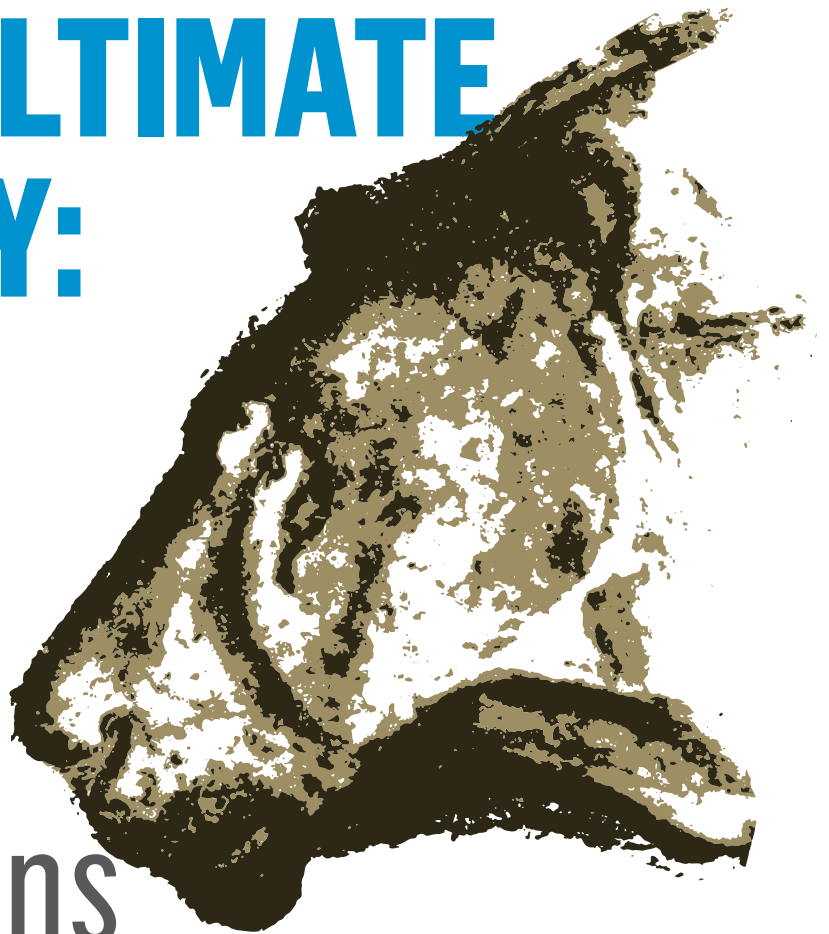


## THE PENULTIMATE CURIOSITY:

Science,  
Religion  
and the  
Big Questions



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# Performance at Conway Hall

**Guest Editor: Dr Luke Dixon**

I'm delighted to be this double edition's guest editor and thought I would let you know something about the performance work I create with The Conway Collective at Conway Hall.

The Conway Collective is an informal group of performance makers, creating and curating work in Conway Hall. Our flagship activity has been The Testing Ground which has provided mentoring, workshop, experiment and performance opportunities for emerging dance/movement/physical theatre artists in this uniquely welcoming and adaptable building. The uniqueness of Conway Hall with its large, wood floored main space and wide variety of ancillary rooms and spaces, has allowed for the creation of a unique range of work, from spectacular shows that have filled the entire building to intimate pieces in the library and on the stairwells, and everything in between.

Highlights of the Collective's own work have included a musical adaptation of Whitehead & Russell's 'Principia Mathematica' performed with The London School of Philosophy, the annual 'Parade' events bringing together dance, music, live art and video in circus-style spectacle, and a site-specific staging of 'The Cherry Orchard' which engaged the entire audience as performers and took place outside as well as inside the building. Amongst

the companies we have hosted have been The New Factory of the Eccentric Actor who recreated the revolutionary fervour that gripped the world in '1848', and The Brighton Players from Port Elizabeth in South Africa in telling the moving, humorous and sometimes desperate stories of men who seek work at the side of the road.

At the heart of all we do is a humanist performative interest in the corporeal, the unique power of the human body to express itself in a space, coupled with an internationalist perspective on artistic collaboration. All the work created and curated has been emboldened and characterised with a distinctive and unique aesthetic drawing on the multi-disciplinary skills, defiant ambitions and social and political radicalism of its makers. The work always attempts to constantly re-define the nature and meaning of contemporary performance through the open-hearted availability of the building for experiment, workshop, rehearsal and public sharing.

The purpose, design, atmosphere and history of Conway Hall itself makes it an ideal space for such radical work. Under the warm wood-lined Main Hall's motto of 'To Thy Own Self Be True', The Conway Collective's projects have fertilised a diversity of aesthetic experiences for artists and audiences.



**Dr Luke Dixon** is a performance maker, writer, teacher and academic, internationally known for his innovative productions of Shakespeare, site-specific performances, teaching of actors and research into performance. His productions for theatre nomad, of which he was Artistic Director for 20 years, have been seen in China, North America, South Africa, Germany, France, Poland, Russia, Czech and Slovak Republics, Spain and the UK. Luke's books on theatre practice are published by Nick Herne, Routledge and Methuen. He is a founding member of The Conway Collective.

# An Intimate Conversation *with* Roger Penrose

Prof Sir Roger Penrose in discussion with Ideas Roadshow host Howard Burton, November 10, 2016



Photos: Darren Johnson



# THE PENULTIMATE CURIOSITY: Science, Religion and the Big Questions?

**Roger Wagner and Professor Andrew Briggs**

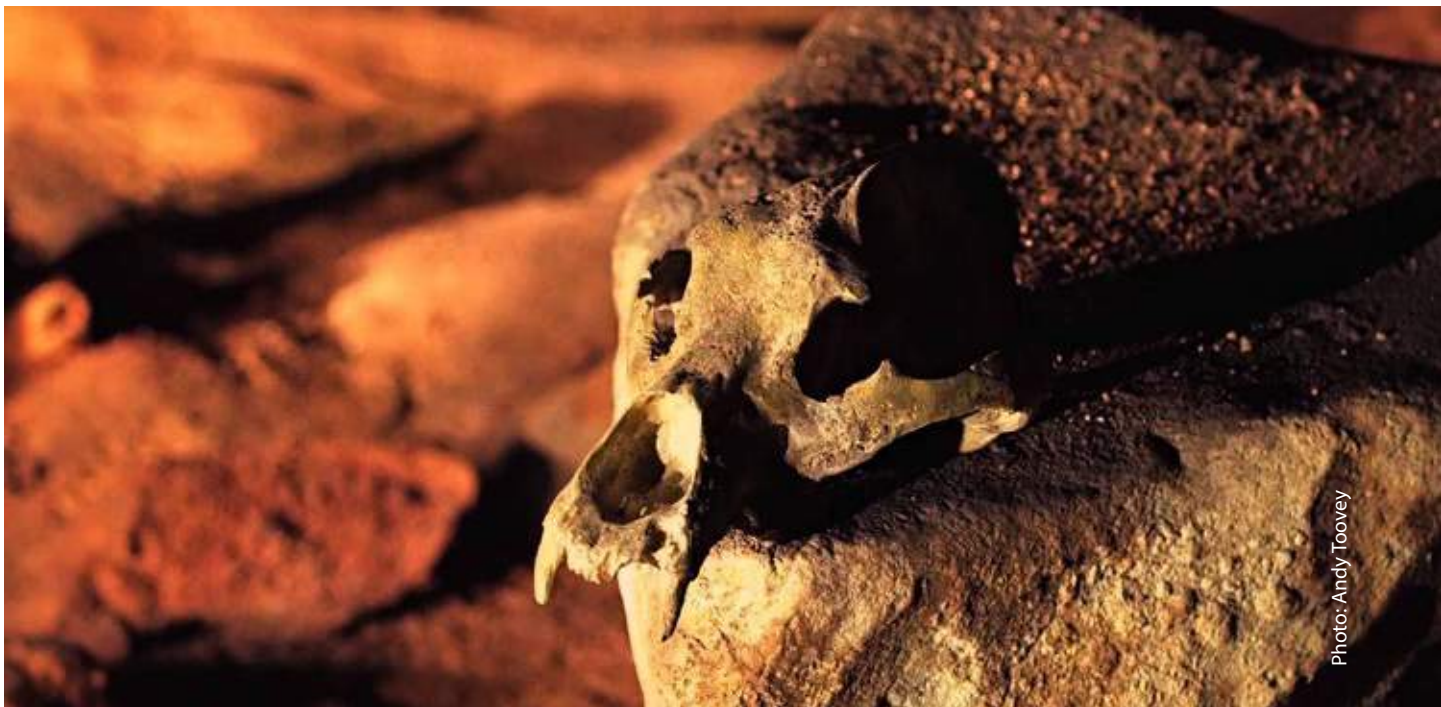


Photo: Andy Toovey

The Ardèche Gorge, in the South of France, is home to some of the most remarkable paintings in the world. They would be worthy of inclusion in any national gallery. But these paintings are in a cave. They have recently been subject to redating by the most sophisticated methods known to science, and the conclusion is that the oldest of them were painted some 35,000 years ago.

Jean Clottes led the team that studied the paintings following their discovery in 1995. In September last year, in the course of making a film, we visited him in his home. Dr Clottes is convinced that the paintings in the Chauvet Pont d'Arc cave were religiously motivated. He points among other things to evidence that people did not live in the cave, but held their religious ceremonies there. He reckons

that the anatomical accuracy of the paintings was essential for the spiritual power that they were intended to convey. The quality of portrayal of the underlying musculature is something that the great animaliers like Leonardo or Stubbs would not have been ashamed of. It is as if the spiritual concerns of the painter inspired a curiosity about the subjects of the paintings.

We had started talking about religion and science more than sixteen years ago, and these paintings seemed to provide a clue.

Although we come from very different professional interests – a painter and poet, and a materials scientist – we share a deep interest in the relationship between the natural sciences and belief in God. That relationship is much more complicated one than is



Lions painted in the Chauvet Cave. This is a replica of the painting from the Brno museum Anthropos. (Source: Wikimedia)

often realised. For a start the categories of science and religion are very recent, at least with the meanings generally attributed to them now.

The historian Peter Harrison loves to ask what you would think of a scholar who told you that they had discovered evidence of a hitherto unknown war that had broken out in the year 1600 between Israel and Egypt. Israel and Egypt did not exist as states then, and whatever conflicts may have been raging, they could not reasonably be described as involving a war between those two countries, even if you could produce contemporary maps showing the cities of Jerusalem and Alexandria and the Jordan and Nile rivers. Professor Harrison argues that many of the claims about the relationship between what we now call science and what we now call religion are confused by a similar distorting projection of our present conceptual maps back onto the intellectual territories of the past.

What we found, as we examined the evidence, is that the relationship between curiosity about the material world, which eventually led to what we now think of as science, was entangled in a rich and often highly fruitful way with questions about what lies, as it were, beyond the rim of the visible world. Where there has been a culture, or a community, or sometimes simply an individual, asking big questions about the nature of truth, reality, meaning, purpose, love, or God, so time and again that has proved

conducive to curiosity about the nature and operation of the physical world we can see and touch and measure and in many cases describe mathematically.

Why, we asked ourselves, should this be so? We found at least three underlying reasons.

First, a development in religion among the ancient Greeks, which posited a single divine rational principle behind the universe, challenged earlier views of Zeus throwing thunderbolts or Poseidon shaking the ground and motivated a search for rational principles underlying natural phenomena. When this belief was combined with the conviction of the Abrahamic religions that God is not a part of the universe but the creator of it, it motivated a search for rational principles underlying the whole physical universe.

Second, developments in religion which have emphasised that the pursuit of truth is a religious duty have provided a motivation across the whole range of intellectual endeavour. Although throughout history intellectual clashes have occurred where people have tried to use science to prove or disprove religion, and have sometimes tried to impose their convictions by force, there is also another story to be told. When for instance reformation theologians began to emphasise the need to study the bible for yourself, it was natural for thinkers like Francis Bacon to conclude that what applied to the book of God's words also applied to book of God's works. The Christian's duty was not



to take things on authority but to study nature for themselves.

Third, and perhaps most fundamental, the impulse to reach out beyond the horizon of the visible world that we describe as ‘religion’ seems to be a universal characteristic of human beings: part of our cognitive architecture. Could the relationship between religious practices and physical curiosity that we find in the Ardèche cave help us to understand the long historical entanglement between science and religion?

As we shared ideas on our reading about the subject, we developed the metaphor of a slipstream. On some mornings and evenings you can see geese flying in a V-formation over the University Parks in Oxford. The geese behind do not have to work as hard as the leader. They find the place where they can benefit from the vortex created by the bird in front, and use this to reduce the work that they need to do. They even adjust the phase of their wings to maximize the energetic advantage.

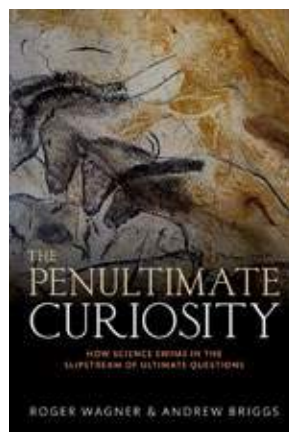
If the need to make sense of the world as a whole could be described as an ‘ultimate curiosity’, then a curiosity about the physical world around us might be described as a kind of ‘penultimate curiosity’ travelling in its slipstream.

The Chauvet Pont d’Arc cave is not open to the public. An earlier discovery in France was the Lascaux caves, into which visitors were initially allowed. After several years it became apparent that the paintings

were deteriorating, which was attributed to the breath of the visitors and other collateral effects of their presence. The caves were sealed off, and an air conditioning system was installed. This caused even more harm than the humans had, and the paintings are alas now damaged beyond repair. By the time the Chauvet Pont d’Arc cave was discovered in 1995 the authorities had learned from the Lascaux experience.

A replica of the Chauvet Pont d’Arc cave has been built. It cost of over 55 million euros and took eight years. Visitors can experience something close to the original cave, and ponder what motivated the penultimate curiosity that lay behind those very remarkable paintings.

For those who may not be able to make it to the Ardèche before Christmas, an alternative might be to read our moderately priced ‘fascinating...beautiful volume’ (Times Higher Education).



*The Penultimate Curiosity: How Science Swims in the Slipstream of Ultimate Questions* by Roger Wagner and Andrew Briggs is published by Oxford University Press (2016).



**Roger Wagner** has been described by Charles Moore in *The Spectator* as the “best religious painter in Britain today”. He has work in public and private collections in Britain and around the world, and has produced several books of illustrated poems and three illustrated volumes of his own translation of the Psalms. He read English at Oxford, and then studied at the Royal Academy School of Art. In 1981 he returned to Oxford and began a conversation about science with Andrew Briggs.



**Professor Andrew Briggs** is Chair in Nanomaterials at the University of Oxford and former Director of the UK Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration in Quantum Information Processing. He has published over 585 papers and articles, the majority in internationally reviewed scholarly journals. After studying physics at Oxford he gained a PhD at the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge, followed by a degree in Theology, winning the Chase Prize for Greek. His scientific curiosity focuses on materials and techniques for quantum superposition and entanglement.

# REMINISCENCES OF RAR

Rocking Against Racism 1976-1982

Conway Hall  
Monday 5 December,  
7pm to 10pm



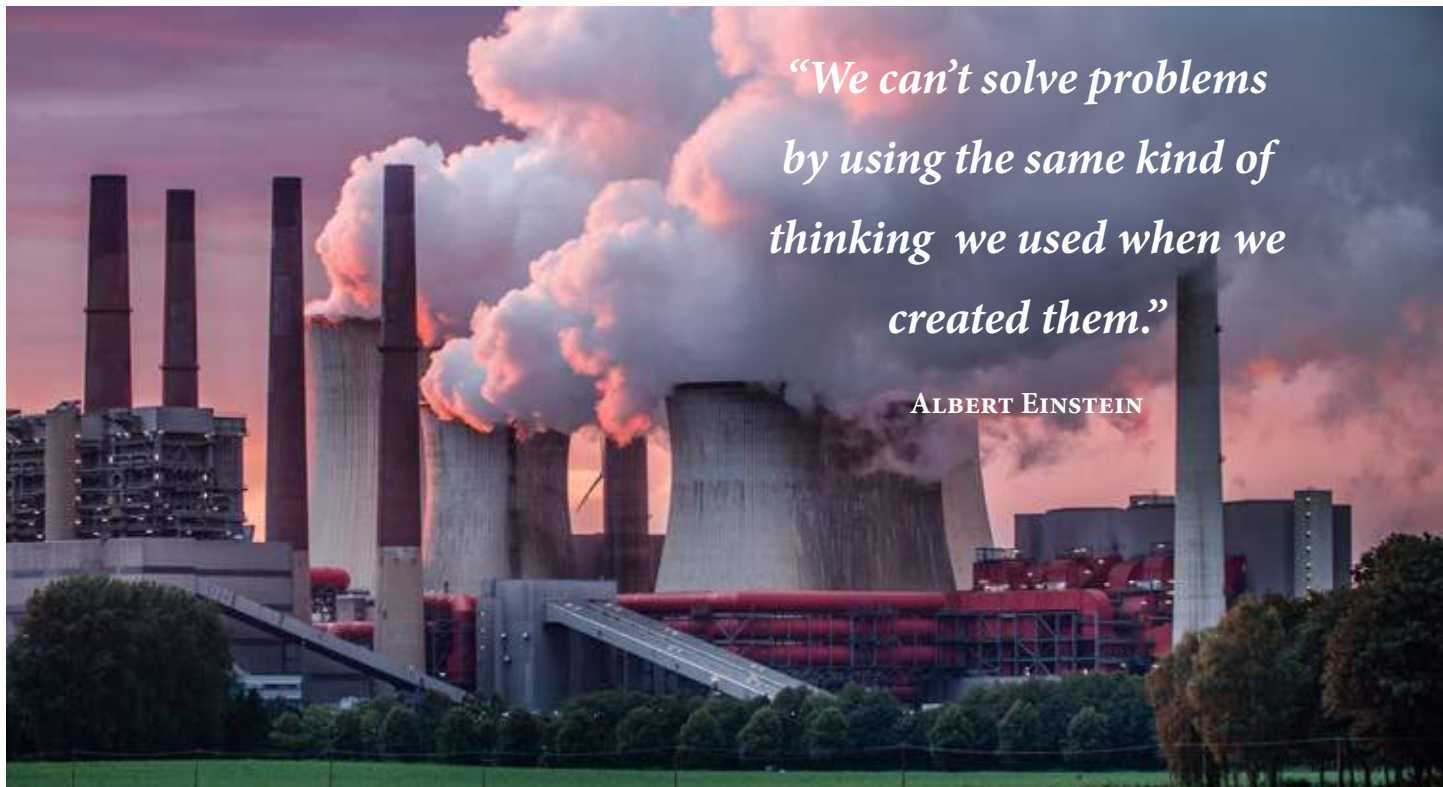
Edited by Roger Huddle & assisted by Red Saunders

**ROCK  
AGAINST  
RACISM**



# Why We Should Abandon CO<sub>2</sub> Emission Reduction Targets

Dr David Williams and Professor Evan Parker



*“We can’t solve problems  
by using the same kind of  
thinking we used when we  
created them.”*

ALBERT EINSTEIN

*Global anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions continue their inexorable rise. The science shows that there is the increasing likelihood that the world is heading towards an environmental and humanitarian catastrophe. Yet despite the multitude of research papers, articles, meetings, and political activity dissipated in the last two decades, we seem to be incapable of implementing mitigation policies that are effective. The reason for this paralysis is that the global strategic response to climate change is fundamentally flawed and is inhibiting progress. We call for a complete change in the world’s strategic response to climate change and to replace it on one based on pragmatism and coherent ethics.*

## 1. THE STATUS QUO

The cornerstone international policy response to the issue of anthropogenic climate change was defined at the UNFCCC meeting in Kyoto in 1997. It is the setting of and striving to achieve globally agreed, national greenhouse gas (CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent) emissions reduction targets. The Paris Agreement (2015) is simply a logical extension of this strategy.

But is this target strategy effective? Analysis shows that CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction targets have had some success, notably at the individual company and national levels. However, they are less successful at the international level. But, it is at the global level

that success is critical. In the period covered by the Kyoto Protocol (1990 to 2013) worldwide CO<sub>2</sub> emissions increased by nearly 60%. The consensus scientific view is that the original objective of using these targets to limit the probability of surface temperature increases to less than 2° C is unlikely to be achieved.

Individual countries have responded differently to these targets, but as an example, the UK has conspicuously set its own challenging CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction targets and has indeed claimed success in achieving these. Some of the activities undertaken in this cause are: (1) heavily subsidised installations of on- and off-shore wind turbines, and domestic and industrial solar cell systems, (2) publically financed domestic and industrial heating and lighting efficiency drives, and (3) establishing a financial sector in emissions trading.

In reality the impact of these initiatives on the UK's CO<sub>2</sub> emission levels has been minimal. The net contribution to CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction from solar and wind sources requires careful auditing and there remains considerable debate over energy and carbon payback times. Also, these energy sources can only reasonably provide a fraction of the UK's total consumption requirements and the issue of matching supply fluctuations with demand remains a fundamental problem. Although there are laudable arguments for enhanced energy efficiency, "Jevon's paradox" will come into play – whereby part of the energy saved by efficiency enhancements is simply used by consumers in some other energy dissipation context – thereby limiting any benefit. It is extremely difficult to distinguish the impact of emissions trading from other policies or market influences. There is no clear evidence to indicate that it has had, as yet, any significant impact on total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the countries that are operating this system. The principal impact of all these initiatives has been to increase the price of energy.

Claims of reductions at national levels are often distorted by the export of energy intensive industries and in the case of the UK the replacement of coal with gas as the primary source.

At the global level, the factor that has the major impact upon CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is the total level of economic activity.

However, it is important to note that there have been notable advances in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

by some cities when they have focussed on technological solutions to specific energy demands (e.g. Barcelona: smart energy and transportation and Bogata: electric buses).

## 2. THE ETHICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Addressing anthropogenic climate change is driven by the need to minimise the risk and scale of any negative future impact on humanity. This is not an isolated ethical problem and cannot be successfully addressed without proper consideration of the inter-dependent global issues relating to energy shortage and energy poverty.

Global economic and population growth forecasts indicate that a 1.5 to 3 fold increase in energy supply will be needed by 2050 and this could be in the range 3 to 5 fold by 2100. This is a monumental challenge, even without the issues relating to fossil fuels.

The most direct route to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, i.e. to meet the targets, would be to reduce energy usage by whatever means, including the mechanism of price increases. Not surprisingly many of the policies that have been pursued do exactly that, with a direct negative impact on humanity.

## 3. THE HOLISTIC SOLUTION

Ethics points us to a larger horizon and to one clear solution to the related ethical issues of climate change and energy price and supply: i.e. ***the development and global deployment of abundant clean energy that is cost-competitive with fossil fuels***. This should be the absolute focus of international effort.

### Innovative Research and Development

No proven, cost competitive clean energy supply system (with the required scalability and consistency) presently exists. The energy supply sector has demonstrated neither the culture nor motivation to lead innovation in this area. Globally co-ordinated, intensive and focussed R&D is required to address this core issue. An international "Manhattan-type" programme, as we have called for seven years, with open access would be an appropriate vehicle. The primary motivation would be the eventual reduction of the cost of clean energy and the commensurate increase in the scale of deployment. For publically

funded R&D, the key determinants for investing in programmes would be (1) the potential for realising cost reductions in genuinely clean energy systems and (2) the potential total global capacity of the energy source (the “abundance factor”). Ultimately, cost reduction would be undertaken in a competitive market but prototype and beta site demonstrations with roadmaps for development and deployment could be trialled as realistic indicators of potential.

The solution is to develop technologies and conditions such that global supply of cheap clean energy is a competitive and profitable market for commercial exploitation. It is evident that without public intervention this will not happen in the foreseeable future.

### Drop the negative target

It is well established that policies based upon ill-considered targets can result in ideological clashes with the core problems not being resolved. In 2003 a seminal paper was published highlighting the danger of the use of a badly chosen target in the area of marine biology. The climate change arena has been characterised by problems almost identical to those defined in this paper i.e. polarised opinions, false predictions and emotive and divisive language, coupled with counter-productive actions and inertia.

There have been many studies on the selection and effectiveness of targets. A case has been made for using a set of criteria summarised by the acronym CUTE (Comprehensive, Understandable, Time-Bound and Enabling) when considering targets for determining public policy.

CO<sub>2</sub> emission targets manifestly fail to satisfy these criteria. They are not comprehensive, because they do not address the interdependent issues of energy supply, and they are not “understandable by all, as the relationship between CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and their impact on humanity is highly complex and uncertain. It cannot be claimed that they have enabled effective policies to be implemented in a time-bound manner. This analysis would indicate that it is not surprising that they are failing.

There may be some merit for individual nations using their own self-determined target strategy. But for this to be effective and valuable it needs to be a target that focuses on the solution, instead of the problem. A simple option would be one based upon

the amount of clean energy consumed per annum (CE) as a percentage of the total energy (TE) used in that same period i.e. the Clean Energy Target (CE %):

$$\text{CE \%} = \{\text{CE/TE}\} \times 100$$

Clearly the scale of anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is a function of the size and prosperity of the world’s population and the anticipated increases in both could be the dominant factor in future emission levels. The most successful, and humanitarian solution to population growth is to increase prosperity and educational opportunities. This leads to the non-intuitive conclusion that “by reducing the price of energy (from any source!)... total energy consumption would also be reduced” or **The Price Conundrum** i.e. any action that increases the price of energy will reduce the living standards of a proportion of the global population and lead to accelerated population growth and increased energy demand.

## 4. A COHERENT VISION

The lack of positive engagement demonstrated by some nations, their leaders (viz Trump) and citizens throughout the world has been a fundamental barrier to progress.

In this new strategy, the objective of the publicly funded R&D programme is to produce **cost-competitive clean energy**. The focus on technology, cost and global supplies is comprehensible and provides a practical route forward. The research roadmap would be transparent and based upon a defined budget. This would avoid the haphazard national public subsidies on green schemes often driven by short-term political expedience. The vision of **“a world with abundant, low-cost clean energy”** is a considerably more powerful and positive message than “a world with no man-made CO<sub>2</sub> emissions”.

Voluntary CE% targets could be positive in generating transitional progress, but unlike CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction targets they are not essential to the core strategy, simply a vehicle for enabling effective policies to be introduced. Energy supply systems will likely vary from country to country with available resources and the results of the R&D. There is no shortage of ideas for technological solutions simply the commitment and funding to effectively pursue them.



It is possible that the costs of clean energy will never be as low as fossil fuel sources (although, estimated “Levelized Energy Cost” analyses on various clean systems have indicated that this is unlikely). In this case, market forces would not be the driver for their introduction; legislation and/or market manipulation (a carbon tax) would be required. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on the world’s leaders to establish the conditions necessary to efficiently and effectively develop clean energy systems that are as cheap as possible.

## 5. SUMMARY

The thesis of this paper is that there needs to be a volte-face in the approach that the world is taking.

Firstly, we need to drop the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction target strategy.

Since the Tokyo Protocol (1997), the world has focussed on CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions. By focussing on the problem, progress on the solution has been severely constrained and limited. The Paris Agreement does not change the focus; in the EU summary document there is no mention of clean energy.

Secondly, we need to launch a major global R&D programme on clean energy sources and their deployment.

Fortunately, there is a vehicle that could play a major part of this initiative. The most significant outcome of Paris was the announcement of “*Mission Innovation*”, inspired by Bill Gates, which brings together countries and funding to accelerate the development and deployment of affordable, clean energy throughout the world. It is essential that the world’s leaders and politicians appreciate that this is where all the focus, resources and effort needs to be placed.

**David Williams** is a retired scientist with a doctorate in physics (University of London). For the majority of his career he worked in high technology companies in sales, product development, strategy and senior management. The products that he developed became key enablers for the mobile phone industry. He subsequently returned to academia (University of Warwick) where he co-ordinated an international scientific research programme for detectors and for the last decade has worked on strategies to mitigate climate change.

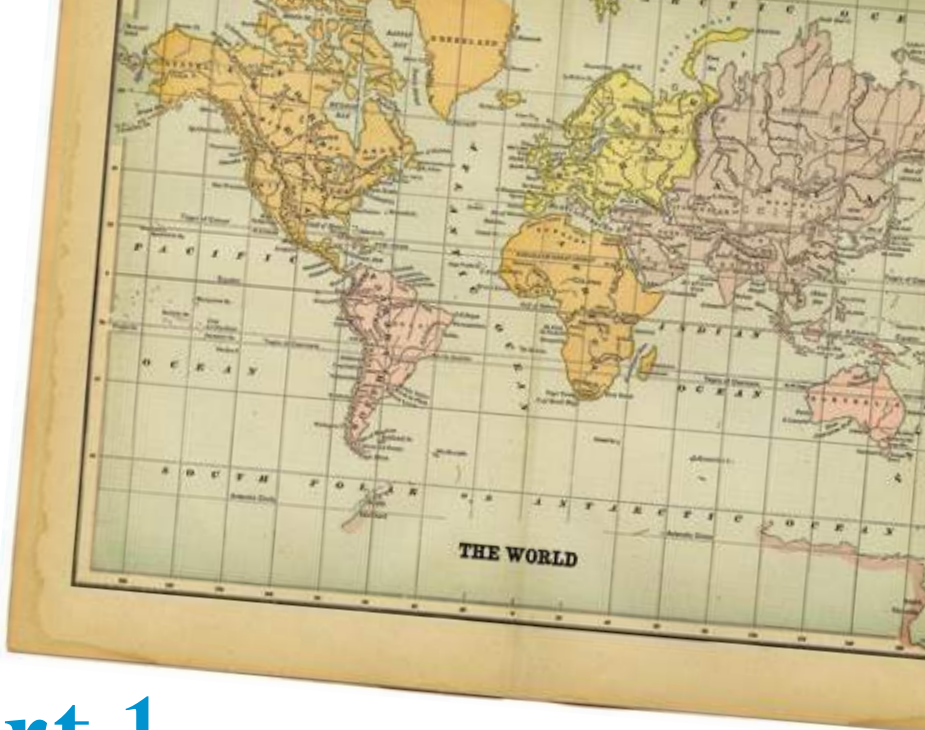


**Evan Parker** is Emeritus Professor of Physics at the University of Warwick working on silicon nanotechnology. He has led major national and EU programmes of research and has spun out two companies on solar cells – and, very recently, on sensor technologies. Working with a colleague Dr David Williams, he has studied climate change for the last eight years. He is a former Trustee of the Society.



**Nigel Sinnott**

# Conway's Journey Round the World, 1883–84: Part 1



*This article is based on a talk given to the Atheist Society (Melbourne) on 8 November 2016, and is best read in conjunction with “Moncure Daniel Conway: A very unusual Virginian”, ER November 2015: 16–20.*

*This account would not have been possible but for the generosity of Conway’s granddaughter, the late Eleanor Conway Sawyer, who in 1978 presented me with a copy of his fascinating narrative of the trip, My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East (1906). She did so because Conway’s biographer, John d’Entremont, had told her I had become interested in Anglo-Australian freethought history. I am very grateful to them both. – N.S.*

In 1882 Robert J. Jeffray and Henry Gyles Turner invited Moncure Conway to lecture in Australia. I know only that Jeffray had been a gold miner, but Turner (1831–1920) was a prominent Melbourne citizen and a leading member of the Melbourne Unitarian Church.

Moncure discussed the invitation with his wife Ellen. He accepted it and decided to make the journey a trip round the world. The journalist, theatrical manager and entrepreneur Robert Sparrow Smythe was engaged as Conway’s Australian lecture agent.

Conway left England on 21 July 1883 on the *Arizona*, bound for New York, where two of his

sons lived. His fellow passengers included a Catholic monsignor (Capel), an eminent Jewish writer, an evangelist going out to assist the revivalist Moody, and a well-known actress, Georgie Cayvan.

One of the people Conway visited in New York was Robert Green Ingersoll, whom Conway, in 1881, had heard lecture on “The Mistakes of Moses”. It had been, in Conway’s words, “a memorable experience”. Conway also quotes an anecdote he had heard about Ingersoll, who had been asked by a man in his audience: “Do you believe in baptism?” Ingersoll’s reply had been “Yes, especially with soap!” Conway regarded Ingersoll as “the ablest freethinker America has produced”.



**Nigel Sinnott** has been active in the freethought movement since 1963. He is a member of Conway Hall Ethical Society, the NSS and Humanist Society of Victoria, has been editor of *The Freethinker* and is a consulting editor of the *Australian Humanist*. He indexed (1970–71) Conway’s bound tract collection at Conway Hall and was briefly (1970) Lettings Secretary. He has lived in Victoria, Australia, since 1976, and is interested in Anglo-Australian freethought history. He runs a freethought press extracts e-mail service.

Conway also visited some of his old haunts in Virginia. He was of the opinion, by the way, that Virginia had not been named after the “Virgin Queen” Elizabeth I, but by the Spaniards after the Virgin Mary, as what they called the Bay of Santa Maria was later named Chesapeake Bay.

After this he went to Washington and Cincinnati (Ohio) and then spent five days and nights travelling by train to Salt Lake City, Utah. The journey was enlivened by Conway’s fellow traveller, John Willard Young (1844–1924), a son of Mormon leader Brigham Young, no less. The two had long discussions on the pros and cons of polygamy. Conway regarded Mormon polygamy as “the outcome of an extreme biblical letter-worship”, but he was thoroughly cynical about the United States government’s opposition to it, which he called “an unconstitutional policy animated by an immoral spirit under the mask of morality”. He added: “The law against polygamy had been worded so that a man might maintain as many women as he pleased provided they were not conceded the dignity and legal protection of ‘wives.’”<sup>[40]</sup>

In Salt Lake City Conway found the Mormons to be “by no means the vulgar people some supposed them, nor the puritanical sectarians I had imagined them, but the Salt Lake aristocracy”<sup>[42]</sup>. He went to a performance at the Opera House and gave a lecture in the same building. He also attended a Sunday morning service at the Mormon Tabernacle, where the congregation numbered more than ten thousand.

From Utah Conway travelled to California and San Francisco which, he says, “struck me as cosmopolitan, occupying a place similar to that of ancient Venice”. His hotel was crowded because his arrival coincided with the national “Great Triennial” of 5,000 members of a body called the Knights Templars. Conway visited a Chinese temple and attended a Chinese theatre. He quoted an anecdote he had heard about Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said of the Yosemite National Park: “It is the only thing I have seen out here that comes up to the brag”. Conway then adds words of his own: “But San Francisco travels fast; it has left brag behind so far that nobody advised me to see Yosemite.”<sup>[49]</sup>

From San Francisco Conway took the mail ship *Australia* bound for Hawaii and Australia. He was surprised by the number of mail bags that were loaded: 150. “Every sack,” he wrote, “was a witness

to the vast numbers who had come to the golden shore only to find it a gate to shores beyond.”<sup>[50]</sup>

On reaching Hawaii Conway was looking forward to a whole day in Honolulu, but he and many others received a very unpleasant surprise. Protestant missionaries had arrived years earlier, and the ship arrived on a Sunday.

We were all in a manner wrecked there. The desert on which we were cast was the Sabbath... A man may be arrested for even having his shop window open. Our ship’s company went about in the fervid heat with parched throats, unable to get even a glass of soda water – nor indeed any cold water at all, the sale of ice being prohibited. So far as the natives were concerned, instead of their sports and dances which a civilized Sunday would have shown us, they were about as lively as a cemetery. Apparently the police were doubled for the purpose of pouncing on any poor Hawaiian attempting to sell souvenirs or fruit, and to prevent our having comfort, much less fun, on shore.<sup>[54]</sup>

Conway went for a wander and, just inside a small chapel, he spotted a bucket of water with a coconut for use as a dipper. He walked in and took a drink. Then he observed that “A Hawaiian preacher was speaking to a small company of his own race in English. All were dressed in solemn and heavy black – on that burning day – and after listening a little the black garb seemed but too true a symbol of the gloomy gospel imported into the once happy islands.”<sup>[54]</sup>

Afterwards Conway visited a church where, he wrote, “a white preacher was holding forth to humble Hawaiians, offering them dogmatic stones where they needed bread”. And he added wryly: “I imagine that he was at Honolulu because elsewhere no congregation would listen to such stuff.”<sup>[54 & 55]</sup>

Eventually Conway and an English acquaintance found a Hawaiian who would take them for a drive into the countryside. “We thus had a few hours’ enjoyment of the beautiful trees and flowers and birds, [and] a delicious bath in the sea.”<sup>[55,56]</sup>

Conway concluded that the rapid success of the missionaries had been because their vengeful Jehovah much resembled Pele, the old Hawaiian volcano god.



On the ship, after leaving Honolulu, Conway's reading included an almanac of 1883 containing Hawaiian proverbs collected by H. L. Sheldon. One proverb impressed him: "The *kalo* root is dead, but there are live maggots enough."

*Kalo*, Conway explained, is the *taro* of New Zealand, and when it dies the root soon fills with maggots. He added, "Mr. Sheldon says this proverb was 'formerly applied to battles in which the bravest had perished, but in these modern times has been applied by scoffers to the overthrow of paganism and the growth of Christianity in its place.'"<sup>[56]</sup>

Conway clearly loved steaming across the Pacific in the *Australia*, and waxed lyrical about the clouds and the dawns and sunsets. But then something very unusual happened. Here are his words:

As for the sun, . . . One day he came forth as mariners had never seen him before – pure blue; all day everything and everybody looked blue. Captain Bannerman said this was new in his experience; the astonishment of the crew was evident, and it became anxiety when about three in the afternoon there appeared around the sun a vast ring of copper-tinted mist. Two hours later this mist sank and made the horizon seem brass; after sunset there flamed up an afterglow that appeared mingled of blood and fire. On the following day the sun was blood-red and an hour before the time for sunset sank behind the wall of copper that made our western horizon. I say "wall", for it was not a cloud; it was fixed there motionless and opaque evening after evening, the rest of the sky being clear.<sup>[60]</sup>

What they were witnessing were the atmospheric effects of the eruptions of Krakatoa, in the Dutch East Indies, on 26 and 27 August 1883. They were heard in Perth, Western Australia, 3000 km away, and on the Indian Ocean island of Rodrigues, 4800 km away. The largest explosion had the power of 200 million tons of TNT, and threw something like 20 cubic kilometres of ash and débris into the atmosphere. Estimates of the death toll vary from 36,000 to 120,000 people.

The ship eventually reached New Zealand. Conway does not say where the *Australia* docked,

but I presume Auckland. He had only a day there, so Conway secured the services of an English-speaking Maori to act as guide and interpreter, as he wanted to see as much of the Maoris as possible. He was not disappointed: "In my conversations with them through my guide I found them candid and witty."<sup>[65]</sup>

It was a shame that Conway had so little time in New Zealand because, although the population was quite small, about 562,000 in 1883, the country already had a flourishing freethought movement in places like Auckland, Christchurch and Wanganui, and he would have been a welcome visitor. Indeed, he writes:

I left New Zealand with reluctance, and with hope in my heart that I might some day return. For in a certain part of the island an influential family belonging to my London chapel had settled, and in laying out a village they had after a sharp controversy succeeded in naming the streets after the great scientific heretics – Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall streets, etc., and they had often demanded that I should come over and lecture in that ideal village.<sup>[65,66]</sup>

After a brief mention of "the sublimities of Sydney Harbour at dawn", Conway mentions nothing else of his arrival there [22 September] and his narrative moves to Melbourne, where he arrived three days later. He visited the Chinese Joss house, which he found very interesting, and was received by the governor of Victoria, the Marquis of Normanby. Other people he met included the Anglican Bishop James Moorhouse and the Rev. Charles Strong of the Scots Church.

He also made notes on the variety of religions and philosophies available:

The census of 1881 gave Victoria a population of 862,246 and registered 144 denominational names. Some of these names in the official Year-book are novel: "Godfearing", "Saved Sinners," "Silent Admirer," "Free-Trade," "Nature," and three men gave their name as "L. S. D." . . . One woman records her faith as a "Walkerite", Mr Walker being a secularist lecturer in Melbourne. . . . There were 53 "Agnostics", 37 "Atheists", 14 "Infidels",

while 7277 registered themselves as without creed or sect. The number of those who rejected every form of Christianity was 20,000.

The Unitarians numbered about one thousand. In 1851, when registration of opinions was compulsory, seventeen hundred confessed the Unitarian faith. In that year the Victorian government voted to divide fifty thousand pounds among all the churches in proportion to their members (giving the five talents to him who had five and the two to him who had two), and the subsidy was continued many years. Under that arrangement the Unitarians received a good piece of property. It now had for its minister Mrs.

Webster, who began preaching there as Miss Turner. She is a sister of Henry G. Turner of the Commercial Bank of Australia, himself a literary man and editor of the "Melbourne Review." Mrs. Webster is a rationalistic Unitarian, and her discourses are very impressive. I had the pleasure of preaching to her society, which consists of educated and influential families.<sup>[72-73]</sup>

(Text numbers in square brackets refer to pages in Conway's *My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East*.)

Parts 2 and 3 of this article will be published in the February and March editions of the *Ethical Record* respectively.

## THE HUMANIST LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Conway Hall Humanist Library and Archives is home to a unique collection of published and archival sources on humanism and its related subjects. We are open for members, researchers and the general public on Tuesdays to Thursdays from 10 till 17. Our collections include printed materials such as books, pamphlets and journals as well as archival material of unpublished institutional and personal records and papers, such as manuscripts, letters and photographs. For your time and convenience it is advisable to contact the library before your visit so we can ensure the material you seek is available.

Tel: 020 7061 6747.

Email: [sophie@conwayhall.org.uk](mailto:sophie@conwayhall.org.uk)

## Conway Hall Ethical Society

Reg. Charity No. 1156033

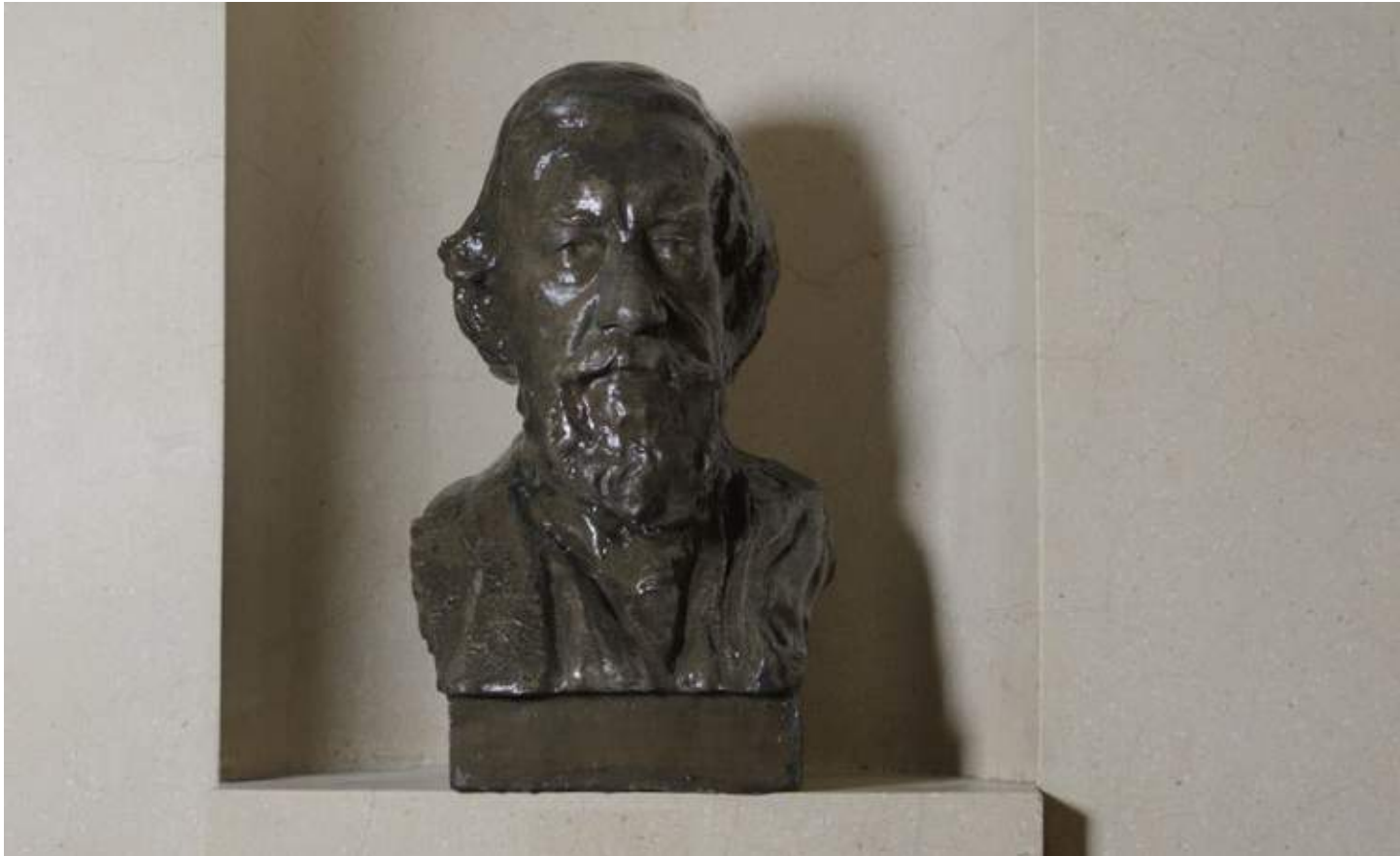
Founded in 1793, the Society is a progressive movement whose Charitable Objects are: *the advancement of study, research and education in humanist ethical principles.*

We invite people who identify with our aims, principles and objects to join our society. The Society maintains the Humanist Library and Archives. The Society's journal, *Ethical Record*, is issued monthly. Conway Hall's educational programmes include Thinking on Sunday, London Thinks, discussions, debates and lectures, courses, and Sunday concerts of chamber music. Memorials, funerals, weddings, and baby naming ceremonies can also be arranged.

**THE ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION IS £35 (£25 IF A FULL-TIME STUDENT, UNWAGED OR OVER 65)**

**Dr Jim Walsh**

# Unveiling Conway's Bust



**Transcript of the speech given by Dr Jim Walsh, CEO, on 28 October 2016 at the unveiling ceremony of the 3D printed 'bronze' bust of Dr Moncure Conway.**

Colleagues, Trustees, Patrons, Friends – welcome to this unique moment in Conway Hall's history. We are here to celebrate something that should have happened on 23rd September 1929, when the building was originally opened.

We're about to unveil a remarkable artwork made possible only by the advances in technology over the last few years. In a sense, technology is enhancing heritage, because without the spectacular

achievements of 3D printing we would continue to have an empty niche in the foyer of Conway Hall.

A bust of Moncure Conway fills the niche and, as you aware, we are in the building named after him. I promise we will unveil it in a few minutes. However, please indulge me and allow me to say a few words before asking our Chair, Liz Lutgendorff, to pull the chord and unveil our amazing new/old bust of Dr Moncure Conway.

In some ways it might be seen that we are celebrating yet another old dead white male, albeit a lost or forgotten Victorian. However, I do think there is relevance today of this particular old dead white male, if we look briefly at what he stood for and maybe even ask ourselves if we stand for similar things?



## SO, WHAT MAKES CONWAY SO SPECIAL?

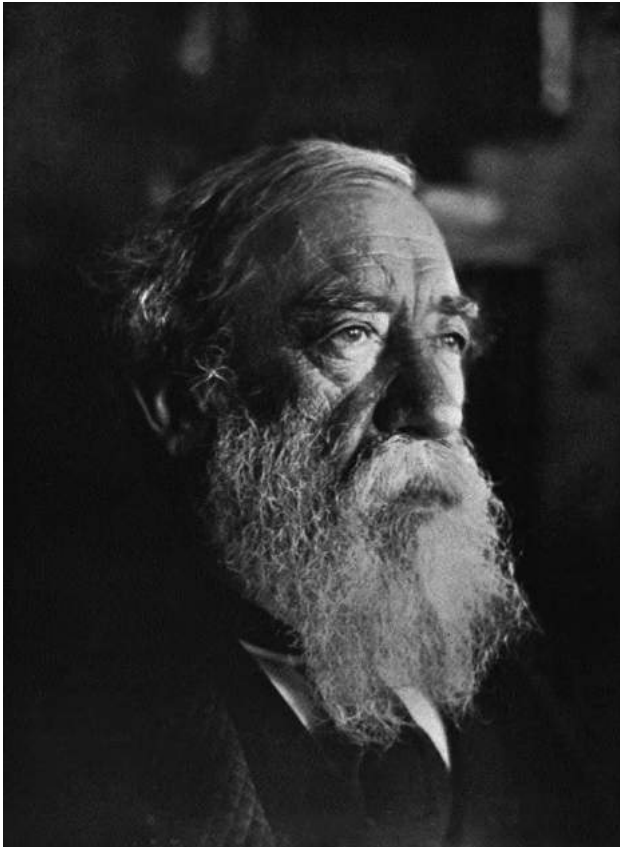
In my opinion, he was special for six reasons:

1. **He championed intellectual freedom and rational inquiry.** This he learned from Ralph Waldo Emerson. And this lifelong stance came off the page in the tragic circumstances of his infant son's death when he asked "How could a benevolent deity allow my son to die?" He was thirty-one and had just moved to England from America with his wife Ellen. The motivation for genuine intellectual freedom and rational inquiry doesn't really come rawer than that.
2. **His curiosity.** Combined with his intellectual endeavours, his curiosity enabled him to converse with scientists, such as Thomas Henry Huxley (known as Darwin's Bulldog), Charles Darwin himself, Charles Lyell, a Fellow of the Royal Society, who gave the first proper account of earthquakes and volcanoes. Poets such as Robert and Elizabeth Browning. Writers, such as Tennyson, George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) and George Henry Lewes (George Eliot's husband) and Charles Dickens. Politicians such as Gladstone. He was also effectively the British literary agent for both Mark Twain and Walt Whitman. His intellectual thirst and curiosity seemed to know no bounds.
3. **His advocacy for the abolition of slavery.** As a young man he witnessed a slave being beaten and this gave him a lifelong hatred of slavery and cruelty. And so during the American civil war, it's no real surprise that he went against his family's wishes and helped his father's slaves to achieve freedom and promoted the abolition cause wherever he felt he could lend his voice and thoughts to give good effect.
4. **He established a culture of intellectual stimulation, which challenged traditional social practices, if he saw them as harmful to individuals.** With others, he set up the Discussion Society at South Place Chapel and the Conference of Liberal Thinkers, so that from 1873 speakers such



as Max Muller (philologist and orientalist), W. K. Clifford (Mathematician & Philosopher) and John Stuart Mill could come and give lectures to his congregation. The South Place Institute was also set up under his watch in 1879 and had lectures and discussions on a wide variety of topics by leading Victorian thinkers and social changers. As he put it in 1893, "We tried to keep abreast of the growing knowledge of the world."

5. **His dedication to women's rights and suffrage** – as brought to his attention by his wife Ellen Dana. In 1871, at Hackney town hall, 47 years before the first women (who being over 30 and meeting the minimum property requirements) could vote, he spoke on the need for equality between men and women. Before that, in 1869, Conway initiated the "appearance of women in our pulpit at the South Place Chapel". So, Ernestine Rose, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Julia Ward Howe (prominent abolitionist), Helen Taylor (feminist author and actor and step daughter of John Stuart Mill), and Annie Besant, among others, all had a platform to speak from.



6. Finally, **his advocacy for peace.** In 1870 he was the *New York World* and *Daily News* front line reporter in the Franco-Prussian war. The atrocities he witnessed churned within him and made him a lifelong champion for peace. He met with the International League of Peace and Freedom and also freethinkers and working men who wanted a United States of Europe. And, in 1899, he attended the first Hague Conference for Peace.

So, I don't think he is just another old dead white male.

### **BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BUST?**

Last year – Sophie Hawkey-Edwards and I were leafing through old *Ethical Records* when trying to assess how we would digitise them, when we came across the phrase “Bust Committee” in a 1904 issue. Neither of us knew what that referred to and, intrigued, we started to do a little digging. It turned out that the “Bust Committee” was convened to raise money to purchase a bronze version of the bust of Moncure Conway presented to the Society in its

plaster form by sculptor Theodore Spicer-Simson. On further digging, we discovered that although we managed to raise the required funds and, in due course, received a bronze bust of Conway, it was now nowhere to be found.

So, a process of detection ensued. The archives were devoid of photographic evidence, save one photo of it installed in South Place Chapel in 1927. Then, Sophie made another discovery in the *Ethical Record*, this time from January 1928, where in relation to the proposed building of Conway Hall, the then committee reported the following:

“The scheme comprises a Large Hall, with Artists’ and Lecturers’ Rooms a small hall with servery adjoining, a Library, Club Room and Caretakers Flat. Also the necessary Cloak Rooms, Lavatories, Boiler House. etc. The Principle entrance will be in Red Lion Square. *In a niche opposite the door will be a bust of Dr Moncure Conway.* [Italics mine]”

So, we had an empty niche, in the foyer, behind me, but no bust. Without wishing to spoil the documentary we’re making – the last scene being shot as I speak – two other busts of Moncure Conway were discovered: both in the United States. Dickinson College, Pennsylvania, have one and this is the one we have had photographed over 750 times from every conceivable angle and turned into a 3D print. The bust behind me is a resin and bronze powdered cast made from that 3D print by the wonderful and talented team at iMakr, on Clerkenwell Road, and they have applied antiquing effects to try and match the look and feel precisely of the Dickinson Bust.

However, just before asking Liz to pull the curtain, may I thank Sophie, Carl Harrison, Trunkman Productions, and the Trustees for believing in the project and of course everyone here today for showing their support.

Liz, would you mind stepping up, pulling the cord to reveal the new/old bust of Dr Moncure Conway in the home that was originally intended over eighty-seven years ago.



**EXHIBITION OF WORK by Gabrielle Bradshaw, 6 October 2016 – 31 January 2017**

# Rhythm of the Wood

**Martha Lee**

The current exhibition at Conway Hall by artist Gabrielle Bradshaw, entitled 'Rhythm of the Wood' depicts woodland scenes in charcoal and drawings of plants and flowers in colourful pastels.

Gabrielle Bradshaw studied at Camberwell School of Art leaving with a First Class Honours degree in Fine Art Sculpture. Whilst still at college she won the SOGAT award for work exhibited at the South London Gallery and made site specific work for the Barbican Arts Centre. Her degree sculpture was exhibited with the London Group at the Royal College.

On leaving college Gabrielle continued her studies at the Rural Development Centre in Salisbury completing several courses in forge work and she honed her welding skills working as a welder and set builder at the National Theatre in London.



Hidden Wonders







Glorious Summer

Intense Heat







Rhythm of the Wood

## Obituary: Dr Peter Draper 1933–2016

Dr Peter Draper died peacefully at home in the way he had planned. He was a founder member and early chair of the British Humanist Association - referred to on their website in their History section. He had been a member of the South Place Ethical Society for many years and was an enthusiastic member of many organisations, including Dignity in Dying, the Socialist Health Association, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the New Economics Foundation.

Peter had written a Viewpoint warmly approving the *Ethical Record* (see May 2016, page 19) just a few weeks before his death.

An evening lecture celebrating the ongoing relevance of his work, based on his book *Health Through Public Policy*, will take place at Conway Hall on 10 May 2017, organised by the UK Faculty of Public Health. His tribute website is <http://peter.draper.muchloved.com>. It has a link to his *Guardian* obituary.

Norman Bacrac

# CONWAY HALL SUNDAY CONCERTS

Start at 18.30 unless specified otherwise.

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## **DECEMBER 4**

Delta Piano Trio

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## **DECEMBER 11, 13:00 to 14:00**

Children's Concert: Little Red Riding Hood

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## **DECEMBER 11**

Brook Street Band

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## **DECEMBER 18**

London Mozart Players Chamber Ensemble

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## **JANUARY 8**

Heath Quartet

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## **JANUARY 15**

Carducci Quartet & Simon Callaghan

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## **JANUARY 22**

Trio Anima (flute, viola, harp)

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## **JANUARY 29**

Piatti Quartet

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For ticket prices and other information, please visit [www.conwayhall.org.uk/sunday-concerts/](http://www.conwayhall.org.uk/sunday-concerts/)



## THINKING ON SUNDAY

Start at **11.00** unless specified otherwise.

**Dec 4**

**Is it Time to Rethink the “University”?**

- *Prof Dennis Hayes*

**Dec 11**

**Cheering for Trump?**

- *Chris Bratcher*

**Dec 18**

**What is Poetic Naturalism?**

- *Chris Street*

**Jan 29**

**My Death, My Decision?**

- *Phil Cheadle*

## OTHER EVENTS

**Monday  
Dec 5**

**Rocking Against Racism 1976–1982**

- 19.00 to 22.00
- Presented by Redwords and Conway Hall

**Tuesday  
Dec 6**

**The Testing Ground**

- 19.45 to 21.15
- Presented by The Conway Collective

**Thursday  
Dec 8**

**A Sea of Lies? The Media, Politicians, and ‘Post-Truth’ Politics**

- 18.30 to 21.30
- Hosted by CFI’s Stephen Law
- Presented by Centre for Inquiry UK, The British Humanist Association and Conway Hall Ethical Society

**Friday  
Dec 16**

**Conway Memorial Lecture 2016 – Lawrence Krauss – Hidden Realities: The Greatest Story Ever Told... So Far (SOLD OUT)**

- 19.00 to 21.00

For ticket prices and other information, please visit [www.conwayhall.org.uk](http://www.conwayhall.org.uk)