God's Determinations

An Explication and Summary

A Project for ID 499
Dr. Bruce Kirkham, critic

by
Samuel L. Han
Edward Taylor was born in about 1642 near the village of Sketchley, Leicestershire, England.¹ He probably spent several years at Cambridge and then taught in a school near Bagsworth, Leicestershire. He was dismissed from teaching in 1662 along with two thousand other clergymen who refused to take the oath required by the "Act of Uniformity."

On April 26, 1668, he embarked for New England, landing on July 5, 1668, at Boston. The trip was relatively uneventful: Taylor spent most of the time in his cabin reading his Bible and keeping a journal of the passage. Shortly after arriving in this country, he entered Harvard. Exactly what subjects he studied are unknown, but it would be safe to guess that they included most of the following: Hebrew, Greek, logic, divinity, ethics,

¹The material contained in this biographical sketch is of such a general nature that I will not footnote the various data in it. The interested reader should consult either of the following articles: Donald E. Stanford, The Poems of Edward Taylor, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. xxix-xlvii; or Norman S. Grabo, Edward Taylor's Christographia, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. xi-xliv.
metaphysics, geography, and mathematics.

He graduated in 1671 from a class that included such noteworthy American literary characters as Samuel Sewall, who was Taylor's roomate during part of their college careers. On December 3 of that same year, Taylor preached his first sermon at Westfield, Massachusetts. A year later the townspeople voted their "earnest desire" that he should remain there as their minister for fifteen acres of land and about forty dollars a year.

On November 5, 1674, he married Elizabeth Fitch, daughter of the distinguished Reverend James Fitch of Norwich, Connecticut. This Mrs. Taylor lived for approximately fifteen years after their marriage, bearing eight children, five of whom died as infants. She died on July 7, 1689. Taylor remarried in 1692, this time to Ruth Wyllys of Hartford.

After serving his community for fifty years, Taylor died an invalid on December 27, 1728.

It was during his tenure at Westfield that Taylor wrote his Poetical Works. The manuscript, however, remained in the possession of the Yale University Library.
until the time of its discovery and publication in 1939.

In spite of any descriptive title we could assign Edward Taylor, he was first and foremost a Calvinist, and it was this Calvinist theology that influenced this puritan minister more than any other intellectual or philosophical position. When we examine Taylor's beliefs, however, we see that he did not always seem to agree completely with the classical Calvinistic doctrines:

Calvinism's Five Points

1. total depravity, man's natural inability to exercise free will, since he inherited corruption from Adam's fall;

2. unconditional election, which manifests itself through God's election of those to be saved, despite their inability to perform saving works.

3. prevenient and irresistible grace, made available in advance but only to the elect;

4. the perseverance of saints, the predetermined elect inevitably persevering in the path of holiness; and

5. limited atonement, man's corruption being partially atoned for by Christ, this atonement being provided the elect through the Holy Spirit, giving them the power to attempt to obey God's will as it is revealed in the Bible.

In fact, as a Calvinist, Taylor might well be considered a liberal. Probably the reason for this was

---


that Taylor was partially educated in England, and English Calvinism had already come through a theological liberalizing process of sorts.\(^4\) So when Taylor arrived in America, we can assume that he was put in the uneasy position of being more liberal in his theology and doctrine than most of the laymen in his congregation. Still this is only by Calvinistic standards. To most of his contemporaries, Taylor was definitely a "theological and ecclesiastical conservative."\(^5\)

Of course, liberalism or conservatism is only the most general distinction, and we should probe a bit deeper to come to a clearer picture of Taylor's beliefs. Such an insight is provided by the enumeration in H. Blau's article "Heaven's Sugar Cake." I will consider each point briefly:

Edward Taylor's Beliefs\(^6\)

1. Man is naturally good and can, through reason, perceive good.


2. Knowledge of spiritual things leads to union of man's mind with God.

3. Since this mental union with God comes from reason, it is faith.

4. Man's nature leads him to this union.

5. Heaven and hell are states of mind rather than places.

6. Sexual love is the symbol of God's love.

7. Christianity is the culmination of these divine revelations.

The first point, for example is in almost direct contradiction to the orthodox Calvinistic point of view as expressed in the first of the "Five Points." Calvinism stresses man's depravity, whereas Taylor seems to be stressing man's basically good nature.

The second point is not in such direct contradiction with Calvinistic doctrine as the first. In fact the fifth of the "Five Points" even opens the door for this type of conclusion, although it certainly does not state it. The notion of any type of mental union is derived by implication of the "Five Points."

Once again, the idea of faith is not in direct contradiction with the basic beliefs of Calvinism, but it does present some problems. Since the Calvinists believed in unconditional election (see the second of the "Five
Points") the role of faith is much diminished in the eyes of the Calvinist. Man's will is controlled by predestination.

The fourth of Taylor's beliefs, however, seems to be in almost direct conflict with the traditional Calvinistic view of man. Taylor seems to be saying that man is basically good (belief one) and that he seeks salvation. But traditional Calvinism did not stress this idea. Instead, it held that man was depraved since Adam's fall (point one) and cannot know God's will. It would then follow that since man is depraved and ignorant of God's will, he is probably not looking for salvation.

The fifth belief of Taylor is not treated directly in the "Five Points," but any study of Calvinism will reveal that the Calvinists did believe in a literal heaven and hell.

In his sixth belief, Taylor again strays from the orthodox Calvinistic point of view, though not as directly as in some of the other places. Here the deviation seems to be one of point of view. The Calvinists took a dim view of all pleasure, especially gratification of the flesh and most certainly sexuality. It would certainly seem doubtful that any of them would sanctify this basically nonintellectual behavior in such a glorious fashion.
On the seventh point, however, I feel that Taylor is in perfect harmony with the basic ideals of even the most ardent Calvinist.

Now that we have briefly examined Taylor's biography and his major beliefs, let us consider his longest work, God's Determinations. In the Johnson edition the poem is composed of thirty six separate poems and covers seventy eight pages. Since its publication in 1939, God's Determinations has drawn a good deal of interest from scholars in the field of colonial American literature. Some of this, no doubt, comes from the circumstances surrounding any publication two centuries after the author's death. However, the most obvious reason for the attention the poems have received is that they are extremely good poetry. Some critics go so far to say that Taylor is the best American poet before the nine-

---


8 One of Taylor's last wishes was that his poetry not be published. His grandson, Ezra Styles, honored this wish, and deposited the manuscripts in the Yale University Library. Two centuries later, they were discovered, Taylor's will broken, and the poems were published. The American Tradition in Literature, ed. Sculley Bradley, et al., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), pp. 62-64.
Of course, critics differ greatly in their technical evaluations of the work. Some call it a great American epic and stress that *God's Determinations* is Taylor's best work. Others, like H. Blau, disagree with this opinion. Blau says that Taylor does better in his shorter works—such as the meditations—because it is there that he could exert the control necessary to make the work develop fully. Others charge Taylor with everything from stretching his metaphors past the point of even being metaphysical conceits, to unclear organization and progression. It is interesting to note, however, that when all of these criticisms are examined carefully, one can readily see that nearly all of Taylor's faults as a poet lie squarely in the realm of technical errors. These errors do not usually detract significantly from the intrinsic value of the poetry. In fact, I feel that I would have to agree with E.F. Carlisle, that Edward Taylor is a fine poet in spite of his technical errors. 

---


11 Blau, p. 342.

12 Carlisle, p. 147.
31-36 choral epilogue

(Numbers refer to poem numbers, not page numbers.)

The first section opens with "The Preface." Here Taylor established God as the creator of the universe, as a being truly omnipotent:

Infinity, when all things it beheld,
In Nothing, and of Nothing all did build,
Upon what Base was fixt the Lath, wherein
He turn'd this Globe, and riggalld it so trim?

(31)

This poem is especially important, because it is a good example of how Taylor can portray and humanize a theological idea. Here he paints a picture filled with emphasis on God's greatness and power:

His Glorious Handywork not make by hands.
Who spake all things from nothing; and with ease
Can speake all things to nothing, if he please.
Whose Little finger at his pleasure Can
Out mete ten thousand worlds with halfe a Span:
Whose Might Almighty can by half a looks
Root up the rocks and rock the hills by th' roots.

(31)

The key point of the poem is saved for the last eight lines and now it is here that Taylor sets the stage for the plot of the entire work:

God Gave All to nothing Man indeed, whereby
Through nothing man all might him Glorify.
In Nothing is imbosst the brightest Gem
More pretious than all pretiousness in them.
But Nothing man did throw down all by sin:
And darkened that lightsom Gem in him,
That now his Brightest Diamond is grown
Darker by far than any Coalpit Stone.

Man is shown as a worthless ingrate who has sinned and thus darkened his soul, "That lightsom Gem in him."

In the second poem of the section, "Prologue," Taylor digresses from his plot and explains his purpose in writing God's Determinations. His purpose, like Milton's is to "justify the ways of God to Man":

I am this Crumb of Dust which is design'd
To make my Pen unto thy Praise alone,
And my dull Phancy I would gladly grinde
Unto an Edge on Zions Pretious Stone:
And Write in Liquid Gold upon thy Name
My Letters till they glory forth doth flame.

The plot finally gets under way with "The Effects of Mans Apostacy." Taylor adopts a narrator's stance here and recounts the fall of man, which he likens to a castle (the heart) being captured. Then he describes man's state after the fall: "Yet this he easily feels, he liveth in / A Dying Life, and Living Death by Sin."

Thus, the state of Man necessitates the same sort of action, both from Man, and from the divine powers. God's reaction is partially expressed in the next poem, "A Dialogue between Justice and Mercy." In fact, this
is one of the most important passages in God's Determinations. Here, those seemingly incongruent parts of God's nature are juxtaposed: his justice and his mercy.

The problem is to allow Mercy to work, while still satisfying Justice:

JUSTICE
My Essence is ingag'de, I cannot bate,
Justice not done no Justice is; and hence
I cannot hold off the Rebells pate
The Vengeance he halls down with Violence.
If Justice wronged be, she must revenge:
Unless a way be found to make all friends.

MERCY
My Essence is engag'de pitty to show:
Mercy not done no Mercy is, and hence
I'le put my shoulders to the burden, so
Halld on his head with hands of Violence.
As Justice justice evermore must doe:
So Mercy mercy evermore must show.

The only solution to this problem is "to make all friends."
This, of course, is accomplished through Christ. Justice' next speech makes this point admirably clear as he quotes one of Christ's most significant lines of the entire Bible:

JUSTICE
I'le take thy Bond: But know thou this must doe:
Thou from thy Fathers bosom must depart,
And be incarnate like a slave below,
Must pay mans Debts unto [the] utmost marke.
Thou must sustain that burden, that will make
The Angells sink into th' Infernall lake.

Nay, on thy shoulders bare must beare the Smart
Which makes the Stoutest Angell buckling cry;
Nay, makes thy Soule to Cry through griefe of heart,
ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI, 16
If this thou wilt, come then, and do not spare:
Beare up the Burden on thy shoulders bare.
(37)

The scriptural allusion to Christ is obvious, and so is
Taylor's point about the necessity of Christ's dying to
save men from their sins and thus satisfy Justice's demands.
Such a concept as this is fairly theologically tacit for
a christian however. The real problem is what will
become of those who do not accept this at once.

Taylor divides those who reject Christ's promise
(Mercy) into two distinct classes: The proud and the
humble. Mercy is the first to realize that there will
be some who do not readily accept and it is he that
mentions this problem to Justice:

MERCY
I do forsee Proud man will me abuse,
He'th broke his Legs, yet's Legs his stilts must bee:
And I may stand untill the Chilly Dews
Do pearle my Locks before he'll stand on mee.
For set a Beggar upon horseback, see,
He'll ride as if no man so good as hee.

JUSTICE
And I forsee Proude man will me abuse,
Judging his Shekel is the Sanctuaries:
He on his durty stilts to walk will Choose:
Yea, is as Clean as I, and nothing Varies:

16 See Mat. 27.46.
Although his Shekel is not Silver good,  
And's tilting stilts do stick within the mudd.  
(39)

The proud, then, are unacceptable to Mercy because they 
would not appreciate his gift. They are also unacceptable 
to Justice. This time because they are not pure of spirit, 
"his Shekel is not Silver good."

Next the discussion turns to the humble:

MERCY
I feare the Humble Soul will be too shie;  
Judging my Mercy lesser than his Sin.  
Inlarging this, but lessening that thereby.  
'S if Mercy would not Mercy be to him.  
Alas! poore Heart! how art thou damnifi'de  
By Proud Humility and Humble Pride?

JUSTICE
The Humble Soul deales worse with me, doth Cry,  
If I be just, I'le on him Vengeance take:  
As if I su'de Debtor and Surety,  
And double Debt and intrest too would rake.  
If Justice sue the Bonds that Cancelld are,  
Sue Justice then before a juster bar.  
(40)

The humble are also unacceptable, but this time the 
reasoning is not so clear. Mercy cannot accept him because 
his belief that his sins are too great for Mercy's atone-
ment implies that mercy is inadequate. This makes the 
humble of guilty of "Proud Humility and Humble Pride."
The humble are also unacceptable to Justice because they 
implicate that he is unjust in his demands, i.e. that he 
is too harsh.
In the next eleven stanzas, Taylor goes on to introduce the notion of free grace and the moral law and to explain the fate of those who trust to their own merit or those who are ignorant of God's grace. As would be expected, those who trust to their own merit, like the proud, are damned (see p. 41). Those who are ignorant, however, will be given a chance to learn of Mercy's promise, "Though simple, learn of mee; I will you teach / True Wisdom for your Souls Felicity." (42).

The poem closes with still another important passage:

JUSTICE
Unto the Humble Humble Soule say,
Cheer up, poor Heart, for satisfy'd am I.
For Justice nothing to thy Charge can lay;
Thou has Acquittance in thy surety.
The Court of Justice thee acquits: therefore
Thou to the Court of Mercy are bound o're.

MERCY
My Dove, come hither, linger not, nor stay.
Though thou among the pots hast lain, behold
Thy wings with Silver Colours I'le o'relay:
And lay thy feathers o're with yellow gold.
Justice in Justice must adjudge thee just:
If thou in Mercies Mercy put thy trust.

Thus we see that Justice is satisfied if man trusts Mercy's mercy fully. Thus those should which are truly humble, "the Humble Humble," will be pardoned under this provision of Justice.
Obviously, "A Dialogue between Justice and Mercy" is an extremely important passage of God's Determinations because it introduces the idea of the dual nature of God which is here personified in the two characters, Justice and Mercy. Another importance is that "A Dialogue" gives the essential divisions of mankind from Taylor's point of view: those who accept Christ's mercy and those who do not. Finally, it gives a division of those who do not accept Christ. These are split into three distinct groups: the Humble Humble, the Humble Proud, and the Proud. After the Humble Humble are spared through Mercy and Justice, the foundation is laid for the real drama of the poem. The poet can now address himself to the problem of gaining salvation for those remaining souls through the work of Justice and Mercy.

In the next poem, "Mans Perplexity When Call'd to an Account," Man is summoned to explain the reason for his fall: "Which sparke our, call man to come and tell / How he his Cloath defil'd, and how he fell" (43). In the second stanza Taylor paints his picture of fallen man as a dirty, odious, little creature trembling in horror before the face of God:

He on his skirts with Guilt and Filth our peeps, With Pallid Fannick Fear upon his Cheeks,
With Trembling joynts, and Quivering Lips, doth quake, 

(43)

Taylor continues with his character sketch of mankind as he allows him to state his case against God's charges. True to this character, Man presents his case, blaming the only other person available for his sin and thus revealing his own nature:

This tale at last with sobs and sighs lets goe: 
Saying, 'my Mate procur'de me all this hurt',
Who threw me in my best Cloaths in the Dirt.'17

(43)

Taylor closes the poem with his description of Man's state after the fall being described:

Thus man hath lost his Freehold by his ill: 
Now to his Land Lord tenant is at Will, 
And must the Tenement keep in repare, 
What'e're the ruins and the Charges are. 
Nay, and must mannage war against his Foes; 
Although ten thousand strong, he must oppose.18

(43)

It is portrayed as a never ending labor filled with animosity between men. The allusion to Genesis III is clear; all Taylor has done is to paraphrase it into an image more consistent with his poem and his time.

17 See Gen. 3.12. 
18 See Gen. 3.17-19, 3.15.
Thus the foundation is laid. Man has sinned and God has banished him from the garden and damned him to hell. In "Gods Selecting Love in the Decree," however, we see the loving side of God start to come into the plot. He sends the means of salvation—Christ—who is symbolized by the coach which will take men to the feast—that is salvation:

Almighty makes a mighty sumptuous feast:
Doth make the Sinfull Sons of men his guests.
But yet in speciall Grace he hath to some,
(Because they Cripples are, and Cannot come)
He sends a Royall Coach forth for the same,
(44)

In spite of this, most men still reject salvation. Their principal reason is that the price of salvation is simply too high:

For hearing of the price, and wanting pay,
Do pish thereat, and Coily pass away.
So hearing of the terms, whist! they'le abide
At home before they'l pay so much to ride.19
(45)

The last poem of this section is "The Frowardness of the Elect in the Work of Conversion." The first sixteen lines of the poem are a brief summary of

19 See Ma. 19.16-22.
some of the previous material, especially stressing
the point that all men have sinned and fallen short of
God's standards. Taylor stresses that there are few men
who are willing to accept grace:

And those whose frame is made of finer twine
Stand further off from Grace than Wash from Wine.
Those who suck Grace from th' breast, are nigh as rare
As Black Swans that in milkwhite Rivers are.
(46)

Seeing that his offer of salvation is being refused
by Man, God seeks them: "Grace therefore calls them all,
and sweetly wooes. / Some won come in ..." (46).
However, this is still only a part of mankind. "... the rest as yet refuse, / And run away ..." (46),
but only to be pursued by Mercy. Some of these surrender,
but the rest divide themselves for the final time:

Then some Cast down their arms, Cry Quarter, Grace!
Some Chased out of breath, drop down with feare,
Perceiving the persuer drawing neer.
The rest persude, divide into two rancks,
And this way one, and that the other rancks.
(46)

Now Mercy has exhausted his efforts for the souls,
and Justice makes her entrance. She pursues them onto
an peninsula where the right wing—the second rank—surrender, but the others still resist:
And followd close, they finde no other way 
To make escape, but t' rally round about:
Which if it faile them they get not out,
They're forct into the Infernall Gulfe alive,
Or hackt in pieces are, or took Captive
But spying Mercy stand with Justice, they
Cast down their Weapons, and for Quarter pray.

(46-7)

Finally the second rank see that there is no escape, and 
they also surrender to Mercy and Justice, but Mercy 
refuses them and they become Justice' captives.

Thus, the first section tells how Man sinned and 
fell from God's presence. It also explains—through 
the use of the allegorical tale related—how Grace finally 
gains control over him. But, this does not complete 
his salvation. In fact, it takes the entire next section 
of twenty-three poems to accomplish this end. As you 
might guess, the theological argument is not as compressed 
as the first section. It requires neither the close 
reading—to avoid missing details—not the knowledge 
of the Old Testament—for understanding of the symbolic 
allusions.

As with the first section, I will include some of 
the key lines of this section; but since the action here 
is much easier to follow, I will be much more selective.

"Satans Rage at them in their Conversion" portrays 
Satan's reaction to the possibility that mankind might
find salvation:

Then Satan in a red-hot fiery rage
Comes bellowing, roaring, ready to engage,
To rend and tare in pieces small, all those
Whom in the former Quarrell he did lose.

(48)

This establishes Satan as a potent threat, even to those
who are under Grace, since he has the power "To rend and
tare in pieces small, all those / Whom in the former
Quarrell he did lose" (48). He attacks the various ranks
for cowerdice and inconsistancy and warns them of the
dangers of apostacy:

For when I shall let fly at you, you'll fall:
And so fall foule Upon your Generall.
Hee'll Hang you up alive then, by and by;
And I'le you wrack too for your treachery.

(48-9)

This marks the start of Satan's struggle for the souls
of the men in the three ranks.

The struggle is more than the men can endure, so
they call on Christ in "The Souls Address to Christ
against these Assaults." In fear they beg Christ to
tell them if Satan can carry out his threats against
those who are Grace's captives. Christ answers them
in the next poem, "Christ's Reply," saying that the
souls can feel confident in their salvation:
Then Credit not your Enemy,
Whose Chiepest daintie is a lie:
I will you comfort sweet extend.
Behold I am a sun and shield,
And a sharp sword to win the field:
I'll surely Crown you in the End.

(51)

Hearing this, the souls who are Mercy's captives are ecstatic, but those saved by Justice still droop, allowing Satan to renew his attack on them and steal what should have been their unending joy, by "swelling Pride up in their hearts" (52). Now Satan changes his method and begins to attack the ranks separately, beginning with the first. The assault continues through the next three poems. Here, Satan's prime assertion is that Grace is insufficient to save fallen Man, because Man is both outwardly and inwardly corrupt in all his deeds.

The first rank make their reply in "The Souls Groan to Christ for Succour," where they beg Christ for comfort from Satan's attack on Grace:

I know he is thy Cur, therefore I bee
Perplexed lest I from thy Pasture stray,
He bayghs and barks so veh'mently at mee.
Come, rate this Cur, Lord, breake his teeth I pray.
Remember me I humbly pray thee first,
Then halter up this Cur that is so Curst.

(60)

These lines show that the souls fear that they may have sinned or may be forced into sin by Satan's attacks,
"I bee / Perplexed lest I from thy Pasture stray"
(60).

Once again "Christ's Reply" is simple and direct. He assures the souls that they can be at peace as he comforts them like children:

Peace, Peace, my Hony, do not Cry,
My Little Darling, wipe thine eye,
Oh Cheer, Cheer up, come see.
Is anything too deare, my Dove,
Is anything too good, my Love,
To get or give for thee?

(61)

His promise is strongly stated. He makes no exceptions as he stresses that the soul that trusts Christ for shelter need not fear anything:

Oh! fight my Field: no Colours fear:
I'll be thy Front, I'll be thy reare.
Fail not: my Battells fight.
Defy the Tempter, and his Mock
Anchor thy heart on mee, thy Rock.
I do in thee Delight.

(64)

This point should not be overlooked: Christ says that all who trust in him are safe. This idea of trusting in him is essential and is repeated again and again in God's Determinations.

To this the souls reply with praises for God and his grace, in "An Extasy of Joy let in by this Reply
return'd in Admiration." The opening stanza expresses the souls' wonder at God's love and mercy:

My Sweet Deare Lord, for thee I'le Live, Dy, Fight. Gracious indeed! My Front! My Rear! Almighty magnify a Mite?
O! What a Wonder's here!.
(65)

Each of the succeeding twenty-two stanzas goes on to praise either God's glory, or the soul's desire to praise him. Both of these are central themes in God's Determinations and they are important parts of Taylor's personal beliefs.

Satan now turns his assaults to those who are the prisoners of Justice, the souls in the second and third ranks. He accuses the second rank of presumptuousness in expecting salvation through Grace. Instead, Satan asserts that Grace will not extend salvation to them. In the case of the third rank, Satan's attack centers around the fact that they resisted Grace: "Hence sprouts Presumption making much too bold, / To catch such Shaddows which no hand can hold" (71). He asserts that their presumption will bar them from grace.

In the next poem, the second and third ranks engage in dialogue expressing their plights:

SECOND
Our Pray'res are pray'reless: Oh! to what we bee,
An ugly Toad's an Angell bright we see.
Oh pray, pray you, oh pray, for us that so
The Lord of Mercy Mercy on's may show.

THIRD
O would we could! but oh Hells Gripes do grinde;
Yea, writhe our Souls with Cramps of e'ry kinde.
If Grace begrace us not, we go to Hell:
The Good Lord help us both, thus fare you Well.

This leads directly into "Their Call in this Sad State
for Mercy." "Their Call" is a most significant passage
because it shows that the souls are now totally dependent
on Grace:

But oh! we did, and are thereto propence:
And what we count off, oft thou Count'st offence.
We've none to trust: But on thy Grace we ly;
If dy we must, in mercy's arms wee'll dy.
Then pardon, Lord, and put away our guilt:
So we be thine, deale with us as thou wilt.

Only now does the soul resolve to risk all and seek the
"Pious Wise," for council, which he receives in the next
four poems (i.e. "The Soul's Search).

"The Soul's Search" is a Soul-Saint dialogue which
serves as a culmination to a good deal of the theological
arguments expressed earlier in God's Determinations.
It is here that Taylor makes his answers to the unsure
Soul through a new character, Saint. In this section
he explains the nature and importance of sin, grace, and
temptation.

With "Some of Satan Sophistry" the Saint, Soul dialogue ends. Here Satan makes his last stand against Grace's attempt to retain possession of the souls of those in the second and third ranks:

The Tempter greatly seeks, though secretly,  
With an Ath'istick Hoodwinke man to blinde,  
That so the footsteps of the Diety  
Might stand no longer stampt upon his minde:  
Which, when he can't blot out by blinding quite,  
He strives to turn him from the Purer Light.  
(93)

Through the rest of the poem, Satan continues as he builds a case around the thesis that sin is not bad. In the next poem, "Difficulties arising from Uncharitable Cariages of Christians," the last problem facing the souls is presented. This problem is—as the title suggests—the poor example, the hateful behavior of some Christians:

When these assaults prove vain, the Enemy  
One Saint upon another oft doth set,  
To make each fret like to Gum'd Taffity,  
And fire out Grace thus by a Chase of Fret.  
Uncharitable Christians inj'rous are:  
Two Freestones rubd together each do ware.  
(96)

This last argument is especially interesting, since this the first mention of the church which has appeared in
God's Determinations. It is significant also that Taylor places this problem last, thus seeming to imply that the poor witness of Christians is really one of the least important reasons for souls not finding Grace's gift of salvation.

The plot finally reaches its climax in "The Effect of this Discourse upon the second and third Rancks" as both of the ranks realize that they can be saved. Now Taylor moves quickly to sum up in his choral epilogue. Now the church becomes an important theme as does the souls' praises of God. This passage in "The Joy of Church Fellowship rightly attended" shows the joy that now marks the lives of the souls, just as fear did before:

Oh! joyous hearts! Enfird with holy Flame!  
Is speech thus tasseled with praise?  
Will not your inward fire of Joy contain,  
That it in open flames doth blaze?  
For in Christ's Coach Saints sweetly sing,  
As they to Glory ride therein.  
(109)

Now we can see that the central theme of God's Determinations is the notion that all men are able to gain salvation. We are especially aware of Man's struggling—struggling with all his might—to escape from damnation. This theme is good example of how Taylor's beliefs are often varient with orthodox Calvinism.
As I stated earlier, the Calvinistic idea of election did not allow for all persons finding salvation or even being able to find it. Taylor, however, asserts repeatedly that any person who will trust in Christ (Grace) will be saved through Mercy.

*God's Determinations* theme and didactic message are not its only interests, however. The reader will be aware at once of the rich variety of symbols and images Taylor employs in his poetry. The choice of this technique probably grew from the Calvinistic view of man's total depravity after Adam's fall. Thus, Taylor believed that the only way a man could speak about God was through metaphors, since God is too great for him to conceive of directly.

I will make no attempt to make any type of exhaustive study of the symbolic material in *God's Determinations*, but I will mention a few of the common characteristics as examples.

---


One of the common properties of Taylor's symbolic technique is his use of domestic objects and scenes for symbolic purpose. This one of the main stylistic characteristics of his work in general and of God's Determinations in particular. He probably developed this habit from the practice of finding illustrations for his sermons, although it is interesting to note that some of the images could be considered to be rather pagan. In spite of this, Taylor's usage always seems Christian, no matter what his choice of symbol or metaphor.

Another symbol in God's Determinations is the use of the two battles in the poem. The first one stands for the battle for man's body and the material world. In it, Satan uses his cunning to defeat unaided man. In the second battle, however—the battle for Man's soul—Satan fails, and God and man are victorious. In the first battle man was defeated when he did not depend on God for help. In the second battle, he was  

23 Blake, p. 18.  
26 Wright, p. 9.
able to gain final victory, but only after he surrendered to Mercy and Justice, thus allowing God to be his helper.

From this brief summary, I hope the reader will come to appreciate the poetry of Taylor through a closer examination of some of the key lines of *God's Determinations*. In any event, I think that this poem establishes Taylor as one of the truly great American poets.
Selected Bibliography


________. "Some Edward Taylor Gleanings." *NEQ*, 16 (1943), 280-96.


Thomas, Jean L. "Drama and Doctrine in God's Determinations." AL, 36 (1965), 452-62.


