

“Come forth into the light of things”: William Wordsworth’s Human Challenge to Economic Thinking

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Panel: Adam Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment

*Slaves cannot breathe in England"--yet that boast
Is but a mockery! when from coast to coast,
Though 'fettered' slave be none, her floors and soil
Groan underneath a weight of slavish toil,
For the poor Many, measured out by rules
Fetched with cupidity from heartless schools
That to an Idol, falsely called "the Wealth
Of Nations," sacrifice a People's health,
Body and mind and soul;
-William Wordsworth, "Humanity," 1829¹*

*But where will Europe's latter hour
Again find Wordsworth's healing power?
-Matthew Arnold, *Memorial Verses*, 1850*

When priests and princes lost their monopoly over the big questions of human existence over the course of the Enlightenment, philosophers, poets, and ordinary people struggled to find out the answers on their own. They looked at themselves and their surroundings with fresh eyes and asked: *What am I? What makes me think and feel as I do? What is the source of knowledge? Of morality? What conditions bring out the best in people? In societies?*

For Adam Smith, a key figure of the Enlightenment, and William Wordsworth, a leading voice in the rise of Romanticism that challenged much of Enlightenment thinking, the answers to these questions mattered greatly.

The conclusions they drew matter a great deal to us today. Smith, a moral philosopher who studied economics but taught rhetoric and belles lettres, influenced the dominant view of human nature and relations lodged in today's

¹ William Wordsworth, "Humanity," *The Complete Poetical Works of Wordsworth*. Ed. Andrew J. George. (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1932) 667. Hereafter cited as *CPW*.

political economy and economic thought. Wordsworth, a poet deeply interested in nature and science, opened a channel of resistance to many of those views that is still active in current economic and social justice movements, environmentalism, and strains of psychology.

This paper explores the tension between the two men's perspectives and discusses what may have been gained and lost, and what may yet be recovered, from views clouded by a long history of readings and misreadings.

Town & Country

We don't know much about Adam Smith's childhood, but we do know that he was born in 1723 in the small port town of Kirkcaldy and that his father, an attorney who practiced in nearby Edinburgh, died before his birth. Dugald Stewart, who gave Smith's eulogy, says that he was a sickly child. He seems to have gotten a decent grammar school education.²

Smith came from a family of Whigs, and grew up to believe that it was a good thing that union with England had loosened the grip of the Scottish aristocracy. Yet he also saw trade thrown into chaos in towns like Kirkcaldy, causing much suffering among the people who made their living by it.³ He developed a lifelong sympathy with the plight of the poorest people.

In 1737, at age fourteen, Smith went to the University of Glasgow at a time when the city was starting to buzz with the financing and re-export of colonial products from America and India. He came under the influence of moral philosopher Francis Hutcheson, who took his cue from natural scientists to seek universal principles governing human behavior. Hutcheson concluded that people innately lean toward virtue and that we are essentially benevolent — a far cry from the view of Bernard

² James Buchan, *The Authentic Adam Smith* (New York: Norton, 2006) 16.

³ Buchan 13-14.

Mandeville, who had scandalized the public a few decades earlier with his notion that humans are scheming and self-interested creatures whose vices alone can lead to prosperity. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*⁴ (1759, hereafter *TMS*) and later, in *The Wealth of Nations*⁵ (1776, hereafter *WN*), Smith would strike a compromise between these two perspectives.

In 1740, Smith went to Oxford and plunged into the study of human nature, reading French philosophers who tended to paint a picture of the human as a being of frail reason, explosive passions, deluded thinking, and cursed to live in a corrupt world without the comforts of religious— ideas which Smith valued for their psychological depth but ultimately found too pessimistic.⁶ He was also inspired by ancient philosophy and the work of Isaac Newton, which inspired his interest in organizing human experience in terms of connected systems.

After Oxford he gave public lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres at the University of Edinburgh, eventually joining the Glasgow University faculty in 1751. After publishing *TMS*, he tutored the future Duke of Buccleuch, whom he accompanied to France and Geneva (the only time in his life he traveled abroad), secured a lucrative life pension from the Duke's father, and was able to spend time in London and return to Kircaldy to work on *WN*. In 1778 he was appointed commissioner of customs in Edinburgh, where he remained until his death.

Smith, then, spent most of his life in universities and at the Scottish Customs Board, places where the new commercial modernity was changing ways of thinking and patterns of life. He found the intricacies of this commercial world intriguing, and closely watched how humans behaved in the rising middle class society. He

⁴ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press: 2002).

⁵ Adam Smith, *Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner. Two vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

⁶ See Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale U Press, 2012) 85.

preferred parlors to parks: Unlike some of his contemporaries, he was not a man who went in for the emerging cult of nature. His anxiety about the natural realm shows up in an early work on astronomy where he posits philosophy as the key to helping us restore order to nature's chaos.⁷

Smith's observations of human beings came from university classrooms, salons, drawing rooms, coffee houses, occasional visits to factories, and walks on the High Street in Edinburgh, where he displayed a personality that was, as historian James Buchan puts it, "practical, cautious, urbane and businesslike."⁸ On the whole, he was optimistic, though cautiously so, about what might arise for people, despite all our limitations and contradictions, in the new capitalist paradigm.

In 1776, the year *WN* appeared in print, William Wordsworth, future Poet Laureate of England, was a 6-year-old boy swimming in rivers and scrambling up cliffs amid the magnificent wilds of his home in northwest England. With its unspoiled forests and mountains, the Lake District would nurture the poet's sensibilities, and later inspire his friends and fellow poets, Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and, in the next generation, the critic John Ruskin.

Wordsworth was a carefree child whose father worked as a lawyer to Sir James Lowther, 1st Earl of Lonsdale, a man known for his enormous wealth rooted in landholdings and a vast industrial empire. The young Wordsworth looked forward to a comfortable place in upper-middle class British society — but that security was smashed. The Earl, famous for his political machinations and so corrupt that he earned the nickname "Wicked Jimmy," owed his father £5000 (over \$750,000 in today's currency) when the elder Wordsworth died in 1783, leaving the boy orphaned (his mother had died a few years prior). Lowther refused to repay the

⁷ Adam Smith, "History of Astronomy," *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. T Cadell jun. and W. Davies. (London, 1795) 3.

⁸ Buchan 8.

family, a betrayal that ensured Wordsworth would grow up dogged by poverty and driven by a strong sense of injustice and a rebellious spirit.⁹

Living with his mother's family in Cumberland, the boy occupied himself on solitary walks through the misty hills at a time when the country people of the Lake District were losing social and economic security as a result of enclosures that took lands out of common use for the benefit of private owners. They also faced the displacements and turmoil related to the beginnings of industrial activities. Wordsworth's interactions with farmers, shepherds, and ordinary laborers impressed upon him a sense of their inherent value, as well as a suspicion of the new system that stripped their dignity.

Wordsworth's keen attunement to the natural world — he was the first person to write of “communing with nature” —gave him a lasting sense that such connection was crucial for humans to develop a sense of security, fulfillment, and morality. His interest in poetry, which began in grammar school and deepened during his years at St. John's College in Cambridge, which he entered in 1787, gave him an outlet for these reflections.

During the lead-up and beginning of the French Revolution in 1789, Cambridge was on fire with students who compared it to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 that gave England a constitutional monarchy, ending the absolute right of kings and queens. Many celebrated the Revolutionaries' high ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality, which seemed far superior to the corruption of British society.¹⁰ Young Wordsworth became a radical.

As tension between France and Britain mounted, along with outbreaks of violence, attitudes at Cambridge hardened and rioters began to attack supporters of the

⁹ Adam Sisman, *The Friendship: Wordsworth and Coleridge* (New York: Penguin, 2006) 16.

¹⁰ Sisman 35.

Revolution.¹¹ Before his final semester, Wordsworth set off on a walking tour of Europe (the poor man's Grand Tour), where he came face-to-face with what was happening. This experience, as well as a subsequent period living in France, stoked his interest in the natural nobility of human beings and his sympathy for the experience of the "common man," issues which would come to pervade his work. In his early twenties, Revolutionary France became for Wordsworth the hope of humankind and he felt alienated in his home country.¹²

When he returned from France in 1792, the liberal publisher Joseph Johnson, also the publisher of Thomas Paine and William Godwin, put out Wordsworth's early poems, including a version of his famous Salisbury poem ("A Night on Salisbury Plain," 1791-4), inspired by a walking tour of Wales. This anti-war protest poem aligned with the views — considered treasonous — of Johnson's circle of reformers and dissenters and expressed the loss of innocent lives to the war machine by evoking the image of Stonehenge Druids performing human sacrifice.

In 1793, the same year this poem was released, Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, a one-time dissenter who had become notorious for corruption, wrote a response to the execution of Louis XVI entitled, "The Wisdom and Goodness of God in having made both Rich and Poor," in which he argued that Britain's provisions for the poor made them lazy. Wordsworth struck back in a response¹³ full of echoes of Paine and Rousseau that defended the killing as a revolutionary necessity and arguing that the monarchy and aristocracy must be abolished because they were cut off from common people and did not understand human nature. He concluded that Britons were like slaves under the current system and called for universal representation as

¹¹ In 1792, Thomas Paine was burned in effigy, clergyman and reformer William Frend was prosecuted, and several former Cambridge Fellows, including Scottish radical Rev. Thomas Fyshe Palmer, a Unitarian minister, were hauled off to Australia in shackles.

¹² Sisman 31.

¹³ William Wordsworth, "A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff," *Wordsworth's Political Writings*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and J.W. Symser (Penrith, CA: Humanities-Ebooks, 2009) 23-56.

the form of government best suited to promote the general welfare. Luckily for Wordsworth, the letter, for unclear reasons, was never published: He might well have faced prosecution.

Like many of his radical contemporaries, Wordsworth struggled with his devotion to the Revolution once the Reign of Terror filled the streets of France with blood. Most of all, he was shocked by the opening of hostilities between England and France, which he blamed on his homeland. Along with his close friend Coleridge, he went to Germany from 1798 to 1799 to avoid the draft and began work on his long autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*,¹⁴ eventually returning to England to settle at Dove Cottage in Grasmere in the Lake District.

There is a long tradition that interprets Wordsworth's trajectory as that of a young leftist who defects, drops politics, turns inward, and removes himself in the Lake District to contemplate ideal pastoral landscapes and return to the reassurances of traditional culture — all the while indulging an unhealthy egotism. There are elements of truth in this view, but the work of E.P. Thompson and others have shown that it is hardly fair or complete. Wordsworth, like many of his fellow radicals, underwent a crisis in the aftermath of the Revolution in an anti-Jacobin England that was hostile to dissenters. Persecutions were common: Wordsworth himself was driven from his rented home at Alfoxton House when spies reported that seditious meetings were taking place.

In time, Wordsworth did reject of some of the tenets of the radical intelligentsia, such as those of William Godwin, whose views he had once espoused. In his later years, when he accepted the patronage of wealthy people and became Poet Laureate, he grew more conservative. But in his poetry, as Thompson notes, the

¹⁴ Wordsworth started this poem at age 28 and worked on it the rest of his life. The 1799 version of this poem, called the Two-Part Prelude, was composed between 1798 and 1799 and contains the first two parts of the later poem, *The 1805 Prelude*, which was found and printed by Ernest de Sélincourt in 1926, in 13 books. The 1850 Prelude was published shortly after Wordsworth's death, in 14 books.

movement is really a turn away from abstract ideas about human beings and toward the real life experience of common people, from the overtly political world to the realm of human engagement.¹⁵ He focused deeply on nature and consciousness, but he also, as John L. Mahoney points out, was keen to understand the power of cities and institutions and people related to them.¹⁶ The reality is that after the Revolution, the great abstract ideas about human beings were coming to be seen by many, including Wordsworth, as not altogether adequate to the plight of people in the early stages of Industrialism, particularly in Britain. This frustration sparked the Romantic impulse.

Wordsworth's poetry, most strikingly poems written before 1805, reveals a deep sense of the dignity of ordinary people, the need for social justice, the unity of human beings and nature, and challenges to Britain's political and economic systems and the ways in which they deform human nature. His poetry marks turning point away from the drawing room and the salon back to the ordinary world and to nature, a shift that represented a significant challenge to received thinking and norms.

Wordsworth's ideas had an enormous afterlife — it is rather hard now to imagine that as late as 1929, Aldous Huxley could remark that “most serious-minded people are now Wordsworthians.”¹⁷ Yet that is how powerful his influence remained until poetry began to fade as a cultural catalyst in the second half of the 20th century. The Victorians considered him to be the premiere guide to the moral life, while historians of ideas in the 20th century viewed him as the consummate poet-philosopher. Some later readers, including Marxists and Deconstructionists, have

¹⁵ E.P. Thompson, *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (New York: The New Press, 1997) 34-36.

¹⁶ John L. Mahoney, *Wordsworth and the Critics: The Development of a Critical Reputation* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001) 68-70.

¹⁷Huxley was frustrated that some adherents of Wordsworth refused to accept Darwin, despite the fact that Darwin himself was inspired by the poet. Huxley's remark is reprinted in Gary Schmidgall, *Containing Multitudes: Walt Whitman and the British Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 2015) 224.

denounced his focus nature's sublime beauty at a time of great poverty, but others have pointed out what seems rather obvious: one concern does not obliterate the other. Wordsworth viewed writing poetry itself to be a moral action, seeing his verses on nature and the healing power of the imagination as sources of inspiration for people to transcend their circumstances. He was a social visionary.

Hearts & Minds

*Society has parted man from man
Neglectful of the universal heart*

–Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1799-1805, 1850¹⁸

Before the Preface of a two-volume edition of his verse published in 1815, Wordsworth included an essay that contains a footnote summing up his extremely harsh view of Adam Smith as “the worst critic, David Hume not excepted, that Scotland, a soil to which this sort of weed seems natural, has produced.”¹⁹

The term ‘critic’ was broadly used time when there were no official boundaries separating literary criticism from political economy and moral philosophy. What Wordsworth means is that Smith was a man whose ideas he did not approve. The poet's letters show that he held this view of Smith at least since 1802.²⁰

In what sense were Smith's ideas problematic for Wordsworth? His conception of human nature, for starters.

Smith's views of human nature, which appear in *TMS* and *WN*, form the basis of how he understood the economy and the workings of markets — and they are not terribly flattering. He was observing the new bourgeoisie, with all its striving and

¹⁸ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XIII.219-220, *CPW*, 214.

¹⁹ Reprinted in Thomas H. Ford, “The Romantic Political Economy of Reading: or, Why Wordsworth Thought Adam Smith Was the Worst Critic Ever,” *ELH* 80:2 (2013): 575.

²⁰ Ford 575.

posturing, and he was less than impressed with what he saw of their ways and manners. As Buchan writes, *TMS*, “with its pen-knives and snuff-boxes...its bad roads and clumsy servants, its jokes fallen flat and its alderman’s wives jostling one another for the best seat at the table,” is a book that rolls into the study of human sentiments into keen, almost novelistic observations of bourgeois fashion and manners.²¹

Perhaps because of his drawing room observations, Smith saw people as powerfully motivated by self-interest, though in contrast to Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* he does allow us an innate moral sympathy with others and sees that we have to have some sort of common interest in order for society to function. Despite this nuance, Smith is remembered best on this topic from a passage in *WN* where he observes that, “it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our own dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”²² Earlier in the same paragraph, Smith notes that commercial society requires us to cooperate with large numbers of people, and we can’t expect to do it through benevolence.

For Smith, when we do anything benevolent it is mostly because we observe codes of conduct, which we follow because we like admiration and approval. We are usually nice to children and friends and tolerant of parents, but self-love is driving us in just about everything. We lie to ourselves. We’re conceited, envious, spiteful, ornery and resentful. But, *a la* Mandeville, our bad qualities can serve a useful social purpose. Our pride may stimulate us to act with integrity because we don’t want to look bad to ourselves. Our vanity can drive us to be generous to others, even though we make a big, self-serving display of it. Hutcheson thought that our selfishness besmirches our virtue, but Smith disagrees in *TMS*: “The habits of economy, industry, discretion, attention and application of thought, are generally supposed to

²¹ Buchan 52.

²² Smith, *WN*, I.ii.2.

be cultivated from self-interested motives,” he writes, “and at the same time are apprehended to be very praiseworthy qualities...”²³

Smith’s humans beings determine right and wrong by judging the actions of other people in society and then coming back to judge ourselves through the glasses of an Impartial Spectator — a kind of internal judge which is often at odds with our emotions.

Smith does not harbor much hope that we can rise to benevolence towards all humanity. We are designed, for better or worse, to function in the great machine of the universe by preserving ourselves and propagating the race. We have always been like this, and if there is to be any improvement at all, it will come within commercial society where we have more choices of work, more wealth, and more opportunities to socialize.

In Books I and II of *WN*, Smith describes humans as naturally social beings inclined to seek material comfort and act upon an innate urge to "truck, barter, and exchange."²⁴ These propensities drive us to exchange goods and services in markets, to accumulate and invest, to seek higher productivity, and to become as rich as we possibly can be. This is a process that starts in the countryside and later flourishes in towns, providing about the best conditions we can hope for to mitigate our worst instincts — and, that’s a good thing, because unlike the popular notion of the rational homo economicus, Smith is clear that instincts drive us more than reason.

Wordsworth had a different take. By the time he was writing, Britain had seen more of the social ills produced by the markets and commercial system that Smith had felt cautiously optimistic about just a few decades before. The poet saw the human spirit as getting crushed, rather improving, from the changes underway.

²³ Smith, *TMS*, VII.ii.3.

²⁴ Smith, *WN*, I.ii.1.

By 1797, Wordsworth had begun a deep friendship with Coleridge, and the two embraced the Romantic idea that in order for humans to live up to their potential and develop their capacities for reason and morality, they needed to be connected to nature, not cut off from in a bourgeois drawing room, or even worse, a smoke-belching factory. In "Tintern Abbey" (1798), Wordsworth emphasizes appreciation of nature's beauty as a remedy for the mental, political and social disconnection he saw in people struck by the effects of industrialization. His laments for the ghostly "wreathes of smoke / Sent up in silence from among the trees" from factories as well as the plight of the "poverty and wretchedness" among the homeless people cast aside by the new system present a pessimistic view of this early stage of modern capitalism.²⁵

If Smith was pessimistic about people, but optimistic about capitalism, Wordsworth felt the reverse.

Wordsworth was appalled by overcrowded urban spaces and unstimulating jobs that dulled human sensibility (Smith worried about the latter, too), a view expressed in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1798).²⁶ He points to a dangerous development whereby people are increasingly unable to discern the great patterns and rhythms of nature, making them more susceptible to becoming what would come to be known as "commodities" in an industrial society.²⁷ For Wordsworth, it is not wealth and accumulation that makes us free, but the stimulation of our minds, which can be provoked by nature and meaningful work. In Book II of *The Prelude*, he traces how nature awakens a child's moral senses and acts as an antidote to the "selfishness" and "wicked exultation" of a period in which material wealth is flaunted.²⁸

²⁵ Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," *CPW*, 91.

²⁶ William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads: 1802 and 1802*, ed. Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 2013) 95-117

²⁷ See Timothy Michael, *British Romanticism and the Critique of Political Reason* (Baltimore: John Hopkins U Press, 2016) 184-85.

²⁸ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, II.435-37, *CPW*, 139.

Wordsworth, unlike Smith, believed that under the right conditions, people are capable of benevolence toward all of humankind. In Book XVIII of *The Prelude*, he writes that the freedom and industriousness of the common people in the countryside give them a natural grace. His admiration for the shepherd's "noticeable kindness of heart"²⁹ and unpretentiousness teaches him a reverence for human nature in general. If people are not called upon to exploit one another — something that a capitalist system encourages us to do — we are free to exhibit more generosity and love, which can extend to all beings.

From these lessons Wordsworth concludes that the moral basis for action is not, as Smith would have it, mostly self-interest and a desire to think well of ourselves, but a view of the good of all humanity, which we can feel when we understand the wholesome harmony of all things. In Book XVIII of *The Prelude* he observes that the more free we are in mind and spirit, the more we can appreciate this truth.

Man free, man working for himself, with choice
Of time, and place, and object; by his wants,
His comforts, native occupations, cares,
Cheerfully led to individual ends
Or social, and still followed by a train
Unwooded, unthought-of even—simplicity,
And beauty, and inevitable grace.³⁰

Wordsworth holds that it is the accumulation of wisdom, beauty, and love, not material wealth, that grants us good lives.

The Parts & the Whole

*Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things
We murder to dissect.*

-Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned: An Evening Scene, on the Same Subject," 1798³¹

²⁹ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XVIII.125, CPW, 180.

³⁰ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*. IXVIII.104-10. CPW. 180.

³¹ Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned," CPW, 83.

*Science advances with gigantic strides;
But are we aught enriched in love and meekness?*
–Wordsworth, “To the Planet Venus,” 1838³²

Much has been written of the influence of Isaac Newton on Adam Smith, who took up his challenge to extend his methods of scientific reasoning into new territory, especially moral philosophy. Smith was so successful in this that his contemporaries called him “the Newton of the moral sciences” or “the Newton of civil society.”³³

But what exactly does that mean? The question is debatable.

Natural philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries often espoused a mechanistic view of the universe rooted in the medieval image of interlocking crystalline spheres operated by God.³⁴ As synchronized time was replacing the rhythms of nature in daily life, the universe started to look like a massive machine that runs like a clock, and the key was to distinguish the parts and figure out what made the whole thing tick. If nature was a machine, then animals were clock-like machines, too, and even humans, albeit with souls.

Newton is often heralded as the champion of a mechanical model of the cosmos anchored in mathematical laws. But he not such as strict mechanist as those in Smith’s time and afterwards often made him, viewing God as not just setting the

³² Wordsworth, “To the Planet Venus,” *CPW*, 759.

³³ See Redman, D., *The rise of Political Economy as a Science* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997) 208–15. John Millar and Thomas Pownall were among those who described Smith in this way.

³⁴ See Stephen D. Snobelen, “The myth of the clockwork universe: Newton, Newtonianism, and the Enlightenment,” *The persistence of the sacred in modern thought*, ed. Chris L. Firestone and Nathan Jacobs (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame Press, 2012) 151.

great machine in motion, but intervening in various ways.³⁵ (Leibniz sneered that Newton's God wanted to wind up his watch from time to time).³⁶

Interpretations of Newton in the British, and especially the Scottish Enlightenment, tended to emphasize his empirical approach, rationalist perspective, and mechanistic model of the universe, a view that carried over into the Victorian Age, when Newton was known as the father of the "Age of Reason." However, a large cache of Newton's papers, sold to Sotheby's in 1936 (a portion of which was purchased by John Maynard Keynes), reveals that the man still touted as a cold, hard scientist was deep into subjects like alchemy, prophecies, and ancient wisdom — heretical interests he tried to keep quiet during his lifetime.³⁷

The version of Newton popular in first half of 18th century-Britain was shaped by agendas of the time, including the desire to discover not only the laws that governed celestial bodies, but those driving human behavior and social and political institutions. Leonidas Montes suggests that in Scotland, this take on Newton may have been linked to the spread of his ideas among the general public in places like coffee houses, where Newtonian science, or at least what people thought it was, got woven together with political and theological interests.³⁸ Hutcheson, philosopher George Turnbull, and Smith's close friend David Hume were all keen to apply what they understood to be Newtonianism to moral phenomena.

We don't know how closely Smith actually read Newton, and some think that his reading was fairly superficial. But Montes argues that Scottish mathematicians like Colin Maclaurin, as opposed to their French counterparts who were more influenced by Descartes, often had more nuanced views of Newton than is generally understood. They grasped that Newton believed mathematics to be an instrument to

³⁵ Snobelen 151-161.

³⁶ Quoted in Leonidas Montes, "Newton's real influence on Adam Smith and its context," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* (2007) 6.

³⁷ Montes 3.

³⁸ Montes 13.

describe nature rather than a model of reality. Smith's early essay on astronomy, which was written before 1758, begins with a psychological account of scientific progress that is really more about the imagination than strict empirical observation or models.

Newton and Smith didn't believe their methods were the final truth, or that the truth is always observable or reducible to known scientific models. Theories aren't meant to be permanent. They are approximations: open-ended and evolving. Economists who link Smith's supposed Newtonianism to theories like that of general economic equilibrium got it wrong because Newton and Smith did not think that science was about having a few axioms and deducing everything from them. Rather, science is an evolving process of new discoveries and changing theories.³⁹

Nevertheless, many interpreters of Smith up to the present day have seen axioms in his writing. Sympathy in *TMS* and self-interest in *WN* are considered to be like gravity. Smith is putting down inalterable laws of human behavior, first in ethics and then economics. Seen this way, Smith's "propensity to truck, barter, and exchange" becomes a fixed principle of human nature, despite the fact that it is merely an imaginative speculation. Neoclassical economics inherited the fixation on abstractions, axioms, and models, which became, as Montes says, "our Zeitgeist."⁴⁰

By the end of the 18th century, Newtonianism was coming under suspicion among some who associated it, somewhat unfairly as we've seen, with attempts to reduce everything to simplistic, mechanical terms. Wordsworth, like Friedrich Schelling in Germany, reacted against such popular conceptions. Smith and many of his fellow Enlightenment philosophers were viewed as proponents of a new scientific paradigm drawn from Newton and were condemned by Rousseau and Wordsworth.

³⁹ Montes 7.

⁴⁰ Montes 16.

Wordsworth was not anti-science: His poetry is infused with an implied scientific viewpoint. He saw scientists, like poets, as imaginative interpreters of nature. In the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth states that the poet “considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other”⁴¹ — an idea which links the poet’s project to that of the observing scientist. He was thinking about science while composing the verses that would be included in *Lyrical Ballads*, requesting a copy of Erasmus Darwin’s giant medical treatise *Zoonomia* during this time⁴² and also delving into the work of English physician David Hartley, founder of the Associationist school of psychology, which Coleridge turned him onto in 1795. Hartley, who studied the connection between physiological and psychological phenomena, is thought by some to have anticipated modern neuropsychology.⁴³ His investigations appealed to Wordsworth’s interest in consciousness.

Like many Romantic writers, Wordsworth tended to prefer organic metaphors to mechanical ones. He did not like to see nature construed as an instrument and suspected most scientists of the period of being obsessed with controlling nature instead of peacefully co-existing with it. He particularly worried that if we see nature as an instrument, we will come to see our fellow human beings as instruments. Like many of his contemporaries, Wordsworth worried that the Enlightenment had encouraged the abuse of the sciences. In his view, scientific knowledge should benefit not just people, or some people, but all of nature. He was opposed to the separation of human beings from nature and the fragmentation of human faculties.

⁴¹ Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, 100.

⁴² Gavin Budge, “Erasmus Darwin and the Poetics of William Wordsworth: ‘Excitement without the Application of Gross and Violent Stimulants’” *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 30:2 (2007) 279.

⁴³ See Dorothy Emmet, “Coleridge and Philosophy,” *Writers and Their Background*, ed. R.L. Brett (Athens: Ohio U Press, 1972) 199.

Wordsworth was suspicious of the emphasis, which became especially popular among scientists with a Utilitarian bent, on quantifiable data. How could you precisely measure experience? Perception? By the time he was writing *The Prelude*, he was rejecting the empiricist treatment of the mind as “murder[ing] to dissect” when it was clear to him that thoughts don’t have a particular beginning or end. To him, our inner world was not made up of discrete thoughts traceable external experience, but a dynamic realm rooted in interpersonal relations. Psychologists of the 20th century would come to appreciate his insights.

Above all, Wordsworth wanted people to draw understanding less from abstractions and statistics and more from experience and observation of nature. In the third edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1802, he offers the lines, “Come forth into the light of things / Let Nature be your Teacher” in the poem, “The Tables Turned.”⁴⁴ In Book V of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth illustrates this point in the description of a dream of meeting a mysterious Bedouin who shows him a tablet with Euclid’s proofs and also a shell. The shell brings brighter wisdom than the geometric proofs.

Wordsworth believed that science needed poetry. In the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, he places poetry above science for several reasons. The scientist studies only the appearance of things while the poet investigates the inner reality of human soul. Also, while the poet grasps the unity of nature and human beings, the scientist can’t get there. Finally, the poet appeals to both the intellect and the heart, but the scientist ignores the heart — a fatal omission.

A contemporary who embodied the idea of a poet-scientist Wordsworth longed for was Humphry Davy, the boy wonder chemist who went on to become the premier Romantic natural philosopher of the age. The two interacted often from 1798-1802:

⁴⁴ Wordsworth, “The Tables Turned,” *CPW*, 83

Wordsworth even asked Davy to correct the proofs of his *Lyrical Ballads* for its expanded 1800 edition.⁴⁵

Davy was not a half-bad poet: His verses were published and admired by Southey and Coleridge. Like Wordsworth, he had grown up amid wild natural beauty — Cornwall in his case — and he shared an interest in the lives of country people. Like Newton, he was curious about what was animating the world and thought of himself as a joyful explorer into nature.⁴⁶ (His joyful soaring heightened when he discovered the delights of inhaling nitrous oxide — also known as laughing gas — a fad that delighted Coleridge and many others). Davy, in contrast to many Enlightenment scientists, was an anti-reductionist who regarded the combination of things, rather than individual elements, as giving character to substances. Like Wordsworth, Davy viewed human beings and nature as complementary elements of a whole. Nature is not something alien we have to struggle against, but something wonderful of which we are inextricably a part. The views of science are not ultimate.⁴⁷

Wordsworth, like many in his circle, was suspicious of scientific expertise, a view he lays out in Book II of *The Prelude*, where he indicates that science, particularly the dissecting variety, is often nothing more than a pile of bunk — something that makes us feel powerful but seduces us with illusions:

Thou, my Friend! art one
More deeply read in thy own thoughts; to thee
Science appears but what in truth she is,
Not as our glory and our absolute boast,
But as a succedaneum, and a prop
To our infirmity. No officious slave
Art thou of that false secondary power
By which we multiply distinctions, then

⁴⁵ Maurice Hindle, "Humphry Davy and William Wordsworth: A Mutual Influence," *Romanticism*, 18:1 (2012) 1.

⁴⁶ Hindle 1.

⁴⁷ See David Knight, *Humphry Davy: science & power* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1998) 87.

Deem that our puny boundaries are things
That we perceive, and not that we have made.
To thee, unblinded by these formal arts,
The unity of all hath been revealed⁴⁸

These lines were addressed to Coleridge, who, influenced by Kant's philosophy, thought that the unifying power of pure reason was more edifying than the work of the specialized sciences, which, like Wordsworth, he faulted for dissecting and separating operations and relying on the "secondary powers" of the mind.

Some of Wordsworth's contemporaries were relieved to see a gauntlet thrown down to a sterile brand of science. The Scottish critic John Campbell Shairp found his poetry to be the "surest antidote to the exclusively analytic and microscopic view of Nature, so tyrannous over present thought, the end of which is universal disintegration."⁴⁹

At the end of the 18th century, people were trying to make sense of industrial developments and the new economy within a scientific framework, exploring the relationships between nature and people to the economy. Smith had been generally optimistic that human beings could live well within the context of economic growth fueled by industry. But not everybody was convinced.

Rev. Thomas Robert Malthus, a theologian and economist, was influenced by Smith but doubted how well economic growth was going to turn out for people in his "Essay on the Principle of Population," published in 1798 —the same year that Wordsworth published the *Lyrical Ballads* with Coleridge. His theory that an unchecked, growing population would outstrip food production had tremendous influence.

⁴⁸ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, CPW, II.209-221, 135.

⁴⁹ Robert M. Ryan, *Charles Darwin and the Church of Wordsworth*. (Oxford, Oxford U Press) 59.

For Malthus there was little point in trying to make humans economically equal, because the laws of nature, which are divinely ordered, will not allow it. He saw society as a great machine driven by self-love and viewed people and nature as inherently at odds. Humans are lazy and we only arise from the chaos of nature out of necessity. We need to use science and technology to liberate ourselves from nature's misery, though nature ultimately can't be totally mastered.

All this was anathema to Wordsworth. To start, he did not think that the economy was something ordained by God or reflecting natural laws. On the contrary, he saw the economy and the suffering it produces as made by human beings, usually powerful and rich ones. In his poem *The Excursion* (1814), he alludes to the new form of commerce and economic activity as producing terrible results and driven by an insatiable and destructive appetite.

I have lived to mark
A new and unforeseen creation rise
From out the labours of a peaceful Land
Wielding her potent enginery to frame
And to produce, with appetite as keen
As that of war, which rests not night or day
Industrious to destroy!⁵⁰

In the same poem, he laments that people are forgetting their own creativity as they become fixated on profits. Where Malthus saw nature as the outer restriction on humans, Wordsworth saw the new economy as the restriction. People were being forced to worship in an economic temple where they must perform "perpetual sacrifice" to "the master idol," whose name is "Gain."⁵¹ Disoriented and unmoored from nature, people become psychologically unhinged, obsessing about out-of-control production and unlimited profit. In the 1805 version of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes London's annual market as a scene in which "the whole creative powers of man asleep." It is a "hell" for the senses where everything is

⁵⁰ Wordsworth, "The Excursion," *CPW*, VIII.87-94, 508.

⁵¹ Wordsworth, "The Excursion," VIII.180-185, *CPW*, 509.

trivial and undistinguishable, a “blank confusion.”⁵² This, for Wordsworth, is the modern economy: inhumane.

Wordsworth, unlike Smith, considered the environmental impact of economic policies and was prescient in stressing that it wasn't just humans who were under assault, but all of nature: “Such outrage done to nature as compels/ The indignant power to justify herself;/ Yea, to avenge her violated rights.”⁵³ His reverence for nature was partly animated by his sense of something divine in it (and thus in human beings), but his mode of spirituality did not require dogma or religious commitment and could appeal to the non-religious and freethinkers.

One of these in the next generation was Charles Darwin, who combined Utilitarian and Romantic ways of thinking. He took a copy of Wordsworth's *The Excursion* with him on his voyage on *The Beagle* and pored over six volumes of the poetry of Wordsworth while writing his grand conception of nature, *The Origin of Species* (1859).⁵⁴ In this work, the visionary power and sensibility that Wordsworth claimed poets could bring to science came to fruition. Inspired by poetry, Darwin brought human beings back into the organic community of nature.

The Rich & The Rest

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers
—Wordsworth, “The World is Too Much With Us,” 1807⁵⁵

Adam Smith decided that free market economies, while certainly not perfect, are the most productive and beneficial to society of all economic systems. He argued, with some caveats, that markets driven by individual self-interest and the desire to maximize productivity — all of this led by the famous “invisible hand” — appeared to be best way to achieve the greatest good for all. Self-interest would encourage

⁵² Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, VII.651-54, *CPW*, 177.

⁵³ Wordsworth, “The Excursion”, VIII.151-156, *CPW*, 509.

⁵⁴ See *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson. (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 2015) 33.

⁵⁵ Wordsworth, “The World is Too Much With Us,” *CPW*, 349.

people to pay attention to moral codes, which happily reduced the cost of doing business and facilitated market transactions. The market would tend to lead us to cooperation rather than dominance and abuse.

Smith knew that the institutions and laws of a society tend to favor the rich, going so far as to state in *WN* that the purpose of civil government is really “the defence of the rich against the poor.”⁵⁶ In Smith’s system, some people would end up with great wealth, but this had benefits for the rest of society over the long haul, at least in material terms. Luxuries might even trickle down: “The houses, the furniture, the clothing of the rich, in a little time, become useful to the inferior and middling ranks of people,”⁵⁷ Smith writes, noting a Duke’s residence that had been converted into an inn. Even the marriage bed of James I was now “the ornament of an alehouse at Dunfermline.”⁵⁸

Beyond the thrill of sitting on a king’s bed while tippling, Smith thought that economic inequality had other advantages for ordinary people. They would look covetously at the rich person’s goodies and work harder. Plus, all that spending on luxury provided jobs. Often, these jobs would not be much fun: Because of the specialization of labor, a lot of people would have to work doing boring, repetitive things they didn’t really want to do, especially if they worked in manufacturing. This would tend to have a mind-numbing effect, but more leisure time provided by the new system (which we still await in the 21st century) could provide an antidote.

Anyway, factory jobs were better than being a country weaver on a small farm. Despite the fact that Smith had not observed country life too closely, he stated that rural work made people lazy — they spent too much time walking around appearing to be doing nothing: “The habit of sauntering and of indolent careless application,”

⁵⁶ Smith, *WN*, V.i.2.

⁵⁷ Smith, *WN*, II.iii.39.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

he asserts in *WN*, “renders [the country worker] almost always slothful and lazy, and incapable of any vigorous application even on the most pressing occasion.”⁵⁹

Though a lot of the work in a commercial economy would be uninspiring, we needed it to increase economic growth, which would boost wealth in general and give everybody more access to the “the necessaries and conveniences of life.”⁶⁰ Wages should rise for people with the overall increased wealth in the economy, though Smith acknowledges that company bosses could get together and agree to drive wages down.

Smith cared about the poor, and advocated the poor laws, a system which obligated individual parishes to provide subsistence to the needy. In *TMS*, he astutely observed that poverty was about more than not getting your physical needs met: it causes psychological pain and shame. It was also bad for the whole society. In *WN*, he wrote that, “no society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.”⁶¹ He also showed an interest in distributing the results of economic growth fairly, stating that feeding, clothing, and lodging the working class “tolerably well” contributed more to society’s good than devoting the same resources to boosting the luxury of the wealthy.⁶² Taxes, he felt, should be higher for the rich, and luxuries should be taxed because the burden falls upon the wealthy.

Romantic writers like Wordsworth, with the benefit of observing a few more decades of the Industrial Revolution, had serious doubts about how all this was turning out for most people. Does a free market economy foster the best in human beings? Can it really sustain the health and stability of human society? Will we lose more than we gain?

⁵⁹ Smith, *WN*, I.i.7.

⁶⁰ Smith, *WN*, Introduction:4.

⁶¹ Smith, *WN*, I.viii.36.

⁶² *ibid.*

Wordsworth personally witnessed how rural workers were expected to make large and painful adjustments to the new economic system. They had to deal with moving away from their homes, fluctuating prices, and organizing their whole lives around a system that was almost entirely beyond their control. The reward for all this suffering was the promise of more comforts than what they got through rural work — even though they might be too bored, anxious, tired, depressed to enjoy them.

Wordsworth's advocacy for the rights and dignity of the poor was powerfully opposed to prevalent economic thinking. Smith thought that economic growth would mitigate the problem of grinding poverty in the long run and that some degree of economic inequality was beneficial to society. Malthus, with his utilitarian calculations and theological bent, considered social and economic inequality part of a divine and natural order and was opposed to the poor laws as harmful because he thought they increased dangerous population growth.

Wordsworth emphasized the prevalence of poverty and his view that it is an unnatural product of injustice. In Book XII of *The Prelude*, he takes a shot at Smith, denouncing the false idol of “The wealth of Nations” that is crushing people. He blasts the treatment of laborers and challenges the claim of the poet William Cowper that England was a place where slavery could not flourish:

Slaves cannot breathe in England" --yet that boast
Is but a mockery! when from coast to coast,
Though 'fettered' slave be none, her floors and soil
Groan underneath a weight of slavish toil,
For the poor Many, measured out by rules
Fetched with cupidity from heartless schools
That to an Idol, falsely called "the Wealth
Of Nations," sacrifice a People's health,
Body and mind and soul;⁶³

In this passage, Wordsworth may have been reacting to less to any direct reading of Smith than to Malthus's discussion of Smith and *WN* in his Essay (in which he

⁶³ William Wordsworth, “Humanity,” *CPW*, 667.

acknowledges a debt to Smith for, among other things, his demographic speculations). Malthus' work had sparked heated political and economic debates,⁶⁴ and he had become something of a bogeyman to the Romantics, so Wordsworth's attitude toward Smith may have been darkened by his dislike of Malthus, whose ideas on population he referred to as "monstrous" in a letter."⁶⁵

In any case, Wordsworth felt that the poor needed to be defended against prevalent economic theories that he believed treated them as less than fully human. He goes on in *The Prelude* to lament "How books mislead us, seeking their reward / From judgments of the wealthy Few"⁶⁶ who don't see how they are hurting the majority of people.

Though Wordsworth expressed admiration for the new industries like mining and textiles, he was appalled by the mental and physical suffering of factory workers, which he highlights in *The Excursion*. Mark Keay observes that unlike Smith, Wordsworth saw what was going on in cotton mills and woolen manufactories as turning people into "mere overlookers of machines."⁶⁷

Wordsworth also condemned Malthus' view that a surplus population didn't have any moral or legal claim upon the rest of the community.⁶⁸ His poetry represented a significant turn toward sympathy for marginalized people, presenting their thoughts and feelings as legitimate material for poets. He stirs compassion for elderly beggars, homeless mothers, and destitute shepherds — people often dismissed as worthless. He draws portraits of people struggling with economic imperatives that don't make sense, who are cast aside because they can't adjust to alienated labor. In

⁶⁴ Philip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture.'* (Oxford: Oxford U Press; 2001) 13-16, 26-29.

⁶⁵ Cited in Robert J. Mayhew, *Malthus: The Life and Legacies of an Untimely Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014) 81-82.

⁶⁶ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XII.169-70, *CPW*, 150.

⁶⁷ From Mark Keay, *William Wordsworth's Golden Age: Theories During the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Palgrave 2001) 157.

⁶⁸ Keay 200.

Salisbury Plain (later included in the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798) he sympathizes with the homeless rural poor who sleep on “Penury’s iron breast,” unrelieved by “those who on the couch of Affluence rest.” The poem includes the story of the Female Vagrant, who is made homeless by industrialization, urbanization, and war. The betrayal of justice in society, especially by the rich against the poor, is presented as poison to human nature and the root of crime and perversion, an idea inspired by Godwin’s *Political Justice*.

Wordsworth used vivid stories of people to challenge economists who thought about humans in generalized and abstract terms. In *Lyrical Ballads* he opposes economists’ notions of labor. The poet was especially incensed by generalizations made by economists concerning the meaning people give to their economic activity.⁶⁹ Wordsworth was repelled by the idea of alienated labor, the kind of work you put up with only for something you hope to get outside of it. He wrote about work among rustic people as noble because it engages the heart and provides dignity. This, to him, was much better than being an idle consumer or slaving at a factory.

Wordsworth’s 1802 letter to Whig statesman Charles James Fox, written the same year as the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, condemns the arbitrariness of government policy that “subsumes individuals beneath the general category of ‘the lower orders.’” When people are reduced to an abstraction, Wordsworth observes, they are manipulated in harmful ways.⁷⁰ The poet included a copy of *Lyrical Ballads* with his letter to Fox, hoping that his verses could induce politicians to rethink their attitudes toward work.

⁶⁹ Shuting Sun, “Wordsworth against the Capitalist Ideology of Labor in “The Last of the Flock” and “Simon Lee,” *English Language and Literature Studies*, 7:2 (2017) 133-36.

⁷⁰ Stuart Allen and Jonathan Roberts, “Wordsworth and the Thought of Affection: ‘Michael,’ ‘The Force of Prayer,’ ‘Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle,’” *European Romantic Review*, 16:4 (2006) 460.

Wordsworth passionately supported the provisions of the Poor Law Amendment Act (which established workhouses designed in theory not just to house the poor but to provide education and opportunity, though in practice many were bleak). As he got older, he worried that the new social and economic relations of modern production might be even worse than the old system of ranks and gradations in rural England that he blasted in his younger days. He observed that the new economic order was based upon the concentration of wealth and capital into a few hands at the expense of the majority who would have to work for low wages from now on.⁷¹

Keay sees Wordsworth's critique of factory life as coming from his sense of the agrarian ideals of small independent production, where people lived in a "natural economy" and close-knit community. Wordsworth was definitely concerned with the overall change of values produced by the new economic system and the deprivations that a materialistic and artificial life would bring to people, expressed in his famous sonnet, "The World is Too Much With Us":

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

The poet believed that people have a tremendous capacity for creativity and morality that was going unrecognized in the new paradigm. Some modern critics have faulted him for not providing workable solutions to conflicts that arose along with economic developments, complaining that a turn to nature was not enough. But Wordsworth was not just offering vague spirituality cut off from the pressing concerns of people and the world. He was deeply interested the welfare and destiny of his country. Ministers quoted him. Educational and social reformers saw him as a guide. People spoke differently because of him. He was known as the poet whose

⁷¹ Keay 201.

work was crucial to the very cultural and spiritual health of society well into the 20th century.⁷²

Wordsworth's reorientation of poetry towards the feelings and concerns of peasants and farm laborers was radical: It broke with the aristocratic traditions of English literature and encouraged the appreciation of poets from the lower classes, like Robert Burns, as well as figures less known today, like Ann Yearsley, a milkwoman who became a poet and playwright and advocated the end of the slave trade. The critic John Ruskin, heavily influenced by Wordsworth, became one of the most trenchant critics of classical political economy and Victorian capitalism. Elizabeth Barrett Browning learned from Wordsworth that poetry had the power to influence social and political thinking. His influence can be seen in development of several strains of thought, including the Christian Socialist movement — a protest against an inhumane industrial system.

Past & Present

—*Yes, in those wanderings deeply did I feel*

How we mislead each other

—Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1799-1805, 1850⁷³

Adam Smith once quipped, “No one every made a bargain in verse.”⁷⁴ That may be true, but no one ever raised up humanity with an economic equation, either.

Economics today is in dire need of a reorientation, and that process may require the visionary perspective of the artist and the techniques and creative habits of literature more urgently than the limiting view of the social scientist. Economists

⁷² Robert M. Ryan, *Charles Darwin and the church of Wordsworth* (Oxford: Oxford U Press: 2016) 3, 5-6.

⁷³ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, IX.205-6, *CPW*, 145.

⁷⁴ Reprinted in Kurt Heinzelman, “The Last Georgic: Wealth of Nations and the scene of writing,” *Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Kathryn Sutherland (Manchester: Manchester U Press, 2013) 173.

have for too long excluded ways of thinking outside of their comfort zone of theories and models, ignoring problems that the models could not explain.

Those problems are now threatening to destroy us.

In our current system of global capitalism, economic inequality is rising, nearly unchecked. The majority of people are increasingly consigned to low-wages and debilitating uncertainty. We are becoming more alienated from ourselves, from society, and from nature. Far too many of us are sick, anxious, and suffering — witness the opioid crisis that is ravaging the United States, the richest country in the world, driven by social and economic distress and the predations of the barely-regulated pharmaceutical industry. The environmental damage produced by ill-conceived economic policies and poor regulation has been shown to be disastrous.

Economists are still stubbornly committed to outdated perspectives, often refusing to consider the complexity, interconnection, and real needs of human beings. They have been too slow to grasp that a field that is not informed by moral reflection is likely to become sterile and produce dangerous results. The knowledge they produced has tended to benefit the rich and powerful, yet they rarely acknowledge their own class interests or the ways in which they are beholden to dominant institutions and subject to their own urges to claim and hold onto power.

If we were to fully appreciate the full scope of Smith's work, we would be attuned to the harmful psychological impact of economic inequality and the exploitative tendencies of free market economies. We would see that Smith would likely agree with George Akerlof that unregulated capitalism has provided too many incentives for people to abuse one another. And that Smith, who did not hold science to be the ultimate and final truth, would likely concur with Roman Frydman that our knowledge is imperfect. We would apprehend that scientific investigations are always open-ended and evolving, and that theories have to be grounded in an understanding of their provisional nature.

If we were to gain inspiration from Wordsworth's insights, we would acknowledge that we have created an economy that restricts too many people rather than expanding their possibilities. We would see that human beings are creative by nature and need to have meaningful work that gives them a sense of dignity, security and agency. We would be appalled by burdens produced by the precarious gig economy and suspicious of notions of a basic income that would grant people subsistence but no meaningful purpose. We would take the lesson that if we are not constantly insecure, struggling, and alienated from our work and our lives, we might have a greater capacity for good that is now generally supposed. We would recognize that contemporary workers, often expected to be on call 24/7 through digital devices and shifts at odd hours, are losing any remaining connection to the rhythms of the natural world, leaving us stressed, disoriented, and prone to disease.

We would also accept Wordsworth's insight that we are part of nature, and that our health as individuals and societies depends on the understanding that we must co-exist with it rather than place ourselves in opposition. We would be reminded that if we are to really understand human beings, we need to see them, talk to them, hear their stories rather than relying solely on abstractions and piles of data.

From misreadings of Smith, we have inherited the image of a rather unhappy, disconnected human being bumping around in artificial societies and markets — the narrow, rational, and self-interested homo economicus in its most fanciful and prevalent form. The present field of economics has been fixated on a simplistic version of Smith's conception of human beings as well as an undervaluation and dismissal of the more expansive, Romantic visions— to the point that putting the terms "Romanticism" and "economics" together in a sentence would leave many practitioners scratching their heads.

Economics is an art as much as a science. It requires imagination and moral insight in order to illuminate problems and provide game-changing solutions. The Romantic

impulse is one of transformation, of refusing to accept the status quo, of movement towards something better. Economists, if they are to be responsive to the needs of people in today's world, would do well to pay more attention to the more nuanced aspects of Smith's actual writings, and especially to consider the perspective of Wordsworth's Romanticism and its rich offerings of alternative outlooks and horizons.

If they are to help guide the world towards a vision that is more humane and just, they could do worse than to set aside the computer models, tuck a volume of Wordsworth's poetry under their arm, find a nice spot beneath a tree, and open themselves to imagining — what the poet called the most exalted form of reasoning — and come forth into the light of things.