

CONWAY'S DEMONSTRATION OF A MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND CREATURES

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In her sole philosophical treatise, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, Anne Conway (1631–1679) offers a demonstration of the proposition that, in addition to God and creatures, there is a being whose essence is the medium between God's essence and creatures' essence. We offer an interpretation of Conway's demonstration that reveals its dependence on a rational principle ('PME'): if beings with extreme natures are united, then they are united by means of a being whose nature is the medium between the extremes. We also assess the extent to which Conway offers a justification for her metaphysics by demonstrating her claims from principles known by the understanding. Conway's philosophical demonstrations are suggestive of a rationalist position on which her metaphysics may be proved from a small number of propositions established independent of experience. However, we ultimately argue that Conway's philosophical methodology is not rationalist in this sense: for Conway is willing to take our daily experience as the evidence for a metaphysical principle, and also to argue for her philosophy on the basis of a consensus among authoritative texts.

Keywords: Anne Conway; Metaphysics; Principles of Continuity; Causation; Trinitarianism; Early Modern Rationalism

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Section 1. Introduction

A central goal of Anne Conway's treatise, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, is to prove that one cannot rationally accept *only* the existence of the natural world together with the transcendent, wholly spiritual God who created it and is present in it.¹ Rather, if one already accepts the existence of God and creation, then one must *also* accept the existence of an additional being whose essence is the middle or medium between the essences of God and creation. Following the translation of Coudert and Corse, we refer to this being as 'the mediator', which helps to capture the idea that the mediator is a being by means of which the union between God and creation takes place.²

The narrower aim of the present paper is to offer a detailed analysis and assessment of Conway's demonstration of the mediator's existence as it occurs in Chapter V of the *Principles*.³ The pursuit of this aim, however, will shed light on some broader open questions about Conway's philosophy. First, by identifying the premises of Conway's demonstration, we help to answer the question, 'What exactly are Conway's principles?' The main principle we wish to highlight, which we dub 'PME', states that *if beings with extreme natures are united, then there is some mediator by means of which they are united* (where 'a mediator' in the general sense names a being, the nature of which is the middle or medium nature between the extremes). PME is centrally important to Conway's metaphysics. Here we attempt to explain its meaning and its deductive role in the argument for the mediator's existence.

A second open question about Conway concerns the extent to which her work may fruitfully be interpreted as a form of early modern rationalism in the tradition that includes René Descartes and G. W. Leibniz. In the secondary literature on the *Principles*, Conway has frequently been labeled a 'rationalist' and has even

1. We will make references to Coudert and Corse's English translation of Conway's *Principles* in the main text by giving the chapter number, section number, and page number in the format (C.S.p) so that, for example, (V.3.24) refers to Chapter V, Section 3, page 24 in Conway (1996). When referring to the original Latin publication of 1690 or first English translation of 1692, we will give page numbers in Peter Loftson's edition (Conway 1998).

2. Coudert and Corse use 'mediator' as a translation for '*medium*', '*ens medium*', and '*natura media*'. Other plausible translations might include 'middle being', 'middle nature', or perhaps 'medium'. For these Latin labels, see Conway (1998: 118, 120). For examples of Coudert and Corse's translations, see (V.2–3.24–5). Conway also frequently uses 'Christ' as a name for the mediator. We will discuss Conway's identification of the mediator with Christ in Section 4.1.

3. The core of Conway's demonstration occurs at (V.2–3.24–5), though, as we will see, other parts of the *Principles* are relevant to the elaboration and defense of Conway's argument.

been called a 'proto-Leibniz'.⁴ Her epistemology has been characterized as apriorist and involving a commitment to something analogous to Descartes' clear and distinct perceptions of the intellect.⁵ Nonetheless, because Conway writes so little about her epistemology, these descriptions of Conway often depend upon a reconstructed or implied view. Our approach will be to articulate a system of principles that can arguably be known by the understanding alone according to the standards of Conway's philosophy. In doing so, we help to adumbrate a metaphysical system that is interesting in its own right and is aptly labeled 'rationalist' because it proceeds from principles that are arguably furnished by the understanding independently of experience. However, we will ultimately find that Conway's own position and philosophical methodology is not rationalist in this sense: first, because Conway takes human experience to be the basis for some metaphysical principles; and second, because some of Conway's arguments are based on the authority of religious texts. Indeed, part of the value of assessing how far Conway's position may be developed from principles furnished by the understanding is to arrive at a more precise conception of the evidentiary roles played in her philosophy by the understanding, experience, and authority.

The plan of the paper is as follows. In the following section (Section 2), we will consider Conway's use of religious texts in the *Principles* and motivate the investigation of how far Conway can demonstrate her philosophical system from principles known by the understanding alone. Section 3 is devoted to the analysis of Conway's demonstration of the existence of the mediator between God and creatures. Section 4 offers a critical assessment of Conway's demonstration and considers a variety of objections to it, together with replies that Conway either explicitly gave or might have given. Section 5 returns to the question of Conway's epistemological and methodological orientation, clarifying the roles played by human experience and authoritative texts in her philosophical work.

4. For a prominent example of the 'rationalist' label, see Jane Duran (1989). For 'proto-Leibniz', see Loptson's introduction in (Conway 1998: 57) and Bernardino Orio de Miguel (2004). In this paper, we will characterize a position as rationalist inasmuch as it attempts to establish a metaphysics using principles furnished by the understanding independent of experience. We will not address other working conceptions of rationalism, in particular the conception on which acceptance of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) is constitutive of rationalism. For an account according to which Conway does accept PSR, see Lois Frankel (1991: 45).

5. For a quick statement of an apriorist reading, see Jacqueline Broad (2003: 85–6). For interpreters who view Conway as accepting something like Descartes' clear and distinct perception of the intellect, see Duran (1989: 75) and Christia Mercer (2009: Section 5). The view that Conway accepts Cartesian clear and distinct perception is misleadingly suggested by a mistranslation and footnote by Coudert and Corse at (VI.4.30). At this place in the text, Conway is simply endorsing the claim that 'entities shouldn't be multiplied without need' (*loc. cit.*). She is not endorsing any claim to the effect that whatever is correctly understood is true. See the original Latin and English translation in Conway (1998: 136–37).

Section 2. Appeals to Authoritative Texts and Demonstrations from Rationally Evident Principles

In the *Principles*, Conway adopts two complementary argumentative strategies in order to persuade the reader of her claims. The first is to cite authoritative texts or views, most prominently the Christian Bible, but also texts in the Kabbalist tradition.⁶ However, Conway does not typically offer support for her claims by citing only a single authoritative source. Instead, she marshals evidence for her claims by showing that they lie within a consensus that can be found among Christian, Platonist, Kabbalist, and other sources. There is an implicit recognition in Conway's appeals to authoritative texts that no single philosophical or religious text has a monopoly on the truth. Rather, if one reads them together with a suitably sympathetic but critical frame of mind, one can see how they arrive at a common philosophical position. The fact that these diverse sources take a common position can then be offered as evidence for its truth.⁷ For example, in trying to convince her reader of the existence of a mediator between God and creatures, Conway appeals to biblical texts concerning Christ and to Kabbalist texts concerning Adam Kadmon. She cites Colossians 1:16, 'through Christ all things visible and invisible have been made', but also highlights how, in the Kabbalist tradition, '[Adam Kadmon's] existence in the order of nature preceded all creatures' (V.1.23). As readers of the *Principles*, we are intended to take these texts as descriptions of a single being whose existence is confirmed by multiple sources.

Conway's frequent appeals to authoritative texts can obscure the fact that she is also pursuing a second argumentative strategy, one that offers evidence for her propositions by producing demonstrations of them from rationally evident principles. Concerning the existence of a mediator between God and creatures, Conway writes that '[t]he existence of...a mediator is as demonstrable as the existence of God, as long as such a being is understood to be of a lesser nature

6. There is a thorny interpretive issue of how to deal with the *Principles'* citations of Francis Mercury van Helmont's *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* and of other works in the *Kabbala Denudata*, especially those works that appeared in print only after Conway's death (Helmont 1684; Rosenroth 1684). Peter Loptson has argued that at least some of these citations were very likely inserted by van Helmont and so were not part of Conway's original manuscript (Conway 1998: 19). As a practical matter, we will neither assume that references to the *Kabbala Denudata* were part of Conway's original manuscript nor that citations to those texts are necessary for the philosophical demonstrations Conway offers. Nonetheless, it seems fair to say that Conway is referring to views in the Kabbalist tradition when she speaks of the views of 'Kabbalists' and 'Hebrews' and also when she uses specialized vocabulary such as 'Adam Kadmon' or '*ruach*'. Cf. (V.1.23; VII.4.51).

7. A major theme of Sarah Hutton's book *Anne Conway: A Woman Philosopher* is that both Conway and her mentor Henry More have a conception of *perennial philosophy* according to which various ancient and modern philosophical sources form parts of a single, timelessly true philosophical system (Hutton 2004: 11, 86–7). If Hutton is correct, this would certainly explain Conway's tendency to look for consensus positions among ancient and modern philosophies.

than God and yet of a greater and more excellent nature than all remaining creatures' (V.2.24). Because Conway clearly thinks the existence of a mediator can be demonstrated—she presents the demonstration in Chapter V of the *Principles*—it follows from this remark that she takes the existence of God to be demonstrable as well. When Conway gives her demonstration of the mediator's existence, she assumes the principle that God is immutable, explaining that this principle is shown to us by 'our understanding, which has been placed in our minds by God' (V.3.24). Thus, for Conway, the knowledge that God is immutable can be achieved by the understanding alone. This is the sense in which at least some of the principles Conway invokes (or proves) are rationally evident. If Conway can demonstrate the claim that there is a mediator between God and creatures from rationally evident principles, then she will have provided a justification for her claim that is independent of appeals to authoritative texts.

It is important to Conway to provide evidence that is independent of textual authorities in part because she hopes to promote belief among peoples who would not recognize the authority of the texts she cites. As Conway notes:

If these matters are correctly considered, they will contribute greatly to the propagation of the true faith and Christian religion among Jews and Turks and other infidel nations; if, namely, it is agreed that there are equally strong reasons by which we can prove that there is a mediator between God and human beings, indeed, between God and all creatures, as there are for proving that there is a God and a creation. (VI.5.31-2)

Human beings from such diverse backgrounds cannot be expected to recognize the authority of the same texts. They can, however, be expected to be susceptible to demonstrations that require no more than the human understanding. If Conway can demonstrate the existence of God, of creatures, and of a mediator between them, she will have made tremendous progress toward her irenic goal of uniting Jews, Christians, and Muslims behind a single philosophical system.⁸

A major objective of this paper is to assess how far Conway can develop a justification for the claim that there is a mediator between God and creatures by demonstrating the mediator's existence from premises that are plausibly known by the understanding alone in Conway's historical and philosophical context. As we will see, the premises of Conway's demonstration include the claims that God exists and that creatures exist. Consequently, in order for Conway to demonstrate the existence of a mediator, she first requires demonstrations of the existence of God and of creatures, and the question of the justification for the

8. For a discussion of Conway irenicism, see Hutton (2004: 107–09). Sandrine Parageau argues that Conway's irenic goal is better understood as a project to convert Jews and other non-believers to Christianity (2018: 251–53).

claim that a mediator exists becomes the question of the justification for Conway's entire metaphysics of substance, according to which there are fundamentally three kinds of being: God's kind; the mediator's kind; and creatures' kind (VI.4.30).

We get a clue to Conway's strategy of demonstration in her remark that '[f]rom a serious and due consideration of the divine attributes...the truth of everything can be made clear, as if from a treasure house stored with riches' (VII.2.44). Conway begins with insight into God's existence and nature, and then uses this insight in order to demonstrate the existence and nature of creation. Specifically, Conway: (i). gives a deductively primitive characterization of God; (ii). demonstrates certain attributes of God; (iii). demonstrates the existence of creatures; and (iv). demonstrates the existence of a mediator between God and creatures.⁹ We consider how Conway carries out this strategy in the following section.

Section 3. Conway's Demonstrations

3.1 *The nature and existence of God*

Conway asserts that God's existence can be demonstrated (V.2.24). However, she neither offers her own demonstration of God's existence in the *Principles*, nor does she suggest which sorts of demonstration she would endorse. As a result, our task in this subsection is speculative and reconstructive. Our goal will be to find indications of the sort of argument for the existence of God that Conway should endorse in light of her demonstrations of God's attributes and her other broader commitments. To foreshadow our main result, we will argue that Conway should endorse some version of an ontological argument in the tradition of Anselm, Descartes, and her mentor Henry More.¹⁰

To keep our discussion grounded in the text of the *Principles*, it behooves us to examine Conway's demonstration of God's immutability. Conway begins by describing God as 'the highest being' [*Ens summum*], and she tells us that God's nature and essence must be considered:

9. Jane Duran reads Conway as pursuing a demonstrative strategy along the lines described here (1989: 73). Our main difference with Duran is that on her reading of Conway's philosophy, we have knowledge of creation from our knowledge of the mediator. This seems to get the order of knowledge backwards. On our reading, the existence of creation must first be demonstrated in order to demonstrate the existence of a mediator.

10. For Anselm's argument, see Chapters II and III of the *Proslogion* (1998: 87–8). For a version of Descartes' argument Conway was familiar with, see *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*, Part I, Propositions 14–16 (1991: 8–9). For More's argument, see *An Antidote Against Atheism*, Chapters III and VIII (1712: 12–3, 21–5).

[The] nature and essence of God is altogether unchangeable, as sacred Scripture and our understanding, which has been placed in our minds by God, shows us. Therefore, if there were any mutability in God, it is necessary that it would tend towards the utmost measure and degree of goodness. In this case, however, he would not be the highest good [*sum-mum bonum*], which is a contradiction. (V.3.24)

This is only the first part of Conway's demonstration, but it seems already to establish the conclusion that God is immutable. Conway takes as her starting point a conception of God as the highest, that is to say, the most perfect being.¹¹ It is part of this conception not merely that God is actually the most perfect being, but that God is the most perfect being possible. Conway's argument has the following logical structure:

1. God possesses the highest degree of perfection. (premise)
2. Suppose that God is mutable. (temporary premise for *reductio*)
3. If God is mutable, then any change in God is a change towards a higher degree of perfection. (premise)
4. If any change in God is a change towards a higher degree of perfection, then God does not possess the highest degree of perfection. (premise)
5. Therefore, God does not possess the highest degree of perfection. (inference from 2.-4.)
6. Contradiction. (1. and 5.)
7. God is immutable. (conclusion by *reductio*)

The intuition behind premise (3.) seems to be that God, being supremely perfect, would have to change toward a higher degree of perfection if God could change at all. Regarding (4.), Conway's thought seems to be that if it were possible for God to change toward a higher degree of perfection, then there would be some degree of perfection that even God had not reached. But then God would not be supremely perfect.

The natural objection to Conway's argument would be to insist that God can change neutrally, neither improving nor worsening, all the while retaining the highest perfection. This objection is to some extent addressed by the remainder of the demonstration:

Furthermore, if anything proceeds to a greater degree of goodness, this is only because there is some greater being whose virtue and influence it

11. Conway describes God as 'most perfect' [*perfectissimum*] at (VII.2.45). Moreover, in the argument we are examining, she seems to use 'higher' and 'more perfect' equivalently.

shares. Now, there is no greater being than God, and he cannot improve or be made better in any way, much less decrease, which would imply his imperfection. Therefore it is clear that God, or the highest being, is wholly unchangeable. (V.3.24)

Conway argues that if God were mutable and capable of worsening, it would follow all the more so that God wouldn't be the highest being, presumably because the highest being is not susceptible to becoming worse. In this way, Conway can argue that if God were mutable, then however God could change—either towards a greater or lesser degree of perfection—God would not be the highest being. This does not directly answer the objection that raises the possibility of neutral change. It does, however, suggest that Conway's demonstration may rest on a tacit premise: that for God, or perhaps for all beings whatever, all change is towards a greater or lesser degree of perfection (or, in other words, towards good or evil).¹²

To be sure, Conway's demonstration of God's immutability is not an ontological argument. It assumes, rather than proves, that God exists. Nonetheless, it uses key concepts and patterns of reasoning familiar from ontological arguments. With regard to concepts, Conway takes as a deductively primitive characterization of God that God is the highest being, where 'highest' is evidently to be understood in terms of perfection. Elsewhere Conway explicitly describes God as 'most perfect' [*perfectissimum*] (VIII.2.45). These characterizations closely mirror the ways both Descartes and More describe God when they present their own ontological arguments, with Descartes describing God as 'a supremely perfect being' in the *Principles of Philosophy*, and More describing God as 'a being fully and absolutely perfect' in *An Antidote Against Atheism* (Descartes 1991: 8; More 1712: 21). On each of these very closely related conceptions, it is plausible that existence belongs to God's essence and idea. So, much like Descartes, Conway is in a position to formulate an ontological argument that starts from the premise that existence belongs to God's very essence, and that derives the conclusion that

12. There are some good reasons to think that Conway accepts the principle that all change is towards good or evil, with the consequence that there are no neutral changes. First, the principle seems to be an unstated assumption of some of her arguments, as it seems to be here. Second, of all the changeable beings Conway recognizes, there is only the mediator, which can and does change only towards the good, and creatures, which can and do change towards good or evil. So, however it may be established, the principle seems to state a truth about reality according to Conway's metaphysics. If Conway does accept the principle that all change is towards good or evil, one possible explanation would be that Conway also accepts that *x is less perfect than y* is a strict total ordering on the conditions of all beings, so that if *a* and *b* are not one and the same condition of one and the same being, then either *a* is less perfect than *b*, or *b* is less perfect than *a*. It is generally acknowledged that Conway operates with a view of beings as arranged in an ontological hierarchy of perfections, but the precise structure of this hierarchy remains an open problem (Hutton 2004: 70–1, 167–68; Mercer 2019: Section 2; Lascano 2017: 174).

God exists. Or, to formulate the issue in More's fashion, Conway could argue that reflection on *what God is* suffices to show us *that God is* (More 1712: 21).

There is plenty of evidence that Conway would have known how to give an ontological argument along these lines. In a letter from More to Conway of September 9, 1650, More describes in detail some of Conway's reactions to Descartes' ontological argument in his *Principles of Philosophy*. At the end of More's letter, Conway writes in her own hand the sentence 'Ye Idea of a fully perfect being Implies its existence...p. 1 p. 14 to 18' (Hutton and Nicolson 1992: 484). While this might look like an endorsement of an ontological argument, it appears instead to be a reference to the arguments in Propositions 14 to 18 in Part I of Descartes' *Principles*.¹³ Most of More's discussion indicates that Conway had not endorsed Descartes' argument but rather had raised some familiar objections to it. More gives quick replies to those objections, apparently taking them to be easily overcome. On balance, it seems hasty to regard More's letter as confirmation that Conway either endorsed or rejected an ontological argument for the existence of God in 1650. What the letter confirms is just that Conway had examined Descartes' ontological argument carefully as a student exercise.^{14,15}

The upshot is that when Conway says that God's existence can be demonstrated but offers no demonstration of her own, something along the lines of Descartes' ontological argument is a highly salient candidate for what she might have intended. Nonetheless, it is difficult to say whether Conway would have endorsed an ontological argument in the 1670's when she was writing the *Principles*. To keep our discussion brief, the reasons for thinking she should employ it include the following. First, an ontological argument dovetails with her argument for God's immutability, since both arguments reason through the consequences of God's supreme perfection. Second, of the main demonstrations of God's existence available to her, an ontological argument most closely fits with a strategy of making the truth of all things clear from the divine attributes (VII.2.44).

13. For relevant discussion of More and Conway's correspondence about Descartes, see Alan Gabbey (1977: 397).

14. To get a fuller sense for Conway's epistolary student exercises with More, see Hutton (2004: 46–8).

15. Conway also would have known the details of the ontological argument More published in *An Antidote Against Atheism* just a couple of years after their correspondence of 1650: (i). More's *Antidote* begins with a letter dedicating the work to Anne Conway and praising her effusively as a living instantiation of virtue (More 1712: A2 verso); (ii). More took care to have a handsomely bound copy of the *Antidote* delivered to Conway; and (iii). they both make references to the work in later correspondence (Hutton and Nicolson 1992: 69, 72, 219). In the preface to the *Antidote*, More rejects Descartes' argument to the effect that only God could be the cause of one's idea of God (More 1712: 4). Then in Book I More goes on to develop a version of the ontological argument that he attributes to Descartes (More 1712: 21–5).

3.2. *The nature and existence of creatures*

Conway offers detailed, explicit arguments establishing the nature and existence of creatures. As a result, our discussion of their nature and existence can be less speculative than our discussion of God's existence. We will first address the existence of creatures, then turn to their nature.

In Chapter II of the *Principles*, Conway demonstrates the existence of creatures as follows:

For God is...the infinite fountain and ocean of goodness, charity, and bounty. In what way is it possible for that fountain not to flow perpetually and to send forth living waters? For will not that ocean overflow in its perpetual emanation and continual flux for the production of creatures? For the goodness of God is communicated and multiplied by its own nature, since in himself he lacks nothing nor can anything be added to him because of his absolute fullness and his remarkable and mighty abundance. And since he is not able to multiply himself because that would be the same as creating many Gods, which would be a contradiction, it necessarily follows that he gave being to creatures from time everlasting or from time without number, for otherwise the goodness communicated by God, which is his essential attribute, would indeed be finite and could be then numbered in terms of years. Nothing is more absurd.¹⁶ (II.4.13)

Put succinctly, creation is a consequence of God's goodness and power. Because his goodness is infinite, God is bound to augment goodness *ad infinitum*. Conway's argument works by listing all the ways God might be supposed to be capable of augmenting goodness and then ruling out all but one as impossible: God can either (a) add goodness to himself; (b) multiply himself, *i.e.*, create more beings with God's nature; or (c) give being to creatures. (a) is impossible, because God is supremely perfect. (b) is impossible, because there can be at most one God. This leaves only (c), that God gives being to creatures. (c) is of course possible, since God's power is sufficient to create beings distinct from God. Note, however, that merely giving being to creatures is not sufficient to augment goodness *ad infinitum*. God must also communicate goodness to the beings God creates, *i.e.*, God must create good creatures.¹⁷ God can do this, since goodness is

16. Conway's goal in this demonstration is not merely to show that creatures actually exist, but also that creatures always have existed and always will exist. Since the temporal aspect is not the focus here, but merely the actual existence of some creature or other, we restrict ourselves to the weaker conclusion that creatures actually exist.

17. Conway rejects the idea that mere being is good in itself, and she also rejects the suggestion that extended bodies with no life or perception are good in themselves (VII.2.46).

one of God's communicable attributes. Therefore, creatures exist, and they have some degree of goodness.¹⁸

On the general account of creation that emerges from this and other passages in the *Principles*, God gives being to creatures by emanating them, and the nature of creatures is largely determined by the attributes that God communicates to them. The nature of creatures therefore depends on which attributes God can and cannot communicate to them. Conway explains this crucial distinction in God's attributes as follows:

The divine attributes are commonly and correctly divided into those which are communicable and those which are not. The incommunicable are that God is a being subsisting by himself, independent, immutable, absolutely infinite, and most perfect. The communicable attributes are that God is spirit, light, life, that he is good, holy, just, wise, etc. Among these communicable attributes there are none which are not alive and life itself. (VII.2.45)

A key attribute of creatures that is meant to follow from this way of drawing the distinction between God's communicable and incommunicable attributes is their *mutability*. For the fact that creatures are mutable allegedly follows from the fact that, although God is immutable, God cannot communicate immutability (VI.1.29). This presents us with a puzzle, since at first glance it is not clear why God cannot create something—say, a physical atom—that is completely immutable. One might have thought that God's omnipotence requires God to be capable of making immutable creatures, since it appears consistent that such things should exist, and since 'God can do anything which does not imply a contradiction' (III.3.16).

Some light can be shed on the present puzzle by giving further scrutiny to Conway's claim that 'if any creature were by its nature immutable, it would be God' (VI.1.29). When one considers God's other incommunicable attributes, such as supreme perfection or absolute infinity, it is plausible that the reason God cannot communicate them is just that, as a matter of necessity, if anything is assumed to have one of those attributes, then that thing is God. In this respect, Conway takes immutability to be just like supreme perfection or absolute infinity. Indeed, immutability, supreme perfection, and the rest are individual essences of God. In order to communicate immutability, God would have to cre-

18. Conway's demonstration of the existence of creatures from God's goodness has Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic roots. Origen makes a similar argument in *On First Principles*, Book I, Chapter IV, Section 3 (2013: 52–3). For a discussion of Neoplatonists on this topic, see R. T. Wallis (1995: 61–72).

ate a being distinct from God that is also God. But that is impossible (II.4.13). It follows that creatures are mutable, and indeed essentially so (IV.1.21).

Arguably, Conway's explanation renders it intelligible that God cannot communicate attributes that are sufficiently like supreme perfection. But it is hard not to wonder why *immutability* should be an incommunicable attribute, since it seems conceivable that God could create an immutable being—such as a physical atom—distinct from God. Given her other commitments, Conway could offer a further explanation that exploits the analogy between immutable creatures and what she calls 'dead matter': if there were to be such a thing as an immutable creature, it would be a being that is imperfect but has no possibility for improvement (cf. VII.2.46). This is something a wise and just God would never create. However, God is bound to follow the dictates of God's wisdom and justice (III.2.16). Hence immutable creatures are, like dead matter, impossible, and immutability must count as one of God's incommunicable attributes.

Having discussed the nature of creatures—that they are essentially mutable—let us pause for a moment to reflect on the way our discussion sheds light on Conway's conception of God. According to Conway, God exists and possesses a number of incommunicable attributes, such as supreme perfection, immutability, and absolute infinity. For each of these attributes, there is a corresponding principle that holds necessarily:

(Po) For anything whatever, it is supremely perfect if and only if it is God.

(P₁) For anything whatever, it is immutable if and only if it is God.

(P₂) For anything whatever, it is absolutely infinite if and only if it is God.¹⁹

With these principles in hand, let us turn to the demonstration of the mediator.

3.3 *The existence of a mediator between God and creatures*

The opening stages of Conway's demonstration of the existence of a mediator between God and creatures consist of a series of reflections on the essences of God and creatures (V.3.24). Conway's goal is to show that these essences are extremes [*extremae*] between which there is evidently a medium essence. Conway writes:

19. (Po) is arguably an axiomatic, indemonstrable truth for Conway. One half of (P₁)—that God is immutable—follows from the demonstration described in the last subsection. It is unclear whether Conway would regard the other half of (P₁)—that only God is immutable—as axiomatic and indemonstrable. Conway often seems to regard it that way (cf. VI.1.29). On the other hand, she arguably has the resources to demonstrate it in the way just outlined.

[The] following things must be considered: first, the nature or essence of God, the highest being; second, the nature and essence of the creatures, which are so unlike each other that the nature of this mediator will become immediately apparent to us. (*ibid.*)

As we saw above, immutability belongs to God's essence. Mutability belongs to creatures' essence, but this mutability comes in degrees. Complete mutability—the kind human beings, trees, and stones have—is the capacity to change towards good or evil. The reader is intended to realize that these two essences are the opposite of one another, both in the sense that 'immutable' is the negation of 'mutable', but also in the sense that the two essences do not resemble each other. As a medium between these two essences, there is room for partial mutability as an essential attribute. Conway identifies this partial mutability as a capacity to change towards the good without the corresponding capacity to change towards evil (*ibid.*).²⁰

Conway's demonstration comes to a close as follows:

Therefore there are three kinds of being [*Entium classis*]. The first is altogether immutable. The second can only change toward the good, so that which is good by its very nature can become better. The third kind is that which, although it was good by its very nature, is nevertheless able to change from good to good as well as from good to evil. The first and last of these three kinds are opposites. The second is the natural medium [*medium*] between them, through which the extremes are united. It is therefore the most fitting and appropriate mediator [*medium*], for it partakes of one extreme because it is mutable in respect to going from good to a greater degree of good and of the other extreme because it is entirely incapable of changing from good to bad. *Such a mediator [medium] is necessary by the very nature of things because otherwise a gap would remain and one extreme would have been united with the other extreme without a mediator [sine medio], which is impossible and against the nature of things, as is apparent throughout the entire universe.* (V.3.24–5, emphasis added)

The italicized sentence states the principle that drives Conway's demonstration, and any analysis of the demonstration requires a careful interpretation of the principle. Let us dub it 'The Principle of the Medium' (PME). It may be articulated laboriously as follows:

20. One might wonder whether there is room for another sort of partial mutability: a capacity to change towards evil but not towards good. Conway argues that this is impossible and cannot be the essence of any being (see Section 4.2).

(PME) If [there are some natures N_a and N_c and some beings a and c possessing those natures, such that N_a and N_c are extremes, and a and c are united], then [there exists a being b such that b 's nature is the medium between N_a and N_c , and a and c are united by means of b].²¹

Here is what PME says in plain English. Suppose you have two natures, or essences, such as *immutable* and *completely mutable*, that are extremes with respect to each other. Suppose moreover that there are some beings that possess those natures, but are united to one another, as God and any completely mutable creature are. In a moment we will say more about the meaning of 'united' in PME, but suffice it to say for now that it requires the beings to be causally linked. According to PME, from these assumptions it follows that there exists a being—let us call it a 'mediator'—which has the nature that is the medium between the two extremes (in our case, that nature is to be *partially mutable*). Moreover, the union of the original beings occurs by means of the mediator.

PME may be put very succinctly as follows: If beings with extreme natures are united, then there is some mediator by means of which they are united. This formulation makes clear that PME expresses a constraint on unions between beings with natures that are extreme with respect to each other. For if there is no mediator between beings with extreme natures, then there is no union between them, either. Moreover, since union is a causal relation, PME may be regarded as a causal continuity principle. The mediator fills the gap in natures between dissimilar yet united beings, and that is what renders the mediator fit to act as a link in a causal chain that connects them.²²

To explain the meaning of PME, more must be said about union. Although Conway never offers a definition of it, we can gain insight into the relation by considering the primary kinds of union in Conway's philosophy: the union between God and any creature; the union between the mind and the body of

21. This formulation resolves an ambiguity in the text. For what, one may ask, are the types of things that are extremes, or are united, or are mediums? Are they natures or beings? In the passage just cited and elsewhere, Conway seems to slide back and forth between both ways of speaking as if not much depends on the difference. Nevertheless, it seems most natural to think of the extremes as natures; the things that are united as beings; the medium as the medium nature; a mediator as a being that possesses the medium nature. On this formulation of PME, *x and y are united* is a two-place relation on beings, while *x and y are extremes* is a two-place relation on natures.

22. PME has Neoplatonic roots; it is particularly reminiscent of Iamblichus's Law of Mean Terms. For discussion and references to primary texts, see Wallis (1995: 123–34). For relevant discussion in Iamblichus, see *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians*, Section 1, Chapters 5–7 (1895: 30–8). For a systematic development of Neoplatonic metaphysics that yields principles similar to PME, see Proclus's *The Elements of Theology*, especially propositions 28 and 132 (1963: 32–5, 116–19). The authors thank Danny Muñoz-Hutchinson for the references to Iamblichus and other Neoplatonists.

any creature; and unions between creatures.²³ A review of the cases reveals that a union between beings consists in their being *present to each other* and *causally related*. But the sort of presence or causal relation in question differs enormously across the kinds of union. In the case of a God-creature union, the presence is what Conway calls 'intimate presence', which requires that God be located just where the creature is without excluding the creature or increasing its bulk (VII.4.50–1). The causal links between God and the creature are twofold, since on the one hand, God is a cause of the creature's existence, and on the other, God exerts a salvific influence on the creature. Note also that the causal links between God and a creature are unidirectional: God has a causal influence on the creature, but the creature has no causal influence on God.

With this much said about the meaning and logical grammar of PME, we present the deductive structure of Conway's demonstration of the existence of a mediator between God and creatures:

1. There is a God that is immutable. (premise)
2. There is at least one creature—call it '*c*'—that is mutable towards good and evil.²⁴ (premise)
3. Immutability, on the one hand, and mutability towards good and evil, on the other, are natures that are extremes. (premise)
4. God and *c* are united. (premise)
5. If [there are some natures N_a and N_c and some beings *a* and *c* possessing those natures, such that N_a and N_c are extremes, and *a* and *c* are united], then [there exists a being *b* such that *b*'s nature is the medium between N_a and N_c , and *a* and *c* are united by means of *b*]. (PME; premise).
6. Therefore there exists a being—call it '*b*'—such that *b*'s nature is the medium between God's nature and *c*'s nature, and God and *c* are united by means of *b*. (inference from 1–5)
7. The medium between God's nature and *c*'s nature is the nature of being mutable only towards the good. (premise)
8. Therefore, there exists a being *b* such that *b* is mutable, but only towards the good, and God and *c* are united by means of *b*. (inference from 6, 7)

Setting aside the logical details, Conway's demonstration is driven by the intuition that resemblance is a necessary condition on the intelligibility of causal

23. Unless specified otherwise, for the remainder of this section 'creature' refers only to completely mutable creatures.

24. In this paper, we attempt to remain neutral with respect to the question of whether Conway takes there to be more than one created substance whose essence is to be completely mutable towards good and evil. For relevant discussion of this issue and Conway's monism generally, see Hutton (1997), Mercer (2015), Grey (2017), and Gordon-Roth (2018).

influence and on the existence of unions between beings.²⁵ When beings have natures that are extremes—as do the immutable God and any completely mutable creature—they fail to resemble each other to such an extent that their causal influence or union requires a mediator sufficiently resembling them both. A mediator between God and creatures can be the basis for the God-creature union precisely because it resembles God (in being immutable towards evil) and resembles creatures (in being mutable towards the good).

Before closing this section, we must issue a promissory note. As a result of the way we have presented Conway's argument, the astute reader may now have a worry about Conway's entitlement to its second premise: that there is at least one creature mutable towards good and evil. For Conway's demonstration of the existence of creatures only proves the existence of creatures in the general sense, creatures whose essence it is to be mutable. It does not prove the existence of a creature with complete mutability, creatures changeable towards good and evil. For now we will flag this issue and temporarily grant Conway her premise; we will turn to Conway's account of our knowledge of the existence of completely mutable creatures in Section 5.

Section 4. Critical Analysis and Objections

4.1 Christ and Conway's mediator

In offering a proof of the existence of a mediator between God and creatures, Conway's intent is to prove the existence of Jesus Christ. Indeed, through much of the text of the *Principles*, Conway uses 'Jesus Christ' [*Jesus Christus*] or 'Christ' as a name for the mediator between God and creatures.²⁶ If we temporarily grant a stipulation to the effect that 'Christ' is nothing more than a name for the mediator, then Conway's argument has some claim to being a proof of the existence of Christ. However, Conway realizes that there is more to the ordinary meaning of 'Christ' than this stipulation would capture. As she describes the dialectical situation:

[Those] who acknowledge such a mediator and believe in him can be said truly to believe in Jesus Christ, even though they do not yet know it and are not convinced that he has already come in the flesh. But if

25. Compare also Conway's discussion of mind-body unions in Chapter VIII, Section 3 (VIII.3.5–60).

26. The opening sections of Chapter V argue that Jesus Christ is the son of God, but that the son of God is 'properly speaking...the mediator between God and creatures' (V.2.24). For a clear example of the use of 'Jesus Christ' as a name for the mediator, see (VI.4.30).

they first grant that there is a mediator, they will indubitably come to acknowledge also, even if they are unwilling, that Christ is that mediator. (VI.5.32)

In other words, Conway considers the sentence 'The union between God and creatures occurs by means of a being mutable only towards the good' to be a statement of belief in Christ. Nonetheless, she recognizes that someone could accept the truth of that sentence and either deny that the sentence expresses belief in Christ or deny that this mediating being has Christ's characteristics as described in the Bible. For example, the Bible describes Christ as taking on a human body and being crucified. Conway cannot prove that the mediator she describes ever took on a human body or was crucified. At best, Conway can try to persuade her audience about these matters using some non-demonstrative means.

In this respect, Conway's dialectical predicament closely resembles that of a more traditional Christian philosopher—Descartes, for example—giving an argument for the existence of God to an audience of non-believers. If successful, the Christian philosopher may prove the existence of a supremely perfect being and may take the sentence 'There is a supremely perfect being' as a statement of belief in the God described by the Bible. But whatever else the philosopher's argument may show, it does not show that God created the world in seven days or communicated the law to Moses. It would take considerable further work to persuade an audience of non-believers that the philosopher's supremely perfect being is identical to God as described in the Bible.

In a sense, Conway is trying to outdo the traditional Christian philosopher just contemplated: whereas the traditional philosopher is merely trying to prove to the atheist that God exists, Conway is trying to demonstrate certain aspects of the Christian faith—the existence of Christ—that many philosophers would take to be beyond rational demonstration.²⁷ That being said, the situation is complicated, and a traditional Christian philosopher may find much to disagree with in Conway's account of Christ. For Conway's mediating being is not God, and is in fact a substance distinct from God with an essence that differs from God's essence (VI.4.30). For many Christians, these facts would disqualify Conway's mediator from being Christ.²⁸ At certain points, Conway seems to get around this problem by using 'Christ' as a name not for the mediator but rather for a certain 'mode or property' of God that may be called God's word (cf. I.7.10; IV.2.21). But this use of 'Christ' is in service of a unitarian account of God accord-

27. For helpful discussions of Conway as attempting to provide the basis for a rational trinitarianism, see Hutton (2004: 107–08; 2005: 216–18).

28. Recall the Nicene Creed, according to which 'Christ is Lord' and which describes Christ as a 'God from God'.

ing to which God is a single substance not consisting of any distinct persons or hypostases (I.7.10). In this denotation of 'Christ', Christ is demoted to a mode or property of a single God. Here again the traditional Christian philosopher may balk, because it may appear that instead of giving a proof of trinitarianism, Conway is abandoning it.²⁹

4.2 *The uniqueness of the mediator*

The issue just raised leads to some difficult objections about the uniqueness of the being whose existence Conway has tried to demonstrate. To see how, recall that we considered temporarily stipulating that 'Christ' is to refer to the mediator between God and creatures. This stipulation only works if there is a unique mediator; otherwise, it is not clear what 'Christ' refers to. But for all we have seen so far, Conway's demonstration at most establishes the *existence* of a mediator between God and a creature mutable towards good and evil. It does not establish the *uniqueness* of that mediator.

Conway anticipates the objection that between God and creatures, there may be not just one mediator but rather 'two, three, four, five, six, or however many can be imagined' (VI.4.30). This is a natural worry once the suspicion has been raised that if PME works at all to demonstrate the existence of a mediator between God and creatures, then it can be reapplied repeatedly in order to demonstrate the existence of *higher-order mediators*: a being whose essence is the medium between God's essence and the mediator's essence; a being whose essence is the medium between the mediator's essence and creatures' essence; and so on. Indeed, Conway sets the stage for this objection. She has already argued that the mediator exists, and she acknowledges that God and the mediator are united, as are the mediator and creatures (IV.2.21; V.6.26; VIII.3.60). The only further condition required for the reapplication of PME is that God and the mediator's natures be extremes (or, respectively, that the mediator and creatures' natures be extremes).

Conway's response to this problem is to argue that there cannot be any such beings as higher-order mediators. She is willing to suppose their possible existence temporarily for the sake of the argument, but her own view is that they are impossible. This follows from Conway's *attribute trialism*, which she argues for as follows:

29. It follows from our discussion that 'Christ' is ambiguous in Conway's *Principles*, being used at times as a name for the mediator, at times for a certain mode of God. Henceforth in this paper, 'Christ' will always be used as a name for the mediator. For further discussion of Conway's christology, see Mercer (2012; 2019) and Parageau (2018).

[We] must now determine how many species of things there are which are distinguished from each other in terms of their substance or essence. If we look closely into this, we will discover there are only three, which, as was said above, are God, Christ, and creatures; and that these three species are really distinct in terms of their essence has already been proved...Furthermore, because the three aforementioned species exhaust all the specific differences in substances which can possibly be conceived by our minds, then that vast infinity of possible things is fulfilled in these three species...Certainly insofar as something can be called an entity, it is either altogether immutable like God, the supreme being, or altogether mutable, that is for good or bad, like a creature, which is the lowest order of being, or partly mutable in respect to good, like Christ, the son of God, the mediator between God and creatures. In what category then could we place some fourth, fifth, sixth, or seventh, etc. species which is not clearly immutable or clearly mutable, nor partly mutable nor partly immutable. (VI.4.30)

Conway is arguing here that any being is either completely immutable (like God), or completely mutable (like a human being, or tree, *etc.*), or partially mutable (like the mediator). She takes these cases to exhaust the metaphysical possibilities, with the consequence that any other sort of being would be impossible and inconceivable for us. We can state the conclusion of Conway's argument—her attribute trichotomy—as a principle in the following way:

(P₃) Every being essentially possesses exactly one of the following three attributes: immutability; mutability only towards the good; or mutability towards good and evil.

Now, in spite of Conway's argument for (P₃), there are a couple of further options for mutability that may seem conceivable to us. It will help to clarify her argument if we consider them briefly. First, it may seem conceivable that a being could be mutable and change neutrally, neither changing towards good nor evil. The fact that Conway does not countenance this possibility may amount to further evidence that she accepts the principle that all change is towards good or evil; that principle seems to be acting as a tacit premise in her argument (recall Section 3.1).

Second, we may suppose that we can conceive of a being that is mutable only towards evil. Confronted with Conway's argument for the existence of a mediator, it is natural to wonder whether there could be such a being, because at first glance it could also serve as a mediator between God and creatures: for it

would resemble creatures in being mutable towards evil but also resemble God in being immutable towards the good (cf. V.3.24–25). Conway elsewhere offers independent arguments aimed at ruling out the possibility of something mutable only towards evil. She insists that whereas a being can change towards the good *ad infinitum*, there is a limit to evil such that nothing can change towards evil *ad infinitum* (VII.1.42). Eventually, something changing toward evil would reach a condition like that of dead matter, which is a ‘non-being...and an impossible thing’ (VII.2.46). ‘[A]nd because it is not possible to proceed towards evil to infinity since there is no example of infinite evil, every creature must necessarily turn again towards good or fall into eternal silence, which is contrary to nature’ (VII.1.42). Hence every being that can change at all must eventually change towards the good, and ‘mutability only towards evil’ does not name an attribute that any being could possibly have.³⁰ Here again we see that the attempt to conceive of a being not possessing one of Conway’s three essential attributes reveals background assumptions about the ontological hierarchy. A full reconstruction of her argument for attribute trialism would need to make those assumptions explicit (though we will not pursue the matter here).

Conway’s attribute trialism has many consequences for her metaphysics.³¹ A first consequence is that there can be no higher-order mediators, since a higher-order mediator would be a being that failed to have any of the three possible attributes. Conway has argued that this is both inconceivable and metaphysically impossible.

A second consequence is that God and the mediator do not have extreme natures, nor do the mediator and creatures. For as we saw above, if either of those two pairs of natures were extremes, PME would apply and assert the existence of the natures of higher-order mediators, contradicting (P₃).³²

A third (and for now final) consequence is that if we interpret the word ‘nature’ in a narrow sense so as to mean essence, then the only natures that are extremes in all of Conway’s metaphysics are God’s nature and creatures’ nature.

30. See Marcy Lascano’s helpful discussion of these issues (2017: 164–65). There are obvious parallels between the being mutable only towards evil and the supremely imperfect being whose possibility is sometimes raised as an objection to ontological arguments. Conway herself discussed the case of the supremely imperfect being with More (Hutton and Nicolson 1992: 484).

31. The attribute trialism expressed by (P₃) is compatible with several ways in which Conway’s philosophy may be interpreted as monist. It is compatible with the views that the distinction between body and spirit is modal rather than substantial. It is also compatible with the view that creation, taken all together, constitutes a substance. For a detailed discussion of these issues, see Gordon-Roth (2018).

32. The fact that the mediator’s nature and creatures’ nature are not extremes is also strongly suggested by Conway’s discussion of how the mediator can be united with the soul of a human being ‘without any other medium’ because of the ‘great affinity and likeness’ between the mediator and the soul (VIII.3.60). The basis of this likeness is presumably that the mediator and the human soul share the attribute of mutability towards the good (V.3.25).

Indeed, if we take 'nature' to mean only essence, then PME applies exactly once in Conway's metaphysics. For on this interpretation, PME says that if beings with extreme essences are united, then there is some mediator by means of which they are united. But since there are only two essences that are extremes—God's essence and creatures' essence—PME can at most be applied a single time in order to obtain the existence of a mediator and has no further positive application with respect to essences.³³

Conway's attribute trialism suffices to rule out the existence of any mediator between God and creatures, the essence of which is something besides mutability only towards good. However, a determined opponent may still object that the uniqueness of the mediator has not been demonstrated, since there may be more than one being, the essence of which is to be mutable only towards good. One might suppose that many such mediators underlie the union between God and any creature, or perhaps that distinct mediators underlie the unions between God and distinct creatures.

Conway adopts a further account of the mediator that gives her a response to the objection just raised. She holds what might be called *the perfect image theory of the mediator*, according to which the mediator is a perfect image of the unitary God (IV.2.21). She articulates the theory as follows:

And since [the mediator] is the most excellent creature produced outside of God as well as his most exact and perfect image, it is necessary that he is like God in all his attributes, which can be said without contradiction to have been communicated to [him]. (V.4.26)

The principle of the perfect image theory is therefore:

(P₄) For all attributes *A*, if God can communicate *A* to the mediator, then the mediator has *A*.

The justification for (P₄) seems to rest on the thought that because the mediator is second in excellence only to God, it follows that God makes the mediator as godlike as possible. This in turn entails that God communicates to the mediator all the attributes God can communicate to him, keeping in mind that God can

33. This result may give the appearance that PME is not so central for Conway after all, but this appearance is misleading. For one thing, PME has an important negative application in Conway's refutation of Cartesian accounts of the mind-body union on the grounds that they violate PME (VIII.3.60). For another, Conway is willing to grant that even though created spirits and bodies have the same essence, they do have extreme natures in a way that requires their union to be mediated (VIII.3.59). This makes PME a central part of Conway's own account of the mind-body union.

communicate an attribute only if God possesses that attribute in the first place.³⁴ As we discussed above, Conway defends a unitarian conception of God as a single substance that is unique in its kind (I.7.10). It follows that for the mediator to be a perfect image of God, the mediator must also be a single substance unique in its kind:

[It] agrees with sound reason and with the order of things that...God is one and does not have two or three or more distinct substances in himself...and...Christ is one simple Christ without further distinct substances in himself... (VI.4.30)

This, finally, is sufficient to establish the uniqueness of the mediator. For Conway's attribute trialism entails the fact that mutability only towards the good is the only essence a mediator between God and creatures could have. But Conway's principle that the mediator is a perfect image of God entails that, like God, the mediator is the only being with its essence. The consequence is that Conway is in a position to claim the existence of *the mediator*: the unique being *b* mutable only towards the good, such that for any creature *c*, the union between God and *c* occurs by means of *b*. A further consequence is that mutability only towards the good is an individual essence of the mediator, since mutability only towards the good is an essential attribute of the mediator, and since no other being has that attribute.³⁵

4.3 *The necessity of the mediator*

Conway faces a particularly difficult objection: her demonstration appears to entail that an *omnipotent God* is *forced* to create the mediator in order to be in a union with creatures. Recall Conway's statement of PME:

34. Importantly for Conway, this entails that like God, the mediator is a cause of the existence of creatures (VII.3.47–8) and is intimately present in all creatures (VII.4.49–50), 'creatures' here designating beings mutable towards good and evil. One might well have thought that *being a cause of creatures* and *being intimately present in creatures* are incommunicable attributes of God. But clearly they are not incommunicable, since God communicates them to the mediator. Cf. (VII.2.45).

35. To someone objecting that Conway has not done enough to demonstrate the uniqueness of the mediator, Conway's response may come across as question begging, since the perfect image theory of the mediator may appear to take the uniqueness of the mediator for granted. Conway is arguably able to respond to this charge by weakening (P4) to the principle that states that for any being *b* whose nature is to be mutable only towards the good, and for any attribute *A* that God can communicate to *b*, *b* has *A*. Let *A* be the attribute of being unique in its kind; it will then follow that there is exactly one being mutable only towards the good.

Such a mediator is necessary by the very nature of things because otherwise a gap would remain and one extreme would have been united with the other extreme without a mediator, *which is impossible...* (V.3.25, emphasis added)

On its face, PME seems to entail that God is incapable of being in a union with creatures except by means of the mediator. But—Conway's opponent might press—Conway thereby contradicts God's omnipotence. For surely there is a consistent scenario in which God exists, completely mutable creatures exist, and God is in a union with those creatures, even though there is no further being such as the mediator. But if it is consistent, then God can actually bring it about (cf. III.3.16). So if God is truly omnipotent, the existence of the mediator is not necessary.³⁶

Conway makes a statement that appears to be aimed at countering this objection, writing that:

[God] is immediately present in all things and immediately fills all things. In fact, he works immediately in everything in his own way. But this must be understood in respect to that union and communication which creatures have with God so that although God works immediately in everything, yet he nevertheless uses this same mediator as an instrument through which he works together with creatures, since that instrument is by its own nature closer to them. (V.4.25)

Unfortunately, these remarks do not sit well with her other claims. Here Conway holds

(i) that God is immediately present in all creatures.

But in the very same section, she also writes:

(ii) '[If the mediator] were not present everywhere in all creatures, there would be an utter chasm and gap between God and creatures in which God would not exist' (V.4.26).

Because (ii) seems to entail that God is only mediately present in creatures, (i) and (ii) are at least *prima facie* contradictory. Indeed, part of what makes objec-

36. For another statement of this objection, see Lopton's discussion of Conway's argument (Conway 1998: 52–3). A generalization of the objection would target the necessity of PME. For it looks as if Conway is claiming that PME is a necessary truth, *i.e.*: necessarily, if beings with extreme natures are united, then there is some mediator by means of which they are united. But the necessity of PME even in the face of God's omnipotence can seem like an unacceptable constraint on God's power.

tions against the necessity of the mediator so difficult for Conway is that they threaten to reveal contradictions in her metaphysics. It can seem that on Conway's view, God is both immediately (V.4.25) and only mediately present in creatures (V.4.26); that God is omnipotent (I.1.9), yet not omnipotent (since God is forced to create the mediator (V.3.25)).

In the remainder of this section, we will argue that in spite of the difficulties just mentioned, there is a consistent view available to Conway that gives her defensible answers to the objections and keeps to the spirit of her metaphysics. First, Conway can retract claim (i) and insist that while God is united with completely mutable creatures, and even intimately present in all of them, God's presence is not immediate. For God's presence in completely mutable creatures occurs by means of the mediator (V.4.26). Similarly, God creates creatures first by emanating the mediator, who together with God gives being to the completely mutable creatures; the latter 'are contained in [the mediator] and have their existence in him, because they arise from him just like branches from a root' (IV.3.22). God is a cause of the existence of completely mutable creatures, though again mediately, by means of the mediator. Thus, in respect of both presence and causal power, God is in a mediated union with completely mutable creatures.³⁷

Second, Conway can concede the objection that God is omnipotent, and therefore God can be in an unmediated union with completely mutable creatures. For she grants that God is omnipotent, and she says that 'God can do anything which does not imply a contradiction' (III.3.16). Thus, in a sense of 'necessary' determined solely by God's power, the existence of the mediator is not necessary. On the other hand, Conway generally uses 'necessary' in a way that considers not just God's power but also God's goodness. In a discussion of God's free choice of the just and the best, Conway writes that 'God is a free agent and a most necessary one, so that he 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' (III.2.16). Taking God's goodness into account, a proposition is necessary not just when its negation is contradictory, but also when its negation describes a less perfect state of affairs. In this sense, the media-

37. On the present view, the mediated union between God and completely mutable creatures stands in contrast with the unions between the mediator and completely mutable creatures (VIII.3.60), or between God and the mediator (V.3.25), both of which are immediate. There may be plausible alternative interpretations of Conway according to which God is both mediately and immediately united to completely mutable creatures. Such interpretations may be motivated as the most charitable way of understanding Conway's assertions, especially the remarks at (V.4.25) just mentioned. The reason we do not develop that line of interpretation here is that it does not sit well with PME. For if God is immediately united to completely mutable creatures, how is the mediator necessary for their union?

tor's existence is necessary because it is part of the best state of affairs.³⁸ Conway could argue, however, that the necessity of the mediator's existence in this sense does not strip God of the power to refrain from creating the mediator. The point is just that God's free choice to create the mediator stems from God's policy to actualize the best state of affairs.³⁹

The two senses of 'necessary' just distinguished are strongly reminiscent of Leibniz's distinction between propositions that are necessary—because their negations are contradictory and impossible in themselves—and propositions that are contingent but certain—because their truth depends on God's free choice to do what is most perfect.⁴⁰ It seems Conway would be well served to draw a modal distinction along these lines. For such a distinction corresponds to real differences in the way Conway would explain the necessity of statements such as 'nothing is vivaciously dead' (*i.e.*, dead and not dead) (III.9.19) on the one hand, and 'every creature contains infinitely many creatures in itself' (III.5.17) on the other. Moreover, if Conway refrains from drawing some such distinction along these lines, it is difficult to see how she can avoid the objection that the necessity of the mediator's existence is inconsistent with God's omnipotence.

Section 5. The Evidentiary Values of Experience, Understanding, and Textual Authority in Conway

The chief principles we have ascribed to Conway so far—PME, together with (Po) through (P₄)—are plausibly known by the understanding according to Conway's philosophy. However, not every principle Conway relies upon in order to establish the existence of the mediator has that character. In the next section

38. Having come this far, Conway's opponent may wish to know why the existence of the mediator is best. Conway's reasons for thinking so are multifaceted. For one thing, she thinks that because the mediator is closer in nature to the completely mutable creatures, the mediator's union with the creatures is a particularly effective way for creatures to be improved and preserved (V.6.26–7). She also maintains that being like the mediator is the highest point creatures can attain (IV.4.22), it being impossible for creatures to be or to be like God. This presumably has a moral component in that creatures can sensibly strive for continuous improvement through the correct use of their free wills (like the mediator), though they cannot sensibly strive for a moral agency like God's. The reasons for the truth of PME in general are also relevant; for example, from her point of view, the continuity of natures from God's to the mediator's to creatures' is an excellent order of the universe (VI.4–5.30–1).

39. The larger issue here concerns Conway's understanding of the relationship between God's power and goodness, and, to use John Henry's terminology, the character of Conway's intellectualism. The suggestion being made is that Conway argue for the consistency of God's omnipotence and God's free choice of the best. For a helpful discussion of intellectualism in More and some of Conway's contemporaries, see Henry (1990).

40. See Leibniz's discussion of necessity and contingency in his *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1989: 44–6).

(Section 5.1), we will consider an important metaphysical principle, the evidence for which is our daily experience. We will then conclude our paper with a reconsideration of Conway's philosophical methodology, taking into account the role that experience plays in it (Section 5.2).

5.1 *Experience and the existence of completely mutable creatures*

To appreciate its role in the justification of Conway's metaphysics, one must see that experience is meant to support a premise in Conway's argument. The conclusion of Conway's demonstration of the existence of creatures in Chapters II–III of the *Principles* is merely that there are *creatures in the general sense*, mutable beings created by God. But the premise of Conway's demonstration of the mediator's existence in Chapter V is that there are *completely mutable creatures*, creatures mutable towards good and evil. Conway needs this premise so that there is something whose nature is extreme with respect to God's nature, but she has not shown this yet (by Chapter V, Section 3).

At just the point in her demonstration of the mediator's existence where she needs to invoke the existence of completely mutable creatures, Conway draws the distinction between complete and partial mutability and tells us that 'daily experience teaches us that creatures are mutable and continually change from one state to another' (V.3.24). Indeed, Conway's discussions of human experience frequently stress the fact that we experience the mutability of creatures (V.3.24; VI.1.28; VI.6.34; VI.7.35; VIII.4.60). Here is a typical statement:

[We] see that in all its operations nature has its order according to which one animal is formed from another and one species proceeds from another, either ascending to a higher perfection or descending to a lower state (VIII.4.60).

To offer an ordinary example, Conway thinks that we experience some horses that start out as nags but, through their good service and works, ultimately become fine steeds; similarly, we experience some fine steeds that become nags through their bad deeds (VI.6.32–5). More radically, Conway takes us to have experience of worms becoming flies, and animals of one biological species being transformed into the species of their prey (VI.6.34).⁴¹ It is worth emphasizing that experience in Conway's sense has a strong moral

41. See Deborah Boyle (2006) regarding Conway's view of animal generation and change.

element. One does not merely observe an animal changing with respect to its physical or biological properties. Rather, one observes a change in the animal towards good or evil, up or down the ontological hierarchy, because of its actions. In this way, one sees God's justice being carried out (VI.7.35). Conway cites these daily observations of change—as opposed to human reason or the understanding—as the evidence for the claim that completely mutable creatures exist.

5.2 *Conclusions concerning Conway's philosophical methodology*

On the view of Conway's philosophical methodology that emerges from the present study, many aspects of Conway's metaphysics are intended to be demonstrable from principles known by the understanding. For example, God's immutability can be demonstrated from God's supreme perfection, and this can be known by the understanding alone. Nonetheless, there seems to be a limit to what can be best or most convincingly demonstrated in this way. It is plausible that the understanding does not provide us with the most convincing way of showing that there are completely mutable creatures. Conway therefore appeals to an additional principle,

(P5) There is at least one creature that is mutable towards good and evil,

that she takes to be justified by human experience. Note, moreover, that Conway's appeal to this premise occurs centrally in her demonstration of the mediator's existence (cf. Section 3.3). Therefore, it seems fair to say that when Conway uses 'demonstration' in the *Principles*, she takes herself to be able to appeal not just to principles known by the understanding alone, but also to principles known by experience, especially when the experience in question is had daily or is extremely common.

It follows that from the perspective of Conway's methodology, the understanding and experience are not opposed to one another in such a way as to make only one of the two a suitable source of evidence for demonstrative principles. Instead, the crucial distinction lies between what can be demonstrated and what can be argued for, in another sense, by appeal to authoritative texts. In the context of a demonstration, Conway constructs deductive arguments for her conclusions using principles based in the understanding or experience (or both). In the context of arguing for something by appeal to authoritative texts, Conway reproduces or cites the relevant texts and develops support for her views by showing that they represent a consensus position contained within the texts. In the best cases, Conway offers demonstrations of her conclusions and also argues

for their truth on the grounds that they are confirmed by authoritative texts. Her conclusions thereby enjoy a form of multiple independent evidentiary support.⁴² Conway's total argument for the existence of a mediator between God and creatures offers a prime example of this methodology. Conway offers a demonstration of her claim from metaphysical principles based in the understanding or experience (or both), and she also argues that the existence of the mediator is confirmed by Biblical and Kabbalistic sources.

Once one sees that for Conway, experience can provide justification for a metaphysical principle, one can begin to appreciate the roles experience plays in her philosophy. For example, when Conway first articulates PME, she notes that it is 'apparent throughout the entire universe' but does not explain what that means (V.3.25). Presumably, what she means is that human experience confirms PME when that principle is restricted to describing continuities in creaturely natures. Indeed, at various points in the *Principles*, Conway mentions aspects of continuity in creation about which she either explicitly or at least plausibly takes us to have experience: the continuity of the natures of earth, water, and air (respectively, gold, silver, and tin) (V.4.25); the resemblance of creatures that are united to each other, so that persons who more closely resemble each other love each other more (VII.3.47); and the continuity in the natures of the mind and the body that are required for mind-body unions (VIII.3.59). Arguably, these aspects of continuity in creation lend support for the claim that there is a continuity among the natures of united beings throughout everything there is. If so, then PME is not merely an intelligible condition on the possibility of unions. It is also confirmed by human experience.

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42. Though our terminology differs from hers, our account of Conway's methodology fits with Jennifer McRobert's picture of Conway according 'as much weight as she gives to arguments (demonstrative, empirical, or otherwise) to appeals to the authority of Scripture, the Kabbala, or other hermetic texts' (2000: 22). The additional suggestion being made here is that when feasible, Conway presents both sorts of evidence as independent support for one and the same claim.

of the relevant Neoplatonic literature is now reflected in this paper. Alexandra Chang adds her thanks to the Carleton College philosophy department. Both authors express their appreciation for the insightful feedback provided by anonymous reviewers.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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