Jonathan Edwards on the Nature of Sin

Historical Context

Charles II

Restoration of Monarchy, 1660

Sets off Anti-Puritan (i.e. anti-enthusiasm) Reaction
- search to restore "order" (vs. Puritan violence & division)
- authority of Church of England (vs. sectarianism)
Materialist Philosophy

Arguments for strong central government that also had metaphysical implications

Hobbes, Leviathan (1651)

Spinoza, Tractatus Theologico-Politicus
The Early Enlightenment

God as “reasonable,” non-arbitrary, establisher (and follower) of universal laws

Scripture as explicable, rational (historical-critical approach)

Theological doctrines: remove that which is mysterious, contrary to reason
Puritan/Calvinist doctrines such as divine decrees, predestination, reprobation, miracles, and original sin, become the objects of criticism in formal theological polemics such as by deist John Toland...

... and in the coffee houses and salons of the early eighteenth century, at the hands of wits such as Jonathan Swift.

Swift

Toland, 1696
The Expanding Limits of Natural Ability

Theologians of reason extol:
- a religious life as sober rather than exuberant
- the innate goodness of humans
- the value of sincere acts (virtue ethics)
- the meritoriousness of good works for salvation
- the responsibility of each for their own sins only

John Tillotson, Archbp. of Canterbury, arguably the most popular preacher of “polite” religion in the late seventeenth century