Abstract: In his dissertation Concerning the End for which God Created the World, the American theologian and philosopher, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), argues precisely and validly for a particular view of God’s purpose and motive in creating and sustaining the world on the substantive assumptions that creation is ex nihilo and that only God is absolutely independent and self-sufficient. He asserts that his is the only conceptually possible counterexample to Baruch Spinoza’s contention that no specific position on God’s end and motive in creation combined with a commitment to God’s aseity and creatio ex nihilo can escape incoherence. His argumentation entails a complex metaphysics, which—with careful qualification—may be referred to by the following terms: dispositionalism, emanationism, idealism, panentheism, anti-platonism, continuous creationism, and occasionalism. This paper briefly describes Edwards’s argumentation for God’s end and motive in creation, summarizes each of these seven positions, and shows how they logically follow.

Key Words: emanation, disposition, idealism, platonism, panentheism, continuous creationism, occasionalism.

Jonathan Edwards’s argumentation in his 1765 dissertation Concerning the End for which God Created the World entails a particular version of emanationism, dispositionalism, idealism, anti-platonism, panentheism, continuous creationism, and occasionalism.1 This paper briefly describes Edwards’s argumentation for God’s end and motive in creation then summarizes each of these seven positions and how they logically follow.2 My aims are to present a précis of Edwards’s theory of God and creation only in so far as it is expressed in End of Creation. He addressed many of these issues early in his career.3 However, too often Edwards’s metaphysics is summarized from what he wrote earlier in his life without giving adequate attention to this mature work. Hence, a secondary aim of this paper is to offer an important and timely corrective to this lacuna in Edwardsian scholarship as space permits.


1 Jonathan Edwards, “Two Dissertations: I. Concerning the End for Which God Created the World,” in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 8: Ethical Writings (ed. Paul Ramsey; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989). Hereafter I will refer to this work as End of Creation. After the first citation to a volume of the Yale editions, subsequent references are cited in the text as WJE with volume numbers and page numbers following.

2 There are more metaphysical entailments than the seven mentioned here, such as Edwards’s view of God and time.

Whether Edwards changed or refined his views from the 1720s to 1755 is not at issue in this paper, nor are questions regarding the historical influences on his thought or to what extent theological terms that apply to medieval or early Reformed theologians may also apply to Edwards’s view as contained in *End of Creation*. Finally, for all of his conceptual and logical rigor, Edwards warns that the deliverances of reason regarding God are imperfect at best. Scripture is the “surest” guide to the reality of what God actually is and does. Nevertheless, Edwards’s philosophical argumentation is conceptually precise and deductively valid. If his assumptions and definitions are accepted, as he expected them to be, then whatever they entail must also be accepted.4

I. ARGUMENTATION FOR GOD’S END AND MOTIVATION IN CREATION

Jonathan Edwards holds that God’s “internal glory” is the knowledge, holiness (love), and blessedness (joy and happiness) that characterize God’s intratritiantarian life. In chapter 1 he argues that God’s end in creating and sustaining the world is for this internal glory to exist in, and be lived out by a society of redeemed beings. God’s motivation for this is from God’s disposition to “share” his internal glory which itself is grounded in and directed by God’s eternally-occurrent supreme regard for himself. The argument proceeds from three assumptions:

1. God is absolutely self-sufficient and independent;
2. Creation is ex nihilo; and
3. God has an ultimate end in creating the world.

The first two are expressed in one crucial paragraph, “God is infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, and independently glorious and happy. … The notion of God’s creating the world … implies a being’s receiving its existence, and all that belongs to its being, out of nothing.”5 Edwards’s commitment to God’s aseity is reaffirmed when he writes, “God’s making himself his end, in the manner that has been spoken of, argues no dependence; but is consistent with absolute independence and self-sufficiency.”6

These assumptions, however, present Edwards with a widely-known conceptual problem. Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) who, being infamous among Christian and Jewish theologians for his unorthodox views of God, claims that any idea of God’s acting for an end in creation coupled with the assumption that God is absolutely self-sufficient and independent will be incoherent.7 The concept of acting to achieve an end entails that one acts in order to gain something one does not already

4 Provided, of course, my representations of Edwards’s views are correct.
5 WJE 8, 420.
6 Ibid., 462.
possess. This means that in acting to achieve his end in creation God must be seeking to satisfy some kind of necessity. If so, God must not be absolutely self-sufficient and independent as assumed. Conversely, if God is self-sufficient, then God’s creating is not an act and there can be no purpose in it.

Although it may appear that some of Edwards’s opponents were not aware of this problem of coherently affirming both divine aseity and divine action because their views clearly founder on it, there is ample evidence (direct and indirect) that Edwards was well informed of it from various sources and fully apprised of its significance. He argues explicitly that God’s end in creation is not something God lacks without creation, nor is it more valuable to God than God’s initial state without creation. As Edwards succinctly puts it,

Now if God himself be his last end, then in his dependence on his end he depends on nothing but himself. If all things be of him, and to him, and he the first and the last, this shows him to be all in all: he is all to himself. He goes not out of himself in what he seeks; but his desires and pursuits as they originate from, so they terminate in himself; and he is dependent on none but himself in the beginning or end of any of his exercises or operations.  

This, in turn, demands some reasonable account of what could have motivated God to create, since God could not gain anything by creating. Edwards provides this account, going so far as to claim that his conceptualization of God’s end and motivation in creating the world is the only coherent way to account for God’s acting for an end in creation on the assumption that God is absolutely self-sufficient and independent. As he asserts, “[There is] no way left to answer but that which has been taken above.”

This claim is momentous and bears restating. On three assumptions shared with his opponents, Edwards painstakingly derives a series of propositions, arriving at a position regarding God’s end and motive in creation, which he claims is the only way to overcome the divine aseity/divine action conundrum. If Edwards is correct on this score, then every extant contrary alternative view of God’s end in creation fails and every future contrary alternative will fail. Refuting contrary alternatives was one of his explicit intentions in writing. It also means that if Edwards’s argumentation is valid, then the propositions it entails admit no contrary

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9 WJE 8, 450.

10 Ibid., 449.

11 In his 1757 letter to Thomas Foxcroft, Edwards writes, “I have also written two other discourses, one on God’s End in Creating the World; the other concerning The Nature of True Virtue. As it appeared to me, the modern opinions which prevail concerning these two things, stand very much as foundations of that fashionable scheme of divinity, which seems to have become almost universal” (italics added). Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 16: Letters and Personal Writings (ed. George S. Claghorn; Yale University Press, 1998), 694.
alternatives. I heartily doubt that the gravity of Edwards’s claim has been properly appreciated.

To better appreciate this achievement, we must briefly consider Edwards’s method. His dissertation Concerning the End for which God Created the World comprises an introduction and two chapters. Edwards first examines what “Reason teaches” in chapter 1 by deductive reasoning from shared implicit assumptions, widely-held concepts, empirical postulates, definitions, and derived propositions, most of which are developed in the introduction. This follows the then-common practice exemplified in Euclid’s Elements and known as the “geometrical method.” As Samuel Clarke described the method of his 1704 Boyle Lecture, “I shall … endeavor, by one clear and plain series of propositions necessarily connected and following one from another, to demonstrate the certainty of the being of God, and to deduce in order the necessary attributes of his nature, so far as by our finite reason we are enabled to discover and apprehend them.”12 In terms of eighteenth-century philosophical discourse, one must suppose whatever is self-evident or logically entailed by the propositions one takes for granted. One may suppose whatever is logically consistent with the propositions one takes for granted. One may not suppose whatever is logically contradictory to the propositions one takes for granted.

Edwards begins by clarifying how the concept of an ultimate end could and should apply to God’s creating, sustaining, redeeming actions. The received simple distinction between ultimate ends and subordinates ends—a distinction first promulgated by Aristotle and used by several British moral theorists of the eighteenth century—was inadequate to answer these questions. Edwards argues that there are actually three different types of ultimate ends: “partially subordinate and partially ultimate” (i.e. mixed), “consequential,” and “original.”13 The definition may be expressed as follows:

(4) An original ultimate end is

a. the pleasure obtained in the achievement of some particular state of affairs that some agent S
b. seeks for itself (intrinsic), not as a means for something else (instrumentally),
c. appraises and esteems as being valuable in itself (inherently)—more so than any alternative—and not at all derivatively valuable,
d. S’s motivation for such (occurrent) actions and attitudes is explained (in part) by reference to S’s dispositional characteristics, and where


13 Edwards’s account of original ultimate end will be given shortly. A mixed ultimate end is end pursued partly for its own sake (ultimate) and partly for the sake of something else (subordinate). A consequential ultimate end is occurrently valued after and because of achieving something subordinate to one’s original ultimate end. See also Walter J. Schultz, “Jonathan Edwards’ Concept of an Original Ultimate End,” JETS 56 (2013): 107–22.
e. both the end and the pleasure are occurrently valued (in both senses) by S before S considers any means to it, and
f. it is the chief end (i.e. the most highly valued end) in an entire complex work.

Edwards then derives two propositions or “theorems.” The first is this:

(5) The end for which God created the world is an original ultimate end.

Only an original ultimate end can be the type of ultimate end for which God created the world. As Edwards emphasizes, “It may be observed that when I speak of God’s ultimate end in the creation of the world in the following discourse, I commonly mean in that highest sense, viz. the original ultimate end.”

The second theorem has to do with God’s motivation:

(6) God is motivated to seek his end in creation by virtue of some disposition.

From these Edwards argues in chapter 1, section I, that, whatever it is,

(7) (Criterion I) God’s ultimate end in creation cannot entail a deficiency, insufficiency, or mutability in God,

(8) (Criterion II) God’s end in creation must (i) be inherently valuable before creation, (ii) be valued inherently before creation, and (iii) be capable of being achieved by creating,

(9) (Criterion III) God’s ultimate end in creation must manifest God’s supreme regard for himself, and

(10) (Criterion IV) God’s ultimate end in creation must be a consequence of God’s creating the world.

It is fairly easy to see how these follow logically from the assumptions and definition. In chapter 1, section II, Edwards then argues that

(11) God’s works ad extra which manifest God’s abilities satisfy Criterion II and IV and Criterion I implicitly.

God’s works ad extra include his works of creation, providence, and redemption. Then in chapter 1, section III, Edwards argues that

(12) In making the most valuable achievement which manifests God’s abilities his original ultimate end (that is, God’s extending his internal glory to and among the redeemed), God makes himself his ultimate end, God manifests his supreme regard for himself (satisfying criterion III), and God’s eternally-occurrent supreme regard for himself is the disposition that moved God to do so.

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14 WJE 8, 423.
In sum, Edwards argues that God’s works of creation, providence, and redemption all manifest God’s abilities ad extra. Each is inherently valuable by virtue of the value of those abilities, thereby satisfying the definition of an ultimate end in general. However, “displaying his glory” merely in this sense of manifesting God’s abilities ad extra is not what Edwards says is God’s original ultimate end. Only God’s “internal” glory externalized—that is, the eternally continuing state of redeemed people knowing God, loving God, and being blessed in God—only this is God’s original ultimate end. Indeed, it also is a work of redemption and manifests God’s abilities, but it is not the mere “display of God’s glory” or the “demonstration of God’s attributes.” In other words, the end for which God created the world is not the manifestation of God’s glory, it is its “externalization.” It is exactly on this point that Edwards’s opponents then—and many more ever since—go wrong. They mistake a mixed ultimate end or consequential ultimate end for an original ultimate end. This is why Edwards distinguishes three kinds of ultimate ends.

With this account in hand of Edwards’s deductively-valid argumentation for his view of God’s end and motive in creation, we are now in a position to explore its entailments.

II. EMANATIONISM

The term “emanation” (as a noun and a verb) appears sixty-three times in End of Creation and, with one exception, the term “communication” (as a noun and a verb) appears seventy times as a synonym for “emanation.” Creation and emanation are distinct concepts according to Edwards’s usage of the terms in End of Creation. “Creation” as a noun denotes a subordinate end. “Emanation” as a noun denotes God’s original ultimate end in creation, which is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the redeemed, “communicated” to them and “diffused” among them by God. Thus, what is emanated truly is “something of God.” In their verb form, each term denotes a distinct type of divine action. According to Edwards without exception, God’s act of emanation is not an act of creation. Thus, this is not Neoplatonic emanationism as Edwards has often been charged with endorsing. Rather, Edwards’s view is Holy Spirit emanationism.15

Let us consider this more closely. In chapter 1, section II, Edwards argues that four things satisfy both Criterion II and Criterion IV. These are (1) the attribute-manifesting effects of the exercise of God’s capacity-attributes; (2) the knowledge of God’s glory; (3) the love of God’s glory; and (4) the emanation of God’s glory. These are not four completely distinct things. The emanation of God’s glory is the most valuable effect of the exercise of God’s ability ad extra and includes the effect of creatures coming to a knowledge and love of God. (In the sec-

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15 As Andreas Köstenberger and Scott Swain report the same idea from their study of John’s Gospel, “For the ultimate goal of the triune mission is that the messianic community … might participate in the intra-trinitarian fellowship of love, glory and gifting that existed ‘before the creation of the world’ (17:24).” Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John’s Gospel (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 177.
tion of this paper devoted to Edwards’s idealism his argument for how these satisfy
the criteria is presented. We are concerned here to getting clear on what he means
by “emanation” and “communication.”) Every instance of Edwards’s use of
“communication” is a synonym for “emanation.”16 It is crucial for the sake of Ed-
wards scholarship that this be settled, because so often what he says about com-
munication in this section gets misrepresented as creation (both as a noun and as a
verb), and once that error is in place others multiply. That this section gets misrep-
resented so often merits multiple quotations from it. (I will number each of these
for ease of reference later.)

(1) Thus it is fit, since there is an infinite fountain of light and knowledge, that
this light should shine forth in beams of communicated knowledge and under-
standing: and as there is an infinite fountain of holiness, moral excellence and
beauty, so it should flow out in communicated holiness. And that as there is an
infinite fullness of joy and happiness, so these should have an emanation, and
become a fountain flowing out in abundant streams, as beams from the sun.

From this view it appears another way to be a thing in itself valuable, that
there should be such things as the knowledge of God’s glory in other beings, and
an high esteem of it, love to it, and delight and complacence in it: this appears I say
in another way, viz. as these things are but the emanations of God’s own
knowledge, holiness and joy. … Therefore to speak more strictly according to truth,
we may suppose that a disposition in God, as an original property of his nature, to an emana-
tion of his own infinite fullness, was what excited him to create the world; and so that the emana-
tion itself was aimed at by him as a last end of the creation.17

The last line should be underscored: “the emanation itself was aimed at by him as a
last end of the creation.” “Emanation” (as a noun) is distinct from “creation” (as a
noun). Creation is subordinate to it.

In chapter 1, section III, Edwards argues that four things listed earlier satisfy
Criterion III, and in making them his end God makes himself his end. Again,
“communication” and “emanation” are synonyms:

(2) And with respect to the fourth and last particular, viz. God’s being disposed
to an abundant communication, and glorious emanation of that infinite fullness of
good which he possesses in himself; as of his own knowledge, excellency, and
happiness, in the manner which he does; if we thoroughly and properly consider
the matter, it will appear, that herein also God makes himself his end, in such a
sense, as plainly to manifest and testify a supreme and ultimate regard to him-
self. … In a larger sense [God’s love] may signify nothing diverse from that
good disposition in his nature to communicate of his own fullness in general; as
his knowledge, his holiness, and happiness; and to give creatures existence in order to
it. … This propensity in God to diffuse himself may be considered as a propen-
sity to himself diffused, or to his own glory existing in its emanation. A respect

16 This holds notwithstanding what he says in earlier writings. In Miscellanies 697, for instance, he
clearly uses “communication” for God’s act of sustaining the creation. See Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol.
17 WJE 8, 432–35, italics original.
to himself, or an infinite propensity to, and delight in his own glory, is that which causes him to incline to its being abundantly diffused, and to delight in the emanation of it. … So God looks on the communication of himself, and the emanation of his 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. Thus the church of Christ (toward whom and in whom are the emanations of his glory and communication of his fullness) is called the fullness of Christ.18

What Edwards writes in the last quote bears repeating: “give creatures existence in order to it.” The “it” refers to an emanation—a communication—of God’s internal glory. Emanation is the end for which God created; creation is a subordinate end. In chapter 2, section VII, Edwards summarizes this.

(3) The thing signified by that name, “the glory of God,” when spoken of as the supreme and ultimate end of the work of creation, and of all God’s works, is the emanation and true external expression of God’s internal glory and fullness; meaning by his fullness what has already been explained. … God’s exercising his perfection to produce a proper effect is not distinct from the emanation or communication of his fullness: for this is the effect, viz. his fullness communicated, and the producing this effect is the communication of his fullness; and there is nothing in this effectual exerting of God’s perfection, but the emanation of God’s internal glory. The emanation or communication is of the internal glory or fullness of God.19

To reiterate, God’s internal glory is God’s own self-knowledge, holiness (love), and blessedness (joy and happiness). The emanation or communication of this to redeemed creatures presupposes, and thus is distinct from, the creation of them. Again, in chapter 2, section VII, he writes,

(4) The emanation or communication of the divine fullness, consisting in the knowledge of God, love to God, and joy in God, has relation indeed both to God and the creature: but it has relation to God as its fountain, as it is an emanation from God; and as the communication itself, or thing communicated, is something divine, something of God, something of his internal fullness.20

It should be clear that Edwardsian emanationism is Holy Spirit emanationism. Nevertheless, just to drive this point home—i.e. that emanation is not creation—four exemplary contrary interpretations are worth mentioning. In 1850, William Wisner, quoting from (1) above, claims that Edwards holds that “creation is an emanation of God.”21 Wisner continues, “We need not wonder that the ancient heathen … should speak of the universe as an emanation of God. … But that an eminent Christian divine, in a rigid logical and metaphysical argument, should speak

18 Ibid., 438, 39, italics added.
19 Ibid., 527, 28.
20 Ibid., 531.
of creation as an *emanation* from God, is to us passing strange.”22 What is “passing strange” is that Wisner would assert this in the face Edwards’s repeated contrary use—sixty-three times. But Wisner is not alone in this error. Anri Morimoto claims that Edwards “recounts this Neoplatonic narrative of emanation in terms of the exercise of the disposition that is originally in God.”23 He then quotes from (1) above, claiming that “in the dispositional understanding of God, *creation* is the external repetition of God’s internal glory.”24 But again Edwards says in the very passage that Morimoto quotes that God’s act of emanation (i.e. of extending and diffusing his self-knowledge, love, and holiness to and among the redeemed) is the externalization of God’s internal glory. It is the biblical doctrine of the pouring out of God’s Holy Spirit into and among the redeemed. Creation is subordinate to this and distinct from it. In two works Michael J. McClymond makes the same mistake regarding what Edwards actually claims in this section of *End of Creation*. He quotes from (2) above, then says, “Here Edwards construes *creation* as an act that expands and enhances God’s own being.” Then, in footnote 71, quoting from (3) above, he writes, “Many statements in *End of Creation* stress the continuity between the Creator and creatures.”25 However, asserting an ontological continuity between God and creation is emphatically not what Edwards is doing in these passages. Edwards actually precludes such continuity by his view of the emanation of God’s internal glory, which he says is the end for which God created the world. Oliver Crisp also ignores Edwards’s multiple assertions, summarizing from (1) above saying that this passage “seems to mean that God emanates himself in creating.”26 Crisp errs again quoting from Edwards above, then summarizing, “This Neoplatonism (for that is what it amounts to) is something Edwards picked up from [reading the] Cambridge Platonists like Henry More. … But like Plotinus, Edwards’ Neoplatonism … implies that the world is ‘emanated’ by God.”27 It should be abundantly clear from what Edwards says that this is not what Edwards says. His view is actually contrary to Neoplatonic emanationism. It is not the world that is emanated. The world is created. God’s internal glory is emanated. Edwards’s view is Holy Spirit emanation and God gives creatures existence “in order to it.” As Seng-Kong Tan correctly and succinctly states it, “the emanation of God’s glory *ad extra* follows creation *ex nihilo* in time and is thus its end.”28

22 Ibid., 446–47.
24 Ibid., 43, italics added.
The term “disposition” n. (“dispose(d)” v.) appears fifty-three times in *End of Creation*. Its cognate “inclination” appears twenty-five times and “propensity” appears five times. In the introduction Edwards develops and presents his concept of a disposition on the basis of a wide range of observations regarding human action. The concept is used to explain what it is that moves agents to achieve whatever it is they love and desire. These desires are for whatever it is they believe is needed in order to be fulfilled, to function, or even to survive. Whatever the particular thing is that is loved and desired, it is associated with some disposition. Thus, to say that someone “loves honey” or “loves society” (i.e. loves social interaction; is gregarious) is to characterize that person as having a disposition, because such people do not constantly think about and incessantly desire honey or society and perpetually take action to gratify the desire. Rather, only under certain circumstances—that is, only after the occurrence of some event satisfies the initiating conditions associated with the disposition—does the agent have the goal in mind, plan for it, and then take action to achieve it. Nevertheless, Edwards does not offer a general account of such initiating conditions, even though all of his examples including its application to God presuppose it. This is very important and will come up again.

According to Edwards, we may suppose that a disposition in God is what moved him to create. This is what reason (understood in a broad sense to include perception, conception, and both inductive and deductive reasoning) entitles him to say. It is likely that the best eighteenth-century explanations of agents’ actions are dispositional explanations (i.e. explanations that refer to dispositions). In other words, by using dispositional language in reference to God, Edwards is using the received philosophical language to say something about God’s motivation in creating and sustaining the world as subordinate to his original ultimate end. Applying the concept of a disposition to God’s pursuit of his original ultimate end so as to explain his motivation would then begin with some account of what God loves (or values or esteems). The explanation would then proceed by associating the state of affairs pursued with some ontological, functional, or psychological “need” in God and then specifying some disposition that had been “triggered” by something so as to initiate action. We must keep in mind that, since God is a se, whatever it is that our concept of a disposition “in” God may actually refer to (generically and specifically, but analogically, not analytically), it is something God does in sustaining himself in being. Edwards’s concept of God’s aseity constrains his use of the expression “disposition in God.”

What, then, are the specific dispositions that “moved” God to create? Since God has no ontological, functional, or psychological needs, what is it that God could love, that God could take pleasure in, and that God could desire and achieve by creative action? Several times Edwards refers to two distinct dispositions. God’s motivation to act *ad extra* is grounded immediately in God’s disposition to “share” (i.e. communicate, emanate, diffuse) his internal glory. God’s internal glory is the self-knowledge, holiness, and blessedness that constitute God’s inner life as trinitarian. However, this disposition itself arises from a deeper disposition, which is
God’s eternally-occurrent supreme regard for himself. There are two facets of this supreme regard: (1) God loves his internal glory; and (2) God also esteems his power and wisdom (which are capacities) and his justice and faithfulness (which are dispositions). As Edwards states this, “I would endeavor to show … how his infinite love to himself and delight in himself will naturally cause him to value and delight in [himself shared],” and again Edwards writes, “[God delights in] his own excellencies’ being seen, acknowledged, esteemed, and delighted in. This is implied in a love to himself and his own perfections.” Finally, he summarizes as follows: “When God was about to create the world, he had respect to that emanation of his glory, which is actually the consequence of the creation, .... It was this value for himself that caused him to value and seek that his internal glory should flow forth from himself.”

Thus, Edwards says repeatedly that God’s eternally-occurrent disposition to supremely regard himself is the ultimate motivating ground for creation. This disposition is primary and controlling even though the secondary and immediate disposition is God’s disposition to share his internal glory. As Edwards says, “the disposition to communicate himself, or diffuse his own fullness … was what moved him to create the world.”

Edwards’s language regarding the secondary disposition sounds like and is indeed similar to what Norman Kretzmann, in describing Aquinas’s view of God’s fundamental motivation in creation, calls the “Dionysian Principle of Goodness.” This principle is that “goodness is essentially diffusive of itself.” According to Kretzmann, the necessitarian line that Christian theologians have traditionally taken to explain God’s motive in creating assumes the “Dionysian Principle” and that God is essentially good. It follows from these that God had to create—had to diffuse his goodness—not out of need, but from goodness. If Edwards’s language is interpreted in these terms—as it seems to have been without exception as far as I am aware—then his account of God’s motivation will inevitably be distorted. Such a misinterpretation will egregiously ignore what Edwards had taken such pains to make clear, which is that two distinct dispositions are required to account for God’s motivation in creation. What Edwards treats as a derived and directed disposition will be seen as the only disposition and Edwards’s view will be seen as necessitarian and as unable to overcome Spinoza’s conundrum. But Edwards insists over

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29 Ibid., 436, 438, italics added.
30 Ibid., 532.
31 For example, Seng-Kong Tan ignores this, claiming, “Emanation is to be countenanced as ontologically and logically prior as the motive force or disposition that moved God to create the world. ... God’s disposition to self-emanate is identical to God’s act of emanationism.” See Seng-Kong Tan, Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 54–55.
32 Ibid., 433–34.
and over again that it is God’s supreme regard for himself that grounds and directs his disposition to share himself.

Furthermore, there is nothing in Edwards’s examples to indicate that a disposition must manifest. The vase’s merely having the disposition of fragility, does not entail that it must manifest fragility—that it must shatter. By the same consideration, merely having the (second-order), eternally-manifesting disposition to value both his “internal glory” and his ability *ad extra* (among other things)—the disposition which grounds “that good disposition” to create in order to share his internal glory—does not entail that God *must* create. Edwards’s view preserves God’s freedom in creation and overcomes Spinoza’s conundrum. However, he does not speculate on what God did in sustaining himself that might have been what initiated his disposition to create in order to “share his glory.”34 This may be the point where the influence of Francis Turretin (1623–1687) on Edwards comes into play.

No other cause can be assigned why the Lord has done this or that than this—because he so willed. If you ask further, why he so willed, you seek something greater and more sublime than the will of God, which cannot be found. Therefore, human temerity ought to restrain itself and not to seek what is not, lest perchance it fail to find that which is.35

All we can ascertain is that “what moved God” lies ultimately in God’s love for himself, so that God is the ultimate source of whether he creates or not. Contrary to what several have claimed regarding Edwards’s view, God did not have to do anything *ad extra* to be God.

### IV. IDEALISM

Edwards’s idealism is better expressed by the term “immaterialism.”36 It has two conceptual facets. The first is that the constitution of the physical creation is ideal in relation to God’s mind. The second is that the ontological status of material objects is real in relation to human minds.37 Edwards’s immaterialism is one of the two kinds of idealism which H. Darren Hibbs distinguishes in his recent survey of

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37 That this is Edwards’s immaterialism in *End of Creation* is the thesis of my unpublished paper, “Metaphysical Idealism in Jonathan Edwards’ *End of Creation*.” It includes a nearly exhaustive examination of Edwards’s statements in “Of Being,” “Of Atoms,” and “The Mind,” in *WJE* 6, 202–7, 208–18, and 332–93, showing that in nearly every case Edwards’s view is inchoate and possibly a latent *res*-idealism.
idealism in the history of philosophy.\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Mens}-idealism is the view that material objects are merely phenomenal constructs within the mind (i.e. an idealism of the mind). This is subjective idealism; the idealism of George Berkeley.\textsuperscript{39} However, there is another kind of idealism, which Hibbs calls \textit{res}-idealism (i.e. an idealism of the thing). Hibbs writes that on this view, “extramental material objects exist, but they are ontologically dependent upon a nonmaterial source.”\textsuperscript{40} By the way, realist versions of quantum mechanics are immaterialist this \textit{res} sense. As Alyssa Ney writes, “There really are material objects, even if … they are ultimately grounded in the behavior of the wavefunction in configuration space.”\textsuperscript{41}

Edwards’s immaterialism is \textit{res}-idealism. Yet, it is a realism, contrary to the misunderstandings of some theorists.\textsuperscript{42} That is, for Edwards, material objects are \textit{real} in relation to humans, but the existence of the universe and all that belongs to it—as an ongoing divine achievement subordinate to God’s original ultimate end in creation—is \textit{ideal} in relation to God’s mind. To put it another way, material objects (as they appear to us) exist independently of human minds, but they are ontologically dependent on God’s willing their existence, their properties, and their relations according to his eternal and perfect ideas of them. Material objects are never \textit{a se} (of themselves), never \textit{creatio ex materia} (created out of preexistent matter), and never \textit{creatio ex deo} (created out of the being of God). Risking distortion by putting it too simply, one might say that Edwards’s view is contrary to Thomas Hobbes’s view that \textit{only} material objects exist and contrary to George Berkeley’s view that \textit{no} material objects exist.\textsuperscript{43}

Edwards’s immaterialism is entailed by his argumentation in chapter 1, section I, for Criterion II.\textsuperscript{44} Recall that this criterion requires that God’s end in creation must (i) be inherently valuable before creation; (ii) be valued inherently before

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\textsuperscript{42} Garrett DeWeese writes, “The most straightforward reading of Scripture leads us to believe that there is an objectively existing, mind-independent world out there that existed before humans were created. While there have been dissenters (for example, Bishop Berkeley’s idealism, Jonathan Edwards’s \textit{creatio continua}), the majority of Christian thinkers have been ontological realists in this broad sense.” Garrett J. DeWeese, \textit{Doing Philosophy as a Christian} (Christian Worldview Integration Series; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011) 281–82.

\textsuperscript{43} In Berkeley’s subjective idealism (i.e. \textit{mens}-idealism), material objects do not exist external to one’s mind. They are phenomenal constructs. That is, we seem to perceive objects (see, touch, taste, smell, and/or hear them), but they do not exist in the way our senses tell us.

\textsuperscript{44} It is entailed in two additional ways. First, both facets are entailed by his argumentation in section II that the effects of God’s work \textit{ad extra} satisfy Criterion II. Second, the first facet of Edwards’s idealism is entailed by his argumentation in section II that an eternally increasing knowledge of God in a society of created beings satisfies Criterion II.
creation; and (iii) be capable of being achieved by creating.\(^{45}\) Criterion II is a logical consequence of the shared assumption that God has an ultimate end in creating the world, the first theorem that God’s end in creation is an original ultimate end, and the definition of an original ultimate end.

While the second and third conditions of Criterion II seem obvious, the first condition of Criterion II might appear to create insurmountable problems. It says that God’s end in creation must be inherently valuable before creation. This is to be expected because what God seeks must actually exist in some form or be present to God in some manner before God created, for if it were only valued but not actually and equally as valuable and real before creation, it would be something God desired but lacked before creation. It would fail Criterion I and fail to overcome Spinoza’s conundrum. On the other hand, it is something that remains to be achieved. But how could a state of affairs be valuable before any step has been taken to achieve it? Has Edwards “run afoul” of his own conceptualization? Or is it not really conceptually possible to overcome the divine aseity/divine acting conundrum raised by Spinoza? Edwards does not address this at this point in his dissertation, because his aim in this section is simply to identify the conditions that any notion of God’s end in creation must meet. Nevertheless, looking ahead just a few paragraphs, we find his succinct answer:

For though these communications of God, these exercises, operations, effects and expressions of his glorious perfections, which God rejoices in, are in time; yet his joy in them is without beginning or change. They were always equally present in the divine mind. He beheld them with equal clearness, certainty and fullness in every respect, as he doth now. They were always equally present; as with him there is no variableness or succession. He ever beheld and enjoyed them perfectly in his own independent and immutable power and will. And his view of, and joy in them is eternally, absolutely perfect, unchangeable and independent.\(^{46}\)

This paragraph is part of Edwards’s more extensive rejoinder to the divine aseity/divine action objection. Edwards holds that God—who is absolutely self-sufficient and independent and acts for an end in creation—cannot gain anything by creating. But how could this be? The solution, for Edwards, lies in the ontological constitution of creation as ideas in God’s mind. He asserts, “The existence of the created universe consists as much in it [i.e. God’s knowledge] as in anything: yea, this knowledge is one of the highest, most real and substantial parts, of all created existence most remote from nonentity and defect.”\(^{47}\) The ideas God has in mind before creation as representational-intentions-for-existence become ideas as divine-acts-of-willing-existence. Divine representations for existence and divine

\(^{45}\) The concept intended by my use of the term, “inherent value,” is perhaps better conveyed by the expression, “real intrinsic value.” Thus, the end must be valuable and valued for itself, not for its usefulness as a means to something else (i.e. its value is intrinsic, not instrumental). To put it another way, God’s end in creation must (i) be valuable in itself and (iii) be valued for itself.

\(^{46}\) \textit{WJE} 8, 448.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 432.
acts of willing existence are two kinds of divine ideas, but ideas nonetheless. As God creates—that is, as the ideas for the existence of creation (which God eternally had in mind) become “physicalized” by his willing the universe into existence according to his plans—there is a change in the ontological form of the idea of creation, but no change in fundamental constitution of creation, because creation is ex nihilo. Therefore, a work of God is inherently valuable before creation, because (1) it is an eternal and perfect idea in God’s mind; and (2) every such effect is valuable by virtue of the eternally-valuable abilities that brought it about. The value of the emanation of God’s glory as a work of God is identical to the infinite value of God’s internal glory, because they are identical. What is “communicated” to the redeemed is God’s internal glory, which is God’s knowledge, holiness, and happiness. What is “exercised” is God’s ability to create so that both what is created (i.e. the physical universe as a context of redemption) and what is effected (i.e. the knowledge of God, love of God, and joy in God experienced by the saints) are themselves “expressions” or “effects” of God’s abilities ad extra. Thus, the reason God’s end in creation adds nothing to God and is valuable before God creates is that the fundamental constitution of creation is never more than an idea (which is fundamentally non-material) in God’s mind—before creation or after—and secondly what is communicated or emanated is of God. Eternal ages before God began to sustain the existence of the universe as an ongoing achievement subordinate to his everlasting, original ultimate end of extending his knowledge, holiness, and happiness into the redeemed, God enjoyed his intra-trinitarian life and had perfect ideas of the everlasting sequence of the individual and collective conscious states of the redeemed and every aspect of the entire “physical/material” context within which they were to be situated.

Let us closely consider how the second facet of Edwards’s idealism is also entailed by this argumentation. Clearly, Edwards treats the ongoing existence of creation as a subordinate end. While the universe is ideal in relation to God’s mind, creatures (redeemed or not) perceive the “heavens” which exist independent of their perception and they either acknowledge the Creator or deny him. He claims that “it was God’s intention … that his works should exhibit an image of himself their author, that it might brightly appear by his works what manner of being he is, and afford a proper representation of his divine excellencies.” Such “works” are the works of creation, providence, and redemption. Even though God’s creating and sustaining the world is a subordinate end, it too will “afford a proper representation of his divine excellencies.” Edwards argues that these effects of the exercise of God’s ability ad extra are inherently valuable by virtue of the attributes that effected them. Thus, the ongoing existence of the universe is partly an ultimate end. That is, the physical creation is a mixed ultimate end.

Second, events or occasions of creature empirical propositional knowledge per se are divine achievements (i.e. ends) and as such they are not merely aspects of

48 Ibid., 422.
God’s sustaining the creation as a subordinate end, but also are inherently valuable and qualify as ultimate, albeit mixed ultimate ends.

Third, creature empirical propositional knowledge of creation as existing outside their minds is the basis of inferential indirect knowledge of God’s capacity-attributes (i.e. his ability \textit{ad extra}). Edwards argues that the creature’s propositional (“notional”) knowledge of God that comes from encountering the creation is inherently valuable by virtue of the eternally-inherent value of the divine attributes that produce both the creation and the knowledge. In sum, the \textit{existence} of creation as an effect that manifests God’s capacity-attributes, creature empirical propositional knowledge of creation, and creature inferential propositional knowledge of God are all effects of the exercise of God’s ability \textit{ad extra}, and as such are inherently valuable. As effects, they are mixed ultimate ends—partly subordinate, partly ultimate. They all meet Criterion I and II and, therefore, are as valuable and real before creation as after. Again, the reason is that, while there is a change in the ontological form of the idea of creation, there is no change in fundamental constitution of creation, because creation is \textit{ex nihilo}.

Bearing this in mind, the propositional knowledge—not simply belief—that creatures have that things are the case “outside” their minds (in addition to the spiritual knowledge of the significance, value, and beauty of things that are the case “outside” their minds) is a necessary condition of the validity of the glory, honor, and praise to God that God intends should arise from such knowledge—things which are all inherently valuable. The validity of creature-praise to God for his works of creation, providence, and redemption requires that creatures’ belief that God did those mighty works be knowledge that he did. The value of the creature knowledge and the value of creature praise require that what seems to be external to a created mind is in fact external to created minds. What appears as a worship-and-gratitude-inducing, unfathomable accomplishment must be in fact just that. If Edwards advocated a Berkeleyan idealism in this work, then the appearance of creation as an effect outside of creatures’ minds would be an illusion—even a deception. Like the Wizard of Oz exposed, God would seem to be much less impressive and truthful than a person’s senses had led them to believe. God’s integrity and ends in creation would be called into question for creating the illusion of the externality of such things and yet accepting the praise for having accomplished them. God would have eternal ideas of and then achieve creatures’ having ideas of God and praising him for things which he did not in fact do. This would all be contrary to God’s moral perfection.

In sum, according to Edwards, the existence of the universe is an ongoing divine achievement subordinate to God’s original ultimate end in creation. Material objects exist independently of human minds, but are constituted by God’s willing their existence, their properties, and their relations. Both facets of his idealism are entailed by his argumentation in Chapter One. The first facet—that is, that the universe is ideal in relation to God’s mind—is required for showing how his view of God’s end and motive in creation overcomes Spinoza’s conundrum. The second facet—that is, that material objects exist “outside” human minds—is entailed by his
argumentation that effects that manifest God’s capacity attributes are inherently valuable and are mixed ultimate ends.

V. ANTIPLATONISM

Edwards’s antiplatonism is (1) that there are no standards of propriety and “fitness,” no moral rules existing independently of God; (2) that God does not stand in a relation of instantiation to a realm of universals; and (3) that there is no external realm of exemplars. All real possibilities are the perfect ideas God has in mind for the effects of the exercise of his ability ad extra. Edwards’s first two antiplatonist positions are entailed by his argumentation that posits and ultimately rejects a fictitious “third being.”

When we are considering with ourselves, what would be most fit and proper for God to have a chief respect to, in his proceedings in general, with regard to the universality of things, it may help us to judge of the matter with greater ease and satisfaction to consider what we can suppose would be judged and determined by some third being of perfect wisdom and rectitude, neither the Creator nor one of the creatures, that should be perfectly indifferent and disinterested. Or if we make the supposition that wisdom itself, or infinitely wise justice and rectitude were a distinct, disinterested person.…49

He concludes the point: “Thus I have gone upon the supposition of a third person, neither Creator nor creature, but a disinterested person stepping in to judge of the concerns of both, and state what is most fit and proper between them. The thing supposed is impossible.”50

The “third being” is a thinly-veiled allusion to Plato’s realm of Forms—the realm to which the British rational intuitionists appealed. His rejection of rationalism’s “third being” reflects his reading of John Gill (1697–1771).51 In Part III, § V, Of the Freedom of the Will of Man, of his book The Cause of God and Truth (1737), Gill writes that “a certain generation of men … have lately risen up among us, who talk of the nature and fitness of things, by which God himself is bound, to which he conforms, and according to which he acts: though one would think, if this was the case, the nature and fitness of things should rather be called God.”52 According to Gill, there is nothing that God consults, much less is there anything to which God is subject. Gill rejects the idea that God conforms his thoughts and behaviors to something that is distinct from God. Edwards says the same. “It belongs to him as supreme arbiter, and to his infinite wisdom and rectitude, to state all rules and measures of proceedings. … it therefore belongs to God whose are all things, who is perfectly fit for this office, and who alone is so, to state all things according to

49 WJE 8, 422–23, italics added.
50 Ibid., 425, italics added.
the most perfect fitness and rectitude.” For Edwards, just as for John Gill, the nature and fitness of things is God. By his use of the words “it is,” in the paragraph just quoted, Edward indicates that God is perfect rectitude (goodness). God does not stand in an exemplification relation to properties in the ontological, platonic sense. This is how the second antiplatonist position is entailed by his argumentation.

His third antiplatonist position, that there is no external realm of “possibilities,” is the converse of his immaterialism and is entailed by the same argumentation. First, the inherent value of the effects of the exercise of God’s abilities ad extra existed before they were physically realized entails the reality in God’s mind of ideas for states of physical systems. Second, his claim that the physical universe “consists in God’s knowledge” or ideas God perfectly “beheld” eternal ages before creation, entails that all real possibilities exist in God’s mind before creation. Since one aspect of God’s glory of which God has eternal knowledge is his infinite power guided by wisdom (omnipotence), all real possibilities exist in God’s mind as a matter of God’s awareness of his ability ad extra.

VI. PANENTHEISM

Edwards’s panentheism is entailed by his immaterialism and by his understanding of God’s infinity. Since God’s being is infinite (i.e. is “all”), all existence is “comprehended within” God, and then since creation is ideal, creation is “within” God as an idea in God’s mind. As he puts it,

Here God’s acting for himself, or making himself his last end, and his acting for their sake, are not to be set in opposition; or to be considered as the opposite parts of a disjunction: they are rather to be considered as coinciding one with the other, and implied one in the other. But yet God is to be considered as first and original in his regard; and the creature is the object of God’s regard consequently and by implication as being as it were comprehended in God; as shall be more particularly observed presently.

The universe exists “in God’s mind” (or consciousness) like an imagined unfolding scenario. This should be called “intentional object panentheism” as opposed to the standard mind/body panentheism. Admitting this type of panentheism is crucial for another reason. Since no aspect of an intentional object can be identical to the consciousness for whom it is intentional, Edwards’s view cannot be pantheistic. Given Edwards’s reif-idealism, his intentional object panentheism is therefore clearly not subject to John Cooper’s criticism:

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53 *WJE* 8, 425.
54 Ibid., 440, italics added.
55 Edwards’s panentheism also entails a rejection of the widely-held idea that “everything that is in God is God.”
But Edwards lacks the robust ontological Creator-creature distinction of classical theism. For him, creatures are divine thoughts. All things considered, his affirmation that “the whole is of God, and in God, and to God” is best construed philosophically as a panentheism that borders on Spinozan pantheism.\(^56\)

Referring to (1) above, Cooper mistakenly asserts that Edwards “regards creation as an inevitable emanation of the divine nature.”\(^57\) As we have seen above, God’s act of emanation is distinct from God’s act of creation. In fact, Cooper’s own view, expressed in his chapter “Why I am not a panentheist,” is as follows:

> [God] knows all possible creatures in all possible worlds from all eternity because he has complete knowledge of his own power to create and sustain them. In this ideal sense, our world and all possible worlds are “in God” from all eternity. But they are not a part of him.\(^58\)

Except for the “possible worlds” expression, Cooper expresses Edwards’s view!

**VII. CONTINUOUS CREATIONISM AND OCCASIONALISM**

Though neither continuous creationism nor occasionalism is mentioned in *End of Creation*, both are logical consequences of his argumentation. Edwards assumes that creation is *ex nihilo*, which according to Edwards means that a being receives “its existence, and all that belongs to its being, out of nothing. And this implies the most perfect, absolute and universal derivation and dependence.”\(^59\) In conjunction with “creation is res-ideal” and “God is *a se*,” these positions entail, first, that no continuant, individual, object, or substance—whatever you may want to call it—ever self-exists. These also entail that every created thing exists when, only as long as, and only because God wills it (not before, not after, not between, not from any other source). Thus, creation at the first moment of its existence was constituted by nothing more than God’s existence-conferring acts of willing it to be and, at each moment of its continuing existence the universe is never constituted by anything more than God’s existence-conferring acts of willing it to be. There is no difference between the first moment of a thing’s existence and any subsequent moment of its existence. Thus, Edwards’s view is a version of the traditional notion of *creatio continuans*. In short, Edwards’s continuous creationism is entailed by his argumentation in *End of Creation* even though he does not state the position until two years later in *Original Sin*.\(^60\)

Ignorant of Spinoza’s conundrum, a theist might advocate one of two contrary alternatives: (1) There are self-existent uncreated substances and powers and (2) God has conferred aseity to created substances and powers. The former in con-
junction with “God is a s e” and “creation is ex nihilo” is contrary to biblical theism—unorthodox. The second alternative, the idea of God conferring self-existence to any created substance or individual, is self-contradictory. Self-existence is not something that can be conferred, because it is always ultimately a conferred and, therefore, a dependent existence not a self-existence. Thus, if one holds “only God is a s e” and “creation is ex nihilo,” then one cannot hold the idea of “ontological momentum” or “existential inertia.” As Kvanvig and McCann put it, “created things can have no capacity for self-sustenance.” Since nothing created ever self-exists at any moment of its existence, then at no time does God “encounter” creation; at no moment could creation ever be ontologically independent. This entails that (physical) concurrentism—the idea that natural causation is co-operative or dual causation—is also called into question. Furthermore, what appears to be “persistence” or ontological “endurance” of an individual and grounded in the individual is really God-planned and God-willed continued existence. That is, a thing’s continuing existence according to God’s eternal perfect ideas or plans for it defines what it is for the thing to persist and endurance, regardless of our concepts.

Edwards’s continuous creationism has to do with a thing’s existence, persistence, and ontological endurance. However, Edward’s notion of creatio ex nihilo has to do with more than these. He says it implies a being’s “receiving its existence, and all that belongs to its being, out of nothing.” This together with the ontological “positive” thesis that “creation is res-ideal” entail that the constitution, properties, and relations of the physical world at every moment can be nothing more than God willing it as such. Every creature is contingent on God’s will for its existence and for all of its properties and relations. One crucial kind of relation is the apparently natural, causal relation between physical events. Given Edwards’s commitments, the apparent causal relation between events is not the productive causation; it is not the causing, the producing, the bringing about, or the making happen. The causing, the producing, the bringing about, or the making happen is God’s existence-conferring action. The productive causation of an event is simultaneous with the occurring of the event. Therefore, physical causation is not a primitive, non-reducible aspect of nature. Causation seems primitive or basic and resists reductive

64 William F. Vallicella briefly describes the incoherence of concurrentism on these grounds in “Concurrentism or Occasionalism?” American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 70/3 (1996): 339–59.
65 This same point has been argued by Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum, Getting Causes from Powers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 106–29.
analyses because it is not a productive relation by, of, or between physical things. Rather, physical causation *is* God’s existence-conferring action according to his plan to achieve his original ultimate end by sustaining the universe, which is a subordinate end. Thus, real causation is not *in* nature; it grounds nature. This is semi-occasionalism and is entailed by “God is *a se,*” “creation is *ex nihilo,*” and “creation is *res-*ideal.”

It should be noted that Edwards’s continuous creationism entails his occasionalism. Among those who have denied this is Philip Quinn. He attempts to find a way to hold continuous creationism while avoiding occasionalism. However, Timothy Miller shows that if one holds to continuous creationism, only a commitment to mere conservationism has any hope of escaping occasionalism. But mere conservationism requires a commitment to causal necessitarianism, the idea that causation is a primitive, ungrounded feature of the world. As Miller notes, “unlike reductionist theories, which attempt to analyze causation in terms of more basic non-causal facts, the necessitarian theory takes causal facts to be fundamental features of the world.” By assuming natural causation to be a primitive feature of the world and not God’s acting, it presumes what it sets out to prove, that is, that God is not the sole cause of natural events. This is theft over honest toil. But there is a higher price to pay. A primitive causal-necessitarian approach to causation requires a commitment to the aseity of causal powers and any idea of God’s end in creation that uses this falls prey to Spinoza’s objection. Edwards’s commitment to God’s unique *aseity* precludes it.

In summary, Jonathan Edwards’s deductively-valid argumentation for his view of God’s original ultimate end and motivation in creation overcomes the well-known divine aseity/divine action problem and entails his Holy Spirit emanationism, (analogical) dispositionalism, *res-*idealism, antiplatonism, intentional-object panentheism, continuous creationism, and semi-occasionalism.

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68 Ibid., 15.