

# 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—infininitely 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 'seemingly blind' or 'vitaly 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 '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 ethereal), 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* can 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 inter-  
mediate 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.]

## Chapter 7: Body and spirit: arguments 1–3

My thesis about body and spirit implies that •the nature of every body is that of a life or spirit, which has the power of perception and is also capable of sense and thought, love and desire, joy and grief. . . .; and consequently that • every body can act and move on its own initiative, putting itself wherever it wants to be. I want to explain more clearly what my case is for all this.

**1.** My **first** reason [the second begins on page 28] comes from the three-part classification of things that I have presented:

God, the highest,  
Christ, the intermediate being, and  
the creation, the lowest rank.

So far as its nature or essence is concerned, this ‘creation’ is one entity, one substance, as I have shown; so that it varies only in its modes of existence, one of which is corporeality. [That was a statement about variation *at a* time as well as *through* time. The variety in the created world right now comes from such facts as that your body exists and so does your mind; but that’s not a fact about two different things, two substances, but only about different features that the one substance has in different parts of itself—it has corporeality *here* and spirituality *there*, or in plainer language it is bodyish here and mindish there.] The body/spirit difference is a matter of degree: a thing can be pretty close to being a body or quite a long way from being a spirit. And because spirit is the more excellent of the two in the true and natural order of things, the more spiritual a creature is the closer it is to God unless it degenerates in some other way; because God, as we all know, is the highest spirit. So a body can become more and more spiritual, without end, because God, the first and highest spirit, is infinite and can’t have *any* corporeality in his constitution. It is indeed in the nature of a creature (unless

it degenerates) to become ever more like the creator. But no creature can become more and more corporeal without end, in the way it can become more and more a spirit. Why the difference? Because *nothing* is

- in every way contrary to God;
- infinitely and unchangeably bad, as God is infinitely and unchangeably good;
- infinitely dark as God is infinitely light;
- infinitely a body with no spirit, as God is infinitely spirit with no body.

So nothing can become darker and darker to infinity, although it can become brighter and brighter to infinity; and nothing can go from bad to worse to infinity, although anything can become better and better to infinity. Thus, in the very nature of things there are limits to evil, but none to goodness. And every degree of evil or sin has its own punishment,. . . . which is appropriate to the nature of the case, and this punishment turns the evil back towards good. Each sin has its punishment stored within it for future use (though the sinner doesn’t realize it while the sin is going on); and when the right time comes for this, the punishment will be unleashed and the sinner will feel the pain of it. This will return him to the original state of goodness in which he was created and from which he can’t ever fall again because this great punishment has made him stronger and more perfect, so that he rises from •his previous indifference of will regarding good and evil to •a level at which he wants only to be good and is incapable of wishing any evil. [The move from ‘it’ to ‘he’ in this paragraph is based on a general sense of appropriateness. The distinction doesn’t exist in Latin.]

From this we can infer that all God's creatures that have fallen, i.e. come down from their initial goodness, must in due course be raised again to a condition that is actually *better* than that in which they were created. God is incessantly at work, so it's the nature of every creature to be always in motion and always changing from good to good, from good to evil, or from evil back to good. It isn't possible to move *for ever* towards evil (because there's no such thing as infinite evil); so it is inevitable that every creature will at some time turn again towards good, because the only alternative is to stop changing altogether, and that is contrary to nature. You might want to suggest that there is another alternative, namely that the sinful creature falls into eternal torment. I reply: If by 'eternal' you mean 'lasting through an endless infinity of ages', what you are suggesting is impossible because all pain and torment stimulates the life, the spirit, of the sufferer. We have plenty of experience of the truth of this, and it also stands to reason: pain and suffering reduce whatever thickness or lumpiness [*grossities vel crassitudo*] the spirit or body is afflicted by; so the spirit that was imprisoned in such thickness or lumpiness is set free and becomes more spiritual and therefore more active and effective, this being achieved by pain. [Lady Conway suffered considerable and sometimes acute pain—headaches—through most of her waking hours throughout most of her adult life.]

So there we have it: a creature can't proceed for ever toward evil or fall into inactivity or spend an eternity in suffering; from which it irrefutably follows that the creature must return toward the good, and the greater its suffering the sooner it will make that return. We see, then, how something, while continuing to be the same substance, can wonderfully change its state, so that a holy and blessed spirit or an angel of light may become an evil and cursed spirit of darkness through its own willful actions. This

change or metamorphosis [here = 'very radical change'] is as great as what happens when a spirit becomes a body. Does such a spirit become *more* corporeal than it was originally, before its wrongdoing pulled it down? Yes it does; and I have already shown that a spirit can become more or less corporeal—it's a matter of degree—though it can't move in that direction to infinity. Spirits can remain for long periods of time without any of the bodily lumpiness characteristic of visible things in this world, such as rocks or metals or the bodies of men and women. For surely even the worst spirits have bodies that are less lumpy than a visible body is. Yet all that lumpiness of visible bodies comes from spirits' having fallen from their original state. Because of this thickness, spirits can in time (*how much* time varies) shrink and pull into themselves. This can't happen all at once in a general way so that the entire body of a fallen spirit becomes equally lumpy in all its parts. Rather, some parts become ever thicker while other corporeal parts of this spirit retain a certain tenuousness, a certain thinness or fluid quality; if they didn't, the spirit couldn't be as active or mobile as it is. These more tenuous parts of a corporeal spirit are (1) its immediate *vehiculum*, with which (2) it is intimately united.

[(1) Lady Conway has been invoking the view—popularized by Descartes but not invented by him—that a living body contains 'animal spirits', which are extremely fine or fluid portions of matter that can move fast, get in anywhere, and do the sort of work that we today assign to the nervous system. She (or rather her Latin translator) uses *vehiculum* in the sense of 'subordinate official' or 'executive officer'; and the tenuous parts of this spirit are its 'immediate' *vehiculum* in contrast with other more lumpy parts of the body on which the spirit acts indirectly, *through* these tenuous animal spirits. (2) Our author is also echoing what was then a fairly common view about the close connection between your body and your mind, namely that it depends your mind's acting on the most mind-like or 'tenuous' parts of your body. Descartes held that minds act directly on animal spirits, but *not* because the latter are mind-like; for him, nothing corporeal is in any way mind-like. The part

that he rejected was accepted by some, and appears memorably here:

. . . blood labours to beget  
Spirits as like souls as it can,  
Because such fingers need to knit  
The subtle knot that makes us man. . . .

That is from John Donne's poem 'The Extasie'.]

The principal spirit (together with as many of its subordinate spirits as it can gather together along with those more finely divided and tenuous parts of the body) pulls away from the lumpier parts of the body, abandoning them as though they were so many dead corpses that have lost the ability to serve those same spirits in their operations.

This departure of subtler and stronger spirits from the thicker and harder parts of the body into the vicinity of better and more tenuous ones can be seen in the behaviour of alcohol that freezes when subjected to extreme cold. If the parts of a body near the surface are frozen by the external cold, and the stronger spirits have avoided that by moving in towards the centre of the body, where the matter is more tenuous and where everything is warmer, then any single drop of alcohol that escapes freezing by moving in to the warm centre has more—many times more—strength and vigour than all the parts that are frozen. Moving on now from that to a different point: We must recognize that thick lumpy bodies are of two kinds: bodies of one kind can be seen and felt by touch; those of the other kind are invisible and impalpable [unfeetable], and yet they are just as thick as the others—indeed often thicker and harder. Though they don't affect our outer senses, we can perceive them internally by our inner senses. . . . They are extremely hard, harder in fact than any flint or metal that our hands can hold. Visible water is composed of these small, hard bodies. It appears to us quite soft, fluid, and tenuous, but that is because of the many other subtle bodies that continually stir and move

the hard particles, so that a portion of water appears to our crude senses as one simple and homogeneous thing. Actually, it consists of many heterogeneous and dissimilar parts, more so than most other bodies. Many of these parts are quite hard and pebble-like: they are the source of beach sand and other sorts of gravel and stones that come from the water in the depths of the earth. When these little pebbly particles of water grow into visible gravel and stones, they eventually lose their hardness and become softer and more tenuous than they had been when they were part of the water. Stones decay and turn into soft earth, from which animals come. Indeed, decaying stones often change right back into water; but this is a different sort of water from before, because one of them hardens while the other softens. You can see this in the two kinds of water that flow from one mountain in Switzerland: drinking one produces kidney stones, drinking the other dissolves them. . . . That's why it is right to say that the heart or spirit of a wicked man is 'hard' or 'stony': his spirit does have real hardness in it, like that found in those pebbly little particles of water. And why it is right to say that the spirit of a good person is 'soft' and 'tender'. We can really *feel* the inner hardness and softness of spirit, and any good person perceives this inwardly, but as tangibly as he can feel the outer hardness of lumpy external bodies with his hands. People who are dead in their sins have no feeling for the hardness or softness of good or bad spirits; so they think that 'softness of spirit', 'hardness of heart' and so on are mere metaphors, when really they have a literal meaning with nothing metaphorical about it.

**2.** My **second** reason for holding that created spirits can change into bodies and bodies into spirits is based on a properly serious consideration of God's attributes; the truth of everything can be declared by them, as though they were

a treasury of learning. [The first reason began on page 26; the third will start on page 30.] God is infinitely good and communicates his goodness to all his creatures in infinite ways; so every one of his creatures receives something of his goodness, and receives it in with the utmost fullness. And his goodness is a *living* goodness, containing life, knowledge, love, and power that he communicates to his creatures. So how could he be the source or creator of anything *dead*? For example, of any mere body or matter, understood according to the views of those who claim that matter can't be changed into any degree of life or perception? It has been truly said that God didn't create •death. It is equally true that he doesn't create •anything that is dead, for how could a dead thing come from him who is infinite life and love? How could a being who is as infinitely generous and good as God is give any creature an essence that is so low-down and diminished that it has no part in life or perception and has no hope of the least degree of these for all eternity? What was God's purpose in creating anything? Wasn't it so that his creatures could be blessed in him and enjoy his divine goodness in their various conditions and states? How could such enjoyment be possible without life or perception? How can divine goodness be enjoyed by something that is *dead*?

I will now carry this argument further. It is customary and correct to divide God's attributes into those that can't be communicated [= 'shared with anything else']:

God's subsisting by himself, and his being independent, unchangeable, absolutely infinite, and most perfect;

and those that can:

God's having spirit, light, life, his being good, holy, just, wise, and so on.

Every one of these communicable attributes is alive—is indeed *life*. Now, every creature shares certain attributes

with God; so which of his attributes is it that produces dead matter, body, that is for ever incapable of life and sense. You may say:

A portion of dead matter shares with God *having reality* or *having an essence*.

I reply: There can't be any dead reality in God for the creature to share in; so it will have to have its own dead reality! Besides, reality is not properly speaking attributed to something; but what is properly attributed to something is what is predicated or affirmed about that reality. So there are no attributes or perfections that can be attributed to dead matter and analogously to God. . . . [Our author's saying 'attributes or perfections' highlights the connection between this passage and the debate over whether existence is a 'perfection' of God, as Descartes said it is. Gassendi replied that 'existence isn't a perfection; it is that in the absence of which there are no perfections'; Lady Conway's view is not dissimilar.]

Also, God's creatures, just because they are creatures, must be like their creator in certain things. Well, in what way is this dead matter like God? If you say 'They are alike in having sheer reality,' I reply that there can't be anything like that either in God or in creatures—so it is mere unreality.

As for the remaining attributes of matter—impenetrability, shape, and motion—obviously God doesn't have these, so they aren't among his communicable attributes! Then what *are* they? They fall within the scope of an attribute of creatures that they *don't* share with God, namely changeability; because impenetrability etc. are simply respects in which creatures can *change*. Thus, since dead matter doesn't share any of God's communicable attributes, we have to conclude that dead matter is completely unreal—an empty fiction, an illusion, an impossible thing. You might try:

'Every being is true and good, so dead matter has metaphysical truth and goodness.'

Well, what *is* this ‘truth and goodness’? If it has no overlap with any of God’s communicable attributes, then it isn’t true, isn’t good, isn’t *anything*! And there’s a related point: Since we can’t say how •dead matter shares anything with God’s goodness, we are even further—*much* further—from being able to show how •it can reason and can grow in goodness to infinity; and I have shown that it is the nature of all creatures to do that. •If you aren’t convinced of that, consider: What progress in goodness and perfection can dead matter make? After a portion of matter has gone through infinite changes of motion and shape, it is still compelled to be as dead as ever. And if motion and shape contribute nothing to *life*, this matter can never improve or progress in goodness in the smallest degree. Here is another attempt to escape my conclusion:

This dead matter, this body, might go through all the shapes and physical configurations there are, including ones that are utterly regular and precise [here = ‘ones in which this body is a complex beautifully functioning machine’].

But what good is *that* to the body when it still lacks all life and perception? Well, then, we could suppose this:

A portion of matter has gone through an infinity of motions from the slowest to the fastest, a process in which it becomes better because of a certain *inner power to improve itself*.

But a body could have such an intrinsic power only if its nature required it and brought it about; and the nature of a sheerly dead body doesn’t ‘require’ any kind of motion or shape, and doesn’t ‘improve’ itself by selecting one motion or shape rather than another. . . .

**3.** My **third** argument is drawn from the great love and desire that each spirit or soul has for bodies, and especially

for the body that it inhabits and is united with. [The second reason began on page 28; the fourth will begin on page 38.] When one thing is brought towards another by love or desire, that is because

- (1) they are of one nature and substance, or
- (2) they are like each other or are of one mind, or
- (3) one owes its existence to the other.

We find examples of this among all animals that produce their own offspring in way that human beings do, in which a parent (3) loves what it has given birth to. Thus even wicked men and women (except for the extremely perverse and profligate) love their own children and cherish them with natural affection. That’s because their children are (1) of one nature and substance with them, as though they were *parts* of them. And if their children (2) resemble them in body, spirit, or behaviour, that increases the parents’ love still further. We also see that animals of the same species love each other more than animals of a different species: farm-animals of one species graze together, birds of one species fly in flocks, fish of one species swim together, and men prefer the company of men to that of other creatures. And in addition to this •particular love there is also a certain •universal love that all creatures have for each other, despite the great confusion [here = ‘the great moral mess’] that resulted from the Fall. This is a natural and inevitable upshot of the same basic fact that all things have a basic substance or essence that makes them *one*—like organs or limbs of a single body. Also, we see in every species of animal that males and females love each other and that in all their matings (except ones that are abnormal and against nature) they care for each other. This comes not only from (1) their unity of nature but also from (2) their conspicuous similarity to each other. These two foundations for the love between men and women are explicitly mentioned in *Genesis*. (1) The



unity of their nature comes in when Adam says of his wife: ‘She is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, etc.’ (*Genesis 2:23*). She loved him because she was taken from him and was part of him. **(2)** Their similarity comes in here: no helpmeet was found for him until Eve was made; among all creatures he saw no one ‘like himself’ with whom he could associate until Eve was created for him. A third reason for love is at work when **(3)** two beings who are not one substance nevertheless love each other because one of them has brought the other into existence and is its genuine and real cause. That is how things stand with regard to God and his creatures. He gave existence, life, and motion to everything, so he loves everything and can’t *not* love everything. When he seems to be angrily hostile to them, this anger and the punishment and judgment that come from it are for the creatures’ good, providing them with what God sees that they need. And in the other direction, God is loved by every creature that isn’t altogether degenerate and lost to all sense of God. . . . The creatures that most resemble God love him more and are more loved by him. [Our author says that one might maintain that the principal cause of love is goodness: creatures love God because he is so good, and love one another because they (rightly or wrongly) see one another as good. She responds that] goodness is the greatest cause of love and its proper object, but goodness isn’t a fourth reason for love, •additional to the first three, because it is •included in them. Why do we call something ‘good’? Because it pleases us on account of its real or apparent similarity to us. [The Latin attaches ‘real or apparent’ to the pleasing rather than to the similarity. That seems to be a slip.] This is why good people love good people and not others. For good people can’t love bad people, and bad people can’t love good ones. . . . [She adds that one thing’s bringing another thing into existence generates love between them *because* it generates similarity

between them]

Taking this as a touchstone, let us now return to our subject—the unifying thread through this chapter—namely the question of whether spirit and body are of one nature and substance and therefore able to change into each other. Tell me what the explanation is of the following well-known fact:

The human soul or spirit loves the body so much, unites with it so tightly, and parts company from it so unwillingly, that in some cases a person’s soul remains •with his body and •subject to it after the body has died, decomposed, and turned to dust.

[Continuing with the 1-2-3 numbering on page 30:] The reason for this love can’t be that **(3)** the spirit or soul gave the body its separate existence, or that the body did this for the spirit; because that would be—speaking strictly and literally—*creation*; and that is solely the function of God and Christ. Therefore, the love I have asked about must occur because of **(2)** the similarity or affinity between the natures of the soul and the body. [Lady Conway reverts to the explanation of love in terms of goodness, deals with it as she did a paragraph back, and then adds something:] What *is* that ‘goodness’ in the body that makes the soul love it so much? What are the attributes or perfections in respect of which a body resembles a spirit, if the body is nothing but a dead torso, a mass of matter that is quite incapable of any degree of life or perfection? You may say: ‘A body agrees with a soul or spirit in respect of *being* or *reality*: just as the spirit has being, so does the body.’ I have already refuted this, •but will give the refutation again, filling in its details a little. If this being—this *supposed* being, this lump of permanently dead matter—has no attributes or perfections matching those of a spirit, then it’s a mere fiction. God hasn’t created any bare being, i.e. something that is *only* mere being, with

no attributes that can be predicated of it. *Being* is merely a logical term and concept, which logicians call the most general genus. As a bare and abstract notion, it doesn't exist •in things themselves but only •as a concept, only •in the human mind. For this reason, every being has an individual nature with certain ascertainable attributes. What attributes does a body have that are similar to those of a spirit? Let us look into the principal attributes of the body that make it different from the spirit according to the view of those who hold that body and spirit are so utterly distant in nature that neither cannot become the other. There are two of these.

- (a) Every body is impenetrable by all other bodies: the parts of different bodies cannot penetrate each other.
- (b) Every body is divisible.

In contrast with this, the people whose views I am examining hold that

- (a') spirits are penetrable: one spirit can penetrate another; a thousand spirits can exist within each other, taking up no more space than one spirit.
- (b') spirits are so simple and unified that no spirit can be separated, dismantled into really distinct parts.

Now, I have said that similarity is the true basis of love and unity; but if we compare the above attributes of body and spirit we see that far from having any similarity or natural affinity to each other they are flat-out opposites. In the minds of these people, it is inconceivable that anything ·else· in the entire universe is as contrary as are body and spirit. Black and white? hot and cold? No, because black can become white and hot can become cold, whereas (they say) something that is (a) impenetrable can't become (a') penetrable. Not even God and creatures are as utterly different in their essence as body and spirit are (according to these people): God shares many of his attributes with creatures, but we can't find any attribute of body that in any way matches ·an attribute of·

spirit or (therefore) of God, who is the highest and purest spirit. So body couldn't be created by God, and must be merely non-being or a fiction. Moreover, just as body differs from spirit in respect of (im)penetrability, they also differ in respect of (in)divisibility. [In this passage, Lady Conway has been expressing the views of the philosophers she is attacking, not her own views; except for the sentence 'So body couldn't be . . . or a fiction', which seems to be *her* sarcastic remark that body, *on her opponents' view about it*, couldn't be created by God.]

Here is a reply that might be made to that:

Body and spirit do share certain attributes, such as extension, motion, and shape. A spirit can stretch from one place to another, can move from place to place, and can change itself into any shape it pleases.

In response to this I say, as I did earlier [on page 6], that a spirit can have extent (though that is denied by most of those who claim that body and soul are essentially different). But there's a terrific difference between the extension of spirit and the extension of body as those folk understand it. In the case of body, . . . extension and impenetrability are really only a single attribute conceptualized in two different ways. If a body *x* doesn't impenetrably keep other bodies out of a given region, what content is there to the statement that *x* is *in* that region? Furthermore, according to the thinking of the people I am criticising, the extension of body is utterly different from that of spirit: a body's extension is so necessary and essential to it that it couldn't possibly have been more or less extended than it is; whereas a spirit (according to these people) can be extended more or less. And since the ability to move and to have a shape stand or fall with extension, what I have said about extension holds equally for those other two attributes. ·And there is a more direct reason for holding that· spirit has shape and mobility in a very different way from body, ·namely that· a spirit can move and shape *itself*,

which a body cannot do.

#### 4.

·IMPENETRABILITY·

Anyway, what's going on when they declare that impenetrability is an essential attribute of the body and penetrability an essential attribute of spirit? Why can't a body be more or less impenetrable and spirit more or less penetrable?" That's how it is with other attributes: a body can be more or less heavy or light, dense or rare, solid or liquid, hot or cold; so why can't it also be more or less impenetrable? They may say:

We always see that a body, when it goes through these ·other· changes, remains impenetrable. For example, when iron is red-hot it is still impenetrable.

I agree that the red-hot iron is not penetrable by any other equally coarse body; but it *can be* and *is* penetrated by a more finely divided body, namely the fire that enters it and penetrates all its parts. This softens it, and if the fire is strong it completely liquefies the iron. They might respond:

This incursion of fire into the iron isn't 'penetration' in the philosophical sense, i.e. it doesn't enter it in such a way that fire and iron occupy only one place and are consequently most •intimately present one to the other. The supposition that it *does* is flatly contradicted by the facts: red-hot iron swells and takes on greater mass than when cold, and when cooled it becomes hard again and returns to its former size.

To this I reply that if they are using 'penetration' to mean what we call •intimate presence' (in which a homogeneous substance enters into another of equal size, without increasing its size or weight), this appears altogether irrational. It is utterly impossible—it would be downright contradictory—for

any creature to have the power of such intimate presence. Only God and Christ, as creators, have the privilege of being intimately present to creatures. If a creature could be intimately present to another creature, it would stop being a creature because it would now have one of the incommunicable attributes of God and Christ. (This attribute should be ascribed primarily to God, and secondly to Christ because he is the intermediate being between God and creatures. ·Christ comes into this on the strength of his intermediate position·. Just as he is involved in changeability and unchangeability, and in eternity and time, he can be said to be involved in spirit and body and thus in place and extension. His body is a different ·kind of· substance from the bodies of all other creatures; ·so there is no absurdity in supposing that· he is intimately present to creatures. But he isn't to be confounded with them!) To suppose that one *creature* can be intimately present to another, mingling or uniting with it in a most perfect way without increasing its weight or extension, smudges the distinctions amongst creatures and makes two or more of them into *one*. Indeed, this hypothesis implies that the whole creation could be reduced to a tiny particle of dust, because any part could penetrate any other without increasing its size. My opponents may reply:

That only proves that •spirits can be reduced to a tiny space, but not •bodies, because they are impenetrable,

to which I respond that they are begging the question, because they haven't yet proved that body and spirit are different substances. If they aren't different, neither of them is any more penetrable than the other (according to the views of the people I am attacking). ·If you question whether an item could be **(1)** unable to be intimately present to any other of the same kind and yet **(2)** able to be intimately present to something of some other kind, consider the case

of *time*. It's easy to see that time is extended in such a way that. . . no part of it can be intimately present in any other part. The first day of the week can't be present in the second, or the first hour of the day in the second, or the first minute of the hour in the second minute of the same hour. That's because it is the nature and essence of time to be *successive*, one part coming *after* another. Yet God is really and intimately present in all times, and doesn't change. Not so for creatures, however, because they continually change as times change; for time is nothing but the motion or change of creatures from one condition or state to another. Just as this is how things stand with regard to time and creatures in time, it's the same for mass or quantity. Whereas in God there is no time and no mass or corporeal quantity, in creatures there is both; if there weren't, the creatures would be—impossibly—either God or nothing. And the kind of quantity, mass and extension that any creature has it has *essentially*; just as it's of the essence of time that it consists of many parts, which have parts, which. . . and so on to infinity. We have no trouble grasping how a shorter time is nested within a longer one—60 minutes in an hour, 24 hours in a day—although one hour immediately *borders upon* the next and cannot be present *in* it. That's how it is with creatures in respect of their spatial extent, i.e. their mass and size: one creature can touch another but can't be present in all its parts.

But a smaller body can be in a larger one, and a more finely divided body can be in a body whose separate parts are larger. This last is the kind of penetration that bodies can properly be said to engage in: a body can be penetrated by another body that is more finely divided than it is, but not by one that is equally or less finely divided. Similarly with souls, which have bodies and can therefore be distinguished into more and less finely divided. Actually, the difference between

•more and less finely divided *is* the difference between body and spirit. (In saying this I turn my back on the thesis that body is merely a dead thing, lacking life and the capacity for life, in favour of the view that body is an excellent creature of God that has—actually or potentially—life and sensation.) That goes with the fact that the word 'spirit' comes from *air*, which has the most finely divided nature in the visible world. Spirit is better defined in this passage from the *Kabbala Denudata* [a contemporary anthology of Kabbalist writings—see the note on page 3]:

A 'spirit' is defined as a central nature that has the ability to emit a luminous sphere and to control its size (which seems to be what Aristotle meant by 'entelechy').

And later in the same work:

'Matter' is defined as a pure centre or a point without a radius. . . . From this we must conclude that the impenetrability of creatures must be limited to their centres.

The Hebrew word *ruach*, which means 'spirit', also signifies air. It's because air moves so fast that in any moving body all the swiftness of its motion is attributed to its spirit. When common people see no motion in bodies, they in their ignorance call them 'dead', and say they have 'no spirit or life'. But in fact there's no such thing as a dead body; every body has motion, and consequently life or spirit. So *every* creature—spirit as well as body—has its own appropriate weight or extension, which cannot be made larger or smaller.

This doesn't prevent us from seeing how a tiny body can expand to a thousand times its former size, as happens with the amazing expansion of gunpowder. All this expansion comes from body's being divided into smaller and smaller parts; they don't truly *fill* the whole of that larger space, because the sum of the size of these tiny parts exactly

equals the size of the original nub of gunpowder. We have to conclude from this that whenever a created spirit is in a body, either •it occupies pores (or tunnels like those a mole makes) or •it makes the body swell to a larger size ·in the way I have described for gunpowder·, as when fire enters into iron and makes it swell. This swelling can and sometimes does occur on such a small scale that we can't see it; it could even happen on such a small scale that it couldn't be expressed in numbers. . . .

·DIVISIBILITY·

Now let us turn to the second attribute that is said to be had by bodies but not by spirits, namely divisibility. If they—·the people I am opposing·—are saying that *every* body is divisible, so that even the smallest conceivable (if such a body can be conceived) can be divided, this is plainly impossible, a contradiction in terms, implying that the •smallest creature can be divided into •smaller parts. Thus, if 'a body' is taken to refer to *one single individual*, then every body is indivisible. When we speak of bodies as 'divisible', we usually mean that we can separate one body from another by placing a third body between them, and in *this* sense spirits are as divisible as bodies! A single spirit can't become two or more spirits (·any more than a single body can become two bodies·), but several spirits coexisting in one body can be separated from each other as easily as bodies can. However bodies or spirits may be divided or separated from each other throughout the universe, they always remain united in this separation, because the whole creation is always just one substance or entity, with no vacuum in it. . . . Quite generally, creatures are united with one another so that no one of them can be separated from its fellow creatures. There's also a particular and much more special unity among the parts of one species in particular. [The reference is to *homo sapiens*, or perhaps to animals generally.] When a body is divided and its limbs are separated

by a certain distance, as long as the limbs don't decompose and change to another species they always send out tiny particles to each other and to the body that the limbs came from; and that body emits similar particles (which can be called 'spirits and bodies' or 'spirits', for they are both). With these particles as intermediaries, the visibly separated limbs and ·other· parts always retain a certain real unity and sympathy [here = something like 'co-ordination of events'], as many examples show—two in particular. **(1)** A man with no nose arranged to have a nose made for him from the flesh of another man, and fastened to him (like grafting a cutting onto the trunk of a tree); when the other man died and his body rotted, that nose also rotted and fell from the face of the living man. **(2)** A surgeon amputated a man's leg and put it across the room from the body; the man was overcome by pain, and pointed out where in the severed leg the pain was; which clearly proves that the parts are in a certain way united even when separated by some distance. Likewise individuals of the same species may be united in a special way even when they are distant from one another. [Our author writes 'individuals of the same species *sive quae affinitatem habent in una specie*', which means '. . . or ones that have an affinity in one species'. This is hard to make sense of; and what happens two sentences further on strongly suggests that the Latin translator slipped, and that what Lady Conway meant was '. . . or ones that belong to different species but have an affinity'.] This is especially evident in the case of human beings. If two people love each other very much, this love unites them so closely that no distance can divide or separate them; they are present to each other in spirit, so that a continual flow or emanation of spirits passes from one to the other—uniting them, as it were roping them together. Thus, anything that someone loves—another person, an animal, a tree, silver, gold—is united with him, and his spirit goes out into it. Incidentally, although an individual human being's

spirit is usually spoken of as one single thing, it is really composed of many spirits—*countless* spirits—just as the ·human· body is composed of many bodies. The body's parts are organized into a certain ordered hierarchy; and this is even more the case with the human spirit, that great *army* of spirits that have their different functions under one spirit, their commander. ·Summing up the past three pages·: It now turns out that impenetrability and indivisibility are no more essential attributes of body than of spirit, because taken in one way these attributes apply to both body and spirit, while taken in the other way they apply to neither.

One might oppose this infinity of spirits in every spirit and this infinity of bodies as follows:

It has been written: 'God made all things by number, weight, and measure.' So it can't be the case that an •innumerable multitude of spirits exists in one human being or that an •innumerable multitude of bodies exists in one ·human· body.

[That quotation comes from *The Wisdom of Solomon* 11:20. This is an apocryphal biblical book, i.e. one of the books that were considered for inclusion in the official Bible but didn't make the cut.] [Lady Conway replies that she didn't mean 'infinite' and 'innumerable' strictly literally: she was saying only that no thinking creature could put a number to those spirits and bodies. God of course *could* number and measure them. She continues:] It's the nature of a creature that if it is to act and enjoy the good that the Creator prepared for it, it can't be merely singular. ·To see that this is true, try to suppose that it isn't·. Let's suppose there is one atom separated from all fellow creatures. What can it do to perfect itself and become greater or better? What can it see or hear or taste or feel, either **(1)** within itself or **(2)** outside? **(1)** It can't see, hear, taste, or feel within itself, ·because that would involve internal motion, and· it can't have internal motion, because

that would involve its parts' going from one arrangement to another arrangement, whereas our atom is strictly singular and doesn't have parts. **(2)** It can't see, hear, taste, or feel any other creature, because for that it would have to receive an image of that other creature within itself; and it can't do that because it's only an atom and is so small that it can't receive anything inside itself. Just as the organs of the external senses are made up of many parts, so are the organs of the internal senses; so *all* knowledge requires that the creature that has the knowledge, the subject of the knowledge or its receptacle, consist of a variety or multitude of things. I mean 'all *creaturely* knowledge', i.e. knowledge that is received from or caused by the items that are known (in contrast with God's knowledge, which isn't received from or caused by creatures, but is *basically his*, coming from him alone). We have knowledge of many different objects, each of which sends us its own image; so we have many images in us, each of them a real entity that needs a place ·within us· that is right for its particular form and shape; and there is no way that could be provided by an atom! If we didn't house images in that way, not only would confusion follow but many things would be present one to another without any extension, which is against the nature of a creature. [The clause 'many things. . . extension' correctly translates the Latin; it is offered with no sense of what our author is getting at here.] (Here is a possible line of thought:

. . . .You contend that· I am a multiple being who receives many images from objects. Because of this ·supposed· multiplicity, if I know some one object I should see it as if *it* were multiple—seeing many men instead of just one, for example.

That is just wrong. ·A multiple knower doesn't automatically make what is known multiple, as the following two examples show·. **(a)** When many people see one man, they don't see

him as many men but only as one, despite the fact that *they as a group* are clearly multiple. (b) When I look at something, I see it with my two eyes. . . .but what appears to me is one thing, not two. If I could see a horse or a man, say, with ten thousand eyes instead of my actual two, what appeared to me would be a single horse or man, no more than that.) Our multiplicity seems to be the great difference between God and creatures. He is *one*, and he has the perfection of not needing anything from outside himself; whereas a creature needs the help of its fellow creatures and has to be multiple if it is to receive this help. (I am not here repeating my point about multiplicity and *knowledge* of other things; my present point is specifically about *receiving help*, or more precisely it is about *receiving*. Whenever something x receives something y, it is nourished by y which thus becomes part of x. Therefore—even supposing that at the outset x is not multiple at all—x is now no longer one thing but many, at least as many as the things that it receives. So creatures form a kind of social group devoted to giving and receiving, where one creature x supports another creature y so that y can't live without x. What creature is there *anywhere* that doesn't need its fellow creatures? None! Thus, every creature that has any life, sense, or motion must be multiple or numerous, so much so that its multiplicity outruns the counting or listing capacities of every created intellect, meaning that its multiplicity is in the everyday sense of the term 'infinite'. Here's another possible line of thought:

A central or ruling spirit must be a single atom. Why else would it qualify as a central or principal spirit

with dominion over all the rest?

That is wrong. The central, ruling, or principal spirit is multiple, and I have already given the reason why it *has to be*. It qualifies as central because all the other spirits come together in it, just as lines from every part of the circumference of a circle meet in the centre and go out from it. In fact, the spirits that make up this central predominant spirit are more firmly and tenaciously held together than are the other spirits, the ones that are like messengers or executives for the principal spirit, the leader. This unity within the dominant spirit is so great that nothing can dissolve it (whereas most of the servant spirits, the ones that aren't parts of the central spirit, can come apart). That's how it comes about that the soul of every human being will remain a whole soul for eternity, lasting for ever, so that it may receive proper rewards for its labor. This is required by the universal law of justice that is inscribed in everything requires this and serves as an extremely strong and unbreakable bond in keeping this unity among the parts of the central or dominant spirit in a human being. Spirits that agreed and united in doing good or bad will be rewarded or punished *together*—what can fit infinite justice and wisdom better than *that*? And it can't happen if they are separated from each other. For the same reason, the central spirit of every other creature is also indissoluble. New central spirits are continually being formed in the production of things, but no central spirit is dissolved; it can only be further advanced or diminished according to its current worthiness or unworthiness, capacity or incapacity.

## Chapter 8: Body and spirit: arguments 4–6

1. My **fourth** argument, to prove that spirit and body differ not in essence but *·only·* in degree is based on the intimate union or bond that exists between spirits and bodies, by means of which spirits control the bodies they are united with, moving them around and using them as instruments in their various operations. [The third argument began on page 30; the fifth begins on page 40.] If spirit and body are so *opposite*, with opposite attributes:

- if spirit is alive—a living and perceiving substance—whereas body is merely a dead mass, and
- if spirit is penetrable and indivisible, whereas body is impenetrable and divisible

then tell me: What is it that unites and joins them so much? What are the chains or ties that hold them together so firmly and for so long? Also, when a spirit or soul gets separated from *·its·* body and no longer controls it or has power to move it as before, what causes this separation? *·The philosophers I am opposing·* might reply:

The *·previous·* union of the soul with the body was caused by the vital fit [*vitalis congruitas*] between them; and when the body decomposes it stops vitally fitting the soul.

Then I ask them: what *is* this *·vital fit·*? If they can't tell us what it consists in, they are babbling, producing empty words, ones with sound but no sense. *·And they surely can't answer my question satisfactorily·*. In *their* understanding of what body and spirit are, they don't *fit* one another in any way at all; because *·in their view·* body is always dead matter, lacking life and perception, just as much when the spirit is in it as after it leaves. And if there were some fit between them, then it would of course remain the same whether the

body was healthy or decomposed. My opponents may say:

Spirit requires an organized body to perform the vital actions of the external senses and to move the body from place to place; and organization is lacking in a decomposed body.

But this doesn't solve their difficulty. *Why* does spirit require such an organized body? Why, for example, can the spirit *see* only by means of such a wonderfully formed and organized corporeal eye *·as we have·*? Why does spirit need corporeal light-rays if it's to see corporeal objects? And why can't the soul see an object unless an image of it is transmitted through the eye? If it is totally spirit and in no way body, why does it need such a variety of corporeal organs that are so greatly and deeply unlike it? And another thing: When one *•body x* moves another body *y*, this involves *y's* being impenetrable and therefore resisting *x*; so how can a *•spirit* move its body or any of its limbs if it is (as *they* say it is) of such a nature that no part of the body can resist it in any way? If a spirit so easily penetrates every body, why is it that when it moves from place to place it doesn't leave the body behind, since it can so easily pass through it without the least resistance? . . . . Think about what happens with the sails of a ship. By means of them the wind drives the ship along, and the driving force is lessened in proportion as there are more openings, holes, and passages in the sails. And if the sails were replaced by a giant *net*, the ship would barely move, even in a gale. This shows us the *·essential·* role of impenetrability in motion; if body and spirit were not mutually impenetrable, a spirit couldn't cause any body to move.



**2.** Here is an objection that might be made to what I have been saying:

God moves whatever bodies he pleases and is indeed the original cause of all movement, yet he is completely incorporeal and is intimately present in all bodies, with nothing impenetrable about him.

I answer that the motion by which God moves a body is completely different from the way a soul moves the body. The will of God that brought bodies into existence also made them move; so *all* motion comes from God, through his will. A creature can't •move itself, any more than it can •bring itself into existence; it is in God that we 'live and move and have our being' (*Acts 17:28*). So motion and being (-existence-) come from the same cause, God the creator: he lavishes motion on creatures without moving himself; he doesn't go from place to place because he is equally present everywhere. But the story of how the soul moves the body is nothing like that. The soul isn't the author of motion •as such•; it merely determines that this or that particular thing moves. The soul moves from place to place with the body, and if the body is imprisoned or chained down, the soul can't escape from the prison or the chains. It is *very* inappropriate to liken •the motion of the body produced by the soul to •the motion that all creatures get from God; it is on a par with likening •a human builder's activity of constructing a ship or a house to •God's activity of creating the first substance or matter. It is obvious that the two are very different: God brought his creatures into existence, but a carpenter doesn't bring into existence the wood from which he builds a ship.

'You say that the motions of every creature come from God; so •you must think that• he is or could be the author or cause of sin.' *No-one* will bring this against me. The •power to move comes from God, but sin comes not from him but from the creature that has misused this •power by

directing it to something other than it should. Thus sin is *ataxia* [Greek], i.e. a disorderly direction of motion, or of the power of moving, from where it ought to be to somewhere else. Consider the example of a ship: that it moves at all is due to the wind; that it moves to this place or that place is due to the helmsman. The helmsman isn't the author = cause of the wind; but the wind is blowing and he uses it well or badly. When he steers the ship to its destination, he is praised, but when he wrecks it by running it onto rocks, he is blamed and thought to deserve punishment.

Another point: Why does the spirit or soul suffer so much when the body is harmed? If the spirit has nothing corporeal about it •even• when united to the body, why is it so upset when the body—whose nature is •allegedly• so different—is damaged? If it's so easy for the soul to penetrate the body, how can any corporeal thing hurt it? 'The soul doesn't feel the pain—only the body feels it'—that can't be said by the people •against whom I am arguing in this chapter, i.e. the ones• who affirm that the body has no life or perception. On the other hand, all the difficulties that I have presented vanish if one accepts •as I do• that the soul is of one nature and substance with the body, although it is much *more* alive and spiritual than the body, *more* swift and penetrable, and so on through various other perfections. Given this account of the situation, it is easy to grasp how the soul is united with body, moves the body, suffers with the body and through the body. [Lady Conway adds here a reference to a Kabbalah text showing that 'this was the opinion of the ancient Hebrews'.]

**3.** We can easily grasp how one body is united with another through the true *fit* between their natures. The most finely divided and spiritual body can be united with a very thick and lumpy body by means of certain bodies that are intermediate between the two extremes—intermediate, that

is, on the spectrum from very fine-grained to very lumpy. These intervening bodies are the ties or links through which such a finely divided and spiritual soul is connected to such a lumpy body. When these intermediate spirits are absent, or stop work, the union is broken. On this basis we can easily grasp how a soul moves a body, just as one finely divided body can move another thick and lumpy one. And since a body is itself is a sentient living thing, i.e. a perceiving substance, it is just as easy to grasp how one body can wound or bring pain or pleasure to another body, because things whose natures are the same or similar can easily affect each other. And this line of thought can be used to answer similar questions:

How do spirits move other spirits?

How do spirits contend or struggle with other spirits?

How do good spirits promote unity, harmony, and friendship with each other?

·These things certainly *do* happen·: the select few who know their own hearts learn from experience that there is such an expulsion and struggle of spirits, especially of good spirits against evil ones. ·And the question of *how* this can happen seems to be unanswerable· if all spirits can be intimately present within each other, for how ·in that case· can they •contend with one another, •struggle to occupy a position, •expel another? Someone might say this:

The spirits of God and Christ are intimately present in everything, yet they wage war against the devil and his spirits in the human heart,

I answer that it isn't valid to compare God's operations with those of his creatures, because God's ways are infinitely superior to ours. Still, one valid difficulty still remains, ·arising from this truth·:

When the spirits of God and Christ struggle against

the devil and the evil spirits in the human heart, they unite with certain good spirits which they •sanctify and •prepare for this union and •use as a vehicle—a war-chariot—in their battle with wicked spirits. In struggling against the good spirits in the human heart, the evil spirits are struggling against God and Christ. The good spirits are those of the pious and faithful person who used to be wicked and since then has been made good. God and Christ help every •pious person in the struggle to prevail over evil spirits; but God allows evil spirits to conquer those that are •evil and unfaithful. He helps only those who fear and love him, and who obey him and believe in his power, goodness, and truth. When he unites with these people, their good spirits are like so many arrows and swords that wound and drive back the dark and impure spirits.

The difficulty I spoke of is this: How can a human soul, even one in the highest state of purity, be united with God, given that God is pure spirit whereas the soul, though pure in the highest degree, is always somewhat corporeal? I answer that this happens through Jesus Christ, who is the true and appropriate medium between the two. Christ can be united with the soul ·immediately·, without the help of anything coming between them, because of their great affinity and likeness. The learned men who say that the natures of body and spirit are completely opposite can't say *that!*

**4.** I take the **fifth** argument from what we observe in all visible bodies such as earth, water, stones, wood, etc. [The fourth argument starts on page 38; the sixth is announced on page 42.] What an abundance of spirits there are in all these things! For earth and water continually produce animals, as they did in the beginning; a pool full of water produces fish, without any fish having been put there to breed. Since everything

else comes from earth and water originally, it necessarily follows that the spirits of all animals are in the water. That is why *Genesis* says that the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters, so that from the waters he would bring forth whatever was created afterwards.

A possible objection to that argument goes like this:

Your argument doesn't prove that all spirits are bodies—only that all bodies contain the spirits of all animals. [Note 'all animals'; it will become important in a moment.] Now, granted that every body has a spirit in it, and that the spirit and the body are united, their natures are still different so that they can't be changed into each other.

I reply that if every body, even the smallest, has in itself the spirits of all animals and other things, just as matter is said to have all forms within itself, does it have all these spirits in it **(a)** actually or only **(b)** potentially? If **(a)**, the question arises: how *can* so many spirits. . . actually exist in their different essences in a small body (even in the smallest conceivable)? It couldn't happen unless the spirits were *intimately present* to the parts of the body, so that they didn't take up any space. But a capacity for intimate presence is something that no creature can have, as I have already shown [see page 33]. Also, if spirits of all kinds exist in each body, even the smallest, how does it happen that *this* kind of animal is produced from *this* kind of body and not from *that*? Why doesn't a single body give rise immediately to *all* kinds of animals? We know from experience that this doesn't happen, and that nature does everything systematically, with one kind of animal being formed from another and one species coming from another, whether rising to a higher perfection or sinking to a lower one. If on the other hand the answer is **(b)** that all kinds of spirits, with their different essences, are contained in each body not actually but only *potentially*,

then the objection to my position collapses because the answer **(b)** implies that the body and all those spirits are the same, i.e. that body can be changed into those spirits (compare 'Wood is potentially fire', i.e. can be changed into fire, and 'water is potentially air', i.e. can be changed into air, and so on). And the thesis that bodies can be changed into spirits is precisely what I am here defending.

And when the present objector concedes that bodies always have or contain spirits, I use this concession as the basis for another argument against him. If spirits and bodies are so inseparably united to each other that no body can be without spirit, indeed without many spirits, this in itself is surely a weighty argument that they are of one basic nature and substance. Otherwise, it would be incomprehensible to us that they wouldn't eventually separate from each other in various strange dissolutions and separations. . . .

Last point: How does it happen that when a body decomposes, other species are generated from this mess? Thus animals come forth from decomposing water or earth; even rocks, when they rot, turn into animals; and mud or other decomposing matter generates animals, all of which have spirits. How does the rotting or decomposing of a body lead to animals' being newly generated? You might try this answer:

What happens is that this decomposition, this process of rotting, releases the spirits of these animals from their chains, so to speak, freeing them to form and shape new bodies for themselves from the rotted matter by means of their plastic natures.

[Henry More, a close friend and philosophical tutor of Lady Conway, invented 'plastic natures' as a go-between enabling spirits to act on bodies; he was Cartesian enough to hold that spirit and body have nothing significant in common. In putting the phrase into the mouth of an opponent, Lady Conway underlines a fact that has been obvious almost from the start of this work, namely that despite her admiration

and gratitude towards More she is decisively parting company from him.] I reply, how did the body in its prime—before it started to rot—so strongly hold those spirits captive? By being hard and dense? If so, then those ‘imprisoned’ spirits are nothing but finely divided bodies; otherwise the hardness and denseness of the body couldn’t lock them in. If a spirit were capable of being intimately present within a body, so that it could penetrate the hardest body as easily as the softest, it could as easily go from one body to another with no need for decomposition or death to generate new life. So the fact, ‘if it is a fact,—that spirits are held captive in certain hard bodies and are liberated when the bodies become soft is a clear argument that spirit and body have the same basic nature, that body is nothing but fixed and condensed spirit, and spirit nothing but finely divided or volatile body.

**5.** This is the place to mention the following facts. In all hard bodies—ordinary pebbles and precious stones, metals, herbs, trees, animals, and all human bodies—there are many spirits that are ‘imprisoned (so to speak) in dense bodies and ‘united with them, unable to come out and fly away into other bodies until death or dissolution occurs. There are also many *other* very finely divided spirits that *do* continually come out of these hard bodies; it’s because they are so finely divided that they can’t be held in by the hardness of the bodies they inhabit; and these finely divided spirits are productions. . . .of the lumpier spirits detained in the body. The latter spirits, though trapped in the body, are not idle in their prison: the body is a kind of workshop for them, where they make the more finely divided spirits that are then given off in colours, sounds, odours, tastes, and various other properties and powers. So the hard body and the spirits it contains are like the mother of the more finely divided spirits, their ‘children’. That is nature’s way: it always works

towards more complete fine-grainedness and spirituality, because that is the most *natural* property of every operation and motion. All motion grinds a thing down and divides it, thereby making it ‘subtle’ and spiritual. In the human body, for example, food and drink are first changed into chyle and then into blood, and after that into spirits, which are nothing but perfectly fine-spun blood; and these spirits, whether good or bad, always move on to an ‘even’ greater degree of ‘subtlety’ or spirituality. Through the spirits that come from blood •we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and feel; through them indeed we also •think, love, hate, and do everything we do; they are the source of •the seed through which the race propagates, and especially of •the human voice and speech, which is full of those good or bad spirits formed in the heart. As Christ taught: ‘The mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things’ (*Matthew* 12:34–5). ‘And Christ also said: ‘Nothing that enters a man from without can defile him; what can defile a man are the things that come out of him’ (*Mark* 7: 15). . . .

**6.** And these are men’s angels or ministering spirits—the ones Christ is speaking of when he says of the little ones who believe in him ‘Their angels look upon the face of my heavenly father’ (*Matthew* 18: 10). There are also other angels, good and bad, that come to men; but the ones I am talking about here are the angels that belong specifically to human beings, the angels of believers who become like little children.

**7.** I draw the **sixth** and final argument from certain texts of both the old and new testaments, which show in clear and explicit words that everything has life and is truly alive in some degree. [The fifth argument starts on page 40.]

•‘He gives to everything life and breath’ etc. (*Acts* 17:25)

•‘God makes everything live.’ (1 *Timothy* 6:13.

•‘He is not called the God of the dead but of the living’ (*Luke* 20:38).

(This last is being said primarily about human beings, but it is a more general truth that, holding for everything else as well.) He is indeed the God of all the things—human beings included—that are resurrected and regenerated in their own kind. ·I speak of ‘resurrection’· because the death of those

things isn’t their •annihilation but a •change from one kind or degree of life to another. [The problem here is present in the Latin: things that are resurrected ‘in their kind’ (*in sua specie*) undergo a change of kind (*ab una specie... in aliam*.) And thus the apostle declares the resurrection of the dead and illustrates it with the example of a grain of wheat that falls to the ground, dies, and rises again as something fruitful (*John* 12: 24).

## Chapter 9: Other philosophers. Light. Life

**1.** From what I have just said, and from various reasons I offered earlier for the view that spirit and body are basically one and the same, it plainly appears that the so-called philosophers, both ancient and modern, who taught otherwise were comprehensively wrong. They built on weak foundations, so that their entire structure ·of philosophical theory· is shaky and is so useless that it is bound to collapse eventually. From this absurd foundation many extremely crass and dangerous errors have arisen—in theology as well as in philosophy—

with great injury to the human race,  
to the detriment of true piety, and  
in contempt of God’s glorious name.

You’ll easily see that I am right about this, from what I have already said and from what I’ll say in this chapter.

**2.** Don’t object that this philosophy ·of mine· is nothing

but Cartesianism or Hobbesianism wearing a new mask. ·My philosophy differs from theirs in much more than a ‘mask’·. There is a solid doctrinal difference, which I shall explore in this and the next three sections, and then a conceptual difference that I’ll take up in section 6. **Firstly**, the Cartesian philosophy claims that body is nothing but *dead stuff* which not only *now does* but *for all eternity must* lack life and perception of every kind. Anyone must be guilty of this great error if he says that body and spirit are contrary things and can’t change into one another, thereby denying bodies all life and perception. This is flatly contrary to the fundamentals of my philosophy. Far from being •Cartesianism with a new mask, my philosophy’s basic principles entitle it rather to be called •anti-Cartesianism. Undeniably, Descartes taught many fine and ingenious things about the mechanical aspects of natural processes and about how all movements conform to regular mechanical laws. He depicts nature—i.e.

the created world—as operating in accordance with the practised skill and mechanical wisdom that God, the source of all wisdom, has given it! That’s all very well and good, but many of nature’s operations are far more than merely mechanical. Nature is not simply an organic body like a clock, that has no vital principle [see note on page 24] of motion in it. It is a living body that has life and perception, which are much more exalted than a mere mechanism or a mechanical motion.

**3.** Secondly, as for Hobbesianism, it is even more contrary to my philosophy than Cartesianism. For Descartes recognized that God is clearly an immaterial and incorporeal spirit, whereas Hobbes claims that God is material and corporeal, indeed, that he is nothing but matter and body. Thus he confounds God and creatures in their essences and denies that there is an essential difference between them. These and many other things are and have been called the worst consequences of the philosophy of Hobbes, to which one may add that of Spinoza. For he confounds God and creatures and makes one being of both, which is diametrically opposed to my philosophy.

**4.** Yet the weak and false principles of those men who have dared to challenge the so-called philosophy of Hobbes and Spinoza have conceded far too much to them and against themselves. Thus not only have they not effectively refuted their adversaries, but have also exposed themselves to ridicule and contempt. Furthermore, if someone objects that our philosophy seems to be similar to that of Hobbes at least in this respect, that

it maintains that •all creatures were originally one substance from the lowest and most ignoble to the highest and most noble and from the smallest reptile,

worm, and fly to the most glorious angel, indeed, from the finest grain of dust and sand to the most exalted of all creatures, from which it follows that •every creature is material and corporeal, indeed, that matter and every body, and consequently their noblest actions, are material and corporeal or flow from some corporeal design,

I concede that all creatures from the lowest to the highest were originally one substance and consequently could convert and change from one nature to another. And although Hobbes says the same thing, nevertheless this is not at all prejudicial to the truth. Other parts of my philosophy agree with Hobbes where he says something true, but that doesn’t make them specifically *Hobbesian*.

**5.** Moreover, far from being a help to him in his errors, this principle of the inter-changeability of spirit and matter strongly refutes his philosophy. [What comes next starts ‘For example...’, but it isn’t an example of the thesis that this principle of Hobbes’s can be used against him. That thesis, indeed, seems to disappear without trace.] For example, Hobbesians argue that all things are one [here = ‘of one kind’] because we see that •all visible things can change into one another, •that all visible things can change into invisible things (as when water becomes air and most of a piece of burning wood turns into something that is so finely divided that we can’t see it; and •that invisible things become visible (as when water appears from air, and so on). Hobbes infers from these facts that nothing is so lowly that it can’t reach the highest level, from which he infers that everything, including God, is corporeal.

Wanting to rebut this argument, Hobbes's adversaries generally deny its premise and assert on the contrary that *nothing of any sort can change into something of another sort*. What about burning wood? Many of them say that the wood is composed of two substances, namely matter and form, and that in combustion the matter remains the same but the form of wood is destroyed and replaced in this matter by a new form, the form of *fire*. Thus, according to them, real substances are continually being annihilated and new ones being produced. But this is so foolish that many others of Hobbes's opponents refuse to take that line about wood's changing into fire and then into smoke and ash; that is, they accept that wood *does* change into fire and then into smoke and ash. But the error that they avoid in that case they still persevere with in other cases, e.g. denying that wood sometimes changes into some animal. (I call this an 'error' because we often see living creatures being born from rotting wood or dung. According to these anti-Hobbesians, wood is mere matter, lifeless and incapable of life or perception; so a living perceiving animal must have its life from somewhere else, and must have a spirit or soul that isn't part of the body or produced by the body, but is sent into it. If they are asked 'Where is this spirit sent from? who sends it? why is this body sent a spirit of this sort rather than some other?', they are *stuck* and are wide open to attack by their adversaries.

A stronger case against the philosophies of Hobbes and Spinoza can be made on the basis of my philosophy, which *accepts* their **premise** that all kinds of creatures can be changed into one another, so that the lowest can become the highest and what was initially the highest can become the lowest. (Not that this can happen randomly. Species-change occurs according to the pattern and order that the divine wisdom has arranged, limiting what can be immediately

changed into what—A must be changed into B before it can change into C, and must be changed into C before it can change into D, etc.)

But I deny the **conclusion** that God and creatures are one kind of substance. There are changes of all creatures from one species to another—from stone to earth, earth to grass, grass to sheep, sheep to human flesh, human flesh to the lowest spirits of man and from these to the noblest spirits—but this ascent can't go as high as God, whose nature infinitely surpasses all creatures, even ones that have risen to the highest level. The nature of God is unchangeable in every way and doesn't admit the slightest shadow of change; whereas every creature is naturally changeable.

**6. Secondly**, when someone objects against my philosophy that it agrees with Hobbes in holding that every creature is material and corporeal. . . ., I reply that by 'material' and 'corporeal', or by 'matter' and 'body', I mean something very different from Hobbes. What I mean is something that didn't occur to Hobbes or Descartes except in a dream. What. . . attributes do they ascribe to these? Only extension and impenetrability; there's no need to add mobility and the capacity to have a shape because these are reducible to extension. And extension and impenetrability are really only one attribute [for our author's defence of this see page 32]; but even if we pretend that these are distinct attributes, this won't help us to understand what this remarkable substance is that is called 'body' and 'matter'. They—these philosophers—stop at the husk, the shell, and don't penetrate to the kernel. They only touch the surface, never glimpsing the centre. For they know nothing and understand nothing concerning the most noble attributes of the substance that they call 'matter' and 'body'.

What *are* these more excellent attributes? They are spirit or life and light, by which I mean the capacity for every kind

of feeling, perception, or knowledge, even love, all power and virtue, joy and fruition, that the noblest creatures have or can have, even the vilest and most contemptible. [Lady Conway may mean

- (i) spirit and (ii) life and light, or
- (i) spirit, i.e. life and (ii) light.

The Latin doesn't enable us to pick one of these as right.]

Indeed, dust can go through a series of transmutations that will give it all these perfections. If this series happens according to the natural order of things, it will require a long time to complete; though God with his absolute power can if he wishes speed the series up so that the dust-to-nobility change happens in a single moment. But he doesn't do that, because his wisdom sees that it's more fitting for events to occur in their natural course and order, so that the changing beings can achieve the maturity that God confers on every being, and so that creatures can have the time they need to acquire through their own efforts ever greater perfection as instruments of divine wisdom, goodness, and power. . . . They get more pleasure from possessing what they have as the fruits of their labour than they would get from having them handed to them on a plate, so to speak. The capacity to acquire these higher perfections is an altogether different attribute from life and perception, and these are altogether different from extension and shape. [The words 'and these are' correspond to a gap in the Latin, but it's pretty clear that this was the intended meaning.] And so (coming back now to my present theme) the activities that constitute *life* are clearly different from mechanical motion—motion from place to place—though they aren't separable from it because they always use mechanical motion as their instrument, at least in all their dealings with other creatures.

**7.** I have said that life and shape are different attributes of one substance. Let us look at some facts about shape, which

can serve as a kind of explanatory metaphor concerning life. **(1)** A single body can change into shapes of every sort, and when it changes from a less perfect to a more perfect shape, the latter *includes* the former. Consider a triangular prism: of all the solid straight-line shapes that a body can acquire, this comes first [because it has only four faces; every other solid straight-line shape has more]. From this a body can change into a cube, which is a more perfect shape that includes the prism. From the cube it can change into another still more perfect shape, one that is nearer to being a sphere, and from this into yet another that is even closer to perfection and so on. Thus the body ascends from less to more perfect shapes—to infinity, for there are no limits. . . . **(2)** But this body consisting of straight lines on a plane can never attain the perfection of a sphere, although it can approximate to it without limit. Now, **(1')** in a closely analogous way a single body can change from one degree or level of life to a more perfect one, which will always include the former, and this can continue without limit: the scale of degrees of life has a beginning but no end, i.e. there is a lowest level of life but no highest level. **(2')** But a creature can never attain equality with God, although it can come close and closer to him without limit. God's infinity is always more perfect than the highest level a creature can reach, just as a sphere is the most perfect of all other figures that no figure can reach.

**8.** Thus shape and life are distinct but not incompatible attributes of a single substance. Shape serves the operations of life. We see this in the bodies of humans and lower animals: the shape of the eye serves sight, the shape of the ear serves hearing, the shapes of the mouth, teeth, lips, and tongue serve speech, the shape of the hands and fingers serves manual activities, and the shape of the feet serves walking. In the same way the shapes of all the other parts of



the body contribute greatly to the vital operations that the spirits perform in that body. Indeed, the shape of the entire ·human· body is more suitable than any other shape that could exist or that could be made for the proper functioning of human life. Consequently, shape and life coexist extremely well in one substance or body, where shape is an instrument of life without which no vital operation could be performed.

9. Similarly, mechanical motion—i.e. the moving of a body from one place to another—is a mode or operation that is •distinct from the •processes of life, though they are inseparable. Life-processes couldn't occur without any motion, because motion is an instrument of those processes. For example, the eye can't see unless light enters into it, i.e. *moves* into it; this motion starts up the life-process in the eye that constitutes vision. And the same applies to all the other life processes all through the body. A life process is a far more noble and divine way of operating than ordinary motion, yet both come together in one substance and cooperate well with each other. ·When you see a hawk, for example·, :

The eye receives light into itself from the hawk, and the eye sends out light or spirit to the hawk.

In this light and spirit there is the life process that unites the hawk with eyesight.

So Hobbes and those of his party err gravely when they maintain that sense and perception are nothing but the mutual reactions of particular bodies, with 'reaction' being understood as meaning nothing but ordinary local motion [i.e. motion from place to place]. In fact, sense and perception are far nobler—far more divine—than any mechanical motion of particles. A vital motion or ·life· process occurs when one item uses another as an instrument that serves to start up a life process in the subject or percipient. And it can be transmitted from one body to another, just as ordinary

motion can, even when the bodies are far apart, so that distant bodies can be united without any new movement of body or matter. Think about what happens when an extremely long plank is pushed southwards from its northern end: the southern end has to move also; and this action ·of one end on the other· runs the length of the plank without any particles of matter being sent from one to the other; the plank itself is sufficient to transmit this motion. Well, in the same way a vital process can travel (accompanied by ordinary motion) from one thing to another—even at a great distance—when there's a suitable medium to transmit it. What we see here is a kind of divine spirituality or fineness of grain in every motion and every life process; we see it in the fact of **intimate presence** [see explanation on page 33]. As I said earlier, no •created substance is capable of this, and yet every •motion and action—including the actions of life processes—is capable of it. That's because a motion or an action isn't a material **thing** or substance but rather a **state** that a substance is in, or a **property** that it has; so it is intimately present in the substance that has it, and that makes it possible for motion to pass from one body to another even at a great distance, if there is a suitable medium to transmit it. And the stronger the motion, the further it can reach. When a stone is thrown into still water, it causes a motion that makes ever larger ·and ever fainter· circles until they are no longer visible to us; and no doubt it goes on after that making more ·and even larger· circles that we can't see because of the dullness of our senses. How long this goes on depends on the force of the initial splash. This motion is transmitted from the centre to the circumference without any body or substance to carry it from the stone.

In the same way, external light—an action or motion caused by a luminous body—can be transmitted through water, glass, crystal, or any other transparent body. I

wouldn't be surprised if all luminous bodies were continually giving off an abundance of finely divided matter, so that the whole substance of a burning candle is given off in that way. . . . The light we receive from a candle (say) can be increased by a crystal where these finely divided outputs of the candle can be compressed [the rest of this sentence is omitted, because the preparer of this text can't make good sense of it; nor, it seems, could any of the previous translators; in case you are interested, it is this: *ne transeant ad minimum in tanta abundantia, quae sufficiat ad communicandum totum lumen*]. Although it is very hard and solid, a crystal transmits light very easily. How can it receive so many bodies and transmit them through itself, when other bodies that are not as hard or solid can't do this? Wood, for example, is not as hard or solid as crystal, yet crystal is transparent and wood isn't. To explain this, we have to grasp that the question was wrongly stated in the first place. It is not true that when light shines through a crystal it 'transmits [bodies] through itself'; if it did that, the bodies in question would presumably pass through pores in the crystal. Wood is certainly more porous than crystal because it is less solid, but this isn't relevant to our present question because light doesn't go through the pores of crystal but through its very substance. The light doesn't grind its way into the crystal or thicken it; rather, it acts by means of **intimate presence**, because light isn't a substance, a body, but is pure action or motion. And so it is that light goes through crystal and not through wood because crystal is a more suitable medium than wood for receiving the *motion* that we call 'light'. There's a great variety of motions and operations of bodies, and each of them can be passed on only through its own special medium. That makes it easy for us to grasp that motion can pass *through* various bodies by a kind of penetration that is different from anything that any portion

of matter, however finely divided, can accomplish—namely by its intimate presence. And if merely place-to-place or mechanical motion can do this, then a vital process, which is a nobler kind of motion, can do it even better. And if it can penetrate the bodies through which it passes by means of its intimate presence, then it can be transmitted from one body to another instantaneously. I mean that the motion or action itself doesn't need *any* time for transmission. In contrast with that, the kind of transmission in which a body is carried from place to place must take some time; how much time depends on the kind of body it is and the speed of the motion that transfers it.

Thus we see how every motion and action, considered in the abstract, has a marvelous subtlety or spirituality beyond all created substances, so that neither time nor place can limit them. Yet motion and action are nothing but states or properties of created substances—like strength, power, and force—through which motion and action can be magnified beyond what the substance itself can do.

[When Lady Conway and her contemporaries speak of matter as 'subtle', they mean that it is finely divided (that is indeed the primary meaning of the Latin *subtilis*); but in the above paragraph she writes as though her view were something like this:

To call some matter 'subtle' is to say something about how easily it can penetrate, get into and out of tight corners, and so on. What *makes* a portion of matter subtle, in this sense, is its being very finely divided; but that's not what subtlety *is*. Something might be subtle and yet not be finely divided because it isn't a portion of matter. An example of this is *motion*.

Perhaps that is her position all through, but the translation of *subtilis* by 'finely divided' will be allowed to stand. As for our author's use of 'spirituality' in this paragraph, there seems to be no way of rescuing that, because she has said, explicitly and often, that spirits are on a continuum with bodies, an item's place on the continuum depending purely on how finely divided it is. She can't now speak of *motion* as having an extreme position on *that* continuum.]

This puts us in a position to distinguish •material extension from •virtual extension; every created thing has both. The material extension of a portion of matter—a body, a corporeal substance—is the extension that can be attributed to it without reference to any motion or action. A body’s material extension is always the same, rather than being bigger at some times than at others. A creature’s •virtual extension •at a given time• is its motion or action •at that time•. [In the interests of clarity, the rest of this paragraph re-orders the original; but it doesn’t add to or subtract from what Lady Conway wrote here.] There are three different possible sources for the motion or action that a creature *x* has. It may have

- (1) been given to *x* immediately by God,
- (2) come from *x*’s own inner being, or
- (3) been given to *x* immediately by some other created thing.

Any action in category (1), coming from God, who is also the source of *x*’s existence, is natural to *x* and is *its own* action because it is a consequence of its essence. An action in category (2) is *x*’s *own* in a stricter sense. The difference between (2) and (3) is labelled as the difference between ‘internal motion’ and ‘external motion’. When this external motion tries to move *x* to a place to which it has no natural inclination to go, this motion is violent and unnatural—e.g. when a stone is thrown up into the air. Any such unnatural and violent motion is clearly a case of ordinary place-to-place motion, *mechanical* motion, and in no way *vital*, because it doesn’t come from *x*’s life. Every motion that comes from *x*’s own life and will is vital, and I call it the motion of life [using a phrase that in this version has generally been translated by ‘life process’]; it isn’t mere place-to-place or mechanical motion, but has in itself life and vital power. This is *x*’s *virtual extension*, which is greater or lesser •at different times• according to the kind or degree of life with which *x* is endowed •at those times•.

For when a creature attains a more noble kind or degree of life, it acquires greater power and ability to move itself and transmit its vital motions to the greatest distance.

There is much debate about how •a motion can be transmitted from one body to another, since it is certainly not a substance or a body •that could be transmitted in the way, for instance, that I transmit •a book by handing it to you•. If it is only a mode [= ‘state or property’] of the body, how can this motion go from being a motion of body *y* to being a motion of body *x*? •Apparently it *can’t* do so•, because a mode of body *y* is *essentially* in *y*, •so that it can’t possibly come to be in *x* instead•. I think the best answer to this objection is as follows. There isn’t a place-to-place movement of this motion from one body to another; motion itself isn’t *moved*—it *moves* the body in which it exists. (If motion *did* get from one body to another by being *moved across*, that would involve a second motion to move the first; this second motion would be communicated by a third, and so on to infinity, which is absurd.) When one created thing *y* communicates motion to another created thing *x*, what happens is that *y*’s motion enables it to *produce* motion in *x*. You could say that *y* *creates* motion in *x*; but this is the only sort of creation that created things are capable of. It isn’t the creation of a new substance, though it may be the creation of a new *kind* of thing; and it is what •basically• happens when creatures are multiplied in their own kind—e.g. in the generation of animals. . . .

We now have the materials for an easy response to all the arguments that some people have used in an attempt to show that a body is altogether incapable of sense or perception. For this we have only to apply what I have said about the attributes of the body:

- It has not only quantity and shape but also life.
- It can be moved not only mechanically in the from-

place-to-place manner but also vitally.

- It can transmit its vital actions wherever it wants, provided it has a suitable medium.
- Lacking such a medium, it can extend itself by sending out finely divided *parts* of itself, which serve as an excellent medium for receiving and transmitting its vital processes.

And it's easy to show how a body gradually attains the perfection of having sense and perception—so that it is

capable not only of perception and knowledge such as the lower animals have but of whatever perfection can be had by any human being or angel. So we can understand and believe Christ's statement that 'God can raise up children to Abraham from stones' (*Matthew* 3: 9), taking it perfectly literally and not as a forced metaphor. It would be the greatest presumption to deny that God's omnipotence gives him the power to raise up the sons of Abraham from pebbles.