Satan and his *Maleficium* in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards

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Introduction

On Sunday morning, June 1, 1735, Joseph Hawley cut his own throat and died. One of Northampton’s leading citizens and uncle to Jonathan Edwards had committed suicide at the height of the religious revival, and this was unintelligible to most people of the region, especially to supporters of the Awakening. Edwards regarded him as “a gentlemen of more than common understanding, and strict morals, religious in his behavior,” but recognized that inwardly he was tormented by “[concern] about the state of his soul.” Finally, as Edwards explained, discouragement and melancholy simply overpowered his uncle, and he ended his life.¹ Two days after the suicide, in a letter to Benjamin Colman (1673-1747), Edwards attributed Hawley’s suicide to the “great rage” of Satan at the “extraordinary breaking forth of the work of God.”² In the mind of Edwards, the primordial, cosmic battle of the Devil and his angels against the agents of God had played itself out in his parish, indeed in the very life of one of his parishioners.

Edwards’ explanation of the Hawley suicide was not simply a desperate attempt to make sense of a devastating pastoral and personal crisis. To the contrary: Edwards actually believed in Satan and in his ability to affect the lives of individuals and broader events of history. This might come as a surprise to some, because most historians of late 17th- and early 18th-century Anglo-American culture have grown accustomed to speaking of a

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² "Letter to Benjamin Colman,” *Works* (Yale), vol. 4, p. 110.
“decline of the demonic” during this period, at least among the educated and influential. This “declension thesis” is not without merit. The art and literature of the period, especially that of John Milton (1608-1674), “mythologized” Satan and his activity, treating them more as literary devices to be manipulated according to human fancy than as malevolent, real-world forces. More importantly, the debacle of the Salem witchcraft trials, reaching its nadir in 1692, and the English Enlightenment critique of the “enchanted world” from the 1670s onward snuffed out belief in Satan and demonic activity altogether in the minds of some on both sides of the Atlantic. But Edwards is not one of them. To be sure, Satan and his maleficium prove to be potent themes in Edwards’ writings as he attempts to interpret individual religious experience and broader events of history.

The descriptive essay that follows synthesizes references scattered throughout the writings of Jonathan Edwards in an effort to discern what he believed about Satan and demonic activity. This study assumes that what we discern in Edwards’ writings is a transformation of (not a decline in) traditional Puritan beliefs about Satan. Edwards’ demonology is as vigorous as that of his Puritan forbears, but he simply reformulated it in light of Lockean epistemology and continued ecclesio-political tensions between Puritan and non-Puritan parties in both England and America. This study begins to pin down what

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3 See, for example, Michael Winship’s *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). See esp. ch. 7.


5 See Russell, pp. 78-79 and Winship, pp. 128.

6 An important study which makes a similar claim about the transformation of attitudes toward witchcraft in England between 1650 and 1750 has recently been published. See Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations c. 1650-c. 1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Bostridge
Edwards believed about Satan and demonic activity, leaving the question of Edwards’ place in the history of late early modern Anglo-American demonology to future research.

What did Edwards believe about Satan and demonic activity? He believed that Satan and his angels are real, albeit supernatural entities. They neither have nor can take on corporeal existence. Impelled by jealousy toward humanity, Satan and his angels pridefully rebelled against God and God expelled them from heaven as a result. In an effort to exact revenge against God, Satan and his angels restlessly work for humanity’s downfall and continued misery to tarnish the glory of God in the created world. Satan and his angels have the power -- insofar as God allows them -- to influence the religious experience of individuals and thereby to misdirect and pervert the redemptive work of God in the world. Despite the pervasive and destructive influence of Satan and his demons in the world, God providentially secures Satan’s defeat in dramatic reversals of Satan’s *maleficium*. Indeed, these repeated instances of Satan’s defeat in the world foreshadowed his eschatological punishment in hell.

Thus, Edwards’ interpretation of the Hawley suicide could not be more representative of his overall beliefs about Satan and his activity. Because the Spirit of God already was withdrawing from Northampton and the revival was winding down, Satan was allowed to rage once again against the people of the region. Precisely by taking advantage of Hawley’s “distemper” and “melancholy,” it was Satan who drove him to those despairing thoughts about the state of his soul. And it was Satan who encouraged suicidal tendencies in Hawley and others of the region “as if somebody had spoke to ‘em, ‘Cut your own throat, now is a good opportunity: *now*, NOW!” Yet, Satan’s *maleficium* in the life of an individual

emphasizes the ecclesio-political situation as decisive in the transformation. With regard to Edwards (and perhaps even the English thinkers of Bostridge’s study), Lockean epistemology cannot be ignored as an influence.

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7 *Faithful Narrative, Works* vol. 4, p. 206-207. Edwards’ words “as if” should not be missed. Edwards is not claiming that Satan actually *spoke* to Hawley, but that Satan made it *seem* as though *someone* had. For Edwards, this is characteristic both of Satan’s subtlety and his cruelty in making impressions on the human imagination, explored below.
also represented a turning point in the broader work of God in the revival.\(^8\) The Hawley suicide was sensible proof to Edwards that the revival was over: not that Satan had triumphed over God’s work in Northampton, but that the momentum in Satan’s primordial struggle against God again had shifted back in Satan’s direction.

**Satan, Devils, and the Damned**

From at least two generations of Puritan religiosity, Edwards inherited a surprising flexibility in the way in which he uses terminology for the demonic.\(^9\) Like his Puritan predecessors, Edwards applied the word “devil” and “devils” with equal force to Satan himself, the angels who do his bidding, and the men and women whose souls are under demonic influence. In fact, at times readers of Edwards have to use particular care in determining precisely which dimension of the demonic alliance Edwards means. Nevertheless, Edwards in many instances relies on other vocabulary to distinguish between them. Satan is most often “Lucifer,” the “old serpent,” “Beelzebub,” and “the Dragon,” reflecting Edwards’ reliance on biblical terminology.\(^10\) In addition to the more general “devils,” Edwards most often refers to the angels who do Satan’s bidding simply as “fallen angels.” And finally, men and women who are under demonic influence, in addition to

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\(^8\) Granted, Patricia Tracy has drawn attention to the possibility that Edwards adjusted the chronology of events in his *Faithful Narrative* to make the Hawley suicide the turning point in the revival. See Patricia Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 116-117.


\(^10\) In “Miscellany 936,” Edwards ticks off a list of all the names for Satan that he has found in the Scripture, “which are never found in the plural number.” Most of the ones listed, however, are rarely used elsewhere in his writings. The names for Satan listed above are the ones that Edwards regularly uses as synonyms for “Satan.” See *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 608. After this initial citation, all references to the Banner of Truth Edition will be given as *Works* (BT), followed by a volume and page number.
being called “devils,” are called simply “the damned,” or “the wicked.”

As his starting point for understanding who Satan is, Edwards interprets Revelation 12:7-9 quite literally. The text reads:

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him (KJV).

There really was a war in heaven, in which Satan and those angels whom he could convince to join him fought against the archangel Michael and the angels loyal to God. The rebellion occasioned God’s judgment: Satan and the rebel angels were cast from heaven to the earth. Following Milton’s lead, Edwards takes considerable poetic license in elaborating this basic narrative into a rich mythology of the demonic.

For Edwards, pride probably motivated Satan and some of the angels to rebel against God. Time and again, Edwards refers to some angels’ unwillingness to serve a lower creature (i.e. humanity) despite God’s command for them to do so. Serving humanity would be according to these angels “degradation and misery,” and Satan thought it a “great debasing of him.” Particularly galling to these angels was God’s decree that one of these humans, Jesus Christ, would have a relationship to God qualitatively different from that of all other created beings. “It seems to me,” Edwards wrote:

that the temptation of the angels, which occasioned their rebellion, was, that when ... God declared his decree that one of that human nature should be

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11 In this instance, Edwards seems to part company with his Puritan forbears, whose vocabulary for human recruits of Satan is much more picturesque. See Godbeer, p. 88.

12 Sensabaugh alludes to Milton’s influence on Edwards by saying simply that the latter “thought highly” of the former. Edwards apparently spoke in some place about the “inimitable excellencies” of Milton’s work, but Sensabaugh provides no reference. Sensabaugh presents more evidence for Milton’s influence on two people close to Edwards: Benjamin Colman and Joseph Bellamy. See Sensabaugh, pp. 43-52, esp. p. 49.


14 “Miscellany 320,” Works (Yale), vol. 13, p.401.
his son, his best beloved, his greatest favourite, and should be united to his eternal Son, and that he should be their Head and King, that they should be given to him, and should worship him, and be his servants, attendants and ministers.\textsuperscript{15}

That a human being, an inferior creation, should be exalted in this way was intolerable to Satan and like-minded angels. The angels’ “appetite for their own honor” overcame their “holy dispositions” and caused them to resist the decree of God.\textsuperscript{16}

But there are some logical problems occasioned by Edwards’ poetic license. After all, the incarnation and exaltation of Jesus Christ was unnecessary until humanity fell, but Edwards assumed that this pride motivated the fall of Satan and his angels when “God was about to create man, or had first created him.”\textsuperscript{17} To the extent that Edwards even tried to explain this apparent logical inconsistency, he predictably relied on the providence and sovereignty of God. Knowing beforehand that humanity would fall, God set in motion “preparation for the work of redemption”\textsuperscript{18} through Christ even though Satan and his angels did not know particularly how it was to be, “God having only in general revealed it to them.”\textsuperscript{19} Elsewhere, Edwards dismissed the problem of chronology altogether: whether the establishment of God’s redemptive plan in Christ “was without the fall predestinated as some suppose, or upon supposition of the fall, as others...” seemed immaterial to him.\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, Edwards completely sidestepped the issue of Satan’s initial motivation to incite rebellion. For Edwards, all sin was the direct result of temptation. But, “seeing [Satan] had no tempter,” Edwards can only say unconvincingly that “tis probable that some extraordinary manifestation of God’s sovereignty was his temptation.”\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{15} ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} “Miscellany 438,” \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 12, p. 487.
\textsuperscript{17} “Miscellany 320,” \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 13, p. 401.
\textsuperscript{18} “Miscellany 833,” \textit{Works} (BT), vol. 2, p. 608.
\textsuperscript{19} “Miscellany 438,” \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 13, p. 487.
\textsuperscript{20} “Miscellany 1261,” \textit{Works} (BT), vol. 2, p. 611.
\textsuperscript{21} “Miscellany 290,” \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 13, p. 382-383.
Edwards’ poetic license took him only so far.

Therefore, it is important to note that Edwards was at best tentative in his description of the angels’ fall. He apparently knew that he is elaborating without direct support from Scripture, and often appealed to “some leading divines” in support of his arguments.22

If the motivation for the angels’ rebellion could be stated with only relative certainty, the actual mechanics were more certain to Edwards: Satan emerged very clearly in Edwards’ writings as the instigator of the war in heaven. Unquestionably, the chief reason for Satan’s influence over those angels who would follow him was simply the angelic hierarchy intrinsic to the created order. In speaking of Satan before his fall, Edwards called him “the chief of all the angels, or greatest in natural capacity, strength, and wisdom, and highest in honor and dignity, the brightest of all those stars of heaven....”23 Moreover, Satan was “God’s chief servant, and the grand minister of his providence, and the top of the creation....”24 Because of Satan’s status among the angelic host before his fall, Edwards was certain that the rebellious initiative had lain with Satan and no one else: as an archangel, Satan “conceived rebellion against the Almighty and drew away a vast company of the heavenly hosts with him.”25

22 In “Miscellany 1057,” Edwards mentions specifically Charles Owen (d. 1746) and John Glas (1695-1773). And, in “Miscellany 1261,” Edwards mentions Girolami Zanchi (1516-1590), whom he accounts as “one of the best protestant writers” and Fransisco de Suarez (1548-1617), “the best of the schoolmen.” Finally, in “Miscellany 1266,” Edwards mentions Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) in support of his position. See Works, (BT), vol. 2, p. 611. It is interesting to note the homiletical use that Edwards made of this theme of demonic pride. For example, in his treatise Some Thoughts, Edwards argued that spiritual pride is the main door through which Satan has access to the hearts of the religious. In fact, pride is the sin that makes human beings most like Satan, that is, makes them devils. See Works (Yale), vol. 4, pp. 414-417. Occasionally, Edwards makes polemical use of the same theme. For example, in “Miscellany 340,” the same pride that caused the apostasy of Satan also prevented the pope (the “antichrist”) and the Roman curia from being true servants of God. See Works (Yale), vol. 13, p. 415.


24 ibid, p. 609.

25 “Miscellany 320,” Works (Yale), vol. 13, p. 402. The double entendre of Edwards’ word
God’s punishment of Satan and this vast company of rebel angels took two forms in Edwards’ thought. First, as Revelation 12:9 asserts, Satan and the fallen angels were cast from heaven to earth, where they continue to build a kingdom in opposition to God’s. Satan remains the leader of the pack, for he “restlessly endeavors to set himself up in this world, and maintain his dominion here, and to oppose God...” With the other devils as “his servants, his wretched slaves,” Satan “seeks to reign as god of this world, and affects to be worshipped as God.”

But in what sense is this “independent kingdom of themselves” a punishment for Satan and the fallen angels? In short, Edwards argued that opposition to God was its own punishment. Indeed, by their continued rebellion, Satan and his angels are perfect slaves to the pride and ambition that reign over them. God had given them over to that same disposition which they exercised when they fell, and by that means makes them forever a procuring of their own misery. And this is a misery they are plunged into as a punishment for their first rebellion.

The restless work of Satan and his angels meets continual “confusion” “disappointment and vexation.” Satan’s efforts are persistently thwarted, because no matter how highly evil exalts itself in the world, Jesus Christ is always exalted above it in the work of redemption. In short, Satan and his angels are fighting a losing battle, and they know it.

But according to Edwards, this temporal disappointment and vexation will pale in comparison with the eschatological punishment that awaits Satan, devils, and the damned.

“conceived” is intriguing. Satan’s rebellion is a conception in both the intellectual sense, and in the sense that rebellion is the “offspring” of Satan.

32 Edwards’ notion of the eschatological fate of the damned cannot be pursued at length here. But it
In fact, mere anticipation of this “future state of perfect misery” inspires a hellish fear in Satan and his angels that torments them even at the present. They have good reason to be afraid; hell is a “world of misery,” a “lake of burning brimstone” and a “dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God.” Moreover, in a kind of providential irony, it is Jesus Christ to whom judgment of the devils has been committed:

how remarkably will [Satan] be mortified at the last day, when he shall be judged by a man, by one of the race, yea one that is as it were all the redeemed. [Devils] must be brought in chains to have their judgment and condemnation before his throne, [he] being united personally to the Deity then sitting on his throne, judging those fallen angels with all his assessors with him in his throne, judging of those angels that thought to have had such a good sport of their destruction.

What makes this scene so ironic is Edwards’ conviction that Jesus Christ actually replaced Satan as the anointed one to whom judgment would be committed. Satan fell because his pride prevented him from serving a lower creation; yet, by virtue of his humiliation (which was directly proportional to Satan’s pride), Jesus Christ was exalted into the place of the fallen archangel, attaining a status which Satan attempted to usurp by force. To make this worth noting that, in reference to Satan’s endless misery in hell, Edwards makes the following supposition: “As the devil’s ministers, servants, and instruments, of the angelic nature, those who are called the devil’s angels, shall have their part with him; for the like reason we may suppose, his servants and instruments of the human nature, will also share with him.” See “Miscellaneous Remarks,” Chapter II, Paragraph 28 in Works (BT). vol. 2, p. 523. Yet, Edwards argues that there is a qualitative difference between Satan and the damned which should not be missed. Although wicked men are the children of the devil, the devil 1) is proportionally more wicked; 2) has a greater habit of sin; and most importantly, 3) is not subject to restraining grace as wicked men often are. See “Miscellany 433,” Works (Yale), vol. 13, p. 482, n. 2.

33 “Miscellany 435,” Works (Yale), vol. 13, p. 483-484.


35 “Miscellany 298,” Works (Yale), vol. 13, p. 385-386. This theme of providential irony is explored in some length below.

36 The Ezekiel passage speaks of the king of Tyre as an anointed cherub. Because Edwards understands the king of Tyre as a “type of devil,” he concludes that pre-lapsarian Satan was the Messiah, or Christ, as he was anointed. See “Miscellany 936,” Works (BT), vol. 2, p. 608-609.

37 Edwards frequently alludes to the contrast between Satan’s pride and Christ’s humility as if the
matters even worse for the devils, those elect against whom the devils strove in their work in the world join Jesus Christ in their judgment. Humanity, then, and Jesus Christ in particular, emerge in the eyes of Satan and his angels as both the reason and the instrument of the punishment for their fall.

As if the fires of hell and the bitter irony were not punishment enough for them, Satan, his angels, and the damned in hell will realize that their eternal misery will only “double the ardor” of the elect angels and humanity in heaven. Moreover, in hell, Satan and his angels will finally realize the magnitude of their sin; their “spiteful rebellion and direct malicious war against God” was an unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit. They suffer in the realization that they never had an opportunity for a Savior. And finally, the devils in hell are “like spiders shut up together” because they cannot catch flies, they devour one another. In short, hatred will be perfected in hell, just as love is perfected in heaven.

Satan’s Maleficium

But this rich mythology of Satan, devils, and the damned composed barely half of the story of Edwardsean demonology. Edwards appeared equally concerned throughout his writings about the work of Satan, his maleficium, and how to discern it in individual religious experience. The external, spectral evidence for Satan’s work which captured the latter recapitulated the former. See, for example, “Miscellany 941,” Works (BT), vol. 2, p. 606.

38 “Miscellany 279,” in Harry S. Stout, ed. A Jonathan Edwards Reader, p. 42. In two treatises published posthumously, Edwards develops a related theme: the conviction that the “torments of the wicked in hell” will not be an “occasion for grief to the saints in heaven.” Rather, the saints in heaven will rejoice at the justice, power, and majesty of God, while praising him for the grace and love that God bestows upon them. See “The End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous,” Works (BT), vol. 2, p. 207-212.


41 “Miscellany 232,” Works (Yale), vol. 13, p. 350. Edwards’ theology of hell deserves far more attention than it can be given here. But the references provided are sufficient to give the reader a basic impression of how hell functions in the punishment of Satan and the fallen angels.
imaginings of at least two generations of Puritan witch-hunters found no place in the writings of Edwards. Rather, Edwards took a turn inward, into the interior life of the human imagination, to find compelling evidence of Satan’s work. Yet the work of Satan can also be discerned in the contours of broader historical events. Indeed, all history for Edwards consisted of God’s redeeming work in creation, whose chief aim is bringing glory to God. But Satan aims to rob God of the glory by repeatedly thwarting that redeeming work however he can. In both arenas of Satan’s work -- in the human imagination and in the events of history -- Edwards saw the primordial conflict between Satan and God repeated, with the fate of humanity hanging in the balance.

“The imagination or phantasy,” Edwards wrote, “is the devil’s grand lurking place, the very nest of foul and delusive spirits.” However the later Romantic traditions in America may have evaluated Edwards’ claim, there is no denying that he took a dim view of the imagination as a source for spiritual understanding. As Edwards made sense of the human mind, the will and the understanding are rational faculties, and in some sense generally operate independently of the body. Indeed, the ideas of the will and the understanding are *sui generis*. The imagination, on the other hand, is a non-rational faculty somehow intricately dependent on the body as its source of ideas. The imagination often uncritically accepts whatever external ideas are presented to and mediated through the body’s “animal spirits.” Without being held in check by the understanding and the will -- which according to Edwards is unlikely -- the imagination lays the human mind bare to whatever ideas are presented to it.

The Edwardsean Satan knew this, and regularly took full advantage of the human imagination. In fact, Edwards went so far as to say that only by the imagination does Satan

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43 In a bewildering passage, Edwards attempts to make this clear relative to his fourth of the distinguishing signs of gracious affections. And, as editor John Smith notes, in his ideas about the imagination Edwards relied heavily on Anthony Burgess (d. 1664). See *Works* (Yale) vol. 2, p. 288-289.
have access to the soul of any person. Satan cannot “excite any thought or produce any
effect in the soul of man” except by his crafty and subtle influence on the human
imagination. Even though every human has an imagination, Edwards argued that certain
kinds of people are relatively more susceptible to the influences of Satan. For example,
“common people” were easily bewitched by a “glittering show of high religion” without
realizing that Satan has transformed himself into an angel of light. And, like Hawley,
“persons that are under the disease of melancholy” were often visibly and remarkably subject
to the suggestions and temptations of Satan. But is it important to remember that, for
Edwards, no one was exempt from temptation by Satan, not even Christ himself.

Among Christians Satan enjoyed particular advantages in making impressions upon
the imagination, because he can adulterate truly gracious experiences and spiritual discoveries
with what Edwards calls “counterfeit religion.” In fact, Edwards claims that

“Tis by the mixture of counterfeit religion with true, not discerned and
distinguished, that the devil has had his greatest advantage against the cause
and kingdom of Christ, all along, hitherto.

Nearly all forms of counterfeit religion are products of Satan’s impressions on the human
imagination.

For example, the pernicious notion of “immediate revelation” arises when
individuals imagine themselves to have direct, unmediated communication with God which
grants them unique spiritual understanding or allows them to predict the future. But such
communication, as divine in origin as it may seem, in reality come from Satan’s impressions

\[44\] Works (Yale), vol. 2, p. 287-288.

\[45\] Works (Yale), vol. 2, p. 289.

\[46\] Works (Yale), vol. 2, p. 86.

\[47\] Discerning counterfeit religion from the true is unquestionably the central theme of Edwards’
Awakening apologetics, and deserves far more attention than it can be given in this study. In
assessing the person and work of Satan in Edwards’ theology, we must confine our attention to
descriptions of so-called counterfeit religion where Satan and his work figures prominently according
to Edwards.
on the human imagination; they are “imaginary revelation[s]” excited by external ideas suggested by Satan. Edwards cites the followers of Thomas Muntzer (1489?-1525) and Caspar Schwenkfeld (1489-1561) among the “many sects of the enthusiasts that swarmed in the world after the Reformation,” and concludes that their claim to immediate revelation was a delusion of Satan. The threat of such delusional, counterfeit religion was very real:

By such a notion [immediate revelation] ... Satan would have the opportunity ... to set up himself as the guide and oracle of God’s people, and to have his word regarded as their infallible rule, and so to lead ‘em where he would and introduce what he pleased, and soon to bring the Bible into neglect and contempt.

This subordination of the Scripture to alleged immediate revelation often led to other erroneous practices of religion. Rather than “declaring one’s faith in Scripture expressions,” candidates for ministry were required to submit to creeds and confessions of faith, which Edwards calls “the chief engines that Satan has made use of to tear the church of God into pieces.” Indeed, Satan’s primary purpose in impressing Christian imaginations with so-called immediate revelation is to “draw [them] off from the Word of God.”

But Satan’s interest in impressing human imaginations went beyond his desire to delude individuals. Satan was keenly aware that the delusion and sin of individual persons grows until they infect larger groups of people and influence broadly felt events of God’s redemptive history. Edwards likens the delusion and sin inspired by Satan to a crocodile. Though a crocodile is born of an egg no larger than that of a goose, it grows incessantly until

48 Works (Yale), vol. 2, p. 286-287.


50 “Miscellany 17,” Works (Yale), vol. 13, p. 209. Edwards’ appeal to “conscience” and “liberty” in religious belief, not to mention the broader theme of anti-creedalism, sounds amazingly like the rhetoric that would emerge in the so-called Second Great Awakening. See Nathan Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale, 1989), esp. ch. 2.

51 Works (Yale), vol. 2, p. 309.
the time it dies, and may reach a length of thirty cubits. So it is with the delusion and sin of individual persons; it

is comparatively easily crushed in the egg, taken in its beginning; but if left alone, what head does it get, how great and strong, terrible and destructive does it become, and hard to kill, and grows as long as it lives. 52

The point of Edwards’ typology is apparent enough. The Satanic delusions and sins of individuals, if recognized as such early on, are easily stamped out. But once those delusions and sins infect “towns, countries and empires, and the world of mankind,” Edwards says, they are highly destructive and hard to be destroyed. 53

The growth of papal power between the 5th and 16th century was a sterling example of this dynamic according to Edwards. Roman Catholicism, Edwards asserted, “seems to be the masterpiece of all the contrivances of the devil against the kingdom of Christ,” and has as its end to “turn the ministry of the Christian Church into a ministry of the devil.” 54 Yet Roman Catholicism was built solely upon the sum total of each pope’s delusion and pretensions to power. The pope began as a minister of the congregation at Rome, but with the complicity of the temporal rulers equally deluded by Satan, popes gradually assumed more and more power for themselves. The logical end, as Edwards saw it, was the pope’s demonic claim to be the vicar of Christ on earth, tantamount to claiming the same power that Christ would have if he were still on earth. For Edwards, this power belongs only to God; the papal claim was thus motivated by the same pride and ambition that occasioned the rebellion of Satan and his fall from heaven. Moreover, with its power, the papal-satanic alliance has led countless numbers of people throughout history into the greatest sins of Reformed theology: idolatry and ignorance of Scripture. 55


53 ibid.

54 Works (Yale), vol. 9, p. 411.

55 Works (Yale), vol. 9, p. 412-414.
Nevertheless, Edwards’ Satanic crocodile was growing closer to home, too. Indeed, in Edwards’ day Satan had spoiled the “paradisaic state of the church of God in New England” with an intractable theological controversy over religious affections. On the one hand, Satan had deluded some New Englanders into believing that “manifold fair shows” and “glistening appearances” of high religion were evidence that God had savingly wrought upon them.\textsuperscript{56} In truth, according to Edwards, such counterfeit religious experiences are an abomination to God and have dire soteriological consequences:

By this means [Satan] deceives great multitudes about the state of their souls; making them think they are something when they are nothing; and so eternally undoes ‘em: and not only so, but establishes many, in a strong confidence of their eminent holiness, who are in God’s sight, some of the vilest hypocrites.\textsuperscript{57}

In one sense, Edwards sympathizes with those led astray by false affections; Satan’s counterfeit comes very close to the real thing. Satan often brings texts of Scripture to the mind, lending credibility to his imaginative delusions;\textsuperscript{58} Satan often inspired (counterfeit) love and humility, mimicking the Christian virtues and graces of highest repute;\textsuperscript{59} and Satan even counterfeited the order of the saving operations of the Spirit of God which are preparatory to conversion.\textsuperscript{60}

On the other hand, others in New England had grown to reject religious affections altogether because of the extremism of some.\textsuperscript{61} Here again, Satan is at work persuading


\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 2, p. 88.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 2, p. 144-145.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 2, p. 146.

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 2, p. 158-159.

\textsuperscript{61} The anti-revival, anti-affection faction in New England was led by Charles Chauncy (1705-1787). Chauncy’s \textit{Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England} (1743) is a point-by-point refutation
them “that all affections and sensible emotions of the mind in things of religion ... are to be avoided, and carefully guarded against, as things of a pernicious tendency.” The soteriological consequences of this delusion are equally dire according to Edwards:

This [Satan] knows is the way to bring all religion to mere lifeless formality, and effectually shut out the power of godliness, and everything which is spiritual, and to have all true Christianity turned out of doors.

Indeed, the “prevailing prejudice against religious affections” is evidence for spiritual death, according to Edwards. By such prejudice, Satan intends,

to harden the hearts of sinners, and damp the graces of many of the saints, and stunt the life and power of religion, and preclude the effect of ordinances, and hold us down in a state of dullness and apathy, and undoubtedly causes [sic.] many persons greatly to offend God, in entertaining means and low thoughts of the extraordinary work he had lately wrought in this land.

Thus, both in the excesses of experiential religion and in the denial of its importance, Satan impresses the imaginations of individuals, and then allows their delusion and sin to grow into prevailing attitudes which thwart the redeeming work of God in the world. In all such cases of Satan’s maleficium, he aims to rob God of glory and to bring ruinous misery upon humanity.

As confidently as Edwards describes Satan’s work in the imagination of post-lapsarian humans and in expanding individual delusion into ruinous historical trends, he is surprisingly reticent about Satan’s role in its initial fall. In fact, in his treatise on original sin Edwards does not mention Satan, even in passages where mention of Satan is ordinarily anticipated. When he addresses Satan’s role in the fall of humanity, Edwards speaks only in

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62 Works (Yale), vol. 2, p. 120.
63 Works (Yale), vol. 2, p. 120.
64 Works (Yale), vol. 2, p. 121.
65 In answering Dr. Taylor’s contention that Adam could not sin without a sinful inclination, Edwards comes close to mentioning Satan, but in a footnote, he says that Taylor is right, but that the
surprising generalities. By his subtle temptations, Satan “procured the fall of our first parents, and so brought about the ruin of the whole race.”

Satan successfully tempted Adam and Eve because he “deceitfully and lyingly told them that they should be as gods.”

Edwards does not skirt around the issue of moral agency in dealing with Satan and post-lapsarian humanity. Though Satan may impress the imaginations of fallen human beings, they bear responsibility for the resulting beliefs and actions. In the Fall of Adam and Eve, however, Edwards appears to avoid making a firm commitment one way or the other regarding moral agency and the work of Satan. In short, the degree of Satan’s responsibility for the initial Fall relative to that of Adam and Eve remains an open question for Edwards.

Satan’s purpose in procuring the Fall is far more clear to Edwards. By rebelling against God and introducing sin and misery into the world, Satan sought to “rob God of [the] glory” expressed in the created order, especially in humanity. “Satan rose up against God,” Edwards wrote,

endevoring to frustrate his design in the creation of this lower world, to destroy his workmanship here, and to wrest the government of this lower world out of his hands, and usurp the throne himself, and set himself up as God of this world instead of the God that made it. And to these ends he introduced sin into the world, had made man God’s enemy, he brought guilt on man and brought death into the world, and brought the most extreme and

sinful inclination was “begotten in him by the delusion and error he was led into...” See Works (Yale), vol. 3, p. 228-229, note 6.


67 Works (Yale), vol. 9, p. 500.

68 Edwards apparently struggled with the relationship between his convictions about moral agency and those about Satan’s work in the world. It is interesting to note that passages in which Edwards contemplates free will and moral agency in the fall of Adam and Eve, mention of Satan is noticeably absent. See, e.g. Miscellanies 291, 501, and 436 in Works (Yale), vol. 13. Godbeer suggests that the ambiguity of Puritan teaching on the “allocation of responsibility for human sin” inadvertently encouraged some to rely on “rival supernatural agency,” i.e. magic and witchcraft. See Godbeer, p. 85. Edwards may forcefully state his position on the moral agency of post-lapsarian humanity, but he appears no closer than his Puritan forbears to answering the question of human moral agency and Satan’s work in the initial Fall of humanity.

dreadful misery into the world.\textsuperscript{70}

But Satan’s end in tempting humanity was equally directed at humanity itself in destroying its pristine happiness and holiness. Indeed, humanity’s Edenic happiness especially inspired in Satan an overpowering jealousy and a desire to see humanity fall:

That man who was of earthly original should be advanced to such honors, when he who was originally of a so much more noble nature should be cast down to such disgrace, his pride could not bear. How then would Satan triumph when he had brought him down?\textsuperscript{71}

In a certain sense, the fall of Adam and Eve recapitulated the fall of Satan himself: the temptation itself was similar in both cases: Satan “aimed at nothing else but to fool man out of his happiness, and make him his own slave and vassal, with a blinded expectation of being like a god.”

Nevertheless, what Satan intended to accomplish in procuring the Fall and what actually came about are two very different matters according to Edwards. In tempting humanity with the imaginative promise of being like a god, Satan ironically became a prophet of the incarnation and of salvation itself:

But little did Satan think that God would turn it so, as to make man’s fall an occasion of God’s becoming a man; and so an occasion of our nature being advanced to a state of closer union with God.\textsuperscript{72}

Moreover, such a providential reversal could only be considered a “defeat” of Satan if the degree of redemptive happiness and holiness of God’s elect exceeded the degree of lapsarian misery which Satan introduced by the Fall.\textsuperscript{73} Elsewhere, Edwards asserts that the degree of happiness among redeemed humanity also exceeds the happiness of pre-lapsarian humanity

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 13, p. 123.


\textsuperscript{73} Edwards develops this point at length in Miscellany 158. His point can be illustrated almost mathematically: if lapsarian misery > redemptive happiness, then Satan is not defeated; if lapsarian misery = redemptive happiness, Satan is frustrated in part; if lapsarian misery < redemptive happiness, then Satan is “wholly disappointed of all his aim.” Of course, Edwards favors this last formula. See \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 13, p.308.
in its Edenic paradise.\textsuperscript{74}

God’s providential reversal of Satan’s \textit{maleficium}, one instance of which has been described, emerges as one of the most prominent themes of Edwards’ demonology. Other examples are equally compelling. Although God prepared the Jewish world to receive the doctrine of satisfactory sacrifice by commanding animal sacrifice, Satan deluded Gentiles into the practice of human sacrifice. Yet God providentially combined both practices in the crucifixion, thereby facilitating an understanding of the atonement by both Jews and Gentiles.\textsuperscript{75} Satan contrived to increase the learning of the Roman Empire in an effort to snuff out Christianity. Yet God made use of the apologists like Justin Martyr and Tertullian to ply that great learning in defense of Christianity.\textsuperscript{76} Although many other instances of Satan’s defeat could be cited, the point is made. In all instances of this defeat, Satan intended to thwart God’s redemptive work in history but painfully discovered that his \textit{maleficium} only facilitated that redemptive work.

\textbf{Conclusion}

One thing is certain following this provisional survey of Edwards’ demonology: it is impossible to speak in absolute terms about a “decline of the demonic” among the educated and influential by the turn of the 18th century in Anglo-American culture. If any absolute statement of the “declension thesis” can be maintained, it must be done with the exclusion of Edwards’ writings as aberrant, or at least unrepresentative of his age. It is more likely that the writings of Edwards reflect a transformation of belief in the demonic, and this transformation deserves fuller contextualization.

Edwards’ own demonology, however, deserves closer scrutiny before the task of

\textsuperscript{74} “Miscellany 344,” \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 13, p. 417. This motif of the \textit{felix culpa}, which finds artistic expression in Milton’s poetry, finds theological articulation in Edwards.

\textsuperscript{75} “Miscellany 307,” \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 13, p. 391-392.

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Works} (Yale), vol. 9, p. 390-392.
contextualizing it should be undertaken. For one thing, it is not at all clear from internal evidence why Edwards veers away from his rhetoric of Satan in some of his treatises, while the rich mythology of Satan and his *maleficium* dominates others. In particular, the absence of Satan in Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will* (1754) and *Original Sin* (1758) is particularly baffling. It is not the case that these later treatises simply witnessed in Edwards’ own theology a “decline of the demonic”; sermons, notes on scripture, and miscellanies dating from the same period make full use of Edwards’ typical rhetoric about Satan and the demonic. The respective audiences of these writings may in part account for the absence of Satan in Edwards’ more philosophical treatises. But at best this is a provisional, impressionistic conclusion. More research is needed, then, to assess the reasons for Satan’s peculiar absence in certain of Edwards’ treatises.

Also, closer scrutiny should be applied to Edwards’ handing of Satan’s *maleficium* and human moral agency, especially as he understands the initial Fall of humanity. This issue, to be sure, was the hobgoblin of Reformed theologians and churchmen throughout the 17th and into the 18th century. But in the end, it appears that Edwards is no closer than his Puritan forbears to solving the dilemma of human moral agency and Satan’s temptation in the Fall. This failure on Edwards’ part dampens his argument in *Original Sin* and leaves him wide open to the Arminian critics whom he aims at answering. If Edwards represents the last great assertion of traditional belief in human depravity, he certainly fails to explain adequately the origin of that depravity, at least relative to Satan’s *maleficium*.

Finally, given Edwards’ obvious interest in the apocalyptic, more research is needed adequately to connect his interpretation of Revelation to his understanding of Satan and his *maleficium*. One sub-theme of the present study has suggested that Edwards sees the primordial conflict between Satan and God -- narrated in Revelation 12:7-9 -- recapitulated in the religious experience of individuals and in broader events of God’s redemptive activity in the world. But this assertion is only the starting point for drawing such a connection between Edwards’ exegesis of Revelation and his demonology. Indeed, this point might be
broadened to include Edwards’ exegesis generally and its connection to his demonology. On what Scriptural evidence other than Revelation does Edwards draw in making sense of Satan and his *maleficium*? To what degree does his poetic license take him beyond the texts of Scripture into the realm of artistic speculation? In other words, is Edwards’ demonology firmly grounded in sound exegesis, or is it a second-order reflection of a religiosity more influenced by Milton than by Scripture after all?