



## God, Nature of in Anne Conway (1631–1679)

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In Anne Conway's *Principia philosophiae*, God is the first cause of all being, the highest of the three orders of being outlined in her system. The book opens with a definition of God as a perfect being, whose perfections are manifested in his attributes. God is 'spirit, life and light' possessed of traditional theological attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, justice, goodness. Conway conceives of two types of divine attribute, making a distinction between those which are 'incommunicable' (such as immutability), which are predicated of God alone, and 'communicable' attributes (such as justice) which may be shared by the works of God. Conway uses this distinction between the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God, as the basis of a principle of likeness and difference between God and creation, which serves to define the essence of each, and to account for likeness between created things and their creator. If God is living, and wise, it follows that his effects (works) reflect his wisdom, and that they must be living. God is essentially a creator, from whom all things derive by a process of continuous emanation, which results from an inner impulse of divine goodness and wisdom. Pre-eminent among the divine attributes are goodness and wisdom, which qualify the execution of God's will. As a communicable attribute, goodness is something which makes all created things similar to God. Since it is in the nature of divine goodness to increase, this derivative goodness of the created world may be augmented to infinity, but it never becomes infinite, for then it would become God. Conway underscores the compatibility of her conception of God with religion, by describing God in religious terms drawn from the main religions of the world Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

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