How Free Was Adam's Will?

Examining John Lafayette Girardeau's Critique of Jonathan Edwards' View of Adam's Will Before the Fall

By Caleb Cangelosi

Jonathan Edwards was a Calvinist. Indeed, none other than B. B. Warfield agreed with the assessment that Edwards was "the greatest of American Calvinists," affirming that "the system to which he gave his sincere adhesion, and to the defense of which, against the tendencies which were in his day threatening to undermine it, he consecrated all his powers, was simply Calvinism."[1] A modern expositor of Edwards' thought has stated the matter directly: "If one wants to know about the Christian faith in its richest Calvinistic form, he could do no better than beginning by reading Jonathan Edwards."[2] Edwards himself did not reject the moniker, though he did give a degree of qualification: "However the term *Calvinistic* is, in these days, among most, a term of greater reproach than the term *Arminian*; yet I should not take it at all amiss, to be called a *Calvinist*, for distinction's sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them; and cannot justly be charged with believing in every thing just as he taught."[3]

Indeed, when it came to the question of Adam's will before the fall, in the state of innocence, the 19th century Southern Presbyterian pastor and theologian John Lafayette Girardeau[4] charged him with believing exactly the opposite of what Calvin taught. In a series of articles published in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* and eventually published in monograph form,[5] Girardeau laid out his case that Edwards' influential book *Freedom of the Will*, helpful as it was for the Calvinistic cause on the whole, contained within it systemic tendencies by which "the Calvinistic theology…injured itself and crippled its

The Author: Caleb Cangelosi is the associate pastor of Pear Orchard Presbyterian Church, Ridgeland, Mississippi.

1. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (1932; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 516, 528.

2. W. Gary Crampton, "Edwards' *Freedom of the Will*: A Review and Analysis," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 3 (2007), 302.

3. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, *The Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (1754; repr., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 131. Henceforth in this paper, *Freedom of the Will*. For a summary of the historical circumstances surrounding Edwards' writing *Freedom of the Will* and a systematic discussion of the book, see Paul Ramsey's introduction in Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 1–128; and Sam Storms, "Jonathan Edwards on the Freedom of the Will," *Trinity Journal* 3, No. 2 (1982), 131–169.

4. Biographical information on John Lafayette Girardeau (1825–1898) can be found in C. N. Willborn, "John L. Girardeau (1825–98): Pastor to Slaves and Theologian of Causes," (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2003); George A. Blackburn, ed., *The Life Work of John L. Girardeau, D. D., LL. D.* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1916); Doug Kelly, *Preachers With Power* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982); Morton H. Smith, *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology* (1962; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Co., 1987); and Henry Alexander White, *Southern Presbyterian Leaders* (1911; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000).

5. For the historical context of these articles, see Willborn, 322ff.; and Sean Michael Lucas, "'He Cuts Up Edwardsism By the Roots': Robert Lewis Dabney and the Edwardsian Legacy in the Nineteenth-Century South," in D. G. Hart, Sean M. Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols, eds., *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 200–214, especially 207–208. Girardeau, responding to a debate between Robert Lewis Dabney and Albert T. Bledsoe in 1876–1877, wrote "The Freedom of the Will," *Southern Presbyterian Review* 29, No. 4 (October 1878), 611–655; and "The Freedom of the Will in Its Theological Relations," *SPR* 30, No. 1 (January 1879), 1–31. James A. Waddell replied to Girardeau with "Contrary Choice," *SPR* 30, No. 3 (July 1879), 516–549. Girardeau rejoined with "The Freedom of the Will in its Theological Relations," *SPR* 31, No. 1 (January 1880), 1–44; "The Freedom of the Will in its Theological Relations," *SPR* 31, No. 2 (April 1880), 323–350; and "The Freedom of the Will in its Theological Relations," *SPR* 31, No. 4 (October 1880), 613–647. Waddell answered with "Re-examination of Dr. Girardeau's Views of the Freedom of the Will," *SPR* 31, No. 4 (October 1880), 690–716. Girardeau wrote one more article, "The Freedom of the Will in its Theological Relations," *SPR* 32, No. 1 (January 1881), 63–102. Girardeau's articles were collected and published with additional material under the title, *The Will in its Theological Relations* (Columbia, SC: W. J. Duffie, 1891). All Girardeau citations henceforth will be from this book. Unfortunately, it is out of print and has never been reprinted.

rightful influence, to the extent of their appropriation" (Girardeau, 19). Girardeau was not the first to challenge the Calvinistic pedigree of Edwards' thoughts on the will, but his work is arguably the fullest treatment to do so arising out of the 19th century American Presbyterian church.[6] In this article, we will examine Girardeau's critique of Edwards, and give consideration as to how Edwards might have responded to Girardeau had they been contemporaries. Though not without its difficulties, Girardeau's solution to the problem of Adam's will before the fall is in the end closer than Edwards' to the Biblical, and the historical Calvinistic, position.

I. Girardeau's Assessment of Edwards' Views and Statement of His Own

Girardeau had great respect for Edwards as a thinker ("a prodigy of metaphysical acumen, as Robert Hall fitly characterized him" [Girardeau, 18]) and appreciated the devastating impact *Freedom of the Will* had on Pelagian and Arminian soteriologies (Girardeau, 19). Thus to disagree with his forefather in the faith was difficult: "We are conscious of a feeling of pain akin to that with which one finds fault with his friends" (Girardeau, 20). Girardeau's conviction that Edwards erred strengthened over time, however (Girardeau, 121). As a twenty-four year old, the Southerner had already begun to move in an opposite direction to Edwards, and during the American Civil War, *Freedom of the Will* "was carefully studied whenever active operations gave way to the quiet of camp life" (Girardeau, 11–13). This study ultimately confirmed in him the belief that Edwards' theory of Determinism and Philosophical Necessity was "radically defective," "out of accord with the Calvinistic system," and gave "an insufficient account of the freedom of the will," primarily because it "incompetently ground[ed] human guilt" and it failed to acquit God of the charge of being the author of sin, "logically tending [on the contrary] to the implication of the divine efficiency in the production of sin" (Girardeau, 19–20, 46, 123).[7] Against Edwards, Girardeau believed that Adam, as first created and unfallen, had the power of contrary choice ("the ability of electing between conflicting alternatives by a decision of his will, of otherwise determining than he actually did…the liberty of deliberate election between the contrary alternatives of holiness and sin" (Girardeau, 80, 133); that in regard to Adam's fall, our first parent sinned by a self-determining choice of his will; and that for this reason, though decreed by God, Adam's fall was avoidable rather than necessary (Girardeau, 46, 90).

Two of Girardeau's starting points must be noted in order to understand his opposition to Edwards. First, his disagreement was founded upon his commitment to Scriptural teachings that he regarded all parties in this controversy to hold, namely, that "God cannot, in any proper sense, be the author of sin," and "that punishment and guilt are strictly correlative—that the absence of guilt implies exemption from punishment." He presupposed these two theological truths as the standards by which to test the validity of Edwards' philosophical theory (Girardeau, 23). Girardeau held that in arenas where philosophy and theology canvas the same terrain, Scriptural teaching trumped philosophical reasoning, because the former is inerrant while the latter may err (Girardeau, 22–23).[8] Thus for Girardeau, "Whatever difficulties emerge to speculation in the attempt to *think* the case [of Adam sinning by] the self-determination of the will, we are under the necessity of *believing* the facts as revealed by Scripture, and of accepting the inferences which they enforce" (Girardeau, 90).

Second, Girardeau insists that "in prosecuting the inquiry in regard to the freedom of the will, it is absolutely requisite to separate the state of man's innocency from his natural, fallen condition" (Girardeau, 55–56; cf. 42). It is on the field of Adam's first sin that the real issue of the freedom of the will, or lack thereof, must

6. For a treatment of the controversy surrounding the reception of Edwards' views on the will in America (though unfortunately with no mention of Girardeau or any of the 19th century Southern Presbyterians), see Allen C. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (1989; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), especially chapters 5 and 6. On the 19th century Southern Presbyterian unease with Edwards on several different fronts, see Lucas, "'He Cuts Up Edwardsism By the Roots.'" Lucas, 201n2, refers to several works on Edwards' reception among northern American Calvinists. On the reception of *The Freedom of the Will* by British Calvinists, see Richard A. Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice: A Parting of Ways in the Reformed Tradition," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 1, No. 1 (2011): 3–22. Muller, 4n4 and 4n5, gives other references to studies of Calvinists who disagreed with Edwards; see also Jeongmo Yoo, *John Edwards (1637–1716) on Human Free Choice and Divine Necessity: The Debate on the Relation between Divine Necessity and Human Freedom in Late Seventeenth-Century and Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 64n106; Michael A. G. Haykin, *Jonathan Edwards: The Holy Spirit in Revival* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press), 150, 213n3; and Jordan Ballor, "Muller and Helm on Jonathan Edwards," *The Junias Blog*, December 15, 2014, accessed October 13, 2015, http://www.juniusinstitute.org/blog/muller-and-helm-on-jonathan-edwards.

7. Girardeau concurred with the later views of his professor James Henley Thornwell. James Henley Thornwell, *Collected Writings* (1871; repr., Vestavia Hills, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004), 1:250.

8. Girardeau clearly did not discount the insights of philosophy entirely, but believed that philosophy and theology typically operated in separate spheres; cf. Girardeau, 21.

be joined (Girardeau, 51, 56–57).[9] For Girardeau, Edwards' neglect of this point set him on the wrong track from the first: "The theory of President Edwards and his followers strangely fails to note this obvious distinction between the case of man in innocence and that of his present and future condition, and therefore comes short of being an adequate account of the freedom of the will" (Girardeau, 56).[10]

These starting points laid down, we are able to move to Girardeau's actual disagreement with Edwards. He understood Edwards and his followers, despite a variety of modifications, to concur in

> the denial to the will of any self-determining power, that is, of any power to originate its determinations—of any real, causal efficiency in itself; and the affirmation that its volitions are efficiently caused by the sum of motives existing in the soul…They agree in affirming moral necessity of all the acts of the will, that is, they hold that the acts of the will, whatever they may be, are unavoidable. They could not be otherwise than they are in any given case... He acts in accordance with a force operating invincibly and inevitably through the will itself. That force is the spontaneity and *habitus* of the man himself. He always acts in accordance with it, never against it…. As is the moral spontaneity of the man, so must be his volitions—the spontaneity determines the will; the will never determines the spontaneity. This is Edwards' moral necessity … [T]he will, morally considered, has, under no conceivable circumstances or relations, any power to act otherwise than in conformity with the moral spontaneity of the soul (Girardeau, 46–49).

Edwards' own words confirm that Girardeau rightly understands the great New Englander: "[T]he will is said to be determined, when, in consequence of some action, or influence, its choice is directed to, and fixed upon a particular object…. It is that motive, which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest, that determines the will … [T]he will always is, as the greatest apparent good is … [T]he will always follows the last dictate of the understanding…" (Edwards, 141–142, 148). In simplest terms, we do what we want to do, and what we want to do we do. Moral necessity, for Edwards, is "that necessity of connection and consequence, which arises from such *moral causes*, as the strength of inclination, or motives, and the connection which there is in many cases between these and such certain volitions and actions" (Edwards, 156). Edwards wrote his tome in order to prove, over against Arminianism, "that necessity is not inconsistent with liberty," and to defend the five points of Calvinism (and the glory of God in salvation) against Arminian attack (Edwards, 152, 430ff.).

Girardeau, a Calvinist like Edwards, does not disagree that necessity as Edwards defines it co-exists with freedom. He cites the examples of God, the elect angels, and glorified men; there is no possibility of their sinning, yet they act freely (Girardeau, 48). He agrees that sinful man necessarily sins and at the same time freely sins, and is therefore morally responsible for his actions; the sinner "has not now, as unregenerate, the power of contrary choice in relation to the alternatives of sin and holiness. He acts with spontaneous freedom whenever he sins, but he has no power to act in the contrary direction" (Girardeau, 56; cf. 124ff.). But this truth raises for Girardeau a pressing question that in his mind the theory of Determinism/Moral Necessity cannot answer satisfactorily: "What determined the spontaneity which thus determines the will?" That is, *why* do we *want* to do precisely what we want to do? In particular, why do we want to sin? How did our nature come to be what it is? Either man had a voluntary agency in bringing about his condition, or he did not. If he did

9. John Gerstner agrees with Girardeau on this starting point: "The real [issue], and Edwards' Achilles' heel, is the unique case—Adam unfallen." John Gerstner, *The Rational Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Powhatan, Virginia: Berea Publications, 1992), 2:313. Cf. also Cornelius Van Til's statement, "Now we believe with John L. Girardeau… that in Adam before the fall we deal with the original and real relation of God to man." Cornelius Van Til, "The Will in its Theological Relations," http://presupp101.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/van-til-the-will-in-its-theological-relations.pdf [accessed August 5, 2014], 29.

10. He later writes, "It is to us one of the curiosities of theological literature, that the distinction between the will of God as to the sin of sinners and as to the first sin of an innocent being, was overlooked by so acute a thinker as President Edwards, and denied by so judicious a thinker as Principal Cunningham" (Girardeau, 60). It appears that Girardeau is responding to the fact that Cunningham recognizes that Edwards failed to make the distinction, but affirms "that there is nothing in the Calvinistic system of theology, or in the Westminster Confession, which precludes men from holding the doctrine of philosophical necessity" in William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 515, 483–484. Nevertheless, Cunningham has strong words for Edwards and Chalmers when it comes to their philosophical necessitarianism: "…they have certainly in their engrossment with this philosophical doctrine of necessity, about which the Confession of Faith says nothing, left out of view an important theological doctrine, to which the Confession gives prominence [i.e., liberty of choice in pre-fall state]; and which certainly ought to have a distinct and definite place assigned to it in the exposition of the scheme of Christian theology" (516). See also Cunningham's preference for theological over philosophical approach to this question in *Historical Theology* (1882; Edmonton, Canada: Still Waters, 1991), 1:585. As to the distinction between pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian state of man, Cornelius Van Til agreed with Girardeau: "Girardeau has rightly criticized Edwards for this lack of distinction" (38).

not, "he only develops his natural constitution when he sins…It cannot be conceived that he would be more to blame than is a poisonous plant in producing poisonous fruit in accordance with the law of its nature." If he did, then he must have done so, in Girardeau's understanding, by "a determination uncaused by a preceding moral spontaneity"—which is disallowed by Edwards. Girardeau thus charges Edwards' theory "with the great fault of making it impossible to show how man has determined his present sinful spontaneity" (Girardeau, 50–51). Clearly, individual men could not consciously determine themselves before they were born, and so the question becomes "whether they so determined themselves in Adam. And that question resolves itself into this: Did Adam, by a free self-decision which might have been avoided, determine himself in the direction of sin?… Did Adam, in the commission of the first sin, act from necessity—that is, was his first sin unavoidable? or did he commit it by an unnecessitated and avoidable decision of his will?"[11] Girardeau believes that for innocent Adam (as well as the non-elect angels), Edwards' theory of moral necessity does not apply.

It is at this point in his argument that Girardeau charges Edwards with essentially making God the author of sin, as rendering Adam's first sin necessary and unavoidable.[12] The question at issue is the relation between God's decree to Adam's first sin. Having first responded to the view that God decreed efficiently to produce the sin, and the view that he decreed efficaciously to procure its commission (the latter held by William Twisse, Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly), he proceeds to interact with Edwards' view, which he understands as God having decreed so to order and dispose Adam's case that the sin would be necessary. Edwards states his views thusly:

> They who object, that this doctrine makes God the Author of Sin, ought distinctly to explain what they mean by that phrase, "the author of sin".… If by "the author of sin," be meant the sinner, the agent, or actor of sin, or *the doer* of a wicked thing; so it would be a reproach and a blasphemy, to suppose God to be the Author of Sin. In this sense, I utterly deny God to be the author of sin…. But if, by "the author of sin," is meant the permitter, or not a hinderer of sin; and, at the same time, a disposer of the state of events, in such a manner, for wise, holy, and most excellent ends and purposes, that sin, if it be permitted or not hindered, will most certainly and infallibly follow: I say, if this be all that is meant, by being the author of sin, I do not deny that God is the author of sin, (though I dislike and reject the phrase, as that which by use and custom is apt to carry another sense,) it is no reproach for the Most High to be thus the author of sin. This is not to be the *actor* of sin, but, on the contrary, of *holiness*. What God doth herein, is holy; and a glorious exercise of the infinite excellency of his nature. And I don't deny, that God being thus the author of sin, follows from what I have laid down…That it is most certainly so, that God is in such a manner the disposer and orderer of sin, is evident, if any credit is to be given to the Scripture; as well as because it is impossible, in the nature of things, to be otherwise (Edwards, 399).

To Girardeau, such an explanation is really a distinction without a difference, "nearly akin" to Dr. Twisse's view. Edwards would perhaps argue that his view is closer to Girardeau's[13] than to Twisse's, in that he focuses on God's permitting Adam's sin rather than producing it: "[T]here is a great difference between God being concerned thus, by his *permission*, in an event and act, which, in the inherent subject and agent of it, is sin, (though the event will certainly follow on his permission,) and his being concerned in it by *producing* it and exerting the act of sin; or between his being the *orderer* of its certain existence, by *not hindering* it, under certain circumstances, and his being the proper *actor* or *author* of it, by a *positive agency* or *efficiency*" (Edwards, 403). But if God so ordered and disposes Adam's case as to render it necessary, argues Girardeau, "it is perfectly clear that Adam could not have avoided it." Girardeau holds therefore that Edwards' view is the same in substance as the view that God was the efficient producer and author of sin, and "is liable to all the objections which [can be] urged against" that explicit affirmation (Girardeau, 64–65).

Girardeau offers three objections against God being the efficient producer and author of sin. First, he argues that the logical deductions from this position are untenable: a) The distinction between sin and holiness would be obliterated. Since God committed the first sin, it is actually a good and righteous act—which is impossible; b) man is punished for what God did; and c) in the warning given to Adam, God pronounced death against himself (Girardeau, 58).[14] Though Edwards explicitly rejects the idea that God is the *Actor* of

11. Girardeau, 56–57.

12. Girardeau was not the first in history to raise this issue against Edwards. James Dana in his reply to Edwards in 1770 and 1773 had levied the same accusation. See Storms, 165ff.; and Guelzo, 155ff.

13. See Girardeau's view below.

14. Cf. Gerstner, 313.

sin, Girardeau believes that his position essentially puts God in this place, and so is liable to these protests. Second, on this scheme "the idea of probation…is inadmissible." The covenant of works is inconceivable if there is no possibility of standing. Finally, the Scriptures bear clear witness against such a doctrine. "They are full of God's condemnation of sin... He directly charges guilt upon the sinner, and assigns his destruction to himself (James 1:13–15)" (Girardeau, 59–60). Edwards seeks to ground his argument that God is the "disposer and orderer of Sin" in the Scriptures as well (Edwards, 400ff.), but Girardeau does not allow that the Scriptures he cites are admissible in the case of Adam's first sin: "It may be that while God commanded Pharaoh to liberate Israel, he efficiently willed that he should not; and that while he commanded the Jews to receive Christ as their Redeemer and King, he efficiently willed that they should crucify him; but it cannot be shown that while God commanded Adam in innocence not to eat of the tree of knowledge, he efficiently willed that he should" (Girardeau, 60).[15]

These arguments are decisive in Girardeau's mind against Edwards. But he recognizes that in Edwards' view there is also a new element, and a most disturbing one. Edwards knows that by what he has stated concerning God being the Author of sin, he has opened a can of worms, and so seeks to respond to the rebuttal that, "if God, when he had made man, might so order his circumstances, that from these, together with his withholding further assistance and divine influence, his sin would infallibly follow, why might not God as well have first made man with a fixed prevailing principle of sin in his heart?" Edwards answers:

> It was meet, if sin did come into existence, and appear in the world, it should arise from the imperfection which properly belongs to a creature, as such, and should appear so to do, that it might appear not to be from God as the efficient or fountain. But this could not have been, if man had been made at first with sin in his heart; nor unless the abiding principle and habit of sin were first introduced by an evil act of the creature. If sin had not arisen from the imperfection of the creature, it would not have been so visible, that it did not arise from God, as the positive cause, and real source of it (Edwards, 413).

This answer unsettles Girardeau to the core of his theology. Rather than understanding the Scriptures to teach that Adam was created "very good," Edwards is teaching that Adam was created with "imperfections" that made sin unavoidable. Man's nature is so constructed from the beginning so that sin is the only possible outcome. Girardeau held the traditional view that Adam was "able to stand, though liable to fall. He was in a sense imperfect as not confirmed in holiness, but his imperfection was not of such a nature as to necessitate his fall." Historically, as we shall note again below, the consensus of the Church had taught that the "imperfection of Adam … lay in the mutability of his will;… According to Edwards, the imperfection was not remediable, but necessarily issued in sin. According to one doctrine, Adam was vulnerable, but not mortally wounded; according to the other, he was mortally infirm" (Girardeau, 67).

Again, in Girardeau's mind, Edwards' view makes God the "remote, though not the proximate, efficient cause of sin. If he so constructs a nature as that sin will be, without his intervention to prevent it, an unavoidable result, he is the real, though indirect producer of that result. He must be conceived, in such a case, as forming the nature in order to sin. It is impossible, upon such a theory, validly to ground the sense of guilt and the right to punish" (Girardeau, 66–67). In addition to this, Girardeau charges Edwards with inconsistency with his entire system of Determinism. If "the abiding principle and habit of sin [was] first introduced by an evil act of the creature," as Edwards writes, then from where did the abiding principle and habit come that caused that first evil act? "If there be anything for which Edwards strenuously contends, it is that acts receive their denomination from the *habitus* of the man. But here the act determines the moral spontaneity, and is not determined by it. To say that it could spring from a mere imperfection or defect of nature, and not from positive dispositions, is to give up the very essence of his theory" (Girardeau, 66).[16] With all these points in view, it is evident that Edwards' theory of the relation of God's decree to Adam's first sin is flawed. It does not properly establish the guilt of Adam or the just propriety of punishment, it does not absolve God from being the author of sin, it propounds a deficient view of creation, and it is even inherently self-contradicting.

What of Girardeau's view, then? Does it make better sense of the Scriptural evidence, as well as the constitutional nature of man? He expresses his view like this:

> God decreed to permit the first sin of Adam…He decreed efficiently to produce Adam as an actual being…

15. Cf. Gerstner, 312.

16. Later, Girardeau to the same effect turns Edwards' words in *Original Sin*, Part II, Chapter I, Section I, back on themselves. Girardeau, 122. See also the logical train of thought presented on pages 154ff.

> [But] God did not decree to prevent him from sinning. He may have done so if he had pleased. It pleased him to determine to permit him to sin. Having decreed to create Adam, he also decreed to endow him with the power freely to obey his law, 'and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of his own will, which was subject to change.' [*Westminster Confession of Faith*, IV.2]. It follows that Adam was not determined to sin by any necessity of nature established by the divine decree, and further, that his sin was not rendered certain by that decree (Girardeau, 75–76).

To the response that he holds to a "bare permission," contrary to *Westminster Confession of Faith* V.4, he asserts, "At the same time, considered in relation to the whole case, the decree was not barely permissive. As he did not determine to prevent sin—which he might have done—by the causal influence of his grace, or the hindering arrangements of his providence, God knew that it would be committed, and so must be regarded as having, on the whole, deemed it better that the sin should take place, rather than that Adam's will should by his intervention be confined to holy acts" (Girardeau, 76; cf. 78).[17] In sum, God decrees to permit Adam to sin; but that decree did not "involve, on God's part, a necessitation of its commission."[18] Therefore, for Girardeau, the sin "must have been produced by a self-determination of Adam's will" (Girardeau, 78–79).

Girardeau proceeds to give four Scriptural arguments that Adam's choice to sin was self-determined as opposed to being the result of moral necessity. First, in response to Edwards' statement that there was some imperfection in Adam as created, Girardeau reminds the reader of Ecclesiastes 7:29, "God made man upright." Adam was created in the moral image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and so "the moral spontaneity of Adam was not that of mere indifference to right and wrong, but was incipiently holy." So why did Adam sin? Girardeau asserts, "Adam sinned unnecessarily, in opposition to his moral spontaneity, and must consequently have been endued with the power of contrary choice." Second, Girardeau presents Adam as a probationer in the Covenant of Works.[19] On Edwards' theory of Determinism, there really cannot be a Covenant of Works, since such a covenant supposes that Adam was able to obey and "secure the reward freely offered him of justification for himself and his posterity." If Edwards' view is correct, writes Girardeau, "the Covenant of Works cannot by us be conceived of except as a mockery. It stipulated conditions which could not be fulfilled, and tendered rewards which could not be secured" (Girardeau, 85). But the Bible teaches that there was indeed such a covenant, and that Adam could have obeyed God—though he was also able to sin, if he chose. Third, Girardeau points to the fact that the specific test in the Garden of Eden was related to whether he would submit his will to God as King. "The very core of the first sin was its unreasonable willfulness. The will was the chief factor in its commission" (Girardeau, 87). Finally, Girardeau considers the inducements which led Adam to commit his first sin. "There were inducements to the commission of it; but they were not motives which sprung from the moral nature of our first parents. Their moral spontaneity, so far from furnishing the motives to the perpetration of the sin, would, if it had been consulted, have urged them to its resistance." What were these inducements? Girardeau says that "in all probability" (Girardeau, 110) they consisted of the blind impulses, "in themselves innocent and legitimate because implanted by God himself in the very make of man." These blind impulses included bodily appetite for food and mental desire for knowledge, in the case of Eve; and affection for Eve, in the case of Adam (Girardeau, 88). The Devil tempted Eve through the organ of sight, "put[ting] his finger upon the divinely constituted adaptation between the make of the body and the external object," and "appeal[ing] to the blind impulse of curiosity" (Girardeau, 111–112). Girardeau explains further:

> [T]he intrinsically legitimate blind impulses of his constitution started the train of inducements, inflamed the desire which enticed the will in the direction of sin. Here were motives brought to bear upon the will; but it is obvious that, in their first presentation, they were in the control of the will [i.e., the will controlled them]. It had the power to resist them, or to comply with them. The instant it freely consented to entertain them directed to the forbidden object, that instant the fall began. Here then we have a reason why the will acted in a specific direction—used its power to choose between opposing possibilities—and we see that it had the power to act or not to act in accordance with it. There was motive, but the will was, at first, master of the motive, not the motive of it (Girardeau, 88–89).[20]

17. In regard to God deeming it better that the first sin should occur, he and Edwards agree; cf. Edwards, 405ff.

18. Girardeau does distinguish between *causal* and *cognitive* necessity; Adam's will was free from causal necessity, but "there was a cognitive necessity—a necessity of infallible connection between God's foreknowledge of the sin of Adam and its commission." Girardeau, 84.

19. For more on Girardeau's Federal Theology, see Willborn, 318ff., especially 326, n71.

20. See Girardeau, 105–113, for more on this topic.

Through this unnecessitated, free choice of the will, the die was cast for the state of every other human will after our first parents (Girardeau, 91–92). Girardeau well summarizes his view of Adam's will before the fall:

> In the estate of man's innocence, his will possessed a self-determining power. It had the freedom of deliberate election between the contrary alternatives of holiness and sin. The moral spontaneity was holy; there was no moral spontaneity that was sinful. Consequently, the moral spontaneity of the will was holy. Its *habitus* was right. So, by his benevolent Creator, was man started in his moral probation. He was furnished with all ability and every opportunity for choosing and maintaining holiness. But it is the testimony of all theology, worth its name, that the will was mutable. It was not confirmed in holiness. The moral spontaneity, although holy, was not fixed, was not so determined in the direction of holiness as to be beyond the danger of being sacrificed by a wrong election of the will. Had man continued obedient to God for the time of trial specified in the covenant of works, his will would have been confirmed. It would have ceased to be mutable, and would have been so determined in holiness as to be forever placed beyond the contingency of a sinful choice. The Fall would have become impossible. But the will, thus mutable and unconfirmed, consented to yield, in all probability, to the solicitation of the blind impulses, in themselves legitimate, but wrongly directed to an object which God had interdicted, and through them to the Satanic temptation which moved them. The will freely decided to do the forbidden act, despite the trend and protest of man's holy spontaneity, and the plunge into sin and ruin occurred. The choice was not necessitated, either by God's predetermination, or man's inherent constitution. It was freely made, when it might have been avoided. Hence the justice of the first man's condemnation; and, as the Scriptures unmistakably declare that all men were represented in him, their federal head, hence, also, the justice of the condemnation visited upon the whole race for that primal act of disobedience (Girardeau, 402).

From Girardeau's perspective, he has both properly guarded God from the accusation of being the author of sin, and answered the "grand inquiry, How did man's present moral condition come to be so determined?" proving what Edwards does not, "that the fixed expression of a sinful spontaneity was not original—it is penal" (Girardeau, 120–121).

II. Edwards' Possible Answer and Girardeau's Response

Having seen Girardeau's view of Edwards' Determinism, and his statement of his own position, we are able next to consider one way that Edwards might have answered Girardeau's arguments, if they had been contemporaries. We shall also see how Girardeau responded to Edwards' counterpoint. It is difficult to know exactly how Edwards would have replied to Girardeau's charge that his position effectively made God the efficient producer of sin, because Edwards chose not to write much on this topic: "But it would require room that can't be here allowed, fully to consider all the difficulties which have been started, concerning the first Entrance of sin into the world" (Edwards, 413).[21] It seems certain, however, that he would say to Girardeau something similar to what he said to the Arminians, namely, that Girardeau's answer is no answer at all: "Nothing that the Arminians say, about the contingence, or self-determining power of man's Will, can serve to explain, with less difficulty, how the first sinful volition of mankind could take place, and man be justly charged with the blame of it. To say, the Will was self-determined, or determined by free-choice, in that sinful volition—which is to say, that the first sinful volition was determined by a forgoing sinful volition—is no solution of the difficulty" (Edwards, 414).

This statement brings us back to the beginning of Edwards' *Freedom of the Will*, where he seeks to dismantle the Arminian view that the will is self-determining by arguing that such a view of the will brings one to a *reductio ad absurdum* contradiction.

> [I]f the will determines all its own free acts, the soul determines them in the exercise of a Power of willing and choosing; or, which is the same thing, it determines them of choice; it determines its own acts, by choosing its own acts…And if that preceding act of the will be also a free act, then by these principles, in this act too, the will is self-determined: that is, this, in like manner, is an act that the soul voluntarily chooses... Which brings us directly to a contradiction: for it supposes an act of the will preceding the first act in the whole train, directing and determining the rest; or a free act of the will, before the first free act of the will (Edwards, 172).

21. The editor of the edition of the two volume Hendrickson set of Edwards' works writes regarding Edwards' position, "We strongly suspect, from his manner of writing, that our author's own mind was not satisfied with the solution which he has attempted." *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1834; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2005), 79–80n‡.

Here Edwards would seem to have Girardeau on the ropes; yet Girardeau has a response ready: "[Here] is a failure to signalize [indicate] a distinction between the origination of existence and the origination of phenomenal changes in existence." He proceeds to explain what he means by this language:

> If the question were, whether the will by its determination originates itself as an existing thing, we would be obliged to confess that it would be a supreme absurdity to affirm that it does. That would imply than an effect produces itself—an absolute commencement with a witness…Or, if it were, as Edwards in attempting to reduce the case to absurdity says, whether one act of choice produces another act of choice, we would also deny, since no phenomenal change can be conceived as, of itself, producing another phenomenal change. But if the question be—and we hold that to be the real state of the question—whether the will, as an existing power, causes its own acts, we fail to see that an absolute beginning is involved. In the power of the will we have a cause, of which volitions are legitimate effects. The chain of cause and effect is unbroken. We would have: volition caused by the power of the will, and that power caused by the creative will of God. There is not addition to the sum of substantive existence by a determination of the will. All that is accomplished is a phenomenal change in previous existence (Girardeau, 93).[22]

Girardeau would not agree with Edwards that to say that Adam's will was self-determined, or determined by free-choice, is to say that the first sinful volition was determined by a foregoing sinful volition; rather, he would argue that Adam's volitions were holy, yet he used his will to choose against his greatest inclination, and to determine itself to sin.

Girardeau would also respond to Edwards with what constitutes the entirety of the third and fourth chapters of *The Will in its Theological Relations*, a collation of quotations from John Calvin with accompanying comment, demonstrating that Edwards is out of step with the great reformer; and a survey of historic Reformed confessions that Girardeau avers support his understanding of Adam's will and first sin. Girardeau quotes Calvin from his commentaries, his *Institutes*, and particularly his *Treatise on the Bondage and Freedom of the Human Will*.[23] Girardeau proves by his citations that "Calvin affirms again and again that the necessity of sinning flows from nature as corrupted by man's action, and not from nature as created by the hand of God. If so, there was, before the act which originated the corruption, no necessity of sinning; indeed, as he says, the first sin was avoidable." One example from Calvin's writings will be given, this from his *Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God*:

> But if the inquiry be as to the first man, he, when he was created in integrity, fell of his own accord; and thence it came to pass that by his own proper fault he brought destruction upon himself and his seed. Now although Adam fell and ruined himself and his posterity not without the knowledge, and so not without the ordination of God, nevertheless that by no means either lightens his fault, or implicates God in his crime. For this is always to be considered, that of his own accord he stripped himself of the rectitude which he had received from God, of his own accord devoted himself to the bondage of sin and Satan, of his own accord rushed headlong to destruction….[24]

Girardeau recognizes that to show that Calvin believed Adam sinned voluntarily is "not to prove that he held that Adam did not sin by necessity." Thus the South Carolinian adduces yet another litany of Calvin quotes presenting the Genevan's belief that Adam had the power of contrary choice. (Girardeau, 146ff.). That Girardeau, rather than Edwards, stands with Calvin is made most apparent in this passage from the *Institutes*, I.15.8: "Adam, therefore, might have stood if he chose, since it was only by his own will that he fell; but it was because his will was pliable in either direction, and he

22. Here Girardeau appears to be following his teacher, Dr. Thornwell, who wrote, "[W]e should not deny to the creature the properties that God has bestowed. We should not be afraid to say, My act, or My thought, or My feeling…They are ours by a power which God imparted to us, and every abuse of these faculties is an act which must be ascribed in all its relations to the will of the creature, and the creature alone." Thornwell, 1:388. Girardeau continues on for most of the second chapter answering Edwards' *reductio ad absurdam* argument. Van Til, 39ff., among other critiques, rejects Girardeau's views on this point of Adam's power to make "phenomenal changes." Van Til believed that he "demonstrated that Girardeau's conception of liberty in the last analysis introduced the vicious pelagian leaven." Van Til, 55. Unfortunately, an apparent sentence fragment at a key part of Van Til's argument makes it difficult to understand Van Til's purported demonstration ("While to find such a place in man's original blind impulses, that were totally neutral, and in man's ability to produce phenomenal changes in creation. [sic]" Van Til, 42). But it seems that he thought that Girardeau's view of the neutrality of the blind impulses meant that he was positing a "sort of freedom for man that is the result of some creaturely domain not included within the decrees of God." Van Til, 42. Girardeau certainly would take issue with his view being "Pelagianism [reasserting] itself in subtlest form." Van Til, 42.

23. See especially Girardeau, 138ff.

24. Cited in Girardeau, 141.

had not received constancy to persevere, that he so easily fell. Still he had a free choice of good and evil; and not only so, but in the mind and will there was the highest rectitude, and all the organic parts were duly framed to obedience, until man corrupted his good properties and destroyed himself…."[25]

Not only Calvin, but the Calvinistic creedal formulations, also heavily support Girardeau over against Edwards (Girardeau, 165ff.).[26] Girardeau cites the Gallic Confession, the Scotch Confession, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Canons of the Synod of Dort, the Formula Consensus Helvetica, and of course the confessional corpus to which he subscribed, the Westminster Standards. The latter document is explicitly in favor of Girardeau's understanding of the issue: "[God] created man male and female…endued with knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change…."[27] "Man in his state of innocency had freedom and power to will and to do that which is good and well-pleasing to God; but yet mutably, so that he might fall from it."[28] "Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, feel from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God."[29] Girardeau, in seven steps, lays out an argument (contrary to William Cunningham) that Determinism/Necessitarianism is incompatible with the Westminster Standards (Girardeau, 173ff.).

Since Jonathan Edwards never subscribed to the Westminster Standards, we do not know what, if any, exceptions he might have taken.[30] Yet it is difficult to envision him subscribing unequivocally to the language of the divines, or even agreeing with that of Calvin. At this we ought not to be surprised, for as we saw at the beginning, he himself acknowledged that he did not believe everything just as Calvin thought. Edwards was a Calvinist; but on the topic of Adam's will before the fall, his necessitarian philosophy led him places Calvin did not go.

25. Cited in Girardeau, 150.

26. See Willem J. van Asselt, ed., *Reformed Thought on Freedom*: *The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). For example: "The freedom of the will before the Fall has two distinctive features: first, it is subjected to no necessity at all; second, it is freedom towards both good and bad" (89).

27. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, IV.2.

28. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, IX.2.

29. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 13.

30. Though in 1750 he wrote to John Erskine in Scotland that he could subscribe to the "substance" of the Confession. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1834; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2005), clxiii.

31. See also Thornwell, 1:249; Girardeau, 17.

32. But see again Girardeau, 90.

III. Conclusion

The topic of this article, the freedom of the will, in particular Adam's will before the fall, is admittedly difficult. As brilliant a theologian as William Cunningham wrote this concerning our subject:

> [It] is the most perplexing and mysterious [doctrine] that has ever occupied the mind of man. No one acquainted with the discussions which have taken place regarding it, can fail to have reached these two conclusions:—1st, That everything of any worth or value that can be said upon the subject, has been said in substance a thousand times; and, 2d, That after all that has been said, there are difficulties and mysteries connected with it which never have been fully solved, and which manifestly never will be fully solved—at least until men get either more enlarged mental faculties, or a fuller revelation from God (Cunningham, 472).[31]

The difficulty is compounded today by the fact that most moderns, including the present author, are not well versed in the philosophical language and thought that dominates these discussions. Admittedly, I have not engaged as deeply as I might have with John Girardeau's philosophical presuppositions. Yet, taking a cue from the title of Girardeau's book, it appears wisest to consider the will not primarily in its philosophical relations, but in its theological relations. When this topic is reduced to its theological essence, we are confronted with the questions of whether God is the author of sin, in what is human guilt (and thus divine punishment) grounded, and how Adam's will differed before and after the fall. With regard to these queries, it appears that Girardeau has the better of Edwards, both biblically and historically. His position is not free from all difficulties—not least being the fact that it is indeed hard to think of Adam choosing against his greatest inclination, doing what he does not want to do![32] But from this cursory glance at Edwards' position through the lens of Girardeau, we are constrained to lift up our voice with the latter: "Great New Englander! Mighty master of metaphysical argumentation! First, spellbound by his genius, which wielded over us the wand of a wizard, we bowed in allegiance to his scepter, then doubted its legitimacy, and then declined subjection to its sway" (Girardeau, 121).▪