

A Christian spirit . . . disposes a person to be public-spirited. A man of a right spirit is not of a narrow, private spirit; but is greatly concerned for the good of the public community to which he belongs, and particularly of the town where he dwells.

JONATHAN EDWARDS
Charity and Its Fruits

In some sense, the most benevolent, generous person in the world seeks his *own* happiness in doing good to others, because he places his happiness in their good.

The whole universe, in all its actings, proceedings, revolutions, and entire series of events, should proceed with a view to God as the supreme and last end. . . . Every wheel, in all its rotations, should move with a constant invariable regard to him as the ultimate end of all; as perfectly and uniformly as if the whole system were animated and directed by one common soul.

JONATHAN EDWARDS
The End for Which God Created the World

C H A P T E R F O U R

JONATHAN EDWARDS, ENJOYING GOD AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE

The Public Life of a Modern Evangelical

As Physics to Space Travel, So Theology to Culture

Jonathan Edwards expressed concern about public life, or what we might call culture—but not very much. Discussions of social issues and public policies and programs have about as much place in his writings as they do in the New Testament. Which does not mean that what he wrote was irrelevant to public life and culture, any more than the New Testament is irrelevant. It was relevant—and *is* relevant—the way physics is relevant to space travel. And the way microbiology is relevant to a ten-day round of tetracycline.

It mattered to Jonathan Edwards, just as it should matter to us, whether a culture is diseased and scarred by fraud and bribery and wife-burning and witchcraft and foot-binding and marital unfaithfulness and teenage promiscuity and pervasive pornography and vigilante justice and rape and murder and theft and sloth and misogyny and pedophilia and dozens of forms of insolence and arrogance. Jonathan Edwards could not imagine a Christian being indifferent to the morals and manners of his own city or country. He said,

A Christian spirit . . . disposes a person to be public-spirited. A man of a right spirit is not of a narrow, private spirit; but is greatly concerned for the good of the public community to which he belongs, and particularly of the town where he dwells. God commanded the Jews that were carried captive to seek the good of the city of Babylon, though it was not their own city, but the city which had captivated them (Jer. 29:7). . . . A Christian spirited man will be also concerned for the good of his country, and it disposes him to lay out himself for it. . . . It is spoken of as a thing very provoking to God that they were not grieved for the calamities of their country (Amos 6:6).¹

The Smallness of Only Being Concerned with Culture

That quote from a sermon on 1 Corinthians 13 gives us a glimpse into the cultural scope of Edwards's concern for the world. But even that quote doesn't come close to the scope he really believed in. Edwards knew something that many social activists and culture-watchers in America—evangelicals and others—don't seem to know or care about, namely, that cultures and societies and peoples who have no Christian presence in them at all cannot even begin to experience Christ-exalting social or cultural transformation. In other words, Edwards was deeply committed to world evangelization and cared as much (or more) about the advance of the kingdom among unreached peoples of the world as he did about the morals of Northampton, Massachusetts. He wrote to the evangelist George Whitefield in 1740,

May God send forth more Laborers into his Harvest of a like Spirit, until the kingdom of Satan shall shake, and his proud Empire fall throughout the Earth, and the Kingdom of Christ, that glorious Kingdom of Light, holiness, Peace and Love, shall be established from one end of the Earth unto the other!²

¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits, Ethical Writings*, ed. by Paul Ramsey, in: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 260-261.

² Quoted in Ronald E. Davies, "Jonathan Edwards: Missionary Biographer, Theologian, Strategist, Administrator, Advocate—and Missionary," in: *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, April, 1997, p. 64.

In other words, if you had asked Edwards what is the really pressing, crucial issue of culture transformation in the world, I think Edwards would have said, “The really pressing issue in culture *transformation* is culture *penetration*. If the glorious God-centered gospel of Christ does not penetrate a people and beget worshipping, nurturing, evangelizing churches, there is not the slightest hope of transformation.”

I think Edwards would have considered it astonishing how many Americans say they care about social justice and cultural issues, but don’t seem to have the slightest concern for the hundreds of unreached people groups who do not have a known church-planting effort in their midst. Two thousand years have passed since the Lord of the universe gave the Great Commission to his church; yet there is not a single church, or a band of disciples or a solitary missionary among hundreds or even thousands of unreached people groups, depending on how you define them³—not to mention several thousand other peoples with a barely discernible Christian presence and witness. Such peoples cannot even begin to trust Christ for the power and wisdom and love to transform cultural darkness into light.

How Would Edwards Use the Internet?

Jesus said to the apostle Paul on the Damascus road, “I am sending you, [to the Gentiles, the nations] to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God” (Acts 26:17-18). Edwards knew that this was the only way transforming light would come to the peoples of the world—namely, by missionaries being *sent* with a message of truth about the triumph of Jesus over sin and Satan and death.

Edwards loved to get news of the works of God in advancing his kingdom among unreached people groups. If he were alive today he would probably be on the Internet from time to time, following what is happening in global efforts to complete the task of world evangelization. Such globally minded missions-driven peo-

³ As I write this chapter, the *Joshua Project 2000* estimates that there are about 579 people groups with over 10,000 population but no church or mission agency even targeting them with a church planting effort. See the Web Page for the AD 2000 Movement (www.ad2000.org), specifically the “Joshua Project 2000,” for the listing of the 1739 most unreached peoples.

ple are the Christians with the *really* “public life,” as Edwards meant it.

Brainerd's Mission and the Impact on Culture

His publication of David Brainerd's journals was an effort to make this point, among others. In his appendix to *The Life of Brainerd*, he said, “There is much in the preceding account to excite and encourage God's people to earnest prayers and endeavors for the advancement and enlargement of the kingdom of Christ in the world.”⁴ When he contemplated the unreached “nations” of Indians in “the wilderness” of America, he thought not only of redeemed persons, but also of transformed cultures. He defended Brainerd's Calvinistic beliefs by pointing to the remarkable transformation that had come to the Native American communities Brainerd served. Of those who said that Calvinism undermined “the very foundation of all religion and morality” he said,

Where can they find an instance of so great and signal an effect of their doctrines in bringing infidels, who were at such a distance from all that is civil, human, sober, rational, and Christian, and so full of inveterate prejudices against these things, to such a degree of humanity, civility, exercise of reason, self-denial, and Christian virtue? Arminians place religion in morality: Let them bring an instance of their doctrines producing such a transformation of a people in point of morality.⁵

In other words, Edwards did not conceive of world missions and the reaching of unreached tribes as a merely individualistic thing. The God-centered gospel as he understood it had great power to transform a culture through the people it changed.

There Is More Than One Kind of Privatism

If there is a problem today with privatistic religion, the worst form of it is not with pietistic evangelicals who don't care about block clubs and social justice and structural sin. The worst form is with

⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. by Norman Pettit, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 7 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 531-532.

⁵ *The Life of David Brainerd*, p. 526.

evangelicals who think they are publicly- and socially-minded when they have no passion for millions of perishing people without the gospel that alone can give them eternal life, and without a saving knowledge of the Light of the world who can transform their culture.

So the first message of Jonathan Edwards to modern evangelicals about our public lives is: Don't limit your passion for justice and peace to such a limited concern as the church-saturated landscape of American culture. Lift up your eyes to the real crisis of our day: namely, several thousand⁶ cultures still unpenetrated by the gospel, who can't even dream of the blessings we want to restore. That is his first message.

The Narrowness of Embracing All as the Echo of the Self's Worth

But even that is not the main thing Jonathan Edwards would want to say to us. Because the real narrowness of our souls is not signified by our failure to embrace the city and the nations, but by our failure to embrace God in all of our other embracing. Edwards's diagnosis of the narrow and confined and selfish interests of human nature is that we are all idolaters of the self and are only interested in ourselves, or—as an extension of ourselves—*our* own family or *our* own city or *our* own world or even our own God, to the degree that we see even God as a reflection of our own value. In other words, even embracing God can be narrow and limited and confined and merely selfish if we embrace him only because he makes much of *us*.

The Fall as the Shrinking of the Soul's Concern

In 1738 Edwards preached a series of messages on 1 Corinthians 13, later published under the title, *Charity and Its Fruits*. His sermon on verse 5, "Charity . . . seeketh not her own," is entitled, "The Spirit of Charity, the Opposite of a Selfish Spirit." In it, he gives his diagnosis of the human heart. It all began with the fall of man into sin in the Garden of Eden:

The ruin that the Fall brought upon the soul of man consists very much in that he lost the nobler and more extensive principles,

⁶ The numbers you pick here depend on the degree of penetration you have in mind. Suffice it to say, compared to the densely evangelized American landscape, there are thousands of people groups with virtually no self-sustaining witness.

and fell wholly under the government of self-love. . . . Immediately upon the Fall the mind of man shrunk from its primitive greatness and extensiveness into an exceeding diminution and confinedness . . . whereas before his soul was under the government of that noble principle of divine love whereby it was, as it were, enlarged to a kind of comprehension to all his fellow creatures; and not only so, but was . . . extended to the Creator, and dispersed itself abroad in that infinite ocean. . . . But as soon as he had transgressed, those nobler principles were immediately lost and all this excellent enlargedness of his soul was gone and he thenceforward shrunk into a little point, circumscribed and closely shut up within itself to the exclusion of others. God was forsaken and fellow creatures forsaken, and man retired within himself and became wholly governed by narrow, selfish principles. Self-love became absolute master of his soul, the more noble and spiritual principles having taken warning and fled.⁷

What's important for our purposes here is that in the Fall, that is, in original sin, the human heart shrank; it contracted to "an exceeding diminution and confinedness"; it forsook God and became the slave of private, narrow, limited self-love. This is the main problem of the Christian and his public life—whether modern or ancient. We love ourselves in a narrow, confined way, and are indifferent to others and society and the nations and God.

*Can Christian Hedonism Survive
Edwards's Indictment of Self-love?*

But now this raises a question—a problem for someone like me—who likes to use the term "Christian Hedonism" to describe Biblical obedience, and to describe the theology of Jonathan Edwards. Christian Hedonism implies that all true worship and virtue involves the pursuit of our ultimate satisfaction—which sounds very much like a form of self-love.

Even the title of this chapter forces this issue with the words, "Enjoying God and the Transformation of Culture." The term "Enjoying God" seems to muddy things by implying that I should

⁷ *Charity and Its Fruits*, pp. 252-253.

get some pleasure for myself, when Edwards says that the very essence of human depravity is our bondage to “self-love.” If we tackle this problem head-on, we will get very close to the heart of Edwards’s ethics and see what a truly public-spirited person is.

The Negative Use of “Self-love”—Narrow Selfishness

The first thing to say is that Edwards uses the term “self-love” in two very different ways, one negative and one neutral. The negative use is the most common. Here’s what he says: “Self-love, as the phrase is used in common speech, most commonly signifies a man’s regard to his confined *private self*, or love to himself with respect to his *private interest*.”⁸ That’s what Edwards means by “self-love” in diagnosing our depravity.

It’s virtually synonymous with selfishness. People who are governed by this self-love, he says, “place their happiness in good things which are confined or limited to themselves exclusive of others. And this is selfishness. This is the thing most directly intended by that self-love which the Scripture condemns.”⁹ This is what he says Paul has in mind when he says in 1 Corinthians 13:5, “Love seeks not its own.” “When it is said that charity seeketh not her own, we are to understand it of her own private good, good limited to herself.”¹⁰ In other words, true spiritual love is not governed by a narrow, limited, confined pursuit of one’s own pleasure.

The Neutral Use of Self-love—Desire for Our Happiness

But Edwards also used the term “self-love” in a neutral way that does not necessarily involve sin, though it might. He says,

It is not a thing contrary to Christianity that a man should love himself; or what is the same thing, that he should love his own happiness. Christianity does not tend to destroy a man’s love to his own happiness; it would therein tend to destroy the humanity. . . . That a man should love his own happiness, is necessary to his nature, as a faculty of the will is; and it is impossible that it

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, in: *Ethical Writings, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, ed. by Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 577.

⁹ *Charity and Its Fruits*, p. 257.

¹⁰ *Charity and Its Fruits*, p. 258.

should be destroyed in any other way than by destroying his being. The saints love their own happiness; yea, those that are perfect in holiness. The saints and angels in heaven love their own happiness. Otherwise their happiness, which God has given them would be no happiness to them; for that which anyone does not love he can enjoy no happiness in.¹¹

In other words, self-love in this second, neutral sense is simply our built-in capacity to like and dislike, or approve and disapprove, or be pleased and displeased. It is neither good nor bad until some object is fastened upon—something that is liked and approved and pleasing. If the thing fastened on is evil, or the fastening on it is disproportionate to its true worth, then our being pleased by it is shown to be corrupt. But the sheer faculty of desiring and liking and approving and being pleased, or not, is neither virtuous nor evil.

Scripture Assumes This Kind of Self-love and Builds on It

He goes on to defend from Scripture this legitimate neutral use of self-love.

That to love ourselves is not unlawful is evident from the fact, that the law of God makes it a rule and measure by which our love to others should be regulated. Thus Christ commands, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” [Matt. 19:19]; which command certainly supposes that we may, and must love ourselves. . . . [NOTE: this has nothing to do with the recent modern notion of self-esteem. Edwards is miles from that idea.] And it appears also from this, that the Scripture, from one end of the Bible to the other is full of things which are there held forth to work upon a principle of self-love. Such are all the promises and threatenings of the word of God, and all its calls and invitations; its counsels to seek our own good, and its warnings to beware of misery.¹²

So Edwards sees that the Bible is replete with commands for us to “seek our own good” and with warnings to “beware of misery.”

¹¹ *Charity and Its Fruits*, p. 254.

¹² *Charity and Its Fruits*, pp. 254-255.

This means that God's Word assumes the legitimacy of the principle of self-love in the simple meaning of desiring and being pleased by what we think is good for us. This, he says, is virtually synonymous with the faculty of the will. Self-love is to the soul what hunger is to the stomach. It is simply there with our creaturehood; it's the inescapable desire to be happy.

What Then Is the Real Evil of the Human Heart?

So now, when we compare these two kinds of self-love, we can see more clearly what Edwards really regards as the essential evil of the human heart and the great hindrance to a public life of virtue. What is evil about self-love is not its desire to be happy—that is essential to our nature as creatures, whether fallen or not. What is evil about self-love is its finding happiness in such small, narrow, limited, confined reality, namely, the self and all that makes much of the self. Our depravity is our being exactly the opposite of public-spirited.

So self-love is a natural trait that man has before and after the Fall, and it becomes evil only because of its narrowness and confinement. We are evil because we seek our satisfaction in our own private pleasures but do not seek it in the good of others. We cherish our health and our food and our homes and families and jobs and hobbies and leisure. And we do not seek to expand that joy by drawing others into it. Our self-love, our desire for happiness, is narrow and confined and limited.

When Our Happiness Is in the Happiness of Another

If self-love were not narrow but broad, it would not necessarily be bad. For example, Edwards said, "Some, although they love their own happiness, do not place that happiness in their own confined good, or in that good which is limited to themselves, but more in the common good, in that which is the good of others as well as their own, in good to be enjoyed *in* others and to be enjoyed *by* others."¹³

How Extensive Must True Virtue Be?

But that raises a serious question: if true virtue is the broadening of self-love so that what makes us happy is not just our private

¹³ *Charity and Its Fruits*, p. 257.

pleasures, but the good of others, then how broad and inclusive does self-love have to be before it stops being narrow and becomes true virtue? How public and social, or even universal, must self-love be to count as virtue and not vice?

What makes this question so crucial is that Edwards knows that there are great acts of moral courage and sacrifice that are *not* truly virtuous. “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3). There are acts that seem to be noble, but are not virtuous. So what’s *wrong* with these broad acts of self-love that even sacrifices life for others?

*If We Don’t Embrace God in Our Virtue,
We Are Infinitely Parochial*

Edwards gives a stunning answer, which is why he is the great man that he is and why he is the man we need to listen to today. He said, as we saw in Chapter One,

If there could be an instinct or other cause [like self-love] determining a person to benevolence towards the whole world of mankind . . . exclusive of . . . love to God . . . [and] supreme regard to him . . . it cannot be of the nature of true virtue.¹⁴

He says that self-love is confined and narrow and selfish—and not virtuous—until it embraces or delights in the good of the whole *universe of being*, or more simply, until it embraces *God*. If self-love embraces family, but not God, it is not virtuous. If it embraces country, but not God, it is not virtuous. If it embraces all the nations of the world, and not God, it is not virtuous. Why not? Edwards simply says, until self-love rises to embrace God, it embraces “an infinitely small part of universal existence.”¹⁵ In other words, to delight in the good of all the universe, but not to delight in God, is like being glad that a candle is lit, but being indifferent to the rising sun. Apart from embracing God as our chief delight, we are (quite literally) infinitely parochial.

¹⁴ *The Nature of True Virtue*, pp. 602-603.

¹⁵ *The Nature of True Virtue*, p. 601.

No God, No Virtue

What Edwards is doing here—and this is the great achievement of his life, and the great message to modern evangelicals—is making God absolutely indispensable in the definition of true virtue. He is refusing to define virtue—no matter how public, no matter how broad—without reference to God. He meant to keep God at the center of all moral considerations, to stem the secularizing forces of his own day. And the need for such vigilance over God-centeredness is even more necessary today. Edwards could not conceive of calling any act truly virtuous that did not have in it a supreme regard to God. One of the great follies of modern evangelical public life is how much we are willing to say about public virtue without reference to God.

Preserving a Supreme Regard for God in All Things

So what Edwards was trying to do in his definition of depravity—by focusing on the negative, narrow, confined, constricted sense of self-love—was to show, in the end, that *every* act of love performed without a supreme regard for God as the object of delight has no true virtue in it. In other words, his treatment of self-love, like everything else he wrote, was aimed at defending the centrality and supremacy of God in all things. The only public life of an evangelical that counts as virtuous is one that savors and celebrates the supremacy of God as the ground and goal of its public acts.

He Has Not Gone as Far as He Can Go

Now one might think that Edwards has pushed the God-centeredness of virtue as far as it can go. What more can he say about the public virtue of Christians that would exalt God more or make him more central in it? Well, he has not gone as far as he can go. And there is one more crucial question he raises about self-love and public virtue.

Even Neutral “Self-love” Is Just Natural and Not Spiritual

He asks, What if self-love does rise high enough and expand broadly enough to embrace the world and even God? Is there a possible reason to think that this embracing of God might *not* be

virtuous? His answer is, Yes. He points out that “self-love”—even the neutral kind that is not evil in itself, the kind that is simply a love of happiness—is still a merely human and natural trait. It is not spiritual. It is not wrought by the Spirit of God. It does not require a work of special grace.

This means that if embracing God can be accounted for merely from the root of such self-love, then it will be a merely natural thing wrought by what is resident in human nature. And though God be at the top of it, he will not be at the bottom of it. Man will be. If that were possible, we will have wrought our own virtue. And God would not be supreme in the cause of virtue, even when being the apparent goal.

Mere Self-love, Minus the Spirit, Embraces God for His Gifts

I say “apparent goal” because what Edwards shows is that when self-love alone is at work to produce virtue, without any special saving, transforming grace—without the awakening work of the Holy Spirit—then self-love inevitably embraces God not for the beauty of his glory in itself, but for the natural benefits God gives. Mere self-love savors the gifts of God without savoring fellowship with God himself. And this, Edwards says, is not a true embracing of God himself. It is an embracing of the self, and of God only inasmuch as he makes much of the self. It is not true virtue, though it can be very religious. Here’s the way he puts it:

This is . . . the difference between the joy of the hypocrite, and the joy of the true saint. The [hypocrite] rejoices in himself; self is the first foundation of his joy: the [true saint] rejoices in God. . . . True saints have their minds, in the first place, inexpressibly pleased and delighted with the sweet ideas of the glorious and amiable [i.e., pleasant, admirable] nature of the things of God. And this is the spring of all their delights, and the cream of all their pleasures. . . . But the dependence of the affections of hypocrites is in a contrary order: *they first rejoice . . . that they are made so much of by God; and then on that ground, he seems in a sort, lovely to them.*¹⁶

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, ed. by John Smith, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 249-250 (emphasis added).

In other words, self-love *alone* simply cannot produce true virtue—private or public—because it is merely natural and has no truly spiritual or supernatural taste or perception of divine beauty. Because of the Fall, self-love is blind and seared in its capacity to discern and delight in the glory of God. It is, as the apostle says, not merely *natural* but “*dead* in trespasses and sins.”¹⁷

Self-love Cannot Make the Good Beautifully Compelling

Another way to say it is that self-love moves us to embrace what we perceive will make us happy, but self-love does not have the power to make what is good and true and beautiful look attractive. Self-love alone may move one person to make money, another to seek power, another to be a philanthropist, another to steal and kill, and another to pray and read the Bible and preach. But it is not self-love that decides what appears to the mind as most attractive and valuable.

So what does make the difference whether self-love embraces God or embraces money? Or more radically: what makes the difference whether self-love embraces God for his gifts or for himself?

The Miracle of New Birth Is the Root of Virtue Beneath Self-love

Edwards’s answer is *regeneration*, new birth—a supernatural work of the Spirit of God in the soul, giving it a new capacity to see spiritual beauty and to savor the glory of God as something real and pleasurable in itself.

The first effect of the power of God in the heart in *regeneration*, is to give the heart a Divine taste or sense; to cause it to have a relish of the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the Divine nature.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ephesians 2:1, 5. And not only is self-love dead to spiritual things, it is merely natural and cannot rise to have spiritual taste or desire which are essential in order to know and love God. Self-love, says Edwards, “cannot be a truly gracious and spiritual love . . . for self-love is a principle entirely natural, and as much in the hearts of devils as angels; and therefore surely nothing that is the mere result of it can be supernatural and divine” (Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, p. 242).

¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, ed. by Paul Helm (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1971), pp. 48-49.

Self-love cannot give itself this taste or sense of divine beauty. That is why self-love cannot be the bottom or the final foundation of true virtue. "Something else," Edwards says, "entirely distinct from self-love [must] be the cause of this, viz. a change made in the views of his mind, and relish of his heart whereby he apprehends a beauty, glory, and supreme good, in God's nature, as it is in itself."¹⁹ Very simply, a capacity to taste a thing must precede our desire for its sweetness. That is, *regeneration* (or new birth) must precede the pursuit of happiness *in God*.

God Touches the Blind Eyes of Self-love and Says, "See!"

Therefore regeneration is the foundation of true virtue. There is no public virtue without it. True virtue not only embraces God as its highest goal—and thus escapes the curse of "infinite parochialism"—it also confesses that God is the root and foundation of its origin. Here is the way the apostle Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 4:6, "It is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." God touched the blind eyes of self-love and gave her an irresistible view of his own glory in the face of Christ. He did not kill self-love; he supernaturally and profoundly transformed it into a spiritual hunger for the glory of God.

So Edwards says, "The alteration which is made in a man when he is converted and sanctified is not by diminishing his love to happiness, but only by regulating it with respect to its exercises and influence, and the objects to which it leads."²⁰ Self-love now has a new spiritual, supernatural taste for what will truly satisfy. Self-love now says to God, "Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11).

Self-love as a Passion for the Supremacy of God in All Things

The message of Jonathan Edwards to modern evangelicals concerning our public life is not mainly a message about what party to belong to, or what social cause to trumpet, or even which

¹⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, p. 241.

²⁰ *Charity and Its Fruits*, p. 255.

unreached people to adopt and evangelize, *as important as these are*. His main message is that, if we would not be infinitely parochial, and thus fail in true virtue, then our private life, our public life, and our global life must be driven not by a narrow, constricted, merely natural self-love, but by passion for the supremacy of God in all things—a passion created through supernatural new birth by the Holy Spirit, giving us a new spiritual taste for the glory of God—a passion sustained by the ongoing, sanctifying influences of the Word of God—and a passion bent on spreading itself through all of culture and all the nations until Christ comes.

This passion is rooted finally in the passion of God for his own glory. Our passion for God's glory is the work of God's Spirit granting us participation in God's own delight in God. Thus Jesus prayed, "I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, *so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them*, and I in them" (John 17:26). This foundation of our passion for God in God's passion for God is so crucial I have made available in the rest of this book the most important work of Edwards concerning this reality, *The End for Which God Created the World*. To that I now bid you a very slow and reflective Godspeed.

P A R T T W O

THE END FOR WHICH
GOD CREATED
THE WORLD

by Jonathan Edwards

A NOTE ON HOW TO READ

*THE END FOR WHICH
GOD CREATED THE WORLD*

(by John Piper)

I have numbered each paragraph (§) in *The End for Which God Created the World* so that reference can be made to particular places with ease. I hope that, when Edwards's work is read and discussed, it will be with the very words of Edwards in view and not merely with vague generalizations and impressions. That is the path of courtesy and of growth.

There is good reason to suggest that readers who are less philosophically and more Biblically oriented should read *The End for Which God Created the World* backwards—Part Two first. The reason is that the work begins most philosophically and ends most Biblically. Some comments on the three major divisions may help the reader decide how to proceed.

1. The Introduction (§§ 1-26) is a discussion of the meaning of terms, especially what Edwards means by “ultimate end” in creation. This is the most difficult of the divisions and will discourage all but the most determined reader. In my judgment, it can be skipped by those who are less philosophically oriented. One should simply keep in mind that the terms “last end” and “ultimate end” are synonymous, and that an “ultimate end” is an end that God values for its own sake and not as a means to some other end (see § 3). Paul Ramsey, the editor of *The End for Which God Created the World* in the Yale critical edition, argues, in fact, that Edwards

“wrote his Introduction last of all parts of the *Two Dissertations*” (*The End* and *True Virtue*, published together as *Two Dissertations*), since he was, evidently, still making notes in his *Miscellanies* on the method to be used *after* he had essentially completed *The End*. In addition, he refers to his definitions expressly only once in the body of the work.¹ One may, then, use the Introduction as a resource to consult if one finds confusion in Edwards’s definitions.

2. The second major division is Chapter One (§§ 27-124). It addresses the question “What does reason teach concerning this affair?” This is a philosophically oriented effort to show that Edwards’s conclusion is rationally defensible. Edwards confesses that “it would be relying too much on reason to determine the affair of God’s last end in the creation of the world, without being herein *principally* guided by divine revelation, since God has given a revelation containing instructions concerning this very matter” (§ 29).

One may ask why Edwards devotes so much effort then to wrestle philosophically with the goal of creation when in the last analysis he settles the matter with Scripture.² His answer is that since “objections have chiefly been made against what I think the Scriptures have truly revealed from the pretended dictates of reason, I would, in the *first* place, soberly consider in a few things what seems rational to be supposed concerning this affair—and *then* proceed to consider what light divine revelation gives us in it” (§ 30). Edwards is persuaded that all truth is one and that what reason truly teaches and what Scripture teaches will cohere.

If determination or time is lacking, and one must choose parts of Chapter One to read rather than the whole, I would suggest that one be sure to include Section Three (§§ 57-76) on God’s making himself the ultimate end in creation, and especially Section Four where Edwards answers four objections to his own position (§§ 77-124). His answers to these objections are very helpful and get to the essence of the matter. I have found that these are the very

¹ *Two Dissertations, Ethical Writings*, ed. by Paul Ramsey, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 407, note 2.

² See Part One, Chapter Two (pp. 49-75) for the relationship between philosophy and Scripture in Edwards’s thinking.

things that people raise questions about today when I teach on God's passion for his glory.

The position Edwards is defending in answering these objections is that, in creating the world, God is "seeking that his glory and excellent perfections should be known, esteemed, loved, and delighted in by his creatures" (§ 99). The objections he answers are that: 1) this seems to indicate some dependence on the creation, or lack of self-sufficiency on God's part in regard to the creation (§§ 77-92); 2) it seems to make God look selfish (§§ 93-98); 3) it seems unworthy of God to pursue the applause of beings "infinitely beneath him" (§§ 99-111); and 4) it seems to contradict the freedom of God in his beneficence and lessen the duty of gratitude that creatures owe (§§ 112-124). Reading Edwards's answers to these objections is not only helpful in defense of his view but just as much in clarifying what he really means.

3. The third major division is Chapter Two (§§ 125-287), which answers the question, "What is to be learned from Holy Scriptures concerning God's last end in the creation of the world?" For those who are more Biblically oriented than philosophically this will be the most compelling division. Here Edwards brings together a vast array of Biblical texts to argue that the ultimate end of God in creation is the exhibition of his glory for the creature to know, love and enjoy. As impressed as I was with the philosophical arguments of Chapter One, it was this section that settled the matter for me. I found it totally persuasive.

The ideal, of course, is that the reader take up a pencil and read (little by little, if necessary) the entire text of *The End for Which God Created the World*, underlining, marking the margins, jotting questions and thinking earnestly about these great matters. But if this is not feasible, I want to stress that much benefit can come from reading only parts of the work. And I would recommend that Chapter One, Section Three (how God makes himself the last end of creation), and especially Section Four (the objections answered), and Chapter Two (the Biblical portion) not be overlooked.

CONCERNING THE TEXT
USED IN THIS EDITION OF

*THE END FOR WHICH
GOD CREATED THE WORLD*

(by John Piper)

The following text of *The End for Which God Created the World* has been taken from the two-volume *Works of Jonathan Edwards* edited by Edward Hickman and published in London in 1834. That edition, in turn, was based on the Worcester edition of 1808-1809, issued forty-three years after *The End for Which God Created the World* was first published in 1765 with a preface by the editor, Samuel Hopkins, a personal friend of Edwards.

The Hickman edition was continually reprinted for over forty years and is in print today as The Banner of Truth Trust edition (1974). The Trust has kindly given written permission to use their text as the basis for what is published here.

From correspondence dated January 4, 1764, we learn that Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy, contemporaries and friends of Edwards, divided the labor in transcribing and preparing the *Two Dissertations* (*The End* and *True Virtue* published together in 1765) for publication after Edwards died—"Hopkins assuming

responsibility for *End of Creation* and Bellamy for *True Virtue*.”¹ It was necessary to transcribe Edwards’s papers into “a fair hand for the press.”² There is a special fitness that Hopkins and Bellamy should prepare *The End for Which God Created the World* for the press, because in 1755 they had both visited Edwards’s home in Stockbridge and heard him read the manuscript in person: “February 12, 1755. Mr. Bellamy came to my house last Tuesday, with whom I went to Stockbridge, and staid there two nights and one day to hear Mr. Edwards read a treatise upon the Last End of God in the Creation of the World. Returned home today. . . .”³

The critical Yale edition of *The End* was published in 1989 and was based on the first edition of the work in 1765.⁴ No handwritten manuscript or copy survives. What about the reliability of the text of *The End* used in this book? Comparing the Banner of Truth (Hickman) edition and the Yale University Press (Ramsey) edition shows that there are numerous differences in the wording. These are minor, as I judge, and do not change the meaning significantly. The usual tendency of the later edition is to simplify Edwards’s language by removing redundancies. For example, compare the first sentence of the Introduction:

Hickman (Banner of Truth, 1974): “To avoid all confusion in our inquiries concerning the end for which God created the world, a distinction should be observed between the *chief* end for which an agent performs any work and the *ultimate* end.”

Ramsey (Yale University Press, 1989): “To avoid all confusion in our inquiries and reasonings concerning the end for which God created the world, a distinction should be observed between the *chief* end for which an agent or efficient exerts any act and performs any work, and the *ultimate* end.”

¹ “Editor’s Introduction,” *Ethical Writings*, ed. by Paul Ramsey, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 113.

² Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), p. 448.

³ From Samuel Hopkins’s diary quoted in Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p. 391.

⁴ “Editor’s Introduction,” *Ethical Writings*, p. 5, note 3. The texts may be compared with the original 1765 edition “available in the Evans microtext editions of works published in America before 1800, #9962” (*Ethical Writings*, p. 113).

The underlined parts were evidently omitted by Hickman, the later editor. These kinds of changes seemed insignificant enough to justify using the 1834/1974 readily-available Hickman edition.

With regard to punctuation, I have felt at liberty to add or remove commas and semicolons, for example, to make the flow of the sentences as clear as possible. This is warranted by the fact that we have little confidence in either the 1765 edition or the 1834 edition that we are looking at Edwards's own punctuation.⁵ The same applies to Edwards's use of italics, capitalization, dashes, parentheses, spelling, contractions and abbreviations. I follow Paul Ramsey, who edited the Yale critical edition in bringing such things into consistency by more readable standards.⁶

I have left the italicization and most of the small caps of the Hickman edition as is, adding only a very few italics of my own to highlight parallels. In addition I have occasionally divided long paragraphs into two or more. Wherever I have added any words or changed any grammatical constructions I have indicated this in brackets. All the brackets used are mine. All the parentheses are from the Hickman edition. The modern reader may be confident that the wording of the text used here represents Edwards's wording closely enough so that a careful reading will not go astray because of inaccuracies. Where there may be rare, fine points of meaning that might be affected by the wording, the careful reader can compare the Yale edition.

With regard to the subheadings, the ones that are centered and in brackets are my own to provide a kind of road map. The numerous bold italicized subheadings that are justified on the left margin are also my effort to give the reader guidance and encouragement to press on. All other headings are Edwards's own.

Of the footnotes, twenty-three of them come from Edwards himself and are marked as such. The rest are mine and are meant to give clarifications and correlations and implications. They represent my own views and have no authority beyond what good judgment and Biblical teaching may warrant.

⁵ Ramsey explains why in *Ethical Writings*, p. 115.

⁶ *Ethical Writings*, pp. 115-121. This includes the abbreviations and punctuation of the Biblical references.

No notion of God's last end in the creation of the world is agreeable to reason, which would truly imply any indigence, insufficiency and mutability in God, or any dependence of the Creator on the creature for any part of his perfection or happiness.

Though it be true that God's glory and happiness . . . are infinite and cannot be added to, and . . . [are] perfectly independent of the creature; yet it does not hence follow, nor is it true, that God has no real and proper delight, pleasure, or happiness in any of his acts or communications relative to the creature.

[God] had respect to himself, as his last and highest end, in this work; because he is worthy in himself to be so, being infinitely the greatest and best of beings. All things else, with regard to worthiness, importance, and excellence, are perfectly as nothing in comparison of him.

All that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God's works is included in that one phrase, the glory of God.

JONATHAN EDWARDS
The End for Which God Created the World

THE END FOR WHICH GOD CREATED THE WORLD

by Jonathan Edwards

I N T R O D U C T I O N

CONTAINING EXPLANATIONS OF TERMS AND GENERAL POSITIONS

The difference between “ultimate” ends and “chief” ends

[1] To avoid all confusion in our inquiries concerning the end for which God created the world, a distinction should be observed between the *chief* end for which an agent performs any work and the *ultimate* end. These two phrases are not always precisely of the same signification, and though the *chief* end be always an *ultimate* end, yet every ultimate end is not always a chief end. A *chief* end is opposite to an *inferior* end; an *ultimate* end is opposite to a *subordinate* end.

“Subordinate” ends are the means of “ultimate” ends

[2] A *subordinate* end is what an agent aims at, not at all upon its own account, but wholly on the account of a *further* end of which it is considered as a means. Thus when a man goes [on] a journey to obtain a medicine to restore his health, the obtaining of that medicine is his subordinate end, because it is not an end that he

values at all upon its own account, but wholly as a means of a further end, *viz.* his health. Separate the medicine from that further end, and it is not at all desired.

[3] An *ultimate* end is that which the agent seeks, in what he does, for its *own* sake; what he loves, values, and takes pleasure in on its own account, and not merely as a means of a further end. As when a man loves the taste of some particular sort of fruit, and is at pains and cost to obtain it for the sake of the pleasure of that taste which he values upon its own account, as he loves his own pleasure, and not merely for the sake of any other good which he supposes his enjoying that pleasure will be the means of.

[4] Some ends are subordinate, not only as they are subordinated to an ultimate end, but also to another end that is itself but subordinate. Yea, there may be a succession or chain of many subordinate ends, one dependent on another, one sought for another, before you come to anything that the agent aims at and seeks for its *own* sake. As when a man sells a garment to get money—to buy tools—to till his land—to obtain a crop—to supply him with food—to gratify the appetite. And he seeks to gratify his appetite, on its *own* account, as what is grateful¹ in itself. Here the end of his selling his garment to get money is only a subordinate end, and it is not only subordinate to the *ultimate* end—gratifying his appetite—but to a *nearer* end—buying husbandry tools, and his obtaining these is only a subordinate end, being only for the sake of tilling land. And the tillage of land is an end not sought on its own account, but for the sake of the crop to be produced, and the crop produced is an end sought only for the sake of making bread; and bread is sought for the sake of gratifying the appetite.

[5] Here gratifying the appetite is called the *ultimate* end, because it is the *last* in the chain where a man's aim rests, obtaining in that, the thing finally aimed at. So whenever a man comes to that in which his desire terminates and rests, it being something valued on its *own* account, then he comes to an *ultimate* end, let the chain be longer or shorter; yea, if there be but one link or one step that he takes before he comes to this end. As when a man that

¹ In Edwards's language, "grateful" does not have the modern meaning of "thankful," but the old meaning of "pleasing."

loves honey puts it into his mouth, for the sake of the pleasure of the taste, without aiming at any thing further. So an end, which an agent has in view, may be both his *immediate* and his *ultimate* end; his *next* and his *last* end.² That end which is sought for the sake of itself, and not for the sake of a further end, is an ultimate end; there the aim of the agent stops and rests.³

[6] A thing sought may have the nature of an ultimate, and also of a subordinate end; as it may be sought partly on its own account, and partly for the sake of a further end. Thus a man, in what he does, may seek the love and respect of a particular person, partly on its own account, because it is in itself agreeable to men to be the objects of others' esteem and love; and partly because he hopes, through the friendship of that person, to have his assistance in other affairs; and so to be put under advantage for obtaining further ends.

Among "ultimate" ends, the "chief" or "highest" end is the one most valued⁴

[7] A *chief* end, which is opposite to an *inferior* end, is something diverse from an ultimate end; it is most valued, and therefore most sought after by the agent in what he does. It is evident that to be an end *more* valued than another end is not exactly the same thing as to be an end valued *ultimately*, or for its own sake. This will appear if it be considered,

[8] That two different ends may be both ultimate, and yet not

² Edwards will use "ultimate end" and "last end" interchangeably in what follows.

³ Notice that, when Edwards speaks of something being "valued on its own account" or something being "sought for the sake of itself," he is *not* saying that this "valuing" or "seeking" is different from delighting in or taking pleasure in. Sometimes in our own day people contrast pursuing God "for his *own* sake" with pursuing God "for the *joy* there is in God." Someone may say, "Don't pursue God because he makes you happy; pursue God as an end in himself." The person who thinks this way will not be able to grasp Edwards's meaning here. Edwards does not make such a distinction between delighting in our ultimate end, on the one hand, and loving that end *for its own sake*, on the other hand. We love honey "for its *own* sake," he would say, because the *delight* we have in it is not a means to anything else. The delight that makes something an ultimate end is delight in the thing itself, not a subsequent delight in some gift or blessing. So pursuing pleasure *in* a thing and pursuing the thing "for its own sake" are the same.

⁴ If it strikes the reader as strange to speak of more than one "ultimate end," keep in mind two things. 1) Edwards is using the term here in relation to a *limited* sequence of events, the last of which is ultimate as the one *in the sequence*, valued for its own sake. 2) Edwards will explain below that we can speak of "ultimate ends" in a "lower sense" and a "highest sense." The "lower sense" is in a limited, finite series of events where the ultimate end may not be the universally ultimate one, but only ultimate in relation to the finite sequence. The "highest sense" is the universally last end for which everything exists. See ¶¶ 20, 24, 26.

be chief ends. They may be both valued for their *own* sake, and both sought in the same work or acts; and yet one valued more highly, and sought more than another. Thus a man may go [on] a journey to obtain two different benefits or enjoyments, both which may be agreeable to him in *themselves* considered; and yet one may be much more agreeable than the other; and so be what he sets his heart *chiefly* upon. Thus a man may go [on] a journey, partly to obtain the possession and enjoyment of a bride that is very dear to him, and partly to gratify his curiosity in looking in a telescope, or some new-invented and extraordinary optic glass, and the one not [be] properly subordinate to the other, and therefore *both* may be *ultimate* ends. But yet obtaining his beloved bride may be his *chief* end, and the benefit of the optic glass his *inferior* end.

[9] An ultimate end is not always the chief end, because some *subordinate* ends may be *more* valued and sought after than some *ultimate* ends. Thus, for instance, a man may aim at two things in his journey: one, to visit his friends, and another, to receive a large sum of money. The latter may be but a *subordinate* end; he may not value the silver and gold on their *own* account, but only for pleasure, gratification, and honor; the money is valued only as a means of the other. But yet, obtaining the money may be *more* valued, and so is a *higher* end of his journey than the pleasure of seeing his friends; though the latter is valued on its *own* account, and so is an *ultimate* end.

But here several things may be noted:⁵

[POSITION ONE]

[A *subordinate* end is never valued (as a *chief* end)
above its *own* *ultimate* end]

[10] *First*, when it is said that some *subordinate* ends may be *more* valued than some *ultimate* ends, it is [never] supposed that⁶ a subordinate end is more valued than *that* to which it is subordinate. For that reason it is called a *subordinate* end, because it is valued

⁵ Here the second part of the Introduction begins, namely, the nine “General Positions” mentioned in the title.

⁶ In the original it reads: “it is not supposed that ever.”

and sought not for its own sake, but only in subordination to a *further* end. But yet a subordinate end may be valued more than some *other* ultimate end that it is not subordinate to. Thus, for instance, a man goes [on] a journey to receive a sum of money, only for the value of the pleasure and honor that the money may be a means of. In this case it is impossible that the *subordinate* end, *viz.* his having the money, should be *more* valued by him than the pleasure and honor for which he values it. It would be absurd to suppose that he values the means more than the end, when he has no value for the means, but for the sake of the end of which it is the means. But yet he may value the money, though but a subordinate end, *more* than some *other ultimate* end to which it is not subordinate, and with which it has no connection. For instance, *more* than the comfort of a friendly visit, which was one ultimate end of his journey.

[POSITION TWO]

[A subordinate end may be equally valued with an ultimate end if it is necessary and sufficient to the ultimate end]

[11] *Secondly*, the ultimate end is always *superior* to its subordinate end, and more valued by the agent, unless it be when the ultimate end entirely depends on the subordinate. If he has no other means by which to obtain his last end, then the subordinate may be *as much* valued as the last end; because the last end, in such a case, altogether depends upon, and is wholly and certainly conveyed by it.

[12] As for instance, if a pregnant woman has a peculiar appetite [for] a certain rare fruit that is to be found only in the garden of a particular friend of hers at a distance—and she goes [on] a journey to her friend's house or garden to obtain that fruit—the *ultimate* end of her journey is to gratify that strong appetite; the obtaining that fruit is the *subordinate* end of it. If she looks upon it [in such a way] that the appetite can be gratified by *no other* means than the obtaining of that fruit, and that it will *certainly* be gratified if she obtain it, then she will value the fruit *as much* as she values the gratification of her appetite.

[13] But otherwise it will not be so. If she be *doubtful* whether

that fruit will satisfy her craving, then she will not value it *equally* with the gratification of her appetite itself. Or if there be some *other fruit* that she knows of that will gratify her desire, at least *in part*, which she can obtain without such trouble as shall counter-vail the gratification—or if her appetite cannot be gratified without this fruit, nor yet with it *alone*, without something else to be compounded with it—then her *value* for her last end will be *divided* between these several ingredients as so many subordinate ends, and *no one alone* will be equally valued with the last end. Hence it rarely happens that a subordinate end is *equally* valued with its last end, because the obtaining of a last end rarely depends on *one* single, uncompounded means, infallibly connected with it. Therefore, men's *last* ends are *commonly* their *highest*⁷ ends.

[POSITION THREE]

*[When there is only one ultimate end,
it is chief above all other ends]*

[14] *Thirdly*, if any being has but *one* ultimate end in all that he does, and there be a great variety of operations, his *last* end may justly be looked upon as his *supreme* end.⁸ For in such a case, *every other* end but that one is in order to that end, and therefore no other can be superior to it. Because, as was observed before, a subordinate end is never *more* valued than the end to which it is subordinate. Moreover, the subordinate effects or events brought to pass, as means of this end, all uniting to contribute their share towards obtaining the one last end, are very various; and therefore, by what has been now observed, the ultimate end of all must be valued more than any one of the particular means. This seems to be the case with the works of God, as may more fully appear in the sequel.⁹

⁷ Edwards uses “highest” interchangeably with “chief,” and “last” interchangeably with “ultimate.” “Highest” is the opposite of inferior (or less desired); “last” is the opposite of subordinate or means to the end. See footnote 2.

⁸ In this sentence “last end” and “supreme end” are used interchangeably with “ultimate end” and “chief end” respectively.

⁹ The logic of this paragraph is this: Since all subordinate ends are inferior to *their own* ultimate ends, this means that if there is *only one* ultimate end, then all other ends are subordinate to it and are therefore inferior to it, so that the ultimate end is the chief and highest end. This, he tells us, is where he is going with regard to God's end in all his works: there is only one ultimate end.

[POSITION FOUR]

[What we seek for its own sake is our “last” or “ultimate” end]

[15] *Fourthly*, whatsoever any agent has in view in any thing he does, which is agreeable to him *in itself*, and not merely for the sake of something else, is regarded by that agent as his *last* end. The same may be said of avoiding that which is in itself painful or disagreeable, for the avoiding of what is disagreeable is agreeable. This will be evident to any, bearing in mind the meaning of the terms. By *last* end is¹⁰ meant that which is regarded and sought by an agent, as agreeable or desirable for its *own* sake; a *subordinate*, that which is sought only for the sake of something *else*.

[POSITION FIVE]

*[There is only one ultimate end
when one thing only is sought on its own account]*

[16] *Fifthly*, from hence it will follow that if an agent has in view *more things than one* that will be brought to pass by what he does, which he loves and delights in on their *own* account, then he must have *more things than one* that he regards as his *last* ends in what he does. But if there be *but one thing* that an agent seeks, on its *own* account, then there can be *but one* last end which he has in all his actions and operations.¹¹

[17] But only here a distinction must be observed of things which may be said to be *agreeable* to an agent, in *themselves* considered:¹²

¹⁰ The original has “being” instead of “is.”

¹¹ To keep these thoughts from being a mere tangle of words, a discerning reader will probably begin to ask if Edwards is preparing to show us that God has but one last or ultimate end in creation, and if so, is he saying that all the other things that God delights in or loves are in some way enjoyed and loved for the sake of that one last end? Asking and thinking about such questions will help us endure what might seem to be an overkill of complex thoughts.

¹² This footnote may need to be read before and after “Position Five” in order to make fullest sense. This is a very difficult section. The point of this and the next four paragraphs of Position Five is that there are “absolute” ultimate ends and there are “consequential” ultimate ends. Both are ultimate ends because they are pleasing to the one who pursues them “in themselves” and not as means to another; yet the occasion for the “consequential” ultimate ends is brought about as a consequence of pursuing some other end. This is a very rarefied distinction. The importance of it seems to be at least this: Edwards is going to speak later of God’s ultimate end as being only one, not many; and this one end will be the “highest end” and “original,” not consequential, namely, the glory of God. Yet there are times when he speaks in his writings of God’s delighting in the justice or faithfulness of an action in itself. These acts are “consequential” upon creation. Thus the creation of the category of “consequential ultimate ends” will help make sense of what Edwards means by God’s delighting in something “for its own sake,” which is nevertheless not his ultimate end in the highest sense, but only an ultimate end “consequentially.” See footnote 15.

(1) what is in itself grateful [i.e., pleasing] to an agent, and valued on its own account, *simply* and *absolutely* considered; antecedent to, and *independent* of all conditions, or any supposition of particular cases and circumstances. And (2) what may be said to be in itself agreeable to an agent, *hypothetically* and consequentially, or on supposition of such and such circumstances, or on the happening of such a particular case.

[18] Thus, for instance, a man may originally love society.¹³ An inclination to society may be implanted in his very nature; and society may be agreeable to him *antecedent* to all presupposed cases and circumstances; and this may cause him to seek a family. And the comfort of society may be originally his *last* end, in seeking a family. But after he has a family, peace, good order, and mutual justice and friendship in his family may be agreeable to him, and what he delights in for their *own* sake; and therefore these things may be his *last* end in many things he does in the government and regulation of his family. But they were not his *original* end with respect to his family. The justice and the peace of a family was not properly his last end *before* he had a family, that induced him to seek a family, but [justice and peace became his last end] *consequentially*. And the case being put of his having a family, then these things wherein the good order and beauty of a family consist, become his last end in many things he does in such circumstances.

[19] In like manner we must suppose that God, *before* he created the world, had some good in view, as a consequence of the world's existence, that was *originally* agreeable to him in itself considered, that inclined him to bring the universe into existence, in such a manner as he created it. But *after* the world was created, and such and such intelligent creatures actually had existence, in such and such circumstances, then a wise, just regulation of them was agreeable to God, *in itself* considered. And God's love of justice and hatred of injustice would be sufficient in such a case to induce God to deal *justly* with his creatures and to prevent all injustice in him towards them. But yet there is no necessity of sup-

¹³ In Edwards's language "society" does not mean primarily the community, but rather the experience of being with other people. Loving society means being sociable and gregarious and liking to get together with others.

posing that God's love of doing justly to intelligent beings, and hatred of the contrary, was what *originally* induced God to create the world and make intelligent beings, and so to order the occasion of doing either justly or unjustly. The justice of God's nature makes a just regulation agreeable and the contrary disagreeable, as there is occasion; the *subject* being supposed and the *occasion* given. But we must suppose something else that should incline him to *create* the subjects or *order* the occasion.

[20] So [in the same way] that perfection of God which we call his faithfulness or his inclination to fulfill his promises to his creatures could not properly be what *moved* him to create the world; nor could such a fulfillment of his promises to his creatures be his *last* end in giving the creatures being. But yet *after* the world is created, *after* intelligent creatures are made, and God has bound himself by promise to them, then that disposition, which is called his faithfulness, may move him in his providential disposals towards them; and this may be the *end* of many of God's works of providence, even the exercise of his faithfulness in fulfilling his promises, and may be in the *lower* sense¹⁴ his *last* end; because faithfulness and truth must be supposed to be what is in *itself* amiable [i.e., pleasant, admirable] to God, and what he delights in for its *own* sake. Thus God may have ends of particular works of *providence*, which are ultimate ends in a lower sense, which were not ultimate ends of the *creation*.

[21] So that here we have two sorts of ultimate ends: one of which may be called *original* and *independent*, the other *consequential* and *dependent*; for it is evident, the latter sort are truly of the nature of ultimate ends; because though their being agreeable to the agent be consequential on the existence, yet the subject and occasion being supposed, they are agreeable and amiable [i.e., pleasant, admirable] in themselves. We may suppose that, to a righteous Being, doing justice between two parties with whom he is concerned is agreeable in *itself* and not merely for the sake of some *other* end. Yet we may suppose that a desire of doing justice between two parties may be *consequential* on the being of those

¹⁴ See footnote 4 and ¶¶ 24, 26. The "lower sense" refers to "last (or ultimate) ends" in the sense of being *subordinate* ends that are *last* in a limited sequence, but may not be last in the "highest" sense after which there are no other ends.

parties and the occasion given. [Therefore I make a distinction between an end that in this manner is *consequential*, and a *subordinate* end.]¹⁵

[22] 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.

[POSITION SIX]

*[The one "original" ultimate end of all creation
governs all God's works]*

[23] *Sixthly*, it may be further observed that the *original* ultimate end or ends of the creation of the world is *alone* that which induces God to give the occasion for consequential ends, by the first creation of the world, and the original disposal of it. And the more original the end is, the more extensive and universal it is. 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 every thing he does towards his creatures. And therefore,

[POSITION SEVEN]

*[In the "highest sense" of God's ultimate end in creation,
this end is also the end of all his works of providence]*

[24] *Seventhly*, if we use the phrase *ultimate end* in this highest sense, then the same that is God's ultimate end in creating the world—if we suppose but one such end—must be what he makes his ultimate aim in all his works, in every thing he does either in creation or providence. But we must suppose that in the *use* to which God puts his creatures, he must evermore have a regard to the *end* for which he has made them. But if we take *ultimate end* in the *lower* sense, God may sometimes have regard to those

¹⁵ The Yale edition includes this sentence that the Banner of Truth edition does not have (Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, ed. by Paul Ramsey, in: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8 [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], p. 413). The point of this difficult paragraph is that an end can be "consequential" and nevertheless "ultimate." The desirability of an act of justice is consequential on the existence of the persons and situation, but the act may be desirable in itself. See footnote 12.

things as ultimate ends, in particular works of providence, which could not in any proper sense be his *last* end in creating the world.

[POSITION EIGHT]

*[The ultimate end of providence in general
is the ultimate end of creation]*

[25] *Eighthly*, on the other hand, whatever appears to be God's ultimate end, in any sense, of his works of providence *in general*, that must be the ultimate end of the work of *creation* itself. For though God may act for an end that is ultimate in a lower sense in *some* of his works of providence which is not the ultimate end of the creation of the world, yet this doth not take place with regard to the works of providence *in general*; for God's works of providence in general are the *same* with the *general use* to which he puts the world he has made. And we may well argue from what we see of the general *use* which God makes of the world to the general *end* for which he designed the world. Though there may be some ends of particular works of providence that were not the *last* end of the creation, which are in themselves grateful [i.e., pleasing] to God in such particular emergent circumstances, and so are last ends in an inferior sense; yet this is only in certain cases or particular occasions. But if they are last ends of God's proceedings in the use of the world *in general*, this shows that his making them last ends doth not depend on particular cases and circumstances, but the nature of things in general, and his general design in the being and constitution of the universe.

[POSITION NINE]

*[There is only one ultimate end of creation
if only one end is agreeable in itself]*

[26] *Ninthly*, if there be but *one thing* that is originally and independent of¹⁶ any future supposed cases, agreeable to God, to be

¹⁶ The original has "on" instead of "of."

obtained by the creation of the world, then there can be *but one last end* of God's work in this highest sense.¹⁷ But if there are *various* things, properly diverse one from another, that are absolutely and independently agreeable to the Divine Being, which are actually obtained by the creation of the world, then there were *several* ultimate ends of the creation in that highest sense.

¹⁷ I take this difficult sentence to mean the following: If God is pleased to seek only one thing in creation that is agreeable to him in itself (that is, not as a means to some future, more agreeable thing), then there is only one last end in creation. Then the next sentence holds out the hypothetical possibility (that Edwards will later reject) that several things may be agreeable to God which are absolutely diverse and independent from each other—not a means to any other thing. These then could be ultimate ends of God in creation.