WHAT MATTER MATTERS: BODY, SPIRIT, AND VITAL MOTION IN ANNE CONWAY'S METAPHYSICS

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ABSTRACT

We often view matter as inert stuff, lacking sensitivity or responsiveness, and seemingly "dead" in contrast to living organisms—for instance, consider the difference between a solid stone and a cat on the prowl. But should we? In my dissertation, entitled *What Matter Matters? Corporeality and Spirituality in Conway's Metaphysics*, I investigate the metaphysics and natural philosophy of Lady Anne Conway, the understudied seventeenth-century English female philosopher. In her *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (1690), Conway questions the common idea of matter. She critically engages with the philosophy of canonical thinkers such as Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Henry More. One popular belief among these philosophers is that lifeless matter and living spirit are two distinct elements, while the generation of various creatures is based on the interaction between the two elements. According to Conway, this way of understanding the world poses a significant conundrum: How can matter and spirit embrace each other if they are so different in nature? In response, she boldly argues that matter and spirit are just two ends of the same spectrum—"That every Body may be turned into a Spirit, and a Spirit into a Body" (*The Principles*, VII). The goal of my dissertation, therefore, is to give a comprehensive and interdisciplinary interpretation of the meaning of matter and spirit in Conway and locate this interpretation in its proper context. In particular, I allude to Henry More's natural philosophy and F.M. van Helmont's kabbalist, alchemical, and medical works, to clarify her theories of spirit and matter.

I argue that while Conway seeks to construct a unified world based on the convertible nature of matter and spirit, she also emphasizes the necessary distinctions between the two elements. When describing matter, Conway uses metaphorical terms like "gross," "dark," and "dense," while referring to spirit as "subtle," "tenuous," and "aethereal." In addressing these metaphors, I suggest that matter is construed as a privation, or a lack of the "default" spirit. The creatures, unlike God, who is motionless and transcends temporal-spatial dimensions, possess special spiritual features that make them both sensitive and active. To move and act, creatures must retain certain bodily properties, such as impenetrability and divisibility. Conway suggests that varying compositions of matter and spirit account for the diversity of species in the world. Transformation between two species is possible only through vital motion— a movement that occurs simultaneously in the matter and the spirit parts of a creature. By exploring these arguments, my dissertation aims to demystify certain of Conway's puzzling descriptions and claims in *The Principles*, making Conway's metaphysics more explicit and more accessible to contemporary readers, and contributing new perspectives to early modern philosophy.

For Nora Hanyang

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In everyday life, we frequently distinguish living from non-living entities. Yet where is the line between life and non-life? It is obvious that the person who is reading this passage is alive—just like a puppy begging for treats or a bunch of blossoming sunflowers. Thanks to modern sciences, especially physiology and biology, we have gained great insights into different life forms. Yet scientists still disagree on questions such as whether a virus is alive, or at which stage the embryo can be considered alive, or whether reanimated lung cells in a dead pig should be called alive. The conception of life is a conundrum not only for empirical sciences but for philosophy as well.

Looking back into the history of Western philosophy, there is a cornucopia of accounts aimed at decoding the nature of life. For example, according to Aristotle, for an object to be alive means that the object is ensouled. Different kinds of souls take charge of the generation of a specific life form, the maintenance of the body, and the preservation of the species. The soul makes the functions of life possible, in contrast to merely dead things. When it comes to the seventeenth century, the Aristotelian conception of life and the faculties of the soul face considerable challenges. Mechanistic philosophers like Hobbes attempt to explain all phenomena in terms of mechanical or local motion alone. Descartes, though preserving the substance of the soul as mind, reduces other faculties to the substance of the body. Vegetation and perception, for instance, can be thoroughly explained through mechanistic laws. One consequence of this framework is that only rational animals like human beings qualify as legitimate life

forms; animals become automata, or organized machines. However, it may seem counterintuitive to think of plants or animals as non-living. At the time, some philosophers, such as the Cambridge Platonists, resisted the idea of mechanizing the traditional functions of the soul. They argue that vegetation, perception, and the like are unique life functions, distinct from the mechanical collisions of billiard balls. These criteria allow plants, animals, and even inorganic things to be considered alive. The phenomena of life cannot be simply reduced to mechanistic laws or inert materials.

Anne Finch, Viscountess Conway (1631-1679), also argues against mechanistic theories of life. What distinguishes Conway from the Cambridge Platonists, such as Henry More, is her monist metaphysical theory. Conway rejects any dichotomy in the substance of the created world; for her, there is only one substance of creatures. Since God cannot create anything contrary to his divine attributes, the created substance must also entail life and spirit. This means that even objects like computers and stones are, in some sense, alive. However, Conway never denies the existence of matter and body—contrary to her friend Francis Mercury van Helmont, who claims that matter is merely a condensation of spirits. She argues that all creatures are both spiritual and corporeal simultaneously. The question for us, then, is how to make sense of the view: What is spirit if it is also corporeal? And what is matter if it is alive yet cannot ultimately be reduced to spirit? The dissertation investigates these key questions in Conway's metaphysics.

The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy[1] is Conway's only published work. The book was first published posthumously in 1690 in Latin, translated

[1] Hereafter referred to as *The Principles*.

and edited from her manuscripts by F. M. van Helmont[2]. In order to examine Conway's concepts of body and spirit more closely, we need to begin with the context presented in her text. *The Principles* consists of nine chapters in total. Chapters One through Three focus entirely on the ontological status and attributes of God. Chapters Four and Five address the creation of God and the role of the mediator, Christ. Chapters Six to Nine explore the created world and its relationship to God and Christ.

Conway argues that the whole cosmos is composed of three substances, i.e., God, Christ[3] as the Middle Nature, and the created world:

> That there are only three kinds of being essentially distinct from each other, namely, God, who is supreme, Christ, the mediator, and creatures, who are lowest. (*P*, VI)[4]

The three substances exist in a hierarchical chain of being. God is the creator of the whole cosmos and the supreme being above other creatures, from whom every existence emanates. Christ, or the Middle Nature, is the first being created by God. Christ stands between God and all other created beings. The world of creatures occupies the bottom of

[2] Debates on the authorship of certain contents in the book are ongoing, especially on how much Francis Mercury van Helmont's ideas are added. For example, Sarah Hutton (2004) suggests that "there [will become] clear many further parallels between Anne Conway's *Principles* and Van Helmont's writings. However, judgements about influence and indebtedness are almost impossible..." (p. 210). Carol White (2008) also argues: "Although scholars acknowledge that it is difficult to access precisely how, and to what extent, van Helmont was also instrumental in transforming Conway's philosophical notes into *The Principles* several years after her death" (p. 7). In spite of the dispute, I assume the author is Conway and I look at the arguments as presented. If some inconsistencies do come up, I will note that later in the relevant part of my dissertation.

[3] For Conway, the term Christ is not fully designated to the historic Jesus Christ in the Christian narratives. Mercer (2019) distinguishes the metaphysical Christ from the historical Christ: "She uses the name 'Christ' to designate two different entities. In order to keep these clear, it is important to distinguish between the metaphysical Christ and the historic one. The former is the second substance and metaphysical conduit between God and creatures. The latter is a creature or mode of the third substance whose name is Jesus of Nazareth and whose birth, life and death are chronicled in the New Testament." (p. 60)

[4] When citing from *The Principles* hereafter (unless otherwise noted), I will use the abbreviation "*P*" to refer to the book and use Roman numbers to refer to the chapter, while the following digit Arabic number to refer to the section.

the hierarchy. It comprises many numerically distinct beings: humans, animals, plants, microbes, and so on. Many natural phenomena and laws apply exclusively to the created world. Simply put, Conway's metaphysical system is a tripartite structure. Although the mediating substance is both corporeal and spiritual, it does not fully align with the nature of the third substance, nor do the concepts of body and spirit of the created world fully apply to the Middle Nature either. For this reason, I would like to set aside further discussion of the Middle Nature and focus primarily on the created world.

In the world of creatures, despite its infinite variety of beings, Conway insists that there only exists one substance: "This creation is one entity or substance in respect to its nature or essence" (*P*, VIII.1); "that all things are one in virtue of their primary substance or essence" (*P*, VIII.3); "that they [body and spirit] are of one nature and substance" (*P*, VIII.4). The one substance, according to Conway, is not bare, but has certain attributes: "For God has created no bare being, which is only mere being and without attributes, which can be predicated of it." (*P*, VII. 3) The created substance has both the attribute of corporeality and the attribute of spirituality, the two of which differ only in degree: "The same thing may be said about spirits, which also have their own degrees of greater or lesser grossness and subtlety inasmuch as they have bodies. Nor is there any difference between body and spirit (...), except that body is the grosser part and the spirit the more subtle" (*P*, VII.3). If a being appears to be denser (like a stone compared to a clementine), that means it has a larger share of corporeality while still possessing some spirituality. Moreover, the two attributes are mutually convertible: "that body is nothing but fixed and condensed spirit, and spirit nothing but volatile body or body made subtle" (*P*, VIII.4);

and "spirit is able to become more or less corporeal in many degrees, although not to infinity" (*P*, VII.1).

There is no purely corporeal being in the cosmos, as Conway believes God cannot create something purely dead[5]. Nor is there a purely spiritual being existing in the created world, as only God is purely spiritual. All creatures are, to varying degrees, simultaneously corporeal and spiritual. The one substance thus forms a spectrum between two hypothetical endpoints: from nearly one-hundred-percent corporeal to nearly one-hundred-percent spiritual—that is, from dead matter to pure spirit. I will elaborate on this spectrum model in detail in later chapters. The attributes of corporeality and spirituality are essential and determinative for the substance of the created world. Recent scholars (e.g., Lascano 2013; Grey 2017; Mercer 2019; Borcherding 2019 & 2021) have focused mainly on Conway's remarks about spirit, based on her claim that "every Body is a certain Spirit or Life in its own Nature" (*P*, VII). However, they have not fully appreciated the extent to which Conway's discussion of matter can shed light on Conway's competence in establishing her own metaphysical theories.

The main goal of the dissertation is to clarify the nature of the created substance– something between dead matter and pure spirit, something that is simultaneously spiritual and corporeal. Despite Conway's use of puzzling descriptions, we can still understand her non-canonical conceptions of body and spirit. I also aim to untangle the notion of vital motion based on the unique ontological structure of the created substance. By justifying

[5] "It is equally true that he did not make any dead thing, for how can a dead thing come from him who is infinite life and love? Or, how can any creature receive so vile and diminished an essence from him (who is so infinitely generous and good) that it does not share any life or perception and is not able to aspire to the least degree of these for all eternity?" (*P*, VII.2).

her unique metaphysical claims, I highlight Conway's philosophical independence from both Henry More and F. M. van Helmont. The following chapters go as follows:

Chapter 2 examines Conway's conception of spirituality. Conway uses puzzling metaphorical references such as "subtle," "tenuous," and "swift" to describe spirits in the created world. In the chapter, I distinguish the spirituality of created beings from the spirituality of God and unpack the metaphorical references. Early scholarship (e.g., Merchant 1979; Popkin 1990; Hutton 2004) concedes that spirit is the fundamental element in the created world, yet offers little explanation of what spirit is in light of Conway's metaphors. First, I highlight the unique attributes of God. Since God the Creator is purely spiritual, he is beyond time and space and is immutable. God does not have direct contact with his creatures, nor does he communicate his eternity and immutability to them. I then distinguish the two fundamental features of creaturely spirit: sensitivity and activity. Sensitivity, along with perception and intelligence, is directly communicated by God. By contrast, activity or mutability originates from the Fall during Creation. The feature of activity distinguishes creaturely spirituality from divine spirituality and marks the ontological boundary between creatures and God. Nevertheless, creatures can still progress toward God since their activity resembles, in some way, God's creativity. Next, I turn to F. M. van Helmont, who holds similar cosmological views, to decode the metaphorical features of spirit. Van Helmont employs the same terms, such as subtlety, to define spirit in his theory of creation, often with more vivid examples. I argue that Conway's "subtle spirit" can be interpreted in a literal manner: as the finer, more active part in the composition of a created being.

Chapter 3 turns to the nature of corporeality in creatures, building on the discussion in Chapter 2. I present Conway's objections to the traditional conceptions of matter in her time and clarify her metaphors for corporeality. Conway argues that both mechanist philosophers (such as Hobbes) and anti-mechanist philosophers (such as Henry More) wrongly base their conceptions of matter on a false dichotomy between matter and spirit. For Conway, corporeality is not heterogeneous to spirituality; rather, the two attributes are mutually convertible. I then address Conway's puzzling descriptions of corporeality, terms like "gross," "dark," and "dense." *The Principles*, considered on its own, does not fully explain how to interpret them across its brief nine chapters. However, these concepts also appear in medical, religious, and scientific texts of the period—texts Conway likely knew. I again refer to van Helmont's texts as a scaffolding to interpret Conway's metaphorical terms. I argue that her idea of corporeality is construed as a privation, or a lack of the pure spirituality. Yet, unlike F.M. van Helmont, who holds a similar view, Conway does not reduce everything to spirit. She maintains the corporeal nature of the created world. Even though creatures can ascend closer to God as ascending on the chain of being, they can never come into direct contact with God, let alone become the same as God. The case of water provides an enlightening example to understand the mystery of corporeality in Conway's philosophy, as water is considered the most corporeal thing in the created world. Although van Helmont also presents similar demonstrations in the case of water, he insists that water is still spirit.

Chapter 4 addresses the problem of vital motion, a topic that has not received sufficient attention in the current scholarship. Conway suggests that "every Motion, proceeding from the proper Life and Will of the Creature, is vital; and this I call a Motion

of Life, which is not plainly Local and Mechanical as the other, but hath in it a Life" (*The Principles*, IX.9). I begin by clarifying the nature of vital motion: it is the change of a creature's spirituality to a higher degree. While Conway acknowledges the explanatory power of mechanical motion in natural phenomena, she introduces this new kind of motion to capture the creature's ultimate orientation toward perfection. Common examples of vital motion include sense perception and mental activity. Then I propose a quasi-parallel reading of the relationship between vital and mechanical motion. The two motions are inseparable, but Conway also implies that mechanical motion is instrumental to vital motion. The instrumentality can be understood in two ways: mechanical motion prepares for vital motion, and manifests the change produced by vital motion in the corporeal parts. Vital motion is superior and always plays the leading role when the two occur together. The asymmetrical relation between the two motions further applies to how each kind of motion is transmitted. While the transmission of vital motion can be done instantaneously in theory, as the transmission occurs in corporeal bodies, it must take a certain time in practice. Due to the inseparability between the two motions, mechanical motion is also transmitted when the transmission of vital motion occurs. The quasi-parallel reading offers further context for understanding Conway's conceptual pair: material extension and virtual extension. While the former refers to the physical dimension of all bodies, the latter only indicates a creature's capability of vital motion.

Last but not least, Conway's metaphysical notions carry moral implications, especially given how the ontological hierarchy of creation corresponds to a moral hierarchy. Conway firmly believes that every creature will ultimately become more spiritual and ascend the chain of being toward perfection—though always remaining

corporeal. The convertibility and transmutability of body and spirit are central to her metaphysical vision. Moreover, Conway emphasizes: “for when a Creature arrives at a Nobler Kind and degree of Life, then doth it receive the greater Power and Virtue to move it self, and transmit its vital Motions to the greatest distance.” (*P*, IX.9) To be more spiritual, in Conway’s terms, means to be more connected to other creatures and the cosmos as a whole. Recognizing the inherent interconnection between concepts such as body, spirit, life, motion, and perfection enables us to better appreciate Conway’s holistic worldview. Her metaphysics offers a profound vision of unity in diversity, one that also invites a deeper reflection on our relationship to nature and other earthly beings.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SPIRITUAL? CONWAY'S VERSION

I. Introduction

It might seem intuitive for readers of Conway to label her a spiritualist. In the 1970s, Merchant (1979) characterized Conway as a spiritualist, suggesting she was a precursor to Leibniz's monadology. Later, in the 1990s, Popkin (1990) and Loptson (1995) further elaborated on Conway's philosophy under the spiritualist label. This interpretation remains compelling to many readers of *The Principles*, especially given Conway's claim that every being under God's creation is, in some sense, spiritual. For Conway, beings in the created world are spiritual because the creator God is pure spirit.

Yet complications arise. God, as pure spirit, is incorporeal, immutable, and timeless. In contrast, all created beings exist in the sequence of time, are mutable, and–most importantly–are also corporeal or material. Conway repeatedly states that creatures are spiritual *and* corporeal, and these attributes are convertible. But what does she mean by "spirit" under such a framework? The label spiritualist offers little help in answering this question. Nor does it adequately clarify her broader metaphysical commitments.

Recent scholarship (e.g., Alexander 2019; Borcherding 2019a; Branscum 2023; Lascano 2023) has moved toward a vitalist reading of Conway's concept of spirit. The terms "vital" or "vitality" are often foregrounded in these interpretations[1],

[1] For example, Merchant (1979): "in much of her discussion of the essential spiritual vitality" (p. 262); McRobert (2000): "It is this perfectibility of Spirit that stands as Conway's expression of a vitalist principle. The characteristic mark of vitalism is the view that basic natural substances exhibit animated goal-oriented activity" (p. 24); Rusu (2021): "for Conway matter has to be vital, which is to say must have life, motion, and perception" (p. 544).

as Conway occasionally predicates "spirit" with "vital" in *The Principles*[2]. Yet these readings face their challenges of their own. Conway does not clearly explain why "life" should be equal to "spiritual." Moreover, the label "vitalism" tends to collapse the life-related attributes—such as sensation, perception, intelligence, affection, and action—into the singular idea of "life."[3] Such reductionism risks flattening the rich distinctions Conway draws.

So how should we understand "spirit" in Conway's metaphysical system? A closer reading of *The Principles* reveals two distinct senses of spirit: a) Spirit in God, as pure spirit; and b) spirits in creatures, which are corporeal or material at the same time. This raises a central question: What kind of spirituality do creatures possess, if it differs from God's pure spirituality? I argue that the spirituality in creatures can be conceived through two aspects–one inherited from God alone, while the other is more closely connected to the Fall. The two aspects serve different roles across Conway's texts. Without clarifying the concept of spirit, neither the label of spiritualism (or, on the other side, materialism) nor vitalism can adequately capture Conway's metaphysical stance within early modern philosophy, nor help us grasp her fundamental philosophical arguments.

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[2] For example, "it necessarily follows, that the Body, which this Vital Spirit forms..." (*P*, VI.7); "and so the Figures of all the other Members have their use, and very much conduce to the Vital Operations, which the Spirit performs in these Members" (*P*, IX.8); "and in this Spirit and Life is a Vital Action" (*P*, IX.9).

[3] I eschew from using the vitality or vital nature of spirit here is due to the ambiguous meanings of vitality or vitalism overall. For example, Merchant (1979) argues that vitalism "'affirm[s] the life of all things through a reduction of Cartesian dualism to the monistic unity of matter and spirit" (p. 255). Merchant's conception is adopted by Borcherding (2019, p. 2). Rozemond and Simmons (2023) suggest that "central to both of their [Conway and Cavendish] accounts is the conviction that any substance in nature is self-active or 'alive,' for which reason they may aptly be described as 'vitalists.'" (p. 107). Branscum (2023) also notes that "'vitalism' in Conway scholarship usually means that all things in creation are living" (p. 1). However, being alive or living still implies multiple things, including sensitivity, activity, or the potential life-giving force. The aspect of activity, as I argue later, must be construed as partially originated from the Fall, that is, being accompanied by corporeality. Hence, vitality in Conway entails both corporeality and spirituality.

In this chapter, I begin by examining God the Spirit, characterized as unique and insurmountable, which Conway identifies as the only incorporeal being. God does not communicate all his attributes to creatures, and this produces a lesser, mediated form of spirituality in the created world. I then turn to the creaturely spirit. I suggest that the creaturely spirituality consists of two key aspects: sensitivity and activity. Sensitivity reflects the part of spirituality inherited from God, while activity entails and is inseparable from corporeality—an outcome from the Fall. After clarifying this twofold structure of spirituality, I explore Conway's puzzling metaphors for spirit, such as light, subtle, and swift. The decoding of the metaphors further reveals the intertwinement of spirituality with corporeality. My interpretation ultimately aims to show how Conway's "spiritualist" language is compatible with a metaphysical framework in which corporeality remains indispensable.

II. Pure Spirit: God

The first three chapters of *The Principles* demonstrate various attributes of God and the relationship between God and his creatures (including the Middle Nature and all beings in the created world). Conway's conception of God is influenced by various streams of thought: (Neo-)Platonism[4], Kabbalism, and even Quakerism. Regarding the main thesis of the chapter, I focus more on the metaphysical features and ontological status of God, bracketing the theological debates and the religious implications behind Conway's conception of God.

[4] The reason I bracket "neo-" is that I agree with S. Hutton's (2020b) claim about Neoplatonism in Conway's time: "In this period, the modern distinction between Platonism and Neoplatonism did not obtain. Plotinus was regarded as the greatest interpreter of Plato" (p. 41). Nonetheless, I do not want readers to understand the seventeenth-century Platonist thought as purely dedicated to Plato or to explanations of Plato alone, as we understand today. Plotinus and Origen also have great influence on Conway. Thus, I would like to keep the "neo-" part, but in bracketed form.

At the beginning of *The Principles*, Conway claims that God is "a Spirit, Light, and Life" (*P*, I.1). Conway herself might not have arranged the order of the contents in the first chapter as we see it now[5]. However, it is still reasonable for us to believe the most essential properties of being God are spirit, light, and life, as Conway repeats these claims multiple times in *The Principles*. My interpretation of the conception of God in Conway's ontology is: first above everything else, God is Spirit. I will ascribe the term "Spirit" in capital S only to God hereafter, as the Spirit is not a spirit of any arbitrary kind, nor in changeable forms. Although God is simple and absolute one, his attributes can be conceived through various aspects. For instance, God the Spirit entails the attributes of wisdom, goodness, justness, mightiness, etc. God is the creator and the maker of everything else that exists.

Following Spirit, immutability, eternity, and indivisibility[6] are shown as another aspect of the significant attributes of God. These attributes are God-limited, that is, incommunicable to any of his creatures[7]. Since God is not divisible or mutable, God cannot be construed under any terms of spatiality[8]. God does not have

[5] There are a couple of discussions on the problem of editorship of *The Principles*, though without definite answers yet. Cf., Coudert (1996), Hutton (2004), Reid (2020), etc.

[6] "In God there is neither time nor change, nor composition, nor division of parts" (*P*, I.2).

[7] See "there are some Attributes of God, which are incommunicable to Creatures, among which is reckoned Immutability" (*P*, V.3); also "For if any Creature were of it self, and in its own Nature unchangeable, that Creature would be God, because Immutability is one of his incommunicable Attributes" (*P*, VI.1); also "For if any Creature were of it self, and in its own Nature unchangeable, that Creature would be God, because Immutability is one of his incommunicable Attributes" (*P*, VI.1); also "The Divine Attributes are commonly and rightly distinguished, into communicable, and incommunicable; the incommunicable are, that God is a Being, subsisting by himself, Independent, Unchangeable, absolutely Infinite, and most Perfect: The communicable are, that he is a Spirit, Life, and Light, that he is Good, Holy, Just, Wise, &c" (*P*, VII.2).

[8] Conway objects to the idea of imaginary space discussed by allegedly medieval scholars. Imaginary space, either not real—that is, does not exist—or exists only as one of God's creation products (*P*, III 7). Although Conway does not mention the alleged scholars by name, she could have learned the discussions of imaginary space from Henry More. In *Divine Dialogues*, More suggests that space is "so imaginary that it cannot be dis-imagined by human understanding" (*Divine Dialogues*, p.54). Thomas (2017) also notes Conway's connection to More regarding the conception of space: "A similar thesis

any form or is not subject to any corporeal depictions: "and so consequently no kind of form of figure whatsoever" (*P*, I.2). Hence, there are no changes or movements in God as well. Relatedly, based on Conway's view of time[9], which is the successive sequence of movements (of creatures), the dimension of time cannot be applied to such an immutable God. Rather, God is eternity[10], which transcends the conception of all the created beings, including intelligent human beings[11].

Conway also notes that God is not divided or separated from his created beings, as God is the creator and maker of all other creatures. Yet the way the creatures exist in temporal-spatial dimensions is incomprehensible to God. The creatures are not a part of God, for God is the substance of pure spirit alone, which is indivisible and does not have parts. Nor is God the immediate agent to endow the creatures with the attributes of life and goodness. Conway argues that Christ, or the Middle Nature[12], does the job of directly communicating to other creatures[13] (whether the job is done successfully remains to be another issue). Thus, God does not have to

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can be found in More, who holds that the (finite) material universe is a plenum, and appears to ground this in God's profundity" (pp. 1003-1004).

[9] "because Time is nothing else but the successive Motion or Operation *of Creatures*" (*P*, II.6, italics added).

[10] "Neither is this Infiniteness of Times equal to the Infiniteness of God's Eternity; because the Eternity of God himself, hath no Times in it; nothing therein can be said to be past, or to come, but the whole is always present: He is indeed in Times; but not comprehended of them" (*P*, II.5).

[11] "that Times from the Creation are Infinite, and without all Number, which no created Intellect can conceive" (*P*, II.1)

[12] "and this Medium [the Middle Nature] partakes of both Extreams [God and the creatures], and therefore is the most convenient and proper Medium; for it partakes of the one Extream, viz. Mutability, to wit, from Good to a greater degree or measure of Goodness, and of the other Extream, viz. that it is altogether unchangeable from Good into Evil; and such a Medium was necessarily required in the very Nature of Things; for otherwise there would remain a Chasm or Gap" (*P*, V.3).

[13] According to Conway, there are two kinds of mutability: 1) from good to evil and 2) from evil to good. Since God possesses the highest goodness, God will not move either from good to evil or from evil to good. Creatures possess both kinds of mutability. As the Middle Nature partakes of both humanity and divinity, it is only mutable from evil to good, serving as the middle point between God and creatures, see *P*, IV. 4&5.

be in immediate contact with the creatures in the same way as an artist making her artefact. Conway has drawn an extremely clear line between God and his creatures in the first three chapters. The way God exists, knows, or has ideas, wills, creates (i.e., acts) cannot be conceived in the same way as the creatures do. Similarly, God the Spirit should not be conceived in the same way as the spirits in creatures as well.

A conundrum would then arise from God's insurmountable distinctions from his creatures: How does God create creatures if the latter is so differentiated from the former? God the Spirit is immutable, while "such is the Nature of every Creature, that it is in Motion, or hath a certain Motion" (*P*, II.6). Even though Conway describes God's creation as the "continual action or operation", yet such action or operation is purely out of God's will, and "neither hath time or succession in it" (*P*, III.8). Then how does the immutable, eternal and transcendent God make mutable, ephemeral and divisible products?

Of course, creatures cannot have all the same properties as God, otherwise "they would be God himself" (*P*, V.3). But if God is not temporal or spatial, let alone corporeal, how does it come that God's creation results in space and time, and more noticeably corporeal beings? Conway does not give a clear answer in *The Principles*. According to Conway scholarship[14], Conway adopts a (neo-)Platonic emanation

[14] Evidence that Conway adopts such an account could be seen in her depictions of God's creation, which allude to the metaphor of "fountain" and "efflux" (*P*, II.4); as well as in her discussion of the Fall, see V.6 and VII.1. According to C. Mercer (2012): "Conway employs the Platonist doctrines articulated above with brilliant finesse. God, who is the supremely good source of everything, emanates the divine perfections to the world" (p.124). Nevertheless, S. Hutton (2020b) points out that while "Conway's hierarchized metaphysics, and her use of such concepts as emanation and participation are the hallmarks of Neoplatonism", "to concede these Platonist credentials does not dispose of the question whether the apparent Platonism of her philosophy is anything more than a surface resemblance" (pp. 41-42). Hutton adds, "Arguably the chief concern of her philosophy is not the nature of substance but the goodness of God. It is her metaphysical conception of goodness, more specifically, her conception of goodness or virtue as godlikeness, which links her with the Platonic tradition in general" (p.41). Another argument for Conway being one of the (neo-) Platonists can be found in "Defining 'Cambridge Platonism'", https://www.cambridge-platonism.divinity.cam.ac.uk/view/texts/normalised/about-the-cambridge-platonists/defining-cambridge-platonism, accessed 2024-09-25. There have not been many works examining the

account[15] for explicating the creature-only features, or "creaturality" (*P*, V). That is, how creatures are caused by God via certain mediation, and creatures have some features that do not show in God himself. For instance, she makes a parallel analogy of body and spirit to darkness and light: "but the Spirit is an Eye or Light beholding its own proper Image, and the Body is a Tenebrosity or Darkness receiving that Image" (*P*, VI.11). While body is darkness, spirit is light that is ultimately emanated from God, "as God is infinitely Light" (*P*, VII.1). And the kind of darkness of the creatures or corporeality "came from a certain fall" (*P*, VII). To be more specific, "yet all that grossness of visible Bodies came from *the Fall of Spirits from their First State*" (*P*, VII.1, italics added). Since Conway underscores the inseparability between light and darkness, we can indicate that the creation and the Fall are two aspects of a single process, rather than that the creation comes first and then the Fall in a more traditional Christian framework.

Although Conway does not provide further details on the details of the Fall of Spirits from God, she suggests that it is possible for the fallen spirits and bodies to transform back to "subtiler and stronger" spirits. Yet the spirit of God surely does not have any kind of transformability, since God is immutable. If there were a created spirit that could be connected back with God, then it was Christ the Middle Nature: "It is done by Jesus Christ, who is the true and proper Medium between both; for Christ and the Soul may be united without a Medium, by reason of that great Affinity

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relationship between (Neo-)Platonism and Conway. While this topic merits further investigation, for this chapter, I will proceed with the assumption that Conway adopts a (Neo-)Platonist view of creation.

[15] The creation as emanation account is used to explain God's causal relation to the world or the whole cosmos: "In general, the emanation thesis makes two claims: 1) that the universe proceeds from God eternally and 2) that God's causation is mediated so that lower things come from higher ones, not directly from God." (McGinnis, Jon and Rahim Acar, "Arabic and Islamic Philosophy of Religion", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/arabic-islamic-religion/>.)

and Similitude between them" (*P*, VIII.3). However, since the fallen spirits have much less affinity to God due to the Fall, they are in no way capable of transforming back into the pure Spirit in God. Even direct contact of the spirits in the created world with God is denied. That is how insurmountable the gap is between God the Spirit and the spirits in the created world.

Highlighting the outstanding superiority of God's spiritual attributes brings more puzzles in Conway's philosophy. First, what are the differences between the fallen spirits and God the Spirit, if the former is still called "spirit" after all? Second, how is it possible that the substance of the created world is spiritual and corporeal at the same time, given that corporeality is in opposition to God the Spirit? Third, what does it mean when Conway uses certain adjectives to refer to spirit (e.g., light, subtle, thin, etc.), and correspondingly, some other specific adjectives for body (e.g., darkness, gross, hard, etc.)? In order to figure out these puzzles, we need to have a closer look at the nature of the spirits in creatures first.

III. Sensitive vs. Active

In this section, I provide the key to the conception of creaturely spirituality. I argue that we can discern two major aspects—sensitivity and activity—that help us clarify the connotations of the term "spirituality" in *The Principles*. The differentiation between sensitivity and activity in creatures is conducive to understanding how creaturely spirituality is distinct from, yet still communicated from, Godly spirituality. As shown in the last section, the spirituality of God necessarily entails immutability, while creaturely spirit is remarkable for its change or movement. The most salient distinction between Godly spirit and creaturely spirit lies in mutability. Nevertheless, God communicates his spiritual attributes to the created

world so that the spirits of the creatures come into existence. How is it possible that creaturely spirit appears differently from God despite their ultimate origin in God? Although we need to tie the two aspects together in creaturely spirituality, it is activity that underscores the specific "creaturality," which is deeply entwined with corporeality coming from the Fall in Creation.

When it comes to defining what spirit is, there are usually certain properties a spirit or a spiritual part essentially possesses. In turn, the appearance of those properties helps mark the being of the spirit. The characteristic properties can be categorized under the term "spirituality." While the vitalist view that treats spirit as life and vitality in general is not essentially wrong, it cannot provide a satisfying answer to the significant question: Why is creaturely spirit creaturely, instead of being as divine as the Creator? Under Conway's contexts, the characteristics of spirit in God and those in creatures are not exactly the same.

I argue that life is a more fundamental feature, of which sensitivity and activity are signs and expressions. Many of the divine attributes—e.g., wisdom, justice, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence—all come together with the "Spirit, Light, and Life" (*P*, I.1). When God communicates his attributes to the creatures[16], the attribute of life always comes first logically. Other features, such as perception, intelligence, and love, also follow life as part of a package deal. The package deal is communicated to the creatures all at once during Creation. The vitality is not about clustering all life-related features together; rather, it emphasizes the attribute of life along with all other sensitive properties *within* creaturely spirituality. The aspect of sensitivity within the spirituality of the created world

[16] "And seeing the Goodness of God is *a living Goodness*, which hath Life, Power, Love, and Knowledge in it, which he communicates to his Creatures" (*P*, VII. 2, italics added).

directly corresponds to Godly spirituality, while the aspect of activity is not straightforwardly shown in God the Spirit. Hence, we cannot simply reduce sensitivity (and together with activity) to the overall term "life" or "vitality."

According to Conway, the term "life" in general includes being spiritual, sensitive, perceptive, intelligent, and virtuous at the same time: "Spirit, or Life, and Light, under which I comprehend a capacity of all kind of Feeling, Sense, and Knowledge, Love, Joy, and Fruition, and all kind of Power and Virtue, which the noblest Creatures have or can have" (*P*, IX.6). Then isn't it self-evident that being spiritual is equivalent to being alive and sensitive altogether, just as the standard vitalist view indicates? The problem lies exactly here: the reduction of spirituality or sensitivity to life is awry. Although Conway frequently mentions "life" alongside spirit and senses, the meaning of life or being alive *per se* does not necessarily entail the sensitive and cognitive functions as we usually understand them today. In *The Principles*, having life or being alive is a default setting—anything in the created world is alive, as we are all created by God. However, trying to find an accurate definition of life is complicated in both philosophical and scientific discussions: Does life mean being conscious, being animated, or being responsive to stimuli, or having metabolism through exchanging energy with the environment[17]? Conway has not offered a textbook definition of life. However, the lack of a clear definition of life does not impact our understanding of the characteristics of spirituality. Instead of

[17] For example, in *Britannica*, the biological definition of life is shown as "living matter and, as such, matter that shows certain attributes that include responsiveness, growth, metabolism, energy transformation, and reproduction" (Margulis, L., Sagan,. Carl and Sagan,. Dorion (2024, September 3). life. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/science/life). The entry of "life" in *Wikipedia* shows: "Life is a quality that distinguishes matter that has biological processes, such as signaling and self-sustaining processes, from matter that does not. It is defined descriptively by the capacity for homeostasis, organization, metabolism, growth, adaptation, response to stimuli, and reproduction" Wikipedia contributors. (2024, October 15). Life. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved 21:36, October 17, 2024, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Life&oldid=1251305140).

focusing on the exact meaning of life, we can temporarily consider "life" as the basic explanatory unit in Conway's cosmos for the purpose of this chapter. Since life is the default setting for every created being, I contend that the attribute of life at least assumes a minimal degree of spirituality in a creature—or a minimal similarity to God the Spirit[18] (but it still is a similarity, not complete opposition to God). No matter how infinitely small the degree of spirituality in a creature is, the creature is still alive.

Among all the attributes of goodness communicable from God, the attribute of life always comes first and foremost, followed by the attributes of senses and intelligence. In the world of creatures, Conway tends to use sensitive functions to represent the signs of life. Life is the more fundamental concept, which grounds and explains the existence of senses in creatures. For example, the creatures that occupy the lower positions in the hierarchy of being include stones, sands, and minerals. In our daily experience, stones and sands are typical examples of things that do *not appear to be* alive, let alone sensitive or actively responsive to the external environment. Nonetheless, the fact that they appear lifeless does not mean these creatures are, in effect, lifeless or insensitive. Conway argues that lower species possess fewer spiritual parts than their denser and darker bodily parts. Hence, their more corporeal appearance may obstruct our ability to recognize the spiritual parts within these creatures. As Conway notes that:

> in all hard Bodies, as in Stones, whether common or precious; and so also in Metals, Herbs, Trees, and Animals; yea, in all Humane Bodies, *there don't only exist many Spirits* (*which are as it were imprisoned in those gross Bodies*, and united with them, and therefore cannot flow forth, or fly out into other Bodies, until they have passed Death or Dissolution) (*P*, VIII.5, italics added)

[18] What does a minimal similarity with God look like? Corporeality. I will say more in the next chapter.

Stones and metals are perceptive, intelligent, and capable of love, even if this is not self-evident to human eyes. A stone is perceptive in that it can let go of its own spiritual parts to other creatures[19]: "also many other very subtile Spirits, which continually flow from them, and which by reason of their subtilty, the hardness of the Body (in which they lay hid) cannot detain" (*P*, VIII.5). A stone can further improve itself, developing thoughts of its own and loving other creatures if its inner spiritual parts continue to wear and divide—allowing the spiritual parts to participate more in exchanges with other creatures:

> for although these [spirits] are detained therein, yet they are not idle in their Prison, but their Bodies are as it were Shops for them to Work out those subtiler Spirits, which afterwards flow out in colours, sounds, odours, tastes, and divers other Powers and Vertues; whence the gross Body, and the Spirits therein contained, are as it were the Mother of those subtiler Spirits, who take the place of Children; for Nature still works to a farther perfection of subtilty and spirituality; even as this is the most natural Property of all Motion and Operation: For all Motion wears and divides, and so renders a Thing subtile and spiritual. (*P*, VIII.5)

To translate the wearing down and division of spiritual parts into modern terms: when the spiritual parts within the stone become subtler, they become more explicit and exposed out of their dense bodily parts. Then the spirits of the stone will be better manifested in the corporeal parts, or they may exit more readily from the prison of the body. Thus, the spiritual parts would have greater abilities to perform sensitive features. Since the spiritual parts in the original stone are so few and heavily obstructed by the outer corporeal parts, the spirits inside cannot exhibit their sensitive

[19] When Conway explains how the perception works in the human case, she shows the example of eye sight: "as the Eye receives the Light into it self, from the Object which it seeth from without; so also it sends the same Light to the Object" (*P*, IX.9). The mechanism of visual perception also falls in the exchange of different parts between the object and the recipient. We can infer that other perceptions would function the same way, only in exchanging different parts via different sensory panels. Lascano (2023) offers a detailed account by pointing out that the parts being exchanged are "images": "While some of these images might be pictorial, namely, those from sight, others will have shapes and forms associated with other sensory faculties (taste, touch, sound, smell)" (p. 127).

functions, such as intelligence and love, beyond the confines of their bodily parts. Therefore, creatures like stones are not merely potentially intelligent; they *are* intelligent, just unable to present their sensitive functions to other creatures (like us) due to their heavy corporeal blockage[20].

The aspect of sensitivity plays an important role in identifying the major signs of spirituality in the created world. But that is not the whole picture of creaturely spirituality. Creatures being spiritual does not only mean being alive and sensitive; it also entails the capability of moving and changing, often in a swift and agile manner. The activity of creatures always involves the corporeal body in motion. Since God is immutable and immutability cannot be communicated to creatures, the mutability of creaturely spirits could not have come directly from God himself. Instead, creaturely spirits obtain mutability through the Fall, along with corporeality, time and space, extension, darkness, and all the relevant attributes that are opposed to God's good nature.

In order to understand the aspect of activity, it helps to examine the kinds of activities that Conway ascribes to spirits or the spiritual parts in creatures. When Conway first introduces creaturely spirits, she demonstrates their ability to penetrate: "As to those Creatures which are Spirits, and can penetrate each other... for in this case those Spirits are more Subtile and Aethereal, which penetrate the Gross and more Corporeal" (*P*, III.5). Only those spirits which are subtler and tinier can penetrate through the grosser and more "matter-ish" parts. The penetration here does not mean co-location as in a Morean sense, which rather implies an incorporeal spirit within a

[20] The degree of spirituality also corresponds to the degree of moral goodness—more spiritual, more intelligent, and more virtuous. A creature of more moral goodness suggests its closer position to God, and thus a superior species: "for when a Creature arrives at a Nobler Kind and degree of Life, then doth it receive the greater Power and Virtue to move it self" (*P*, IX.9).

corporeal body. It is like a knife cutting through the cheese, that is, the subtler parts squeezing their way through grosser parts[21]. The subtlety and tenuity of creaturely spirits are the enabling conditions for the penetrating action. Once certain spiritual parts become subtle enough—that is, no longer hindered by the denser parts—spirits tend to penetrate and flow out of the body:

> And we may observe this departure of the subtiler and stronger Spirits, out of the harder and grosser parts of the Body, into the more soft and tenuious, in a certain Spirituous Liquor, which is congealed with great cold, where the stronger Spirits (forsaking the harder Parts which are outward, and chiefly exposed to the cold) do gather themselves into the middle Part of the Body... (*P*, VII.1)

After flowing out of one body, the subtle spiritual parts could penetrate another body. Some of the "stronger" spirits could even gather in the center of the other body[22]. In this case, the movements of spirits always require a certain bodily lodge.

The activity of creaturely spirits flowing in and out implies changes of their status or condition of life, including the death of one individual and the generation of a new one[23]. Conway argues that every single creature has a chief or dominant group of spirits that forms its identity[24]. If the dominant group of spirits becomes stronger and more notable, then this creature is more likely to ascend in the hierarchy of being: "by how much the more a Creature is a Spirit, (if at least wise it doth not any

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[21] The same meaning applies to the term "penetration" used hereafter, unless otherwise noted.

[22] A materialist like Hobbes would agree with such an account. Although Conway herself would never accept a materialist reading of her philosophy, the similarities can be seen as an objection to a purely spiritualist reading of her.

[23] Conway does not believe in the absolute death of the creatures. Instead, she suggests that the spirits of a dead individual decomposed and transferred and formed into a new individual according to the previous one's moral doing: "For Death is not the Annihilation of these Things; but a change from one kind and degree of Life to another" (*P*, VIII.7).

[24] "the Spirit of a Man, or Beast, is a certain innumerable multitude of Spirits united together in the said Body, which have their Order and Government so, that there is one Captain, or Chief Governor, another a Lieutenant, and another hath a certain kind of Government under him" (*P*, VI.11). There are certain discussions on the identity of creatures depending on the dominating spirits, e.g., Thomas (2018), Pugliese (2019), Sample (2022), and Lascano (2023).

otherwise degenerate) so much the nearer it approaches to God, who is the chiefest Spirit" (*P*, VII.1). Conversely, if the opposite occurs, the creature will descend to become an inferior species. The changes of the spiritual parts in creatures are also closely connected to the transmutation between different species. In contrast, God does not change, nor does He become better or worse. Therefore, the change in spiritual status is peculiar to creatures with corporeal manifestations.

Furthermore, the activity of creaturely spirits is sometimes presented as its love for the body: "the great Love and Desire that the Spirits or Souls have towards Bodies, and especially towards those with which they are united, and in which they have their Habitation" (*P*, VII.3). Spirits in love with certain bodies create a strong union between spirits and bodies, and then spirits would habitat in bodies. Since the spirit is the active principle while the body is the passive principle[25], the union is enacted by the activity of the spirit. Spirit is the one which moves body: "all swiftness of Motion is imputed to the Spirit in the moved Body" (*P*, VII.4). While the love or union between spirit and body is ultimately based on their homogeneity as one substance, the action of love is still accomplished through the performance of the more spiritual part.

The spirituality in the created world is distinct from the Godly spirit in that creaturely spirit is mutable, or quite active in change. Nonetheless, Conway also suggests that God is the ultimate power behind all the motions in creatures, despite God being immutable. God creates the world, just like preparing the blank canvas for the all the created beings to act and perform: "For both Creatures and Times (which are nothing else but successive Motions and Operations of Created Beings) had a

[25] "In every visible Creature there is a Body and a Spirit, or *Principium magis Activum*, & *magis Passivum*, or, more Active and more Passive Principle" (*P*, VI.11).

Beginning, which is God or the Eternal Will of God" (*P*, II.5). The moving power comes ultimately from God: "the moving Power be of God" (*P*, II.5). Although God is not the efficient cause of creaturely motion, his connection to motion in the created world is through intimate presence (together with the Middle Nature): "most strictly and in the highest degree intimately present in them all" (*P*, I.3); "such an intimate Presence in Creatures, which only agrees unto God and Christ as Creators, whose Prerogative it is to be intrinsecally present in Creatures" (*P*, VII.4). Conway depicts this relationship between God and creaturely motion as the center point of the wheel[26]. All creatures' motions and actions are fundamentally grounded in God. However, the enabling conditions of motion and action in creatures should be traced back to the Fall, where the spirits gain corporeality (or materiality) and situate themselves in the dimension of time and space.

In the created world, being more spiritual is equivalent to being more active: "so the Spirit captivated or detained in that grossness or crassitude is set at Liberty, and *made more Spiritual, and consequently more Active and Operative*" (*P*, VII.1, italics added). Spirituality in the creatures indicates their degree of activity and mutability in a positive way[27]. Motion, in turn, would make a creature more spiritual: "For all motion wears and divides, and so renders a thing subtle and spiritual" (*P*, VIII.5). A creature's ability to move more suggests that it is becoming more spiritual, with more subtle parts within its body.

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[26] Cf. "Suppose a great Circle or Wheel to be moved by a Centre, whereas the Centre always remains in one place, even as some do think the Sun after this manner to be moved about his Centre (by some Angel or Spirit remaining in the Centre) within the space of so many days. Now albeit the Centre moves the whole Wheel, and causes a great and continual Motion in the same; yet that always resteth, neither is it in the least moved" (*P*, III.8).

[27] Also see: "if it be granted, that the Soul is of one Nature and Substance with the Body, although it is many degrees more excellent in regard of Life and Spirituality, as also in swiftness of Motion, and Penetrability, and divers other Perfections" (*P*, VIII.2).

The activity of creatures, in one way, shows the essential distinction from the immutable God. Yet, in another way, the activity also resembles God's creativity. The spirits never stop moving or acting in the created world. The more spiritual parts within a creature represent a constantly moving status, while the corporeal part represents a rather static and inert status of the creature. The movement and action of spiritual parts are infinite in time[28]. But what about God's creation regarding the temporal dimension? Since Conway argues that God exists beyond time and space, she neither supports a continual creation view of God nor a one-time creation. Whatever God does or acts cannot be measured in terms of time. The creation of God is eternal, that is, infinite to the created world. Time and motion have a beginning, as they come into existence from the Creation[29]. After the beginning, or the overall existence of the created world, time is conceived as infinite[30] afterward. In this way, through infinite action and motion in time, creatures resemble God's creation in infinity in a parallel manner under two different realms. It makes sense that the activity and mutability of creaturely spirituality correspond to the creativity of God[31]––even though the former is temporary while the latter is eternal.

[28] Conway suggests that "yet nevertheless the Creatures, and that Will which created them, are so mutually present, and so immediately happen one after another; that nothing can be said to come in between" (*P*, II.1). The conception of time is synonymous to the succession of motion or activity" (*P*, III.5). Then if time is continuous and infinitely ongoing, the motion and activity of creatures are continuously ongoing.

[29] "Neither can we assign any other Beginning to Creatures, but God himself, and his Eternal Will, which is according to his Eternal Idea or Wisdom. Hence it follows by Natural Consequence, that Times from the Creation are Infinite, and without all Number" (*P*, II.1).

[30] "For both Creatures and Times (which are nothing else but successive Motions and Operations of Created Beings) had a Beginning, which is God or the Eternal Will of God. And why should it seem strange to any one that Times in their whole Collection or Universality, may be said to be Infinite, when the least part of Time that can be conceived, contains in it self a kind of Infinity?" (*P*, II.3)

[31] Lascano (2023) also notes: "God's continual creation and conservation is what sustains the power of motion in creatures" (p.63).

Last but not least, the activity or mutability of spirituality provides the key to understanding corporeality in Conway. Moving is changing, either in terms of changing places in space, or altering internal states or external appearances along the time axis. All these changes require bodily or corporeal bases to be accomplished, for pure spirit is perfect and does not need to change at all. Creaturely spirit, meanwhile, entails corporeality—spirit and body are two attributes of the same substance that comes from the Fall during Creation. Conway's monist ontological claims about the created world, such as the existence of one substance alone, the union of spirit and body, and the convertibility between spirit and body—stem from here: creaturely spirituality carries corporeality within itself. Without corporeality, the motion of a spirit would not make any sense. Because pure spirituality excludes motion and change. The activity aspect necessarily suggests the corporeal component of creaturely spirituality. Hence, instead of congregating all the life attributes together, I use the two aspects of spirituality to clarify the similarities and distinctions between creaturely spirit and God the Spirit.

To conclude, on the one hand, the connotations of sensitivity, which entail life, perception, intellect, and love, originate from God's own divine attributes. Sensitivity is projected as the divine spirituality in creatures and resembles more the thinking and mental features of the soul in Descartes[32]. On the other hand, the activity indicates another indispensable attribute of the creatures: corporeality. The two aspects are not mutually exclusive. They can overlap. For example, forming a perception involves the action and motion of several spiritual parts. Since one does not necessarily need any mentally related features to move, activity is more likely to

[32] Cf. Hatfield (2012): "The role of the soul is restricted to properly mental functions: to the conscious aspects of sensations and other mental operations; to intellectual acts; and to acts of volition (will). In effect, soul becomes mind (AT 7:161, 356)" (pp. 155-156).

capture why creaturely spirit is creaturely—matter in motion is the prerequisite for creaturely activity. That helps us understand why spirit and matter are always correlative, to which the standard vitalist view lacks a plausible solution.

IV. Subtle and Mutable

After unpacking the connotations of creaturely spirituality, we are more prepared to venture into Conway's abstruse text. In this section, I examine the puzzling metaphors attributed to the spirits of creatures such as subtlety, lightness, agility, and so on. I aim to explain how these metaphorical features can be understood, drawing on references from F.M. van Helmont.

People commonly acknowledge that every being in the created world is spiritual in Conway's metaphysics. From the perspective of creation theory in *The Principles*, there are two main reasons why every single creature should be spiritual (and the same time alive): 1. God, the creator, communicates certain of His attributes to His creatures, including the attribute of life; 2. God, the creator, cannot create something entirely opposed to Himself, that is, God cannot create purely dead bodies. Regarding reason 1, Conway illustrates multiple times that God gives all creatures "being, life, body, and whatsoever else of good they [creatures] have" (*P*, I.1). "For seeing God is infinitely Good, and communicates his Goodness infinite ways to his Creatures; so that there is no Creature which doth not receive something of his Goodness, and that very largely" (*P*, VII.2). Despite the immutability that is exclusive to God, other attributes of God the Spirit including "life, power, love and knowledge," are communicated to creatures. The essence of a created being must possess spiritual features such as life and knowledge as a product of God's creation. Reason 2 implies

that the creatures are likely to become more like God based on their essential spirituality inherited from the divine spirit:

> because God who is the First and Supreme Spirit is Infinite, and doth not nor cannot partake of the least Corporiety; whence such is the Nature of a Creature, unless it degenerates, that it always draws nearer and nearer unto God in likeness: But *because there is no Being, which is every way contrary to God*, (viz. there is no Being, which is infinitely and unchangeably Evil, as God is infinitely and unchangeably Good; nothing infinitely Dark, as God is infinitely Light; nor any thing infinitely a Body, having nothing of Spirit, as God is infinitely a Spirit, having nothing of Body (*P*, VII.1, italics added)

Though God is not in direct communication with his creatures, and the creatures are distinct from their Creator, it is impossible for anything that is completely opposite to God the Spirit to exist in this created world. Thus, the creatures do not consist of anything dead. In other words, every created being must be spiritual and *nothing less than* spiritual. Nevertheless, Conway does not deny the existence of body or corporeality in the created world either[33]. As shown in the previous section, the aspect of activity of creaturely spirituality presumes the involvement of corporeality.

In *The Principles*, Conway offers two major types of literal descriptions of creaturely spirit. First, God the Spirit communicates several attributes to the creatures: life, love, goodness, holiness, justice, and wisdom (*P*, VII.2)[34], the meanings of which are fairly straightforward. Second, there are also puzzling depictions of creaturely spirits. For example, "As to those Creatures which are Spirits, and can penetrate each other, in every created Spirit (...) for in this case those Spirits are more *Subtile and*

[33] Lascano (2023) also notes the distinctions between the nature of Godly spirit and that of creaturely spirit: "God is pure spirit, which is living, knowing, indivisible, infinite, and eternal. The properties of created spirit, according to Conway, are that it is living, perceptive and sensitive (or at least potentially perceptive and sensitive), extended, penetrable, and divisible" (p. 25). Her account focuses more on the model of priority monism to explain the distinctions.

[34] See also: "these following, Spirit, or Life, and Light, under which I comprehend a capacity of all kind of Feeling, Sense, and Knowledge, Love, Joy, and Fruition, and all kind of Power and Virtue" (*P*, IX.6).

Aethereal, which penetrate the Gross and more Corporeal" (*P*, III.5); "And we may observe this departure of the *subtiler and stronger* Spirits, out of the harder and grosser parts of the Body, into the *more soft and tenuious*, in a certain Spirituous Liquor, which is congealed with great cold, where the stronger Spirits (...) do gather themselves into the middle Part of the Body, which is always *subtile and thin*" (*P*, VII.1, italics added). When Conway describes the creaturely spirits on their own (instead of being compared with God or the Middle Nature), she often uses the more metaphorical terms, i.e., subtlety, aethereality, softness, tenuity, thinness, volatility, and so on. What does Conway really mean by attributing these "metaphorical" features[35] to the creaturely spirits?

To unravel the puzzling terms, I would like to reference F. M. van Helmont. The demonstrations of spirit in Helmontian natural philosophy are strikingly similar to Conway's illustrations. F. M. van Helmont is the son of the famous 17th-century physicist J. B. van Helmont. He becomes Conway's closest friend in the last years of her life. Van Helmont is Conway's physician, as well as the one who introduces her Jewish cabbalist thought[36]. It is unclear how deeply van Helmont is involved in the writing of *The Principles*[37]. However, it is worthwhile to examine van Helmont's works produced shortly after his residence at Ragley Hall with Conway. Despite

[35] In the whole book of *The Principles*, Conway also refers these more or less metaphorical features to spirit: "strong" (*P*, VI.11), signified as "air" (*P*, VII.4), "divisible", "a certain composition", "innumerablility" or "infiniteness", "impenetrability" (*P*, VII.4), "requires an organized body", performs "vital acts of the external senses" (*P*, VIII.1), "subtle and volatile" (*P*, VIII.4).

[36] See "these strands of Helmontian natural philosophy and cabbalism in Anne Conway's thought are intimately interconnected" (Hutton, 1996, p.230). See also: "This and other ideas in her treatise she [Conway] extracted from the works on the cabala included in the *Kabbala denudata*, such as the *Philosophia Kabbalistica dissertatio* and the *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae*. Spirit in the *Kabbala denudata* was the capacity to enlarge or contract by sending out light from a center" (Merchant, 1979, p. 260).

[37] In terms of how much involvement of van Helmont in *The Principles*, see Reid (2020): "Anne Conway and Her Circle on Monads".

certain different metaphysical doctrines[38], Conway and van Helmont share similar views in natural philosophy. Earlier scholarship notes the close association between Conway's metaphysics and van Helmont's: "On the basis of divine attributes, she [Conway] follows van Helmont and argues that God could not create anything completely contrary to himself" (Coudert, 1998, p. 202)[39]. Additionally, Hutton (1996) suggests that "the spiritualized universe conceived by Anne Conway bears striking similarities to van Helmont's" (p. 231)[40]. Even though recent scholarship has not paid sufficient attention to van Helmont, many of his descriptions of spirit, particularly through the use of metaphorical terms, overlap with or coincide with Conway's. Therefore, van Helmont's illustrations of spirit can help clarify the puzzling metaphors in Conway.

Conway frequently juxtaposes "spirit" with "subtle" together in *The Principles*. This is also true for van Helmont. In his first published book, *The Alphabet of Nature*[41], van Helmont presents metaphysical statements under the influence of cabbalism. There are certain paragraphs where he associates the term "spiritual" with the term "subtle." For instance: "Indeed, whatever is *more subtle and spiritual* in the air mostly penetrates through the diaphragm into the abdomen so that

[38] Van Helmont is a spiritualist monist, who believes everything can be reduced to spirit in the world. Body has a much less important ontological status than spirit in his cosmology.

[39] A further note from Coudert (1998): "Conway's Christology, like van Helmont's, is also highly unorthodox, for it combines kabbalistic and Neoplatonic ideas with the *logos* doctrine of Philo." (p. 203)

[40] A plot twist here: "The question remains open as to whether it was the influence of van Helmont which led Anne Conway to abandon the Cartesianism of her philosophical education, or whether Anne Conway influenced van Helmont's philosophy of spirit" (Hutton, 1996, p.242). No matter which direction the influence goes, it would still be helpful to read van Helmont's works as a cross-reference to *The Principles*.

[41] On the importance of how this book represents F. M. van Helmont's own thought: "In this work, van Helmont made a preliminary synthesis of his father's philosophy and ideas taken from the Jewish Kabblah. The product of this combination characterized van Helmont's thought from that time onwards. All his later writings are elaborations of the basic ideas which he first expressed here." (Coudert, 1998, p.59).

it can circulate throughout the entirely body" (pp. 69-71). Van Helmont's association between subtlety and spirit primarily stems from his metaphysical and religious beliefs. He explains the procedure of the Creation and natural philosophy based on the view of Platonist cabbalism. We can gain insights, especially from *Sketch of Christian Kabbalism* (1684), where van Helmont presents his arguments on Creation in detail in the form of dialogues between a Kabbalist and a Christian philosopher. The main thesis of his Creation theory focuses on how spirit and intelligence are communicated from God during the Fall. In explicating the life-related features from God to the creatures (via angels and other possible media), van Helmont often refers to the feature of subtlety. When God communicates light and spirit to the earth, divine spirits need to go through certain veins or vessels to be disseminated, which van Helmont calls canals[42]. Through the "subtle canals,"[43] the divine attributes can be infused into the creatures from the Middle Nature (or First Adam). Since the divine spirits are the purest, that is least coagulated or condensed[44], they only need to go

[42] The idea of God communicating or emanating his divine attributes, especially light and soul, to creatures can be traced back to Neoplatonic thoughts. What van Helmont is more acquainted with is perhaps Issac Luria's version of creation: "According to the complex mythology of the Lurianic Kabbalah, after God withdrew from himself, traces of light were left in the void. These traces were formed into the image of the primordial man, *Adam Kadmon*, who was thus the first manifested configuration of the divine. However, at this point a catastrophe occurred. Further divine lights burst forth from *Adam Kadmon*, but the "vessels" meant to contain them shattered" (Coudert, 1999, p. 120). Yet according to van Helmont's alchemical background, the "vessels" can be construed more literally. Van Helmont explicates how the subtle spirits would move and penetrate through the vessels just like the subtle air in the glass vessel in an alchemical experiment in *The Alphabet of Nature* (pp. 49-50).

[43] For example, "Neshamah, or Understanding: this is the grade that in man is the special intellect communicated by the universal and divine intellect, which in one moment is capable of understanding everything simultaneously and for ever, which in the First Adam is represented by the subtle canals" (*Sketch*, p. 69); "This is the third grade of divinity in the Gospels, that is, the most divine influx that communicates to inferior things, and through which they are drawn to cognition and love, that is, the union with the first cause. this original light was produced by the infinite through the subtle canals" (*Sketch*, p. 75).

[44] Cf., "The 'reification of the immaterial,' which Vickers takes as characteristic of Renaissance occultism, is thus a basic aspect of alchemical thought and one that influenced the alchemical and physical theories of Paracelsus and Jan Baptista van Helmont. Paracelsus describes the creation of the world as a series of chemical coagulations in which astral matter becomes increasingly material" (Coudert, 1999, p. 143). According to van Helmont, how various kinds of creatures come into being also depends on the materialization, or coagulations of aethereal spirits.

through the most subtle tunnel to reach the earth. Moreover, the spiritual characteristics borne by the Creator, or other divine features, are best presented as "subtle": "Indeed, the heavens were, in part, the most subtle material and were extended through the Worlds of Creation and formation..."[45] (*Sketch*, p. 87).

Why is spirit considered subtle in the first place, rather than being ascribed to other characteristics? According to van Helmont, since spirit is directly emanated from God, it should bear "the most subtle conception of all" (*Sketch*, p. 55). Spirit plays a significant role in conveying divinity to creatures: it is "the most divine influx that communicates to inferior things, and through which they are drawn to cognition and love, that is, the union with the first cause. This original light was produced by the infinite through the subtle canals" (*Sketch*, p.75). Hence, the spirits that reach the created world must be subtle enough to travel through such canals. Furthermore, van Helmont provides a complete account of how the created world is established on the emanated spirits. Beginning with the most subtle spirit from God, the earth and its various creatures come into existence. The spirits first act in the form of vortices, and then water[46] is formed: "therefore it follows that the same must be changed into a spiritual water, to the end it may pierce into all and every least part of the body" (*The Spirit of Diseases*, p.26). Later, fire emerges from the cohesion of water, and then "Stones, Metal, Minerals, etc." (*The Spirit of Diseases*, p.10). The descriptions of the subtle spirit seem more intelligible in van Helmont's account— spirit is presented in a

[45] See also: "As for the seven other spirits that are before the throne, they can be interpreted as the seven inferior numerations, which are here the spirits, that is, the most subtle conception of all (*Sketch*, p.55).

[46] I will give a detailed account of water as the most spiritual and subtle being on earth in van Helmont, compared with Conway's account of water being the most corporeal being on earth in the next chapter. It is not clear whether Conway had already formed her account of water before her acquaintance with van Helmon, as many of Van Helmont works were written after Conway's death. Yet Conway must have known about van Helmont's claims on water, especially regarding the elder van Helmont's experiment on water. For more details, we can refer to Coudert (1999)'s work (pp. 158-159).

literally more fine-grained, tenuous, and minuscule shape in space, just like the animal spirits and the fluids in the blood[47]. I argue that this conception of subtlety also applies to Conway's "subtle spirit." The metaphors of "thin", "tenuous", and "aethereal" in Conway are synonymous with the term "subtle," understood as existing to a very diminutive degree. Since Conway argues that the spirits are extended in the created world, their subtlety can be construed in a literal manner, meaning they are very tiny in the spatial dimension.

Van Helmont also depicts the characteristics of spirit as airy and swift, particularly regarding the action or movement of spirits. The spirits on earth move like air— subtle, light, swift, and efficient: "Of this spiritual being, the weather-glasses are made, which represent to us the changes of the weather and air. So that we may perceive even by the eye, what a great regiment there is in this spiritual being or essence of the air, which is indeed the vigour and strength of the Macrocosm" (*The Paradoxal Discourses*, p. 28). In interpreting the *Scriptures*—specifically the *Genesis*, which is more relevant to the creation theory, van Helmont suggests: "Let the light appear (or let there be light) that is, let the spirit of nature give a most strong motion to the most subtil matter"[48] (*A Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 20). God uses the subtle spirits to regulate the earthly bodies in the form of air: "From this it is easy to see *what a noble spirit God has implanted in the air* since it can so easily move and

[47] For example, when van Helmont explains how the spirits work to form the weather, including clouds and winds, thunder and lightning, he makes an analogy of the fluids in animal bodies: "Q. What doth this spiritual Being (which is called the spiritual vigour and strength of the Macrocosm work or effect in the Air? R. Even as in the Microcosm there be many continual revolutions of various sorts of water and blood, and that (according to what shall be shewed hereafter, when we shall treat concerning the Microcosm) the flesh and sinews take their original from the bones; as also several living humours and winds, salt and sulphurous essences, etc." (*The Paradoxal Discourse*, p. 28).

[48] The most subtle matter refers to the matter that comes most closely to spirit during God's Creation, according to van Helmont: "Indeed, the heavens were, in part, the most subtle material and were extended through the Worlds of Creation and formation, through that vortex" (*Sketch*, p. 87).

regulate all heavy bodies" (*The Alphabet of Nature*, p. 97, italics added). Moreover, when van Helmont explicates how the human body works, the spirits can function effectively due to their ample subtlety. For example, "this can be easily understood if one considers that the aforesaid semen, in which the essence of the entire human being is hidden, must v*anish and dissipate into a most subtle spirit* unless it is expelled in the act of generation" (*The Alphabet of Nature*, p. 85, italics added)[49].

In *The Principles*, we find corresponding arguments about spirits moving like air, in a swift and agile manner. Conway alludes to the Hebrew word "rúakh" to demonstrate the identity between spirits and air in certain aspects. She suggests such a spirit moves as swiftly as air: "For the Hebrew Word, רוח, which signifies a Spirit, signifies also Air; and because Air hath a very swift Motion, all swiftness of Motion is imputed to the Spirit in the moved Body" (*P*, VII.4). This description of airiness aligns with the feature of "aethereal" in the spirits. Conway also echoes van Helmont on the spirit being swift and agile when working on the bodies through the action of penetration: "although it [the soul] is many degrees more excellent in regard of Life and Spirituality, as also in swiftness of Motion, and Penetrability, and divers other Perfections" (*P*, VIII.2). Moreover, Conway argues that the Middle Nature possesses more spirituality than any other creatures according to the hierarchy of created beings. And in the Middle Nature there "exist the most swift and vehement Motions" (*P*, V.7), which also supports the positive correlation between spirituality and swiftness in motion.

[49] Another example of how the subtle spirit works in the air as it penetrates other bodies: "*whatever is more subtle and spiritual in the air* mostly penetrates through the diaphragm into the abdomen so that it can circulate throughout the entirely body" (*The Alphabet of Nature*, pp. 69/71, italics added). Similar accounts in *The Principles* can be found when Conway explains the process of digestion as making spirits more subtle.

In terms of the characterizations of spirits in natural philosophy, Conway shows certain similarities with van Helmont. However, she further endows the spirits of creatures with a moral dimension: "by how much the more a Creature is a Spirit, (if at least wise it doth not any otherwise degenerate) so much the nearer it approaches to God, who is the chiefest Spirit" (*P*, VII.1). Creaturely spirituality is also equivalent with moral goodness and virtue, marking each individual's position in the hierarchy of being, while the hierarchy is built in accordance to the distance towards God's goodness and intelligence.

In conclusion, Conway's metaphors for depicting spirits are not mysterious (though a bit esoteric). Rather, by investigating relevant Jewish and Christian cabbalist ideas, as well as (neo-) Platonic and Helmontian natural philosophy, these metaphors can be translated in a comprehensible way. We can construe that the features of being subtle, tenuous, and thin refer more to the physical dimensions of a creaturely spirit—tiny, fine-grained in space, and light in weight, just like air or closer to the animal spirits. Based on this, spirits move or act in a swift, strong, or agile manner because of their physical characteristics. The strong and agile movement of spirits is best shown when they cut through or move through other bodily parts or bodies. These outstanding features of creaturely spirits, in turn, highlight the distinction between creaturely spirituality and Godly spirituality. While the former is mutable (and quite active), the latter is immutable and transcends any motion-related context, that is, time and space. The mutability is conceptually grounded on corporeality, time, and space, which all come from the Fall. Again, the construal of creaturely spirituality is essentially connected to corporeality.

V. Conclusion

The term “spirit” plays an outstandingly important role in Conway’s philosophy. Therefore, we need to pay extra attention to what Conway really means when she uses “spirit” in different contexts. Since God and the creatures are completely two distinct substances, the nature of spirit in God and that in the creatures should also be treated distinctly.

To answer the first question brought at the end of the first section, that is, why the fallen spirits in the created world are still called “spirit” after all: The spirits of creatures, while entailing corporeality due to the Fall of divine spirit, are still the products of God’s creation and inherit certain attributes from God. Then regarding the second question, the connotations of creaturely spirituality mainly refer to the sensitivity and activity of creatures. The aspect of activity implies the necessary existence of corporeality in the created world. To the last question, the puzzling metaphors can be read in a more literal way. The spiritual parts of a creature are finer-grained in the physical dimension, are lighter in weight, and are more capable of moving freely.

Hence, creaturely spirituality is the more active principle of the substance of the created world, while corporeality serves as the more passive principle. The more spiritual parts are responsible for performing the motion and actions of a creature, forming its species identity, and indicating its corresponding position in the hierarchy of being. However, all these features of creaturely spirituality are only possible with the accompaniment of corporeality. In fact, we also need the features of corporeality to understand spirituality, which I will explain in the next chapter. The unbreakable interweaving between spirit and body highlights Conway’s uniqueness in her metaphysical construction.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CORPOREAL?

A PRIVATION ACCOUNT OF CONWAY'S CORPOREALITY

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that Conway's conception of spirituality in the created world is inherently tied to corporeality. The next question, then, naturally arises: what is corporeality? Since Conway rejects the idea of lifeless or soulless matter—as found in Descartes, Hobbes, or Henry More—her conception of corporeality is not as straightforward as commonly assumed. While she concedes that a body is extended, divisible, and impenetrable, Conway argues that these features are not exclusive to corporeality but are also true to spirituality. In other words, a being is corporeal insofar as it is hard, gross, and dark—not simply because it is extended (since a spirit, too, is extended). What distinguishes Conway's conception of corporeality from that of More and other canonical philosophers is her puzzling characterization of the term. Understanding these puzzling terms is key to grasping Conway's unique view of corporeality.

Earlier scholars such as Hutton (1997) and Clucas (2000) suggest that, in Conway, body is reducible to spirit, effectively eliminating any real distinction between corporeality and spirituality. More recent scholars have generally adopted a non-reductive reading while maintaining that Conway's body and spirit are essentially the same[1]. Lascano (2023) highlights the retentive nature and the repository function

[1] There have been quite some discussions on Conway's monism: While people can easily recognize the single existence of the substance in the created world, what kind of the substance effectually it remains contentious. Recent discussions on Conway's monism see Gordon-Roth (2018), Pugliese (2019), Thomas (2020), Branscum (2022), and Grey (2023).

of body by invoking the terms "dark" and "condensed," while also describing body as "merely dense, gross spirit" (p. 22)[2]. While this account helps clarify certain aspects of body, it risks reducing body to spirit. Lascano explicates the denseness and grossness too literally—as if body were made up of a bulk of spirits. By contrast, Borcherding (2021) argues that corporeality signifies the passivity, in contrast to the activity of spirituality[3]. This is a helpful insight that draws out a distinct feature of body rather than simply portraying it as a modified form of spirit. However, Borcherding stops short of affirming that body is itself spiritual or vital matter, and the details of how body fulfills a passive function remain ambiguous. Furthermore, both Lascano and Borcherding note that Conway's conception of corporeality includes extension, divisibility, and impenetrability, even as Conway herself is not satisfied with these attributes as sufficient to characterize corporeality. Hence, I aim to determine what exactly makes Conway's body corporeal—what distinguishes it from more conventional understandings of body.

When corporeality or body is appears in *The Principles*, it is framed as something that cannot be attributed to God: "He hath no manner of Darkness, or corporeity in him, and so consequently no kind of Form of Figure whatsoever" (*P*, I.2). From this passage, we may infer that corporeality is synonymous to darkness, with form and figure included. So, body or corporeality at least denotes spatial extension. But what does it mean for corporeality to be darkness as well? Since similar characterizations of corporeality recur throughout her texts, it is worth closely

[2] Sample (2022) holds a similar view towards the nature of corporeality, see p. 55.

[3] See "Matter, she argues, properly understood is never a purely passive 'dead mass which lacks life and perception' (*P*, IX.2)" (p. 7); "it [the distinction between spirit and body] is between an incomplete notion of matter as merely passive extension - which Conway, alongside many materialists, rejects - and a notion of matter as essentially active and self-moving, which she - like them - affirms" (p. 8).

examining Conway's overall characterizations of corporeality. In addition to "dark," she uses words such as hard, gross[4], tenebrous, dark[5], coarse, fixed, condensed[6], figurable, impenetrable, divisible, mobile[7] to associate with corporeality.

I argue that these characterizations of corporeality can be categorized into two subsets: the literal and the puzzling. The literal subset includes terms such as impenetrable, divisible, and figurable[8]. Their meanings are relatively straightforward. For canonical early modern philosophers such as Hobbes, Descartes, and More, body is something that occupies a place and extends in space[9]. Since two bodies cannot co-locate in the same place, body is also impenetrable[10]. These features—impenetrability and divisibility, as well as the capability of being moved[11]—constitute a standard conception of body, which Conway acknowledges.

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[4] "so that here is a twofold grossness and hardness of Bodies, the one palpable and visible to our External Senses; the other invisible and impalpable, which nevertheless is as gross as the other, yea, often grosser and harder" (*P*, VII.1).

[5] "the Spirit is an Eye or Light beholding its own proper Image, and the Body is a Tenebrosity or Darkness receiving that Image" (*P*, VI.11).

[6] "a Body is nothing but a fixed and condensed Spirit, and a Spirit nothing but a subtile and volatile Body" (*P*, VIII.5).

[7] See "as touching the other Attributes of Matter, viz., Impenetrability, Figurability, and Mobility" (*P*, VII.2). Here by "mobility," Conway refers to the ability of being moved away from a body's original place. It does not necessarily entail self-motion as in Cavendish's sense. Since Conway does not mention mobility as one of the basic characteristics of corporeality elsewhere in *The Principles*, I leave the problem aside now. More will be discussed in the next chapter of vital motion.

[8] By figureability, Conway refers to shape or form of a being in space, which indicates divisibility of that being as the spatial dimension can always be further divided to infinity. For instance, "that Image is a real Being, it follows we have many Images in us, which cannot be all received in an Atom, but have need of their distinct Places in us, in their distinct Forms and Figures" (*P*, VII.4). Figure is synonymous with form, which suggests possessing certain spatial extension and occupying a location.

[9] For example, Hobbes suggests that "the word body, in the most general acceptation, signifieth that which filleth, or occupieth some certain room, or imagined place" (*Leviathan*, III.34.2).

[10] For example, More argues that a body is "a substance impenetrable and discerpible" (*The Immortality*, I.III.1).

[11] A classical definition of a body by Descartes: "by a body I understand whatever has a determinable shape and a definable location and can occupy a space in such a way as to exclude any other body; it can be perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste or smell, and can be moved in various ways, not by itself but by whatever else comes into contact with it" (*Meditations*, AT VIII.26).

The puzzling subset includes the terms not usually assigned to body or matter by other philosophers, such as tenebrous, dark, gross, coarse, fixed, and condensed, etc. In everyday life, we do not usually think of a body as dark or gross—for example, the fur of a ginger cat is soft and delicate. Terms like dark and tenebrous are counterintuitive as descriptions of body.

In this chapter, I offer a privation account of corporeality, illustrating how corporeality serves a passive function in contrast to spirit and how Conway applies this conception in her example of water. First, I refer to van Helmont to explicate the meanings of the puzzling terms. The meanings of these puzzling terms must be interpreted within Conway's ontological setup, that is, the three-tiered cosmos where God is the creator and the world is His creation. In the second section, I provide a privation-based reading of corporeality: creaturely corporeality presents an absence from God, the pure spirituality, not creaturely spirituality. By "incomplete privation," I refer to a state that lacks full spiritual perfection without being entirely devoid of life or divine likeness. It is a metaphysical absence, not an ontological nullity. In the final section, I analyze Conway's arguments about water as a test case for translating these puzzling terms and applying the privation account. I also show that, although Conway's text bears similarities to van Helmont's, she is not derivative from him.

II. Motivate the Question

Overall, Conway acknowledges the common conceptions of corporeality held by her contemporary philosophers. She concedes that being corporeal involves "the other Attributes of Matter, viz., Impenetrability, Figurability, and Mobility" (*P*,

VII.2). Being corporeal—or being a body or material[12]—entails being impenetrable, figurable, and mobile. Conway does not object to these conceptions. But she is not fully satisfied with them either. For Conway, body is not simply dead matter extended in three-dimensional space. Rather, body is spiritual; yet not because certain spirits reside within the body, or because the body is composed of spirits. But because body shares the same nature with spirit: "That Spirit and Body are originally in their first Substance but one and the same thing" (*P*, IX.1).

Among the three substances in Conway's cosmos, only God lacks corporeality: "because God who is the First and Supreme Spirit is Infinite, and doth not nor cannot partake of the least Corporiety; whence such is the Nature of a Creature" (*P*, VII.1). When it comes to creatures, however, the tension between body and spirit arises:

> Let us examine the principal Attributes of Body, as distinct from a Spirit, according to their Opinion, who so much dispute, that Body and Spirit are so infinitely distant in Nature, that one can never become the other: The Attributes are these, That a Body is impenetrable of all other Bodies, so that the parts thereof cannot penetrate each other; but there is another Attribute of Body, viz. to be discerpible or divisible into parts. (*P*, VII.2)

Conway here alludes to Henry More by using the term "discerpible." Although she agrees with More that body is divisible and impenetrable, she does not endorse More's view that spirit is "infinitely distant," that is, completely different from body. Conway firmly rejects the essential dichotomy between body and spirit, a view also shared by philosophers such as Hobbes and Descartes. For her, although body and spirit are distant in degree, they are not distinct in kind. Not only is body impenetrable and divisible, but spirit is impenetrable and divisible at the same time. Divisibility and

[12] Since Conway usually uses body and matter interchangeably, I do not distinguish corporeality and materiality in the dissertation. Both the terms "body" and "matter" will be referred as corporeality hereafter.

impenetrability are the characteristics that both body and spirit share. Hence, neither divisibility nor impenetrability can exhaust the nature of body or distinguish it from spirit.

If extension, impenetrability, and divisibility are no longer exclusive to body (and likewise, sensibility and activity are no longer the distinguishing features for spirit), what makes body *body* in Conway's philosophy? The answer lies in the puzzling terms she employs:

> that a Spirit is capable of Corporiety, Secund um majus & minus, or more and less; although not infinitely, yet in many degrees. Hence it is, they could remain for many Ages, and have nothing of such a Corporeal Crassitude, as Things in this visible World have, such as are hard Stones, or Metals, or the Bodies of Men and Women: For certainly the Bodies of the worst Spirits have not such a Crassitude as any visible body, and yet all that grossness of visible Bodies came from the Fall of Spirits from their First State…(P, VII.1)

Conway uses crassitude, grossness, or hardness to denote the more corporeal beings or features in distinction from spirit in the created world. Importantly, these corporeal features are not original to spirituality; they arise from the Fall. Based on the spectrum view of the created substance, body and spirit represent the two opposite ends of the spectrum. While the end of spirit appears subtler and lighter, the end of body is darker and grosser. If the lighter and subtler end of spirit has had detailed treatment, the darker end, i.e., corporeality, deserves the same.

At first glance, to characterize a body as hard and gross may not seem odd. In everyday experience, bodies like stones and metals are indeed hard and fixed. However, many other beings considered corporeal do not exactly comply with these characteristics. For instance, how can I conceive the cat's fur to be hard and gross? Conway's puzzling terms of corporeality can be interpreted both literally and metaphorically. I suggest the metaphorical meanings of corporeality must be construed under certain metaphysical assumptions—just as we interpret the puzzling

terms of spirituality. Before turning directly to Conway's texts on corporeality, I will first refer to van Helmont—for van Helmont's arguments on body help clarify both the literal and metaphorical meanings of the puzzling terms she uses.

III. Reference to F. M. van Helmont

As I suggested in the previous chapter, F. M. van Helmont offers a similar—if not more detailed—account of the subtlety and agility of spirit, which greatly aids in interpreting Conway's metaphors. Here, I again refer to van Helmont's descriptions of body as supplementary to understanding Conway's conception of corporeality. Like Conway, van Helmont uses puzzling terms such as "dark" and "gross" to describe body and matter in the world of creatures. For example, "but only that very substance itself, which appearth under the form of matter, viz. in its blindness or darkness, to wit, in that its dull rest" (*A Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 8); "And this terrestrial being, or the earth, viz. matter, was a plainly unmoved mass, inasmuch as it was gross thick matter" (*A Cabbalistical Dialogue*, p. 19).

Van Helmont's use of the terms such as "dark" and "gross" can be read from two perspectives: first, he introduces the terms through a privation account; second, he also uses them in a more literal manner. Regarding the privation account, van Helmont draws on a (neo-) Platonic theory of emanation[13], whereby body and matter are conceived as privative from God and spirit. God is the supreme light, emitting radiance, i.e., spirits, into the world he created: "We also describe the nature of God symbolically, as an infinite light that completely fills all possible space" (*Sketch*, p.

[13] Cf., "The outlook of von Rosenroth and van Helmont agree in all essentials. Most importantly, they both rejected Cartesian dualism and the mechanical philosophy in favor of an animistic and monistic philosophy derived from a combination of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and the Kabbalah." (Coudert, 1996, p. 101).

33). Van Helmont maintains that everything in the universe ultimately consists of spirit, which originates from God the pure spirit alone: "but in and according to *the spirit, of which the body is made, and doth consist*, and into which, after it hath attained its perfection, it must with improvement and advance be again reduce" (*The Paradoxal Discourses*, p. 9; italics added)[14]. When the Fall occurs during God's creation, "the lowest spirits, those belonging to Kingdom, removed themselves from all actuality and descended into the state of potentiality, which is called material; that is, their radiation, which had extended into the spheres, ceased" (*Sketch*, p. 81). The material or matter is the form taken by fallen spirits that least resemble God's light and purity. While God is the purest and brightest light, the lowest spirits could only appear in a dark form. The "darkness" of body originates from the symbolic account of God's creation, i.e., emanations of the light. Darkness signifies the earthly spirits' status of being far removed from God. Hence, the darkness of body or matter is a metaphor under the privation account—being most privative from spirit and God's light.

On the other hand, van Helmont's conception of corporeality entails lifelessness and impenetrability as well. A body "when considered and looked upon as a dead and wholly lifeless thing, and as being an aggregate onely of corporeal parts, put together corporeally, may touch another body, but cannot be united with it" (ibid., p. 9). His account of body aligns with those of materialists and dualists. No matter what kind of creatures, their bodies are dead and simply a pile of aggregated parts. By denying the co-location of two bodies, he also admits to the impenetrability of corporeality.

[14] Note the fundamentally metaphysical claim is body being made of spirit, from which Conway distances herself.

Van Helmont also provides further support for a literal construal of the puzzling terms. The characteristics of grossness and hardness pertain to the generation of basic terrestrial elements. In *Sketch*, he presents a cabbalistic creation narrative which is designed to adapt to the traditional Aristotelian-Christian account. While some of the spirits[15] (luckily) remain closer to God, some of the spirits descend from God into the lowest class and become bodies. While the former kind are more subtle and live closer to God's place, i.e., the heavens, the latter are considered more "terrestrial and crass" (*Sketch*, p. 87) and are called earth. The spirits in the heavens can move and make the scattered lowest spirits gather in groups, forming more condensed bodies. Various earthly elements and species are produced out of such condensation of the "most subtle matter" (ibid.). The condensation of the fallen spirits makes the basic matter on the earth, which is crass and dense. Hardness, grossness, crassitude, or denseness all amount to our common-sensical experience of corporeal matter, such as stones, sands, and metals.

In van Helmont's demonstrations of the generative principles, we can see how the privative and the literal meanings of the puzzling terms are presented together. Van Helmont suggests that the warmth or heat from the sun and the coolness from the moon together bring forth the condensation of the lowest spirits to become bodies on the earth. Yet the primitive bodies are considered dead and unconscious. Then the warmth, under proper conditions, can further reduce firm bodies back into subtle spirits that can obtain more life or consciousness. New species are formed by adding more subtle spirits: "that by means of the swift motion of a common fire, so vast a quantity of combustible matter is reduced into a spiritual being, as into fire or heat;

[15] For example, *Adam Kadmon* the first born of God and creatures like angels.

and also that afterwards, this invisible being is brought to a body again" (*Two Hundred Queries*, p. 7). With the instillation of more subtle spirits, a body could transmute into a more advanced form. Yet the most primitive forms of bodies are still made of the spirits who are most removed from God, appearing gross and condensed. In this way, corporeality consists of privation from God while presenting physical grossness and hardness.

As Coudert (1996) notes, van Helmont's theory of transmutation could be traced back to the Renaissance era: "Paracelsus describes the creation of the world as a series of chemical coagulations in which astral matter becomes increasingly material" (p. 143). Since van Helmont largely inherits the alchemical tradition[16], his understanding of corporeal things features those materials with the lowest purities, that is, mostly mixed with non-spiritual or dead things. The corporeal bodies need to be broken down and distilled[17] to obtain a higher degree of spirituality. Such an alchemical world view affirms the hierarchical position of the fallen spirits on earth, descending from the most subtle, trivial, lightweight being to the aggregation of the grosser, harder, and chunkier being. In this way, while the term "darkness" is construed as standing opposite to the light of God, the grossness and crassness rather cohere with our average perceptions of what typical material beings, such as stones and sands, look like. However, to bring up van Helmont's corporeality is rather a scaffolding to help understand Conway's conception of corporeality. In the next part,

[16] Cf. Coudert (1996): "Von Rosenroth and van Helmont came to their reading of the Kabbalah with minds steeped in Renaissance Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and alchemy. They were syncretists in the best Renaissance tradition of Pico, Postel, and Reuchlin" (p. 145).

[17] For example, "the chemical operations which gave alchemists the greatest certainty they were on the right track were distillation and sublimation, or what alchemists themselves were more likely to call 'rarefaction,' 'exaltation,' and 'condensation.'" (Coudert, 1996, p. 142)

I will show Conway's similar yet still distinct conception of corporeality, under her own privation account.

IV. Conway's Conception of Corporeality

i. The (Incomplete) Privation Account of Corporeality

Conway knows about the latest scientific and philosophical theories on what matter or body is in the seventeenth century. Yet she rejects taking a similar stand with Descartes, Hobbes, or More on the conception of corporeality. Conway develops such a conception in *The Principles* even before her acquaintance with van Helmont[18]. The co-mentioning of corporeality and spirituality in Conway is not based on spirit being the only legitimate existence, as in van Helmont, but on the homogeneity between the two attributes. Nor does Conway deny the ontological position of body in the first place. If van Helmont's conception of corporeality is a standard privation account, Conway's account would rather be an incomplete privation account. Because the substance of the created world is not pure spirit alone––it is corporeal and spiritual simultaneously. Despite the similar meanings of the puzzling terms, Conway is not derivative from van Helmont. Her philosophical independence on the issue is best shown in her metaphysical setup, that is, the homogeneity between body and spirit.

What does it mean for corporeality to be essentially homogenous with spirituality? I propose an incomplete privation account[19]: corporeality is the privation of spirituality; yet there is no complete absence from spirituality in the created world.

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[18] Cf. Hutton (2012b).

[19] For the meaning of privation, I take the standard Aristotelian view: "For Aristotle, privation is an instance of opposition defined in terms of the absence or presence of a default property for a given subject" (Horn, Laurence R. and Heinrich Wansing, "Negation", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), forthcoming URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2025/entries/negation/).

Being privative of spirituality does not mean ontologically void of spirituality. As shown in the last section, there are two types of reading in the puzzling terms of corporeality—the literal one and the metaphysical one. The literal reading of corporeality is more intuitive, for instance, a piece of stone is representative of being a corporeal thing. But this reading cannot resolve certain problems, such as those corporeal beings that do not appear to be dark and hard. We need to appeal to the metaphorical reading instead. Besides, it is the metaphorical reading of corporeality that reveals the essential homogeneity with spirituality, which is against an overly literal reading of corporeality in Conway.

Regarding the (incomplete) privation account, I have three main arguments. First, darkness is a privative notion, which naturally invites the privation account. Second, we need a qualification on the privative account of corporeality, which helps circumvent a reductionist reading of Conway. Third, we can test the privation reading with other puzzling terms. I will show the arguments in the following sections.

ii. The Darkness of Corporeality

Conway first mentions body as something that God does not have. In the meantime, the term "body" is described as one of the attributes God creates for the creatures. These two framings of body constitute the major scenarios where corporeality is involved: body or matter is either shown as a negative to (pure) spirituality, or as a particular attribute of creatures. No matter in which scenario, the talk of corporeality is always accompanied by the contrast to spirituality. We can spot the parallel demonstrations on the puzzling features of corporeality between Conway and van Helmont: a (neo-)Platonic account of creation, including the Fall of spirit; the farthest element from God the pure spirituality being the end in the hierarchy of

being; the employment of the terms “dark,” “gross,” and “hard”[20]. In most cases, we can understand both the literal and the discursive meanings of the puzzling terms in Conway referring to van Helmont’s descriptions.

When Conway employs the terms “dark” and “gross,” she does not only mean the literal darkness and grossness as we can see in stones and sands. She is implying that a particular part or an individual presents more darkness and grossness than the others at the same time. So when Conway mentions hard stones[21], she also indicates that the stones possess hardness and grossness in a higher degree than other creatures. Similar to van Helmont, Conway’s illustrations on the order of the transmutation hierarchy begin from hard stones and then progress to more sentient beings: “as we see Water changed into Stones, Stones into Earth, and Earth into Trees, and Trees into Animals or Living Creatures” (*P*, V.6). According to van Helmont, the hard and lifeless bodies like minerals and metals represent what the lowest fallen spirits[22]. Besides, the darker appearance of the inferior spirits resembles their farther position away from the divine spirit, that is, light or God. So it is with Conway, the characteristics of darkness and grossness entail both the literal meaning of being dark and gross and the metaphorical meaning of being far away from God. And to say something being dark or gross does not need to satisfy both meanings at the same time. A more corporeal being does not necessarily appear in a darker color; yet such a being must have less goodness of God.

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[20] Conway does not seriously distinguish darkness from hardness or grossness as van Helmont does.

[21] “And here is to be noted, that in all hard Bodies, as in Stones, whether common or precious; and so also in Metals, Herbs, Trees, and Animals; yea, in all Humane Bodies, there don't only exist many Spirits (which are as it were imprisoned in those gross Bodies, and united with them, and therefore cannot flow forth, or fly out into other Bodies, until they have passed Death or Dissolution” (*P*, VIII.5).

[22] Van Helmont calls the fallen spirits “material”: “The lowest spirits, those belonging to Kingdom, removed themselves from all actuality and descended into the state of potentiality, which is called material” (*Sketch*, p. 81).

In short, Conway refers the metaphorical meaning of the terms "darkness" and "grossness" to lack of light and subtlety of spirituality. Since corporeality should be construed as derived from spirituality, corporeality suggests a lower degree of spirituality. Other than the literal grossness and denseness, Conway employs the terms "darkness" and "grossness" to indicate a lack of light and subtlety of spirituality. A more corporeal being does not have to be dark and hard in its outlook. The corporeal being is denser and grosser compared to a more spiritual being. In other words, the terms "dark," "hard," "gross," and "dense" only make sense when in the same context with something more spiritual—Being corporeal means being less like God. Hence, the attributes of corporeality are descriptions of a being that is further away from pure spirituality. How much absence of pure spirituality there is constitutes the degree of corporeality.

Yet unlike van Helmont, Conway suggests that being corporeal is in no way being dead in the created world. Death is completely opposite to God. Since everything ought to be ontologically dependent on God in one way or another, there are no dead things, or things that thoroughly lack life and senses:

> It is truly said of one that God made not Death, and it is as true, that he made no dead Thing: For how can a dead Thing depend of him, who is infinitely Life and Charity? Or how can any Creature receive so vile and diminutive an Essence from him, (who is so infinitely Liberal and Good,) that should partake nothing of Life or Knowledge, nor ever be able to aspire to it, no not in the least degree? (*P*, VII.2)

There is no absolutely dead thing under God. None of the metaphorical characteristics of corporeality should indicate a complete absence of life. Hence, it is not really accurate to say that corporeality is the opposite of spirituality. Since corporeality does not tolerate death, being corporeal must entail life to some degree. Consequently, "darkness" and "grossness" are not thoroughly void of life and senses either.

To conclude, the term "darkness" of corporeality signifies corporeal beings coming from the Fall; more importantly, the darkness indicates the absence of pure spirituality. Based on the privative nature of the characteristics of darkness (together with grossness) in Conway's demonstrations of corporeality, we can infer that corporeality can be conceived under a privation account as well. Corporeality is hence the privation of spirituality. Nevertheless, such privation will never reach one hundred percent: corporeality would never become the absolute absence of spirituality, as there is no absolute death. So I would rather call it an incomplete privation account.

iii. A Qualification on the Privation Account

Even for a privation account of the creaturely corporeality, especially on how the characteristics can be understood as reduced from those of spirituality, the attribute of corporeality itself cannot be simply reduced to spirituality. In other words, we cannot construe corporeality as the same thing as spirituality (even after certain changes and makeovers). The latter kind of conception rather suits van Helmont: matter is just the condensation of spirits. Matter is not different from spirit; rather, matter is a large number of spirits squeezing closely together. But this is not the case for Conway. Although the differentiation between the more corporeal and the more spiritual is trivial, corporeality and spirituality are still two different "attributes," instead of two different "modes." We cannot identify a privation of spirituality as a reduction to spirituality in Conway.

This is a crucial qualification on the privation reading of corporeality. Conway does not commit to the metaphysical stance where either the pure spirit or the dead matter is the determinate attribute of the created substance. Meanwhile, the creaturely spirit and the creaturely body do not stand completely opposed to each other as in a typical dualist narrative. Then, where does the distinction between corporeality and

spirituality come from? We need to go back to the starting point where spirituality and corporeality first come into existence. In the created world, spirituality ultimately stems from God, while corporeality comes from the Fall: "yet all that grossness of visible Bodies came from the Fall of Spirits from their First State" (*P*, VII.1). There is an absolute contrast between the Godly spirituality and the hypothetically pure corporeality—dead matter void of all life and sense. The opposition between body and spirit in the real world is rather conceptual or hypothetical. There is no absolute opposition between spirituality and corporeality within the creatures. According to Conway, spirituality cannot be transformed completely into dead matter, nor can corporeality be transformed into pure spirituality[23]. To be more accurate, when we say corporeality is absent from spirituality, the word "spirituality" does not refer to the creaturely spirituality, but the pure spirituality in God.

Some might object that, as body and spirit are convertible to each other, there are no real distinctions between the creaturely corporeality and the creaturely spirituality. While a certain part of a creature might change its degree of spirituality by breaking down itself and becoming more subtle, it does not mean that part completely changes into pure spirituality, or vice versa. The homogeneity of body and spirit signifies the single substance of the created world, which is used to distinguish the substance from the substance of God (and the Middle Nature). Besides, corporeality is essentially distinct from pure spirituality, not the creaturely spirituality. The creaturely spirituality is also absent from pure spirituality to some degree.

[23] Conway suggests that "a Spirit is capable of Corporiety, Secund um majus & minus, or more and less; although not infinitely, yet in many degrees" (*P*, VII.1). The denial of infinite transformation or capability of changing into corporeality shows the indispensable distinctions between pure spirituality and hypothetically absolute corporeality.

If we take the substance of the created world as a spectrum, we will find that the endpoints of the spectrum are essentially different. The endpoint of the spiritual direction is pure spirituality, while the point of the corporeal direction is death or total lack of life. But the two endpoints do not really exist on the spectrum, as there is neither pure spirit nor dead matter in the created world. They are hypothetical and can only be conceived within our theorizations. Perhaps we can call these two points the imagined ends; yet they are void of real existence. The two hypothetical endpoints signify the two distinguishable directions on the spectrum. The direction toward the spiritual endpoint implies more spirituality, as well as more subtlety, light, intelligence, and so on. Accordingly, the direction toward corporeal endpoint refers to more corporeality and more darkness, which can also be interpreted as further absent from spirituality. Body and spirit on the same spectrum are differentiated in terms of directions, but still continuous in essence. The spectrum does not work like a thermometer that merely tells quantitatively different readings. The position of a creature on the spectrum shows the distances from the two hypothetical endpoints, which manifests its ontological configuration. That is, whether the creature is closer to the Fall or God. The creature's degree of corporeality indicates how much the creature is absent from pure spirituality.

Corporeality, in most cases, is conceived regarding spirituality. And vice versa. The degree of corporeality or spirituality of a creature works as the index for the ontological configuration of that creature. When the index changes, we can either say, for example, the creature increases its degree of spirituality, or correspondingly, it reduces the degree of corporeality. When Conway uses the term "spirit" or "body," she refers to the more spiritual being and the more corporeal being, compared to other parts of the being or other individuals. In terms of the conversion from corporeality to

spirituality, which is sometimes illustrated as dissection or divarication of certain parts, it tells the change of degrees in being more spiritual[24]. And vice versa. Such changes can be viewed from either direction. Just like a point on the spectrum, when it moves closer to one end, then viewed from the other end, the point has moved farther away. For example, if we focus more on the degrees of corporeality of a piece of stone, which later turns into a pile of sand, then we can tell how much the stone moves away from the hypothetical corporeality endpoint. That is, how much the stone moves closer to the hypothetical spirituality endpoint, or how much the stone is less absent from the pure spirituality. In the meanwhile, how much the stone looks less dark and gross compared to its previous status. Conway is more likely to use the conversion to underscore the changeability or transformability of creatures, not to suggest that we can tell no difference between body and spirit.

Therefore, the privation of spirituality is rather manifested as being distant from God, the pure spirituality. The creaturely spirituality and corporeality are both absent from the pure spirituality. Yet corporeality and spirituality in the substance of the created world still refer to two distinct directions which help to locate the ontological status of a creature. Corporeality being privative of spirituality in effect signifies being further away from God. A spectrum view would help avoid misunderstandings, especially the idea of reducing Conway's corporeality to spirituality alone.

iv. The Other Puzzling Terms

By using the incomplete privation account, I can show the degree of corporeality in terms of how much distance the subject is from God the pure

[24] "For all Motion wears and divides, and so renders a Thing subtile and spiritual." (*P*, VIII.5) When a body part is divided into more minute forms, it becomes more spiritual.

spirituality. Let us try out the privation account using one of the examples in *The Principles*:

> ... here is a twofold grossness and hardness of Bodies, the one palpable and visible to our External Senses; the other invisible and impalpable, which nevertheless is as gross as the other, yea, often grosser and harder, which may be truly perceived by the Internal Senses... (*P*, VII.1)

The attribute of corporeality is beyond what we see or feel to be gross and hard. In terms of the internal senses, Conway refers to our reflective and rational abilities to know things. For instance, some beings might not seem gross and hard at first sight, while still possessing higher degrees of corporeality. The corporeal parts of these beings are positioned further away from God, even though they do not necessarily appear exactly like a "dead body" to our naked eyes. The higher degree of grossness and hardness in the instance should be conceived as carrying more absence of spirituality, i.e., privative of spirituality. The account also works on the straightforward terms characterizing corporeality. If a creature is condensed and impenetrable, the creature is less likely to have subtle spiritual parts within. With fewer spiritual parts, the creature is more removed from the pure spirituality.

The metaphorical characteristics of corporeality make more sense when viewed under the privation account: These characteristics pass down from the descriptions of spirituality. Beginning with God, we get to know what pure spirituality is—life, light, and sense. The creaturely spirituality is then shown in two aspects: sensitivity and activity. The former aspect, while inheriting the life, light, and sense from God, is manifested in subtlety and tenuity. The latter aspect is manifested in agility, swiftness, and the stronger capability of change. Then, the denotations of corporeality can be derived in this way: If we reduce the performance in each manifestation of the creaturely spirituality until the very end (yet the end is not

included), we will obtain the characteristics of corporeality correspondingly. (We should always keep in mind that the privation account of Conway's corporeality does not entail the complete absence of spirituality.)

In sum, the creaturely corporeality, while being homogenous with the creaturely spirituality, ultimately emerges from the incomplete privation or absence of the pure spirituality. While spirituality has a clearer source of explanation, i.e., God, corporeality does not. We can only read the degree of corporeality based on the distance of a being from the pure spirituality. The metaphorical characteristics, such as dark, tenebrous, dense, and gross, also come from the conceptual opposition to the pure spirituality (yet not completely void of spirituality). To be more accurate, the absence or the reduction of the pure spirituality. Furthermore, the (incomplete) privation account cuts right to the conundrum between the distinction and the convertibility of body and spirit. The real distinction is built upon the opposition between the two hypothetical ending points of the spectrum: the pure spirituality and the hypothetically dead corporeality. Spirituality and corporeality signify two different directions towards the two hypothetical ending points. The (incomplete) privation account of corporeality also provides a better resolution to Conway's puzzling terms, especially those that are not compliant with our average perceptions of body and spirit.

V. Water the Most Corporeal Thing

Both Conway and van Helmont endorse a privative account of corporeality. They also share many of the puzzling terms in describing body and matter. Moreover, they both use the case of water as the most privative being from spirituality. While water is a commonly seen and used element, we cannot take it for granted that the two

philosophers mention water on an arbitrary basis. Rather, water has a special metaphysical significance in their philosophical works. Based on these similarities and their close relationship, people might naturally raise the doubt whether Conway is derivative of van Helmont.

One of the leading Conway researchers, Hutton (1996), notes: "The doctrine that water is a primary substance whence other bodies evolve is a central Helmontian teaching. And Van Helmont also uses the specific example of the Swiss mountain in his *Divine Being and its Attributes*" (p. 240). Hutton (1997) further suggests: "...most notably the biological ideas associated with Helmontian medicine, according to which all things derive from the single primary element, water" (p. 228). Hutton's position implies that the metaphysical significance of water in Conway rather stems from F. M. van Helmont or from cabbalistic thought. Coudert (1998) backs up the implication by arguing that Conway's philosophy in general has a deep imprint from van Helmont: "It is carefully argued, scholastic in presentation and shows the imprint of kabbalistic thought at every turn" (p. 202); or even "Conway rephrases van Helmont's argument that matter is simply a term to describe spirit in a 'dull' or 'gross' state. Within the 'species' of creatures there is a continuum between spirit and matter" (p. 204). While the reading of Conway as a Helmontian helps decode certain puzzles in *The Principles*, it does not cover the whole truth. The case of water shows exactly Conway's independence from van Helmont, instead of copying van Helmont word by word. By examining their case of water as follows, I will show that Conway's philosophy is not derivative of van Helmont's.

i. Van Helmont's Case of Water

Water is the common element that appears in van Helmont's variations of texts: water is the most far-removed element from God and spirit, yet water plays a

significant role in the formation of the earth. Interestingly, the case of water also plays a fundamental role in Conway's conception of corporeality. There are certain similarities between the two philosophers in the case of water. However, I suggest that Conway is in no way following van Helmont word by word. It would be beneficial to take a close look at van Helmont's account first and then compare it with Conway's.

I mainly examine the works[25] of van Helmont dated around the 1680s[26], in which Van Helmont ascribes water as the first element that comes into existence from the fallen spirits. Despite his (neo-) Platonic account of creation, Van Helmont largely adopts a more traditional Aristotelian view in his cosmology. While the previous section shows how God creates the world, the following section focuses on van Helmont's account of the formation of the cosmos and the process of how various elements and species are generated. There are two major realms under God: the celestial and the terrestrial. While the former is the realm beyond the range of the moon, which includes all other stars and planets, the latter is under the moon, which is also called the sublunary world, or more familiarly, the earth where human beings, animals, and plants live.

According to van Helmont, the forming of the earth comes from the primitive material of water. The existence of all creatures is the manifestation of God, that is, from the emanation of the fallen spirits. The very first product is Adam Kadmon, working basically as the Middle Nature in Conway's work, in which

> truly, the light existed; that is, the natural spirit, which you call Sandalphon, gives motion to the most subtle intense matter... This light then illuminated *the supernal watery gas*, by which method the cone of

[25] *A Cabbalistic Dialogue* (1682), *Sketch of Christian Kabbalism* (1684), *Two Hundred Queries* (1684), *The Paradoxal Discourses* (1685), and *The Spirit of Diseases* (1694).

[26] After Conway's death and before the first publishing of *The Principles*.

> its shadow turned towards the opposite hemisphere, where the shards had been relegated (Genesis 1:3, and following). (*Sketch*, p. 89; italics added)

The watery gas from Adam Kadmon further forms a globe filled with water. The globe is placed in the middle of the celestial vortices. Following is that "the planets then were condensed from those waters that, left from the terrestrial globe, gathered around the extremities of the vortices" (*Sketch*, p. 89). The hydrogenized vortices (i.e., waters) on the globe keep on moving, instilled by the light from God via Adam. Then the waters gather on one side of the globe, leaving the other side dry. The dry part of the globe "formed natural seeds of vegetation that put forth metals and vegetables" (*Sketch*, p. 89). And from the middle of the globe rose the nature of the sun, which was formed by the most subtle matter. Under the illumination and the heat of the sun, some waters become condensed and change into harder particles. The opposition between the illumination of sunlight and the shadowy waters constitutes the continuing self-orbiting of the earth.

After the initial formation of the earth (together with the moon[27]), van Helmont affirms that "this watery material at the extremities of the vortices, *under the name of water*, gyrated above the heavens, with particles evidently *made dense* with a third of all elements" (*Sketch*, p. 89; italics added). From the condensation of the waters, the earth is "partly terrestrial and crass matter" (*Sketch*, p. 87). The terrestrial nature was once immobile and without any shape. Matter is formed based on such terrestrial nature, "but not given action" (*Sketch*, p. 87). The action or motion on the earth "was aroused in the natural spirits and in the aqueous particles in this central vortex [the center of the earth, which is the darkest and farthest away from the light]"

[27] Van Helmont attributes the moon to the feminine principle in correspondence to the masculine principle of the sun: the moon was "obtained from the previous part of the sun's governance, before the resolution of that cause, which you call a whole diminution" (*Sketch*, p. 89).

(*Sketch*, p. 87). Since earthly matter or body is directly produced out of the terrestrial nature of the earth, the condensed waters are the antecedent to matter and bodies. Van Helmont shows the idea of water being the origin, or the foundational matter of creatures in *The Spirit of Diseases* as well: "that to create signifies the bringing forth of something visible and tangible, from invisibles and spirituals, (viz. from the heavenly waters, for the waters are twofold, those above, and the other beneath the firmament, the upper being of a more spiritual nature than those upon earth)" (*The Spirit of Diseases*, p. 9). Hence, the water that forms the heavenly bodies should be the heavenly waters, while the water on the earth is responsible for the existence of other earthly creatures. The early creatures are generated out of the condensed waters like stones and sands[28]. Nonetheless, water does not create other creatures as an efficient cause, but rather serves as a material cause. The element of water on the earth is like the flour, which is the base material for all kinds of pastries after various baking procedures. The other ingredients, such as baking powder, cream, butter, and so on, all come from the transformations of this unique flour as well.

Van Helmont has detailed expositions on how the flour would be transformed into other ingredients and what different baking procedures would look like. Just to give a few examples here: "that the sun, as the father, generates and produceth an essential birth in the water, forasmuch as in the same, the heat of the sun becomes corporified, from whence afterwards stones, metals, trees, herbs and animals are brought forth" (*The Paradoxal Discourses*, p. 8). By receiving the heat of the sun, the water becomes more condensed or solidified, which can later be processed and shaped into other forms of creatures. He underscores that the birth of the earthly beings is not

[28] "Now we see that this lower part of the Great World, viz. the earth, is made up and doth consist of several waters, seas, and rivers, and of different sorts of sand, stones, and metals, etc." (*The Paradoxal Discourses*, p. 35).

possible without the union between the father and the mother. In this case, the heat and the water correspond to the father and the mother. Water provides the ground of generation, in a way like a mother conceiving and giving birth.

Besides, water is not only the base material, or the flour itself, but is the principle that complements the light or the spirit, or the actions of the maker as well. The principle can be manifested as in the pair of day and night, or the pair of male and female, or the pair of fire and water[29]. Van Helmont suggests that the male and female principles exist from the very first moment of creation. Only when both the female and male principles[30] are present would the generation of creatures begin:

> And for as much as the heavens and earth consist of these two essences the fiery and watery, it follows, that all creatures proceeding from the earth, must likewise consist of the same and when anything becomes defective in its fiery essence, so as that it cannot, as formerly, form and subdue the watery essence for the support of its body, then the body decays and dies. (*The Spirit of Diseases*, p. 16)

Let me take the baking example again, where the flour represents the watery and female essence, with the baker being the fiery and male essence: For the pastries to be completed, both the conditions of the flour and the abilities of the baker should be considered. The baker must adapt to the specific characteristics of the flour, such as the temperature, humidity, and strength, to ensure the successful production of the pastries. Meanwhile, the flour requires the hands of the baker to be formed into certain edible forms. That is how water, as well as its counterpart spirit, works both as the material and as the principle in generating various species.

[29] Cf. *The Spirit of Diseases*, pp. 13-16.

[30] It also corresponds closely to Conway's view of the male and the female principles shown at the end of Chapter VI. More discussions on the gendered principles can be found in Boyle (2006), Borcherding (2019b), and Lascano (2023).

Van Helmont's arguments on water being both the origin of other creatures and the generative principle do not come out of nowhere. He appeals to the digging and mining practice in his time to prove that water makes quicksand[31], which is the primary origin of the whole earth or visible bodies:

> We find everywhere in the world, in digging, whether it be vallies for springs, or in mountains for to get out metals, that through the same be never so high, yet at the bottom is always a quick-sand found, beyond which there is no digging any further; for this quick-sand drives with the water (...). Now this water with which the quick sand is mingled, and this sand which is continually made in the water, is the foundation of the whole earth, and of the highest and vastest mountains, as being that on which they rest and supported; and is indeed the very root *from whence the whole earth, all mountains, and other visible bodies do arise and have their origin... and from whence they likewise receive and enjoy their nourishment, as from their mother* [water]: all which may be made out visibly to the eye. (*The Paradoxal Discourses*, p. 36; italics added)

Since van Helmont is a natural philosopher and an alchemist proper, he does have much first-hand experience and decent knowledge of the compositions of minerals, metals, and all in all, the earth. It is natural for him to give these quasi-scientific[32] explanations as proof to defend the ontological role water plays.

In fact, the element of water has been a much-discussed topic in early modern natural philosophy (or natural science) and medical studies. Van Helmont does not construct the claims on the case of water solely by himself. One of the most significant influences for the young van Helmont might well be his father—Jan Baptiste van Helmont: "As his father's laboratory assistant, he may have observed the famous tree experiment, in which the elder van Helmont concluded that a tree's growth was due to water and nothing else. According to both father and son, water

[31] Conway's demonstrations of water also involve the entailment of hard bodies like sand and stones. But Conway does not really show the sources of such demonstrations.

[32] "scientific" in a modern sense.

was the matrix from which all existing things emerged, and it was a spiritual, not a physical matrix" (Coudert, 1996, p. 158). I basically agree with Coudert here—while she ascribes the term "matrix" to water, I would like to further analyze the significance of water in two aspects. Van Helmont explicates the emergence of minerals and metals from the water[33], both as the foundation and as the principle, as shown above. When it comes to the emergence of organic beings, "Francis Mercury thought he could prove that everything came from the basis of digestion, which he envisioned as a process in which material food was transformed into a spiritual, watery substance capable of nourishing and replenishing the body" (Coudert, 1996, p. 159). Since water comes from the fallen spirits and is made by the light and higher spirits, water is essentially spiritual. Thus, all the bodies on the earth, emerging from waters, are spiritual as well. Even though some bodies look hard and gross to us, they are the results of water being condensed and solidified.

With the experiments or experience with water producing or being the foundation of other creatures, van Helmont argues that water is the primordial element on the earth. Since the world is manifested as the emanation of God, or the fallen spirits, genealogically, water would be the first thing that the fallen spirits become (within the sublunary realm). Even though water is most privative of Godly spirituality, water is still spirit, while other creatures are all spirits just in different forms. In contrast, although Conway has parallel demonstrations on both the genealogical position of water and the characteristics of water, she holds completely

[33] One can easily relate to Thales' famous saying of "all things are from water and all things are resolved into water." While F. M. van Helmont does not directly quote Thales in his works, he must have been indirectly influenced by Thales. In his father—J. B. van Helmont's book *Ortus Medicinae*, which the young van Helmont helps to publish, the older van Helmont tries out the willow experiment first brough up by Nicholaus of Cusa in *Idiotae, dialogus IIII*. The willow experiment is set to prove that water is the fundamental element from which other elements are sprung. Nicolas's idea actually goes back to Thales. (See Egerton, 2004, pp. 208-209).

opposite views towards the nature of water. Water is the most corporeal, or least spiritual, thing for Conway.

ii. Conway's Case of Water

There are three main types of illustrations of water in *The Principles*. The first type is on the descriptions of the external appearances of water, that is, hard and gross. For example: "And out of these hard and small Bodies, visible Waters are for the most part composed" (*P*, VII.1). The second goes to the demonstrations of water being the origin of other species on the earth. Conway usually refers water as the beginning point of the evolution from inorganic matter to plants and then to animals: "as the Brutal nature hath its Original from Water" (*P*, VI.10). Connected to the second type, the third is about the role water plays in the transmutations between different species. That is to say, water has the potential to transform into other kinds of creatures: "so that all things which are bounded with Time, are subject unto Death and Corruption, or are changed into another *Species* of things, as we see Water changed into Stones, Stones into Earth, and Earth into Trees, and Trees into Animals or Living Creatures" (*P*, V.6). Besides, when Conway mentions the word "water," she can both mean the water in particular such as the cup of water we are drinking, or the water as the abstract element in general, which often implies the ontological status.

From the first and second types of illustrations on water, we can infer that the element of water is the most corporeal being on the earth. While the second type of illustration might still sound like van Helmont, there is no way we can make such an inference in van Helmont. Water is the beginning point of all other creatures, and water needs to be broken down or made more subtle so that more spiritual parts can be released into freedom from the corporeal barriers. However, Conway also

concedes that water does not even look very corporeal according to our daily experience:

> ... although they [waters] appear to us very soft, fluid, and tenuious, by reason of the great Plenty of certain other subtile Bodies which continually agitate, and move the said hard Particles; so that Water seems to our gross Senses to be one thing Homogeneal, Simple, and Uniform, although it consisteth of many Heterogeneous and Dissimilar or differing Parts, *more than many other Bodies*; and *many of these Parts are exceeding hard and stony*, whence proceeds Gravel, bubbling forth, and all *other little Sands and Stones, which have their Original and Birth from the Waters* springing from the bottom of the Earth...(*P*, VII.1, italics added)

Conway suggests that instead of being homogeneous and simple, water consists of many "exceedingly" hard bodies. Only out of water can these hard stones and gravels come into existence. It is not possible for the producers of hard stones to be softer than the products. Thus, the water is even harder than stones and sand. What is more, since all other species have their origins in water[34], which means the other creatures are direct or indirect products from the source of water as well. Then it is further proved that the water can only be the hardest species of being on this earth, i.e., the most corporeal.

Conway explicitly shows that water produces other creatures, even citing the same example from van Helmont: "as it is observed that from one Mountain in Helvetia two Kinds of Water flow, one whereof being drunken breeds the Stone, and the other is a proper remedy against it" (*P*, VII.1). However, Conway's independence appears in the ontological level. Since Conway does not deny the existence of corporeality in the created world, Conway's monism is way different from van Helmont's spiritualist monism. The chain of beings in the created world

[34] From Conway's argument that "From which Aethereal Substance, as well Angels as Men, have their Original, *quoad Spiritus,* or, *as to their Spirits;* as the Brutal nature hath its Original from Water" (*P*, VI.10), we can infer that from angels to the lower creatures all have their origins from water.

does not begin with a purely spiritual being. Contrarily, the created world is always corporeal from the beginning[35]. Hence, when Conway treats water as the original kind of creature on the earth[36], water cannot but be corporeal.

But water does not seem that corporeal, that is, literally hard and gross to human eyes. Even from the daily experience in Conway's time, water brings out the sand and stones in all water bodies; it is still baffling to equate the fluid water with the most corporeal thing. What about other candidates, such as minerals and metals, that seem to be more fit for the job? First, being most corporeal does not solely mean possessing physical hardness and grossness. Conway suggests that the hardness and grossness can be used allegorically: "how the Heart and Spirit of a Wicked Man may be said to be hard and stony; because indeed his Spirit hath in it a real hardness, such as is found in those little stony Particles of certain Waters" (*P*, VII.1). I argue that the hardness and grossness need to be understood under the privation account. That is to say, the hardness and grossness indicate how absent the being is from the pure spirit.

In addition, water appears in a special way as in *Genesis*: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (KJV, 1.2). Water is already there when God creates the world. Setting aside all the biblical discussions, Conway adapts this proposition by her metaphysical assumptions: Water should be lacking most of spirituality, or most privative from spirituality, regarding water's relation to God. Then the hardness and grossness are most unlike the characteristics of the pure spirituality. It coheres with the privation reading of corporeality. Moreover, Conway

[35] For example, Conway argues that "Creature is but one Essence or Substance, as to Nature or Essence, as is above demonstrated, so that it only differs secundum modos existendi; or, according to the manners of existence; among which one is Corporiety" (*P*, VII.1).

[36] "...which [sands and stones] have their Original and Birth from the Waters springing from the bottom of the Earth" (*P*, VII.1).

briefly mentions the distance of water from God from a moral perspective: "From which Aethereal Substance, as well Angels as Men, have their Original, *quoad Spiritus,* or, *as to their Spirits;* as the Brutal nature hath its Original from Water" (*P*, VI.10). What is further away from God possesses less sensitivity, intelligence, and goodness at the same time. A lack of these characteristics is considered brutal. When such brutal nature originates from water, water is again proved to be farthest away from the pure spirituality.

A possible objection could be that since water is the first thing that comes with God's creation, does that suggest that water is closest to God the Spirit? The short answer is no. Although God is the source of all creation, Conway distinguishes between what emanates directly from divine essence and what arises from the Fall within creation. Water belongs to the latter: not a direct act of divine will, but the outcome of spiritual degradation. Unlike van Helmont, she does not provide further arguments on how water is formed directly out of the fallen spirits. Instead, Conway simply takes for granted that water is already there when God creates the earth. Water is more likely to be the first product of the Fall, through which water obtains its highest degree of corporeality and becomes most privative of pure spirituality.
If water is the most privative being from pure spirituality, that also explains how water is capable of being the repertoire or the origin for other creatures. When Conway objects to the idea of absolute death, she holds that the ending of one individual is a transformation into another kind. The order of the creaturely transformation begins with water: "as we see Water changed into Stones, Stones into Earth, and Earth into Trees, and Trees into Animals or Living Creatures" (*P*, V.6). Since the transformation of an individual is essentially the change of its degree of

spirituality (or correspondingly corporeality), water possessing the highest degree of corporeality would possess the greatest potential of changing in different ways.

According to Conway, increasing the degree of spirituality is accomplished through breaking down and becoming more subtle of the relatively more corporeal part. Then water, with most corporeal parts, is also possible to go through more steps of breaking down to achieve various degrees of granularity. There can be more routes of elevating water into different degrees of spirituality. In short, to translate water as the origin of other creatures, water has the biggest potential of being transformed into all kinds of beings. Conway concedes that the potentiality of a creature effectively implies its transformability: "that is, that a Body may be turned into them; as when we say Wood is potentially Fire, that is, can be turned into Fire; Water is potentially Air, that is, may be changed into Air" (*P*, VIII.5). Even when the transformation does not start from water *per se*, water can always be the mediating step of transformation. For example, "that the *Species* of divers Things are changed, one into another, as Earth into Water, and Water into Air, and Air into Fire or Aether; and the contrary, as Fire into Air, and Air into Water, &c..." (*P*, VI.6).

Given that water is the being closest to the corporeal ending point of the spectrum, we can further understand Conway's other arguments. For example,

> how the Heart and Spirit of a Wicked Man may be said to be hard and stony; because indeed his Spirit hath in it a real hardness, such as is found in those little stony Particles of certain Waters; when on the contrary the Spirits of good Men are soft and tender. (*P*, VII.1)

Water, as the most corporeal thing, also corresponds to the lowest position in the moral hierarchy of creatures. By describing the hardness like water in a man, Conway indicates the evilness in a man—being most removed from God. After all, I would like to note one relatable understanding of water being most corporeal or most privative of spirituality: the versatility in the potentiality for transformations implies

the flexibility of water. Being fluid and transparent as per our average intuitions, water is flexible.

Hence, being most privative of the pure spirituality, or being most far away from God, water resembles more the contrary features of spirituality, namely, hardness and grossness, than any others. This explains why water constitutes the hard sands and stones as well. By owning the most corporeality, water has the greatest potential to be transformed into other kinds of creatures. In spite of the metaphorical meanings, water is indispensable in the composition of life, even in a literal manner. Conway's distinction from van Helmont in the case of water is shown by the different ontological status of water: while van Helmont's water is made of spirits, Conway's water is most privative of spirituality. We cannot reduce the conception of corporeality to spirituality, even when corporeality is an incomplete privative notion. Conway is not derivative of van Helmont—she always underscores the simultaneous corporeality and spirituality of creatures, not just spirit or dead matter alone existing in the world.

VI. Conclusion

Conway's conception of corporeality is special in that she is not satisfied with the common understandings of body or matter. Although Conway agrees with Henry More (and similarly Hobbes and Descartes) that body is extended, divisible, and impenetrable, yet these characteristics are not exclusive to body alone—so is the case with spirit. What truly distinguishes body from spirit are the puzzling terms: darkness, grossness, hardness, and so on. Nonetheless, corporeality in Conway is not immediately equivalent to being hard and gross. Instead, corporeality means a lack of the pure spirituality to a certain degree. The (incomplete) privation account offers

clues to understand the puzzling terms for corporeality. With the help and comparison with van Helmont, we can gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the metaphorical terms. Besides, the (incomplete) privation account does not cut down the essential homogeneity between spirituality and corporeality in the created world. Rather, it underlines the unbreakable connection between the two attributes within the same substance—the characteristics are mutually explicable, and convertible as they are rooted in the same substance. The close examination of the two attributes helps to clarify the substance of the created world as something more than absolute death and less than pure spirit.

The account further accommodates the perplexing case of water in *The Principles*, where water is labelled as the most corporeal being on earth. The case of water helps vividly distinguish Conway from van Helmont on their metaphysical stances. Van Helmont's metaphysical system might look almost identical to Conway's: an emanation account of creation from God, a hierarchical order of creatures based on the degrees of spirituality, and water as the foundation of other creatures. However, Conway embraces the corporeal attribute of the created world in the first place, while van Helmont is a spiritualist in a traditional senseConway's corporeality is not the same as the canonical conceptions of corporeality seen in her contemporaries, including Descartes, Hobbes, More, and Spinoza. To be corporeal, then, is to exist at a greater distance from divine spirituality: to be less subtle, less sensitive, and less active. Yet even the most corporeal being, for Conway, remains alive and transformable. Meanwhile, these characteristics of corporeality do roughly comply with our daily perceptions of what matter looks like. We will see more merits of the privation account of corporeality in connection to spirituality later when it comes to the motion problems in Conway.

CHAPTER 4

CONWAY'S VITAL MOTION AND ITS QUASI-PARALLEL RELATIONSHIP TO MECHANICAL MOTION

I. Introduction

As shown in the last two chapters, Conway argues that both spirituality and corporeality entail the characteristics of extension and impenetrability. Body and spirit are not contrary to each other, but both are required for any creaturely activities: "And thus Life and Figure are distinct, but not contrary Attributes of one and the same Substance, and Figure serves the Operations of Life" (*P*, IX.8). Accordingly, Conway suggests that there are two kinds of motion when it comes to explicate the activities: "Likewise, Local and Mechanical Motion (*i.e.*) the carrying of Body from place to place, is a Manner or Operation distinct from Action or Vital Operation" (*P*, IX.9). Readers of Conway may have the impression that vital motion is the counterpart to mechanical motion—while mechanical motion refers to the movement of body, vital motion is the movement of spirit. However, we cannot simply treat vital motion as another kind of mechanical motion working in spiritual parts, or as an occult quality behind life activities. Vital motion, with its relation to mechanical motion, offers another aspect through which to understand the substance of the created world being simultaneously spiritual and—although with some complications.

Although Conway does not introduce the notion of vital motion until the final part of the last chapter in *The Principles*, this does not diminish its importance. On the contrary, Conway's discussions of vital motion are highly suggestive and resonate with many of the key issues in her metaphysics. Vital motion indicates a specific way of movement or changes within spirituality in the created world, which cannot be

reduced to local or mechanical motion. The motion serves Conway's objection to the popular mechanistic worldviews of her time. Yet Conway also devotes much effort to reconciling the novel motion with the more familiar idea of mechanical motion. Hence, a key philosophical question is how Conway justifies this new kind of motion within her metaphysics, and how she makes its relationship with mechanical motion intelligible.

To motivate the central thesis of this chapter, I group the scholarly discussions of vital motion into three main topics: 1. the nature of vital motion; 2. the relationship between vital motion and mechanical motion; 3. the causal account of vital motion. For topic 1, Hutton (1997) describes vital motion as "internal motion" for all creatures: "This operates rather like a field of force, and achieves its effects by stimulating a response in other things" (p. 229). The internal motion account is also supported by Head (2022). Similarly, Sample (2023a, 2023b) characterizes vital motion as spontaneous or inner motion. McRobert (2000) explains that vital motion "substitutes the exertion of spiritual influences for contact between bodies" (p. 32), while noting its role in Conway's theory of transmutation. White (2008) reads vital motion as a movement that shows "the 'wisdom, goodness, and power' intrinsically present in creatures" (p. 57). While these accounts reveal certain dimensions of vital motion, a comprehensive analysis of its ontological nature within Conway's metaphysics is still lacking.

On topic 2, Lascano (2023) explicates the mechanism of how vital motion works as self-motion "in which creatures connect to other creatures and the way in which they change their moral and ontological status" together with mechanical motion (p. 61). Vaucanson (2021) highlights the distinct direction of vital motion: vital motion, as the operation of life, is "a force of life that strives towards perfection"

(p. 142), whereas mechanical motion does not go for perfection. Other accounts[1] simply affirm the distinction between vital and mechanical motion. But the details of the relationship between the two kinds of motion remain unclear—how the two motions can work together at the same time for a single change of a body[2]. Topic 3 is generally involved with Conway's theological arguments or her moral philosophy. For example, Broad (2018) argues for an occasionalist position in Conway, interpreting vital motion as a motion "when the soul moves the body" (p. 590). Borcherding (2019b) presents "vital action as the exercise of the spiritual force emanated by God and mediated through Christ that is intimately present in all creatures, and accounts for their ability to cognize and act" (p. 130). Costello (2023) holds a similar view, describing vital action as the emanation from God and Christ, who are immediately and intimately present in all creatures (p. 914). Schmaltz (2023) compares Conway's vital motion to other forms of vitalistic causation in early More and Cavendish. While topics 1 and 2 are more relevant to Conway's metaphysics proper, topic 3 often expands into the moral and ethical concerns: for instance, freedom and independence of creatures, moral responsibility, and theodicy in Conway's philosophy.

This chapter is an effort to bridge some of the gaps in current scholarship by developing a more precise account of Conway's vital motion. I focus on examining the distinct nature of vital motion and provide a more accurate interpretation of its relationship to mechanical motion. What remains underdeveloped in current literature is an account of how vital and mechanical motion function together in created

[1] See Boyle (2006) and Alexander (2019).

[2] Hereafter, I will use "body" to refer to an individual being in the created world; unless the notion of "body" is put together with "spirit"—then the notion means matter or material in contrast to spirit, soul, or mind.

beings—neither as symmetrical opposites nor as merely coexisting modes. In this chapter, I propose that their relationship is best described as quasi-parallel: that is, the two motions always occur together, but they differ fundamentally in nature and function. Vital motion originates from the spiritual nature of creatures and is directed toward divine perfection; mechanical motion, by contrast, indicates more generally the change of place or physical dimension. The term quasi-parallel captures both their inseparability and their asymmetry. This interpretive model not only illuminates Conway's metaphysics of the created substance but also provides a framework for understanding her vision of a hierarchical, unified cosmos in which life, body, and spirit operate in harmony.

Moreover, understanding the quasi-parallel relationship helps clarify how vital motion and mechanical motion differ in their ways of transmission. Although vital motion can be transmitted instantly in theory, due to its inseparability from mechanical motion, it still requires time. Meanwhile, mechanical motion is also capable of being transferred along with vital motion. Moreover, Conway's discussion of virtual extension with material extension illustrates another point of asymmetry.

II. The Nature of Vital Motion

i. A Distinct Kind of Motion

Conway argues that mere mechanical motion or mechanical laws are not enough to explain all life phenomena or organic functions: "But yet in Nature, and her Operations, they are far more than merely Mechanical; and the same is not a mere Organical Body, like a Clock, wherein there is not a vital Principle of Motion." (*P*, IX.2) This passage marks the first occasion where Conway introduces the notion of "vital motion." She later uses the exact phrase "vital motion" again: "for when a

Creature arrives at a Nobler Kind and degree of Life, then doth it receive the greater Power and Virtue to move it self, and transmit its vital Motions to the greatest distance." (*P*, IX.9) In addition to these cases, Conway also employs adjacent expressions, such as "vital action" (*actio vitalis*), "vital operations" (*operationes vitales*), or "can move vitally" (*movere vitaliter posse*). The relative infrequency and imprecision of her terminology, however, do not lessen the importance of vital motion within *The Principles*.

Conway refutes Cartesian and Hobbesian assumptions regarding the substantial difference between spirit and "dead matter." She denies the existence of dead matter and suggests that there is no substantial distinction between matter and spirit. Accordingly, the mechanical laws under Cartesian and Hobbesian philosophies—which presuppose lifeless matter—are inadequate for explaining life[3]. Therefore, Conway contends that the operations of "life and sense" should have a vital principle of motion (*P*, IX.2). In seeking to account properly for life and mental phenomena, Conway introduces an alternative kind of motion. This allows Conway to avoid the charge of relying solely on the mechanical laws, which might otherwise collapse into materialism.

Conway's arguments for the homogeneity of spirituality and corporeality, that is, the single substance of the creatures being simultaneously spiritual and corporeal, are not without challenges: for instance, whether the convertibility of body and spirit risks reducing one attribute to the other; or, whether the corporeal-spiritual spectrum is a placeholder for materialism or spiritualism under another name. In this context, vital motion would be a good candidate to resist the risk of metaphysical

[3] Meanwhile, Conway concedes the mechanical laws have certain explanatory efficacy in life phenomena. It is more about the mechanical laws not being enough, rather than not suitable for vital actions at all. More details are shown in the following paragraphs.

reductionism. Vital motion is both the product and the evidence of the unique ontological framework of created beings and their relations to God and the Middle Nature.

Yet vital motion is not a *deus ex machina* introduced to fill the gaps in mechanical explanations. Conway does not attempt to cancel mechanical motion or deny the efficacy of mechanical laws. Rather, she acknowledges that mechanical laws function effectively in nature[4]. In addition to mechanical motion, created beings can move vitally at the same time. The phrase "moving vitally" emphasizes the distinctive way in which the creatures move when acting as living, rather than merely corporeal, beings. Conway typically uses the terms "vital action" and "vital operations" to refer to life actions or activities, such as understanding, knowledge (*P*, IX.6), and sense perception (*P*, IX.9). When Conway refers specifically to "vital motion", the notion is linked with a creature "transmitting its vital motions to the greatest distance" (*P*, IX.9). Nonetheless, the meaning of "vital motion" closely parallels that of vital action and vital operations. I therefore propose to treat vital motion, vital action, and vital operation as interchangeable.

ii. The Nature of Vital Motion

I have identified seven key scenarios in *The Principles* where Conway employs the concept of vital motion: 1. Vital motion is occurrences arising from

[4] "although it cannot be denied that Cartes taught many excellent and ingenious Things concerning the Mechanical part of Natural Operations, and how all Natural Motions proceed according to Rules and Laws Mechanical, even as indeed Nature her self, i.e. the Creature, hath an excellent Mechanical Skill and Wisdom in it self, (given it from God, who is the Fountain of all Wisdom,) by which it operates" (*P*, IX.2).

spirituality[5]; 2. Vital motion may be perceptions excited by local motion[6]; or more generally, it uses local motion as its instrument; 3. Vital motion corresponds to the natural dispositions of a creature, meaning the motion is neither external nor preternatural to the creature[7]; 4. Vital motion can penetrate different bodies, or be transmitted from one creature to another[8]; 5. Vital motion is fundamental to a creature's self-motion and its interactions among multiple creatures[9]; 6. Since vital motion is subordinate to God, its goal and direction are oriented towards God, perfection, and pure spirituality[10]; 7. Vital motion is connected to the vital extension of a creature[11].

Summarizing these descriptions of vital motion, we can briefly say that vital motion is a kind of motion, which involves the change or movement of spiritual parts,

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[5] For example, Conway claims that "these following, Spirit, or Life, and Light, under which I comprehend a capacity of all kind of Feeling, Sense, and Knowledge, Love, Joy, and Fruition, and all kind of Power and Virtue, which the noblest Creatures have or can have" (*P*, IX.6). Life actions like feeling, sense, knowledge and emotions all come from the attributes of spirituality, namely, spirit, life and life. Given that life actions all have "a vital principle of motion" (*P*, IX.2), these life actions arising from spirituality are vital motion.

[6] For example, "So the Eye cannot see, unless Light enter it, which is a Motion and stirs up a Vital Action in the Eye, which is Seeing; and so in all other Vital Operations in the whole Body" (*P*, IX.9).

[7] For example, "But every Motion, proceeding from the proper Life and Will of the Creature, is vital; and this I call a Motion of Life, which is not plainly Local and Mechanical as the other, but hath in it a Life, and Vital Virtue" (*P*, IX.9).

[8] For example, "for it is the Motion or Action of Life, which uses the other [mechanical or local motion] as its Instrument, whose Service consists herein; that is, to stir up a Vital Action in the Subject or Percipient; and can like Local Motion be transmitted through divers Bodies, although very far distant asunder, which therefore are united, and that without any new Transition of Body or Matter" (*P*, IX.9).

[9] See "for when a Creature arrives at a Nobler Kind and degree of Life, then doth it receive the greater Power and Virtue to move it self, and transmit its vital Motions to the greatest distance" (*P*, IX.9).

[10] For example, "so a Creature, not of it self, but in subordination to God, as his Instrument may give existence to Motion and vital Action, and so the Motion in one Creature may produce Motion in another: And this is all a Creature can do towards the moving it self or its Fellow Creatures, as being the Instrument of God, by which Motions a new Substance is not created, but only new Species of Things, so that Creatures may be multiplied in their Kinds, whilst one acts upon, and moves another" (*P*, IX.9).

[11] See "A Virtual Extension is a Motion or Action which a Creature hath, whether immediately given from God, or immediately received from its Fellow Creature" (*P*, IX.9).

or in the spiritual dimension of a creature. The common manifestations of vital motion are the advanced life phenomena. Ontologically, it is a mode[12] of the attribute of spirituality of creatures, which can be transmitted across different bodies. While vital motion is superior to mechanical motion, it is also inseparable from the latter. Moreover, vital motion is spontaneous from a creature *per se*, while God and the Middle Nature play a causal role simultaneously.

While local motion can easily be identified through changes in a body's position[13] or shape[14], vital motion might not be immediately recognizable from outer appearances. Yet Conway characterizes vital motion as movement toward perfection[15], that is, toward a higher degree of spirituality. Although she does not explicitly rule out the possibility that vital motion could result in a lesser degree of spirituality, vital motion must, by definition, be proper for a creature—meaning that it positively affects the creature's spirituality: "But every Motion, proceeding from the proper Life and Will of the Creature, is vital; and this I call a Motion of Life, which is not plainly Local and Mechanical as the other, but hath in it a Life, and Vital Virtue"

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[12] "For Motion or Action is not a certain Matter or Substance, but only a manner of its Being; and therefore is intrinsecally present in the Subject, whereof there is a Modus, or Manner" (*P*, IX.9).

[13] "Local and Mechanical Motion (*i.e.*) the carrying of Body from place to place" (*P*, IX.9)

[14] For example, "Life and Figure are distinct Attributes of one Substance, and as one and the same Body may be transmuted into all Kinds of Figures; and as the perfecter Figure comprehends that which is more imperfect; so one and the same Body may be transmuted from one degree of Life to another more perfect" (*P*, IX.7). Conway compares transmutations of figures to transmutations into a different degree of life, which suggests that these two kinds of transmutations are different kinds of motion. While the change towards a more perfect life surely is vital motion, we can then understand that change of forms or shapes also belong to mechanical motion.

[15] By the triangular prism example for what life or the spiritual parts can achieve via vital motion, Conway only refers to the perfection from an imperfect figure to a more perfect figure (*P*, IX.7). Besides, Conway attributes the superior intelligent features to perfections as well: "this capacity of the afore-mentioned Perfections is quite a distinct Attribute from Life, and Understanding, or Knowledge, quite distinct from the former, viz. Extension and Figure" (*P*, IX.6). Conway indicates that through various life actions, lower species can also become more perfect: "yea, Dust and Sand, may be capable of all those Perfections, sc. through various and succedaneous Transmutations [by gaining capacities of all kind feeling, sense, and knowledge, love, joy, and fruitation, and all kind of power and virtue] from the one into the other" (*P*, IX.6).

(*P*, IX.9). Thus, Vital motion carries a vital virtue, that is, divine goodness, for the creature. Vital motion always moves toward greater perfection, namely, God the pure spirituality. A motion that would cause a creature to have a lower degree of spirituality cannot be vital. Conway further claims that "That which is immediately given of God (from whom also it hath its Being,) and which is the natural and proper effect of its Essence, is in a more proper way of speaking, a proper Motion of the Creature, proceeding from the innermost parts thereof; and therefore may be called Internal Motion" (*P*, IX.9). Vital motion must proceed from within the creature—it is spontaneous to the creature[16]. Thus, vital motion arises from a creature's spontaneity and ends in an elevated degree of spirituality for that creature.

In contrast, local motion does not necessarily alter a creature's degree of corporeality. For example, if I move my hand from the keyboard to the teacup without any particular purpose, my hand neither becomes more corporeal nor more spiritual.

Yet local motion can, in some cases, contribute to an increase or decrease in spirituality (and corporeality in correspondence). Conway indicates that

> [internal motion] as distinguished from External, which is only from another; and therefore in respect thereof may be called Foreign; and when the said External motion endeavours to carry a Body, or any Thing, to a place whereunto it hath properly no natural inclination, then it is preternatural and violent; as when a Stone is thrown up into the Air, which Motion being preternatural and violent, is plainly Local and Mechanical, and no way vital, because it doth not proceed from the Life of the Thing so moved… (*P*, IX.9)

Local motion could come from a foreign body and is not necessarily spontaneous. If a local motion is caused externally and contradicts the creature's natural inclination, it

[16] "From inside" does not have to be from physically inside (although so is with most of the cases). By internal motion, Conway refers to the motion that springs from the subject themselves when looking within the created world alone. That is, the subject is not affected by other bodies to produce the motion. The aspect of divine causation would be another big topic in Conway's internal motion, which I will leave aside due to space limitations.

is “preternatural and violent.” Such a motion would increase the creature’s degree of corporeality. For instance, if my feet are tied, then I could only jump to move around, which is against my natural walking habits. The forced jumping is considered violent, which does not help with my spirituality. On the contrary, as I struggle to move around and become distracted, my capacity for higher intellectual activities is undermined. Then my degree of spirituality decreases while my degree of corporeality increases. However, when a mechanical motion occurs alongside a vital motion and the overall result is an increase in spirituality, then the mechanical motion assists in lowering the degree of corporeality. In general, mechanical motion alone may raise or lower a creature’s corporeality; yet vital motion must always enhance a creature’s degree of spirituality.

To conclude, vital motion is a distinct type of motion from mechanical motion—both ontologically and functionally. Nonetheless, Conway still mentions the two types of motion frequently together. Their relationship remains somewhat puzzling: how can vital motion and mechanical motion be parallel while the latter is only the instrument of the former, and how can the two work together simultaneously to bring about a single change in a body?

III. The Quasi-Parallel Relationship Between Vital and Mechanical Motion

According to Conway, on the one hand, vital motion is inseparable from mechanical motion. On the other hand, mechanical motion serves vital motion as its instrument, the latter being ontologically superior to the former. Scholars such as McRobert (2000), Vaucanson (2021), and Borcherding (2021)[17] have noted how vital

[17] Borcherding (2021) suggests that “vital action is a kind of extension, this highlights vital action’s spatial nature: via the medium of mechanical motion, creatures can extend themselves across space

motion uses mechanical motion as its instrument. However, how the two kinds of motion work together in parallel remains unclear.

In this section, I would like to show that the parallel between vital and mechanical motion can be understood in two aspects: first, every occurrence of vital motion is necessarily accompanied by a corresponding occurrence of mechanical motion; second, mechanical motion is instrumental in that mechanical motion is manifesting the change brought about by vital motion in corporeal parts and thus facilitating vital motion. Nevertheless, the two motions do not possess the same ontological significance in Conway's metaphysics. Vital motion is closely tied to the hierarchy of beings in the created world and ultimately resembles the advancement toward God. Hence, I characterize their relationship as quasi-parallel—mechanical motion necessarily occurs with vital motion, yet the latter is ontologically superior and primary.

i. The Inseparability of Vital and Mechanical Motion

First, I explain why vital motion is inseparable from mechanical motion. Before digging deeper into the problem, we need to keep in mind that Conway never denies the explanatory force of mechanical laws in nature[18]. Local and mechanical motion[19], most commonly, refer to the change of place of a body: "Local and Mechanical Motion (*i.e.*) the carrying of Body from place to place" (*P*, IX.9). Changes in shapes and forms also count as mechanical motion. For instance, Conway

through their "subtle parts" and thereby communicate motion and life to others, or—conversely—receive motion or life from them." (p. 130)

[18] E.g., "although it cannot be denied that Cartes taught many excellent and ingenious Things concerning the Mechanical part of Natural Operations, and *how all Natural Motions proceed according to Rules and Laws Mechanical, even as indeed Nature herself*, i.e. the Creature, hath an excellent Mechanical Skill and Wisdom in itself, (given it from God, who is the Fountain of all Wisdom,) by which it operates" (*P*, IX.2, italics added).

[19] For the sake of brevity, I will use either mechanical motion or local motion hereafter.

uses the analogy of transforming a triangular prism into a globe, showing the steps of geometrical change—i.e., changing the outer form of the prism from triangular to a spherical one[20]. Even though the analogy is used to illustrate changes in the degree of life, the transformation of the form is still explicable under mechanical laws.

According to Conway, all actions of life must have a certain corporeal or mechanical explanation. As she suggests, "Figure serves the operations of life" (*P*, IX.9). Take the example of eyesight: sight perception involves the local movement of certain cells in the eye. That is, local motion must occur when we observe any changes or movements in nature. Under the assumption that local motion is present in every movement of creatures, Conway introduces vital motion:

> But yet in Nature, and her Operations, they are far more than merely Mechanical; and the same is not a mere Organical Body[21], like a Clock, wherein there is not a vital Principle of Motion; but a living Body, having Life and Sense, which Body is far more sublime than a mere Mechanism, or Mechanical Motion. (*P*, IX.2)

People tend to read this statement simply as Conway's critique of mechanical motion: a vital principle of motion is required for explaining the actions of living and organic beings, other than mechanical laws. Nonetheless, her introduction of vital motion does not negate the presence of mechanical motion. Vital motion never occurs in isolation; every occurrence of vital motion is accompanied by a local motion.

As Conway suggests, vital motion is inseparable from mechanical motion, just as spirit is inseparable from body: "altho' they [local and vital motion] are

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[20] "We have an Example of Figure in a Triangular Prisme, which is the first Figure of all right lined solid Bodies, whereinto a Body is convertible; and from this into a Cube, which is a perfecter Figure, and comprehends in it a Prisme; from a Cube it may be turned into a more perfect Figure, which comes nearer to a Globe, and from this into another, which is yet nearer" (*P*, IX.7).

[21] The term "Organical body" might sound contradictory to a clock. The Latin text is "*et illa non est corpus mere organicum horologio simile*". The translation into "organical body" does not seem problematic on the surface. I conjecture that Conway is, in effect, referring to a body that is organized in a mechanical way like a clock. And consequently, the mechanical organization alone could make the body move without vital powers or any life injections.

inseparable, so that a Vital Action can in no wise be without all Local Motion" (*P*, IX.9). The inseparability arises from the metaphysical structure of the created substance. A creature possesses both the spiritual and the corporeal attributes: "So that Life and Figure consist very well together in one Body, or Substance, where Figure is an Instrument of Life, without which no Vital Operation can be performed" (*P*, IX.8); "And thus Life and Figure are distinct, but not contrary Attributes of one and the same Substance, and Figure serves the Operations of Life" (ibid.). Life corresponds to spirituality; figure to corporeality. The two attributes are not only co-existent, but they are co-constitutive of created beings.

Recall that for Conway, the substance of the created world is like a spectrum, with two hypothetical endpoints—pure spirituality and dead matter. A creature might be more spiritual than other creatures, but it still retains its corporeal composition. It is not the case that a creature can be neatly divided into two distinct halves: one completely spiritual and the other entirely corporeal[22]. Even the most spiritual part of a creature is still corporeal. In other words, every being in the created world, no matter how small or advanced, consists of both corporeality and spirituality. Whenever or however a being moves or changes, there must be changes in its corporeal and spiritual parts simultaneously, although the changes are manifested differently. Changes in corporeality should be categorized properly as mechanical motion.

Vital actions rather highlight the changes beyond the merely corporeal: "But this capacity of the afore-mentioned Perfections is quite a distinct Attribute from Life, and Understanding, or Knowledge, quite distinct from the former, viz. Extension and

[22] This will only lead back to the traditional dualist mind-body model.

Figure" (*P*, IX.6). Vital motion is "an Action of Life" (*P*, IX.9). However, since possessing life is the default setting for all creatures[23], it is still unclear what the nature of "an action of life" is. Conway cites some examples of vital motion: sensitive perceptions such as eyesight and hearing[24]; actions such as speaking, working, and walking[25]; and especially a creature attaining a higher degree of spirituality[26].

When a creature attains a higher degree of spirituality, it moves higher in the hierarchy of being, becoming more like Christ and God. As the degree of spirituality increases, the corporeal parts in the creature would also work more harmoniously with the spiritual ones: "Yea the Figure of the whole Body is more commodious for the proper Operations of Human Life, than any other Figure whatsoever is, or could be made" (*P*, IX.8). Since vital motion manifests in operations of perception, spontaneous action, and mental activity (more prominent in human beings), a higher degree of spirituality corresponds to better performance in sensitivity and activity[27]. That is, becoming better in sense perceptions, mental functions, and goodness in general[28]. When it comes to the metaphorical terms of spirituality, increased spirituality implies better in those qualities such as subtlety, aethereality, softness, tenuity, thinness, volatility, and lightness. Possessing more spirituality also means the

[23] As there is no dead body in the created world, the creatures should have a minimal degree of life. More to see in Chapter 2.

[24] "as we see in the Body of Man or Beast, how the Figure of the Eye serves the Sight; the Figure of the Ear, the Hearing" (*P*, IX.9).

[25] "the Figure of the Mouth, Teeth, Lips, and Tongue, serve the Speech; the Figure of the Hands and Fingers serve to Work; the Figure of the Feet to Walk" (*P*, IX.9).

[26] "the case is the same in divers degrees of Life, which have indeed a beginning, but no end; so that the Creature is always capable of a farther and perfecter degree of Life, ad infinitum" (*P*, IX.7).

[27] As discussed in Chapter 2.

[28] The goodness does not have to be moral. Rather, it indicates the similarity to God the perfection. Sample (2022) discusses in detail how the goodness needs to be construed as metaphysical goodness, while the moral goodness is rather an extended concept.

physical dimension being tiny and fine-grained, and light in weight, or a strong capability of moving swiftly. At the same time, an increased degree of spirituality implies a simultaneous decrease in corporeality.

We might visualize this in terms of the spectrum mentioned earlier. Suppose a creature positioned on the spectrum of the created substance. Its original position is A, midway between pure spirit and dead matter. After undergoing a vital motion, the creature's degree of spirituality increases, shifting the position closer to the spiritual pole. The new position, B, is further away from the dead matter endpoint, signifying the creature's decreasing degree of corporeality. Since changing the position on the spectrum indicates changing of distances from both two hypothetical endpoints, moving closer to perfection is simultaneously gaining more distance from dead matter.

Besides, after achieving a higher degree of spirituality, a creature's corporeal parts become more subtle and less gross. The corporeal changes occur via either of the two mechanical processes: breaking down the gross and coarse corporeal parts[29]; or absorbing subtler parts from other bodies[30]. The decrease of grossness and hardness is done either by dividing the creature's own corporeal parts, or by giving out its coarse parts and having more subtle parts from outside. In each case, mechanical motion is required. Thus, vital motion is inseparable from mechanical motion.

Conway's own example of eyesight vividly showcases the mechanism of vital motion and its inseparability from mechanical motion:

> So the Eye cannot see, unless Light enter it, which is a Motion and stirs up a Vital Action in the Eye, which is Seeing; and so in all other Vital Operations in the whole Body…for as the Eye receives the Light

[29] "For all Motion wears and divides, and so renders a Thing subtile and spiritual" (*P*, VIII. 5).

[30] "but also many other very subtile Spirits, which continually flow from them, and which by reason of their subtilty, the hardness of the Body (in which they lay hid) cannot detain" (*P*, VIII. 5).

> into it self, from the Object which it seeth from without; so also it sends the same Light to the Object, and in this Spirit and Life is a Vital Action, uniting the Object and Sight together... (*P*, IX.9)

In this passage, there are two occurrences: 1. the light (L1) entering the eye from the object; 2. the motion of eyesight, including the eye sending out the same light (L2) back to the object. The first occurrence involves the light (L1) moving from the outside object into the eye, which is a typical mechanical motion. This mechanical motion is the enabling condition for the second motion carried out by the eye, as the entering light (L1) "stirs up" the eyesight. The second occurrence is the motion of the eye, where the eyeball is the agent of motion. When the eye receives the light (L1) in the first occurrence, the light (L1) then becomes part of the eye. Hence, sending out "the same light" (L2) is sending out a corporeal part from the eye. While the eyesight is a vital motion *per se*, the light (L2) being sent back to the object is another mechanical motion—the body of light moving across space.

The movements of L1 and L2 together make up the exchange[31] of the parts between the eye and the object, first moving from the object, and then from the eye back to the object. Yet the vital motion of eyesight only corresponds to the second occurrence, where the eye is the spontaneous acting agent of reflecting the light mechanically and producing the eyesight vitally. The first occurrence is solely an occurrence of mechanical motion, while being the precondition for the second occurrence. In this way, the eyesight perception can be viewed both vitally and

[31] My reading differs from Lascano (2023) and Borcherding (2019b), both of whom regard the exchange between one body and another as a single occurrence. And the single occurrence constitutes the vital motion of one body. However, I find their readings problematic as "exchange" always requires two acting agents to achieve the exchange—while A receives something from the other and gives out something, B also gives out and receives the thing from the former. When it comes to the analysis of the action of A, it does not make sense to include B's action of giving out, let alone B's action of receiving. At most, B's action of giving out is the necessitating condition for the exchange, or for the action of receiving and giving out action of A. Hence, I do not take in the action of the object receiving the light from the eye in the second occurrence, as the agent of this particular action is the object, not the eye, and thus not part of the vital motion of the eyesight.

mechanically—obtaining the eyesight and sending out the light from the eye to the object. Besides, by accomplishing a new sense perception, the eye increases its degree of spirituality.

The metaphysical nature of vital motion, particularly in terms of its inseparability from mechanical motion, stems from the unique spectrum construct of the created substance. Because every creature is both corporeal and spiritual, any vital motion must also entail a change in its corporeal parts. The change of the corporeal parts falls under the range of mechanical motion. Therefore, as Conway claims: vital motion "can in no wise be without all local motion" (*P*, IX.9). Yet inseparability is not symmetry. The next part shows how mechanical motion serves a subordinate, instrumental role.

ii. The Instrumentality of Mechanical motion to Vital motion

Although vital motion is inseparable from mechanical motion, Conway adds a further nuance that mechanical motion is merely instrumental: "because this [mechanical motion] is the instrument thereof" (*P*, IX.9). In the example of eyesight example, the mechanical motion of the eyeball emitting the light is then the instrument to the vital motion of eyesight. The mechanical motion of the eye sending out the light does not cause the vital motion, nor is the other way round. I argue that mechanical motion rather occurs simultaneously in the corporeal parts, facilitating vital motion.

Many scholars discuss the causal account of vital motion by referencing the instrumentality of mechanical motion. For instance, Broad (2018) suggests that souls or spirits are the instruments that activate vital motion, while the "true author" is God through the medium of the Middle Nature (p. 590). Lascano (2023) points out that Broad's view "brings Conway close to the views of philosophers like Malebranche"

(p. 61). Yet Lascano only briefly mentions the instrumental role of mechanical motion, noting: "the ability of creatures to see external objects, which is a motion of life, requires the mechanical motion of light reflecting on the lenses of the eyes" (p. 64). Similarly, Sample (2022) cites the example of eyesight[32] in Conway to show that mechanical motion is necessary to trigger vital motion. She also appeals to mechanical motion to explain the temporal feature of creatures, while vital motion is atemporal. This reading helps reconcile the apparent conundrum of creatures' actions being both determined by God (atemporal) and by themselves (temporal). Likewise, Vaucanson (2021) suggests that "Conway's description of the local motion of bodies as an instrument of vital action runs in parallel to her description of Christ as the instrument of God" (p. 143). Nevertheless, many of these interpretations take the meaning of "instrument" too literally, which does not help explain the role mechanical motion plays in the occurrence of vital motion. It is easier to understand corporeal parts as instruments of a motion, as these parts function like tools to accomplish an action. But construing a motion as an instrument of another requires further unpacking.

We are generally more comfortable with the idea that something substantial can be used as an instrument. But what does it mean for one motion—a mode[33]—to be the instrument of another? Conway provides a helpful clue that figure is an instrument of life before introducing the idea of local motion being the instrument of vital motion. For example, "figure serves the operations of life"; "as we see in the

[32] Scholars such as Broad (2018), Borcherding (2019b), Vaucanson (2021), and Lascano (2023) allude to this example as well.

[33] "And therefore we see how every Motion and Action, considered in the Abstract, hath a wonderful subtility or spirituality in it, beyond all created Substances whatsoever, so that neither Time nor Place can limit the same; and yet they are nothing else but Modes or Manners of created Substances" (*P*, IX.9).

Body of Man or Beast, how the Figure of the Eye serves the Sight; the Figure of the Ear, the Hearing; the Figure of the Mouth, Teeth, Lips, and Tongue, serve the Speech; the Figure of the Hands and Fingers serve to Work; the Figure of the Feet to Walk" (*P*, IX.8). These examples imply that all life functions require an appropriate organ or corporeal body parts to accomplish. In other words, the corporeal configuration is indispensable to spiritual functions.

When it comes to local motion being the instrument of vital motion, Conway outlines two possible scenarios: 1. mechanical motion prepares for vital motion (e.g., light entering the eye stirs up eyesight); 2. mechanical motion accompanies or expresses vital motion (e.g., the eye emitting light during perception). The first scenario becomes the dominant view in current scholarship, as it is explicitly shown in Conway's example of eyesight. She also argues more generally that it is the case for other life activities: "it is the Motion or Action of Life, which uses the other as its Instrument, whose Service consists herein; that is, to stir up a Vital Action in the Subject or Percipient" (*P*, IX. 9). Just as the light travelling from the object to the eye, a body's change of place—from outside into the subject or the percipient—prepares for the vital motion to arise in the subject. But "stirring up" is not equivalent to causal efficacy. Mechanical motion is simply part of the enabling conditions[34] for vital motion to occur.

In the second scenario, the corporeal parts serve as tools to accomplish the action of life, and the action of life must involve changes in corporeal parts. These corporeal changes adhere to mechanical laws. Conway uses the analogy of moving a beam, where one end is moved, the other must move with the first end. The parallel

[34] This does sound like occasionalism. Since we are not talking about the causal account of vital motion here, I would like to set the discussions aside.

movement of the two ends of the beam suggests that vital motion and mechanical motion occur together: “After the same manner also, a Vital Action can proceed together with Local Motion from one thing to another” (*P*, IX.9). However, we still lack a clear explanation of how the corporeal parts as instrument is analogous to corporeal motion as instrument. Specifically, where does the instrumentality of mechanical motion come from?

My reconstruction is as follows: first, vital motion always includes a simultaneous change in the corporeal dimension. That change manifests as mechanical motion. Second, as vital motion represents the increase in the degree of spirituality, the accompanying mechanical motion reflects the change in reducing the degree of corporeality. In this way, vital motion plays the leading role and guides the direction, while mechanical motion simultaneously completes the relevant change in corporeal parts. To note that vital motion is not dependent on mechanical motion, as vital motion is not the product or consequence of mechanical motion. Rather, vital motion is spontaneous, while mechanical motion is not necessarily so. In the occurrence of vital motion, mechanical motion occurs only to accomplish the change in the corporeal parts, which is then instrumental.

Hence, mechanical motion’s instrumentality to vital motion can be understood in two senses: 1. mechanical motion helps enable vital motion, by preparing the corporeal condition for a new occurrence of vital motion, just as shown in the first occurrence of the eyesight case. Nonetheless, the mechanical motion does not cause the vital motion, nor is it caused by the vital motion; 2. mechanical motion expresses or facilitates the change of vital motion in the corporeal parts. In both cases, mechanical motion is inferior and secondary compared to vital motion in ontological status. Mechanical motion is not interdependent or completing to vital motion. Vital

motion occurs out of an agent's spontaneity, while the accompanying mechanical motion is rather following. The instrumentality of mechanical motion emphasizes the spiritual and spontaneous nature of vital motion; yet the corporeal dimension cannot be overlooked at the same time. Since there can always be a mechanical motion without any involvement with vital motion, the two kinds of motion do not stand in symmetry. That is why mechanical motion and vital motion are in a quasi-parallel relation.

IV. The Quasi-Parallel Relation in Application

The quasi-parallel reading further applies to the occasions where both kinds of motion are present. Conway suggests that the transmission of vital motion across different bodies and that of mechanical motion require different lengths of time. Furthermore, she introduces the notions of virtual extension and material extension to demonstrate the uniqueness of vital motion. Because vital motion is inseparable from mechanical motion, its transmission cannot be realized without taking time. The asymmetry between the two motions also helps in interpreting virtual extension correctly. I will expand on these points in what follows.

i. Transmission of Motions

Conway indicates that motion can be transferred, though in a relatively ambiguous manner:

> Therefore 'tis manifest, that Motion may be transmitted through diverse Bodies, by another kind of penetration, than any Body or Matter (how subtile soever it be) is able to make; to wit, by intrinseck Presence. And if mere Local or Mechanical Motion can do that, then certainly a Vital Action (which is a nobler kind of Motion) can do the same… (*P*, IX.9)

She further argues that motion is a "modus, or manner, consist herein, viz. to exist or be inherent in its own body" (*P*, IX.9). Motion can be transmitted across different bodies—even at a distance—through "an apt and fit medium" (*P*, IX.9). The transmission of motion does not involve taking a motion away from one body and pasting it onto another[35].

However, Conway does not specify that only vital motion can be transmitted. Rather, she emphasizes that transmission of motion does not occur in the same way as local motion, i.e., moving something from one place to another. Thus, it would be incorrect to claim that local motion is incapable of transmission[36]. The key point is that transmission happens by means of divine creation—through the intimate presence of God and the Middle Nature. God and the Middle Nature create the same motion directly in both the original body and a new body by intimately presenting in them at the same time[37]. The type of motion being transmitted is not restricted. Both vital motion and mechanical motion can be transmitted, although vital motion, when considered alone, would have been transmitted more quickly and over greater distances[38]. Conway illustrates this with the example of a beam of wood:

> a Beam of Wood of an exceeding great length, is moved by one Extream from the North to the South, the other Extream will

[35] "The Answer to this Objection, which seemeth to me best, is this, That Motion is not propagated from one Body to another by Local Motion, because Motion it self is not moved, but only moves the Body in which it is; for if Motion could be propagated by Local Motion, this Motion would be propagated of another, and this again of another, and so ad infinitum, which is absurd" (*P*, IX.9).

[36] Scholars like Sample (2022) and Lascano (2023) propose that local motion and vital motion differ in their capability of transmission: local motion cannot be transmitted while vital motion can be, even instantly. I disagree with the claim.

[37] More discussions on intimate presence, see Broad (2018), Borcherding (2019 plurality), Vaucanson (2021), Sample (2023 freedom), and Lascano (2023). I agree with the more general idea that by intimate presence, God and the Middle Nature play a causal role in creatures' actions. Yet to explicate the issue more comprehensively, such as whether it shows the occasionalist or concurrentist position of Conway, requires another paper.

[38] In theory, a vital motion in a creature can be produced in another creature that is located further away: "for it is the Motion or Action of Life… and *can like Local Motion be transmitted through divers Bodies, although very far distant asunder*" (*P*, IX. 9; italics added).

> necessarily be moved also; and the Action is transmitted through the whole Beam, without any Particles of Matter sent hither to promote Motion, from one Extream to the other; because the Beam it self is sufficient to transmit the said Motion: *After the same manner also, a Vital Action can proceed together with Local Motion from one thing to another*, and that too at a great distance, where there is an apt and fit *Medium* to transmit it…(*P*, IX.9; italics added)

As the first end of the wood beam is moved, the second is moved in the same distance and in the same manner. Each end's change of place is a local motion, although the local movement of the second end is transmitted from the first. The example shows how a vital motion can be transmitted, like the local motion from one end of the beam to the other end[39]. Through the intimate presence of God and the Middle Nature, the movement occurring in the first end is directly created in the other end.

The transmission of vital motion exemplified in the transmission of mechanical motion aligns with my earlier argument: mechanical motion is the corporeal manifestation of vital motion. Moreover, the transmission of vital motion in effect cannot be realized without the accompanying transmission of mechanical motion as well.

Although vital motion is enacted through intimate presence, it does not imply that it is entirely atemporal[40]. Conway writes:

> and if it can penetrate those Bodies, it passeth through by intrinseck Presence, then it *may* in one moment be transmitted from one Body to another, or rather require no time at all, I mean Motion or Action it self requires not the least time for its transmission, *although 'tis impossible but that the Body, wherein the Motion is carried from place to place*[41]*, ought to have some time*, either greater or lesser, according to the

[39] Conway uses more mechanical motion examples to explicate vital motion. Perhaps it is hard to conceive a vital motion on its own without the simultaneous change in the corporeal parts, or at least it is hard to depict vital motion more literally. However, since Conway indicates that vital motion is always accompanied by mechanical motion, it makes sense to use the mechanical motion examples for our understanding.

[40] I wish to rebut Sample (2022)'s argument of vital motion being atemporal here.

[41] I believe by "carried from place to place", Conway is using an analogical way to describe the transmission of the motion; not stating the motion is transmitted in a manner of local motion.

> quality of Body and vehemency of Motion which carries it. (*P*, IX.9; italics added)

The intimate presence *per se* or theoretically transmitting a vital motion from one body to another does not require time, since the subject—God—is beyond time. However, Conway concedes that the transmission of vital motion occurs within the bodies of the created world. The created bodies are not exempt from the conditions of temporality and spatiality. If the vital motion is transmitted *through* a body containing corporeal parts, then it must take some time, regardless of whether the time is short or long. If vital motion took no time, while the accompanying local motion did, there would be an unexplained temporal gap between the two motions—which is implausible[42]. Besides, since vital motion is inseparable from mechanical motion, it is equally implausible for vital motion to be transmitted without any accompanying mechanical motion. Even though vital motion has the aid of the divine intimate presence, it is still a mode dependent on the temporal and spatial creatures. The transmission also requires a proper medium[43]. The medium is corporeal, and motion through it necessarily takes time.

Therefore, the quasi-parallel relationship between vital motion and mechanical motion also applies to the case of motion transmission. Since vital motion is inseparable from mechanical motion, the transmission of vital motion cannot escape the conditions of mechanical motion, that is, temporality and spatiality. However, since vital motion is the change in spirituality and possesses a superior ontological

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[42] Conway literally says that vital motion proceeds together with local motion when being transmitted at a great distance: "After the same manner also, a Vital Action can proceed *together with Local Motion* from one thing to another, and that too at a great distance, where there is an apt and fit Medium to transmit it..." (*P*, IX.9; italics added)

[43] "For Motion or Action is not a certain Matter or Substance, but only a manner of its Being; and therefore is intrinsecally present in the Subject, whereof there is a Modus, or Manner, and can pass from Body to Body, at a great distance, if it finds a fit Medium to transmit it" (*P*, IX.9)

status, it might be transmitted more swiftly or effectively—traveling faster and farther than mechanical motion—though still bound to the corporeal framework through which it operates.

ii. Virtual Extension and Material Extension

The asymmetry between the two kinds of motion also sheds light on Conway's subtle distinction between virtual and material extension. Since vital motion and mechanical motion are not ontologically symmetrical, we cannot simply conceive of vital motion as a kind of mechanical motion in the spiritual parts. This asymmetrical relationship applies to the pair of virtual extension and material extension[44] as well. Virtual extension is not a measurement of the degree of spirituality, and thus does not correspond to material extension.

Material extension refers to the physical size or measurement of a creature in space. Since all creatures possess some degree of corporeality, they must extend in space. In this sense, Conway's notion of material extension is consistent with the accounts offered by Descartes and More. Virtual extension, however, is a more elusive concept, appearing only in one paragraph in the final chapter of *The Principles*:

> A Virtual Extension is a Motion or Action which a Creature hath, whether immediately given from God, or immediately received from its Fellow Creature…and this I call a Motion of Life, which is not plainly Local and Mechanical as the other, but hath in it a Life, and Vital Virtue, and this is the Virtual Extension of a Creature, which is either greater or lesser, according to that kind or degree of Life wherewith the Creature is endued, for when a Creature arrives at a Nobler Kind and degree of Life, then doth it receive the greater Power and Virtue to move it self, and transmit its vital Motions to the greatest distance. (*P*, IX.9)

[44] While Broad (2018), Borcherding (2019b) and Sample (2023a) briefly mention virtual extension without further clarification, Lascano (2023) explains that "virtual extension, however, is something that changes depending on the kind of creature an individual current is (i.e., what natural kind— stone, horse, man, etc.)" (pp. 68-69). I find Lascano's account not accurate enough, though I agree with her later claim that "virtual extension is affected by two sources—God and other creatures" (p. 69).

According to Conway, there are two sources of virtual extension in a creature: 1. a motion given by God or received from other creatures; 2. the vital motion from within the creature itself, moving itself or transmitting motion to others. Virtual extension is not about physical size or spatial dimensions[45]. Instead, it indicates a unique kind of scenario in which vital motion occurs: a creature interacting with or connecting to other creatures, whereby the creature is "virtually extended." A creature possessing a higher degree of spirituality or occupying a higher place in the hierarchy of being is more virtually extended—this means the creature is better at receiving from others or transmitting vital motions, reflecting its deeper and broader relations in the created world. Thus, virtual extension entails both a creature's internal capacity for accomplishing vital motion and its ability to connect with others.

The capacities of virtual extension ultimately mirror God's own intimate presence in all creatures. Thus, virtual extension serves as an index of a creature's position within the hierarchy of creation. For example, a human can connect with other humans, animals, and plants in diverse ways (by communicating, touching, exchanging bodily parts, and so on). In contrast, a stone is poor in virtual extension as it can hardly perform the vital motion of connecting meaningfully to other creatures. The stone's lack of virtual extension marks its position low in the hierarchy of being. Corresponding to the privation account of corporeality, as the stone possesses more degrees of corporeality, it is more privative of divine spirituality, which is reflected in its low capacities in vital motion.

[45] I agree with Weichert (2012) that virtual extension suggests a vital force within a creature, as all vital motion springs spontaneously from inside the creature. However, Weichert's reading of identifying virtual extension as a medium or a stimulus to motion (p. 165) is problematic. For virtual extension is vital motion and does not play the stimulating role. Another claim that virtual extension suggests a spatial component for vital motion (p. 166) is not plausible either for similar reasons.

Hence, virtual extension and material extension are fundamentally different: material extension concerns physical quantity and spatial occupation; virtual extension concerns the quality of spiritual interaction—and is applicable only in a small range. We cannot treat virtual extension as the spiritual counterpart of the material extension, just as vital motion is not simply the spiritual counterpart of mechanical motion.

To sum up, the quasi-parallel relationship between vital and mechanical motion also holds for their associated concepts. The inseparability of the two motions implies that both can be transmitted across different bodies via divine creation—and both require some time in the created world. Though vital motion retains its ontological superiority due to its divine imprint. Relatedly, virtual extension applies only to the interactive cases of vital motion and indicates a creature's capacity for spiritual activity. Material extension, by contrast, pertains only to physical size and lacks further metaphysical meanings. We should always pay attention to certain asymmetries between Conway's concepts, despite that they usually appear in pairs.

V. Conclusion

In Conway's philosophy, to move vitally is not just to change in spiritual parts, but it is more about improving and ascending the hierarchy of being. The quasi-parallel reading of the relationship between mechanical motion and vital motion accommodates Conway's unique characterizations of the two kinds of motion. First, vital motion is inseparable from mechanical motion, which is the "parallel" part of their relationship. Conway does not propose a wholly independent kind of motion that would replace or override mechanical motion when explaining life phenomena. Rather, even a creature's increase or decrease in spirituality is accompanied by

corresponding corporeal changes. For instance, a puppy grows into an adult dog, whereby its vital operations bring out greater spirituality in itself. Meanwhile, the puppy's size increases, its strength becomes greater, and so forth. Corporeal changes can be illustrated and explained by mechanical motion, while the spiritual transformation ascending the hierarchy requires vital motion.

Second, mechanical motion is instrumental to vital motion—this is the "quasi" part. Mechanical motion prepares for vital motion or facilitates the change of vital motion in corporeal parts. Vital motion is ontologically superior as it always increases a creature's spirituality and elevates its place in the hierarchy of creation. But mechanical motion lacks such orientation. A motion that diminishes a creature's spirituality, or moves it downward in the hierarchy, is not vital, even if the motion involves spiritual elements[46]. According to Conway, events like death, decomposition, or other violent changes serve a larger divine purpose, such as punishment or moral instruction, ultimately contributing to the creature's perfection[47]. For example, the death and decomposition of a worm nourishes a sparrow, aiding the latter's development into a higher degree of spirituality (such as being more energetic). The worm is thus transmuted into a part of the sparrow, as a step toward greater perfection. While the transmutation is a vital motion, the occurrence of decomposition is entirely a mechanical motion, which prepares for the vital motion.

Third, the quasi-parallel structure clarifies how the two motions differ in their mode of transmission. In theory, vital motion can be transmitted instantaneously via

[46] For example, the voluntary sin of human beings.

[47] See "That when the Spirit of a Man, through Impiety, shall change itself into the Qualities and Conditions of a Beast, it is but Justice in God, that the said brutish Spirit should enter into the Body of a Beast, and there for a certain Time be punished" (*P*, VI). Besides, "Herein the Justice of God marvellously appears, whilst he assigns to every Kind and Degree of Transgression its due and proper Punishment; neither doth he sentence every Sin and Transgression to Hell-fire, and the Punishment due unto Devils" (*P*, VI.8).

the intimate presence of God in creatures. When Conway speaks from the standpoint of divine omnipresence, an instant transmission is possible. However, for embodied creatures, all motion occurs in time. Since vital motion cannot occur without mechanical motion, its transmission must entail mechanical motion being transmitted as well. Besides, the quasi-parallel relationship provides helpful context for interpreting Conway's distinction between virtual and material extension. Virtual extension is not a counterpart of material extension in spirituality. It rather represents a creature's capacity to connect to other creatures through vital motion. If a creature possesses greater spirituality, it can reach out further, exert its influence more on others, and engage in more spiritual interactions. The creature is thus considered more virtually extended. Virtual extension is not a scale to tell the degrees of spirituality; it has to be present in the occasion of vital motion.

Vital motion neither cancels mechanical motion nor substitutes it—every little change of a creature must involve mechanical changes. We cannot construe vital motion simply as losing or gaining certain spiritual parts either. Vital motion is a special mode pertaining to the attribute of spirituality that tracks a creature's progression towards God and its capacity for life activities. The relationship between vital and mechanical motion is not one of equivalence or contradiction, but one of asymmetrical cooperation. Vital motion is frequently invoked in discussions of Conway's moral concerns or the theodicy problem in *The Principles*. Yet only by carefully understanding the nature and function of vital motion can we proceed to tackle the harder philosophical challenges it is meant to address. The quasi-parallel account offers a strong foundation for further exploring Conway's vision of a holistic and ordered cosmos.

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