



## Substance in Anne Conway (1631–1679)

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The terms substance, essence and nature (Latin: *substantia*, *essentia*, *natura*) are used inter-changeably in Anne Conway's *Principia*. Substance is the defining nature of an entity or being and is determined by its properties. Conway posits three types of being (or species): God, Middle Nature (Christ) and Creation (or Creature). The second two share properties of the first. These are the 'communicable' attributes of God (spirit, life, light, justice, wisdom, goodness). All things are therefore some form of spirit endowed with life. Middle Nature and Creation are differentiated from one another and from God by properties or combinations of properties unique to each. The key differentiating attribute is mutability: God is wholly immutable, created nature wholly mutable, and Middle Nature both mutable and immutable. Strictly, therefore, Conway's metaphysics entails three substances. The third species, Creation, is further differentiated by multiplicity of its constituent monads, which are the building blocks of changeable things. Nevertheless, "the whole Creation is still but one Substance or Entity" (*Principles* VII.4). Since things are mutable, created things may become more or less active, more or less solid, more or less good, but nothing can lose its original 'godlikeness' completely, for then it would cease to exist. All changes are therefore changes of mode, not substance.

Conway holds, further, that physical change occurs in step with moral condition, in such a way that the less good a creature becomes, the less spirit-like its form or 'figure'. The degree of corporeality correlates to the relative goodness or badness of the creature. The substance monism of the third species is thus a dual-aspect monism, through which Conway sought to provide a teleological account of nature (see *Perfectibility* in Conway). Her substance monism is motivated partly by the failures of dualism and materialism to explain life and movement, but chiefly by her desire to clarify the relationship of God to the world, in order to vindicate divine goodness.

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### **Keywords:**

god, substance, essence, monism, change, nature, goodness