In 1690, a philosophical work, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, was published. It had two main objectives: first, to lay a foundation for the nature of God that allows for bad things to naturally occur while maintaining the omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, qualities traditionally ascribed to the Abrahamic notion of god; and second, to criticize the contemporary philosophies of Descartes, Hobbs, and Spinoza, which were seen as containing contradictions or promoting atheism. There is nothing extraordinary in the text from a modern day philosophical interpretation, although, in its time, it was profound enough to influence the thought of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, a mathematician, scientist and philosopher, amongst other things. The context surrounding the author, and the posthumous publication of the work, however, is of much more interest to the modern day scholar, especially since the author of *The Principals* was a woman, Anne Conway. In this paper I attempt to show that Conway’s purpose for writing the *Principles* focused on making sense of her ailments, that she stands out as unique amongst her female contemporaries and deserves her spot on the list of important seventeenth-century philosophers without a gendered qualification, and that the reason she undertook her work and why it was published was partly due to the effects of the anti-Scholastic movement, focusing specifically on Cartesian philosophy, especially dualism, in that it separated mind from body, and thus, allowed ideas to be gender neutral.

Pain was to be a common occurrence throughout the life of Anne Conway. She was born Anne Finche in 1631 to a prominent English family. Her father was Sir Heneage Finche, Sergeant-at-Law, Recorder of the City of London and Speaker of the House of Commons.¹

¹ Louise D. Derksen, “Anne Conway’s Critique of Cartesian Dualism,” *The Paideia Project*, available at
Conway would never know her him, however, as he died one week before she was born. Furthermore, after suffering and then recovering from an extreme illness (it is unclear what the illness was) she developed “debilitating and recurring” headaches that plagued her for the rest of her life. The pain was so bad that she ended up trying unusual and dangerous methods to relieve her discomfort. In April 1656, for example, she went to France determined to undergo the trepan, which is a procedure where, “without anesthetics, the skull is opened to allow pressure to be released.” After arriving in France the surgeons decided not to proceed with the trepan but decided on the alternative procedure of opening “her jugular arteries instead.” However, her headaches continued and got worse. She was never rid of them and at various times thereafter she was thought to be on her death bed as a result of them. Moreover, her only child, Heneage, died of smallpox in late 1660; he was two years old. Conway was so distraught that she would not part with the corpse and ended up getting smallpox herself. Her tortures, dominated by the excruciating pain of her headaches, continued until February 18, 1679, the day she died.

The lifelong pain that Conway endured seems to have had a direct influence on her philosophy and theodicy. Instead of building from her experiences, Conway needed to assume characteristics of God, and proceed from those assumptions, in her attempt to produce an ontological system that allowed for an all powerful, all knowing, and all good God to exist. She did this by describing an ontology that focused on three types of substance: God, Christ, and the Creatures (a kind of revision on the holy spirit). “God is a spirit,” posits Conway in the first
line of the *Principles*. He is “Light, and Life, infinitely Wise, Good, Just, Mighty, Omniscient, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Creator and Maker of all things visible and invisible.”\(^8\) Christ is that which “all Things are said to consist or have their Existence” within.\(^9\) Essentially, Christ is a medium, a combination of God and the Creatures, and thus, “his substance contains a high degree of spirit as well as matter.”\(^10\) Creatures are everything else that exists in the world. They are either animate or inanimate, and they “share in one substance which is a mixture of matter and spirit.”\(^11\) Within the level of Creatures, infinite levels of being can exist through processes that can best be described as evolutionary. Conway writes that, “Mathematical Division of Things, is never made in *Minima*; but Things may be Physically divided into their least parts; as when Concrete Matter is so far divided that it departs into Physical *Monades*, as it was in the first State of its Materiality.”\(^12\) These monads are the basic substance of which Creatures are comprised. Since monads are both physical and spirit, hence, of God and Christ, Creatures themselves are of God and Christ, although they can never be God or Christ. However, all Creatures can change form. Since, “the Nature, and Essential Attribute of God [is] to be unchangeable, and without succession; so the Nature of Creatures is to be changeable and successive.”\(^13\) Since discomfort is usually part of change, and since all Creatures must change as part of their nature, she could sufficiently explain, to herself, how God could allow his creation to experience such pain. It was a necessary condition so they could evolve.

Conway showed early on an intense curiosity about the philosophy of Descartes, which later turned into skepticism, and Henry More, the prominent and eminent member of the

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\(^8\) Conway, Ch.1-1.  
\(^9\) Ibid., Ch. 4-3.  
\(^10\) Derksen.  
\(^11\) Ibid.  
\(^12\) Conway, Ch. 3-9.  
\(^13\) Ibid., Ch. 4-1.
Cambridge Platonists, who also tutored Conway in her younger years and, over time, became a lifelong friend, was more than willing to aid in her education. More sent her numerous transcripts of Descartes’ writings\textsuperscript{14} and always encouraged her to approach it “in a non-dogmatic, critical fashion.”\textsuperscript{15} It is unclear how she viewed the specifics of Descartes dualism in her younger years, but by the time she wrote her Principles, she clearly had problems with his metaphysics. According to Conway, Cartesian dualism makes it so “every Body is a mere dead Mass, not only void of all kind of Life and Sense, but utterly incapable thereof to all Eternity.”\textsuperscript{16} This clearly contradicts her adopted position of the nature of the Creatures. According to Conway’s philosophy, everything is essentially \textit{of} God. Therefore, she could not accept the position that relegated, or allowed, all inanimate matter to be separate from God. This criticism added to the traditional critique, which questioned how material and non-material substances could interact. Conway criticized “those who affirm Body and Spirit to be contrary Things, and inconvertible one into another,” because doing so denied “a Body all Life and Sense.”\textsuperscript{17} Conway needed the “Body and Spirit” to interact to support her position “that the mind suffers when the body is in pain.”\textsuperscript{18} She knew from her ailments that her mind suffered when her body was in pain, so any idea that allowed for the contrary was seen as a contradiction.

However, Conway adopted at least one very important aspect of the Cartesian philosophy and expanded upon it in her doctrine. Like Descartes, Conway’s philosophy stems from the argument that God, as a perfect being, “will not deceive or lead anyone to error.”\textsuperscript{19} This derives from the position that a perfect idea must come from a perfect source. Thus, if the source is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Karen Detlefsen, “Review of Sarah Hutton’s \textit{Anne Conway: A Woman Philosopher},” Notre Dame Philosophical Review. July 1, 2005. Available at \url{http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24814-anne-conway-a-woman-philosopher/}.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Conway, Ch. 9-2.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Detlefsen.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Collinson, 58.
\end{itemize}
perfect, it would be incapable of deception. Although there are many problems with this argument (which won’t be discussed here since it is irrelevant to the paper), it is undeniable that such a position is necessary for a philosophy such as Conway’s. Whereas Descartes concerned himself with proving the existence of God, Conway sought to establish likely attributes of God’s nature. “Yet I would not hereby determine,” begins Conway, “what the Absolute Power of God will or can do; as some do vainly and grosly dispute; but only hint what the Power of God probably may do, or will do.”20 It was important for Conway to maintain a certain distance between the substance of God and the Creatures, because it was imperative for her to make sense of her condition. Since she could not fully understand why she was meant to suffer she needed to hold the position that people could never know, with certainty, the will of God. Although, by following the premise that God is perfect and all-good, they could know that there was some will at play that allowed their suffering to have meaning.

Perhaps the easiest way of understanding the philosophy of Conway is to contrast it with that of Hobbes and Spinoza. She disliked the ideas of Hobbes, not because of his position on material objects, but because he “affirms God himself to be Material and Corporeal; yea, nothing else but Matter and Body, and so confounds God and the Creatures in their Essences, and denies that there is any Essential Distinction between them.”21 With Spinoza, he “confounds God and the Creatures together, and makes but one Being of both.”22 It was the consequences and metaphysics of their doctrines that she disapproved of. Both were atheistic to her. Hobbes put forth a theory that paid no importance to God, and Spinoza’s doctrine allowed for God and man to be considered the same. Even though her philosophy agreed with theirs on most things, “that all Kinds of Creatures may be changed one into another, that the lowest may become the highest,

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20 Conway, Ch. 3-9.
21 Conway, Ch. 9-3.
22 Ibid.
and the highest...may become the lowest,” she disagreed “that God and Creatures are one Substance.” If God and Creatures were the same, then following from her philosophy, her ailments would have had to make sense to her. But they did not. So for her, there was a necessary problem with their theories. Even worse, if there was nothing, such as a God, that could make sense of her ailments, regardless of whether she could understand them, then that would suggest that there was no purpose for them, and therefore, her suffering would be meaningless. This is why she needed to build her metaphysics from assuming characteristics of God, and not from experience. She needed to believe that things followed “according to that Course and Succession which Divine Wisdom hath ordained.” She needed to believe that there was a greater meaning or purpose to her suffering.

Perhaps Conway’s philosophy can offer an insight into her conversion to Quakerism. Besides the obvious comfort that likely came from The Religious Society of Friends, she might have seen in the doctrines of Quakerism similarities to her own philosophical beliefs. Remember that Conway ascribed to the substance of God, spirit and light. Furthermore, she attributes all Creatures to be of the substance which she calls God. Thus she ascribes to all people a part of that spirit and light substance. This is very similar to the Quaker ideal that every human has within them the inner light of God. Like the Quakers, this position allows her to deny the idea of a hell “and to affirm universal salvation.” Since all Creatures are of God, according to Conway’s philosophy, and since God exists eternally, and all Creatures exist temporally, they can be said to exist infinitely. And since all Creatures, “or whole creation, is but one only Substance or Essence in Specie,” the different modes that that substance takes can evolve and

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21 Ibid., Ch. 9-5.  
24 Ibid.  
25 Detlefsen.  
26 Conway, Ch. 6-4.
transform to different levels within its ontology (depending upon good or bad actions). For example, if a man is bad it may become a lower animal, like a horse, and if good, the horse may become a man. In this state of infinite transformation resides universal salvation since, even though one can transform to a lower state of being from performing evil deeds, they can always redeem themselves in their next life, regardless of how low they fall. It has a progressive element in that it allows the Spirit within all Creatures the chance to infinitely improve within the ontology of creation. This would be ever so important to one like Conway who had suffered throughout her life but continued to do good deeds. Conway could join a community of people which shared, at least to a certain degree, ideas and ideals similar to hers. It is quite easy to imagine the value of such comfort and how it might have allowed Anne Conway piece of mind in her final days.

Anne Conway was among a select few women of the seventeenth-century who engaged in philosophy. Indeed, she seems unique as a seventeenth-century intellectual figure in just about every respect. The most obvious being that she was a woman in a time when intellectual discourse was a realm for men. The less obvious would be how her pain primarily motivated her engagement in philosophy. Even amongst her female contemporaries, however, she stands out in many ways. Indeed, when we compare Conway to some of her female contemporaries she seems so out of place that she fits better with the male philosophers of her time. She has no traces of feminism or political activism in her work, something that was prominent in the writings of other women intellectuals of her day. She also engaged directly with men in philosophical discourse and her written work was relatively well received by her contemporaries.

When we compare Conway’s work to those of Bathsua Makin (1600-1675) and Mary Astell (1666-1731), both early English feminists, we can see that she had little in common with

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27 Ibid., Ch. 6-8.
their ambitions. Both Makin and Astell were activist writers who sought to alter society by focusing on bettering the education of women. Conway’s work was introspective and focused on making sense of her pain in a way that was philosophically viable. In this respect, she somewhat resembles Descartes and his introspective pursuit to clear away his doubt. Both Descartes’ and Conway’s ambition was to approach or obtain fundamental truths by which sound foundations could be built. Whether we believe their arguments is irrelevant to the fact that they both succeeded in doing so in a way that seemed to satisfy their curiosity.

Conway compares much better with Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia (1618-1680) and the English Duchess of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673). The epistolary relationship that Princess Elizabeth maintained with Descartes from 1643 until his death in 1650 mirrors that between Conway and More. Like Conway and More, Elizabeth and Descartes also met in person many times and developed a close friendship. Descartes even dedicated the French addition of his *Principles of Philosophy* to Elisabeth, just as More dedicated his *Antidote against Atheism* to Conway. Indeed, one reason Descartes accepted the position of tudor to Queen Kristina of Sweden was to argue on behalf of Elizabeth for the return of her late father’s Palatinate lands. Additionally, like Conway to More, Elizabeth was very critical of her mentor—so much so that Descartes undertook to clarify his positions and how they relate to the passions in his *The Passions of the Soul*. However, unlike Conway, Elizabeth never produced any known philosophical work. Her writings consist in the letters written to Descartes. Even though she was an avid critic, and expressed many merited objections, she never attempted a synthesis.

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28 Elizabeth had petitioned the Queen for a meeting in 1646 for help on the matter, but the Queen ended up inviting Descartes instead. Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia (1618-1680), available at http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/philosophers/Elisabeth.html.

of her ideas. She died in 1680 after spending time in a convent and after a long and painful illness.30

Less similar than the Princess of Bohemia in terms of her relationship with an established mentor, Margaret Cavendish had more similarities to Conway in the philosophical works that she produced. She had a brother John Lucas, who was well-established in the academic community and who helped found the Royal Society. He, like Conway’s brother John, helped aid her in her early education. Through her marriage with William Cavendish, she was able to interact with such figures as Hobbes, Descartes, Marin Mersenne, Pierre Gassendi, and Kenelm Digby. However, she seems to have had little to no direct philosophical engagement with any of them. Furthermore, without the connections of her brother and husband, it is unlikely that any of her work would have been published.31 Moreover, Cavendish produced not just one work, like Conway, but multiple works, including her two most prominent philosophical treatise: The Grounds of Natural Philosophy (1668) and Observations on Experimental Philosophy (1666). It appears that, as a result of her Observations, she was even awarded an invitation to visit the “male scientific establishment” of the Royal Society in 1667.32 She even established somewhat of a philosophical readership and standing by publishing, in 1670, the replies of those who she had presented copies of her work to, which likely contributed to her dual reputation as femme savant and “Mad Madge” for dealing in the male dominated realm of science and philosophy.3334

Unfortunately, there is no known correspondence between the two, but it is likely that Cavendish

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30 Elizabeth.
32 Hutton, Anne Conway, 113.
33 Ibid., 112-113.
34 White, 8.
knew of Conway; and it is certain that Conway knew of Cavendish, although she “kept her at a firm distance.”

The difference in public relations between Conway and Cavendish is obvious; Conway was reserved and private, never herself publishing anything, whereas Cavendish was quite the opposite. The most obvious explanation that answers why this was the case could be obtained from the life long ailments that Conway suffered. However, as much as a factor as this likely was, we would miss some valuable insights if we were to settle on that observation. Conway had much more support in her studies than Cavendish. Her education was as formal as a woman’s could be in the seventeenth-century through Henry More. Through More, Conway had primary access to the Cambridge Platonists. This support, in addition to her brother and after 1670 Francis Mercury van Helmont, the one who introduced Conway to both Kabbalism and Quakerism, likely helped to quench the desire for discourse in Conway. “I have received yours of Nov. 22 which hath in some measure eased me of the great inquietude I was in before through the want of your letters,” Conway writes to More in 1662, “but nothing can comfort me for the want of your excellent company which...is esteemed by me more than any thing either England or Ireland can afford.”

It should not be underestimated how valuable such support can be to the inquiring mind. Cavendish, even though at times she had her brother to converse with, was rather lacking in the support that Conway received from so many people. Writing was a natural outlet when no other was available. When no one of esteem critically engaged with her, “she engaged their views critically in the form of a correspondence between herself and a fictional third person.”

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36 Ibid., 77.
37 Cunning.
It appears also that Conway’s physical pain afforded her opportunities to critically engage in scientific discourse in a way that Cavendish was not privy to. Conway’s and van Helmont’s intellectual relationship blossomed after their meeting, which began as a medical inquiry. In addition to van Helmont, Conway conversed with such men as Thomas Willis, Robert Boyle, and all types of medical practitioners ranging from “royal physicians to faith healers, from Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians to self-taught lay practitioners.”\(^{38}\) Although the circumstances were not exactly favorable, Conway undoubtedly engaged much more often with more prominent academicians than Cavendish. Consequently, she likely felt less need to express herself and, therefore, did not write as vehemently as Cavendish. Nevertheless, when Conway did write her sole work, it seems to have been received rather favorably—at least much more so than the works of Cavendish. Conway received a reference from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the famous philosopher of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century. Leibniz acknowledges Conway as a source for his own thought and relates his metaphysical views closely to Conway’s: “My philosophical views approach somewhat closely those of the late Countess Conway and holds a middle position between Plato and Democritus.”\(^{39}\)

An answer to why this is the case can be seen in two factors. First, Conway’s work had no traces of atheism and, second, she was not the one to publish her work. Conway’s work emphasized the necessity of God. Cavendish’s work dismissed God as incomprehensible to humans; and in her work she refused “to cite the Scripture, which only treats of things belonging to faith, and not to reason.”\(^{40}\) Cavendish rejected metaphysical speculations and concerned herself with materialistic inquiries. Her philosophy is very much in line with Hobbes, in that “she denied the existence of immaterial substance and postulated that everything in nature

\(^{38}\) Hutton, *Anne Conway*, Ch. 6 (119-121).
\(^{39}\) Ibid., 233.
\(^{40}\) Cunning.
is corporeal, including the soul.”  Whether her husband’s patronage to Hobbes had an impact on her thought is unknown. However, Cavendish had two things going against her: she was a woman and she was considered an atheist. Indeed, many philosophers would battle against the foes of atheism, not least of whom was Henry More.

After 1651, when Hobbes released his colossal work, *Leviathan*, More aspired to nothing higher than protecting theology from atheistic doctrines. In 1653, More released his *Antidote Against Atheism*, which was a response to the atheism he interpreted from Hobbes’ writing. In his preface to his *Collection*, released in 1662, More concisely stated what his main goal was:

> And I think it will be impossible anything should, if they will be but pleased to take notice of my Design, which is not to Theologize in Philosophy, but to draw an *Exoterick* Fence or exterior Fortification about Theology; That making good those *Out-works* against all the assaults of the confident *Atheist* [Hobbes], and his Gigantick batteries raised against the belief of the existence of a *God*, and of a *Reward in the World to come*, I might teach him what a man of Vanity and temerity he is, in that he imagines it so feisable a thing, in his unskilled thoughts, to overrun the *Holy City and Sanctuary*, he being so easily beat off from the *walls* thereof.  

This deep animosity for Hobbes was not unique. Cavendish’s principles aligned her with the atheist crowd, a crowd that many came to argue against--especially Conway.

Conway also likely benefited from a posthumous publication, and one done with the blessing and assistance of two prominent men with good connections. Whereas Cavendish published her own work, albeit with the assistance of her brother and husband, More and van Helmont were responsible for the publishing of Conway’s *Principles*. Thinking it might read

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41 Hutton, *Anne Conway*, 113.
42 More, 6.
better in Latin, Conway’s manuscript, which More wrote looked like it was written “abruptly and scatteredly,” was translated to Latin, possibly by More. More, however, would not live to see the work published, as he died in 1687; but after arriving in Holland in 1690, van Helmont had the work published. Although, it would be two more years before the work was retranslated to English and published on the island under the known title.

Van Helmont might indeed be the primary factor in the successful reception of Conway’s Principles. He was a consummate traveler, expounding his and his friends philosophies to all who would listen. Furthermore, he had formed an acquaintance with Leibniz as early as 1671. We know that by 1694, van Helmont was very much in the mind of Leibniz, as he was interested in his philosophy, even if it was “bristling with paradoxes.” As Majorie Hope Nicolson relates, when the two of them met in Hanover in 1696, “Van Helmont held the floor, pouring forth with flashing eyes his experiences, his theories, and his beliefs....Constantly in his conversation, Van Helmont went back to the days in England, and the names of Lady Conway and Henry More recur again and again.” Although it is not certain that Leibniz learned of Conway through his encounters with van Helmont, nor whether this meeting was the first time he heard her name, it seems more than likely that van Helmont was primarily responsible for introducing Conway’s Principles to Leibniz. Whether this was the case, it seems clear that Conway, unlike Cavendish and the other women of her time, benefited from the avid support and promotion by her male contemporaries.

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44 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 455.
Questions abound when it comes to Conway and these seventeenth-century women philosophers and intellectuals. Although, perhaps none evoke greater curiosity and reveal more about the time than why Henry More, a very prominent and eminent figure, would undertake the mentorship of, and later consider a colleague, the Lady Anne Conway. In the Conway Letters, Majorie Hope Nicholson noted that there was no appearance of condescension when More addressed Anne, "no attempt on the part of the teacher to pass over problems too difficult for the female mind."\(^48\) This seems odd in a time when thinking on such things as philosophy was considered a realm for men.

Anne’s love of philosophy, and relationship with Henry More, originated through the correspondence she maintained with her older brother, John, while he was away at school. John sent back philosophical treaties upon request, which she used as a means of intellectual guidance and in turn sparked her interest in philosophy.\(^49\) In 1647, Henry More was chosen by Anne’s brother, John, to be his tutor upon John’s return to Christ’s College in Cambridge.\(^50\) It was in 1650—-the same year Anne was arranged to marry Edward Conway--when Anne and Henry began exchanging letters.\(^51\)

Perhaps More was simply unique. Exceptions seem to exist to just about every situation. However, perhaps the answer, or part of the answer, lies in the effects of the anti-Scholastic movement, especially in the philosophy of Descartes, the philosophy that Anne Conway came to argue against. Although Aristotle’s ontological categories were under fire, they were still very much dominant during the seventeenth-century. According to Aristotle’s categories, a substance can be thought of in two distinct ways. “In its primary sense substance is that which bears or

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 47.
\(^{49}\) Finche.
\(^{50}\) Ibid.
\(^{51}\) Finche.
supports qualities; it is that to which predicates may be ascribed. In its secondary sense it refers to particular *kinds* of substances, as it does in the categories where to assert that ‘Socrates is a man’ is to say that Socrates is a substance of a certain kind, namely *mankind*.”

The implication is that man and woman belong, or can belong, to two separate and distinct ontologies: mankind and womankind. In such a context, any thought or idea that derived from a woman could be thought of as womanly. If the realm of intellectual thought and discourse was believed to be for men, then any theory posited by a woman would automatically be inferior to those of a man.

However, if one adopted a Cartesian position, this separation would not follow. Descartes’ notion of substance separates mind from material, where “Consciousness is the essential property of mind substance; extension in length, breadth and depth is the essential property of bodily or material substance. Descartes' realization that he cannot doubt that he exists as a thinking substance...convinces him that mind can exist independently of matter.”

Such a conclusion allows for the thoughts of people to be distinct from those they came from. It became irrelevant where an idea came from since, for a Cartesian, an idea can exist independent from the agent who created it. When More and Conway first began correspondence, he was very interested and supportive of Descartes’ philosophy. Although he eventually disagreed with some of the conclusions, as did Conway, the influence of Cartesian thought remained. Even the ideas of Hobbes, and especially Spinoza, allowed for the conclusion that nothing about a woman implied that they could not think on the same level as a man. If God *is* everything, as many implied from Spinoza’s writings, then that means God *is* woman too.

Indeed Henry More’s actions with Anne Conway are nothing if not a precise demonstration of how the Cartesian method of inquiry was to be practiced. In one of their early

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52 Collinson, 23.
53 Ibid., 58.
letters, from 1650, More offers guidance to Conway: “Though I would have you to habituate your self, compos’dly, and steadilly to think of any thing that you think worth thinking of, and to drive it on to as clear and distinct approbation as you can,” however, “do not think of anything anxiously and solicitously, to the vexing or troubling of your spirits at all. What you would force at one time may happily offer itself at another.”54 This is essentially the same advise that Descartes gives to his readers in his 1647 French edition of his *Principles of Philosophy*. He counsels them to read the work completely like a novel; and if they desire to read it again, then repeat the process, but this time make marks on places of confusion. If a third reading does not clear up the confusion, Descartes is confident that a fourth attempt will. Descartes, after all his many years of work, believed that, “there are almost none that are so dull and slow as to be incapable of forming sound opinions or indeed of grasping all the most advanced sciences, provided they receive proper guidance.”55 Quite clearly, his relationship with Princess Elizabeth shows that indeed Descartes considered women to be among those who had such capabilities; and there can be little doubt of how Cartesian dualism was engaging to many women of the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries.56 With the love of Catesianism that More had, until the publication of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, in 1651, it seems unmistakable that More’s relationship with Conway follows, whether consciously or unconsciously, the precedent set by Descartes and Elizabeth.

Although women have always had the same ontological ability as men to think on such matters, the intellectual culture of the seventeenth-century was perhaps slowly coming to accept it. Even for those who steadfastly adhered to principles that separated men from women, their

54 Hutton, *Anne Conway*, 44.
56 Sarah Hutton concludes the same in *Women Philosopher*, 4-5, 9, and Erica Harth concludes the same in “Cartesian Women,” *Yale French Studies* no. 80 (1991): 149, in JSTOR [database online], 6, Feb 2012.
foundations slowly became such that women should not participate for fear of social disorder, not that they could not participate from being ontologically unable. In response to the position of women in the French Solons, which were “also a major conduit for Cartesian discourse,”\(^\text{57}\) Rousseau states: “As for us [men]...we have taken on entirely contrary ways; meanly devoted to the wills of the sex which we ought to protect and not serve, we have learned to despise it [women] in obeying it, to insult it by our derisive attentions; and every women in Paris gathers in her apartment a harem of men more womanish than she.”\(^\text{58}\) Rousseau is not claiming here that women cannot engage in intellectual activity. Rather he is claiming that they should not; and as a result of their engagement, society is turning upside down. The significance of this should not be underestimated. If it is thought that someone cannot do something, then it is easy to maintain that they ought not do it. However, if it is shown and the paradigm comes to accept or assume that one can do something, then it becomes possible for that person or group to demand that they ought to have the right to do so. In other words, the locked door to the exit of the room was suddenly unlocked. It was the women intellectuals and philosophers of the seventeenth-century who made sure that, even though the door might not yet be open, it would indeed remain unlocked.

Although feminists long predate Descartes, perhaps his influence indirectly helped provide the paradigm shift that empowered their struggle. Conway, and other women intellectuals of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century suggest this as at least plausible; especially since many drew upon Cartesian principles. The fact that Conway was taken seriously by her contemporaries, and was able to get her work published, suggests the possibility that one effect of Cartesian dualism, to those who took merit from it, was to allow women’s arguments on

\(^{57}\) Harth, 146.  
intellectual matters to stand independent of their sex. In this instance, however, Conway separates herself even from her female contemporaries. She was introspective and, like Descartes, focused on making sense of peculiarities--for her, pain; for him, doubt. She learned from and regularly engaged critically with some of the most prominent academics of her time. Her intellectual curiosity and synthesis was of a higher lever (not implying superior, simply non-normative) than most of her female contemporaries, and of such quality that it influenced succeeding philosophers. She is an example that not all female philosophers, even those of the seventeenth-century, need be feminists. Anne Conway was indeed not a feminist, she was simply a seventeenth-century philosopher.