

James C. McGlothlin, review of *Jonathan Edwards' Concerning The End for Which God Created the World: Exposition, Analysis, and Philosophical Implications*. By Walter J. Schultz. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage, 2020. 351 pages. \$110.00.

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For close to two decades now philosopher Walter J. Schultz has been publishing scholarly articles on Jonathan Edwards, specifically on, what many believe to be Edwards' greatest work, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World* (1765). Some of us have anticipated and awaited Schultz's eventual publication of a book that would summarize and synthesize his many years of reading, researching, teaching and writing on Edwards' *End of Creation* (for short). That book is now here: *Jonathan Edwards' Concerning The End of Creation God Created the World: Exposition, Analysis, and Philosophical Implications*. In this review I will first offer a summary this book and then give some evaluation.

Schultz's twelve-chapter book is structured into two main parts. Part One comprises the first seven chapters, Part Two comprises the remaining five. Several appendices are also included. Though the book can be read as a continuous whole, Schultz notes in the Preface that the chapters or appendices can be read individually as well. The aim of the book, in Schultz's own words, is an attempt to clarify Edwards' admittedly difficult *End of Creation* "by a careful examination of Edwards' entire argumentation, providing pertinent historical background, explicating essential concepts, and demonstrating its deductive validity using both prose and symbolic logic" (19). In short, Schultz hopes in this book to "exposit and analyze Edwards' argumentation and to explore the 'clews' [Edwards' word] to find the vistas he saw" (28).

Part One of Schultz's book primarily seeks to provide exposition and analysis of Edwards' argumentation within *End of Creation*. Chapter One introduces Edwards' book and Schultz suggests nine separate problems that Edwards faced in presenting a coherent theory of God's end and motive in creation. Schultz also presents what he sees as the various goals that Edwards had for *End of Creation*. In Chapter Two Schultz explains Edwards' distinctions between different sorts of "ultimate ends." The importance of this, claims Schultz, is for Edwards' solution to The Divine Self-Sufficiency and Divine Action Problem (I will reference this as the DSDA problem, to be explained below.) Chapter Three summarizes in more detail the overall argument for God's end and motivation in creation, where Schultz presents three implicit assumptions of Edwards' argument: God has an ultimate end in creation, God is absolutely self-sufficient, and creation is *ex nihilo*. Chapter Four traces Edwards' argument that God's end in creation must manifest God's supreme regard for himself and thus serves Edwards' constructive and polemical goals in writing

End of Creation. Chapter Five then addresses Edwards' use of the fictitious "Third Being" argument where Schultz argues that Edwards successfully overthrows a view popular among some eighteenth-century thinkers, namely that God was supposedly necessarily bound by external norms. In Chapter Six Schultz addresses a perennial question in Edwards scholarship: Should Edwards be considered a Neo-Platonist because of his use of the word *emanation*? Schultz argues that though *emanation* is an allusion to a Neoplatonic idea that God emanates his own essence, for Edwards this should be more strictly understood as "*Holy Spirit emanationism*" (33), where creation and emanation are not mixed (as in Neo-Platonism) but where God creates *in order to* emanate his Spirit according to his redemptive plan. Chapter Seven presents in detail Edwards' overall solution to the DSDA problem. Schultz spends some time here laying out this issue, especially as it was articulated by Baruch Spinoza in his *Ethics* (1677), which Edwards' seems to have been aware of. Schultz summarizes the problem as given by Spinoza:

[I]f God created the world to achieve an end, then the state achieved must be more valuable to him than his initial state without creation. The very concept of acting to achieve an end entails that the agent values the state to be achieved more than the initial state. It follows that if God's acts [are] for ends, then God is neither self-sufficient nor free (33–34).

Schultz's exposition, I think, convincingly shows how Edwards solved this problem from within biblical or historic orthodox Christianity.

Part Two of Schultz's book comprises the remaining five chapters of the book, which trace out, explain, and develop some of the philosophical implications of Edwards' argumentation. Though sections of Part One are clearly informed by Schultz's philosophical insights, Part Two contains the bulk of Schultz's original philosophical argumentation. The first chapter of Part Two, Chapter Eight, addresses Edwards' understanding of modalities (i.e. necessity, possibility, contingency) of various types of created things and how they are related to God's representation of them. Though Edwards' ideas are under examination here, it is clearly Schultz's expertise in modern metaphysical and modal concepts that help to explicate these notions. Schultz explains how different modal concepts in *End of Creation* can be understood as "God's ability to create," which "is his own *power* to bring about various states of affairs *ad extra* as . . . guided by his wisdom within the constraints of his holiness" (34). Chapter Nine addresses Edwards' metaphysical idealism, which claims that the universe is both ideal with respect to God and real with respect to creatures. Though often confused with the eighteenth-century thinker George Berkeley's idealism, Schultz argues how Edwards' view is actually a result of his three assumptions that solve the DSDA problem. Edwards, claims Schultz, is motivated to his idealism not because of some metaphysical or epistemological assumption, but due essentially to his understanding of God. Chapter Ten addresses God's freedom in creation, which deals with another perennial question in Edwards scholarship: Did Edwards consider God's creation a necessary act? Assuming that Edwards did indeed overcome the DSDA problem, what did he consider God's motivation for creating? Schultz argues that Edwards answers this question with a dispositional

account of God. Though early on Edwards seems to have been attracted to the Dionysian Principle that “goodness must diffuse itself,” it is clear that he is *not* appealing to that principle in *End of Creation*. Schultz argues that though Edwards’ argumentation does not entail that God must create, it does entail that God’s freedom in creation is ultimately inscrutable. Chapter Eleven explores two of Edwards’ most controversial doctrines: continuous creationism and occasionalism. Schultz shows how both are implied by Edwards’ commitments within *End of Creation*. In Chapter Twelve Schultz seeks to defend Edwards against one of the main objections to these two doctrines.

Schultz’s book concludes with six appendices—over eighty pages—of additional and insightful material. Though appendices, they should not be considered superfluous to the overall aim of the book. Of these, I found Appendix C to be one of the most rewarding as Schultz lays out in detailed, first-order, formal logic the complete argument of *End of Creation*, and shows it to be deductively valid. The other appendices also contain much worthwhile material.

Let me now offer some evaluation.

Given the amount and exceptional quality of research within Schultz’s book, I believe it should be considered an essential resource for any future studies of Edwards’ *End of Creation* and a good resource for Edwards studies more generally. Given the amount of Edwards scholarship in recent decades, it is fairly astonishing that there have been few books that have focused exclusively upon Edwards’ *End of Creation*. Moreover, it seems to me, that few works have treated *End of Creation* as the magnum opus of Edwards’ mature thought, as it so rightly deserves. Schultz’s book shows why *End of Creation* should have that sort of intellectual priority for understanding Edwards. But regardless of that evaluation, this book should still become a standard reference work in studying Edwards’ *End of Creation*. Schultz’s book also has important bearing on various “perennial” issues in Edwards studies more generally, such as Edwards’ relation to Neo-Platonism and philosophical idealism. Schultz’s book gives good evidence and argumentation that yield important implications for these issues, and others, within Edwards studies. Thus, this book should serve in pushing other Edwards studies forward as well.

In addition, I think Schultz’s book has even wider application for Christian philosophy and theology beyond Edwards studies. Schultz’s discussion of Edwards’ solution to the DSDA problem offers, I think, many rich suggestions and resources for thinking about some contemporary issues in Christian philosophy, particularly current discussions surrounding divine aseity and divine action in relation to abstract objects. Regardless of his or Edwards’ own conclusions, Schultz book convincingly shows Edwards to be a very orthodox and creative thinker for contemplating many such issues. Though this was not a primary point to Schultz’s book, he does make a case (see Appendix F) for seeing Edwards as way for thinking about many other issues in philosophy and theology.

In a similar vein, I personally found Schultz’s book to offer a philosophically exciting example for Christian scholarship in general. Schultz’s presentation of Edwards makes him an attractive exemplar for how Christian scholarship can be accomplished *by primarily thinking about God as the center of everything*. That may seem like an obvious point. But, as historian Mark Noll once claimed, though Edwards’ has intellectual descendants to his piety or Calvinistic theology,

he really has “no successors to his God-entranced world-view, or his profoundly theological philosophy.” (See Mark A. Noll, “Jonathan Edwards, Moral Philosophy, and the Secularization of American Christian Thought” *The Reformed Journal* 33, (Feb. 1983), 26.) If that assessment is even partly true, this is probably due to a lack of knowledge about how to reproduce such a vision. But I think Schultz’s book shows how Edwards might be followed here. It seems to me that Schultz’s book exhibits how a Christian who thinks deeply and biblically about who God is and how God acts, and tries to radically understand all of reality through this lens, this can push us—as best as we can—to coherently understand a whole host of things in a “God-entranced” way. By seeing how Edwards’ sought to think clearly and biblically about everything through God, he came to philosophical positions that were rich and original. I think that Schultz’s book displays, though indirectly, how this vision might be perpetuated.

The one major weakness of Schultz’s book, though also a strength, is that it is very philosophically dense. The intellectual rigor of Schultz’s book will probably put off anyone who might be a more casual or devotional reader of Edwards. Some scholars may even desire to eschew Schultz on the grounds that this book is “too analytic.” But though this work does indeed reflect Schultz’s own analytical-philosophical training, one should understand that this is primarily due to the structural complexity and logical precision of Edwards’ *End of Creation* that makes Schultz’s book—not a work of “analytic theology” but rather—an attempt on Schultz’s part “to be uncompromisingly faithful to Edwards” (18) and the rigor of eighteenth-century theological thinking. In reading Schultz’s book, you sometimes feel like you must “step back” and attempt to get more of a panoramic view of the “big picture” of *End of Creation*. But this should be unsurprising. As Schultz admits at one point, and as any researcher of Edwards knows, reading Edwards can be “utterly fatiguing. After a few days of study, his language begins to sound as if he is saying the same thing over and over again” (27). This is especially unsurprising since Schultz’s book focuses on *End of Creation* and this work “remains among the most difficult works of theological philosophy” (18). As an analytic philosopher, I think Schultz does a superlative job of clearly explaining Edwards. But I fear many Christian scholars will not be patient with the precision of either Edwards’ original argumentation, much less Schultz’s exposition of it.

In sum, I believe Walter Schultz’s new book on Edwards should become a standard reference work on *End of Creation* and an important resource for Edwards studies more generally and for some issues in Christian philosophy as well.

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