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IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION**



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Body, Spirit and Gender in Anne Conway

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*Whereas an origin centrally dominates what derives from it,
the beginning ... encourages nonlinear development.*

Edward Said¹

1. Introduction

The relation between body and spirit is a central topic in Lady Anne Conway's (1631–1679) treatise *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*:² two whole chapters, amounting to almost one third of her book, are dedicated solely to this theme. Scholarship has amply shown that with her anti-dualist approach, Conway positions herself as a highly original thinker within the philosophical discussions of her time. It is therefore not surprising that her comprehension of the

* I would like to thank all the scholars connected to the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Platonism for many rich and stimulating conversations about Anne Conway and the network of Cambridge Platonists. Their perspectives and insights were invaluable in helping me shape my understanding of Lady Conway's religious philosophy. Of course, the arguments presented in this article – and thus any shortcomings or misrepresentations – are entirely my own. This article has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 676258.

1 Edward SAID, *Beginnings. Intention and Method*, New York 1985, 373.

2 Conway's treatise was first published in 1690, eleven years after her death, in a Latin translation from the original English manuscript. In 1692, it was re-translated into English and published in London. The complicated history of the manuscript presents some obvious text-critical challenges. Nevertheless, it remains the most coherent source for Conway's thoughts. For more information on the genesis of this book, see e.g. Sarah HUTTON, *Anne Conway. A Woman Philosopher*, Cambridge/New York 2009, 225. The most recent edition of the Latin and English text of Conway's *Principles* is Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, ed. with an introduction by Peter LOPTSON (AIHI 101), The Hague/Boston/London 1982. My references, however, are to the modernised English translation in Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Allison COUDERT/Taylor CORSE, Cambridge/New York 1996.

relation between body and spirit is commonly studied by scholars of Conway.³ The theme continues to be relevant and provocative today, not least from the perspective of feminist and gender studies.⁴ This article seeks to contribute to the discussion by engaging with two hitherto overlooked passages in the *Principles* concerning body and spirit. The two passages are chapter 6 paragraph 4, where Conway construes her interpretation of creation from a dual principle, represented as “father” and “mother”; and chapter 6, paragraph 11, in which Conway addresses the topic of sexual generation and connects body and spirit to a female and a male principle. At first glance both passages seem somewhat obscure and ill-fitting in their textual context because they employ a gendered language that is not found anywhere else in the treatise. I will argue that the creation narrative in Gen. 1–3 can be used as an interpretative key to the first passage and that the second passage may be a parallel to the first as they both insist on the unification of male and female in creation. Thus, a possible connection can be established between them that brings to the fore the intersection between body, spirit and gender.

The two passages treat male and female in the context of bodily fluidity and transformation and are therefore connected to the core structure of Conway’s anti-dualist argument. According to her, mutability is the defining characteristic of creation and she argues that body and spirit are two aspects of the same

- 3 For detailed studies of Conway’s understanding of body and spirit in view of contemporary philosophy and the new science of the seventeenth century, see HUTTON, *ibid.* 82–93, 116–118, 127, 140–153; Richard POPKIN, *The Spiritualist Cosmologies of Henry More and Anne Conway*, in: Sarah HUTTON (ed.), *Henry More (1614–1687). Tercentenary Studies* (AIHI 127), Dordrecht 1990, 97–114; Cecilia ROSENGREN, *Conway. Naturfilosofi och kvinnliga tänkare i barockens tidevarv*, Munkedal 2009; Christian HENGSTERMANN/Ulrike WEICHERT (eds.), *Anne Conways Principia Philosophiae. Materialismuskritik und Alleinheits-Spekulation im neuzeitlichen England* (Pontes 52), Münster 2012; Marcy LASCANO, *Anne Conway. Bodies in the Spiritual World*, in: *Philosophy Compass* 8 (2013) 327–336; Deborah BOYLE, *Spontaneous and Sexual Generation in Conway*, in: Justin SMITH (ed.), *The Problem of Animal Generation in Early Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge 2016, 175–193.
- 4 See Carolyn MERCHANT, *The Death of Nature. Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, New York 1990; Phyllis MACK, *Visionary Women. Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1995; Sarah HUTTON, *Conway, Anne (c. 1630–79)*, in: Edward CRAIG (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 2, London/New York 1998, 669–671; Jacqueline BROAD, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, Cambridge 2007; Carol W. WHITE, *The Legacy of Anne Conway (1631–1679). Reverberations from a Mystical Naturalism*, Albany NY 2009; Sarah APETREI, *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England*, Cambridge/New York 2013; Sarah HUTTON, *Women, Freedom and Equality*, in: Peter ANSTEY (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Seventeenth Century Philosophy*, Oxford 2013, 501–508; ead., *Blue-eyed Philosophers Born on Wednesdays. An Essay on Women and the History of Philosophy*, in: *The Monist* 98 (2015) 7–10; ead., *Liberty of Mind. Women Philosophers and the Freedom to Philosophize*, in: Jacqueline BROAD/Karen DETLEFSEN (eds.), *Women and Liberty, 1600–1800. Philosophical Essays*, Oxford 2017, 123–140.

principle. This makes her use of a gendered terminology interesting because it is employed within an ontology of process and fluidity. Theologically, she links creation to God through Christ. Here, the metaphor of the “seed” (*semen*) commonly employed by the Cambridge Platonists to denote “Christ within” resurfaces in Conway’s explanations of both creation and procreation. I will propose that the metaphor might be seen as a principle in both the source of creation and the process of deification.

In what follows, I will explicate these passages and their textual context. I wish to show how Conway destabilizes categories of being in favor of an ontology of process and fluidity, and I suggest that Conway’s approach could bring a gendered perspective to her anti-dualism. I also propose that the fluid understanding of embodiment might find resonance in modern feminist and gender studies. Finally, I will discuss how Conway’s argument relates to some contemporary issues.

2. Some notes on the approach

Firstly, this article emerged from my interest in gender theory and feminist theology. Upon reading these passages in Conway’s treatise, I found they suggested the need for a queer interpretation. I am aware that I need to tread carefully here: using categories normally associated with modern Western liberal thought such as feminism and gender in an early modern context may seem anachronistic. However, Sarah Apetrei warns us that refusing to use these terms involves “a kind of reverse anachronism. It assumes that we moderns, or postmoderns, have a monopoly on the claim to feminism, and to pass the test earlier thinkers would have to exhibit the sort of Whiggish political progressivism that could only be the outcome of the process in which they were engaged.”⁵ I concur with Apetrei that the refusal to use the terminology is, in itself, bordering on determinism, and we may overlook or misconstrue the open beginnings of feminist thought or gendered symbolism if we expect them to come in a recognizable package.⁶ Here, gender theory can be a useful analytic tool as it questions categories often perceived as “natural” or “essential” and subsequent (fictitious) binaries such as male/female, gay/straight, civilized/primitive, etc. both in hermeneutic conceptualizations and in political practices.⁷ In this paper, I use gender theory as it functions in poststructuralist academic discourses as a signifier of power-dynamics and an agent for troubling binary thinking. In this way it points to *difference itself* as an object of analysis,

5 APETREI, *Women* (n. 4) 31.

6 *Ibid.* 32.

7 Laurel L. SCHNEIDER/Carolyn RONCOLATO, *Queer Theologies*, in: *Religion Compass* 6 (2012) 1–13, 1 f.

which comes into relevance in my reading as I argue that Conway blurs the line between unity/difference, particularity/universality, and being/becoming.⁸

Secondly, Conway's metaphysical system is organically incorporated in a theological superstructure. Her treatise is a typical Cambridge Platonist attempt to align contemporary questions consistently with Christianity. The theological framework of Conway's treatise is evident both from the many implicit and explicit biblical references and dogmatic interpretations, which she uses to ground and advance her argument, and from the central role she gives to Christ. There are some detailed studies of Conway's Christology which are foundational to this study.⁹ I hope to contribute further to this existing research by focusing on the protological and soteriological aspects of Christ in Conway's system. However, not much attention has been paid to her use of the Bible. My conservative and preliminary assessment is that Conway quotes or paraphrases biblical texts to base or support her arguments at least 30 times in her treatise. These references, I believe, are not simply Conway complying with the philosophical expectations of her time – there is plenty of evidence to suggest that she is able to think against the grain – rather they are central to her arguments. In this paper I aim to show how Conway's interpretation of *Genesis* is woven into the two selected passages and how an exegesis of it may shed some light on her creation narrative.

Finally, this article's validity in a volume about the reception of the Church Father Origen (185–253/54) lies in the fact that Conway's anthropology and soteriology clearly draw on the ancient Alexandrine. Their similarities include an emphasis on human freedom, the Word as the image of the divine, the body as a locus of change and process rather than static being and the belief in universal

8 WHITE, *Legacy of Anne Conway* (n. 4) 4. 97–118, identifies precisely these concerns as main objectives for Conway. She views Conway as ambassador for an eco-theology that challenges the “dominion-over-nature” ideology through its emphasis on relationality and vitalism.

9 See e.g. HUTTON, *Anne Conway* (n. 2) 65–67. 188–190. 199–202; ead., *Platonism and the Trinity. Anne Conway, Henry More and Christoph Sand*, in: Martin MULSOW/Jan ROHLS (eds.), *Socinianism and Arminianism. Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-century Europe*, Leiden/Boston 2005, 209–224; Jonathan HEAD, *Anne Conway on Time, the Trinity, and Eschatology*, in: *Philosophy and Theology* 29 (2017) 221–276; Sandrine PARAGEAU, *Christ in Anne Conway's Principia* (1690). *Metaphysics, Syncretism, and Female Imitatio Christi*, in: *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* 5 (2018) 247–265. In her book on Anne Conway, Hutton traces some of the possible influences on Conway's Christology and draws out similarities and differences between Conway's conception of Christ and her contemporaries'. The next two articles discuss Conway's conception of Christ in relation to her Trinitarianism. The recent study by Parageau argues that Conway's metaphysics is, in fact, Christocentric. Here, Conway's theodicy as well as her argument for interreligious unification hinge on her Christology. Parageau also suggests that Conway's presentation of a metaphysical, genderless Christ can be interpreted as a way of reintroducing women into Christianity.

salvation.¹⁰ When relevant, I will refer to passages in Origen in the footnotes, to draw attention to this possible source of Conway's thought.

3. Male and female in creation

We begin *in medias res*, in chapter 6, where Conway discusses the nature of creatures and their place in the cosmological order. She argues that all of creation is inherently mutable, and that this changeability is its defining characteristic. God the creator, on the other hand, is perfect unity and unable to change. The question then arises: how is one to account for the difference in creation – to which may also belong sexual difference – if there is neither multiplicity nor mutability in the source of creation? Mutability is the key concept in Conway's theological philosophy. It structures her cosmology, her anthropology and her soteriology. Based on the capability for change, Conway identifies three kinds of being:

“Therefore there are three kinds of being. The first is altogether immutable. The second can only change towards 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.”¹¹

These three kinds of being are identified as God, Christ, and creatures, respectively. God is the first principle, the beginning, from which all things come into existence. He creates everything in unison with his Word:

“In God there is an idea which is his image or the word existing within himself, which in substance or essence is one and the same with him ... and, indeed, all creatures were made or created according to this very idea or word.”¹²

10 From as early as 1661 Henry More and Lady Conway corresponded about Origen. See Marjorie H. NICOLSON (ed.), *The Conway Letters. The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More and their friends (1642–1684)*. Revised Edition with an Introduction and New Material, ed. by Sarah HUTTON, Oxford 1992, 192. For a brief survey of convergences between Origen's and Conway's philosophies, see Sarah HUTTON, Origen and Anne Conway, in: Alfons FÜRST/Christian HENGSTERMANN (eds.), *Autonomie und Menschenwürde. Origenes in der Philosophie der Neuzeit (Adamantiana 2)*, Münster 2012, 221–234. On Origen in seventeenth-century England, see Daniel P. WALKER, *The Decline of Hell. Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment*, London 1964, 124 f.; Alfons FÜRST/Christian HENGSTERMANN (eds.), *Die Cambridge Origenists. George Rusts Letter of Resolution Concerning Origen and the Chief of His Opinions (Adamantiana 4)*, Münster 2013; Christian HENGSTERMANN, *Pre-existence and Universal Salvation. The Origenian Renaissance in Early Modern Cambridge*, in: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25 (2017) 971–989.

11 Conway, *Principles* 5,3 (p. 24 COUDERT/CORSE).

12 *Ibid.* 1,6 (p. 10).

Conway quickly identifies this Word with Christ, thereby establishing him as part of the creative process.¹³ Further, we learn that all creatures are created *imago Dei*, i. e., according to this image, which is Christ.¹⁴ Christ serves a two-fold function, in Conway's ontology. On the one hand, he bridges the ontological gap between God and his creation, i. e., he serves as *medium*. Jonathan Bennett warns that there is a linguistic pitfall here: Christ's position as a *medium* (Latin) between God and creatures does not mean "mediator" in anything like our present sense, a go-between or a negotiator. The Latin word for that is *mediator*.¹⁵ Conway clearly explains that she means something else:

"This mediating must not be understood in so crass a way, as if it stood at a midpoint between two extremes, just as the trunk of the body is between the head and the feet, but it is a median in respect to its *nature*."¹⁶

She understands Christ's position as a *be-between*, which is apparent from the Latin text, where she refers to him as *natura haec media* or "middle Nature".¹⁷ Christ participates in both the nature of God and in the nature of creation, meaning that he "shares mutability and immutability and eternity and time [and] ... spirit and body and consequently place and extension".¹⁸ This function of Christ in Conway's ontology is quite clear. On the other hand, Christ seems to have a pivotal role in the creative process as the creative command of God and the unifying principle according to which all creatures are created. This, however, has not been thoroughly investigated. It is the unification of creation in Christ that makes salvation possible, because it is through him that deification is achievable. These two themes – Conway's protology and her soteriology – are connected in her Christology.

But for now, let us return to the multiplicity that defines creation: creatures are created in the *image of God* and through his Word, i. e. Christ. Unlike God,

13 Ibid. 6,5 (p. 31). Throughout her treatise Conway refers to the revealed Word as "Christ", "Son of God", "first-born Son of God", "Mind", "the Celestial Adam", and "the eternal mediator".

14 Gen. 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

15 Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy. God, Christ, and Creatures, The Nature of Spirit and Matter*. Modern edition, trans. Jonathan BENNETT (<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/>), 2009, 11.

16 Conway, *Principles* 5,4 (p. 25 COUDERT/CORSE; italics K. F.).

17 In Loptson's Latin edition (n. 2) p. 82. Loptson translates this as "middle Nature" (p. 168), which emphasizes the fact that Christ is, in fact, his own separate species in Conway's system, and that he bridges the ontological gap between God and creation. Coudert and Corse avoid the term "middle Nature" and opt instead for "mediator" in their translation of this phrase (p. 24).

18 Conway, *Principles* 6,4 (p. 30 COUDERT/CORSE).

who is pure spirit and unity and therefore unable to change, creation is defined by change.¹⁹ Conway's explanation for this ontological gap hinges on the radical freedom of creation. We can infer that God created the first spirits with free will, as Conway explains that at a certain point creation "fell" from God through "its own willful actions".²⁰ In the Fall, the original ethereal bodies of the created spirits changed into crasser or thicker bodies. Conway explains how "all the crassness of the visible bodies comes from the fall of the spirits from their original state".²¹ Referring to 1 Cor. 12:12, Conway argues that the term body refers to *all matter* of creation, not just human beings. *All* creatures are created according to a certain principle, God's Word or image which is Christ, and their difference is due to "their virtues":

"Thus, what Paul says about human beings can also be understood about *all creatures* (which in their primitive and original state were a certain species of human being designated according to their virtues)."²²

It is the extent of the spirit's self-alienation from God that resulted in the different physical bodies.²³ Conway uses Paul to argue that all aspects of creation are inherently spiritual, because they all partake of the same divine principle. This common principle also explains the love, which, according to her, binds all of creation together. Not only does this mean that all of creation is inherently spiritual, it means that all of creation is inherently one being, which leads Conway to propose her main thesis, that body and spirit are not opposites, but at different ends of the same continuum. She argues:

19 Ibid. 6,1 (p. 28).

20 Ibid. 7,1 (p. 43). Conway's interpretation of the Fall leaves many questions unanswered: Does the Fall occur at a certain point in time? Are there created spirits which did not fall? Did all fall with Adam, or does each spirit fall individually? See e.g. *ibid.* 5,6 (p. 27); 7,1 (p. 42). The idea that the rational spirits turned away from God and fell on account of their own free will is a central point in Origen, e.g. *princ.* II 8,3 f. (GCS Orig. 5, 155–162); II 9,2.6 (5, 165 f. 169 f.).

21 Conway, *ibid.* 7,1 (p. 43). There are spirits without *visible* bodies in Conway's cosmology, but she maintains that all created spirits are embodied.

22 Ibid. 6,4 (p. 31; italics K.F.). I believe Conway is referring to 1 Cor. 12:12: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

23 Alfons FÜRST, Matter and Body in Origen's Christian Platonism, in: Brouria BITTON-ASHKELONY/Aryeh KOFSKY (eds.), *Origeniana Duodecima* (BETHL 302), Leuven (forthcoming), shows how Origen also explains the multiplicity of creation by a fall away from God, the nature of which is disputed among Origen-scholars. Fürst's reading of Origen bears a strong resemblance to my interpretation of Conway: the pre-existent rational beings are always embodied, even before the Fall.

“Truly, every body is a spirit and nothing else, and it differs from a spirit only insofar as it is darker. Therefore, the crasser it becomes, the more it is removed from the condition of spirit. Consequently, the distinction between spirit and body is only modal and incremental, not essential and substantial.”²⁴

Conway fiercely argues this monist position against the body-soul dualism of reputable philosophers including René Descartes and her own teacher, Henry More.²⁵ However, the spirit-matter continuum is not an egalitarian structure but a hierarchy. Since “the spirit is the more excellent of the two in the true and natural order of things”, the more spiritual a creature becomes, the closer it comes to God, who is the highest spirit.²⁶ This does not render body evil or superfluous; rather, the body “receives” and “retains” the image of the spirit, a function that proves important to Conway’s understanding of personal identity.²⁷ Perception, memory and feeling are “stored” in the body, and the body then reflects these characteristics outward. Therefore the spiritual bodies of created beings are not static; they are subject to change depending on our moral behavior. She explains how good choices quite literally entail the acquisition of more spiritual bodies. Conversely, bad choices lead to grosser, darker bodies:

“One may easily understand how the heart or spirit of a wicked man is called hard and stony because his spirit has indeed real hardness in it ... On the other hand, the spirit of a good person is soft and tender. We can really sense the internal hardness and softness of spirit [and these phrases] have a real and proper meaning without any figurative sense.”²⁸

Although there are spirits without *visible* bodies in Conway’s cosmology, there are no unembodied spirits, since only God is pure spirit. We should note here that “spirit” is an ambiguous term in Conway. It can denote both that which within the Christian tradition is called the Holy Spirit (that principle which makes God

24 Conway, *Principles* 6,11 (p. 39 f. COUDERT/CORSE).

25 In using the term “monist” I align myself with most Conway scholars. However, it should be noted that, while Conway is monist in the Neo-platonic sense that all things can be referred back to God, she does not hold that God and the created world are the same substance. Although all matter is essentially spiritual and alive, it can never become *fully* spirit, as this applies to God only. Thereby she maintains a distinction between God and creature and avoids the position of Spinoza, against whom she is explicitly writing. See *ibid.* 9 (p. 63–70).

26 *Ibid.* 7,1 (p. 42). Conway stresses that creation can never become *like* God (hence panentheism), only move closer to perfection. As in Origen, this is possible through Christ. See Anders-Christian JACOBSEN, *Christ – The Teacher of Salvation. A Study on Origen’s Christology and Soteriology* (Adamantina 6), Münster 2015, *passim* (e.g. 87 f. 139–143. 253. 332–335).

27 Conway, *ibid.* 6,11 (p. 38 f.).

28 *Ibid.* 7,1 (p. 44).

present in the world), soul (the incorporeal essence of a living being), and spirit (the part of the living being that partakes of God). Finally, it has a material connotation as it is always linked to body in some way through what Conway calls “vital action”.²⁹

The possible ascent of spirits to God through virtuous choices opens the door to Conway’s belief in the transmutation of species. In her famous “horse-example” she illustrates how the move from bad to good or from good to bad has evident consequences for the spirit’s embodiment: when a horse dies, its body is transformed in accordance with its spirit. It is unthinkable that a good horse, which continuously becomes better and more excellent through its good and free choices, should stay a horse forever. “The horse will surely change eventually into a human being”, Conway asserts.³⁰ By the same line of reasoning, over time an oyster could become an angel, and an angel a rock, on account of their freedom.³¹ Conway specifies that even “dust and sand” are capable of being perfected, because they are really embodied spirits.³² Making responsible use of their freedom, all creatures have the ability to climb up the ontological ladder.³³

The idea of man’s deformity is often explicated in the metaphor of the “seed” which is said to be the Word of God implanted in the soul of each creature to bestow upon him the double gift of grace and of free will.³⁴ Constantinos A. Patrides explains that for Conway and her contemporaries this seed is believed to be the principle within that empowers each creature to change for the better and triumph over evil.³⁵ Thereby Conway seems to grant Christ an important role in the process of deification as well as in the process of creation. But unlike Paul, who believes that Christ is the only binding principle in creation, Conway brings something else into the picture.

It is to Conway’s perplexing description of that binding principle that we now turn:

29 Ibid. 9,6 (p. 66).

30 Ibid. 6,6 (p. 33).

31 These examples may seem crude, but they illustrate a point: it is not entirely clear whether Conway believes there is a limit to the transmutation of species and, in that case, where to draw the line. She clearly holds all of creation to be one species and, further, that even dust and sand are capable of perfection. Therefore, I think it is possible that the horse-example is not an exaggeration that serves as a pedagogical tool but that Conway does actually believe that any part of creation can climb the ontological ladder.

32 Conway, Principles 9,6 (p. 66 COUDERT/CORSE).

33 The theory that each creature’s place in the cosmology reflects its moral choices, and that the creature may use its freedom to ascend or descend on the scale of being has clear parallels to Origen’s thoughts, cf. princ. III 1,23 (GCS Orig. 5, 240–242); III 5,4 (5, 274 f.); III 6,7 (5, 289).

34 See e. g. Henry More, *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness*, London 1660, ix.

35 Constantinos A. PATRIDES, *The Cambridge Platonists*, Cambridge/New York 1969, 20.

“God made all tribes and troops of creatures *from one blood* ... Thus God has implanted a certain universal sympathy and mutual love into his creatures so that they are all members of one body and all, so to speak, brothers, for whom *there is one common Father*, namely, God in Christ or the word incarnate. *There is also one mother, that unique substance from which everything has come forth*, and of which they are the real parts and members.”³⁶

Two things particularly strike one in this passage: First, all creatures are created from “one blood”, which I take to mean that all of creation has its beginning in the same source, and, as Conway explains, this “original state” of creation was characterized by unity.³⁷ Second, and adversely, Conway characterizes the source of creation as a gendered dual principle: “God in Christ or the Word incarnate” combined with “that unique substance from which everything has come forth”, represented by Conway as “father” and “mother”. How may we shed light on this tension between unity and duality in Conway’s thought?

Three pages later in the same chapter, Conway speaks about the spiritual matter that constitutes the different bodies of creation. Conway’s interpretation of *Genesis* is the key to unlocking the mystery of this tension. According to the Bible, God first created through his Word (Gen. 1:3). At God’s command, his Word, life sprang forth from the earth that God had created (Gen. 1:11–25). From a biblical point of view, therefore, Conway can argue that earth, matter, is alive, and it is from this spiritual matter that the first human being, Adam, is formed (Gen. 2:7):

“And does not rotting matter, or body of earth and water, produce animals without any previous *seed* of those animals? And in the creation of this world did not the waters produce fish and birds *at God’s command*? Did the earth not also at the same command bring forth reptiles and beasts, which were, on this account, real parts of earth and water? And just as they have their bodies from the earth, so they have their spirits, or souls, from the earth. *For the earth produced living souls, as the Hebrew text says, and not simply material bodies lacking life and spirit.* For this reason the difference between human beings and beasts is exceedingly striking. For it is said about human beings that God made them *in his image* and breathed into them the breath of life and they became living souls, so that they received his life, the principal part that makes them human beings, which is really distinct from the divine soul or spirit which God breathed into them.”³⁸

36 Conway, *Principles* 6,4 (p. 31 COUDERT/CORSE; italics K.F.).

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid. 6,6 (p. 34; italics K.F.). With regard to the first sentence, COUDERT, *Conway Principles* (n. 2) 34, notes that “Conway accepts the traditional idea that animals were spontaneously generated from decaying matter”. While this is undoubtedly true, this passage is related to the metaphor of the seed as well, i. e. Christ’s role in both creation and procreation (the latter will be explored in the next part of this article).

It is clear from both passages that the matter from which the first being is formed is not dead but alive and spiritual. Whether God's Word is necessary to facilitate creation, i. e., whether creation occurs in the unity between Word (Christ) and spiritual matter (earth), or whether life was always already there, is unclear. Conway seems to assert both. On the one hand, it would seem that the father breathes his breath of life into every being, thus participating in it and thereby making it alive: God "breathed into them the breath of life and they became living souls". This seems to suggest that the living matter and God's Word create together in unity. On the other hand, Conway's statement that the "body of earth and water ... produce animals without any previous seed of those animals" suggests a clear duality in the principle of creation, where the spiritual matter from which everything comes forth, "mother", is alive in and of itself, and this part is equally important in the act of creation.

Conway's ambiguous interpretation of the creation narrative might resonate well with Catherine Keller, who distinguishes between origin and beginning. The first, she argues, signifies changeless authority and the second plural and non-finished becoming. In her book, *Face of the Deep*, Keller critically engages in the development of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, and uncovers an alternative tradition that focuses on the multiplicity of the beginning in *Genesis*, a tradition that Keller calls *creatio ex profundis*. Analyzing the Church Father Irenaeus and his battle against the Gnostics, Keller uncovers the gnostic myth of Sophia, the twelfth Aeon, whose daughter Enthymesis (Sophia's formless intention) so longs to know the "Word, that light, which gave form to her chaos" that her passions form the material world: "Her tears become water; her smile, light; her sorrow, solid bodies; and her terror, motion."³⁹ Keller explains how Irenaeus dismisses this mystic use of Christian narrative into an ambiguous, erotic, maternal, and already vaguely embodied matrix.⁴⁰ God created not *from* matter but *of* matter, he asserts.⁴¹ This, Keller argues, "mitigates against any bi-gendered complexification of the divinity. The Father needs nothing but his own logos to create. This is a rhetoric of sheer power. I hope I am elucidating how a specific cluster of signifiers – of masculine supremacy, of female abjection, and of unilateral domination – form the metonymic links of the new doctrine [*creatio ex nihilo*]."⁴² For Keller, the creation narrative in *Genesis* is cast as a cosmological drama of gender and power.⁴³ Read in this contemporary feminist light, Conway's account of the dual gendered perspective in the creational process seems radical. This is the first (and

39 Catherine KELLER, *The Face of the Deep. A Theology of Becoming*, Abingdon, Oxon/New York 2003, 52.

40 Ibid. 51. Cf. Irenaeus of Lyons, *haer. I 4* (I p. 30–33 UNGER).

41 Ibid. I 2,3–5 (I p. 41–45).

42 KELLER, *Theology of Becoming* (n. 39) 53.

43 Ibid. 44.

only) reference to a maternal principle in the divine source, and Conway does not follow it up. But her reflection on creation as the unification of the Word of God (“father”) with the formation of spiritual matter (“mother”) could be seen as challenging the typical “masculine supremacy” and “female abjection” of the creation narrative. She uses *Genesis* as the foundation for her argument that matter is alive and is defined by having the capacity for every kind of feeling, knowledge, sensitivity, even love, power and virtue, and the capacity to improve.⁴⁴ The mixture of unity (from God) and multiplicity (from the spirits of the earth) seems to speak to Conway’s assertion that “all creatures, or the whole of creation, are also a single species in substance or essence.”⁴⁵ Thereby the dual principle of creation becomes part of Conway’s main anti-dualist thesis regarding the continuity between body and spirit.

Further, Keller links the act of creation to that of procreation, acutely aware that the male dominance of the orthodox God in the *creatio ex nihilo* is transferred to procreation: “Men create, women procreate. This gender dualism comes hitched to the binary of transcendence and immanence.”⁴⁶ As will become clear in the next section, Conway, too, links creation and procreation. But rather than asserting male dominance in answering the question of what gives being, she grants the male and the female principle equal importance in an eternal process of becoming.

4. The battle of the sexes

The next passage that I will look at seems to carry over both the gender-duality and the image of the seed from the creative principle to the individual and procreation. Conway explains that “in every visible creature there is body and spirit, or a more active and a more passive principle, which are appropriately called male and female because they are analogous with husband and wife.”⁴⁷ She insists that procreation requires the union of these two principles, spirit and body, male and female. But the fact that she aligns the male principle with activity and spirit does not make the female principle superfluous or reduce it to being pure “dead” matter in an Aristotelian sense (I will return to this point). On the contrary, the spirit *needs* the body to receive its image.

It is also the body that makes it possible to interact with others. According to Conway, it is through the emanation and retention of spirits that we perceive,

44 Conway, *Principles* 9,6 (p. 66 COUDERT/CORSE).

45 *Ibid.* 6,4 (p. 31).

46 KELLER, *Theology of Becoming* (n. 39) 33.

47 Conway, *Principles* 6,11 (p. 38 COUDERT/CORSE).

think, achieve knowledge, and remember. Since it is the body's function to "receive", "reflect" and "retain" the spirit,⁴⁸ spirit is always "embodied," whether that body be "terrestrial, aerial or ethereal."⁴⁹ But not only that, the body also retains the spirit and makes sure it does not "vanish" as an "image in a mirror vanishes when the object is removed".⁵⁰

"Just as every spirit needs a body to receive and reflect its image, it also needs a body to retain the image. For every body has this retentive nature in itself to a greater or lesser degree, and *the more perfect a body is – that is, the more perfectly mixed it is – the more retentive it is.*"⁵¹

Conway argues that the more perfectly mixed the body is, i. e. the better the mix of male and female *semen* it has, the better it retains the spirit. This ideal of unity between the male and female resembles the principle of unity between the paternal and the maternal principles in creation. However, Conway shifts the weight from the cooperation of these principles in creation to the struggle between the male and female spirits in the procreational – and soteriological – process. The mix of the male and female principles in the post-lapsarian body concretely entails a *fight* between the male and female spirits in its conception:

"In this semen, as in the body, the masculine semen, which is the spirit and image of the male, is received and retained together with the other spirits which are in the woman. And whatever spirit is strongest and has the strongest image or idea in the woman, whether male or female, or any other spirit received from the outside of one or the other of them, that spirit predominates in the semen and forms a body as similar as possible to its image."⁵²

The male and female are constructed as opposing principles fighting for dominance, and whichever is the strongest "rules" the body, i. e. the body comes to resemble this spirit. I interpret this not merely as a simple explanation of physiology – whether one is born a boy or a girl – but as an assertion of the above-mentioned bodily ethics where male and female are but one decisive factor in the creature conceived. If the dominating spirit resembles a vegetative being rather than a man or woman, this spirit will seek to make the body resemble itself. This means that asexuality, or non-gender, is a real physical possibility in Conway's philosophy, whereby she arguably takes the early Christian paradigm "neither male nor

48 Ibid. 6,11 (p. 39).

49 Ibid. 5,6 (p. 27). Although some creatures, such as angels and devils, are not corporeally perceptible by our senses, they nevertheless do have bodies corresponding to their sin.

50 Ibid. 6,11 (p. 39).

51 Ibid. (p. 38 f.; italics K. F.).

52 Ibid. (p. 39).

female” seriously as the sexual foundation of her unifying order. The principles are clearly distinct but not divided. Of further relevance to the theological content of the passage, Conway again refers to the *semen*, or seed, notably the *semen* of the woman.⁵³ Patrides explains that the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), “traditionally identified with Christ”, was often connected to the metaphor of deification. He concludes that “the seed appears to be the aspect of man’s deiform nature”.⁵⁴ This brings the soteriological perspective forward in this passage. Thus, the “fight” between the male and female *semen* could also refer to the fight between good and evil in each creature, a process that decides the outcome of the body. In any case, Conway’s rhetoric in explaining this process seems to emphasize the difference between these principles, the multiplicity within the individual, rather than the unity. This could point to Conway’s insistence on the ontological difference between creation and God, where Christ is needed as medium. She simultaneously holds that it is the perfect mixture of male and female – two biologically distinct but not divided principles – that results in the strongest and most perfect individual.

I will argue that modern conceptions of identity and subjectivity come into anachronistic relevance to Conway’s theology of the body. Not only is every created being formed of male and female, but this is also true of the other spirits we encounter. According to Conway there is a constant exchange of spirits in creation:

“There are also many other very subtle spirits which continually emanate from them [the principal spirits] and which, because of their subtlety, cannot be contained by the hardness of the bodies in which they dwell; and these subtle spirits are productions or conjunctions of the greater spirits detained in the body ... which then emanate in colors, sounds, odors, tastes, and various other properties and powers.”⁵⁵

In the words of Carol W. White, “by a process analogous to emanation or radiation”⁵⁶ we are exchanging spirits whenever we see, hear, taste, smell, or touch.⁵⁷ Ultimately, what is surrounding us influences us to the point that we are changed, even physically. Invoking 1 Cor. 6:16 f.,⁵⁸ Conway writes:

53 Ibid.

54 PATRIDES, *Cambridge Platonists* (n. 35) 20. This interpretation can also be found in Origen, *princ.* I 3,6 (GCS Orig. 5, 56 f.): “All who are rational beings are partakers of the Word of God, that is, Reason, and in this way, as it were, bear certain seeds, implanted within them, of Wisdom and Justice, which is Christ.” Translation: p. 75 BEHR.

55 Conway, *Principles* 8,5 (p. 61 COUDERT/CORSE).

56 WHITE, *Legacy of Anne Conway* (n. 4) 58.

“Also, if a man is united and joined with something, then he becomes one with that thing. He who unites himself to God is one with him in spirit, and he who unites himself with a prostitute is one in flesh with her. Shouldn’t someone who is united to a beast become one with that beast for the same reason and similarly in every other case?”⁵⁷

The body holds the images received in interaction with the rest of creation. Thus, bodies play an important role in a being’s ability to change and interact with others. Rather than being a prison, Conway argues that the body reflects the image of the principal spirit, and coincidentally the individual’s moral and ontological status.

We are moving towards what I would call a bodily ethics. Conway frames the body as an epistemological category of ethical nature. The body is situated as a transformative and processual *locus* that participates in God through the seed of Christ given in creation, which in turn makes deification possible. The body is thus an ethical category as well as an ontological one. This raises the question of how the biological difference of sex relates to ethical behavior. A tentative answer to this would be to insist on a combination of the male and female principle that Conway speaks of in both the passage on creation and the passage on procreation. Spirit is defined in male categories (“father”) whereas body is defined in female categories (“mother”), but both are present and necessary in the creative process. However, since she argues that the perfect body is an androgynous body (the “perfect mix”), does that mean that the perfect body should resemble the pre-lapsarian body of creation, which is made in the image of Christ? The union of a male and a female principle seems fundamental to Conway’s explanation of both creation and procreation. It seems reasonable to suggest that the two passages I have analyzed can be connected: creation’s common source, which Conway identifies as both “father” and “mother”, could represent the male and the female principles that she insists must be present in the healthy spirit in order for it to return to God. Thus, I would argue that the two passages mirror each other, so that procreation is really analogous to creation.

Moreover, the beginning of both creation and procreation seems fluid and processual rather than stable and unified. Conway asserts that all creatures con-

57 Alfons FÜRST, *Θεία αἴσθησις*, Origen’s Epistemological Concept of Spiritual Sensation, in: Christian HENGSTERMANN (ed.), *God in the Iconic Imagination. Spiritual Sensation in Douglas Hedley’s Christian Platonism*, London (forthcoming), shows how this idea has some similarity to Origen’s “spiritual senses” – a notion Origen discusses frequently both in his early and his late work.

58 “Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”

59 Conway, *Principles* 6,8 (p. 37 COUDERT/CORSE).

tain multiple spirits, even uncountable spirits,⁶⁰ which all cooperate in open-ended, plural processes towards the improvement and ultimate salvation of creation. This multiplicity and fluidity in both creation and procreation ties together Conway's understanding of the beginning (protology) and the end (soteriology). In this ontology of process Conway is following the metaphysics of Origen, who re-thinks the relation between process and absoluteness, between being and becoming.⁶¹

5. Conway in dialogue

The passages analyzed above clearly seem out of place in their textual context, which makes me think that they are Conway's contributions to some contemporary debates. Those to whom they were presumably addressed can serve as part of the explanation of these complex passages.⁶² However, these broader contextual points should not homogenize our reading of Conway.

a) The science of generation

One of the debates that form the background of Conway's discussion of "father" and "mother" and procreation, is the science of generation in her time. The study of animal conception and heredity influenced the seventeenth-century treatment of philosophical presuppositions, for example, mechanism, substance and cause.⁶³ Jonathan Bennett suggests that in her vocabulary of "father" and "mother" Con-

60 Ibid. 3,5 (p. 17).

61 Cf. Origen, princ. II 9 (GCS Orig. 5, 163–172). See Harald HOLZ, Der Begriff des Willens und der Freiheit bei Origenes, in: Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie 12 (1970) 63–84; Theo KOBUSCH, Die philosophische Bedeutung des Kirchenvaters Origenes. Zur christlichen Kritik an der Einseitigkeit der griechischen Wesensphilosophie, in: Theologische Quartalschrift 165 (1985) 94–105.

62 It is beyond the scope of this article to list all the philosophical currents that may have influenced Conway's metaphysics and these two passages in particular. One strand of thought would be that of Jacob Böhme's "alchemical and apocalyptic theory of the *union of opposites*, and his ideas about the final restoration of prelapsarian androgyny": APETREI, Women (n. 4) 191 (italics K.F.). Apetrei, moreover, argues that Böhme's particular vocabulary was also the inspiration for Jane Lead, a Philadelphian mystic Quaker whose connection to Anne Conway has been established by several scholars (see Elisa Belluci's contribution to this volume). Further, the Neo-platonic thought of *coincidentia oppositorum* was prominent both among the Quakers and in the seventeenth-century world generally and may have exerted some influence on Conway.

63 SMITH, Animal Generation (n. 3) 2.

way is echoing “one of the popular ideas about animal generation, namely that the differentiating push comes from the male seed, while the female merely provides the soil, as it were, in which the seed grows.”⁶⁴ Bennett links the passage where Conway speaks about the “father” and the “mother” in creation to the passage concerning the male and the female principles in procreation, claiming that they are analogous: “Conway is likening ‘God creates the universe by giving variety to basic undifferentiated matter’ to ‘A father creates a baby by planting a variety-producing seed in a woman’s undifferentiated womb.’”⁶⁵ Following Bennett’s interpretation, it seems that Conway adheres to the Aristotelian metaphysics in which the female contribution to creation is limited to providing the material principle, making her a passive recipient.

This is a complex matter. While I agree that Conway uses the terminology “father” and “mother” in respect to creation to echo a theory of animal generation, I am hesitant to affirm that she adheres to Aristotelian metaphysics. She rather follows the competing, albeit less popular, two-seed theory formulated by Galen. In his books *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* and *On Semen*, Galen extensively argues that both the father and the mother contribute *semen*,⁶⁶ the formal principle of life, which fits with Conway’s later assertion that the female produces *semen*. As we have seen, Conway specifically asserts that this female *semen* is the “purest extract of the whole body.”⁶⁷ Against Aristotle, Galen and other “pangenesis” argued that *semen* must come from all parts of the body. This theory accounted for the fact that a creature can resemble its parents.⁶⁸

If Conway indeed adheres to the Galenic tradition, it would be a further indication of an equal ontological status between male and female, as opposed to a hierarchy wherein the male is closer to God.

64 BENNETT, *Principles* (n. 15) 17.

65 Ibid. These passages are not quotations from the 1996 edition of Conway’s treatise, nor are they from his own edition of the *Principles*, so one would have to assume Bennett paraphrases here for the purpose of making the analogical content clear.

66 Galen, *On Semen* II 4,1 (p. 173–179 DE LACY).

67 Conway, *Principles* 6,11 (p. 39 COUDERT/CORSE).

68 For more information, see BOYLE, *Spontaneous and Sexual Generation* (n. 3), which expresses the complexity of the matter as she asserts that “Conway’s association of spirit with the male and body with the female may suggest a more Aristotelian account, but in fact her view of the parents’ contributions more closely resembles Galen’s” (ibid. 189). Boyle makes a case for Conway’s use of both theories and argues further that her view on generation resembles the idea of “spontaneous generation”.

b) Henry More's exegesis of *Genesis*

Conway's teacher and friend Henry More spent a great deal of time working on his (Origenian) exegesis of *Genesis*, particularly in his *Conjectura Cabbalistica* of 1653, which is dedicated to Anne Conway. In fact, Richard Popkin argues that Conway may have been the co-author of several of More's earlier works, including the *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, and that their spiritualistic cosmologies should be seen as a joint effort to combat the new science of Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza.⁶⁹ More distinguishes between matter and first matter (using the Greek term: ὕλη, *hyle*) in his metaphorical interpretation of creation. Briefly put, More understands *hyle* as the raw material out of which all bodies were to be built. It is this physical *hyle* that was created on the first day, if we recall the words from Gen. 1:2: "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." In chapter 7 of his *Appendix to the Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, More identifies "earth", as in the *Genesis* account of the first day of creation, with "Metaphysical Hyle", describing it as "the Possibility of this external and material Creation" and as "the lowest degree and shadow of Being", in accordance with the text's reference to the "deep".⁷⁰ Particularly the description of *hyle* as "possibility" resonates well with my interpretation of Conway, as does the reference to the "deep" (cf. *creatio ex profundis*).

More calls this raw material that really exists only in potentiality "physical monads".⁷¹ These physical monads certainly would need to be individually created by God, but further activity would then be required to bind them together into macroscopic compound bodies.⁷² Thus More explains how: "The Metaphysical Hyle belonged to the First day, and the Physical to the Second."⁷³

In any case, for More as for Conway, every creature consists of some first matter and God's creative power. For Conway this first matter is spiritual, alive and associated with the female. God then breathes into the original human beings his incarnate Word, making it possible for them to partake of the divine principle:

"Moreover, since the human body was made from earth, which, as it has been proved, contained various spirits and gave those spirits to all the animals, without doubt the earth

69 See POPKIN, *Spiritualist Cosmologies* (n. 3).

70 Henry More, *An Appendix to the Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, in: id., *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*, London 1662, 134 f. See Jasper REID, *The Metaphysics of Henry More* (AIHI 207), Dordrecht 2012, 94.

71 More, *ibid.* 142.

72 REID, *Metaphysics* (n. 70) 95, explains that it is unclear whether the "possibility of corporeal creation should be understood in terms of an infinite empty space, laid out ready to receive bodies into its dimensions", or as a "homogeneous mass of atoms, not yet bound together but ready to be united into an infinite variety of different compound bodies".

73 More, *Appendix* 141.

gave human beings the best and most excellent spirits which it contained. But all these spirits were far inferior to the spirit of human beings, which they received from above and not from the earth.”⁷⁴

The “mother”, matter, and the “father”, God’s spirit, thus co-operate in making the finest creatures possible, the pre-lapsarian humans.⁷⁵ More, too, contends that all of creation is a mix of matter and spirit, the union of which he unfolds as the work of the metaphysical “Spirit of Nature”. But, importantly, human beings are endowed with rationality, meaning that they possess the ability to think freely for themselves, to plan intelligent responses to sensed events, and even to achieve some conception of God and other insensible things.⁷⁶ This difference between human beings and animals is part of the godly order.⁷⁷ Perhaps the “spirit from above” that Conway mentions as particular to human beings is a reference to Henry More’s interpretation of the creation. In any case, Conway is deeply indebted to More in her account of creation.

c) Descartes and dualism

Conway is committed to refuting the dualism between body and spirit. Her anti-dualistic critique is first and foremost directed against Henry More, who she believes did not entirely manage to refute Descartes’s separation of matter and spirit. Thereby her critique extends to Descartes as well. She criticizes every attempt to define body and spirit as types of extension that are differentiated by mutually exclusive properties. Conway’s critique is strictly methodological and consists of exposing inconsistencies in More’s and Descartes’s arguments. For example, she holds that it is inconsistent to ascribe impenetrability to one kind of extended substance (body) and not to another (spirit).⁷⁸

74 Conway, *Principles* 6,6 (p. 34 COUDERT/CORSE).

75 Henry More was keen on describing his neo-platonic understanding of creation in a Trinitarian framework: *Psychozoia*, Cambridge 1647, 10a–12b. Knowing how closely he co-operated with Conway, it is possible to stretch the theological interpretation a bit and argue that a third principle is needed in this union, namely the creative love of the mother and the father. In that case, Conway’s is not a dual principle of creation but a Trinitarian image of creation. The spirit that creation received from above would then be the Holy Spirit. We have already looked at the unifying love as a key concept in Conway, which could be called the Holy Spirit.

76 Cf. REID, *Metaphysics* (n. 70) 318.

77 Cf. *ibid.* 371.

78 Conway, *Principles* 3,9 (p. 18 f. COUDERT/CORSE). On the methodological nature of Conway’s anti-dualist critique, see HUTTON, *Anne Conway* (n. 2) 73–93. In the present context it may also be interesting to note that Conway does philosophy in exactly the same way as

In addition, the passages analyzed above make a theologically informed criticism of dualism, which also pertains to body and gender. Conway's fierce battle with dualisms is particularly clear in the second passage about procreation. Even if Conway is not explicit about the significance of gender to her metaphysics, it is quite clear that the categories she operates within are fluid, and we can at least detect some androgynous undertones in her philosophical theology.

Gender is an unavoidable category in discussions of body and identity. In a seventeenth-century context, the ambivalence of the Cartesian philosophy for women serves as a crucial example of how body and gender are connected. While the Cartesian emphasis on reason made philosophy accessible to women, his metaphysical division between body and mind underlined a gendered hierarchy, as women are associated with body and emotion while men have claimed for themselves the higher realm of mind or spirit.⁷⁹ The Cartesian association of women with bodily behavior found its medical counterpart in the return of an Aristotelian view on biology in early modern science. Based on Aristotle's biological theories, all sorts of diseases became associated with women in the seventeenth century and affected their social status, e.g. the infamous "hysteria."⁸⁰

6. Conclusion

This article has given a theologically informed analysis of two key passages in Conway, which pertain to body, spirit and gender. I have argued that Conway is grappling with these questions in relation to questions of unity and difference, and that the importance of these categories extends to the relation between body and spirit.

In the first passage, Conway asserts that creation has its beginning in the same source and that the pre-lapsarian state of creation was characterized by unity. She then identifies the common source as a gendered dual principle, namely God in

her contemporary (male) colleagues. She fully ascribes to the accepted methodology of the day, and she even implicitly references Descartes when she describes her method.

79 Conway, *ibid.* 7,1 (p. 42). While Conway here contends that spirit is the higher realm of reality, she does not explicitly comment on the resulting effect this could have, e.g., a justification of political inequality between men and women. However, these issues were addressed by Conway's contemporary, Margaret Cavendish (1623–1673) e.g., in her novel *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World* (1666), and by the slightly later Mary Astell (1666–1731) e.g., in her books *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest. By a Lover of Her Sex* (1694) and *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700). See also APETREI, *Women* (n. 4) 31.

80 Lauren KASSELL, *Medical understandings of the body. C. 1500–1750*, in: Sarah TOULAN/Kate FISHER (eds.), *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body. 1500 to the Present*, Abingdon, Oxon/New York 2013, 57–74, 66–69.

Christ or the Word incarnate (“father”) combined with “that unique substance from which everything has come forth” (“mother”). These two principles are not contradictory but can be understood as complementary in the light of *Genesis*. The dual principle of creation becomes part of Conway’s main thesis: that body and spirit are not opposites, but at different ends of the same continuum. The mixture of unity (from God) and multiplicity (from the spirits of the earth) blurs the boundaries of unity/multiplicity and allows creation to participate in the essence of God.

The second passage seems to carry over the gender-duality from the creative principle to the individual. Conway explains that every individual requires the union of these two principles: spirit and body, male and female – concepts that are distinct but not divided. The body serves as an outward reflection of its inner spirits, and the more perfectly mixed it is – the more androgynous – the more spiritual it can become, and the more deified. The body reflects the individual’s moral and soteriological status, which makes for a bodily theology where spirit can never be thought of without body. But, importantly, the body is always situated (as argued from 1 Cor. 6:16 f.) and in a soteriological process along with the rest of creation.

The two analyzed passages can be connected: creation’s common source, which Conway identifies as both “father” and “mother”, could represent the male and the female principle that Conway insists must be present in the healthy spirit in order for it to return to God. That is, the uniting with “Christ within” and bodily transformation are part of the framework of her anti-dualism. The transgressing of boundaries is a theological and indeed specifically Origenian endeavour. Anne Conway’s blurring of boundaries – which might be understood as gendered –, her attention to multiplicity and spirituality in all of creation, and her insistence on feminine symbolism in both creation and procreation could be cautiously read as an expression of a subtle feminist voice claiming both ontological and intellectual equality of the sexes.