

# ALBERT BLEDSON

AN EXAMINATION OF  
PRESIDENT EDWARDS'  
INQUIRY INTO THE  
FREEDOM OF THE WILL

Albert Bledsoe

**An Examination of President  
Edwards' Inquiry into  
the Freedom of the Will**

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**Bledsoe A.**

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# An Examination of President Edwards' Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

I entered upon an examination of the “Inquiry” of President Edwards, not with a view to find any fallacy therein, but simply with a desire to ascertain the truth for myself. If I have come to the conclusion, that the whole scheme of moral necessity which Edwards has laboured to establish, is founded in error and delusion; this has not been because I came to the examination of his work with any preconceived opinion. In coming to this conclusion I have disputed every inch of the ground with myself, as firmly and as resolutely as I could have done with an adversary. The result has been, that the views which I now entertain, in regard to the philosophy of the will, are widely different from those usually held by the opponents of moral necessity, as well as from those which are maintained by its advocates.

The formation of these views, whether they be correct or not, has been no light task. Long have I struggled under the stupendous difficulties of the subject. Long has darkness, a deep and perplexing darkness, seemed to rest upon it. Faint glimmerings of light have alternately appeared and disappeared. Some of these have returned at intervals, while others have vanished for ever. Some have returned, and become less wavering, and led on the mind to other regions of mingled obscurity and light. Gladly and joyfully have I followed. By patient thought, and sustained attention, these faint glimmerings have, in more instances than one, been made to open out into what has appeared to be the clear and steady light of truth. If these are not mere fond illusions, the true intellectual system of the world is far different from that which has been constructed by the logic of President Edwards.

If his system be false, why, it may be asked, has the Inquiry so often appeared to be unanswerable? Why has it been supposed, even by some of the advocates of free agency, that logic is in favour of his system, while consciousness only is in favour of ours? One reason of this opinion is, that it has been taken for granted, that either the scheme of President Edwards or that of his opponents must be true; and hence, his system has appeared to stand upon immoveable ground, in so far logic is concerned, only because he has, with such irresistible power and skill, demolished and trampled into ruins that of his adversaries. Reason has been supposed to be on his side, because he has so clearly shown that it is not on the side of his opponents. But the scheme of the motive-determining power, does not necessarily arise out of the ruins of the self-determining power; it is only to the imagination that it appears to do so. Because the one system is false, it does not follow that the other is true.

There is another and still more powerful reason for the idea in question. The advocates of free agency have granted too much. The great foundation principles of the scheme of moral necessity have been incautiously admitted by its adversaries. These principles have appeared so obvious at first view, that their correctness has not been doubted; and hence they have been assumed by the one side and conceded by the other. Yet, if I am not greatly mistaken, they have been derived, not from the true oracles of nature, but from what Bacon quaintly calls the “idols of the tribe.” If this be the case, as I think it will hereafter appear to be; then in order to secure a complete triumph over the scheme of moral necessity, even on the arena of logic, we must not only know *how to reason*, but also *how to doubt*.

I fully concur with the younger Edwards, that “Clarke, Johnson, Price, and Reid have granted too much;” and while I try to show this, I shall also endeavour to show that President Edwards has

assumed too much, not for the good of the cause in which he is engaged, but for the attainment of truth.

If his system had not been founded upon certain natural illusions, by which the true secrets of nature are concealed from our view, it could never have been the boast of its admirers, “that a reluctant world has been constrained to bow in homage to its truth.” If we would try the strength of this system then, we must bend a searching and scrutinizing eye upon the premises and assumptions upon which it is based; we must put aside every preconceived notion, even the most plausible and commonly received opinions, and lay our minds open to the steady and unbiased contemplation of nature, just as it has been created by the Almighty Architect; we must view the intellectual system of the world, not as it is seen through our hasty and careless conceptions, but as it is revealed to us in the light of consciousness and severe meditation. This will be no light task, I am aware; but whosoever would seek the truth on such a subject, must not expect to find it by light and trifling efforts; he must go after it in all the loving energy of his soul. Let this course be pursued, honestly and perseveringly pursued, and I am persuaded, that a system of truth will be revealed to the mind, to which it will not be constrained to render “a reluctant homage,” but which, by harmonizing the deductions of logic with the dictates of nature, will secure to itself the most pleasing and delightful homage of which the human mind is susceptible.

Those false conceptions which are common to the human mind, those “idols of the tribe,” of which Bacon speaks, have been, as it is well known, the sources of some of the most obstinate errors, both in science and in religion, that have ever infested the world. And it is evident, that while the assumptions from which any system, however false, legitimately results, are conceded, it will stand, like a wall of adamant, against the most powerful artillery of logic. It will remain triumphant in spite of all opposition. It may be contrary to our natural convictions, and consequently liable to our suspicions; but it cannot be refuted by argument. Its advocates may reason correctly, and its adversaries may appeal to opposite truths; but neither can ever arrive at the truth, and the whole truth. This has appeared to me to be the case, with respect to the long controverted question of liberty and necessity.

The above causes, conspiring with some instances of false logic, which have been overlooked amid so much that is really conclusive, and also with a number of unsound, yet plausible, devices to reconcile the scheme of moral necessity with the reality of virtue and free-agency, have, in the minds of many, rendered the work of President Edwards both an acceptable and an unanswerable production. Such, at least, is the conclusion to which I have been constrained to come; but whether this conclusion be correct or not, it is not for me to determine. Time alone can show, whether the foundation of his system, like that of truth, is immutable, or whether, like many which have been laid by the master spirits of other ages, it is destined to pass away, though not to be forgotten.

In the above enumeration of causes I have not alluded to those of a theological nature; because they have been but partial in their operation. And besides, I have not wished to refer to this subject at all, except in so far as, is necessary to indicate wherein I conceive the errors of the Inquiry to consist, and thereby to point out the course which I intend to pursue in the following discussion.

## SECTION I. OF THE POINT IN CONTROVERSY

It is worse than a waste of time, it is a grievous offence against the cause of truth, to undertake to refute an author without having taken pains to understand exactly what he teaches. In every discussion, the first thing to be settled is the point in dispute; and if this be omitted, the controversy must needs degenerate into a mere idle logomachy. It seldom happens that any thing affords so much satisfaction, or throws so much light on a controversy, as to have the point at issue clearly made up, and *constantly borne in mind*.

What then, is the precise doctrine of the Inquiry which I intend to oppose? The great question is, says Edwards, what determines the will. It is taken for granted, on all sides, that the will is determined; and the only point is, or rather has been, as to what determines it. It is determined by the strongest motive, says one; it is not determined by the strongest motive, says another. But although the issue is thus made up in general terms, it is very far from being settled with any tolerable degree of clearness and precision; ample room is still left for all that loose and declamatory kind of warfare in which so many controversialists delight to indulge.

The question still remains to be settled, what is meant by determining the will? In regard to this point, the necessitarian does not seem to have a very clear and definite idea. “The object of our Inquiry,” says President Day, “is not to learn whether the mind acts at all. This no one can doubt. Nor is it to determine *why we will at all*. The very nature of the faculty of the will implies that we put forth volitions. But the real point of inquiry is, *why we will one way rather than another; why we choose one thing rather than its opposite*,” p. 42. One would suppose from this statement, that we have nothing to do with the question, *why we put forth volitions*, but exclusively with the question, *why we will one way rather than another*. Here the author’s meaning seems to be plain, and we may imagine that we know exactly where to find him; but, in the very next sentence, he declares that the object of our inquiry is, “what is it that determines *not only that there shall be volitions*, but what they shall be?” p. 42. In one breath we are told, that we have nothing to do with the question, why our volitions are put forth or come into existence; these are admitted to be implied in the “very nature of the faculty of the will;” but, in the very next, we are informed that we have to inquire into this point also. One moment, only one of these points is in dispute, and the next, both are put in controversy. Surely, this does not indicate any very clear and definite idea, on the part of President Day, as to the point at issue.

The notion of President Edwards, on this subject, appears to be equally unsteady and vacillating. “Thus,” says he, “by determining the will, if the phrase be used with any meaning, *must be intended*, causing that the act of the *will should be thus, and not otherwise*: and the will is said to be determined, when, in consequence of some action, or influence, its choice is directed to, and fixed upon a particular object. As when we speak of the determination of motion, we mean causing the motion of the body to be in such a direction, rather than another,” p. 18.

Now, are we to understand from this, that the determination of the will can only refer to the question, why it is directed to and fixed upon a particular object, and not to the question, how it comes to put forth a volition at all? One would certainly suppose so; and that, according to Edwards, we have nothing to do with the question, “How a spirit comes to act,” but with the question, “why its action has such and such a particular direction and determination.” But this supposition would be very far from the truth. For he informs us, that “the question is not so much, How a spirit endowed with activity comes to act, as why it exerts such an act, and not another; or why it acts with such a particular determination?” This clearly implies, that although the question, “How a spirit comes to act,” is not chiefly concerned in the present controversy; yet *it is partly* concerned in it. This question

is concerned in it, though not *so much* as the other question, why the act of the mind is as it is, rather than otherwise.

This is not all. When Edwards attacks the doctrine of his adversaries, in regard to the determining of the will, he never seems to dream of the idea, which, according to himself, if the phrase mean any thing, *must* be attached to it. He treats it as a settled point, that by determining the will must be intended, not causing volition to be one way rather than another, but causing it to come into existence. He could take this expression to mean the one thing or the other, just as it suited his purpose.

Are these two questions really distinct? Can there be one cause of volition, and another cause of its particular direction? I answer, there cannot. No such distinction can be shown to exist by a reference to the cause of motion. Force is the cause of motion. One force may put a body in motion; and, afterwards, another force may change the direction of its motion. Upon a superficial observation, this may seem to illustrate the distinction in question; but, upon more mature reflection, it will not appear to do so. For the force which sets a body in motion necessarily causes it to move in one particular direction, and not another; because it is impossible for a body to move without moving in a particular direction. After one force has put a body in motion, another force, it is true, may change its direction; but in such a case, it is not correct to say, that one force caused its motion and another the direction of that motion. For, in reality, both the motion of the body and its direction, result from the joint action of the two forces; or, in other words, each force contributes to the motion, and each to its direction. Both the motion and its direction are caused by what is technically called, in mechanical philosophy, the “resultant” of the two forces; and the case is really not different, so far as the distinction in question is concerned, from the case of motion produced by the action of a single force. The absurdity of this distinction consists, in supposing that a body may be put in motion without moving in a particular direction; and that something else beside the cause of its motion, is necessary to account for the direction of that motion. The illustration, therefore, drawn from the phenomena of motion, fails to answer the purpose for which President Edwards has produced it.

The same absurdity is involved in the supposition, that one thing may cause volition to exist, and another may cause it to be directed to and fixed upon a particular object. No man can conceive of a choice as existing, which has not some particular object. It is of the very nature and essence of a choice to have some particular direction and determination. If a choice exists at all, it must be a choice of some particular thing. Hence, whatever causes a volition to exist, must cause it to have a particular direction and determination. Let any one show a choice, which is not the preference of one thing rather than another, and then we may admit that there is some reason for the distinction in question; but until then, we must be permitted to regard it as having no foundation in the nature of things. If it were necessary, this matter might be fully and unanswerably illustrated; but a bare statement of it is sufficient to render it perfectly clear.

We shall hereafter see, that the reason why President Edwards supposed that there is some foundation for such a distinction is, that he did not sufficiently distinguish between the cause of a thing and its condition. Although we may suppose that the “activity of the soul” is the cause of its acting; yet motive may be the indispensable condition of its acting; and, in this sense, may be the reason why a volition is one way rather than another. But it is denied that there can be two *causes* in the case; one to produce volition, and another to determine its object. We have seen that such a supposition is absurd; and we shall hereafter see, that Edwards was led to make it, by confounding the condition with the cause of volition.

After all, it may be said, that Edwards himself did not really consider these two things as distinct, but only as different aspects of the same thing. If so, it will follow, that when he undertook to establish his own scheme, he represented motive as the cause of volition; and yet when he was reminded, that the activity of the nature of the soul is the cause of its actions, he replied, that although this may be very true, yet this activity of nature is not the “cause why its acts are thus and thus limited,

directed and determined.” He replied that the question is not *so much*, “How a spirit comes to act,” as why it acts thus, and not otherwise. That is to say, it will follow, that he chose to build up his scheme under one aspect of it, and to defend it under another aspect thereof; that as the architect of his system, he chose to assume and occupy the position, that motive is the cause of volition itself; yet as the defender of it, he sometimes preferred to present this same position under the far milder aspect, that although “the activity of spirit, may be the cause why it acts,” yet motive is the cause why its acts are thus and thus limited, &c. In other words, it will follow, that his doctrine possesses two faces; and that with the one it looks sternly on the scheme of necessity, whilst, with the other, it seems to smile on its adversaries.

The truth is, the great question which President Edwards discusses throughout the Inquiry, as we shall see, is “How a spirit comes to act;” and the other question, “why its action is thus and thus limited,” &c., which, on occasion, swells out into such immense importance, as to seem to cover the whole field of vision, generally shrinks down into comparative insignificance. As a general thing, he goes along in the even tenor of his way, to prove that no event can begin to be without a cause of its existence; and, in particular, that no volition can come into existence without being caused to do so by motive; and it is only when it is urged upon him, that “a spirit endowed with activity” may give rise to its own acts, that he takes a sudden turn and reminds us, that the question is not so much “how a spirit comes to act?” as “why its acts are thus and thus limited?”

From the supposition made by Edwards, that “if activity of nature be the cause why a spirit acts,” it has been concluded that he regarded the soul of man as the efficient cause of its volitions, and motive as merely the occasion on which they are put forth or exerted. But surely, those who have so understood the Inquiry, have done so very unadvisedly, and have but little reason to complain, as they are prone to do, that his opponents do not understand him. If Edwards makes mind the efficient cause of volition, what becomes of his famous argument against the self-determining power, by which he reduces it to the absurdity of an infinite series of volitions? “If the mind causes its volition,” says he, “it can do so only by a preceding volition; and so on *ad infinitum*.” Is not all this true, on the supposition that the mind is the efficient cause of volition? And if so, how can any reader of Edwards, who does not wish to make either his author or himself appear ridiculous, seriously contend that he holds mind to be the efficient, or producing cause of volition? There be pretended followers and blind admirers of President Edwards, who, knowing but little of his work themselves, are ever ready to defend him, whensoever attacked, even by those who have devoted years to the study of the Inquiry, by most ignorantly and flippantly declaring that they do not understand him. These pseudo-disciples will not listen to the charge, that Edwards makes the strongest motive the producing cause of volition; but whether this charge be true or not, we shall see in the following section.

## SECTION II. OF EDWARDS' USE OF THE TERM CAUSE

We have already seen that Edwards must be understood as holding motive to be the cause of volition; but still we cannot make up the issue with him, until we have ascertained in what sense he employs the term *cause*. It has been contended, by high authority, that he did not regard motive as the efficient, or producing cause of volition, but only as the occasion or condition on which volition is produced. Hence, it becomes necessary to examine this point, and to settle the meaning of the author, in order that I may not be supposed to misrepresent him, and to dispute with him only about words.

The above notion is based on the following passage:

“I would explain,” says President Edwards, “how I would be understood when I use the word *cause* in this discourse; since, for want of a better word, I shall have occasion to use it in a sense which is more extensive, than that in which it is sometimes used. The word is often used in so restrained a sense as to signify only that which has a positive efficiency or influence to produce a thing, or bring it to pass. But there are many things which have no such positive productive influence; which yet are causes in this respect, that they have truly the nature of a reason why some things are, rather than others; or why they are thus rather than otherwise.”... “I sometimes use the word *Cause*, in this Inquiry, to signify any antecedent, either natural or moral... upon which an event so depends, that it is the ground or reason, either in whole or in part, why it is, rather than not; or why it is as it is, rather than otherwise; or, in other words, any antecedent with which a consequent event is so connected, that it truly belongs to the reason why the proposition which affirms that event, is true; whether *it has any positive influence, or not*. And, agreeably to this, I sometimes use the term *effect* for the consequence of another thing, which is perhaps rather an occasion than cause, most properly speaking.” And he tells us, that “I am the more careful thus to explain my meaning, that I may cut off occasion, from any that might seek occasion to cavil and object against some things which I may say concerning the dependence of all things which come to pass, on some cause, and their connection with their cause,” p. 50-1.

This is the portion of the Inquiry on which the younger Edwards founds his conclusion, that his father did not regard motive as the *efficient* cause of volition, but only as the occasion, or condition, or antecedent of volition. He finds this language in the Essays of Dr. West; “We cannot agree with Mr. Edwards in his assertion, that motive is the cause of volition;” and he replies, “Mr. Edwards has very particularly informed us in what sense he uses the term *cause*;” and, in proof of this, he proceeds to quote a portion of the above extracts from the Inquiry. Having done this, he triumphantly demands, “Now, does Dr. West deny, that motive is an antecedent, on which volition, either in whole or in part depends? or that it is a ground or reason, either in whole or in part, either by positive influence or not, why it is rather than not? Surely, he cannot with consistency deny this, since he says, ‘By motive we understand the *occasion*, end or design, which an agent has in view when he acts.’ So that, however desirous Dr. West may be to be thought to differ, in this point, from President Edwards, it appears that he most exactly agrees with him,” p. 65.

Now, if Edwards really believed that motive is merely the occasion on which the mind acts, agreeing herein most perfectly with Dr. West, why did he not say so? Why adhere to the term cause, which can only obscure such an idea, instead of adopting the word occasion, or condition, or antecedent, which would have clearly expressed it? Surely, if Edwards maintained the doctrine ascribed to him, he has been most unfortunate in his manner of setting it forth; it is a great pity he did not give it a more conspicuous place in his system. It is to be regretted, that he has not once told us that such was his doctrine, in order that we might see for ourselves his agreement with Dr. West in this respect, instead of leaving it to the initiated few to enlighten us on this subject.

He has, we are told, “very particularly informed us in what sense he uses the word cause,” p. 64. Now is this so? Has he informed us that by *cause* he means *occasion*? He has done no such thing, and his language admits of no such construction. He merely tells us, that he *sometimes* uses the term cause to signify an occasion only; but when and where he so employs it, he has not explained at all. He has not once said, that when he applies it to motive he uses it in the sense of an occasion, or antecedent; and, if he had said so, it would not have been true. The truth is, that he has used the word in question with no little vagueness and indistinctness of meaning; for he sometimes employs it to signify merely an occasion, which exerts no positive influence, and sometimes to signify a producing cause. This is the manner in which he uses it, when he applies it to motive. In his definition of motive, as the younger Edwards truly says, he includes “*every cause* or occasion of volition;” every thing which has a “tendency to volition;” &c., p. 104. Thus, according to the younger Edwards himself, the elder Edwards has, in his definition of motive, included every conceivable cause of volition; and yet, when Dr. West objects that he makes motive the producing cause of volition, the very same writer replies that he has done no such thing: that he has “very particularly explained in what sense he uses the word cause” when applied to motive, and that he means “by *cause*, no other than *occasion, reason, or previous circumstance necessary for volition*; and that in this Dr. West entirely agrees with him,” p. 65. If we may believe the younger Edwards, then, when the author of the Inquiry says, that motive is the cause of volition, he means that it is no other than the occasion or previous circumstance necessary to volition, and not that it is the cause thereof in the proper sense of the word; and yet that it is the cause thereof in every conceivable sense of the word! Now, he agrees with Dr. West himself; and again, he teaches precisely the opposite doctrine! Let those who so fondly imagine that they are the only men who understand the Inquiry, and that the most elaborate replies to it may be sufficiently refuted by raising the cry of “misconstruction;” let them, I say, take some little pains to understand the work for themselves, instead of merely giving echo to the blunders of the younger Edwards.

President Edwards says, that the term cause is often used in so restrained a sense as to signify that which has “a *positive efficiency* or *influence* to *produce* a thing, or bring it to pass.” It is in this restrained sense that I use the word, when I say that President Edwards regarded motive as the cause of volition; and it is in this sense that I intend to make the charge good. I intend to show that he regarded motive, not merely as the occasion or condition of volition, but as that which *produces* it. This position, as we have seen, has been denied by high authority; and therefore it becomes necessary to establish it, in order that I may not be charged with disputing only about words; and that although I may be exceedingly “desirous of being thought to differ with President Edwards” on this subject, yet I do “most exactly agree with him.”

To begin then; – if motive is merely the condition on which the mind acts, and exerts no influence in the production of volition, it is certainly improper to say, that it *gives rise to volition*. This clearly implies that it is the efficient, or producing cause of volition. On this point, let the younger Edwards himself be the judge. “That self-determination *gives rise* to volition,” is an expression which he quotes from Dr. Chauncey, and italicizes the words “*gives rise to*,” as showing that the author of them regarded the mind as the efficient cause of volition. Now, President Edwards says, that the “strongest motive excites the mind to volition;” and he adds, that “the notion of exciting, is *exerting influence to cause the effect to arise and come forth into existence*,” p. 96. Surely, if to give rise to a thing, is efficiently to cause it, no less can be said of exerting influence “to *cause it to arise and come forth into existence*.” And if so, then, according to the younger Edwards himself, the author of the Inquiry regarded motive as the efficient cause of volition; and yet, on p. 66 he declares, that President Edwards did not hold “motive to be the efficient cause of volition;” and that if he has dropped any expression which implies such a doctrine, it must have been an inadvertency. I intend to show, before I have done, that there are many such inadvertencies in his work; the younger Edwards himself being the judge.

Now, it will not be denied, that that which produces a thing, is its efficient cause. The younger Edwards himself has spoken of an “*efficient, producing* cause,” in such a manner as to show that he regarded them as convertible terms, p. 46. He being judge, then, that which produces a thing, is its efficient cause. I might easily show, if it were necessary, that he himself frequently speaks of motive as the efficient, or producing cause of volition; but, at present, I am only concerned with the doctrine of President Edwards. “It is true,” says President Edwards, “I find myself possessed of my volitions before I can see the effectual power of any cause to *produce* them, for the power and *efficacy* of the cause is not seen but by the effect,” p. 277. Here, from the volition, from the effect, he infers the operation of the cause or power which *produces* it. Now this cause is motive, the strongest motive; for this is that which operates to induce a choice. Motive, then, *produces* volition, according to the Inquiry; it is not merely the condition on which it is produced.

The younger Edwards declares, that President Edwards did not regard “motive as the efficient cause of volition,” p. 66, but only as the “occasion or previous circumstances necessary to volition;” in this respect “most exactly agreeing with Dr. West” himself; and yet he tells us, in another place, that “every cause of volition is included in President Edwards’ definition of motive,” p. 104. Now, does not every cause of volition include the efficient cause thereof? Does not this expression include that which is the cause of volition in the real, in the only proper, sense of the word?

To save the consistency of the author, will it be said, that “every cause” does not include the efficient cause in his estimation, since in his opinion there is no such cause? If this should be said, it would not be true; for the younger Edwards did, as it is well known, regard the influence of the Divine Being as the efficient cause of volition. He regarded the Deity as the sole fountain of all efficiency in heaven and in earth. Hence, if the definition of President Edwards included “every cause” of volition; it must have included this divine influence, this efficient cause. Indeed, the younger Edwards expressly asserts, that this “divine influence” is included in President Edwards’ “explanation of his idea of motive,” p. 104. He tells us, then, that President Edwards regards motive as merely the *occasion* of volition; and yet that he considered motive as including the efficient cause of volition! At one time, motive is merely the antecedent, which exerts no influence; at another, it embraces the efficient cause! At one time, the author of the Inquiry “most exactly agrees” with the libertarian in regard to this all-important point; and, at another, he most perfectly disagrees with him! It is to be hoped, that President Edwards is not quite so glaringly inconsistent with himself, on this subject, as he is represented to be by his distinguished son.

Again. President Edwards has written a section to prove, that “volitions are necessarily connected with the influence of motives;” which clearly implies that they are brought to pass by the influence of motives. In this section, he says, “Motives do nothing, as motives or inducements, but by their influence. And so much as is *done by their influence* is the effect of them. For that is the notion of an effect, something that *is brought to pass* by the influence of something else.” Here motives are said to be the causes of volitions, and to *bring them to pass by their influence*. Is this to make motive merely the condition on which the mind acts? Is this to consider it as merely an antecedent to volition, which exerts no influence? On the contrary, does it not strongly remind one of that “restrained sense of the word cause,” in which it signifies, that which “has an influence to produce a thing, *or bring it to pass?*”

Once more. In relation to the acts of the will, he adopts the following language to show that they are necessarily dependent on the influence of motives: “For an event to have a cause and ground of its existence, and yet not be connected with its cause, is an inconsistency. For if the event be not connected with the cause, it is not dependent on its cause; its *existence* is as it were *loose from its influence*; and it may attend it, or it may not; its being a mere contingency, whether it follows or attends the influence of the cause, or not; and that is the same thing as not to be dependent on it. And to say the event is not dependent on its cause, *is absurd*; it is the same thing as to say, it is not its cause, nor the event the effect of it; for dependence on *the influence of a cause is the very notion of an effect*. If there be no such relation between one thing and another, consisting in the connexion

and dependence of one thing on the influence of another, then it is certain there is no such relation between them as is signified by the relation of cause and effect,” p. 77-8. Now, here we are told, that it is the very notion of an effect, that it owes its existence to the influence of its cause; and that *it is absurd* to speak of an effect which is loose from the influence of its cause. It is this influence, “which causes volition to arise and come forth into existence.” Any other notion of cause and effect is absurd and unmeaning. And yet, President Edwards informs us, that he sometimes uses the term cause to signify any antecedent, though it may exert no influence; and that he so employs it, in order to prevent cavilling and objecting. Now, what is all this taken together, but to inform us, that he sometimes uses the word in question *very absurdly*, in order to keep us from finding fault with him? The truth is, that whatever apparent concession President Edwards may have made, he does habitually bring down the term *cause* to its narrow and restrained sense, to its strict and proper meaning, when he says, that motive is the cause of volition. He loses sight entirely of the idea, that it is only the *occasion* on which the mind acts.

I might multiply extracts to the same effect almost without end; but it is not necessary. It must be evident to every impartial reader of the Inquiry, that even if the author really meant by the above extracts, that motive is merely the antecedent to volition; this was only a momentary concession made to his opponents, with the vague and ill-defined hope, perhaps, that it would render his system less obnoxious to them. It had no abiding place in his mind. It was no sooner uttered than it was repelled and driven away by the whole tenor of his system. We soon hear him, as if no such thing had ever been dreamed of in his philosophy, asking the question, and that too, in relation to motives, “What *can be meant by a cause*, but something that is the ground and reason of a thing *by its influence*, an influence that is prevalent and effectual,” p. 97. Will it be pretended, that this does not come up to his definition of an efficient cause, as that which brings something to pass by “a *positive influence*?” Such a pretext would amount to nothing; for Edwards has said, that “motives excite volition;” and “to excite, *is to be a cause in the most proper sense, not merely a negative occasion, but a ground of existence by positive influence*,” p. 96.

An efficient cause is properly defined by the Edwardses themselves. “Does not the man talk absurdly and inconsistently,” says the younger Edwards, “who asserts, that a man is the efficient cause of his own volitions, yet puts forth no exertion in order to cause it? If any other way of *efficiently* causing an effect, be possible or conceivable, let it be pointed out,” p.49. President Edwards evidently entertained the same idea; for he repeatedly says, that if the mind be the cause of its own volitions, it must cause them by a preceding act of the mind. The objection which he urges against the self-determining power, is founded on this idea of a cause. It is what he means, when he says, that the term *cause* is “often used in so restrained a sense as to signify only that which has a *positive efficiency or influence to produce a thing, or bring it to pass*.”

That President Edwards regarded motive as the efficient or producing cause of volition, according to his own notion of it, is clear not only from numerous passages of the Inquiry; it is also wrought into the very substance and structure of his whole argument. It is involved in his very definition of the strongest motive. The strongest motive, says he, is the whole of that which “*operates to induce a particular choice*.” Now, to say that one thing *operates* to induce another, or bring it into existence, is, according to the definition of the younger Edwards himself, to say that it is the efficient cause of the thing so produced. If there be any meaning in words, or any truth in the definition of the Edwardses, then to say that one thing operates to produce another, is to say that it is its efficient cause. President Edwards, as we have seen, holds that motive is “the effectual power and efficacy” which produces volition.

Again. Edwards frequently says, that “if this great principle of common sense, that every effect must have a cause, be given up, then there will be no such thing as reasoning from effect to cause. We cannot even prove the existence of Deity. If any thing can begin to be without a cause of its existence, then we cannot know that there is a God.” Now, the sense in which this maxim is here used is perfectly

obvious; for nothing can begin to be without an efficient cause, by which it is brought into existence. When we reason from those things which begin to be up to God, we clearly reason from effects to their efficient causes. Hence, when this maxim is applied by Edwards to volitions, he evidently refers to the efficient causes of them. If he does not, his maxim is misapplied; for it is established in one sense, and applied in another. If it proves any thing, it proves that volition must have an efficient cause; and when motive is taken to be that cause, it is taken to be the efficient cause of volition.

This is not all. Edwards undertakes to point out the difference between natural and moral necessity. In the case of moral necessity, says he, “the cause with which the effect is connected is of a particular kind: viz., that which is of a moral nature; either some previous habitual disposition, or some motive presented to the understanding. And the effect is also of a particular kind, being likewise of a moral nature; consisting in some inclination or volition of the soul, or voluntary action.” But the difference, says he, “does not lie so much *in the nature of the connection*, as in the two terms connected.” Now, let us suppose that any effect, the creation of the world, for example, is produced by the power of God. In this case, the connection between the effect produced, the creation of the world, and the act of the divine omnipotence by which it is created, is certainly the connection between an effect and its efficient cause. The two terms are here connected by a natural necessity. But we are most explicitly informed, that the connection between motives and volitions, differs from this in the nature of the two terms connected, rather than in the nature of the connection. How could language more clearly or precisely convey the meaning of an author? To say that President Edwards does not make motive the efficient cause of volition, is, indeed, not so much to interpret, as it is to new model, his philosophy of the will.

The connection between the strongest motive, he declares, and the corresponding volition, is “absolute,” just as absolute as any connection in the world. If the strongest motive exists, the volition is sure to follow; it necessarily follows; it is *absurd* to suppose, that it may attend its cause or not. To say that it may follow the influence of its cause, or may not, is to say that it is not dependent on that influence, that it is not the effect of it. In other words, it is to say that a volition is the effect of the strongest motive, and yet that it is not the effect of it; which is a plain contradiction. Such, as we have seen, is the clear and unequivocal teaching of the Inquiry.

In conclusion, if Edwards really held, that motive does not produce volition, but is merely the occasion on which it is put forth, where shall we find his doctrine? Where shall we look for it? We hear him charged with destroying man’s free-agency, by making motive the producing cause of volition; and we see him labouring to repel this charge. Truly, if he held the doctrine ascribed to him, we might have expected to find some allusion to it in his attempts to refute such a charge. If such had been his doctrine, with what ease might he have repelled the charge in question, and shown its utter futility, by simply alleging that, according to his system, motive is the occasion, and not the producing cause, of volition? Instead of the many pages through which he has so laboriously struggled, in order to bring our ideas of free-agency and virtue into harmony with his scheme; with what infinite ease might a single word have brought his scheme into harmony with the common sentiments of mankind in regard to free-agency and virtue! Indeed, if Edwards really believed that motive is merely the condition on which the mind acts, nothing can be more wonderful than his profound silence in regard to it on such an occasion; except the great pains which, on all occasions, he has taken to keep it entirely in the background. If the younger Edwards is not mistaken as to the true import of his father’s doctrine, then, instead of setting it forth in a clear light, so that it may be read of all men, the author of the Inquiry has, indeed, enveloped it in such a flood of darkness, that it is no wonder those who have been so fortunate as to find it out, should be so frequently called upon to complain that his opponents do not understand him. Indeed, if such be the doctrine of the Inquiry, I do not see how any man can possibly understand it, unless he has inherited some peculiar power, unknown to the rest of mankind, by which its occult meaning may be discerned, notwithstanding all the outward appearances by which it is contradicted and obscured.

The plain truth is, as we have seen, that President Edwards holds motive to be the producing cause of volition. According to his scheme, “Volitions are necessarily connected with the influence of motives;” they “are brought to pass by the prevailing and effectual influence” of motives. Motive is “the effectual power and efficacy” by which they are “produced.” They are not merely caused to be thus, and not otherwise, by motive; they are “caused to arise and come forth into existence.” This is the great doctrine for which Edwards contends; and this is precisely the doctrine which I deny. *I contend against no other kind of necessity but this moral necessity, just as it is explained by Edwards himself.*

Here the issue with President Edwards is joined; and I intend to hold him steadily to it. No ambiguity of words shall, for a moment, divert my mind from it. If his arguments, when thoroughly sifted and scrutinized, establish this doctrine; then shall I lay down my arms and surrender at discretion. But if his assumptions are unsound, or his deductions false, I shall hold them for naught. If he reconciles his scheme of moral necessity with the reality of virtue, with the moral agency and accountability of man, and with the purity of God; then I shall lay aside my objections; but if, in reality, he only reconciles it with the semblance of these things, whilst he denies their substance, I shall not be diverted from an opposition to so monstrous a system, by the fair appearances it may be made to wear to the outward eye.

## SECTION III.

### THE INQUIRY INVOLVED IN A VICIOUS CIRCLE

The great doctrine of the Inquiry seems to go round in a vicious circle, to run into an insignificant truism. This is a grave charge, I am aware, and I have ventured to make it only after the most mature reflection: and the justness of it, may be shown by a variety of considerations.

In the first place, when we ask, “what determines the will?” the author replies, “it is the strongest motive;” and yet, according to his definition, the strongest motive is that which determines the will. Thus, says Edwards, “when I speak of the strongest motive, I have respect to the whole that operates to induce a particular act of volition, whether that be the strength of one thing alone, or of many together.” If we ask, then, what produces any particular act of volition, we are told, it is the strongest motive; and if we inquire what is the strongest motive, we are informed, it is the whole of that which operated to produce that particular act of volition. What is this but to inform us, that an act of volition is produced by that which produces it?

It is taken for granted by President Edwards, that volition is an effect, and consequently has a cause. The great question, according to his work, is, what is this cause? He says it is the strongest motive; in the definition of which he includes every thing that in any way contributes to the production of volition; in other words, the strongest motive is made to embrace every thing that acts as a cause of volition. This is the way in which he explains himself, as well as the manner in which he is understood by others. Thus, says the younger Edwards, “in his explanation of his idea of motive, he mentions all agreeable objects and views, all reasons and arguments, and all internal biases and tempers, which have a tendency to volition; i. e. every *cause* or *occasion* of volition,” p. 104. Every reader of President Edwards must be satisfied that this is a correct account of his definition of motive; and this being the case, the whole amounts to just this proposition, that volition is caused by that which causes it! He admits that it would be hard, if not impossible, to enumerate all those things and circumstances which aid in the production of volition; but still he is quite sure, that the whole of that which operates to produce a volition does actually produce it! Though he may have failed to show wherein consists the strength of motives; yet he contends that the strongest motive, or the cause of volition, is really and unquestionably the cause of volition! Such is the great doctrine of the Inquiry.

If this is what the Inquiry means to establish, surely it rests upon unassailable ground. Well may President Day assert, that “to say a weaker motive prevails against a stronger one is to say, that that which has the least influence has the greatest influence,” p. 66. Now who would deny this position of the learned president? Who would say, that that which has the greatest influence has not the greatest influence? Surely, this great doctrine is to the full as certain as the newly discovered axiom of professor Villant, that “a thing is equal to itself!”

President Day, following in the footsteps of Edwards, informs us that the will is determined by the strongest motive; but how shall we know what is the strongest motive? “The strength of a motive,” says he, “is not its prevailing, but the power by which it prevails. Yet we may very properly measure *this power by the actual result!*” Thus are we gravely informed that the will is determined by that which determines it.

Again. If we suppose there is a real strength in motives, that they exert a positive influence in the production of volitions, then we concede every thing to President Edwards. For, if motives are so many forces acting upon the will, to say that the strongest will prevail, is simply to say that it is the strongest. But if motives exert no positive influence, then when we say that one is stronger than another, we must be understood to use this expression in a metaphorical sense; we must refer to some property of motives which we figuratively call their strength, and of which we suppose one motive to possess a greater degree than another. If this be so, what is this common property of motives, which

we call their strength? If they do not possess a real strength, if they do not exert an efficient influence; but are merely said, metaphorically speaking, to possess such power and to exert such influence; then what becomes of the self-evidence which President Edwards claims for his fundamental proposition motives exert a real force, of course the strongest must prevail; but if they only have something else about them, which we call their strength, it is not self-evident that the motive which possesses this something else in the highest degree must necessarily prevail. Hence, the great doctrine of President Edwards is either a proposition whose truth arises out of the very definition of the terms in which it is expressed, or it is utterly destitute of that axiomatical certainty which he claims for it. In other words, he has settled his great doctrine of the will by the mere force of a definition; or he has left its foundations quite unsettled.

Motives, as they are called, are different from each other in nature and in kind; and hence, it were absurd to compare them in degree. “The strongest motive,” therefore, is a mode of expression which can have no intelligible meaning, unless it be used with reference to the influence which motives are supposed to exert over the mind. This is the sense in which it clearly seems to be used by Edwards. The distinguishing property of a motive, according to his definition, is nothing in the nature of the motive itself; it consists in its adaptedness “to move or excite the mind to volition;” nor indeed could he find any other way of measuring or determining what he calls the strength of motives, since they are so diverse in their own nature from each other. He could not have given any plausible definition of the strength of motives, if he had looked at them as they are in themselves; and hence, he was under the necessity of defining it, by a reference to the “degree of tendency or *advantage* they have to move or excite the will.” Thus, according to the Inquiry, the will is determined by the strongest motive; and yet we can form no intelligible idea of what is meant by the strongest motive, unless we conceive it to be that which determines the will. The matter will not be mended, by alleging that the strongest motive is not defined to be that which actually determines the will, but that which has the greatest degree of previous tendency or advantage, to excite or move it; for we cannot know what motive has this greatest degree of previous tendency or advantage, except by observing what motive actually does determine the will.

This leads us to another view of the same subject. The strength of a motive, as President Edwards properly remarks, depends upon the state of the mind to which it is addressed. Hence, in a great majority of cases, we can know nothing about the relative strength of motives, except from the actual influence which they exert over the mind of the individual upon whom they are brought to bear. This shows that the universal proposition, that the will is *always* determined by the strongest motive, can be known to be true, only by assuming that the strongest motive is that by which the will is determined.

The same thing may be made to appear from another point of view. It has been well said by the philosopher of Malmsbury, “that experience concludeth nothing universally.” From experience we can pronounce, only in so far as we have observed, and no farther. But the proposition, that the will is always determined by the strongest motive, is a universal proposition; and hence, if true at all, its truth could not have been learnt from observation and experience. It must depend upon the very definition of the terms in which it is expressed. We cannot say that the will is in all cases determined by the strongest motive, unless we include in the very idea and definition of the strongest motive, that it is such that it determines the will. President Edwards not only does, but he must necessarily, go around in this circle, in order to give any degree of clearness and certainty to his doctrine.

That President Edwards goes around in this vicious circle, may be shown in another way. “It appears from these things,” says he, “that in some sense, *the will always follows the last dictate of the understanding*. But then the *understanding* must be taken in a large sense, as including the whole faculty of perception or apprehension, and not merely what is called reason or judgment. If by the last dictate of the understanding is meant what reason declares to be best, or most for the person’s happiness, taking in the whole of its duration, it is not true, that the will always follows the last dictate

of the understanding,” p. 25. In this place, President Edwards gives no distinct idea of what he means by the last dictate of the understanding, which the will is said to follow in all cases. But in the eighth volume of his works, that dictate of the understanding which the will is said to follow, is called the “practical judgment;” and this is defined to be, “that judgment which men make of things that prevail, so as to determine their actions and govern their practice.” Here again are we informed, that the will always follows the practical judgment, and that the practical judgment is that which men make of things that prevail, so as to determine the will.

The Inquiry itself furnishes abundant evidence, that I have done its author no injustice. “I have chosen,” says he, “rather to express myself thus, *that the will always is as the greatest apparent good, or as what appears most agreeable*, than to say the will is determined by the greatest apparent good, or by what seems most agreeable; because an appearing most agreeable to the mind, and the mind’s preferring, seem scarcely distinct. If strict propriety of speech be insisted on, it may more properly be said, that the *voluntary action*, which is the immediate consequence of the mind’s choice, is determined by that which appears most agreeable, than the choice itself.” After all, then, it seems that choice itself, or volition, is not determined by that which appears the most agreeable; because, in reality, the sense of the most agreeable and volition are one and the same thing. But surely, if we cannot distinguish between choice and the sense of the most agreeable, then to say that the one always is as the other, is only to say that a thing is always as it is. Edwards saw the absurdity of saying that a thing is determined by itself; but he does not seem to have seen how insignificant is the proposition, that a thing is always as it is, and not otherwise; and hence this is the form in which he has chosen to present the great leading idea of his work on the will. And henceforth we are to understand, that the preference of the mind is always as that which appears most agreeable to the mind; or, in other words, that the preference or choice of the mind is always as the choice of the mind.

This is not all. President Edwards himself has frequently reduced the fundamental doctrine of the Inquiry to an identical proposition. It is well known, that “to be determined by the strongest motive,” “to follow the greatest apparent good,” “to do what is most agreeable,” or “what pleases most,” are all different modes of expression employed by him to set forth the same fundamental doctrine. In speaking of this doctrine, he says: “There is scarcely a plainer and more *universal* dictate of the sense and experience of mankind, than that, when men act voluntarily, and do what they please, then they do what suits them best, or what is most *agreeable to them*. To say, that they do what *pleases* them, but yet not what is agreeable to them, is the same thing as to say, they do what they please, but do not act their pleasure; and that is to say, that they do what they please, and yet do not what they please.” Most assuredly, if to deny the leading proposition of the Inquiry, is to deny that men do what they please when they do what they please; then to affirm it, is only to advance the insignificant truism, that men do what they please when they do what they please. It seems to me, that after President Edwards had reduced his fundamental proposition to such a truism, he might very well have spared himself the three hundred pages that follow.

Again, he says: “It is manifest that no acts of the will are contingent, in such sense as to be without all necessity, or so as not to be necessary with a necessity of consequence and connection; because every act of the will is some way connected with the understanding, and is as the greatest apparent good is, in the manner which has already been explained; namely, that the soul always wills or chooses that, which in the present view of the mind, considered in the whole of that view, and all that belongs to it, appears most agreeable. Because, as we observed before, nothing is more evident than that, when men act voluntarily, and do what they please, then they do what appears most agreeable to them; and to say otherwise would be as much as to affirm, that men do not choose what appears to suit them best, or what seems most pleasing to them; or that they do not choose what they prefer, *which brings the matter to a contradiction.*”

Thus, the great fundamental doctrine of the Inquiry is reduced by Edwards himself to the barren truism, that men do actually choose what they choose; a proposition which the boldest advocate of

free-agency would hardly dare to call in question. After labouring through a whole section to establish this position, the author concludes by saying, “These things may serve, I hope, in some measure to illustrate and confirm the position laid down in the beginning of this section: viz. That the will is always determined by the strongest motive, or by the view of the mind which has the greatest previous tendency to excite volition. But whether I have been so happy as rightly to explain the thing wherein consists the strength of motives, or not, *yet my failing in this will not overthrow the position itself; which carries much of its own evidence along with it, and is a point of chief importance to the purpose of the ensuing discourse:* and the truth of it I hope will appear *with great clearness*, before I have finished what I have to say on the subject of human liberty.” Truly the position in question, as it is explained by the author himself, carries not only much, but all, of its own evidence along with it. Who can deny that a man always does what he pleases, when he does what he pleases? This truth appears with just as great clearness at the beginning, as it does at the conclusion, of the celebrated Inquiry of the author. It is invested in a flood of light, which can neither be increased by argument, nor obscured by sophistry.

From the foregoing remarks, it appears, I think, that the fundamental doctrine of the Inquiry is a barren truism, or a vicious circle. If Edwards understood the import of his own doctrine, when he reduced it to the form that a man does what he pleases when he does what he pleases, it is certainly a truism; and if this is all his famous doctrine amounts to, it can have no bearing whatever upon the question as to the cause of volition; for whether the mind be the cause of its own volitions, or whether the strongest motive always causes them, or whether they have no causes at all, it is equally and unalterably true, that every man does what he pleases when he does what he pleases. There is no possible form of the doctrine of free-agency or contingency, however wild, which is at all inconsistent with such a truism.

Edwards is not always consistent with himself. He sometimes represents the greatest apparent good, or sense of the most agreeable, as the cause of volition; and then his doctrine assumes the form, that the will is determined by the strongest motive, or the greatest apparent good. And yet he sometimes identifies a sense of the most agreeable with the choice itself; and then his doctrine assumes the form that the choice of the mind is always as the choice of the mind; and to deny it is a plain contradiction in terms.

From the fact that Edwards has gone round in a circle, it has been concluded that he has begged the question; but how, or wherein he has begged it, is a point which has not been sufficiently noticed. The very authors who have uttered this complaint, have granted him the very thing for which he has begged. If volition is an *effect*, if it has a *cause*, then most unquestionably the cause of volition is the cause of volition. Admit that volition is an effect, as so many libertarians have done, and then his definition of motive, which includes every cause of volition, places his doctrine upon an immutable foundation. We might as well heave at the everlasting mountains as to try to shake it.

Admit that volition is an effect, and what can we say? Can we say, that the strongest motive may exist, and yet no volition may follow from it? To this the necessitarian would instantly reply, that if any thing exists, and no volition follows thereupon, it is evidently not the cause of volition, and consequently is not the strongest motive; for this, according to the definition, includes every cause of volition: it is indeed absurd, to suppose that an effect should not proceed from its cause: This is the ground taken both by President Edwards and President Day. It is absurd, says the latter, to suppose that a weaker motive, or any thing else, can prevail over the stronger – and why? Because the strongest motive is that which prevails. “If it be said,” he continues, “that *something else* gives the weaker motive a superiority over the stronger; *then this something else is itself a motive*, and the united influence of the two is greater than that of the third,” p. 66. Thus, say what we will, we can never escape this admirable net of words, that the will is determined by that which determines it.

I do not intend, then, to engage in the hopeless task, of admitting volition to be an effect, and yet striving to extricate it from “the mechanism of cause and effect.” This ground has long

since been occupied by much abler persons than myself; and if they have failed of success, falling into innumerable inconsistencies, it is because, on such ground, success is impossible; and that notwithstanding their transcendant abilities, they have been fated to contradict themselves.

## SECTION IV. VOLITION NOT AN EFFECT

The argument of the Inquiry, as I have shown, assumes that a volition is an effect in the proper sense of the word; that it is the correlative of an efficient cause. If it were necessary, this point might be established by a great variety of additional considerations; but, I presume that every candid reader of the Inquiry is fully satisfied in relation to it.

If we mean by an effect, every thing that comes to pass, of course a volition is an effect; for no one can deny that it comes to pass. Or, if we include in the definition of the term, every thing which has a sufficient reason and ground of its existence, we cannot deny that it embraces the idea of a volition. For, under certain circumstances, the free mind will furnish a sufficient reason and ground of the existence of a volition. All that I deny is, that a volition does proceed from the mind, or from motive, or from anything else, in the same manner that an effect, properly so called, proceeds from its efficient cause.

This is a point on which I desire to be distinctly understood. I put forth a volition to move my hand. The motion of the hand follows. Now, here I observe the action of the mind, and also the motion of the hand. The effect exists in the body, in that which is by nature passive; the cause in that which is active, in the mind. The effect produced in the body, in the hand, is the passive result of the prior direct action of the mind. It is in this restricted sense, that I use the term in question, when I deny that a volition is an effect. I do not deny that it depends for its production upon certain circumstances, as the conditions of action, and upon the powers of the mind, by which it is capable of acting in view of such circumstances. All that I deny is, that volition results from the prior action of mind, or of circumstances, or of any thing else, in the same manner that the motion of body results from the prior action of mind. Or, in other words, I contend that action is the invariable antecedent of bodily motion, but not of volition; that whatever may be its relations to other things, a volition does not sustain the same relation to any thing in the universe, that an effect sustains to its efficient cause, that a passive result sustains to the direct prior action by which it is produced. I hope I may be *always* so understood, when I affirm that a volition is not an effect.

It is in this narrow and restricted sense that Edwards assumes a volition to be an effect. He does not say, in so many words, that the mind cannot put forth a volition, except in the way of producing it by a preceding volition or act of the will; but he first assumes a volition to be an effect; and then he asserts, that the mind can be the cause of no *effect*, (italicising the term effect,) except by the prior action of the mind. Thus, having assumed a volition to be an effect, he takes it for granted that it cannot proceed from the mind in any way, except that in which any effect in the outer world proceeds from the mind; that is to say, except it be produced by the direct prior action of the mind, by a preceding volition. Thus he brings the idea of a volition under the above narrow and restricted notion of an effect; and thereby confounds the relation which subsists between mind and its volitions, with the relation which subsists between mind and its external effects in body. In other words, on the supposition that our volitions proceed from the mind, he takes it for granted that they must be produced by the preceding action of the mind; just as an effect, in the limited sense of the term, is produced by the prior action of its cause. It is in this assumption, that Edwards lays the foundation of the logic, by which he reduces the self-determining power of the mind to the absurdity of an infinite series of volitions.

It is evident that such is the course pursued by Edwards; for he not only calls a volition, an effect, but he also says, that the mind can “bring no *effects* to pass, but what are consequent upon its acting,” p. 56. And again he says, “The will determines which way the hands and feet shall move, by an act of choice; and *there is no other way* of the will’s determining, directing, or commanding any

thing at all.” This is very true, if a volition is such an effect as requires the prior action of something else to account for its production, just as the motion of the “hands and feet” requires the action of the mind to account for its production; but it is not true, if a volition is such an effect, that its existence may be accounted for by the presence of certain circumstances or motives, as the conditions of action, in conjunction with a mind capable of acting in view of such motives. In other words, his assertion is true, if we allow him to assume, as he does, that a volition is an effect, in the above restricted meaning of the term; but it is not true, if we consider a volition as an effect in a larger sense of the word. Hence, the whole strength of Edwards’ position lies in the sense which he arbitrarily attaches to the term *effect*, when he says that a volition is an effect.

Now, is a volition an effect in such a sense of the word? Is it brought into existence, like the motion of body, by the prior action of any thing else? We answer, No. But how shall this point be decided? The necessitarian says, a moment before the volition did not exist, now it does exist; and hence, it necessarily follows, that there must have been a cause by which it was brought into existence. That is to say, it *must* be an effect. True, it must be an effect, if you please; but in what sense of the word? Is volition an effect, in the same sense that the motion of the body is an effect? This is the question.

And this question, I contend, is not to be decided by abstract considerations, nor yet by the laying of words together, and drawing conclusions from them. It is a question, not of logic, but of psychology. By whatever name you may please to call it, the true nature of a volition is not to be determined by reference to abstractions, nor by the power of words; but *by simply looking at it and seeing what it is*. If we would really understand its nature, we must not undertake to *reason it out*; we must *open our eyes*, and *look*, and *see*. The former course would do very well, no doubt, if the object were to construct a world for ourselves; but if we would behold the glory of that which God has constructed for us, and in us, we must lay aside the proud syllogistic method of the schools, and betake ourselves to the humble task of observation – of patient, severe, and scrutinizing observation. There is no other condition on which we can “enter into the kingdom of man, which is founded in the sciences.” There is no other course marked out for us by the immortal Bacon: and if we pursue any other we may wander in the dazzling light of a thousand abstractions, and behold whatever fleeting images of grandeur and of beauty we may be pleased to conjure up for ourselves; but the pure light of nature and of truth will be hid from us.

What then is a volition just as it is revealed to us in the light of consciousness? Does it result from the prior action of mind, or of motive, or of any thing else? In other words, is it an *effect*, as the motion of body is an effect!

We always conceive of the subject in which such an effect resides, as being wholly passive. President Edwards himself has repeatedly said, that it is the very notion of an effect, that it results from the action or influence of its cause; and that nothing is any further an effect, than as it proceeds from that action or influence. The subject in which it is produced, is always passive as to its production; and just in so far as it is itself active, it is not the subject of an effect, but the author of an action. Such is the idea of an effect in the true and proper sense of the word.

Now does our idea of a volition correspond with this idea of an effect? Is it produced in the mind, and is the mind passive as to its production? Is it, like the motion of a body, the passive result of the action of something else? No. It is not the result of action; it is action itself. The mind is not passive as to its production; it is in and of itself an action of the mind. It is not *determined*; it is a *determination*. It is not a produced effect, like the motion of body; it is itself an original producing cause. It does seem to me, that if any man will only reflect on this subject, he must see that there is a clear and manifest difference between an act and an effect.

Although the scheme of Edwards identifies these two things, and his argument assumes them to be one and the same; yet his language, it appears to me, frequently betrays the fact, that his consciousness did not work in harmony with his theory. While speaking of the acts of the will as

effects, he frequently says, that it is the very idea of an effect that it results from, and is necessarily connected with, the action of its cause, and that it is absurd to suppose that it is free or loose from the influence of its cause.

And yet, in reference to volitions, he often uses the expression, “*this sort of effects,*” as if it did not exactly correspond with the “very idea of an effect,” from which it is absurd to depart in our conceptions. When he gives fair play to consciousness, he speaks of different kinds of effects; and yet, when he returns to his theory and his reasoning, all this seems to vanish; and there remains but one clear, fixed, and definite idea of an effect, and to speak of any thing else as such is absurd. He now and then pays a passing tribute to the power of consciousness, by admitting that the soul exerts its own volitions, that the soul itself acts; but he no sooner comes to the work of argument and refutation, than it is motive that “causes them to be put forth or exerted,” p. 96. Ever and anon, he seems to catch a whisper from the voice of consciousness; and he concedes that he sometimes uses the term cause to designate that which has not a *positive* or *productive* influence, p. 50-1. But this is not when he is engaged in the energy of debate. Let Mr. Chubb cross his path; let him hear the voice of opposition giving utterance to the sentiment, that “in motive there is no causality in the production of action;” and that moment the voice of consciousness is hushed in the most profound silence. He rises, like a giant, in the defence of his system, and he declares, that “to excite,” as motives do, “is positively to do something,” and “certainly that which does something, is the cause of the thing done by it.” Yea, “to excite, *is to cause in the most proper sense, not merely a negative occasion, but a ground of existence by positive influence,*” p. 96.

These passages, which are scattered up and down through the Inquiry, in which the doctrine of liberty seems to be conceded, I cannot but regard as highly important concessions. They have been used to show that we misconceive the scheme of Edwards, when we ascribe to him the doctrine of fate. But when they are thus adduced, to show that we misrepresent his doctrine, I beg it may be remembered that such evidence can prove only one of two things; either that we do not understand what he teaches, or that he is not always consistent with himself.

If he really held the doctrine of fatalism, we ought not to be surprised that he has furnished such evidence against himself. It is not in the nature of the human mind to keep itself always deaf to the voice of consciousness. It is not in the power of any system always to counteract the spontaneous workings of nature. Though the mind should be surrounded by those deep-seated, all-pervading, and obstinate illusions, by which the scheme of fatalism is made to wear the appearance of self-evident truth; yet when it loses sight of that system, it will, at times, speak out in accordance with the dictates of nature. The stern and unrelenting features of fatalism cannot always be so intimately present to the mind, as entirely to exclude it from the contemplation of a milder and more captivating system of philosophy. Notwithstanding the influence of system, how rigid soever may be its demands, the human mind will, in its moments of relaxation, recognize *in its feelings* and *in its utterance*, those great truths which are inseparable from its very nature.

Let it be borne in mind, then, that there is more than one process in the universe. Some things are produced, it is most true, by the prior action of other things; and herein we behold the relation of cause and effect, properly so called; but it does not follow, that all things are embraced by this *one* relation. This appears to be so only to the mind of the necessitarian; from which one fixed idea has shut out the light of observation. He no longer sees the rich variety, the boundless diversity, there is in the works of God: all things and all modes and all processes of the awe-inspiring universe, are made to conform to the narrow and contracted methods of his own mind. Look where he will, he sees not the “free and flowing outline” of nature’s true lineaments; he every where beholds the image of the one fixed idea in his mind, projected outwardly upon the universe of God; behind which the true secrets and operations of nature are concealed from his vision. Even when he contemplates that living source of action, that bubbling fountain of volitions, the immortal mind of man itself, he only beholds a *thing*, which is made to act by the action of something else upon it; just as a body is made to

move by the action of force upon it. His philosophy is, therefore, an essentially shallow and superficial philosophy. The great name of Edwards cannot shield it from such condemnation.

## SECTION V. OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF REGARDING VOLITION AS AN EFFECT

It has been frequently conceded that a volition is an effect; but to make this concession, without explanation or qualification, is to surrender the whole cause of free agency into the hand of the enemy. For if a volition is an effect, properly speaking, the only question is as to its efficient cause: it is necessarily produced by its cause.

To make this matter clear, let us consider what is precisely meant by the term cause when it is thus used? An effect is necessarily connected, not with the *thing* which is sometimes called its cause, but with the *action* or *positive influence* of that thing. Thus, the mind, or the power of the mind, is sometimes said to be the cause of motion in the body; but this is not to speak with philosophical precision. No motion of the body is necessarily connected, either with the mind itself, or with the power of the mind. In other words, if these should lie dormant, or fail to act, they would produce no bodily motion. But let the mind act, or will a particular motion, and the body will necessarily move in consequence of that action. Hence, it is neither with the mind, nor with the power of the mind, that bodily motion, as an effect, is necessarily connected; it is with an act of the mind or volition that this necessary connection subsists. A cause is said to imply its effect: it is not the mind, but an act of the mind, that implies motion in the body.

This is evidently the idea of Edwards, when he says, as he frequently does, that an effect is necessarily connected with the *influence* or *action* of its cause. The term *cause* is ambiguous; and when he says, that an effect is necessarily connected with its cause, he should be understood to mean, in accordance with his own doctrine, that the cause referred to is *the influence* or *action* by which it is produced, and not the thing which exerts that *influence* or *action*. Thus, although motives are said to be causes of action, he contends, they can do nothing except by their influence; and so much as results from their influence is the effect of that influence, and is necessarily connected with it.

Now, if a volition is an effect, if it has an efficient cause, what is that cause? By the *action* of what is it produced? It cannot be by the act of the mind, says Edwards, because the mind can produce an *effect* only by another act. Thus, on the supposition in question, we cannot ascribe a volition to the mind as its cause, without being compelled to admit that it results from a preceding act of the mind. But that preceding act, on the same supposition, will require still another preceding act to account for its production; and so on *ad infinitum*. Such is the absurdity which Edwards delighted to urge against the self-determining power of the mind. It is triumphantly based on the concession that a volition is an effect; that as such the prior *action* of something else is necessary to account for its existence. And if we suppose, in accordance with the truth, that a volition is merely a state of the mind, which does not sustain the same relation to the mind that an effect does to its efficient cause, this absurdity will vanish. The doctrine of liberty will no longer be encumbered with it.

Now, proceeding on the same supposition, let us conceive of a volition as resulting from the influence exerted by motive. If an *act* of the mind is an effect, surely we may say, that the act or productive influence of motive, or of any thing else, is likewise an effect; and consequently must have a cause to account for its existence; and so on *ad infinitum*. Hence, the very absurdity which Edwards charges upon our system, really attaches to his own.

Will it be said that this *ad infinitum* absurdity does not result from the supposition in question, but from the fact that the mind can do nothing except by its action or influence? It is very true, as Edwards repeatedly declares, that the mind can be the cause of no *effect*, except by a preceding act of the mind. The truth of this proposition is involved in the very idea which he attaches to the term *effect*, and it is based upon this idea alone. And we may say, with equal propriety, that motive can be

the cause of no *effect*, except by its action or productive influence. Indeed, Edwards himself expressly says, that motives can do nothing, except by an exertion of their influence, or by operating to produce effects. Thus, the two cases are rendered perfectly parallel; and afford the same foundation on which to erect an infinite series of causes.

To evade this, can it be pretended, that motive just exerts this influence of itself? May we not with equal, nay, with infinitely greater propriety, contend that mind just exerts its own positive influence of itself? Or, will it be said, that it is a mistake, to suppose that Edwards ascribed any real, productive, or causal influence to motives; that he regarded them as the *occasions* on which the mind acts, and not properly as the *causes* of its action? If so, then the whole scheme of moral necessity is abandoned, and the doctrine of liberty is left to stand upon its own foundation, in the undisputed evidence of consciousness.

The truth is, if we take it for granted, that a volition is an effect, properly so called, and as such must proceed from the prior action of something else, we cannot escape the *ad infinitum*, absurdity of the Inquiry. If we rise from this platform, we cannot possibly ascend in any direction, without entering upon an infinite series of causes. Whether we ascend through the self-determining power of the mind, or through the determining power of motives, or through the joint action of both, we can save ourselves from such an absurd consequence only by a glaring act of inconsistency. Hence, we are forced back upon the conclusion that action may, and *actually does* arise in the world of mind, without any efficient or producing cause of its existence, without resulting from the prior action of any thing whatever. Any other hypothesis is involved in absurdity.

Let it be assumed, that a volition is, properly speaking, an effect, and every thing is conceded. On this vantage ground, the scheme of necessity may be erected beyond the possibility of an overthrow. For, even if we “suppose that action is determined by the will and free choice,” this “is as much as to say, that it must be necessary, being dependent upon, and determined by something foregoing; namely, a foregoing act of choice,” p. 199. Let the above position be conceded, and there is no escape from this conclusion. Nay, the conclusion itself is but another mode of stating the position assumed.

It is evident, then, that action must take its rise somewhere in the world, without being caused by prior action; or else there must be an infinite series of acts. I say it takes its rise in the mind, in that which is essentially active, and not in matter. Edwards does not say, that it takes its rise in matter; and hence, there is no dispute on this point. It is very remarkable, that this objection to his scheme, that it runs into an infinite series, seems never to have occurred to President Edwards. He seems to have endeavoured to anticipate and reply to all possible objections to his system; and yet this, which has occurred to so many others, appears not to have occurred to himself, for he has not noticed it.

The younger Edwards has attempted to reply to it. Let us see his reply. “We maintain,” says he, “that action may be the effect of a divine influence; or that it may be the effect of one or more second causes, the first of which is immediately produced by the Deity. Here then is not an infinite series of causes, but a very short series, which terminates in the Deity or first cause,” p. 121. Thus, according to the younger Edwards, the infinite series of causes is cut short, terminating in the volition of Deity. What! does the volition of God come into existence without a cause of its existence? What then becomes of “that great principle of common sense,” so often applied to volition, that no event can begin to be without a cause of its existence? Is this great principle given up? Has it become obsolete?

It may be contended, that although human volition is an effect, and so must have a cause; yet the divine volition is not an effect. The elder Edwards could not have taken this ground; for he contends, that the volition of Deity is just as necessarily connected With the strongest motive, or the greatest apparent good, as is the volition of man. According to the Inquiry, all volitions, both human and divine, are necessarily connected with the greatest apparent good, and in precisely the same manner. The above pretext, therefore, could not have been set up by him.

This ground, however, is taken by the younger Edwards. "It is granted," says he, "that volition in the Deity is not an effect," p. 122; it has no cause, and here terminates the series. But how is this? Can some event, after all, begin to be without having a cause of its existence? without being an effect? By no means. How is it then? Why, says the learned author, the volitions of the Deity have existed from all eternity! They have no causes; because they have never begun to be!

"I deny," says he, "that the operations and energies of the Deity *begin in time*, though the effects of those operations do. They no more begin in time than the divine existence does; but human volitions all begin in time," p. 123. This makes all the difference imaginable; for as the divine acts have existed from all eternity, so they cannot be caused.

But there is an objection to this view. "If it should be said," he continues, "that on this supposition the effects take place not till long after the acts, by which they are produced, I answer, they do so in our view, but not in the view of God. With him there is no time, no before nor after with respect to time," p. 124.

Now, it will not be denied, that things appear to God just as they are in themselves; and hence, if his volitions, which are said to exist long before their effects, even from all eternity, appear to him not to exist long before them; then they do not in reality exist long before them. But if the divine volitions do not really exist long before their effects, but just before them, as other causes do before their effects, why should they not have causes as well as any other volitions? If they really exist just before their effects in time, and not long before them, why do they not exist in time just as much as any other volitions? and why do they not as much require causes to account for their existence? If they only seem to us to exist long before their effects, even from all eternity, how can this mere seeming make any real difference in the case? There is a very short series, we are told, the volition of Deity constituting the first link. Has not this first link, this volition of the Deity, a cause? No. And why? Because it has existed from all eternity; and so nothing could go before it to produce it. Did it not exist long before the effect then, which it produces in time? No. And why? Because in the view of God and in reality, it existed just before its effect, as all causes do, and therefore there is no real severance of cause and effect in the case! It really comes just before its effect in time, and therefore there is no severance of cause and effect; and yet it really existed before all time, even from all eternity, and therefore it cannot have a cause! Now is this logic, or is it legerdemain?

There is no time with God, says the author; then there is no time in reality; it is all an illusion arising from the succession of our own thoughts. If this be so, then all things do really come to pass simultaneously; and if there were a very long series, even an infinite series of causes and effects, yet would they all come to pass in the same instant. Indeed, there is very great uncertainty about the speculations of philosophers in regard to time and space; and we hardly know what to make of them, except we cannot very well understand them; but one thing is abundantly certain; and that is, that it is not good logic, to assert that a particular cause cannot be produced, because it has existed long before its effect, even from all eternity; and yet repel objections to this assertion, by alleging that they only seem to do so, while in reality there is no such tiling. This is to turn from the illusion to the reality, and from the reality to the illusion, just as it suits the exigency of the moment. Such are the poor shifts and shallow devices, to which even gifted minds are reduced, when they refuse to admit that action, that volition, may take its rise in the world, spontaneously proceeding from mind itself, without being made to do so by the action of any thing upon it.

Let us suppose, that a man should tell us, that a producing cause existed long before its effect; that there was nothing to prevent it from bringing its effect to pass; and yet, long after it had existed, its effect sprang up and came into existence; what should we think? Should we not see that it is absurd, in the highest degree, to say that an unimpeded causative act existed yesterday, and even from all eternity, unchanged and unchangeable; and yet its effect did not come to pass until to-day? Surely, no man in his right mind can be made to believe this, unless it be forced upon him by the desperate necessities of a false system; and if any person were told, that although such a thing may seem absurd

to us, inasmuch as the cause seems to exist in full operation long before its effect, yet it is not so in the view of God, with whom there is no time, should he not be pardoned if he doubted the infallibility of his informant?

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