

Freedom of the Will

A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of the Will
which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment,
Praise and Blame

Jonathan Edwards

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Larger omitted passages are reported on between brackets, in normal-sized type.—Edwards's discussions of and quotations from Biblical passages are omitted, as they add nothing to the book's *philosophical* value. Those omissions are signposted as they occur.

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Part 2: The freedom of will that the Arminians think is the essence of the liberty of moral agents: Does it exist? Could it exist? Is it even conceivable?

Section 1: The Arminian notion of liberty of will as consisting in the will's self-determining power—its obvious inconsistency

... I shall now consider the Arminian notion of the freedom of the will, and its supposed essentialness for moral agency, i.e. for anyone's being •capable of virtue or vice and •a fit subject for command or advice, praise or blame, promises or threats, rewards or punishments. The rival view is that the only thing that does or can make someone a moral agent, and make him a fit subject for praise or blame etc., is what counts as 'liberty' in ordinary language. In this Part, I shall discuss whether any such thing as Arminian freedom is possible or conceivable; I shall discuss in Part 3 the question of whether anything like Arminian freedom is necessary to moral agency and so on. [The phrase 'Arminian freedom' replaces Edwards's 'that freedom of the will that Arminians insist on'. Similar abbreviations will be used several times in what follows.]

Let us start with the notion of a self-determining power in the will, which is what the Arminians count as the absolute essence of the will's freedom. I shall especially press this question: Isn't it plainly absurd and a manifest inconsistency to suppose that the will itself determines all the free acts of the will? [See the note on 'determine' on page 3.]

There is a linguistic point that I want to set aside. It is very improper to speak of the will as determining itself •or anything else•, because the will is a •power, whereas determining is done by •agents [see page 17]. This improper way of speaking leads to many mistakes and much confusion, as Locke observes, but I shan't argue against the Arminians

on this basis. When they speak of the *will's* determining itself, I shall take it that what they mean by 'the will' is 'the willing soul'. I shall assume that when they speak of the will as determining x they mean that the soul determines x through its power of willing or acting voluntarily. That is the only thing they *can* mean without gross and obvious absurdity. Whenever we speak of powers-of-acting as *doing* x, we mean that the agents that have these powers of acting do x in the exercise of those powers. 'Valour fights courageously'—we mean the man who is influenced by valour fights courageously. 'Love seeks the beloved'—we mean that the loving person seeks the beloved. 'The understanding detects x'—we mean that the soul in the exercise of its faculty of understanding detects x. 'The will decides or determines x'—we had better mean that x is determined by the person in the exercise of his power of willing and choosing, or by the soul acting voluntarily.

[Edwards now offers an argument that he states in the language of 'the will determining itself'. He means this to be understood as short-hand in the manner he has just described, and the argument goes through on that interpretation. Here it is, expressed without the distracting 'self-determination' idiom: Arminians say that every free act someone performs—including every act of the will—was caused by a preceding act; and if that had also to be free, it was caused by a yet earlier act, and so on backwards. How did this sequence of acts start? •If its first member was a free act, then that act is a counter-example to the Arminian thesis that freedom involves causation by a free act. •If the first member was not a free act, then—given that

it determined the second member of the sequence, which determined the third etc.—it seems to follow that none of the acts in the sequence has been free. Although this is obvious at first glance, Edwards says, he proceeds to 'demonstrate' it. Unfortunately, the 'demonstration' is stated in the language of *self*-determination; we had better get used to it. Here it is:]

If the will governs itself and determines its own actions, it doubtless does this in the same way that we find it governing our limbs and determining how they shall move—namely by antecedent volitions. The will determines how the hands and feet shall move by an act of choice, and it has no other way of determining, directing, or commanding *anything*. Whatever the will commands, it commands by an act of the will. . . . Thus, if the will's freedom consists in its having itself and its own actions under its command, so that its own volitions are determined by itself, it will follow that every free volition arises from an earlier volition that directed and commanded it; and if that directing volition was also free, it was determined by a still earlier one . . . and so on, until we come to the first volition in the whole series. •If that first volition is free—if it is a case of self-determination by the will—then the Arminian must say that it too was determined by a yet earlier volition—and that is a contradiction, because here we are talking about the *first* act in the series. •And if that first act of the will is not free, then none of the following acts that are determined and fixed by it can be free either. [Edwards tries to make this more intuitively compelling •by stating it in terms of a five-act sequence, and then maintaining that the point is just as good with ten acts in the sequence, or a hundred or ten thousand. And •by presenting an analogous argument about the movements of links in a chain. Then:] If the first act on which the whole sequence depends, and which determines all the rest, isn't a

free act, then the will isn't free in causing or determining any one of those acts. . . . Thus, this Arminian notion of liberty of the will as consisting in the will's self-determination is inconsistent with itself and shuts itself wholly out of the world.

Section 2: Two attempted escapes from the foregoing reasoning

(A) Here is something that might be said in an attempt to evade the force of what I have been saying:

When Arminians speak of the will as determining its own acts, they don't mean that the will determines an act by any preceding *act*, or that one *act* of the will determines another. All they mean is that the faculty or power of will—or the soul in its use of that power—determines its own volitions, doing this without any *act* occurring before the act that is determined.

This is full of the most gross absurdity. I admit that I made it up; and it might be an injustice to the Arminians to suppose that any of *them* would make use of it. But it's as good an escape-attempt as I can invent, so I want to say a few things about it.

(1) If the power of the will determines an act of volition—meaning that the soul in its use or exercise of that power determines it—that is the same thing as the soul's determining the volition by an act of will. An •exercise of the power of will and an •act of the will are the same thing. It is a contradiction to say that the power of will—or the soul in the use or exercise of that power—determines volition without an act of will preceding the volition that is determined.

(2) If a •power of will determines the act of the will, then a •power of choosing determines it. As I pointed out earlier, in every act of will there is choice, and a power of willing is

a power to choose. But if a power of choosing determines the act of volition, it determines it by choosing it. It's just absurd to say that a power of choosing *determines* one thing rather than another without *choosing* anything! But if a power of choosing determines volition by choosing it, then we are back with a preceding act again—the act of choosing.

(3) To say 'The faculty or the soul •determines its own volition, but not by any •act' is a contradiction. For the soul to direct, decide, or determine anything is to act. . . . And this act can't be identical with the act that it aims to produce; so it must be something prior to it.

(4) The advocates for this 'Arminian' notion of the freedom of the will speak of a certain *sovereignty* in the will that gives it the power to determine its own volition. This means that the determination of volition must itself be an *exercise* of that supposed power and sovereignty, and that must be *act* of the will.

(5) If the will determines itself, then in doing this either it is active or it is not. If it is active, then the determination is an act of the will. If it isn't active in its determination of itself, then how does it exercise any liberty in this? . . .

(B) Here is a second kind of thing that might be said to defend Arminianism from my attack:

Although it is true that if the soul determines its own volitions, it must do so by *acting* in some way, the relevant act doesn't have to be *prior* to the volition that it determines. It could be that the will or soul determines the act of the will *in* performing that act; it determines its own volition in the very act of volition; it directs and shapes the act of the will, causing it to be thus and not so, *in* performing the act and without any preceding act.

Anyone who says something like this must mean one or other of these three things. **(1)** The determining act precedes the

determined one in the order of nature, but not in the order of time. **(2)** The determining act doesn't precede the determined act in the order of time or of nature; in fact it isn't truly distinct from it; the soul's *determining* the act of volition is identical with its *performing* the act of volition. . . . **(3)** Volition has no cause, and isn't an effect; it comes into existence with such-and-such a particular determination without any ground or reason for its existing or having the properties that it does have. I shall consider these separately.

(1) 'The determining act is not *temporally* before the determined act.' Even if that were right, it wouldn't help. If the determining act *x* is before the determined act *y* in the order of *nature*, being the cause or ground of *y*'s existence, that makes *x* *distinct from y* just as much as if it occurred earlier than *y* in time. Causes are always distinct from their effects: the cause of a body's movement may occur at the same time as that movement, but it isn't *identical with* the movement. . . . And so we still have a series of acts with each member causing the one before, which leads to the problem of the status of the first act in the series. Because it is the first, it isn't caused by any act of the will distinct from it; so it isn't a free act according to the Arminian account of freedom; and if it isn't free then neither is any act that depends on it—which means that there is no freedom anywhere in the series. In short, the *first-act-in-the-series* problem is fatal to the Arminian account of freedom, whether the *firstness* is temporal or only causal.

(2) 'The determining act is not temporally *or* causally before the determined act, because it is identical with it. The performance of that act *is* the determination of the act; for the soul to •perform a particular volition is for it to •cause and determine that act of volition.' In this account, the thing in question—namely freedom of the will—seems to be forgotten, or hidden by a darkness and unintelligibility of

speech. [Edwards criticizes this at some length. The core of the criticism is the point he has already made in passing in (1), namely that any cause must be distinct from its effect, so that what determines an act of the will can't be that very same act of his will. Acts of the will do determine—settle, fix—things, but they can't determine *themselves*.]

(3) 'The soul's performance of a particular act of will happens without any cause. There is absolutely no reason why the soul is determined to perform *this* volition rather than *that*.' This can't possibly be said in support of the Arminian view that the will determines its own acts, for liberty of will consists in the power of self-determination! If the will determines the will, then *something* determines it, and now we have the claim that *nothing* determines it!

And yet this very thesis that the free acts of the will happen without a cause *is* certainly implied in the Arminian notion of liberty of will, even though it is flatly inconsistent with many other things in their system and in conflict with their notion of liberty. Their view implies that the particular determination of volition has no cause, because they hold that free acts of the will are *contingent* events—•contingency is essential to •freedom on their view of freedom. Events that have a prior ground and reason for their occurrence, a cause that antecedently determines them to occur just as and when they do, don't happen contingently. [Edwards is here using 'contingent' not in what he has called its ordinary-language sense but rather in the special sense that philosophers have invented for it. See page 12. When he writes that it is 'certainly implied in the Arminian notion of liberty of will' that all free actions are 'contingent' in this sense, he is presumably relying on his view that if x is caused it is necessitated by something that is necessary (because securely lodged in the past or present), which means that x itself is necessitated and so isn't 'free' in any Arminian sense. After discussing the 'contingency' claim through sections 3 and 4, he will start 5 by saying, in effect, that the claim was

after all irrelevant to the Arminian cause.] If some previous thing by a causal influence and connection determines and fixes precisely when and how the event occurs, then it isn't a contingent matter whether the event will occur or not.

Do the free acts of the will occur without a cause? This question is in many ways very important in this controversy, so I shall go into it thoroughly in the next two sections.

Section 3: Can volition occur without a cause? Can any event do so?

Before starting in on this, I want to explain what I mean by 'cause' in this discussion, because I shall—for want of a better word—be using it in a broader sense than is sometimes given to it. The word is often used in a narrow sense in which it applies only to something that has a positive effectiveness or influence in producing a thing or making an event occur. But many things that have no such positive productive influence are still *causes*, in that they really are the reason why some events occur rather than others or why the events are as they are. For example, the absence of the sun in the night isn't the cause of the fall of dew at that time *in the same way as* its beams are the cause of mist rising in the day-time; and the sun's withdrawal in the winter isn't the cause of the freezing of lakes *in the same way as* its approach in the spring is the cause of their thawing. And yet the absence (or withdrawal) of the sun is an antecedent with which the dew (or the freezing) is connected, and on which it depends; it is part of the ground and reason why the dew falls (or the lakes freeze) then rather than at other times; although the absence (or withdrawal) of the sun is not something positive and has no positive influence.

I should further point out that when I speak of connection of causes and effects, I am talking about •moral causes [see

the note on page 13] as well as the ones that are distinguished from those by being called •natural. Moral causes can be *causes* in as proper a sense as any causes whatsoever, can have as real an influence, and can as truly be the ground and reason for an event's occurring.

So I shall sometimes use 'cause' to signify any antecedent *x*—natural or moral, positive or negative—on which some outcome *y* depends in such a way that *x* is all or part of the ground or reason why *y* exists, or occurs, or is as it is. In other words, if antecedent *x* is so connected with a consequent outcome *y* that *x* truly belongs to the reason why the proposition asserting that *y* exists or occurs is true, then *x* is a 'cause' of *y* (in my usage), whether or not it has any positive influence. And in conformity with this, I sometimes speak of something *y* as an 'effect' of something else *x*, when strictly speaking *x* may be an occasion of *y* rather than a 'cause' in the most usual sense. [The word 'occasion' was variously used for various kinds of *leading-to* that were thought to fall short of outright *causing*. Occasionalism was the thesis that bodies can't cause changes in one another but seem to do so because (e.g.) a •collision is the occasion of a •rebound through being the occasion for God's causing the rebound. In our present context, Edwards is probably thinking of negative states of affairs: the sun's *not* shining overhead is an occasion but (he thinks) not strictly a 'cause' (in the ordinary sense) of the formation of icicles.] What makes me especially careful to explain what I mean by 'cause' is this: There may be people who will look for chances to object to and find fault with things I am going to say about how everything that happens depends on and is connected with some cause, and I want to protect myself against fault-finding.

Having thus explained what I mean by 'cause', I assert that **nothing ever happens without a cause**. Anything that is self-existent—i.e. anything whose nature is such that it must exist, whatever else is the case—must exist

from eternity and must be unchangeable; things that *begin* to exist are not self-existent, so their existence must be founded on something other than themselves. Anything that *begins* to exist must have a cause why it begins to exist *just then*—that seems to be the first dictate of the common and natural sense that God has implanted in the minds of all mankind, and the main basis for all our reasonings about the existence of things past, present, or to come.

This dictate of common sense applies equally to substances and modes, i.e. to things and the manner and circumstances of things. Consider the two cases:

We see a motionless body start to move.

We see a body come into existence.

In each case we suppose that there is some cause or reason for this new •mode of existence (in one case) or this new •existence (in the other), and the supposition is as natural to us and as necessary in the former case as it is in the latter. Similarly with change of direction, of shape, of colour—the beginning of any of these new modes is a new event, and the human mind necessarily supposes that there is some cause or reason for it.

If this great principle of common sense is taken away, we lose all our arguments from effects to causes. That will rob us of all knowledge of anything's existence except the knowledge we have by the most direct and immediate intuition. We'll still be able to know that a certain pain exists, but not that a certain damaged finger exists. Most importantly: all our proof of the existence of God will be lost. We argue for his existence from

- our own existence, from
- the observed coming into existence of other things, and from
- the existence of the world with all its parts and their properties.

We can see plainly that these things are not necessary in their own nature—so they aren't self-existent—so they must have causes. But if things that aren't in themselves necessary (·i.e. aren't self-existent·) can come into existence without a cause, all this arguing gets nowhere.

·AN ASIDE ON *a priori* KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S EXISTENCE·

I'm not denying that the nature of things contains a basis for the knowledge of God's existence without any evidence of it from his works. I do think there is a great absurdity in denying Being ·or Existence· in general, and imagining an eternal, absolute, universal *nothing*. And that leads me to suppose that the nature of things contains something that could make it •intuitively evident that there must be an eternal, infinite, most perfect being, if only our minds were strong enough and broad enough to have a clear idea of *general and universal Being*. In that case, though, we wouldn't come to know of God's existence by •arguing; we would see it as •intuitively evident; we would see it as we see other intrinsically necessary truths whose contraries are intrinsically absurd and contradictory—that twice two is four, that a circle has no angles. If we had as clear an idea of *universal infinite entity ·or thing·* as we have of these other things, I suppose we would intuitively see the absurdity of supposing that there is no such universal infinite thing. . . . But our minds aren't strong and broad enough for us to know this for certain in this intuitive way. The way in which *we* come to the knowledge of God's existence is the one Paul speaks of in Romans 1:20: 'The invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen; being understood by the things that are made; even his eternal power and Godhead.' We first *ascend* and prove from the effects that there must be an eternal cause; then we prove—by argument, not by intuition—that this being must be necessarily existent; and then thirdly from the proved necessity of his existence

we can *descend* and prove many of his perfections, arguing from cause to effect. ·END OF ASIDE·

But if we give up the great principle that what is not intrinsically necessary must have a cause, and start maintaining that things can come into existence—*begin* to exist—without any cause, that will deprive us of *all* our means of reasoning our way upwards from the creation to the creator, *all* our grounds for believing that God exists. . . . The reasoning that we do now engage in involves supposing not just that what begins to exist has a cause, but also that the cause is proportional to the effect. The principle that leads us to determine that nothing can occur without a cause also leads us to determine that there can't be more in the effect than there is in the cause.

If we once allowed that things can happen without a cause, we would not only have no proof of the existence of God but we would also have no evidence of the existence of anything at all except our own immediately present ideas and consciousness. We have no way to prove anything else except by arguing from effects to causes: from •ideas that are now immediately present to us we infer •other things that are not immediately in view; from •sensations now aroused in us we infer the existence of •things outside us as the causes of these sensations; and from the existence of •these things we infer •other things on which they depend as effects on causes. When we infer the past existence of ourselves and other things by memory, we're relying on the view that our present ideas are consequences ·or effects· of past ideas and sensations. . . . If there's no absurdity or difficulty in supposing **one** thing to begin to exist of itself and without a cause, then there's no absurdity or difficulty in supposing the same of **millions of millions** of things. For nothing (or no difficulty) multiplied ·by any number you like· is still nothing (or no difficulty).

And indeed according to the theory I am attacking—that the acts of the will happen without a cause—there are in fact millions of millions of events continually occurring without any cause or reason, all over the world and at every moment down through the centuries. There is a constant stream of such events within every moral agent! This contingency—this effective *nothing*—this productive *no-cause*—is always ready at hand to produce such effects as long as the agent exists and as often as he needs them. Suppose this were how things stand:

Acts of the will seem to happen of themselves, .i.e. without and cause distinct from them. They happen all the time, wherever there are subjects capable of acts of the will. And they are the only events that seem not to be caused.

That would show that •there is some cause of these acts of the will—something that picked them out and made them different from other events—and that •they didn't really happen contingently. For contingency is blind; it doesn't pick and choose a particular sort of events. *Nothing* doesn't choose. This *No-cause*. . . can't cause it to be the case that just one particular sort of event happens, distinguished from all other sorts. For example: The only sort of matter that drops out of the sky is *water*, and this has happened so often, so constantly and plentifully, all over the world and all through the centuries in all ages, *shows* that there is some cause or reason for the falling of water out of the sky, and that something besides mere contingency has a hand in the matter.

Suppose that *non-entity* is about to bring something x into existence: it must do this without any cause or antecedent that settles what kind of item x shall be. If this is happening all the time, there is never a cause or antecedent that could determine whether the things that come into existence are

to be stones or stars or beasts or angels or human bodies or souls, or merely some new motion or shape in natural bodies, some new sensations in animals, some new ideas in the human understanding, *some volitions in the will*—or anything else out of all the infinite number of possible items. With many millions of millions of items coming into existence in this way all over the face of the earth, you couldn't expect them all to be of one particular kind. . . .

Someone might want to try this reply:

Free acts of the will are items of an utterly different kind from anything else, and it's because of their special nature that they can occur without any previous ground or reason whereas other things cannot. It is something *in* these acts that enables them to come into existence without a cause.

Someone who seriously says this seems to be strangely forgetting himself: in the course of maintaining that there is no ground for the occurrence of acts of will, he is giving an account of some ground for their occurrence! •And the account he gives is incoherent in itself, quite apart from its conflict with his over-all position. Here is why:• The special nature of acts of the will, no matter how different it makes them from everything else, can't lay the foundation for an act of the will to occur without a cause; because to suppose that it did would be to suppose that the special nature of the act exists prior to the act's occurrence—to suppose that it is *clearing the way* for the act to occur without a cause. Something that in any fashion clears the way for an event to occur must itself be *prior to* that event. The event's special nature can't have influence *backward*, enabling it to act •as a way-clearer• *before* the event occurs. The special nature of a volition can't do anything, can't have any influence, at a time when it doesn't yet exist; and afterwards it is too late for it to influence the occurrence of the volition, because by then

the volition has made sure of occurring without its help.

So the supposition that an act of the will might come into existence without a cause is as contrary to reason as the supposition that the human soul or an angel or the globe of the earth or the whole universe might come into existence without a cause. And once we allow that •a volition could occur without a cause, how do we know that there aren't many •other sorts of effects that can do so as well? What makes it absurd to think that a volition occurs without a cause is not some special fact about *volitions*. . . .

Section 4: Can volition occur without a cause because the soul is active?

The author of *Essay on the Freedom of Will in God and in Creatures* defends the doctrine of a self-determining power in the will. [The author in question was Isaac Watts, as Edwards knew. He didn't use the name out of respect for Watts's evident desire to publish his works anonymously. On later occasions, this version will put the name into Edwards's text.] He answers the objection that

Nothing exists or happens without a sufficient reason for its existence or occurrence, and for its being *thus* rather than *so*,

by maintaining that

Although that is true of •corporeal things, which are—strictly and philosophically speaking—•passive, it doesn't hold for •spirits, which are •active and have the spring of action within themselves, so that they can determine themselves.

He is clearly supposing that an act of the will can occur in a spirit without a sufficient reason why it occurs or why it is *thus* rather than *so*. But he has certainly handled this matter very incautiously and carelessly—and I have *five* reasons for saying so!

(1) In giving his answer to the objection, Watts seems to have forgotten what the objection was. His own statement of the challenge was this:

•How can an event occur without a sufficient reason for its occurrence and for its being *thus* rather than *so*?

Instead of solving this difficulty as it applies to volitions, as he says he will do, he forgets himself and answers this completely different question:

•What sufficient reason is there why a volition occurs and why it is *thus* rather than *so*?

And he answers *this* in terms of the active being's own determination as the cause, a cause that is sufficient for the effect; which leaves the original challenge untouched. . . . The soul's activeness may enable it to be the •cause of effects; but it doesn't enable it to be the subject of •effects that have no cause! [In this section and a few later places, 'activeness' replaces Edwards's 'activity'. He uses the latter to refer to a property that a thing has, an aspect of its nature; but we today use 'activity' more to refer to something the active thing does or engages in, an *exercise of* its activeness.]. . . . A soul's having an active nature won't enable it to produce (and settle the details of) uncaused effects •within itself, any more than it will enable it to produce uncaused effects in •something else. But if an active being were to exercise its activeness by determining an effect in some external object, how absurd it would be to say that the effect was produced without a cause!

(2) The question is not so much 'How does an active spirit come to act?' as 'Why does an active spirit act *thus* rather than *so*?' If the activeness of a spirit (the soul of a man, for instance) is the cause •or reason• why it acts rather than remaining inactive, *that* alone isn't the cause •or reason• why it acts in one way rather than another. . . . To explain this there must be more than mere activeness, which is a

•general tendency to action; there must also be a •particular tendency to perform that individual action. 'Why does the soul of man use its activeness in the particular way it does?' Faced with that question, the answer 'Because it is active' would strike us as entirely missing the point.

(3) The only way the activeness of an active being can lead to •something x's being the case is for •x to result from the exercise of his activeness, i.e. from *actions* that he performs. . . . And any such action, any such exercise of his activeness, must occur prior to its effects. 'We all know that' this priority is required if one thing's action is to produce an effect in •something else; but it holds just as strongly when one thing's action produces an effect in •itself. Therefore a person's activeness can't cause the details of his first action—the first exercise of his activeness—because that would imply a contradiction. It would be to say that the first exercise of activeness is before—and is the cause of—the first exercise of activeness.

(4) If the soul's sheer *activeness* were the sole cause of any of its actions, then all the actions that it caused would be exactly alike. It would be the •same substantial soul, and the •same nature of activeness, at work in each case, so the effects would have to be the •same also. And that won't do, because we are trying to explain human volitions, which exhibit great variety. To get a variety of actions as effects, the soul has to put in a variety of actions as causes. But then how can those I am opposing explain the variety of the input-actions? 'We are back at the starting-point of the problem, with only one difference: we now know that the problem *can't* be solved by appealing simply to the soul's activeness'. It's true that the substance of the soul may, independently of how and with what variety it acts, be in different states and circumstances 'at different times'; but those whom I am opposing won't allow differences in the soul's circumstances

to be the determining causes of the acts of the will, because that is contrary to their notion of self-determination. [In this context as in many others, 'circumstances' means 'relational properties'. Edwards says that his opponents won't allow acts of the will to be caused by any of its relational properties; but that seems to leave the 'in different *states*' part of their argument untouched.]

(5) Let us suppose, as do the theologians 'whom I am opposing', that strictly speaking the only things the soul actively *does* are free volitions. It follows that all the exercises of the soul's activeness reflect its nature as a •willing and •choosing being, so that whenever it actively produces effects it does so •voluntarily and •by choice. But for x to produce y *by choice* is for x to produce y *in consequence of and according to x's own choice*. So it can't be true that the soul through its activeness produces *all* its own acts of will or choice, because that would take us right back to the contradiction of a free act of choice before the first free act of choice. According to these gentlemen's own notion of action, if a volition occurs in the mind without a free act of the will to produce it, the mind is not the voluntary cause of that volition, because it doesn't arise from, and isn't regulated by, choice or design. So it can't be the case that the mind is the active voluntary determining cause of the first volition that starts off the whole series.

- The mind's being a designing cause only enables it to produce effects in consequence of its design; but it doesn't enable it to be the designing cause of all its own designs.

- The mind's being a choosing cause enables it to produce effects in consequence of, and according to, its choices; but it can't enable it to be the choosing cause of all its own choices.

And in the same way:

•The mind's being an active cause enables it to produce effects in consequence of its own acts, but it can't enable it to be the determining cause of all its own acts—

because that introduces the contradiction of supposing a determining act that occurs prior to the first act. . . . These five points show us that the activeness of the soul's nature provides no relief from the difficulties associated with the notion of a self-determining power in the will, and won't help that notion's absurdities and inconsistencies.

Section 5: Even if the things said in these attempted escapes were true, they are quite irrelevant and can't help the cause of Arminian liberty; so that Arminian writers have to talk inconsistently

I have shown in section 4 that the soul's activeness can't be a reason why an act of the will occurs, or why it is thus rather than so. But the case against Arminianism doesn't depend on that. You'll recall that 'activeness' was brought into the story in an attempt to defend the view that volitions are *contingent* events, not depending for their occurrence or their detailed natures on anything that came before them. Well, I now maintain that even if I were wrong in section 4, even if it were shown that every volition is after all contingent in the philosophical sense of 'contingent' [introduced on page 12], that wouldn't help the Arminians to establish their notion of freedom as consisting in the will's determination of itself. The absolutely central case against their view doesn't have to mention contingency. It goes like this:

For the will to determine x is the same as for the soul to determine x by willing; and the only way the will

or the soul can determine a volition is by willing that it occur, i.e. by *choosing* it. (If the will doesn't cause and determine the act by choosing it, it doesn't cause or determine it at all. What isn't determined by choice isn't determined voluntarily or willingly; and our present topic is the Arminian view that the soul does willingly—i.e. with its will—determine the volition in question.) On the Arminian theory, therefore, every free act of the will has to be determined by some previous act of the will; so we have here two acts of the will—one producing or choosing the other. And that brings us—or rather the Arminian—back to the old absurdity and contradiction of holding that *every* free act of will is caused and determined by a preceding free act of will.

To counter this charge of absurdity and contradiction by claiming that free acts are not caused at all is not to *rescue* the Arminian position but to *destroy* it.

A different attempt to rescue Arminianism might be to claim that the soul determines its own acts of will not by a preceding act of will but in some other way. But this can't succeed. If the soul determines its volition by an act of the understanding, or an act of some other power, then the will doesn't determine itself, and the theory that the self-determining power of the will is the essence of liberty is given up. (I am relying here on the discussion [on page 17] in which I freed Arminianism from its way of talking as though the **will**, which is a faculty, were a substance that acts, does things, produces effects. I did this by replacing the Arminian 'The will causes. . . ' by the conceptually cleaner 'The **soul** causes. . . , doing this **through its will**'.) On this account, the acts of the will may indeed be directed and effectively determined and fixed; but this is done without any exercise of choice or will in producing the effect; and if will and choice

aren't exercised in this procedure, how can liberty of the will be exercised in it?

Thus, the Arminian notion of liberty as consisting in the will's determining its own acts destroys itself—no matter how they dodge and weave in deploying it. •If they hold that every free act of will is determined by the soul's own free choice, a free act of will that occurs either temporally or causally *before* the act in question, they come to the grossly contradictory position that the *first* free act is determined by a free act that *precedes* it! •If instead they say that the will's free acts are determined by some other act of the soul and not an act of will or choice, this destroys their notion of liberty as consisting in the acts of the will being determined by the will itself. •As for the view that the acts of the will are not determined by anything at all that is temporally or causally prior to them, and are 'contingent' in the sense of not being determined at all, this also destroys—or, more accurately, it *deserts*—their notion of liberty as consisting in the will's determining its own acts.

Because this is how things stand with the Arminian notion of liberty, the writers who defend it are forced into gross inconsistencies. An example is provided by Daniel Whitby in his discussion of freedom of the will in his book *The Five Points of Calvinism*. He there opposes the opinion of the Calvinists who identify a man's liberty with his power to *do what he will*, saying that on this point those Calvinists plainly agree with Hobbes. Yet he himself introduces the very same notion of liberty as dictated by 'the sense and common reason of mankind, and a rule laid down by the light of nature, namely that liberty is a power of •acting from ourselves or •doing what we will'. He is right—this is agreeable to 'the sense and common reason of mankind'! So it isn't very surprising that Whitby accepts it against himself, for what *other* account of liberty can anyone invent? Indeed,

this author repeatedly seems to accept this view of liberty; it comes up in the passages he quotes from the Church Fathers in his own support. Here are small excerpts from the passages:

- Origen: 'The soul acts by its own choice.'
- Justin Martyr: 'Every man does good or evil according to his own free choice.'
- Maccarius: 'God made it in men's choice to turn to good or evil.'

Thus Whitby arrives in effect at the very notion of liberty that the Calvinists have—the one he condemns because Hobbes accepts it. . . . I have said 'what other account of liberty can anyone invent?', and I now admit that Whitby offers one. He says elsewhere that liberty consist not only in liberty of •doing what we will but also a liberty of •willing without necessity. (For convenience of reference, let us call this 'the two-part account' of liberty.) But then the question comes around again: what does that 'liberty of willing without necessity' consist in if not the power to *will* as we please without being impeded by an opposing necessity? i.e. a liberty for the soul to will as it chooses? And if we take the basic do-what-we-will account of liberty and—following the two-part account—apply it to the acts of the will themselves, we get the result that the man performs acts of will according to his own free choice or proceeding from his choice. And then you be the judge: don't you agree that this involves a free choice preceding the free act of will? And if that's how it is with all free acts, then you again be the judge: doesn't it follow that there is a free choice *before* the first free act of the will? And you be the judge of one last thing: does the system of these writers offer any possibility of avoiding these absurdities?

If liberty consists, as Whitby in the two-part account says it does, in a man's doing what he will, with 'doing'

understood as covering not only •external actions but also •the acts of the will themselves, then the liberty of the latter—the liberty of the will—must consist in the man's *willing what he wills*. There are only two things this could mean. here is one of them:

(i) The man has power to will as he does will; because what he wills he wills; and therefore has power to will what he has power to will.

If that is what is meant, then all this mighty controversy about freedom of the will and self-determining power comes to absolutely nothing. All that is being defended is the thesis that the mind of man does what it does, and is the subject of what it is the subject of; or that *what is the case is the case*. No-one has any quarrel with *that*.

The other thing that might be meant is this:

(ii) A man has power to will in whatever way he chooses to will; i.e. he has power by one act of choice to choose another. . . .

And someone who says *this* is merely dodging his opponents and baffling his own reason. For we keep coming back to the question; what constitutes the liberty of the first of the two acts of choice? The only answer our philosopher can give is one that re-applies to the first act the account he gave of the liberty of the second act; and so he is launched on an infinite regress of acts in the soul of every man without beginning.

Section 6: What determines the will in cases where the mind sees the options as perfectly indifferent?

Some believers in the self-determining power ·of the will· say that the view is strongly supported by a kind of experience we all have (according to them), namely the experience of being able to determine our wills at times when no prevailing motive is presented to our minds. [See note on 'determine' on

page 2.] In such a case, they argue,

The will has to choose between two or more actions that are perfectly equal in the view of the mind; the will seems to be altogether indifferent, ·i.e. evenly balanced between the two·; and yet we find it easy to come to a choice—the will can instantly determine itself to one ·action· by its over-riding power over itself, without being moved by any inducement that outweighs its rivals.

Thus Watts in his *Essay on the Freedom of Will etc.* writes as follows:

In many cases the will is not determined by •present uneasiness or by •the greatest apparent good or by •the last dictate of the understanding or by any thing else [each of those three was said by some philosophers to be *only* determinant of the will] , but merely by •*itself* as a dominant self-determining power of the soul. In some cases the soul wills a certain action not because of any influence on it but just *because it will*. I can turn my face to the south or the north; I can point with my finger upward or downward. In these cases the will determines itself. . . .without a reason borrowed from the understanding; and this reveals its perfect power of choice arising from within itself and free from all influence or restraint of any kind.

And he explicitly says that the will is often determined by no motive at all, and acts without *any* motive or basis for preference. I have two things to say about this.

(1) The very supposition that is made here directly contradicts and overthrows *itself*. This argument rests on the supposition that out of several possible courses of action the will actually •chooses one rather than another at the same time that it •is perfectly indifferent—·perfectly evenly balanced between them·—which is just say that the mind

•has a preference at the same time that it •has no preference. •You might want to challenge 'at the same time', but I am right to include it. If Watts had meant only that the mind is indifferent *before* it comes to have a choice, or *until* it has a preference, he wouldn't have thought he was engaged in a controversy. And anyway it *isn't* what he meant: it is pretty clear that what he is supposing is not that

the will chooses x rather than y, having been indifferent between them *before* making that choice,

but rather that

the will is indifferent between x and y *when* it chooses; and it stops being indifferent between them only *afterwards*, as a result of its choice. . . .

Here is what he says:

Where the courses of action that are proposed appear equally fit or good, the will is left without a guide or director; so it has to make its own choice by its own determination, •which it *can* do• because it is strictly speaking a *self*-determining power. In such a case, what the will does is (as it were) to make a good to itself by its own choice, i. e. create its own pleasure or delight in this self-chosen good. This is analogous to someone who seizes a patch of unoccupied land in an uninhabited country, makes it his own possession and property, and rejoices in it as such. Where things were previously indifferent, the will finds nothing to make one agreeable than another, when they are considered merely in themselves, but the pleasure it feels *arising from the choice it has made* and carried through with.

We love many things that we have chosen, *purely because we chose them*.

He can't have been thinking hard when he wrote this! Choice or preference can't be *before itself* either temporally or causally; it can't be the basis for itself or a consequence

of itself. The very act of •choosing one thing over another is •preferring that thing, which is •setting a higher value on it. It is not the case that the mind sets a higher value on one thing than on another as a result of setting a higher value on that thing!

[Edwards devotes about two more pages to **(i)** more quotations showing that Watts really does have the view that Edwards is here attacking, and **(ii)** developing his reasons for rejecting the view as impossible. Here is a bit of **(i)**, linked to the core of **(ii)**:] Speaking of the case where none of the courses of action presented for choice is fitter to be chosen than the others, Watts writes: 'In such a case the will must act by its own choice and determine itself *as it pleases*.' He is supposing that the very determination that is the basis and impetus for the will's act is an act of *choice and pleasure*, in which one act is more agreeable than another: and this preference and greater pleasure is the basis for all that the will does in this case. So the mind is *not* indifferent when it determines itself, but *prefers* to do one thing rather than another. [Edwards writes '*...but had rather do one thing than another*'. The italics are his.] So the will does not act in indifference. . . . Perhaps it is possible for the •understanding to act in indifference, but surely the •will never do so, because the will's beginning to act is the same thing as its beginning to choose or prefer. . . .

(2) It's not very hard to show, with regard to the sorts of cases Watts presents, not only •*that* in them the mind must be influenced in its choice by something that has an outweighing influence on it, but also •*how* this happens. All that is needed to clear up this matter is a little attention to our own experience and some clear thinking about the acts of our own minds in such cases. Consider this case:

I am confronted by an empty chess-board. For some reason I am resolved to put my finger on one square of

the board, without having decided which square it will be—perhaps my employer has ordered me to do this, or a friend has asked me to do so. Not being confined to or steered towards any one square in particular, and finding nothing in the squares—considered in themselves—that recommends any one of the sixty-four over the others, my mind determines to give itself up to what is commonly called 'accident',² by resolving to touch whatever square

happens to be most in view,
happens to catch my eye at that moment,
happens to be most in my mind, or
has my attention on it through some other such accident.

Here the mind takes three steps, though they can all be performed seemingly instantaneously.

1. It forms a •general resolve to touch one of the squares.
2. It forms a second •general resolve, namely to let itself be led to whatever individual square is made salient by some accident such as those listed above.
3. Finally, it makes a •particular decision to touch a certain individual square; the one that the mind lands on through that sort of accident *does* now offer itself in preference to the others.

Now, it is obvious that in each of those three steps the mind is proceeding *not* in absolute indifference but under the influence of an outweighing inducement. It takes step 1 because of an order or request or for some other reason. It takes step 2—i.e. resolving to pick whatever square accidentally becomes salient—because it seems at that time to be a convenient way of doing what is needed to fulfill the general purpose resolved on in step 1. Then in step 3 the

mind decides to touch the individual square that actually does become salient to it. It doesn't do this in a state of indifference; on the contrary, it is influenced by a prevailing inducement and reason—namely to carry through with the procedure resolved on in step 2.

In a case like this there will always be accidents that serve the purpose without creating any delays. Among many objects in the mind's view, one will be salient in our •visual field or in our •thoughts. When we are open-eyed in bright sunshine, many objects strike our •eye at once and countless images may be traced on the eye by the rays of light; but the mind can't attend to many of them at once, or anyway not for long. Similarly with •ideas in the mind: we don't have—or anyway not for more than a moment—a number of ideas that are equally strong in the mind's view and equally getting its attention. Nothing in the world varies more constantly than the ideas of the mind; they don't remain precisely the same for the least perceivable stretch of time. (And we know why. [What follows is Locke's theory about the origin of our idea of time passing.] The only way the mind has of perceiving the passage of time is through the successive changes of its own ideas. Therefore, while the perceptions of the mind remain precisely the same there is no sensible succession and therefore no perceivable length of time.)

[Edwards next makes the point that just as each of the three mental steps has a cause, so does the 'accident, as I have called it' by which the mind is guided in step 3. There is no appeal here to events that happen without a cause, any more than there is in such 'accidents' as the fall of dice.]

When people insist that, in cases like the chess-board one, the will acts while being strictly indifferent, not moved

² I pointed out •on page 12• that what is commonly called 'accident' is nothing like the Arminian metaphysical notion of *contingency*, i.e. something that isn't connected with anything that came before it. Ordinary-language 'accident' is something that happens in the course of some human activity, without being foreseen and without being produced by human planning.

by any inducement in its decisions, they are confused in their thought, and there are probably two reasons for this.

[One, Edwards says, is that people don't distinguish different things that a mind might be said to be indifferent about at a particular time. That stops them from properly grasping that at the instant of taking step 1 the mind may be indifferent with respect to what step 3 will be, although a second or two *later* it reaches a resolve, a determination, a non-indifference, with respect to step 3. There is more to chew on in his other suggested explanation for people's confusion, namely:] They seem to drift away from the real question, or at least not stay clearly focused on it. They debate the question:

Is the mind indifferent about the **objects** presented to it, one of which is to be taken, touched, pointed to, etc.—such as two eggs or two cakes that appear equally good?

Whereas the question we are really discussing is:

Is the person indifferent with respect to his own **actions**, e.g. *taking* an egg or *taking* a cake?

When the mind is confronted by these choices, its most immediate and direct concern is not with the objects that are presented but with the acts to be performed concerning these objects. [Edwards, like all his philosophical contemporaries, often uses 'object' extremely generally, so that actions can be called 'objects'. Already in this work he has sometimes used 'object' in this very general way, and the present version has usually replaced it by 'action'. Edwards is not confused about this; it's just that the narrower sense of 'object', which he is following here in order to make a good philosophical point, is really *our* only sense for it.] Even if the objects appear equal, the mind doesn't have to make any choice between *them*; what it has to choose is an external action relating to the objects—taking one, touching one, etc.—and these possible actions may not appear equal, so that one can be

chosen before another. In each of the three steps, what the mind resolves on is not an object but an action relating to an object.

There is no need to assume that the mind *ever* chooses or prefers one of the objects over the others—before it has taken one, or afterwards. The man does indeed choose to take, or touch, one object rather than any other; but not because he chooses the object he takes or touches. It can happen that of two things that are offered a man may prefer to take the one that he values less, bypassing the one that his mind prefers. In a case like that, •choosing the thing taken is obviously different from •choosing to take it; and the same is true whenever the things presented are equally valued by the mind. The Arminian argument that is the topic of this section is said to be based on our *experience* of choosing between options without any preference for any one of them. The only thing that fact and experience make evident is that in such cases the mind chooses one *action* rather than any other. So the Arminians can't further their cause unless they show that the mind chooses one action in perfect indifference with respect to that *action*, not to prove that the mind chooses one action in perfect indifference with respect to its *object*. . . .

Section 7: The view that freedom of the will consists in indifference

What I have said in section 6 has gone some way to showing the absurdity of the opinion that

•liberty consists in indifference, or in the equilibrium that clears the will of any antecedent bias; •when the indifferent will chooses one way rather than another, it does this entirely *from itself*, exercising its own power

and the sovereignty that it has over itself.³

But this view has been around for so long, and has been so generally accepted and so strenuously insisted on by Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians, Jesuits, Socinians, Arminians, and others, that it may deserve a fuller consideration. So I shall now proceed to a more detailed and thorough inquiry into it.

·A SUPPOSED REFINEMENT·

[To guard himself against accusations of misrepresenting his opponents, Edwards now devotes a page to a fairly recent minority view about what kind of indifference is essential to liberty. It is the view that what liberty involves is not indifference ·or equilibrium· in the will's •inclinations or •tendencies, but rather indifference ·or equilibrium· in the soul's •power of willing—meaning that the will *so far as its power or ability to choose goes* can go either way. This is offered as a refinement of the 'indifference' theory of freedom, Edwards says, but he can't find any sense in it that doesn't make it collapse back into the more familiar form of the theory. Then:]

But I needn't go on about the inexplicable abstruseness of this ·equilibrium-of-power· idea. All I need is this:

Any Arminians who talk in *any* way about indifference as essential to liberty of will, if they mean something that is relevant to their over-all system, must be talking about an indifference that leaves the will in a state of being *not yet determined*, but free from actual

possession, and vacant of predetermination [those nine words are Edwards's], so as to make room for the exercise of the self-determining power of the will. Their position has to be that the will's freedom consists in or depends on this •vacancy and •opportunity that is left for the will itself to be the determiner of the act that is to be the free act.

·That fits the main line of the 'freedom-as-indifference' theory, and also the more recent 'refinement' of it; so from now on we needn't attend to the 'refinement' separately·.

·PERFECT EQUILIBRIUM·

The first point I want to make is that this theory of liberty won't work unless the indifference ·that it postulates· is perfect and absolute; there must be *perfect* freedom from all prior bias or inclination. [It seems that Edwards here uses 'absolute' to mean 'complete', which in this context is also what 'perfect' means. At any rate, he continues the discussion in terms of 'perfect', and 'absolute' drops out of sight.] Why? Because if the will is already ·somewhat· inclined before it exerts its own sovereign power on itself, then its inclination is not *wholly* owing to itself. . . . The slightest degree of antecedent bias is inconsistent with the Arminians' notion of liberty; for as long as a prior inclination—·however slight·—continues to possess the will, the will is *bound* by it and can't *possibly* act otherwise than in conformity with it. ·Isn't that right·? Surely the will can't act or choose contrary to a prevailing inclination that it has; to suppose that it can would be to suppose that the will can

³ Whitby and some other Arminians distinguish two kinds of freedom—that of God and perfect spirits above, and that of persons in a state of trial [= 'human beings here below']. He allows that the former kind of freedom is consistent with necessity; the latter, he thinks, doesn't go with necessity; and he takes this freedom from necessity to be required if we are to be subjected to praise or dispraise, rewards or punishments, precepts and prohibitions, promises and threats, exhortations and dehortations, and treaties and covenants. It is this ·human· freedom that he thinks requires indifference. He quotes Thorndike with approval: 'We don't say that indifference is required for any freedom—only for the freedom of man in this state of travail and proficiencie [= (roughly) 'hard work and gradual self-improvement'], the basis of which is God's offer of a treaty, and conditions of peace and reconciliation to fallen man, together with those precepts and prohibitions, those promises and threats, those exhortations and dehortations, with which the treaty is enforced.'

be inclined •against its present prevailing inclination, i.e. •contrary to what it is inclined to. . . . The will can no more •choose contrary to its own present greatest •inclination than it can •prefer contrary to its own present •preference, or •choose contrary to its own present •choice! Thus, so long as the will is under the influence of a left-over prevailing inclination, it isn't at liberty for a new free act, or for any act of self-determination.

Possible objection: There is no need for the indifference to be perfect. A former inclination may still remain, but be weak enough so that the strength of the will can oppose and overcome it.' This is grossly absurd; for the strength of the will, however great it is, can't give the will such sovereignty and command that it can cause itself to prefer and not to prefer at the same time, or to choose contrary to its own present choice.

[Having dismissed as 'grossly absurd' the idea that a free action may go *against* a pre-existing inclination, Edwards now returns to the original proposal, that a free action might be one in which the will is tilted one way by a 'remaining inclination' and exercises its self-determination (and thus its freedom) in making itself go in the direction indicated by that inclination but *going further* than the unaided inclination would take it—meaning 'further' in a broad sense that covers not just literally walking further but also shouting louder, throwing harder, thinking more intently, pushing harder, pulling for a longer time, giving someone more help, harming someone more, and so on. (The term 'distance', just below, is also to be understood similarly broadly.) Edwards's rather difficult way of opposing this has at its core the following fairly simple thought. An inclination *x* inclines the soul to go a certain 'distance' in a certain action; the soul's freedom is exercised in its making itself go 'further'. Now, what interests us is

•the outcome of the soul's self-determination, and that upshot is
•the total distance of the action *minus* the part of its distance that is due to inclination *x*.

And, Edwards says, **the inclination *x* is entirely irrelevant to this**; it makes no contribution to it at all; and it is just wrong to bring that inclination in as a way of ducking the problem of how a soul could determine itself when in a state of *perfect* indifference or equilibrium. The inclination makes the equilibrium less than complete; but is also irrelevant to the soul's alleged achievement of self-determination; so it doesn't make the achievement less difficult. Edwards follows this up with two physical analogues, and then concludes that he was right all along to insist that the indifference theory of freedom of the will is doomed unless it can make its case in terms of *perfect* equilibrium. He then resumes the argument he was about to engage in when he was interrupted by the thought about a left-over *slight* inclination.]

·IN THE STATE OF FREEDOM, NOT AFTER IT·

I now offer this as an axiom that is undoubtedly true: every free act is done *in* a state of freedom, not merely *after* such a state. If an act of the will is an act *in* which the soul is free, it must be exerted *in* a state of freedom and *in* the time of freedom. . . . The notion of a *free act of the soul* is the notion of an act in which the soul •uses or •exercises liberty; and the soul can't put its liberty to •use in its act unless it has that liberty at the very time when it acts.

So now our question is:

Does the soul of man ever perform an act of will while remaining in a state of liberty—meaning a state of ·perfect· indifference ·or equilibrium·? Does the soul ever perform an act of preference at the very time at which it is in a perfect equilibrium, not inclining one way more than another?

You have only to read the question to see how absurd it would be to answer Yes. It would be ridiculous for anyone to insist that the soul *chooses* one thing rather than another when at the very same instant it is perfectly indifferent regarding them. That would be to say that the soul prefers one thing to another at the very same time when it has no preference. Choice and preference can't be in a state of indifference, any more than motion can be in a state of rest. . . . Motion may occur immediately after rest, but it can't co-exist with rest for even the tiniest stretch of time. Similarly, choice may occur immediately after a state of indifference, but it can't exist with indifference; even at the very start of its choice, the soul is not in a state of indifference. If *this* is liberty, then, no act of the will is ever performed in a state of liberty or in the time of liberty. Volition and liberty, far from being •essential one to another, are •contrary one to another: one excludes and destroys the other, just as motion destroys rest, and light destroys darkness. So the will doesn't act *at all*—doesn't even *begin* to act—while it has this kind of 'liberty', •i.e. the kind that consists in perfect indifference or equilibrium. As soon as the action begins, freedom stops; and this 'freedom' can't touch the action, can't affect it or entitle it to be described in one way rather than another—any more than it could if it had stopped twenty years before the action began. . . .

•TWO FURTHER ESCAPE-ATTEMPTS•

(1) An Arminian might want to argue back in this way:

Your argument is nothing but a trick and delusion. What the will exercises its liberty on is not •the act of choice or preference itself but •the determining of itself to a certain choice or preference. The act of the will in which it is free and uses its own sovereignty consists in its causing or determining the *change* from a state of indifference to a certain preference,

i.e. causing itself to give a certain tilt to the balance which has until now been horizontal; and it does *this* while remaining in equilibrium and perfect master of itself.

Let us see whether this can give the Arminian the success that has so far escaped him!

The claim is that the will, at a time when it is still in perfect equilibrium, with no preferences, determines to •change itself from that state and •arouse in itself a certain choice or preference. Isn't this just as absurd as the previous version of the theory, whose absurdity we have already seen? If the will in a state of perfect indifference determines to leave that state and give itself a certain inclination, tell me this: doesn't the soul determine this *by choice*? That is: isn't the will's coming to a •determination to change its state the same thing as the soul's coming to a •choice to change its state? If the soul doesn't *choose* to do this, then it doesn't *voluntarily* determine its change of state. And if *the soul* doesn't determine it voluntarily, i.e. of its own will, then in what sense does *its will* determine it? And if the will doesn't determine the change of state, then how in making that determination does it make any use of its liberty? . . . Suppose, then, that the opponents •concede that this determination is an act of choice, and •insist that the soul, while still in a state of perfect indifference, *chooses* to put itself out of that state and to turn itself in one direction rather than another. That brings us right back to the very same absurdity that we had before! . . .

(2) Or the opponents might try this:

A state of liberty is not the same as a state of indifference, and liberty can exist without indifference. But indifference is still essential to freedom, because it is needed to go immediately before it: it's essential to the freedom of an act of will that it should directly and

immediately *arise out of* a state of indifference.

This won't help the cause of Arminian liberty, or make it consistent with itself. For if the act springs immediately out of a state of indifference, then it doesn't come from antecedent choice or preference. And if the act arises directly out of a state of indifference, without any intervening choice to determine it, then it isn't determined by the will; the mind exercises no free choice in the affair, and free choice and free will have no hand in the determination of the act.

·THE POWER TO SUSPEND·

Here is another attempted way out of the difficulty

The absurdities ·you have pointed out· can be avoided by saying that. . . indifference is not essential to liberty in such a way that the mind must make its choice *in* a state of indifference (which is an inconsistency) or that the act of will must spring immediately out of indifference (·which is absurd·); but indifference may be essential to the liberty of acts of the will in a different way from those, namely: Liberty of the will consists in the mind's power to hold back or suspend the act of volition, keeping the mind in a state of indifference in the meantime, until there has been opportunity for proper deliberation.

It would be a great mistake to think that this is any help. It doesn't reconcile any inconsistency or lessen any difficulty. I now show this.

The first point to be grasped is that this •suspending of volition (supposing that there *is* such a thing) is itself an •act of volition. If the mind determines to suspend its act, it does so voluntarily; it has some reason for choosing to suspend; and this choice or determination is an act of the will. And the opponent would have to agree about this, because he holds that the liberty of the will consists precisely in its power to suspend, and that its suspending is the very thing in which

the will *exercises* its liberty. . . .

·With that point firmly established, let us see what we get·. This determining to suspend acting is not only an act of the will, but is supposed to be the *only* free act of the will; because the opponent is saying that the liberty of the will *consists in this*, which implies that this is the only kind of act of will that we have to consider in this controversy. And now the difficulties arise again, as we confront our old question:

In the acts in which the will is free, what does its freedom consist in?

This question, as put to our present opponent, is:

In an act in which the will suspends action, what does its freedom consist in?

The answer he is committed to is that the liberty of the will in this act of suspension consists in a power to suspend *even this act* until there has been opportunity for thorough deliberation. But this plunges us directly into the grossest nonsense, because what we're talking about is an act of suspension, and there is no room for a space of deliberation and suspension in order to determine whether we will suspend or not. If there were, that would mean that even the suspension might be deferred; and that is absurd, because •postponing the decision about whether or not to suspend will actually •*be* suspending. Why? Because during the time of suspension to consider whether to suspend, the act is automatically suspended! Either you act immediately or you suspend—there is no other alternative.

[Then a paragraph drawing the 'liberty = power-to-suspend-action' theory into an infinite regress. Then:] And besides all this there is yet another a delusion and a latent gross contradiction in this theory. . . . The question was: When the mind performs act of volition x, what does its liberty consist in? And now we are given an 'answer' that doesn't answer *that* question at all, because it talks only

of the mind's liberty not in •performing x but in •resolving to suspend performing x. This is simply irrelevant to the question that was asked. . . . Summing up the discussions in this section: it's very obvious that the liberty of the mind does *not* consist in indifference, and that indifference is not essential to it, necessary to it, or in any way involved in it, as the Arminians suppose. . . .

Section 8: The view that freedom of the will rules out every kind of necessity

Arminians in this controversy lay great stress on their thesis that it is essential to human liberty that volitions or acts of the will are *contingent* events—understanding contingency as opposite not only to constraint but to all necessity. Because it is emphasized so much, I want to look closely into this.

Two questions arise. •Is there—*can* there be—any such thing as a volition that is 'contingent' in the sense of having no infallible connection with anything that happened previously? •If there were such a thing, would this be any help to the cause of liberty? •I shall devote this section to the first question. The second will come up in section 13.

Could any volition occur *contingently* in this manner? Bear in mind what I have already shown, namely that nothing can ever happen without a cause or a reason why it occurs *thus* rather than *so*, and I have especially produced evidence for this in connection with acts of the will. If that is right, then the acts of the will are never 'contingent' in the sense of 'not necessary', because anything that has a cause or reason must be •necessarily• connected with its cause. Here are three reasons for saying this.

(1) For something to have a cause and ground of its existence and yet not to be connected with its cause is an inconsistency. If it isn't connected with the cause, it

is not dependent on the cause; its existence is loose from the cause's influence (so to speak) and *may* accompany it but *may not*, because it is a mere contingency, whether or not it follows or comes with the cause's influence. That amounts to saying that it isn't dependent on it. And to say something *isn't dependent on its cause* is absurd—it is saying that its cause is not its cause. If two things are not related in this way:

x is connected with y and depends on it,
then they are not related in this way:

x is an effect of y, which is its cause.

There is only as much causality between two things as there is connection and dependence between them. . . . 'Perhaps the connection and dependence is not total, but only partial; Perhaps the effect x, though having *some* connection and dependence on the cause y, isn't *entirely* dependent on it.' That is to say that not all of x is an effect of y—that only a part of x arises from y, and a part from something else.

(2) If some events are not necessarily connected with their causes, then it follows that some events occur without *any* cause, which is contrary to what we are supposing and I have demonstrated. Why? Well, if x wasn't *necessarily* connected with the influence of y, then •y could have happened without x following; and so• given that y occurred, it was a contingent matter whether x would accompany or follow it. Suppose x *did* follow: *why* did it follow? There is no cause or reason for this. . . . Here is something in the present manner of the existence of things and state of the world that is absolutely without a cause—which is contrary to the supposition and contrary to what I have demonstrated.

[Edwards's (3) is really a rewording of (2). He expresses it by saying that to suppose that x has a cause and ground of its existence with which it is not necessarily connected is to suppose that it has a cause that isn't its cause. Then:]

I have probably made this matter so plain that there is no point in reasoning about it any further, but I shall add just one more point. It is that in the supposed case we are discussing, the 'cause' isn't really a cause at all, because its power and influence have turned out not to be sufficient to produce such an effect, and if it isn't *sufficient* to produce it then it doesn't *produce* it. . . . Something that isn't sufficient to produce x at one time can't be sufficient to produce it at another time when the causally relevant circumstances are exactly the same. So even in a case where x does follow y, it doesn't do so because of y as its cause. You might try to get around this by supposing that the difference of time is a causally relevant circumstance; but that conflicts with the stipulation that y is the cause. ·Anyway, no-one thinks that mere difference of time is causally relevant, and that suggests yet another argument against the view I am attacking here·. If mere difference of time has no causal influence, then obviously the statement

y was sufficient to produce x at T_1 and not sufficient to produce it at T_2

is as absurd as the statement

y was sufficient to produce x at T_1 and not sufficient to produce it at T_1 .

Summing up: It is obvious that every effect has a necessary connection with its cause, i.e. with whatever is the true ground of and reason for its existence. Thus, if there is no event without a cause—as I proved earlier—then no event whatever is contingent in the way that Arminians suppose the free acts of the will to be contingent.

Section 9: How acts of the will connect with dictates of the understanding

It is clear that no acts of the will are contingent in the sense of being entirely without necessity—i.e. of not being necessary consequences of anything else to which they are connected—because every act of the •will is connected in some way with the •understanding. How? Well, each act of the will is shaped by the greatest apparent good in a way that I have already explained, namely: the soul always wills or chooses whatever appears most agreeable to it, given the mind's present view of the whole situation. . . . Nothing is more evident than that when men act voluntarily, doing 'what they please', they do what appears most agreeable to them. To deny this would be tantamount to saying that men don't choose what appears to suit them best or what seems most pleasing to them; or that they don't •choose what they •prefer—which is a contradiction. ·In those remarks, the understanding comes in through the expressions 'what appears. . .', and 'the mind's present view'·.

Because it is so obvious that the acts of the will have some connection with the dictates or views of the understanding, this is accepted by some of the main Arminian writers, particularly Whitby [see page 29] and Samuel Clarke. And George Turnbull accepts it too, although he is a great enemy to the doctrine of necessity. In his work *The Principles of Moral and Christian Philosophy* he approvingly cites another ('excellent') philosopher as sharing his view about this, in these words:

No man sets himself to do anything without having some view that serves him as a reason for what he is doing; and whatever faculties he employs, it is always the understanding that leads the way, shining whatever light it has; and all the soul's operative powers

are directed by that light, whether it is true or false. The will itself, however absolute and uncontrollable it may be thought to be, never fails to obey the dictates of the understanding. . . . The ideas and images in men's minds are the invisible powers that constantly govern them; and to these they all submit readily.

Let us now look impartially into the question of whether •the notions of liberty that these writers have is consistent with •this thesis about how the will relates to the understanding. Whitby clearly holds that the acts and determinations of the will always follow the understanding's view of the greatest good to be obtained or the greatest evil to be avoided. In other words, he holds that the determinations of the will constantly and infallibly follow these two things in the understanding:

- the content of the understanding's thoughts about what good is to be obtained and what evil is to be avoided by the conduct in question;
- the intensity and clarity of those thoughts, which are increased by attention and consideration.

He is extremely confident and dogmatic in this, as he is in every opinion that he maintains against the Calvinists, contemptuously writing off the contrary opinion as absurd and self-contradictory. You can see this in the following quotation from his *Five Points of Calvinism*:

It is certain that what naturally makes the understanding *perceive* is evidence that is proposed, apprehended, and taken into account. What makes the will *choose* is something that is approved by the understanding and therefore appears to the soul as good. And whatever the will *refuses* is something represented by the understanding as evil and therefore appearing to the will as evil. So all that God does or can require of us is to refuse the evil and choose the good. Thus, to say that

- evidence proposed, apprehended, and taken into account is not sufficient to make the understanding approve; or that

- the greatest good proposed, the greatest evil threatened, when thoroughly believed and reflected on, is not sufficient to get the will to choose the good and refuse the evil,

is in effect to say that

- the only thing that moves the will to choose or to refuse is not sufficient to get us to do so;

which *must* be false, because it is self-contradictory.

- Suppose we have a natural dislike for the truths proposed to us in the Bible; that can make us reluctant to attend to them, but it can't block our belief when we do read or hear them and attend to them. •Suppose we also have a resistance to the good that we ought to choose; that only can disincline us to believe that it is good and to approve it as our chief good. •Suppose we are drawn to the evil that we should decline; that only can make it harder for us to believe that it is the worst of evils. But through all this, what we do really believe to be our chief good *will* still be chosen; and what we do really apprehend as the worst of evils *will* be refused by us as long as we have that belief about it. To get us to pursue good and avoid evil, therefore, all God has to do is to illuminate our understandings so that we, attending to and considering what lies before us in our understandings, will apprehend and be convinced of our duty. . . .

Notice how clearly and confidently Whitby asserts that the greatest good proposed and the greatest evil threatened, when thoroughly believed and reflected, on is sufficient to get the will to choose the good and refuse the evil, and is the *only* thing that moves the will to choose or to refuse; that

it is self-contradictory to suppose otherwise; . . . and that we'll always choose what we *believe* to be our chief good, and refuse what we *apprehend* to be the worst of evils. He couldn't have made it clearer:

The determinations of the will must always follow the illumination, conviction, and attention of the understanding regarding the greatest good and the greatest evil that are proposed, going by •*how good or evil* the understanding takes them to be, and by •*how strongly* the understanding believes them to be good or evil. And this is •*necessarily* the case, and can't fail to be the case in even a single instance.

That last sentence certainly expresses what Whitby takes to be the status of his thesis, because he asserts that it is •*self-contradictory* to suppose the thesis false.

I am aware that in these assertions he is taking aim at the Calvinists. He wants to show, in opposition to them, that there is no need for the spirit of God to act on the will, altering it and steering it towards a good choice; and that all God does in this matter is to suggest ideas to the understanding; and Whitby thinks that if those ideas are attended to they will infallibly achieve the end of good decisions by the will. [In the original, what God is said not to do is called a 'physical operation', and what he is said to do is called a 'moral' one.] But whatever his plan was, he did say very directly that every act in which the will chooses or refuses is *necessary*; which is flatly contrary to his own notion of the liberty of the will. . . . On the view he has expressed here, every act of choice or refusal by the will depends on, and is necessarily connected with, some prior cause; and **the cause is not the will itself** or any act of the will's or anything pertaining to the will; rather, it is something belonging to another faculty, the understanding, whose acts precede all the acts of the will, and govern and determine them.

[Edwards now devotes more than a page to introducing and dismissing two attempts that Whitby might make to escape this conclusion. Each tries to make the will partly responsible for what the understanding does. How much attention the understanding gives to its own 'lights' may depend on (i) how much attention the person has voluntarily decided to pay to them, and/or on (ii) whether the person has been led by his earlier voluntary conduct to form bad habits. Edwards easily shoots both of these down. With either supposition, he says, the earlier acts of the will *necessarily* follow yet earlier deliverances of the understanding, so that the problem of freedom of the will re-arises with *them*. And trying to deal with this by *re-applying* move (i) or move (ii) still brings us back to acts of the will that are necessitated. Edwards concludes:] So Whitby's view implies that the will is necessarily determined in every one of its acts. . . . by a cause other than the will, a cause that doesn't come from or depend on any act of the will at all. This utterly abolishes his whole theory of liberty of will; at one stroke he has •*cut the sinews* of all his arguments from God's goodness, righteousness, faithfulness, and sincerity in his commands, promises, threats, calls, invitations and protests, which Whitby expounds in terms of 'reprobation', 'election', 'universal redemption', 'sufficient and effectual grace', and 'freedom of the will of man'; and has •*revealed* as pointless all his exclamations against the doctrine of the Calvinists, which he says accuse God of obvious unrighteousness, unfaithfulness, hypocrisy, untruthfulness, and cruelty.

Samuel Clarke in his *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* tries in a different way to get around the argument from •*volition's* necessary connection with the last dictate of the understanding to •*volition's* status as necessary. He supposes that the last dictate of the understanding *is* the act of the will—as distinct from its

occurring prior to the act of the will and necessitating it. Let him have this supposition—it won't alter the case for the necessity of the act. If the dictate of the understanding is the very same thing as the determination of the will (as Clarke supposes), then the determination of the will doesn't arise from choice; and if it doesn't arise from choice then freedom of choice had no hand in it: it is necessary, i.e. choice can't prevent it. . . .

Let us combine this view of Clarke's with the Arminian view that

- Liberty consists in the will's determining its own acts, having free opportunity, and being without all necessity,

or—to put this more correctly by not treating the will as though it were an agent, an acting substance, rather than a power or faculty of the soul—

- Liberty consists in the soul's having power and opportunity to have what determinations of the will it pleases.

And if the determinations of the will are the very same things as the last dictates of the understanding, then

- Liberty consists in the mind's having power and opportunity to choose its own dictates of the understanding.

But this is absurd; for it makes •the determination of choice prior to •the dictate of the understanding, and the ground of it; which is inconsistent with the view that the dictate of the understanding is the determination of choice.

The only apparent way out is to suppose that one determination of the will (= dictate of the understanding) is caused by a *prior* determination of the will (= dictate of the understanding); but that will lead us back into the old absurdity [Edwards's phrase] of an infinite regress of determinations, each caused by an earlier member of the series. . . .

And another point: Clarke's view runs the understanding together with the will, implying that they are one and the same. Never mind just now whether they *are* the same; the point I want to make concerns what happens to the Arminian notion of liberty if we combine it with this view that understanding = will. It turns the Arminian doctrine of liberty into this:

- Liberty consists in a self-determining power in the *understanding*, free of all necessity; being independent, undetermined by anything prior to its own acts and determinations; and the more the *understanding* is thus independent and sovereign over its own determinations, the more free it is.

(This is a fairly standard formulation of the Arminian doctrine, with 'will' replaced by 'understanding' throughout.) This means that •the freedom of the soul as a moral agent must consist in •the understanding's independence from any evidence or appearance of things, or anything at all that presents itself to the mind prior to the understanding's determination! What a liberty *this* is! An understanding that has this 'liberty' has no trouble judging either •according to the evidence or •against it; it has at all times a sovereign command over itself to judge either favorably or unfavorably anything that is plainly exhibited to it. It's a kind of 'liberty' that makes people impervious to persuasive reasoning, arguments, protests, and other such moral means and inducements. Yet the Arminians defend their notion of liberty-with-no-necessity by just such means as those. According to Clarke's view, the •more free men are the •less they are governed by such means, the less they are subject to or influenced by the power of evidence and reason in their decisions about what to believe.

•Coming back now to the Arminian view of freedom on the assumption that understanding and will are not the same:•

The Arminian notion of liberty-without-necessity implies that a free will is not determined by the understanding or necessarily connected with the understanding; and that the further the will is from such connection, the freer it is. When its liberty is full and complete, the determinations of the will have *no connection at all* with the dictates of the understanding. If that is how things stand, it will be useless to try to get someone to perform a free virtuous act by presenting things to his understanding; indeed, *all* instructions, advice, invitations, protests and arguments will be useless; for in all these we merely present things to the understanding, trying to give the person's mind a clear and vivid view of the objects of choice. This will be in vain if the person's will is free, i.e. self-determined and independent of the understanding. [Edwards begins the paragraph 'And whether the understanding and will are the same or no', but this must be a slip, because all the rest of the paragraph presupposes that they are *not* the same.]

Section 10: Volition necessarily connected with the influence of motives; criticisms of Chubb's doctrines and arguments concerning freedom of the will

We have reached the conclusion that every act of the will

- has some cause,

and therefore (as I have proved)

- has a necessary connection with its cause,

and therefore

- is necessary by a necessity of connection and consequence.

Something that clearly brings out the truth of this conclusion is the fact that *every* act of the will is aroused by some motive. Here's a consideration that makes it obvious that

this is right. Suppose that a mind wills without being aroused by any motive or inducement; that mind has no goal that it proposes to itself or pursues in willing; it aims at nothing, and seeks nothing. If it doesn't seek anything, then it doesn't *go after* anything or exert any inclination or preference towards anything. And so we are brought to a self-contradiction, because the mind's •willing something is the same thing as its •going after something by an act of preference and inclination. . . .

If the acts of the will are aroused by motives, then motives are the causes of their being aroused—or (the same thing) causes of their coming into existence. From which it follows that the existence of the acts of the will is strictly speaking the *effect* of their motives. The only way motives can *do* anything as motives or inducements is by their influence; and what comes about through their influence is the *effect* of them. For that is the notion of an effect—something that comes about through the influence of something else.

And if volitions are strictly speaking the effects of their motives, then they're necessarily connected with their motives. I have shown that every effect and outcome is necessarily connected with whatever is the real ground of and reason for its existence. Obviously, then, volition is necessary, and doesn't come from any self-determining power in the will: a volition that is •caused by previous motive and inducement is not •caused by the will's sovereign power over itself to determine, cause, and arouse volitions in itself. And these obvious facts about motives push the notion of indifference or equilibrium out of the picture, because what motives do is precisely to tilt the will, giving it a certain inclination in one direction.

Thomas Chubb in his *Collection of Tracts on Various Subjects* has advanced a theory of liberty that is greatly divided against itself and undercuts itself—doing this in

many ways, of which I shall pick out five.

(1) Chubb asserts over and over again that the will in all its acts is influenced by motive and arousal; and that this is *always* the prior ground of and reason for all its acts. [Edwards supports this with quotations from Chubb. Then:] And yet according to his theory what enables the influence of motives to arouse us to action and to be actually a ground of volition is the mind's volition or choice that they should do so. He loudly insists that in all free actions the mind doesn't have the volitions that motives arouse until it *chooses* to do so. It chooses whether to go along with the motive that presents itself to the mind; and when various motives are presented, it chooses which it will give way to and which it will reject. 'Every man has power to act or to refrain from acting agreeably with or contrary to any motive that presents itself.' [Edwards quotes two more passages to the same effect, says there are many others, and continues:]

Now how can these things hang together? How can the mind first act, and by its act of volition and choice determine what motives are to be the ground of and reason for its volition and choice? Chubb's account implies that the choice is already made before the motive has its effect, and that the volition is already performed before the motive prevails so as actually to be the ground of the volition—so that one motive's coming out top is a consequence of the volition of which that same motive is the ground! If the mind has already chosen to comply with a particular motive and to consent to being aroused by it, the arousal arrives too late and has no more work to do. . . . In the picture that Chubb draws for us, the son enters the scene before the father who begets him: the choice is supposed to be the ground for the motive's influence, yet that same influence is supposed to be the ground for the choice. . . .

[Edwards adds a further paragraph pointing out that on Chubb's theory the notion of what is prior or 'previous' comes unstuck: a volition is influenced by a prior motive which gets its influence from the prior occurrence of that volition.]

(2) In line with the inconsistent notion of the will that I have been criticizing, . . . Chubb frequently calls motives and arousals of the will to action 'the passive ground or reason of that action'. A remarkable phrase! I don't think there's anything more unintelligible and empty of clear and consistent meaning in all the writings of Duns Scotus or Thomas Aquinas. [This is said in contempt for those famous scholastic philosophers.] [Edwards devotes two pages to discussing things that Chubb might have meant by 'passive ground etc.', shooting each one down. The discussion brings great analytic competence to bear on a topic that doesn't deserve it.]

(3) Although Chubb asserts that every volition has some motive, and that 'in the nature of the thing no volition can take place without some motive to induce it', he says that volition doesn't always follow the *strongest* motive. . . . Here are his words:

Though with regard to •physical causes the strongest always prevails, it is otherwise with regard to •moral causes. With them, sometimes the stronger prevails but sometimes the weaker. It's clear why there is this difference: it is because what we call 'moral causes' are strictly speaking not *causes* at all, but merely passive *reasons* for or *arousals* to the action in question—arousals that we have power to (or are at liberty to) comply with or reject, as I have showed above.

And so throughout the paragraph he uses various phrases in insisting that the will isn't always determined by the strongest motive. (That is, by the motive that is strongest

prior to the volition itself. If we absurdly used 'strongest' to mean 'actually prevailing', *defining* the strongest motive as the one that is acted on, then of course, as Chubb points out, it is trivially true that the strongest motive always prevails.) In other parts of his work he says repeatedly that the will is not determined by any superior strength or advantage that motives have from any constitution or state of things or any circumstances whatsoever previous to the actual determination of the will. His whole discussion of human liberty implies this; his whole theory is based on it.

But these claims can't all be right. Before a choice is made, the relevant motives vary in how strong they are. Chubb rightly supposes that the motives 'invite', 'induce', 'arouse', and 'dispose the mind to action'. This implies that the motives have in themselves something that is *inviting*, some tendency to *induce* and *dispose* the mind to volition. And if they have in themselves this nature and tendency, no doubt they have it in different degrees, some greater and some less. And the ones that have most of this tendency, considered with all their nature and circumstances prior to the volition, are the *strongest* motives, and those that have least are the *weakest* motives.

Now, we are invited to believe that volition sometimes doesn't follow the motive that is strongest, i.e. has the most previous tendency or advantage (all things considered) to induce or arouse it, but follows the weakest motive, the one which, as it stands previously in the mind's view, has least tendency to induce it. If that ever happens, it will be a case in which **the will apparently acts wholly without motive**, without any previous reason to dispose the mind to it; and this is contrary to what Chubb thinks is the case. What act is this? It is **the act of preferring the weakest motive**. [Edwards argues ingeniously and at length for his view that Chubb must say that there is no reason or motive

for choosing to be influenced by the weakest motive x. If there were one, *its* strength would be part of the strength of x-all-things-considered, so that x-all-things-considered wouldn't be the weakest motive after all. He then continues:]

An act of choice or preference is a *comparative* act, in which the mind compares two or more things that it sees as competitors. If the mind in this comparative act prefers the option that appears inferior in the comparison, then it does this without any motive or inducement or temptation whatsoever. Here is a parallel case, which may help you to see that I am right about this:

Suppose that a hungry man has the offer of two sorts of food; he has an appetite for each, but a stronger appetite for one than for the other; and apart from his appetites there is absolutely nothing in the situation to induce him to take either kind of food. If he chooses the food for which he has the lesser appetite, declining the food his appetite for which is stronger, this is a choice made absolutely without previous motive, arousal, reason, or temptation—just as it would be if he had no appetite at all for either kind of food. . . .

If the mind in its volition can go *beyond* motive, then it can go *without* motive; for when it goes beyond the motive it is out of the reach of the motive, out of the limits of its influence—so it is without motive. If that can happen, it follows that volition doesn't depend on motive, and no reason can be given for what Chubb so often asserts, namely that 'in the nature of things volition cannot take place without a motive to induce it'.

If God endowed a balance with a natural agency or activeness of such a sort that: when unequal weights are put into the scales of the balance, its agency could enable it to cause the balance to tilt so that the lesser weight goes down and the greater one goes up, this would clearly demonstrate

that how the balance moves doesn't depend on weights in the scales; any more than it would depend on weights if the balance could move itself when there is no weight in either scale. The balance has an activeness that allows it to move itself against the greater weight; it must certainly be more than sufficient to allow the balance to move itself when there is no weight at all.

Chubb holds that the will can't stir at all without some motive; and that if there is a motive for doing x and none for not doing x, a volition to do x will *infallibly* follow that motive. This amounts to supposing that the will is **entirely dependent on motives**; for if it weren't *wholly* dependent on them, surely it could help itself a little without them; or help itself a little against a motive without help from the strength and weight of a contrary motive. But his view that the will can choose as it pleases from amongst the motives that are presented to it, even choosing to be influenced by the weakest of them and neglecting the strongest, supposes the will to be **wholly independent of motives**.

[In two further paragraphs, Edwards picks out two other features of Chubb's position that are inconsistent with his view that the will can choose what motive to be influenced by.]

(4) Chubb holds that necessity is utterly inconsistent with agency. According to him, to say of an event of which x is the subject that

(a) the event was necessitated, and (b) the event was an *action* that x performed,

is self-contradictory. All through his discussions of liberty he supposes that necessity rules out agency [= activeness] or freedom; and that if you deny this you'll be implying that liberty and necessity are the same thing, that action and passion [= 'doing and undergoing', 'doing and being-done-to'] are the same thing. Thus, he seems to believe that strictly

speaking the only action is volition, because the only actions are free actions, and those are all volitions. As for the *effects* of volition in body or mind, they are all necessary but we call them 'free' because they are the effects of an act that isn't necessary.

And yet according to him volition itself—every act of volition, every *free* act of volition—is the effect of a volition; and it follows from this, given the things I have quoted from him, that every act of free volition must be necessary! [Edwards devotes most of two pages to quoting passages from Chubb which, he says, imply that every volition is the effect of a volition. When someone has chosen to act in a certain way, 'he could *if he had pleased* have chosen and done the contrary'. Edwards reads this as meaning that he could have chosen to choose the contrary, implying that the choice he did make resulted from his choice to make it. 'The will. . . is at liberty to choose what kind of good it pleases.' Edwards comments: 'If those last words mean anything, they must mean that the will is at liberty to choose what kind of good it chooses to choose; implying that the act of choice itself is determined by an antecedent choice.' All this presupposes that Chubb regards not only physical events but also mental ones as produced by volitions; and Edwards quotes passages showing that he does. Then:]

Now these things imply two great absurdities.

(a) Chubb clearly supposes that every free act of choice is commanded by and is the product of free choice, which implies that the first free act of choice that occurs in the situation we are thinking about—or indeed the first free act of choice that anyone ever performed—is the product of a previous act of choice. I hope I don't need to work hard to convince you that it is an absurdity to say that the very first act is the product of another act that occurred before it.

(b) Suppose that Chubb were right in his insistence that every free act of choice is the product or the effect of a free act of choice; it would follow from this, by his own principles, that no act of choice is free—every single one is necessary. Why? Because every act of choice, being the •effect of a foregoing act, would be •necessarily connected with that foregoing cause. As Chubb himself says: 'When the self-moving power is exercised, it becomes the necessary cause of its effects.' So his notion of a free act that is rewardable or punishable is a heap of contradictions. It is a •free act, and yet by his own notion of freedom it is •necessary. . . . According to him, every free act is the product of a free act; so that there must be an infinite sequence of free acts, *without* a beginning, in an agent that *has* a beginning. Thus: an infinite sequence of acts—every one of them free, yet none of them free and all of them necessary. They are all rewardable or punishable, yet the agent can't reasonably be the object of reward or punishment on account of any one of these actions. He is active in them all and passive in none; yet also active in none but passive in all.

(5) Chubb strenuously denies that motives are *causes* of the acts of the will. [Edwards goes on to quote instances of this denial in Chubb's book, following that by many other quotations in which Chubb implies that motives *are* causes of volitions—saying that they 'dispose' the mind to act, 'influence' it, 'produce' actions, are 'necessary' to actions, and so on. All these passages taken together yield 'another whole heap of inconsistencies', Edwards says. He winds up this entire section thus:]

So we see that Chubb is driven into strange inconsistencies by combining •his notion of liberty as consisting in the will's power of self-determination and freedom from all necessity with •the common-sense view that there can't be any volition without a motive. If we think hard about this, we

may become convinced that the two can't be reconciled. •So we have to choose•. Well, it is in a way self-evident that there can't be any act of will or preference of the mind unless there is some motive or inducement—something in the mind's view that it aims at and goes after. So it is really obvious that the kind of liberty that Arminians insist on doesn't exist anywhere in the universe, and isn't even possible or conceivable.

Section 11: The evidence that God has certain foreknowledge of the volitions of moral agents

In this section I shall defend the thesis that

•God has certain foreknowledge of acts of the wills of moral agents,

and in the next section I shall defend the inference from that premise to the conclusion that

•The volitions of moral agents are not contingent, i.e. are necessary consequences of prior events.

You might think that there isn't any need to argue in defence of that premise when addressing oneself to people who profess to be Christians, but there *is*! There have been—especially in recent times—people who claim to believe that the Bible is the word of God yet *deny* that God has certain foreknowledge of the free acts of moral agents. So I shall consider the case for such foreknowledge on God's part, doing this as fully as the designed limits of this book will permit; assuming throughout that I am talking to people who accept the truth of the Bible.

My **first argument** [the second begins on page 50] is based on God's prediction of the acts of moral agents. My handling of this matter will have two axioms in the background:

•*The need-to-know axiom*•: If God doesn't •foreknow these events then he can't •peremptorily and certainly

foretell them. If he has merely an uncertain guess concerning events of this kind, then an uncertain guess is all he can declare. To predict something in a positive manner is to imply a claim to *know* about it in advance.

·*The scope axiom*·: If God doesn't certainly foreknow the •future volitions of moral agents then he can't certainly foreknow •events that depend on those volitions either. The only way to foreknow those dependent events is *through* foreknowledge of the volitions on which they depend, and the former knowledge can't be more certain than the latter.

Let the consequences of the volitions of moral agents be as large, numerous and widespread as you like, making series of differences that multiply as they branch off, with each series running all through the universe and continuing to all eternity; God must be as ignorant of all these infinitely many consequences as he is of the volition that started them off. That whole state of things—however important and extensive it is, must be hidden from him ·if he can't foreknow the volitions of moral agents·.

I don't think anyone will deny either of those two axioms, so I now proceed to point out certain facts.

(1) Men's moral conduct and qualities, their virtues and vices, their wickedness and good practice—things rewardable and punishable—have often been foretold by God. Pharaoh's moral conduct in refusing to obey God's command to let his people go was foretold. God said to Moses: 'I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go.' (Exodus 3:19) Here God professes not only to guess at but to know Pharaoh's future disobedience. [Edwards adds a long series of further examples from the old and new testaments.]

(2) Many events have been foretold by God that *depend on* the moral conduct of particular people, being brought about

through their virtuous or vicious actions. For example, God told Abraham in advance that the children of Israel would go to live in Egypt (Genesis 15); and their doing so came about through the wickedness of Joseph's brothers in selling him, the wickedness of his mistress, and his own notable virtue in resisting her temptation. [Then there are about eight further biblical examples.]

(3) God has often foretold the future moral conduct of nations and people, of numbers, bodies, and successions of men; and has foretold his own judicial proceedings which—along with many other events—depend on the virtues and vices of men; none of which could be foreknown if the volitions of men acting as moral agents hadn't been foreseen. The future cruelty of the Egyptians in oppressing Israel, and God's judging and punishing them for it, was foretold long before it actually happened (Genesis 15:13-14). [Edwards backs this up with about four pages of further biblical examples, including:] Christ himself foretold his being delivered into the hands of the elders, priests, and scribes, and being cruelly treated by them and condemned to death; that they would hand him over to the Gentiles; and that he would be mocked, flogged and crucified (Matthew 16:21). . . .

(4) Unless God foreknows the future acts of moral agents, all the prophecies we have in scripture concerning the great apostasy of the Antichrist—

the rise, reign, wicked qualities, and deeds of 'the man of sin' and his workers and hangers-on; the extent and long continuance of his dominion; his influence on the minds of princes and others, to corrupt them and draw them away to idolatry and other foul vices; his great and cruel persecutions ·of Christians·, the behaviour of the saints under these great temptations, and so on

—are prophecies that God uttered without *knowing* the things that he foretold. The predictions concerning this great apostasy are all of a moral kind, relating to men's virtues and vices and the behaviour and other upshots that depend on them; and they are very detailed, with most of them being often repeated with many precise descriptions of qualities, conduct, influence, effects, extent, duration, periods, circumstances, final result, and so on, which it would take too long to specify in detail. It would be utterly absurd to suppose that God predicted *all these* when he didn't have any certain knowledge of the future moral behaviour of free agents.

(5) Unless God foreknows the future acts of men's wills, and their behaviour as moral agents, all the great things that are foretold in both the old and new testaments concerning the glorious future of the •kingdom of the Messiah were things that God predicted and promised on the basis of mere guesses, not knowing in advance whether any of them would happen. For that •kingdom is not of this world; it doesn't consist in external things, but is within men, and consists in •the reign of virtue in their hearts, in •righteousness and peace and joy in the holy ghost. . . . [Edwards goes on a great length about how the coming of Christ's kingdom depends on the moral conduct of men, and emphasizes the positive, confident, 'peremptory' manner in which God makes his predictions. He lays special stress on two of these:] That great promise and oath of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so much celebrated in both the old and new testaments, namely 'In their seed all the nations and families of the earth will be blessed'. . . . That first gospel promise that ever was made to mankind, that great prediction of the salvation of the Messiah and his victory over Satan, made to our first parents (Genesis 3:15).

(6) If God doesn't have foreknowledge of the future actions of moral agents, it follows that the prophecies of scripture

in general are made without foreknowledge. For most if not all the prophecies in scripture are either predictions of the future behaviour of moral agents or of outcomes depending on them or somehow connected with them. . . . Consider for example the individual men who have been the great conquerors of the world, having (under God) the main hand in the states of the world at all later times—I mean men such as Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander, Pompey, Julius Caesar and so on. *Their* coming into existence undoubtedly depended on many millions of acts of the will in their parents. And most of these volitions depended on millions of volitions in their contemporaries of the same generation; and most of these on millions of millions of volitions in preceding generations. As we go back in time, the number of volitions that were in some way the occasion of the event multiply like the branches of a river until they come at last to a virtually infinite number. This won't seem strange to you if you think about what scientists tell us of the innumerable multitudes of things that are at work in the generation of animals. [Edwards lists some of them: sperm, ova, and so on. Then he goes into ways in which voluntary human conduct affects which human beings are conceived and born. Then an example in which the founding of a whole empire can be traced back to one person's happening to have a thought at a particular moment. And so on, concluding:] These hints may be enough to convince any thoughtful person that the whole state of the world of mankind in all ages, and the very existence of every person who has ever lived since the times of the ancient prophets, has depended on more volitions or acts of the wills of men than there are sands on the sea-shore.

Thus, if God doesn't exactly and perfectly foresee the future acts of men's wills, all the predictions that he ever uttered concerning. . . all the wars, commotions, victories,

prosperity, and calamities of any kingdoms, nations, or communities in the world have all been made without knowledge.

Thus, if it were true that God cannot foresee the volitions and free actions of men, he couldn't foresee anything relating to the state of the human world in future ages—not so much as the existence of one person who will live in that world. All he could foresee would be (a) events that he himself would bring about by the miraculous exercise of his immediate power; and (b) things that would occur in the natural material world by the laws of motion and those parts of the course of nature that are independent of the actions of mankind—like a very able mathematician and astronomer calculating precisely the revolutions of the heavenly bodies. . . .

And if we think hard about this matter, we'll find good reason to think that God couldn't with any absolute certainty foresee even those events if he couldn't certainly foreknow the volitions of human beings. (a) Whenever God miraculously intervenes in the natural order of things, he does so because the state of the moral world requires him to do so. And knowing when *that* will be the case involves knowing in advance how men will behave. (b) What the natural world is *for* is the moral world, and how things go in the former is undoubtedly subordinate to God's designs with respect to the latter. So, on the present supposition that God can't foreknow how men will act voluntarily, he can't predict the sorts of natural things that a good astronomer might try to predict, because he can't know in advance when he will find it appropriate to intervene miraculously in the natural order. [Edwards adds four 'corollaries', stating further consequences of the thesis that God can't foreknow the voluntary actions of men. •The apostle James spoke falsely when he said 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world' (Acts 15:18). •Predictions

that God has uttered 'in the most positive manner' are not merely unaccompanied by *knowledge* but are based on *very uncertain conjectures*, because they depend on countless human volitions no one of which God knows about in advance. •Jesus spoke falsely when he expressed many great and important predictions depending on men's moral actions, and said 'Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away' (Matthew 24:35). •God spoke falsely on the many occasions when he spoke of his predictions as evidences of foreknowledge (several verses in Isaiah 41-48).]

Second argument: [the first began on page 47.] If God doesn't foreknow the volitions of moral agents, then he didn't foreknow the fall of man or of angels, and so couldn't foreknow the great things that resulted from those events; such as his sending his Son into the world to die for sinners, and everything relating to the great work of redemption; all the things that were done for four thousand years before Christ came to prepare the way for it. [Edwards lists some of the events that were parts of 'the great work of redemption', and refers to biblical passages where God is said or implied to have *known* that the great work was going to be done.]

Third argument: If God is ignorant of the future volitions of free agents, it follows that he must in many cases truly repent [here = 'regret'] what he has done, and must genuinely wish he had acted differently. Why? Because in the most important affairs—namely the affairs of God's moral kingdom—the outcomes are uncertain and contingent, and must often turn out quite differently from how he had expected. If that were so, we would have reason to understand *literally* the statement in Genesis 6:6: 'It repented the lord that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him at his heart.' [Edwards cites other biblical passages saying that God does not 'repent' of anything.]

Fourth argument: It will also follow that God, because he is continually repenting of what he has done, must be constantly changing his intentions regarding his future conduct. . . . His purposes for the main parts of his scheme—namely the ones affecting the state of his moral kingdom—must be always liable to be upset through his lack of foresight; and he must be continually setting his system right again after it gets out of order through the contingency of the actions of moral agents. Instead of being absolutely unchangeable, God must perform countless acts of repentance and changes of intention—ininitely more than any other being, simply because his vastly extensive responsibilities range over infinitely many things that are to him contingent and uncertain. In such a situation he must be mostly occupied in mending broken links as well as he can, correcting his disjointed scheme of things in the best manner possible in the circumstances. In governing the world that he has made and has the care of, the supreme lord of all things must be under great and miserable disadvantages, through his being utterly unable to find out in advance various important things that will later happen to his system—things that he could have provided for in advance if only he had known about them in advance. . . . And man has the power through his voluntary actions to disappoint God, smash his plans, make him continually change his mind, subject him to vexation, and bring him into confusion.

[Then a long paragraph of biblical quotations asserting God's unchangeability.]

Fifth argument: If you *think through* this notion of God's ignorance of future volitions of moral agents, you'll see reason to think that it implies this: God after he had made the world was liable to be *completely frustrated, not achieving the end* for which he had created it. . . . It's clear that the moral world is what the natural world is *for*: the rest of the

creation is merely a house that God has built with furniture for moral agents, and the good or bad state of the moral world depends on how moral agents employ their moral agency, and so depends on their volitions. So if God can't foresee the volitions (because they are contingent and subject to no kind of necessity), the affairs of the moral world are liable to go •wrong, •extremely wrong, right up the scale to being •utterly ruined. . . .

According to the theory I am arguing against, God couldn't foresee the fall of men or the fall of angels, and must be greatly disappointed by these events; and so his grand scheme for our redemption and for destroying the works of the devil, and all the great things God has done to further these designs, must be merely the *products of his own disappointment*—contrivances to mend as well as he could his system, which originally was entirely good and perfectly beautiful, but was broken and thwarted by the free will of angels and men. And still he must be have been liable to be totally disappointed a second time: he couldn't know that he would have his desired success in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of his only-begotten Son, and the other great works that he performed to restore the state of things. He couldn't know after all whether there would actually be any reasonable amount of restoration, because that depended on the free will of men. Most of the Christian world fell away from Christianity into something worse than heathenism, and this continued for many centuries. [Edwards is referring here to the Roman Catholic church.] If God couldn't foresee men's volitions, how could he know whether Christ-endom would ever return from this falling away? And how could he foretell how soon it would begin? The apostle ·Paul· says it began to happen in his time—how could it be known how far it would go in that age? Indeed, how could it be known that

the gospel that wasn't effective in reforming the Jews would ever be effective in turning the heathen nations from their heathen religions in which they had been confirmed for so many centuries?

It is often said in the Bible that •God, who made the world for himself and created it for his pleasure, would certainly achieve his purpose in creating the world and in all his works; that •just as all things come *from* him so they would all be *to* him; and that •in the final outcome of things it would appear that he is the first and the last: 'And he said unto me "It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last"' (Revelation 21:6). These things are not consistent with God's being liable to be disappointed in everything he has done; indeed, they aren't consistent with his failing in *anything* that he has undertaken.

Section 12: God can't have certain foreknowledge of the future volitions of moral agents if they are contingent in a way that excludes all necessity

Having proved that God has a certain and infallible foreknowledge of the voluntary acts of moral agents, I now embark on showing that it follows from this that these events are necessary with a necessity of connection or consequence. •This will complete the inference presented at the start of section 11• [page 47].

So far as I have been able to discover, the leading Arminian theologians deny that this follows, and affirm that such foreknowledge is not evidence that the foreknown event is in any way necessary. Let us go into this question thoroughly and in detail. I can't help thinking that the right answer can be discovered by careful thought.

As an aid to having this matter properly considered, I offer three major points.

(1) It is very evident that if a thing *x* already exists or has existed, and the existence of another thing *y* is infallibly and unbreakably connected with *x*, then the existence of *y* is necessary. Note four points of detail: (a) As I pointed out earlier when explaining the nature of necessity [item (b) on page 11], if something has existed in the past, its past existence is now *necessary*: it has already made sure of existence, so it's too late for any possibility of alteration in that respect; it's now impossible for it to be false that the thing has existed. (b) If there is any such thing as a divine foreknowledge of the •present• volitions of free agents, that foreknowledge is something that has already existed; so now its •past• existence is necessary; it is now utterly impossible for it not to be the case that this foreknowledge did exist. (c) It is also very obvious that things that are indissolubly connected with other things that are necessary are themselves necessary. (Just as a proposition whose truth is necessarily connected with another proposition that is necessarily true is itself necessarily true.) To deny this would be a contradiction: it would be in effect to say that •the connection was unbreakable and also that •it could be broken. . . . I leave it to you to judge how absurd that is. (d) It is equally obvious •that if there is a full, certain, and infallible foreknowledge of the future existence of the volitions of moral agents, then there is a certain, infallible, and unbreakable connection between those volitions and that foreknowledge; and •that therefore—by (a), (b) and (c)—those volitions are necessary events, because they are infallibly and unbreakably connected with something that has already existed and thus is now necessary and cannot not have been. To say otherwise. . . is to commit oneself to the absurdity that it isn't impossible for a proposition that is now infallibly known to be true to have no truth in it!

(2) I shall prove that no future event can be certainly foreknown if its occurrence is contingent and without any necessity. [Edwards could validly infer this from his previous point, by elementary logic. From

(1) If for some x : x is necessary and *If x , then y is necessary*, then y is necessary,

infer

(2) If y is not necessary, then there is no x such that x is necessary and *If x , then y is necessary*.

For some reason, Edwards ignores this proof, and goes in for something more roundabout, though it is not without interest.] It is impossible for a thing to be certainly •known to any intellect unless it is •evident to that intellect. To suppose otherwise is to imply a contradiction: because

P is certainly known to understanding U

is the same as

P is evident to U,

which is the same as

U sees P's evidentness.

But no understanding—created or uncreated, •human or divine—can see evidentness where there isn't any! for that would be to see something to exist that *doesn't* exist. So any truth that is absolutely without evidentness •at a given time• is absolutely unknowable •at that time•; to suppose that it is known is a contradiction.

But if there is any future event whose existence is contingent, with nothing necessary about it, the future occurrence of that event is absolutely without evidentness •now•. For it to be evident in any way, it must be either •self-evident or •proved. Why? Because if something is evident, it must either be evident in itself (•i.e. self-evident•) or evident in something else—i.e. evident through its connection with something else (•through which it can be proved•). But a future event whose occurrence isn't in any way necessary can't be evident in either of these ways. •It can't be self-evident;

for if it were, it could now be known through what is now to be seen in the thing itself, i.e. its present existence or the necessity of its nature; but we have stipulated that it doesn't yet exist and that it isn't necessary that it will come to exist. •Nor can it be proved, i.e. made evident through its connection with something else, because that is also contrary to the case as we have stipulated it. If something existing *now* were connected with the future occurrence of the contingent event, that would destroy its contingency! Thus it is demonstrated that there is in the •present• nature of things absolutely nothing making it evident that the contingent—in no way necessary—event will occur; so it can't •now• be seen to be evident, which is just to say that it can't •now• be known. [Throughout all this, and in some other places, 'evidentness' replaces Edwards's 'evidence'. The words could mean the same in his day, but they can't in ours. In the next paragraph our sense of the word seems to be involved, as well as the other sense, and accordingly 'evidence' is allowed to stand. But bear in mind that for Edwards the 'evidence' of something is conceptually tied to the thing's being 'evident'.]

Let us consider this in an example. Suppose that 5760 years ago the only thing that existed was God, and that then something else—a body, a spirit, an entire *world*—sprang into existence out of nothing, taking on a particular nature and form; all in absolute contingency, without God or anything else being involved in its causation, and with there being no sort of ground or reason for its existence, no dependence on or connection with anything that existed before. In this situation, there was no evidence of that event beforehand. There was no evidence of it to be seen in the thing itself, for it didn't yet exist. [You might think that in that sentence Edwards is making the highly dubious assumption that *one can't see anything in the nature of x unless x exists*; but he isn't. Rather, he is relying on the thesis that *one can't see existence in the nature of x unless x exists*—and that is perfectly all right. If existence

can be seen in the nature of x then x exists necessarily, and what exists necessarily exists at all times; so if x doesn't exist now, . . . etc.] And there was no evidence of it to be seen in anything else, for that would involve connection, which is contrary to the initial stipulation. . . . This event was absolutely without evidence, and therefore absolutely unknowable. Any increase in power of understanding or in capacity for noticing—even an *infinite* increase in these—would contribute nothing towards spotting any signs or evidences of this future contingent event. An increase in the strength of our sight may increase our ability to discern evidence that is far off and very much hidden and shrouded in clouds and darkness; but it doesn't increase our ability to discern evidence where there isn't any!. . . . Rather, it increases our ability to see and be sure that there isn't any.

(3) To . . . say that God knows for sure—not merely conjecturing—that a certain thing will infallibly happen, while at the same time knowing that it is contingent in such a way that possibly it won't happen, is to imply that his knowledge is inconsistent with itself. . . . And if God knows everything, he knows that this future occurrence is uncertain. If it really is contingent, then God sees it as contingent. . . . If volitions are in themselves contingent events, with nothing necessary about them, then someone's predicting them in a peremptory and confident manner doesn't show how complete his knowledge is, but rather that he is ignorant and mistaken, because it reveals him as supposing to be certain a proposition that is—in its own nature, and all things considered—uncertain and contingent. Possible defence:

'God may have foreknowledge of contingent events by means that we can't conceive of.'

That is ridiculous, just as it would be ridiculous to say

'For all we know to the contrary, God may know contradictions to be true',

or

'God may know a thing to be certain while also knowing it not to be certain, though we can't conceive how he could do this—he has ways of knowing which we can't grasp.'

[Edwards now embarks on something he labels 'Corollary 1'. Its basic content is sharp and clear; but his presentation is hard to follow, partly because he approaches his target by an indirect route without properly explaining what he is doing and why. The target is a line of thought that says

God's foreknowledge of x's occurrence doesn't imply that x is necessary, in the way that God's decreeing that x shall occur implies that x is necessary.

Edwards identifies two bases someone might have for accepting this, and criticizes them in turn. (a) The assumption might be that a divine decree that x shall occur makes x *more* necessary than does divine foreknowledge of x's occurrence. Edwards says he has shown that divine foreknowledge of x's occurrence implies that x is absolutely, perfectly, completely necessary; there can't be any question of anything's implying that x is *more* necessary than that. (b) The assumption might be that a divine decree that x shall occur *makes* it necessary that x shall occur, whereas divine foreknowledge of x's occurrence doesn't *make* anything be the case—it doesn't have any *influence* in the world. Edwards quotes Whitby and two other writers making this point, e.g. writing that 'God's foreknowledge is not the cause of future things; rather, their being future is the cause of God's foreknowledge of them'. Edwards in reply concedes this difference between decrees and foreknowledge, but declares it to be irrelevant to the real point at issue, namely whether events that God foreknows are necessary. He writes:] Infallible foreknowledge of x can prove the necessity of x without being what causes the necessity. If the foreknowledge of

x is absolute, this proves x to be necessary—proves that it is impossible for x not to come about *somehow*, through a decree or in some other way if there are any other ways. My opponents on this matter assume that because certain foreknowledge doesn't *cause* an event to be necessary as a decree does, therefore it doesn't *prove* it to be necessary as a decree does. But that rests wholly on the supposition that nothing can •prove something to be necessary, or be •evidence of its being necessary, unless it has a causal influence to •make it necessary; and this is untenable. If certain foreknowledge of the future occurrence of an event isn't what first •makes it impossible that it should fail to occur, it can and certainly does •demonstrate that it is impossible that it should fail to occur, whatever the source of that impossibility may be. . . . It is as evident as anything can be that a thing that is infallibly known to be true can't possibly turn out not to be true; so there is a necessity that it should be true—and it makes no difference to *this* whether the knowledge is the cause of this necessity or the necessity is the cause of the knowledge.

[This next paragraph responds to something Whitby has quoted someone as saying: 'Foreknowledge has no more influence on things, to make them necessary, than after-knowledge does'.] All certain knowledge—whether it be foreknowledge, or after-knowledge, or at-the-same-time knowledge—proves the thing known to be necessary now, by some means or other; i.e. it proves that it is impossible that the thing should now be otherwise than true. I freely admit that foreknowledge doesn't prove a thing to be necessary *any more than* after-knowledge does; but •in saying this I am tying necessity to after-knowledge, not cutting it loose from foreknowledge. After-knowledge that is certain and infallible proves that it is now impossible that the known proposition should be not true. After-knowledge proves that it has now, somehow or other, become impossible

that the relevant proposition—the one affirming that the event in question has occurred—should be false. And the same holds for certain foreknowledge. . . .

There must be a certainty in things themselves before they can be •certainly known or—the same thing—•known to be certain. For certainty of knowledge is simply knowing or detecting the certainty in the things themselves that are known. So there must be a certainty in things, to be a basis for certainty of knowledge and to make things capable of being known to be certain. The necessity of the proposition that something will occur consists in the firm and infallible •connection between the subject and predicate of that proposition. All certainty of knowledge consists in a grasp of the firmness of that •connection. So God's certain foreknowledge that x will occur is his view of the firm and unbreakable connection between the subject and the predicate of the proposition affirming that x will occur. The subject is the possible outcome x; the predicate is x's future existence; and if future existence is firmly and unbreakably connected with x, then the future existence of x is necessary. If God certainly knows the future occurrence of an event that is wholly contingent and may possibly never occur, then he sees a firm connection between a subject and predicate that are not firmly connected; which is a contradiction. . . .

•BACKWARDS CAUSATION•

And another point: Granting that Whitby and the others are right in saying that God's foreknowledge of x is not the cause but the effect of x's occurrence, far from showing that this foreknowledge •doesn't imply the necessity of x's occurrence, this really brings out more clearly that it •does. Why? Because it shows the occurrence of the event to be so settled and firm that it's as if it had already occurred;. . . .its future occurrence has already had actual influence and effectiveness, and has produced an effect, namely foreknowledge:

the effect exists already; and as the effect presupposes the cause and entirely depends on it, it's as if the future event that is the cause had occurred already. The effect is as firm as possible, because it has already taken possession of existence or occurrence, and has made sure of it. But the effect can't be more firm and stable than its cause, ground, and reason. The building can't be firmer than the foundation.

To illustrate this matter, consider a situation in which a reflecting telescope has images that are the real effects of stars that they resemble, the stars themselves being too far away to see ·with the naked eye·. If these images in the telescope have actually existed in the past—·e.g. a few seconds ago·—it has now become utterly impossible for them *not* to have existed. And since they are the true effects of the heavenly bodies that they resemble, this proves the existence of those heavenly bodies to be as real, infallible, firm, and necessary as the existence of these effects. . . . ·That is plain sailing. But now let us think about something weird·. Let us suppose that future existences—·e.g. stars that will come into existence at some future time·—can somehow have influence *backwards* in time to produce effects *beforehand*, causing exact and perfect images of themselves in a telescope a thousand years *before* they exist, or indeed at all earlier times. I am supposing that these images are real *effects* of these future stars, and are perfectly dependent on and connected with their cause. ·Now think about the situation after the images have come into existence but before the stars they are images of have done so·. The •effects, the images, have already achieved actual existence, so their existence is perfectly firm and stable and utterly impossible to be otherwise; and in this case, as in the other ·less weird· one, this proves that the existence of ·the stars·, their •causes, is also equally sure, firm, and necessary; their not existing ·at some time· is as impossible as it would

be if they—like their effects—were now in the past. Now vary the case again: suppose that the antecedent effects (through backward causation) of things that don't yet exist are not •images in a telescope but rather •perfect ideas of the things in God's mind, ideas that have existed there from all eternity. Those ideas are *effects*, which are truly *connected* with their cause—and in saying this I am using 'effects' and 'connected' in their strict senses. The case is not altered—·i.e. the backward causation of a •divine idea by a future existent x makes the future existence of x necessary, just as does the backward causation of a •telescopic image by a future existent x·. [Does Edwards think that God's foreknowledge is a case of backward causation, or does he merely consider that possibility in order to make his point about how cause-effect relates to necessity? This version leaves it unclear which answer is right; so does the text as Edwards wrote it.]

·GOD AS NOT IN TIME?·

Arminians, wanting to undercut the argument from •God's foreknowledge to the •non-contingency of the volitions of moral agents, say things along the lines of this:

It is not strictly correct to speak of 'foreknowledge' in God. It's true that God has the most utterly complete knowledge of all events, from eternity to eternity, but there is no such thing as *before* and *after* in God. He sees all things in one perfect unchangeable view, not in a time-taking series.

I have two main things to say about this.

(1) I have already shown that *all* certain knowledge proves the necessity of the truth that is known, whether it be before, after, or at the same time. Although it is true that there is no before and after in God's knowledge, and that we have no idea of how he knows what he knows, we do know this much: there is no outcome—past, present, or to come—that God is ever uncertain of. He never is, never was, and never will

be without infallible knowledge of everything that actually occurs at some time; he always sees each item's existence to be certain and infallible. And as he always sees things just as they really are, nothing is ever really 'contingent' in the sense that it could have never come about. If it's true that strictly speaking there is no *foreknowledge* in God, that is because things that are •future to us are •as-though-present to God, as if they already existed; which amounts to saying that future events are, in God's view, always as evident, clear, sure, and necessary as if they already existed. . . .

[Edwards continues arguing at some length that the 'God isn't in time' thesis doesn't interfere with his argument that •God's knowledge of future events implies that •those events are necessary. One detail in this: even if God's knowledge of events that are in *our* future isn't knowledge-of-the-future from *his* standpoint, he can and sometimes does communicate that knowledge to us, enabling us to *foretell* the future with absolute certainty; and the argument against contingency can go through on the basis of our certain foretelling. He concludes:] So it's clear that •there being no before and after in God's mind doesn't affect •the necessity of the existence of the events known. Indeed. . .

(2) The view that there is no before and after in God's knowledge, so far from weakening the case for holding that no events are contingent, makes the case's *strength* even easier to see. There are two reasons for this.

(a) Why is there no succession—no before and after—in God's knowledge? Because it is absolutely perfect to the highest possible degree of clearness and certainty. All things past, present, and to come are viewed with equal evidentness and fullness; future things are seen as clearly as if they were present; the view is always absolutely perfect [partly = 'complete']; and if something is constantly perfect there is no way for it to change, and so no before and after in it; a

thing's coming into existence doesn't *add* anything to God's knowledge, making it larger or clearer or more certain. From God's point of view, things that did, do, or will exist are all the same to him. And that gives strength to my demonstration regarding future things, namely that it is as impossible they should fail to exist as it would be if they existed already. This 'God is timeless' objection, instead of weakening my argument, sets it in the strongest light. . . .

(b) What stops God's knowledge from having any before and after is its *unchangeability*. But that directly and plainly demonstrates my conclusion that it is utterly •impossible for any known event to fail to occur. For if that were •possible, then a change in God's knowledge and view of things would be possible (because if the known event didn't occur as God expected, he would change his mind and see his former mistake); but he is unchangeable, so that it is utterly infinitely impossible that his view should be changed. . . .

I conclude that no geometrical theorem—no proposition of *any* kind—is more capable of strict demonstration than the proposition that God's certain foreknowledge of the volitions of moral agents rules out •their being 'contingent' in the sense of being without any kind of necessity, and so rules out •their being 'free' in the Arminian sense. [That concludes the discussion of 'Corollary 1', started on page 54].

Corollary 2: Thus, what the Calvinists teach concerning the absolute decrees of God doesn't at all imply any more *fatality* in things than demonstrably follows from the teachings of most Arminian theologians, who acknowledge God's omniscience and universal foreknowledge. [In this context, 'fatality' means something like 'inevitability'; the basic notion is that of something's being *settled long in advance*.] So all their objections against the Calvinist doctrine—as implying Hobbes's doctrine of necessity or the stoics' doctrine of fate—count as much against their own teachings as it does against that of the

Calvinists. . . .

[The half-page labelled 'Corollary 3' is a single vast sentence in which Edwards expands what he has said in Corollary 2. The thesis is that Arminians are not entitled to object to Calvinism on grounds involving its thesis that 'men are under necessity in their moral operations', because they—or such of them as believe God to be omniscient—are committed to the very same thesis about necessity. The bulk of the paragraph is taken up by a listing of the more specific objections that Edwards has in mind: the one that is easiest to understand is 'arguments against the necessity of men's volitions from premises about the reasonableness of God's commands, promises, and threats, and the sincerity of his advice and invitations'.]

Section 13: Even if the volitions of moral agents are not connected with anything antecedent, they must be 'necessary' in a sense that overthrows Arminian liberty

Suppose some act x of the will has a cause. Then I have shown that x is not contingent but necessary, because it is an effect that is necessarily dependent and consequent on its cause, whatever that may be. If the cause is the will itself, by antecedent acts of choosing and determining, x must be a necessary effect of those previous acts. The act x—a determined effect of the previous cause—can't prevent the effectiveness of its cause; it has to be wholly subject to its determination and command, as much as movements of the limbs are. The consequent commanded acts of the will are as passive and as necessary, with respect to the previous determining acts, as the parts of the body are with respect to the volitions that determine and command them. Therefore, if all the free acts of the will are like this,

if they are all effects determined by the will itself, i.e. by antecedent choice, then they are all necessary; they are all subject to, and decisively fixed by, the previous act that is their cause. And indeed all this can be re-applied to the previous act, the one that determined act x, if it is a free and voluntary act; for it too must be determined and fixed by a still earlier act, and so it too must be necessary. So that on this Arminian account of freedom **all the free acts of the will are necessary. . . .** And yet the Arminians say that **necessity is utterly inconsistent with liberty.** So that according to their view, the acts of the will can't be free unless they are necessary, and can't be free if they are necessary!

Suppose that some act x of the will does not have a cause. This means that x is not connected with and determined by anything that happens before it; in short, x is absolutely contingent. Allowing this to be possible still won't help the Arminians. For if x happened completely contingently, with no cause at all, then no act of the will, no prior act of the soul, was its cause; no determination or choice by the soul had any hand in it. This accidental event x did indeed occur in the will or the soul, but the will or the soul wasn't the cause of it. The will is not active in causing or determining x, but is purely the passive subject of it, the thing to which or in which x happens; at least according to the Arminians' notion of activity and passivity. In this case, contingency does as much to prevent [= 'get in ahead of'] the determination of the will as a proper cause does; and so far as the will is concerned x was necessary, and couldn't have been otherwise. For to suppose that

•x could have been otherwise if the will or soul had pleased

is to suppose that x depends on some prior act of choice or pleasure, which is contrary to what we have stipulated to be

the case. And supposing that

•x could have been otherwise if its cause had ordered it otherwise

conflicts with its not having any cause or orderer [Edwards's phrase]. Anything that doesn't depend on any free act of the soul is necessary so far as the soul is concerned; and the volition x we are discussing here doesn't depend on anything and isn't connected with anything; so it doesn't depend on any free act of the soul, and is therefore necessary so far as the soul is concerned. It comes to the soul by accident, and the soul is necessarily subjected to it (just as the passive earth is necessarily subjected to whatever falls upon it). This conflicts with the Arminian notion of liberty as the will's power of determining itself in its own acts, being •wholly active in this, •with no passiveness and •with no subjection to necessity. Thus, contingency is required by the Arminian notion of liberty and yet is inconsistent with it.

This is a good place to call attention to something that Watts wrote in his *Essay on the Freedom of Will in God and in Creatures etc.*:

The word 'chance' always means something done without design. Chance and design stand in direct opposition to each other; and 'chance' can never be properly applied to acts of the will. That is because the will is the source of all design; whatever it chooses it *designs* to choose, whether or not the choice is a good one; and when it is confronted with a need to choose between two perfectly equal things, it *designs* to set itself onto one of the two, merely because it will.

Watts seems to have been very careless here. For if 'the will is the •source of all design', as he says it is, then certainly it isn't always the •effect of design; there must be *some* acts of the will that occur without having been designed, and those acts must happen by chance, according to his definition of

'chance'. And if the will 'designs to choose' whatever it does choose, . . . as he says it does, then it designs to determine all its designs. Which leads us into an infinite regress of designs determining designs. The very first design would have to be the effect of a preceding design, or else it would occur by chance, according to this author's notion of chance.

We should look into another possible way of connecting the acts of the will with something earlier that is their cause. . . ., namely by relating them to *the views of the understanding*. This is not so very different from things we have already discussed, but let's deal with it anyway. This idea won't help the Arminians if it takes the form:

•Volitions are necessarily connected with the views of the understanding,

because that leaves the necessity of volitions standing, thus knocking out liberty on the Arminian view of what that is. So the Arminian will have to suppose that although volitions are •related to the views of the understanding, they aren't •connected with and •necessitated by them. Here is what this implies regarding liberty:

The liberty of the soul consists at least partly in its acts' being free from restraint, limitation, and government by the understanding, and in liberty and liableness to act contrary to the views and dictates of the understanding; so that the more disengaged from the understanding the soul is, the more liberty it has.

Think what this implies regarding the noble principle of human liberty, especially in the form of *complete* liberty, i.e. an unconstrained liableness to act altogether at random, without the least connection with, or restraint from, or government by any dictate of reason or anything whatever that is apprehended, considered, or viewed by the understanding. . . . The notion mankind have had of liberty is as a dignity or privilege, something worth claiming. There's no dignity or

privilege in being given up to such a wild contingency as this, to be perfectly and constantly liable to act unreasonably, and to be no more guided by the understanding than we

would be if we had no understanding, or were as destitute of perception as smoke that is driven by the wind!