another, different explanation elsewhere in *Original Sin*:

When man sinned, and broke God's covenant, and fell under his curse, these superior principles left his heart: for indeed God then left him; that communion with God, on which these principles depended, entirely ceased; the Holy Spirit, that divine inhabitant, forsook the house. Because it would have been utterly improper in itself, and inconsistent with the covenant and constitution God had established, that God should still maintain communion with man, and continue, by his friendly, gracious vital influences, to dwell with him and in him, after he was become a rebel, and had incurred God's wrath and curse.¹⁸⁶

Losing the Holy Spirit was part of God's judgment upon Adam:

The sentence was in great part executed immediately; he then died spiritually; he lost his innocence and original righteousness, and the favor of God; a dismal alteration was made in his soul, by the *loss of that holy divine principle*, which was in the highest sense the life of the soul. In this he was truly ruined and undone that very day; becoming corrupt, miserable and helpless.¹⁸⁷

Here, in Edwards' second explanation, Adam sins, and *only then* God withdraws the Holy Spirit (a.k.a. the 'superior principle') from Adam. This appears to be more in line with how Christians throughout history have understood the Fall. But in Edwards' second explanation, one wonders how Adam could sin if the superior principle of love for God was still ruling over the inferior principle when Adam sinned, and God only removed the superior principle afterward as a punishment.¹⁸⁸ As a result, Edwards defaults back to his first explanation:

The first arising or existing of that evil disposition in the heart of Adam, was by God's *permission*; who could have prevented it, if he had pleased, by giving such influences of his Spirit, as would have been absolutely effectual to hinder it; which, it is plain in fact, he did *withhold*: and whatever mystery may be supposed in the affair, yet no Christian

¹⁸⁶ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 382, see also 390.

¹⁸⁷ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 258, emphasis mine.

¹⁸⁸ Clyde A. Holbrook, "Exposition of Arguments," in WJE 3: 51.

will presume to say, it was not in perfect consistence with God's holiness and righteousness, notwithstanding Adam had been guilty of no offense before.¹⁸⁹

It appears that Edwards is wrestling with this question by alternating back and forth between two apparently contradictory explanations, none of which is fully satisfactory.¹⁹⁰ Finally, as shown in the above quote, after struggling to explain the biblical story of the first sin in a way that is compatible with his deterministic philosophy of decision-making and causality, Edwards ultimately resorts to "mystery."

One attempt to harmonize these conflicting explanations in Edwards' thought is to say that God intentionally withdrew the Holy Spirit temporarily for the purpose of "testing" Adam. But accepting this claim is difficult, for even if deprived of the Holy Spirit's governing influence, Adam's rational mind would have realized that it was wrong to sin, except in a situation where he was deceived.¹⁹¹ Perhaps Edwards believed that this was necessary, for had Adam successfully avoided sinning, then God's purpose to reveal himself as a redeeming God would have been thwarted, not all of God's 'attributes' would have been revealed, and God's ultimate purpose for creation would have failed. So it does not seem that God could have made it a genuinely fair test after all.¹⁹² Yet Edwards insists that "for God so far to have the disposal of this affair, as to withhold those influences, without which nature will be corrupt, is not to be the

¹⁸⁹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 393–394, emphasis his.

¹⁹⁰ Many commentators have found Edwards inconsistent on the explanation of original sin, including Clyde Holbrook, Samuel Storms, John Gerstner, Sam Logan Jr., and others (Bombaro, 210, referring to John Kearney, "Jonathan Edwards' Account of Adam's First Sin," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 15, no. 2 [Autumn 1997]: 127–141). Stephen Daniel admits that from the perspective of "fallen human consciousness" the doctrine of original sin seems to "violate moral requirements," is unsatisfactory, and is frequently labelled as inconsistent (Daniel, 132, 139, 144). In contrast, Daniel has a unique account of Edwards' theory of original sin which identifies sin as individuality and subjectivity, through interpreting Edwards according to Daniel's understanding of semiotics and Stoic-Ramist logic (Daniel, 133–151).

¹⁹¹ Bombaro, 212–213, referring to several of Edwards' "Miscellanies" entries such as no. 436 in WJE 13: 484–486 and no. 501 in WJE 18: 51. If Bombaro's interpretation of Edwards' thought is accurate, it would mean that Edwards thought that God effectively set Adam and Eve up for failure because God's 'greater good' purposes required it, by not only temporarily removing the influence of the Holy Spirit from them so they could be tested, but also putting them in a situation where they would be infallibly deceived.

¹⁹² It does not seem that Edwards could claim that Adam and Eve had "sufficient grace" to withstand their test if they had so chosen, for according to Edwards, grace is always efficacious, such that if they truly had it, they could not have sinned (Bombaro, 300 and 302 where he cites Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 15 in WJE 13: 208).

author of sin.”¹⁹³ Arminians, among others, would certainly not find this persuasive.¹⁹⁴

3.4.5 The Punishment of Adam and His Offspring

Regardless of how the first sin occurred, Edwards insists it is a proper punishment for the rest of humanity to be given over to sin:

If Adam, for his persevering obedience, was to have had everlasting life and happiness, in perfect holiness, union with his Maker, and enjoyment of his favor, and this was the life which was to be confirmed by the tree of life; then doubtless the death threatened in case of disobedience, which stands in direct opposition to this, was a being given over to everlasting wickedness and misery, in separation from God and in enduring his wrath.¹⁹⁵

This punishment was then extended to all of Adam and Eve’s descendants,¹⁹⁶ who are effectively ‘one’ with Adam, and thus would have approved of Adam’s first sin,¹⁹⁷ or at least would have opted for Adam to make a choice on their behalf.¹⁹⁸ Now, “the depravity of nature, remaining an *established principle* in the heart of a child of Adam, and as exhibited in after-operations, is a *consequence* and *punishment* of the first apostacy [sic] thus participated, and brings new guilt.”¹⁹⁹ This then justifies God continuing to withhold the Holy Spirit from the rest of Adam’s descendants, ensuring that they remain in bondage to sin,²⁰⁰ unless God has predetermined to

¹⁹³ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 383–384, emphasis his. See also WJE 3: 387–388.

¹⁹⁴ Bombaro notes that by the twentieth century most commentators such as Perry Miller, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Clyde Holbrook dismissed Edwards’ attempt at explaining the Fall as “circular reasoning” (Bombaro, 217). On the whole, Bombaro argues that Edwards’ explanation is consistent with the rest of Edwards’ dispositional views of reality and God’s purposes of self-glorification. However, as shown in chapter 1, the Fall is just one component of the problem of reprobation, and reprobation is inconsistent with several key elements of Edwards’ thought.

¹⁹⁵ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 238.

¹⁹⁶ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 245–246, 383. Edwards cites Rom. 5:16–19 (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 248, 310).

¹⁹⁷ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 390–391, 407–408. Edwards’ philosophical argument for why Adam and his descendants are considered by God to be ‘one’ has been discussed in chapter 2, section 2.4.1, p. 98–100.

¹⁹⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 396.

¹⁹⁹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 391, emphasis his.

²⁰⁰ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 387.

graciously restore the ‘superior principles’ to them on the basis of Christ’s death, if they are one of God’s elect.

In summary, Edwards argues that God can justly hold sinners who are predestined to hell responsible for their sins and for Adam’s first sin, despite their inability to do otherwise due to the bondage of original sin. This argument has its origins in Edwards’ understanding of Scripture, which he sees as supported by experience, common sense, and Christian tradition. He then attempts to justify this as reasonable through use of his philosophy of natural and moral necessity, as well as by further appeals to his understanding of common sense regarding the source of virtue. Edwards has some difficulty, however, when it comes to explaining the very first sin within his deterministic philosophy, for it suggests that God was in some way responsible for Adam’s sin, as well as for the ongoing sins of all of Adam’s descendants. Perhaps the only way that Edwards could defend his position is to appeal to the idea that God *needed* Adam to sin, in order to bring greater blessing to the world as a whole. As will be shown in the next section, this is also an argument which Edwards makes on the basis of Scripture.

3.5 Edwards’ Approach to Theodicy

Edwards knew that the Arminians accused Calvinists of making God the “author of sin,”²⁰¹ and of portraying God as “unjust and cruel, and guilty of manifest deceit and double dealing, and the like.”²⁰² We have just discussed this difficulty vis-à-vis the first sin. This section will examine how Edwards attempts to defend God’s goodness despite God’s total control over sin and evil.

First, in response to the Arminian accusation that if people necessarily sin then it is not the sinner’s fault but God’s fault, Edwards argues that the Arminians also have a problem for theodicy, because they say that God withholds his help from the demons, which necessarily causes the demons to be evil. Edwards says that his own beliefs about human sin are nearly

²⁰¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 397.

²⁰² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 438.

identical to this Arminian belief about demons.²⁰³ Additionally, he claims that the Arminian belief in God's perfect foreknowledge of all things would make God just as much the author of evil and sinful actions as if God had ordered these evil or sinful events to occur.²⁰⁴ But Edwards denies that God's ordering of events so that sin necessarily occurs would make God the author of sin "if, by 'the author of sin,' be meant the sinner, the agent, or actor of sin, or the *doer* of a wicked thing."²⁰⁵ However,

if, by "the author of sin," is meant the permitter, or not a hinderer of sin; and at the same time, a disposer of the state of events, in such a manner, for wise, holy and most excellent ends and purposes, that sin, if it be permitted or not hindered, will most certainly and infallibly follow; I say, if this be all that is meant, by being the author of sin, I don't deny that God is the author of sin. . . . What God does herein, is holy; and a glorious exercise of the infinite excellency of his nature.²⁰⁶

He proceeds to quote Scripture about God hardening Pharaoh's heart and the hearts of the kings of Canaan, and also refers to the narratives about Joseph's enslavement, Zedekiah's rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar's conquests, and the crucifixion of Christ.²⁰⁷ He says that all these events were God's will, even though they involved sin and evil.

Edwards concludes "thus it is certain and demonstrable, from the holy Scriptures, as well as the nature of things, and the principles of Arminians, that God permits sin; and at the same time, so

²⁰³ Edwards says that Whitby believes God withholds his grace from the demons, which necessarily causes them to be evil, in which case, according to Arminian principles, God is the proper and efficient cause of their evil deeds (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 397–398). However, Whitby should not be assumed to speak for all Arminians on this topic. Arminians today rarely touch on this issue; one exception is the open theist Gregory A. Boyd who addresses the origin of supernatural evil in his books *God At War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), and *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001).

²⁰⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 398. This *tu quoque* response to the Arminians appears again in Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 384, 386–388. However, in order for this argument to work, it requires that there legitimately is no solution to the problem of theodicy. Otherwise, it only means that both Edwards and the Arminians have a problem (Holmes, 232). In order to actually 'win' this argument, Edwards has to show why his solution should be preferred over the Arminians' (Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin*, 57).

²⁰⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 399, emphasis his.

²⁰⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 399. Although, given Edwards' occasionalism, the distinction between causation and permission is very small or nonexistent (Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin*, 64).

²⁰⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 400–403, 406.

orders things, in his providence, that it certainly and infallibly will come to pass, in consequence of his permission.”²⁰⁸ All that God does to achieve this is “to order and dispose things concerning them, so to leave them to themselves, and give them up to their own wickedness, that this perfect wickedness should be a necessary consequence.”²⁰⁹ Edwards cites George Turnbull, who wrote that despite God being the “‘Father of lights,’ the Author of every perfect and good gift, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning” (James 1:17), God forms both light and peace as well as creates darkness and evil.²¹⁰ Yet elsewhere, Edwards affirms that God has infinite goodness and “is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.”²¹¹

To explain this paradox, Edwards attempts to use the analogy of the sun, which is the proper and direct cause of light and warmth, yet when it sets, it indirectly and necessarily leads to coldness and darkness despite these attributes not being those of the sun itself.²¹² Similarly, Edwards

²⁰⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 403.

²⁰⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 409.

²¹⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 407n6, probably referring to Isa. 45:7, although the exact translation that Edwards or Turnbull uses is not given here. Barshinger notes that the KJV was Edwards’ preferred translation (Barshinger, “Introduction,” in Barshinger and Sweeney, 4). Modern translations now often substitute “calamity” or “disaster” for “woe/evil” in this verse (e.g., the ESV, NIV, NKJV, NASB). For more on translation possibilities that do not require this verse to mean that God is the ultimate cause behind all evil in the world, see Frederik Lindström, *God and the Origin of Evil: A Contextual Analysis of Alleged Monistic Evidence in the Old Testament*, trans. Frederick H. Cryer [Lund: Gleerup, 1983], 198–199.

²¹¹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 102. This is a quotation of Habakkuk 1:13.

²¹² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 404. Crisp criticizes this analogy, for “the sun, unlike God, is not a moral agent. If it were, then it *would* be the author of the resulting cold and dark, since it would be acting as a voluntary agent in bringing about the state of affairs where darkness obtains” (Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin*, 64).

An interesting repetition of this image appears in Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 185 in WJE 11: 120. He claims “that the sun is designed by God as a type of Christ may be argued from Scripture, not only by Christ’s being frequently represented by it, being called the Sun, the Sun of Righteousness, the Light of the World, etc.; but also by the sun’s withdrawing its light when Christ was crucified, as it were conforming to its antitype; as the veil of the temple did at the same time, that rent when Christ’s flesh (which by the Apostle’s testimony is its antitype [Hebrews 10:20]) was rent, or his animal nature destroyed. And at the same time, the light of the sun was extinguished when the life of Christ, its antitype, was extinguished. Christ rising with the sun at his resurrection, is another argument of the same thing.” In the next entry no. 186 he says “when the sun withdraws, beasts of prey go forth to destroy, and that is the time for caterpillars and noisome insects, and hurtful vermin in general, to go forth to prey upon the trees and plants. But when the sun rises they retire, well representing the nature of evil spirits, and the corruptions of the heart, and wicked men, and the enemies of our souls and the church of God in general” (WJE 11: 120). In a later entry, he cites Ps. 104:21–22 as a source of this idea (Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 211 in WJE 11: 129).

asserts that God is the proper cause of holiness and goodness, but when God chooses to withdraw his influence, it leads to sin and evil:

So, inasmuch as sin is not the fruit of any positive agency or influence of the Most High, but on the contrary, arises from the withholding of his action and energy, and . . . necessarily follows on the want of his influence; this is no argument that he is sinful, or his operation evil, or has anything of the nature of evil; but on the contrary, that he, and his agency, are altogether good and holy, and that he is the fountain of all holiness.²¹³

Edwards believes that this line of reasoning can exonerate God from accusations of being the cause or author of the first sin, even though God permits sin and “that it should necessarily follow from his permission,”²¹⁴ such as in the case of the first sin of Adam and Eve.

Edwards also appeals to the traditional Calvinist distinction between God’s secret and revealed wills, saying that although these may appear to conflict, they actually do not, for one relates to the evil in the event, and the other relates to the good that comes as a result.²¹⁵ He claims “there is no inconsistency in supposing, that God may hate a thing as it is in itself, and considered simply as evil, and yet that it may be his will it should come to pass, considering all consequences.”²¹⁶ But Edwards clarifies that “God don’t will sin as sin, or for the sake of anything evil; though it be his pleasure so to order things, that he permitting, sin will come to pass; for the sake of the great good that by his disposal shall be the consequence,” although God hates evil, forbids it, and punishes it.²¹⁷

²¹³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 404.

²¹⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 413.

²¹⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 406, 415.

²¹⁶ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 407. He provides an illustration of this: “the wheels of a WATCH or a CLOCK move contrary one to another, some one way, some another, yet all serve the intent of the workman, to show the time, or to make the clock to strike. So in the world, the providence of God may seem to run cross to his promises, one man takes this way, another takes that way; good men go one way, wicked men another, yet all in the conclusion accomplish the will, and center in the purpose, of God the great Creator of all things” (Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 178 in WJE 11, 118, quoting Spencer’s *Similes and Sentences*, 69).

²¹⁷ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 409. Edwards refers to Turnbull’s *Principles of Moral Philosophy* and *Christian Philosophy* as support for this argument that evil can contribute to a greater good (WJE 1: 407n6). Also see Edwards, “Part V: Predestination,” in WJE 27, about a quarter of the way in, where Edwards branches from a discussion of God’s happiness very similar to that given in *Freedom of the Will*, into a discussion of theodicy and

To defend against the accusation that this is to say that God does evil so that good may come, which is immoral as per Romans 3:8, Edwards says that again, it is not God himself *doing* the evil, but only *ordering and permitting* evil for God's good ends, which is right and good for the creator and governor of the world to do.²¹⁸ Edwards argues that it is better for a good and wise God to be in control of evil and sin in order to ensure that evil always leads to a greater good, than for evil and sin to be left to chance.²¹⁹ In fact, if God did not manage evil in this way, Edwards says that God would be neglectful of his creatures.²²⁰ Therefore, Edwards concludes that God ordering and disposing of evil events for a good purpose is not evil, but is actually perfectly holy.²²¹

Why then does God need the devil? Edwards attempts to explain the role of Satan in God's providence by saying,

though undoubtedly, God and the Devil may work together at the same time, and in the same land; and when God is at work, especially if he be very remarkably at work, Satan will do his utmost endeavor to intrude, and by intermingling his work, to darken and hinder God's work; yet God and the Devil don't work together in producing the same event, and in effecting the same change in the hearts and lives of men.²²²

why God should allow sin and evil if these displease God. His solution is to claim that although these go against God's will in one sense, in another they contribute to an overall greater good and presumably, to God's happiness, much in the same way that reprobation does as described in chapter 1.

²¹⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 410. I cannot find any other references to Rom. 3:8 in Edwards' works. He skips over it in *The "Blank Bible," Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 24*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008), 990–991. He nearly mentions it when he cites Rom. 3:7 in "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 479, but without addressing the question it asks. Paul Ramsey notes that Edwards' follower "Hopkins presumed to know enough about the divine wisdom to write (as JE would not) a treatise entitled *Sin, Thro' Divine interposition, an Advantage to the Universe* (Boston, 1759), in *Three Sermons from Rom. iii. Romans 3:5–8* (Boston, 1773)" (Paul Ramsey, "Appendix One: Joseph Bellamy's Copy of the Charity Sermons," in WJE 8: 648n6). Perhaps Edwards' lack of willingness to address the issue hints that he knew there was an incompatibility between his interpretation of this verse and his approach to theodicy.

²¹⁹ On the other hand, one could argue the opposite, and say that if evil is left to chance or lesser creatures' wills, then it is comforting to know that there is a possibility that evil can be avoided, whereas if evil is God-ordained it becomes unavoidable (Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 369).

²²⁰ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 405.

²²¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 406.

²²² Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revivals," in WJE 4: 344.

Yet in Edwards' larger system, Satan does not have any real power to oppose God, for what Satan does is ordained by God for some greater good purpose. Thus, Satan cannot hinder God's work at all; he actually serves God's purposes and could even be said to work for God.²²³

We see these principles in application when Edwards is defending the Great Awakening revivals. Edwards says that the irregularities or errors that lead to criticism of the revivals are partly due to "the hand of men that are guilty of them, and the hand of God in permitting them" as well as "the hand that Satan has in them."²²⁴ Yet Edwards suspects that due to God's "permission and disposal," God allows the revivals to "suffer so many irregularities and errors in conduct" in order to refute these errors quickly at the beginning so that the revivals can continue on unimpeded for the benefit of the church, and to humble people to thereby secure the glory of these revivals for God's own self.²²⁵

When it comes to the entirety of sin and evil in the world, Edwards argues it is compensated for by the much larger degree of blessing brought to the elect in Christ:

For the benefit of Christ's merits may nevertheless be vastly beyond that which would have been by the obedience of Adam. For those that are saved by Christ are not merely advanced to happiness by his merits, but are saved from the infinitely dreadful effects of

²²³ In Edwards' view, Satan's rebellion and temptation of Adam and Eve were all part of God's plan, and Satan is as fully under God's control as any other created agent. Edwards' thought on the fall of Satan can be found in a variety of *Miscellanies* entries, and is summarized in McClymond and McDermott, 279–287. Edwards' theodicy is apparent here also, for Edwards argues that Satan's fall means that the unfallen angels are blessed with more holiness and happiness than if it had not occurred. Heaven is also thereby opened up for humans to take the place of the fallen angels, in an argument similar to Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* (McClymond and McDermott, 286). After the Fall, Edwards argues that all Satan's attempts to thwart God's will for human salvation ultimately backfire and lead to the gospel spreading more widely (McClymond and McDermott, 291–293). The question of how God could then justly punish Satan would be similar to that of how God can justly punish the reprobate, if the actions of both ultimately contribute to God's goals for greater good.

²²⁴ Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revivals," in WJE 4: 324–325. This is reminiscent of what Calvin says about the will of God, Satan, and humans in relation to the Chaldeans' theft of Job's camels in Job 1 (Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.4.2 pp. 310–311). Edwards certainly read Calvin's *Institutes*, since he cites it three times in *Religious Affections*. Edwards' familiarity with Calvin would not be unexpected, for "Calvin's authority was simply taken for granted in New England" (Peter J. Thuesen, "Reformed (Calvinist) Divinity," in WJE 26: 47).

²²⁵ Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revivals," in WJE 4: 323–324. Note that just because someone admits that God can bring good out of evil, which is a scriptural idea suggested in Rom. 8:28, it does not necessarily commit one to the same views on theodicy as Edwards, for even open theists can admit that God can bring good out of evil which God did not foreknow or directly cause (Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 47).

Adam's sin, and many from immense guilt, pollution and misery by personal sins; also brought to a holy and happy state, as it were through infinite obstacles; and *are exalted to a far greater degree of dignity, felicity and glory, than would have been due for Adam's obedience; for aught I know, many thousand times so great.* And there is enough in the gospel dispensation, clearly to manifest the sufficiency of Christ's merits for such effects in all mankind. And how great the number will be, that shall actually be the subjects of them, or how great a proportion of the whole race, considering the vast success of the gospel, that shall be in that future extraordinary, exempt, and glorious season, often spoken of, none can tell.²²⁶

He confidently believes that "the exceeding greatness of the benefit received" is "far greater than the misery which comes by the first Adam, and abounding beyond it."²²⁷ Because of this significantly greater good, Edwards argues that

there is no person of good understanding, who will venture to say, he is certain that it is impossible it should be best, taking in the whole compass and extent of existence, and all consequences in the endless series of events, that there should be such a thing as moral evil in the world. And if so, it will certainly follow, that an infinitely wise Being, who always chooses what is best, *must choose that there should be such a thing.* And if so, then such a choice is not an evil, but a wise and holy choice.²²⁸

It seems that to Edwards, even though God could have achieved a good situation for humanity without the Fall, the fact that a *greater* good could be achieved by allowing/ordaining sin and evil meant that God simply "must" do so, even though God hates sin and evil in themselves. This argument seems incongruous, considering the emphasis that Edwards puts on God's sovereignty being such that God can do whatever God wants without any opposition. This appears to be the same problem found in chapter 1 with regard to reprobation and God's sovereignty, where God should both want to and be able to save everyone but, for some greater good purpose, cannot.

As one last argument, despite the Arminian claim that one should reject any doctrines that seem to have negative consequences for God's moral character, even if Scripture appears to teach these doctrines, Edwards says "it would show a truer modesty and humility, if they would

²²⁶ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 259–260, emphasis mine. Yet his last sentence in the above quote conflicts with his claim that only relatively few people will be ultimately saved, as documented in chapter 1.

²²⁷ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 336.

²²⁸ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 407–408, emphasis mine. See also WJE 1: 411.

entirely rely on God's wisdom and discerning, who knows infinitely better than we, what is agreeable to his own perfections."²²⁹ In his sermon on Psalm 46:10, "The Sole Consideration, that God is God, Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty," Edwards claims that God is an infinitely perfect being, and as a result, God has both perfect wisdom and understanding, which ensures that God can never do wrong.²³⁰ Thus, humans cannot demand that God must make sense to us, and we cannot tell God what he should do.²³¹ Edwards has many harsh words for people who question God's ways and God's justice, and accuses them of having "low thoughts" about God, and of being prideful and arrogant.²³² This final argument by Edwards seems to be nearly an appeal to "mystery," once again.

3.5.1 Summary of Edwards on Theodicy

When considered together with the topics addressed in the rest of this chapter, Edwards' approach to theodicy can be summarized in two main points. First, sinful people have moral responsibility for their decisions despite having no ability to choose otherwise, because it is their own hearts which will to commit sin, and they are the immediate agents who perform the sinful deeds, despite God ordaining the situations and controlling their unchosen volitions. Second, God allowed/caused the Fall (of both Adam and Eve, and Satan and the demons) and

²²⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 438. An example of such an Arminian rejection of the doctrine of predestination on the basis of theodicy, even if predestination might seem to be taught in Scripture, is found in John Wesley's sermon "Free Grace." Wesley argues "No scripture can mean that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works. That is, whatever it prove beside, no scripture can prove predestination" (John Wesley, "Free Grace," in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 3: Sermons*, ed. Albert Outler and Frank Baker [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975], 556). Thus, it seems that Wesley is using some other criteria by which to interpret Scripture, such as a principle of "God is love," whereas Edwards wants to take the words at face value, at least, when it suits him. However, as seen in this chapter, Edwards is also interpreting Scripture based on more than just the words themselves. Other considerations come into play, such as his assumptions about God's sovereignty, foreknowledge, and his deterministic views on causality. Just as Wesley seems to do here, Edwards does not count every text as equally authoritative.

²³⁰ Edwards, "360. Sermon on Ps. 46:10, The Sole Consideration, that God is God, Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty," in WJE 50: 41.

²³¹ Edwards, "360. Sermon on Ps. 46:10, The Sole Consideration, that God is God, Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty," in WJE 50: 42.

²³² Edwards, "360. Sermon on Ps. 46:10, The Sole Consideration, that God is God, Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty," in WJE 50: 48–53. Some of these criticisms in this sermon are reminiscent of his Arminian opponents' objections to Calvinistic views of God's sovereignty.

allows/causes the evils of world history, in order to achieve the maximum good which is God's glory and the elect's eternal happiness, and therefore, God is good and holy. Neither of these reasons, however, keep God from being the ultimate cause of sin and evil, and thus Edwards' views on theodicy and the origin of sin contain the same problems found in Edwards' views on reprobation.

Although Edwards' argument appears to be supported by verses such as Romans 8:28, Isaiah 45:7, and various narratives of God bringing good out of evil, his scriptural interpretation seems to be influenced by Calvinist tradition. Again, as in other parts of this chapter, there are some biblical verses which contradict Edwards' assertions, such as Romans 3:8. Additionally, Edwards' attempted defense that God only 'allows' sin as a necessary consequence of God withdrawing God's influence does not work within Edwards' larger philosophical system, where God is the only causal agent.

Fundamentally, it seems that Edwards' beliefs about God's sovereignty led him to reject the idea that anything could happen which God truly does not want to occur; thus, God must want sin and evil to occur, and if so, it must be for a good/holy reason. This seems to be where Edwards rests, even though he is unable to fully explain it to Arminian satisfactions. The next chapter will explore the effects of Edwards' conversion experience and other personal experiences as potential sources for his confidence in God's goodness.

3.6 Conclusion to Chapter 3

As seen in this chapter, Edwards makes many appeals to Scripture to justify his ideas which constitute essential components of his belief in double predestination. These ideas include God's foreknowledge of all things due to deterministic causality, the compatibility of praise and blame with unchosen inner dispositions, and the bondage of the human will to sin. We have also seen his attempt to justify why a perfectly good and holy God who is in total control of everything down to the tiniest particles of matter would determine that there should be such a thing as evil, suffering, or reprobation.

However, Edwards' case is not irrefutable, since he ignores or discounts verses that appear to contradict his own interpretations or the interpretations of the authors he learned from. Perhaps

the influence of Edwards' philosophical and religious tradition may explain why Edwards either could not or did not see that there are other possibilities in interpreting these texts which do not require his deterministic assumptions.

It also appears that Edwards does not offer any indisputable evidence that Scripture definitely endorses double predestination. Indeed, Edwards apparently feels the need to support his interpretations of these verses, prophecies, or stories by appealing to other sources of authority such as his philosophy of causality, his convictions about God's sovereignty, other authors, and even common sense. He feels free to make use of whatever sources support his arguments, while discounting those same sources when they are appealed to by his opponents. Furthermore, Edwards' in-depth philosophical explanations in support of his interpretation of Scripture continue to contradict each other in several ways, or else are not fully compatible with his larger philosophical system. This is again a hint that something beyond logical consistency or a careful harmonization of Scripture is likely the basis for Edwards' beliefs about God's total sovereignty over individuals' eternal destinies.

At this point, the primary factor driving Edwards' beliefs about double predestination is not yet entirely apparent. If it was his philosophy, then it would seem that his explanations should be more logically consistent with one another and with his overarching metaphysical worldview. If it were the biblical texts themselves, then it is strange that he did not attempt to harmonize apparently-conflicting verses. If it was his use of traditional sources of biblical interpretation, then he should have realized that Arminians had their own preferred historical sources and authors to whom they could appeal. Furthermore, common sense is inherently subjective. Recalling the Wesleyan quadrilateral of Scripture, Reason, Tradition, and Experience, it seems plausible that Edwards' personal spiritual experiences may explain how he became convinced that double predestination was true. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Edwards' Personal Spiritual Experiences and Philosophy of Conversion as they Relate to Double Predestination

The previous chapters have shown how Edwards' philosophical views of causality and God's sovereignty combine with his interpretation of some key themes, narratives, and verses of Scripture to form Edwards' deterministic worldview where all reality is controlled by God for the purpose of revealing God's glory. This chapter will examine Edwards' deterministic understanding of Christian conversion which supports his view of double predestination. According to Edwards' theory of *spiritual perception*, the only reason anyone becomes born-again is because God chooses to graciously and irresistibly change their hearts and illuminate their minds. However, this theory has the same sorts of problems seen in the previous chapters, such as logical contradictions and ambiguous or conflicting interpretations of Scripture.

As a result, I will propose that a likely source for Edwards' monergistic view of Christian conversion was his personal conversion experience which resonates strongly with his theory of spiritual perception.¹ I will also suggest that it was through his conversion experience that Edwards learned to love the doctrine of God's sovereignty. It must then be considered why Edwards interpreted his conversion experience in this monergistic way. Edwards' personal writings narrating his childhood and young adult experiences will be examined in order to see how he began to form his values and convictions.² Combining these sources with biographical studies of Edwards may allow additional insight into his change of mind on predestination.

¹ This analysis will not be entirely new, for other scholars have already studied Edwards' personal life and his conversion experience, and have suggested some ways in which these influenced Edwards' theology. Richard L. Bushman, "Jonathan Edwards as Great Man: Identity, Conversion, and Leadership in the Great Awakening," in Scheick, 41–64 analyzes Edwards' childhood and adolescence using the same approach as Erik H. Erikson's *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1962; reissued 1993). Daniel B. Shea, "The Art and Instruction of Jonathan Edwards' Personal Narrative," in Scheick, 265–276 compares Edwards' *Personal Narrative* with his youthful diary entries. Bombaro, 38–41, 55–57; Marsden, 39–43, 57–58; and William Sparkes Morris, *The Young Jonathan Edwards: A Reconstruction* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Pub., 1991), 31–48, 182–183, 216–217, 531–535 also provide some analysis of Edwards' personal conversion experience. My contribution will be to synthesize these insights and combine them with additional sources which provide a more holistic overview of Edwards' youthful concerns.

² This analysis will be informed by: Walter E. Conn, *The Desiring Self: Rooting Pastoral Counselling and Spiritual Direction in Self-Transcendence* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1998); James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The*

The chapter will end by proposing that a possible source for Edwards' assurance of God's goodness, despite the difficulties for theodicy which double predestination creates, may be found in Edwards' interactions with nature which he interpreted through the use of scriptural typology.

4.1 Edwards' Understanding of Christian Conversion

In *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards argues that because he has refuted the Arminian concept of libertarian free will, he has also refuted all objections to the Calvinist claim that God's grace is irresistible and efficacious when it causes sinners' conversions.³ He argues,

the doctrine of determining efficacious grace certainly follows from things proved in the foregoing discourse; hence will necessarily follow the doctrine of particular, eternal, absolute election. For if men are made true saints, no otherwise than as God makes 'em so, and distinguishes 'em from others, by an efficacious power and influence of his, that decides and fixes the event; and God thus makes some saints, and not others, on design or purpose, and (as has been now observed) no designs of God are new; it follows, that God thus distinguished from others, all that ever become true saints, by his eternal design or decree.⁴

Edwards feels so secure in his belief about individual, particular election that he even says

From these things it will inevitably follow, that *however Christ in some sense may be said to die for all, and to redeem all visible Christians, yea, the whole world by his death*; yet there must be something particular in the design of his death, with respect to such as he intended should actually be saved thereby. As appears by what has been now shown, God has the actual salvation or redemption of a certain number in his proper, absolute design, and of a certain number only; and therefore such a design only can be prosecuted in any thing God does, in order to the salvation of men.⁵

Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981); Bernard Lonergan, "'Theology in its New Context' and 'The Dimensions of Conversion,'" in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, ed. Walter E. Conn (New York, NY: Alba House, 1978); and John D. Dadosky, "Healing the Psychological Subject: Towards a Fourfold Notion of Conversion?" *Theoforum* 35 (2004): 73–91.

³ Edwards defines irresistible as "that which is attended with a moral necessity, which it is impossible should ever be violated by any resistance" (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 433). See also Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 665 in WJE 18: 211.

⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 435.

⁵ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 435, emphasis mine.

Edwards cites no Scripture here to support this claim. Indeed, this statement could be taken as discounting or dismissing several key verses which do seem to suggest that God desires all to be saved, and that Christ's death was for the sins of the entire world.⁶

Edwards does attempt to harmonize a few such verses with his claim, but his attempts appear to be more ad hoc than based on any consistent principle of biblical interpretation. For example, he tries to refute his Arminian opponent John Taylor's universalistic interpretations of Romans 5:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 by saying that "all" in these verses does not really mean *all*.⁷ Instead, Edwards makes a distinction between "all" who are "in Adam" (every human) and "all" who are "in Christ" (only those who are saved).⁸ Yet this is slightly ironic, for elsewhere Edwards protests when, in Taylor's interpretation of verses, Taylor uses a word suddenly in a different sense than it is used earlier in the same sentence; although this is precisely what Edwards is doing here.⁹

While Edwards' explanation may be a plausible attempt to harmonize these passages above with those that show that not all people will be saved, he does not indicate in which sense the word "all" should be taken in 1 Timothy 2:3–4 or 2 Peter 3:9 regarding God's *desire* that all be saved.¹⁰ Edwards at one point argues that "we may justly infer what God intends by what he actually does, because he does nothing inadvertently, or without design."¹¹ But if only a few are saved, as Edwards claims, then to be consistent he would have to contradict these verses and claim that it is actually God's *intention* to only save a few, leaving no gap between what God desires and what actually occurs. After all, his understanding of God's sovereignty means that

⁶ E.g., 1 Tim. 2:3–4, 2 Pet. 3:9, Ezek. 18:23, John 3:16, 2 Cor. 5:19, 1 John 2:2.

⁷ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 322–323.

⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 323, 325.

⁹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 331.

¹⁰ Edwards does cite these verses in his sermon "The Dreadful Silence of the Lord," in WJE 19: 111. He also mentions 2 Peter 3:9 in passing in "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 504 and "Miscellanies," no. 669 in WJE 18: 214. Yet he does not attempt to nuance or qualify the term "all" or to explain these verses in any further detail or harmonize these verses with other passages. Thus it is unclear what Edwards actually thought of these verses.

¹¹ Edwards, "End of Creation," in WJE 8: 427.

God's will can never be thwarted. What then can these verses about God desiring to save everyone mean to Edwards?

It has been suggested that Edwards was "uncomfortable" with the idea of limited atonement, for "the logic of Edwards' theology in the areas of atonement, Christology, and even predestination nowhere demands a limited salvation."¹² In one sermon, Edwards does affirm that Christ's death is enough to save all people, at least in theory, when he proclaims,

there is mercy enough in God to admit an innumerable multitude into heaven: there is mercy enough for all. And there is merit enough in Christ to purchase heavenly happiness for millions of millions, for all men that ever were, are, or shall be. And there is a sufficiency in the fountain of heaven's happiness to supply, and fill, and satisfy all: and there is in all respects enough for the happiness of all.¹³

But apparently this was just a fleeting thought, as only a few paragraphs later Edwards reverts to saying that "when heaven was made, it was intended and prepared for all those particular persons that God had from eternity designed to save."¹⁴ Yet near the end of this sermon, Edwards evangelistically appeals to sinners to "seek heaven" for "there is suitable provision there for

¹² Holmes, 150. He goes on to say "Edwards did, of course, hold to a doctrine of limited atonement—there was no other position admissible in New England Puritanism—but there is textual evidence that he was uncomfortable with the idea" (Holmes, 150). Holmes' argument is based on the first line of the quotation from *Freedom of the Will* in footnote 5 above. As a result, Holmes claims that "not only the insistence on a genuinely universal ('the whole world'!) sense to the work of redemption, but also the constant qualifiers concerning strictness of speech, indicate that Edwards, whilst certainly wanting to hold to the theological point, is unhappy with the mode of expression" (Holmes, 158). He cites Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 424 in WJE 13: 478 where Edwards argues that all people have the "opportunity" of being saved and that Christ died for all (Holmes, 158–159). However, Holmes' claim may be potentially undercut by the fuller context of this earlier quotation by Edwards, as seen above.

One could also examine "Miscellanies," no. t in WJE 13: 174, where Edwards attempts to say that God foreknows that not all will be saved, but in theory, Christ's death would be enough for all. However, based on all that has been shown in chapter 1 about Edwards' beliefs about God's purposes in reprobation, and Edwards' deterministic philosophy in chapters 2 and 3, I must agree with Bombaro when he argues, contra Anri Morimoto, Gerald McDermott, and Holmes, that Edwards did not hold universalist or inclusivist views of salvation (Bombaro, 233–239, 255–288). More on this debate will be addressed in chapter 5.

¹³ Edwards, "The Many Mansions," in WJE 19: 739. Similar claims that God has enough grace for all to be saved, but that reprobates refuse to accept this grace are made in Edwards' sermon "Glorious Grace," in WJE 10: 397–398.

¹⁴ Edwards, "The Many Mansions," in WJE 19: 740. Given what Edwards has said earlier about God only intending for some individuals to be saved, it seems unlikely that Edwards imagined that God would over-design heaven to accommodate individuals whom God did not ever intend to dwell there.

you.”¹⁵ He argues that because God invites sinners to believe in the gospel, then each person is actually so invited, for God cannot lie.¹⁶ But if particular election of individuals is true, then God has not actually invited all sinners to believe the gospel, and God is indeed lying if he claims they are so invited, and it is also a lie to say that God desires to save all.¹⁷ It is beyond the scope of this study to examine every sermon by Edwards to see if this sort of inconsistency happens frequently, but it is likely that it would, since otherwise his preaching would have become fatalistic instead of evangelical.¹⁸

Thus, on the topic of limited atonement, Edwards again appears to struggle with his interpretation of Scripture. Despite at times lapsing into evangelistic appeals that give the appearance that Edwards believed that salvation was genuinely open to all, on the whole it seems that Edwards is convinced by other verses, as seen here and in chapter 1, that the number of people who will ultimately be saved is few, which is God’s intention and aim.¹⁹

¹⁵ Edwards, “The Many Mansions,” in WJE 19: 742–743.

¹⁶ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 223.

¹⁷ Jerry Walls argues that particular election is comparable to the image of God holding out one arm to sinners to invite them to come to God, with God holding his other arm behind his back with his fingers crossed, for God knows that he will not enable all to actually come to him as supposedly invited. Alternatively, it would be like a host who displays a party invitation to a blind man who cannot read it, and the host then claiming that the blind man was properly “invited” to the party (Jerry L. Walls, *Does God Love Everyone?: The Heart of What is Wrong with Calvinism* [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016], 83 and 19, respectively). This second illustration will become more relevant when considering Edwards’ theory of spiritual perception.

¹⁸ Thuesen notes that this sort of inconsistency was frequent in Puritan sermons, and covenant theology was a common way that Puritans attempted to reconcile these difficulties (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 54–55). Other attempts to reconcile evangelism with double predestination appealed to God’s secret will in contrast to God’s revealed will, or to medieval theories of multiple causation (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 56–57). In contrast, Fiering argues that instead of this being an inconsistency in Edwards’ preaching, the impossible demand that hearers should feel differently toward God than they do is useful in producing convictions of guilt and may lead to a conversion, although he does not cite any sources to support this claim (Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards’ Moral Thought*, 320).

On the other hand, the suicide of Edwards’ uncle Hawley may counter Fiering’s claim and suggest that if people become convinced they are not elect, it can have deadly consequences. It is suggested that Hawley fell into melancholy as a result of fears over the state of his soul, which were possibly aggravated by Edwards’ harsh revivalistic preaching. Edwards later commented on “multitudes” who felt tempted to also kill themselves, but it is unknown if any actually attempted it or succeeded, besides one parishioner in a neighboring town. These events ended the success of the revival in the area (Marsden, 163–166).

¹⁹ Edwards cites Matt. 7:13–14, 22:14; Prov. 20:6; and Eccl. 7:25–29 (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 161–162). Also recall his claim seen earlier in chapter 3, section 3.2 that God cannot aim to achieve a goal which God knows will not be achieved (Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 435).

Edwards' belief in God's total control over who is saved is supported by Edwards' theory of how Christian conversion occurs. He describes the change that happens at a person's conversion in several ways based on different portions of Scripture. At times, he calls conversion a "change in the temper and disposition" of an individual's heart.²⁰ Other times, based on various scriptural images, he calls conversion the gaining of a new "nature," then, based on 2 Corinthians 3:18 he claims, it is "the power of a Creator only that can change the nature, or give a new nature."²¹ Referring to Ephesians 2:1–5, Edwards compares Christian conversion to being raised from the dead, which likewise depends totally on God's power.²²

In line with Edwards' explanation about the Fall, he argues that being reborn as a Christian involves re-gaining this same 'superior' or 'spiritual' principle that Adam and Eve lost after they sinned.²³ This 'spiritual principle' is the Holy Spirit, who was purchased as an inheritance for the elect by Christ's death.²⁴ The Holy Spirit indwells individual Christians as if they are his temple, and thus God is "so united to the faculties of the soul, that he becomes there a principle or spring of new nature and life."²⁵ This constant presence of the Holy Spirit is what guarantees that God's grace is efficacious in Christians, for

²⁰ This is based on verses such as 2 Cor. 5:17; John 3:3–11; Tit. 3:3–5; 1 Pet. 1:22–23; 1 John 2:29; Ezek. 11:19, 36:26; Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:8–10; Rom. 6:4–6; and Eph. 4:21–23. What is especially interesting is how Edwards cites Deut. 30:6 about God being the one to make a person's heart love God, and immediately afterward cites Jer. 4:1–4 which appeals to people to choose to return to God, to make their own hearts sensitive to God, and also the command in Deut. 10:16 to not be stiff-necked towards God. Yet Edwards does not attempt to harmonize, explain, or refute these verses (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 370–371). In other sermons he appeals to people to not harden their hearts when they hear the gospel, and cites verses such as Heb. 3:8–11 and Ps. 95:7–8 (Edwards, "The Duty of Harkening to God's Voice," in WJE 10: 439).

²¹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 340.

²² Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 302.

²³ He cites many verses that contrast the principles of the "flesh" with those of the "spirit," or the "natural man" versus the "spiritual man" (Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 274–282).

²⁴ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 236.

²⁵ He cites verses such as 1 Cor. 3:16, 2 Cor. 6:16, and John 14:16–17 (Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 200). This indwelling of the Holy Spirit is God "communicating" himself to the elect such that they participate in God's own divine nature, and all the benefits thereof, such as God's 'fullness,' spiritual beauty, happiness, goodness, and love, as discussed in chapter 1 (Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 203; Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21: 123–124). However, this does not mean that Christians themselves become divine. As Strobel notes, Edwards

gracious affections do arise from those operations and influences which are spiritual, and that the inward principle from whence they flow, is something divine, a communication of God, a participation of the divine nature, Christ living in the heart, the Holy Spirit dwelling there, in union with the faculties of the soul, as an internal vital principle, exerting his own proper nature, in the exercise of those faculties. This is sufficient to show us why true grace should have such activity, power and efficacy. *No wonder that which is divine, is powerful and effectual; for it has omnipotence on its side. If God dwells in the heart, and be vitally united to it, he will show that he is a God, by the efficacy of his operation.*²⁶

The final sentence in the above quotation seems to rest once again on Edwards' presupposition that for God to be truly sovereign, nothing can thwart his will.

4.1.1 Edwards' Case for Irresistible Grace as a 'Divine and Supernatural Light'

Edwards most frequently described Christian conversion as the receiving of "divine and supernatural light."²⁷ He writes, "natural men are represented in Scripture as having no spiritual light, no spiritual life, and no spiritual being; and therefore conversion is often compared to opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead. and a work of creation (wherein creatures are made entirely new), and becoming newborn children."²⁸ Based on Matthew 16:17, Edwards argues that Christians are specially chosen by God and are "objects of God's distinguishing love," such that God favors Christians by giving them the spiritual illumination to see divine truths, specifically in contrast to others whom God leaves in darkness:

still wants to uphold some distinction between the elect (who have the indwelling Holy Spirit), and the Son, for only Jesus has "immediate" knowledge of God. This is because Edwards believes that if anyone had "immediate" or complete knowledge of God's mind, then all their thoughts would be shared in common and they would actually *be* the same being. In contrast to Christ, Edwards thought elect creatures only "see" God through images, words, symbols, nature, providence, and especially, in Christ. Furthermore, it is only through the Holy Spirit's enabling of spiritual perception that the elect are able to perceive God in these things. Elect creatures will never fully know God, because God is infinite, although this leaves room for finite creatures to continually grow in knowledge of God for all eternity (Strobel, 160–161 and 174–175, referring to Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 777 in WJE 18: 427–429).

²⁶ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 392, emphasis mine.

²⁷ McClymond and McDermott, 377.

²⁸ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 204.

How highly favored art thou, that others that are wise and great men, the scribes, Pharisees, and rulers, and the nation in general, are left in darkness, to follow their own misguided apprehensions, and that thou should'st be singled out, as it were by name, that my heavenly Father should thus set his love on thee, Simon Barjona. This argues thee blessed, that thou should'st thus be the object of God's distinguishing love.²⁹

He refers to a large number of verses that emphasize the spiritual seeing and knowing of God, Jesus Christ, and the wondrous things in Scripture as what distinguishes the elect from the reprobate.³⁰ However, perhaps due to Edwards' beliefs about causality, Edwards appears to assume that in these verses it is the seeing of God that *causes* the elect to be saved, instead of a simple description that those who are saved now see and know God, regardless of how their conversions occurred. For example, based on 2 Corinthians 3:18, Edwards says "this light is such as *effectually influences* the inclination, and changes the nature of the soul. It assimilates the nature to the divine nature, and changes the soul into an image of the same glory that is beheld."³¹ Yet Edwards admits that in these verses "their believing in Christ and spiritually seeing him, are spoken of as running parallel,"³² and so it may be difficult to distinguish which was the cause and which was the effect, or if there is such a relation at all.

Then, from the Spirit's irresistible influence "there is a new inward perception or sensation of their minds, entirely different in its nature and kind, from anything that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were sanctified."³³ Edwards calls this perception the "spiritual sense":

²⁹ Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17: 408–409. "A Divine and Supernatural Light," concisely summarizes almost a decade of Edwards' reflections on spiritual perception (Mark Valeri, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17: 405; Marsden 157). "First delivered in Northampton in August 1733 and printed in Boston the following year, it enhanced his reputation as a spokesman for experimental Calvinism and set forth many of the themes that undergirded his preaching through the Great Awakening" (WJE 17: 405). The fact that this work is not structured like Edwards' usual sermons "suggests that Edwards intended it as a major statement even at the time of composition" (WJE 17: 407).

³⁰ Such as 1 John 3:6, 3 John 11, John 14:19, John 17:3, Matt. 11:25–27, 2 Cor. 4:6, 2 Cor. 3:18, Ps. 119:18, Ps. 25:14, John 6:40, and John 12:44–46 (Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17: 417–419).

³¹ Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17: 424, emphasis mine. Also on this page, Edwards frequently mentions the term "cause" and other synonyms when discussing the influence of this divine light.

³² Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17: 419.

³³ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 205.

this new spiritual sense is not a new faculty of understanding, but it is a new foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of understanding. So that new holy disposition of heart that attends this new sense, is not a new faculty of will, but a foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of will.³⁴

This new sense is entirely different from any other senses which humans have, and can be compared to the difference between touching honey and tasting it.³⁵ He lists several verses about “tasting” or “savoring” the things of God.³⁶ Based on these verses, he says, “Spiritual understanding *primarily* consists in this *sense*, or *taste of the moral beauty of divine things*; so that no knowledge can be called spiritual, any further than it arises from this, and has this in it. But *secondarily*, it includes *all that discerning and knowledge of things of religion, which depends upon, and flows from such a sense*.”³⁷ Edwards did not invent this concept, for “this emphasis on the Spirit providing a taste or sense was standard in the Puritan material leading up to Edwards,”³⁸ such as in the works of John Owen, Peter van Mastricht, and Francis Turretin, whom Edwards read.³⁹

As a result of receiving this new sense, a Christian is able to perceive the “beauty of holiness” in divine and spiritual things, as well as perceive God’s goodness and excellency.⁴⁰ Spiritual perception will produce a child-like love for God which rejoices in God’s glory and happiness.⁴¹ This initial love for God is completely separate from any self-interest, and only later do

³⁴ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 206.

³⁵ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 206, 209.

³⁶ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 273. Such as in 2 Cor. 2:14, Matt. 16:23, 1 Pet. 2:2–3, and Song. 1:3.

³⁷ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 273, emphasis his. Here, Edwards emphasizes the sense of the heart, although he admits that there is not a clear distinction between the faculties of understanding and the will which he claims operate together (Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 272).

³⁸ Strobel, 179. He refers to Brad Walton, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections, and the Puritan Analysis of True Piety, Spiritual Sensations, and Heart Religion* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2002), 179–206.

³⁹ Strobel, 178–184. Edwards’ quotes Owen’s understanding of “the true nature of saving illumination,” in Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 250.

⁴⁰ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 260–262.

⁴¹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 238, 241. See also WJE 2: 207–208.

Christians love God because of his favour towards them:

They don't first see that God loves them, and then see that he is lovely; but they first see that God is lovely, and that Christ is excellent and glorious, and their hearts are first captivated with this view, and the exercises of their love are wont from time to time to begin here, and to arise primarily from these views; and then, consequentially, they see God's love; and great favor to them.⁴²

Although in reality, “the saints’ love to God, is the fruit of God’s love to them; as it is the gift of that love. God gave them a spirit of love to him, because he loved them from eternity. And in this respect God’s love to his elect is the first foundation of their love to him, as it is the foundation of their regeneration, and the whole of their redemption.”⁴³ Thus, it is only upon conversion that Christians discover that God loves them, and they are enabled to return that love as gratitude.⁴⁴ This new sense will also produce love for all others in proper “symmetry and proportion” with this love for God.⁴⁵ Finally, this sense will produce new attitudes such as humility, meekness, quietness, forgiveness, and mercy, among others.⁴⁶ He says, “the first glimpse of the moral and spiritual glory of God shining into the heart, produces all these effects, as it were with *omnipotent power*, which nothing can withstand.”⁴⁷

God’s grace, given by the Holy Spirit, is also responsible for all good that Christians do, for

⁴² Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 246. However, this claim means that Edwards has to try to reinterpret 1 John 4:19 in such a way that it does not mean that Christians love God because of God’s love shown towards them in the gospel or by the death of Christ. Instead, Edwards says it is because God loves the elect that God gives them the Holy Spirit which then causes the elect to love God (Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 248–249).

⁴³ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 249.

⁴⁴ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 249. Even though Edwards mentions that Jesus’ life, death, and work of redemption is the “main objective ground” for the love of both humans and angels towards God (WJE 2: 249), I will show in the upcoming section 4.1.3 that Edwards believed it is impossible for anyone who does not have the indwelling Holy Spirit to truly love God. Thus, according to Edwards, there is no chance that someone without spiritual perception could ever come to love God due to the “objective” ground of the gospel.

⁴⁵ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 369. This idea matches well with his ethical theory of true virtue as being about loving God and all other beings in proportion to their worthiness, as discussed in chapter 2, section 2.1.

⁴⁶ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 312, 315, 323, 345–346.

⁴⁷ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 265, emphasis mine. Again note his assumption about the nature of God’s omnipotence as meaning that nothing can oppose or resist God’s will.

according to Edwards, the new principle of the Holy Spirit will shine forth in holy actions.⁴⁸ The Holy Spirit guides a Christian's actions, "partly in *instructing* a person in his duty by the Spirit, and partly in powerfully *inducing* him to comply with that instruction."⁴⁹ Therefore,

this light, and this only, has its fruit in an universal holiness of life. No merely notional or speculative understanding of the doctrines of religion, will ever bring to this. But this light, as it reaches the bottom of the heart, and changes the nature, so it will effectually dispose to an universal obedience. It shows God's worthiness to be obeyed and served. It draws forth the heart in a sincere love to God, which is the only principle of a true, gracious and universal obedience. And it convinces of the reality of those glorious rewards that God has promised to them that obey him.⁵⁰

Despite his strong assertion in this passage about "universal holiness of life" and "universal obedience," Edwards does not expect Christians to constantly act in holy ways after conversion, or to immediately have a perfect sense or understanding of God and love for God. This, he says, is because the spiritual sense is usually given slowly,⁵¹ and grows continually until a Christian reaches perfection in heaven.⁵² Edwards was aware of his own experience of daily variation in his spiritual resolve, which he attributes to God either withdrawing or giving more of the Holy Spirit.⁵³ Yet this reality would seem to bring into question all that Edwards has claimed about how all-determining the Holy Spirit's influence is over Christians' attitudes and actions. Edwards could perhaps answer this question by appealing to his view of theodicy, where the Holy Spirit allows or even wills Christians to still live in sin and struggle with growing in spiritual maturity for some mysterious greater good purpose.

⁴⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 302; Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 398.

⁴⁹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 281, emphasis his. This effect occurs through the Holy Spirit attracting Christians to do those actions which are spiritually beautiful, and repelling Christians from actions which are not spiritually beautiful (Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 281–283). This attraction or repulsion occurs as the Holy Spirit directs a person's natural self-love principle to love what God determines is good (Bombaro, 202). Essentially, to Edwards, the Holy Spirit acts as an "override mechanism offering effective motives to a consciousness that is readily sensitive to such divine motions" (Bombaro, 202).

⁵⁰ Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17: 424–425.

⁵¹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 275.

⁵² Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 343.

⁵³ Edwards, "Diary," entry for Wednesday Jan. 2, 1722–23 in WJE 16: 760. See also Jan. 15 in WJE 16: 764–765.

However, his theory also raises a question about those Christians who eventually fall away from faith. Edwards endorses the idea that once one is saved by God's irresistible grace, then God's grace also keeps the elect individual from falling away. Therefore "it is absolutely fixed in God's decree, that all true saints shall persevere to actual eternal salvation."⁵⁴ If Christians have no change in their behavior after claiming to be saved, or fall back into old ways, then according to Edwards, "'tis a sign they never were risen with Christ," because if a change has truly occurred, it will last for a lifetime.⁵⁵ Thus, Edwards concludes that it is only persistent Christian practice that proves a person is really a Christian.⁵⁶

In an attempt to explain those individuals who at first seem so promising but later fall away, he says that the Holy Spirit can influence people's souls without indwelling them, simply by acting upon individuals' existing "natural principles" and senses.⁵⁷ The Holy Spirit can even give the non-elect an "abundant and plentiful measure of awakening grace," even though it will eventually decay away.⁵⁸ Why the Holy Spirit would act in such a way is never discussed by Edwards. This lacunae might be one of the weakest points of his deterministic theory of conversion outlined above.

⁵⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 436. See also Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 182.

⁵⁵ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 391, 396.

⁵⁶ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 406, 420, 426–427. See David Hall's analysis of Edwards' increasing interest in distinguishing who was saved and who was not, beginning with Edwards' disappointment with how many people in his congregation seemed to lose their interest in religion after the revivals. Edwards came to believe that many were making hypocritical professions of faith, which may have sparked Edwards' interest in limiting communion only to those who he felt were genuine Christians. Edwards' attempt to apply this standard caused the controversy that ultimately led to his dismissal from his ministerial position in Northampton (David D. Hall, "Moving Toward a Change of Mind," in WJE 12: 56–62). Edwards' new pastoral practice was a significant shift from that of his grandfather Solomon Stoddard, who believed that it was impossible to distinguish who was truly saved from who was not, and thus, Stoddard allowed all who were baptized to participate in the Lord's Supper (David D. Hall, "Solomon Stoddard and Stoddardeanism," in WJE 12: 39–40).

⁵⁷ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 201–202, 206–207, 227–229, 279; Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17: 410–411.

⁵⁸ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 406.

4.1.2 Spiritual Perception Allows New Discernment of Gospel Truths

Much in the same way that Edwards attributed Adam's initial holiness to the indwelling Holy Spirit and Adam's right thinking about God, Edwards also says that the change which produces these holy affections in Christians arises from some new knowledge or spiritual instruction that the mind receives about God from hearing the gospel. Referring to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he says,

truly spiritual and gracious affections . . . arise from the enlightening of the understanding to understand the things that are taught of God and Christ, in a new manner, the coming to a new understanding of the excellent nature of God and his wonderful perfections, some new view of Christ in his spiritual excellencies and fullness, or things opened to him in a new manner, that appertain to the way of salvation by Christ, whereby he now sees how it is, and understands those divine and spiritual doctrines which once were foolishness to him.⁵⁹

This sense does not directly give any new doctrinal insight into interpreting Scripture,⁶⁰ but may help avoid interpretations motivated by “the prejudices of a depraved appetite,”⁶¹ and thus, helps the mind be open to the true meaning of Scripture.⁶² This spiritual enlightenment is not reserved only for the intelligent, for “if the Gospel ‘depended only on history, and such reasonings as learned men only are capable of, it would be above the reach of far the greatest part of mankind.’”⁶³ When one has spiritual perception, the gospel is believed because it is seen as

⁵⁹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 267–268.

⁶⁰ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 278; Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17: 412. One error that Edwards warned against was that of believing that the Holy Spirit was giving immediate private revelation which was not previously given to anyone else as recorded in the Bible (Edwards, “Extraordinary Gifts Of The Spirit Are Inferior To Graces Of The Spirit,” in WJE 25: 305–306).

⁶¹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 285.

⁶² Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17: 414. That is, provided that interpreters of Scripture are humble and depend on the Holy Spirit to enlighten their eyes, and do not desire to know Scripture only to parade their intelligence before others. Otherwise, interpreters become more likely to fall into erroneous interpretations (Nichols in Barshinger and Sweeney, 39, citing Edwards, “Sermon Thirteen,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 9, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, ed. John F. Wilson [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008], 291, and Edwards, “The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth,” in WJE 22: 102).

⁶³ Marsden, 157, quoting from Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17: 423.

beautiful, excellent, and glorious,⁶⁴ and this beauty convinces one that it is true:

A true sense of the divine excellency of the things of God's Word doth more directly and immediately convince of the truth of them; and that because the excellency of these things is so superlative. There is a beauty in them that is so divine and godlike, that is greatly and evidently distinguishing of them from things merely human, or that men are the inventors and authors of; a glory that is so high and great, that when clearly seen, commands assent to their divinity, and reality.⁶⁵

Having a sense for the beauty or harmony of spiritual truths is one way that Edwards believes one can judge the veracity of these ideas.⁶⁶ For example, in a person with this spiritual light,

There is not only a rational belief that God is holy, and that holiness is a good thing; but there is a sense of the loveliness of God's holiness. There is not only a speculatively judging that God is gracious, but a sense how amiable God is upon that account; or a sense of the beauty of this divine attribute.⁶⁷

As will be explored in the next major section, after what Edwards believed was his conversion experience, Edwards came to see God's sovereignty as beautiful, even as it related to the doctrine of reprobation, and God's sovereignty was what he loved to contemplate. Perhaps this beauty that Edwards perceived was part of what convinced him that his deterministic understanding of God's sovereignty was true. His theory of spiritual perception also hints at what Edwards may have judged about the salvation of those who, unlike Edwards, did not see such deterministic understandings of God's sovereignty or double predestination as beautiful or wonderful.

⁶⁴ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 297–298, 302; Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17: 413.

⁶⁵ Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17: 415; Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. aa in WJE 13: 177–178.

⁶⁶ The unconverted person may have some knowledge of spiritual truths, but will find them “disagreeable” or fictitious, and it is only with the new sense that these ideas are perceived as beautiful and true (Bombaro, 45). It is as if there is a sort of resonance between the disposition of the Holy Spirit in Christians and any true “excellency” that Christians encounter, either in the world or in Scripture, simply “because their disposition or ‘principle of holiness’ consists of divine excellency itself, the Holy Spirit” (Bombaro, 49). For more on the criteria of beauty or harmony as an indicator of truth in Edwards’ thought, see Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, chapters 5 and 6.

⁶⁷ Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17: 413.

4.1.3 The Reprobate Not Being Given Spiritual Perception is No Excuse

Despite upholding the idea that people are entirely dependent on God to give the spiritual perception necessary for salvation, Edwards also wants to maintain that those who do not receive this perception are still at fault for rejecting God and the gospel.

In *Original Sin*, Edwards appeals to Romans 1, as well as to George Turnbull's *Christian Philosophy*, John Locke, and even his Arminian opponent, John Taylor, to defend the idea that all people have a natural ability to know something about God and their expected moral duties.⁶⁸ Edwards believes that people sin and fail to love God not because they lack any knowledge of God or morality that can be perceived in creation or through reason, but simply because they lack the disposition to make use of it. Edwards calls this a "moral inability, consisting in a desperate depravity, and most evil disposition of heart."⁶⁹

It is this same "depraved disposition" which makes those who have heard the gospel discount or ignore it, even though it is "contrary to reason" to not consider eternal happiness as far outweighing anything else in this life, or to not consider eternal punishment as an overwhelming motivation to believe in Christ.⁷⁰ Edwards believes that the reason people do not accept the gospel is because their minds are full of "spiritual pollution": they are "under the power of filthy lusts" which blind them to the glory and beauty of God revealed in the gospel.⁷¹ Any individual's lack of love for God is also due to the absence of spiritual light.⁷²

Additionally, Edwards rejects John Taylor's claims that the gospel is not taught clearly enough for people to understand it, or that the gospel has been misunderstood and perverted. In response, Edwards argues that the gospel is misunderstood or perverted because of the inherent depravity

⁶⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 148–149.

⁶⁹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 151.

⁷⁰ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 152–155.

⁷¹ Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17: 421.

⁷² Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 120–121.

of humans.⁷³ He believes it is “an antisciptural and absurd doctrine” that those who have no spiritual light should believe in Christ, because “the Scripture is ignorant of any such faith in Christ . . . that is not founded in a spiritual sight of Christ.”⁷⁴ Indeed, people “not only can’t exercise faith without some spiritual light, but they can exercise faith only just in such proportion as they have spiritual light.”⁷⁵ Yet Edwards argues there is no way for natural persons to achieve the ‘supernatural principle’ of the Holy Spirit by exercising their ‘natural’ principles.⁷⁶ If true, then it seems that even Edwards should admit that it is wrong for God to condemn people for their failure to believe in Christ if God has not given them the necessary spiritual perception.

Even though spiritual perception is given to individuals based on God’s sovereign elective purposes, Edwards wants to avoid the charge of being an enthusiast. Therefore, he encourages people to participate in religious activities in order to open themselves up to God’s grace, in order that God may bestow the Holy Spirit and everything that comes as a consequence thereof.⁷⁷ He says a person must be exposed to the truths in God’s Word, because the supernatural light “is not given without the Word,” and the Word is the means by which the mind learns the notional ideas of Christian doctrine.⁷⁸ The sacraments also exhibit the gospel and Christ’s redemption to us through sensible forms, “the more to affect us with them.”⁷⁹ Despite this, Edwards insists that while God’s Word, preaching, and the sacraments are means that God may use to produce conversions, these things themselves have no power to produce the effect of receiving spiritual perception. Instead, it is only *on occasion* of making use of these things that God may choose to

⁷³ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 185–186.

⁷⁴ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 175.

⁷⁵ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 176. He cites a number of verses including 2 Cor. 4:4.

⁷⁶ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 205.

⁷⁷ He warns that if any neglect the means of grace, it is “unreasonable presumption” and “enthusiastical” to think that the Holy Spirit would work in their minds to save them (Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 138). See also Bombaro, 281–285.

⁷⁸ Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17: 416–417.

⁷⁹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 115.

immediately bestow spiritual perception to a person.⁸⁰ This is because it is appropriate that something as “excellent” as the divine communication of spiritual perception to a person be given immediately by God.⁸¹

However, given Edwards’ views on free will, idealism, and occasionalism, the only reason that a person would choose to participate in religious activities is because God has *already* moved them to act in such a way,⁸² for no one can be saved who was not eternally predestined to be saved. No one, by participating in these means, can force God to save them, or even to consider saving them, if they were not so chosen from all eternity past.

Thus, although Edwards believes his philosophy of conversion is built on Scripture, his theory is also influenced by his deterministic philosophy of causality and his interpretation of God’s absolute sovereignty. Yet, once again, his approach exhibits self-contradiction and difficulty interpreting certain verses of Scripture, and it also raises questions about God’s justice. However, when Edwards’ writings about his theory of conversion are compared to his own personal conversion experience, it becomes clear that a major reason Edwards believed in irresistible grace, as depicted in his theory of spiritual perception, was very likely due to his own conversion experience.

⁸⁰ Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17: 416. William Scheick says that Edwards attempted to reconcile these ideas by saying that while God could “arbitrarily” give the divine and supernatural light to someone, God’s normal method is to first have the Holy Spirit convince people to seek salvation through the ordinary means of grace before bestowing conversion on them. But Edwards did not want to place too much emphasis on people preparing themselves for salvation, because “too great a reliance on these preparatory stages may lead to the sort of error Edwards perceived in Arminian notions” and could lead to spiritual pride (William J. Scheick, “The Grand Design: Jonathan Edwards’ History of the Work of Redemption,” in Scheick, 181–182).

⁸¹ Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17: 422; Bombaro, 275. This would seem to negate Bombaro’s concern that Edwards downplays baptism as an important means of grace by which one may receive spiritual perception from God (Bombaro, 66).

⁸² “This with me is established, that grace and the exercise of grace is given entirely by the Spirit of God, by his free and most arbitrary motions; but that his ordinary method, notwithstanding, is to give grace to those that are much concerned about it, and earnestly and for a considerable time seek it, or continue to do things in order to do it. That is, ’tis the Spirit’s ordinary method, first to make them concerned about it, so as to convince them that ’tis best to seek it, so far as to make them seek it much, and then to bestow it” (Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 113b in WJE 13: 282–283).

4.2 Edwards' Personal Conversion Experience

Jonathan Edwards likely wrote his short autobiographical “Personal Narrative” as part of a letter to Aaron Burr, on December 14, 1740.⁸³ This form of writing was part of New England’s culture and was known as “designated epistolary,” which was a blend between personal communication and an informal essay.⁸⁴ George Marsden, the most notable recent biographer of Edwards, calls Edwards’ autobiography a “stylized account” of his life, written at a time when he was known as a famous revival preacher; thus, Marsden cautions that it could be seen as a sort of preaching.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, there are not many other personal writings from Edwards’ earlier years surrounding his conversion and his accompanying change of attitude towards the doctrine of double predestination,⁸⁶ and so his autobiography will be a major source for this study. Even if ‘stylized,’ it likely represents Edwards’ key memories, and when supplemented with a few diary entries, it appears to be possible to put together a more detailed picture of his significant spiritual experiences.

One day, as a young adult, Edwards read 1 Timothy 1:17. He writes, “As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before. Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did.”⁸⁷ This led him to pray “with a new sort of

⁸³ George S. Claghorn, “Introduction,” in WJE 16: 4. Burr would later marry Edwards’ daughter Esther in 1752 (Marsden, 392).

⁸⁴ Claghorn, “Introduction,” in WJE 16: 3–4.

⁸⁵ Marsden, 25, 45. Holbrook echoes similar concerns, saying that Edwards’ “Personal Narrative” should not be interpreted as his direct experience but as experience interpreted didactically, because it is “colored deeply by ideas developed long after the events and descriptions of his spiritual estate occurred” (Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 22). Daniel Shea thinks likewise, and suspects that Edwards was intending to use his “Personal Narrative” as an example of his longer argument in *Religious Affections* about distinguishing between true and false faith (Shea, 266), which Marsden argues was also the purpose behind Edwards’ work *The Life of David Brainerd* (Marsden, 331–332). Scheick also agrees that the “Personal Narrative” was written not just for personal benefit but for an audience (William J. Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards: Theme, Motif, and Style* [College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1975], 59, 63).

⁸⁶ Marsden, 46.

⁸⁷ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 792.

affection,” although, at the time, he never thought that there might be anything “of a saving nature in this.”⁸⁸ Yet shortly thereafter,

I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. I had an inward, sweet sense of these things, that at times came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged, to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ; and the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation, by free grace in him. I found no books so delightful to me, as those that treated of these subjects.⁸⁹

In summary, he developed a new “sense” of God’s glory, gained new “apprehensions and ideas” about God and the gospel, and all these appeared beautiful, excellent, lovely, glorious, and delightful, indicating new affections. All of this matches perfectly with his description of the effects of spiritual perception. Edwards continues,

The delights which I now felt in things of religion . . . were totally of another kind; and what I then had no more notion or idea of, than one born blind has of pleasant and beautiful colors. They were of a more inward, pure, soul-animating and refreshing nature. Those former delights, never reached the heart; and did not arise from any sight of the divine excellency of the things of God; or any taste of the soul-satisfying, and life-giving good, there is in them.⁹⁰

Then Edwards found that “the sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden as it were, kindle up a sweet burning in my heart; an ardor of my soul, that I know not how to express.”⁹¹ Later, “my sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of everything was altered: there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything.”⁹² As seen

⁸⁸ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 793. Yet Marsden says that Edwards later came to see this as his true Christian conversion (Marsden, 45, 57). I agree, for Edwards’ “Personal Narrative” does not mention any later struggles with the question of his salvation, although his diary reveals that his spiritual struggles continued for two years after this significant experience, as will be discussed shortly.

⁸⁹ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 793.

⁹⁰ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 794–795. Note the metaphors of blindness and sight.

⁹¹ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 793.

⁹² Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 793.

here, Edwards describes his conversion experience in the exact same way and using the same terms that he uses when discussing the effects of receiving spiritual perception.

Yet even after this amazing experience, Edwards underwent spiritual struggles not disclosed in his “Personal Narrative.”⁹³ Edwards’ conversion experience occurred when he was seventeen years old, in the spring of 1721, the first year of his graduate studies.⁹⁴ However, his first diary entry shows that even in late 1722 he still questioned whether he was truly saved. The reasons he gave were “because I cannot speak so fully to my experience of that preparatory work, of which divines speak,” and “I do not remember that I experienced regeneration, exactly in those steps, in which divines say it is generally wrought.”⁹⁵ Both Edwards’ father and grandfather held to a Puritan model of conversion called “preparationism,”⁹⁶ which held that one had to experience “legal terror” due to one’s own sinfulness before fully coming to trust in God’s grace for salvation.⁹⁷ This seems to be what Edwards is describing in the excerpt from his diary above.

Edwards again mentioned his concern about his salvation in his diary later in 1723:

The last night, in bed, when thinking of death, I thought, if I was then to die, that, which would make me die, in the least degree fearfully, would be, the want of a trusting and relying on Jesus Christ, so distinctly and plainly, as has been described by divines; my not having experienced so particular a venturing, and entirely trusting my soul on Christ, after the fears of hell, and terrors of the Lord, encouraged by the mercy, faithfulness and promises, of God, and the gracious invitations of Christ.⁹⁸

⁹³ Marsden, 50.

⁹⁴ Marsden, 39, 46, 63; Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 35.

⁹⁵ Edwards, “Diary,” entry for Dec. 18, 1722, in WJE 16: 759; Marsden, 50.

⁹⁶ Bombaro, 38; Morris, 559–560.

⁹⁷ Marsden, 58. Yet Edwards admits, “Indeed, I was at some times very uneasy, especially towards the latter part of the time of my being at college. Till it pleased God, in my last year at college, at a time when I was in the midst of many uneasy thoughts about the state of my soul, to seize me with a pleurisy; in which he brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the pit of hell.” This motivated him to regain his passion in pursuing religion (Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 791). Why Edwards did not consider this as experiencing “terror” and as the expected precursor to his conversion experience is not known. Perhaps the expectation was that terror would be immediately followed by relief, rather than be separated from it by months or years, as it was in Edwards’ case.

⁹⁸ Edwards, “Diary,” entry for July 4, 1723, in WJE 16: 773.

A month later he again said, “the chief thing, that now makes me in any measure to question my good estate, is my not having experienced conversion in those particular steps, wherein the people of New England, and anciently the Dissenters of Old England, used to experience it.”⁹⁹ These last two entries were made potentially in connection with a disagreement with his parents regarding whether he was ready to be a full communicant church member. It seems that perhaps they were not yet convinced he was truly saved, and this doubt was making Edwards also question his salvation as well.¹⁰⁰ Several scholars suspect that this concern was the inspiration behind a number of Edwards’ writings including his early diary, as well as his later interest in determining the traits of someone who is truly converted, as he does in *Religious Affections*.¹⁰¹

Perhaps in order to console himself, or to explain and justify his experiences to his parents and others, Edwards crafted his own theory of Christian conversion by making use of certain Bible verses as well as the ideas found in the works of Puritan authors such as John Owen which fit well with his own personal experience. He expressed this new understanding in his early sermon “Christ, the Light of the World” (1723), which “publicly introduces Edwards’s version of the ‘new spiritual sense’ by presenting the essence of his personal experience as the *sine qua non* of ‘true religion.’”¹⁰² In this sermon Edwards attributes salvation to irresistible grace, applied to individuals through the Holy Spirit who acts as spiritual light.¹⁰³ This concept also appears in his

⁹⁹ Edwards, “Diary,” entry for Aug. 12, 1723, in WJE 16: 779.

¹⁰⁰ Marsden, 57–58.

¹⁰¹ Kinnach says that Edwards “may have actually begun his diary in order to deal with the problem [of his atypical conversion]” (Wilson H. Kinnach “Preface to the New York Period,” in WJE 10: 269). Marsden agrees, saying that Edwards’ diary “begins on a note of uncertainty, raising the question that was still plaguing him during these years, as to whether he was truly converted,” (Marsden, 50). This uncertainty likely also inspired Edwards’ later work *Religious Affections* (Marsden, 57; Morris, 29). This concern over discerning whether individuals were truly converted or not reappears during the controversy over Edwards’ desire to limit parishioners’ participation in communion, and restrict the privilege of having their children baptized to only those parishioners who could make credible confessions of faith and show it in their lives through consistent Christian practice (David D. Hall, “Moving Toward A Change of Mind,” in WJE 12: 56–62).

¹⁰² Bombaro, 57; Edwards, “Christ, the Light of the World,” in WJE 10: 535–546.

¹⁰³ Edwards, “Christ, the Light of the World,” in WJE 10: 543.

sermon on James 1:17 (1728), and finally in “A Divine and Supernatural Light” (1735).¹⁰⁴ Despite how Edwards’ conversion experience did not conform to his family’s and society’s expectations, it is ironic how in both “Christ, the Light of the World” as well as “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” Edwards seems to project his own expectations for conversion onto all other Christians. He never mentions any alternative ways that a person may be converted apart from receiving spiritual perception.

However, in *Religious Affections*, published in 1746, Edwards is much more cautious. First, he recognizes that it is impossible to say that all Christians experience conversion in the same way: “Experience plainly shows, that God’s Spirit is unsearchable and untraceable, in some of the best of Christians, in the method of his operations, in their conversion.”¹⁰⁵ Edwards also admits that if it is believed that a person must experience conversion in a particular way, then individuals may be influenced to make their experience conform to this expectation: “a scheme of what is necessary, and according to a rule already received and established by common opinion, has a vast (though to many a very insensible) influence in forming persons’ notions of the steps and method of their own experiences. I know very well what their way is; for I have had much opportunity to observe it.”¹⁰⁶ For example, he says that people who are converted may at first be very confused about what is happening, but then they might pick out passages of Scripture that can help them make sense of their experience, while ignoring other passages, until “what they have experienced is insensibly strained to bring to an exact conformity to the scheme that is established.”¹⁰⁷ On his own account, therefore, just because Edwards believes his theory of spiritual perception is supported by Scripture, it does not necessarily mean that he is not reading

¹⁰⁴ Wilson H. Kimnach, Introductory comments to Edwards, “Christ, the Light of the World,” in WJE 10: 534; Edwards, “66. Sermon on Jas. 1:17,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, Vol. 43, Sermons, Series II, 1728–1729* (Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 162. Scheick believes that this idea is present even in Edwards’ “Personal Narrative,” where Edwards frequently says that the changes in his heart and mind were not clear even to himself (Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, 59–60).

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 162.

¹⁰⁷ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 162.

his own experience back into Scripture, or doing the very thing that he cautioned against—picking out verses of Scripture that seem to match with his experience.

Edwards continues his critique of some common assumptions regarding conversion, by warning that simply because certain feelings happen to arise on the occasion of reading Scripture, it does not guarantee that this experience is from God. Instead, he believes it is more important for feelings to be agreeable with what is in Scripture.¹⁰⁸ Just because an affection is particularly strong does not prove that it either is, or is not, from God,¹⁰⁹ even if it is a feeling of love.¹¹⁰ And just because a person first experiences fear of hell which is later relieved by comfort—even if this is how God often operates—it does not prove that the experience is from God.¹¹¹ These claims are curious when compared to how his own feelings seemed to play a strong role in his conversion experience. Edwards' warning also appears to be potentially incompatible with his theory of spiritual perception, where he argues that it is primarily by a change of feelings that one can judge the reality of a person's salvation.

Since *Religious Affections* was published six years later than his "Personal Narrative," one might wonder if Edwards would reinterpret his own conversion experience and his resulting theory of spiritual perception in light of these considerations. However, it seems that even in *Religious Affections* he is still convinced of the reality of irresistible grace. He admits that it might seem to a person during their conversion that what they are experiencing is due to efficacious grace, but "if grace be indeed owing to the powerful and efficacious operation of an extrinsic agent . . . why is it unreasonable to suppose, it should seem to be so, to them who are the subjects of it? Is it a strange thing, that it should seem to be as it is?"¹¹² Yet he recognizes that people can be affected

¹⁰⁸ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 143–144.

¹⁰⁹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 130–131.

¹¹⁰ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 146.

¹¹¹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 155–156, 158–160. Edwards agrees that in most cases God does first make people afraid of God's judgment before saving them (Edwards, "162. Sermon on Hosea 5:15," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, Vol. 45, *Sermons, Series II, 1729–1731* [Jonathan Edwards Center: Yale University, 2008]; Edwards, "Miscellanies," entry no. 116b in WJE 13: 282–283).

¹¹² Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 138–139.

by other things which people also do not feel they are the authors of, besides the Holy Spirit, and so this statement may be based more on Edwards' prior assumptions than reality.¹¹³

In summary, it appears that Edwards believed that his spontaneous conversion experience occurred because God irresistibly gave him the Holy Spirit and the resulting spiritual perception, and all the changes of heart and nature that come along with it. This seems to have convinced him of the reality of irresistible grace, which he then found supporting evidence for in Scripture. Irresistible grace is also a necessary part of Edwards' deterministic predestinarian scheme. Yet if we take his own advice in *Religious Affections*, his personal experience and his corresponding subjective interpretation of it are not irrefutable proof that his theory is correct.

4.3 Edwards' Change of Mind on Predestination

Edwards' conversion experience was critical in helping him come to accept the doctrine of double predestination, which was necessary before he was able to truly love God and trust God's goodness. Edwards admits that he did not initially love the doctrine of double predestination:

From my childhood up, my mind had been wont to be full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased; leaving them eternally to perish, and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me.¹¹⁴

Despite this, Edwards later became convinced and satisfied that God was righteous when disposing of people according to God's sovereign will, which ended Edwards' objections to the doctrine. He calls this change a "wonderful alteration in my mind," such that from then on, "I scarce ever have found so much as the rising of an objection against God's sovereignty, in the most absolute sense, in showing mercy on whom he will show mercy, and hardening and eternally damning whom he will."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 141–142.

¹¹⁴ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 791–792.

¹¹⁵ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 792.

Along with this new assurance, “I have often since, not only had a conviction, but a delightful conviction. The doctrine of God’s sovereignty has very often appeared, an exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet doctrine to me: and absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. But my first conviction was not with this.”¹¹⁶ Throughout *Religious Affections*, Edwards uses the term “conviction” frequently. Sometimes he refers to the “conviction of sin,” and at other times, to a “rational conviction,” or a “spiritual conviction.”¹¹⁷ He says that affections are often “attended with a thorough conviction of the judgment, of the reality and certainty of divine things.”¹¹⁸ A conviction will influence a person’s actions, for

they who are thoroughly convinced of the certain truth of those things, must needs be governed by them in their practice; for the things revealed in the Word of God are so great, and so infinitely more important, than all other things, that it is inconsistent with the human nature, that a man should fully believe the truth of them, and not be influenced by them above all things, in his practice.¹¹⁹

This definition of a conviction as a belief about reality which influences a person’s actions and feelings fits well with modern discussion about convictions as found in James William McClendon Jr. and James M. Smith’s book *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*. They say some beliefs are so foundational that they can be called a “conviction.” These are especially “important” and “persistent” beliefs, which are resistant to change even in the face of difficulties, challenges, or doubts.¹²⁰ A conviction will also “exercise a dominant or controlling role over a

¹¹⁶ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 792.

¹¹⁷ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 333 and 328, respectively.

¹¹⁸ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 395.

¹¹⁹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 395.

¹²⁰ James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*, revised edition (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 87. Indeed, if a belief is not persistent, it is likely not a conviction. Some convictions may even require a person to die for them (McClendon and Smith, 161–162). Granted, there may be a small distinction between a “conviction” in the sense of an external movement of God on the soul, such as in the case of a “conviction” of sin, and a “conviction” in the sense of a fundamental presupposition about reality. However, in both cases, a person has a deep sense of a truth that motivates their external actions and perceptions of the world and themselves. In the previous quotation, Edwards seems to say that there are some fundamental truths in God’s word that should perpetually influence Christians’ lives; in this case, they would function the same way as the convictions described here by McClendon and Smith.

number of other beliefs held by their believers, or those that govern (or correspond to) broad stretches of their thought and conduct.”¹²¹ Thus, our convictions “not only guide us but identify us and make us what we are.”¹²² The set of convictions by which a community or an individual lives is bound together by the “glue” of their communal or personal narrative, which allows them both to endure shocks and confront opposing viewpoints.¹²³ Based on all we have seen regarding Edwards’ views thus far, his belief about God’s sovereignty likely could be classified as a personal conviction according to these criteria.¹²⁴

In contrast to some philosophers who emphasize “the distinction between knowledge and certitude,” McClendon and Smith assert that

convictions are likely to include both beliefs that the holder is said to know (have evidence or authority for, be able to defend) and those of which the holder is (merely) certain (feels sure about). Moreover, convictions will sometimes be the conclusions of reasoned arguments and based upon evidence. But the premises of such arguments may themselves be the convictions of the arguers, even presupposed ones of which the holder is hardly aware.¹²⁵

Whether a conviction is considered “justifiable” depends primarily on the perspective of those

¹²¹ McClendon and Smith, 87. “A belief that cannot serve as a guide to other beliefs or actions through changes in time and circumstances simply will not have the persistence to recommend itself as a conviction” (162).

¹²² McClendon and Smith, 5. This is true not only for individuals, but also for communities, who usually share a certain set of convictions, even if not every individual agrees entirely or holds all convictions equally strongly or ranks them at the same level of priority (91). To not have convictions would be to have no constant character which endures over time or provides a rationale for one’s decisions (106). Individuals without convictions would thus risk having unfulfilled “rudderless lives” (160).

¹²³ McClendon and Smith, 175–176, citing Alasdair MacIntyre’s work *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), chapter 15.

¹²⁴ Bombaro also believes that for Edwards, “a conviction of the absolute and arbitrary sovereignty of God serves as the cornerstone of his entire thought” (Bombaro, 230). Marsden likewise suggests that “the central principle in Edwards’ thought, true to his Calvinistic heritage, was the sovereignty of God” (Marsden, 4).

In contrast, I would not classify Edwards’ insistence on cause and effect as a conviction, for as seen in chapter 2, he feels free to change his philosophy of causality as it suits his theological arguments. But his insistence that God must be sovereign and that a sovereign God must control absolutely everything do seem to be fundamental convictions which Edwards never questions or considers altering.

¹²⁵ McClendon and Smith, 90.

who hold it.¹²⁶ However it must be noted that “convictions do not occur in isolation; they are found in their holders along with other beliefs, some of which are, in the usual case, also convictions,” and “thus the justification of any one conviction is not likely to be achieved without regarding its relation to other convictions embraced by the same community or the same believer.”¹²⁷ Indeed, the justification of convictions goes hand-in-hand with gaining those convictions in the first place.¹²⁸ This chapter has already shown how Edwards’ conviction about God’s sovereignty is closely connected to his conviction about the nature of Christian conversion. In the next chapter we will see how this conviction connects with Edwards’ understanding of the gospel message itself.

Perhaps conflicting convictions may explain some of the logical inconsistencies seen in Edwards’ theology and philosophy thus far. McClendon and Smith might agree with this suggestion, for they write:

conviction sets as we understand them are seldom deductive systems or theoretical constructs. If they possess a unity, it is rather first of all the unity of their coinherence in the organic unity of a community of persons. Neither logical interdependence nor any other single explanatory feature will account for the occurrence of particular conviction sets. Logic, to be sure, is not debarred. The notion that some convictions preside over others suggests that logic has a role to play in most sets. But it may be associations of a contingent historical nature, or overt or subconscious emotive force of the sort explored by attitude research, or combinations of these and other, unnamed, elements, that bind our convictions together. We cannot, in general, say what these must be; they are surely as varied as life itself. What we can, definitionally, say is that the glue that binds convictions into a single set is their mutual relation to the life of the person or (normally) the life of the community in which he or she shares.¹²⁹

It is thus the community’s convictions which are primary. Any individual in that community may have slight variations of these convictions, but these can only be properly understood within the

¹²⁶ McClendon and Smith, 172–173.

¹²⁷ McClendon and Smith, 91. Therefore, “the justification or rejection of convictions, we see, must often consist in the justification or rejection of sets of convictions, of conviction sets, that will stand or fall in interdependence and not one-by-one” (McClendon and Smith, 98–99).

¹²⁸ McClendon and Smith, 168–169.

¹²⁹ McClendon and Smith, 99.

context of the greater community itself.¹³⁰

However, convictions are not immutable, and it is possible to give up a conviction or gain a new conviction by undergoing a “conversion” of personal convictions.¹³¹ What characterizes a conversion is “the radical reorientation, occurring dramatically in a few hours, days, or months, of all that is most important to the convert.”¹³² A person does not have to reject every one of their prior convictions, for these form the context for the new conviction, and the new conviction will often be explained by building on or modifying previous convictions.¹³³ However, a change in one conviction may also require a change in other beliefs and convictions, if one desires to be consistent.¹³⁴ I suggest that a change in convictions may even require one to make a change in one’s community, which may be a significant factor to remember when considering Edwards’ personal situation as will be explored in the next chapter.

Thus, it seems that the shift in Edwards’ perspective on God’s sovereignty which occurred around the same time as when he became assured of his salvation could be seen as a conversion in more than one way. Insights into possible influences that shaped or prepared him for such a conversion experience may be found through analysis of the moral and religious changes that a

¹³⁰ McClendon and Smith, 100–101, 178. Thus, they warn that judging the convictions of others across convictional community lines becomes potentially presumptuous or questionable (101–103). This may be a risk with this dissertation, as I do not share all of Edwards’ theological convictions, particularly those regarding God’s all-determining sovereignty, foreknowledge of all future events, and double predestination. However, McClendon and Smith admit that one must have some sort of convictions beyond simply “being reasonable” in order to evaluate the convictions of others, or otherwise, there would be no place to begin one’s assessment. Thus the assessor’s convictions “need not be the convictions currently under assessment” (114).

¹³¹ McClendon and Smith, 169. Synonyms for ‘conversion’ used by McClendon and Smith include ‘enlightenment,’ ‘regeneration,’ and ‘new birth,’ although they do not use these terms in the Christian theological sense (169).

¹³² McClendon and Smith, 169.

¹³³ McClendon and Smith, 170.

¹³⁴ After all, inconsistent convictions cannot possibly be true, both in the sense of logical compatibility, and living consistently by them (McClendon and Smith, 159), even though it is possible for people or communities to inconsistently hold some contradictory convictions (McClendon and Smith, 165).

person often experiences as one develops from a child into a young adult.¹³⁵ Of course, Edwards' conversion experience cannot be simply reduced to or explained away by any of these theories; at best, this analysis is speculative and unable to be verified. It is difficult to know with certainty what is going on in the mind and heart of any individual—even ourselves—never mind a person living in a different time and place. Nevertheless, I hope this attempt may provide additional insight into some of Edwards' concerns or priorities during the stages of his life surrounding his significant change of mind on predestination. Edwards' life as an adolescent and young adult are the most relevant, but to provide the necessary background this analysis will begin with Edwards' childhood.

4.3.1 Edwards' Childhood and Early Adolescence

The highly religious environment which surrounded Edwards in both his Puritan society and personal home life has already been explored briefly at the start of chapter 3. In summary, Edwards and his siblings were taught the Westminster Confession and the corresponding Shorter Catechism from a young age, with the result that “if their indoctrination into confessional Calvinism's monergistic soteriology did not ensure the enthronement of God and His self-glorifying purposes in their minds, they also were submersed into a culture of church-life in which God seemed to encroach upon every aspect of their social and personal worlds.”¹³⁶

In his “Personal Narrative,” Edwards writes about his childhood love of religion, including how he would go out to a secret place in nature to pray, loved to perform his religious duties, and

¹³⁵ This analysis will rely on insights from several experts in this area, including Walter Conn, James Fowler, and Erik Erikson. Bernard Lonergan's theories on conversion will also be helpful. Primarily, I will be working with Conn, because he accessibly summarizes and incorporates insights from other developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, James Fowler, Erik Erikson, and Robert Kegan into Conn's stages of the developing self (Conn, 81). Other Edwards scholars will be brought in with relevant observations and their own insights into Edwards' life, personality, and theology to confirm or support this analysis.

However, these theories of development may themselves be questioned as to whether they truly reflect reality when it comes to their methodologies, analyses, and presuppositions. Thus, this analysis is not a critical part of my argument regarding the reasons behind Edwards' belief in double predestination, which I think will stand on its own. However, some insights from these experts may be relevant.

¹³⁶ Bombaro, 29, citing I. N. Tarbox “Timothy Edwards and His Parishioners,” *The Congregational Quarterly* (1871): 256–274 and Kenneth Minkema, “The Edwardses: A Ministerial Family in Eighteenth-Century New England,” PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 1988, *passim*.

would speak about religion with other boys.¹³⁷ Edwards admits these activities gave him “self-righteous pleasure,” but nothing more.¹³⁸ Young adolescents are often concerned with “conforming to and upholding the rules and expectations and conventions of society or authority just because they are society’s rules, expectations, or conventions.”¹³⁹ At this age, these things are seen as good in themselves, and the individual often wants to please others by showing they are a ‘good’ person with good intentions, and by conforming to society’s expectations.¹⁴⁰

This desire to conform to society’s expectations can be amplified by the community’s religious beliefs. In the Christian tradition, the doctrine of hell may provide particularly potent motivation for children to take on their community’s religious beliefs.¹⁴¹ At the time, Puritan practices encouraged an upbringing that was intended to make children aware that death could come at any moment, and to fear that if they died without being saved they would be worthy of eternal damnation and would suffer in the fires of hell.¹⁴² Jonathan’s father Timothy, “like the vast majority of New England’s preachers, was convinced he must not flinch from warning sinners of the dangers of falling into unending hellish tortures.”¹⁴³ Since Jonathan grew up in his father’s congregation, he would presumably have heard these warnings many times. Furthermore, Edwards’ mother was also theologically inclined, and she read Scripture to Jonathan as a child

¹³⁷ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 790–791.

¹³⁸ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 791. However, Morris notes how this does indicate something about Edwards’ later career and spirituality, for “it reveals not only Edwards’ early desire for secret converse with God, but also his desire to share his concern with others; and it reveals his love of nature, and his feeling that nature no less than Church could be the place of converse between him and his maker” (Morris, 32).

¹³⁹ Conn, 93, quoting Lawrence Kohlberg, “Moral Stages and Moralization: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach,” in *Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research, and Social Issues*, ed. Thomas Lickona (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 33.

¹⁴⁰ Conn, 99.

¹⁴¹ James Fowler notes that young children in the stage of Intuitive-Projective faith (generally from the ages of two to seven) absorb basic ideas of religion and morality from their parents and society around them. He argues that if children at this age are taught about “the sinfulness of all people without Christ and the hell of fiery torments that await the unrepentant,” it can lead the child to dramatically take on their community’s religious identity as early as seven or eight years old (Fowler, 123, 132).

¹⁴² Marsden, 26–27.

¹⁴³ Marsden, 27.

and trained him in his early piety.¹⁴⁴ Edwards admits that his spiritual life was originally characterized by a deep sense of concern about whether he was truly saved.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, Edwards' early love for acting in ways that emulated his community's religious behavior was possibly due to an ingrained fear of hell, combined with a natural desire to please his parents and society, on top of whatever natural inclination towards religion Edwards may have had.

Edwards' college environment continued the in-depth instruction in Calvinistic theology that had begun at home. He was already a precocious child with many intellectual interests, including optics, biology, and metaphysics, in addition to theology.¹⁴⁶ In 1716, at age 12, Edwards went to attend Yale College, then called Connecticut Collegiate School, where he was instructed in the theology of Reformed authors such as Johannes Wollebius, William Ames, and William Perkins, "all of whom emphasized God's predestination of man and terrestrial events for his own glory."¹⁴⁷ Edwards' education also included repetition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism every week, along with Bible reading, attending services, and personal self-examination.¹⁴⁸

Yet as he grew in his theological knowledge, Edwards struggled with accepting his community's beliefs about God's sovereignty. As he described in his "Personal Narrative," this was primarily because of his objection to God's sovereignty over the horror of reprobation.¹⁴⁹ In Edwards' earliest theological works, he attempted to defend orthodox Calvinism as reasonable, including the doctrines of total depravity, eternal hell, and God's final judgment, although, with the role of predestination "diminished."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ Morris, 21.

¹⁴⁵ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 791, see also my earlier footnote 97 on p. 184. The sorts of images of hell that Edwards may have imagined as a child could potentially resemble those in his famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," which certainly could be considered terrifying.

¹⁴⁶ Morris, 57.

¹⁴⁷ Bombaro, 30. He notes that all these authors are found in Edwards' reading "Catalogue," in WJE 26.

¹⁴⁸ Bombaro, 30–31; Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, 31.

¹⁴⁹ Marsden, 40; Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 72.

¹⁵⁰ Bombaro, 35.

Marsden suggests that Edwards' inner rebellion against a core aspect of Calvinist theology may have been partly due to his "youthful rebellious spirit, which despite his outward conformity had long reserved a place for secret inward resistance to his parents, their schooling, and to church indoctrination," and would have been supported by his strong intellect.¹⁵¹ Additionally, Edwards had read many more controversial books on Anglicanism and Arminianism than most other students, and was likely aware of objections to the doctrine of double predestination and reprobation made by contemporary authors who promoted the supposedly more "reasonable" and "humanitarian" doctrines of Arminianism.¹⁵²

Thus, it seems that as a young teenager, Edwards was likely tempted to reject the doctrines of God's absolute sovereignty and double predestination. Yet what held him back from pursuing this direction was his fear of God's potential judgment if he were wrong, and his knowledge that God disliked rebellion. Marsden suggests, "even if he thought it was repulsively unfair, he deeply feared that the fires of hell awaited those who rebelled against God. He deeply wanted to trust in God, yet he could not believe in, let alone submit to, such a tyrant."¹⁵³ Edwards' early view of God as a tyrant may have been partly due to his father's controlling, demanding, and perfectionistic nature,¹⁵⁴ because children often base their images of God on their parents.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Marsden, 40.

¹⁵² Marsden, 87, 40, 63.

¹⁵³ Marsden, 40. Marsden bases this suggestion on statements about Edwards' initial dislike for God's sovereignty in Edwards' "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 791–792, as well as Edwards' early sermon "The Value of Salvation" (Marsden, 40n47). In this sermon, Edwards argues that people should value salvation above all else because the world will one day be destroyed by God, and then even emperors and other powerful people who are not saved will be subjected to eternal destruction in hell (Edwards, "The Value of Salvation," in WJE 10: 313–314, 320–321).

¹⁵⁴ Marsden, 21–22, 34, 42–43. See also Bushman, "Jonathan Edwards as Great Man: Identity, Conversion, and Leadership in the Great Awakening" in Scheick, 46–48 and 55, which suggests that the emotional environment in which Edwards grew up was a combination of fear and love, with strict moral and intellectual expectations from his father, and anticipations of punishment for stepping out of line. This would not have been unusual for Puritans, for whom the father of a household was seen as "prince and teacher, pastor and judge" with extensive legal rights and religious responsibilities, who desired to parent in a manner that was both loving and authoritative (Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 177, 179). It is interesting how a harsh father is something that Erik Erikson believes was an important factor in Martin Luther's personal development which may have contributed to Luther's long struggle to love God (Erikson, *Young Man Luther*, 28–29).

¹⁵⁵ Conn, 95; Fowler, 141. Fowler says that children can come to see God as similar to their parents, who make decisions, and try to do what is best for their children. In an interview with a ten-year old girl, Fowler asks her about

Having a parent who is a pastor (and is thus seen as God's representative in the community) probably accentuates this tendency.

Therefore, there seems to be more to Edwards' adolescent development than just a desire to please his parents and conform to his society. He seems to be caught at least in part between an earlier childhood desire to conform to expectations in order to avoid punishment by authority figures, including God himself,¹⁵⁶ and the later adolescent tendency to begin questioning society's conventions due to gaining the freedom of going away to college and being exposed to new ideas.¹⁵⁷

4.3.2 Edwards' Later Teenage Years

As Edwards progressed through his teenage years he fell away from this love for religion and began struggling with sin.¹⁵⁸ He wrote that he felt holiness was "a melancholy, morose, sour and unpleasant thing."¹⁵⁹ He continued in this opinion until the senior year of his undergraduate degree in 1719–1720 when Edwards nearly died from pleurisy (lung inflammation). He wrote that God "brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the pit of hell."¹⁶⁰ After one more brief period of sinful living, Edwards made vows to God to break off his sinful ways, pursue

death, and she frequently replies that God's ways are mysterious but whatever God does is for the best—just like her parents do (Fowler, 141). Fowler also notes that this girl "shows evidences of an emerging structuring in which seeming inequalities and differences in human fortune actually work for good" (Fowler, 142). These assertions that whatever God does is always for the best and that what seems unfortunate actually works out for good is surprisingly similar to Edwards' justification of God's ways in chapter 3. Yet Fowler notes that this girl, unlike most people in Stage 2 Intuitive-Projective faith, is seemingly open to the idea that God may make mistakes or be limited in what God can control—again, similar to her parents (Fowler, 142). Fowler notes that some teenagers and even adults may continue to exhibit aspects of Stage 2 faith (Fowler, 146).

¹⁵⁶ His fear of God's punishment seems to fit with Kohlberg's Preconventional Stage 3 of moral reasoning, where a child does not yet understand society's rules or expectations but obeys so as to avoid punishment (Conn, 93).

¹⁵⁷ This questioning of society's norms fits better with Kohlberg's transitional Stage 4 ½ from Conventional to Post-Conventional morality (Conn, 102).

¹⁵⁸ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 791.

¹⁵⁹ Marsden, 36, citing Edwards, "Miscellanies," entry a. in WJE 13: 163: "We drink in strange notions of holiness from our childhood, as if it were a melancholy, morose, sour and unpleasant thing . . ."

¹⁶⁰ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 791; Marsden, 36; Morris, 32.

salvation, and practice religion.¹⁶¹ However, he remained full of inner turmoil, and labelled the manner in which he sought his salvation as “miserable”; as a result, he doubted “whether ever it issued in that which was saving.”¹⁶² He had no delight in religion, and still worried about his salvation.¹⁶³ There is not yet any hint that his views of God have changed from those he held previously as a child; Edwards likely still feared God’s punishment, and his experience of severe illness and the fear of potentially going to hell if he died seems to have been a key motivation behind his renewed commitment to religion.

How seriously Edwards took this commitment can be seen through his diary entries, where he drafted personal “resolutions” to try to live by (a common Puritan practice).¹⁶⁴ These included resolutions relating to time management, temperance in eating and drinking, avoiding sins he was particularly prone to (irritability, pride, evil-speaking), and making sure that all he did was done for God’s glory.¹⁶⁵ He tracked violations of these resolutions to see whether he was improving.¹⁶⁶

Edwards’ new commitment to give up his sinful ways and his choice to value holiness, salvation, and religion of his own accord may appear to be evidence of his personal religious conversion. However, Edwards did not seem to consider it as such, for he had not yet experienced the divine and supernatural light of spiritual perception.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Marsden, 36.

¹⁶² Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 791.

¹⁶³ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 791.

¹⁶⁴ Marsden, 50.

¹⁶⁵ Marsden, 50–51; Edwards, “Resolutions,” in WJE 16: 753–759.

¹⁶⁶ Marsden 52.

¹⁶⁷ Such a change in Edwards can, however, be seen as a “moral conversion,” which “changes the criterion of one’s decisions and choices from satisfactions to values.” Now, instead of being told how to act by parents or society, Edwards committed himself to these values of his own free will (Bernard Lonergan, “‘Theology in Its New Context’ and ‘The Dimensions of Conversion,’” in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, ed. Walter E. Conn [New York, NY: Alba House, 1978], 17).

4.3.3 Edwards' Young Adult Years

Edwards wrote:

But I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God, and his justice in thus eternally disposing of men, according to his sovereign pleasure. But never could give an account, how, or by what means, I was thus convinced; not in the least imagining, in the time of it, nor a long time after, that there was any extraordinary influence of God's Spirit in it: but only that now I saw further, and my reason apprehended the justice and reasonableness of it. However, my mind rested in it; and it put an end to all those cavils and objections, that had till then abode with me, all the preceding part of my life.¹⁶⁸

He clearly linked the first appearance of his new delight in God's sovereignty with his personal spiritual conversion experience which may have occurred while reading 1 Timothy 1:17.¹⁶⁹

Before this experience, Edwards feared God and likely thought that God was potentially an unjust tyrant, particularly because of the Calvinist belief that God predestined people to eternal punishment. Yet afterwards, Edwards felt a new sense of love for God, and gained a lifelong "delightful conviction" about God's sovereignty. From this point on in his "Personal Narrative," Edwards no longer struggled with any doubt or questioning of God's goodness, love, or sovereignty. Marsden believes "it was only when Jonathan's vision expanded to appreciate that the triune God who controlled this vast universe must be ineffably good, beautiful, and loving beyond human comprehension that he could lose himself in God."¹⁷⁰

This change in Edwards' personal spiritual life had a corresponding impact on his theology. Edwards' new spiritual perception "brought about a different perspective on reality and his confessional faith" where all reality was oriented towards God's self-glorification.¹⁷¹ Seeing God's glory in everything "became to him a permanent, pervasive, and axiomatic mental

¹⁶⁸ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 792. Marsden admits there is not much detail to be found on what exactly caused this change of mind, yet Marsden attributes it to some combination of Edwards' increasing theological understanding and intellectual reasoning, and perhaps inspiration from the Holy Spirit (Marsden, 41).

¹⁶⁹ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 792.

¹⁷⁰ Marsden, 43.

¹⁷¹ Bombaro, 28–29.

principle” which formed “the bedrock of Edwards’s vision of reality.”¹⁷² From this day forward, the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty became “a fundamental principle of all that he thought and wrote.”¹⁷³ This resonates with the themes explored in chapter 1, regarding how Edwards believed that God’s acts of creation, election, and reprobation are ultimately for the purpose of revealing God’s glory. Bombaro believes that this spiritual experience influenced Edwards’ philosophical worldview, such that, “what his emergent idealism and dispositional concepts revolved around, indeed, facilitated, and were subservient to, was a radically theocentric perspective of reality,” albeit one constrained by Edwards’ acceptance of Reformed Scholasticism’s “uncompromisable doctrines” of God’s immutability, eternality, and aseity.¹⁷⁴

It also seems true that this brief passage in Edwards’ “Personal Narrative” is “crucial for understanding not only the young Edwards, but also his entire later career,” for this experience divides Edwards’ life into two distinct eras.¹⁷⁵ After this experience, Edwards felt “enthralled” by a sense of a special calling to use the latest knowledge to defend God’s word.¹⁷⁶ He began with his early attempts to refute Arminianism, as will be seen in the next chapter.

It seems that Edwards had finally experienced his religious conversion, for Edwards’ view of God changed from seeing God as potentially unjust to God now being good, beautiful, “sweet,” and worthy of worship and love.¹⁷⁷ Edwards had also become comfortable with God’s absolute

¹⁷² Bombaro, 12.

¹⁷³ Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 48.

¹⁷⁴ Bombaro, 16–17. Morris also comments that “Edwards returned to this paradigmatic conversion experience as the fundamental experiential basis of all of his later metaphysical and epistemological theory,” especially his concepts of being, proportionality, and beauty (Morris, 533). His conversion may also account for some mystical elements which distinguish him from Calvin and other English and American Puritan predecessors (Morris, 531).

¹⁷⁵ Marsden, 40.

¹⁷⁶ Marsden, 63.

¹⁷⁷ According to Lonergan, a religious conversion is when a person is grasped by ultimate concern and falls in love with God (Lonergan, “‘Theology in Its New Context’ and ‘The Dimensions of Conversion,’” 18–20; Conn, 127; Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1972], 240, 242). “For Christians who understand God as love itself, religious conversion in this sense is falling in love with love,” and dedicating one’s life fully to the “desire to love and the search for truth, to the hunger for goodness and the thirst for justice” (Conn, 152). This has interesting similarities to Edwards’ ethical theory of true virtue.

sovereignty and desired to submit fully to God, to the extent that he wished “I might be nothing, and that God might be all,” and also “to be emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone.”¹⁷⁸

It is relevant to Edwards’ experience that during the two preceding centuries, the question of assurance of salvation had been a significant pastoral problem among Protestants, especially Puritans, which made the doctrine of predestination an issue of pastoral care.¹⁷⁹ During this time,

the piety of predestinarian grace as an experience was particularly focused on providing assurance and certainty, as anxieties dissolved in the experience of being seized, in spite of one’s unworthiness, as one of the chosen of that awesome yet gracious numen upon which one was totally dependent. It must be remembered that the powerful religious experience was always of being chosen, not of being left out, and thus certainty and reassurance, not despair, were derived from the unique logic of this way-of-being-religious. Thus converged a particular theology of assurance and the recognizable need of a particular time and place for reassurance.¹⁸⁰

As seen above, Edwards personally struggled with such assurance, and so it is not surprising that such a view of being “chosen” by God would have perhaps comforted him, as it did many others with similar spiritual needs at that time.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 796, 801.

¹⁷⁹ Wallace, 45–54, citing Lynn Baird Tipson Jr., “Invisible Saints: The ‘Judgment of Charity’ in the Early New England Churches,” *Church History* 44 (1975): 469; Ian Breward, “The Significance of William Perkins,” *Journal of Religious History* 4 (1966): 122; and Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress*, trans. W. Montgomery, 1912 reprint (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 62. More recent scholarship on the Puritan issue of assurance is found in Lehner, 1–32.

¹⁸⁰ Wallace, 195–196. He cites Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism Between Luther and Voltaire: A New View of the Counter-Reformation*, trans. Jeremy Moiser (London: Burns and Oates, 1977), 126; Carl Brindenbaugh, *Vexed and Troubled Englishmen, 1590–1642* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 276; and Henry G. Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought, 1630–1690* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963).

¹⁸¹ Wallace, 10–11. One is again reminded of Edwards’ uncle Hawley, who seemed to have the experience of believing he was reprobate, and the despair and sad consequences to which it led (Marsden, 163–166). Thuesen notes that many other Puritans were troubled over how they could know they were elect, which often led an individual to “tireless labor in her calling and tireless self-examination about the quality of her temporal and spiritual exertions” (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 58). He says “many Puritan clergy and laity admitted to having endured bouts of spiritual discouragement or even despair” over fears that they may not be elect, and thus, they often feared to participate in the Lord’s Supper due to worries of bringing damnation on themselves (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 60–62, quote from 60). He reveals that some Puritans either attempted or committed suicide out of fear of being reprobate from the founding era up to the time of Edwards. Ulrich Zwingli’s successor Heinrich Bullinger labelled

4.4 Nature as a Potential Source of Edwards' Belief in God's Goodness

There is likely more behind Edwards' sudden change of mind about God's goodness than has been seen so far. How did Edwards come to believe that God is fully good, perfect, and trustworthy, and therefore, just in whatever God does—including reprobation? A clue may be found in how Edwards' religious conversion also caused a corresponding shift in his view of thunderstorms. For this correlation to become credible, a short discussion of Edwards' use of typology is necessary.

4.4.1 Edwards' Understanding of Typology

Typology became widely used during the early church era by allegorical schools of interpretation and dominated in the Middle Ages before the Protestants began to question its legitimacy.¹⁸² However, Protestants continued to use typology because it was useful to help interpret difficult portions of Scripture such as the Psalms or apocalyptic passages which could not be taken literally. Later English and Scottish theologians began to make greater use of typology again, which was passed on to Puritan interpreters of Scripture through the works of William Perkins.¹⁸³ As a result, “the Protestant hermeneutic that came down from sixteenth-century Europe to eighteenth-century New England emphasized a literal and historical interpretation of Scripture, but it also accepted and employed both prophetic or typological interpretations as well

this sort of fear or despair as *tentatio praedestinationis* and said there was “scarcely any other more dangerous” temptation (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 64–65). Thus, Wallace's claim that the convert's experience was “always of being chosen” is not entirely accurate, although in Edwards' case and many others it likely held true.

¹⁸² An introduction to the history of typology in Christianity can be found in Wallace E. Anderson, “Edwards and the History of Typology,” in WJE 11: 4–6. More on the history of typology beginning in the New Testament itself, and including commentators such as Philo, Origen, and Augustine, through the Middle Ages to Tyndale, Luther, Calvin, and Samuel Mather can be found in Thomas M. David, “The Traditions of Puritan Typology,” in *Typology and Early American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), 11–45. Cotton Mather's approach to typology is detailed in Mason I. Lowance, Jr. “Cotton Mather's Magnalia and the Metaphors of Biblical History,” in Bercovitch, 139–160. Cotton made use of Samuel Mather's work *Figures or Types*, and wrote his own works, the *Magnalia Christi Americana* in 1702 and the “Biblia Americana” manuscript (1700–1714) where he used typology in a fairly conservative way (Lowance, “Cotton Mather,” 143, 159).

¹⁸³ John F. Wilson, “Typology In Protestantism And Puritanism And In The Redemption Discourse,” in WJE 9: 44–47.

as allegorical interpretations of certain texts, at least so far as these were warranted by the Bible.”¹⁸⁴ Edwards attempted to follow this guideline and find a “medium between those that cry down all types, and those that are for turning all into nothing but allegory and not having it to be true history.”¹⁸⁵

In general, “for Edwards, typology represented an exegetical science that revealed God’s progressive dispensation through history and human time while providing continuities between the Old and New Testaments and contemporary events.”¹⁸⁶ However, he was also willing to apply typology beyond Scripture. He writes, “to say that we must not say that such things are types of these and those things unless the Scripture has expressly taught us that they are so, is as unreasonable as to say that we are not to interpret any prophecies of Scripture or apply them to these and those events, except we find them interpreted to our hand.”¹⁸⁷

Edwards was aware that his perspective was unusual. He admits,

I expect by very ridicule and contempt to be called a man of a very fruitful brain and copious fancy, but they are welcome to it. I am not ashamed to own that I believe that the whole universe, heaven and earth, air and seas, and the divine constitution and history of the holy Scriptures, be full of images of divine things, as full as a language is of words; and that the multitude of those things that I have mentioned are but a very small part of what is really intended to be signified and typified by these things.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Anderson, “Edwards and the History of Typology,” in WJE 11: 6.

¹⁸⁵ Anderson, “Edwards on Types,” in WJE 11: 7, citing Edwards, “Types,” in WJE 11: 151. Anderson notes that at the time, “those who ‘cry down all types’ were the advocates of natural theology, Enlightenment rationalism, and Deism in particular. Those who tended to turn ‘all into nothing but allegory’ can most readily be identified as the Catholic and Anglican inheritors of the ancient Alexandrian approach, who spurned the literalist approach in favor of allegorism. . . . Among these poles stood a variety of viewpoints, most important of which for Edwards was that of the inheritors of the Puritan dissenting tradition” (Wallace E. Anderson, “Edwards and Contemporary Thought on Typology,” in WJE 11: 11).

¹⁸⁶ Mason I. Lowance, Jr., “Editor’s Introduction To ‘Types of the Messiah,’” in WJE 11: 157. See also Mason I. Lowance, Jr., “‘Images or Shadows of Divine Things’ in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards,” in Bercovitch, 213–215, where Lowance shows how Edwards makes use of historical typology in his sermon series, “A History of the Work of Redemption.”

¹⁸⁷ Edwards, “Types,” in WJE 11: 152.

¹⁸⁸ Edwards, “Types,” in WJE 11: 152. See also Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” in WJE 11: 51.

He believes this divine communication through images is one of the purposes for which God made creation, because “’tis very fit and becoming of God, who is infinitely wise, so to order things that there should be a voice of his in his works instructing those that behold them, and pointing forth and showing divine mysteries and things more immediately appertaining to himself and his spiritual kingdom.”¹⁸⁹ Edwards argues this claim is proven by the use of typology in Scripture.¹⁹⁰

Edwards believes that through Scripture, one can learn how God speaks through typology in the wider world. He advises that “the Book of Scripture is the interpreter of the book of nature [in] two ways: viz. by declaring to us those spiritual mysteries that are indeed signified or typified in the constitution of the natural world; and secondly, in actually making application of the signs and types in the book of nature as representations of those spiritual mysteries in many instances.”¹⁹¹ Thus, Scripture is the way that God teaches humanity the “language” of typology, and once one has developed enough fluency, Edwards believes one is then free to move on to

¹⁸⁹ Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 57 in WJE 11: 67.

¹⁹⁰ Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 7 in WJE 11: 53. He cites 1 Cor. 15:36, Heb. 9:16–17, and how marriage is a type of the union between Christ and the church in Eph. 5:30–32 (WJE 11: 53). The editors say that Edwards’ “appeal to Scripture, both here and elsewhere, presupposes the validity of typological interpretations of Scripture itself. He was aware of the dangers of such interpretations, especially in text where the context provides no explicit explanation. The problems of finding and justifying correct typological interpretations are the subject of an eight-page octavo MS entitled ‘Types’” (WJE 11: 53).

Other verses which Edwards used to justify this approach to Scripture include Eccl. 1:7, John 12:24, and Matt. 12:33, as well as the imagery used in the Psalms and other Old Testament works (Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 22 in WJE 11: 57–58). Further verses include John 1:9, John 15:1, Heb. 9:24, Heb. 8:2, and John 6:32 (Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 45 in WJE 11: 62). More evidence comes from Paul’s typological use of Hagar and Sarah in Gal. 4 (Edwards, “Types of the Messiah,” in WJE 11: 192), and even the rainbow in Gen. 9:12–13 (Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 55 in WJE 11: 66). A full list of verses which Edwards cites in “Images of Divine Things” can be found in WJE 11: 142, and the later section of the same work, titled “Scriptures.”

Above all, Edwards read the Song of Solomon as “treating of the divine love, union and communion of the most glorious lovers, Christ and his spiritual spouse, of which a marriage union and conjugal love . . . is but a shadow” (Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 32 in WJE 11: 59). It is interesting how shortly after Edwards’ conversion experience he came to love this book of the Bible (Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 793).

¹⁹¹ Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 156 in WJE 11: 106.

learning new types seen in nature beyond those seen in Scripture itself.¹⁹² Yet what is seen, if seen properly, will confirm what is in Scripture.¹⁹³

This claim corresponds with Edwards' philosophy of idealism and theocentric worldview, according to which the purpose of creation is for God to communicate himself. God communicates to those who possess spiritual perception through both Scripture and nature, for "the Spirit who illuminates the pages of Scripture is the same Spirit who facilitates spiritual perception and communicates the biblically oriented content of the same."¹⁹⁴

Edwards filled several notebooks with lists of the theological ideas that he believed could be seen in images or types from nature, where he referred to the sun, moon, and stars, snakes and spiders, grass and vegetation, rivers, trees, clouds, and animals, among other things.¹⁹⁵ Most interesting for this study are the specific types or images that Edwards interpreted as being relevant to the topic of God's sovereignty, reprobation, and God's goodness.

In his "Images of Divine Things," Edwards compares God's attributes to elements of nature: "as thunder, and thunder clouds, as they are vulgarly called, have a shadow of the majesty of God, so the blue sky, the green fields and trees, and pleasant flowers have a shadow of the mild attributes of goodness, grace and love of God, as well as the beauteous rainbow."¹⁹⁶ He discusses thunder and lightning in more detail, explaining "the extreme fierceness and extraordinary power of the heat of lightning is an intimation of the exceeding power and terribleness of the wrath of

¹⁹² Edwards, "Types," in WJE 11: 150–151; Edwards, "Types of the Messiah," in WJE 11: 191–192. Presumably, Edwards would say that an interpreter must depend on the Holy Spirit to be led correctly in these types, and should also follow the instruction of previous allegorical Puritan writers (Lowance, "Editor's Introduction To 'Types of the Messiah'," in WJE 11: 161–165).

¹⁹³ Edwards, "Images of Divine Things," no. 70 in WJE 11: 74.

¹⁹⁴ Bombaro, 67. The quote is Bombaro's summary of Edwards' thought.

¹⁹⁵ See Edwards' notebooks "Images of Divine Things," "Types," and "Scriptures," in WJE 11.

¹⁹⁶ Edwards, "Images of Divine Things," no. 28 in WJE 11: 58. See also Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 108 in WJE 13: 278–279 for a similar idea.

God.”¹⁹⁷ Elsewhere, he mentions lightning and storms as images of God’s “vengeance” and “wrath,” as supported by several scriptural references.¹⁹⁸ All of the above references are relevant to Edwards’ change of mind on predestination, as hinted at by how Edwards notes that his conversion experience led to an important change in his attitude towards thunderstorms:

And scarce anything, among all the works of nature, was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning. Formerly, nothing had been so terrible to me. I used to be a person uncommonly terrified with thunder: and it used to strike me with terror, when I saw a thunderstorm rising. But now, on the contrary, it rejoiced me. I felt God at the first appearance of a thunderstorm. And used to take the opportunity at such times, to fix myself to view the clouds, and see the lightnings play, and hear the majestic and awful voice of God’s thunder: which often times was exceeding entertaining, leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God.¹⁹⁹

If Edwards saw thunderstorms as a typological display of God’s sovereign power in nature, even if threatening and potentially destructive, then his change of heart towards them coincides perfectly with his new love for God’s sovereignty and his acceptance of the doctrine of double predestination.

There is a further instance of Edwards’ early study of nature which is relevant to the topic of predestination. In his early “Spider Letter,”²⁰⁰ Edwards describes certain sorts of ‘ballooning’ spiders who let out a thread of web which then lifts them up through the air so that they can move easily from one tree to another. Yet what Edwards finds most notable about these spiders is how he believes that through this behavior, many spiders are blown into the sea and go to their destruction:

¹⁹⁷ Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 33 in WJE 11: 59.

¹⁹⁸ Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 74 in WJE 11: 76, and also Edwards, “Types,” nos. 39 and 40 in WJE 11: 134–135.

¹⁹⁹ Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 794.

²⁰⁰ This letter was dated October 23, 1723, and thus was not written as early as many of Edwards’ previous biographers had suspected (Wallace E. Anderson, “Note on the ‘Spider’ Papers,” in WJE 6: 147; Kenneth P. Minkema, “From New York to Northampton,” in WJE 14: 4). This letter was addressed to “the Honorable Paul Dudley, Associate Justice of the Superior Court of Massachusetts, and Fellow of the Royal Society of London,” who wrote several early studies of nature (Anderson, “Note on the ‘Spider’ Papers,” in WJE 6: 151).

Hence [there] is reason to admire at the wisdom of the Creator, and to be convinced that it is exercised about such little things in this wonderful contrivance of annually carrying off and burying the corruption and nauseousness of the air, of which flying insects are little collections, in the bottom of the ocean where it will do no harm; and especially the strange way of bringing this about in spiders, which are collections of these collections, their food being flying insects, flies being the poison of the air, and spiders are the poison of flies collected together.²⁰¹

If God did not dispose of spiders in this way, Edwards claims that the land would be eventually overrun with them, or, when they died in the winters and thawed in the summer to rot, they would dissipate into “nauseous vapors.”²⁰² But in the meantime he believes spiders serve a useful purpose as food for birds and to keep the population of other insects in check.²⁰³ This early scientific reasoning once again reveals Edwards’ confidence that all of nature works together as part of God’s great providential design,²⁰⁴ although elsewhere he speculates that spiders could represent “devils” or the “lusts of men.”²⁰⁵ Other typological images of God’s wrath, as perceived by Edwards, include the heat of the sun as well as the lava of volcanoes.²⁰⁶

It is therefore interesting that all these images reappear together in his sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” where he describes God holding sinners over a fire as if each were a spider hanging only by a thread.²⁰⁷ In a different work, Edwards compares “carnal men” to pigs that are only useful to be slaughtered.²⁰⁸ In both these images of spiders and pigs, an echo of reprobation might be seen, for to Edwards the reprobate are ultimately most useful to God in

²⁰¹ Edwards, “The Spider Letter,” in WJE 6: 167–168. This is an interesting example of how Edwards’ ‘scientific’ understanding informs his theology, even though today no scientist would endorse these speculations.

²⁰² Edwards, “The Spider Letter,” in WJE 6: 168.

²⁰³ Edwards, “The Spider Letter,” in WJE 6: 168.

²⁰⁴ Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, 5.

²⁰⁵ Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” nos. 127 and 160 in WJE 11: 97 and 107, respectively.

²⁰⁶ Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” nos. 84 and 128, in WJE 11: 85 and 97, respectively. In other entries he cites verses referring to fire and brimstone such as Gen. 15:17, 19:24, 2 Sam. 22:9, 23:7, and Exod. 19:18 as representing God’s wrath or human misery (Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” WJE 11: 133).

²⁰⁷ Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” in WJE 22: 410–411.

²⁰⁸ Edwards, “Images of Divine Things,” no. 176 in WJE 11: 116.

their destruction. Yet it seems unlikely that any of these images were the source of Edwards' acceptance of double predestination. But once he accepted this doctrine, he could now see the beauty and usefulness of it, much in the same way that he seems to appreciate God's sovereignty, power, and glory as revealed through reprobation. While these types supported Edwards' belief in double predestination, and as seen earlier in chapter 3, also provided some support for his views on theodicy, it may have been Edwards' personal experiences of nature more generally which convinced Edwards that God was fully good in all God does.

4.4.2 Edwards' Personal Experiences With Nature

Edwards' willingness to use images from nature in his typological imagination is not surprising, given that Edwards' interaction with nature was an important part of his spiritual life. He describes how he thoroughly loved walking alone in nature and contemplating God, which would bring him "a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, that I know not how to express."²⁰⁹ Furthermore, after his religious conversion,

The appearance of everything was altered: there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind. I often used to sit and view the moon, for a long time; and so in the daytime, spent much time in viewing the clouds and sky, to behold the sweet glory of God in these things: in the meantime, singing forth with a low voice, my contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer.²¹⁰

These passages may have given rise to some scholars' arguments that Edwards' perspective on nature was due to his spiritual vision of God's glory in everything which occurred at his conversion experience.²¹¹ However, other authors suggest the opposite; that Edwards' early adolescent contemplation of nature may have been what prepared Edwards for his change of mind regarding God's glory and sovereignty. The latter seem more likely to be correct, for

²⁰⁹ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 793.

²¹⁰ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 793–794.

²¹¹ Bombaro, 84; McClymond and McDermott, 73.

before his significant conversion experience, Edwards was involved in serious philosophical and theological speculation as he sought to understand the harmony and beauty of God's reality, and believed that nature was a communication of God's love, beauty, and happiness to creatures.²¹²

For most of his life, Edwards resided within the Connecticut River Valley in East Windsor, Connecticut, and later, in Massachusetts between Northampton in the south and Greenfield in the north. It was then a somewhat isolated area of fertile soil; many rivers and streams, hills, gentle mountains, and dense forests were interspersed with a few small frontier towns set up as trading centres for farmers.²¹³ "His cultural and spiritual roots were planted and nourished there, and it was there that those first impressions of nature, which were so deeply to affect his thought, were formed."²¹⁴ As a result, it is not surprising that "the beauty and majesty of nature stamped themselves unforgettably on his early thought."²¹⁵

In consequence, his personal experiences of nature may have "contributed far more to Edwards's philosophy, theology, and ethics than has usually been allowed by his interpreters."²¹⁶ Based on Edwards' diary and "Personal Narrative," one may suggest that "it was flowers, clouds, sky, sun, moon, storms, and trees that evoked his deepest religious feelings."²¹⁷ It was not uncommon for contemporary people in Britain and New England to spend time in natural settings for solitude and contemplation of God, and so "Edwards was not unique in finding God's handiwork, power,

²¹² Marsden, 39, 77.

²¹³ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 19–20.

²¹⁴ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 10. Holbrook grew up in the same area and testifies to the beauty and power of the landscape, which he says even more spectacular sights have not been able to replace (11).

²¹⁵ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 10, quoting from Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1941), 32.

²¹⁶ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 11.

²¹⁷ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 29. Scheick believes that Edwards was eventually able to 'internalize' or 'spiritualize' nature, as demonstrated in Edwards' "Personal Narrative" where Edwards imagines that he is alone in the mountains when conversing with Christ, and how Edwards describes the soul as a garden of flowers warmed by God's sunshine (Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, 62, referring to Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 793, 796).

wisdom, and gracious attributes in nature.”²¹⁸ One of Edwards’ early works, “Beauty of the World,” is “a short essay filled with thoughts of beauty and the principles of harmony and proportionalities discerned by his metaphysical and scientific mind.”²¹⁹ Edwards’ “Personal Narrative,” “On Sarah Pierpont,” and “Images of Divine Things,” all “reveal an extraordinary sensitivity to natural beauty, and it is doubtful whether Edwards would ever have formed his conception of ‘Being’ had he been nurtured in less favorable surroundings.”²²⁰

The beauty that Edwards saw in nature inspired him to want to understand it in an orderly, logical way.²²¹ This desire appeared in other early writings where Edwards exhibited an early scientific attitude toward observing nature and wondering at God’s designs. Yet it is interesting how in his more scientific writings, the things Edwards praises most are primarily God’s wisdom and power and the order, symmetry, proportionality and harmony that God has created—and less so God’s mercy, grace, or love.²²² This resonates with Edwards’ love of God’s sovereignty as extolled in his “Personal Narrative,” as well as the difficulties he faced regarding theodicy.

Hints of Edwards’ approach to theodicy can also be seen in how Edwards rarely mentions the effects of sin on the created world. Instead, it seems he believed nature was wisely created by God in an orderly, structured, and hierarchical way. Edwards ordinarily viewed nature as untouched by the consequences of sin, in contrast with others at the time who believed that the

²¹⁸ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 24, referring to Richard S. Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1958), chapters 1–2.

²¹⁹ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 35; Edwards, “Beauty of the World,” in WJE 6: 305–307. Editor Wallace Anderson says that “Beauty of the World” is not dated, but most of the documents in this volume were written before Edwards was 23 years old (Wallace E. Anderson, “Biographical Background,” in WJE 6: 2). Based on documentary dating evidence, this essay was likely written in 1726, near the end of Edwards’ Yale tutorship (Wallace E. Anderson, “Note on Papers on Nature and Natural Phenomena,” in WJE 6: 297).

²²⁰ Morris, 30.

²²¹ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 39, 53. Edwards verifies Holbrook’s claim when he admits that his amazement with nature spurred his desire for scientific study (Edwards, “Of Insects,” in WJE 6: 155).

²²² Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 35–37, citing Edwards, “Wisdom in the Contrivance of the World,” in WJE 6: 307–310. A similar emphasis on God’s majesty and omnipotence rather than God’s love or grace appears in Luther’s writings (Sheldon Shapiro, “Quelques réflexions sur la signification psychologique de la prédestination dans la Réforme,” *Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique* 68, no. 3 [January 1973]: 826).

effects of the Fall or the worldwide flood were so serious that the world had become effectively a “ruin.”²²³ This perspective on nature matches well with Edwards’ belief that everything works together as part of one great system just as God intended, including sin and evil.

4.5 Edwards’ Theodicy Confirmed by Spiritual Experience

Edwards also appeals to personal experience to support his claims about God’s goodness despite the presence of sin and evil in the world. During his wife Sarah’s remarkable spiritual experiences, Edwards recorded that she had a vision in which God’s holiness and glory outweighed all the evil in the world, and she experienced total delight and confidence in God’s absolute and unsearchable omnipotence. He writes that Sarah would experience especially strong feelings of God’s love and glory in her

resignation and acceptance of God, as the only portion and happiness of the soul, wherein the whole world, with the dearest enjoyments in it, were renounced as dirt and dung, and all that is pleasant and glorious, *and all that is terrible in this world, seemed perfectly to vanish into nothing*, and nothing to be left but God, in whom the soul was perfectly swallowed up, as in an infinite ocean of blessedness.²²⁴

He explains further that she experienced

a sense of the glorious, *unsearchable, unerring wisdom of God in his works, both of creation and providence*, so as to swallow up the soul, and overcome the strength of the body: a sweet rejoicing of soul at the thoughts of God’s being infinitely and unchangeably happy, and an exulting gladness of heart that God is self-sufficient, and infinitely above all dependence, and reigns over all, *and does his will with absolute and uncontrollable power and sovereignty*.²²⁵

²²³ Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley, and Nature*, 39. Scheick notes that Edwards did once say that after the Fall “the world was ruined as to man as effectually as if it had been reduced to chaos again,” but Scheick says “the phrase ‘as to man’ is important. Nature is not actually spoiled; it only appears that way to man’s degenerated sight,” because people without spiritual perception are less able to perceive God’s perfections and providential design in nature (Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, 6–7, quoting from Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption, Sermon 1,” in WJE 9: 124). Edwards may be contrasted with Thomas Burnet who, a century earlier, wrote that the irregularity seen in the shapes of mountains is contrary to God’s orderly, simple and perfect nature, and so must be attributed to the disorder of the biblical flood (Thomas Burnet, *Sacred Theory of the Earth*, 1681–89 reprint [London: Centaur Press, 1965], 120–129).

²²⁴ Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival,” in WJE 4: 333, emphasis mine.

²²⁵ Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival,” in WJE 4: 337, emphasis mine.

This sense included “a continual rejoicing in all the works of God’s hands, the works of nature, and God’s daily works of providence, all appearing with a sweet smile upon them.”²²⁶

One might say this means that she only rejoiced over those things that were clearly from God in the sense of being holy and good. However, this distinction is never made clear by Sarah or Jonathan in the text. If Christians are supposed to rejoice in absolutely *everything* that God does, then according to Edwards’ understanding, it would have to include rejoicing at sin and evil which, after all, are only going to lead to greater good. But rejoicing at sin and evil contradicts Edwards’ ethical theory discussed in chapter 2, that Christians should rejoice in love and holiness but hate sin and evil. Edwards even writes that if the revivals turn out to be a “work of the devil” then it would not be something to rejoice in,²²⁷ even though presumably, in his view, God would have allowed even that for God’s greater glory.

It could be possible that what changed Edwards’ mind and reassured him of God’s goodness was his conversion experience itself, which would certainly constitute a work of God’s grace in his heart. It is supposed that

the theology of predestinarian grace was ultimately rooted in a particular piety or way-of-being-religious; it was the reflection of a religious experience. . . . predestination was essentially an experience of grace and that therefore the person who held it “could contemplate with serenity the logical paradoxes of the idea of predestination.” Because this experience of grace, which entailed predestination, was so powerful, it had a logic, order, and beauty of its own that was difficult to grasp by an outsider, and apparently, by modern persons. And thus, all the unfortunate consequences which outsiders saw entailed by predestination could be cheerfully ignored by its proponents.²²⁸

If Edwards gained confidence from his conversion experience that he did indeed have the “divine and supernatural light,” it would have assured him that he was elect. For example, Calvin wrote in regard to conversion that “there is a far different feeling of full assurance that in the Scriptures

²²⁶ Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival,” in WJE 4: 340.

²²⁷ Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival,” in WJE 4: 344.

²²⁸ Wallace, 194, quoting Shapiro, “Quelques réflexions sur la signification psychologique de la prédestination dans la Réforme,” 826, Wallace’s translation.

is always attributed to faith. It is this which puts beyond doubt God's goodness clearly manifested for us. . . . But that cannot happen without our truly feeling its sweetness and experiencing it ourselves."²²⁹

One might argue that once Edwards became assured that he was saved, he simply no longer had personal motivation to wrestle with the question of God's goodness in reprobation. Despite the uncertainty that his diary reveals as to whether he was truly converted or not, Edwards does not appear to continue to worry in his "Personal Narrative" about his eternal salvation in the same way that he might have if he held the view that it is possible for a person who has been truly saved to fall away from faith.²³⁰ Perhaps then the certainty of God's goodness which Edwards gained from his conversion experience and/or experiences of nature can explain what one author calls the "bracketing" of theodicy in Edwards' works.²³¹ This suggestion may be supported by William James' statement in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, that

One can never fathom an emotion or divine its dictates by standing outside of it. In the glowing hour of excitement, however, all incomprehensibilities are solved, and what was so enigmatical from without becomes transparently obvious. Each emotion obeys a logic of its own, and makes deductions which no other logic can draw.²³²

Thus, in attempting to understand Edwards' personal change of mind on predestination, it may be the case that it was a personal subjective spiritual experience which others may simply be unable to fully understand.

²²⁹ Terrence Erdt, *Jonathan Edwards: Art and the Sense of the Heart* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 11. This quote can be found in Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.15, p. 561.

²³⁰ For example, Calvin warned that the reprobate can deceive themselves into believing that they have faith, and so the only real sign that a person is elect is to endure in faith to the end of life (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.10–12, pp. 554–558, and 3.2.17–18, pp. 562–564), thus making a person's election potentially uncertain until death.

²³¹ Holmes, 233.

²³² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 260 as quoted in Wallace, 194. This quote can be found in William James, *The Works of William James*, Vol. 15, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 261. Wallace comments that "at some point something like this has to be recognized by the modern investigator, or else an enormous episode in past human thinking [regarding the appeal of the doctrine of predestination] will forever be elusive" (Wallace, 194).

4.6 Conclusion to Chapter 4

Edwards testified that his personal spiritual experiences played a key role in his coming to terms with God's sovereignty and the doctrine of reprobation. Edwards' religious conversion allowed him to overcome his fear of God's wrath, which had been ingrained into him as a youth. Despite the negative implications of double predestination in relation to theodicy, through Edwards' perception of God's beauty and goodness, stemming at least in part from his new spiritual sense and experiences of nature as supported by his understanding of typology, he lost his concerns that God might be an unjust tyrant. In turn, he became able to praise God's sovereignty as one of the things he loved most about God.

Edwards also derives his theory of spiritual perception from this conversion experience, and explains conversion as a result of God choosing to give some individuals a special new sense which allows them to perceive God's beauty, thus causing an instant love for God in their hearts. This functions as a sort of 'irresistible grace,' and is in line with the deterministic views of decision-making and God's absolute sovereignty over individuals' eternal destinies which Edwards came to defend in *Freedom of the Will* and *Original Sin*.

However, Edwards' perceptions and reporting of his conversion experience may have been influenced by what he had read about conversion from earlier Puritan authors, as he cautions others in *Religious Affections*. While I believe his conversion experience may truly have been of God, his interpretation of grace as irresistible is likely subjective, and could have been further influenced by his religious tradition and his community's expectations.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, it is precisely the influence of New England's Puritan community which likely constitutes the final factor in why Edwards came to affirm double predestination, for as seen thus far in this study, all his arguments and appeals to sources of evidence in support of this belief are either inconsistent, ambiguous, or personally subjective. Yet when the other occurrences in Edwards' life as a young theologian anticipating a future role in his Puritan community are examined, the reason Edwards affirmed double predestination becomes much more clear.

Chapter 5

Edwards' Puritan Culture and Personal Historical Context

A thorough investigation into the reasons behind Edwards' belief in double predestination cannot be completed without considering the influence of Edwards' Puritan society. This is because a community's religious convictions, as shown through its standards, practices, and speech-acts, are some of the most significant influences on the formation of an individual's convictions.¹ How widely a belief is shared in one's community is a major factor in shaping an individual's beliefs, to the extent that a belief may not even be questioned until an individual becomes aware of others who do not hold the same belief.² This chapter will therefore examine Edwards' personal circumstances in the context of the wider history of New England in order to gain more insight into his religious worldview. This will include a discussion of what he was convinced was good for his Puritan society, and also of what he believed was the true gospel. These convictions will be contrasted with the competing Arminian and deistic options which were beginning to appear in New England during Edwards' lifetime.

As noted previously, Edwards was raised in a highly religious environment, under the instruction of his father's preaching and his mother's devotional guidance, within a culture thoroughly saturated by church involvement. This religious influence was amplified by his theological instruction at college, where he learned from notable Puritan authors such as those listed in chapter 3. Edwards absorbed his basic understanding of Puritan theology from these sources and activities. As will be shown by reference to Puritan history, this necessarily included the Calvinistic doctrine of double predestination. I will also suggest that Edwards' religious conversion in the spring of 1721 and his accompanying acceptance of Calvinistic doctrine may have been partly motivated, confirmed, or strengthened by the political and religious tension between Puritans and Anglicans in Connecticut during the time when Edwards was completing his master's degree at Yale.

¹ McClendon and Smith say that communities are "the most important unit in assessing belief and establishing knowledge claims," for a community's beliefs are supported by and lived out in the community's religious practices and speech-acts (McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, 12. See also 17, 43, 81).

² McClendon and Smith, 86.

This chapter will end with a discussion of how a community's pre-existing assumptions shape the way its members interpret texts. Thus, despite his claim to not depend upon Calvin (nor, presumably, any other Puritan author),³ it may be that Edwards' Puritan tradition ultimately explains some of his perplexing interactions with Scripture which have been noted throughout this study. This is not to say that Edwards simply capitulated to his culture's expectations on double predestination, for indeed, Edwards was willing to challenge his society on important theological issues, one of which cost him his pastorate. However, because scriptural interpretation and theology are done in communities, a person's interpretation is naturally shaped by his or her community's traditional pre-understandings. Edwards' sense of spiritual perception may have also made it easy for him to dismiss or overlook alternative perspectives or interpretations, or perhaps even miss the contradictions in his own thought. Edwards' historical context also explains why, despite his struggle to accept the doctrine of double predestination, he did not simply adopt Arminianism.

5.1 Edwards' Puritan Historical Context

The first time that Edwards publicly spoke against Arminianism was at his final M.A. oration at the Yale commencement of September 20, 1723.⁴ Edwards was anxious about this address because as an aspiring minister, his future reputation depended on gaining public acceptance, and the theses defended in these orations were of interest to educated people throughout New England.⁵ Additionally, Edwards had decided to address the topic of Arminianism, which was a controversial subject given the historical context of New England. Investigating this context will give further insight into Edwards' religious conversion, especially if he can be seen as a typical young adult trying to define his identity and place in society.

³ Edwards, "Author's Preface," in *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 131.

⁴ George S. Claghorn, "Introduction," in WJE 16: 7. This public oration at commencement was a degree requirement for M.A. students (George G. Levesque, introduction to "Quaestio: Peccator Non Iustificatur Coram Deo Nisi Per Iustitiam Christi Fide Apprehensam," in WJE 14: 47).

⁵ Marsden, 82–83. He refers to Edwards, "Diary," entries for July 29, August 9, and August 24, 1723, in WJE 16: 777–780.

Near the end of the 1600s and early 1700s, New England's colonies were undergoing a "moderate enlightenment" which led the people to become more liberal and ecumenical in their religious beliefs.⁶ Although New England clergy were still technically required to affirm the Westminster and Savoy Confessions,⁷ "Arminian" (i.e., non-Calvinist) views were growing in Massachusetts among both laity, clergy, and students at Harvard.⁸ The Calvinist doctrine of God's total sovereignty, contra Arminianism, was seen by many Puritans to be of the utmost significance, for,

if Calvinist orthodoxy collapsed in New England, they were convinced, so would vital piety and so would strict morality. . . . In short, the future of their civilization and the light it might provide for the world depended on maintaining the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. . . . One had only to look to the English homeland, riddled with fashionable heresy and lax morals. This was nothing new. From the beginning of New World settlements, New Englanders had defined themselves against Anglicanism, Arminianism, and moral laxity. Since the Restoration of 1660, at least, English elite culture was, as the heirs to Puritanism viewed it, driven by fashion and degeneracy. Fashion controlled not only styles and manners; it also shaped belief. Arminianism was a beguiling first step.⁹

A brief history of the movement that came to be called Puritanism is useful to explain how this situation in New England arose.

Historically, the Church of England became more Calvinistic under the influence of Thomas Cranmer, who was appointed Primate of the English church in 1533 by Henry VIII. Cranmer was

⁶ McClymond and McDermott, 49–51. Some suggested reasons for this 'enlightenment' are: increasing trade, the presence of English literature in New England, the English laws of toleration (49), as well as Yale and Harvard beginning to train more than just clergy and making new English books available to their students (51).

⁷ McClymond and McDermott, 58. Adherence to the Westminster Confession was not based on political compulsion but was because Puritans saw it as a great achievement and chose to adopt it, although they modified the portions on church governance to allow for a congregational model (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 48). This standard was then upheld by local ministerial associations (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 71). It should be noted that the Westminster Confession endorses infralapsarian predestination (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 49–50), as did Francis Turretin, a Genevan theologian whose work became a standard reference for many later Puritans including Edwards, although some Puritans held to supralapsarianism (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 52).

⁸ Marsden, 140, 433; C. C. Goen "The Arminian Threat," in WJE 4: 6–8; Gerald J. Goodwin, "The Myth of 'Arminian-Calvinism' in Eighteenth-Century New England," *New England Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (June 1968): 225.

⁹ Marsden, 138.

sympathetic to Lutheran and Reformed theology, and invited continental Protestant theologians to England to teach in universities and advise the English bishops.¹⁰ When Queen Mary came into power she endorsed Catholicism and persecuted Protestants. Many Protestants fled to Europe, until Elizabeth I was crowned in 1558, and the English church became Protestant once again, while retaining some Catholic elements.

Groups emerged within the Church of England who were unsatisfied with this compromise, and desired for the church to become more fully Protestant in the areas of vestments, ceremonies, and disciplinary issues.¹¹ In general, these groups—some of whom by the 1560s were pejoratively dubbed “puritans”—also tended to put stronger emphasis on the doctrine of predestination than did those members of the Church of England who conformed to Elizabeth’s new standards but remained Calvinist in their theology.¹² English Protestants returning from exile in Europe tended to take the Puritan side, and produced literature arguing for the importance of predestination, wanting to see it taught more strongly in the Church of England out of fear of the growing presence of “papists” and other “counterfeit professors.”¹³ Some even asserted that “predestination ‘should and ought to be preached in every sermon, and in every place, before all congregations, as the only doctrine of salvation’ and that those who believed it but did not everywhere preach it were as much enemies of God as those who denied it.”¹⁴ The reason for such a claim goes back to the Reformation, when

Luther and Calvin charged that the Roman Church had replaced tradition for Scripture as final authority, and that the result was an unbiblical doctrine of justification. Because justification was allegedly the heart of salvation, it was the doctrine, as Luther put it, by which the church stands or falls. The church would stand as apostolic and Christian if it

¹⁰ Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 15; Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 7.

¹¹ Wallace, 36; Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590–1640* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 8; Bremer, 9–11.

¹² Wallace, 37.

¹³ Such as “Anabaptists, libertines, Pelagians, Arians, and the ‘Familie of Love’” (Wallace, 37–41, quote from 41) as well as Arminians (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 33–34).

¹⁴ Wallace, 42.

taught justification as the Bible teaches it, and it would fall like the house built on sand if it taught an unbiblical view of faith and works. According to the Reformers, Rome was teaching the latter, that human beings are justified by faith and works, rather than by faith alone—*sola fidei*.¹⁵

Along with justification by faith alone, the Reformers insisted that righteousness was imputed, and that salvation did not depend on human merit but only on God's grace.¹⁶ As a result,

predestination in Protestant anti-Roman Polemic was therefore used emphatically to assert *sola gratia* and often appeared along with the assertion that the will was in total bondage to sin, without freedom to choose the good, prior to grace. If anyone was to be saved, it must be through the grace of God irresistibly and effectually calling those whom God had predestined to life. Not otherwise can the grace of God in salvation be truly vindicated against Roman "works-righteousness." Specifically, then, Protestant polemicists declared that man has no free will to choose the good, and that predestination can in no manner depend upon foreseen merit.¹⁷

In general, Puritans and other Calvinists "agreed that unconditional election meant that salvation was by grace alone, apart from any human merit, and this was taken to be cause for thanksgiving to God as well as for humility before God."¹⁸ Gradually, predestination came to be seen as the "keystone" of Reformed Protestant scholasticism, and was linked to the doctrines of providence, soteriology, and the divine attributes themselves.¹⁹ A prime example of this theology can be found in the works of the English scholastic theologian William Perkins.

For Perkins, all of the works of God fell either under his decrees or the execution of his decrees, a distinction derived from Beza, with every topic related to predestination. Thus the work of Christ is one of the means of predestination, creation and the fall are considered means of accomplishing predestination, the church is defined as the body of the predestined, and the efficient cause of the church is identified as predestination.²⁰

¹⁵ McDermott, "Was Jonathan Edwards an Evangelical?" in Barshinger and Sweeney, 234.

¹⁶ Wallace, 63.

¹⁷ Wallace, 64.

¹⁸ Wallace, 46. Wallace says "the anti-Arminians. . . interpreted Arminianism as the assertion of salvation by human merit and therefore as the total overthrow of the Reformation gospel. Salvation by merit, of course, made Arminianism in their view no different from the religion of Rome" (Wallace, 99–100).

¹⁹ Wallace, 58–59.

²⁰ Wallace, 59–60.

As these scholastic Reformed theological systems grew, it became increasingly important to defend several logical consequences of the doctrine of predestination as parts of a consistent system, including the decree of reprobation, limited atonement, and perseverance of the elect. In particular, it became critical to uphold reprobation against both Catholic and Arminian opponents who questioned it.²¹ It should be noted that English Arminianism was not directly linked to Arminius or the Dutch Remonstrants; they were called Arminians because they similarly questioned Calvinism.²²

Despite this controversy, the initial debate within the English church from which Puritanism came was not about predestination. It began when some ministers became opposed to some of the more liturgical elements of Elizabeth's instructions for the English Church. In turn, the church attempted to discipline non-conforming ministers, who responded by publicly criticizing the church and the government.²³ When Elizabeth died and James I (VI) became king, the situation became more serious for the Puritans because Arminianism was spreading in England, both in the universities and among church officials.²⁴ Despite his initial opposition to Arminianism,²⁵ King James eventually sided with the Arminians.²⁶ As a result, "the Arminian position became favored by church and monarch and was assaulted by predestinarians, who increasingly saw themselves as dissenters in the Church of England."²⁷ The Arminians appealed

²¹ Wallace, 60. Double predestination was affirmed in the Lambeth Articles drafted in 1595, but these did not take a clear position on the supralapsarianism vs. infralapsarianism debate (Tyacke, 30–31).

²² Wallace, 79, 106. However, there may be a direct link between some English Baptists and the Dutch Arminians, after some Puritans became Baptists during their time in the Netherlands during James I's rule (Wallace, 107). Arminius' theology will be discussed in greater detail in section 5.4.

²³ John Craig, "The Growth of English Puritanism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 38–40.

²⁴ Wallace, 83. Tyacke spends two chapters discussing in detail the debate between Arminians and Calvinists at Cambridge and Oxford universities.

²⁵ Wallace, 82.

²⁶ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 40–41; Bremer, 16.

²⁷ Wallace, 84. Arminianism was more popular with 'high-church' Anglicans who believed that Calvinism undermined the need for the sacraments or a church hierarchy (Wallace, 98–99; Thuesen, *Predestination*, 42–43; Tyacke, 246).

to the king and urged him to forbid discussion of predestination and similar issues, which he did in 1622.²⁸ In turn, the Puritans and Calvinists argued that “to forbid its discussion was to forbid discussion of the gospel and was thereby an assault upon the heart of the Christian faith and the Protestant character of the Church of England.”²⁹

William Laud was an Arminian who argued that Calvinistic predestination implied that God was “the most unreasonable tyrant in the world.”³⁰ After Laud was chosen as the archbishop of Canterbury in 1633 his policies tended to “alienate, shock, and anger Puritans”; he insisted that they use the Book of Common Prayer exactly as written, wear the required vestments, perform the liturgy exactly as specified, and make a number of other modifications that were seen by Puritans as being too Catholic.³¹ Additionally, “the Laudian Arminians began to reject the Protestant understanding of grace as forensic and to substitute for that conception formulas that spoke of grace more as quality or substance to be infused into the individual in the sacramental life of the church.”³² The Laudians also tended to minimize the differences between Anglicans and Catholics, and refused to call the Pope the “Antichrist.”³³ As expected, the Puritans and other Calvinists believed that Arminianism and the Anglican church were effectively repudiating the core beliefs of the Reformation and the gospel itself.³⁴

Because of this, some ministers disobeyed the Church’s instructions and suffered the loss of their preaching licenses. Others fled to the Netherlands or to New England along with Puritan laity

²⁸ Wallace, 90; Thuesen, *Predestination*, 42; Tyacke, 102. This prohibition against discussing predestination was repeated in 1626 and 1628 by Charles I (Tom Webster, “Early Stuart Puritanism,” in Coffey and Lim, 56).

²⁹ Wallace, 91.

³⁰ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 43.

³¹ Webster, 56–57, quote from 56.

³² Wallace, 99.

³³ Wallace, 99–100.

³⁴ Wallace, 101–102. At worst, some feared that the English Arminians were returning to an approach that was very similar to the old Catholicism which had earlier persecuted Protestants both in England and in Europe (Wallace, 104). More on the claims that Arminianism was a “Popish plot” are documented in Tyacke, 227–228, 243–244.

who wanted to escape persecution and practice their religion as they saw fit.³⁵ In particular, “the men and women who came to Massachusetts during the 1630s hoped to do more than merely escape from the threat of Laudian persecution: they wished to strike a blow for the true faith by the erection of a model Christian community.”³⁶ By the 1640s and 1650s they had largely succeeded, and had set up several biblical Commonwealths.³⁷ In 1660, after England’s civil war ended and the monarchy was restored, Anglicanism was likewise restored and many Presbyterians, Baptists, and other non-Anglicans who lost their positions left for New England.³⁸

In sum, by Edwards’ time, when Puritans thought of the Anglican church it brought to mind both the theological threat of Arminianism and the political threat of government persecution.³⁹ It was feared that “if Anglicans became strong in New England, it was not hard to imagine the day when the colonies would be brought into conformity with the mother country, with an Anglican episcopal establishment.”⁴⁰

5.2 The Yale Apostasy

Edwards believed that he had a special calling to “an important intellectual role in the spiritual combat” between Calvinism and Arminianism, and he saw his M.A. oration as his “first foray” into the “battle for the truth.”⁴¹ This reflects Edwards’ view of the world as an arena of combat

³⁵ Webster, 58; Wallace, 101; Bremer, 32–33, 37–40. Bremer says “for whatever individual reasons, some 21,000 Englishmen moved to the Puritan colonies in the decade of the 1630s. Most—judged by their stated reasons, by their choice of New England in preference to more economically desirable destinations, and by their conduct following their arrival—seem to have been motivated to some extent by religious concerns” (Bremer, 39). Those dissenters who stayed in England tried to find a compromise, or else wrote and offered other forms of support to the laity by alternative means (Webster, 59–60).

³⁶ Bremer, 57.

³⁷ Bremer, 89, 124.

³⁸ Bremer, 126.

³⁹ Marsden, 83–84, 86–87.

⁴⁰ Marsden, 86.

⁴¹ Marsden, 90–91. These terms in quotation marks are Marsden’s, although he bases them on the theme of struggle between Protestants and Catholics found in Edwards’ interpretations of certain passages in the book of Revelation chapters 14 and 16, as found in Edwards, “Notes on the Apocalypse,” in WJE 5: 113–118.

between good and evil, although God would eventually triumph.⁴² Apocalyptic themes were present, as Edwards (like other Puritan leaders) identified the Church of Rome as the Antichrist.⁴³ Additionally, although they were Protestant, Anglicans were considered suspect because, as Edwards saw it, if one accepted Anglican traditions as authoritative and valid, then one would also have to accept the traditions of the Catholic church, and so Anglicanism was only one small step away from Catholicism.⁴⁴

Thus, to Edwards, refuting Arminianism was an important part of defending New England from immorality, impiety, and even the Antichrist. Edwards took his calling very seriously, as seen in the opening lines of his oration:

The task which concerns us today is of the very highest importance, although of the least difficulty, that is, to defend the truth of the Reformed religion to Protestants and of the Christian religion to Christians. Nor do we consider it to be a slight glory to guard that which is assuredly central, both always for the first Christians and for those more recent who everywhere profess the purity of Reformed Christianity, all of whom agree that the highest glory of the gospel and the delight of the Scriptures is this very doctrine of justification through the righteousness of Christ obtained by faith.⁴⁵

This was an especially significant topic because the year before, Timothy Cutler, a respectable rector of Yale College, had used the commencement address to declare his commitment to Anglicanism by ending a prayer with the words “and let all the people say, amen,” a phrase from

⁴² Marsden, 137.

⁴³ Marsden, 88–90; Bremer, 34–35. See Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 340 in WJE 13: 414–415 where he compares the Pope to the Antichrist.

⁴⁴ Marsden, 91, citing Edwards, “Miscellanies,” nos. 12 and 13 in WJE 13: 206–207. Other New England clergy seem to have suspected likewise (Francis Albert Christie, “The Beginnings of Arminianism in New England,” *American Society for Church History* 3 [March 1912]: 172). Christie suggests that this same reasoning may have been partly behind Edwards’ later communion controversy, due to Edwards’ desire to avoid church membership practices that were too similar to Anglicanism (Christie, 169).

⁴⁵ Edwards, “A Sinner Is Not Justified in the Sight of God Except Through the Righteousness of Christ Obtained by Faith,” in WJE 14: 60. This is an English translation from the Latin version written by Edwards, titled “Peccator Non Iustificatur Coram Deo Nisi Per Iustitiam Christi Fide Apprehensam.” The WJE editors note that portions of the English translation are taken from Edwards’ “Miscellanies” entries nos. 2, 27b, 36, 41, 44, as well as perhaps nos. s., nn., and oo. available in WJE 13, which Edwards appears to have written first in English and then translated into Latin for his oration (WJE 14: 48, 53). Which scholar completed the English translation is not clearly indicated.

the Anglican prayer book. He revealed he had secretly been reading Anglican works and meeting with a group to discuss the benefits of Episcopal forms of church government.⁴⁶

The news had caused a serious shock to the Puritan community as far away as Boston, who saw this as an “apostasy” which threatened to lead to an increasing Anglican presence in New England.⁴⁷ Yale was specifically a Puritan institution which was renowned for its orthodoxy, and so the fact that a rector from Yale would convert to Anglicanism was disturbing.⁴⁸ “The defection was all the more surprising because Cutler, prior to coming to Yale, was widely regarded as a model defender of Puritan convictions. Moreover, of the seven men who announced their conversion, six were Yale College graduates, and five had taught there in significant capacities.”⁴⁹ Along with Anglicanism, Cutler had embraced Arminianism.⁵⁰ Another

⁴⁶ Marsden, 83–84 and 84n5. He cites Richard Warch, *School of the Prophets: Yale College, 1701–1740* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 96–125. Most relevant pages are Warch, 100 and 103–109.

⁴⁷ Marsden, 83–84. Marsden notes that before the Yale apostasy, “Anglicanism had been technically legal for decades in Connecticut, but no Anglican priest had successfully established a mission in the colony. Cosmopolitan Boston had learned to live with an Anglican presence, but every Connecticut town had resisted this Puritan nemesis. Strenuous efforts by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (the missionary wing of the Church of England) to plant churches in Connecticut found only stony soil” (Marsden, 83).

The first Anglican churches in New England were planted in the early 1720s: “The Rev. James McSparren arrived at Narragansett in 1721 and began immediately to construct Rhode Island’s first Episcopal Church. His congregation would leap to 300 in two years. . . . Boston’s new Christ Church would open its doors for the first time on December 29, 1723, with the fiery Timothy Cutler soon speaking to audiences of well over 400. In 1700, outside of Virginia and Maryland, there were not half a dozen Anglican clergymen in the colonies of North America; by 1724 in New England alone there were eight parishes and an equal number of clerics” (Thomas C. Reeves, “John Checkley and the Emergence of The Episcopal Church in New England,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 34, no. 4 [Dec. 1965]: 354–355).

Warch, 100–102, 117–124 also attributes the increase of Anglicanism in Connecticut to the Yale Apostasy: “At the time of the Cutler Apostasy, there had not been one settled Anglican minister in Connecticut and only a few scattered adherents of the church. When Samuel Johnson (another of the Yale defectors) returned from England in 1723 he became the only Church of England minister in the colony. Twenty years later there were over two thousand communicants and seven priests in the Connecticut [Anglican] Church. All of the ministers had graduated from Yale” (Warch, 124). Bremer states that Samuel Johnson “became the driving force behind New England Anglicanism” (Bremer, 225). Thus, it is noteworthy that Edwards had personally clashed with Johnson when Johnson was a tutor at Yale, perhaps due to religious differences between Edwards’ evangelical background and Johnson’s interest in Anglicanism (Warch, 93–94).

⁴⁸ Marsden, 84, 87.

⁴⁹ Levesque, introduction to Edwards, “Quaestio: Peccator Non Iustificatur Coram Deo Nisi Per Iustitiam Christi Fide Apprehensam,” in WJE 14: 50. See also Warch, 104, 112.

⁵⁰ McClymond and McDermott, 57; Christie, 170.

of the defectors, Samuel Johnson, rejected the label of Arminianism but argued that in the Church of England's teachings "we shall find nothing in them that can be justly interpreted to express the Calvinist doctrine of absolute predestination and reprobation."⁵¹ As a result, it was feared that Cutler and others may have been undermining Calvinist doctrine in those students who would become future clergy.⁵² Yale trustees responded with a declaration that all future rectors, tutors, and trustees would have to subscribe to a Calvinist confession of faith and show their opposition to Arminian doctrine.⁵³

As a result, in 1723, "more than ever, ministers and local residents were prepared to scrutinize every candidate's statement, carefully listening for any hint of heterodoxy. In no small measure, the reputation of Yale, and with it the hopes and fears of the Connecticut colony, were resting on Edwards and his fellow graduates."⁵⁴ Edwards may have feared that they would question his orthodoxy as he had studied under Cutler and read many more controversial books on Anglicanism and Arminianism than had other students.⁵⁵ Thus, it seems that Edwards intended to use his M.A. oration to publicly declare his Calvinist orthodoxy.⁵⁶ This shows that Edwards was concerned about how others saw him; a typical adolescent priority related to finding an approved identity within society,⁵⁷ and living up to external expectations of society or authority figures.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1955), 20.

⁵² Marsden, 86; Warch, 114, 116.

⁵³ Marsden, 87; Wright, 18; Warch, 114. Harvard also insisted that their faculty and tutors uphold Calvinism (Christie, 154–157).

⁵⁴ Levesque, introduction to Edwards, "Quaestio: Peccator Non Iustificatur Coram Deo Nisi Per Iustitiam Christi Fide Apprehensam," in WJE 14: 51.

⁵⁵ Marsden, 87. Yale had recently acquired a donation of books from Jeremiah Dummer which contained a number of contemporary English works including tolerant Anglican authors such as Archbishop John Tillotson, Henry More, and Daniel Whitby (McClymond and McDermott, 51; Marsden, 139; Bombaro, 32). "The Arminian, latitudinarian theology contained therein was far more compatible than Calvinism to the progressive thought of the Enlightenment" (Bremer, 224). See also Morris, *The Young Jonathan Edwards*, 101; Wright, 19–20.

⁵⁶ Marsden, 82–87.

⁵⁷ Conn, 96. In terms of Fowler's faith development, in Stage 3 Synthetic-Conventional faith, teenagers become concerned about "forming a personal myth of the self" and they project this self-image into their hoped-for future roles and interpersonal relationships, while fearing the possibility that they may not be accepted by others (Fowler, 152).

Teenagers are also commonly preoccupied with what their future occupation will be and how they will fit into society.⁵⁹ Edwards wanted a position as a pastor in a town near Yale in order to continue to take advantage of Yale's extensive library, and knew that if he made a good impression at this oration it might open up a job opportunity.⁶⁰ Even though his conversion experience had helped him make peace with the doctrine of predestination one year before the 'apostasy,' Edwards was an insightful and intelligent youth, and these sorts of concerns and social pressures may have already been influencing him years earlier when he was struggling to accept the doctrine of predestination. He likely sensed that if he rejected double predestination he would no longer be accepted as a respectable part of his community. These potentially unconscious or unformulated concerns regarding the importance of adhering to his Puritan community's religious beliefs may have been objectively confirmed by his community's sudden reaction to this 'apostasy.'

Edwards had even more motivation to adhere to his community's faith, for there was a local young Puritan woman named Sarah to whom Edwards was attracted,⁶¹ and who would become his wife four years later. Sarah was "the extravert belle of the little college town," a "vibrant brunette, with erect posture and burnished manners" who "stunned everyone with her beauty and charm, to which before long were added the well-known Hooker and Pierpont skills of sociability."⁶² How highly the young Edwards thought of Sarah can be seen in his description of

⁵⁸ Fowler, 154. Interestingly, Fowler notes that adolescents, while they make their own choices and commitments, often feel that their values and self-images have been chosen for them by influential others in their communities (Fowler, 154). Furthermore, "when God is a significant other in this mix . . . the commitment to God and the correlated self-image can exert a powerful ordering on a youth's identity and values outlook" (Fowler, 154). If so, perhaps Edwards had a sense that who he was and his values were not chosen by himself but were given to him by his community and/or God himself. This possibility resonates well with Edwards' later insistence in *Freedom of the Will* that God determines people's dispositions which influence their choices and wills, and that individuals do not choose their own values or motivations.

⁵⁹ Conn, 96.

⁶⁰ Marsden, 93.

⁶¹ Marsden, 93–94, 99.

⁶² McClendon, *Ethics*, 112. Both Marsden and Harry S. Stout suspect that Edwards had Sarah in mind when he wrote the intro to "Miscellanies," no. 108 in WJE 13: 278.

her in his note “On Sarah Pierpont,” written when he was twenty and she was thirteen.⁶³ She came from a prominent and distinguished Puritan ministerial family in New England, and her father had been the pastor of New Haven’s church before passing away.⁶⁴

It could be suggested that at this point Edwards had not yet found his own personal values and was only following society’s expectations and the status quo.⁶⁵ However, as shown in the previous chapter, Edwards had moved beyond this stage when he was willing to question the deeply-held Puritan belief of predestination. Instead, it appears that Edwards had come through his period of struggles and was willing take a stand based on self-chosen principles.⁶⁶ This is not unusual for young adults who are beginning to make “more or less irreversible decisions for one’s own life and for the welfare of others.”⁶⁷ Edwards’ decision to take a public stand on his religious beliefs and align himself with one side in this significant theological debate, which had so much social weight and potential consequences, is a good example of such a choice. His M.A. oration also shows that Edwards had critically examined his beliefs and was interested in creating and defending systems of propositions.⁶⁸ Therefore, the choices that Edwards made in this pivotal period of his life, which followed shortly after his change of mind on the issue of predestination, are not unexpected or out of place with what many young adults typically experience during this period of their lives.

⁶³ Edwards, “On Sarah Pierpont,” in WJE 16: 789–790; Claghorn, “Introduction,” in WJE 16: 745.

⁶⁴ Marsden, 93.

⁶⁵ This would be Kohlberg’s Stage 4 Conventional moral reasoning, where “good behavior means not only doing one’s duty and respecting authority, but also working to maintain the social order for its own sake” (Conn, 100).

⁶⁶ Edwards would now be at Kohlberg’s Stage 5 Postconventional moral orientation, which makes sense if Edwards was indeed at Kohlberg’s Stage 4 ½ earlier in the previous chapter. In Stage 5, a person makes moral decisions based on “autonomous principles that have validity independent of any external authority.” They have become their own moral authority and are no longer blindly following society’s values (Conn, 106–107).

Coming into a new stage of moral reasoning may be why Edwards began feeling uncomfortable with Solomon Stoddard’s practices regarding communion and church membership, even though Stoddard was a powerful religious authority figure, and the community endorsed Stoddard’s practices (Marsden, 345, 348–352, 370–374). See also David D. Hall, “Moving Toward a Change of Mind,” in WJE 12: 51–62.

⁶⁷ Conn, 106. This would match with Fowler’s Stage 4 Individuative-Reflective faith (Fowler, 182).

⁶⁸ This is again a feature of Stage 4 faith (Fowler, 180–183, 186–187).

In conclusion, if Edwards wanted to pursue an occupation as a Puritan pastor and to remain in good standing with Yale and the Puritan community around him (including his family and potential wife), Edwards needed to accept and defend the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Evidence that this was the case can be found by examining the Robert Breck affair, which reveals that in this society even *questioning* predestination was enough to put a person's ordination at risk. This indicates that Edwards' future goals were seemingly dependent upon reconciling himself with the Calvinist doctrine of God's sovereignty.

5.3 The Breck Affair and Edwards' Fears of Arminianism

In 1733–1734 there was a major theological controversy in New England over the ordination of Robert Breck.⁶⁹ Breck was a graduate of Harvard, and was called to preach as a candidate for ministry in Windham, Connecticut. There, several of his sermons supposedly “contained statements that ran contrary to the Westminster Confession,” including that “persons who followed the ‘Light of Nature’ could be saved with or without faith, that certain passages of Scripture were corrupt, and that predestination gave ‘no Encouragement to Duty’.”⁷⁰ He was interviewed by another pastor in the same town who determined that Breck had “Arminian” views, and this pastor announced that he would prevent Breck from being ordained. Breck then moved to Springfield, Massachusetts and preached there in a vacant pulpit. When the congregation wanted to hire him as their pastor, several powerful conservative men became alarmed and rallied against him. These included Edwards' uncle by marriage, William Williams, who was the leader of an influential New England family. He mobilized and led a group of ministers who took it upon themselves to guard the theological purity of the clergy in the region.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Hall notes that a variety of written accounts of this event exist, and he lists them in “The Robert Breck Affair,” in WJE 12: 4n9. He also provides his own account in WJE 12: 4–17. It is likely this event which Edwards refers to when he wrote in the fall of 1734: “about that time began the great noise that there was in this part of the country about Arminianism” which led the common people in many surrounding towns to begin “inquiring, with concern and engagedness of mind, what was the way of salvation, and what were the terms of our acceptance with God” (Edwards, “A Faithful Narrative,” in WJE 4: 100; Wright, 9).

⁷⁰ Hall, “The Robert Breck Affair,” in WJE 12: 6.

⁷¹ Marsden, 176; Hall, “The Robert Breck Affair,” in WJE 12: 8; McClymond and McDermott, 57.

Among other accusations, the major issue with Breck was that he

had taught that it was ridiculous to say God would damn the heathen who had never heard of Christ. God, Breck had allegedly said, would hold people responsible only for that which was in their power to do. Breck reportedly had quoted one of the more liberal English authors, Thomas Chubb, in saying a person might be saved out of love of virtue itself, even without any faith or knowledge of Christ. As was customary, Breck's opponents were using "Arminian" in the broad sense of almost any anti-Calvinistic teaching.⁷²

Edwards claims that Breck had also said "faith in Christ was not in its own nature necessary to salvation; and that all that was necessary . . . was that men should forsake sin and lead moral lives."⁷³

Breck replied that he was not an Arminian, claimed to affirm the Westminster Confession, and argued that these views were just his speculations and not settled teachings.⁷⁴ He managed to obtain several certificates of his orthodoxy from his father's powerful friends.⁷⁵ This turned the issue into a political debate over the power of different associations of clergy, who were all trying to exert their influence over forms of church government and appointing pastors. Some supported Breck while others opposed his ordination. To settle the issue, an ordination council was convened, composed of eight clergymen drawn from the region, some of whom made long journeys to attend.⁷⁶ They met and heard evidence, but the meeting was interrupted when Breck

⁷² Marsden, 177. Some of Breck's claims are recorded in Edwards, "A Letter to the Author of the Pamphlet Called An Answer to the Hampshire Narrative," in WJE 12: 157–159.

⁷³ Edwards, "A Letter to the Author of the Pamphlet Called An Answer to the Hampshire Narrative," in WJE 12: 159.

⁷⁴ Marsden, 177; Hall, "The Robert Breck Affair," in WJE 12: 7.

⁷⁵ Marsden, 178–179.

⁷⁶ Marsden, 179. Hall notes that this issue may also have raised interest across the region because it touched on a larger controversy between ministers who wanted to uphold "freedom of conscience" and others who wanted to force ministers to adhere to the Westminster confession, which may be seen as a "local echo of disputes in the early eighteenth century among Nonconformist ministers in England and Presbyterians in Scotland and Ulster" (Hall, WJE 12: 14). Hall writes that "hindsight tells us that the faction speaking on behalf of liberty of conscience, or the right of private judgment, was beginning to break with the doctrines of high Calvinism" (WJE 12: 15). In contrast, Breck's opposers believed that "the greater danger lay not in 'persecution' of dissent, but in allowing false opinions to corrupt the household of God" (WJE 12: 15).

was arrested by the sheriff on the orders of Colonel John Stoddard and a few other judges.⁷⁷ “In the Breck case Stoddard had stretched his authority as the most powerful judge of the region in turning the defense of orthodoxy into a legal issue.”⁷⁸ Breck was charged with “violating a Massachusetts statute against atheism and blasphemy.”⁷⁹ Breck’s confession of faith was read publicly before the people at his legal hearing, and although the case was ultimately thrown out and Breck was ordained, the issue “was a colony-wide sensation” which made it into the newspapers.⁸⁰ This incident reveals how closely theology was tied to politics and to the justice system in New England during Edwards’ lifetime.

Edwards exerted his own influence in attempting to oppose Breck, since “for Edwards, Breck embodied the rise of Arminianism in Hampshire County that threatened further revivals—not to mention Calvinist orthodoxy.”⁸¹ To this end, “he co-signed a series of Hampshire Association communications from August 1735 supporting Breck’s opposers within the Springfield church,” co-authored a “printed defense of the Hampshire County ministers’ opposition” in 1736,⁸² and wrote a longer letter in 1737, again trying to defend Breck’s opposers.⁸³ This controversy also prompted Edwards to preach his sermon “Justification by Faith Alone” (1734),⁸⁴ which was “an expansion of one of a series of anti-Arminian sermons that were instrumental in sparking off the

⁷⁷ Marsden, 179. Stoddard was Edwards’ uncle, and a theologian himself; “Jonathan found him ‘no inconsiderable divine,’ as able as the best divines he knew” (Marsden, 344).

⁷⁸ Marsden, 344. That a theological disagreement could become a legal issue was not unusual for the time, since “the men who founded Massachusetts Bay and her sister colonies . . . believed that there was one true faith, one true way to worship according to God’s wishes, and that it was possible to determine what that path of truth was. As a result, they felt it to be the duty of the magistrates to punish open expressions of heresy” (Bremer, 93). Most European countries also believed the state had the right to restrain heresy for the good of society (Bremer, 94).

⁷⁹ Marsden, 179.

⁸⁰ Marsden, 180.

⁸¹ Claghorn, “Introduction,” in WJE 16: 9.

⁸² Claghorn, “Introduction,” in WJE 16: 9; Marsden, 180.

⁸³ Edwards, “A Letter to the Author of the Pamphlet Called An Answer to the Hampshire Narrative,” in WJE 12: 93–163.

⁸⁴ Marsden, 177. Edwards says that this sermon seems to have reassured his hearers on the issue they were highly concerned about (Edwards, “A Faithful Narrative,” in WJE 4: 116).

first revival that Edwards witnessed at Northampton.”⁸⁵ As a result, “during the Great Awakening most evangelicals followed his lead in rejecting pre-Awakening ideas of conversion as based in varying degrees on Arminian presuppositions.”⁸⁶

After the revivals in 1734–1735, however, Edwards noticed that people in his congregation were beginning to ‘backslide.’ He believed that the growth of Arminianism in western Massachusetts was causing the revival spirit and general interest in religion to decline.⁸⁷ “The mood Edwards perceived from his congregations communicated to him that not only was Christianity’s role being marginalized in the spheres of business, politics and society, but his role too. Christianity’s pervasiveness was, little by little, vanishing from all aspects of daily life.”⁸⁸

Edwards lamented the problems of false religion and hypocrites within Christianity in the introduction to *Religious Affections* (1746). Here, he specifically focused on revivals, saying that Satan “brings in, even the friends of religion, insensibly to themselves, to do the work of enemies, by destroying religion, in a far more effectual manner, than open enemies can do, under a notion of advancing it,” leading the average Christian to become unsettled and confused, and culminating in doubts, heresy, and even atheism.⁸⁹ He would likely apply the above criticism to Arminianism also, given its history and expression in New England.

5.4 Arminianism in New England

Arminianism takes its name from Reformed pastor and university professor James Arminius, who lived in the Netherlands during the late 1500s and early 1600s. He had come to reject both supralapsarian and infralapsarian predestination, and instead argued that predestination was based on God’s foreknowledge of an individual’s faith. This was in order to avoid suggesting

⁸⁵ Holmes, 159.

⁸⁶ Goen, “The Arminian Threat,” in WJE 4: 5–6.

⁸⁷ Claghorn, “Introduction,” in WJE 16: 9; Marsden, 438.

⁸⁸ Bombaro, 270–271.

⁸⁹ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 88–89.

that God is the author of sin, to encourage evangelism, and to uphold the usefulness of prayer.⁹⁰

Originally, Arminians differed from Calvinists on a number of issues:

while still asserting the inability of man to exercise saving faith or do anything really good without regeneration by the Holy Spirit, or without prevenient grace, the early Arminians nevertheless taught that the divine decrees were conditional, or dependent on God's foreknowledge of the faith in believers, and that Christ's atonement made possible, although not actual, the salvation of everyone. Grace, they believed, was indispensable at every moment in the life of believers, but it was not irresistible. Grace, they were confident, would prove sufficient for continual victory over temptation; but they refused to express this confidence by the "necessary" perseverance of the saints. As irresistibility was the distinguishing mark of Calvinism, so was conditionalism of Arminianism.⁹¹

Arminianism had been rejected by the Synod of Dort in 1618–1619 in the Netherlands. In England, King James initially “approved the use of ‘all legal means to put down the Arminians,’ comparing them to ‘the Pelagians of old.’”⁹² As will be shown shortly, the eighteenth-century “Arminians” tended to depart from Arminius’ position and instead taught a gospel very similar to the fifth-century Pelagians. The Puritan desire to uphold predestination as a defense of salvation by God’s grace alone was likewise similar to Augustine’s ancient response to the Pelagians. It is thus worth examining this ancient debate in order to understand the historical precedent for why Puritans such as Edwards found Arminianism so concerning.

In Rome from about AD 390 to 410, Pelagius, a lay ascetic from Britain,⁹³ taught that it was humanly possible to be perfect, and therefore God demanded perfection; anyone who failed to

⁹⁰ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 38. Arminius’s writings against a Calvinistic view of predestination can be found in his “Declaration of the Sentiments of James Arminius,” in *Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will, and the Nature of God*, ed. John D. Wagner (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011). In this document, Arminius rejects the idea that predestination is the heart of the gospel, and argues it was never a critical part of the early church’s beliefs (35–40). He criticizes double predestination for being against God’s nature of goodness, justice, and wisdom (40–41), and for destroying the biblical doctrine of God’s resistible grace (45). He also argues that double predestination makes God a sinner who irresistibly moves people to sin (46–47), among other problems. Other Arminians also believed that Calvinism tarnished God’s love for all people, and was fatalistic (Wallace, 92).

⁹¹ Paul Ramsey, “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE 1: 2–3.

⁹² Wallace, 82. Others also labelled Arminians as either Pelagians or Catholics (Wallace, 85, 144–145, 156–157).

⁹³ James Wetzel, “Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 51; Peter Brown,

perform what God's law required would be condemned to hell.⁹⁴ Pelagius rejected the idea that humans were afflicted with original sin which made them unable to avoid sinning.⁹⁵ Instead, he argued that people have free will to determine their own actions because God holds them responsible for their sins.⁹⁶ He claimed that because baptism freed people to live without sin, Christians were prevented from attaining perfect holiness only due to "the weight of past habits" and "the corruption of society."⁹⁷ Any sin post-baptism thus had to be paid for by penance and obedience.⁹⁸ To Pelagius, God's grace to humanity only consisted of free will, the moral law, and Christ's example.⁹⁹ Unsurprisingly, Pelagius denied predestination, perhaps because he believed it to be a denial of human freedom.¹⁰⁰

Augustine became aware of the opinions of Pelagius' followers and coined the name "Pelagianism" for what he believed was a serious theological error.¹⁰¹ Against Pelagianism, Augustine asserted that people commit accidental sins out of ignorance or weakness because of

"Pelagius and His Supporters: Aims and Environment," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19, no. 1 (April 1968): 98.

⁹⁴ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 342, 347; Brown, "Pelagius and His Supporters," 102–103.

Pelagius may have been reacting against Augustine's teaching that people needed God's grace in order to morally improve, which implied that without this grace, a person was doomed to sin despite their best efforts (Brown, *Augustine*, 343; Thuesen, *Predestination*, 20; Wetzel, 51). Pelagius may also have been influenced by the Stoic philosophy of self-control (Henri Rondet, *The Grace of Christ: A Brief History of the Theology of Grace*, trans. and ed. Tad W. Guzie [Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1967], 108–109).

⁹⁵ Brown, *Augustine*, 343.

⁹⁶ Brown, *Augustine*, 372–373.

⁹⁷ Brown, *Augustine*, 365; Brown "Pelagius and His Supporters," 104.

⁹⁸ Mark W. Elliott, "Pelagianism," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Ian A. McFarland et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 377.

⁹⁹ Rondet, 114–116.

¹⁰⁰ Rondet, 108–109, 116.

¹⁰¹ Brown, *Augustine*, 345. Brown notes that in Ali Bonner's book *The Myth of Pelagianism* (2018) Bonner argues that "Pelagianism" was invented by Augustine in order to promote Augustine's own theses about original sin, predestination, and the need for God's grace for conversion. However, Brown believes Bonner's claim is overly simplistic (Peter Brown, "The Myth of Pelagianism?" *Peritia* 29 [2018]: 236–239).

an inherited sinful nature, which means that no one can be sinless, not even after baptism.¹⁰² God had to heal the human heart to enable it to love what is good before people could start to live in freedom from sin, and this divine healing depended only on God's sovereign prerogative.¹⁰³ Augustine came to uphold the idea of unconditional predestination, where God chooses to graciously save only some of humanity on the basis of Christ's death.¹⁰⁴ However in so doing, Augustine emphasized God's role in salvation to such an extent that the role for human input was "all but obliterated."¹⁰⁵

Pelagianism was anathematized at the Council of Carthage in AD 418, and was also condemned by Pope Innocent I and Pope Zosimus.¹⁰⁶ However, beginning in the 6th century, semi-Pelagians accepted that salvation required God's grace, but rejected deterministic predestination.¹⁰⁷ They argued that human free will was only impaired by original sin, such that a person could take the first step of faith, after which God's grace would provide the necessary assistance. Therefore, those who did not have faith were entirely to blame for their own damnation.¹⁰⁸ Thus, semi-Pelagians affirmed that "God desires the salvation of all men, and he offers his grace to all. It is up to man to choose freely, and it is man who entirely determines his own destiny. Predestination amounts simply to foreknowledge, for there is no divine preference."¹⁰⁹

Augustine also rejected this view because he believed that if God chose to save people based on

¹⁰² Brown, *Augustine*, 350, 363, 365–367. This meant that Augustine became a defender of Christianity for the average person who still struggled with sin, contra Pelagius who wanted to make Christianity an exclusive community for elite ascetics. Thus, the debate may be perceived as an echo of the earlier Donatist controversy where Augustine also favoured the average Christians over the elitists (Brown, "The Myth of Pelagianism?" 235–236; Brown, "Pelagius and his Supporters," 112–113).

¹⁰³ Brown, *Augustine*, 373.

¹⁰⁴ Rondet, 132, 140; Thuesen, *Predestination*, 20–22.

¹⁰⁵ Wetzel, 49.

¹⁰⁶ Rondet, 107; Wetzel, 51; Brown, "Pelagius and His Supporters," 99.

¹⁰⁷ Rondet, 123, 145–146; Thuesen, *Predestination*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 22.

¹⁰⁹ Rondet, 146–147.

God's foreknowledge of their future obedience, then it would be essentially salvation by works, which was rejected by the Apostle Paul.¹¹⁰ Instead, Augustine interpreted Romans 9 as meaning that God chose Jacob over Esau for God's own gracious, but unknowable, reasons.¹¹¹ The Second Council of Orange in AD 529 affirmed Augustine's position, but did not explicitly endorse double predestination.¹¹² This council's primary concern seem to have been to affirm two main theses: 1) that people cannot merit God's salvific grace (out of fear that such merit would mean that people would deserve praise for their own salvation), and 2) that people cannot be the cause of their own salvation.¹¹³

Augustine's position was adopted by major Christian thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin.¹¹⁴ In contrast, the early Arminians, like the semi-Pelagians, taught that election was based on God's foreknowledge of faith.¹¹⁵ Yet to the Arminians' Reformed opponents, "the idea that any future human action could be the cause of God's decision was anathema" because the Reformed theologians "considered it a grave affront to absolute divine sovereignty."¹¹⁶

Beginning early in the English Reformation there was an unofficial lay tradition of "freewillers" and Anabaptists in England who rejected the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination because they believed it was "unscriptural and a violation of common sense," and they debated with those who upheld predestination.¹¹⁷ In the 1650s during Oliver Cromwell's rule, the Anglican Arminians

¹¹⁰ Wetzel, 53; Thuesen, *Predestination*, 19.

¹¹¹ Wetzel, 53.

¹¹² Thuesen, *Predestination*, 22–23.

¹¹³ Taylor W. Cyr and Matthew T. Flummer, "Free Will, Grace, and Anti-Pelagianism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 83 (2018): 184–188. See also Rondet, 158–159.

¹¹⁴ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 24–31.

¹¹⁵ Wallace, 83.

¹¹⁶ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 39.

¹¹⁷ Wallace, 20–21, 79.

lost power when the pro-Calvinist Long Parliament created the Westminster Confession, which affirmed a moderate Calvinist view of predestination.¹¹⁸ Yet Arminianism persisted among some polemical Anglicans, and also in tolerant groups such as the Cambridge Platonists and Quakers.¹¹⁹ Arminianism also endured in groups who later became General Baptists. For example, John Smith (sometimes spelled Smyth) denied original sin and reprobation and argued that predestination only means that God chooses to save those who believe in Christ; God's grace is given to all so that all people can repent and believe if they so choose.¹²⁰ After 1660 and the Restoration, many Anglican clergy returned to Arminian and increasingly moralistic perspectives, leading to further debates with dissenting Calvinist theologians.¹²¹

In an echo of Pelagius' concerns, a significant reason behind the English Arminian opposition to predestination was the fear that the Calvinist teaching of unconditional election and perseverance of the saints led Christians to feel safe in their eternal salvation regardless of how immoral their behavior was.¹²² Instead, Anglican Arminians asserted that salvation depended on free human repentance and obedience, and taught that people could fall away from grace.¹²³ This position was in reaction to some extreme Calvinists who had become antinomians out of fear that more-moderate Calvinists such as Richard Baxter were putting too much emphasis on personal holiness as necessary for salvation, which the antinomians perceived as being too close to Arminianism. Following Luther, the antinomians argued that all sins of an elect individual are covered by grace, and so to rely on or require personal holiness for salvation detracts from grace.¹²⁴ The antinomian position may have grown popular because

¹¹⁸ Wallace, 105–106.

¹¹⁹ Wallace, 129, 132. Wallace lists Anglicans such as Henry Hammond, Herbert Thorndike, Thomas Pierce, Jeremy Taylor, and George Bull (Wallace, 122–127). They made the usual Arminian objections that Calvinists portrayed God as casting innocent babies into hell, and that Calvinism made God the author of sin (Wallace, 123).

¹²⁰ Wallace, 106–107.

¹²¹ Wallace, 159–162, 175–176.

¹²² Wallace, 120–129.

¹²³ Wallace, 124–127.

¹²⁴ Wallace, 114–119, 133–144.

the doctrines of unconditional election, total depravity and justification by faith alone could lead to an apparently logical deduction that, since I can do nothing to gain salvation, I should not try and, once saved, since my salvation is not dependent on good works, I need not strive to live well, and indeed perhaps should sin boldly so that my forgiveness will testify all the more to the overwhelming grace of God.¹²⁵

As in England, Arminianism in New England was not directly influenced by Jacob Arminius but was called Arminianism because its proponents reacted against Calvinism in a way that was thought to be similar to the Dutch followers of Arminius.¹²⁶ However, the conflict which arose in New England followed the same historical patterns seen in both the Pelagian controversy and the Arminian-antinomian controversies in England.

Antinomianism “was an ever-present danger facing Puritan theology, which had surfaced in a famous controversy in New England” beginning in the mid-1630s regarding the theology of John Cotton, Anne Hutchinson, and John Wheelwright.¹²⁷ Hutchinson had become the leader of a popular study group in Boston, and she objected to John Wilson’s preaching because he emphasized that human actions could prepare a person to receive God’s grace.¹²⁸ She became convinced that “all of the clergy of Massachusetts save Cotton and Wheelwright were preaching not the Covenant of Grace, but a Covenant of Works. They were, in her eyes, placing so great an emphasis on the individual’s good conduct as to imply that such conduct was indispensable to salvation,” making them “no better than Arminians.”¹²⁹ In contrast, Cotton and Hutchinson “taught that conversion comes apart from human activity or use of the means of grace.”¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Holmes, 148. See also Wallace, 114–118.

¹²⁶ Wright, 6. Wright proposes that New England’s Arminians arose organically due to social and intellectual forces within Puritan culture (Wright, 6). Goen believes that Wright’s account is the most plausible attempt at explaining the appearance of Arminians in New England (Goen, “The Arminian Threat,” in WJE 4: 10).

¹²⁷ Holmes, 147–148; William K. B. Stoevers, “*A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven*”: *Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), 25–33; Bremer, 68–69.

¹²⁸ Bremer, 68.

¹²⁹ Bremer, 69.

¹³⁰ Bremer, 68; McClymond and McDermott, 373, citing Emery John Battis, *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of

A local synod was called and Wheelwright, Hutchinson, and several others were banished or disenfranchised by 1638.¹³¹ Perhaps in an attempt to avoid falling into either Arminianism or antinomianism, it became useful for Puritan preachers to emphasize the concept of “preparation” for salvation, and pastors encouraged people to seek salvation through the means of grace.¹³² Additionally, New England’s Puritans believed that God had made a covenant with his elect people, so that if one heard the gospel and accepted it, one was then obliged to strive for holiness.¹³³ These elements of Puritan theology were an attempt to reconcile unconditional predestination with the Bible’s apparently-conditional appeals for people to repent and believe.¹³⁴ But this teaching implicitly highlighted the role of human free choice, as did the emphasis on human participation in the sacraments as necessary for potential conversion.¹³⁵

Over the next century in New England, due to a lack of persecution and a focus on this-worldly concerns, there was a decline in the number of people who could testify to having personal conversion experiences, even though the people were outwardly prosperous and generally moral. Theological compromises to keep parents interested in having their children baptized and attending church only exacerbated the problem.¹³⁶ Thus, “as experiential piety waned, it was

North Carolina Press, 2009) and T. D. Bozeman, *The Precisionist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

¹³¹ Bremer, 71–72. Cotton was not punished because he claimed he had never shared Hutchinson’s beliefs, and he accepted the synod’s definition of orthodoxy (Bremer, 72).

¹³² Wright, 16. By 1640 it had come to be expected that anyone becoming a church member in the colonies of Massachusetts, New Haven, or Connecticut would make a public confession of faith containing a description of the steps of ‘preparation’ which preceded a conversion experience (Bremer, 98–99, 101–102).

¹³³ Wright, 15–17.

¹³⁴ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 54–55.

¹³⁵ Wright, 16–17; Goen, “The Arminian Threat,” in WJE 4: 11.

¹³⁶ Wright, 10–13; Joseph Haroutunian, *Piety Versus Moralism: The Passing of New England Theology* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1964), xx–xxi, 3–7. This would be the “Halfway Covenant” created in 1662 where “following a doctrine of the Federal [Covenant] Theology, according to which the offspring of the regenerate are included in the covenant of grace, the first generation of Puritans in New England presented their children for baptism, the sign and seal of the covenant, fully expecting that when such children reached spiritual maturity they would profess conversion as their parents before them had done. When many members of the second generation found that they could not honestly testify to such an experience, their relationship to the visible church was in considerable doubt. When they began to have children, whom they naturally wanted baptized, the problem became intolerable. After

natural for leaders of the holy commonwealths to stress men's 'natural power' to obey the terms of the external covenant, so that if they did what they could in this respect, possibly God would enable them . . . to believe unto salvation."¹³⁷ This idea, combined with the idea that people could use the sacraments to prepare themselves for "conversion and entrance into the covenant of grace," implied that there was something which people could do to earn God's grace.¹³⁸ Thus, Puritan preachers faced a conundrum. If they emphasized salvation as wholly due to God's grace, as the Reformers had taught, then, like in the antinomian controversy, people might stop trying to avoid sin or to give up striving to live moral lives. "But if this Antinomian argument stressed election and God's grace at the expense of codes of morality, Arminianism emphasized human initiative at the expense of God's sovereignty" by placing emphasis on human free will, by which one could accept or reject God's grace.¹³⁹ As a result, "the doctrine of election was not denied, but the average listener was left with the impression that his salvation was within his own control."¹⁴⁰ In sum, "for at least half a century the whole basis of church life in New England had been shifting imperceptibly to human effort and moral striving, so that quite unawares many orthodox ministers were encouraging a subtle form of salvation by works."¹⁴¹ This situation may have predisposed both clergy and laity to be receptive to Arminianism.

Edwards "first encountered 'apostate clerics' the same way he met Locke and More—through the Dummer Catalogue, which harbored some of the dreaded heresies that were 'plaguing' the

much discussion, a Massachusetts synod in 1662 finally affirmed: Church members who were admitted in minority, understanding the Doctrine of Faith, and publicly professing their assent thereto; not scandalous in life, and solemnly owning the Covenant before the Church, wherein they give up themselves and their Children to the Lord, and subject themselves to the Government of Christ in the Church, their Children are to be baptized" (Goen, "The Arminian Threat," in WJE 4: 12–13). Application of the principle was inconsistent and hotly debated through the 1660s (Bremer, 146–147), but was generally accepted by the majority of churches by 1676 (Bremer, 149). However, the name "Halfway Covenant" was invented by later historians (Bremer, 145).

¹³⁷ Goen, "The Arminian Threat," in WJE 4: 11. See also Bremer, 226.

¹³⁸ Goen, "The Arminian Threat," in WJE 4: 12. Goen notes that even Edwards' grandfather Stoddard may have taught such a doctrine by opening the Lord's Supper to all as a "converting ordinance," and encouraging people to be more active in seeking salvation (WJE 4: 16–17).

¹³⁹ Wright, 15.

¹⁴⁰ Wright, 17.

¹⁴¹ Goen, "The Arminian Threat," in WJE 4: 10.

British Isles. Numbered among the distrusted books were Daniel Whitby's *Discourse on the Five Points* and John Tillotson's *Sermons*. Edwards read these and was scandalized."¹⁴² Primarily, Whitby objected to the idea that God could hold people responsible for Adam's sin and also "for not doing that which it was impossible for us to do," arguing that this is contrary to both common sense and Scripture.¹⁴³ Tillotson questioned whether all sinners deserved the same eternal punishment in hell and asked whether hell would last forever, saying it may only be a threat that God might not follow through on, and argued that God never predestined anyone to such torment without foreseeing the individual's transgressions.¹⁴⁴ He also argued that being a Christian was about following Christ's commandments, which grace made possible, provided that one put in human effort.¹⁴⁵

In 1719 an anonymous pamphlet titled *Choice Dialogues Between a Godly Minister and an Honest Country Man, Concerning Election & Predestination* attacked Calvinism,

charging that its doctrines take away the free will of man, and make God the author of sin. They [the *Dialogues*] admit that redemption comes from God's grace; but by analogy with the cultivation of the soil, man's labor is necessary to remove obstacles which would prevent the sun from producing the harvest. The rigid Calvinistic notions of predestination, the author declared, "are not only most *absurd*, but likewise *blasphemous* against God," and they have the unfortunate result of tormenting the souls of those who believe them.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Bombaro, 32. Whitby's *Discourse on the Five Points* is the shortened title used by Edwards for *A Discourse Concerning I. The True Import of the Words Election and Reprobation; and the Things Signified by Them in the Holy Scripture. II. The Extent of Christ's Redemption. III. The Grace of God; Where It Is Enquired, Whether It Be Vouchsafed Sufficiently to Those Who Improve It Not, and Irresistibly to Those Who Do Not Improve It; and Whether Men Be Wholly Passive in the Work of Their Regeneration? IV. The Liberty of the Will in a State of Trial and Probation. V. The Perseverance or Defectibility of the Saints; with Some Reflections on the State of Heathens, the Providence and Prescience of God* (1710) (Paul Ramsey, "Daniel Whitby," in WJE 1: 82). Samuel Clarke's *Boyle Lectures* (1704–1705) were also available in New England at the time, although these were not commonly cited in sermons until around 1745, after the Great Awakening (Wright, 57).

¹⁴³ Ramsey, "Daniel Whitby," in WJE 1: 84.

¹⁴⁴ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 83–84. Edwards refutes Tillotson in his sermon "The Eternity of Hell Torments," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards With A Memoir by Sereno Dwight*. Vol. 2, ed. Hickman, 83–89, where Tillotson is mentioned by name on page 86.

¹⁴⁵ Wallace, 184.

¹⁴⁶ Wright, 20, emphasis original.

This pamphlet was later attributed to John Checkley, who is noted as being the first American-born person to openly criticize the Puritan doctrine of predestination. His argument was based on Scripture, reason, and the early church fathers.¹⁴⁷

By the 1730s some ministers were complaining that, under the influence of Arminian writings from England, many younger ministers no longer held to the important articles of faith and were defending and preaching Arminianism.¹⁴⁸ This is what led to the Robert Breck affair in 1734. Benjamin Kent and Samuel Osborn were two other ministers who were also questioned at this time about their Arminianism and denial of absolute election.¹⁴⁹ Osborn was dismissed from his position in 1738 for preaching that people “can do that upon the doing of which they shall certainly be saved,” such that people’s obedience “is a cause of their justification.”¹⁵⁰ Edwards complained in 1739 that ever since the Synod of Dort, “Arminianism has gradually more and more prevailed, till they [Anglicans] are become almost universally Arminians; and not only so, but Arminianism has greatly prevailed among the Dissenters, and has spread greatly in New England as well as Old.”¹⁵¹

By the 1740s the Enlightenment emphasis on reason had bolstered the case for Arminianism, which as a result became more popular in New England. Even formerly Puritan pastors came to promote Arminianism through sermons and pamphlets, and other theologically liberal and even outright heretical ideas were becoming commonplace.¹⁵² A significant example can be found in

¹⁴⁷ Reeves, “John Checkley and the Emergence of The Episcopal Church in New England,” 350. Checkley was born in 1680 to an established Puritan family, but became an Anglican in 1710 after attending Oxford and travelling in Europe (Reeves, 350).

¹⁴⁸ Wright, 21.

¹⁴⁹ Wright, 22–23; Christie, 153, 160–165.

¹⁵⁰ Wright, 25.

¹⁵¹ Edwards, “Sermon Twenty-Four,” in WJE 9: 432.

¹⁵² Marsden, 433–434. “The Enlightenment, often dated from the publication of Isaac Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* in 1686 and John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises on Government* three years later, represented in its essence a challenge to the traditional reliance upon authority in religious and secular life, and carried an assertion of man’s ability to discover the secrets of the universe and exert some control over his destiny. Pushed to its logical extreme, the Enlightenment would later become a philosophical

Lemuel Briant's sermon "The Absurdity and Blasphemy of Depretiating Moral Virtue" (1749), where he argued that Christianity "contains the most refined system of morality the world was ever blessed with; which every where considers us as moral agents, and suspends our whole happiness upon our personal good behavior."¹⁵³

In this sermon he also argued that the belief that certain individual people are chosen for eternal life regardless of how wickedly they act, while others are not so chosen regardless of how much they pray or try, destroys all "moral agency" and leads people to "vilify human nature itself."¹⁵⁴ Briant worried that trusting in Christ's imputed righteousness led people to not care about being personally righteous, for "either our righteousness is of some use and significancy in the affair of our salvation, or it is not. . . . If the latter, then there is not one word to be said in favor of it [in Scripture], but the greatest advocates for licentiousness may be the best friends to Christianity, and the most vicious the highest in the grace of God."¹⁵⁵ Against those who use Isaiah 64:6 to claim that even the best human works are comparable to "filthy rags" he replied, "no passage perhaps in the whole Book of God has been more shamefully perverted" to discourage Christian morality, and claimed such an interpretation lays a "fatal snare" for people's souls.¹⁵⁶ Instead, he argued that Jesus' life gave humanity an example to emulate, that Jesus' whole doctrine is summed up by the Sermon on the Mount,¹⁵⁷ and that people will be judged according to their works for eternal rewards.¹⁵⁸ Briant's ideas caused such an uproar that a local council was called

movement totally antithetical to the Calvinist world view that lay at the core of New England Puritanism" (Bremer, 223).

¹⁵³ Lemuel Briant, *The Absurdity and Blasphemy of Depretiating Moral Virtue: A Sermon Preached at the West-Church in Boston, June 18th 1747* [Boston: J. Green for D. Gookin, 1749], 7; McClymond and McDermott, 58, 54.

¹⁵⁴ Briant, 7.

¹⁵⁵ Briant, 8, 24–26, quote from 26.

¹⁵⁶ Briant, 9. From the biblical context, Briant argued that Isaiah was commenting on the general immorality of the people of Israel at his time (Briant, 10–15), and Briant noted that nowhere else in Scripture is personal righteousness demeaned (Briant, 15–16).

¹⁵⁷ Briant, 17–18.

¹⁵⁸ Briant, 20–21, 26–27. However, he believed that the Holy Spirit assists Christians to produce the truly good virtues which are the fruits of the Spirit, so good works are not performed completely under Christians' own self-power (Briant, 18–19).

and several pastors attempted to correct him, yet his congregation refused to dismiss him.¹⁵⁹

Influential liberal clergy in Boston such as Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew, who had both graduated from Harvard and whose writings were widely circulated, also slowly became more openly Arminian.¹⁶⁰ They were both influenced by and promoted Arminian works such as John Taylor's *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin, Proposed to Free and Candid Examination* (1740) and *A Key to the Apostolic Writings* (1745).¹⁶¹ Taylor argued that Calvinism could be disproven by comparing Scripture with itself, using the lenses of universal reason and morality.¹⁶² Thus, "so far as we *truly* follow the Scriptures, we are infallibly sure we are in the Right: And so far as we *honestly* and *sincerely* endeavour to follow them, we are infallibly sure of God's acceptance."¹⁶³

According to Taylor, the purpose of God's grace to the Church is to encourage obedience, virtue, and true religion.¹⁶⁴ In an attempt to harmonize biblical verses about people being saved by faith with those commanding people to live moral lives, Taylor argued that there are two sorts of justification. The first is by grace without works and occurs when people first make a profession of faith in Christ which ensures their past sins are forgiven.¹⁶⁵ The second requires works of

¹⁵⁹ Clyde A. Holbrook, "The New England Controversy on Original Sin," in WJE 3: 9–10; Marsden, 434.

¹⁶⁰ Wright, 8; Marsden, 433–434. Wright notes that Chauncy was about as "Arminian" as ministers in Boston who approved of the Halfway Covenant had been for two generations, so that "in all that Chauncy wrote, there may have been Arminian tendencies, yet he never overstepped the boundaries of orthodoxy" and did not consider himself an Arminian until after 1755 (Wright, 56, 58). The opponents of the revivals may have been repelled by the emotional excesses of the revivals, and so reacted by emphasizing reason and free will (Marsden, 434–436, 281–283; Haroutunian, 9, 14, 21).

¹⁶¹ Marsden, 434–436. John Taylor's background and career is summarized by Clyde A Holbrook in "John Taylor (1694–1761)," in WJE 3: 68–70. Taylor has been labelled as an Arminian, a Socinian, and possibly a deist. He rejected the idea of the Trinity and thus may also have been an early Unitarian (WJE 3: 68–70).

¹⁶² Marsden, 435.

¹⁶³ John Taylor, "Dedication," in *A Paraphrase with Notes on the Epistle to the Romans: To which is Prefix'd a Key to the Apostolic Writings, or an Essay to explain the Gospel Scheme, and the Principal Words and Phrases the Apostles have used in describing it*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Waugh in Gracechurch-Street, 1747), v.

¹⁶⁴ John Taylor, "A Key to the Apostolic Writings," in *A Paraphrase with Notes on the Epistle to the Romans*, 58.

¹⁶⁵ Taylor, "A Key to the Apostolic Writings," 97–98, 100.

righteousness and repentance for ongoing sins, and so qualifies them for eternal life in heaven.¹⁶⁶ He worried that if people are predestined to final salvation apart from good works, then all the moral instructions and commandments in the New Testament would be “needless.”¹⁶⁷

Taylor also rejected the idea that people are naturally corrupt and deserving of God’s wrath and damnation until they are moved by God’s irresistible grace to become part of the “small, uncertain” number of the elect, based on God’s arbitrary decree of election.¹⁶⁸ This idea, he claimed, has several flaws: 1) it is directly contrary to the principles of Christianity taught by the apostles in Scripture; 2) it throws a “dark veil over the grace of the gospel”; 3) it makes people fearful; 4) it encourages a false and superstitious humility; and 5) it throws ministers into “endless absurdities.”¹⁶⁹ In a footnote, he attributed the doctrines of unconditional election, reprobation, original sin, and irresistible grace to Manichean influences on early Christianity.¹⁷⁰ Whether Taylor even thought that God’s grace is necessary for salvation is brought into question by his argument that the righteous heathen may be saved on the day of judgment when their works are judged, provided they have believed that God exists and rewards those who seek him.¹⁷¹ Thus, I believe Edwards was right to be concerned, for the ideas promoted by Breck, Briant, Taylor, and others do indeed appear similar to Pelagius’ ancient heretical beliefs.

The general New England Puritan hostility towards ministers who professed “Arminian” beliefs did not fade away quickly. Edwards’ younger cousin Joseph Hawley III had also studied theology at Yale, but after spending time abroad as a military chaplain, he returned in 1758 proclaiming liberal and Arminian perspectives.¹⁷² Because of Hawley’s unconventional views,

¹⁶⁶ Taylor, “A Key to the Apostolic Writings,” 99–100, 115, 123.

¹⁶⁷ Taylor, “A Key to the Apostolic Writings,” 70–71.

¹⁶⁸ Taylor, “A Key to the Apostolic Writings,” 102.

¹⁶⁹ Taylor, “A Key to the Apostolic Writings,” 102.

¹⁷⁰ Taylor, “A Key to the Apostolic Writings,” 102–103.

¹⁷¹ Taylor, “A Key to the Apostolic Writings,” 105–107. He refers to Heb. 11:6 and Acts 10:34–35.

¹⁷² Marsden, 358.

he knew that he would never be ordained in New England and chose to become a lawyer.¹⁷³

By 1752, “it seems the lack of lasting fruit from the Awakenings, the bitter pill of being turned out of his ministerial charge, negative reports about the state of ‘true religion’ in Scotland, England, and the Netherlands, as well as the proliferation of heterodox, if not heretical, theology throughout former Calvinistic enclaves, left Edwards vexed about the future of Christianity.”¹⁷⁴ In Edwards’ view,

the new unbelief was truly alarming, even unprecedented, because it arose from those reared with the very benefits of Protestant teaching. “And particularly,” he proclaimed, “history gives no account of any age wherein there was so great an apostasy of those that had been brought up under the light of the gospel to infidelity, never such a casting off the Christian religion and all revealed religion, never any age wherein was so much scoffing at and ridiculing the gospel of Christ by those that have been brought up under gospel light, nor anything like it as there is at this day.”¹⁷⁵

All this made Edwards increasingly distressed, and he responded by writing *Freedom of the Will*.¹⁷⁶ Edwards believed that the Arminians argued that “Calvinistic notions of God’s moral government are contrary to the common sense of mankind.”¹⁷⁷ In turn, he intended to defend Calvinism against both “common sense” and Enlightenment rationality by showing that Calvinism was ultimately more reasonable than Arminianism.¹⁷⁸ This would be done by disproving what Edwards called the “inconceivably pernicious” idea that libertarian free will is necessary for people to be held morally accountable for their actions.¹⁷⁹ This line of argument was directed against some English Arminians who defended what Edwards believed was the “inconsistent” and “absurd” idea that free will means individuals’ choices are completely

¹⁷³ Marsden, 358.

¹⁷⁴ Bombaro, 196.

¹⁷⁵ Marsden, 199, quoting from Edwards, “Sermon Twenty-Four,” in WJE 9: 438.

¹⁷⁶ Marsden, 435–436.

¹⁷⁷ Edwards, “151. To the Reverend John Erskine,” in WJE 16: 491.

¹⁷⁸ Marsden, 437.

¹⁷⁹ Marsden, 437. This quote is from Edwards, “228. To the Reverend John Erskine” in WJE 16: 719.

undetermined by physical or moral constraints, meaning that what people choose is not in any way related to their personal character or preferences, and does not even depend upon having rational reasons for their actions.¹⁸⁰ In response, Edwards argued that the Arminians had departed from traditional Christian teaching for reasons other than because they were more philosophically enlightened than either the Reformers or early church fathers.¹⁸¹

However, beyond these general reasons for his opposition, Edwards had more specific concerns about Arminianism. In *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards appears concerned that Arminianism was undermining morality in New England. After appealing to experience and Puritan history, Edwards claims, “I think, the tendency of doctrines, by what now appears in the world, and in our nation in particular, may much more justly be argued from the general effect which has been seen to attend the prevailing of the principles of Arminians, and the contrary principles; as both have had their turn of general prevalence in our nation.”¹⁸² He argues that when Calvinism prevailed, society demonstrated greater virtue and more sincere religious practice, whereas when Arminianism began to become popular, there were trends of “vice, profaneness, luxury and wickedness of all sorts, and contempt of all religion, and of every kind of seriousness and strictness of conversation.”¹⁸³ Despite the New England Arminians’ teaching of moralism or legalism which would seemingly encourage morality and virtue, Edwards argues the opposite. He claims that Arminianism excuses “all evil inclinations, which men find to be natural” since they did not willingly choose them, and worries it “will directly lead men to justify the vilest acts and practices, from the strength of their wicked inclinations of all sorts; strong inclinations inducing a moral necessity; yea, to excuse every degree of evil inclination.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Edwards, “151. To the Reverend John Erskine,” in WJE 16: 491; Marsden, 440; Paul K. Conkin, “Edwards, Jonathan,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Patte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 360.

¹⁸¹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 437.

¹⁸² Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 422.

¹⁸³ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 422. See also Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 187 for similar complaints.

¹⁸⁴ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 421. It seems Edwards feared that when people reflected about their motives for sin, they may conclude that in some cases they were not ‘self-determined’, and therefore, they could not be properly held accountable for these sins (Paul Ramsey, “Edwards and his Antagonists,” in WJE 1: 71). It is not

In addition to the threat to morality, Edwards feared that Arminianism would lead to a weakening or disappearance of Christianity in New England. Although he recognized that Catholicism was still a threat to Protestantism, more concerning to him was a defection from traditional orthodox Protestant views to new beliefs such as deism, Socinianism, Arianism, and Quakerism.¹⁸⁵ Edwards feared that Arminianism and a belief in libertarian free will would lead people to follow the path of Thomas Chubb—one of the authors Edwards attempts to refute in *Freedom of the Will*; Chubb was an Arian, and then became a deist.¹⁸⁶ Chubb originally moved in this direction due to his opposition to the idea that there is no natural goodness in humanity, and also due to his desire to “vindicate God’s moral character.”¹⁸⁷ It is possible that

deism, by Edwards’s lights, was the terminus of all roads that departed from Reformed orthodoxy and meandered through the way stations of latitudinarianism, Arianism, and especially Arminianism. Edwards believed that New England in the first half of the century was infested with Arminians and feared that if they remained unchecked, his “land” would be overwhelmed by the deist catastrophe that had already “overrun” England. That would mean a denial “of the whole Christian religion.”¹⁸⁸

Thus, “the [concept of the] freedom of will was, as Edwards saw it, the breach through which deism poured, and the abandonment of Christianity. Having done what he could in this work to stop the breach, Edwards indicates in his conclusion [of *Freedom of the Will*] the consequence he

clear why Edwards believes this is so, for Arminians likely would not agree with his assumptions that they are subject to moral necessity or that their wills are ever not self-determined. More of Ramsey’s analysis of Edwards’ logic on this issue is found in WJE 1: 69–74, and 84, where it is noted that Arminians doubted that it was just for God to hold people responsible for what they could not avoid. However, I do not see any hint that Arminians thereby excused sin, especially since, as shown earlier, they taught that good works and morality were necessary for salvation.

¹⁸⁵ Marsden, 199. For example, see Edwards “Sermon Twenty-Four,” in WJE 9: 430–432 and 438 where he labels Anabaptists, Arminians, ‘enthusiasts,’ Socinians, Arians, and deists as being inspired by Satan to oppose true Reformation faith.

¹⁸⁶ Paul Ramsey, “Edwards and His Antagonists,” in WJE 1: 6–69, referring to Edwards, “Author’s Preface,” in WJE 1: 132. In New England, many others who were leaning toward the “Arminian” position eventually became “Old Lights, Baptists, Methodists, or moved toward Unitarianism and Universalism” (Claghorn, “Introduction,” in WJE 3: 4n9).

¹⁸⁷ Ramsey, “Edwards and his Antagonists,” WJE 1: 74.

¹⁸⁸ McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 19, quoting Edwards, “Sermon Twenty-Four,” in WJE 9: 432. See also Bombaro, 191.

expected his argument to have for strengthening belief in all the other doctrines of orthodox Calvinism.”¹⁸⁹

In the preface to his next major work, *Original Sin*, Edwards writes:

According to my observation, no one book has done so much towards rooting out of these western parts of New England, the principles and scheme of religion maintained by our pious and excellent forefathers, the divines and Christians who first settled this country, and alienating the minds of many from what I think are evidently some of the main doctrines of the gospel, as that which Dr. Taylor has published against the doctrine of original sin.¹⁹⁰

In this work, Taylor claimed that people were only responsible for what they freely chose, and thus, people could not be held guilty of original sin.¹⁹¹ If God holds people responsible for sin, then people must have the power to avoid sinning, for “duty cannot be greater than ability; therefore, the Christian religion consists of our making ‘a due use of the powers we already have before we receive and in on order to our receiving, further help’.”¹⁹² Edwards believed this would mean that Christ died for nothing.¹⁹³ If people have obligations to God and people also have the power to fulfill these obligations by avoiding all sin, then it would effectively mean a return to works-righteousness which both Paul and the Reformers had fought against.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Ramsey, “Edwards and His Antagonists,” in WJE 1: 69. See also McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 47; Bombaro, 260–261.

¹⁹⁰ Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 102.

¹⁹¹ Bombaro, 194–195, referring to John Taylor’s *The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin* (London, 1738), 160 and 167–168. I only have access to John Taylor *The scripture-doctrine of original sin proposed to free and candid examination. In three parts*. (London: J. Wilson at the Turk’s-Head in Gracechurch-street, 1740), but I believe the same ideas can be found on pages 155–159. “To the eighteenth century moralist it was becoming increasingly evident that guilt is a personal matter, and that it is unjust to punish one for the guilt of another. The notion of ‘tender infants’ being consigned to hell because of the guilt of a man who had lived several thousand years before, seemed to be sufficient proof that the doctrine of original sin was a huge lie” (Haroutunian, 29).

¹⁹² Bombaro, 195, citing John Taylor’s *The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin* (London, 1738), 256. Alternatively, this quote may be found in the version by John Taylor, *The scripture-doctrine of original sin proposed to free and candid examination. In three parts* (London: J. Wilson at the Turk’s-Head in Gracechurch-street, 1740), 249.

¹⁹³ Bombaro, 195, referring to Holbrook, “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE 3: 35. See also Edwards, *Original Sin*, WJE 3: 356, and Edwards, “147. To the First Church of Christ, Northampton,” in WJE 16: 483–484.

¹⁹⁴ Bombaro, 195–196, citing Holbrook, “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE 3: 35.

5.5 Edwards' Understanding of the Gospel

Against these Arminian ideas, Edwards attempted to make use of what he saw as the best of Enlightenment philosophy to uphold the doctrines of total depravity, irresistible grace, and unconditional election. Throughout his career, Edwards expressed his concerns regarding Arminianism through sermons, public lectures, and his published works. A chronological examination of several key sermons reveals that Edwards had a lifelong concern to defend the gospel of salvation by faith alone and grace alone as he understood it.

In his public M.A. oration, Edwards argues that “the highest glory of the gospel and the delight of the Scriptures is this very doctrine of justification through the righteousness of Christ obtained by faith.”¹⁹⁵ He specifies, “when it is asserted that a sinner is justified by this faith alone, we mean, of course, that God receives the sinner into his grace and friendship for this reason alone, that his entire soul receives Christ in such a way that righteousness and eternal life are offered in an absolutely gratuitous fashion and are provided only because of his reception of Christ.”¹⁹⁶ As seen in these opening lines, Edwards made a connection in his theology very early on between the gospel of justification by faith alone and God’s glory.

It has been shown throughout this study that God’s glory is a major theme for Edwards. In chapter 1, according to Edwards, God’s glory is the ultimate reason why God created the world, and is God’s ultimate aim in everything that God does, especially in election and reprobation. God’s glory is thus achieved even through all the sin and evil that occurs throughout history, as explored in chapter 3. God’s glory is also shown through God’s absolute sovereignty, which according to Edwards, means that God has to be the ultimate and immediate cause behind every action and effect, and also the only cause in any individual’s coming to faith, as discussed in chapters 2 and 4. It is therefore not surprising that yet again, Edwards appeals to God’s glory as a defense of what Edwards understands the true gospel message to be.

¹⁹⁵ Edwards, “A Sinner Is Not Justified in the Sight of God Except Through the Righteousness of Christ Obtained by Faith,” in WJE 14: 60.

¹⁹⁶ Edwards, “A Sinner Is Not Justified in the Sight of God Except Through the Righteousness of Christ Obtained by Faith,” in WJE 14: 61.

In an even earlier sermon titled “Glorious Grace,” written in the summer of 1722,¹⁹⁷ Edwards argues that the gospel is the most glorious thing about God:

The gospel is [by] far the most glorious manifestation of God’s glory that ever was made to man, and the glory of the gospel is free grace and mere mercy. Now those that will not depend on this free grace, they do what they can to deprive the gospel of this glory, and sully the glory of God therein shining forth; they take away the praise, glory, and honor, that is due to God by his free grace and mercy to men, and set up themselves as the objects of it, as if their salvation at least partly, was owing to what they have done.¹⁹⁸

Edwards repeatedly emphasizes that depending on anything other than God’s grace for salvation dishonors God, the gospel, and God’s grace. It also provokes God’s wrath at those who are prideful, ungrateful, and self-righteous.¹⁹⁹ Edwards argues that God’s grace is necessary in order for anyone to be saved, for

Although God the Father has provided a savior for us, and Christ has come and died, and there is nothing wanting but our willing and hearty reception of Christ; yet we shall eternally perish yet, if God is not gracious to us, and don’t make application of Christ’s benefits to our souls. We are dependent on free grace, even for ability to lay hold in Christ already offered, so entirely is the gospel dispensation of mere grace.²⁰⁰

In contrast to what he believed the Arminians were teaching, Edwards argues in his sermon “None Are Saved by Their Own Righteousness” (1729) that “there are none saved upon the account of their own moral or religious excellency or goodness, or any qualification of the person, any good disposition of the heart, or any good actions, either sincere or not sincere.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ This date of composition is taken from “Appendix: Dated Batches of Sermons Dating by Thomas A. Schafer,” in WJE 10. This sermon would have been written only slightly over a year from Edwards’ significant spiritual experience in the spring of 1721, during the period when he was still struggling with assurance of his salvation.

¹⁹⁸ Edwards, “Glorious Grace,” in WJE 10: 396.

¹⁹⁹ Edwards, “Glorious Grace,” in WJE 10: 396–397. See also Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” in WJE 19: 240.

²⁰⁰ Edwards, “Glorious Grace,” in WJE 10: 394–395. Following this, he interprets Eph. 2:8–10 as: “we shall [be saved] freely and for nothing if we will but accept of Christ, but we are not able to do that of ourselves, but it is the free gift of God” (WJE 10: 395).

²⁰¹ Edwards, “None Are Saved by Their Own Righteousness,” in WJE 14: 333.

This sermon is based on Titus 3:5, but throughout it he quotes a number of other verses to this point, such as Romans 9:16, Galatians 2:21, and Romans 4:16. He makes several arguments for why this is so based on God's justice, and on how this gospel glorifies God. For example,

'tis plainly the design of the gospel to exalt God's free grace and love, and the excellency and fullness of Christ Jesus the Savior; and in order to that, to show us our own great and entire unworthiness and emptiness of all excellency in ourselves, and that it is not any proportion or any manner of relation between our excellency that moves God to bestow upon us those great blessings of the gospel, but mere grace.²⁰²

It seems he had the Arminians in mind when he says, "some think that God by their righteousness won't only be inclined to pardon them, but to more than that, to bestow heaven upon them for their righteousness. So do many of the Papists, and the Pharisees of old."²⁰³ While some Christians overtly argue for "the popish doctrine of merit," he believes that many more would claim they do not, but in fact they "think God won't do fairly if he has no mercy upon them, seeing they attended his rules for so long a time and have taken such pains as they have done. They have done as much as it was in their power to do."²⁰⁴

These themes were again expounded in his Boston lecture on July 8, 1731, where once more he criticized Arminianism and argued that people make no contribution to their own salvation.²⁰⁵ This sermon became Edwards' first publication,²⁰⁶ titled "God Glorified in the Work of Redemption, by the Greatness of Man's Dependence upon Him." In this work he says, "there is

²⁰² Edwards, "None Are Saved by Their Own Righteousness," in WJE 14: 345.

²⁰³ Edwards, "None Are Saved by Their Own Righteousness," in WJE 14: 348. He expands on this by saying, "this was the self-righteousness of the Jews: they went about to establish their own righteousness; they did not seek justification by faith, but by the works of the law . . . and they thought they had warrant for it from the Word of God" (Edwards, "None Are Saved by Their Own Righteousness," in WJE 14: 347). Elsewhere, Edwards uses Scripture to refute how Arminians taught that Christians no longer have to keep the "ceremonial" parts of the Old Testament laws but only the "moral" parts (Edwards, "Justification By Faith Alone," in WJE 19: 168–183).

²⁰⁴ Edwards, "None Are Saved by Their Own Righteousness," in WJE 14: 346.

²⁰⁵ Levesque, introduction to Edwards, "Quæstio: Peccator Non Iustificatur Coram Deo Nisi Per Iustitiam Christi Fide Apprehensam" in WJE 14: 52; Mark A. Valeri, introduction to Edwards, "God Glorified in Man's Dependence," in WJE 17: 196.

²⁰⁶ Marsden, 140–141.

an absolute and universal dependence of the redeemed on God. The nature and contrivance of our redemption is such that the redeemed are in everything directly, immediately, and entirely dependent on God: they are dependent on him for all, and are dependent on him every way.”²⁰⁷

This is because

We are dependent on Christ the Son of God, as he is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We are dependent on the Father, who has given us Christ, and made him to be these things to us. We are dependent on the Holy Ghost, for 'tis of him that we are in Christ Jesus; 'tis the Spirit of God that gives us faith in him, whereby we receive him, and close with him.²⁰⁸

Additionally, Christians are “dependent on the power of God for every exercise of grace, and for carrying on the work of grace in the heart, for the subduing of sin and corruption, and increasing holy principles, and enabling to bring forth fruit in good works, and at last bringing grace to its perfection.”²⁰⁹ Thus, in every way, Christians are “dependent on God’s arbitrary and sovereign good pleasure.”²¹⁰ Edwards believes that acknowledging this dependence gives more opportunities for Christians to glorify God by respecting, honoring, and praising God, and it also ensures personal humility.²¹¹ The fact that people are sinners who cannot deserve any of God’s grace also shows that all Christians’ goodness, holiness, excellency, and happiness come from God.²¹² Christians’ total dependence and natural inadequacy increases God’s glory, because

’Tis a more glorious effect of power to make that holy that was so depraved and under the dominion of sin than to confer holiness on that which before had nothing of the contrary. ’Tis a more glorious work of power to rescue a soul out of the hands of the devil, and from the powers of darkness, and to bring it into a state of salvation, than to confer holiness where there was no prepossession or opposition. . . . ’tis a more glorious

²⁰⁷ Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in WJE 17: 202.

²⁰⁸ Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in WJE 17: 201. Throughout his sermon Edwards cites a number of biblical verses to prove each component of this statement.

²⁰⁹ Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in WJE 17: 206.

²¹⁰ Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in WJE 17: 204.

²¹¹ Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in WJE 17: 210–211, 213–214.

²¹² Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in WJE 17: 205.

work of power to uphold a soul in a state of grace and holiness, and to carry it on till it is brought to glory, when there is so much sin remaining in the heart, resisting, and Satan with all his might opposing, than it would have been to have kept man from falling at first, when Satan had nothing in man.²¹³

This is yet another reason why Edwards believes the Fall was necessary. Edwards adds, “’tis certainly a thing that God aims at in the disposition of things in the affair of redemption . . . that God should appear full and man himself empty; that God should appear all and man nothing.”²¹⁴ He fears that if any part of salvation were to be attributed to Christians, then they would have “divided hearts,” between “the good itself, and him *from* whom, and him *through* whom we received it,” whereas if everything is attributed to God, then God is owed all the respect and glory, and the Christian’s heart can be focused fully on God.²¹⁵ In contrast, Edwards believes that the Arminian scheme detracts from God’s glory because it ignores the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to salvation, and negates dependence on Christ’s righteousness by making people think they can have some sort of independent righteousness.²¹⁶

In another sermon, “Justification by Faith Alone” (1734), Edwards takes on those “modern divines” and “divines in the Arminian scheme.”²¹⁷ This sermon elaborates on the same theme Edwards defended in his M.A. oration. His text is Romans 4:5, which he exegetes to argue that God justifies sinners not on the basis of any goodness in them or any good works.²¹⁸ He argues that personal righteousness or good works cannot save anyone for a number of reasons, including that God is infinitely displeased with sinners and nothing in a sinner is good enough to compensate for that by pleasing God or earning God’s favor.²¹⁹ Instead, God counts faith as

²¹³ Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in WJE 17: 206. This echoes Edwards’ approach to theodicy.

²¹⁴ Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in WJE 17: 211.

²¹⁵ Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in WJE 17: 211–212, emphasis his.

²¹⁶ Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” in WJE 17: 212–213.

²¹⁷ M. X. Lesser, introduction to “Justification by Faith Alone,” in WJE 19: 143.

²¹⁸ Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” in WJE 19: 147.

²¹⁹ Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” in WJE 19: 161–164.

imputed righteousness.²²⁰ This imputation removes a sinner's guilt, averts any punishment they deserve, and entitles them to eternal life, based on Romans 5:1–2 and Acts 26:18.²²¹ Edwards believes that Christ not only paid the penalty for Christians' sins, but also "purchased heaven" for them through Christ's perfect obedience.²²² This imputation of Christ's righteousness and entitlement to heaven is due to the union between the Christian and Christ which makes all Christ's benefits now belong to the Christian, and faith is the cause of this union.²²³ Yet Edwards insists that faith is not a "work."²²⁴

Edwards' main concern seems to be that if there were any part that works could play in salvation it would diminish God's grace, which is part of God's glory. He summarizes his opponents' views on grace as:

Those that maintain that we are justified by our own sincere obedience, do pretend that their scheme does not diminish the grace of the gospel; for they say that the grace of God is wonderfully manifested in appointing such a way and method of salvation, by sincere obedience, in assisting us to perform such an obedience, and in accepting our imperfect obedience, instead of perfect.²²⁵

In contrast, he argues that it is "evident that it doth both show a more abundant benevolence in the giver when he shows kindness without goodness or excellency in the object, to move him to it; and that it enhances the obligation to gratitude in the receiver."²²⁶ Whereas if a person's works were to contribute anything to their salvation, it would make the individual Christian a partial Mediator or Savior instead of Christ alone.²²⁷ Likewise, to say that Christ atones for sin by

²²⁰ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," in WJE 19: 148–149.

²²¹ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," in WJE 19: 150–151. More on 185–186, 188–189.

²²² Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," in WJE 19: 192–193.

²²³ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," in WJE 19: 156–157. He cites many verses from John for support.

²²⁴ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," in WJE 19: 160.

²²⁵ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," in WJE 19: 183.

²²⁶ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," in WJE 19: 184.

²²⁷ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," in WJE 19: 185, 199.

suffering, but people must then add their own obedience to be counted as righteous and qualify for heaven would be “to rob him of half his glory as a Savior.”²²⁸

Therefore, Edwards labels any idea that there is something a person can do of their own free will to be saved as a false gospel that endangers people’s souls.²²⁹ It is fundamentally a difference between two gospels: “the one is a gospel scheme, the other a legal one.”²³⁰ If this is linked back to the analysis shown in chapter 1, such a false gospel would also threaten to ruin the purpose for which God designed the world, which is to reveal God’s glory.

However, the need for predestination in such a scheme is not entirely clear. The original Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace results in nearly identical affirmations about the need for God’s grace to enable sinners to turn to God, and for salvation being entirely from God, albeit, with the Christian freely consenting to Christ in a way that is not a ‘work’.²³¹ It is true that such a Calvinist scheme, where a person is not saved unless God irresistibly and sovereignly applies God’s grace to that person’s heart, does appear to safeguard the gospel from any moralism, legalism, or self-initiative that the ‘Arminians’ were teaching at the time. Yet it returns to the main question of chapter 1: if it is God’s free grace to sinners which is the most glorifying to God, then why should God predestine most people to hell rather than show even more grace and save them, which would presumably increase God’s revealed glory?

²²⁸ Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” in WJE 19: 192. Edwards argues that if Christ only atoned for sin then he would deliver sinners from God’s punishment in hell, but this would not be enough to “purchase heaven” for them. Thus, Christ’s perfect obedience is what purchases heaven for Christians instead of our own “imperfect obedience” or good works, as he seems to believe the Arminians or others argue (WJE 19: 192–193).

²²⁹ Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” in WJE 19: 237.

²³⁰ Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” in WJE 19: 238. ‘Legal’ here is meant in the sense of ‘legalistic’.

²³¹ Arminius upholds the idea that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to Christians on the basis of personal faith in Christ, and that it is a pure gift of God, although the grace to receive it is free and not irresistible (James Arminius, *Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will, and the Nature of God*, ed. John D. Wagner [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011], 350–355). As an analogy, Arminius says “a rich man bestows, on a poor and famishing beggar, alms by which he may be able to maintain himself and his family. Does it cease to be a pure gift, because the beggar extends his hand to receive it?” (358). This concern over whether a person consenting to receive God’s grace constitutes a ‘work’ which could make the believer praiseworthy for accepting salvation has continued in contemporary debates over synergism versus monergism (Cyr and Flummer, 184–185).

5.6 Edwards' Later Personal Development

Edwards' desire to refute the Arminians may explain certain elements of his theology. If a community's beliefs are coming under threat, being challenged, or losing relevance, the only way these convictions will not be lost is "for a Reformer to stand up and show how the convictions are still valid/meaningful and should be applied in the new situation."²³²

Furthermore,

when we speak of the reform of convictions, we imply a convictional distance between the reformers and their own community, although neither need be aware of this gap at the outset. Such reformers cannot be mere good housekeepers, asserting the community's fundamental convictions and urging conformity to these. For, if convictional reform is needed, it is precisely the relevance of those fundamental convictions that is in question.²³³

This convictional difference between Edwards and his community may be seen in his willingness to make use of new and innovative philosophical or ethical arguments in attempts to address Enlightenment objections against his community's deeply-held belief in God's absolute sovereignty and predestination.²³⁴ Several of these attempts were seen in chapters 2 and 3.

When a reformer is able to revitalize a conviction within a community, there is also the possibility that articulating a conviction in a new way could allow those who previously held differing convictions to reconsider it and commit to it.²³⁵ But if the reformer's attempt to persuade opponents fails, engagement with those who disagree is still valuable, for in a pluralistic community one defines and refines one's own belief system through engagement with those who differ.²³⁶ Edwards had to justify his belief in double predestination in a context where these beliefs were challenged, and this required him to define and defend his concepts of free

²³² McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, 162–163.

²³³ McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, 163.

²³⁴ Bombaro, 288, see also 26, 29, and 32, referring to WJE 9: 432 and WJE 16: 224–235. See also Gay, 114.

²³⁵ McClendon and Smith, 165, 168.

²³⁶ McClendon and Smith, 166–168, 173.

will, God's sovereignty, and so forth in response to the Arminians and deists. Therefore, Edwards' interaction with his Arminian and deistic opponents could be seen as a form of an "interconvictional encounter," where

representatives of distinct convictional communities meet one another in such a way that one or both parties are thereby convictionally changed. Such encounters range from the relatively benign meetings of the classroom and campus, through the clash and interplay of the social, ethnic, and religious groups in a wider society. . . . not least, they include the friction, the fire, and (sometimes) the fruitful engagement in the meeting of diverse religious communities.²³⁷

While Edwards and the Arminians did not sit down to discuss issues in person in hopes of resolving their disagreement, through his writings, he attempted to persuade his Arminian readers to take his perspective, and likewise, the Arminians would have hoped that through their writings, Edwards and other Calvinists would take theirs.²³⁸ However, unless Edwards had the courage to risk abandoning his community, he realistically could not accept Arminian doctrine.

It could be proposed that due to the pressure put on Edwards to affirm double predestination, he simply chose to express outwardly what was expected of him by his society and did not actually believe it himself.²³⁹ One might argue that Edwards' public theology was "skillfully crafted so as to render his theology orthodox to the scrutinizing eye of Reformed Protestantism,"²⁴⁰ but

meanwhile, behind closed doors . . . Edwards surreptitiously experimented with heterodoxical thoughts, compromised his confessional affiliation, and pursued the logic of strange new doctrines in genuinely private notebooks and short theological essays. . . . Things simply were not what they appeared to the public eye. The sage of Stockbridge may have been rethinking his commitment to confessional Calvinism and his private notebooks evidence this phenomenon.²⁴¹

²³⁷ McClendon and Smith, 166.

²³⁸ Wright notes that after the Great Awakening revivals, New England's society became much more polarized and communication among those who disagreed tended to be through debate, not a search for agreement (Wright, 58).

²³⁹ E.g. Holmes' comment that Edwards may have been uncomfortable with limited atonement, but there was no other option available in his time, as discussed in my chapter 4 footnote 12.

²⁴⁰ Bombaro, 255.

²⁴¹ Bombaro, 255.

This is not a new idea, for the suggestion that Edwards' personal theology was different than what he publicly confessed goes back to Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1880, who accused Edwards of privately holding un-trinitarian views.²⁴² Inspired by Sang Hyun Lee's study of Edwards' dispositional ontology, based on Edwards' "Miscellanies" and other early notebooks,²⁴³ Gerald McDermott and Anri Morimoto argue that Edwards was secretly opposed to the "scandal of traditional Christian particularism."²⁴⁴ These authors emphasize Edwards' comments about how he believed that some elements found in otherwise false non-Christian religions may have communicated some genuinely divine truths to non-Christian people groups, and could have allowed such people to know enough about God to be saved.²⁴⁵ Additionally, McDermott and Morimoto argue that based on Edwards' theory of conversion, God could theoretically give the disposition of the Holy Spirit to whoever God wanted, which would make such people regenerate regardless of whether these people had heard the gospel; thus many more people could be saved than just those who expressed actual faith in Christ in this life.²⁴⁶

²⁴² Bombaro, 255. This accusation was based on a short document composed of a series of Edwards' "Miscellanies," entries, primarily no. 1062, in WJE 20: 430–433.

²⁴³ Bombaro, 8–9. Lee refers frequently to Edwards' "Miscellanies," particularly entry no. 241 in WJE 13: 357–358 several times when building his case (Lee, 15, 35, 48), along with Edwards' early notebooks "The Mind" and "On Atoms" (Lee, 35–61).

²⁴⁴ Bombaro, 256–257. He refers primarily to Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3, and Anri Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995). See also Gerald R. McDermott, "Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman, and Non-Christian Religions," in Helm and Crisp, 129–30 and McClymond and McDermott, 585–598, 716.

²⁴⁵ McClymond and McDermott, 586–588. Edwards' interest in non-Christian religions may have been provoked by deists who claimed that if God damned the five-sixths of the world who had no opportunity to hear the gospel then God was a "monster unworthy of devotion" (McDermott, "Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman, and non-Christian Religions," in Helm and Crisp, 127; McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 131).

However, this debate may be a matter of interpretation, because Bombaro's work, which attempts to refute McDermott and Morimoto, also makes heavy use of Edwards' "Miscellanies" and other personal notebooks, albeit, supplemented by Edwards' sermons (Bombaro, 20).

²⁴⁶ McClymond and McDermott, 589–598; McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 134. The primary evidence cited here is Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 27b in WJE 13: 213–215, as well as no. 323 in WJE 13: 456–459, where Edwards says "a person according to the gospel may be in a state of salvation, before a distinct and express act of faith in the sufficiency and suitableness of Christ as a Savior" (WJE 13: 458). McClymond and McDermott speculate that through this theory, Edwards may have argued that infants and non-Christians could be saved. However, they admit that Edwards never explicitly reached this conclusion (McClymond and McDermott, 593; McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 137).

In contrast, Bombaro believes that “Edwards remained consistent to his theological profession, both publicly and privately,” as shown by Edwards re-preaching his older sermons with rarely any modifications, which upheld traditional Calvinist particularism and eternal hell for the reprobate.²⁴⁷

In part, this debate appears to depend on one’s view of Edwards’ early notebooks and the “Miscellanies,” and whether these should be trusted to provide an accurate picture of Edwards’ true beliefs. It could be that the “Miscellanies” provide insight into Edwards’ development of thought and the ideas he was exploring, but should not be seen as his final word on any subject.²⁴⁸ Bombaro notes that “nearly all of his theological and philosophical notebooks were begun after his conversion and, as one of their purposes, served as repositories for some given project or projects.”²⁴⁹ Whether these are reliable sources from which to make such a case about Edwards’ private beliefs (versus his openly published works and sermons) is questionable. Bombaro argues that these sources are not “merely [Edwards’] private speculations on difficult and mysterious matters,” but were “semi-private” notebooks that Edwards would allow students under his instruction to openly browse, which he intended to use for publishable material, and which he actually did make use of in his later works, such as “End of Creation” and “True Virtue.”²⁵⁰ If so, this may support the idea that Edwards did not fear that his unpublished notes were potentially unorthodox, and thus support Bombaro’s argument that “Edwards’s soteriology hardly suits an inclusivistic Edwards, let alone a pluralistic or universalistic one. Indeed, neither his vision of God, nor his conception of redemptive history, nor even his philosophy of dispositions—as innovative as they may be—lend themselves to the proposals of Morimoto and McDermott.”²⁵¹ McDermott admits that “for Edwards, there was no inconsistency between the

²⁴⁷ Bombaro, 257, 267.

²⁴⁸ Holmes, 36.

²⁴⁹ Bombaro, 74.

²⁵⁰ Bombaro, 80, referring to Schafer, “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE 13: 7–10 and Ava Chamberlain, “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE 18: 8–10.

²⁵¹ Bombaro, 257.

possibility of reconciliation for the heathen and the probability that only a precious few of the heathen had ever been saved, for this was the testimony of scripture as he understood it.”²⁵² Instead, Edwards could argue that the fact that most heathen had access to some divine truths proves that God is righteous to condemn them for rejecting the truths that they were graciously given.²⁵³ Therefore, even if Morimoto and McDermott are correct, and Edwards thought that there was a chance that God may elect those who were not Christians or Old Testament believers, it does not seem that Edwards was open to universalism. Given his philosophical determinism, the question of God’s justice in regard to reprobation remains, even if some people who were not technically Christian during their earthly lives could be counted among the elect.

It thus appears difficult to argue that Edwards did not believe what he claimed he believed and argued regarding double predestination, based on what he was willing to openly preach and publish.²⁵⁴ Furthermore, it seems unusual, if not impossible, that one who took the pursuit of holiness and doing all for God’s glory as seriously as Edwards seems to in his “Resolutions” and *Religious Affections*, would or could keep such a great secret his entire life—claiming to outwardly believe and teach things that he questioned or denied in private.²⁵⁵

²⁵² McClymond and McDermott, 598. Thus, I am confused by Bombaro’s claim that “for both McDermott and Morimoto, an inner disposition [of the Holy Spirit] has been granted to all persons as a universal benefit of Jesus’ Christ’s work on the cross (pace: Roman Catholicism’s notion of infused prevenient grace concomitant with sacramentarianism: hence the title of Morimoto’s book),” *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation* (Bombaro, 256). Yet here, Bombaro cites only Morimoto’s book passim, without providing a specific quotation or page reference, and does not cite anything by McDermott. Indeed, McDermott himself clearly says “Edwards never came close to accepting . . . universalism, but . . . he used the *prisca theologia* to help respond to the scandal of particularity” (McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 132).

²⁵³ McClymond and McDermott, 598.

²⁵⁴ I prefer to place more weight on the sources which Edwards was willing to publish or preach openly, supplemented only as necessary by these other more-private sources. Thus, I agree with Oliver Crisp who suggests that Edwards’ unpublished work was often speculative and may not represent views that Edwards would have wholeheartedly affirmed. “This is not to imply that Edwards was a sort of Reimarus-like figure, preaching in public doctrines he secretly repudiated or revised. Rather, it is to say that Edwards was very careful about what he published and the fact that certain works remained in notebook form with no indication that he was ready to publish them should give any reader of Edwards pause when assigning a place of prominence to such works in his corpus” (Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 5–6).

²⁵⁵ The very high standards that Edwards held for himself and his congregation can be observed in the copy of a covenant renewal that Edwards led his congregation through. This is included in Edwards’ letter “To the Rev. Thomas Prince of Boston,” in WJE 4: 551–554, and includes a pledge to be honest in all things (551).

This seems even more unlikely when one considers his mature ethical theory as expressed in “True Virtue.” This work shows that in his later life, Edwards had not only taken his own principled theological stance, but had come to affirm universal principles of morality.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, as shown in the controversy in which Edwards disagreed with nearly his entire town about who should be considered a member of the church, be baptized, and receive communion, the mature Edwards did not appear to be the sort of person who would simply conform to social expectations, although as a youth he had conformed to his grandfather’s practices.²⁵⁷ However, it was after this controversy when Edwards had been dismissed from his congregation that he wrote *Freedom of the Will* and *Original Sin*, which continued to promote his deterministic beliefs. It seems that if Edwards was willing to risk his career over his beliefs about communion, he was also the sort of person who would have risked it for predestination, if he had truly believed that the Arminians were more correct.

Yet instead of questioning double predestination or repudiating it, as Edwards aged he settled into defending Calvinism as the only true and biblical theological system, as seen in *Freedom of the Will*.²⁵⁸ As he did so however, as seen throughout this study, Edwards seemed unconcerned with reconciling the logically-conflicting aspects of his assertions, or admitting that Scripture can be read in alternative ways. Therefore, he may have not recognized how his preconceptions and cultural or community environment were influencing his theological judgment.

After all, what one determines to be the meaning of anything is based not only on our own senses, experience, and judgment, but also on “the external and internal experience of a cultural

²⁵⁶ This aligns with Kohlberg’s Stage 6 moral reasoning, where a person chooses to follow universal principles of morality, such as Kant’s categorical imperative, or the Golden Rule (Conn, 109). Thus, it seems unlikely that Edwards would feel comfortable hiding his true beliefs for personal gain.

²⁵⁷ Marsden, 346–352.

²⁵⁸ This again fits with traits of Fowler’s Stage 4 faith. In contrast, people in Fowler’s Stage 5 faith become more aware of the complexities involved in making knowledge claims, move beyond strict dichotomies (such as the true/false distinction Edwards made for Calvinism/Arminianism), gain an interest in dialogue with other views, and care less about upholding or constructing strict systems of thought (Fowler, 185). This is not to say that Fowler’s theory is correct in its possible implication that Stage 5 faith is somehow superior to Stage 4 faith, or to claim that Edwards should have moved on from Stage 4 faith to Stage 5 faith, but I find that this distinction helpfully highlights two alternative approaches to theology.

community, and by the continuously checked and rechecked judgments of that community.”²⁵⁹ This becomes particularly true regarding the interpretation of Scripture and other written texts, especially those written in the past and in different historical circumstances, for individuals necessarily interpret texts from their current historical and personal vantage points.²⁶⁰ Or, phrased differently, “we always read a text with our own pre-understandings, that is, only in the light of our own experiences. There is no objective way to grasp a text. . . . we are always affected by our past.”²⁶¹ Indeed, it is only our past traditions which even make such understanding possible.²⁶² While this is not to imply an endorsement of relativism, it is true that we can never see texts from a timeless, objective perspective—God alone has such a view.²⁶³ Therefore,

all we can have is a view, and barring those usual kinds of errors for which God gives us colleagues to point out, the only thing we can possibly see from the horizon from which we look is a particular perspective on the thing itself. This is not to deny that the object of our view is really there; . . . interpretations bring into being something which was potentially there from the first. . . . [yet] all we shall ever have are a multiplicity of views, and that is all we can have. This circumstance has nothing to do with subjectivity and absolutely everything to do with historicity.²⁶⁴

Despite this, “a translator still endeavours to remain open to the ‘otherness’ of the text” through a

²⁵⁹ Lonergan, “‘Theology in Its New Context’ and ‘The Dimensions of Conversion’,” 16.

²⁶⁰ John Angus Campbell, “Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 64, no. 1 (1978): 107–108. The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer’s central interest was how humans understand communication and how meaning is passed on. As Leonard C. Hawes explains in his review of *The Reality of Ethnomethodology* by Hugh Mehan and Houston Wood (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975), “Hermeneutics is the practice of interpreting and understanding. Gadamer contends hermeneutics is the art of clarifying and mediating, by our own effort of interpretations, what is said by persons we encounter in tradition. Hermeneutics operates wherever what is said is not immediately intelligible” (John Stewart ed., Leonard C. Hawes, Robert E. Nofsinger Jr., Larry D. Browning, George Diestel, Gary C. Woodward, Carol Stoel-Gammon, Donald L. Dudley M.D., Halford Ross Ryan, Lynda M. Greenblatt & Mark Adams, “Book reviews,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 64, no. 1 (1978): 110).

²⁶¹ Chiaki Green, “Translation and Conversation in Truth and Method by Hans-Georg Gadamer,” *Existential Analysis* 22, no. 1 (January 2011): 107.

²⁶² Green, 108, 111.

²⁶³ Campbell, 109.

²⁶⁴ Campbell, 109.

process of mediation of prejudices called “the fusions of horizons.”²⁶⁵ We become open to new unexpected possibilities through “conversation” with the text, or with others about the text. It is through such conversation that we may be able to eventually adjust our pre-understandings to gain new perspectives, or at least, come to see that another’s perspective is worthy of respect or consideration.²⁶⁶ Part of this task means that interpreters need to acknowledge and question their own pre-understandings, or else they risk narrowing or limiting their understanding which may lead them to subjectively “do violence” to the original text.²⁶⁷

Therefore, it is impossible to say that Edwards read Scripture in any way other than from within his historical and cultural context, and with his own subjective point of view, as every interpreter does. His community’s convictions and pre-understandings also may have led him to dismiss some verses which did not line up easily with his own interpretations, or partly blinded him to other interpretative possibilities. This can help explain some of his perplexing interpretations of biblical verses which he reads as endorsing his deterministic understanding of reality.

To become more objective, individuals should attempt to become more aware of how their own beliefs and values are influenced by their finite vision of the world, their community, their personal history, and their subjective personal choices. Recognizing that there is a subjective element to beliefs and values which lead to alternative ways of perceiving reality should inspire theologians and interpreters of Scripture to be less rigid and more gracious when interacting with others who may disagree.²⁶⁸ While Edwards made occasional appeals for his opponents to

²⁶⁵ Green, 108.

²⁶⁶ Green, 113–114.

²⁶⁷ Green, 111. Gadamer believed that no meaning of a text is ever completely fixed such that no new understandings are impossible, or that a final correct interpretation will be found that stands for all time. So in a sense, all temporal human understanding is inadequate and incomplete, requiring a continual process of re-reading, re-interpretation, and re-application in which a text’s meaning is re-created anew (Green, 112). Perhaps Edwards would have agreed with this perspective: as shown in chapter 3, section 3.1, he realized that the Church is continually coming to a deeper understanding of Scripture.

²⁶⁸ This may require a person to undergo a “cognitive conversion”: “Cognitive conversion consists precisely in discovering that [personal] criterion in the dynamic structure of one’s own realistic judgment. Despite appearances, it is precisely because cognitive conversion is rooted in the discovery of one’s reality as a critical knower that it leads not to arrogance but humility” (Conn, 123).

recognize the possibility of their own error and humbly accept what Scripture says,²⁶⁹ it seems that he himself was not willing (or perhaps did not have time) to re-examine or revise his philosophical presuppositions or scriptural interpretation on the issue of double predestination.

Personality may have been another factor behind why Edwards did not care to revise his theology to address Arminian criticism. Many biographical accounts present Edwards as “somewhat presumptuous, impervious, and egotistical . . . not without justification.”²⁷⁰ One critic of Edwards who knew him during his later years commented that “he was a very great bigot, for he would not admit any person into heaven, but those that agreed fully to his sentiments.”²⁷¹ It is notable that pride is one of the issues Edwards identified as an area of personal struggle as a youth, and even later in life.²⁷² It is possible that Edwards’ theory of spiritual perception may have contributed to his sense of pride and his judgmental attitudes towards those who disagreed with him, for as Bombaro suggests,

aside from clashes with parishioners, Robert Breck and his associates, the Williams family in Stockbridge, and Old Light Calvinists, which in every case Edwards thought himself not only in the right but also generally above reproach, there was the whole epistemological issue: Edwards claimed to “see” things as they really were—spiritual and moral—and offer on behalf of confessional Protestantism an objective response to the Enlightenment worldview in both England and New England. Edwards was one of the “haves”; his opponents were of the “have nots.” . . . the spiritual sense was still something Edwards intimates that he grasped and experienced well beyond others, thereby making himself the authority on the matter.²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 438. Yet Edwards seems to be simultaneously convinced that his own interpretation matches with God’s “unerring instruction” and ultimate truth (WJE 1: 438).

²⁷⁰ Bombaro, 292.

²⁷¹ Marsden, 380.

²⁷² Marsden, 51. See also Edwards, “Diary,” entry for Saturday, Mar. 2 in WJE 16: 767 and Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” in WJE 16: 803. Elsewhere, Edwards identifies pride as “the worst viper that is in the heart” and “the most hidden, secret, and deceitful of all lusts,” which Marsden says “was surely a commentary on his ongoing battle with the most subtle of his own sins” (Marsden, 225, citing Edwards, “32. To Deborah Hatheway,” in WJE 16: 93).

²⁷³ Bombaro, 292.

Thus, it may be true that for Edwards, “without coming out and saying it, he seems to suggest and adjudicate that if one did not subscribe to the ‘world according to Edwards,’ then one remained outside the ‘world according to God.’ Then again, it appears that he did say it to his congregation perhaps a few too many times, netting him a one-way ticket to Stockbridge.”²⁷⁴

Therefore, it seems that Edwards was seen as having a tendency towards arrogance. Bolstered by his theory of spiritual perception and his personal conversion experience which ensured that he was one of those who had such perception, this tendency could have led Edwards to doubt that his opponents were even saved. This likely applied to the Arminians, for, according to Edwards, if they truly had the Holy Spirit, they would have the spiritual perception which would convince them that double predestination was true and beautiful, just as it had done for Edwards.²⁷⁵ For example, he says “that all true Christians have such a kind of conviction of the truth of the things of the gospel is abundantly manifest from the Holy Scriptures.”²⁷⁶ This means that Christians can

²⁷⁴ Bombaro, 293.

²⁷⁵ This idea has been suggested also by Bombaro, who writes that “it became clear to him, then, as to why clerics within the church could be so blind concerning the reality of God in the world vis-à-vis Enlightenment contrarians, notwithstanding their baptisms: they were never truly regenerated through an encounter with God like him and therefore never came into possession of the ‘new spiritual sense.’ If they had, then they would have been part of the vanguard against the new learning instead of its disciples” (Bombaro, 70, see also 230–232). Stephen Daniel traces this fundamental difference in the perception of reality and methods of reasoning between the elect and reprobates back to “radically different assumptions” (Daniel, 86). The saint sees all things as linked together in a system of meaning that connects them to one another and to God, while fallen humans perceive things as separate and independent from one another and from God in which they exist (Daniel, 86–87, 193–194). Daniel links the differences in worldview between the elect and reprobate to thinking in terms of Stoic-Ramist “propositions” versus Platonic-Aristotelian “prepositions,” associating the latter with original sin (Daniel, 69–70, 129–132).

Other revivalist ministers such as George Whitefield and James Davenport had also accused the more liberal or Arminian clergy of being unconverted, and thereby leading their congregations astray (Wright, 42; Marsden, 231–233). These revivalists believed that if someone had not had a dramatic conversion experience then he or she may be unconverted. Unfortunately, those who had such an experience were often assured that they were elect, and thus had the right to judge others’ spiritual states, even those of ordained ministers (Wright, 51–52).

Although Edwards was initially cautious about making similar accusations (Marsden, 234), he soon came to question the salvation of those who opposed the Great Awakening revivals (Marsden, 237–238), and even doubted the salvation of some of those who claimed to be converted in the revivals (Marsden, 286–289). The communion controversy in which he insisted that parishioners make a profession of faith which met his standards in order to be admitted to communion or to have their children baptized seems to indicate that he later became comfortable making these sorts of judgments about others’ potential salvation (Marsden, 347–355).

²⁷⁶ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 292. See more on this theme in Stephen J. Nichols, *An Absolute Sort of Certainty: The Holy Spirit and the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 100–104, 150–151.

have “an absolute sort of certainty” about the truth of the gospel.²⁷⁷ As shown in this chapter, Edwards believed that double predestination was a critical part of the gospel which ensured that salvation was due only to God and not to human choice. Given all this, instead of being willing to genuinely dialogue with his theological opponents, Edwards could simply dismiss them as having nothing true to add on the subject. However, Edwards appeared to have allowed some grace for those who he believed *would* agree with him if they were not confused, inconsistent, misled, or unclear in their thinking.²⁷⁸ Some Arminians likely thought the same thing about Edwards or other Calvinists.

In addition to these personal and historical factors, simply identifying as part of a particular group or community may expose one to the risk of becoming biased against other competing groups.²⁷⁹ This may be because

group egoism not merely directs development to its own aggrandizement but also provides a market for opinions, doctrines, theories that will justify its ways and, at the same time, reveal the misfortunes of other groups to be due to their depravity. . . . in the measure that the group encouraged and accepted an ideology to rationalize its own behavior, in the same measure it will be blind to the real situation, and it will be bewildered by the emergence of a contrary ideology that will call to consciousness an opposed group egoism.²⁸⁰

Edwards and his Puritan community do appear to have been “bewildered” as to why Arminianism was growing in New England, and they condemned it as false and dangerous, perhaps not realizing it provided an alternative ideology which offered some answers to theological difficulties that Puritan beliefs were unable to adequately address. Edwards attempted to address some of these difficulties in his major works, such as the justice of God holding all

²⁷⁷ Nichols, *An Absolute Sort of Certainty*, 101. He cites Edwards, “The Mind,” in WJE 6: 346.

²⁷⁸ Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” in WJE 19: 242.

²⁷⁹ Lonergan lists four types of biases: dramatic, egoistic, group, and general. As summarized by Dadosky, a group bias is when one favors one’s own group “at the expense of others outside of the group” (Dadosky, 76n7).

²⁸⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 54. The point of view that differences in beliefs among people are intractable and primarily due to either “ignorance or perversity” has been labelled convictional imperialism, and is one of the three possible perspectives on the question of differences in beliefs as defined by McClendon and Smith (McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, 8, 10).

people as guilty of Adam's sin and condemning people for sins they were predetermined to do. However, Edwards' answers were not convincing to everyone. Questions about how God could be good if God predestined people to hell (especially infants), or whether God allowed or ordained sin, or punished people forever in hell for finite sins continued to be raised by critics of Calvinism over the next decades.²⁸¹ Despite further attempts by Edwards' followers and others to answer these problems, most people in New England came to find Calvinism less persuasive and turned to Arminianism, universalism, or other liberal philosophies.²⁸²

In sum, it appears clear that there was a Puritan bias against Anglicans, Arminians, Catholics, and all others who disagreed with Edwards and his Puritan community about double predestination constituting a critical part of the gospel. A group bias may also be reflected in the us-versus-them aspect of Edwards' view on double predestination itself, in that the eternal glory of God and the happiness of the elect requires the suffering of the reprobate, who are hated by both God and the elect.²⁸³ Thus, belief in double predestination could itself be a contributing factor to group bias if others outside of the preferred group are believed to be non-elect. Of course, Edwards made his own argument about how to know who is truly a Christian in *Religious Affections*, and concluded that true faith is ultimately shown by consistent Christian practice.²⁸⁴ Thus, Edwards expected true Christians to give a profession of faith and show good Christian conduct, while admitting that only God knows anyone's heart.²⁸⁵ However, based on what Edwards understood was the true gospel, it seems that Edwards would have thought that unless people were willing to admit that salvation was fully from God's grace and required no

²⁸¹ Haroutunian, 21–29, 36–42, 134–143.

²⁸² Haroutunian, 14, 60, 71, 154, 177, 200, 256, 258, 281–282.

²⁸³ Thomas Talbott suggests that double predestination is an exclusivist concept which tempts people to distinguish between themselves (who are presumed to be elect) and others who are judged to be not elect, leading to sinful attitudes, as demonstrated by the prophet Jonah who wanted to see Nineveh destroyed (Thomas Talbott, "Universal Reconciliation," in Brand, 218–219). Edwards' ethical theory of true virtue, which argues that it is sinful to love only a limited group of people, would likely support Talbott's assessment.

²⁸⁴ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE 2: 406, 420, 426–427.

²⁸⁵ Marsden, 351–352, referring to Edwards, "An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion in the Visible Christian Church," in WJE 12: 266–283. See more in Edwards, "An Humble Inquiry," in WJE 12: 176–180, 287–288, 291.

free choice of one's own, they were believing a false gospel, did not have spiritual perception, and thus, were potentially not elect.

5.7 Conclusion to Chapter 5

This chapter has shown that although Edwards' personal religious conversion allowed him to make peace with the doctrine of predestination with which he initially struggled, this conversion did not occur in a vacuum. Indeed, there were many different social factors that Edwards was likely aware of, and which, as demonstrated in the Yale apostasy and the Robert Breck affair, which would have likely had a significant real-world impact on his ability to achieve his future goals if he had not been able to affirm the doctrine of predestination as his community expected.

How much this awareness influenced his personal conversion experience is difficult to say, yet it is extremely fortunate for Edwards that the timing of his religious conversion helped him resolve his struggles on the issue that was a defining feature of his Puritan community only a year or so before he was ready to graduate with his M.A. degree. It seems clear, however, that Edwards genuinely came to believe that double predestination was true, and he did not affirm it only for practical purposes or personal gain, for he continued to passionately defend it throughout his career.

One might wonder if Edwards would have come to hold the same position if there had been more religious freedom in his community regarding the question of double predestination. Perhaps he would have, if, as seen in his sermons, he believed that predestination was the only way to ensure that all the glory for salvation goes to God alone. In the next chapter, a final summary of Edwards' beliefs regarding predestination will be presented to corroborate this proposal that the most decisive reason Edwards affirmed double predestination was his understanding of the gospel itself.

Chapter 6

Edwards' Theological Method on Double Predestination

Having examined the influence of each category of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral on Edwards' beliefs about predestination, I will now conduct a final methodological analysis to propose an answer as to why Edwards upheld the doctrine of double predestination. This analysis will make use of Nancey Murphy's application of Imre Lakatos's philosophy of science to theology, along with the insights from the previous chapters. As a result of this analysis, I will argue that the most significant factor behind Edwards' affirmation of double predestination was his desire to defend the core Protestant conviction that salvation is by faith alone and God's grace alone, against what he perceived as the threat of 'Arminian' moralism or legalism in New England.

However, the historical decline in popularity of Edwards' deterministic theology suggests that it was ultimately inadequate to counter the appeal of Arminianism during and after his lifetime. Appreciation for Edwards as a theologian has increased among scholars and evangelicals over the last century, yet few theologians have continued to uphold Edwards' double-predestinarian stance. Finally, I will examine some alternatives to double predestination and their advantages and weaknesses in order to suggest some factors which Christians may wish to consider when coming to their own positions on this theological question, or when engaging in theological dialogue with those who differ.

6.1 Final Summary of Edwards' Views on Double Predestination

As shown in previous chapters, numerous elements comprise Edwards' theological arguments for double predestination. Some of the reasons he held to the more uncommon elements of his worldview may be seen through a short summary of the logic of Edwards' position on double predestination.

First, in his work "End of Creation," Edwards argues that God creates the world for God's own glory. This glory is revealed to elect creatures, who are redeemed by Christ's death and given spiritual perception through the indwelling Holy Spirit, allowing them to 'see,' know, and love God. As a result, the elect then rejoice in God, in God's happiness, and in their own happiness. However, the full glory of God and the elect's eternal happiness require God to reveal all of God's attributes, including God's holiness, justice, and wrathful opposition to sin. These

attributes are revealed primarily through God inflicting an infinitely horrible punishment upon sinners. Thus, God needs at least some sinful beings to punish eternally for their sins.

According to God's wisdom, it appears that some particular ratio of elect to reprobate is necessary in order to maximize the happiness of the elect and simultaneously maximize God's glory. Therefore, God needs to have total control over exactly who is saved and who is not; otherwise, someone might be saved or lost whom God does not desire to be saved or lost. If this occurred, then God would not have achieved maximum glory or maximum happiness for the elect, thus thwarting God's entire purpose for creation, making God unhappy.

Yet Edwards cannot conceive of God ever being unhappy. Instead, Edwards believes that God is absolutely sovereign and in control of all that happens, including sin and evil. God's sovereignty means that everything ultimately serves a greater good purpose. Edwards makes use of the philosophical frameworks of idealism and occasionalism in order to argue that God controls all things based on God's perfect foreknowledge, and in accord with all of God's rules of causality and created dispositions. God continually creates every atom in the correct place with the right properties to ensure that, through the appearance of cause and effect, everything in history and the resulting eternal state occurs just as God wills. According to Edwards' reading of Scripture, in this eternal state only few intelligent creatures are saved, and most are condemned to hell.

Yet God's condemnation is only 'just' if sinful creatures are morally blameworthy for their own sin. Therefore, Edwards must say that the reprobate are morally responsible for their sinful desires, even though they cannot choose against their desire to sin. Sinners in hell thus need to have had a sinful disposition which caused them to 'freely' sin during their earthly lives. Despite God's absolute sovereignty and God being the only causal power, Edwards does not want God to be directly responsible for sin or sinful dispositions because God is good and holy. As a result, Edwards argues that God created Adam and Eve with the natural inferior disposition of self-love such that, if they were left without the influence of the superior disposition of the Holy Spirit, they were guaranteed to fall into sin, just as God required and ordained. All their descendants are then guilty of sin simply by being born into a state of depravity. Additionally, through his theory of continuous creation, Edwards believes that God can still 'justly' hold sinners accountable for their past sins and their own corrupted state, as well as Adam and Eve's sin.

As for the elect, on the basis of Christ's death on the cross, God graciously restores the disposition of the Holy Spirit to them, giving them the spiritual perception which effectually and irresistibly causes them to love God and all other beings. Because the elect contribute nothing to their own salvation, this ensures that God receives maximum glory for their redemption and also causes the elect to eternally praise God for not making them reprobate. This praise will somehow be so great as to compensate for all of the sin, evil, and suffering that occurs throughout history and in hell forever, without which God's glory and the happiness of the elect would be reduced.

Ostensibly, this appears to be a consistent and logical system, where every part is necessary in order to justify or explain the other parts of the system. Unfortunately, it is in the details of these claims that numerous perplexities, difficulties, and tensions arise. Some of the most prominent examples of these include Edwards' multiple conflicting explanations regarding causality, how the Fall occurred, and how God's foreknowledge functions. Edwards' claims that God is most glorified when creatures are most holy and happy, and yet God predestines most creatures to hell appear un-reconcilable, even to those who appreciate Edwards' system.¹ The justice of God holding creatures morally responsible when God is the ultimate cause behind all their choices, actions, and dispositions is also philosophically difficult to accept. Edwards' claim that it is morally right to hate another being in the way that Edwards believes that God and the elect will hate Satan and the reprobate contrasts with Edwards' claim that true virtue involves love for all beings. Edwards' silence regarding Bible verses that conflict with his claims is also concerning.

Above all these other issues, the major problem is his theodicy. As seen in chapter 1, Bombaro argues that according to Edwards, sin, evil, and reprobation are necessary expressions of God's complex inner beauty.² Yet even Bombaro admits that

there is something profoundly unsettling about ontological "irregularities" in God's beautiful being. One thinks of the ongoing and more recent profusion of global conflicts and violence, as well as natural disasters, and wonders how one would even attempt to

¹ Bombaro says that Edwards makes an "interesting, if not internally coherent" argument about God's purposes in glorifying God's attributes through the elect and reprobate (Bombaro, 291).

² See chapter 1, section 1.4, p. 39.

explain avowed genocidal hatred, entrenched bigotry, acts of terrorist murder, the “collateral damage” of thousands in the crossfire of armed combatants, and countless bodies strewn ashore in the aftermath of killer tsunamis, in terms of God’s complex beauty. Moreover, such a concept leaves one altogether perplexed over what the pastoral value of such a theory could be, since Edwards offers no explanation or practical use for the teaching outside of promoting the glorification of God.³

When the eternal torment of most humans in hell is added to all the above, the amount of suffering required to fully glorify God in Edwards’ system is simply astounding. Yet the major difficulty is not the “collateral damage” itself, but the fact that in Edwards’ system, the creatures who commit all these sinful acts are fully determined to do so by God. God’s role in setting up the Fall, and his being the ultimate cause of evil significantly overshadow God’s goodness.

Therefore, it seems true that in Edwards’ system, like other Calvinistic systems,

the sorrows of Calvinism all merged into the “problem of free-will.” The one eternal complaint of its enemies was that it was “deterministic,” that it reduced men to mere machines and undermined moral responsibility. Its theological scheme was highly conducive to such inferences. Its doctrines of election, predestination, efficacious grace, etc., were all apparent denials of human agency and power. Calvinism made an excellent theology of human dependence on God, but it jeopardized the “moral agency” of man.⁴

A common reaction to such a distortion of God’s sovereignty is to define creaturely freedom as independence from God’s sovereignty.⁵ Kathryn Tanner notes that “Pelagianism of some sort becomes arguably the dominant motif in modern theology” for “when it seems one can hold on to traditional claims for divine sovereignty only at the cost of the creature’s own integrity, most theologians, with good reason, choose not to do so.”⁶ For example, “talk of God’s unconditioned agency may raise suspicions of divine injustice and indifference; it may foster a fear of God tinged with resentment,”⁷ or a defense of God’s sovereignty may nearly become “an advocacy of

³ Bombaro, 293.

⁴ Haroutunian, *Piety Versus Moralism*, 220.

⁵ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 156, 122–123.

⁶ Tanner, 123.

divine tyranny.”⁸ Edwards may have agreed with such criticisms in the period before his personal conversion experience.

However, there are several problems with Pelagianism, according to Tanner:

Talk of the creature’s capacities could promote a preoccupation with self that dishonours the pre-eminence of God. It [Pelagianism] might foster a kind of self-reliance that indicates distrust of God. In the face of human achievement such talk might prompt a prideful, self-satisfied smugness. In the face of human failings, it could undergird anxiety about the future. In cases where human effort always seems to fall short, it might produce a feeling of hopeless despair. Finally, an emphasis on the creature’s capacities might lead to an attitude of ingratitude to God; one does not recognize that what one has is a gift.⁹

These seem to be exactly the sorts of concerns that Edwards had about Arminianism when he argued that Christians need to attribute their salvation fully to God’s grace. Yet when theologians attempt to counter the over-emphasis on creaturely freedom by arguing that “God’s sovereignty excludes talk of the creature’s own power and freedom . . . [then] the original intention to counter Pelagianism falters.”¹⁰ This is because “theologians who do nothing more than deny to the creature freedom and power of that sort argue on the same grounds as their opponents. They are ultimately unsuccessful, therefore, in countering the influence on theology of modern claims about the world and human persons.”¹¹ The rise of Arminianism in New England as a reaction against deterministic Puritan theology exemplifies Tanner’s claims quite well, and also explains why Edwards’ arguments against free will were unable to convince the Arminians.

Given all of these difficulties, it is perplexing why Edwards did not make more use of his insight that the cross is sufficient to reveal God’s justice and wrath at sin,¹² or notice that God’s triune

⁷ Tanner, 114–115.

⁸ Tanner, 123.

⁹ Tanner, 114.

¹⁰ Tanner, 123.

¹¹ Tanner, 161–162.

¹² As in chapter 1, section 1.4.1.

nature of perfect love, the fountain of all the rest of God's attributes, does not require a display of sin, evil, and suffering in order for God to be fully glorified.¹³ Given Edwards' deterministic understanding of God's sovereignty and the existence of sin, evil, and suffering in the world, Edwards had to find some explanation for these which did not attribute them to a source outside of God's will. But then the question arises: why did Edwards retain his deterministic philosophy if it led to increased problems for theodicy? An answer to this question may be suggested by discerning what was at the core of Edwards' beliefs about election and reprobation.

6.2 Discerning the Hard Core of Edwards' Views on Double Predestination

In Edwards' system, there appears to be no clear initial premise which acts as the foundation for the rest of his claims. Some method is necessary to enable us to discern what may be the most decisive reason(s) for Edwards' beliefs on double predestination.

A solution may be found in Nancey Murphy's work, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (1990), where she applies Imre Lakatos' philosophy of science to theology. She suggests that Lakatos' theory makes it possible to analyze 'holistic' belief systems which do not appear to have fundamental presuppositions upon which the rest of the system is built. Instead, a holistic belief system is more like a "web" or "net": "Beliefs that are most likely to be given up in the face of recalcitrant experience are located at the edges; beliefs less subject to revision are nearer the center."¹⁴ I believe this describes the system of beliefs that comprises Edwards' understanding of the doctrine of double predestination. Yet before analyzing Edwards' system, it is useful to examine the reasons why Murphy believes it is helpful and even necessary to apply philosophies of science to theology, in order to address any concerns about this method.

Murphy argues that until theology can "substantiate its knowledge claims in the court of

¹³ As in chapter 1, section 1.4.2.

¹⁴ Nancey Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1990), 8.

probable reasoning,” Hume’s skepticism and agnosticism regarding theism prevails.¹⁵ She asserts that “the appropriate response to Hume’s arguments is to show that theology measures up to the best available theory of scientific method.”¹⁶ If the God described in the Bible is real and is truly the Creator and Sustainer of the world as Christians believe, then Murphy believes it should be possible to support theological claims built on both tradition and Scripture through the use of a theological method that is comparable to those used in other ‘scientific’ investigations into the nature of reality.¹⁷

However, one may question whether it is legitimate to apply a theory of scientific rationality to theology at all. Despite the common accusation by atheists that theology is exactly the *opposite* of rational science,¹⁸ Murphy notes that numerous philosophers have argued that there are significant similarities between science and theology.¹⁹ Both theologians and scientists “formulate hypotheses and support them by showing that if true they would account for a given

¹⁵ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 88.

¹⁶ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 88. McClendon and Smith question this assertion, since they say that even the insistence that all beliefs must be measured by objective standards of evidence and proof is itself a conviction. Furthermore, what sorts of arguments and evidence are considered acceptable will likely vary depending on one’s underlying convictions (McClendon and Smith, 118–123, 137–139, 145–146). There is also the difficulty that theological claims are not able to be tested scientifically (McClendon and Smith, 132–133). Furthermore, even the sciences, particularly social sciences, are undertaken using a particular underlying set of convictions which influences their method, and which may vary from scientist to scientist (McClendon and Smith, 135). Alasdair MacIntyre also explains that rationality is shaped by the communities in which individuals are raised (Josh Reeves, “After Lakatos,” *Theology and Science* 9, no. 4 [2011]: 406).

¹⁷ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 87. Her method meshes well with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral that this dissertation has been using as a presupposition, since the Wesleyan Quadrilateral also looks to multiple sources of information beyond Scripture to support theological claims.

¹⁸ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 207–208.

¹⁹ Works referred to by Murphy in making a positive case for the similarity between the methodologies of theology and science include: Alastair McKinnon, *Falsification and Belief* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970); Douglas C. Macintosh, *Theology as an Empirical Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1919); John R. Carnes, *Axiomatics and Dogmatics* (New York: Oxford University, 1982); Basil Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1973); and Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). She notes that several skeptics of theism have also applied scientific methodology to theology, such as A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952); Antony Flew, R. M. Hare, and Basil Mitchell, “The University Discussion,” in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: SCM, 1955), 96–130; and William Warren Bartley III, *Retreat to Commitment* (New York: Knopf, 1962) (Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 80–84). Thus, this claim that theology and science are similar and can or should use similar methodology is not new, and is made on both sides of the theistic debate.

set of facts.”²⁰ Additionally, both theology and science involve “the gathering of data, the formulation of concepts and general relationships, the creation and use of hypotheses, and the deductive application of generalizations and hypotheses to particular situations.”²¹ Furthermore, several theologians have already set a precedent for applying philosophies of science to theology.²² Therefore, there is a plausible case for classifying theology as a science, and for classifying some theologies as scientific research programs as defined by Imre Lakatos.

Murphy describes Lakatos’ definition of a research program in this way:

A research program consists of a set of theories and a body of data. One theory, the “hard core,” is central to the program. Conjoined to the core is a set of auxiliary hypotheses that together add enough information to allow the data to be related to the theory. . . . The auxiliary hypotheses form a “protective belt” around the hard core because they are to be modified when potentially falsifying data are found. A research program, then, is a series of complex theories whose core remains the same while auxiliary hypotheses are successively modified, replaced, or amplified in order to account for problematic observations.²³

In sum, a research program has an unchanging ‘hard core’ theory that researchers attempt to protect with ‘auxiliary hypotheses’ which can change when it becomes necessary.²⁴ The hard core is essential, because

²⁰ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 82.

²¹ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 82, quoting from Harold K. Schilling, *Science and Religion: An Interpretation of Two Communities* (New York: Scribner’s, 1962), 37.

²² This includes Nicholas Wolterstorff, who argued that Christian theological convictions can be a criteria for choosing between empirically-adequate scientific theories, and perhaps Hans Küng, who Murphy says “used [Thomas] Kuhn’s theory of paradigm change as a tool for reconstructing the history of theology, suggesting that the works of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin initiated new paradigms in Christian theology” (Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 84, referring to Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976] and Hans Küng and David Tracy, eds., *Paradigm Change In Theology: A Symposium for the Future* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1989).

²³ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 59.

²⁴ It is interesting that McClendon and Smith argue something similar for the relationships in Christian theology between doctrines and the lesser supporting convictions. Doctrines themselves may be subservient to even larger convictions, such as that God exists (McClendon and Smith, 95–97). Thus, the idea of a more central doctrine supported by lesser ones is not a unique idea held only by Murphy or Lakatos.

the hard core of a research program plays a quasi-definitional role in that the attempt to support it constitutes working on *that* program. It also forms the center of the theoretical structure in that all other theories of the program elaborate its meaning and relate it ('quasi-deductively') to the appropriate evidence.²⁵

When this model is applied to theology,

a single doctrine could form the center of a theological research program, but the research-programs model seems to lend itself better to incarnation in a systematic theology involving many doctrines. Here some central organizing idea would serve as the hard core of the program, while theories regarding the various doctrines would constitute auxiliary hypotheses elaborating that central idea and relating it to the data. Additional auxiliary hypotheses would provide a rationale for taking those facts as relevant support for the program and would describe the program's concrete methods of research.²⁶

Thus, in a systematic attempt to relate multiple theological doctrines to one another, the central organizing idea is the hard core, which is then protected by auxiliary doctrines that elaborate on it and support it. These auxiliary doctrines are also protected by further doctrines which justify which data is to be used in theology, and how theology is to be done.

This proposal is interesting, yet as Murphy notes, "it is important to show that existing theologies can be construed as Lakatosian research programs, because there is not much reason to propose a theological method that is entirely out of step with what theologians have been doing."²⁷ Murphy argues that several different theologies do seem to meet the criteria of Lakatosian research programs. She refers to the modernist Catholic theologians who each in their own way attempted to defend the core hypothesis that "genuine Catholicism is the true faith and reconcilable with modern thought."²⁸ Other theological research programs may include process theology, the 'death of God' theology, some demythologizing or existentialist interpretations of Scripture, the application of analytic philosophy to theology, or the stream of thought which includes

²⁵ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 94, emphasis hers.

²⁶ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 175–176.

²⁷ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 18.

²⁸ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 92.

Pannenberg's "identification of revelation as history."²⁹ She believes all these examples confirm that Lakatos' theory of research programs is a plausible one to apply to theology.³⁰

I believe that Edwards' arguments about double predestination appear to conform to this definition of a research program. Using a process of elimination, I will attempt to categorize his various arguments as either the auxiliary protective hypotheses which are subject to change, or as the hard core hypothesis which is not modified but is defended by the auxiliary hypotheses.

If the defining trait of auxiliary beliefs is their being subject to change to accommodate new data in order to protect a hard core hypothesis, then it seems that Edwards' philosophy of causality falls into this auxiliary category. As shown in chapter 2, Edwards' philosophical definition of how causes and effects are related, or whether things in themselves have any causal power or not, changes depending on what doctrine Edwards is attempting to uphold. When attempting to defend a deterministic view of decision-making, he argues that the links between cause and effect are strong and cause always precedes effect in time. However, when defending the doctrine of original sin, he insists that cause and effect must be simultaneous in both space and time. This alternate view of causality then leads Edwards to deny that there is any cause in the universe that is not a result of God's immediate action, leading to his theories of occasionalism and continuous creation, which he uses to attempt to justify his claim that God can treat humanity as a single entity who is guilty of Adam's sin. It seems, then, that Edwards' views of

²⁹ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 86.

³⁰ It should be noted that Murphy has moved beyond endorsing Lakatos' methodology in all its details, and has modified it by incorporating some insights from Alasdair MacIntyre (George F. R. Ellis, "Nancey Murphy's Work," *Zygon* 34, no. 4 [December 1999]: 601–602). This shift was because Murphy came to believe that Lakatos' theory could not provide clear enough standards to judge between equally-consistent theological paradigms/traditions (a.k.a. research programs) in order to determine which one is preferable or superior, and accepted MacIntyre's approach as more viable (Reeves, "After Lakatos," 402–406; Nancey Murphy, "Theology and Science Within a Lakatosian Program," *Zygon* 34, no. 4 [December 1999]: 635–636; Nancey Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics* [New York: Routledge, 1997, reprint 2018], 57–62).

This aspect of Lakatos' philosophy will not be employed in this analysis of Edwards' understanding of predestination. Furthermore, MacIntyre's idea of incommensurate alternative philosophies or 'traditions' seems to be comparable to Murphy's concept of competing 'research programs' (Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity*, 49–62, 123–129; Bruce W. Ballard, *Understanding MacIntyre* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000], 25–31). Thus Lakatos' definition of the structure of a research program is still applicable and useful for my purposes here and has not been made obsolete by Murphy's or MacIntyre's proposals for judging between research programs.

causality, occasionalism, and continuous creation are auxiliary doctrines, for he appeals to them seemingly only in order to protect other doctrines which are more central. In this case, the more central theological doctrines are those that define how people are responsible for their sins despite being unable to avoid sinning, and how all people are rightly held guilty of Adam's sin. Both of these assertions support the need for the gospel, but they also uphold God's justice in punishing the reprobate in hell, since in Edwards' thought, the revelation of God's justice is the reason for the Fall, sin, reprobation, and hell. This raises the issue of theodicy.

As shown in chapter 3, Edwards' views on theodicy are also inconsistent and subject to change. His description of the Fall varies as to whether God first removed the Holy Spirit from Adam and then Adam sinned, thus making God responsible for the Fall, or whether somehow the Fall happened before the removal of the Holy Spirit, even though this is seemingly impossible according to Edwards' philosophy of decision-making.³¹ Edwards' argument that Scripture depicts the reprobate as deserving their punishment in hell supports his theory of decision-making where those who cannot do otherwise still deserve punishment for their moral failure. This argument relies on a circular logic which assumes that Edwards' theory of decision-making is correct, and that those in hell were indeed actually unable to avoid sinning.³² Edwards' attempt to explain evil as a natural consequence of God's withdrawal from the world is also inconsistent with his own deterministic views of reality where God is the only cause of everything.³³ This determinism is seen ultimately in his metaphysical idealism, according to which everything is composed of God's ideas, which implies that God's will is the ultimate source of evil and sin.³⁴ This means that Edwards has to resort to the assertion that everything which happens is allowed/caused by God for a greater good purpose, including reprobation.

One might argue that God's glory is a major theme in Edwards' thought which has recurred

³¹ See chapter 3, section 3.4.4.

³² See chapter 3, section 3.4.3.

³³ See chapter 3, section 3.5 and compare with chapter 2, sections 2.3 and 2.4.

³⁴ See chapter 2, section 2.5, p. 109–110.

throughout this study, and so perhaps constitutes the core of Edwards' beliefs about double predestination. As shown in chapter 5, Edwards believed that the idea that humans can do nothing to save themselves is more glorifying to God than 'Arminian' legalism or Pelagianism. It appears that Edwards finds the doctrine of original sin useful to oppose these alternative understandings of the gospel. It is also true that God's maximal glory is the final justification which Edwards appeals to in order to defend God's ordination of several negative events including: the Fall, all the sin, evil and suffering in the world, reprobation, and even the eternal torment of the reprobate in hell. However, what makes God glorious is inherently subjective. The Arminians of the time believed that they too were defending God's glory by denying God's ultimate responsibility for sin and evil, and also denied God was the ultimate cause of why people end up in hell. Hence, a desire to uphold God's glory does not appear to explain why Edwards took the position he did on double predestination. Instead, Edwards' appeals to God's glory appear to function primarily as an explanation or defense of God's actions.

Edwards' experiences of nature, while supplying evidence which convinced him that God is fully good and which provided a few naturalistic types for double predestination and theodicy, also were probably not the hard core of his beliefs. After all, many Christians would agree that God is good and could say, following Romans 1, that nature reveals something of God to humanity, yet not all agree with Edwards on predestination. Without dismissing Edwards' experiences or his interpretations of them which helped him to come to terms with the doctrine of predestination, the 'types' which Edwards saw in nature as supporting the doctrine are subjective. Thus, when his personal experiences of nature are used to bolster his beliefs in double predestination, these arguments appear to act primarily in a defensive or auxiliary manner.

Perhaps it was Edwards' interpretation of Scripture which is central and is what all the aforementioned arguments are defending. However, as seen several times in this study,³⁵ Edwards minimizes or simply does not address verses which appear to disagree with the verses that he uses to support his beliefs. This is perplexing. I would expect that if Edwards had built his

³⁵ E.g. chapter 2, section 2.3, p. 92n106, chapter 3, section 3.2, p. 129n81 and 131, and section 3.5 p. 159n218, and chapter 4, section 4.1, p. 167.

doctrine primarily on a thorough study of all relevant Scripture verses about God's sovereignty, providence, and predestination, then these verses would be incorporated into his arguments—or at least, he would be more careful to explain verses which appear to conflict with his system in order to show that they do not undermine it. This would have been especially relevant in order to prevent these verses from being used offensively by the Arminians against Edwards' proposals. Such exegesis would have made it possible to weigh whether Edwards or the Arminians make the more convincing exegetical case for their doctrines. Instead, Edwards seems to use Scripture only to support his preconceived theological or philosophical ideas, and never admits that the Bible can be read in multiple ways or can support alternative ideas. In particular, he does not seem to recognize that there may be alternative views of God's foreknowledge, God's character, or God's methods of conversion, and diverse conclusions as to whether everything which occurs is what God wants to happen. This is not to say that every perspective on these issues is equally valid, or that such a harmonization of Scripture is even fully possible on this side of eternity. However, if Edwards' case were derived primarily from Scripture, because of his high respect for Scripture and his belief in its inerrancy,³⁶ I believe there would be more evidence in Edwards' works of attempts to refute these alternative interpretations or to reinterpret difficult verses on the basis of Scripture itself.

It could then be suggested that double predestination itself is merely an auxiliary supporting hypothesis for Edwards' hard core belief that everything which happens must be God's will, in order for God to achieve God's prophesied purposes without experiencing frustration or disappointment. Edwards does not have irrefutable scriptural or philosophical reasons for these claims, and thus they seem to be fundamental assumptions.³⁷ Yet this assertion—that God must control everything in order to achieve what God wants—is linked to Edwards' beliefs about causality, including his rejection of contingent events and his acceptance of the 'butterfly effect.'³⁸ However, Edwards' views of causality are inconsistent, and his multiple explanations

³⁶ See chapter 3, section 3.1, p. 122.

³⁷ See chapter 3, section 3.2, p. 131, and chapter 2, section 2.3, p. 92–93.

³⁸ See chapter 3, section 3.2, p. 130n82, and chapter 2, section 2.3, p. 91.

for how God's foreknowledge functions differ from one another. Thus, his assertion that without deterministic cause and effect, God could not know the future and could not control all that happens so that God is not disappointed, cannot be the hard core of Edwards' belief system.³⁹ Instead, it also seems to be an auxiliary hypothesis supporting his hypotheses on causality, which support his theories of decision-making, which in turn support the doctrine of original sin.

An alternative possibility for the hard core of his system, based on Edwards' "Personal Narrative," could be his conviction about God's sovereignty, defined as God having absolute control over everything that occurs.⁴⁰ Perhaps this is what double predestination is meant to defend, and this is the reason that Edwards never considers the possibility that God might allow creaturely freedom which could oppose or limit God's will. However, there is good reason to reject this explanation. As seen in chapter 2, Edwards' theory of true virtue could justify supralapsarian predestination, where God, as the ultimate being who infinitely outweighs the rest of creation has the right to treat his creatures as God desires, including the right to predestine them to eternal torment for God's glory.⁴¹ This could have solved Edwards' theodicy problem, for if 'existential weight makes right,' then it should not matter if God is good according to human standards.⁴² If God's absolute sovereignty was Edwards' core theological belief, then

³⁹ This is even more true when Edwards' components of idealism, occasionalism, and continuous creation are considered. See chapter 3, section 3.2, pp. 130 and 133.

⁴⁰ This possibility has been suggested by several authors. Bombaro believes that "a conviction of the absolute and arbitrary sovereignty of God serves as the cornerstone of his entire thought" (Bombaro, 230). Pauw notes that it is frequently thought that Edwards' theology is "centered in 'the rhetorical climax of the God of power'" (Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 7). Marsden believes "the central principle of Edwards' thought, true to his Calvinistic heritage, was the sovereignty of God" (Marsden, 4). Thuesen also argues that "ultimately what was at stake for Edwards in all liberal equivocations on predestination and hell was God's absolute sovereignty" (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 85).

⁴¹ See chapter 2, section 2.1, pp. 73–74.

⁴² Wes Morrongton discusses some of the theological and ethical conundrums which appear for those who, like Edwards, would hold to the "divine command" theory of ethics. He argues that either one must admit that whatever God commands is good simply because God is God (and thus, even potentially troubling commands must be considered 'good'), or else admit some sort of limit on God's sovereignty which constrains God's actions to some smaller subset of all possible actions defined as 'good' by some other standard (Wes Morrongton, "What if God Commanded Something Terrible? A Worry for Divine-Command Meta-Ethics," in *Religious Studies* 45, no. 3 [September 2009]: 249–267).

One might reply that God cannot be said to be either morally good or morally bad, for God is not capable of having moral virtues in the sense that humans do (Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 59–61). However,

supralapsarian predestination would seem to be the logically consistent answer. The barrier that prevented Edwards from endorsing supralapsarian reprobation was his belief that Scripture teaches that God never punishes someone who is innocent.⁴³ This then required Edwards to make his difficult and inconsistent arguments about theodicy and original sin. Therefore, Edwards must be attempting to defend something even more central than God's absolute sovereignty.

Further clues as to the core of Edwards' beliefs on predestination may be found by examining two alternative ways that Edwards could have made his system self-consistent, in order to understand why he did not choose these options.⁴⁴

First, if Edwards maintains that God creates a deterministic world in which God is the only causal agent, and God wanted the Fall to occur because all sin and evil contribute to greater good, then it appears that reprobation is still not a necessary component of Edwards' system. As shown in chapters 1 and 4, if God creates the elect to delight in God and love 'Being in general' and God has the means to irresistibly convert anyone God chooses, then it seems that God should simply save everyone. This would apparently lead to quantitatively greater individual creaturely happiness, greater happiness for the elect as a whole, and in consequence, greater glory for God. As shown through Edwards' own words, the cross would be sufficient to ensure that there would be no aspect of God's character as triune love which would remain unrevealed to the elect.⁴⁵ God would still be fully in control of all things, and everything truly would lead to God's maximal glory *and* the maximal happiness of his creatures. With this universalistic approach, Edwards' system could have been entirely self-consistent and also have fulfilled Edwards' desire to portray

Edwards did affirm that God is a moral agent who possesses "moral perfection and excellency" (Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 622). As discussed in chapter 2, Edwards believed that moral excellence is to love God and all other beings, as shown by expressing a benevolent will towards them. Edwards argues that this is the standard for both divine and human morality (Edwards, "True Virtue," in WJE 8: 620–621).

⁴³ See chapter 2, section 2.1, pp. 74–76.

⁴⁴ This is a similar approach to that used by Nancey Murphy when she deduces the reason the Catholic modernists did not convert to liberal Protestantism, a more advanced competing alternative which shared their concern to reconcile Christianity with "the intellectual conditions of the modern age." She suspects this was because the Catholic modernists had a conviction that Catholicism is the true faith, which excluded Protestant claims (Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 93).

⁴⁵ See chapter 1, sections 1.4.1 and 1.4.2.

God as perfectly beautiful and good. However, the reason Edwards could not opt for universalism is because he believed that Scripture teaches that most people will end up in hell.⁴⁶ Incorporating this belief within Edwards' deterministic worldview while attempting to maintain God's goodness leads to all the problems, inconsistencies, and contradictions noted in this study.

If Edwards did not want to uphold supralapsarianism because of its negative implications for God's justice,⁴⁷ and did not want to uphold universalism because it seems contrary to Scripture, then it seems to me that the only remaining logically-consistent answer as to why people end up in hell despite God being perfectly good would have required Edwards to include some minimal level of libertarian creaturely free will. This option would have allowed him to claim that all who end up in hell willingly choose it by rejecting God's offer of salvation, even though they could have been saved. Then, any glory that God receives from the demonstration of God's justice in hell would be a redemption even of creaturely rebellion. This possibility could still fit with Edwards' claim that seeing God's justice increases the happiness of the elect. Yet this shift to include libertarian free will would have required Edwards to discard the deterministic assumptions underlying his system, and accept that some things happen which God allows but does not truly desire, which may not work out for an ultimate greater good, and which may make God temporarily unhappy.⁴⁸ Such a drastic change in worldview would be unlikely for Edwards, as his determinism is simply incompatible with any real creaturely influence on God's will. Furthermore, the reality of human libertarian free will was exactly what the Arminians were arguing at the time, but as shown in chapter 5, Edwards rejected Arminianism as a false gospel.

Based on chapter 5, one might argue that Edwards simply capitulated to his culture's expected beliefs about predestination in order to secure personal success in his chosen career. There was

⁴⁶ See chapter 1, section 1.7, p. 61–62.

⁴⁷ See chapter 2, section 2.1, p. 74.

⁴⁸ I am not attempting to argue that adopting this perspective would solve all problems in theodicy. However, in my opinion, saying that God permits evil which God is not the ultimate cause of is at least one step better at upholding God's goodness than systems which assign all causation to God. Of course, I recognize that this opinion is formed by my own reading of Scripture, philosophical presuppositions, personal subjective experiences, and the Christian tradition in which I was raised.

strong pressure around the time of his conversion experience for ministers to adhere to Puritan theological expectations. It has been suggested that

our own ideology, as it must, forbids us ever to question and analyze the structure of what we hold to be true, since only thus can we maintain the fiction that we chose to believe what in fact we had no choice but to believe, short of ostracism or insanity; while we are more than eager to find the logical flaws, and particularly the insincerity and captivity, in one who operates in another system.⁴⁹

Edwards' eagerness to critique his opponents in detail while not addressing the inconsistencies or lacunae in his own system may make it appear that Edwards could have been restricted in such a way by his culture's expectations. Admittedly, it was extremely convenient that Edwards' change of mind happened to take place in time for him to firmly support Puritan orthodoxy at his graduation, which shortly followed the New England apostasy. This enabled him to become an ordained minister, to marry the woman he loved, and to begin building a respectable reputation in his community. As argued in chapter 5, however, it seems unlikely that Edwards accepted what he initially considered a "horrible doctrine"⁵⁰ for purely pragmatic purposes, or preached it despite secretly believing otherwise.

Perhaps, then, it was his conversion experience which formed the hard core of his beliefs regarding double predestination. As shown in chapter 4, Edwards interpreted his spiritual experience as a sort of irresistible grace which inspired his theory of spiritual perception. This conversion experience seems to have assured him of God's goodness despite the doctrine of double predestination. The importance of this event may be highlighted through a thought experiment regarding what may have occurred if Edwards had not had such an experience.

First, Edwards may have continued to follow God simply due to his fear of hell, as when he recommitted himself to pursuing religion after nearly dying from illness during his undergraduate studies. If he were still determined to become a Puritan minister, he would have had to grudgingly accept (or at least, not publicly deny) the doctrine of double predestination,

⁴⁹ Erikson, *Young Man Luther*, 135.

⁵⁰ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 792.

although it seems likely that he would not have had nearly as much love and passion for God. It is plausible that a person's level of passion makes a difference in the quality of their work. So if Edwards were merely trying to avoid censure, it seems likely that he would not have become as influential of a minister in New England, and may not have fulfilled his potential.

Alternatively, Edwards could have rejected the doctrine of double predestination. Then he would have had two options. First, he may have been able to join a more 'liberal' Anglican congregation in Boston and pursue ordination in that denomination. However, Edwards' Puritan background provided some resistance to that option, since the Anglicans had persecuted Puritans in England. Additionally, Edwards believed that to accept Anglicanism was basically to accept Roman Catholicism, which he viewed as the "Antichrist," and Catholics had also persecuted those who proclaimed the true gospel of salvation by faith alone.⁵¹ Furthermore, if Edwards believed that Arminianism was a distortion of the gospel and was undermining morality in New England, then he would have been even more opposed to converting to any form of it. Thus, it appears that the only remaining alternatives would have been to either 1) become an outcast from all of these groups and hope to attract followers to his own independent church, or 2) give up any ambition of being ordained and keep his beliefs quiet while remaining in his Puritan community. The first option seems unwise and unlikely, given the strong opposition to Robert Breck's ordination from other Puritan ministers in New England.

In sum, without a conversion experience, it seems that realistically, Edwards could have been either a half-hearted and potentially hypocritical Puritan minister serving God due to fear of hell and pragmatically professing a doctrine with which he disagreed, or he could have given up on becoming a minister and theologian altogether. Neither of these possibilities would be ideal if God knew that Edwards had great potential to be a minister and theologian. It is therefore possible to speculate that God truly did give Edwards the spiritual experience which convinced him of God's goodness. This experience enabled Edwards to love God and to make peace with

⁵¹ Marsden, 91, citing Edwards, "Miscellanies," nos. 12 and 13 in WJE 13: 206–207. Also see Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 340 in WJE 13: 414–415, where he directly compares the Pope to Satan and the Antichrist. Thus, even if other Puritans were able to become Anglicans as in the Yale apostasy, I do not believe that Edwards could have willingly chosen to become an Anglican.

the doctrine of double predestination which his Puritan society expected him to uphold. This outcome was not only very helpful for Edwards' personal spiritual development, but it also allowed him to become a fully-committed and passionate Puritan minister.

Although it is risky to speculate about God's motives, let us frame a thought experiment to outline hypothetical reasons that God would give Edwards such a spiritual experience. Possibly, God desired for Edwards to know and love God more fully, in line with what Edwards proposed as God's ultimate end of creation. However, another possibility presumes as true Edwards' understanding of the gospel of salvation being a free and gracious gift from God, such that no one can earn or merit eternal life. In such a case, 'Arminianism' as it was then being expressed would indeed have been a threat to the gospel. God may thus have desired for Edwards to refute Arminianism, using the best arguments and philosophy available at the time. Since no-one's theology is perfect in this life, as per 1 Corinthians 13:12, perhaps it was better for God to allow Edwards to defend a theological system that involved some logical inconsistencies and contradictions, and even a doctrine of double predestination, than to see the true gospel in New England replaced by moralism and semi-Pelagianism. If so, then God could have helped Edwards accept the culturally necessary doctrine of predestination by helping Edwards see God's true beauty through his conversion experience, thus enabling Edwards to avoid hypocrisy and have great passion for his calling to ministry, in order for him to be maximally used by God to spread the gospel through the Great Awakening revivals.

This thought experiment is of course only imaginative. However, as shown in chapter 5, Edwards maintained a lifelong conviction that Arminianism as expressed in eighteenth-century New England was not the true gospel. He felt that it depended too much upon human free will, which led people to trust in their own abilities instead of God's grace for salvation. This, he felt, diminished God's glory. When he judged that Arminianism led to negative consequences for morality and spiritual development in the people of New England, this likely confirmed his belief that it was not truly from God, and thus deserved to be refuted. To do so, Edwards affirmed the Puritan scheme of double predestination by accepting that there is no role for human free will in conversion because it is God who chooses who is saved. Because of Edwards' reading of Scripture, however, he could not endorse the philosophically-consistent options of either supralapsarianism or universalism that his larger system could imply.

Thus, the reason Edwards opted for infralapsarian double predestination, even though it creates several contradictions and problems in his theological system as a whole, could have been because Edwards was trying to hold together two biblical ideas. The first, contra the Arminians, is that the only reason anyone is saved is because of God's grace. The second is that God is good and loving, as per Scripture and as confirmed by Edwards' conversion experience, despite his belief that not everyone will be saved. Taken together, Edwards may have believed that the biblical gospel message claims something like this: God, out of his gracious loving goodness, sovereignly saves some of humanity from a situation that they can do nothing to save themselves from, for the sake of God's glory and the elect's eternal happiness. All of Edwards' other philosophical, scriptural, and experiential arguments support this 'hard core' conviction of what he believed was the true gospel.

This theory seems supported by the proposal made in chapter 5, that Edwards' opposition to the Arminians may have prevented Edwards from appreciating the Arminians' valid points of criticism regarding double predestination, and from admitting that it is possible to read Scripture in a way that supports some aspects of Arminianism (just as it can be read to support some aspects of Calvinism). If Edwards found the Arminians' views to be a fundamental threat to what he saw as the true gospel message, he would have had no interest in learning from them, and could have dismissed them as unsaved heretics rather than responding with an attempt to address the flaws in his system.⁵²

In summary, I propose that the most decisive reasons behind Edwards' beliefs on double predestination were: 1) Tradition (the choice between Puritanism and Arminianism in New England regarding which tradition had the true gospel message); 2) confirmed by Experience (Edwards' personal spiritual conversion that enabled him to see God and all that God does as good, and supplied evidence for his doctrine of spiritual perception); 3) justified by Reason (his philosophical arguments for idealism, God's purpose in creation, causality, God's sovereignty, decision-making, true virtue, appeals to "common sense," and his attempts at theodicy); and 4) supported and constrained by his reading of Scripture (by interpreting verses according to a

⁵² See chapter 5, pp. 264–266.

Calvinistic perspective and seemingly not considering other interpretive possibilities, and being convinced by Scripture that some people will be lost but that God is just and good despite this).

Identifying Edwards' core belief as the conviction that salvation is only by God's grace and not by human choice or effort would place Edwards in continuity with other Puritan theologians, earlier Reformed theologians such as John Calvin and Martin Luther, as well as the early church theologian Augustine and the Augustinian tradition that developed in the Middle Ages. Thus, it seems possible to label the variety of concepts that Edwards puts forth in order to preserve this core truth as auxiliary hypotheses, even though these are not necessarily identical to the auxiliary hypotheses in the systems of other theologians who defended this same core truth.

As a result, not only could it be said that Edwards' theology was in some sense a 'research program' in which he continued to craft changing auxiliary hypotheses to support his core conviction, but that his work as a whole could be seen as part of the deterministic 'research program' of Christian thought which shares the same core hypothesis. In their own ways, I believe each of these earlier theologians in this 'deterministic' research program resorted to defending the doctrine that salvation is by God's grace alone and not human effort specifically in response to challenges from systems that insisted on the role of good works for salvation.⁵³ For example, it was shown in chapter 5 how Augustine defended double predestination in contrast to Pelagius' views on free will in order to reject works-righteousness and affirm the necessity of God's grace for salvation. Luther and Calvin likewise competed with medieval semi-Pelagian or more forthrightly Pelagian streams of thought. In Edwards' case, his concern was the challenge to this same doctrine by eighteenth-century Arminians and their moralistic or legalistic teachings, which this study has identified as the fundamental reason why Edwards defended the 'core hypothesis' that there is no role for human effort or free will in salvation.

⁵³ For example, Murphy argues that the core hypothesis of the modernist Catholics was what distinguished this research program from the "other live options of its day" (Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 93). McClendon and Smith also assert that belief systems are frequently justified in relation to other competing belief systems (McClendon and Smith, 141–144, 173–175, 179). For example, "if I believe in God (am convinced of God) in a pluralistic world, a world in which I know there are people of good will who do not so believe, then my faith, if justified at all, must be a faith that takes account of that very pluralism that in part denies my faith. It must be faith justifiable . . . in a world that includes unfaith" (McClendon and Smith, 173).

However, as I will discuss in the next section, the legacy of Edwards' theology indicates that it was not a completely satisfactory answer to refute those who wanted to uphold creaturely free will. What can be learned from this history and the direction that alternative theological proposals have taken has useful implications for the future of the debate between modern-day Calvinists and Arminians.

6.3 The Legacy of Edwards' Views on Double Predestination

After Edwards' death in 1758, despite having a few loyal followers such as Joseph Bellamy (1719–1790), Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803), and other New Light puritans, Edwards' theological influence generally declined during the era of the American Revolution.⁵⁴ This may have been partly due to the cultural influence of the Declaration of Independence. In claiming that all people have the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” the Declaration seemed to presuppose self-determination, and encouraged the newly-forming American attitudes of rejecting old traditions, including the predestinarian teachings of the Westminster Confession.⁵⁵ Additionally, major American figures such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin rejected and disdained Calvinistic predestination.⁵⁶

Edwards' theology regained some significance after the French Revolution and during the Second Great Awakening through the ministries of Timothy Dwight (1752–1817) and Charles Finney (1792–1875).⁵⁷ As a result, “for about half a century from 1800 to 1850, Edwards was the

⁵⁴ Marsden, 498–499. Surprisingly, this decline occurred despite the success of the “New Divinity” educational program where “by taking post-baccalaureate ministerial hopefuls into their homes as pastoral apprentices, New Divinity theologians such as Joseph Bellamy, Charles Backus, and Nathanael Emmons trained the lion’s share of New England’s future pastors,” including “such influential Edwardseans as Jonathan Edwards Jr., Levi Hart, John Smalley, and Samuel Spring,” such that “by the time of New England’s Second Great Awakening, literally hundreds of New England ministers could trace their pedagogical genealogy back to Edwards himself” (Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, 34).

⁵⁵ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 104.

⁵⁶ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 105–107.

⁵⁷ Marsden, 498–499; Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 273–274. Although Finney admired Edwards, he modified Edwards' thought as he learned it from Nathaniel Taylor (Marsden, 499; Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor*, 150–151; Sweeney, “Evangelical Tradition in America,” 221–222). Guelzo notes that Edwards' theology became increasingly

polestar of the most formidable and influential American theology.”⁵⁸ He has been credited with having a profound influence on nineteenth-century Presbyterians, including Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), William Cunningham (1805–1861), Charles Hodge (1797–1878), and Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921).⁵⁹ Yet after this, in New England and America as a whole, moralism grew in popularity while Calvinistic theology declined.⁶⁰

Methodist preachers who began to appear in New England probably contributed to this decline. Like their founder John Wesley (1703–1791), they rejected Calvinistic double predestination and won an increasing number of converts.⁶¹ Such decline may also have been due to Edwards’ successors who tried to continue the offensive against moralists, Arminians, liberals, and others. Yet in so doing, they had

appropriated their [opponents’] axioms and interests, and thus had produced a brand of Calvinism, ‘the new divinity’, which was perplexing and unattractive. It was Calvinism soiled and bruised in its struggle against the humanitarianism of the age, exaggerated here, distorted there, sheepish, worried, and weakening. It annoyed many of the orthodox, irritated the enlightened, and filled the land with discord and trouble.⁶²

“watered-down” as it was transmitted to future generations through Finney, Mark Hopkins, J. H. Fairchild, and Dwight L. Moody (Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 274).

⁵⁸ Marsden, 499. See also Mark A. Noll, “Jonathan Edwards and Nineteenth-Century Theology,” in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 261–269.

⁵⁹ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, xv, 83.

⁶⁰ Marsden, 500; Haroutunian, *passim*; Noll, “Jonathan Edwards and Nineteenth-Century Theology,” 275–279.

⁶¹ Thuesen, *Predestination*, 116–119. Thuesen notes that while Calvinists also had their revivals, “in sheer numbers of converts, pride of place in the antebellum period belongs to the Methodists. Between 1776 and 1850, Methodists increased from an estimated 3 percent of all church members to 34 percent, making them ‘the most extensive national institution other than the Federal government’”. By contrast, Presbyterians and Congregationalists lost ground in the same period, declining from 39 to 15 percent of adherents. Even allowing for error in the notoriously difficult science of religious demographics, these numbers strongly suggest that the first eight decades of the republic were not kind to unconditional predestinarians” (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 119, quoting Nathan O. Hatch, “The Puzzle of American Methodism,” *Church History* 63, no. 2 (1994): 178). Hatch suggests the Methodists’ success partly came from their preaching of “God’s free grace, the liberty of people to accept or reject that grace, and the power and validity of popular religious expression” which, in contrast to Calvinism, encouraged “individual freedom, autonomy, responsibility, and achievement” (Hatch, 178, 179). These values may have resonated with America’s emerging ideals of capitalism, liberal individualism, and democracy (Hatch, 187–188).

⁶² Haroutunian, 60. More on the rise of the ‘New Divinity’ is documented in William Breitenbach, “Piety and Moralism: Edwards and the New Divinity,” in Hatch and Stout, 177–204.

James Dana took up the attempt to refute *Freedom of the Will* in 1770.⁶³ Yet while he criticized Edwards' work, he was unable to offer his own alternative.⁶⁴ Nathaniel William Taylor (1786–1858), a student of Timothy Dwight, tried to supplement Edwards' system, but in so doing, he effectively rewrote it and rejected key elements of Edwards' thought.⁶⁵ Taylor compromised his Calvinistic and Edwardsean heritage to the point that his theology was nearly the same as the Arminian moralists, and thus contributed to the disappearance of Edwards' theology.⁶⁶ Taylor had great influence in Yale Divinity School, and numerous allies who controlled all the major Connecticut periodicals. Together, they effectively influenced future graduates who would become clergy, and overwhelmed the proponents of the New Divinity who also claimed Edwards' legacy.⁶⁷

⁶³ Haroutunian, 229. At least 29 other serious attempts were made to refute *Freedom of the Will* during the nineteenth century (Noll, "Jonathan Edwards and Nineteenth-Century Theology," 270).

⁶⁴ Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 243.

⁶⁵ Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 243–244. Guelzo describes how Taylor argued that all people have the ability to comply with God's moral government, but avoided Pelagianism by saying this ability was due to God's grace. He rejected Edwards' distinction between natural and moral necessity, replacing these with simple 'certainty' which was not deterministic. However, he claimed that all that happens is still as God desires, even if sin is an unavoidable by-product of the sort of world that God created with self-determining moral agents who operate according to principles of self-love (Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 243–256). As a result, his opponents complained he was practically an Arminian, and accused him of only appealing to Edwards and Calvinism in order to make himself appear orthodox (Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 270–271). "But Taylor did succeed as an Edwardsean in one sense: he was able to produce an apologetic for New England Calvinism that absolved Calvinism of the most damaging criticisms the Unitarians could make against it. It is no wonder that, in that sense, his contemporaries interpreted his teachings as a redaction of *Freedom of the Will* and not a destruction. And he did it in terms that as in *Freedom of the Will* were also aimed at forcing a recalcitrant segment of the Calvinist community (this time the Edwardseans) to admit the ineffectiveness of their apologetic" (Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 255–256).

It is possible that Taylor's deviations from Edwards' theology occurred because Taylor was, like Edwards, "somewhat theologically eccentric and very much a constructive theologian who called no man master" (Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 13). This could have been because "what Edwards transmitted to his theological heirs was a method of working through a theological problem for oneself with meticulous attention to detail and careful theological distinctions, but without much reliance upon confessions and the tradition" (Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 13–14).

⁶⁶ Haroutunian, 253–254, 266–280; Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor*, 129, 152; Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 272. Yet Sweeney argues that Taylor's theological flexibility and influence at Yale allowed his theology to shape both New England and evangelical Christianity as it spread westward across the United States by bringing New England's values, echoes of Edwards' theology, and the gospel to new and culturally diverse situations (Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor*, 145–149).

⁶⁷ Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 272–273.

Thus, “by the late nineteenth century . . . rigorous Calvinist theology was in full retreat in most American cultural centers, and Edwards’ reputation suffered accordingly. All but a dwindling group of ardent followers jettisoned the particulars of his Calvinist teachings,” even though Edwards’ arguments for Calvinism were still considered significant among his opponents.⁶⁸ In the early twentieth century, Edwards was often maligned as being only a “hell-fire preacher,” and he was blamed for many elements of American culture which progressive Americans wished to be freed from.⁶⁹ In this period, Edwards remained an interest mostly to biographers, some of whom were sympathetic to Edwards as a person but criticized his theology.⁷⁰

The revival of interest in Edwards among theologians is commonly traced to A. C. McGiffert’s sympathetic biography published in 1932, and several publications from the 1930s to the 1950s by H. Richard Niebuhr who “celebrated what he saw as the essence of Edwards’ theology, even while moving far from most of its particulars.”⁷¹ Others who appreciated Edwards and promoted his work included John H. Gerstner, R. C. Sproul, Iain Murray, and John Piper.⁷² Joseph Haroutunian’s work *Piety Versus Moralism: The Passing of New England Theology* (1964) also praised Edwards’ work while denigrating his successors’ decline into moralism.⁷³ Perry Miller’s

⁶⁸ Marsden, 500.

⁶⁹ Marsden, 501.

⁷⁰ Marsden, 501. Marsden cites Henry Bamford Parkes as one of the more sympathetic. Parkes portrayed Edwards as a “tragic figure” that became too absorbed with Calvinism. Without this rigid Calvinistic framework, he argued that Edwards “might have become the greatest figure in the history of American thought; he might have altered the whole of the future history of America” (Henry B. Parkes, *Jonathan Edwards, The Fiery Puritan* [New York: Minton, Balch, 1930], 253, as quoted in Marsden, 501). Ola Winslow was also sympathetic, but asserted that Edwards’ dogmatic system was outdated and “needed to be demolished” (Ola Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards, 1703–1758: A Biography* [New York: Macmillan, 1940], 297–298, as quoted in Marsden, 501).

⁷¹ Marsden, 501. He refers to H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Chicago: Willet, Clark, 1937), 101–103, 113–116, 135–145 as examples. See a shorter discussion on Niebuhr’s use of Edwards in Donald Weber, “The Recovery of Jonathan Edwards,” in Hatch and Stout, 61–66. Scholars of religion from the late 1920s and early 1930s were also studying Edwards, but these authors were not interested in theology and were instead primarily concerned with understanding how Edwards should be remembered (Stephen D. Crocco, “Edwards’s Intellectual Legacy,” in Stein, 300–301, 307). Other instances of minor historical cultural commentary on Edwards in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are documented in Lesser, “Edwards in American Culture,” in Stein, 282–285.

⁷² Sweeney, “Evangelical Tradition in America,” 230–231.

⁷³ Marsden, 501.

biography of Edwards in 1949 portrayed him as a genius and America's greatest philosopher while downplaying his Calvinism, which made Edwards attractive to a wider scholarly audience.⁷⁴ Miller also recruited scholars to begin publishing the Yale volumes of Edwards' works,⁷⁵ which have become a major scholarly project at the Jonathan Edwards Center, founded in 2003 at Yale University. Their mission statement notes that Edwards

is the subject of intense scholarly interest because of his significance as an historical figure and the profound legacy he left on America's religious and intellectual landscapes. His writings are being consulted at a burgeoning rate by religious leaders, pastors, and churches worldwide because of the fervency of Edwards's message and the acumen with which he appraised religious experience.⁷⁶

In particular, Edwards has become very attractive to contemporary evangelicals because "the full-blooded religious zeal Edwards brings to bear on his writings about God, creation, salvation, and consummation, in sermons, notebooks, letters, dissertations, treatises, and essays on matters ranging from semiotics, through theology and metaphysics, to natural science is shot through with evangelical concern."⁷⁷ His wide variety of writings on many different topics also attracts interest from Christian intellectuals beyond just the Reformed tradition, making him "one of the most widely read major theologians today."⁷⁸ This is likely helped by the Yale Center's online resources which have greatly increased accessibility to Edwards' works, with the result that "no [other] comparable digital resource for an American religious figure [currently] exists."⁷⁹

George Marsden's recent impressive biography of Edwards won several awards, further increasing the current interest in Edwards among historians and theologians. Marsden hoped that

⁷⁴ Marsden, 502; Lesser, "Edwards in American Culture," in Stein, 288.

⁷⁵ Marsden, 502.

⁷⁶ "About Us: The Jonathan Edwards Center Mission," Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, accessed February 24, 2021, <http://edwards.yale.edu/about-us>.

⁷⁷ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, xiv.

⁷⁸ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 15.

⁷⁹ "About Us: The Jonathan Edwards Center Mission," Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, accessed February 24, 2021, <http://edwards.yale.edu/about-us>.

his book would encourage theologians to continue to appropriate useful elements of Edwards' thought for today, or at least to engage with Edwards' arguments and perspectives as a way of transcending the limits of contemporary thought.⁸⁰ Oliver Crisp also suggests that reading Edwards may provide "ways of tackling longstanding theological conundrums and uncovering fresh aspects of the truth once delivered to the saints. . . . Edwards still has things to teach us today, in matters of theological method as well as doctrinal substance."⁸¹ Robert Jenson's work serves as an example, in which he recommends elements of Edwards' thought that he believes would be helpful to address certain issues in American theology.⁸² Others have argued that Edwards' theology can form a bridge between Eastern and Western Christianity, Protestants and Catholics, liberals and conservatives, and charismatics and non-charismatics, thus making him "a global theologian for twenty-first-century Christianity."⁸³

Yet it is questionable how far one may wish to appropriate Edwards' thought, for "Edwards had a wonderful ability to carry the implications of widely held Christian assumptions to their logical conclusions, sometimes with unnerving results."⁸⁴ In this dissertation I have highlighted some of these "unnerving results," such as the doctrine that most people are predestined to an eternity of torment in hell—which even Edwards described as "horrible"—and his admission that God is at least in some sense "the author of sin."⁸⁵ Yet some Christians today affirm double predestination

⁸⁰ Marsden, 502–503.

⁸¹ Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, xx.

⁸² "The thesis of this book is . . . that Edwards' theology meets precisely the problems and opportunities of specifically American Christianity and of the nation molded thereby, and that it does so with the profundity and inventive élan that belong to only the very greatest thinkers" (Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988], 3).

⁸³ McClymond and McDermott, 718–728, quote from 727. Some possibilities for how Edwards' theology may be interacted with today can be found in the discussion between Oliver Crisp, Kyle Strobel, and George Marsden in "Jonathan Edwards in Theological and Historical Perspective," *The Table*, Biola University Center for Christian Thought (February 9, 2018), accessed February 26, 2021, <https://cct.biola.edu/jonathan-edwards-in-theological-and-historical-perspective/>.

⁸⁴ Marsden, 503.

⁸⁵ Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in WJE 16: 792; Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in WJE 22: 415; Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, WJE 1: 399.

and are willing to call themselves Puritans,⁸⁶ and a few scholars still hold to Edwards' positions and make use of his arguments to attempt to defend a deterministic understanding of predestination.⁸⁷ It has been claimed that the unified and comprehensive nature of Edwards' theology makes it "potentially useful for . . . contemporary evangelical and confessional theologians defending 'classical' pronouncements of the doctrine of God over-against 'open-theists' and soteriological inclusivists."⁸⁸ However, this investigation has shown several major reasons why Arminians and open theists today choose to reject a deterministic approach to free will. This should be a warning to theologians who attempt to make use of Edwards' system to respond to Arminianism and open theism that unless they make significant departures from Edwards' deterministic system, their systems will encounter the same difficulties as Edwards'. In the next section, I will explore some possible alternatives to double predestination, and suggest some criteria that individual Christians may wish to consider when making choices regarding their personal beliefs on this issue.

⁸⁶ Thuesen notes the "perennial appeal of strict, confessional predestinarianism to certain segments of the American religious population. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the term *Puritan* is a badge of honor for a minority of conservative Protestants, who have republished classics by Shepard and other ministers and have even adopted 'Puritan' as an institutional designation (witness the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, founded in 1995 in Grand Rapids, Michigan). Thus, the career of Puritan predestinarianism is not so much a story of declension—though, to be sure, five-point Calvinism lost favor in much of New England by the early nineteenth century—but a story of sporadic resurgence, a tale as winding and fascinating as the logic of Puritanism itself" (Thuesen, *Predestination*, 72, italics original).

⁸⁷ Such as John Piper, who admires and promotes Edwards in his book *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Leicester: Intervarsity, 1998) and who affirms double predestination in his book *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983). He makes nearly the same case as Edwards does, that God does not save all people in order to achieve the "manifestation of the full range of God's glory in wrath and mercy" as well as exalt God's "sovereign grace" (John Piper, *Does God Desire All To Be Saved?* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013], 39, 53). Sweeney calls Piper "America's most famous Edwardsean minister" (Sweeney, "Evangelical Tradition in America," in Stein, 230). C. Samuel Storms also appeals to Edwards' justification for God not electing all people in *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 185–186, 188–190, and tries to use Edwards to refute open theism in his chapter "Open Theism in the Hands of an Angry Puritan," in Hart, Lucas, and Nichols, 114–130.

⁸⁸ Bombaro, 291. Bombaro suggests that Edwards' position could be useful to maintain evangelical particularism as promoted by authors such as William Lane Craig and R. C. Sproul (Bombaro, 292).

6.4 Implications of This Study

Nancy Murphy suggests that when an individual is choosing between competing theological research programs, one should consider whether a program can do better than its competition “in terms of its ability to overcome its own problems and even, in some cases, the problems of rivals that cannot be solved using the rivals’ own resources.”⁸⁹ A superior research program should also be “able to explain why things must have appeared as they did to its predecessors and contemporary rivals from their more limited or defective perspectives.”⁹⁰

As shown above, Edwards’ predestinarian research program was unable to withstand the test of time within his own Puritan community, as increasing numbers were being persuaded by rival alternatives. As highlighted by this study, several reasons for abandonment of Edwards’ theology could have potentially included his difficult biblical exegesis, philosophical inconsistency, and claims that may have been ethically distasteful.⁹¹ Ultimately, it appears that if one affirms the reality of evil and the biblical possibility of eternal destruction for unsaved creatures, then the claim that God directly controls everything in the universe is difficult to consistently uphold while simultaneously maintaining that God is fully good and loving towards his creatures.

One example of an attempt to preserve the doctrine of predestination while minimizing the potential problems for theodicy was made by Karl Barth. While still in the Reformed stream of

⁸⁹ Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity*, 125.

⁹⁰ Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity*, 125. This is her summary of Alasdair MacIntyre’s categories of both diachronic and synchronic justification of truth claims. For more detail on these categories, see Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity* 58–59 and 123–129. Yet Murphy notes that even if a research program meets these criteria, it cannot prove that any claim made by a research program is objectively true. Instead, whichever research program is currently “unsurpassed” by rivals in terms of its ability to both solve and explain a rival’s problems only “provides the best *possible* evidence for truth” (Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity*, 128, emphasis hers). She believes this approach to determining the truth of theological research programs avoids problems related to absolute truth claims, while also avoiding complete relativism. Thus she believes that “unsurpassability” is the most viable definition of truth for Christian theologians, since “neither absolutism (this side of the Eschaton) nor ‘absolute’ relativism is a real option” (Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity*, 128).

⁹¹ For example, one might consider Edwards’ ideas that God can justly send a newborn baby to hell (chapter 3, section 3.4.1, p. 144n151), that God ensured Adam and Eve would certainly sin and then punished them and their yet-to-be-born descendants for this sin (chapter 3, section 3.4.4, p.153 and 3.4.5 p.154–155), and that the elect will rejoice over the eternal torment of the reprobate (chapter 1, section 1.7, p.64).

thought, Barth perceived the same sorts of theodical difficulties with the traditional Calvinistic doctrine of election as have been highlighted in this study. He writes that when predestination is thought of as God saying “yes” to some of humanity and “no” to others, then “it is inevitable that the No should become much the stronger and ultimately the exclusive note. It is inevitable that the doctrine should in the last resort be understood as δυσαγγέλιον [bad news], and that as such it should be repudiated with horror (and not without inward cause).”⁹² He worries that if the doctrine of predestination places emphasis on God’s absolutely free choice of individuals,

then it will be hard to distinguish His freedom from caprice or His mystery from the blindness of such caprice. It will be no less hard to maintain His righteousness in any form except that of mere assertion. It will then be difficult to make it clear that God is not merely a tyrant living by His whims, that He is not merely blind fate, that He is something other than the essential inscrutability of all being.⁹³

Barth is well-known for his revision to the doctrine of election which depicts Christ as being freely chosen by God as both the elect one and reprobate one for the sake of reconciling humanity to God, which he argues for on the basis of Scripture.⁹⁴ In this way, Barth claims the doctrine of election is recovered as the good news of God’s love for humanity that Barth believes it should be seen as. However, in Barth’s treatment of sin and evil, there may still be a hint that God permits these in order to demonstrate God’s grace to humanity in Christ.⁹⁵ Additionally, it is not entirely clear whether in Barth’s view, all humanity is therefore elect “in Christ,” which could imply universalism, or whether at other times Barth opts for “conditional election whereby humans are elect-in-Christ until or unless they opt out of this elect status.”⁹⁶ While Edwards’

⁹² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics Volume II, The Doctrine of God*, Part 2, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978), 18, brackets mine.

⁹³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 25.

⁹⁴ R. Michael Allen, *Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics: An Introduction and Reader* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 71; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 84.

⁹⁵ Nico Vorster, “The Augustinian Type of Theodicy: Is It Outdated?” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5, no. 1 (2011): 40.

⁹⁶ Oliver D. Crisp, “The Election of Jesus Christ,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 2, no. 2 (2008): 148. Bromiley agrees that there could be a “problem of the incipient universalism” in Barth’s doctrine of election because it is not

thought could also be potentially compatible with universalism, this approach may not be attractive if, like Edwards, one affirms the scriptural witness that not all people will be saved.

Another alternative which avoids the problems of reprobation found in Edwards' thought is to approach election from a corporate perspective. This is also an aspect of what Karl Barth argued when he said that after the election of Christ, it was the community of Israel and the Church who are elect "in Christ," instead of individual believers. Individual believers are elect only by inclusion in this elect community.⁹⁷ This argument has also been made by other authors who advocate for corporate election.⁹⁸ Yet whether in Barth's version of election, versions of corporate election, or the Arminian version of election being based on God's foreknowledge, I argue that free will is necessary to allow creatures to reject God to avoid the problem of how God and the creature can truly be in genuine relationship, as discussed at the end of chapter 2.

However, because of Edwards' core conviction that the gospel could not be upheld if there were any room for creaturely free will, he was not able to refine his system in order to accommodate the sorts of concerns and critiques highlighted throughout this study. Yet taking one's critics' concerns seriously is recommended, for rational inquirers must

enter into controversy with other rival standpoints, doing so both in order to exhibit what is mistaken in the rival standpoint and in light of the understanding afforded by one's own point of view and in order to test and retest the central theses advanced from one's own point of view against the strongest possible objections to them to be derived from one's opponents.⁹⁹

clear whether Barth believed that people could or would finally reject the God who has elected them in Christ (Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*, 97). Alister McGrath and Emil Brunner both argue that Barth's doctrine is universalistic and precludes the possibility that anyone will not come to faith (Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th ed. [Hoboken: Wiley, 2016], 348–349, citing Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics*, vol. 1, trans. Olive Wyon [London: Lutterworth Press, 1949], 346–351).

⁹⁷ Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*, 91.

⁹⁸ Such as William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015); Clark H. Pinnock "Divine Election as Corporate, Open, and Vocational," in *Perspectives on Election*, ed. Brand, 278–316; A. Chadwick Thornhill, *The Chosen People: Election, Paul, and Second Temple Judaism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015); Shawn Lazar, *Chosen to Serve: Why Divine Election is to Service, Not to Eternal Life* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2017).

⁹⁹ Reeves, "After Lakatos," 407, quoting Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1990), 14.

This would be a profitable exercise for any Arminian or open theist who believes that their theological system is superior to a Calvinistic scheme such as that of Jonathan Edwards. Similarly, Calvinists and other determinists would be called to engage with the best examples of Arminian or open theist theology.

What criteria might a theologian look for when determining if a proposed theological solution or revision to this ongoing debate is satisfactory or not? As indicated in this study, the major concern for Edwards was the issue of human ability or free will as related to the question of salvation. In his society this appeared as the choice between two different theological traditions.

The role of ‘tradition’ is thus a potentially useful criterion. Like Edwards, I believe that Protestant Christians should not uphold what past theologians thought simply because they thought it. However, to address Calvinist concerns, Arminians and open theists would need to uphold the traditional Protestant ‘research program’ whose ‘core conviction’ is that salvation is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, without any contribution from human good works. In the face of Arminian moralism or outright Pelagian legalism, perhaps Edwards’ solution was the best which could be crafted at the time, within the constraints of his Puritan culture’s history and the challenges from Enlightenment philosophy.

However, it should be noted that although the Arminians of Edwards’ time were verging on legalism or Pelagianism, not all Arminianism is inherently Pelagian. Affirming that a libertarian free choice is necessary for any individual’s salvation does not preclude giving all the credit for the ability to make such a choice to God’s prevenient grace. To Arminians who follow the tradition of James Arminius (and not the eighteenth-century ‘Arminian’ moralists), prevenient grace means that a free choice to accept God’s gracious and unmerited offer of salvation is enabled only by the work of the Holy Spirit, without which, there would be no conviction of sin or ability to exercise faith.¹⁰⁰ Even so, to Arminians and other Christians such as myself who

¹⁰⁰ The term ‘prevenient grace’ comes from Augustine’s *De natura et gratia* and is implied in Bible verses such as John 1:9, 6:44, Acts 10 and more (J. Gregory Crofford, *Streams of Mercy: Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley* [Lexington, KY: Emeth, 2010], 10). Based on John 6:44, Arminians can affirm that “it does not belong within the framework of possibilities of the unsaved person for him to be able to respond to Jesus Christ apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works as the Word is preached. The human heart can resist

uphold libertarian free will, “the ground of justification is the imputation of the death and righteousness of Christ to the believer’s account. The condition of justification is faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in no way whatever gets any consideration as any form of merit that would form the smallest part of the ground of my justification.”¹⁰¹

It is true that sometimes this is not expressed well by every Arminian. The concept of prevenient grace was used by John Wesley to hold together the doctrines of “total depravity, salvation by grace, human responsibility, and the offer of salvation to all.”¹⁰² Yet Wesley also argued, somewhat similarly to John Taylor as described in chapter 5, that while Christians are initially justified by faith in Christ, good works are necessary to persevere in faith and be finally saved. Without these good works a justified and born-again person would fall away.¹⁰³ Contemporary Wesleyan philosopher Jerry Walls also portrays human free will as providing a “free response of faith” and “free cooperation,” which are small contributions to the process of salvation.¹⁰⁴ Calvinists such as Edwards would find these ideas concerning, and so would Arminians and

this work of the Holy Spirit, but where the Holy Spirit is allowed to work, He enlightens the mind concerning sin, Jesus Christ, and salvation. He produces conviction in the heart. The preparation of the mind and heart by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit creates a framework of possibilities in which a person can respond in faith to Jesus Christ. The response of faith is not guaranteed, but it is made possible. . . . Faith is called a gift because it cannot be exercised without the work of the Holy Spirit” (F. Leroy Forlines, *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson [Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2011], 257).

¹⁰¹ Forlines, 267–268. Even the Reformed theologian Oliver Crisp recognizes that although many Arminians and Wesleyans are accused of being soteriological synergists, “careful Arminian theologians deny that fallen human beings may turn to God without the interposition of divine grace, just as Reformed theologians do” (Oliver D. Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* [Minneapolis, MI: Fortress, 2014], 27–28, quote from 28).

¹⁰² Crofford, 9.

¹⁰³ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 145, 151, 153–154. For example, Wesley believed that even though a person is born again in a moment based on faith alone, God commands people to repent and do good works, “which if we willingly neglect we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all. Therefore both repentance and fruits meet for repentance are in some sense necessary to justification” (John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 2, *Sermons*, ed. Albert Outler and Frank Baker [Oxford: Clarendon, 1975], 162). Later in this sermon on pp. 164–165 and 167, Wesley says that without good works it is impossible to retain either faith or God’s favour. Wesley says such good works include prayer, participating in the Lord’s supper, reading Scripture, fasting, works of mercy, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those who are sick or in prison, evangelizing, and encouraging others in faith (Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” 166).

¹⁰⁴ Walls, *Does God Love Everyone?*, 72.

others such as myself who want to uphold the idea expressed in Ephesians 1:13–14 that once a person has faith, that person is guaranteed to be eternally saved.¹⁰⁵

However, the fact that some Arminians make theological errors does not negate that Arminianism, as represented most accurately by Arminius, claims that faith is not a meritorious work that contributes to salvation.¹⁰⁶ Arminius also attributes all good that people do to God's grace.¹⁰⁷ However, free will is what distinguishes people as separate agents from God:

Take away free will, and nothing will be left to be saved. Take away grace, and nothing will be left as the source of salvation. The work [of salvation] cannot be effected without two parties—one, from whom it may come: the other, to whom or in whom it may be wrought. God is the author of salvation. Free will is only capable of being saved. No one, except God, is able to bestow salvation, and nothing, except free will, is capable of receiving it.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps a better way of expressing this would be to say that choosing to not resist God's grace is not the same as actively accepting God's grace. Such a distinction could ensure that all the good regarding a person's salvation is attributed to God without requiring God to be the ultimate cause of why some are not elect.¹⁰⁹ This may be one way that the Arminian 'research program' is attempting to make progress by overcoming past errors discovered through interaction with alternative perspectives, while still remaining true to its 'hard core' conviction.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Such as Norman L. Geisler, "Four Views on Eternal Security," in *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2010), 306–326; Charles C. Bing, *Simply By Grace: An Introduction to God's Life-Changing Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 53–66. Some may characterize this as a return to antinomianism; however, the role of good works is emphasized in connection with heavenly rewards, being a disciple of Christ, and being a blessing to others in this temporal life (Bing, 79–106).

¹⁰⁶ Again, see Arminius' analogy that "a rich man bestows, on a poor and famishing beggar, alms by which he may be able to maintain himself and his family. Does it cease to be a pure gift, because the beggar extends his hand to receive it?" (Arminius, *Arminius Speaks*, 358).

¹⁰⁷ Arminius, *Arminius Speaks*, 68–69.

¹⁰⁸ Arminius, *Arminius Speaks*, 7–8.

¹⁰⁹ Eleonore Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," in Stump and Kretzmann, 140–141.

¹¹⁰ Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity*, 58.

On the Calvinist side, unless one chooses to follow Edwards and insist on the unsaved status of all those who cannot see how beautiful and glorious God is for predestining most of his creatures to eternal torment, Calvinists and other Christian determinists should desire to address the theodical concerns raised by Arminians and open theists. Jonathan Edwards' system, as portrayed in this study, is perhaps one of the more thorough and detailed attempts to justify God's goodness despite the existence of sin and evil in the world and the biblical fact that not all people will be eternally saved. Although Edwards attempts to explain that sin, evil and reprobation contribute to the greater good of God's glory and the elect's happiness, his determinism is ultimately the critical weakness which makes Arminians and others recoil from his depiction of God in the very ways that Edwards once did as a youth.¹¹¹

It is unlikely that any system which can fully address all theodicy-related concerns will be crafted in this fallen world while theologians only see in a mirror dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12). Even Arminians and open theists must admit that some things occur which God does not directly desire and could prevent, but chooses to allow for the sake of a greater good purpose.¹¹² That is, unless one wants to affirm the unbiblical option of a severely-limited God who is overpowered by creaturely free will, which would make it questionable whether God could ever achieve his

¹¹¹ For example, Clark Pinnock argues that if God and the elect rejoice at seeing the reprobate tormented in hell forever, then in his view, it makes God (and the elect) sadistic on the level of a child who tortures a cat in a microwave (Clark Pinnock, "The Conditional View" in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and William Crockett [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996], 140).

¹¹² One suggestion as to why God allows sin is in order to ensure that a loving relationship between God and creatures is not forced, which would invalidate love. For example, C. S. Lewis famously wrote that "free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata—of creatures that worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for his higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight . . . and for that they must be free" (C. S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity," in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* [New York: Harper Collins, 2002], 48). Other theologians on the free-will side argue similarly: see Norman L. Geisler, "God Knows All Things" in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986), 69; Gregory A. Boyd, "God Limits His Control" in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Dennis W. Jowers (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 188–189; Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 381; Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 41–47; Forlines, 48–50; Fred Berthold, *God, Evil, and Human Learning: A Critique and Revision of the Free Will Defense in Theodicy* (Albany: State University of New York, 2004), 65–68.

promises of a final victory over evil.¹¹³ Some might doubt whether any solution to the question of predestination could ever be found which avoids compromising either God's sovereignty or God's complete goodness.¹¹⁴ Yet finding a solution that can satisfy both of these central concerns would be the only way to resolve the debate between Calvinists and those who affirm libertarian free will, including Arminians or open theists.

There are some different possibilities for how such a resolution may proceed. One may picture some sort of formalized discussion, similar to that undertaken by the Roman Catholic Church's *Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity* and the *Lutheran World Federation* which

¹¹³ Proponents of this option argue that it is more comforting to believe that God is always doing everything God can to prevent and restrain evil, and that God never allows any evil to occur that God could prevent. But this means that God literally cannot prevent some evil (Thomas J. Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015], 140–143, 169–175, 176–180; Berthold, 81–87).

¹¹⁴ These would not be the only important criteria to consider when working on this theological debate. The categories of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral may be useful to consider, for as this study has shown, even Edwards made use of all these sources in his own theology, and each played a role in his understanding of the gospel and his arguments for double predestination. Thus, this study would recommend that Christians test any theological belief by seeing if it is compatible with a thorough reading of Scripture, whether it is logically or philosophically consistent (Reason), whether it supports personal love for God in one's spiritual life (Experience), and whether it is compatible with the central Christian convictions of our faith communities (Tradition). This would not just be a one-time test, as these criteria could be used continually for the ongoing refining of our theology or personal beliefs in the light of new challenges to them either from within or without our convictional communities.

These above suggestions are compatible with the advice of McClendon and Smith when they discuss criteria which may be considered when choosing one's personal convictions. They say that both philosophy and theology care about loci like "truth" and "consistency" (McClendon and Smith, 182–183), for inconsistent convictions cannot possibly be true, both in the sense of logical compatibility and living consistently by them (McClendon and Smith, 159). They also recommend discerning whether a conviction leads to a "happy life," perhaps as judged by standards of righteousness, justice, or beauty (McClendon and Smith, 106–107, 155). I believe that Edwards would agree with such recommendations.

In the case of the debate over predestination, an example of testing one's theological convictions by experience may include whether it can provide a person with joy and assurance of salvation or enable them to love God. For example, the idea of election may cause unnecessary anxiety in some, for "if the reason for choosing one person and not another lies wholly within the secret counsel of God, a person may always be uncertain of their status. Even if he knows himself as a believer, he may always wonder if his faith is a genuine gift of God or a temporary and ineffective imitation conjured up by his own deceptive will" (Jack W. Cottrell, "The Classic Arminian View of Salvation," in *Perspectives on Election*, ed. Brand, 134). Some may believe that double predestination and absolute sovereignty implies that God is a bully "to which I could submit but which would not inspire admiration in me and certainly not love" (Clark H. Pinnock, "Response to Part 1," in *Reconstructing Theology: A Critical Assessment of the Theology of Clark Pinnock*, ed. Tony J. Gray and Christopher Sinkinson [Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2000], 84). Even the staunch Calvinist John Piper argues that one should not believe in double predestination if it would cause a person to question God's justice, righteousness, goodness, or love (John Piper, "Does God Predestine People to Hell?" *Ask Pastor John*, Episode 450, *Desiring God* [Nov. 19, 2017], accessed February 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0Ry0yEhhOw>).

resulted in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* being signed in 1999, and to which several other ecclesial groups have now assented.¹¹⁵ However, since the Calvinist-Arminian debate is not confined to only particular denominations who could come to formal agreement, a more organic and gradual process is likely necessary. Perhaps this process would be similar to that described by Alasdair MacIntyre, as summarized by Bruce W. Ballard:

At the initial stage, each side describes the other's main points in its own terms and shows how these points conflict with its main theses. Each may also agree that the other has a few, less important, points from which it could learn. The second stage is more complex. As intellectual traditions continue their courses, new problems and issues surface. If a tradition cannot meet an important challenge from its own resources, a kind of eddy forms. When a tradition is conscious of its inability to overcome certain difficulties, it may engage with other traditions in the second stage manner. Here it is a matter of borrowing more substantially from the other. When the other tradition has resources that allow it to deal with the problem more adequately, its understanding may be incorporated by the tradition with the problem.¹¹⁶

Thus, the debate would continue through each intellectual tradition engaging one another via ongoing interaction of all sorts. The 'first stage' requires the sort of examination which has been attempted in this study of Edwards' views on double predestination. Here, I have shown how elements of his defense of double predestination conflict with themselves and with his overarching understanding of why God created the world. I also admit that, in line with Edwards' concerns, the opposing Arminian tradition needs to avoid falling into semi-Pelagianism or legalism. However, the 'second stage' of debate is "neither easy nor common,"

¹¹⁵ The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2019), 5, accessed February 25, 2021, https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2020/documents/joint_declaration_2019_en.pdf.

The process took two years of preparation and revisions and was the conclusion of nearly two decades of Lutheran/Catholic dialogue. This process involved the formation of the *Ecumenical Working Group of Evangelical and Catholic Theologians* in Germany who produced a document in 1986 titled *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era—Do They Still Divide?* which was debated by various Lutheran groups. It should be noted that not all Lutheran synods signed onto the Joint Declaration due to remaining concerns (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective* [St. Louis, MI: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 1999], 13, accessed February 25, 2021, <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=339>. This document is also listed on The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's document library here: <https://www.lcms.org/about/leadership/commission-on-theology-and-church-relations/documents/general-resources#ecumenical-responses>).

¹¹⁶ Ballard, 38.

for it requires a theologian to look at one's own tradition from an external and opposing viewpoint, as well as for the theologian to have courage, humility, and creativity.¹¹⁷ This need to continually refine and adjust one's theology will also be driven by the fact that a community's language is constantly changing due to both internal and external pressure.¹¹⁸ This gradual change means that defining the community's convictions and justifying these convictions in the face of current objections will need to be an ongoing task,¹¹⁹ which likely precludes the creation of a once-and-for-all statement that could stand the test of time.

Ultimately, individuals will have to justify their own convictions to themselves, using the criteria which they find acceptable. They will also have to re-justify their convictions in the face of future challenges which arise within their own communities or through encounters with members of communities that hold alternative convictions.¹²⁰ Thus, the work of theology continues in each Christian's own mind and heart, until the eschatological day when we all see clearly. In the meantime, this process may explain the diversity of Christian beliefs on difficult issues such as

¹¹⁷ Ballard, 39. In the Reformed tradition, this sort of "second stage" work appears to have been attempted by Oliver Crisp in his book *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress, 2014). One reviewer argues that Crisp's book may be helpful in showing younger Calvinists that their tradition is not as "narrow" as they may believe (Andrew C. Smith, "Book Review: Oliver D. Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology*," *Review & Expositor* 112, no. 1 [February, 2018]: 175).

In this work, Crisp accepts Arminianism and Calvinism as equally "evangelical" and recognizes that Arminianism attributes salvation fully to God's grace such that individuals do not contribute to their own salvation (Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 23–27 and 27–28). However, since Crisp seems to affirm that people have no free will when it comes to their eternal salvation, his proposals will remain unsatisfying to Arminians, while his admission that humans sometimes have libertarian free will may be unsatisfying to Calvinists (Mark W. Elliott, "Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology by Oliver D. Crisp," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 [April 2017]: 480; Roger E. Olson, "Review of Oliver Crisp's 'Deviant Calvinism' Part Three," *Patheos*, December 24, 2014, accessed February 26, 2021, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2014/12/review-of-oliver-crisps-deviant-calvinism-part-three/>).

¹¹⁸ McClendon and Smith, 108–109.

¹¹⁹ McClendon and Smith, 154, 174.

¹²⁰ McClendon and Smith, 179. This fits well with MacIntyre's advice that individuals should begin by discovering which 'tradition' they most identify with, although this may involve sorting through a complex mess of possibly inconsistent beliefs which they have adopted from a variety of sources in their familial, cultural, educational, social, and religious backgrounds. The next step would be for individuals to learn enough about this tradition so that they can begin participating in conversation with others both within that tradition and external to it, whether in formal or informal encounters appropriate to their level of education (Ballard, 40–41).

predestination. It is also a call for further charitable dialogue and vigorous study as the way forward, not just in this area of theology, but in all areas of theological debate and disagreement.

In the end, Edwards seems to have justified his beliefs about God's goodness to his own satisfaction despite his belief in double predestination, and felt confident dismissing his opponents' criticisms as belonging to those without spiritual perception. However, theologians today may profit from the reminder that

the justification of that conviction is my business, mine and that of my convinced fellows. But the process of justification cannot be altogether the same for me if I so much as know that there are those who dissent. . . . And it will be quite different if I come to see those who differ with me, not merely as 'fools' or 'barbarians,' but also as folk with flesh like my flesh, brain like my brain, soul like my soul. To that extent, though the justificatory task is still my own, it may draw upon sympathies, correspondences, insights that are not merely private or partisan. And therein lies our hope of transcending the convictional cellblocks to which we might otherwise be confined.¹²¹

¹²¹ McClendon and Smith, 173.

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