



Creation in Anne Conway (1631-1679)

Jonathan Head

Keele University

In her *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (1690), Anne Conway offers an account of creation as a never-ending process that takes place over an infinite duration of time. Given that God is both immutable and outside of time, Conway argues that we can only understand the divine decision to create as a single, unified act that has no start or endpoint. God is essentially a creator and so we cannot make sense of creation beginning or ceasing: "God was always a creator and will always be a creator because otherwise he would change. Therefore, creatures always were and always will be" (Conway 1996: 2.5; 13). In this way, the *Principles* rejects a more orthodox Christian account that sees history as having both a finite past and a finite future.

The divine decision to create is grounded in God's overwhelming perfect goodness. It is a necessary feature of infinite goodness that it will seek to spread itself as far as it is able, for a good being will desire to have as many other things as possible share in its goodness. Conway uses recognizably Neoplatonic imagery to describe this process, speaking of God as a "fountain" that will "flow perpetually" and "send forth living waters" (2.4; 13). Conway argues that we can infer that creation not only takes place over an infinite duration of time, but also involves "an infinity of worlds or creatures" (3.4; 16).

In addition to the creative activity of God, Conway also posits a role for Christ or the Logos as an instrument of creation. Christ contains "the universal seeds or principles" (4.1; 21) through which all beings are created. All creatures have a deep bond with Christ because "they arise from him just like branches from a root" (4.3; 22).

Primary Sources:

Conway, Anne 1690. *Principia philosophiae antiquissimae ac recentissimae*. Amsterdam: n.p.

Conway, Anne 1692. *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. London:

n.p.

Conway, Anne 1996. *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. Coudert, Allison & Corse, Taylor (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. URL: Google books.

Secondary Sources:

Head, Jonathan 2021. *The Philosophy of Anne Conway: God, Creation and the Nature of Time*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. URL: Google books.

Hutton, Sarah 2004. *Anne Conway: A Woman Philosopher*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. URL: Google books.

Frankel, Lois 1991. Anne Finch, Viscountess Conway, in: Waitle, Mary Ellen (ed.): *A History of Women Philosophers: Volume 3*. Dordrecht: Springer, 41-58. URL: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-011-3790-4_3 [13|05|2021].

Keywords:

God, Christ, creation, time, goodness, Neoplatonism