



Freedom in Anne Conway (1631–1679)

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In her *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (1690), Anne Conway posits a distinction between divine freedom and the kind of liberty enjoyed by God's creatures. Creaturely freedom consists in having indifference of the will, in the sense of having a genuine ability to choose between different incentives for action. The use or abuse of the indifferent will by creatures not only has an impact upon their moral status, but also potentially their physical form, as a human being who lives a "brutish or animal life" are in danger of finding themselves in the body "of a brute and not a human" (Conway 1996: 6.7; 36) in a future life.

Conway argues that God cannot have an indifferent will as it would imply an imperfect nature. A being who enjoys indifference of the will can choose between morally good and bad courses of action and so has the power to live in a less than morally perfect way. In contrast, God is constrained by his own perfect nature to always do what is best: "God must do whatever he does to and for his creatures since his infinite wisdom, goodness, and justice are a law to him which cannot be superseded" (3.2; 16). Divine action is both necessary and yet free in the highest sense.

In this way, Conway rejects a voluntarist account of divine freedom, according to which God can arbitrarily direct his will without constraint by a pre-existing moral framework. Conway argues that such a view of God makes him akin to "those cruel tyrants in the world who do most things from their own pure will, relying on their power, so that they are unable to give any explanation for their actions other than their own pure will" (3.1; 15).

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