

Walter J. Schultz

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

Exposition, Analysis, and Philosophical Implications

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Walter J. Schultz

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who awakened me to seeing God’s acting as the “foundational unity
of the Bible”
and
who so beautifully exemplified compassion and grace through his own
weaknesses.

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Chapter Twelve

Divine Action and the Persistence of Physical Objects

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

– Jonathan Edwards

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

I. An objection to continuous creationism and occasionalism

Among the metaphysical positions entailed by Edwards' view of God's end and motive in creation are his positions on continuous creationism and (physical) occasionalism. Perhaps the earliest and most frequently mentioned objection to continuous creationism and occasionalism is that they entail that *no object persists*. In 1871 Charles Hodge objects to Edwards' "real doctrine of continuous creationism," asserting that "it destroys all continuity of existence. If God creates any given thing every moment out of nothing, it ceases to be the same thing."¹ Hermann Bavinck, perhaps echoing Hodge, charges that "If providence meant a *creating anew every moment*, creatures would also have to be produced out of nothing every moment. In that case, the continuity [read: *persistence*] ... would be totally lost ... All created beings would then exist in appearance only."² Recently, Katherin Rogers, commenting on occasionalism in general, announces that

I will argue that [occasionalism] entails that ... most of the objects which we suppose to fill that world *cannot* exist. (emphases added)³

David Vander Laan argues that

If an object persists through time, then its later existence must be caused by its earlier existence. Many theists endorse a theory of continuous creation, according to which

1 Charles Hodge, "Theology," in vol. 1 of *Systematic theology*, 579, and "Anthropology" in vol. 2 of *Systematic theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Printing Company, [1871], 1982), 217–20.

2 Hermann Bavinck, *Reformed dogmatics*, vol. 2 of *God and creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, [1928], 2004), 607.

3 Katherin A. Rogers, "What's wrong with occasionalism?" *American Catholic philosophical quarterly* 75, no. 3 (2001): 345–6.

God is the sole cause of a creature's existence at a given time. The conjunction of these two theses rather unfortunately implies that no object distinct from God persists at all.⁴

More objectors could be added to the list, but that would not be necessary. They all agree that if continuous creationism were true—or physical occasionalism, as the case may be—no objects persist. The objection is important and, given the nature of deduction, if the objection is not refuted, it threatens to render false at least one proposition in Edwards' entire argumentation. Hence, it must be addressed with care and precision.

Two features of the objection

There are two features of this objection. The first feature is that the objection presupposes some concept of *persistence*, and the second is that the objection is an impossibility claim. To complain that occasionalism entails that no ordinary object persists is to have some idea of persistence in mind. A survey of the history of this objection reveals that a pre-critical, ordinary notion of persistence is operative. If the objection is to be fairly adjudicated and either sustained or refuted, the fact that the presupposed idea of persistence may not pass muster should be borne in mind. The way objects *seem* is not always the way objects *are*.⁵ Experience tells us that natural objects such as plants and animals persist over time even though they may change in several respects. For example, "That big maple tree in the front yard had deep green leaves last summer, but now all of them are fallen to the ground. Yet it is the same tree." Nevertheless, from cognitive psychology and the biology of perception we now know that our everyday representations of object persistence are the result of complex cognitive processing.⁶ Our perception of objects is the result of a complex process of which we are not entirely aware and over which we have little, if any, control. We implicitly trust that when our perceptual capacities function properly they deliver accurate sensations, perceptions, and perceptual beliefs. But science indicates that there are differences of which we are not aware through ordinary perception. For example, since the speed of light is approximately 186,000 miles per second and the moon is just under 250,000 miles from Earth, light from the Moon's surface has to travel about

4 David Vander Laan, "Persistence and divine conservation," *Religious studies* 42, no.2 (2006):159.

5 See Amie L. Thomasson, *Ordinary objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Kathrin Koslicki, *The Structure of objects* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Daniel Z. Korman, *Objects: nothing out of the ordinary* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015).

6 See Brian J. Scholl, "Object persistence in philosophy and psychology," *Mind & language*, 22, no. 5 (November 2007): 563–91.

1.3 seconds to reach our eyes and be processed as an image. Given the speed of light, the moon we now see in the night sky is what the moon was in the past. The universe as we “have it in mind” through perception and cognition is a stage in the process of perception lingering in consciousness long after the perceived event has passed. For another example, fundamental physics tell us that the elementary matter and force particles (i.e., fermions and bosons) which constitute the objects we perceive are not objects in the same sense, and do not themselves persist.⁷ If an object’s ultimate constituents are not objects and do not persist, how does a composite object persist? Finally, it is an established fact of biology that several of our body’s systems are constantly sloughing off old cells and replacing them with new ones. What makes our bodies the same body if by the time we are twenty years old so many of its original cells are replaced with different ones—several times over? In short, our perceptual experience seems to be an unreliable indicator of the nature of objects. So it is that we might ask

What is really going on during an ordinary physical object’s *apparent* persistence over time?

A definitive answer would be based on the best current science, providing an explanation of the errors or distortions of ordinary experience and would apply at the limits both to the universe *as a whole* (which is an object) and to the apparent *fundamental constituents* of matter, such as electrons. But no such unifying scientific theory yet exists and quantum theory is far from settled on a metaphysical paradigm. Hence, a definitive adjudication of the dispute may not be available. Nevertheless, a plausible, non-tendentious idea of persistence would be one that is informed by reflection on the ways physics, chemistry, and biology treat physical systems and should address the problems that arise from such reflection. One such problem is to reconcile three intuitive theses and their presuppositions. It seems that

- (a) *objects persist,*
- (b) *objects change,* and
- (c) *no object can have incompatible properties.*

These plausible ideas seem to conflict. Any two of them entail a denial of the other. (These conflicts will be discussed in Section IV below.) Facing this initial problem, metaphysicians have developed *analyses* or *accounts* of persistence, each

⁷ Carlo Rovelli, *The order of time* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2018) and *Quantum gravity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

of which “succeeds” only at the cost of giving up at least one of the three theses or one of their presuppositions.⁸ The purpose of this chapter is not to present these theories and their shortcomings. These theories and this diagnosis of the problem are reported several times in the literature.⁹ What is *not* in the literature is a presentation of the account of persistence that is entailed by Edwards’ argumentation in *End of Creation*.

My point here is simply to take note of the contemporary state of the question, to suggest that the objection may not be as strong as it seems, and to set the stage for Edwards’ view. I will argue that the view of the persistence of objects entailed by Edwards’ metaphysics of God and creation succeeds in explaining and reconciling these three intuitions. Furthermore, the Edwardsian view applies at all scales: to the universe *as a whole*, to the apparent *fundamental constituents* of matter, and to everything in between. It is also consistent with several realist theories of fundamental physics and recent developments in the metaphysics of biology.¹⁰ It cannot, however, be categorized under any of the three standard views of persistence without misrepresenting some other aspect of the metaphysics of *End of Creation*.¹¹

The second feature of the objection is that it is an impossibility claim. It asserts that “It is *not logically possible* that continuous creationism and occasionalism are true and physical objects persist.” To refute the objection, it must be shown that it *is* logically possible. This can be accomplished by showing that the set of all three positions is logically *consistent*. In other words, it must be shown that Edwards’ continuous creationism, occasionalism, and concept of persistence are logically

8 It might seem that there is an obvious solution on the grounds of a supposed difference between an object’s *essential* and *accidental* properties. All one has to do is to recognize that an object’s identity is a matter only of its essential properties (presupposing that identity is sortal relative and internally given), and it is only an object’s accidental properties that can vary over time (temporally indexing a notion of property possession). This solution does not provide an account of the nature of properties and of what it means for an object to have a property—issues presupposed by a view of persistence. Moreover, it raises several new problems which are discussed in the literature. See Sally Haslanger and Roxanne Marie Kurtz (eds.) *Persistence: Contemporary Readings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Bradford Books The MIT Press, 2006), 24.

9 Sally Haslanger, “Persistence through time” in *The Oxford handbook in metaphysics*, eds. Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 315–54 and “Persistence, change and explanation,” *Philosophical studies* 56 (1989): 1–28. See also Johanna Seibt, “Beyond endurance and perdurance: recurrent dynamics” in *Persistence*, ed. Christian Kanzian (Frankfurt: Onto Verlag, 2008), 133–164.

10 See Mauro Dorato and Michael Esfeld, “GRW as an ontology of dispositions,” *Studies in history and philosophy of modern physics* 41 (2010): 42–9; Fay Dowker, “Causal sets as discrete space-time,” *Contemporary physics* 47, no. 1 (January–February 2006); Daniel J. Nicholson and John Dupré, *Everything flows: towards a processual philosophy of biology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

11 See the discussion below under Section III.

compatible. As a matter of logic alone, this can be accomplished in several ways. The most convincing strategy, however, and indeed the aim of this chapter, is to show that Edwards' argumentation *entails* continuous creationism and occasionalism.

II. Edwards' argumentation entails the persistence of physical objects

Edwards' argumentation in *End of Creation* entails a concept of the persistence of physical objects that is consistent with—and, indeed, accounts for—ordinary experience and science. Let us closely consider what this concept is and how it logically follows. What we are doing here is not exegesis, because Edwards does not give us his entire argument connecting his assumptions to his ideas of continuous creationism and occasionalism. Rather, what follows is a sequence of the logical consequences of the concepts which Edwards does provide and emphasize. Edwards grounds his argumentation in three assumptions:

- (A1) God has an ultimate end in creating and sustaining the world.
- (A2) God is infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, and independently glorious and happy.¹²
- (A3) Creation is *ex nihilo*.

Assumption (A2) entails that

- (1) God is absolutely self-sufficient.

Even so, Edwards asserts premise (1) itself three times in *End of Creation*, referring to "God's absolute self-sufficiency."¹³ The word *absolute* indicates that the God who acts is self-sufficient in every respect. God needs nothing outside of himself to exist, to be fulfilled, or to function as the God who acts for ends. Even though there are probably many such respects that could be listed, as was demonstrated in Chapter One, Edwards' argumentation involves and emphasizes three: God's *existence*, *felicity* and *functioning*. Premise (1) can be expressed in the following terms:

God is ontologically, psychologically, and functionally self-sufficient.

12 WJE 8: 420. See Chapter One, Section I.

13 Ibid., 445, 450, and 462.

While being self-sufficient in each of these respects plays a role in Edwards' argumentation, God's being self-sufficient in his *functioning* is as crucial as any, yet almost always overlooked. God sovereignly accomplishes "the *end* for which [he] created and sustains the world" with its system of subordinate ends, unaided and unhindered in his works of providence and redemption. Perhaps because of his 35-year background and concern with understanding and experiencing God's end in creation, Edwards—perhaps more than any previous theologian—understood the importance of God's *functional* self-sufficiency. In my judgment, Edwards' efforts to understand God's ultimate end in creation predisposed him to be alert to the fact that Scripture portrays God as *the God who acts*. It may have also predisposed him to emphasize God's sustaining, guiding, and redeeming actions over attention to God's metaphysical nature as characterized much of the Reformed Scholastic tradition. Moreover, his attention to God as *the God who acts* probably made him alert to its implications regarding the dynamic, processual nature of creation. A fair presentation of Edward's views requires a deliberate and careful attempt to understand and to appreciate the *significance* of what he seems to have understood and the reasons *why* he held the metaphysical positions he did. Bearing this in mind, consider what Edwards asserts in writing that

God as perfectly knew himself and his perfections, had as perfect an idea of the exercises and effects they were sufficient for, *antecedently to any such actual operations* of them, as since. (emphasis added)¹⁴

Let us condense, summarize, and refer to the content of this as

(A2") God is eternally perfectly aware of his ability *ad extra*.

From Edwards' assumption (A1) that *God has an ultimate end in creating and sustaining the world*, which, as Edwards argues, involves God's pursuing a temporally ordered system of subordinate ends, from (A2") God's being perfectly aware of all possibilities, especially his plan, and from his assumption (A3) that *Creation is ex nihilo*, it follows that

¹⁴ WJE 8: 432. This statement nearly perfectly reflects the statement that Edwards' copied from Stapfer's *Institutiones* 1:87. See Philip J. Fisk, *The Tension between Jonathan Edwards's "Controversies" Notebook and Freedom of the Will on Whether Reality Is Open and Contingent*. The Global Edwards. Rhys S. Bezzant. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2017, 128. See also Richard A. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought*. Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Academic, 264–268.

(2) God created the universe *ex nihilo* and is sustaining every object according to plan.¹⁵

The emphasis in premise (2) for our purposes should be placed in the phrase, “according to plan,” the meaning of which must be appreciated in light of Edwards’ claim that *God is perfectly aware of his ability and its effects* (which was established in Chapters Three and Eight) and in light of the meaning of premise (1), in particular that *God is functionally self-sufficient*. Every aspect of the universe is being sovereignly realized according to plan.

Most, if not all, Christian theologians and philosophers in Edwards’ day would agree with premises (1) and (2). Nevertheless, in virtue of the perennial and solution-resistant conundrum generated by holding (A1) and (A2) and in virtue of Edwards’ unique solution, it seems reasonable to think that he more acutely appreciated two aspects of the collective import of the two premises as they now expressed in (2). The first aspect is that since God is temporally eternal and is sustaining creation, God cannot be “in” physical time. *God is metaphysically temporal*.¹⁶ Physical time is the sequence of God’s universe sustaining action. The second aspect of the import of (A1) and (A2) is that God’s being absolutely self-sufficient and sustaining the universe *ex nihilo* according to plan results in “the most perfect, absolute and universal derivation and dependence” of all things created.¹⁷

This chapter traces how this radical and thorough dependence of created entities entails a notion of the persistence of physical objects.¹⁸ Since the question of persistence involves both ordinary experience and metaphysical explanation, to avoid tendentiously framing the problem, let us assume (as does basic science) that all objects are physical systems.¹⁹ The category of *physical system* includes

15 On the basis of Scripture, Christians (Catholic, Eastern, and Protestant) hold that God the Father, through and for Christ the Son, freely created the world and now continually sustains it according to his plan for his purposes in Christ. Moreover, God is revealing himself through the creation, God is providentially guiding it, and God is redeeming it. In other words, God’s works of creation, sustenance, self-disclosure, providence, and redemption are all according to his plan for his purposes in Christ. God acting according to plan is the dynamic, underlying reality of all things.

16 Appendix F explicates the ways Edwards’ argumentation entails *God is metaphysically temporal*.

17 WJE 8: 304.

18 For a rigorous account of how Edwards’ view applies to agents, see Philip John Fisk, *Jonathan Edwards’s turn from the classic-reformed tradition of freedom of the will* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2016).

19 The one exception to the stipulation is a so-called “elementary particle.” For the purposes of this chapter, nothing of consequence obtains if some think of it as an *object* or as an *event*: an *excitation* of a general co-variant quantum field.

trees, dogs, boulders, atoms, planets, molecules, tables, human bodies and their parts, lakes, mountains, and so on. It also includes snowstorms, galaxies, cancer tumors, forest fires, volcanoes, rivers, and hurricanes, in addition to the entire universe. Not all physical systems are objects, e.g., The Great Chicago Fire of 1871. While the boundary between the categories is not easily drawn scientifically, the distinctions will suffice to circumscribe what we mean by "object" without skewing the argument. Hence, we have the following definition:

DEF: An *object* is a composite physical system, having parts and properties.

With these clarifications in place, let us continue to trace the entailments of Edwards' argumentation as it pertains to the persistence of objects.

Edwards' idealism (or immaterialism) is crucial to his view of persistence. H. Darren Hibbs distinguishes two kinds of metaphysical idealism in his survey of idealism in the history of philosophy. Hibbs calls Berkeleyan idealism "*mens-idealism*" (i.e. an idealism of the mind). "*Res-idealism*" (i.e. an idealism of the thing) is that "extramental material objects exist, but they are *ontologically dependent upon a nonmaterial source*.(emphasis added)" Edwards' immaterialism in *End of Creation* is *res-idealism*: material objects are real in relation to humans, but the existence of the universe and all that belongs to it—as an ongoing divine achievement subordinate to God's original ultimate end in creation—is ideal in relation to God's mind. In other words, material objects are, in Hibbs terms, "ontologically dependent on a non-material source."

As was established in Chapter Nine, Edwards' *res-idealism* is logically required by his assumptions and definitions.²⁰ That is, to avoid the threat of incoherence that arises for attempts to combine assumptions (A1) through (A3), God's original ultimate *end* in creation and all that it presupposed must *be valuable* and *be valued* both *as* it is being created and *before* being created, but not *more* valuable or valued as it is being created. The only way this can be is that, when before creation what was an element of God's awareness of his ability as a plan *for* the universe becomes a physical reality by God's willing or speaking it, there is a correlative change in the ontological *form* of God's ideas that pertain to it; a change from an *idea for it to exist* to an *idea of willing that it exist*. These are both divine ideas. The universe's existence depends on God; it is *ideal* with respect to God's mind. Nothing *real* with respect to God's mind—nothing of additional *being*, nothing possessing ontological self-sufficiency, and nothing of additional *value*—is brought into existence. In other words, we have this "theorem," which is logically grounded ultimately in assumptions (A1) through (A3), and whose content is il-

20 See H. Darren Hibbs, "Who's an 'idealist?'" *Review of metaphysics* 58 (2005): 567.

luminated and accentuated both by the phrase in (2) *according to plan* and by the entailment that *God is metaphysically temporal*:

(3) The physical creation at every moment of its existence is *ideal* in relation to God's mind and *real* in relation to creatures.

Physical fundamentality and ontological ground

This claim might be more precisely understood by considering the difference between *physical fundamentality* and *ontological ground*. Whatever is physically fundamental—whether *objects and structures*, *events and structures*, or *causal powers and structures*, depending on one's ontology of fundamental physics and emergent complexity—there is always the question of its (or their) ontological ground. What is the ultimate ontological ground of things of these kinds? What is the source of their existence, nature, and “behavior”? Physicalists, metaphysical naturalists, and neo-Aristotelians hold that whatever is physically fundamental is its own ontological ground. While this position does not entail that *God does not exist*, it does entail that *physical systems are ontologically and functionally self-sufficient*, which, as shown in Chapter Nine, is impossible if God, who is absolutely self-sufficient, acts for an original ultimate end in creation. For Edwards, *God's willing that things exist* is the one and only ontological ground of a thing's existence. This is not to say that God's ideas *constitute* physicality at the fundamental level, that divine ideas are *physically* fundamental. Yet, there is no mediating thing, event, or power between them. Creation is not a change in an existing thing. God *wills x* as physically fundamental and *x exists* as physically fundamental, simultaneously. There is a genuine complementarity without identity. (This notion is developed below in the presentation and discussion of premise (9)).

The persistence of physical objects

Several distinctions are crucial to bear in mind as we address the persistence of objects in terms of Edward's idealism, continuous creationism, and occasionalism. The problem of persistence presupposes that

(4) Some objects appear to persist.

What this means is that physical objects *appear* to continue in existence over some finite duration while retaining their identity. That is, they *seem* to remain the same thing regardless of change. This applies even though there are four dif-

ferent kinds of change in physical systems. First, there is the *transformation* of physical systems. For example, there are the developmental changes that occur in the zygote/child/adult process, the acorn/oak process, metamorphosis of the caterpillar/butterfly process, and the green leaves/no leaves seasonal process of deciduous trees. Second, there is the *functional alteration* of instances of natural kinds of physical systems. This is observed in the changing shapes of the heart as it pumps blood. Third, there is the *disintegration* of physical systems, such as the decomposing of a dead fallen pine and the dissolving of a salt crystal in water. Lastly, there is simple *diachronic emergence* of a physical system in virtue of natural process, such as the emergence of Mt. Everest in virtue of the movement of tectonic plates. Thus, by analysis of our shared, general concept of persistence, we have this premise:

(5) For any object x , if x *persists*, then x (a) continues in EXISTENCE over some finite duration while (b) retains its IDENTITY regardless of change.²¹

How should we metaphysically explain an object's apparent *persistence* constrained and determined by premises (1) through (5)? It follows from premises (2) and (3) that

(6) Every object's *existence* at any moment is grounded immediately and only in God's existence-conferring action according to plan (God's positive willing its existence), and no object exists at any moment other than as being grounded immediately and only in God's existence-conferring action plan.

Premise (6) expresses the "positive" conditions of an object's existence at any moment of its existence. There are also "negative" conditions of existence-at-a-moment, which are implicit in (6) and which also follow from (2) and (3):

(7) *Divine Existential Dependence* (DXD). For any object x , x cannot *begin to exist* at any moment *before* and *without* God's efficacious, existence-conferring volition *that* it exists and cannot *continue to exist* (i.e., persist) for any moment *after* and *without* God's willing its existence.

Divine Existential Dependence (DXD) entails that ontological self-sufficiency is incommunicable.²² Were it otherwise, even for a moment of any object's exist-

21 Premise (5) reflects two facets of the ordinary concept of persistence as it applies to objects and must be accounted for by a metaphysical analysis, even if each entails the other.

22 According to Neil Williams, causal powers are the causes of the sequential temporal parts of objects. What links each temporal part of a fundamental object—the unity condition that ac-

ence, the potential incoherence in holding both (A1) that *God has an ultimate end in creating and sustaining the world* and (1) that *God is absolutely self-sufficient* would be realized. Since from (5) an object's existence is a necessary condition of its persistence, it follows from (7) that

(8) An object's *persistence* requires and involves a sequence of moments of conferred existence.²³

Divine Existential Dependence (DXD) states only what *cannot* be the case regarding an object's existence, which is one facet of persistence. When it is combined with the "positive" principle of creation in (6), we have the traditional *Doctrine of Divine Conservation* (DDC). As Augustine writes,

Wisdom, when It governs created things graciously, gives them a motion beyond our powers to comprehend or describe. [...] And if this motion is withdrawn and Wisdom ceases from this work, creatures will immediately perish.²⁴ Let us, therefore, believe and, if possible, also understand that *God is working even now, so that if His action should be withdrawn from His creatures, they would perish.* (emphasis added)²⁵

Thomas Aquinas states the idea this way:

Now, from the fact that God rules things by His providence it follows that He preserves them in being. [...] to be is not the nature or essence of any created thing, but only of God. [...] Therefore, nothing can remain in being if divine operation cease.²⁶

And later:

Both reason and faith bind us to say that creatures are kept in being by God. [...] [T]he being of every creature depends on God, so that not for a moment could it subsist, but

counts for an object's diachronic composition—is causal. That is, a certain kind of unilateral causal power has as its characteristic manifestation the existence of that object at a subsequent moment. Objects with these powers cause their own existence until something else prevents their operation. This alternative is precluded by assumptions (A1) through (A3). See Neil Williams, "Powerful perdurance: linking parts with powers" in *Causal powers* ed. Jonathan Jacobs (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

23 Physical time is simply a matter of the sequence of God's existence-conferring action according to plan.

24 *De Genesi ad litteram* 4:12 vol. 1 of *St. Augustine, the literal meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 118.

25 *Ibid.*, 5:20.

26 *Summa contra Gentiles* 3:65 in *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, Book Three: Providence, Part I*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

would fall into nothingness were it not kept in being by the operation of the Divine power [...]”²⁷

Even though the *Doctrine of Divine Conservation* (DDC) has been held by Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants for centuries, few if any understood the import of the doctrine as clearly as Edwards did. This is because he understood DDC as a consequence of how to coherently hold both that *God is absolutely self-sufficient* and that *God has an ultimate end in creating and sustaining the world*.

Failing to grasp the problem and Edwards' solution is probably why DDC has been called into question. Philip Quinn (1979) says, “orthodox theists are committed to holding that the universe, and each contingent individual in it, is continuously dependent on God for its existence. But I can see no conclusive and convincing reason why a theist must maintain that the universe is necessarily continuously dependent upon God for its existence.”²⁸ John Beaudoin (2007) recently observed that “despite its centrality to the orthodox view about God's relationship to his creation [...] attempts to prove that the world could not endure but for God's conserving activity are scarce.”²⁹ But now we have such an argument. What has not been given its due consideration or clearly grasped in the past are the ideas that God's *self-sufficiency* is an intrinsic property, that *functioning* is a crucial dimension of God's *self-sufficiency*, how God's being perfectly aware of his ability *ad extra* affects the idea of God's having a plan, that God is acting for his original ultimate end, and that creation must be ideal with respect to God—all of which are essential components of Edwards' metaphysics of God and creation. It is fair to say that Edwards understood these more clearly than did his predecessors, probably because of his striving for so many years to state a coherent theory of the “end for which God created the world.”

Given (2) that creation is *ex nihilo*, (3) that it is ideal in relation to God's mind, (6) that objects exist over a duration only in virtue of divine existence-conferring action, and (7) that objects cannot exist other than in virtue of divine existence-conferring action, it follows that

27 *Summa Theologiae* I.104.1. in *Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948).

28 Philip Quinn, “Divine conservation and Spinozistic pantheism,” *Religious Studies*, xv (1979): 300.

29 John Beaudoin, “The world's continuance: divine conservation or existential inertia?” *International journal for philosophy of religion* 61, no. 2 (2007): 84.

(9) Every object x is such that the duration of the divine existence-conferring *act* with respect to x 's existence and duration of the existence of x , which is the *result* of the act, are simultaneous and coextensive.

In other words, an object's existence involves two aspects. It is a (1) *temporally simultaneous* and *coextensive* (2) *complementarity* of divine action and result of action. An apparently persisting *object* (e.g., Mt. Sinai or Moses) or an individuated *event* (e.g., the Red Sea parting or Sarah giving birth) must be understood these ways. Considered as a matter of God acting, objects and events are the *producing*s of God. They are things God *achieves*. Considered as a matter of what God accomplishes, objects and events are the *results* of God's acting. They are *things* God achieves. What is understood from each angle of consideration depends on which term of the complementarity is emphasized: things God *achieves* or *things* God achieves.

This claim is not new. Something similar was advocated by Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) in the thirteenth century, William of Okham (1287–1347) and Gregory of Rimini (1300–1358) in the fourteenth century, Francisco Suarez (1548–1617) in the sixteenth century, Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth century, and others since. Because the claim might seem strange to most people and perhaps counter-intuitive, let us review its historical affirmations. Thomas Aquinas writes,

God at the same time gives being and produces that which receives being, so that it does not follow that his action requires something already in existence.³⁰

Francisco Suarez asserts the same idea:

The *act* of creation is [...] not, to be sure, something really distinct from [the] created entity.³¹

As Edwards stated it earlier in his career,

The substance of bodies at last becomes either nothing, or nothing but the Deity *acting* in the particular manner in those parts of space where he thinks fit. [. . .] all body is

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Quæstiones Disputatæ De Potentia Dei* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952), 87–8.

³¹ Francisco Suarez, "Whether creation is something within the creature that is distinct in reality from the creature itself," *Metaphysical Disputations Disp. 20*, sect. 4, in *On creation, conservation, and concurrence: metaphysical disputations 20, 21, and 22*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (South Bend IN: St Augustine's Press, 2002), 69, fn 13.

nothing but what immediately *results* from the exercise of divine power in such a particular manner. (*emphases added*)³²

Karl Heim observes that,

We now see [...] a dynamic conception of the world—Reality lived no longer as Being, but as Act. This means that what the cognising mind sees before itself as an object is not the *act* itself, but always the completed, secondary *result* of the act. *The primary Reality, in which we ourselves and our whole existence are set, is altogether dynamic and living action.* (*emphases added*)³³

To reiterate, premises (2) through (8) combine to express the traditional idea of the *Doctrine of Divine Conservation* (DDC). If at any moment God—who alone is self-existent—ceases *actively* to confer existence to a created thing, which is incapable of self-existence, that thing cannot exist the following moment. Never, in any of its most fundamental respects, can a created thing exist apart from God's willing that it exist, which is metaphysically the same as God's actively conferring existence to it and the same as God's creating it.

Notice that the term *creating* is not a transitive verb. When God creates, God is not acting on an existing thing because no object exists prior to its being created. God's creating never involves a change in an existing thing. With this in mind, it can be more easily grasped that premises (7), (8), and (9) entail the idea of *Continuous Creationism*:

(10) *Continuous Creationism* (CC). For every object *x*, at the *first moment* of *x*'s existence, *x* is ontologically grounded in nothing more than God's existence-conferring act of willing it to be according to plan and, *at each moment* of *x*'s continuing existence (i.e., *x*'s persistence), *x* is ontologically grounded only in God's existence-conferring acts of willing it to be according to plan.

A recurrent misconception

Having in hand Edwards' notion of *continuous creation* (which includes the proviso "according to plan") and keeping in mind the importance of *continuous creation* for appreciating *how* the ongoing existence of the universe has inherent

32 Jonathan Edwards, "Of Atoms," WJE 6: 215.

33 Karl Heim, *God transcendent: foundation for a Christian metaphysic*, trans. Edgar Primrose Dickie (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1935), 184. See also Johannes Wendland, *Miracles and Christianity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), 280, and Alfred George Hogg, *Redemption from this world; or, The Supernatural in Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1922).

value solely as an effect of God's creating enables us to correct a recurrent misconception and misrepresentation regarding what Edwards says about continuous creation in *Original Sin*.³⁴ The misconception involved two concepts: (1) what is meant by "created anew" and (2) the source of an object's transtemporal identity. Edwards' continuous creationism is not that of *repeating* pairs of moments, where the thing comes into existence at one moment and then goes out of existence at another, as in the following graphic:

exist	not exist	exist	not exist	exist
t^n	t^{n+1}	t^{n+2}	t^{n+3}	t^{n+435}

Rather, Edwards' continuous creationism should be represented as in the following graphic:

exist	exist	exist	exist	exist
t^n	t^{n+1}	t^{n+2}	t^{n+3}	t^{n+4}

Each moment of physical existence can be represented by some positive integer n in the natural number sequence.³⁶ In Edwards' view there are no moments of non-existence in between moments of creation. God's sustaining the universe is continuous *discrete* creation. Once God brings something into existence, it exists over time as God wills it and never "goes out of existence" until God so wills. Yet, each moment of existence is (in one sense of the term) a "new" moment of existence. Thus, a thing does not have to *cease* to exist in order to be "created anew." This is what Edwards means by "created anew."

As expressed in premise (5) our concept of persistence involves *both* existence and identity. Both components are expressed in Edwards' assertion that

34 WJE 3: 398–404.

35 For example, Kenneth P. Winkler writes "Edwards seems to view the various parts of time as discontinuous, spaced by thin slices of 'intermediate time.'" Kenneth P. Winkler. "Continuous Creationism." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XXXV* (2011), 287. See also Oliver Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*. Oxford University Press, 2012, 25.

36 This holds whether one treats a "moment" of physical time as a convex set of discrete Planck moments or as interval of continuous theoretical "points," which demarcate a duration of physical existence.

This oneness of created substance, existing at different times, is a merely dependent identity; dependent on the pleasure and sovereign constitution of him who worketh all in all.³⁷

Notice that Edwards does not claim that “there is no such thing as identity.” His emphasis in this sentence is not on whether an object *persists*, but rather on the nature and source of an object's *identity* as it persists. The received view was that an object's identity was in the object (so to speak) as a particular set of essential properties, a *haecceity* (from the Latin *haecceitas*, which translates as “this-ness”), which is a non-qualitative property. Edwards, by contrast, is saying that the *identity* of objects—more specifically, what it is that makes an object the same object over time (i.e., its *transtemporal identity*)—is not *in* created objects. In short, what he is saying in the disputed passage is that “there is no such thing as any identity or oneness *in* created objects.”

God's works of creation, providence, and redemption are sequentially ordered according to an exhaustive system of mixed ultimate ends and consequential ultimate ends, presupposed by God's original ultimate end. The system of ends is God's plan. The transtemporal identity of an object—i.e., what “makes” *x* the unique thing it is—is the complete history of that individual, as a part of this system of ends. Thus, the transtemporal identity of an object is objective and external to the thing. It is God's complete plan *for x*.³⁸ To put this another way, there is a conceptual difference between the notion of a particular object *x existing* over time and a particular object *x being the same thing* over time. Given (2) and (6), while a particular object *x's existing* over time is God's *acting* according to his plan for it, its *being the same thing* over time is God's acting *according to his plan for it*. God's “sovereign constitution” is located in God's complete plan. In short, Edwards provides both the EXISTENCE component and the IDENTITY component of the concept of persistence.

With this clarification in hand, we can address the second issue out of which arises the recurring misconception of Edward's continuous creationism, namely, the *source* of an object's transtemporal identity. What Edwards denies—as he does

37 Original sin. Vol. 3, The works of Jonathan Edwards. Edited by Clyde A. Holbrook. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970, 400.

38 Failing to understand this, that is, that Edwards holds that identity lies in God's plan according to which God creates, Kenneth P. Winkler, quoting the same section from Edwards' *Original Sin*, reverses the order in Edwards' position, asserting that Edwards “took the heroic course of asserting that God, in an act of legislation distinct from the creative acts responsible for the existence of things, makes distinct things one [...] the divinely stipulated or legislated identity Edwards takes God to impose on naturally nonidentical things. [...] God is treating distinct things as one [...] Edwards's God seems to make things one in spite of their inherent distinctness.” Winkler concludes that this “seems unacceptable.” Kenneth P. Winkler. “Continuous Creationism.” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XXXV (2011), 289, 307.

four times in an extended explanatory footnote—is the numerical identity of the physical constitution of a thing at differing moments of its existence. The physical constitution is different because the object is being created “anew” at each moment.³⁹ The sequence of divine existence-conferring acts and the simultaneous results of the acts recur, and thus are not identical.

What Edwards is *not* denying, however, is the *transtemporal identity* of the object thereby sustained in existence *according to plan*. An object physically exists only at those moments God wills that it exist. While a person’s *body* at any two distinct moments is not the same *body* (i.e., not numerically identical) due to changes over time and being continually created, its transtemporal identity does not change (i.e., it is the same body in that sense) and the person is the same person. Therefore, given both Edwards’ idealism and his concept of transtemporal identity, Jonathan Edwards in 1710 is the same person as Jonathan Edwards in 1755. This fits Scripture: “O LORD . . . in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.”⁴⁰ In sum, Edwards holds (1) that an object’s *transtemporal identity* is located in God’s plan for the object and (2) that the *existence* of an object at any moment is only the *effect* of God’s creative act.

Failing to keep the existence and identity components of persistence distinct and to bear in mind Edwards’ concept of these and their roles in his argumentation in *Original Sin* regarding the imputation of Adam’s guilt to posterity is the source of the recurrent misconception. Charles Hodge (1871; 217), Philip Quinn (1983; 64), and Jonathan Kvanvig and Hugh McCann (1988; 15) misrepresent Edwards’ position, conflating these distinct components, erroneously attributing to Edwards the view that “no object persists.” Kvanvig and McCann express this error, claiming that Edwards believed “each of the things God creates somehow begins to exist *anew* at each moment.”⁴¹ Edwards simply does not assert this, nor does what he says entail that things “begin to exist” at every moment. They begin to exist at the first moment that God creates them, and they continue in existence, i.e., “God’s upholding created substance [...] is altogether equivalent to an *immediate production out of nothing*, at each moment, because its existence at this moment is not merely in part from God, but wholly from him; and not in any part or

39 Ibid., 402–404, fn 5.

40 Psalm 139: 1, 14–18.

41 Jonathan L. Kvanvig and Hugh J. McCann, “Divine conservation and the persistence of the world” in *Divine and human action: essays in the metaphysics of theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 15.

degree, from its antecedent existence.”⁴² For Edwards, an object begins to exist only once. The only way Kvanvig and McCann could make the error of equating the concept of *continuous creation ex nihilo* with *their concept of begin to exist anew at every moment* is to fail to remember that for Edwards an object's *trans-temporal identity* is only in God's plan for it, not *in* the object. The latter view which locates transtemporal identity *in* the object comes from an Aristotelian notion of *substances*, whose *accidental* and *essential* properties were thought to define the thing as the *kind* of thing it is and as the very *thing* it is.

This difference in the source of an object's transtemporal identity determines a difference in views of efficient causation. To reiterate, for Edwards God's plan—in so far as it includes a complete history *for* the physical creation—is a plan *for* every state of every physical system, no matter how simple or complex. Since states of physical systems are sequences of events, God's plan is *for* a complete sequence of events. As God enacts his plan, continually creating the entire universe with all of its component physical systems in every respect, the apparent causation between events is not real causation.⁴³ Real causation is God's conferring existence according to his plan. This is *physical occasionalism*, which is a logical consequence of (10) continuous creationism:

(11) *Occasionalism* (O). Every state of every physical system at every moment is a matter only of God's immediate, existence-conferring volition according to plan.⁴⁴

This inference invites elaboration. Whatever *state* a physical system is in at any moment of being is due entirely to the *way* it is being created at that moment. Therefore, whatever *difference* or *change* there is in the *parts* of any physical system from one moment to the next is due only to the changes in the *ways* it is being created at those moments. This means that every object (which is a physical system) with all of its parts, structure, and properties—its existence, its nature, and its functioning—is a matter solely of God's existence-conferring acts of willing it as such according to plan. Therefore, no state of a physical system at one moment of existence brings about anything either within itself or in a distinct physical system at the next moment because the entirety of what exists (i.e., what is “brought

42 WJE 3: 402.

43 For a similar argument, see Nicholas Malebranche, *Dialogues on metaphysics and On religion*, eds. Nicholas Jolley and David Scott (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 106–111.

44 Philip Quinn's attempt to preserve concurrentism by blocking this logical consequence fails. See Timothy Miller, “*Continuous creation and secondary causation: the threat of occasionalism*,” *Religious studies* 47, no. 1 (2010): 17.

about”) at any moment is what results *only* from God’s existence-conferring action. While changes within a system may *seem* to be caused by the configuration of parts at a previous moment—as though each configuration gave it a causal power that brings about the altered configuration of the next state—such changes are caused only by God’s acting according to plan, the detectable regularities within which are described by laws. The patterns or regularities of physical behavior according to laws of co-existence, laws of succession, or forces (as the case may be), though real, are ultimately and only God acting according to plan. No object which is ontologically dependent to the utmost extent, in every respect, at every moment of its existence, can be functionally self-sufficient to any extent in any respect at any moment of its existence. Any notion of *functioning self-sufficiency*—the ideas of a physical system *functioning on its own* or possessing *autonomy*—conjoined with premises (1) and (2), is an incoherent theory about God and creation.⁴⁵ The attribution of “causation,” apparent “functionings,” or “causal powers” to purely physical systems is no more than a conceptual projection. It must be underscored that though changes in states of physical systems over a sequence of moments understood as dispositional properties are real states, real changes, and real properties with respect to creatures—a fact that makes science possible and legitimate—the apparent causation by physical systems or causal powers is nothing other than God’s conferring existence according to plan. In other words,

(12) Every object’s *existence*, *nature*, and *functioning* at any moment is due only to God’s positive willing its *existence* and its *functioning*, and no object *exists* or *functions* at any moment other than as God’s *existence-conferring action*.

Since God is sustaining physical objects, and since these objects are neither ontologically nor functionally self-sufficient, but are being continually created by God, their apparent functioning (internally and externally) is really only God’s existence-conferring actions. In other words,

(13) An object’s continuing *existence*, *nature*, and *functioning* are passive.

Taking stock, God is sustaining the universe with its sub-systems and constituents in existence by willing it as such according to plan. There are no parts or

⁴⁵ Many, if not most, contemporary theistic philosophers treat such functionings as manifestations of an object’s constitutive properties, which are neo-Aristotelian causal powers. See Robert C. Koons and Timothy H. Pickavance, *The atlas of reality: a comprehensive guide to metaphysics* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2017) and Travis Dumsday, *Dispositionalism and the metaphysics of science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

properties of an object that cause it *actively* to persist or to function “on its own.” Rather, a physical object’s existence, its nature, and its functioning are due only God’s existence-conferring action according to plan.

Treating God’s creation of the world as a past and finished event is imprecise, incautious, and misleading. To be precise, when we refer to the physical world, any of its objects or subsystems, their perceived properties, and ways they function and interact, the objective referent of our statements is a simultaneous and complementary duality; it is only be the universe *as* it is being created and sustained. This is consistent with realist fundamental physics which holds that the persisting universe is a sequence of states of physical systems, a dynamic complex of ongoing events and processes. Richard Campbell explains that there are two broad paradigms of physical explanation grounded in two distinct types of ontology. The one explains the dynamic (i.e., apparent change) on the grounds of the static, according priority to entities (i.e., objects, “substances” or “bits of matter”). The other paradigm explains the apparently static on the grounds of the dynamic (i.e., events and processes).⁴⁶ Edwards’ view is a version of the latter and as such is consistent with some approaches to quantum theory. Lee Smolin is a quantum physicist and, though not a theist, writes that

We cannot understand the world we see around us as something static. We must see it as something *created*, and under *continual recreation*, by an enormous number of processes. (*emphasis added*) [...] the passage of time expresses *an active process of creation* and this “activity of time” is the *creation* of novel events, each on after the other. (*emphasis added*)⁴⁷

The term *creation* for Smolin is a metaphor, but for Edwards “*creation*” is not a metaphor. As it appears in *End of Creation*, *creation* it is a *nominalization* of the verb *create* in the present perfect continuous tense, which indicates an action that was begun in the past and continues. The universe is like a symphony.⁴⁸ Just as what we hear is, on deep analysis, a simultaneity of performance and sound, so the universe is a simultaneity of divine existence-conferring action and the result. Even the operation of our perceptual and conceptual capacities are matters of God’s continuous action, including *perception* of objects and a *conception* of their persistence.

46 Richard Campbell, *The Metaphysics of emergence*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.

47 Lee Smolin, *Three roads to quantum gravity* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 64 and *Einstein’s unfinished revolution: the search for what lies beyond the quantum* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 266.

48 One might say that the symphony is “off-key” at times, given that it is “fallen” and will itself be redeemed.

Toward a positive account of persistence

Since the concept of an object's *persistence* includes continuing *existence* and some account of what grounds its transtemporal *identity*, which is *remaining the same thing regardless of change*, we do not yet have a "positive" account of persistence. What we need now is (1) to determine how an object's *transtemporal identity* fits into this, (2) indicate how this accounts for an object's *properties* and *relations*, and (3) show how such properties and relations account for an object's *functionings* and *change*. First, object *x*'s *transtemporal identity* is God's plan for *x*, and *x*'s existence at every moment is the temporally co-extensive result of God acting according to plan. Second, God *enacting* these representations yields all of *x*'s perceived *properties* and *relations*, some of which make it the *kind* of thing it is. Finally, a physical object or physical system's *functionings*, what it characteristically does and the *changes* it either undergoes or brings about, are a matter of its properties and its relationship to other things. Properties are dispositions, and dispositions are really God's commitment to confer existence on condition.

Given (13), at no moment does anything exist or have any of its properties other than as God's existence-conferring volition. The continuing existence of every created being—every (apparent) *object*, every (apparent) *part*, every (apparent) *aspect*, and every (apparent) *relation*—depends entirely on God's sustaining action, at every moment of its existence, for its existence and its functioning. McCann and Kvanvig have argued this, concluding "we see no room for a plausible compromise. If the theological doctrines at issue are correct, then not only is it 'in Him that we live, and move, and have our being,' it is also through Him and by His power that the universe and the things in it have their own *distinctive character at each instant*" (*emphasis added*)⁴⁹ Thus, we have this principle:

(14) *Divine Identity Dependence* (DID). For any object *x*, the *individual essence* of *x* is such that every moment *t* in the entire existence of *x*, *x* at *t* is the act/result of God conferring *x*'s existence at *t* according to plan.

This principle of *Divine Identity Dependence* (DID) is an analysis of what it means for a physical object *x* to *depend* for its *identity* on God, which includes its properties and, thus, events of *x*'s functioning. Combining (14) with (7) (DXD) that *x* *depends for its existence on God*, we have this principle:

49 Hugh J. McCann and Jonathan L. Kvanvig, "The occasionalist proselytizer: a modified catechism," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5, (1991): 588.

Ontological Dependence (OD). For any object x and moment t , x at t is *ontologically dependent* on God at t if and only if (DXD): x depends for its existence solely on God acting according to plan and (DID): x depends for its identity solely on God acting according to plan.⁵⁰

In this we have the *existence* conditions and the *transtemporal identity* conditions for a metaphysical account of *persistence*.

Given (14), since (2) God created and is sustaining every object *ex nihilo* according to plan, it follows that

(15) An object's *persistence* is passive.

An object's *persistence* is due solely to the existence-conferring actions of God according to his plan to achieve his original ultimate end. Given (2) that *God created the universe ex nihilo and is sustaining every object according to plan*, from (14) and (15) it follows that

(16) PERSISTENCE. A persisting object is a *passive continuant* (result)/*process* (act) complementarity.

A persisting object is *the continuing result* of God's existence-conferring action according to plan for his original ultimate end, while at the same time it is a *process* of divine action in virtue of God *acting* according to plan for his original ultimate end. In short, a persisting object is a simultaneous complementarity of both divine *action* according to plan and the *result* of divine action according to plan.⁵¹ To make this more precise, let us observe this definition:

PHYSICAL EXISTENCE. For any physical system x , and any duration δ (which is a convex set of Planck moments), x *exists* (*physically*) *over* δ if and only x has mass/energy over δ .

Both the existence of x over some duration δ (as continuing result and process of divine action) and the transtemporal identity of x (as the complete plan for x) are

50 See Walter J. Schultz, "Divine action, ontological dependence, and truthmaking" in *Mereologies, ontologies and facets: the categorial structure of reality*, ed. Paul M. W. Hackett (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018), 213–4.

51 This is what Edwards also says in *Original Sin*, noting that it is common to have a "wrong notion of what we call *sameness* or *oneness* in created things [...] there is no such thing as any identity or oneness in created objects, existing at different times, but what depends on *God's sovereign constitution* . . . for it appears that a *divine constitution* is what *makes truth*, in affairs of this nature." WJE 3: 397, 404.

necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the persistence of x over δ . On this view, two distinct sentences referring to x at different moments, whether x has changed or not, involve both facets (existence and identity) and, given the nature of Edwards' view of transtemporal identity, both sentences reference to x , not two distinct things or two distinct temporal parts of one thing.⁵²

Edwards' idealism, continuous creationism, and his complete representation exemplarism together entail this view of transtemporal identity and a version of *presentism*. "*Presentism*" in general is the view that only present physical systems (or events) exist and others, which are past or future with respect to the present, do not exist. Given Edwards' idealism and continuous creationism, an object exists only during the moments of God's conferring existence. This process, however, involves more than what is included in the "now" of standard "presentism," because it is God's existence conferring action according to plan.⁵³ Therefore, Edwards' view of persistence is not a version of *four-dimensionalism*.⁵⁴ Edwards' view is not a version of *exdurantism* ("stage theory") nor of *perdurantism* ("worm theory"). Both of these views presuppose that objects at any moment are temporal parts of a four-dimensional metaphysical whole. *Exdurantism* holds that an ordinary object is only one distinct momentary stage at a time, being wholly present at every moment it exists, having past and future stages as its temporal counterparts all of which constitute a four-dimensional metaphysical whole. *Perdurantism* also holds the doctrine of temporal parts, but differs in that an ordinary object is a four-dimensional metaphysical whole; the totality of its distinct temporal parts, being only partially present at any moment it exists. For Edwards, however, there are no such metaphysical wholes. Instead, what exists metaphysically is *God's plan* which is ontologically prior to what is created. The *object or physical system* that exists physically and only *as* God creates it according to plan. Thus, whenever the term "temporal part" is used in the four-dimensional sense, it cannot apply to Edwards' view. The term "temporal part" may, however, be used

52 Roderick Chisholm, failing to understand Edwards' explicit point, supposing that both existence and identity are somehow *in* the created object, initiates a tradition of misrepresentation on this point, perpetuating the false idea that Edwards held to a doctrine of temporal parts. Roderick M. Chisholm, *Person and object: a metaphysical study* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1976), 138–9. See also Mark Heller, *The ontology of physical objects: four-dimensional hunks of matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 21.

53 Edwards' view of persistence is consistent with Lee Smolin's as expressed in *Einstein's unfinished revolution: the search for what lies beyond the quantum*. New York: Penguin Press, 2019.

54 Michael Rea writes that "*Four-dimensionalism*" is "a view about the ontological status of non-present objects" and comes in two standard varieties, either ("eternalism") that "all past and future objects exist" or ("growing block theory") that "all past objects exist, but future objects do not exist." Michael C. Rea, "Four-dimensionalism." *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, eds., Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 246, 247.

as a figure of speech, reflecting only a possible way to conceptualize or talk about a persisting object. One may tell the story of the history of an object, say the “Edmund Fitzgerald,” which sank in a storm on Lake Superior. It would be an empirical history which would have “temporal parts” in different sense. This would be consistent with Edwards’ view, but this would not be temporal parts understood metaphysically. Edwards’ view of persistence is unique and could be called, “*continuantism*.”

III. Edwardsian persistence overcomes the “problem of persistence” and the objection

The objection that continuous creationism and occasionalism entail that *No physical object persists* presupposes some concept of *persistence*. Both Edwards and the objectors are tasked with the project of providing an account of persistence, one that reconciles three intuitively plausible theses and their presuppositions:

- (a) objects *persist*,
- (b) objects *change*, and
- (c) no object can *have incompatible properties*.

Each of these involves at least one crucial presupposition. The crucial presupposition of Thesis (a) lies in the following definition:

(PERSIST). If an object persists, it remains the same object over time.

In the background to this issue is a basic intuition about the identity of objects:

(LEIBNIZ’ LAW: *indiscernibility of identicals*). If an object x is the same object as y (i.e., is *numerically identical* to y), then x and y are *qualitatively identical*.

In other words, every property had by object x is also had by object y . Thus, if an object x has a property that y lacks (or vice versa), then they are not the same object. Thesis (b) presupposes the following by definition:

(CHANGE). If a physical object changes, it either “gains” or “loses” a property over time.

In addition to presupposing a concept of a physical *property*, thesis (c) presupposes what it is to *have a property*.

In holding any two of the three theses, one must implicitly deny the other. Suppose (a) that an object persists and (b) that it changes. By CHANGE, it either gains or loses a property over time. Say, for example, that having been exposed to the spring sun, the granite boulder was warm by late afternoon, but by the next morning it was cold. Even so, by PERSIST, it remains the same object over time. Yet, the boulder in the afternoon (object *x*) is not qualitatively identical to the boulder the next morning (object *y*). Therefore, by LEIBNIZ' LAW, it cannot be the same object. Holding both (a) and (b) implicitly contradicts (c) the intuition that no physical object can have incompatible properties. Alternatively, to affirm that (b) physical objects change and that (c) no physical object can have incompatible properties is implicitly to deny that (a) physical objects persist (i.e., remain the same object over time). This is Heraclitus' position: *there are no persisting objects*. Everything is in flux. Finally, to affirm that (a) physical objects persist and that (c) no physical object can have incompatible properties is implicitly to deny that (b) physical objects change and to agree with Parmenides that *nothing changes*.

Overcoming this initial problem of conflicting intuitions requires a reconciling *analysis* or *account of persistence*, one that both explicates their content and explains their plausibility. According to Edwards' metaphysics of God and creation, a persisting object is a *passive continuant* (result)/*process* (act) complementarity. Since the *existence* and *transtemporal identity* of an object is a matter of divine action according to plan, so are its *properties*. However, an object's properties are *patterns* of divine commitment, which are components of God's plan. When a commitment is enacted, what we perceive and conceive are dispositions and laws of succession. Whether a physical system *has* a dispositional property and, if so, *when* it manifests are matters of what God's plan includes.⁵⁵ When an object's different dispositions manifest, it is according to God's plan, that is, according to God's commitments regarding it. This is what it means to *have a property* under Edwards' idealism, continuous creationism, and occasionalism. These affirm and account for intuitions (a), (b) and (c) and their presuppositions. Dispositions need not and seldom constantly manifest. Therefore, though the *manifestations* of dispositions can be imagined to be incompatible if they were imagined as occurring at the same time, the incompatibility does not necessarily arise because *having a disposition* does not require that it always manifest. In other words, while *some* manifestations of different dispositions cannot co-occur,

55 For a divine action, truth-conditional account of "*physical system x has dispositional property D*," see Walter J. Schultz, "Dispositions, capacities and powers: a Christian analysis," *Philosophia Christi* 11, no. 2 (2009): 321–38 and Walter J. Schultz and Lianne D'Andrea-Winslow, "Causation, dispositions, and physical occasionalism," *Zygon, the journal of science and religion* 52, no. 4 (2017): 962–83.

there is nothing in the nature of dispositions that preclude an object from *having* them simultaneously. They simply cannot *manifest* at the same time. Dispositions manifesting at different times is what accounts for the differences in what is perceived. The dispositional properties are not necessarily gained or lost. What is perceived in the granite boulder example is a *qualitative* difference: once the boulder was warm, and later it is cool. These perceived qualitative differences are not incompatible properties but are alternative manifestations of the dispositions of granite and the sun under two different sets of conditions. Secondly, objects can *have a property* even when it is not observed or even observable. These facts enable Edwards' view to avoid conflict with LEIBNIZ' LAW.

Therefore, the view of persistence of physical objects entailed by Edwards' continuous creationism and occasionalism overcomes the "problem of persistence." In fact, Edwards' occasionalism *entails* the persistence of ordinary objects. What we individuate as an ordinary physical object through the mechanism of perception is a relatively invariant core of aspects of processes over time, the identity of which lie not *in* the object but in God's plan *for* it, i.e., the identity of an object lies in God's "sovereign constitution."

IV. The no persistence of objects objection against occasionalism is false

The objection to Edwards' continuous creationism and occasionalism is an impossibility claim: "It is *not possible* that continuous creationism and occasionalism are true, and physical objects persist." In Section II it was shown that Edwards' argumentation in *End of Creation* entails his *continuous creationism*, his (*physical*) *occasionalism*, and that these entail a view of persistence, which is that a persisting object is a *passive continuant* (result)/*process* (act) complementarity. This view of persistence successfully addresses a widely recognized problem of reconciling three intuitions about persistence. Thus, the objection to Edwards' continuous creationism and occasionalism is simply false.