

# The Principles of the most Ancient and Modern Philosophy

## God, Christ, and Creatures

## The Nature of Spirit and Matter

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis .... indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported within [brackets] in normal-sized type.—This work was posthumously published in a Latin translation, and the original (English) manuscript was lost; so the Latin is all we have to work with.—The division into chapters and sections is presumably Lady Conway's; the titles of chapters 2–9 are not.

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## Chapter 1: God and his divine attributes

**1.** God is spirit, light, and life; he is infinitely wise, good, just, and strong; he knows everything, is present everywhere, can do anything; he is the creator and maker of all things visible and invisible.

**2.** Time doesn't pass in God, nor does any change occur. He doesn't have parts that are arranged thus-and-so, ·giving him a certain constitution·; indeed, he doesn't *have* separate parts. He is intrinsically self-containedly *one*—a being with no variation and with nothing mixed into it. There are in God no dark parts, no hints of anything to do with bodies, and ·therefore· nothing—*nothing*—in the way of form or image or shape.

**3.** God is an essence or substance that is in the correct literal sense *distinct* from his creatures: ·he is ·one substance and they are ·others·; but he is not separated or cut off from them—on the contrary he is closely and intimately and intensely *present* in everything. Yet his creatures are not parts of him; and they can't change into him, any more than he can change into them. He is also in the correct literal sense the *creator* of all things, who doesn't just give them form and figure [i.e. shape them up in a certain way], but gives them their essence—their life, their body, and anything else they have that is good.

**4.** And because in God there is no time and ·therefore· no change, God can't ever have *new* knowledge or make a *new* decision; his knowledge and his will [i.e. his decisions, choices, wants] are eternal—outside time or beyond time.

**5.** Similarly, God has none of the passions that his creatures come up with, because every passion is temporal: it starts at

a time and ends at a time. (I'm assuming here that we want to use the term 'passion' correctly.)

**6.** In God there is an ·idea that is his image, i.e. the ·Word that exists in him. In its substance or essence this ·idea or word· is identical with God himself. It is through this idea or word that God knows himself as well as everything else; all creatures were made or created according to it. [This use of 'word' echoes the opening of John's gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' In 4:2 (page 10) Lady Conway ingeniously links this use of 'Word' with the more ordinary sense in which a 'word' is a bit of language.]

**7.** Similarly, there is spirit or will in God that ·comes from him and yet is one with him [= 'identical with him'?] in its substance or essence. It is through this ·will· that creatures receive their essence and activity: creatures have their essence and existence purely from him because God—whose will agrees with his utterly infinite knowledge, *wants* them to exist. [That is: wants them to exist as the fundamental kinds of things they are ('essence') and as having the detailed histories that they do ('activity').] And thus God's wisdom and will are not entities or substances distinct from him, but distinct modes or properties of a single substance. And this ·one substance· is the very thing that the most knowledgeable and judicious Christians are referring to when they speak of 'the Trinity'. ·The standard account of the Trinity says that there are ·three persons in ·one substance; but· the phrase 'three distinct persons'

- is a stumbling block and offence to Jews, Turks , and other people,
- is actually without any reasonable sense, and

•doesn't occur anywhere in Scripture.

[Here and throughout this work, Lady Conway—like other writers at her time—uses 'Turks' as a label for Moslems in general.] If that phrase were omitted from the doctrine of the Trinity, what was left would be readily accepted by everyone. For Jews and Turks and the rest hardly deny that God has wisdom. . . . and has within himself a Word by which he knows everything. And when they concede that this same being gives all things their essences, they *have to* accept that he has a will through which something that was hidden in the idea is brought to light and made actual—created and maintained—when God creates and fashions a distinct and essential substance. This is to create the essence of a creature. A creature doesn't get its existence from the idea alone, but rather from •will and the idea conjointly; just as an architect's idea of a house doesn't build the house unaided, i.e. without the co-operation of the architect's will. [Many philosophers would have said that the essence of (say) you exists in God's mind, independently of his decision to bring you into existence, i.e. his decision to *instantiate* that essence. We see here that Lady Conway thinks differently: she holds that an essence doesn't exist until something *has* it; so that God in creating you created your essence.]

### Notes added to chapter 1:

The last part of this chapter—especially section 7—is a theme in the ancient writings of the Hebrews, thus:

(1) Since God was the most intense and infinite light of all things, as well as being the supreme good, he wanted to create living beings with whom he could communicate. But such creatures couldn't possibly endure the very great intensity of his light. These words of Scripture apply to this: 'God dwells in inaccessible light. No-one has ever seen him, etc.' [1 Timothy 6:16].

(2) To make a ·safe· place for his creatures, God lessened the highest degree of his intense light throughout a certain space, like an empty sphere, a space for worlds.

(3) This empty space was not a merely negative item, a non-thing like a gap in someone's engagement-book. Rather, it was an *actual place where the light was not so bright*. It was the soul of the Messiah, known to the Hebrews as *Adam Kadmon* [= 'primal man' or 'first man']. . . .

(4) This soul of the Messiah was united with the entire divine light that shone in the empty space—less brightly so that it could be tolerated. This soul and light ·jointly· constituted one entity.

(5) This Messiah (called 'the Word' and 'the first-born son of God'), as soon as his light was dimmed for the convenience of creatures, made from within himself the whole series of •creatures.

(6) They were given access to the light of his divine nature, as something for them to contemplate and love. This giving of access united the creator with his creatures; the happiness of the creatures lay in this union.

(7) That is why God is represented by the Trinity. ·There are three concepts here, traditionally known as (f) the Father, (s) the Son, and (h) the Holy Ghost.· Of these,

(f) is the infinite God himself, considered as above and beyond his creation;

(s) is that same God in his role as the Messiah;

(h) is the same God insofar as he is *in* creatures—in them as the Messiah—with his light greatly dimmed so as to adapt it to the perception of creatures.

This verse (John 1:18) is relevant: '(f) No man hath seen God at any time; (s) the only begotten Son that is in the bosom of the Father (h) hath declared him ·to us·.'

(8) But it is customary among the Hebrews to use the word

'person' in this way: to them a 'person' is not an individual substance but merely a concept for representing a species or for considering a mode.

[This is the only chapter to which Lady Conway added Notes in this fashion. But she has frequent references to one of the things that

underlay these Notes as well, namely works stemming from 13th century Jewish mysticism known collectively as the Kabbalah. These references are omitted from the present version, except for the two in the main text, on page 11 and page 34..]

## Chapter 2: Creatures and time

**1.** All creatures *are* or *exist* simply because God wants them to: his will is infinitely powerful, and his mere command can give existence to creatures without

having any help,  
using any *means* to the end of creation, or  
having any material to work on.

Hence, since God's will exists ·and acts· from eternity, it follows necessarily that ·creation results immediately, with no time-lapse, from ·the will to create. [In the Latin text, the author doesn't ever address the reader directly, as she frequently does in the present version. The reasons for that are purely stylistic.] But don't think that creatures are themselves co-eternal with God; if you do, you'll muddle together time and eternity. Still, an act of God's creative will is so immediately followed by ·the start of the existence of· the creature that nothing can intervene; like two circles that immediately touch each other. And don't credit creatures with having any other source but God himself and his eternal will—the will that follows the guidance of his eternal idea, his eternal wisdom.

It naturally follows from this that the time that has passed since the moment of creation is infinite; it doesn't consist of any number ·of minutes, hours or years·, or any number that a created intellect can conceive. For how could it be marked off or measured, when it has no other beginning than eternity itself? [This stops a little short of the fairly common early-modern view that although there are *infinitely many* Fs, for various values of F, there is no such thing as an *infinite number* because that phrase is self-contradictory.]

**2.** If you want to insist that time is finite, you are committed to time's having begun some definite number of years back: perhaps 6,000 years ago (some people think it could hardly be further back than that); or . . . 600,000 years ago (that is accepted by some); or let it be any finite distance into the past—perhaps inconceivably far back, but still at a definite starting point T. Now tell me: Could the world have been created earlier than it was? Could the world ·and therefore time· have existed before T? If you say No, then you are restricting the power of God to a certain number of years. If

you say Yes, then you are allowing that there was time before all times, that is a plain contradiction. [Lady Conway is evidently equating *how far back the world goes* with *how far back time goes*. She has spoken of 'time that has passed since the moment of creation', and she will do so again; but it's pretty clear that she equates this with 'time that has passed'.]

**3.** On this basis we can easily answer a question that has greatly worried many people:

Did creation occur—*could* it have occurred—from eternity....?

There are two answers to this, corresponding to two ways of understanding 'from eternity'. Taking the question to be asking 'Has the created world existed for an infinite number of times?', the answer is Yes. But if the question is asking 'Is the created world eternal in the way that God is eternal, meaning that it didn't ever have a beginning?', the answer is No. There's nothing surprising in the view that times—the totality of them, taken all together—are infinite. It is, after all, conceivable that even the smallest stretch of time has something infinite about it: just as no time is so long that a still longer one can't be conceived, so also no time is so short that an even shorter time can't be imagined....

**4.** The infinity of time from the beginning of creation can likewise be proved by the goodness of God. For God is infinitely good, loving, and generous; indeed, he is goodness and charity—the infinite fountain and ocean of goodness, charity, and generosity. How could that fountain not flow.... perpetually? Won't that ocean perpetually overflow for the production of creatures, and be continuously in flood ·for their benefit·? God's goodness communicates itself and makes itself grow; that is its nature. It can't be amplified by anything outside God, anything making up for some lack in him; because there isn't anything that he lacks—he is too absolutely complete for that. And since he can't

augment *himself*, because that would be the creating of many Gods, which is a contradiction, it necessarily follows that he brought creatures into existence from time everlasting, i.e. through a numberless sequence of periods. Otherwise the goodness communicated by God, which is his essential attribute, would indeed be finite and could be numbered in terms of years. Nothing is more absurd.

**5.** So God's *essential* attribute is to be a creator. God always was a creator, therefore, and he always will be one, because otherwise he would change; and there always have been creatures, and there always will be. The eternity of creatures is nothing but the infinity of times in which they have existed and always will exist. This infinity of times is not the same as God's infinite eternity, because there's nothing *temporal* about the divine eternity: nothing in it can be called *past* or *future*; it is always entirely *present*. God is in time, but he isn't *contained* in it....

**6.** Why is the infinity of time different from God's eternity? The answer is obvious. ·On the one hand·:

Time is nothing but the successive motion or operation of creatures; if they stopped moving or operating, time would come to an end, and the creatures would go out of existence because it is the ·essential· nature of every creature to *move* in its progression towards greater perfection.

Whereas ·on the other hand·:

In God there is no successive motion, no process of growing in perfection, because he is absolutely perfect ·already·; so there are no times in God or in his eternity.

·And there is another reason too·: there are no ·parts in God, so there are no ·times in him, because all times have parts and are—as I said earlier—infinitely divisible.

## Chapter 3: Freedom, infinity, space

**1.** If we consider the divine attributes that I have mentioned, especially God's •wisdom and his •goodness, then we can utterly refute—we can *destroy*—the indifference of the will that has been attributed to God (and wrongly called 'free will') by the Scholastics and by other so-called philosophers. [An 'indifferent' will, in the sense at work here, is one that has no greater tug in any direction than in any other.] God's will is indeed utterly free: just because he is free and acts spontaneously in whatever he does, anything he does in regard to his creatures is done without any external force or compulsion and without any causal input from the creatures. But he is not—repeat *not*—ever indifferent about whether or not to act; if he were, that would be an imperfection, making God like his corruptible creatures! This indifference of will is the basis for all changeability and corruptibility in creatures; I run those two together because there would be nothing wrong in creatures if they weren't changeable. [The word 'corruptible' as used here is tied to Latin *corruptio* and early modern English 'corruption', usually referring in a general way to the condition of being rotten, spoiled, gone wrong.] Crediting God with that indifference of will would be implying that he is changeable, and thus is like corruptible man, who often acts from sheer will, with no true and solid reason. i.e. no guidance from wisdom. That likens God to cruel tyrants who mostly act from their own sheer will, relying on their power and not being able to give any explanation for their actions except 'I chose to do it'. In contrast with that, any *good* man can give a suitable explanation for what he does or will do, because he understands that true goodness and wisdom require him to have such an explanation; so he wants to act as he does because it is right and he knows that if he doesn't he will be

neglecting his duty.

**2.** True justice or goodness, therefore, is not indifferent; there's no slack in it. Rather, it is like a straight line: there can't be two or more equally straight lines between two points; only one line between them can be straight, and all others must be curved—more or less, depending on how much they depart from the straight line. So it is obvious that this indifference of will, which is an imperfection, has no place in God. For this reason God is both a most •free agent and a most •necessary one: anything that he does in relation to his creatures is something that he *must* do, because his infinite wisdom, goodness, and justice are for him a law that can't be broken.

**3.** It clearly follows that God •was not indifferent about whether or not to bring creatures into existence, and that he •made them from an inner impulse of his divine goodness and wisdom. So he created worlds—i.e. created creatures—as promptly as he could, because it's the nature of a necessary agent to do as much as he can. Since he *could* have created worlds or creatures from time immemorial, before 6,000—before 60,000—before 600,000—years ago, he has done this. God can do anything that doesn't imply a contradiction. 'Worlds or creatures will exist continuously through an infinite time in the future'—there's nothing contradictory about that; so there's no contradiction, either, in 'Worlds or creatures have existed continuously through an infinite past time'.

**4.** From these divine attributes, properly understood, it follows that God has made an infinity of worlds or creatures. He is infinitely powerful, so there can't be any number n

of creatures such that God couldn't create more than n creatures. And, as we have seen, he does as much as he can. His will, goodness, and kindness certainly extend. . . .as far as his power does. Thus it clearly follows that he has infinitely many creatures of infinitely many different types, so that they can't be counted or measured, either of which would set a limit to them. Suppose that the universe of creatures is spherical and is this big:

Its radius is n times the diameter of the earth, where n is the number of grains of dust in the entire world.

And suppose that its ultimate parts, its atoms, are this small:

A single poppy seed contains 100,000 atoms.

That yields an immensely large finite number of very small atoms; but it can't be denied that God with his infinite power could make this number greater and greater by multiplying to infinity. . . . And since (as I have said) God is a necessary agent who does everything that he can do, it follows that he did and always does multiply and increase the •essences of creatures to infinity [i.e. increase to infinity how many •creatures there are; see the note on 'essences' in 1:7].

**5.** The same argument shows that not only the universe (or system of creatures) as a whole is infinite, i.e. •has infinity in itself, but every creature •has infinity in it. A creature may be the smallest we can see with our eyes, or even the smallest we can conceive of in our minds, but it •has in itself an uncountable infinity of parts, or rather of entire creatures. It can't be denied that God can put one creature inside another; so he could just as easily put in two, or four, or eight, endlessly multiplying creatures by always placing smaller creatures inside larger ones. And since no creature could be so small that there couldn't be a smaller one, no creature is so big that an even bigger one isn't always possible. [That's what the Latin means, but this may be a

slip by that translator. It would be more reasonable for Lady Conway to say at this point: Just as no creature could be so small etc., so also no creature is so big etc.'—a comparison, not an inference.] It follows •that infinitely many creatures can be contained in any creature, however tiny, and •that all these could be bodies and mutually impenetrable. As for created *spirits*, which can penetrate one another: any one of these can 'contain' infinitely many others, which all have the same extent—the same spatial size—as one another and as the spirit that 'contains' them. What happens here is that the spirits are more finely divided and more spiritual, which enables them to penetrate items that are less finely divided, more lumpy, more corporeal; so there's no shortage of space to force some of them to give way so as to make room for others. I'll say more about the nature of bodies and spirits in the proper place [Chapter 7, starting at page 26]. All I need here is to demonstrate that in every creature, whether spirit or body, there is an infinity of creatures, each of which contains an infinity in itself.

[Four comments on section 5: **(a)** In early modern English, and the corresponding Latin, a 'creature' was simply *something created by God*, so that a pebble could be a creature. But early in section 5 we see the phrase 'an infinity of parts, or rather of entire creatures', apparently taking 'a creature' to be more than merely something God has created. In other contexts, notably on page 9, Lady Conway clearly regards all created things of any kind as 'creatures'. **(b)** In this section and elsewhere, *subtilis* and *grossus*—standardly translated by 'subtle' and 'gross' respectively—are translated by 'finely divided' and 'lumpy' or 'not finely divided' respectively. These are what Lady Conway means by them, and are indeed closer to the meanings of the Latin words. **(c)** When speaking of the packing of bodies into bodies, our author speaks of these bodies as being 'mutually impenetrable'; she means that no two bodies can *each* occupy *the whole* of a given region of space at the same time; so the packing has to be done by body x having tunnels or crevices into which

the parts of body y can creep, and of course y in its turn having still smaller tunnels or crevices into which the parts of body z can creep, and...so on. And that must also be her view about the packing of spirits into spirits, the only difference here being that all those tunnels and crevices must be smaller than many of those of bodies. Given that the subtle/gross difference is the whole difference between bodies and spirits, it seems that a certain distance along the body-packing process we'll be dealing with such tiny tunnels and such tiny portions of body to slide into them that really we are dealing with spirits. If that is right, it seems to be something our author overlooked. You might think that it isn't right, and that for spirits she envisages a different kind of packing, involving something she calls 'intimate presence'. (This has floated past rather quickly a few times, but we'll hear much about it later on.) To say that x is 'intimately present' to y is to say that x and y *each* occupy *the whole* of some region of space at the same time. If that is how spirits contain other spirits which...and so on to infinity, there is no need for tunnels etc. and no threat that somewhere down the line the body-packings will turn into spirit-packings. But that can't possibly be Lady Conway's view, because it implies a radical difference of *kind* between bodies and spirits, whereas this entire work is dedicated to the thesis that the body/spirit difference is only one of *degree*—specifically, a difference along the continuum from extremely finely divided to crudely chunky. And also because, as we shall see on page 33, Lady Conway declares—firmly, clearly, and for given reasons—that no created thing or substance can be intimately present to anything else. (d) The whole idea of inserting the parts of one body into tunnels, crevices or gaps in another body makes no sense unless that tunnels etc. are otherwise *empty*, but on page 35 and elsewhere Lady Conway emphatically declares that there is no such thing as empty space. This seems to be a deep and important flaw in her thinking.]

**6.** All these things praise and commend God's great power and goodness—the way his infinity appears radiantly in the works of his hands, right down to every single one of his

creatures. (You might think: ‘·This can't be right, because it puts infinity into *us*, putting us on a par with God.’ That is wrong, because just as one infinity is greater than another, so God is always infinitely greater than all his creatures; nothing can be compared to him.) Thus, God's truly invisible attributes can be clearly seen by being understood *through* the things he has made or *in* the things he has made. The greater and more magnificent his works, the more they show the maker's greatness. Some people hold •that there's only a finite number of creatures in the universe, so that they are countable, and •that the whole body of the universe occupies so many acres or miles or diameters of the earth in length, depth, and breadth. They are estimating God's great majesty according to a petty and undignified scale. They are telling a tale not about God but about an idol of their own imagination, whom they confine to a narrow space, like the tiny bird-cage a few inches wide; isn't that a fair description of the world they imagine, when it's compared to the true and great universe that I have described?

**7. They may say this:**

We don't confine God *within* this finite universe. We take him to exist within it and also in the infinite spaces that we imagine outside it.

But if those imagined spaces are *merely* imaginary, they're nothing but idle fictions; and if they are real entities, what else can they be but creatures of God? Also, either God is at work in those spaces or he isn't. If he isn't, he isn't there; because God works wherever he is—it's his nature to act, just as it's the nature of fire to burn or of the sun to shine. For God always works, and his work is bringing creatures into existence according to the eternal idea or wisdom that is in him....

**8.** Moreover this continual action or operation of God, considered as something that is in him, i.e. comes from him, or considered in relation ·only· to himself, is just one continual action or command of his will. There is nothing serial or temporal in it, no before or after; it is always *all* present to God; nothing ·in it· is past or future, because God has no parts. But considered as manifested *in* creatures, or as operating *on* creatures, God's action is temporal and has a series of parts. It's hard for us to imagine this or to grasp it conceptually, but there is a good solid reason for affirming it. Perhaps we can be helped a little in our attempts to grasp it by thinking of a great wheel rotating around its centre while the centre remains in the same place. Or think of

the sun, which is made to rotate around its centre by some angel or spirit who is in its centre, producing n rotations every m days. The centre moves the whole thing, producing a great and continual motion; yet the centre remains always motionless, and isn't moved in any way.

How much more true this is of God, who is the first mover of all his creatures, giving them their true and appointed motions! But they don't move him. ·It is appropriate to use the wheel/sun examples in this way, because· ·the rule of God's will is the analogue in him of ·the motions and operations of creatures. But ·this is only an analogy·: strictly speaking, there is no motion ·in God· because all motion is successive....

**9.** I have maintained that the smallest creatures that can be conceived have infinitely many creatures within themselves, so that the smallest particles of body or matter can be stretched and divided in infinite ways into ever-smaller parts. Some people have objected to this, ·opposing it with atomism·, as follows:

(1) Whatever is actually divisible as far as any actual division can go is divisible into indivisible parts.

(2) And matter is actually divisible as far as any actual division can go.

(3) Therefore, matter is divisible into indivisible parts.

[•Where the above argument has 'indivisible', it's clear from the Latin that Lady Conway used 'indiscerpible'. It means the same thing, but was a technical term invented by her friend and mentor Henry More; she was signalling that she was starting to move away from his philosophy. •In premise (2) the word 'matter' replaces 'matter or body (which is of course just packed-together matter)'. •She abbreviates (3) the conclusion to 'Therefore etc.]

This argument suffers from the fallacy that logicians call combining uncombinables, i.e. joining words or terms that ·jointly· imply contradiction or absurdity. This fallacy is lurking in the phrase *actually divisible*, which says that one and the same thing *is* and *is not* divided. For 'actually' signifies **division**, while 'divisible' signifies **not division** but the capacity to be divided. ·Combining these into a single phrase· is as absurd and contradictory as 'seeingly blind' or 'vitally dead'. And if the objectors ·clear themselves of this fallacy by· using the phrase 'actually divisible' to mean just one of those two things—i.e. either to refer only to (a) what really has been divided or to refer to (b) what is ·merely· capable of being divided, a ·different· fallacy will be readily apparent to us. (a) If the objectors use 'actually divisible' to refer only to what has been divided, then I grant them their premise

(1a): Whatever has been actually divided as far as any actual division can go is divisible into indivisible parts.

But in that case their premise

(2a) Matter has been actually divided as far as any actual division can go

is false. **(b)** If they use ‘actually divisible’ to refer only to whatever is merely *divisible*, i.e. is capable of being divided, then I deny the premise

**(1b)** Whatever can be divided as far as any actual division can go is divisible into indivisible parts.

And anyway the proposition when taken in this sense it is a mere tautology, an empty repetition of the same thing. [What proposition? She is referring to the opening *clause* of premise **(1)**, namely ‘whatever can be divided as far as any actual division ·of it· can go’, contending that everything answers to that description.] ·An argument based on· it is on a par with:

- Whatever can be removed from its place as far as it can be removed can be removed only up to a certain distance;
- London can be removed from its place as far as it can be removed.
- Therefore etc.

The same form of argument can be used to ‘prove’ that the human soul exists or has its essence for ·only· a finite number of years, so that it is mortal, comes to an end:

- Anything whose time or duration is actually divisible to the extent to which an actual division ·of it· can be made will come to an end, and is divisible into a finite number of years;
- The soul’s time or duration is actually divisible to the extent to which an actual division ·of it· can be made;
- Therefore etc.

.... Please note that when I say that the smallest particle of body or so-called matter is always divisible into even smaller parts to infinity, so that there can’t be any actual division in matter that couldn’t be carried still further, I’m not specifying what God’s power will be or is •absolutely able to do. (Some people *do* do that; their behaviour is crass and

stupid.) I am only indicating what God’s power does and will do •insofar as it operates in creatures and through creatures in all its productive activities [see note on ‘creature’ on page 6]; the point being that in all analyses and divisions of bodies **nature** never has—i.e. **creatures** never have—divided any body into parts so small that they couldn’t be further divided. And the body of any creature can’t ever be reduced to its smallest parts—not through the most fine-grained operations of any creature or created power. And that’s enough for my present purpose. For God doesn’t make divisions in any body or matter except by working together with his creatures. Therefore he never reduces creatures to their smallest parts. [Despite the word ‘Therefore’, Lady Conway abruptly shifts to an entirely different reason why God doesn’t actually go the whole way is dividing any of his creatures. Namely:] It’s because it is the nature of all motion that it breaks down and divides something into finer parts; so if a material thing were broken down into its *finest* parts, no motion could occur in it. Bringing *that* about would be contrary to God’s wisdom and goodness. Any creature in which all motion or operation had ceased would be entirely useless in creation—it would be no better than *nothing*. And, I repeat, for God to be unable to do something would be contrary to God’s wisdom, his goodness, and all his other attributes....

**10.** ‘Everything is infinitely divisible, always divisible into ever-smaller parts’—this isn’t an empty or useless theory; on the contrary, it’s extremely useful in the understanding the causes and reasons of things and in understanding that all creatures, from the highest to the lowest, are inseparably united thus:

They send out from themselves ·some of· their more finely divided parts. These are mediators: they intervene between one creature and another, enabling

them to act on one another at great distances. This is the basis of all the sympathy and antipathy that occurs in creatures. Someone who has a good grasp of these things can easily see into the most secret and hidden causes

of most things, which ignorant men call ‘occult qualities’. [It’s pretty clear that Lady Conway thinks that ‘sympathy’ and ‘antipathy’ are also terms used by ignorant people who accept fake explanations of facts that are really to be explained in terms of the physics of tiny particles.]

## Chapter 4: Christ and creatures

**1.** People have puzzled over the question ‘Did God create all creatures at the same time or one after the other?’ What I have said makes it easy to answer this, ·as follows·. **(1)** If ‘create’ refers to •God himself, i.e. to an internal decree of his will, then the creation occurred all at once, because it’s the nature and essential attribute of God to be unchangeable and eternal. **(2)** If ‘create’ refers to •the creatures, ·i.e. to what happens to them·, then the creation was spread out through time, because it’s the nature of God’s creatures to be changeable and temporal. **(3)** If ‘create’ refers to the universal seeds and sources that are like springs and fountains from which creatures flow forth in an orderly series fixed by God (the greatest and first source of all things), then again it can be said that all creatures were created at the same time, especially if we remember the Messiah, i.e. the Christ, who is the first born of all creatures. . . .and through whom ‘all things visible and invisible have been made’ (Colossians 1:16).

**2.** ‘Jesus Christ’ signifies the *whole* Christ, who is both God and man. As **God**, he is called *logos ousios* [Greek], meaning ‘the **essential Word** of the father’. As **man**, he is named by *logos prophorikos* [Greek], meaning **the word that**

**is uttered and revealed**, the perfect and substantial image [= ‘likeness’] of God’s word. This revealed word is eternally in God, perpetually united to him; it is his vehicle, his ‘organ’, just as our body is the vehicle or organ of our soul. Both the Old and New Testaments mention this revealed word, which is the wisdom of God: for example, Proverbs 8:22, 31 and 3:19; Psalms 33:6, 22:2 and 110 (first part), Job 1:1,2,3, etc.; Ephesians 3:9, Colossians 1:15–17. The last of those passages contains an explanation of the underlying truth that that through the Son. . . .God can’t be known exactly, barely, without decoration, as he is. Nor can any of his attributes. ·We are told that the Son is the perfect image of the Father, and· and ‘image’ signifies something *visible* that represents something else. So the Son is the *visible* image of the *invisible* God, and of God’s equally invisible attributes; ·which is why he can’t present God or his attributes exactly, barely, just as they are; but· he (the Son) represents God in some very special way ·that somehow makes it clear that he is representing •God· rather than •any created thing.

**3.** And the same line of thought is at work when Paul, writing to the Colossians, calls Christ ‘the first of all created beings’ and describes how Christ related to creatures, who, in their

original state were all like the sons of God. At that time he was 'the first born' of all the \*sons, and \*they were the sons, so to speak, of that firstborn son of God. That's why I said that all things are rooted in him, i.e. have their existence in him, because they arise **from** him in the way branches arise from a root, so that they remain forever **in** him in a certain way.

**4.** Created things couldn't be equal to Christ, couldn't have the same nature that he has. That is because his nature could never sink to their level, changing from good into bad. So their nature is far inferior to his; they can never strictly speaking become him, any more than he can ever become the Father. The highest point they can reach is be *like* him, as Scripture says. Thus, we as mere creatures are only his sons and daughters *by adoption*.

## Chapter 5: God, Christ, and time

**1.** After what I have said in the preceding chapter about the son of God, who is the first born of all creatures, there is still much more to be said on this topic. I shall devote this chapter to saying it, because it is needed for a correct understanding of what follows. Regarding Jesus Christ (as I call him, following Scripture): in calling him 'the son of God, (the first born of all creatures', I imply that \*he was eternally unified with God not only in \*his divinity but also in \*his humanity, i.e. that his celestial humanity was united with God before the creation of the world and before \*his incarnation [i.e. before he became a man equipped with flesh and bone etc.]. The ancient Kabbalists [see note on page 3] wrote many things about this: how the son of God was created; how his existence preceded all creatures in the order of nature; how everything is blessed and sanctified in him and through him. The Kabbalists in their writings call him 'the celestial Adam', or 'Adam Kadmon' (the first man), 'the great priest', 'the husband (or betrothed) of the church', or....'the first-born son of God'.

[We are about to hear a lot about Christ's position as a *medium* (Latin) between God and creatures. This is hard to translate. It does *not* mean 'mediator' in anything like our present sense; the Latin word for that is *mediator*. A mediator is someone who has a

**role as a go-between;**

whereas Lady Conway's topic here is Christ's

**position as a be-between,**

so to speak. It is a position that he occupies because he shares attributes with God and other attributes with Creatures. This version will use the English 'medium' for the noun, and 'intermediate' for the related adjective; this is *not* a standard use of 'medium', but at least it avoids the strong wrong suggestions of the word 'mediator'.]

**2.** This son of God, the first born of all creatures, this celestial Adam and great priest as the most learned Jews call him, is properly described as the *medium* between God and created things. The existence of such a medium can be \*demonstrated as well as the existence of God can; all that is needed is to grasp that the medium's nature is below God's

but above, more excellent than, all other created things. This excellence makes it right for us to call him the son of God.

**3.** In order to grasp the •demonstration• that I have referred to, think about

(1) the nature or essence of God, the highest being and

(3) the nature and essence of creatures.

These are so unlike each other that (2) this intermediate nature springs into view. ·To be really sure about it, there are some things we should go through in patient detail·. (1) As I have already said, God's nature—his essence—is altogether unchangeable; we are shown this by sacred Scripture and by our understanding (which was placed in our minds by God). ·Here's what our understanding tells us about this.. If God *were* in any way changeable, it would have to be a change in the direction of a more wide-ranging and more intense goodness. But if that were possible for him, he wouldn't already be the highest good, and that's a contradiction. Furthermore, if anything proceeds to a greater degree of goodness, that's because it is sharing in the influence and the virtue of some greater being; no being is greater than God; so he can't improve or be made better in any way.... Therefore it is clear that God, or the highest being, is wholly unchangeable.

·So much for God; now for creatures·. The nature of creatures is really distinct from the nature of God: he has certain attributes that can't be shared with his creatures, and his unchangeableness is one of these; from which is necessarily follows that creatures are changeable—an 'unchangeable creature' would have to be God himself! And, anyway, daily experience teaches us that creatures are changeable and continually change their state.

Now, there are two kinds of changeability. To be

changeable<sub>1</sub> is to have the intrinsic power to change oneself for better or for worse; all creatures have this power except for the first-born of all creatures, ·Jesus Christ·. To be changeable<sub>2</sub> is to have the power of changing from one good to another—including changing from good to *better*—but not of changing in any other way. So there are three kinds of being.

- First kind: altogether unchangeable.
- Second kind: changeable<sub>2</sub>; can change toward the good, so that something good by its very nature can become better.
- Third kind: changeable<sub>1</sub>; can change from good to ·a different or greater· good as well as from good to bad.

The first and third of these kinds are opposites. The second is a natural medium—a very fitting and appropriate one—between those extremes: it shares with the third kind the ability to change, and it shares with the first kind an inability to change from good to bad. Such a medium is required by the very nature of things: without it, there would be a gap, and one extreme would be united [meaning?] with the other extreme without any medium ·or intermediate case·, which is impossible and against the nature of things (as can be seen all through the entire universe). I am talking here about the Messiah's •moral unchangeability, not his •natural unchangeability. Some people object that if Christ had been naturally incapable of changing ·for the worse·, it would have been pointless to tempt him (see Matthew 4:3, Hebrews 2:17–18, 4:15). But there are other arguments—purely philosophical ones—that the perfect first born emanated immediately from God at the beginning (and that only he did). This is also confirmed in chapters 2 above and 7 below by the authority of ancient and modern philosophers, along with a response to opposing arguments.

**4.** Don't understand this 'medium' in a crude way, as being *spatially* between, like your trunk coming between your head and your feet. It is intermediate in respect ·not of its location but· of its nature, just as silver is intermediate between tin and gold, and water between air and earth, though silver and water are crude analogues of the medium I am discussing. No-one supposes that the son is intermediate between God and creatures in the sense ·of being a kind of stand-in for God·, implying that God himself is not immediately present in all creatures. Indeed, he *is* immediately present in all things and immediately fills all things, and he works immediately in everything. I mean those words strictly literally; but they must be understood in terms of the kind of union and communication that creatures have with God, where God works in everything *immediately* and yet using this medium that I have been talking about as an instrument through which he works together with creatures, since that instrument is by its own nature closer to them. (Still, because that medium is by its nature far more excellent than all the other productions of God that we call 'creatures', it is rightly called 'the first born of all creatures' and 'the son of God' rather than a 'creature' of God. And it is produced by generation or emanation from God rather than by 'creation' strictly speaking: we say that the son of man [a phrase here making its first appearance in this work] was generated by God rather than made or created by him; we say that a house or a ship is the 'work' of its maker but not his 'son': it isn't a living image and likeness of *him*, ·as a son may be of his father·. Thus, the first creation produced outside of God is more fittingly and properly called his 'son' than his 'creature', because it is his living image and is greater and more excellent than all creatures. But as long as we understand the facts correctly, there's no point in arguing about words.) It follows that the son himself is ·also· immediately present in all these creatures so that

he may bless and benefit them. And by existing among creatures and being the true medium between them and God, he actively raises them into union with God. And since he is the most excellent creature produced outside of God, as well as being his most exact and perfect image, he must resemble God in all his attributes, which can be said without contradiction to have been passed on to ·Christ; so ·he must be present everywhere. And here's another argument for that conclusion: if Christ were not present everywhere in all creatures, there would be an utter chasm between God and creatures—a gap in which God would not exist. And that is absurd. [In talking about the 'medium' between God and creatures, this version of the text has shifted from 'it' and 'itself' to 'he' and 'him' and 'himself'. Latin doesn't have this distinction; the basis for the change is just the gradual development of what sounds like a *personal* role for the medium, and the increasing use of 'son'.]

**5.** Now a different point. Because he shares in God's unchangeability and creatures' changeability, the son is midway between what is altogether unchangeable and what is altogether changeable, sharing something with each. So he can be said to share eternity (which belongs to God) and time (which belongs to creatures). I said earlier [page 3] that nothing intervenes between eternity and time, or between the creating will of God and the creatures that he makes; but in that context 'time' and 'creature' must be understood in a broader sense in which this medium, ·this Son·, counts as one of the creatures and as being in time along with the rest. We mustn't think of this intervening being, ·this Son·, as existing ·in time before ·all other· creatures, but only as preceding them in ·the order of nature. Thus, strictly speaking no time elapsed between creatures and the all-creating power and will of God that created them.

**6.** But using 'time' in the ordinary sense of the word,

referring to a successive increase or decrease of things during which they grow for a while and then decline until they die or change into another state, we can say flatly that neither •this medium nor any •other• creature that is perfectly united to •him is subject to time and to its laws. That's because the laws of time hold only for a certain period, and when that is completed the things subject to time decline, waste away, and die or change into another kind of thing altogether. As the ancient poet [Ovid] said: 'Voracious time and envious age destroy everything.' That is why time is divided into four parts, following the ages of men living in this world: infancy, youth, manhood, and old age. Thus, everything that is circumscribed by time is subject to death and decay or changes into something else, just as we see water change into stone, stones into earth, earth into trees, and trees into living animals. [That water could be changed into stone was proclaimed as a discovery by F. M. van Helmont, Lady Conway's friend and mentor. We meet this again on pages 16 and 20.]

But in that most excellent intermediate being •whom we call 'the son of God'• there is no defect or decay; and properly speaking *death* has no place in him either. He is like a most powerful and effective ointment through which anything can be preserved from decline and death; whatever is joined with him is always new and vigorously growing. Here is perpetual youth without old age but with the virtues of age, namely great increase of wisdom and experience without any of the imperfections that old age normally brings.

Yet when Christ became flesh and entered his body, which he brought with him from heaven (for every created spirit has some body, whether it is terrestrial, aerial, or etherial), he took on something of our nature and thus of the nature of everything. (Why 'thus of everything'? Because the nature of man contains the nature of all creatures, which is why man is called a microcosm [= 'a small-scale model of the universe']].

In taking on flesh and blood, Christ sanctified nature so that he could sanctify everything, analogous to fermenting a whole mass of stuff by fermenting one part of it. Then he descended into time and for a certain period voluntarily subjected himself to its laws, to such an extent that he suffered great torment and death itself. But death didn't hold him for long: on the third day he rose again, and the purpose of all his suffering, right up to his death and burial, was to heal, preserve, and restore creatures from the decay and death that had come upon them through the Fall. [This is Lady Conway's first mention of mankind's 'fall' from innocence down into sinfulness (represented in the Bible by Adam's sin of disobedience in Eden); it is far from being the last.] By doing this he brought time to an end, and raised creatures above time, raising them to •the level• where he dwells—he who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, without loss, decay, or death. Similarly, through his spiritual and inward appearance in men he saves, preserves, and restores their souls, and subjects himself to suffering and death (as it were), and for a while he submits himself to the laws of time so that he may raise the souls of men above time and corruption, up to himself, in whom they receive blessing and in whom they gradually grow in goodness, virtue, and holiness forever.

**7.** For this reason, those who achieve a perfect union with Christ are raised to a region of perfect tranquility, where nothing is seen or felt to move or be moved. Extremely strong and swift motions do occur there, but they are so smooth, uniform and harmonious—with no resistance or disturbance—that they appear to be completely at rest. In the external world •down at our present level• we find many examples of motion that our eyesight doesn't detect: where the motion is too fast to be seen, and where it is too slow; so that we can perceive only the middle kind. So the laws of

time apply not only to earth and earthly things ·and visible motions· but also to the sun, moon, stars, and to all the parts of the universe that we can see along with many that we can't. In the course of time, all these things can change into things of very different kinds, which happens through the same process and order of the divine operation that

God gave to all things as law or justice. For in his divine wisdom he has decided to reward every creature according to its works. But that's enough for just now about this most excellent intermediate being. I'll have occasion to say more about him further on.

## Chapter 6: Change

**1.** The difference between God and creatures, rightly considered, shows pretty well that the nature of all [*omnes*] creatures can change; and our everyday experience confirms this. Now, take any [*aliqui*] creature you like: if it can change, it must owe its changeability simply to its being a creature; and from this it follows that all [*omnes*] creatures are changeable. Why? Because of this law:

Whatever fits any [*aliqui*] thing because it belongs to a certain species fits everything [*omnes*] belonging to that species.

...If this weren't so, there wouldn't *be* any distinction between God and creatures. God's unchangeability is one of his attributes that can't be shared with anything else, so any 'creature' that was unchangeable would be God!

**2.** How far does this changeability go? Can one individual be changed into another individual (whether of the same species or a different one)? I say that this is impossible: if it happened, then things would change their *essences*, which would cause great confusion not only for creatures but also for the wisdom of God, which made everything. ·Confusion

for God's wisdom·: If, for example, Paul could change into Judas or Judas into Paul, then the punishment for a sin would fall not upon the sinner but upon someone else who was innocent and virtuous. . . . And if a righteous man were changed into another righteous man—e.g. Paul changed into Peter and vice versa—then ·each would be rewarded for his virtue, but· neither would receive his proper reward but rather the other man's. This mix-up would not befit the wisdom of God. ·Confusion for creatures·: If one individual's essential nature could change into someone else's, it would follow that we creatures had no true being or essence. It would also follow that

- we couldn't be certain of anything,
- we couldn't have true knowledge or understanding of anything,
- all the innate ideas and precepts of truth that all men find in themselves would be false, and therefore
- anything inferred from those would be false also.

For all certain knowledge depends on what we commonly call 'objective truths'—truths about objects—and if ·objects could change their essences then· objective truths could slide

around, so that no statement would be invariably true—not even such clear and obvious truths as that *the whole is greater than its parts* and that *two halves make a whole*. [The next two sections involve a crucial distinction; Lady Conway is perfectly clear about it, but she doesn't highlight it as much as it perhaps deserves. Before coming to it, let's be sure of grasping firmly what she says about statements of the type 'x belongs to a different species from y'. There is difference-of-species understood in the ordinary informal way: men are one species, horses another, pebbles a third. Call this *loose* species-difference. Then there is what we can call *tight* species-difference, which occurs when the species that contain x and y respectively are 'distinct in their substance or essence', by which our author means that those species are fundamentally or basically distinct. (According to the 'tight' criterion, she says, there are only three species: •the species whose only member is God, •the species whose only member is Christ, and •creatures.) By the 'loose' criterion there are countless species of creatures. Now for the crucial distinction, which occurs *within* the framework of species 'loosely' distinguished from one another. Let 'F' and 'G' be two adjectives defining two species—e.g. 'F' could be 'human' and 'G' could be 'equine'. In Lady Conway's view, for *any* such values of 'F' and 'G' the statement

(a) Something that is F can change into something that is G, is **true**. Thus, a man could in principle become a tree, a tree could become a rock, etc. On the other hand, for any two individuals x and y the statement

(b) x can change into y

is **false**. A man could in principle (a) become a horse, but *that* man can't (b) become *that* horse.]

**3.** Can one species change into another? Before tackling this question, we should take a close and careful look at how one species differs from another. Many species are commonly said to differ from one another though they are not distinct in •substance or essence but only in •certain modes [= 'properties'] or attributes. When these modes or attributes change, the thing itself is said to have changed its species; but in such a case what has changed is not the thing's essence—is not the thing itself—but only its state or condition. For example, when some water freezes and

turns solid, it is still the same portion of stuff. ·That is uncontroversial, but I go further·: When water turns to stone [see note on page 14], there is no reason to suppose that a greater change of substance has occurred than when it turns to ice. And when a stone changes into softer and more pliant earth, there's no change of substance here either. Similarly in all the other changes that we get to observe, the substance or essence always remains the same: there's merely a change of form—the substance gives up one form and takes on another. These arguments prove that in terms of its substance or essence one species can't change from one into another, and equally that one individual can't change into another. A species is simply individual entities brought under one general and common mental idea or one common word; for example *man* is a species containing all individual men and *horse* is a species including all individual horses. Alexander can't change into another •man—or into his own •horse! . . .

**4.** To learn what changes a thing *can* undergo, we must discover how many species of things there are that differ in their substance or essence. If we look closely into this, we find that there are only three—

God, Christ, creatures

—the three I have already discussed and declared to be really distinct in their essences. There's no reason to think that there is a fourth species essentially distinct from those three, and anyway there seems to be nothing that a fourth species could do. All phenomena in the entire universe can be traced back to the three species I have mentioned, as though tracing each phenomenon back to its own particular original cause, nothing pushes us into recognizing a further species. ·Indeed, something pushes us the other way, namely· the rule that *Entities should not*

*be multiplied without need.* (·Need we accept that rule? Yes, because· whatever is handled correctly by the understanding is utterly true and certain.) The three species that I have listed cover all the specific differences in substances that we can possibly conceive—that vast infinity of possible things. So how could a place or space be found for a fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh. . . species? *Do* these three species really cover everything? Any entity must be

- altogether unchangeable like God, the supreme being,
- altogether changeable for good or bad, like a creature. . . or
- partly changeable in respect to good, like Christ the son of God and medium between God and creatures.

If there were a fourth, fifth, sixth etc. species, its members would have to be •not across-the-board unchangeable, •not across-the-board changeable, and •not partly changeable and partly unchangeable. What category could we assign *that* to? Besides, if you postulate some fourth. . . etc. species you'll destroy the excellent order that we find in the universe, since ·on your scheme of things· there would be not only one medium between God and creatures but two or more—as many as can be imagined—between the first and the last. Furthermore, it agrees with sound reason and with the order of things that just as

God is *one*, and doesn't have two or three or more distinct substances in himself, and

Christ, being Heaven's man, i.e. the first Adam of all, is one simple [= 'partless'] Christ with no distinct substances in himself,

so likewise

the totality of creatures form single species in substance or essence, though it includes many individuals gathered into subordinate species and distinguished from each other modally but not substantially

or essentially.

Thus, what Paul says about •all human beings, namely that God 'has made of *one blood* all nations of men' [Acts 17:26], can be taken to apply to •all creatures. . . And we can see why God did this. He made all 'nations' of human beings to be 'of one blood' so that they would love one another, would be united by the same sympathy, and would help one another. In implanting a certain universal sympathy and mutual love into his creatures, God made them all members of one body and all (so to speak) brothers who all have the same Father, namely •God in Christ, i.e. God made flesh. They also have one mother, that unique substance or entity from which all things have come forth, and of which they are the real parts and members. And although sin has greatly weakened this love and sympathy in creatures, it hasn't altogether destroyed it.

[This version's 'Father' and 'mother' follow the Latin *Pater* and *mater*. Two remarks about what our author seems to be getting at here. (i) She is evidently echoing one of the popular ideas about animal generation, namely that the differentiating push comes from the male seed, while the female merely provides the soil, as it were, in which the seed grows. Lady Conway is likening

•'God creates the universe by giving variety to basic undifferentiated matter'

to

'A father creates a baby by planting a variety-producing seed in a woman's undifferentiated womb'.

Or so it seems; though this doesn't square with her saying at the start of chapter 2 that God creates creatures *sine omni. . .materia*, i.e. without having any material work on. (ii) Her reference to 'that unique substance. . . from which all things have come forth' etc. seems to reflect the somewhat Spinozist view that the whole universe of matter is really just one single thing. She says this more explicitly on page 35.]

**5.** 'It is utterly impossible that anything should change from being of kind  $K_1$  to being of kind  $K_2$ '—what kinds  $K_n$  are there of which that is true? The three I have mentioned—

God, Christ, creatures  
and *only* those three. Now that we have accepted this, we  
can walk down the middle path of truth about  
Being,

leaving the greatest errors and confusion on the right and left. [This version is following the Latin in the sudden switch from 'being' to 'Being'.] **(1)** On one side there are those who maintain that all things are one Being, of which they are real and proper parts. These ·theorists· mix God with his creatures, implying that they have a notion of only one essential thing, so that sin and the devils would be merely •parts of this divine being or •minor modifications of it. This has dangerous consequences. Although I don't want to pick a quarrel with those who have fallen into this opinion by mistake, I ought to warn you about where such principles lead, so that you may look at them more carefully and avoid their absurdity. **(2)** Then there are those maintain that there are two species of things: •God, the supreme and utterly unchangeable Being, and •Creatures, the lowest and altogether changeable beings. These ·theorists· don't pay enough attention to the excellent scheme of things that I have described above, which appears everywhere—I am referring to the general fact that the universe doesn't have qualitative gaps or chasms, so that between any two different kinds of thing there is an intermediate kind. Attending to that might have led them to see that in addition to the two extremes ·of God and creatures· there is also a certain medium which shares things with each of them. This is Jesus Christ. The wiser among the Jews recognize him, and so do some among the 'Gentiles', maintaining that there is such an intermediate Being which they call by different names such as 'the Word', 'Son of God', 'God's first-born Son', 'Mind', 'Wisdom', 'heaven's Adam' etc., and also 'the eternal medium'.

If we can get agreement that the case for this:

There is a medium between God and human beings,  
indeed between God and all creatures  
is just as strong as the case for this:

There is a God and a creation,  
this will contribute greatly to spreading the true faith and  
Christian religion among Jews and Turks and other infidel  
nations. That is because someone who acknowledges that  
there is such a medium and believes in him [or 'in it'; the  
Latin doesn't distinguish these] can be said truly to believe in  
Jesus Christ even if they don't know that that's what they  
believe in and haven't accepted that he has already come in  
the flesh. Once they accept that there is a medium, they'll  
certainly come to accept, perhaps unwillingly, that Christ is  
that medium.

Then there are others who put things into very many  
essentially different species, multiplying the species of Beings  
almost to infinity. This altogether upsets the scheme of  
things and clouds the glory of the divine attributes so that it  
can't shine with its proper splendor in creatures. Why? Well,  
if a creature were entirely limited by its own individuality,  
totally constrained and confined within the very narrow  
boundaries of its own species, then no medium could enable  
it to change into something else; no creature could attain  
further perfection and a greater share in divine goodness,  
and creatures couldn't act and react on each other in various  
ways.

**6.** I'll illustrate with these things with an example or two.  
First, let's consider a horse that is endowed by its creator  
with various levels of perfection, such as

bodily strength and also some kind of grasp of how to  
serve its master.

This horse also exhibits

anger, fear, love, memory, and various other qualities.

We humans have these, and we can also observe them in dogs and many other animals. Now, God's power, goodness, and wisdom have created this good creature, making it changeable in such a way that it can continually and infinitely move towards the good, so that the glory of its attributes shines more and more. That's how it is with any creature: it's in continual motion—constantly *operating*—in ways that tend to bring •improvements (as though they were its reward for all its work), unless •they are blocked by the creature's willfully transgressing •God's rules• and misusing the impartial will that God has given it. A question now arises:

After a horse has served its master well, doing what is appropriate for such a creature, what further perfection—what higher level of goodness of being or essence—can a horse attain?

Is a horse a mere machine, dead matter? Or does it have some kind of *spirit* that has thought, sense, love, and other properties that are fitting for the spirit of a horse? If it does have such a spirit (and no-one can doubt that it does), what happens to this spirit when the horse dies? You may say:

The horse returns to life with the body of another horse, so that it is still a horse as it was before but stronger and more beautiful and with a better spirit than before.

Well, good for it! If it dies a second, third, or fourth time, becoming steadily better and more excellent, is it still a *horse* through all this? And how often can this return-to-life happen? Is the species *horse* so infinitely perfect that a horse can go on improving for ever while still remaining a horse? It is pretty generally agreed—for good reasons—that this visible earth won't always remain in its present state; so the continual generation of animals in their •present• coarse bodies will also have to cease. If the earth takes on another

form in which it doesn't produce vegetation, then horses and their like will cease to be as they are now; they can't remain the same species, because they won't have the proper nourishment for that. It is easy to conclude 'Well, then, that will be the end of them!' but that is wrong. God's goodness towards his creatures always remains the same, and his keeping them in existence is a constant act of creation; so how can anything be annihilated? I have demonstrated—and it is generally accepted—that God is a perpetual creator who acts freely and with •necessity; •so it isn't •possible that he will stop his creative activity by letting any of his creatures go out of existence.. You might reply:

'Then if the earth changes in the way you have been supposing, horses and other animals will correspondingly change in their physical structures, so that they can still get nourishment from the changed earth.'

Then a new question arises: When the creatures change in that way, will they still belong to the same species as before? Or will there come a time •for a given creature• when it changes into something different, like the difference between a horse and a cow, which is usually recognized as a difference of species. And another: Are there any pairs of species of creatures  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  of which the following is true?

$S_1$  is infinitely better than  $S_2$ , so that a member of  $S_2$  can go on for ever improving and getting closer to members of  $S_1$  without ever coming to belong to  $S_1$  itself.

For example, the species *horse* is in many ways closer to the species *human being* than many other creatures are; but is the qualitative distance between those two species infinite or only finite? If it is finite, then the horse will eventually change into a human being (in respect to its •spirit, I mean; I am not asking whether a horse's •body can become a human body, because the answer to that is obvious). If the qualitative

distance between the two species is infinite, then we have this result:

Any human being—even one with the lowest and meanest understanding—has an •actual infinite excellence;

•which shows that we are following a false trail here, because that level of actual excellence belongs only to God and Christ—no creature has it. We do speak of the highest excellence of creatures using the language of ‘infinity’, but the infinity we are speaking of is only potential, not actual. That is, a creature is *always* able to become more perfect and more excellent; so its capacity to improve is infinite; but it never reaches this infinity. For however far a certain finite being may progress, it is still always finite, although there are no limits to its progress....

I am not contradicting what I said chapter 3 about the infinity of creatures, because that wasn’t about their infinite goodness and excellence but only about •how many species of creatures there are and •how big they are (•i.e. how many members they have•), neither of which can be counted or measured by a created intellect. Individual creatures are only finitely good, and there is only a finite qualitative distance between their species; but they are potentially infinite, i.e. they are always—endlessly—capable of greater perfection. Think of an endless staircase with infinitely many steps, no two of which are infinitely distant from each other (otherwise it wouldn’t be possible to go up or down the staircase). Now, the steps in this model represent species that can’t be infinitely distant from each other or from those that are closest to them. In fact, daily experience teaches us that various species change into each other: earth changes into water [see note on page 14], water into air, air into fire or ether; and vice versa, fire into air, air into water etc., yet these are distinct species. Similarly, stones change into metals

and one metal changes into another. You may want to say ‘Those are only bare bodies with no spirit’, •but don’t say that, because we see the same thing happen with plants and even with animals. Plants: Wheat and barley can and often do change into each other, especially in Hungary where sowing barley produces a crop of wheat, and in Germany where sowing wheat produces a crop of barley.... Animals: Worms change into flies, and when beasts and fish feed on beasts and fish of other species the prey change and come to have the nature and species of the predators. And doesn’t rotting matter, i.e. a body composed of earth and water, produce animals without having contained any seed of those animals? And when this world was created, didn’t the waters produce fish and birds at God’s command? Didn’t the earth also, at the same command, produce reptiles and beasts, which were therefore real parts of earth and water? And just as they got their bodies from the earth, they also got their spirits, or souls, from the earth. For the earth produced living souls, as the Hebrew text says, and not simply material bodies lacking life and spirit. That makes the difference between human beings and beasts exceedingly striking: we are told that God made human beings ‘in his image’ and breathed into them the breath of life that made them living souls, so that they received his life, the principal part that makes them human beings, which is really distinct from the divine soul or spirit that God breathed into them. [In this context and some others, ‘soul’ translates *anima*, which is the source of our word ‘animate’. Where animals are concerned, early modern writers are apt to have no firm distinction between having a soul and being alive.]

Moreover, since the human body was made from earth, which, as has been proved, contained various spirits and gave those spirits to all the animals [Latin *brutis* = ‘non-human animals’], the earth surely gave to human beings the best spirits that it contained. But *all* these spirits were far

inferior to the spirit that human beings received not from the earth but from above. ·This· human spirit ought to have dominion over these ·other· merely terrestrial spirits, enabling it to rule over them and raise them to a higher level—to raise them indeed to ·the level of· its own nature, this being the truest ‘multiplication and increase’ of human beings. But ·sometimes· the human spirit, ·instead of internalizing earthly spirits and making *them* like *it*·, allowed the internalized earthly spirits to have dominion over it so that *it* became like *them*. That is what lies behind ‘You are of the earth and you shall return to the earth’ [Ecclesiastes 12:7?], which has a spiritual as well as a literal meaning.

7. Now we see how God’s justice shines so gloriously in this transformation of one species into another. ·Don’t be surprised by my bringing justice into this story·. It is quite certain that a kind of justice operates not only in ·human beings and ·angels but in all other creatures, ·including the lower animals·. You would have to be *blind* not to see this! This justice appears when creatures change for the worse as much as when they change for the better. When they become better, this justice bestows a reward and prize for their good deeds. When they become worse, justice punishes them with penalties that fit the nature and degree of their wrong-doing. This justice imposes a law for all creatures and inscribes it in their very natures. Any creature that observes this ·innately given· law is rewarded for becoming better. Any creature that breaks this law is punished accordingly.

·Here are a few examples of this. **Beasts in relation to men:**· ·Under the law that God gave to the Jews, if a beast has killed a man, the beast has to be killed. . . . ·If any human being has sexual relations with a beast, not only the man but the beast must be killed. ·It was not only Adam and Eve that received a sentence and punishment from God after their

transgression but also the serpent, which was the brute part in man that he had received from the earth. [A ‘brute’ is a lower animal, a non-human animal (the same as ‘beast’). And ‘brutish’ (and ‘brute’ as an adjective) mean ‘of the same nature as the lower animals’; it isn’t always automatically a term of condemnation.] ·**Men in relation to beasts:**· God implanted in man the same instinct for justice towards beasts and the trees of the field: and man who is just and good loves the brute creatures that serve him, and he makes sure that they have food and rest and the other things they need. He does this not only for his own good but also in obedience to a principle of true justice. •If he cruelly requires work from them without providing the food they need, then he has surely broken the law that God inscribed in his heart. •If he kills any of his beasts purely for pleasure, then he acts unjustly and will be punished accordingly. •A man who has in his orchard a tree that is fruitful and grows well fertilizes and prunes it so that it becomes better and better; whereas if the tree is barren and a burden to the earth, he chops it down and burns it. So there’s a certain justice in all these things: in the transmutation from one species to another, whether higher or lower, the same justice appears. If a man lives a pure and holy life on this earth, like the heavenly angels, he is elevated to the rank of angels after he dies and becomes like them. . . .—isn’t that just? A man who lives such an impious and perverse life that he is more like a devil raised from hell than like any other creature, and who dies in that state without repenting, is hurled down to hell and becomes like the devils—isn’t that an exercise of the very same justice? But if someone lives a life that isn’t either angelic or diabolical but rather brutish or animal, so that his spirit is more like that of beasts than of any other creature, becoming a brute in spirit and allowing his brutish part and spirit to have dominion over his better part, ·after his death· he also changes his bodily shape

into that of the species of beast that he most resembles in the qualities and conditions of his mind—doesn't the same justice act most justly in this? And since that brute spirit is now dominant, holding the other spirit—the one he got from God—captive, isn't it likely that when such a man dies his brute spirit always governs, suppressing his human spirit and forcing it to serve the animal spirit in every possible way? And when that brute spirit returns again into some other body [apparently the doctrine of reincarnation is at work here], it rules over •that body and is free to shape •it according to its own ideas and inclinations (which it didn't previously have in the human body). [In that last parenthetical bit, Lady Conway is presumably distinguishing a human being's having a spirit that is *like* those of a lower animal from his actually having the thoughts and desires of such an animal.] It follows that this body that the vital spirit shapes will be that of a brute and not a human, because a brute spirit can't produce anything but a brute shape. Why not? Because the formative power of such a spirit is governed by its imagination, which imagines and conceives as strongly as possible *its own* image, according to which the external body must take shape.

**8.** In this way the justice of God shines forth wonderfully, since it assigns the appropriate punishment for each kind and degree of wrongdoing, and doesn't demand hellfire and damnation for every single wicked sin and transgression. Christ taught the opposite of that in the parable where he says that only the third degree of punishment is to be sent down to hell-fire [Matthew 5: 22]. . . .

What objection can be made to the justice of God? You might try this:

'When it is decreed that the body and soul •of a particular sinful human being• is converted into the nature of a brute, this is an insulting lowering of the

dignity and nobility of human nature.'

This can be countered with the common axiom: *The corruption of the best is the worst*. When a human being has so greatly degraded himself by his own willful wrongdoing, dragging his initially noble nature down to the mental level of a most foul brute or animal so that it is wholly ruled by lust and earthly desires, where's the injustice in God's making him bear the same image •in his body as •in the spirit into which he has internally transformed himself? ·If what you are mostly indignant about is a person's being returned to life with the *body* of a beast, I reply·: Do you really think it is worse to have the body of a hog than to have the spirit of a hog? It certainly isn't! The lowest level one could possibly be dragged down to is that of the *spirit* of a brute; this will be agreed to by almost everyone who has some genuine nobility of soul. . . . However, you might ·complain about God's justice from the opposite side·, saying:

'When someone has lived a brutish life throughout all his days, it is too mild a punishment merely to bring him back after death in the condition and state of a beast.'

I reply to this that the just creator and maker of all things is wiser than you are, and knows better what punishment is appropriate for each sin. God has arranged everything as justly and wisely as possible, so that no-one who lives in a flesh-dominated way like a beast, can enter the kingdom of heaven. ·If your complaint about mildness of punishments is based on the idea that all sin is or should be punished by hell-fire, I would point out that· Christ explicitly teaches us that *not* every sin is to be punished with the penalty of hell. . . . And ·here's another relevant consideration·: If a man is united and joined with something, he becomes one with that thing. He who unites himself to God is one with God •in spirit, and he who unites himself to a prostitute

is one •in flesh with her. Doesn't it stand to reason that someone who is united to a beast will become one with that beast (and similarly in every other case)?.... All degrees and kinds of sin have their appropriate punishments, and all these punishments tend toward the good of creatures: under the influence of mercy and favour, *judgment* becomes a judgment in favour of the salvation and restoration of creatures. Since God's mercy and favour extends over all his work, why do we think that God punishes his creatures more severely and strictly than he does in fact? This dims the glory of God's attributes and doesn't encourage love for God and admiration for his goodness and justice in the hearts of men as it should. In fact it does precisely the opposite!

**9.** The common idea about God's justice—namely that *every* sin is punished by endless hellfire—has given men a horrible idea of God, depicting him as a cruel tyrant rather than a benign father towards all his creatures. If instead of that an image of a lovable God were more widely known, fitting what he is truly like and shows himself to be in all his dealings with his creatures, and if our souls could inwardly feel him, *taste* him, as he is charity and kindness itself and as he reveals himself through the light and spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ in the hearts of men, **then** men would finally love him above everything and acknowledge him as the most loving, just, merciful God, fit to be worshipped before everything, and incapable of inflicting the same punishment on all sinners. **Then—and only then!**

**10.** Then why did he destroy **(a)** the original world with water, and decide to destroy **(b)** this world with fire (as he did Sodom)? Surely, to show •that he punishes different kinds of sins differently, and •that while **(a)** the first world was bad, **(b)** this one—which is to be destroyed by fire—is even worse and is therefore to have a greater punishment. ·So much for

how punishments differ in *severity*. As for how they differ in *kind*: the reason seems to lie in the following contrast. **(a)** The old world's sins were more carnal and brutish, as God's word reveals when he said, 'My spirit will not always strive in man because he was made flesh' [Genesis 6:3], meaning that man's obedience to the desires of the flesh made him completely brutish or bestial. The upshot of that was:

If that generation (apart from Noah and his family) hadn't been wiped out, the whole human race (with that same exception) would have been *bestial* in the following generations;

and that is what God wanted to avert by drowning them, a punishment that would bring them back from the nature of beasts to the nature of men. In contrast with that, **(b)** the sins of this world, which is to be destroyed by fire (like Sodom), are •not so much *brutish* as· *devilish*, because of their hostility, malice, cruelty, fraud, and cunning. So *fire* is the appropriate punishment for those sins, because fire is the original essence of the devils—those high yet degenerate spirits—and it is therefore by fire that they [i.e. devilish men] must be degraded and ·then· restored.

For what is fire, but a certain kind of ethereal and imperfect substance contained in combustible bodies, which we see shoot up and immediately vanish because it is so tenuous? So far as their spirits are concerned, angels as well as men originate from this ethereal substance, just as brutes originate from water. [In this sentence, 'angels' is meant to cover also the fallen or degenerate angels whom we call 'devils'.]

Just as all God's punishments of his creatures are in proportion to their sins, they tend to work for the good of the sinners, curing these sickly creatures and putting them in a better condition than they were in before; and this is true even of the worst sinners.

**11.** Now, let us consider briefly how creatures are composed, and how the parts of this composition can change into one another. ·Can they change into one another? Yes·, because they originally had the very same essence and being. [We are about to encounter two occurrences of ‘principle’ in a sense that it hasn’t had before in this work. In early modern times, ‘principle’ and its French and Latin cognates sometimes mean something like ‘source (of energy)’ or ‘mechanism (in a very broad sense)’ or ‘drive’. It’s a little hard to know what word or phrase captures it best in a context where a ‘principle’ is being described as ‘passive’; but bear in mind that the ‘principles’ referred to here are real parts or aspects of creatures and not propositions of any kind.] In every visible creature there is (**b**) body and (**s**) spirit, or (**s**) a more active and (**b**) a more passive principle, which are appropriately called male and female because they are analogous to husband and wife. [Our author doesn’t mean to align male/female with body/spirit or with spirit/body. Her point is merely that body and spirit are a co-operating pair. Later in this section she will imply that anything with both body and spirit is either male or female, but there’s no hint there that a thing’s sex is determined by the details of its body/spirit mix. On page 27 Lady Conway starts to indicate a complex but definite connection between body/spirit (in that order) and bad/good (in that order); so there can be no question of her connecting it with the difference between the sexes.] For just as the normal generation of human beings usually needs the cooperation of male and female, so too *every* generation and production of *anything at all* requires the simultaneous operation of those two principles, spirit and body. ·Here is how this co-operation works·. •Spirit is light, i.e. the eye looking at its very own image; and •the body is the darkness that receives this image. When the spirit sees it, that’s like seeing oneself in a mirror. The spirit can’t see itself reflected like that in clear air or in any diaphanous [=‘nearly transparent’] body, because the reflection of an image requires a certain opacity, which we call ‘body’. But nothing is essentially

a body, just as nothing is essentially dark—nothing is so dark that it can’t become bright. Indeed, *darkness itself* can become light, just as created light (·as distinct from the uncreated light of God·) can be turned into darkness, as the words of Christ plainly show when he says ‘Take heed that the light which is in you be not darkness’ [Luke 11:35]. By ‘the light that it is in you’ he means the eye—the spirit—that is in the body and that sees the images of things. As well as needing a body to •receive and reflect its image, every spirit also needs a body to •retain the image. Every body has some degree of this retentive nature; the more perfect a body is—i.e. the more thoroughly mixed it is—the more retentive it is. Thus water retains more than air does, and earth retains certain things more than water does. The seed [Latin *semen*] of a female creature is the purest extract of the whole body, which means that it is perfectly mixed, and therefore has a remarkable power of retention. The masculine semen, which is the spirit and image of the male, is received and retained in this ·feminine· seed, . . . along with other spirits that are in the woman. Whichever spirit is strongest and has the strongest image in the woman, whether it’s the man’s or the woman’s or some other spirit that has come ·into the woman· from outside them both, *that* will be the spirit that predominates in the seed and forms a body as similar as possible to its image. That is how every creature gets its bodily shape.

The internal productions of the mind are generated in the same way. (I am talking about the mind’s *thoughts*. ·Some philosophers have said that thoughts are not mental substances but merely *states of* or *events in* minds, which are substances; but I contend that· thoughts are genuine creatures, each of its own kind, and that they have a true substance appropriate to themselves.) These thoughts are our inner children, and they divide into masculine and

feminine—i.e. they have body and spirit. If our thoughts didn't have *body*, we couldn't retain them or reflect on them. Why not? Because all reflection depends on a certain darkness, and that's the body. Similarly, memory requires a body in order to retain the spirit of the thought; otherwise it vanishes, as a mirror-image vanishes when the object is removed. Thus, when we remember something, we see within ourselves its image, which is the spirit that came from it when we looked at it from the outside. This image, this spirit, is retained in some body which is the seed of our brain, and that is how a certain spiritual generation—as it were a spiritual *giving-birth*.—occurs in us. Thus, every spirit has its own body and every body has its own spirit. Just as a body, whether of man or brute, is nothing but a countless multitude of bodies gathered into one and arranged in a certain structure, so the spirit of man or brute is also a countless multitude of spirits united in this body; they are rank-ordered in such a way that one is the principal ruler, another has second place, a third commands others below itself, and so on down—just as in an army. That is why creatures are called ‘armies’ and God is called ‘the leader’ of these armies. Just as the devil who assaulted the man whom Jesus helped said ‘My name is legion, because we

are many’ [Mark 5:9]. So every human being, indeed every *creature*, contains many spirits and bodies. (The Jews call men’s many spirits ‘Nizzuzuth’, meaning ‘sparks’. [A footnote here refers to texts in the Kabbalah.]) Indeed, every body is a spirit and nothing else, differing from a spirit only by being darker; so the more lumpy and coarse it becomes, the further it gets from condition of spirit. The distinction between spirit and body is only modal and incremental, not essential and substantial.

[That last brief sentence should be lingered on a little. For Descartes the mind/body or spirit/body distinction is

essential: nothing could possibly move from one side of the line to the other;

and it is

substantial: it is a difference between one basic kind of substance and another.

Those may be merely two ways of saying the same thing. Against them (or it), Lady Conway says that the spirit/body distinction is

modal: it’s a distinction between two ‘modes’ that a substance might have, i.e. two states or conditions it might be in;

and it is

incremental: it marks a difference of degree, so that (for example) a given substance might be *more* spiritual than it used to be.

Our author’s departure from Descartes (and many others) on this topic is sharp and radical. Now we shall see what she does with it.]