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MONCURE CONWAY AND GERMAN PHILOSOPHY

by Loyd D. Easton (Ohio Wesleyan University)

In the writings and public views of Moncure Conway there were two related and developing themes in which his specific ideas on religion and social reform were rooted. The first theme was his religious naturalism, his view that God -- all that is divine and holy -- is to be found in the processes of nature and history, not in a separate transcendent realm accessible through some special revelation or church authority. In the development of this theme German philosophy was of major importance, particularly the views of Georg Hegel, David Friedrich Strauss, and Ludwig Feuerbach. The second theme, developing and buttressing the first, was Conway's view of nature as a dynamic unity manifest in the pervasive processes of evolution. On this ground he defended the unity and brotherhood of all men, the essential premise of his commitment to the abolitionist cause and movements for democratic social reform. Further, his attachment to the theory of evolution impelled him to defend for religion and all areas of social life the openness to new ideas, sustained inquiry, and responsiveness to rational evidence that characterizes the scientific temper.

I

Conway's ancestors and parents had a part in setting the direction of his thought. His family was long-established and prominent in Virginia, related to the Taylors, Madisons, and Lees.¹ One of his ancestors had signed the Declaration of Independence, and another had strongly opposed slavery but was prevented from freeing his slaves by Virginia law. Conway's

grandfather had absorbed liberal religious views at the College of William and Mary from a band of rationalists called the "Illuminati" after the German society founded by Adam Weishaupt. In 1829, three years before Moncure Conway's birth, his parents had been converted from the moribund Episcopal Church to Methodism and became leaders in the Methodist movement. Though they were methodical in religious practice, they remained detached from camp meeting emotionalism and were more interested in the Methodist commitment to humanitarian reform than matters of dogmatic theology.

As a result of his family's Methodism, Conway entered Dickinson College in 1847 after five years at the Fredericksburg Classical and Mathematical Academy. At Dickinson he studied mathematics, natural science, Greek and Latin, English, and church history. His courses in chemistry and zoology were well taught by professors who later became nationally prominent. In addition to required studies he read widely in eighteenth century novelists and such American literature as he could find. He participated in the college philosophical society and at one of its meetings defended an unbelieving classmate who had been forced to argue for Christianity. Thus Conway was already sensitive to freedom of mind. Gnawing questions about the moral justification of slavery came into his thinking as he joined in a protest against the antislavery position of a prominent professor. During his second year at Dickinson, Conway attended a series of prayer-meetings in a nearby church. Determined to be converted, he went forward to the altar and "resolved never to stop from that moment," he said, "until I enjoyed religion in my heart." Presently he joined the Methodist Church.

After graduation from college Conway returned to Virginia in an aimless mood. He tried studying law but was also attracted to journalism through the influence of a companionable cousin who edited a Richmond paper.

Conway's aimlessness was resolved, however, in 1850, a crucial year in his life. In that year he published his first extensive writing, a pamphlet on the deplorable state of education in Virginia. More important, he discovered Ralph Waldo Emerson whose views profoundly redirected his thinking. Coming upon an extract of Emerson's essay on "History," Conway was deeply moved and immediately purchased a copy of the Essays, First and Second Series. Emerson brought him, Conway said, a "revelation" but also precipitated a "spiritual crisis," "subtly inbreeding discontent in me of faith in myself." The "revelation," however, had positive results in Conway's decision to become a Methodist minister. He found that Emerson's views "did away with the bounds between sacred and secular by making both sacred." Free of theological negations, they widely agreed with the Methodist emphasis on personal experience and indifference to dogma. "I cannot remember," Conway observed, "ever hearing a Methodist sermon about the Trinity."

Conway's appointment as a Methodist minister by the Baltimore Conference made him a circuit rider. His travels brought him into contact with some Hicksite Quakers whose spiritual self-possession and creedless religion much impressed him and reinforced ideas he had found in Emerson. As a circuit rider Conway lived and studied out of his saddlebags in which he carried, in addition to the Bible and Methodist Discipline, Emerson's Essays, Coleridge's Aids to Reflection, and Carlyle's Latter Day Pamphlets. Emerson's transcendentalism, denying any gulf between sacred and secular and viewing God as nature's indwelling presence, set Conway firmly on the road to religious naturalism. This direction was reinforced by his study of Coleridge's Aids to Reflection which had significantly shaped Emerson's transcendentalism between 1829 and 1832.² Coleridge's book aimed to give the general reader some of the basic ideas of Immanuel Kant and use them in the direction that

Hegel had taken toward unifying the realms of nature and faith. In particular, Coleridge utilized Kant's distinction between sense-based, analytical judgments of the Understanding on one side and necessary, universal principles of Reason on the other. Thus there was a distinction in kind between Understanding which beholds the material, phenomenal world and Reason which gives access to an intelligible, spiritual order. But Coleridge did not take this distinction as final in relation to the spiritual order. Again following Kant, he looked to Reason in its moral employment, Reason as involving conscience, to delineate the spiritual order of real freedom and ultimate ends.³ Thus through Coleridge's Aids to Reflection Conway was first exposed to German philosophy, to basic ideas of Immanuel Kant and the dualisms of Understanding and Reason, Nature and Spirit, that Hegel wanted to synthesize.

Even during his first year as a circuit rider, Conway began wrestling with doubts and wondered what he could honestly preach. In his own words, "The morally repulsive dogmas and atrocities ascribed to the deity in the Bible became impossible." He wrote to Emerson of his misgivings and received a friendly answer saying that a "true soul will disdain to be moved except by what natively commands it." Impressed by a Unitarian minister from Baltimore, Conway left his native Virginia in 1853 to attend Harvard Divinity School and find truer intellectual bearings.

At Harvard, Conway found most of the theologians trying to steer a middle course between Unitarian orthodoxy and "German Rationalism," the critical interpretation of the Bible inspired by David Friedrich Strauss who viewed miracles as spiritually significant myths. With the more radical-minded students Conway rallied around Emerson and Theodore Parker who became his real teachers. Conway established close personal ties with both Emerson and Parker. From conversations with Emerson he became interested in Goethe

and often used passages from Goethe's writings as texts for his sermons and addresses. In retrospect Conway saw Emerson as the source of "the whole movement of reverent Freethought in America," "the most sweeping radical of his generation," whose distinctive views precipitated an intellectual and moral revolution. In holding that there is one Mind common to all men, an all-embracing intelligence containing each man's particular being, Emerson taught that the powers and rights of each belong to all. Such a view, Conway believed, induces a proper humility as it emancipates man from all masters.⁴

Conway admired Theodore Parker as "the standard-bearer of religious liberty" and was aware that his treatment of biblical miracles had been shaped by "German rationalism," particularly the views of Strauss. While Parker was teaching school in the 1830s, "he entered," wrote Conway, "into the great deeps of German Thought and Theology, his acquaintance with which was not surpassed by that of any living man."⁵ Parker had criticized Strauss's Life of Jesus, particularly its presuppositions in Hegelian metaphysics, but nevertheless rejoiced in its publication. He considered Strauss to be "an individual raised by God" to bridge the chasm between "stiff supernaturalism" and "the fair domain of free religious thought." Parker took the title for his famous sermon of 1841, "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity," from one of Strauss's essays, and his view of what was "transient" leaned heavily on Strauss's criticism of the Bible.

After graduation from Divinity School, Conway became pastor of the Unitarian Church in Washington, D. C. and brought to that position a well-crystallized abolitionist position regard to slavery. He spoke out vigorously against the evils of slavery and reminded his congregation of its incompatibility with the brotherhood and unity of mankind. The sonship of God, Conway urged, means the brotherhood of all mankind, including the least of men.

There is no ground whatsoever for treating some races as inferior. "Man is one, and one member cannot suffer but all suffer; one cannot be a slave but all are to some extent slaves."⁶ With such views Conway was merely applying the religious perspective he had developed under the influence of Emerson, Parker, and indirectly "German rationalism." As he became increasingly outspoken on slavery, he was "rebuked" by his Washington congregation and finally dismissed in 1856 for persisting in the "desecration of his pulpit," whereupon he accepted appointment to the First Congregational Church of Cincinnati, Ohio

II

Conway regarded Cincinnati as "the most cultivated of the western cities and found its rich cultural life much to his liking. With a third of its population German, there were many musical societies of high quality, theaters that attracted actors of international eminence, and a flourishing program of opera. There were also well-established libraries, lecture programs and literary clubs. Conway threw himself into these activities with enthusiasm. "I was adopted in the clubs," he later noted, "and wrote criticisms of the classical concerts, the picture exhibitions, the operas, and plays." When his activities as a "dancing and theater-going preacher" drew adverse comment, he defended the theater from his pulpit as one of the community's most important institutions.

Conway was pleased to find the atmosphere of Cincinnati congenial to social reform, "to every new creed or social experiment." He noted that remnants of Father Rapp's Harmonists, Robert Owen's New Harmonists, and Fanny Wright's interracial community had all "found some nest in Cincinnati." Though Conway's congregation contained many of the city's wealthy and prominent citizens, including Judge Hoadly and Alphonso Taft, it was firmly

antislavery in sentiment and in this respect shared the view that prevailed among the Germans. Hence Conway could address himself to other issues of reform, so his sermons concentrated on Jesus daily crucified in the poor, woman deprived of her rights, the prostitute unwillingly degraded, and the drunkard driven into misery. With his customary boldness he not only confronted his wealthy congregation with burning social issues but frequently wrote newspaper articles on them and lectured to Cincinnati's Jewish societies and German Turners.

Among the Germans with whom Conway associated and talked in the cultural center peculiar to Cincinnati, Wielert's saloon, he was closest to John B. Stallo and August Willich. Stallo was an active member of Conway's congregation and a prominent lawyer who had published a book in 1848 that extensively interpreted Hegel's philosophy for the first time in English and applied it to evolution in nature and democracy.⁷ Though Conway was acquainted with Stallo's political views, he was apparently not aware of Stallo's great intellectual debt to Hegel. Conway was particularly impressed by August Willich and found him to be one of Cincinnati's most interesting citizens, an eloquent and vigorous leader of the labor movement. Under Stallo's persuasion, Willich had become editor of the Cincinnati Republikaner, Organ der Arbeiter and had made it, in Conway's judgment, "a strong and radical paper." Willich's study of Hegel and Feuerbach had earlier led him to resign his commission in the Prussian army and identify himself with the labor movement. He commanded a Workers' Legion in the German revolution of 1848 and subsequently became a member of the central committee of Marx's Communist League in London. After quarreling with Marx over the need for armed insurrection in Germany and France -- a step that Marx firmly opposed -- Willich came to America. Conway admiringly recalled how Willich led a torchlight

demonstration in the streets of Cincinnati to protest the execution of John Brown. "In after years when I saw Garibaldi in London," said Conway, "I felt as if I had met him before in the form of my old friend Willich."⁸

The German atmosphere of Cincinnati furthered Conway's passage from a dynamic, supernaturalistic theism to what he called "theism evolved from the pantheism of the poets." He studied and absorbed Strauss's book on The Life of Jesus; it gave him further reasons for believing that Deity is to be found within the processes of nature and history so there is no basis for miracles of supernatural intervention. Strauss's book, moreover, amply reinforced Conway's distrust of the Bible taken literally and directly. Even during his first year as a Methodist minister he had found it full of "morally repulsive dogmas and atrocities."

In 1859 Conway preached a series of fateful sermons against the credibility of the miracles recorded in the Gospels. In what was probably the last of the series he said, "I would rather never enter a pulpit again than enter it under the superstition of believing that the being I worship was one who established a religion by his ability to walk on water, or swear at a fruit tree so as to wither it."⁹ Conway urged his congregation to reject "the star-announced supernatural Christ" for Christ as the "Ideal Man," "The Great Master of Spiritual Law." Such ideas alienated many of the congregation, and the conservatives overtly seceded. This was the beginning of the end of Conway's Cincinnati ministry.

Further, The Dial magazine, which Conway edited in Cincinnati as a successor to the earlier New England journal of the same name, testified to the increased influence of German thought on Conway's views. In its "Catholic Chapters" The Dial presented excerpts from Schiller, Goethe, and Hegel along with passages from Socrates, Emerson, and St. Augustine. Its longest series

of articles was written by O. B. Frothingham on "The Christianity of Christ." Frothingham, a "later transcendentalist" and historian of the movement like Conway, had absorbed much of Hegel's thought. History was for him the essence of all things, and philosophy's primary category was "becoming" not "being." With "historical reason" thus pre-eminent, Frothingham's heroes were F. C. Baur and D. F. Strauss. He viewed their "Left-Hegelian" philosophy -- "Left" as suggested by the seating of radicals in the French parliament -- as the authentic fulfillment of transcendentalism.¹⁰ In his series on "The Christianity of Christ" Frothingham tried to show, in the spirit of Strauss and with Strauss's critical method, how much of Christianity is not of Christ and how increments of dogma and tradition have been engrafted, due to a variety of historical causes, on the few simple and human teachings of Jesus.

III

In a commemorative address some dozen years after he had left Cincinnati, Conway indicated in detail what Strauss and Hegel had meant to him in the development of his philosophy of religion. He had already paid some respect to Strauss in a London sermon defending him against Gladstone as "the Premier in the Kingdom of Reason" who had shown the incredibility of Gospel miracles as history and the need to "adore the grandeur of the universe as the shrine of the Supreme life-giving and law-making Reason." The commemorative address with fuller homage to Strauss was published both in London, where Conway was leader of The Ethical Society, and in The Index, a weekly journal of the Free Religion Association in Boston. While Conway was a contributing editor, The Index published a number of articles on German philosophy including a long, laudatory article on Ludwig Feuerbach, the Left-Hegelian thinker whose views were later to become central in Conway's own "religion of Humanity."

In his commemorative address Conway noted Strauss's debt to Hegel, the philosopher "destined to create an epoch in the history of the human mind."

Referring to the massive impact of Hegel's thought, Conway held that

We are all living in the Hegelian formation; and this whether we understand that philosophy or not, and even if we reject its terms. For Hegel was as a great vitalizing breath wafted from afar, beneath which, as under a tropical glow, latent seeds of thought were developed to most various results.

Conway precisely formulated the leading theme of Hegel's philosophy as follows:

Its essence is the conception of an absolute idea which has represented itself in Nature, in order that by a progressive development through Nature it may gain consciousness in man, and return as mind to a deeper union with itself.¹¹

Such a view of the world, Conway allowed, had been partially anticipated in the Hindu conception of a universal soul of nature. But Hegel's formulation was particularly adapted to Western thought; its central meaning was reflected "in the materialism no less than in the idealism of our age, and may be felt in the philosophy of Huxley no less than in that of its best exponent, Emerson." Thus Conway not only identified Emerson's philosophy, which influenced him so deeply, with Hegel's but also saw Hegel's emphasis on the world's unitary process as being reflected in Huxley's evolutionism. Hegel's philosophy well expressed Conway's view that Deity is to be found within the processes of nature and history, not in a separate transcendent realm manifesting itself in miraculous, supernatural interventions.

Conway saw Strauss as the one who best comprehended the bearings of Hegel's philosophy on theology "by throwing off the mere form of his forerunner's doctrine, just as that philosopher had thrown off the formulas of his forerunners." Though Hegel thought of himself as an orthodox Christian, Strauss came to renounce orthodox Christianity. Though Hegel was designated an idealist, Strauss came to think of himself as a materialist.

"But we must not," Conway warned, "be victims of the letter. Fruit is different from the blossom; but it is for all that, blossom in another form." From the "blossom" Strauss concluded that Hegel's philosophy was incompatible with miracles though it left room for mysticism. He studied the life of Christ as an historical phenomenon and found that the miracles in the New Testament were on the same footing as stories told about Apollo and Bacchus. They were myths generated by the thought-patterns of an unscientific age, not literal historical facts. Nevertheless they were important and significant for humanity. Formulating Strauss's view of myths, Conway held that

They were born out of the human heart in every part of the world, and were types of its aspirations, hopes, and spiritual experiences. That which could not be respected as history could be revered as a reflection of the religious sentiment.¹²

Hence where the church set an individual, Strauss would put humanity. In

Conway's quotation from Strauss:

Humanity is the union of two natures -- God becomes man, the infinite manifesting itself in the finite, and the finite spirit remembering its infinitude; it is the child of the visible Mother and the invisible Father, Nature and Spirit.

Thus Conway found in Strauss foundations for his developing "religion of Humanity" as well as his position on miracles.

While Conway was correct in his estimate of Strauss's relation to Hegel, he did not elaborate the details of that relationship. In particular, he did not show how Strauss's idea of "myth" had applied Hegel's view that in religion truth takes the form of "imaginative presentation" transmitted by the community. Hegel maintained that apart from a philosophical or conceptual grasp of religious truth, Spirit -- the true substance and reality of all things -- takes "the form of the universal self-consciousness of a religious community."¹³ In that community events of the past are kept alive in sensuous form through "imagination." "Imaginative presentation," said Hegel, "constitutes the

characteristic form in which spirit is conscious of itself in this its religious community."¹³ Strauss's conception of "myth" was merely an extension and application of Hegel's view of an historically- and socially-formed "imaginative presentation." In the mythical interpretation of Biblical history, Strauss wrote, the higher intelligence at work in putatively historical events is "the spirit of a people or a community" and this spirit, not an immediate supernatural agency, gives them "an absolute inherent truth," not a specific and literal historical truth.

IV

During Conway's years in Cincinnati the second major motif in his thought, his adherence to an evolutionary view of the world and the scientific freedom it implied, was crystallized and firmly grounded. This motif reinforced the naturalistic view of God he developed under the influence of Emerson, Parker, Strauss, and Hegel.

Early in 1859 Conway "answered" the Rev. Dr. Horace Bushnell's defense of supernaturalism based on supposed evidence from geology. Conway cited what he had learned from Agassiz in Cambridge about embryonic development pointing to "the derivation of one species from another." Conway's book on the Natural History of the Devil also brought forward the idea of "arrested and progressive development" which he had derived from Emerson as early as 1854.¹⁴ Conway regarded this idea as central in the pre-Darwinian history of evolution, showing that those who studied Emerson were building their faith on evolution before Darwin provided its scientific foundation. Apparently Conway was unaware that Emerson's pre-Darwinian view of evolution had been significantly shaped by the Hegelian book published in 1848 by his friend and fellow-Cincinnatian, John B. Stallo. Emerson had used evolutionary

ideas from Stallo's book in the early 1850s and later noted that it had anticipated Darwin by a decade.

Prior to the appearance of Darwin's Origin of Species, Conway proclaimed the unity of man and nature. He held that man is nature in quintessence. There are minerals in his skeleton, vegetable matter in his hair, and metal in his blood. "These things reappear in the human form," said Conway, "because the Law of the Universe is Ascent." In the realm of mind the truths of science -- "and rightly speaking there are no others" -- become knowledge without ranting or violence, a surer road to truth that religion should follow.¹⁵ With such views already entrenched in his thinking, Conway enthusiastically welcomed The Origin of Species and saw it as dealing a deathblow to the supernaturalism and miracles of "dogmatic Christianity." Darwin provided rigorous scientific support for the evolutionary view of the world, the idea of "progressive development," Conway had already found in Emerson and came to see clearly in Hegel.

Conway was especially enthusiastic about Strauss's last book, The Old Faith and The New, which ardently embraced the theory of evolution and applied it to religion. He quoted Strauss's view that nature consists of struggles contributing to the harmony of the whole and manifests graded development from lower to higher. Hence we are dependent not on rude power but on order and law, reason and goodness. The old Deity, then, must be replaced by "the law-governed Cosmos, full of life and reason" and deserving the same piety as the devout had always given to a supernatural Being. Conway particularly agreed with Strauss in opposing the traditional Christian dualism of soul and body, man and nature. This dualistic view of the world engendered by supernaturalism, Strauss told Conway on a visit to Heilbronn, reinforces superstition as the Siamese twin of political despotism and social degradation.¹⁶

Firmly committed to liberal social reform, Conway returned to Hegel to explain Strauss's conservatism as a member of the German legislature. Strauss, as Conway put it, distrusted sweeping away a few snowdrifts when winter was still in the air. In this respect he correctly followed Hegel. "Those who study Hegel," Conway argued, "know that his apparent conservatism was the crust outside a fiery radicalism." Hegel saw history as the realization of liberty requiring a Reformation in religion. The French Revolution, missing this prerequisite, had led only to formal, external freedom. Full freedom, however, requires basic institutional changes, so Strauss broke with popular movements of his day because he saw that the institutional conditions of concrete freedom were being ignored.

As he developed his naturalistic view of religion Conway became aware of the problem of the shift in meaning of the key words he was using in his sermons and addresses. He became sensitive to the relation between language and thought and particularly to the way language can mislead thought. In this he anticipated the currently prominent preoccupation with semantics and "linguistic philosophy." What was needed, Conway concluded in the 1850s, is "a philosophy of words." Though Friedrich Schlegel and the Humboldts among the Germans had studied the bearing of language on race, "the naturalist of words had yet to appear." Conway saw language as the special mark of humanity in contrast to animality and as a distinctly social achievement. Language, he maintained, is "Nature humanizing." The various uses of words show that they are only "symbols" of things, not the fact itself. "The word love," for example, "cannot do instead of loving." As knowledge changes and grows, the meanings of words change, as in the case of "sunrise" since Copernicus. Theology is particularly full of misleading uses of words whose emotional overtones -- as in "heretic" or "freethinker" -- widely

prevent clear reasoning.¹⁷ Conway saw his effort to be a "naturalist of words" as essential to the development of a sound philosophy of liberal Christianity.

V

On leaving Cincinnati in 1862, Conway served for two years as editor of an abolitionist journal in Boston and then went to London to win sympathy for the Union cause. His increasingly virulent anti-slavery views led him to attack Lincoln as a "tool," and in a high pitch of excitement at one anti-slavery meeting he was ready to welcome world revolution to sweep away all forms of tyranny. He not only fought for complete emancipation but actively advocated intermarriage as the solution for the race problem, holding that intermarriage would result in a stronger people in every way. "The evening star of the epoch of separate races," said Conway, "is the morning star of Human Unity. Men we have, but not yet Man."

In 1864 Conway became permanent minister of ^{South Place Chapel (subsequently} the Ethical Society) in London, a position he held for thirty years with such distinction that the Society's meeting place on Red Lion Square now bears his name, Conway Hall. From London he contributed to Cincinnati newspapers a series of lively, sometimes sensational, letters that revealed the versatility of his interests as well as the boldness of his thinking. He reported, for example, details of the struggle between capital and labor in England and the valuable role of unions. He described the growth of the Chartist movement in relation to London poverty, the proceedings of a prison-reform congress, the views of exiled Russian nihilists, the opening of plays and art exhibits, and the activities of Parliament. Reporting on the refugees from the Paris Commune he tried to explode the myth of their bloodthirstiness and compared their views to those that had animated Brook Farm in Boston. His "radical religious and political opinions" were often vehemently attacked in the public press.

Soon after he was settled in London, he began associating with exiled revolutionists such as Mazzini, Louis Blanc, and Karl Blind. He was closest to Blind, an intimate friend of Marx in the 1850s, who persuaded him to give a series of lectures to "the working class" on "relations between employe^rs and employees, cooperation, the elevation of woman, and national education." Association with Blind reinforced Conway's interest in German thought and culture. His address on the centenary of Alexander Humboldt's birth praised him as a great naturalist and referred to his book, Cosmos, as "a hymn to the unity and perfection of Nature," the keynote of the age. During the Franco-Prussian War, in which Conway observed the grim realities battle at Gravelotte, his sympathies were with Germany as fighting for a free fatherland that would resist any oppression Bismark might impose on victor or vanquished. But Conway's sympathies for downtrodden humanity superseded his feelings for any particular nation. Soon he was writing in defense of the refugees from the Paris Commune and seeking aid for them in collaboration with Karl Marx.¹⁸

As Conway associated with British "rationalists" and the exiled Germans who published Der Deutsche Eidgenoss -- Karl Blind aided by Ferdinand Freiligrath, Franz Sigel, and Ludwig Feuerbach in Germany -- his thought moved through the view that nature is a "measureless organism of Reason" toward a "religion of Humanity," free of all traces of his former theism. This movement reflected the influence of Strauss and was crystallized under the impact of Feuerbach's book on The Essence of Christianity.

Strauss had not pursued the question of the psychological source of myths, the content of religion, but acknowledged that Feuerbach, another prominent Left-Hegelian, had found the answer. In a parallel movement in 1880 Conway turned to a study of Feuerbach's thought. On the publication

of George Eliot's translation of The Essence of Christianity, Conway saw Feuerbach as continuing the effort begun with German research and Unitarianism "to reconstitute Christianity on a natural basis." Feuerbach, according to Conway, found Christianity more interesting than Christ as a great chapter in the spiritual history of mankind. After critics like Strauss had worked on the myths and dogmas in the Bible, Feuerbach pursued the question of their origin, "the mental and moral facts beneath them." He found the roots of religion to be man's self-consciousness as a species. Hence God is the personification by man of his own higher powers as a distinct being. In Feuerbach's words:

Man -- this is the mystery of religion -- projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject; he thinks of himself as an object to himself, but as the object of an object, of another being.¹⁹

On this basis Conway agreed with Feuerbach that the more God is exalted in theological Christianity, the more man is degraded. The more God is reified as a transcendent, metaphysical entity, the more is Christ's one supreme command, "Love," replaced by the divisive, hate-breeding rule, "Believe." Conway fully accepted Feuerbach's view of Christ:

He who loves man for man's sake, who rise to . . . universal love . . . he is Christ himself. He does what Christ did, what made Christ Christ . . . Where there arises the consciousness of the species as species, the idea of humanity as a whole, Christ disappears, but not his true nature.²⁰

Sharing Feuerbach's attitude toward "faith" and the command to believe in theological Christianity, Conway welcomed the decay of faith as a liberation of humanity. Nothing of real value is lost in the decay of faith. We only cease to project. We no longer, as it were, cross the stream to fetch water on the other side because we have come to realize that the water we fetched comes from the stream itself at our feet. "Every day," Conway was pleased

to observe, "the Christ of superstition declines, and Christ becomes a name for human charity."

Relying on Feuerbach rather than principles of Auguste Comte's "positivism," which he found ambiguous, Conway emphasized the moral implications of the "religion of Humanity." Feuerbach had stated the moral law corresponding to the scientific law Darwin had discovered and Emerson had translated into spiritual truth -- namely, "Man has his highest being, his God, in himself; not as an individual but in his essential nature -- his species."²¹ On this basis moral conduct is action in loyalty to the law of the species but a law requiring variation and individuality in the service of universal ends. This, in contrast to Jewish or Christian sectarianism, is the basis of a truly Catholic religion in which man "finds his saviour by becoming one." Such a religion, not faith in a supernatural being, is properly the "religion of Humanity" foreshadowed by Feuerbach.

Shortly before his death in 1907, and after he had returned to America to spend his last years in New York at work on his memoirs and vindicating biographies of Tom Paine and Edmund Randolph, one of his ancestors, Conway gave testimony to the lasting influence of German philosophy, particularly the Left-Hegelian philosophy of Strauss, on his thinking. In an address on "Dogma and Science" at the Rome Congress of Freethinkers, he recalled how Strauss had insisted that "all freedom must be preceded by emancipation from supernaturalism," the birthplace of superstition and hence oppression. "The man who gives up the whole of his moral nature to an unquestioned authority," Strauss had maintained, "suffers a paralysis of his mind, and all the changes of outward circumstances in the world cannot make him a free man."²²

In the whole course of Conway's life and thought, the views of Hegel, Strauss, and Feuerbach were the major impetus for a "New Reformation" of Christianity -- a reformation that is still going on and has found its latest, somewhat sensational, expression in current efforts of "radical theology" to formulate "the secular meaning of the Gospel" and the principle of "religionless Christianity." That meaning and principle were at the center of Conway's thought a century ago. For Conway the "New Reformation" began with what he called the "fifth gospel" of Emerson and Parker. It fused Left-Hegelian philosophy with the scientific outlook inspired by Darwin, and carried the abolitionist passion for freedom and humanity into movements for wider social reform -- the emancipation of labor, the full realization of democracy, and the achievement of world peace.

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13. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. by J. B. Baillie, rev. by C. J. Friedrich in The Philosophy of Hegel (New York: Modern Library, 1954), pp. 515-516.
14. Conway, Autobiography, I, pp. 280-81. Cf. Conway, "Letter to Charles Eliot Norton," 4 April 1903, manuscript in Conway Collection, Dickinson College Library; Easton, op. cit., pp. 46-49.
15. Conway, "A Discourse [On Truth]," Cincinnati, 1859, manuscript in Conway Collection, Columbia University Library.
16. Conway, "David Friedrich Strauss," op. cit., p. 159. Cf. Autobiography, II, pp. 13-14.
17. Cf. Conway, "The Word," The Dial, 1 (1860), pp. 98-99; "Hold Fast the Form of Sound Words," manuscript in Conway Collection, Columbia University Library.
18. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Letters to Americans (New York: International Publ., 1953), p. 83; Conway, Autobiography, II, pp. 268-70.
19. Ludwig Feuerbach, Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot [Marian Evans] (New York: Harper and Bros., 1957), pp. 29-30. Cf. Conway, "Feuerbach," 22 January 1882, manuscript in Conway Collection, Columbia University Library.

20. Conway, op. cit.. Cf. Feuerbach, op. cit., p. 269.
21. Conway, "Individual and Species," Lessons for the Day (London: E. W. Allen, 1882), I, pp. 63, et passim. Cf. ibid., II, pp. 11, 135-43.
22. Conway, Addresses and Reprints 1850-1907 (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1909), p. 367; Autobiography, II, p. 14.