

# 4. Economics and Anti-Economics<sup>1</sup>

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## Synopsis

The paper traces the development of mainstream British economics during the century following the publication of *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776. The emphasis is not on the economists' formal statements of principles and doctrines, but on the policy prescriptions and social attitudes which they inferred from them.

It is suggested that the economists saw a clear connection between their economic principles and their attitudes to other controversial questions, including issues related to civil liberties, public education and the role of women; and that the economists' opponents – the anti-economists – also saw the connection.

The paper shows that the attitudes of the leading economists on these issues were well in advance of their time. This is true even of those who have subsequently been regarded as arch conservatives.

The economists' views on many social and national issues were, indeed, so radical as to lead to a continuing conflict in their minds as to how far they should express or publicise them – thereby prejudicing their capacity to influence the course of policy on economic issues which were themselves the subject of bitter controversy.

All of the economists whose views are discussed here were subjected to strong criticism, and most of them to venomous verbal attacks. Ironically, they are commonly represented in the late-twentieth-century conventional wisdom as having themselves held the false opinions against which they were arguing.

It is shown that television series such as Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* and John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Age of Uncertainty* have grossly misrepresented the economists' position and understated their contribution. Such popularisations have amounted, in effect, to Newspeak versions of the classical economic texts; and in fact accord with Orwell's definition of Newspeak versions in that they have 'not merely changed into something different, but actually changed into something contradictory to what they used to be'.

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented by Ian Castles, President, ANZAAS Economics Section on 18 May 1984 at the 54th ANZAAS Congress. Except where otherwise indicated, all figures and tables in this chapter are Castles' own.

The economists	The anti-economists
Adam Smith, 1723-90	Napoleon Bonaparte, 1769-1821
Dugald Stewart, 1753-1828	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1772-1834
Thomas Robert Malthus 1766-1834	Robert Southey, 1774-1843
David Ricardo, 1772-1823	Michael Thomas Sadler, 1780-1835
James Mill, 1773-1836	John Wilson, 1785-1854
John Ramsay McCulloch 1789-1864	Frederick Engels, 1820-1895
Nassau William Senior, 1790-1864	Thomas Carlyle, 1795-1881
John Stuart Mill, 1806-1873	John Ruskin, 1819-1900

*The ingratitude of mankind towards their benefactors has been notorious. It is not indeed universal ... But in general it will be found that those whose merits have been promptly and adequately recognised have been men who have participated in the opinions and the passions of those around them. They have been statesmen or soldiers or demagogues, whose objects have been the same as those of their contemporaries and who have differed from them only by perceiving more clearly or employing more unscrupulously the readiest means of attaining them. Men of a higher moral and intellectual character – men who are unaffected by the prejudice of their age and country – who refuse to aid in gratifying irrational desires or in maintaining irrational opinions, must not expect power or even popularity ... This is peculiarly the case where the services rendered have been those rather of a teacher than of a legislator, where they have consisted in exposing fallacies, softening prejudices, stigmatising selfishness, and preparing in one generation the way for measures which are to be adopted by another.*

– Nassau W Senior, in *Biographical Sketches* (London 1863)

## I

In George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Syme, the philologist, explains to Winston Smith that

By 2050 – earlier probably – all real knowledge of Oldspeak will have disappeared ... Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron – they'll exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something different, but actually changed into something contradictory to what they used to be.

The creation of Newspeak versions was not to be confined to works of the imagination:

Considerations of prestige made it desirable to preserve the memory of certain historical figures. Various writers, such as Shakespeare, Milton

(and) Swift...were therefore in process of translation...There were also large quantities of merely utilitarian literature...that had to be treated in the same way.

Orwell's book was written in 1948. It soon became apparent that the classics of utilitarian literature were already being changed 'into something contradictory to what they used to be'.

The early chapters of John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, which was published in 1958, provided summary translations of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Malthus' *Essay on Population* and Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. These were Newspeak versions: their purpose was to support the arguments in later chapters of Galbraith's book, not to reproduce the sense of the Oldspeak originals. Indeed, Professor Galbraith provided a remarkably frank justification for his approach:

Within a considerable range, (the individual) is permitted to believe what he pleases. He may hold whatever view of the world he finds most agreeable or acceptable to his taste...Audiences of all kinds applaud what they like best. And in social comment the test of audience approval, far more than the test of truth, comes to influence comment... Individuals, most notably the great television and radio commentators, make a profession of knowing and saying with elegance and unctious what their audience will find most acceptable.

The *Affluent Society* passed the test of audience approval with honours. Within five years one of Galbraith's professional colleagues had expressed 'shock' that it had been read by many more Americans than *The Wealth of Nations*. And in 1973 Professor Galbraith was chosen by the BBC to 'do a television series on some aspect of the history of economic or social ideas'. *Teledep* within Orwell's Ministry of Truth could not have chosen better. The series attracted millions of viewers all over the world. It was entitled *The Age of Uncertainty* because, Professor Galbraith explained,

It sounded well; it did not confine thought; and it suggested the basic theme: we would contrast the great certainties in economic thought in the last century with the great uncertainty with which problems are faced in our time.

The great certainties were proclaimed 'with elegance and unctious' and the audiences found it most acceptable.

## II

In the same year as *The Affluent Society* was published, CP Snow suggested an alternative formula for writing the history of modern times:

What is needed is that in the general history books the development of science should take its place along with political and economic developments. It is only just that this should be done even from the historian's point of view, for the world we live in is as much the produce of science as of politics and economics. The steam engine helped shape the modern world at least as much as Napoleon and Adam Smith, but only rarely do the historians admit the fact...this is one way in which history must be written if the worlds of science and the humanities are not to drift still farther apart.

The underlying assumption, developed at length in Snow's famous lecture in the following year, was that it was sensible to conceive of the modern world as having been shaped by two non-communicating cultures – science, which included the steam engine; and the humanities, which included Napoleon and Adam Smith.

It is difficult to think of two figures from the same era of whom it could more certainly be said that they represented *different* cultures than Napoleon and Adam Smith. As was pointed out within five years of Napoleon's death, by Oxford's first professor of political economy:

Napoleon...had an utter horror of political economy; the principles of which...he said, if an empire were built of granite, would grind it to powder. On such subjects he trusted to commonsense. And his commonsense was an undistinguishing acceptance of the whole theory of the mercantile system. It appears, from his conversations at St Helena, that he fully believed that the continent must be a loser by its commerce with England, and that it must be so on account of the excellence and cheapness of English commodities. These abominable qualities must, he thought, enable us...to undersell the continent in its own market, and ultimately produce its ruin...He thought that he could put an end to this trade by his continental system. Without doubt the principal object of that system was to ruin England; but he appears to have implicitly believed that it was also a blessing to the continent. The murmurs of his subjects and allies he treated like the complaints of spoiled children, who do not know what is for their own good and who, when experience has made them wiser, will embrace from choice what they have submitted to from necessity. There can be no doubt, I think, that these opinions and the obstinacy into which they led him, were the ultimate causes of his downfall.

Thus Adam Smith's culture was the antithesis of Napoleon's. It was in fact, the scientific culture. Nothing could have been more foreign to his habits of thought than the dichotomy perceived by Snow. Adam Smith wrote *A History of Astronomical Systems* and planned a 'connected history of liberal sciences and elegant arts'; he was an enthusiastic botanist; and the two greatest Scottish natural scientists of his day – the chemist Joseph Black and the geologist James Hutton – were his lifelong friends and his literary executors.

By suggesting that historians should write about the history of the steam engine as well as about Adam Smith, Snow revealed his ignorance of what they had written about both. Here is an historian writing over a century ago:

It was in Glasgow that Adam Smith saw a most startling proof of the obstacles thrown in the way of industrial originality by the old regulations of industry. Whilst he was Professor at the University, there came to Glasgow James Watt, the inventor of the condensing steam-engine, anxious to set up as a mathematical instrument-maker; but the Corporation of Hammermen refused him permission, on the ground that he was neither a burgess of the town nor had served an apprenticeship to the trade. Fortunately, however, for Watt, he had a friend among the Professors, by whose influence he was allowed to establish his workshop within the University buildings, where the power of the corporation could not penetrate...The world was on the eve of an industrial revolution; and...the two men who did most to bring it about...met... in Glasgow, when one was dreaming of the book, and the other of the invention, which were to introduce a new industrial age.

Adam Smith enjoyed visiting Watt's workshop and Watt, for his part, later recalled with gratitude that it was to the conversation at this time with Adam Smith, Joseph Black and others that 'my mind owed its first bias towards... subjects in which they were all my superiors, I never having attended a college, and being then but a mechanic'. And when Watt was 'amusing the leisure of his old age...with his new invention of the sculpture machine, and presenting his works to his friends as "the productions of a young artist just entering his eighty-third year"', one of the first works he executed with the machine was a small head of Adam Smith in ivory'.

From experiences such as the initial Watt episode and his subsequent friendship with Watt, Smith drew two of the most important conclusions of *The Wealth of Nations*. In the first place

The property which every man has in his own labour, as it is the original foundation of all other property, so it is the most sacred and inviolable. The patrimony of a poor man lies in the strength and dexterity of his

hands; and to hinder him from employing this strength and dexterity in what manner he thinks proper without injury to his neighbour, is a plain violation of this most sacred property.

And secondly

Though the interest of the labourer is strictly connected with that of the society, he is incapable either of comprehending that interest, or of understanding its connexion with his own. His condition leaves him no time to receive the necessary information and his education and habits are commonly such as to render him unfit to judge even though he was fully informed. In the public deliberations, therefore, his voice is little heard and less regarded, except upon some particular occasions, when his clamour is animated, set on, and supported by his employers, not for his, but for their own particular purposes.

A policy prescription of the greatest significance followed. The public should 'establish, in every parish and district, a little school' and should 'impose upon' almost the whole body of the people the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education'; and these essential parts were not just 'the three R's' but elementary science:

There is scarce a common trade which does not afford some opportunities of applying to it the principles of geometry and mechanics, and which would not, therefore, gradually exercise and improve the common people in those principles, the necessary introduction to the most sublime, as well as to the most useful, sciences.

This was probably the first serious proposal ever made for universal formal education of the young in elementary science; and it was supported not only on vocational grounds but because it would help students to fulfil themselves as human beings and citizens. 'Science', said Adam Smith, 'is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition'.

One immediate reaction from the scientific establishment to *The Wealth of Nations* is recorded by Boswell. Within days of publication, Sir John Pringle, President of the Royal Society, observed to him

that Dr Smith, who had never been in trade, could not be expected to write well on that subject any more than a lawyer upon physics.

Thirty years later Davies Giddy, who was to succeed his friend Sir Humphry Davy as President of the Royal Society, vigorously opposed legislation to have all children taught:

However specious in theory the project might be, of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would in effect be found to be

prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing countries; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors; and in a few years the result would be that the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power towards them, and to furnish the executive magistrate with much more vigorous laws than were now in force.

Fifty years after *The Wealth of Nations* appeared, Coleridge, who has been praised in the twentieth century for his unique understanding of the scientific as well as the literary culture, wrote:

The whole pretended sciences (of political economy) is but a humbug. I have attentively read...Adam Smith...Malthus and Ricardo and found (i.e. believe myself to have found) a multitude of sophisms but not a single just and important result which might not more convincingly be deduced from the simplest principles of morality and common sense.

Among the sophisms that Adam Smith, Malthus and Ricardo had all produced were strong statements in support of universal education. But Coleridge had other ideas:

The breaking-up of the cottage home education...(is) one of the most miserable mistakes which the well-intentioned people of the day have yet made; and they have made, and are making, a great many, God knows.

As for the school curriculum, here is Coleridge in 1833:

I more than doubt the expedience of making even elementary mathematics as part of the routine in the system of the great schools.

In 1955 Dr Jacob Bronowski addressed the Education Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting. His subject was *The Educated Man* in 1984 and his conclusion was

My program...(is) to make the language of science part of the education, the cultural education, of the young who will have either to make or to suffer 1984.

No mention was made of Adam Smith's earlier program to make the language of science part of the cultural education of the young. In fact, Bronowski had claimed that economics

has never become an empirical science, because it has never recovered from the fatal reasonableness of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*.

In 1960 Bronowski was the joint author of a book which referred to Adam Smith's proposal to have 'the government intervene and educate the labouring poor' and commented that this was 'strange doctrine for a supposed free enterpriser'.

The wheel had now turned full circle. In 1776 the President of the Royal Society thought that Smith, being a philosopher, could not know about trade; and in 1960 one of the greatest science popularisers thought that Smith, being a free trader, could not know about anything else.

Bronowski later achieved world-wide fame with *The Ascent of Man* – the BBC television series on the history of science. He did it well, but he never mentioned Adam Smith or *The Wealth of Nations*.

### III

The model for the BBC's Bronowski and Galbraith television serialisations had been Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation*. The subtitle of this series was *A Personal View*, and Lord Clark's personal view of the contribution of *The Wealth of Nations* to civilisation was an idiosyncratic one. This is the only reference:

In *The Wealth of Nations* Adam Smith invented the study of political economy, and created a social science that lasted up to the time of Karl Marx, and beyond.

Earlier historians of civilisation had taken a different view. Henry Buckle, the champion chess player who spoke 19 languages and acquired 22,000 books, declared in his *History of Civilisation in England* that *The Wealth of Nations* was

in its ultimate results probably the most important book that has ever been written; (it has) done more towards the happiness of man than has been effected by the united abilities of all the statesmen and legislators of whom history has preserved an authentic account.

The two great reformers of the criminal law in the early nineteenth century – Sir Samuel Romilly and Sir James Mackintosh – had both known Adam Smith personally. Their recorded opinions about the influence of Adam Smith and his book are also in striking contrast to Kenneth Clark's.

Romilly, who was to be the Solicitor-General in the 'Ministry of All the Talents' wrote a letter to France about a month after Smith's death in which he said:

I have been surprised and, I own, a little indignant to observe how little impression (Adam Smith's) death has made here. Scarce any notice has been taken of it, while for over a year together after the death of Dr Johnson nothing was to be heard of but panegyrics of him...

Mackintosh was a member of the House of Commons for twenty years, and a professor of law and politics for seven. As parliamentarian, academic, advocate, historian and philosopher, he was one of the most prominent figures in British life during the first turbulent half century of the Smithian revolution. This was his assessment:

The great name of Adam Smith rests upon...*The Wealth of Nations*; perhaps the only book which produced an immediate, general and irrevocable change in some of the most important parts of the legislation of all civilised nations...In a few years it began to alter laws and treaties; and has made its way through the convulsions of revolution and conquest to a due ascendant over the minds of men...

Another prominent figure in politics, literature and the law during the first half of the nineteenth century was Lord Brougham, a key figure in securing the passage of the great Reform Bill of 1832. Here is Brougham's comment on the literary merit of *The Wealth of Nations*:

There is not a book of better English to be anywhere found. The language is simple, clear...homely...idiomatic...Besides its other perfections, it is one of the most entertaining of books. There is no laying it down after you begin to read. You are drawn on...by the strong current of the arguments...the fulness and force of the illustrations, the thickly strewn and happily selected facts.

In *Civilisation*, Clark makes frequent reference to Smith's compatriot and contemporary Robert Burns. In one such reference he notes that

The only people who saw through industrialism (in the late eighteenth century) were the poets...Burns, passing the Carron Iron Works in 1787, scratched these lines on a window pane:

*We cam na here to view your works,*

*In hopes to be mair wise,*

*But only, lest we gang to hell,*

*It may be nae surprise.*

Such graffiti are slender evidence that Burns 'saw through industrialism' (whatever that means). But we know that, soon afterwards, Burns read the great book by industrialism's 'patron saint'. Perhaps he enjoyed Adam Smith's non-sexist version of 'A man's a man for a' that':

By nature a philosopher is not in genius and disposition half so different from a street porter, as a mastiff is from a greyhound...

Or perhaps the author of *Ye banks and braes* enjoyed the economist's praise of country living:

The beauty of the country besides, the pleasures of a country life, the tranquility of mind which it promises and, whenever the injustice of human laws does not disturb it, the independency which it really affords, have charms which more or less attract everybody.

Or perhaps it was the impact of the whole which led him to write to a friend:

That extraordinary man, Smith, in his *Wealth of Nations*, finds me leisure employment enough. I could not have given any man credit for half the intelligence Mr Smith uncovers in his book. I would covet much to have his ideas respecting the present state of some quarters of the world that are or have been the scenes of considerable revolutions since his book was written.

*The pith o'sense, and pride o'worth,  
Are higher rank than a'that'.*

## IV

We now turn to Galbraith's views. In *The Wealth of Nations*, he says,

Private vice became public virtue, which has been considered ever since a most convenient thing.

Here Professor Galbraith appears to have confused *The Wealth of Nations* with Mandeville's satire *Fable of the Bees or Private Vices made Public Benefits* which was written 70 years earlier. A major theme of *The Wealth of Nations* is that private vice becomes a public vice – for example, the greed of private manufacturers leads to 'the most infamous abuse and detraction,...personal insults (and) sometimes...real danger' to Members of Parliament; and only statesmen who are excessively under the influence of private shopkeepers could employ 'the blood and treasure of their fellow citizens to found and maintain... an empire'.

Another Galbraith line is that Adam Smith, in his 'greatest phrase', said that the individual is 'guided as though by an unseen hand' to serve the public interest in serving his own. The Oldspeak text is considerably less sweeping,

By directing (his) industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, (the individual) intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in *many* other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. *Nor is it always* the worse for society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he *frequently* promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it (emphasis added).

Then there is Adam Smith's 'great thought', which as presented by Professor Galbraith is an eighteenth century version of 'What's good for General Motors is good for the USA':

The wealth of a nation results from the diligent pursuit of each of its citizens of his own interests...In serving his own interests, the individual serves the public interest.

This is Newspeak again. *The Wealth of Nations* says almost the opposite – that the interest of merchants and manufacturers 'is always in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the public'; and so their proposals required 'the most suspicious attention' because they

had generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public, and (they) accordingly have, upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed the public.

Finally, Galbraith categorises Adam Smith as a 'conservative' (though he is 'far too wise and amusing to be left to the conservatives'). But, Smith himself regarded his book as radical – as a 'very violent attack...upon the whole commercial system of Great Britain'. It was, in fact, an attack on more than the commercial system: it was one of the most comprehensive assaults on 'sacred cows' in the history of literature. Among the targets were:

- *the universities* – 'sanctuaries in which exploded systems and obsolete prejudices found shelter and protection, after they had been hunted out of every other corner of the world';
- *the professors at Oxford* – most of them had 'given up altogether even the pretence of teaching';
- *the established Church* – 'philosophical good temper and moderation' are promoted when the law 'favours no one sect more than another';
- *parochial schools* – they taught a useless smattering of Latin while failing to teach science;

- *the electoral system* – the representation of the people in the House of Commons was very unequal;
- *the East India Company* – it ‘oppresses and domineers’;
- *slavery* – it was harsher in the West Indies than in medieval Europe, and was only maintained because ‘the pride of man makes him love to domineer, and nothing mortifies him so much as to have to condescend to persuade his inferiors’;
- *laws against forestalling* – they appealed to the same fears as laws against witchcraft;
- *customs policy* – ‘the sneaking arts of underling tradesmen are...erected into political maxims for the conduct of a great empire’; and
- *taxation policy* – ‘there is no art which one government sooner learns from another than that of draining money from the pockets of the people’.

The radical influence of *The Wealth of Nations* is apparent in the hatred and fear of those who deplored that influence. Galbraith says that ‘the acclaim (for the book) was immediate’ and notes that it was praised by Hume and Gibbon – but at that time Hume, Gibbon and Smith were all being reviled by respectable opinion for their ‘infidelity’. Fourteen years after *The Wealth of Nations* was published, *The Times* concluded its obituary notice for Adam Smith with:

he deserves the chief praise, or the chief blame, of propagating a system which tends to confound National Wealth with National Prosperity.

The meaning of the phrase is not clear, but it was not intended as a compliment. Robert Southey, the reactionary and bigoted Poet Laureate, described *The Wealth of Nations* as ‘a tedious and hard-hearted book, greatly over-valued even on the score of ability’ – but it is significant that, writing in 1816, Southey saw all of the ills of modern times as beginning 40 years earlier (that is, in 1776, not in 1766 or 1786).

The peak of hostility to the revolutionary doctrines of *The Wealth of Nations* was reached in the immediate aftermath of the French revolution. On February 1 1793, the day that Britain went to war with France, the Marquis of Lansdowne, former Prime Minister and former friend of the new-dead Adam Smith, had told the House of Lords that the so-called ‘French principles’

had been exported from us to France and cannot be said to have originated among the people of the latter country. The new principles of government founded on the abolition of the old feudal system... have...been inculcated by Dr Adam Smith in his work on *The Wealth of Nations*, which has been recommended as a book necessary for the information of youth by Mr Dugald Stewart...

Mr Dugald Stewart would have known that only eighteen months earlier the church, house and laboratory of Joseph Priestly, the discoverer of oxygen, had been wrecked and burned by the 'Church and King' mob in Birmingham; and that Priestly had also, in happier days, been a friend of Lord Lansdowne's.

And so, not far from where Galbraith joked in 1973 that 'Adam Smith is far too wise and amusing to be left to the conservatives', Professor Stewart decided to abandon his intention of giving a long account of Adam Smith's opinions, in an address he was about to give to the Royal Society of Edinburgh; because at that period, as he was to explain nearly 20 years later,

the doctrine of a Free Trade was itself represented as a revolutionary tendency, and some who had formerly prided themselves on their intimacy with Mr Smith, and on their zeal for the propagation of his liberal system, began to call in question the expediency of subjecting to the disputation of philosophers the arcana of State policy and the unfathomable wisdom of the feudal ages.

In 1801-02, when Stewart first began to give a course of lectures on political economy at the University of Edinburgh, the mere term 'political economy' made people start. 'They thought it included questions touching the constitution of governments', said Lord Cockburn, 'and not a few hoped to catch Stewart in dangerous propositions'. By this time, however, political economy had produced a book whose basic proposition was seen by many as far more dangerous than any in *The Wealth of Nations*.

## V

No book in history has evoked such contrary reactions, from the highest praise to the most violent condemnation, as Malthus' *Essay on Population*. As an example of the hostile assessments, Coleridge lamented the acceptance of 'the monstrous practical sophism of Malthus' and went on:

I solemnly declare that I do not believe that all the heresies and sects and factions which the ignorance and the weakness and the wickedness of man have ever given birth to, were altogether so disgraceful to man as a Christian, a philosopher, a statesman, or citizen, as this abominable tenet.

That was said in 1832, still in Malthus' lifetime. Here is Keynes' assessment, exactly 100 years later:

Malthus's *Essay* is a work of youthful genius. The author was fully conscious of the ideas he was expressing. He believed that he had found the clue to human misery. The importance of the *Essay* consisted not

in the novelty of his facts but in the smashing emphasis he placed on a simple generalisation arising out of them...The book can claim a place amongst those which have had great influence on the progress of thought. It is profoundly...in that tradition of Scotch and English thought...the tradition which is suggested by the names of Locke, Hume, Adam Smith, Paley, Bentham, Darwin and Mill, a tradition marked by a love of truth and most noble lucidity, by a prosaic sanity free from sentiment or metaphysic, and by an immense disinterestedness and public spirit...It is in this company that Malthus belongs.

Many in that company were reviled by their contemporaries. Boswell 'talked with indignation and contempt of the poisonous productions with which (his) age (was) infested' and asked Johnson to 'knock Hume's and (Adam) Smith's heads together'. Paley was regarded by George III as a 'dangerous revolutionary'. Bentham, Darwin and Mill were all to suffer vicious verbal assaults. But only Malthus was ferociously assailed for decades by the most pious, respectable and worthy people of his time.

'Mr Malthus is cast in his action against God Almighty', wrote the pious Robert Southey. 'The insults the theory of Malthus levels at God,' wrote the pious Michael Sadler, 'and the injuries it meditates inflicting upon man, will be endured by neither'. 'Instead of distrusting his own conclusions,' complained RB Seeley, Sadler's pious biographer, Malthus 'boldly puts forward a system...wholly opposed to the whole tenor of Scripture'. And to the pious Hudson Gurney, heir to an enormous banking fortune, a bill before the House of Commons was 'an attempt to bring the detestable system of Mr Malthus to bear upon the legislation of the country – a system which every chapter of sacred history condemns, every page of civil history confutes and every map of a half-unpeopled world, after a duration of nearly 6000 years, proves the absurdity of'.

In the late-twentieth-century Newspeak versions of history, these attacks have been expunged from the record. Malthus is portrayed as a great ally of the pious and the respectable. Here is Lord Clark in *Civilisation*:

When I call (the works of Malthus and Ricardo) sacred books I am not joking. (They) were taken up as gospel by the most serious and even pious men, who used them to justify actions they would never have thought of defending on human grounds...the very words 'pious', 'respectable', 'worthy', have become joke words, used only ironically.

Presumably Clark is still not joking when he goes on to say that 'one hates the inhuman way in which the doctrines of Malthus were accepted'. This is Newspeak again: what one hates, if one studies the Oldspeak documents, is the inhuman way in which the doctrines of Malthus were for so long *rejected*.

At first Malthus' assailants expected that he would be a 'pushover'. In 1803 Southey reminded John Rickman of the Census Office:

Do not forget Malthus's rascally metaphysics. Break him on the wheel.  
I will see the sentence registered. You ought to set our foot on such a  
mischievous reptile and crush him.

Seven years later Southey wrote to Sir Walter Scott that he was 'making ready to come upon that precious philosophist, or philosophicide, with a thunder clap'; and to Walter Savage Landor that 'I meditate a mortal blow at Malthus, who is the special object of my contempt and abhorrence'.

Malthus made no reply to the vicious personal attacks, corresponded prolifically with those who addressed issues in a scientific spirit and prepared successive new editions of the *Essay*. In these he readily modified his position in the light of sound argument and evidence but not otherwise. By 1815, Coleridge was scandalised

to hear Malthus quoted in a British Senate! Stupid, hard-hearted blunders ingrafted on pedantically disguised, and yet falsely worded, truisms...Were the Prince to knight him, he would smell no worse to my nostrils.

This letter of Coleridge's also referred offensively to Malthus in German and Greek. It was a particular cause of outrage among Malthus' critics that he had written the *Essay* in English, thus risking the possibility that its contents might be read by those who should be protected from such blasphemy: the working classes and perhaps even women. Southey protested in 1816 that the book was

written in the vulgar tongue, and sent into the world for the edification of all dabblers in metaphysics, male and female! One might have thought that such an argument could never have been advanced 'by one of women born'; that it would never have been heard without indignation by one who had a wife, a sister or a daughter.

In another essay the Poet Laureate was more specific:

A book necessarily leading to such topics of discussion as Mr. Malthus's ought not to have been written in English. The main point upon which his argument turns, and the necessity of *vice* for the preservation of *good order*, were not subjects to be sent into circulating libraries and book-societies, and to be canvassed at tea-tables.

Such prudish attitudes imposed costs in human suffering which are beyond calculation. As John Stuart Mill was to point out in his *Principles of Economics*, published 50 years after Malthus' *Essay*:

Religion, morality and statesmanship have vied with one another in incitements to marriage, and to the multiplication of the species...the rich, provided the consequences do not touch themselves, think it impugns the wisdom of Providence to suppose that misery can result from the operation of a natural propensity; the poor think that 'God never sends mouths but he sends meat'. No one would guess from the language of either, that man had any voice or choice in the matter. So complete is the confusion of ideas on the whole subject, owing in a great degree to the mystery in which it is shrouded by a spurious delicacy, which prefers that right and wrong should be mismeasured and confounded on one of the subjects most momentous to human welfare, rather than that the subject should be freely spoken of and discussed. People are little aware of the cost to mankind of this scrupulousity of speech. The disease of society can, no more than corporal maladies, be prevented or cured without being spoken about in plain language...One would imagine that children were rained down upon married people, direct from heaven, without their being art or part in the matter; that it was really, as the common phrases have it, God's will, and not their own, which decided the numbers of their offspring.

Mill went on to suspect that an important reason for the slow acceptance of Malthus' principle of population was that it was true:

One may be permitted to doubt whether, except among the poor themselves (for whose prejudices on this subject there is no difficulty in accounting) there has ever yet been, in any class of society, a sincere and earnest desire that wages should be high...Nearly all who are not laborers themselves, are employers of labor, and are not sorry to get the commodity cheap.

And he also pointed out that, if given the chance it would be the wives, sisters and daughters who would welcome the Malthusian doctrine most warmly:

It is never by the choice of the wife that families are too numerous; on her devolves (along with all the physical suffering and at least a full share of the privations) the whole of the intolerable domestic drudgery resulting from the excess. To be relieved from it would be hailed as a blessing by multitudes of women who now never venture to urge such a claim, but who would urge it, if supported by the moral feelings of the community. Among the barbarisms which law and morals have not yet

ceased to sanction, the most disgusting surely is, that any human being should be permitted to consider himself as having a *right* to the person of another.

Mill regarded Malthus' *Essay* as the 'fountain-head' from which 'the permanent place now occupied in the minds of thinking men by the question of improving the condition of the labouring classes may be dated', because it

furnished a sufficient explanation of the state of extreme poverty in which the majority of mankind had almost everywhere been found, without supposing any inherent necessity in the case...And the explanation afforded a sure hope...Whatever raises the civilization of the people at large – whatever accustoms them to require a higher standard of subsistence, comfort, taste, and enjoyment, affords itself... the means of satisfying the wants which it engenders...these are the prospects which the vilified population principle has opened to mankind. True, indeed the doctrine teaches this further lesson, that any attempt to produce the same result by other means...might, for any *general* effect of a beneficial kind which it can produce, as well be let alone. And, the doctrine being brought thus into conflict with those plans of easy beneficence which accord so well with the inclinations of man, but so ill with the arrangements of nature, we need not wonder that the epithets of 'Malthusians' and 'Political Economists' are so often considered equivalent to hard-hearted, unfeeling, and enemies of the poor – accusations so far from being true, that no thinkers, of any pretensions to sobriety, cherish such hopeful views of the future social position of labour, or have so long made the permanent increase of its remuneration the turning-point of their political speculations, as those who most broadly acknowledge the doctrine of Malthus.

The late twentieth century conventional wisdom finds such opinions disagreeable and has suppressed them. In *The Affluent Society* Galbraith described John Stuart Mill as 'conscientious and immeasurably learned' but titled the chapter 'Economics and the Tradition of Despair' – which presumably means that Mill was also, in Galbraith's view, immeasurably wrong; and in *The Age of Uncertainty*, Mill was described 'prodigious and luminous' in the same episode as viewers were told that 'It was with Malthus and Ricardo that economics became the dismal science'.

In *Civilisation* Kenneth Clark did not mention Mill at all; but his comments on Malthus and the population principle were classical specimens of Newspeak, reminiscent of the slogans in bold letters on the wall of the Ministry of Truth. The crusade of the pious and respectable against Malthusianism disappeared and their enthusiastic acceptance of Malthus' gospel was substituted: WAR IS PEACE. The costs to welfare which Mill attributed to confusion of ideas and

spurious delicacy were attributed by Clark to politicians being 'held in the intellectual prison of classical economics': FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. And children apparently *did* rain down direct from heaven – 'the squalid disorder of industrial society', said Clark, had arisen 'because of unpredictables, and in this case the unpredictable was the growth of population': IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.

## VI

In the Newspeak histories, Ricardo's image is even more tarnished than that of Malthus. In *Civilisation* he was portrayed as a prophet of the 'new religion of gain...a most earnest man...but inexorable'. Galbraith filled out the portrait in *The Age of Uncertainty*:

Nor was Ricardo ever thought an optimist. In the Ricardian world workers would receive the minimum necessary for life, never more. This was the iron law of wages. It led...to the conclusion that not only was compassion wasted on the working man but it was damaging...The more numerous the people, the richer were the landlords. They fattened, the people starved. And...nothing could be done about it...David Ricardo was not, by his own lights a cruel man. In a naturally cruel world he merely urged against contending in a futile way with the inevitable...He did provide the rich with a very satisfactory formula for suffering the misfortunes of the poor.

CP Snow presented Ricardo as an example – indeed the example – of moral blindness in an 'intelligent man'. Two years after his 'put science into history' proposal, he told the American Association for the Advancement of Science:

the scientists who want to contract out say, *we* produce the tools. *We* stop there. It is for the rest of *you* – the rest of the world, the politicians – to say how the tools are used. (This) is one of the easier methods of letting the conscience rust. It is exactly what the early nineteenth-century economists, such as Ricardo, did in the face of the facts of the first industrial revolution. We wonder now how men, intelligent men, can have been so morally blind.

Thus has Ricardo been portrayed in the Newspeak texts: priggish, inflexible, solemn, pessimistic, gutless, hard-hearted, unfeeling, aloof, humourless, impotent and unprincipled. But the Oldspeak records paint him differently.

Two years before Ricardo died suddenly at the age of 51, at a time when he was at the height of his fame as an economist and as an active member of the House of Commons, Maria Edgeworth spent several days at his home. She was an intelligent and acute observer – the foremost woman novelist of the day and

the co-author of the first modern book on the education of children; and her observations of Ricardo survive in letters sent to friends during her visit. Here are some extracts:

Mr Ricardo is altogether one of the most agreeable persons as well as the best informed and most clever I ever knew.

I did not know how much I wanted better conversation and more warmth of character till I came here...I never argued or discussed a question with any person who argues more fairly or less for victory and more for *truth* (than Ricardo). He gives full thought to every argument brought against him and seems not to be on any side of any question for one instant longer than the conviction of his mind is on that side. It seems quite indifferent to him whether *you* find the truth or *he* finds it provided it be found.

You have no idea how easily grave Mr Ricardo is amused. He delights so in Mr Smith's acting that he cannot help laughing and forgetting his own part when he is acting with him.

Maria Edgeworth visited 'Mr Smith's' household several days later. From there she wrote of being disturbed before breakfast:

'Mr Ricardo is come! Has ridden 9 miles to breakfast with us!' Joy – down went pen and Maria – delightful conversation at breakfast – all laughing and openhearted – mixed with placid deep philosophy now and then from Ricardo...

Ricardo returned to his London house after Parliament resumed, and Maria Edgeworth's letters during the session provide a revealing commentary on Snow's charge that Ricardo 'contracted out':

All who have any sense themselves or any taste for sense in others are ambitious of knowing Mr Ricardo, and his kind permission to me to bring who I please to breakfast with him has put it in my power to oblige several...especially our young American friend Mr Ralston and young John le Favre...It has now become high fashion with blue ladies to talk political economy. There is a certain Lady Mary Shepherd who makes a great jabbering on this subject while others who have more sense like Mrs Marcet hold their tongues and listen.

Miss Edgeworth also reported that the President of the Royal Society was not so free with his invitations as was Ricardo:

With Sir Humphry Davy's grand Academical Conversazione...we can have nothing to do as no ladies are admitted.

One of Maria Edgeworth's letters from this period reported Ricardo's account of his childhood:

Mr Ricardo began to tell me a part of his history when we were out walking the other day through a charming wood. 'We were 15 children. My father gave me but little education. He thought reading writing and arithmetic sufficient because he doomed me to be nothing but a man of business. He sent me at eleven to Amsterdam to learn Dutch, French, Spanish but I was so unhappy at being separated from my brothers and sisters and family that I learned nothing in two years but Dutch which I could not help learning.'

Some years after entering his father's stockbroking firms, Ricardo outraged his family by becoming a Unitarian and marrying a Quaker. Expelled and disinherited, he rapidly established in business on his own account and prospered. He took up geology as a pastime, setting up his own laboratory and mineral collection. A chance reading of *The Wealth of Nations* led him to economics and thence to James Mill. Maria Edgeworth wrote of this too:

He (Ricardo) told me another time that Mr Mill...was the person who encouraged him to educate himself and pursue his studies after he made a fortune. He dotes upon Mr Mill – says he could never find a blemish in him...

At 42, Ricardo retired from business in order to devote himself exclusively to public service in the broader sense. His *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* appeared in 1817 and he entered Parliament soon afterwards.

Some brief extracts from his speeches and writings must now be quoted in order to demonstrate the absurdity of the accounts of his views and attitudes which are given by Galbraith, Clark and Snow.

According to Professor Galbraith, Ricardo was never thought an optimist. Some must have thought he was, when he told the House of Commons that:

If corn were exported and imported, as in other countries, without restraint, this country, possessing the greatest skill, the greatest industry, the best machinery and every other advantage in the highest degree, its prosperity and happiness would be incomparably, and almost inconceivably, great.

Ricardo thought compassion was wasted on the working man, Galbraith told his viewers. Not when he was writing to Malthus, commenting on the draft of a book by the radical leader Francis Place:

He (Place) has stated the case of the poor with great force, and I think in many respects with great justice. He tells you what their complaints

are against the rich, the chief of which is a want of sympathy with their distress, and oppressive laws – such as combination laws, corn laws, restraints on commerce and many others.

According to Galbraith, Ricardo thought it was futile to contend against a naturally cruel world. In fact Ricardo was convinced it was *not* futile – that is why he went into Parliament; and the Hansard records of his speeches – abbreviated and rough as they are – show that he constantly implored his colleagues *not* to take this defeatist line:

If the argument of the honourable member were to be considered as valid, there was an end to all hopes of future improvement. The present generation had invented steam-engines and gas lights and...other useful and beneficial discoveries, and he trusted that they would never be stopped in their progress by being told of the wisdom of their ancestors...

Galbraith's sarcastic remark that Ricardo provided the rich with a very satisfactory formula for suffering the burdens of the poor is yet another reversal of the reality preserved in the Oldspeak records. It was Ricardo who robbed the rich landlords of their mercantilist rationalisations, by throwing the weight of his authority against the corn laws and high food prices:

Let him implore (his colleagues) to recollect that they were legislating for the happiness of millions, and that there was no evil so intolerable as the high price of human food. He was astonished to hear the honourable member...declare that it was a matter of indifference to him whether (these) prices were high or not.

Ricardo was wealthy ('In this house all the luxuries that riches can give without the ostentation', wrote Maria Edgeworth) but so were many of his parliamentary colleagues; and at the time of life when most of them had been living in Oxford or Cambridge colleges, the young Ricardo had been observing the misery of London's poor from 'Jews' walk'. He did not need to wait for the statistical demonstrations to know that the death rate was positively correlated with the price of food.

During his parliamentary career, Ricardo was the object of some offensive personal comment, usually of an anti-semitic character. William Cobbett wrote:

I see that they have adopted a scheme of one Ricardo (I wonder what countryman he is)...Faith! they are now become *every thing*. Baring assisted at the Congress of Sovereigns and Ricardo regulates things at home. The Muckworm is no longer a creeping thing; it rears its head aloft...This Ricardo says, that the country is happy in the discovery of a paper money; that it is an *improvement* in political science.

But Ricardo's alleged moral blindness, which to CP Snow was so obvious as not to require explanation or elaboration before an audience of American scientists, was not observed by his contemporaries. A memoir published soon after his death referred to the 'disinterestedness which made him always regardless of his own personal benefit, in the maintenance of general principles':

When a Bank proprietor, he argued strenuously and warmly against the inordinate gains of that body; he defended the cause of the fund-holders when he had ceased to be one; he was accused of an attempt to ruin the landed interest after he became a large landed proprietor; and while a member of parliament, he advocated the cause of reform, which, if adopted, would have deprived him of his seat. Superior to the misleading power of self-interest, his aim was the dissipation of erroneous, and the promulgation of true and correct principles, the adoption of which should tend to the amelioration of mankind, and the production of the greatest possible good.

The posthumous tributes from both sides of politics were not of the kind usually paid to the possessor of a rusty conscience. Henry Lord Brougham, the Whig statesman who was a member of The Commons throughout the Ricardo period, wrote 16 years later:

His speaking, his conduct, his manner, were all unexceptionable, and all suited to the man, his high station among philosophers, his known opinions on political affairs, his kindly nature, and his genuine modesty. There was something about him, chiefly a want of all affectation as well as pretension in everything he said or did, that won the respect of every party. His matter was ever of high value. Whether you agreed or differed with him, you were well pleased to have it brought out and made to bear upon the question, if indeed the pursuit of right and truth was your object...He was uniformly and universally respected for the sterling qualities of his capacity and his character, which were acknowledged by all...Few men have...had more weight in Parliament; certainly none who, finding but a very small body of his fellow-members to agree with his leading opinions...ever commanded a more patient and even favourable hearing; this...might be regarded as the triumph of reason, intelligence and integrity over untoward circumstances and alien natures.

Thomas de Quincy, author of *The Confessions of an Opium Eater*, was a Tory. In an article published six months after Ricardo's death in which he regretted never having met Ricardo, de Quincy wrote:

I do not remember that any public event of our own times has touched me so nearly, or so much with the feelings of a private affliction, as the death of Mr Ricardo. To me in some sense it *was* a private affliction –

and no doubt to all others who knew and honoured his extraordinary talents...His privilege of intellect has a comprehensive sanction from all the purposes to which he applied it in the course of his public life: in or out of Parliament...he was known and honoured as a public benefactor. Though connected myself with persons of the political party hostile to his, I heard amongst them all but one language of respect for his public conduct.

Ricardo's speeches were not confined to explaining to 'the rest of the world, the politicians' how the principles of political economy should be applied in the real world. He also spoke out, with courage and eloquence on behalf of civil liberties and freedom of expression. On 19 March, 1823, at the General Court of the East India Company, he attacked 'the infamous custom, the shocking system' of slavery

for surely it was impossible that any man could, for a moment, reflect on the treatment and punishment of slaves without shuddering...On this day, he believed, a petition would be presented to parliament by a most benevolent individual (Mr Wilberforce) in favour of that unfortunate race of men who were subject to the horrors of slavery. He hoped the application would produce its just effect...

It did not do so, because there were many who apparently contemplated the treatment of slaves with greater equanimity than Ricardo. Among them was Coleridge, who asked ten years later:

Have you been able to discover any principle in this Emancipation Bill for the slaves, except a principle of fear of the abolition party struggling with a dread of causing some monstrous calamity to the empire at large?

Ricardo, who could not think of slaves without a shudder, was described by Kenneth Clark as 'inexorable'; whilst Coleridge, who could not see any point in freeing them, was praised because he 'looked at nature in the high mystical manner'. And Wilberforce, whom Clark ranked first in 'the greatest civilising achievement of the nineteenth century: humanitarianism' had a poor record on civil rights issues by comparison with Ricardo.

It had been Wilberforce who had persuaded the Parliament to impose, 25 years earlier, the laws against trade unions that Ricardo and his colleagues were fighting to remove: it had been Wilberforce who had, throughout this period, been a leading figure in the Society for the Suppression of Vice, which directed itself mainly towards ensuring that the harsh laws against blasphemy and sedition were rigidly enforced; it had been Wilberforce who had been on the secret committee which had recommended severe repressive legislation in 1818; and it was Wilberforce who, only one week after the speech in which Ricardo

had described him as a 'most benevolent individual' attacked Ricardo strongly because he 'seemed to carry into more weighty matters those principles of free trade which he had so successfully expounded'. Ricardo had dared to advocate that 'fair and free discussions...be allowed on all religious topics', and had stated his view that 'prosecutions ought never to be instituted for religious opinions... however absurd and extravagant'. Richard Carlile, the free thinker, was in prison for expressing his religious opinions and Wilberforce was certainly not in favour of emancipating *him*. He wrote bitterly in his diary:

I had hoped that Ricardo had become a Christian: I see now that he has only ceased to be a Jew.

So in his lifetime Ricardo was blamed by the most famous humanitarian of the age for giving his views on 'weighty matters' to the parliament; and 140 years after his death the future parliamentary under-secretary for science chose him as *the* example of the scientist who had 'contracted out'.

As Brougham said, the career of the historical Ricardo epitomised 'the triumph of reason, intelligence and integrity'. Nothing demonstrates more surely the subsequent triumph of prejudice, ignorance and superstition than the fact that the same career could be pointed to in 1960 as epitomising moral irresponsibility in science.

Throughout his busy parliamentary years David Ricardo maintained close friendships and an unceasing correspondence with his professional peers – with Malthus, James Mill and McCulloch. That he had their unreserved affection and unfeigned respect is evident both from their later comments ('I have never loved anybody out of my own family so much', said Malthus), and from the hundreds of letters which survive. Maria Edgeworth's lines, penned 20 years later, celebrate the true spirit of science which shines from every letter between the two greatest economists of the day:

Malthus and Ricardo...hunted together delightfully in search of truth, and huzzaed when they found her on whichever side she was and without caring who found her first; and indeed I have seen them put both their able hands to the windlass and drag her up from the bottom of the well in which she so strangely loves to dwell...

## VII

The boy whose father thought reading, writing and arithmetic sufficient education for a career in business became a remarkably effective correspondent, and not only on economics. Ricardo's penultimate letter to James Mill included a long paragraph commenting on the correspondence between Voltaire and

D'Alembert ('nothing surprises me more than the fire and activity of Voltaire's mind, when borne down by age and infirmities'); chided Mill for delaying and unreasonably shortening a forthcoming visit; and reflected on the progress of the nation:

The grand cause, good government, is always present to my mind, but I hope it will have a better champion in the House of Commons...I am quite sure that the good cause is advancing, though at a very moderate step, and all we can do in our time is to help it a little forward.

In his last letter to Mill, Ricardo made no mention of his condition although he was now suffering from acute pains in his head. This letter was devoted exclusively to comments on a paper, now lost, by Mill's brilliant 17-year-old son John Stuart. Less than a fortnight later, the desolate elder Mill wrote to McCulloch:

You and I need not tell to one another how much we grieve on this deplorable occasion. (I have) an estimate of his value in the cause of mankind which to most men would appear to be mere extravagance...His memory must be a bond of connection between us. In your friendship I look for a compensation for the loss of his.

The following issue of *The Republican*, a journal which was being produced by those of Richard Carlile's associates who were not in jail, published the text of a letter which had been sent to Ricardo two months earlier. The writer was not one of the pious and respectable people whom Kenneth Clark supposed were Ricardo's warmest supporters. On the contrary, he was 'one of the numerous body of men who profess republican principles'. He had been pleased to see 'gentlemen of talents, fortune and integrity, standing up and holding...just and liberal sentiments, undismayed by the taunts of the bigot and the frowns of the interested'; and he had gone on to express to Ricardo his

admiration of your conduct with respect to that much injured...calumniated and misrepresented individual Mr Carlile...It is in pursuing such a course as this...that you secure the affections of all honest and well-meaning men...

Young John Stuart Mill had also been active in Carlile's support, having just written a series of letters to the *Morning Chronicle* on the subject of Carlile's persecution and on freedom of expression. It was probably at about the same time that young Mill and several of his friends had been arrested for distributing the 'abominable handbills' – a series of pamphlets outlining contraceptive techniques. Though he made no mention of the incident in his autobiography, Mill did say that, among his contemporaries,

Malthus's population principle was quite as much a banner, and a point of union among us, as any opinion specially belonging to Bentham.

This great doctrine, originally brought forward as an argument against the indefinite improvability of human affairs, we took up with ardent zeal in the contrary sense, as indicating the sole means of realising that improvability by securing full employment at high wages to the whole labouring population through a voluntary restriction of the increase of their numbers.

The population principle of Malthus was also a 'point of union' among the older generation of economists. James Mill, in his *Elements of Political Economy*, wrote that:

The limitation of the number of births by raising wages will accomplish everything that we desire, without trouble or interference...The limitation of the numbers...may be carried so far as...to raise the condition of the labourer to any state of comfort or enjoyment which may be desired.

And McCulloch wrote in his *Lectures*

the well-being and happiness of society must ever necessarily depend on the degree in which the principle of increase is subjected to prudential control and regulation.

By this time, Malthus had brought about a revolution in economic thought. Even the concept that the birth rate might be influenced by the knowledge and will of individuals was revolutionary. Coleridge, as we have seen, thought that political economy was humbug, and he had sneered at Malthus for writing a volume to prove that man could not live without eating. In an article published in the month after Ricardo's death, de Quincey took him to task:

I must assure Mr Coleridge that there is something more to it than *that...* Is it nothing for lawgivers and the governors of the world to treat with contempt the pernicious counsels of political economists from Athenian days down to our own – clamouring for direct encouragements to population? Is it nothing for England that he first has exposed the fundamental vice of our Poor Laws (viz. that they act as a bounty on population), and placed a lighthouse upon the rocks to which our course was rapidly carrying us in darkness? Is it nothing for science and the whole world that, by unfolding the laws which govern population, he has given to political economy its complement and sole desideratum?

There is ample evidence from the literature of the day that contraception must have been widely discussed and practised in the mid 1820s. John Stuart Mill's brush with the law was alluded to in a verse which was published in *The Times* in February 1826:

There are two Mr M-'s, too, whom those that like reading

Through all that's unreadable, call very clever;  
 And, whereas M- Senior makes war on *good* breeding  
 M- Junior makes war on all breeding whatever!

Several months later Francis Place – who had been responsible for the printing and distribution of the pamphlets which Mill junior and his friends handed out ‘at market time among the wives and daughters of mechanics and tradesmen’ – wrote an article in *The Trades Newspaper and the Mechanics Weekly Journal*. One paragraph is interesting both for its general sense and for the unmistakable implication of one phrase:

The political economists are the great enlighteners of the people. Look at their works from the time of the great man Adam Smith to the *Essay on Wages* just published by Mr McCulloch, and see if they have not, all along, deprecated everything which was in any way calculated to do injury to the people; see if they have not been pre-eminently the advocates for increasing the knowledge of the working classes *in every possible way* and then let any man say, if he can, that they have not been pre-eminently the best friends of these classes (emphasis added).

Francis Place was at this time corresponding with Richard Carlile who, during or between his prison terms, wrote the pamphlet *What is Love?* This pamphlet included descriptions of contraceptive techniques and this revealing paragraph:

*It is better to prevent than cure, and here prevention is most simply practicable, a means within the reach of all.* The best and wisest of men labour with zeal to promulgate secretly or covertly a knowledge of this plan. Women are also secretly engaged in it, after having got over the prejudice of the old customs by giving it a full consideration. It is alluded to in Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*. And still more plainly in the article *Colonies* in the supplement to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, from the pen of the same gentleman. It is clearly alluded to in Place's *Illustrations of the Principle of Population*. It has been broached somewhat disguisedly in several newspapers, and preached in lectures to the working people by a most benevolent gentleman at Leeds; it has been circulated by thousands of handbills through the populous districts of the north, and is the hinted inference, as the only remedy, for all that is said in the House of Commons or elsewhere upon the subject of the unemployed and badly paid surplus population.

In addition to supporting measures to reduce the birth rate, the economists advocated schemes of assisted emigration to the colonies and a method of raising wage levels and relieving poverty. Torrens had put forward such a scheme in 1817 as a means of ‘affording effectual and permanent relief of the labouring classes’; and early in 1823 Ricardo had written to Wilmot Horton, the Under-Secretary for Colonies, endorsing a *Plan of Emigration to Upper Canada*:

The plan would be economical; it would enable us to get rid of the most objectionable part of the poor laws, the relieving able bodied men; and what is to me by far the most important consideration, it could not fail to make the wages of labour more adequate to the support of the labourer and his family, besides giving him that as wages which is now given to him as charity.

Wilmot Horton took this as a clear statement of Ricardo's support for assisted emigration as an anti-poverty measure, and reproduced the letter in his pamphlet *Causes and Remedies of Pauperism*. Professor Galbraith – having attributed to Ricardo the views that there were *no* remedies for poverty, that workers must *always* be in misery and starving and that it was futile to contend against fate and the iron law of wages – could not accept such a simple interpretation. There was another possible explanation:

Ricardo's reputation as a bad writer is greatly deserved...his prose was awkward, uncertain and unpredictable as to meaning conveyed...It is bad writing based on incomplete thought.

The belief that Ricardo could not say what he meant certainly made it easier for Galbraith to believe what he pleased about Ricardo's views. But the obscurity that Galbraith discovered does not appear to have been perceived by Ricardo's contemporaries and near-contemporaries. John Stuart Mill, who has not been thought to be notably clumsy in thought or expression, wrote much later that Ricardo was

the time founder of the abstract science of political economy (and his writings are still, after all that has been written, its purest source. What had been added to the science since Ricardo does not need to be substituted for his doctrines, but to be incorporated with them. They do not require alteration or correction, so much as fuller exposition or comment.

Four years after receiving Ricardo's letter, Mr Wilmot Horton received unambiguous support for his emigration proposals from the greatest economist then living. Malthus appeared as a witness before the Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom, which was chaired by Wilmot Horton. Before summarising Malthus' evidence, we must recall Kenneth Clark's statement that Malthus' doctrines were used by pious and respectable people 'to justify actions that they would never have thought of defending on human grounds'; and Galbraith's statements that 'Thomas Robert Malthus, going a step further (than the iron law of wages) adduced his immortal conclusion that people everywhere would proliferate to the point of starvation' and that 'Malthus was on the whole unperturbed by his conclusions and...did not feel called upon to produce any remedy'.

In the course of his evidence, Malthus answered about 250 questions. The following extracts from the transcript indicate his general line:

*Is not the tendency of a redundant supply of labour, ready at all times to fill up the decrease of the labouring population by want and disease, beneficial to the manufacturing and commercial interest – inasmuch as it lowers wages and raises profits, and renders possible a successful competition with foreign capitalists?*

I should think that, even if it did so, no person could possibly bring themselves to encourage such a system with that view.

*Compassion for the labouring poor and regard to the public peace may render the diminution of the supply of labour desirable, but a redundancy is favourable to trade and commerce, is it not?*

In one respect it is, and in one respect not; it may enable the capitalist to work up his commodities cheaper, and to extend his foreign trade, but it certainly will have a tendency to diminish the home trade and I think the home trade much more important than the foreign...

*Although the redundancy in the supply of labour should tend to impoverish the condition of the labouring classes generally, yet is it not possible that the demand in the home market for the gross amount of produce might be fully as great as if the labouring classes were fewer in number and in more prosperous condition?*

The difference in the demand of the labouring classes, living well and comfortably, would in my opinion be such as to more than balance the numbers...I should say there is a great difference in the manner in which the labouring classes live, as to clothing, houses and other domestic comforts and conveniences, and that habits of that kind must create a great demand for commodities and labour, a great home demand...

*(The) proposition involves on the one hand the happiness of the labouring classes, and on the other their misery?*

Yes; which I hold to be the most important of all considerations, the one to which all others should give way...

*Does not the rate of increase of population in different countries depend very much on the different habits of the people?*

Very much.

*With reference to Ireland, what is your opinion of the habits of the people...?*

The habits are very unfavourable in regard to their own condition, because they are inclined to be satisfied with the very lowest degree of comfort, and to marry with little other prospect than that of being able to get potatoes for themselves and their children.

*Do you think that any combination of circumstances could effect (a removal of those habits, unless there is emigration)?*

It would be a work of great time, and probably of great suffering, if it *were* accomplished, but I should not expect it to be accomplished without emigration; and one of the cases in which...a government is called upon to make a great pecuniary sacrifice is where there is a prospect of some great and beneficial change, which change cannot take place without such sacrifice unless you are disposed to overlook the greatest possible degree of misery...

*If cheap tracts were written and given to the poor, and in some instances taught in the schools, explaining the doctrines you have just laid down with respect to the condition of the poor, do you imagine they would be able to understand them, and that they would apply what they learned to their own case?*

I think they are not very difficult to be understood, but they are perhaps rather difficult to apply. I believe some tracts of that kind have been occasionally circulated.

*Have you any knowledge of the effects produced?*

I have understood that many of the labouring classes, particularly the artisans, acknowledge the doctrines that have been laid down on the subject of population...

*To which do you think the principles of emigration is of most importance at present, to England, to Scotland or to Ireland?*

Unquestionably to Ireland...

*What is your opinion of the capability of Ireland to become a rich and flourishing country?*

My opinion is that it has very great capabilities, that it might be a very rich and very prosperous country...

*Do you think any one circumstance would more tend to accelerate that state of things, than a judicious system of emigration put into force in that country?*

I think that a judicious system of emigration is one of the most powerful means to accomplish that object.

The Committee received this evidence with the greatest satisfaction. Its final report quoted Malthus' evidence at length in rebuttal of the argument that 'redundancy of labourers is calculated to promote the interests of the proprietors and capitalists', and noted that:

The testimony which was uniformly given by the *practical witnesses* has been confirmed in the most absolute manner by that of Mr Malthus;... the experience of facts is thus strengthened throughout by general reasoning and scientific principles.

## VIII

According to Kenneth Clark in *Civilisations*:

Poverty, hunger, plagues, disease: they were the background of history right up to the end of the nineteenth century, and most people regarded them as inevitable – like bad weather. Nobody thought they could be cured...The old Poor Laws were not designed to abolish poverty but to prevent the poor from becoming a nuisance. All that was required was an occasional act of charity...

This was the environment in which the business and landed establishment reacted to the report of Mr Wilmot Horton's Emigration Committee. From their standpoint, an occasional act of charity was one thing; but having to make a 'great pecuniary sacrifice' in the hope of bringing about 'some great and beneficial change' was another. It was high time that the practitioners of the pseudo-science of political economy, and their fellow travellers, were put firmly in their place. In a pamphlet published in the same year as the Committee's report, Richard Carlile forecast the reaction precisely:

All pretend to desire the improvement of the condition of the working people; but the moment that any attempts are practically made toward the improvement an outcry, founded upon the most contemptible prejudices, is raised, and the effort has no encouragement. The truth is, that the aristocracy which forms the legislature of this country flourishes upon the vices and miseries of the working people...

Southey, the Poet Laureate, was quickly into the attack. It was now 25 years since he had urged John Rickman to 'break (Malthus) on the wheel'. And over 10 years since he had publicly described Malthus' population principle as

'too foolish, as well as too wicked, ever to become permanently prevalent; the temporary reputation which Mr Malthus obtained by renewing it is disgraceful to the age'. Time had not improved Southey's temper:

We may shudder at the application of Mr Malthus's doctrines, made by certain wretches of the radical school, for whose writings the pillory and a pelting shower of popular indignation would have been the deserved and proper punishment, if there were not some offences of such a nature that it is better that they go unpunished in this world, than be brought to light and notice. The poor will continue to increase and multiply, notwithstanding the schemes of madmen and the devices of men who are the opprobrium of humanity...The poor are the prolific portion of the community. Increase and multiply they will and must; it is in the order of nature, whose institutions should strive against that order.

A more comprehensive attack on the Committee and its report was mounted by Michael Thomas Sadler, MP in a book of over 400 pages entitled *Ireland: Its Evils and Their Remedies: Being a Refutation of the Errors of the Emigration Committee*. The theme of the book was outlined in a critical notice in the *Edinburgh Review*:

The leading object of the work is to show that the theory of population, as laid down by Mr Malthus and others, is entirely false; that those who maintain (it) impeach the goodness and power of the Deity; and that the true law of population, by which the increases of mankind has been, and still is, in all cases, regulated is simply this, '*The fecundity of human beings, under equal circumstances, varies inversely as their numbers on a given space*'.

Mr Sadler explained that the book was written as a supplement to a work which he was still preparing, which would contain the proof of this proposition; but he did outline the key argument in relation to Ireland, which was summarised thus in the *Edinburgh Review*.

In the days of...Sir William Petty, the population of Ireland was under a million and half; and 'yet the wretchedness of the inhabitants was more conspicuous than it is even at present' when it exceeds *seven* millions. This, according to Mr Sadler, is an irrefragable proof of the hollowness of the modern theory of population; and of the 'ignorance and folly' of those who represent the miseries of Ireland as resulting from the increased number of her inhabitants.

The experience of thousands of years, Sadler went on, had taught the world that obedience to the divine command to 'Multiply – *replenish* the earth' was the only certain road to national prosperity and individual happiness'. Ireland was, he said, grossly underpopulated:

Its surface might, on the very lowest calculations which our practical agriculturalists have ever made, sustain in plenty far above ten times the number of inhabitants that it now nearly starves; while 'the wastes of the sea'...remain almost totally untouched.

The members of the Emigration Committee were labelled 'political quacks', whom 'it is hard to acquit...of either ignorance or cruelty'. The *Edinburgh Review* commented:

When the non-employment, squalid poverty and wretchedness of the Irish poor are universally admitted, it is really farcical to talk of the 'cruelty' and 'atrociousness' of encouraging their emigration to Canada and the United States...If there be inhumanity in the case, it is fairly chargeable on those who endeavour to prevail on the poor to continue where there are no means of providing for their comfortable support, and who, by misrepresenting the objects and motives of those who would improve their condition...make them cling to the very poverty of which they are at once the victims and the source.

Sadler's attack on Malthus and the Committee gained much attention, the *Edinburgh Review* article noting that:

The speech and the book of the member for Newark were for three long months the subjects of eternal eulogy with the writers and readers of the *Morning Journal* and *Standard*; and Mr Sadler...was declared to be the only statesman in the House of Commons.

When Wilmot Horton spoke in defence of the Emigration Committee in May 1829, he complained that there were few in the House to hear him. He praised Malthus and the other expert witnesses, and reiterated the view that emigration was the only remedy for the immediate problem that could be applied with a prospect of success. Sadler replied, strongly objecting 'to the principle of public and national emigration as unnecessary, impolitic and productive of much individual suffering', and to wasting the country's resources 'in so fruitless and anti-national and... cruel an attempt as that of lessening the population'.

Four months later Sadler received a request, signed – in the words of his biographer – 'by nearly all the wealth and respectability' of the town of Whitby, 'that he would accept the honour of a public dinner'. The peroration of the speech Sadler made at the dinner ran thus:

It was the province of God, saving the presence of our political economists, to decide (the numbers of our countrymen); and He has decided it, in the superabundance of the means of human subsistence which, as a nation, He has lavished upon us...Short indeed, and infernal, would be the remedy were (Malthus') revolting notion true. Deportation...(and) murder...would be obvious and general benefits...

Rather than on the dogmas of political economists, we will still rest, as to this matter, upon the assurances of Him who giveth food to all flesh; for His mercy endureth forever.

Soon after, Sadler, a Wesleyan linen manufacturer, had provided this illuminating indication of 'the inhuman way in which the doctrines of Malthus were accepted' by himself and by the wealth and respectability of a provincial city, the book of which his *Ireland* had been the supplement, appeared. Entitled *The Law of Population, and Disproof of Human Superfecundity*, Sadler's treatise ran to 1300 pages. His biographer was to describe it as 'the greatest gift bestowed on mankind by any secular writer of modern times'.

It is of interest to note Sadler's connections. His book was dedicated to his patron, the Duke of Newcastle, of whom the *Dictionary of National Biography* makes the following comments:

He was a rigid conservative, and violently opposed the claims of the protestant dissenters, catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform...For more than twenty years the general public censured the duke's motives as a landlord and member of the House of Lords, and his appetite for jobbery was declared to be insatiable.

The copy of Sadler's book in the National Library of Australia is inscribed, in the author's hand, to 'The Right Honourable Lord Wynford, with the author's respectful compliments'. It was Lord Wynford who, as Mr Justice Best, had told Richard Carlile at one of his trials that 'Persons were at liberty to put their own construction upon texts of Scripture, but they must not dispute the truths of Scripture'. *The Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Best states that

He was a vehement supporter of the Tory party, and strenuously opposed the Reform Bill at every stage...As a judge he was unfortunately far from free of bias of temper, and sometimes even of political prejudice.

In essence, Sadler's book was an expression of the thesis that he had already propounded. Indeed there was another attack on the Emigration Committee:

I deny that general deportations of our countrymen are necessary; ...they are...unnatural in themselves, and cruel in their consequences...the main instrument in...colonizing migrations was barbarism...Those purposes accomplished, that veil of ignorance which seemed as effectually to conceal the inexhaustible bounties of Providence from their benighted eyes as it does from those of some of our political economists, was drawn aside...In the Divine economy, no such remedy is contemplated... As the population of the nations has increased, the necessity of these

wanderings has diminished. I speak thus, advisedly, and in defiance of the information, or, I would rather say, the more formidable ignorance, of all the emigration committees on earth.

In his chapter on 'The Preventive Check', Sadler claimed that

The restraining of marriage, under whatever pretence, is never, in any part of the Scriptures, for one moment sanctioned. On the contrary, the primary command and blessing of the Deity are 'INCREASE AND MULTIPLY'.

Moreover, the postponement of marriage 'would...counteract the plain desire of Nature' and lead, because of the ages of the parents, to 'a fatherless or motherless child to every labouring family in the empire'. Nor could there be any attempt at family planning:

Some of the converts and advocates of (the Malthusian theory of population) have already begun to act upon it by explaining and recommending, in a scientific form, and in plain and unequivocal language, the means by which the passions may be in some sort gratified, and the consequences – human increase – prevented or evaded. Some of these passages I have selected and had meant to give them in another language, but I forbear; in the words of the act of Parliament...they 'are not to be rehearsed'. Such are the auxiliaries, 'most foul, strange and unnatural', of the modern theory of population; such are the assistants of the 'preventive check'...(Human) increase is equally commanded by the Deity, prompted by Nature and required for the promotion of the happiness and prosperity of the species. Inexpressibly sinful, as well as presumptuous, is...any systematic and premeditated attempt to repress the natural numbers of mankind.

So far as Sadler could see, there was little difference between birth control and infanticide;

There is a broad distinction made, it is true, between preventing beings from living which would otherwise emerge into existence, and depriving them of life when they have obtained it...But, believing in the immortality of the soul, the perpetual happiness of the innocent after death (and) that religion which has 'brought life and immortality to light', I confess I cannot fully comprehend the distinction...(This) argument will have little weight with the political economists who, as it regards this question, reject all consideration of a future state...

## IX

To the pious and respectable middle-class, the publication of Sadler's massive book marked the end of a bad dream. Sadler's biographer, RB Seeley, was to write twelve years later:

The Malthusian theory received its death-wound on the day when Mr Sadler's work appeared; its dying struggles were decently concealed by the mantle cast over them by its friends; but the whole system has now passed away...We might apply to it the expressive words of the Psalmist – 'I sought for it, but lo, it could nowhere be found'.

The 'mortal blow' that Southey had planned twenty years earlier had at last been delivered: another writer had come upon 'that precious philosopher... with a thunder clap' but Southey was as pleased as if he had achieved the great work himself:

You have demonstrated that Malthus's theory is as absurd, as the consequences to which it necessarily leads are execrable...Hereafter the truth will be universally acknowledged: but...the present generation of political economists (who are the pests, and bid fair to be the ruin of the country)...will not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead!

Sharon Turner, the author of the best-selling *Sacred History of the World* pointed out that Mr Sadler's work has

rescued us from that chimerical dread of the superabundant population of the earth under which we have been labouring for the last thirty years.

John Wilson of *Blackwood's Magazine* joined the chorus of praise:

Our business is not now with this distinguished man as a member of Parliament – he comes before the public as the author of one of the most ingenious, able, and learned works, on perhaps the most difficult and important part of Political Economy, that has been given to the world since Political Economy deserved the name of a mixed Science...The work was a good deal abused before it was published by some ingenious persons who, since its publication, have been mum; nor, as far as we have seen, have any of the Malthusians yet made upon it any formidable attack.

And Wilson doubted whether any of them could do so:

How arid are the writings of the economists! Reading their works is like toiling across a flat desert ankle-deep in sand – no well, no oasis, all dry

dust and not a single tree. No wonder so many travellers sink and are seen no more; and that they are now shy of joining even the caravan under Mr McCulloch...

But the bad dream was now over. The economists had been routed by the shining knight, Sadler. God was in his heaven and all was right with the world. The Cinderellas from the slums could get married, have lots of children, and live happily ever after:

The admirable old Public, God bless her! – nay, say not old – the admirable young, bold, bright, and buxom Public – just like Miss in her teens running off to Gretna-Green with her own chosen suitor, out of a score of sailors, and soldiers, and civilians – selects such a man, for example, as the member of Newark, places her colours in his cap; and on his return from routing all his foes, flings her arms round his neck, and absolutely smotheres him with kisses. The rejected slanderers sneak into corners and bite their thumbs – the nails whereof have already been nibbled to the quick in a habit unconsciously acquired by thirst and hunger.

There were some who were not prepared to put their colours in Mr Sadler's cap, and who even preferred the rejected slanderers skulking in the corners. The young Thomas Babington Macaulay told the readers of the *Edinburgh Review* that

The spirit of the work is as bad as its style. We never met with a book which so strongly indicated that the writer was in a good humour with himself, and in a bad humour with everyone else...Mr Malthus is attacked in language which it would be scarcely decent to employ respecting Titus Oates. 'Atrocious', 'execrable', 'blasphemous' and other epithets of the same kind are poured forth against that able, excellent and honourable man with a profusion which in the early part of the work excites indignation, but after the first hundred pages produces mere weariness and nausea.

And Macaulay was less than impressed with the scientific merit of the work:

We have shown that Mr Sadler is careless in the collection of facts; that he is incapable of reasoning on facts when he has collected them; that he does not understand the simplest terms of science; that he has enounced a proposition of which he does not know the meaning; that the proposition which he means to enounce, and which he tries to prove, leads to all those consequences which he represents as impious and immoral; and that, from the very documents to which he has himself appealed, it may be demonstrated that this theory is false.

This article provoked Sadler to write another book entitled *Refutation of an Article in the Edinburgh Review*; Macaulay responded in the *Edinburgh* with 'Sadler's Refutation Refuted'; and *Blackwood's* began to publish 'Mr Sadler and the *Edinburgh Reviewer*: A Prolusion in Three Chapters'.

The author of these last articles was John Wilson, who had succeeded Dugald Stewart as professor of moral philosophy at Edinburgh. Although no one had succeeded in catching Stewart in dangerous propositions, his lectures on political economy had been a continuing irritant to the conventionally wise (an 1817 essay by Southey referred to 'critics of all dimensions, from the undergraduate in the ungentle craft...to the Scotch professor who for fifteen years has been discharging his blunderbuss against a shield from whence the leaden shot falls flattened'); and the establishment was relieved when in 1820 the economist retired and an anti-economist was installed in his place.

Just before Sadler's *Law of Population* appeared, Wilson had written an article on 'Education of the People' which showed that he was free of the unsound views on that subject which had been expounded by an earlier Scottish professor of moral philosophy in *The Wealth of Nations*. Here is an extract:

To the lower orders, knowledge is not their business – that is, not to the great lower order, those who render the daily labour of their hands to the use of others. Their business is to render a prescribed and taught, and, for the most part, a very simple, and uniformly recurring labour. Their calling, then, is in a great measure independent of knowledge, except what is communicated to them in it.

In his 'Prolusion' on Sadler and the *Edinburgh Reviewer*, Wilson said that Malthus' population principle had been 'hanging like a deadweight on the hopes of all who hoped highly of the future happiness and virtue of man'. In fact:

This doctrine of a supposed great Master in Political Economy revolted not only the feelings, but the reason, of men who studied the nature and condition of their own race in the schools of common humanity; and was thought by them irreconcilable with much of what they humbly believed it had been permitted them to know of the attributes and providence of God.

Wilson followed up with an attack on Francis Place, who was a tailor by profession:

We have seen in bad Latin, schemes proposed to thwart the principle of population, which, as they were disgraceful to manhood, it was satisfactory to know originated out of the pale of humanity – *measures* which, as they were addressed, we believe, so could they only have

had any temptation, to a tailor. Others, again, who did not directly recommend men to become monkeys or monsters, aimed abuse – in words to us unintelligible – against marriage.

Then there was an attack on the political economists as a group – including on Nassau Senior, who had just lost his chair at Oxford because he had put forward a proposal on policy towards Ireland which displeased the Tories:

Men are not naturally the brute beasts these writers have insultingly represented them to be...That egregious wiseacre, ex-Professor Senior, seems to have lately felt this – and, with all the pomposity and pedantry of the school and the schools, has dedicated some pages of a lecture to prove that human beings have reason as well as passions. When it is a duty to marry, and what are the duties of marriage, Nature herself dictates; nor have there ever been wanting in this long-enlightened land, moral and religious teachers to expound such duties, not out of such books as these pragmatistical coxcombs and Cockney political economists have produced or studied, but out of a book which few of them know much about, and many of them nothing – THE BIBLE. With regard to that mighty class, which we have higher authority than that of the political economists for believing never shall cease out of the land – the Poor – the deductions drawn from the Malthusian law of population were impious and cruel.

Sadler had also realised that the economists were defying Christian teaching in supposing that they could abolish poverty; and without the fear of poverty, he pointed out, people could not be induced to work. Here is how the member for Newark developed this theme in the House of Commons on June 3, 1830:

It is not possible to rid any country of what too many consider as its nuisance and disgrace; nor is it perhaps desirable, were it even possible. Not only does the condition in which poverty stands in relation to wealth call into existence the best feelings and noblest virtues of the human heart; poverty, or rather the fear of poverty, which could only be inspired by its actual existence, calls forth all that activity, and animates all those exertions by which...the independence of the individual is secured (and) the public prosperity enlarged...Yes, sir, the poverty we seek to relieve will never cease; poverty of too deep and distressing a character to be tickled into mirth and ecstasy by the ready but empty hand of wealth and affluence....–the 'be thou warmed and be thou clothed' schemes of recent economists. 'The poor ye have always with you' says the author of our religion...

Political economy had now become a difficult science indeed. Only three years earlier, Nassau Senior had devoted a significant part of his introductory lecture at Oxford to the problem of poverty in civilised societies. He had said that

the misery of those upon whom actual want does fall...is too painful to be steadfastly contemplated, and forms only a small part of the evil. The great evil is the general feeling of insecurity; the fear which must beset every man whose labour produces him only a subsistence...that at some period, how near he cannot tell, the want under which he has seen others sink may reach himself.

Senior went on to cite recent English actuarial data which demonstrated that any material reduction in the price of wheat was almost always accompanied by a decrease in the number of burials. From this he deduced that 'there must be almost always in this country a considerable number of persons just vibrating between the possession and the want of mere food'. He pointed out that, while he was speaking, there were 'tens of thousands of families of hand weavers... who are working fourteen hours a day for what will scarcely support animal existence'. He quoted at length from the evidence of witnesses before Wilmot Horton's Committee, demonstrating the desperate plight of millions of people in England and Ireland. And he concluded that his hope for the future was:

founded solely on the expectation that the diffusion of sound principles of political economy will aid our enlightened ministers with the whole strength of public opinion, and enable them to conquer the ignorance, prejudice and individual interest which have always been opposed to every improvement.

Senior would have expected that there would be disputes about whether or not the key principles of political economy were sound; but he would not have contemplated for a moment the possibility that a leading politician would soon win wide acclaim by asserting that the *objective* of removing want was unsound.

Malthus himself was the leading proponent of the "'be thou warmed, be thou clothed'" scheme of recent economists': he had told the Emigration Committee of the advantages of the labouring classes 'living well and comfortably...with clothing, houses and other domestic comforts and conveniences'. Ten years earlier Ricardo, in his *Principles*, had written that

The friends of humanity cannot but wish that in all countries the labouring classes should have a taste for comforts and enjoyments, and that they should be stimulated by all legal means in their exertions to procure them.

These aspirations were now being challenged. The Creator's commands, said Sadler, were to increase and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: there were no commands to live well and comfortably, and develop a taste for enjoyment. 'By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread', said the Scriptures: there was nothing about sweating to produce domestic comforts and

conveniences. 'If man will live, he must eat: and if he will eat, he must labour', Lord Hale had said nearly two centuries earlier; and the great economist of Hale's day had insights to which all of the modern economists were blind:

The fact is, as Sir William Petty observed long ago, nothing but necessity makes man labour at all, and the bulk of mankind will never labour beyond what is adequate to supply their habitual necessities.

So Mr Sadler told the House of Commons in 1830, and the conventional wisdom was as powerful then as it is now. Within a considerable range the worthy politicians and upright middle class gentlemen were permitted to believe what they pleased; and most of them found it agreeable to believe that Sadler the rising politician had demolished Malthus the ageing academic. Sadler's 2000 pages of abusive refutation were being lauded by most of the respectable journals, and his scientific achievements had earned him a Fellowship of the Royal Society.

We have two significant measures of the attitude of the establishment to Malthus at the time of his death.

One of them is the market price of his *Essay*, it dropped (according to Seeley, who was a publisher and bookseller) from 24/- in 1830 to 5/9 in 1835.

The other indication of Malthus' standing with the establishment was the obituary notice in *The Times*. It consisted of one sentence:

We see with regret the announcement of the death of Mr Malthus, the eminent writer – a man whose private virtues were not, and could not be, disputed by those who were most hostile to his views on political economy.

The deaths of those who were most hostile to Malthus' views on political economy were treated with less circumspection. The notice for Coleridge, who had died five months earlier, began:

We have this week to record the departure of another mighty spirit from among us – the quenching in the darkness of the grave of another of the few bright stars which yet remained to us...

And that for Sadler, who died six months later, included the following:

Men unaccustomed to witness such devoted reverence for truth cannot conceive the toil with which Mr Sadler was accustomed to verify the most minute and apparently unimportant fact employed in the course of his argument. Never will the poor have such an advocate; his whole heart and conversation were in their cause; and his deepest regret during his illness referred to the incompleteness of his work on population – an incompleteness that lost to the poor the advantage that a full confirmation of his system by the recent censuses would have conferred upon them.

There was no possibility that apparently unimportant facts and census results could have *destroyed* Sadler's system – he was too devout for that. As Seeley was to write in his massive biography of Sadler seven years later:

Mr Malthus's criminality lay here...Instead of distrusting his own conclusions, he boldly puts forward a system...wholly opposed to the whole tenor of Scripture...Had his facts been as clearly established as the rotation of the earth, or the mortality of man, still a proper reverence for the All-wise should have held his judgement suspended.

A tribute to Malthus by William Empson, who had been professor of politics and law at the college where Malthus held the chair of political economy, confirmed that he had indeed followed this criminally scientific approach:

If popular declaimers ever put themselves in the way of learning humility and charity, it might do something towards teaching them these virtues to be informed that when Mr Malthus first entered upon (his) inquiries...he entertained most of the erroneous opinions in which they are immersed at present. He had to do what they refuse to do – to unlearn false knowledge, and to master the prejudices of his age and country. This made him frequently remark that there was no science in which first impressions were so generally wrong as political economy.

## X

'Adam Smith and Malthus and Ricardo! There is something about these three figures to evoke more than ordinary sentiments from us their children in the spirit'. So wrote Keynes in 1933, and he may well have had in mind a passage from the article by Empson which has just been quoted:

Political economy – the science of civilisation – is sought to be discredited by the help of private slander, and the name of one of the best of men is made an ignominious by-word for inflaming the passions of the poor...Political economy is charged with hardness of heart. The science can appear and call witnesses to character only in the persons of its professors. We remember Sir James Mackintosh saying that he had known Adam Smith slightly, Ricardo well, Malthus intimately. He added 'Is it not something to say for a science that its three great masters were about the three best men I ever knew?'

The testimony of many other witnesses to Malthus' character is recorded in Oldspeak literature.

Malthus and his doctrines provided splendid opportunities for the wit of Rev. Sydney Smith – the famous Dean of St Paul's whose conversation frequently

reduced his audience to helpless mirth. There are numerous stories of servants having to flee in uncontrollable laughter from the dining rooms of his hosts. To one of his correspondents Smith wrote:

Philosopher Malthus was here last week. I got an agreeable party for him of unmarried people. There was only one lady who had had a child; but he is a good-natured man and, if there are no appearances of approaching fertility, is civil to every lady...

Soon after Malthus' death, Smith wrote to Wilmot Horton, who was now Governor of Ceylon:

Poor Malthus! everybody regrets him; – in science and in conduct equally a philosopher, one of the most practically wise men I ever met, shamefully mistaken and unjustly calumniated, and receiving no mark of favour from a Liberal Government, who ought to have interested themselves in the fortunes of such a virtuous martyr to truth.

Four years later, Sydney Smith was editing for publication his numerous contributions to the *Edinburgh Review*, the great journal of which he had been co-founder. Coming across a reference he had made to Malthus in an article written nearly forty years earlier, Smith wrote a footnote which is unlike anything else in the book:

I cannot read the name of Malthus without adding my tribute of affection for the memory of one of the best men that ever lived. He loved philosophical truth more than any man I ever knew, was full of practical wisdom and never indulged in contemptuous feelings against his inferiors in understanding.

Another witness for Malthus is Maria Edgeworth, the Irish novelist who for many years was attacked for her attitude to Christianity in every review of her books, even of those where religion was not touched on. In a letter of 1822, she wrote to her father's widow of her 'love and admiration and *gratitude* to Mr Malthus' who was

a most amiable man – of strict truth, perfect integrity and rational benevolence as all who know him declare – and this is the man whom party represents as a bloodthirsty monster – An Ogre! Cobbett began one of his papers lately with these words 'I have hated many men but I *never* hated any man as much as I hated Malthus'.

Yet another witness for Malthus who was not pious in the conventional sense is Harriet Martineau, the journalist and social critic who inspired the famous line 'There is no God, and Harriet is his prophet'. In her *Autobiography* she wrote:

Mr Malthus, who did more for social ease and virtue than perhaps any other man of his time, was the 'best-abused man' of the age. I was aware of this; and I saw in him, when I afterwards knew him, one of the serenest and most cheerful men that society can produce. When I became intimate enough with the family to talk over such matters, I asked Mr Malthus one day whether he had suffered in spirits from the abuse lavished on him. 'Only just at first,' he answered. - 'I wonder whether it ever kept you awake a minute' – 'Never after the first fortnight,' was his reply. The spectacle of the good man in his daily life, in contrast with the representations of him in the periodical literature of the time, impressed upon me, more forcibly than any other thing in my own experience, the everlasting fact that the reformers of morality, personal and social, are always subject at the outset to the imputation of immorality from those interested in the continuance of corruption.

All of these comments were made about an economist whom Clark's television series noticed only as 'a clergyman named Malthus' whose 'sacred book' provided Victorian hypocrisy with one of its chief supports; and whom Galbraith's series lampooned because his 'Principle on Population' referred to

'the passion between the sexes' (a most damaging thing that he sometimes thought might be subject to 'moral restraint' and against which he suggested ministers might warn at marriage)...

– a sensible and indeed courageous suggestion in the social environment in which it was made.

The remarks of Professor WS Jevons, in his presidential address to the Economic Science and Statistics Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in 1870, are as pertinent today as they were 114 years ago:

There is no one who occupies a less enviable position than the political economist. Cultivating the frontier regions between certain knowledge and conjecture, his efforts and advice are scorned and rejected on all hands. If he arrives at a sure law of human nature, and points out the evils which arise from its neglect, he is fallen upon the large classes of people who think their own common-sense sufficient; he is charged with being too abstract in his speculations; with overlooking the windings of the human heart; with under-valuing the affections. However humane his motives, he is lucky if he escapes being set down on all sides as a heartless misanthrope. Such was actually the fate of one of the most humane and excellent of men, the late Mr Malthus.

## XI

The theme of Galbraith's *The Age of Uncertainty* was, as noted earlier, to 'contrast the great certainties in economic thought in the last century with the great uncertainty with which problems are faced in our time'. It will be clear by now that the great certainties in economic thought did not in fact *exist* in the last century, but only in the minds of Galbraith and his viewers as they *contemplated* the last century.

It was also noted earlier that all of Galbraith's certainties about Ricardo were wrong – that Galbraith believed Ricardo was very pessimistic when in fact he was very optimistic; that Galbraith believed that Ricardo regarded compassion on the working man as wasted when in fact he contended that it was not; that Galbraith believed that Ricardo regarded it as futile to seek remedies for poverty, when in fact his concern was that the available remedies were not being applied; and so on.

Professor Galbraith was not content with being certain about what Ricardo said and wrote in his lifetime. He was equally certain about what he would have expected and recommended after he was gone. Here is Galbraith's account of the great potato blight of the late 1840s which occurred a quarter of a century after Ricardo's death:

Not only were the circumstances as Ricardo and Malthus foretold; the response of Westminster to the Irish disaster was as Ricardo would have recommended. As now would be said, it was from the book. The Corn Laws were repealed to allow the free import of grain. Though excellent in principle, this did not help those without money to buy grain, a category that included the entire starving population...Corn was imported not for the purpose of feeding the hungry but of keeping down prices. Low prices were also not helpful to people who had no money at all. In 1845, a program of public works was inaugurated. This was in conflict with the principle that the poor should never be helped and in the following year, when it was greatly needed, it was abandoned.

Presumably Ricardo had sent a message of protest. Perhaps he was shown sanctimoniously holding 'the Ricardian Tablets' while the greater part of the television screen represented several hundreds of thousands of people starving to death. It was of course futile to contend against a cruel world:

There is (a) tendency...for the consequences of principled action, if they are very unpleasant, to be given divine sanction. Smith's unseen hand had become the hand of God – the hand of a rather ruthless God who couldn't have had much liking for the Irish.

The ratings of *The Age of Uncertainty* among Irish Americans would have been wonderfully boosted by these reflections, thus confirming in striking fashion Galbraith's dictum that, in such matters, the test of audience approval invariably triumphs over the test of truth.

Living in the middle of the real Ireland throughout the years of the real famine was Maria Edgeworth. She turned 80 in 1847, the worst year. She no longer managed the Edgeworthstown family property – though she had done so with considerable skill for 15 years, until she was well into her 70s. Though stunned by the misery which surrounded her on every side, she worked tirelessly to relieve distress; and through it all she thought often of David Ricardo, and of what he would have said and done if he had lived.

This is not a speculation, but a fact which is proved by surviving Oldspeak records. Maria Edgeworth wrote regularly to Richard Jones, who was Malthus' successor in the political economy chair at Haileybury College. In one letter written in 1847 she concluded a discussion about the potato as a staple food with:

...and it brings in the lowest price, affording nothing to fall back upon in case of failure. I have letters of Ricardo's in which all the *requisites* for a safe national food are ably stated and the potato is lowest in his scale.

And in April 1849, the month before she died, she wondered in another letter what 'our dear deceased friend Mr Ricardo' would have said about the discussion of Irish problems in Berkeley's *Querist*.

The letters in which Ricardo and Edgeworth discussed the potato also survive. They begin with Maria Edgeworth asking a question:

which is one of *vital* consequence to this country – the question *for* and *against* the potato, which has for some hundred years past been alternatively cried up as the blessing and cried down as the bane of Ireland.

She went on to discuss McCulloch's article on *Cottagers* in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. She contested the view that potatoes were not storable and enclosed with her letter a sample of storable flour which had been converted from potatoes twenty years before. She then asked whether

You in England who do not live upon potatoes and who have gone through all the prosperity and adversity of manufactures, are you better off? – are you happier? – I don't ask whether you are richer than we are in Ireland. Take an average of years – don't fix your eye upon this dreadful time of famine. I wish my dear Sir that after your intended excursion to France you would come to poor little Ireland and see and judge it for yourself...

Ricardo's reply ran to more than six pages. He made clear, though politely, that it was wrong to 'take an average of years':

The argument that the failure of the potato crop is only occasional... appears to me defective. Judging by my own feelings, if for five six or seven years of easy competency with respect to food, I had to endure one year of famine and to witness the sufferings of my family and friends for that one dreadful year, I would rather that I had never been born; no happiness can compensate perpetual hunger for one year; much less can it compensate for the dreadful suffering of starvation...

Ricardo went on to ask the obvious questions – you say that potatoes are storable but what is the cost of preparation and storage? Will people be able to afford them in famine years? Do you have some of those 'patient, plodding, calculating merchants' who can wait that long for their return? 'I think we are not only richer but happier in England', he concluded. 'We are never so near actual famine as you are; what can you put in the scale against this dreadful evil?'

Quickly Miss Edgeworth wrote another long letter back to the inexorable lawgiver, the arch-hypocrite who had engraved on tablets of stone the principle that the poor should never be helped. It began:

Welcome dear Sir most welcome you and your family back to England – I feel as if I had warm friends nearer to me – and...I feel assured that at some future time you and yours will be in the midst of us at Edgeworths town – by the time we have done quarrelling about decking King William's statue with orange ribbons, and...throw no more bottles or rattles at our Lord Lieutenants.

In this letter Maria Edgeworth supported her argument for potatoes with the answers to a number of questions she had asked of one of the more experienced tenant-farmers on the Edgeworth estate. Ricardo's response acknowledged the force of some of the answers but pointed out that what was a *profitable* crop to the farmer might not be the crop which would secure an abundant supply of food to the people: 'what you state respecting the want of money to purchase food among the lower classes last year is precisely the evil which will accompany every failure of the potato crop in Ireland'.

The viewers of Galbraith's series were told, in effect, that Ricardo and his colleagues were simple-minded. They were incapable of seeing that people without money could not buy corn; they thought that the repeal of the Corn Laws would be a panacea for all ills; and they were unmoved by evidence. It was all pure Newspeak.

## XII

In his last letter to Maria Edgeworth, Ricardo wrote that:

Your restless nation gives us a great deal of trouble in Parliament. The best amongst us do not know how to manage you, nor what course to take to give you the blessings of peace, order, and good government. You have been so long subjected to misrule as hardly to be in a fit state to be reclaimed by common means. Coercion and severity have proved of little use, and I hope the system of indulgence, kindness, and conciliation will now be tried. If that system will not succeed I hope we shall get rid of you altogether; – we could do very well without you.

But the system of indulgence, kindness and conciliation was not to be tried; nor was the option of separation or home rule which Ricardo canvassed in his letter to Maria Edgeworth and also, without doubt, in the discussions of the Committee on Ireland of which he was an active member.

In the same issue of *Blackwood's* as one of the chapters in his *Proslution* on Sadler was appearing in 1831, John Wilson contributed an article on *The State of Ireland*.

He lamented that 'the existence of the Church is endangered, the separation of Ireland from Britain is made a matter of open attempt and probability and sufferings of the former are increased'; and he knew who to blame:

Catholic Emancipation is confessed by those who advocated it to be a total failure – a failure as complete and destructive as Free-Trade, and the other nostrums which have filled the empire with calamity and convulsion.

As for indulgence, kindness and conciliation:

The time has come when the truth, and the whole truth, must be spoken to the Irish people...they must be told strongly and unsparingly of their defects and infirmities, not to insult and upbraid, but to reform and instruct them. What, then, are the great causes of Irish penury and misery? Without hesitation, we reply – the individual deficiencies and misconduct of the Irish people. It is self-evident that the very best laws and institutions cannot preserve the individual from want and barbarism, who is improvident, incapable, vicious and turbulent – that he is the cause of his own suffering...In the more shewy kinds of natural ability, the Irishman has no superior; in the more solid kinds, and the qualities of disposition essential for producing national prosperity, he stands the lowest of civilised men.

It was in this same year that 'that egregious wiseacre ex-Professor Senior' wrote his *Letter to Lord Howick on a legal provision for the Irish poor*. Senior, who has been pilloried by anti-economists for a century and a half as the arch-priest of doctrinaire *laissez-faire*, summarised his recommendations as follows:

I am anxious that these provisions should be made as ample as possible: that public money should be advanced to facilitate emigration, and for the formation of roads, canals and harbours; that the Irish should be relieved from one of the worst relics of feudal barbarism, the local taxation imposed on fairs and markets; that they should also be relieved from the absurd duties on timber...and above all I am anxious that they should be relieved from the expense of supporting the Catholic Church.

The major recommendations were anathema to the establishment, and were never seriously considered.

Through the 1830s and early 1840s the population of Ireland continued to rise, and so did its prosperity. The anti-economists had no doubt that these developments were connected, and that the absurdity of the Malthusian doctrine so ruthlessly exposed by Sadler was being confirmed with every passing year. Their confidence was fortified by the publication in 1841 of a book by one G Tradescant Lay entitled *The Chinese as they are: their moral, social and literary character*. Mr Lay explained that

The prosperity of the Chinese tempts me to frame a system of political economy, which lays population as the foundation whereon everything in the way of social comfort and personal affluence is reared...I look upon man as the great capital of a nation – a view which is based on what I see in China, where a *swarming people are encircled by a swarm of comforts*. In no country do the inhabitants crowd every habitable spot as in China; in no country do the poor people abound with so many of the elegancies and luxuries of life. Early marriage encourages fertility and augments the population...and...consequently, the means of living...In China, the natives throng all those parts which are susceptible to tillage, till there is not enough room to hold them. Here we behold an assortment of comforts for the poor, such as no other country can parallel...

The reaction against Malthusianism received further support in Frederick Engels' *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* which was first published in 1844. According to Engels:

The productive power at mankind's disposal is immeasurable... According to the most able economists and statisticians...'over populated' Great Britain can be brought within ten years to produce a corn yield sufficient for a population six times its present size... Malthus...maintains that population is always pressing on the means of

subsistence...If we want to be consistent, we must admit that *the earth was already over-populated when only one man existed*...Am I to go on any longer elaborating this vile, infamous theory, this hideous blasphemy against nature and mankind?...Here at last we have the immorality of the economist brought to the highest pitch...It is just this theory which is the keystone of the liberal system of free trade...If it is a fact that every adult produces more than he himself can consume...then it must be assumed that each worker ought to be able to produce far more than he needs...One must consider a large family to be a very welcome gift for the community. But the economist...is so firmly set in his antithesis that the most striking facts are of as little concern to him as the most scientific principles...It is absurd to talk of over-population so long as there is enough waste land in the valley of the Mississippi for the whole population of Europe to be transplanted there.

If a large family was a very welcome gift to the community, the Irish problem was near to being solved. But the economists, as impervious to the most striking facts as to the most scientific principles, continued their immoral search for other solutions. In the same year as Engels' *Outlines of a Critique*...appeared the *Edinburgh Review* published an article by Nassau Senior entitled 'Ireland in 1843'. Sydney Smith, who had been one of the founders of the *Edinburgh* 40 years earlier, said of this article that 'nothing could be wiser or better'. Lord Jeffrey, another of the founders, wrote to the editor:

I have just finished that great paper on Ireland, and am so full of admiration and gratitude to the author, that I cannot help telling you of it. Nothing so wise, so impressive, so bold, so temperate, nothing, in short, so powerful and so practical, has appeared in our pages, since the time when we battered in breach in the minor causes of catholic emancipation and slavery abolition. The truth and justice of the leading doctrines are sustained with clearness and force, and urged in a tone of calm confidence and authority that must command attention, and lead to conviction in many unwilling quarters. I have never read any publication which is so sure to produce an impression, so certain not to be overlooked, so secure against all answer, and so likely to have beneficial effects.

Though Sydney Smith and Francis Jeffrey had been leaders in every liberal movement for almost half a century, Lord Clark presumably regarded them as locked up with the politicians in the intellectual prison of classical economics. Engels had escaped. In *Civilisation*, Clark said that his *Conditions of the Working Classes in England*, published in the same year as the *Outlines of a Critique*...was

presented as documentation, but is in fact the passionate cry of a young social worker, and as such it provided, and has continued to provide, the emotional dynamo of Marxism. Marx read Engels – I don't know who else did: that was enough.

The condition of the working classes revealed by Engels' book was not more shocking than their condition as revealed in Malthus' *Essay* nearly half a century earlier. Harriet Martineau pointed out in her *Autobiography* that:

(Malthus) found, in his day, that a portion of the people were underfed; and that one consequence of this was a fearful mortality among infants; and another consequence, the growth of a recklessness among the destitute which caused infanticide, corruption of morals, and, at best, marriage between pauper boys and girls.

Kenneth Clark's statement that nobody up to the end of the nineteenth century thought that these evils could be cured was wrong. The belief that they could be cured was the primary motivation of all of the great nineteenth-century economists, as well as some of the anti-economists such as Engels. The difference was that the economists' remedies were based, as the Emigration Committee of 1827 recognised, on general reasoning and scientific principles; whereas Engels' remedies were based on false reasoning and ignorant prejudice.

Engels' belief that a large family was a very welcome gift for the community was just as wrong as (and far more dangerous than) the belief of many of his contemporaries that the world was only 6000 years old. This should have been abundantly plain to John Kenneth Galbraith, a professor of economics and a former ambassador to India. It is a telling indication of the potency of the conventional wisdom that it was not.

## XIII

Several weeks after Maria Edgeworth's death, the historian and philosopher Thomas Carlyle made his first visit to Ireland. Carlyle was at the height of his fame, the author of *Sartor Resartus*, *The French Revolution*, and *Chartism*. Frederick Engels had lavished praise on his *Past and Present*.

This much is certain: a Whig would never have been able to write a book that was half so humane as *Past and Present*.

Carlyle's companion on his visit was Charles Gavan Duffy – then a leading Irish politician, later to be a prominent figure in Australian politics. In his *Conversations with Carlyle*, published over 40 years later, Duffy told of their

discussions. One day, Duffy asked Carlyle for his view of Dickens, whose *David Copperfield* was then appearing in serial form. 'His theory of life was entirely wrong', said Carlyle:

He thought men ought to be buttered up, and the world made soft and accommodating for them and all sorts of fellows having turkey for their Christmas dinner. Commanding and controlling and punishing them he would give up without any misgivings in order to coax and soothe and delude them into doing right. But it was not in this manner the eternal laws operated, but quite otherwise.

The philosopher and the politician visited a workhouse, and Carlyle was scandalised:

Consider the absurdity of shutting up thousands of forlorn creatures to be fed at the cost of beggars like themselves. Why not regiment these unfortunate wretches, put colonels and captains, sergeants and corporals, over them and thrash them, if it proved needful, into habits of industry on some lands at home or in the colonies? Try them for a couple of years, he would say, and if they could not feed and clothe themselves, they ought to be put out of the world.

This was a more ambitious emigration scheme than that recommended by the inhumane Whigs such as Malthus and Senior, and it incorporated a more clearly specified incentive structure.

On his return to England, Carlyle wrote to his friend Emerson in the United States that the chaotic ruin he had seen everywhere was

the general fruit of long-continued falsity and folly...the gospels of political economy, of *laissez-faire*, no-government (and) paradise to all comers...will first have to be tried, and found wanting...What is to be done? asks everyone...'Blacklead these two million idle beggars,' I sometimes advised, 'and sell them in Brazil as niggers – perhaps parliament...will allow you to advance them to be niggers?'

Carlyle immediately wrote the essay which *Fraser's Magazine* published as 'The Negro Question'; but which he entitled – when he published it in his own name three years later – 'the Nigger Question'.

It was in this article that Carlyle gave economics its name – the most quoted description that any science has ever had. He referred to

the social science...which finds the secret of this universe in 'supply and demand', and reduces the duty of human governors to that of letting men alone...Not a 'gay science' (but) a dreary, desolate and indeed quite abject and distressing one; what we might call the *dismal Science*.

According to Carlyle, the 'unhappy wedlock of philosophical liberalism and the dismal science' had produced a 'wide-weltering deluge of benevolent twaddle and revolutionary grapeshot'. The human species had been 'reduced to believe in rosepink sentimentalism alone' and was

sunk in deep froth-oceans of 'benevolence', 'fraternity', 'emancipation-principle', 'Christian philanthropy' and other most amiable-looking but most baseless...baleful and all-bewildering jargon...the flunky-world...descends, manipulating its ballot-boxes...and divine constitutional apparatus; quoting its dismal sciences, statistics and other satisfactory gospels and Talmuds...

There were however 'fixed headlands' where 'fact and nature...say a few words to us':

The everlasting duty of all men, black or white, who are born into this world (is) to do competent work...; for that and for no other purpose was each of us sent into this world...If it be (a man's) own indolence that prevents and prohibits him (from working), then his own indulgence is the enemy he must be delivered from: and the first 'right' he has – poor indolent blockhead...is that every unprohibited man...shall endeavour to 'emancipate' him from his indolence, and by some wise means...compel him, since inducing will not serve, to do the work he is fit for.

Since the 'indolent two-legged cattle' in the West Indies would not work for money, Carlyle considered that they should be compelled to work 'with beneficent whip'. (It was 75 years since Adam Smith had said that slavery was maintained in the West Indies only because 'the pride of man makes him love to domineer, and nothing mortifies him so much as to have to condescend to persuade his inferiors').

Carlyle went on to point out that 'in other places than Demerara, and in regard to other interests than those of sugar-making', the same problems existed:

I have to complain that, in these days, the relation of master to servant, and of superior to inferior...is fallen sadly out of joint...Austere philosophers...have talked to me about the possibility of doing without servants; of trying somehow to serve yourself (boot cleaning, etc., done by contract). The Duke of Trumps (told me) that the state of his domestic service was by no means satisfactory...'Five-and-forty of them', said his Grace; 'really, I suppose, the cleverest in the market, for there is no limit to the wages...An iron law presses on us all here...It is I that am a slave; and often I think of packing the whole brotherhood of them out of doors one good day.'

## XIV

This essay of Carlyle's produced one good outcome. John Stuart Mill, whose *Principles of Political Economy* had recently been published, replied in the following issue of *Fraser's*. He did not mention the 'dismal science' jibe, but he vigorously defended the humanitarians; and he angrily criticised Carlyle for strengthening the forces of tyranny:

At this crisis of American slavery, when the decisive conflict between right and iniquity seems about to commence, your contributor steps in, and flings this missile, loaded with the weight of his reputation, into the abolitionist camp. The words of English writers of celebrity are words of power on the other side of the ocean; and the owners of human flesh...will welcome such an auxiliary. Circulated as his dissertation will probably be, by those whose interests profit by it, from one end of the American Union to the other, I hardly know of any act by which one person could have done so much mischief as this may possibly do...

More importantly, Mill severely criticised Carlyle for his 'gospel of work', and cogently stated his own attitude:

This 'gospel of work'...as justly deserves the name of a cant as any of those which (your contributor) has opposed...To give it a rational meaning, it must first be known what he means by work. Does work mean every thing which people *do*? No; or he would not reproach people with doing no work. Does it mean laborious exertion? No; for many a day spent in killing game includes more muscular fatigue than a day's ploughing. Does it mean useful exertion? But your contributor always scoffs at the idea of utility. Does he mean that all persons ought to earn their living? But some earn their living by doing nothing, and some by doing mischief; and the negroes, whom he despises, still do earn by labour the 'pumpkins' they consume and the finery they wear...

There is nothing laudable in work for work's sake. To work voluntarily for a worthy object is laudable; but what constitutes a worthy object? On this matter the oracle of which your contributor is the prophet has never yet been prevailed on to declare itself. He revolves in an eternal circle round the idea of work, as if turning up the earth, or driving a shuttle or a quill, were...the ends of human existence...

The worth of work does not surely consist in its leading to other work, and so on to work upon work without end. On the contrary, the multiplication of work, for purposes not worth caring about, is one of the evils of our present condition...The beautifying of existence is as

worthy and useful an object as the sustaining of it; but only a vitiated taste can see any such result in those fopperies of so-called civilization, which myriads of hands are now occupied and lives wasted in providing.

In opposition to the 'gospel of work', I would assert the gospel of leisure, and maintain that human beings *cannot* rise to the finer attributes of their nature compatibly with a life filled with labour. I do not include under the name labour such work...as is done by writers and afforders of 'guidance', an occupation which, let alone the vanity of the thing, cannot be called by the same name with the real labour, the exhausting, stiffening, stupefying toil of...agricultural and manufacturing labourers. To reduce very greatly the quantity of work required to carry on existence is as needful as to distribute it more equally; and the progress of science, and the increasing ascendancy of justice and good sense, tend to this result.

The future of work and of leisure is the subject of an extensive literature in recent times. It is often held that the traditional structure of economic theory does not provide a satisfactory framework within which to examine the matter. Few who have made this claim could set down the key issues as clearly and as forcefully as did the foremost classical economist of the day in this article published in 1850.

Carlyle regarded Mill's response as pathetic. In his *Journal* on February 7, 1850 he wrote:

Nigger article has roused the ire of all philanthropists to a quite unexpected pitch. Among other very poor attacks on it was one in 'Fraser'; most shrill, thin, poor and insignificant, which I was surprised to learn proceeded from John Mill...No use in writing that kind of criticism.

## XV

'With Ricardo and Malthus the notion of massive privation and great inequality became a basic premise' – so Galbraith wrote in *The Affluent Society*. As we have seen, the statement is absurd. 'It was to Ricardo and Malthus that Carlyle alluded', Galbraith went on, 'when he spoke in 1850 of the "Respectable Professors of the Dismal Science"' and gave to economics a name that it has never quite escaped because it was never quite undeserved'.

It is clear that Professor Galbraith had never looked at the Carlyle essay in which 'the dismal science' appeared, or the subsequent *Latter-day Pamphlets* in which the 'respectable professors' were added. If he had done so, he would

have realised immediately that Carlyle's complaint was that the economists were soft-hearted, warm and sentimental – and not (as Galbraith assumes) that they were hard-hearted, cold and ruthless.

He would also have realised that it was *not* to Ricardo and Malthus that Carlyle was alluding: the attack was on living professors, not dead ones. The name McCroudy appears frequently in the *Latter-day Pamphlets* and refers to McCulloch; and Nassau Senior, who had been professor of political economy at Oxford at 35 and was now back in his old Chair at the age of 60, is featured in the first of the *Latter-day Pamphlets*:

Never till now did young men, and almost children, take such a command in human affairs. A changed time since the word Senior (Seigneur, or Elder) was first devised to signify 'lord,' or superior; as in all languages of men we find it to have been!...In times when men love wisdom, the old man will ever be venerable, and be venerated, and reckoned noble: in times that love something else than wisdom, and indeed have little or no wisdom, and see little or none to love, the old man will cease to be venerated: – and looking more closely, also, you will find that in fact he has ceased to be venerable, and has begun to be contemptible; a foolish *boy* still, a boy without the graces, generousities, and opulent strength of young boys. In these days, what of *lordship* or leadership is still to be done, the youth must do it, not the mature or aged man; the mature man, hardened into sceptical egoism, knows no monition but that of his own frigid cautions, avarices, mean timidities...

These sentences would have been grossly offensive even if it had been the case that Professor Senior lacked maturity and wisdom. In fact, he had an abundance of both. In 1841 Sir James Stephen wrote to McVey Napier, editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, 'you cannot rate Senior too highly in his own peculiar walk, which is that of comprehensive, mature and luminous thinking about permanent national interests'.

Twenty years earlier, when Senior was putting forward the sane and forthright remedies for dealing with the Irish problem which we noted earlier, Carlyle had written:

Never since the beginning of time was there...so intensely self-conscious a society. Our whole relations to the universe and to our fellow-man have become an inquiry, a doubt; nothing will go on of its own accord, and do its function quietly; but all things must be probed into, the whole working of man's world be anatomically studied...Till at length indeed, we have come to such a pass that except in this same *medicine*, with its artifices and appliances, few can so much as imagine any strength or hope to remain for us. The whole Life of Society must now be carried on

by drugs: doctor after doctor appears with his nostrum of cooperative societies, universal suffrage, cottage-and-cow systems, repression of population, vote by ballot.

With respect to Senior's work as Royal Commissioner on the Poor Law Inquiry in the 1830's, the *Economist* was to remark many years later:

It rarely falls to the lot of any individual to do so much permanent good to his country by the labours of a whole life as Mr Senior effected on this occasion by the well-directed exertions of a few brief years.

While Senior was engaged in these 'well-directed exertions', and working to use the mass of data available to maximum advantage, Carlyle scoffed at a publication which drew together the available actuarial data on the expectation of life in Britain ('Is it not as if some zealous scientific son of Adam had proved the deepening of the ocean by survey...of two mud-plashes on the coast of the Isle of Dogs?')

The Report of the Royal Commission on the Handloom Weavers, which was written by Senior, included a reference to the 'wage' system applying before the Poor Law Amendment Act:

Under the unhappy system prevalent during the forty years immediately preceding the Poor Law Amendment Act, a large portion of the labourers of England were treated not as freemen but as slaves or domestic animals, and received not strictly speaking wages, regulated by the value of their labour, but rations proportioned to their supposed wants...Under such circumstances wages, if we can apply the term to payments so regulated, rose and fell with the price of bread, just as the keep of a horse rises or falls with the price of oats.

In the first of the *Latter-day Pamphlets*, Carlyle argued that the old system was not an unhappy one:

In the progress of Emancipation, are we to look for a time when all the horses also are to be emancipated, and brought to the supply-and-demand principle? Horses too have 'motives'; are acted-on by hunger, fear, hope, love of oats, terror of plaited leather; nay, they have vanity, ambition, emulation, thankfulness, vindictiveness; some rude outline of all our human spiritualities, – a rude resemblance to us in mind and intelligence even as they have in bodily frame...Small kindness to Hodge's horses to emancipate them! The fate of all emancipated horses is, sooner or later, inevitable. To have in this habitable Earth no grass to eat...

While Carlyle argued for government action so that the unwilling could be compelled to work with 'beneficent whip', and jeered at the 'dismal science' for reducing the duty of human governors to that of letting men alone, Senior was telling his students in his lectures at Oxford that government

cannot of course enact that every family shall have five well-built, well-ventilated rooms, any more than it can enact that every family shall live on roast beef, but it can prohibit the erection of houses without drainage, or in courts, or back to back. It can require the streets to be paved, it can regulate their width and the thickness of the walls. In short, it can provide prospectively against the creation of new seats of disease and vice.

While Carlyle argued in another of the *Latter-day Pamphlets* that 'the grammar of nature, which he learned from his mother...was, as it still is, the grand education of the working man', Senior worked tirelessly for compulsory state-supported education. In his seventies he was to be Chairman of the Royal Commission which recommended such a system. As one of his biographers commented;

It is sometimes maintained that the progressive spirit deteriorates with age. In this instance, however, the record shows that the septuagenarian economist was the most vehement protagonist of the majority opinion; whereas the old-fashioned view of the minority was zealously supported by the youthful Goldwin Smith.

Finally, and remembering Engels' comment about Carlyle's humanity and the Whigs' lack of it, we may compare this extract from one of the *Latter-day Pamphlets* –

They are wont, here in England for some time back, to proclaim in the gross, as if it had become credible lately, all two-legged animals without feathers to be 'free'. 'Here is a distressed Nigger,' they proclaim, 'who much prefers idleness to work – should not he be free to choose which? Is not he a man and brother?'...My friends, I grieve to remind you, but it is eternally the fact: Whom Heaven has made a slave, no parliament of men nor power that exists on earth can render free. No; he is chained by fetters which parliaments with their millions cannot reach...The bigger candle you light within the slave-image of him, it will but show his slave-features on the larger and more hideous scale...Him the Supreme Powers marked in the making of him, *slave*; appointed him at his and our peril, not to command but to obey...

with this passage, also on the subject of slavery, in Senior's review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

The civilised Virginian, who can never go from his cabin with the certainty of spending another night in it;...the Virginian wife, who sees

her husband handcuffed and carried off, because his good conduct, industry and skill have made him so valuable that his master thinks that he cannot afford to keep him; the Virginian mother, who finds that her children, one after another, disappear, as each attains the age of sale;... all these feel their sense of suffering sharpened by their sense of wrong. All around them are whites, their fellow-countrymen...whose homes are inviolable, among whom the child belongs to its parents, husbands and wives to one another, and a man to himself. To the black race alone... all family ties and security are denied; domestic affections, the greatest source of happiness to the rich, almost the only source of happiness to the poor, are to them converted into instruments of torture (and) the causes of constant anxious terror.

## XVI

Nassau Senior was a major contributor to Britain's academic public life for 40 years. He was also, contrary to the popular image, a progressive and creative contributor. He believed that there should be no legal or economic discrimination against the female sex, saying that 'I believe women to have as clear a perception of their own interest and as much determination and as much power to follow it as belong to their brothers or to their fathers'. His *Lectures* at Oxford were frequently critical of the attitudes of governments to the disadvantaged:

I ought perhaps to include among the evils of poverty, the carelessness with which the individual interests of the poor are dealt with by the legislature, and particularly...by those who profess peculiar humanity.

It was in recognition of such attitudes, and of Senior's remarkable intellectual powers, that Count Cavour, the father of modern Italy, described him as 'the most enlightened thinker in Great Britain'.

When Senior died in 1864 he was, without question, the most significant economist to have died since Malthus 30 years earlier. As we have seen, *The Times* noticed Malthus' death in a single sentence; for Senior there was no obituary notice at all.

When Carlyle died nearly 20 years later, the obituary notice covered the whole of the leading page and the greater part of another. It began by claiming that

No recent man of letters has held in England a place comparable to that which for at least a quarter of a century has been his without dispute...A great man of letters, quite as heroic as any of those whom he depicted, has passed away amid universal regret.

and went on to celebrate his massive triumph over the economists and their fellow travellers:

The political economists mumbling barren truisms or equally unfruitful paradoxes about supply and demand; Malthusians preaching...the most unacceptable of gospels; so-called statesmen collecting with impotent hands information about the 'condition of England' question; `...the helpless babbling of Parliament' and liberty made a pretext, in the West Indies, and elsewhere, for flying in the face of the great law that, if a man work not, neither shall he eat – these were some of the butts of his scorn and contempt...It is astonishing to note how, under uncouth, rhapsodical phraseology, lie many ideas which are now the common property of most educated men. The novelties and paradoxes of 1840 are, to a large extent, nothing but the good sense of 1881. Who would not now echo Mr Carlyle's protests against the supposed omnipotence of Parliament or the possibility of saving nations by the use of the ballot box? Who now believes...that human nature can be reformed by any order of the Poor Law Commissioners? Who does not own that the change in our colonies from servitude to idleness and squalor...was not an unmixed blessing to those most concerned?...It is enough to say that again and again he reminded...his generation of stern truths it was in danger of forgetting.

Audiences were applauding what they liked best long before the days of television.

## XVII

In *Civilisation*, Kenneth Clark wrote that:

The strange thing is that none of these mid-nineteenth century writers (*except for Carlyle and Ruskin*) seemed to notice that the triumph of rational philosophy had resulted in a new form of barbarism (emphasis added).

The way in which Carlyle noticed the new form of barbarism has already been illustrated. We must now turn to the other figure with whom his name is so often bracketed – John Ruskin.

In his autobiography, Kenneth Clark tells how

for many years, Ruskin became the greatest single influence on my mind. My chapter on Ruskin in *The Gothic Revival* must have been the first attempt to do him justice since his obituaries...

Ruskin's influence was not confined to art. Clark also explained how he had, as an undergraduate, been deeply influenced by 'Ruskin's beautifully simple and candid examination of the basic truths of economics':

My economics tutor, Freddie Ogilvie, who was to become Reith's successor at the BBC, was trying gently to persuade me of the reasonableness of classical economic theory. Ruskin made me entirely unresponsive.

The implied assumption is interesting. If Ogilvie had suggested that Landseer was a finer painter than Rembrandt, Clark the art critic could have told him that he was wrong. He might have offered to help Ogilvie appreciate Rembrandt's genius, but any failure to respond would have been Ogilvie's problem – not Clark's. It does not seem to have occurred to Lord Clark that his opinion that Ricardo was inferior to Ruskin reflected on *him* – not on Ricardo's genius or Ogilvie's powers of persuasion.

## XVIII

Ruskin was already famous as the author of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice* before he took up political economy. His change of interests dates from about the year 1854, when he was 35. In that year Ruskin's wife left him and he went back to live in his parents' house. To understand the personal background on which his approach to political economy was based, it is necessary to know that this was 'a large house with seven acres of gardens, and a troop of servants, each with his or her appointed station and appointed work'.

During the following year, Ruskin began to read the main texts on political economy and was not impressed. He wrote to Mrs. Carlyle:

My studies of political economy have induced me to think...that nobody knows anything about that, and I am at present engaged on an investigation, on independent principles, of the natures of money, rent and taxes...

The outcome of these reflections was a series of lectures called *The Political Economy of Art*, which were delivered at Manchester in 1857. In the first of these lectures, Ruskin expressed the anti-Malthusian view that over-population was impossible:

The world is so regulated with the laws of Providence that a man's labour, well applied, is always amply sufficient to provide him during his life with all things needful to him, and not only with those, but with many pleasant objects of luxury; and yet farther, to procure him with large intervals of healthful rest and serviceable leisure. And a nation's labour,

well applied, is in like manner, amply sufficient to provide its whole population with good food and comfortable habitation; and not with those only, but with good education besides, and objects of luxury...

He recognised that there *were* people who were in want or misery or degradation, but this was because industry had been wanting or was in error:

When there should have been providence, there has been waste;  
when there should have been labour, there has been lasciviousness;  
and wilfulness, where there should have been subordination.

And he quoted from Proverbs, chapter 13, verse 23:

Much food is in the tillage of the poor, but there is that is destroyed for want of judgement.

Ruskin's 'beautifully simple and candid examination of the basic truths of economics' was that economy meant '*applying* your labour rationally...*preserving* its produce carefully...*distributing* its produce seasonably'. Applying labour rationally meant 'not growing oats in land where you can grow wheat'; preserving its produce carefully meant 'laying up your wheat wisely in storehouses for the time of famine'; and distributing its produce seasonably meant 'being able to carry your corn at once to the place where the people are hungry'.

This was a fair description of the *problems* which political economists and legislators had been addressing during the previous century. Ruskin offered no solutions. Indeed, there was no sign that he perceived that his exposition had begged all of the significant questions.

The argument in this and other lectures during the succeeding years suggests that Ruskin had not read the works of political economy which he criticised, other than to ferret out debating points.

'Economists usually speak as if there were no good in consumption absolute', he claimed. 'So far from this being so, consumption absolute is the end, crown and purpose of all production'. So far from economists speaking as if there were no good in consumption absolute (that is, as distinct from consumption as a means to sustain production and investment) this was what modern economics was about – the key difference between the system of Adam Smith and the system on which he mounted his 'very violent attack'. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith had written:

Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to, only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer. The maxim is so perfectly self-evident, that it would be absurd to attempt to prove it. But in the mercantile system, the interest of the consumer is almost constantly

sacrificed to that of the producer; and it seems to consider production, and not consumption, as the ultimate end and object of all industry and commerce.

In another lecture, Ruskin presented as the current thinking of economists a theory which was close to what Malthus had put forward in the first edition of his *Essay* in 1798, but which he had already abandoned in the 1803 edition:

In all the ranges of human thought I know none so melancholy as the speculations of political economists on the population question. It is proposed to better the condition of the labourer by giving him higher wages. 'Nay,' says the economist, – 'if you raise his wages, he will either people down to the same point of misery at which you found him, or drink your wages away'.

Ruskin went on to attribute to political economists the view that labourers 'cannot receive education' (which was, of course, a ludicrous misrepresentation), and then asked 'Why not? That is precisely the point at issue'. It was not the economists that Ruskin was here attacking but the anti-economists – including himself; because in evidence to a House of Commons Committee at about this time Ruskin had said of his art lectures

In my class, workmen are especially tempted to think of rising above their own rank...– becoming something better than workmen, and that effect I particularly dread...I think that the moment a man desires to rise out of his own class, he does his work badly in it;...they wish to become something better than workmen, and I want to keep them in that class; I want to teach every man to rest contented in his station...

And Ruskin went on to tell the Committee that 'Nothing assists the working man so much as having the moral disposition developed rather than the intellectual...'– which was precisely the attitude to education which Adam Smith and his successors had criticised.

In another lecture, Ruskin criticised political economy because it was 'founded on self-interest'. He quoted in support of this view a sentence from Mill's *Principles*:

In all reasoning about prices, the proviso must be understood, 'supposing all parties to take care of their own interest'.

Ruskin could with equal validity have criticised medical science for being 'founded on self interest'; because much of its reasoning supposes that 'all parties...take care of their own interest'.

Like many of the other anti-economists, Ruskin asserted that the greatest good for a country *was* in having the greatest number of people: 'that country is the richest', he said, 'which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings'. The underlying assumption that the greatest number is conducive to the greatest good is the doctrine that de Quincy had described in 1823 as the 'pernicious...counsels from Athenian days to our own clamouring for direct encouragements to population'.

The most famous of Ruskin's anti-Malthusian statements was in the chapter on the 'veins of wealth' in *Unto this Last*:

It may be discovered that the true veins of wealth are purple – and not in Rock, but in Flesh – perhaps even that the final outcome and consumation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed and happy-hearted human creatures. Our modern world, I think, has rather a tendency the other way; – most political economists appearing to consider multitudes of human creatures not conducive to wealth, or at best conducive to it only by remaining in a dim-eyed and narrow-chested state of being.

The first of these two sentences was quoted with enthusiasm by Sir Oliver Lodge, who had ten children, in his Introduction to the *Everyman* edition of *Unto this Last* in 1907. It showed, said Lodge, the contrast between real and spurious national wealth. Seven years later Lodge, as President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, delivered a public lecture in Adelaide in the course of the Association's only meeting in Australia. Sir Oliver's discourse was entitled 'the Ether of Space'. He

described the properties of the ether of space as the omnipresent connecting medium, and maintained its complete reality, in spite of its intangible and generally insensible character. He discussed the relation between ether and matter, and urged that the experimental elusiveness of the ether was a natural consequence of its uniformity and of the universality of its functions.

But by now the ether had no functions, universal or otherwise; because, as many of the scientists present must have known, Einstein's work had made the ether obsolete. Lodge continued to believe in the 'complete reality' of the ether until his death in 1940: to the end, he remained as impervious to the findings of natural science at the outset of the twentieth century as to the findings of economic science at the outset of the nineteenth.

## XIX

John Ruskin was a friend and dedicated disciple of Thomas Carlyle, and a strong advocate of his 'gospel of work'; and, as the years went by, he became increasingly bitter in his attacks on the economists and their (as he saw it) distorted attitudes to work and to life.

In 1870 – the same year as Jevons complained about the treatment of economists in his Presidential Address to the British Association – Ruskin began the famous series of letters to the working men of England which he entitled *Fors Clavigera*. The tenth of these letters contained a savage attack on the economics profession. In order to understand the nature and force of the attack, it is necessary to know that, at this stage and for the preceding thirty years, John Stuart Mill was afflicted by a continuous twitch in one eye. This is what Ruskin wrote to the workers of England:

Now I tell you once for all, Carlyle is the only living writer who has spoken the absolute and perpetual truth about yourselves and your business; and exactly in proportion to the inherent weakness of brain in your lying guides, will be their animosity against Carlyle...For in the modern liberal there is a new and wonderful form of misguidance. Of old, it was bad enough that the blind should lead the blind;...but now a worse disorder is upon you, that the squinting should lead the squinting...The modern liberal politico-economist of the Stuart Mill school is essentially of the type of a flat-fish – one eyeless side of him always in the mud, and one eye, on the side that *has* eyes, down in the corner of his mouth...Read your Carlyle, then, with all your heart,... and you will learn from him...that every man shall do good work for his bread...If you are resolved that the work shall be good, the bread will be sure; if not – believe me, there is neither steam plough nor steam mill, go they never so glibly, that will win it from the earth long.

When John Stuart Mill died less than two years after this letter was published, the short obituary notice in *The Times* was almost sneering in its tone. Whilst acknowledging that it was from Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* that 'the existing state of the *so-called* science may be learnt' (emphasis added) *The Times* went on

But in this work, instead of confining himself to the collection of known and recognised theories or facts, he had propounded sundry doctrines of dangerous tendency and doubtful soundness...We need hardly add that many of his opinions on society and government have been generally and justly condemned...He was often a wrong-headed, but always a kind-hearted man...Of late years Mill has not come before the world with advantage. When he appeared in public it was to advocate

the fanciful rights of women, or to propound some impracticable reform or revolutionary change in the laws relating to the land; but, with all his errors and paradoxes, he will be long remembered as a thinker and reasoner who has largely contributed to the intellectual progress of the age.

The respectable public figures of mid-Victorian England did not want to remember Mill unless they could do it discreetly. Five days after his death *The Times* carried a notice that Lord Derby

'will, with pleasure, join in any mark of respect to the late Mr Mill which does not take such a form as to imply on the part of the contributors or promoters an agreement in Mr Mill's political opinions.' It is understood that the movement will be organised on this basis.

Mr Gladstone initially joined the organising committee, but then withdrew.

In the same year as *The Times* was inveighing against Mill's advocacy of 'the fanciful rights of women' the name of Alfred Marshall – who was to be the dominant figure in British economics for the next 50 years – appeared in print for the first time as the author of an essay entitled 'The Future of the Working Classes'. The opening passage of the essay was an eloquent endorsement of Mill's position on 'the fanciful rights of women'. All Mill's instances, he wrote

tend to show how our progress could be accelerated if we would unwrap the swaddling-clothes in which artificial customs have enfolded woman's mind and would give her free scope womanfully to discharge her duties to the world.

Several years later, Mill's attitude to the emancipation of women again came under public notice. One of John Ruskin's letters published as *Arrows of the Chace* included the following sentence:

My friend, while you still teach in Oxford the 'philosophy'...of that poor cretinous wretch, Stuart Mill, and are endeavouring to open other 'careers' to English women than that of the Wife and the Mother, you won't make your men chaste by recommending them to leave off tea.

But by now, Ruskin's interests had taken a new turn. In his address to the students of Oxford on taking up his professorship there, he said:

There is a destiny now possible for us, the highest ever set before a nation to be accepted or refused. We are still undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best northern blood...This is what England must either do, or perish; she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men; seizing every piece of

fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on, and there teaching these her colonists, that their chief virtue is to be fidelity to their country, and that their first aim is to be to advance the power of England by land and sea...

Cecil Rhodes was in the audience. As one of Rhode's biographers wrote, John Ruskin had

supplied the philosophic jumping-board from which Cecil Rhodes was to plunge into the African continent to paint its map red with the colour of Britain and the blood of thousands.

Ruskin was to live on for more than a quarter of a century. As the 1960's editions of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* stated:

The close of his life was one of entire peace and honour. He was loaded with the degrees of universities and membership in numerous societies and academies. 'Ruskin Societies' were founded in many parts of the kingdom...

On Ruskin's death in 1900, *The Times* produced one of its most fulsome eulogies. The *litterateur* who had referred to John Stuart Mill as a squinting flat-fish had many virtues, but one above all deserved special mention:

Never was any man so sympathetic, so winning, so uniformly and invariably courteous;...it was the same at all times, and to all men.