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THE WILL: FETTERED YET FREE (*FREEDOM OF THE WILL*)

Sam Storms

Jonathan Edwards was right. If the concept of libertarian freedom can be established, Calvinist theologians (he called them "reformed divines") will have lost all hope of defending their view 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 . . . like kind."[1]

To understand "libertarian" freedom and the threat it poses to evangelical orthodoxy, we must look closely at the title to Edwards's treatise. *Freedom of the Will* is merely shorthand for the more cumbersome, *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of That Freedom of the Will, Which Is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame*.[2] Edwards's purpose was clearly to address a "prevailing" concept of human freedom that was thought to be foundational to moral accountability. Stephen Holmes is correct in reminding us that "Edwards' fundamental question in this book is ethical: what conditions must obtain for an action to be worthy of praise or blame? . . . He is concerned to establish those things that must be the case concerning human decision for such decision to be meaningfully analyzable ethically."[3] In other

[1] *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3, *Original Sin*, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970), 376.

[2] All citations from Edwards's treatise will be from *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973 [fourth printing]), originally published in 1957 as the first in the projected twenty-seven-volume edition of Edwards's works, and hereafter cited within the text by page number only. Edwards began the actual drafting of the treatise in August 1752; it was ready for publication in 1753. This is somewhat misleading, however, in that Edwards had written extensively on the will in the *Miscellanies*, his private theological notebook, beginning as early as 1723.

[3] Stephen R. Holmes, "Strange Voices: Edwards on the Will," in *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2002), 87-88.

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words, it is "that freedom of the will which is supposed to be essential to moral agency," i.e., libertarian freedom, against which Edwards launches his considerable theological and philosophical skills.[4]

Sad to say, though, notwithstanding Edwards's efforts, the understanding of human freedom that he "sought to stop in its tracks is now so pervasive as to be axiomatic everywhere except amongst philosophers, who are aware there is an argument to be had, and those theologians who are prepared to risk incomprehension and dismissal as anachronistic by daring to mention such offensive (but traditional) notions as predestination, special providence and the sovereignty of God."[5] I have made a similar point in an article that addresses the use of libertarian freedom among so-called contemporary "open theists."[6] Clark Pinnock is representative of the latter and defines libertarian freedom or the power of contrary choice as follows:

> What I call "real freedom" is also called libertarian or contra-causal freedom. It views a free action as one in which a person is free to perform an action or refrain from performing it and is not completely determined in the matter by prior forces—nature, nurture or even God. Libertarian freedom recognizes the power of contrary choice. One acts freely in a situation if, and only if, one could have done otherwise. Free choices are choices that are not causally determined by conditions preceding them. It is the freedom of self-determination, in which the various motives and influences informing the choice are not the sufficient cause of the choice itself. The person makes the choice in a self-determined way. A person has options and there are different factors influencing us in deciding among them but the decision one takes involves making one of the reasons one's own, which is anything but random.[7]

My purpose in this essay is threefold. First, I will briefly unpack Edwards's devastating critique of libertarianism,[8] one that I am con-

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[4] One cannot help but think of Paul Ramsey's comment in his editorial introduction to the volume on freedom of will: "This book alone is sufficient to establish its author as the greatest philosopher-theologian yet to grace the American scene" (2).

[5] Holmes, "Strange Voices," 88.

[6] C. Samuel Storms, "Prayer and the Power of Contrary Choice: Who Can and Cannot Pray for God to Save the Lost?" *Reformation & Revival Journal* 12 (Spring 2003): 53-67.

[7] Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2001), 127.

[8] For a more extensive interaction with Edwards's arguments against libertarianism, see my *Tragedy in Eden: Original Sin in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), 176-206.

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vinced has yet to be successfully refuted. Second, I will reconstruct Edwards's concept of the will. Although some have found it to be intolerably complex,[9] it is actually quite simple and forthright once one grasps the meaning of several important terms he employs. Third, and finally, I want to address the most problematic element in Edwards's theology of the will—the fall of Adam and the entrance of evil into the human race. For all the biblical cogency of his concept of the will, Edwards argues himself into a philosophical predicament that gives all the appearance, his protests notwithstanding, of making God the author of sin. More on this below.

EDWARDS AND LIBERTARIANISM

The libertarians[10] whom Edwards encountered insisted that the will must exercise a certain sovereignty over itself whereby it determines or causes itself to act and choose. Whereas the will may be influenced by antecedent impulses or desires, it always retains an independent power to choose contrary to them. The will is free from any necessary causal connection to anything antecedent to the moment of choice.

Edwards finds this argument both incoherent and subject to an infinite regress. He points out that for the will to determine itself is for the will to act. Thus the act of will whereby it determines a subsequent act must itself be determined by a preceding act of will or the will cannot properly be said to be *self*-determined. If libertarianism is to be maintained, every act of will that determines a consequent act is itself preceded by an act of will, and so on until one comes to a *first* act of will. But if this first act is determined by a preceding one, it is not itself the first act. If, on the other hand, this act is *not* determined by a previous act, it cannot be free since it is not *self*-determined. If the first act of voli-

[9] Conrad Wright ("Edwards and the Arminians on the Freedom of the Will," *Harvard Theological Review* 35 [October 1942]) contends that "whatever else its publication may have done, it produced a state of incredible intellectual confusion. Edwards's followers part of the time did not understand him; his opponents often found themselves in a maze of contradictions; and the historian is fortunate if he can finish a reading of the documents with a confident understanding of the arguments and a clear picture of the real issues involved" (241). Mark Twain called Edwards's treatise an "insane debauch" marked by "the glare of a resplendent intellect gone mad" (*Mark Twain's Letters*, ed. A. B. Paine, 2 vols. [New York, 1917], 2:719-720, as cited in Henry F. May, "Jonathan Edwards and America," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988], 23).

[10] Those whom Edwards chose as representative of the libertarian position were Daniel Whitby (1638-1726), an Anglican divine; Thomas Chubb (1679-1747), a deist; and Isaac Watts (1674-1748), a hymn-writer who more closely approached Edwards's general theological position than the other two.

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tion is not itself determined by a preceding act of will, that so-called first act is not determined by the will and is thus not free.

Edwards's point is that if the will chooses its choice or determines its own acts, it must be supposed to choose to choose this choice, and before that it would have to choose to choose to choose that choice, and so on *ad infinitum*. Therefore, the concept of freedom as self-determination either contradicts itself by positing an unchosen (i.e., non-self-determined) choice or shuts itself wholly out of the world by an infinite regress.

To avoid this conundrum, some libertarians argue that acts of will come to pass of themselves without any cause of any sort. They simply happen, spontaneously and inexplicably. But nothing is causeless, except the uncaused First Cause, God. To argue for volitional spontaneity would render all human choice random and haphazard, with no reason, intent, or motive accounting for its existence. If human acts of will are not causally tethered to human character, on what grounds does one establish their ethical value? How may one be blamed or praised for an act of will in the causation of which neither he nor anything else had a part? Furthermore, how can one explain a diversity of effects from a monolithic no-cause? If there is no ground or cause for the existence of an effect, what accounts for the diversity of one effect from another? Why is an entity what it is and not otherwise if not because of the specific nature of the cause that produced it?

Yet another option for the libertarian is to argue that one chooses in the absence of a prevailing motive. The will chooses between two or more things that are allegedly perfectly equal as perceived by the mind. The will is altogether indifferent to either (or any) of the objects of choice, yet determines itself toward one without being moved by any preponderating inducement.

But this is to say that the will chooses something instead of another at the same time it is wholly indifferent to both. But to choose is, by definition, to prefer. Whatever is preferred thus exerts a preponderate influence on the will. How can the will *prefer* A over B unless A appears *preferable*? Says Edwards:

> How ridiculous would it be for anybody to insist, that the soul chooses one thing before another, when at the very same instant it is perfectly indifferent with respect to each! This is the same thing as to say, the

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> soul prefers one thing to another, at the very same time that it has no preference. Choice and preference can no more be in a state of indifference, than motion can be in a state of rest, or than the preponderation of the scale of a balance can be in a state of equilibrium. (207)

How could a man be praised for preferring charity to stinginess, for example, if both deeds were equally preferable to him, or more accurately, lacking any preferability at all? Do we not praise a man for giving generously to the poor because we assume he is of such an antecedent character that such a deed appears more preferable to him than withholding his money? If there is nothing about the man that inclines him to prefer generosity, if the act of giving money is no more preferable to him than the act of withholding it, is he worthy of praise for giving?

Neither will it do to contend that freedom consists not in the act of the will itself but in a determining so to act. The operative sphere of freedom, on this suggestion, is simply removed one step farther back and is said to consist in causing or determining the change or transition from a state of indifference to a certain preference. "What is asserted," said Edwards, "is, that the will, while it yet remains in perfect equilibrium, without preference, determines to change itself from that state, and excite in itself a certain choice or preference" (208). But this determination of the will, supposedly indifferent, is open to the same objection noted above. Neither is it feasible to locate the sphere of freedom in a power to suspend the act of will and to keep it in indifference until there has been opportunity for proper deliberation. For is not the suspending of volition itself an *act* of volition, subject to the same strictures already stated? And if it is not an act of volition, how can liberty of will be present in it? I concur with Edwards that the idea of freedom consisting in indifference is "to the highest degree absurd and contradictory" (208).

Finally, Edwards's opponents would often assert that all acts of will are contingent events. They are not in any sense necessary. They could as easily not happen as happen. Nothing necessitates their occurrence. This argument is driven by the belief that if an event is necessary, it is morally vacuous. Only an act of will that could as easily have not occurred as occurred is an act worthy of the predicate "free" and subject to praise or blame. Edwards's response to this argument is multifaceted and beyond the scope of this essay. Be it noted that I have

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elsewhere addressed his argument from divine foreknowledge and the necessity the latter imposes on all events.[11] But Edwards's most important response to the argument from contingency is found in the distinction he makes between *natural* necessity and *moral* necessity. More on this below.

EDWARDS ON AUTHENTIC FREEDOM

If all events, including acts of will, have a cause or are determined by something, what is it that determines the will? Edwards argues that "it is that *motive*, which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest, that determines the will" (141, emphasis mine). By motive Edwards means the whole of that which moves, excites, or invites the mind to volition, whether that be one thing alone or several in conjunction. Motive is not itself desire, "but rather the totality of whatever awakens desire in us when apprehended."[12] Thus volition or choice is never contrary to the greatest apparent good. "The choice of the mind never departs from that which, at that time, and with respect to the direct and immediate objects of that decision of the mind, appears most agreeable and pleasing, all things considered."[13]

But if the choice of the mind, to use Edwards's terms, "never departs" from that motive that appears strongest, does not this impose a *necessity* on all acts of will? Yes, but it is a necessity that arises within and proceeds from the will, rather than one that is imposed from without and is contrary to it. The former Edwards calls "moral necessity" and the latter "natural necessity." I will return to this critical distinction momentarily.

If it is assumed that the will, to use Edwards's language, always is as the strongest motive, what is it that constitutes any supposed motive *to be* the strongest in the mind's eye? What is the cause of the state or condition of the mind that results in one motive being strong and another weak in the moment of perception? The answer to this question

[11] See my chapter "Open Theists in the Hands of an Angry Puritan: Jonathan Edwards on Divine Foreknowledge," in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition*, ed. D. G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003), 114-130.

[12] Hugh J. McCann, "Edwards on Free Will," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (Aldershot, Hants/Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003), 35.

[13] Ibid., 147.

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leads us to Edwards's doctrine of constitutional depravity, or the doctrine of original sin.

Given a constitutional bias (i.e., inborn disposition or inclination) toward evil and unbelief, every motive that confronts the mind will appear good, agreeable, and strong only so far as it corresponds to (or tends to invite) an evil and vicious inclination. Likewise, every motive that has no strength or tendency to incite or induce an evil mind will be weak and hence ineffective to the will or any supposed consequent external action. Thus, given the reality of constitutional depravity, or a fixed bias of mind, only that which appears agreeable to that quality of mind will issue in external action, and every external action will simply be the effect of said bias. This is merely to say that Edwards's concept of the will is a function of his doctrine of original sin. Conrad Wright is surely correct in the following:

> The whole controversy would have been vastly simplified if the Arminians had recognized clearly that Edwards' treatise was not wrong, but irrelevant [or perhaps a better word would be, secondary]. They should have dismissed the Freedom of the Will, and concentrated on the treatise on Original Sin which complemented it. Moral necessity without total depravity loses all its sting.[14]

I will return to this point in the last section of this essay.

In the above citation, Wright referred to *moral necessity*, an idea without which Edwards's concept of the will is incoherent. Moral necessity refers to "that necessity of connection and consequence, which arises from such *moral causes*, as the strength of inclination, or motives, and the connection which there is in many cases between these and such volitions and actions" (156). By way of contrast, *natural* necessity is that which "men are under through the force of natural causes" (156), such as physical compulsion or torture or threat of pain or lack of opportunity. The "moral causes" noted by Edwards are

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[14] Conrad Wright, "Edwards and the Arminians on the Freedom of the Will," 252. See the discussion by Allen C. Guelzo in his *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 47-50, as well as his article, "The Return of the Will: Jonathan Edwards and the Possibilities of Free Will," in *Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Religion*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee and Allen C. Guelzo (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 87-110.

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> internal to the person choosing—a like or dislike; a moral imperative that is held in high esteem; a sense of some advantage to be gained by moving one way or the other. Natural causes are external—a gun held to my head or a locked prison door. . . . Edwards can insist that a free choice is one which is caused only by moral causes, a constrained choice [i.e., one lacking authentic freedom] is one caused, in part at least, by natural causes.[15]

If a person should choose evil in consequence of that necessity which is external to his will and imposed upon him by constraint of natural forces, he is absolved from moral responsibility. But if he behaves unlawfully because of a necessity that is *in* his will and consistent with it, he is surely to blame. Far from undermining moral accountability, this is foundational to it, for do we not highly praise that person whose compassion arises from a deep-seated disposition or propensity for the welfare of others, and do we not condemn that person whose cruelty is the fruit of an entrenched and malicious character? Hugh McCann's explanation is lucid and to the point. Freedom, he notes,

> concerns the relation between willing and its consequences, with whether decision and volition are able to issue in the behavior chosen. Where we are able to do as we please, so that a choice to do A would result in our A-ing, we have free will. The opposite of this is not causation, which Edwards holds operates throughout, but rather *constraint* or *restraint*, whereby we are either forced to do what we do not will, or prevented from doing what we do or might will. This kind of necessity—Edwards sometimes calls it "natural necessity," to distinguish it from the moral variety—excuses. A prisoner in a locked cell can neither be praised nor blamed for not leaving. But moral necessity does not. However determined his will may have been in committing the crime that brought him to his cell, the prisoner deserves to be there.[16]

Or to illustrate yet again, if a man confined to a wheelchair by paralysis does not *move* to deliver a woman from attack, he is not morally culpable. But if he does not *care* that she is attacked, he is. Or if he is *not*

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[15] Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 153.

[16] McCann, "Edwards on the Will," 36.

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confined and is physically capable of saving her but chooses to look the other way, he is deserving of contempt.

An odd incident that illustrates this distinction occurred not long ago in the state of Pennsylvania. A man who robbed a bank by telling an employee that he had a bomb strapped to his body was later apprehended by police. He pleaded with them for help, insisting that the bomb had been placed there by someone else who threatened to detonate it if he did not comply. Sure enough, at the precise moment the "robber" said the bomb would explode, it did—on national television, no less. Assuming this man was in no way inclined to theft, his choice to "rob" the bank was constrained. His will was subject to a natural necessity by factors over which he had no control. Had he survived and his claim substantiated, a court of law would most certainly have declared him not guilty. On the other hand, had it been proven that he lied about the bomb and that his decision to rob the bank was his own, arising from the greed or anger or rebellion of his heart, he would be fully deserving of whatever penal sanctions attach to such a crime.

Edwards's point is that there is a natural inability, arising from a natural necessity, that exonerates a person from praise or blame. But there is also a moral inability, arising from a moral necessity, that actually establishes culpability. If I fail to save a drowning child because I cannot swim (a natural inability), I am subject to a natural necessity and thus blameless. If I refuse to save a drowning child because I don't care (a moral inability), I am subject to a moral necessity and deserving of condemnation. When Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms in 1521 and declared, "Here I stand. I can do no other," it wasn't because his legs were incapable of carrying him out of the presence of his accusers. His "inability" to do anything other was the "necessary" product of a will that "freely" defied the Roman Catholic Church.

This is the same understanding that we find in Calvin, who chides those who fail to distinguish between necessity and compulsion. He points, as does Edwards, to the necessity that God always does what is good. "But suppose," says Calvin, "some blasphemer sneers that God deserves little praise for His own goodness, constrained as He is to preserve it. Will this not be a ready answer to him: not from violent impulsion [or what Edwards would call natural necessity], but from His

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boundless goodness [i.e., moral necessity] comes God's inability to do evil?"[17] He concludes that "if the fact that he *must* do good [emphasis mine] does not hinder God's free will in doing good; if the devil, who can do only evil, yet sins with his will—who shall say that man therefore sins less willingly because he is subject to the [moral] necessity of sinning?"[18] The point of this distinction between necessity and compulsion, then, is that

> man, as he was corrupted by the Fall, sinned willingly, not unwillingly or by compulsion; by the most eager inclination of his heart, not by forced compulsion; by the prompting of his own lust, not by compulsion from without. Yet so depraved is his nature that he can be moved or impelled only to evil. But if this is true, then it is clearly expressed that man is surely subject to the [moral] necessity of sinning.[19]

So let me summarize. Foundational to Edwards's theory is that nothing comes to pass without a cause, including all acts of the will. The cause of an act of will is that motive which appears most agreeable to the mind. The will, therefore, is determined by or finds its cause and ground of existence in the strongest motive as perceived by the mind. The will, therefore, always is as the greatest apparent good is. The will is neither self-determined nor undetermined but always follows the last and prevailing dictate of the understanding. The act of will is necessarily connected in a cause/effect relationship with the strongest motive as perceived by the mind and cannot but be as the motive is. This type of necessity is moral, lies within the will, and is one with it. It is a necessity wholly compatible with praise and/or blame. If, on the other hand, the will is acted upon by external factors contrary to its desires, the individual is exempted from responsibility. Freedom is simply the opportunity one has to act according to one's will or in the pursuit of one's desires. This notion of freedom, contends Edwards, is not only compatible with but absolutely essential to moral responsibility.

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[17] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), II.3.5.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

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EDWARDS AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

As I briefly noted earlier, the fundamental issue is not whether the strongest motive has a causal influence on the will, but what it is that causes any supposed motive *to be* highest in the mind's view. What is the cause of the state or temper of mind that results in one motive being strong and another weak in the moment of perception? Since every effect must have a cause, either man or God is the uncaused initial cause of the disposition or state of mind from which issue evil actions. If the will is not self-determined, it must be determined by God. But this would appear to make God the direct and efficient cause of moral evil. Edwards explicitly denies the latter and accounts for the existence of evil by appealing to the notion of divine *permission*:

> There is a great difference between God's being concerned thus, by his *permission*, in an event and act, which in the inherent subject and agent of it, is sin (though the event will certainly follow on his permission), and his being concerned in it by *producing* it and exerting the act of sin; or between his being the *orderer* of its certain existence, by *not hindering* it, under certain circumstances, and his being the proper *actor* or *author* of it, by a *positive agency* or *efficiency*. (403)

But if Edwards is to exonerate God, he must define divine permission as the absence of any causal influence in the inception of a sinful disposition. But to do so results in either asserting no cause for the evil disposition of the mind (spontaneity) or allowing the person to be his own cause (self-determination), both of which are contrary to his entire treatise.

We are left with this question: Why and how did Adam sin? The first transgression was either self-caused, spontaneous, or caused by some act of God. James Dana, Edwards's chief critic,[20] insists that Edwards "must either maintain the positive energy and action of the deity in the introduction of sin into the world, or else admit that it arose from a cause in the mind of the sinner—in other words, that he was self-determined."[21]

To understand Edwards's response to this criticism we must con-

[20] James Dana, *An Examination of the Late Reverend Edwards' 'Enquiry on Freedom of Will'* (Boston: Daniel Kneeland, 1770); and *The "Examination of the Late Rev'd President Edwards' Enquiry on Freedom of the Will," Continued* (New Haven, Conn.: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1773), hereafter cited as *Examination Continued*.

[21] Dana, *Examination Continued*, 59.

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sider his view of the nature of Adam and his will as created antecedent to the Fall. Edwards articulated his view in response to John Taylor,[22] who argued that the Reformed doctrine of original sin demanded that human nature at some time be corrupted by a positive influence or infusion of evil, either from God or the individual. Edwards countered by insisting that

> the absence of positive good principles, and so the withholding of a special divine influence to impart and maintain those good principles, leaving the common natural principles of self-love, natural appetite, etc. (which were in man in innocence) leaving these, I say, to themselves, without the government of superior divine principles, will certainly be followed with corruption, yea, and total corruption of the heart, without occasion for any positive influence at all.[23]

Edwards conceived of the creation of Adam as follows:

> 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.[24]

Besides these, he continues,

> 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*.[25]

The superior principle was designed by God to rule the natural and thus maintain psychical and physical harmony in the being of Adam. However, "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."[26] But if these principles did not leave *until* Adam sinned,

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[22] For a thorough analysis of Taylor's treatise, see my *Tragedy in Eden: Original Sin in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 31-70. Much of what follows has been adapted from that book.

[23] Edwards, *Original Sin*, 381.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 382.

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their absence cannot be the cause of sin. Communion with God, on which the existence of the superior principles in Adam and their domination of the lower principles depended, ceased only *after* he had transgressed.

Edwards says, "it was of necessity, when once man had sinned, that original righteousness should be taken away; . . . It was impossible therefore, but that original righteousness must be taken away *upon man's sinning*."[27] The consequence for Adam was this:

> 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.[28]

Were it necessary, Edwards believes it an easy task to demonstrate

> how every lust and depraved disposition of man's heart would naturally arise from this *privative* original, . . . Thus 'tis easy to give an account, how total corruption of heart should follow on man's eating the forbidden fruit, though that was but one act of sin, *without God's putting* any evil into his heart, or *implanting* any bad principle, or *infusing* any corrupt taint and so becoming the *author* of depravity.[29]

Here is the problem: If total corruption of heart *followed* the initial transgression, and was therefore not its cause but its consequence, how did Adam sin? Edwards insists that "only God's *withdrawing*, as it was highly proper and necessary that he should, from rebel-man, being as it were driven away by his abominable wickedness, and men's *natural* principles being *left to themselves*, this is sufficient to account for his being entirely corrupt, and bent on sinning against God."[30]

But since Adam's fall preceded and resulted in the withdrawal by God of the superior principle in his soul, thereby assuring only that

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[27] "Miscellanies," no. 374, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, *The "Miscellanies," a-500*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 446 (emphasis mine).

[28] Edwards, *Original Sin*, 382.

[29] Ibid., 383.

[30] Ibid.

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Adam would persist in sin, but not explaining the cause of its initial appearance, and since Edwards has previously dismissed the suggestion that Adam's first act of volitional rebellion was self-determined or spontaneous, why did, or rather, *how could* Adam sin?

Edwards consistently affirms that the withdrawal from Adam of divine influence was *subsequent to* his transgression. The departure of God's sustaining grace was in consequence of something Adam, not God, did. Adam's nature became corrupt, says Edwards, prior to and therefore apart from any action on the part of the Deity. How then did Adam sin? Was it in consequence of some antecedent disposition in his nature as created? No, for Adam was created upright and inclined to righteousness. Edwards does suggest in one place that "it was meet [fitting], if sin did come into existence, and appear in the world, it should arise from the imperfection which properly belongs to a creature, as such, and should appear so to do, that it might appear not to be from God as the efficient or fountain" (413). But any imperfection in the creature, as such, can only reflect badly on the Creator.

Might not this evil disposition be the effect of a sinful act of will by Adam, rather than antecedent to it? But how could Adam have come by a wicked will if he was created holy? Such an act of will cannot be self-determined nor have emerged spontaneously. Is, then, Thomas Schafer correct in saying that "Edwards' doctrine of the will, required alike by his theology and his metaphysics, breaks on the impossible task of accounting for both original righteousness and the fall"?[31]

Once Edwards has exempted God from any direct causal influence in the initial transgression of Adam, he simply has no way of explaining how the first man, being righteous, could generate an act of rebellion, and this notwithstanding the positive presence and sustaining influence of divine grace! The only antecedent cause in Adam sufficient to a volitional effect is that upright and holy disposition with which he was endowed by God from the beginning of his existence. However, such a disposition could, by Edwards's own admission, yield only such acts that partake of the quality of the cause (or motive) whence they proceed. Thus Edwards's scheme is capable only of explaining how Adam might continue to sin but not how he might *begin* to sin.

If Adam's sin, like all events, demands a cause sufficient to the effect,

[31] Thomas A. Schafer, "The Concept of Being in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1951), 228.

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either Adam by self-determination or God by direct interposition is the morally responsible efficient of that first transgression. A divine decree to permit the Fall merely asserts that God determined not to hinder it *should* it occur. It does not sufficiently explain why or how it did in fact occur. In several of his "Miscellanies" Edwards addresses this point. For example:

> Adam had a sufficient assistance of God always present with him, to have enabled him to have obeyed, if he had used his natural abilities in endeavoring it; though the assistance was not such as it would have been after his confirmation, to render it impossible for him to sin.[32]

But why did he not use his natural abilities if they were created righteous? If they were not righteous, then they were either evil or indifferent. If evil, then God is the cause of sin for having directly created Adam in that condition. If indifferent, then how could they yield an ethically blamable action? Edwards has already argued that an indifferent cause cannot explain an immoral (or moral) effect.

In the same paragraph he contends that "man might be deceived, so that he should not be disposed to use his endeavors to persevere; but if he did use his endeavors, there was a sufficient assistance always with him to enable him to persevere."[33] But to what in Adam, as created, would temptation have appealed? What in Adam was subject to being deceived to sin if, as argued, Adam was created righteous? And if righteous, how could any temptation have any strength to evoke a sinful response? By Edwards's own reasoning, the will always is as the greatest apparent good. But by virtue of that original righteousness with which Adam was initially endowed, no evil motive could ever appear good or have any tendency to evoke or excite the mind. The mind, being by nature inclined to righteousness, will find suitable or pleasing only such motives as are morally compatible with it. Should it be suggested that God permitted Adam to be confronted with a temptation (motive) he knew Adam was too weak to resist in that condition in which God had created him, then it is God, not Adam, who is to blame for the sin that necessarily followed.

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[32] "Miscellanies," no. 501, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards,* vol. 18, *The "Miscellanies," 501-832*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 51.

[33] Ibid.

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Adam, says Edwards, was created upright and thus from the moment of his first existence preferred what is good and righteous. Consequently, to use Edwards's own terminology, for Adam, who presently prefers good, to at present prefer evil is for him to prefer at present what is at present not preferable. Edwards himself insisted that this is logically absurd. But to predicate of Adam a preference for evil at precisely the moment he prefers good is to affirm just that. On the basis of what Edwards himself has said, the only way for Adam at present to prefer the opposite (i.e., evil) of what is at present preferred (i.e., good) is for God to directly alter or influence his present preference. To admit this, however, is to concede the objection that Edwards's concept of causal determinism of the will makes God the author of sin.

Edwards is not unaware of this problem and addresses it this way:

> If it be inquired how man came to sin, seeing he had no sinful inclinations in him, except God took away his grace from him that he had been wont to give him and so let him fall, I answer, there was no need of that; there was no need of taking away any that had been given him, but he sinned under that temptation because God did not give him more.[34]

But how did he sin even with what God *had* given him, if what he had was righteous? Edwards continues:

> He did not take away that grace from him while he was perfectly innocent, which grace was his original righteousness; but he only withheld his confirming grace. . . . This was the grace Adam was to have had if he had stood, when he came to receive his reward. This grace God was not obliged to grant him . . . . and so the sin *certainly* followed the temptation of the devil. So that, as to the sin of mankind, it came from the devil.[35]

By this Edwards means, as he says again in "Miscellany 436," that God gave Adam "sufficient" grace but not "efficacious" grace to resist temptation. But why does Edwards infer from the absence of efficacious grace that sin "certainly" followed from the temptation? As I have already argued, even in the absence of confirming or efficacious grace there is nothing in Adam causally sufficient to explain the effect (i.e., his

[34] "Miscellanies," no. 290, in *WJE*, 18:382.

[35] Ibid. (emphasis mine).

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sin). If by creation he is in such a condition that, antecedent to God's withdrawal of divine influence, he necessarily sins, then God is most certainly the efficient and morally responsible cause of the transgression.

Neither will it do to say that Adam fell because his will was overpowered by the immoral and deceptive influence of Satan. This suggestion is problematic for two reasons. First, it would mean that Adam fell by a *natural* necessity, which Edwards has argued exempts one from moral responsibility. Second, this would only push the problem of evil back a step such that every question heretofore asked of Adam and his transgression would be asked of Satan and his.

This is the dilemma that prompted James Dana to conclude that, on the whole, Edwards's doctrine,

> while it acquits the creature from all blame, impeacheth the Creator as the positive cause and source of the revolt of angels and mankind, and ultimately fixeth all the criminality in the universe on him. How infinitely reproachful must that scheme of doctrine be, which involveth so horrid and blasphemous an imputation on the supreme creator and governor of the universe.[36]

Dana's solution to the problem, however, is likewise plagued with an insurmountable difficulty. Nothing that the Arminian can say about the contingency or self-determining power of the will can serve to explain with any less difficulty how a sinful inclination could arise in the heart of him who was created holy and upright. Nor will it suffice to argue (as did Pelagius) that Adam was not created holy and upright but with an indifference or equilibrium of will, for the same objections Edwards raised earlier against indifference would apply here with equal force (414).

Dana merely asserts that how sin came to be permitted is more than one can comprehend. But if God knew (and all but contemporary open theists would affirm he did) that Adam would sin if left to himself, a condition Dana affirms came from the Creator and for which he, therefore, is ultimately responsible, and without that assistance which was absolutely necessary to the avoiding of sin (which assistance God surely could have provided had he so willed), then in the nature of the case God is as properly the reason why Adam sinned as if he (God) were the efficient

[36] Dana, *Examination Continued*, 68.

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cause of it. Thus the mere existence of sin, and not just the question of its original cause, poses a problem that seems to defy explanation.

It would appear that Dana is unable and Edwards unwilling to explain how Adam fell. Dana is unable because spontaneity, self-determination, and indifference fail to account for the transition of Adam's will from obedience to rebellion. Edwards is unwilling in that his deterministic concept of human volition, if consistently applied, must trace every effect in the universe, and therefore every act of will, to the ultimate, all-sufficient, uncaused cause, the eternal Deity.

CONCLUSION

I began this essay with Edwards's insistent claim that if libertarian freedom is embraced, one must relinquish any hold on a Calvinistic soteriology and those doctrines essential to it. I trust that whether or not the reader agrees with Edwards's conclusions, he will acknowledge the truth of that assertion. As mysterious and unsettling as Edwards's treatise so often proves, I for one remain convinced that he is correct in his reasoning and reading of Scripture. Perhaps, then, I should close by leaning heavily on that text with which Edwards himself concluded his most famous work:

> *For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? . . . But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor. 1:19-20, 27-29)*

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