God’s Free Will
• God is free because he acts spontaneously, without external compulsion, but he is also necessitated by his goodness and reason.
  “For although the will of God is most free so that whatever he does in regard to his creatures is done without any external force or compulsion or without any cause coming from the creatures (since he is free and acts spontaneously in whatever he does), nevertheless, that indifference of acting or not acting can in no way be said to be in God, for this would be an imperfection and would make God like his corruptible creatures” (P III.1, 15).

Human Free Will
• Human beings have indifference of will, which is the basis for all change and evil in creatures.
• There is no other distinction between creatures and God but mutability.
  This indifference of will, according to Conway, “is the basis for all mutability and corruptibility in creatures, so that there would be no evil in creatures if they were not mutable” (P III.1, 15, emphasis mine).
• God has implanted in us a desire for goodness, but we are capable of choosing evil.
  “And this is the nature of all creatures, namely that they be in continual motion or operation, which most certainly strives for their further good (just as for the reward and fruit of their own labor), unless they resist that good by a willful [voluntaria] transgression and abuse of the impartial [indifferentiae voluntatis] will created in them by God” (P VI.6, 32).
• Good and evil are relative terms for Conway: All being has some goodness (since all beings share in some of God’s attributes). When we choose “evil” we are really choosing a lesser good. What is good for a one type of being, a horse, for example, is to have the virtues of a horse (obedience, speed, calmness of nature, etc.). What is good for a human is to have the virtues associated with our sort of being (piety, holiness, kindness, honesty, etc.). To act like a devil is to act with ‘hostility, malice, cruelty, fraud, and cunning’ and to act like a beast is to indulge our ‘lust and Earthly desires’ (P VI.10 and 8, 38 and 36).
• Sin, according to Conway, is ‘ataxia, or a disorderly direction of motion or the power of moving from its appropriate place or state to another’ (P XIII.2 58).

Why Create Creatures with the Ability to Choose Evil?
• The creation story – God emanates his goodness
  “And since he is not able to multiply himself because that would be the same as creating many Gods, which would be a contradiction, it necessarily follows that he gave being to creatures from time everlasting…for otherwise the goodness communicated by God, which is his essential attribute, would indeed be finite and could be numbered in terms of years” (P II.4, 13).
• The claim that God makes mutable, and thus possibly evil, creatures out of the necessity of communicating his goodness might strike one as odd.
  “Indeed, no one thinks that because I say that the motions of every creature come from God that he is or could therefore be the author or cause of sin, for although the power to move comes from God, yet sin in no way comes from God but from the creature which has abused this power and directed it to something other than it should. Thus sin is ataxia, or a disorderly direction of motion or the power of moving from its appropriate place or state to another. If for example, a ship is moved by wind but is steered by a helmsman so that it goes from this or that place, then the helmsman is neither the author nor the cause of the wind; but the wind blowing, he makes either a good or bad use of it. When he guides the ship to its destination, he is praised, but when he grounds it on the shoals and suffers shipwreck, then he is blamed and deemed worthy of punishment” (P VIII.2, 58).
• Compare the following passage from Part One, Section 38 of Leibniz’s Theodicy: “Let us now compare the force which the current exercises on boats, and communicates to them, with the action of God, who produces and conserves whatever is positive in creatures, and gives them perfection, being and force: let us compare, I say, the inertia of matter with the natural imperfection of creatures, and the slowness of the laden boat with the defects to be found in the qualities and the action of the creature; and we shall find that there is nothing so just as this comparison. The current is the cause of the boat's movement, but not of its retardation; God is the cause of perfection in the nature and the actions of the creature, but the limitation of the receptivity of the creature is the cause of the defects there in its action.”
How do we Choose Evil?

• Basis of desire and love is similarity: “For the reason why we call something good is because it really or apparently pleases us on account of its similarity to us, or ours to it” (P VII.3, 47). We love and desire those things that we see as similar to us in (1) kind, (2) cause, or (3) thought.

• When a creature desires and loves something, she changes herself. Conway writes, “For whatever receives something is nourished by it and thus becomes part of it” (P VII.4, 54-5). And again, “Thus, whatever someone loves – whether it is a human being, an animal, a tree, silver, gold – is united with him, and his spirit goes out to it” (P VII.4; 53).

• Whenever we see, hear, taste, smell, or touch, we are exchanging spirits with others. We produce subtle spirits in our own bodies, which in turn are perceived as colors, sounds, odors, etc., and are taken in by other created beings. When we receive these sorts of images from others, they are stored in our body. These spirits literally become part of us and can influence our future desires, thoughts, and will.

“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?” (P VI.8 37).

What are the Consequences?

• The principal spirit and the body: every individual has one principal spirit, which is constituted by a bundle of spirits, that is their dominant spirit and which constitutes that individual. This principal spirit determines the external shape of the individual by causing the formation of the darker grosser spirits (body) connected to it to reflect its image.

• The great chain of being: “Consequently, after some period of time all these things can change into very different kinds of things, and this happens through the same process and order of that divine operation which God gave to all things as law or justice. For in his wisdom he has decided to reward every creature according to its works” (P V.7, 27).

“This justice appears as much in the ascent of creatures as in their descent, that is, when they change for the better or worse. When they become better, this justice bestows a reward and a prize for their good deeds. When they become worse, the same justice punishes them with fitting penalties according to the nature and degree of their transgression. The same justice imposes a law for all creatures and inscribes it in their very natures. Whatever creature breaks this law is punished accordingly. But any creature who observes this law receives the reward of becoming better” (P VI.7, 35).

• Limits of evil: “Consequently, it is the nature of a creature, unless it degenerates, always to become more and more like the creator. But because there is no being which is in every way contrary to God (surely nothing exists which is infinitely and immutably bad, as God is infinitely and immutably good, and there is nothing which is infinitely dark as God is infinitely light, nor is anything infinitely a body having no spirit, as God is infinitely spirit having no body), it is therefore clear that no creature can become more and more body to infinity, although it can become more and more spirit to infinity” (P VII.1, 42).

• The purpose of pain and suffering: “All pain and torment stimulates the life or spirit existing in everything that suffers. As we see from constant experience and as reason teaches us, this must necessarily happen because through pain and suffering whatever grossness or crassness is contracted by the spirit or body is diminished; and so the spirit imprisoned in such grossness or crassness is set free and becomes more spiritual and, consequently, more active and effective though pain” (P VII.1, 43).

• Universal salvation: “…[A]ll degrees and kinds of sin have their appropriate punishments, and all these punishments tend toward the good of creatures, so that the grace of God will prevail over judgment and judgment turn into victory for the salvation and restoration of creatures. Since the grace of God stretches over all his work, why do we think that God is more severe and more rigorous a punisher of his creatures than he truly is? This obscures and darkens the glory of God’s attributes in an astonishing way and does not foster love for God and admiration of his goodness and justice in the hearts of men as it should, but does precisely the opposite” (P VI.8, 37).