

# 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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## **Contents**

<b>Chapter 1: God and his divine attributes</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Creatures and time</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Freedom, infinity, space</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Christ and creatures</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter 5: God, Christ, and time</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 6: Change</b>	<b>15</b>

<b>Chapter 7: Body and spirit: arguments 1–3</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Chapter 8: Body and spirit: arguments 4–6</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Chapter 9: Other philosophers. Light. Life</b>	<b>43</b>

## 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 [unfeelable], 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, all of that is diametrically opposed to our 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; nor are other parts of that philosophy necessarily Hobbesian, where Hobbes says something true.

**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.