



## *Perfectibility* in Anne Conway (1631–1679)

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Perfectibility is essential to Anne Conway's metaphysics, grounded in her conception of divine goodness and her dual-aspect monism. Since all things have some resemblance to God, everything is good. It is in the nature of divine goodness to increase, so all things have the potential to increase in goodness infinitely, but not to the extent that they become God. The capacity of created things to increase in goodness is only possible because everything which is not God is mutable.

Conway holds, further, that the interactions which cause change can only occur between things that are alike. It follows that all created things are constituted of a single substance and the changes which creatures undergo, over time entail decrease or increase in their capacity to act according to their degree of goodness, and result in physical changes such that the more degenerate the creature, the more corporeal it becomes. However, creatures cannot degenerate so far as to become totally evil, for that would mean becoming so unlike God as not to exist. Loss of goodness cannot proceed infinitely, since that would contradict the nature of divine goodness to augment the derivative goodness of created things. Recovery is possible because the degenerate condition is a state of punishment, and therefore *sui generis* purgative. The greater physicality, as it were the 'thickening' of spirit, which accompanies degeneration is a painful process which ultimately stimulates its own reversal. Regeneration involves progressive loss of the disabling 'grossness' of the degenerate creature, thereby increasing its capacity to act. The regenerating creature recovers its original purity of substance in step with its augmenting goodness, ultimately reaching the point where it recovers its pristine godlikeness – a state of both goodness and pure spirit.

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