

Walter J. Schultz

# Jonathan Edwards' Concerning The End for Which God Created the World

Exposition, Analysis, and Philosophical Implications

V&R



The *Jonathan Edwards*  
Center at Yale University



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Walter J. Schultz

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For James “Buck” Hatch (1914–1999),  
who awakened me to seeing God’s acting as the “foundational unity  
of the Bible”  
and  
who so beautifully exemplified compassion and grace through his own  
weaknesses.

Thank you, Professor Hatch.



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## Preface

“That which God had primarily in view in creating, and the original ordination of the world, must be constantly kept in view, and have a governing influence in all God’s works, or with respect to everything he does towards his creatures.”

– Jonathan Edwards

*Concerning the End for Which God Created the World* (1765)

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) was a pastor, theologian, and philosopher in Colonial America. This book is an exposition of his dissertation *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, which, after 35 years of development, was completed in 1755 and published posthumously in 1765.<sup>1</sup> Edwards argues that God’s “original ultimate end” in creating and sustaining the world is the pleasure God takes in his “internal glory,” that is, God’s self-knowledge, holiness, and happiness eternally-increasing in a society of beings who are upheld in existence moment-by-moment *ex nihilo*. Put another way, God’s end is God’s Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ) indwelling the redeemed, thereby enabling and empowering their experience of God’s own knowledge, love, and joy, so that their words, deeds, and emotions redound to the praise of his glory. As Edwards puts it, “the church of Christ [is that] toward whom, and in whom are the emanations of his glory and communication of his fullness.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, “God in seeking his glory, therein seeks the good of his creatures” and “God in seeking their glory and happiness, seeks himself.”<sup>3</sup> The good that is in God is their good. Before creating anything, God appraised this goal as being inherently valuable and esteemed it as such. God then began to pursue this and continues to act toward it. All of God’s works creation, providence, and redemption are inherently valuable, but only the highest—the “chief” of all the works is the end for which God created the world.<sup>4</sup> God’s motiva-

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1 Jonathan Edwards, *Two dissertations I. Concerning the end for which God created the world*, in *Ethical writings*, vol. 8 of *The works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Hereafter I will refer to this work as *End of Creation*.

2 WJE 8: 439.

3 *Ibid.*, 458–459.

4 Even though there is only one original ultimate end, God’s work *ad extra* is a complex multi-faceted revelation. Edwards distinguishes three types of ultimate ends, all of which are inherently valuable and all of which are involved in God’s works of creation, providence, and redemption. These express what Donald Evans presents in terms of “Creation as Performative Action,” “Creation as Impressive and Expressive Action,” and “Creation as Causal Action.” See Donald Evans, *The logic of self-involvement: a philosophical study of everyday language with*



tion to pursue this end is grounded *immediately* in God's disposition to share (i.e., communicate, emanate, diffuse, externalize, extend) His "*internal Glory*," but it is *ultimately* grounded in God's eternally occurrent supreme regard for Himself.

If as Edwards claims in the epigraph, God's end in creation determines all of his works towards his creatures, then Jonathan Edwards' dissertation is *among* his most important works, if not *the* most important. This book traces Edwards' argumentation, explains its crucial components, and explicates several logical entailments having philosophical import.

Edwards' *End of Creation* (as it is called) comprises only an introduction and two chapters. Its primary intended role was to provide the conceptual ground for Edwards' ethics—what he called "True Virtue." Edwards and others—notably Thomas Clap and Baruch Spinoza—recognized that for a theist of any kind, a view of *how we should live* (i.e., an ethics) will depend on a view of the nature of God and God's purposes. Accordingly, this book aims first to exposit the conceptual ground of "true virtue" as Edwards locates it in God's nature and purposes. A secondary aim of this book is to explore and to map the philosophical implications of his argumentation. The book focuses on the Introduction and Chapter One, while bringing crucial components of Chapter Two into consideration as they apply to and elaborate on what is established.

The philosophical implications of Edwards' view of God's purpose and motivation in creation include a version of *exemplarism* (i.e., the nature of God's ideas for creation), *dispositionalism* (i.e., the characteristics of God which explain God's motivation), and *emanationism* (i.e., what God shares of himself with persons who have a living faith in Christ). They entail a view of *idealism* (i.e., a view of the ultimate ground of the universe), *God's temporal nature, continuous creationism* (i.e., how God sustains creation), a version of *panentheism* (i.e., how God, who is infinite, is related to creation, from which God is absolutely distinct), and *occasionalism* (i.e., the nature of causation of physical events or states of creation).<sup>5</sup> Together, these entail other concepts, which constitute a rather complete metaphysical system. A metaphysical system is a *system of concepts* that is supposed to explain the *fundamental concepts* of science, mathematics, and ordinary experience.<sup>6</sup> What is crucial to bear in mind, perhaps of utmost importance, is that the metaphysics entailed by Edwards' argumentation in *End of Creation* provides a thoroughgoing *divine action* understanding of the foundation of reality. What is fundamental for Edwards is God's acting according to his plans for his purposes

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special reference to the Christian use of language about god as creator. London: SCM Press LTD, 1963.

5 The word *entail* should be understood in its logically technical sense: "If *A* is true and *A* entails *B*, *B* must be true."

6 These terms are defined as they become pertinent in the exposition.

in Christ. Were we to have an understanding of how the fundamental concepts of science, mathematics, and ordinary experience are related in reality to the God who acts for his original ultimate end in creation, sustaining the universe, while providentially guiding its affairs, and working redemption, we would have the core ideas of the Christian understanding of reality. While Edwards did not have the opportunity to develop these as he had hoped, he pointed the way for others to follow.

In addition to the flood of books and articles that have been published in recent decades on various aspects of the general *theology* of Jonathan Edwards, several articles have been devoted to some aspects of his *philosophy*, particularly what he wrote early in his career. Few of these articles extensively discuss or even mention the philosophical entailments of *End of Creation*. By contrast, this book is solely concerned with Edwards' theological philosophy as it is explicitly expressed in, or logically entailed by, his argumentation in *End of Creation*. This is important since *End of Creation* expresses his mature views on many issues central to his philosophical theology in general.

The most significant works of most major philosophers and theologians have had at least one, and often several, scholarly expositions. This is true of Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, John Calvin, and others. Yet it is only in the last two or three decades that *End of Creation* is receiving the attention it deserves.<sup>7</sup> This book, therefore, fills a lacuna in contemporary Edwards scholarship.

The absence of a major work dedicated solely to Edwards' *End of Creation* is probably related to its structural complexity and to its logical and conceptual precision. The nature of his goals in writing and his awareness of the hegemony of

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7 Stephen R. Holmes, *God of grace and God of glory: an account of the theology of Jonathan Edwards* (2000), notes that apart from McClymond's chapter, Jenson's brief account, and Gerstner's occasional comments, "very little has been published" (45). Perhaps the following significant and helpful works, which except for Piper (1998) address but are not entirely dedicated to *End of Creation*, should be added to the list in order of their publication dates: Sang Hyun Lee, *The philosophical theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Michael J. McClymond, "Sinners in the hands of a virtuous God: ethics and divinity in Jonathan Edwards's *End of Creation*" repr. in *Encounters with God: an approach to the theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); John Piper, *God's passion for His Glory: living the vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998); William J. Danaher, *The Trinitarian ethics of Jonathan Edwards* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Stephen H. Daniel, "Edwards as philosopher," in *The Cambridge companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 162–80; John J. Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's vision of reality: the relationship of God to the world, redemption history, and the reprobate* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012); and Oliver Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013).

rationalism or “reason” as a rule of faith in eighteenth-century colonial America, makes sense of the pains Edwards takes to be logically precise. (The analytic style of this book therefore reflects an attempt to be uncompromisingly faithful to Edwards and does not make it a reconstruction of Edwards in the idiom of contemporary analytic philosophy or analytical theology.) His analysis of the concept of an *end* and of a *disposition* in their role in the explanation of behavior is complex, yet coherent. Adding to the difficulty of comprehending *End of Creation* is Edwards’ habit of allusion. Apparently observing a commitment he made earlier in his life to avoid what he feared could be taken as a prideful, ostentatious show of erudition, he often uses a term commonly associated either with a school of thought or with a particular theorist without citing or even naming the school or the theorist. Sometimes he freights the term with an alternative meaning in the service of his own rhetorical purposes (e.g., “emanation” and “Third Being”). It is perhaps for these reasons that more than one contemporary scholar has mistaken the conceptual and logical complexity of Edwards’ argumentation for genuine confusion. In short, it is *famously* difficult to discern Edwards’ exact usage of terms in *End of Creation*. Even Samuel Hopkins in the Preface to *End of Creation* writes that

The author had designed these dissertations for the public view; and wrote them out as they now appear: though ‘tis probable that if his life had been spared, he would have revised them, and rendered them in some respects more complete. Some new sentiments, here and there, might probably have been added; and some passages brightened with further illustrations. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Samuel Hopkins, along with Joseph Bellamy, first encountered this work when Edwards read it to them in February 1756. Hopkins wrote in his diary for February 12, “Mr. Bellamy came to my house last Tuesday, with whom I went to Stockbridge and stayed there two nights and one day, to hear Mr. Edwards read a treatise on ‘The Last End of God in the Creation of the World.’”<sup>9</sup> Anyone who has ever attempted to come to grips with Edwards’ views and argumentation by carefully reading his *End of Creation* can only imagine what it must have been like to be present to listen to Edwards over those two evenings and a full day. One can easily appreciate the listener’s desire that “some passages [be] brightened with further illustrations.” One can only wish that the final version had been a bit more perspicuous. But, alas, nothing further was added, and so *End of Creation* remains among the most difficult works of theological philosophy.

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<sup>8</sup> WJE 8: 401.

<sup>9</sup> From Samuel Hopkins’ diary, quoted in Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: a new biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 391.

This book attempts to rectify this by a careful examination of Edwards' entire argumentation, providing pertinent historical background, explicating essential concepts, and demonstrating its deductive validity using both prose and symbolic logic. This level of precision is important because Edwards' use of terms sometimes permits a wide range of plausible interpretations that can lead to subtle misrepresentations of his theology and philosophy. When the entire argument is considered (following *The Principle of Charity* in interpretation), the range of otherwise plausible interpretations of Edwards' terms or points is constrained and narrowed.

Edwards' life and theological work overlaps the culmination of a long struggle over what would be recognized as the proper and authoritative ground for ascertaining truth in theological matters. Would it be tradition, Scripture, the inner witness of the Spirit, or reason? Reason, according to Beiser (1996), "was understood as the business of giving and assessing reasons, as the activity or faculty of discovering and evaluating where we have sufficient evidence for our beliefs."<sup>10</sup> The term *reason* also denoted a faculty by which humans think and make judgments. By the 1830s, reason seemed to have won the allegiance of most theologians and philosophers. While theological method had almost always involved some combination of Scripture, reason, and tradition, what was at stake was the acknowledged final arbiter of theological disputes.

It is treacherously difficult to categorize the theological philosophy of Jonathan Edwards' *End of Creation*. It seems to resist in some respect every attempt to label it.<sup>11</sup> What is clear, nevertheless, is that, for Jonathan Edwards, the final rule of faith was Scripture. Not only is *End of Creation* an argument from Scripture against particular ideas arising from the deliverances of reason and tradition in the eighteenth century, it also decries the practice of depending on these as the primary sources to provide true accounts of the nature of God, God's purposes, and Christian experience. As Edwards says,

Nor is it to be supposed that mankind, who, while destitute of revelation, by the utmost improvements of their own reason, and advances in science and philosophy, could come to no clear and established determination *who the author of the world was*, would ever have obtained any tolerable settled judgment of *the end* which the author of it proposed to himself in so vast, complicated and wonderful a work of his hands. (*emphases added*)<sup>12</sup>

10 See Frederick C. Beiser, "The sovereignty of reason: the defense of rationality in the Early English Enlightenment" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), x.

11 For an informative discussion on this issue, see Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott. *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 649–662.

12 WJE 8: 419.

This explains his explicit repudiation of the practice, expressed twice in *End of Creation*, bookending his discussion of “what reason teaches” by affirming the priority of scripture:

it would be relying too much on reason, to determine the affair of God's last end in the creation of the world, only by our reason, or without being herein principally guided by divine revelation, since God has given a revelation containing instructions concerning this matter. [...] revelation is the surest guide in these matters.<sup>13</sup>

This claim requires elaboration. Edwards' theological (and indeed philosophical) method was grounded in a historical (history of redemption) approach to Scripture. In a letter to the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, he tells of his aspiration to complete “a great work,” presenting “a body of divinity in an entire new method, being thrown into the form of a history, considering the affair of Christian theology, as the whole of it, in each part, stands in reference to the great work of redemption by Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup> He is referring to his work-in-progress called “A History of the Work of Redemption.” In it he writes,

The end of God's creating this world was to provide a kingdom for his Son in it; for he is appointed the heir of the world, and that he might have the possession of it and kingdom in it to all eternity. So that so far forth of the kingdom of Christ is set up in the world, so far is the world brought to its end, and the eternal state of things set up.... So far are the waters of the long channel of divine providence, that has so many branches and so many windings and turnings, emptied out and disgorged into their proper ocean that they have been seeking from the beginning and head of their course, and so are come to their rest. So far as Christ's kingdom is established, so far are things wound up and settled in their everlasting state, and a period put to the course of things in this changeable world. So far is the first heavens and the first earth come to an end and the new heavens and new earth, the everlasting heavens and earth, established in their room.<sup>15</sup>

Robert Brown writes that this “History of Redemption” is “an original and creative contribution to American religious thought.”<sup>16</sup> Nelson Kloosterman says that

this [historical] structure of presenting biblical truth differs significantly from the deductive, systematic *loci* model employed in traditional Reformed theology [and that] A

13 Ibid., 419, 463.

14 Jonathan Edwards to the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, October 19, 1757, WJE 16: 727.

15 WJE 9: 349–50.

16 Robert Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2002), 173; see Chapter Six, “Theology in the Historical Mode,” 26.

body of divinity true to Scripture would, therefore, exhibit fidelity to the Bible's own form as well as to its content. Rather than bringing to the Bible categories framed by philosophy, whose questions and answers would be driven by the perplexities of the human mind, Edwards wished to emphasize the Scripture's self-authenticating history and integrative harmony as the source of insight and solution to the many problems posed by current thought.<sup>17</sup>

Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott devote a chapter to the concept, saying,

One of Edwards's governing theological ideas—and the concept that dominates much of his private reflection during his final years—is captured in the phrase “history of redemption.”<sup>18</sup>

In sum, a preference for history of redemption characterizes Edwards' theological method. Edwards treats the central events of Scripture as being subordinate ends in God's pursuit of his original ultimate end in creation. Edwards was a pastor committed to Scripture, reasoning from the Bible and prioritizing the biblical view of the God who acts and who reveals himself progressively. Thus, for Edwards, theological claims justified primarily on the grounds of reason and tradition, such as were found in both eighteenth-century rational theology and Reformed Scholasticism, were to be tested against and subordinated to what is derived from a historical sense of Scripture.

This stands in contrast to Aristotelian Classical Theism and Protestant Scholasticism which, adopting the method Pseudo-Dionysius, sought knowledge of “God in himself” by reasoning three ways from creation: *via eminentiae* (the way of eminence or perfection), *via negationis* (the way of removal or negation), and *via causalitatis* (the way of causation).<sup>19</sup> Simply put, one finds a property in creation—one which God shares with creation (i.e., a communicable attribute), such as “goodness”—then posits that God possesses that property perfectly. This is *via eminentiae*. Then one removes from that perfection whatever aspects of it that God cannot have. This is *via negationis*. Finally, one reasons as to how that perfection in God is the source of the property in creatures. Supposedly, what one

17 Nelson D. Kloosterman, “The use of typology in post-canonical salvation history: an orientation to Jonathan Edwards' A History of the Work of Redemption,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 14 (2003): 71.

18 See Michael J McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott. *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 181–190. See also Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), 3–12.

19 W. J. Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas' doctrine of God as expounded in the Summa Theologiae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

arrives at by reasoning from creation is knowledge of God in himself, the material for contemplative theology.

For Edwards, by contrast, creature knowledge of “God in himself” is something God seeks and works in the redeemed. It is an essential aspect of the end for which God created the world. In other words, creature knowledge of God in himself (God’s attributes, perfections, “internal glory”) is a work of God, involving propositional (“notional”) understanding of Scripture and Gods’ revelation of himself in nature and involving personal knowledge of God in himself in virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit. What is intimately known is “God’s internal glory.” As Edwards puts this,

Tis a thing infinitely good in itself that God’s glory should be known by a glorious society of created beings. And that there should be in them an increasing knowledge of God to all eternity [...] in seeking this, and making this his end, he seeks himself, and makes himself his end.<sup>20</sup>

In sum, Edwards gives priority to what Scripture teaches regarding creature knowledge of *God in himself*—of God’s internal glory, namely that such knowledge is a *work of God* having transforming effects. It is part and parcel of the work of redemption.

To reiterate, what is fundamental for Jonathan Edwards is God’s acting according to his plans for his purposes in Christ. God’s purposeful acting is what gives Scripture its unity and what makes sense of all of reality. Edwards was acutely aware of God’s sustaining, redeeming action as a present tense reality; the reality to whom Edwards looked and on whom he relied for insight informed by Scripture and for power to live out the “end for which God created the world.”

This is not to say that Edwards completely dismissed or repudiated the ideas of Reformed Scholasticism and rationalist theology. Whenever he used the terms of received theology, he attempted to ascertain how much of their conceptual content should be revised or replaced.<sup>21</sup> His practice of replacing or revising the conceptual content of the terms of various “theisms” with biblical content is especially evident in his use of “disposition” to explain “God’s acting for ends” and to distinguish among types of ends and in his use of “emanation.” The latter refers to the continuing indwelling presence and gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the redeemed. Its meaning is far removed from the Neoplatonism with which it is

20 WJE 8: 431, 432, 438.

21 This exemplifies Ryan M. McGraw’s report that “Reformed theology itself demanded critical interaction with the entire catholic Christian tradition without enslaving theologians to the opinions of anyone other than God himself, who spoke by the Spirit of Scripture.” Ryan M. McGraw. *Reformed Scholasticism: Recovering the Tools of Reformed Theology*. (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 151.

associated, which is that the world is constituted by an emanation of God's essence. Similarly, Edwards' concepts of *disposition* and *end* faithfully represent the dynamic picture of God given in Scripture.<sup>22</sup> In his use of these terms, it is evident that Edwards subordinates his theology and philosophy to Scripture, reasoning from it.

Of equal if not greater importance is the fact that, while for rhetorical purposes Edwards does not make a point in *End of Creation* of emphasizing the Trinitarian nature of his philosophical theology, nevertheless each "act of God" in creation, providence, and redemption is Trinitarian: the Father is the source ("speaking"; willing), the Son is the Wisdom and the laureate ("through whom and for whom"), and the Spirit is the direct causal agent ("By my Spirit"). Edwards' Trinitarianism explains God's motivation and is the locus of God's excellency and infinite value, which is an idea central to the entire argument of *End of Creation*. These ideas reinforce the assertion made earlier that Edwards subordinated scholastic notions to scripture, revising or rejecting them as necessary. As Amy Plantinga Pauw observes, "Excellency largely supplanted simplicity as a marker of divine perfection in Edwards's thought."<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps because of its conceptual complexity, logical precision, and Edwards' practice of allusion, a most biblically grounded, comprehensive, conceptually coherent, logically consistent, and ultimately spiritually edifying Christian philosophy has been inadvertently obscured for more than the 250 years since its publication. This is not to suggest that nothing of it has been discovered and promoted. Many excellent and accurate articles and books have addressed it to some extent. Most of these, however, deal with what Edwards had written elsewhere and earlier, sometimes interpreting *End of Creation* in terms of what he had written decades before. What has not yet been published is a theory of God and creation that *End of Creation* alone expresses and entails.

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22 I take it that *this* dynamism of God's acting for ends is the primary point that Sang Hyun Lee intends. He writes, "Edwards does continue the Western philosophical and theological stress upon God's aseity or prior actuality. But God, for Edwards, is also essentially an active and relational Power. And it is Edwards' conception of God's essentially dispositional character, together with the doctrine of the Trinity, that mediates between God's aseity and God's creativity." See Sang Hyun Lee. *The philosophical theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, 174. I agree with this, as I do on many of the points for which Lee argues. Nevertheless, in my opinion, Edwards' use of the concept *disposition* regarding God refers not to an *entity* or a *power*, but rather to a *way* God is in himself as Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. In its proper use, the term refers to something about the "degree, circumstances and relations" of God's knowledge, holiness, and happiness. See Appendix F.

23 This book supports Pauw's assertion. Amy Plantinga Pauw. "One Alone Cannot be Excellent": Edwards on Divine Simplicity." Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian. Eds. Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003: 115–125.



This present attempt to exposit the philosophy in *End of Creation* is crucial for another reason. Edwards wrote, "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."<sup>24</sup> He then insists, "That which God had primarily in view in creating, and the original ordination of the world, must be constantly kept in view, and have a governing influence in all God's works, or with respect to everything he does towards his creatures."<sup>25</sup> We can be sure that Edwards was convinced of this, having spent approximately 35 years developing and refining his argumentation. He even goes 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. As Edwards asserts, "[There is] no way left to answer but that which has been taken above."<sup>26</sup>

This claim is momentous and bears insistent emphasis. 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 make sense of God's being absolutely self-sufficient yet creating for an end. Edwards has "cleared the table" of every competing, contrary alternative. Edwards accomplishes what others have said was impossible. William Wisner, for example, writing in 1850 and opposing Edwards, claims that "it is impossible to show that God is his own end in creation" because God's making himself his end, as Edwards claims, entails both a deficiency in God and Neoplatonic emanationism, which contradict God's absolute self-sufficiency and creation *ex nihilo*, respectively.<sup>27</sup> Wisner simply fails to follow Edwards' argument and restates the problem, which was well-known in Christian (and Jewish) philosophical theology. As Baruch Spinoza argues in his *Ethics* (1677), the very concept of acting to achieve an end entails that the agent values the state to be achieved more than the initial state. Hence, if God created the world to achieve an end, then the state achieved must be more valuable to him than his initial state without creation. It must provide God with something real and valuable that he otherwise lacked. It follows that God must not have been fulfilled in his initial state without creation. If this is so, then God is not self-sufficient and must have acted out of necessity to satisfy a deficiency.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, God could not have

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24 WJE 8: 413.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 449.

27 William C. Wisner, "The end of God in creation," *American Bible Repository*, 3rd series, 6 (1850): 430–56.

28 "The Ethics" in *The Ethics and selected Letters*, ed. Seymour Feldman, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982), 59.

freely created as both Catholic and Reformed theologians had claimed. Both Spinoza and Wisner are mistaken. Edwards' view of the end for which God created the world resolves this problem, and one of the aims of this book is to show that.

If Edwards is correct in asserting this his view of God and creation is the *only* way to overcome Spinoza's Conundrum, 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. Second, if Edwards' argumentation is sound, then whatever it *entails* admits no contrary alternative. Third, if Edwards is correct, then these concepts of God's end and motivation in creation—these issues that Edwards had so painstakingly argued for—should play a central role in contemporary biblical, systematic, and philosophical theology. Most often, however, they do not. I heartily doubt that the gravity of Edwards' claim has been properly appreciated.

This book attempts to understand *End of Creation* on its own terms. In what ways might Edwards have changed or refined his views from the 1720s to 1755 when the work was completed is not the primary concern of this book. Rather, its aim is simply to exposit and analyze Edwards' argumentation in *End of Creation* and to ascertain its entailments. While for some purposes one work in a corpus may be interpreted in light of another, each should nevertheless be explicated on its own terms before comparisons are made. Many theorists *refer* to *End of Creation*, yet few actually exposit and explicate it, and none do so with the support of formal logical analysis to represent Edwards' careful reasoning. Edwards' philosophical argumentation is deductively valid, and this is demonstrated in Appendix C. Attitudes towards scholarly methodology change and sometimes cycle back, experiencing a renaissance of approval and adoption. Whatever the dominant attitude is at the reading of this book, in fairness to Edwards it should be borne in mind that his was the Age of Reason. To make his case, he supplemented his reliance on Scripture with deductive logic. Edwards' philosophical chapter, Chapter One, deserves to be explicated in these terms.

One danger, perhaps too often realized, is that an exposition of a difficult work turns out to be more impenetrable and confusing than the work it is intended to illuminate and explain. I truly hope that danger is not realized here. To minimize or even preclude as much, the reader should note that, while this book is a progressive exposition and analysis of Edwards' argumentation, each chapter can be read as an independent essay. For this reason, each chapter provides a summary of relevant background material that may appear in other chapters in greater detail. Also, the Summary of Chapters is a condensed version of the entire book. It could be consulted to review the flow of ideas.