

UNTO THIS LAST
JOHN RUSKIN

John Ruskin

❑ (born February 8, 1819, London, England—died January 20, 1900, Coniston, Lancashire) English critic of art, architecture, and society who was a **gifted painter**, a distinctive prose stylist, and an important example of the Victorian Sage, or Prophet: a writer of polemical prose who seeks to cause widespread cultural and social change.

❑ Ruskin's family background in the world of business was significant, too: it not only provided the means for his extensive travels to see paintings, buildings, and landscapes in Britain and continental Europe but also gave him an understanding of the newly rich, middle-class audience for which his books would be written.

❑ In 1843 Ruskin published the **first volume of *Modern Painters***, (intended as a defense of J.M.W. Turner) a book that would eventually consist of five volumes and occupy him for the next **17 years**.

❑ Although he is best known as an art critic and patron, he was a true polymath and was also a talented watercolorist, an engaging teacher, a respected geologist, and a **campaigner for social and political change**.

❑ The **importance of nature, God, and society** are reoccurring themes throughout his work and these driving forces formed the tenets of his forward-thinking beliefs.

❑ He was an advocate for new styles of painting, the protection of historic buildings, the conservation of natural landscapes, the education of women, and the **improvement of conditions for the working classes.**

❑ He also identified risks associated with the Industrial Revolution, such as **pollution**, many years before they were widely acknowledged.

❑ His writings and the ideas in them brought new artists to prominence, encouraged the **formation of the National Trust**, and helped to protect the architecture of Venice.

❑ His views also helped to shape welfare reforms in Britain such as the **introduction of a minimum wage, free school meals, and universal healthcare.**

❑ Ruskin was an incredibly prolific writer, publishing more than **50 books** on a huge range of topics from art criticism to fiction and political treatises to travel guides. It was through these writings (which included lecture transcripts and letters as well as more conventional essays) that he communicated his innovative ideas and over the course of his career, he **simplified his writing style to make them as accessible to as many people as possible.**

❑ Ruskin was an avid promoter of **Gothic architecture** and his writing influenced a widespread return from Neoclassicism to the earlier Gothic style. His work inspired architects including Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Walter Gropius and his ideas are said to have been influential in the **foundation of the Garden City Movement.**

❑ As art critic, Ruskin championed the idea of "truth to nature" which encouraged painters to closely observe the landscape and in doing so capture the natural world as truthfully as possible, not romanticizing what they saw.

❑ This idea was hugely influential on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of young artists who rejected contemporary notions of artistic beauty and instead sought to produce a pre-Renaissance style of painting.

❑ Ruskin's emphasis on the natural (along with his dislike of mass production) also had an impact on the development of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

- ❑ England in the age of Queen Victoria had been transformed in **hellish ways by the Industrial Revolution** and unregulated capitalism.
- ❑ Large numbers of people lived in **poverty, and ill health** and performed brutally **repetitious factory work** under the worst of conditions.
- ❑ The cities of England were shattered by decaying neighborhoods.
- ❑ **Factories filled the air with smoke and fumes and poured industrial discharges into the water.**
- ❑ Amid this widespread suffering, manufacturers and merchants had become **wealthy** and had joined the older land-owning classes as the **Victorian elite**.

❑ In large part because of his religious upbringing, Ruskin was always deeply concerned with right and wrong behavior, righteous and immoral ways of living, and the social conditions of the world around him.

❑ Also, he saw the natural world as the work of God, and as an art critic and artist, he believed that peoples' lives are diminished when they are surrounded by ugliness.

❑ Appalled and outraged by Victorian England, Ruskin had increasingly included social commentary in his writing on art.

UNTO THIS LAST (1860)

□ an essay critical of economics by John Ruskin, who published the first chapter **between August and December 1860** in the monthly journal **Cornhill Magazine** in four articles.

□ He **challenged the orthodox (“classical”) economic theory** of Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, David Ricardo, and others.

□ He offered instead a **compelling vision of a better society** in which commerce was conducted justly, workers were treated fairly, people lived fulfilled, happy lives, war was recognized as evil, and clean air, water, and soil were recognized as essential to human life and protected from industrialism.

❑ Ruskin **redefines key economic terms**, such as “wealth,” “produce,” “capital,” “labor,” and “value” from a humanistic and Christian perspective.

❑ In so doing, he **calls for moral regeneration and social reform**. He urges the elite of Victorian England to think in terms of the **betterment of the nation as a whole rather than their self-interest**.

❑ His climactic pronouncement is that **“There is no wealth but life.”** That country is the richest, says Ruskin, which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings.

❑ The part of Ruskin's thinking that **most people will find disturbing** and least relevant to our age is not his errors in economic theory but **his rejection of democracy and the right of workers fight to better their lives.**

❑ Ruskin is **the flipside of Karl Marx.** His view of social organization and his politics stem from an idealized vision of the Feudal society in the Middle Ages—a time when, Ruskin thought, **the high and low social classes were united in their concern for each other's well being.**

❑ Ruskin's ideas continue to engage us, but there is no escaping the fact that **he is both a forward- and backward-looking thinker.**

What Ruskin wants

- 1** Ruskin demands that the business elite improve the conditions of the lower classes out of moral responsibility.
- 2** Though no socialist, Ruskin proposes government intervention in regard to education, vocational training, and more.
- 3** Ruskin wants employers agree on rates of pay for each category of work and give workers more employment security than day labor.
- 4** Ruskin was a very early environmentalist who recognized how much human beings lose when they are denied sunlight, fresh air, and open meadows.
- 5** He makes clear his great abhorrence of war.
- 6** Ruskin wants political economists to focus much more on how well people live.

Unto This Last as Literature

- 1** Ruskin is a brilliant prose stylist with a rare gift for striking and memorable phrasing.
- 2** The prose style of *Unto This Last* mixes argument, satire, and deeply moving statements of his hopes for moral regeneration.
- 3** Ruskin very consciously wrote *Unto This Last* in a simpler style than his art criticism so that it could be more widely read. Even so, his complex prose is difficult for modern readers.
- 4** Ruskin also quotes scripture extensively and uses Biblical phrasing. He can write as an angry prophet.
- 5** Although the book's structure is eccentric, Ruskin, regarded *Unto This Last* as his best-written book.
- 6** *Unto This Last* is a deeply idiosyncratic masterpiece.

Essay 1: "The Roots of Honour"

- ❑ In this essay, Ruskin discusses the **fundamental principles of wealth and labor**.
- ❑ He argues **against the prevailing notion of wealth** as monetary accumulation and instead emphasizes the **importance of productive labor in creating true wealth**.
- ❑ Ruskin criticizes **the idea of wealth being solely determined by monetary value**, advocating for a broader definition that includes moral and spiritual dimensions.
- ❑ He introduces the **concept of "justice" as essential to economic transactions** and argues that fair compensation for labor is crucial for maintaining societal harmony and moral integrity.

Essay 2: "The Veins of Wealth"

- ❑ Ruskin explores the mechanisms of wealth distribution and the role of the economy in society.
- ❑ He critiques the capitalist system for its emphasis on profit maximization at the expense of labor and social welfare.
- ❑ Ruskin argues that wealth should be distributed equitably to benefit all members of society, rather than concentrating in the hands of a privileged few.
- ❑ He advocates for a more just economic system that prioritizes the well-being of workers and promotes the common good over individual greed.

Essay 3: "Qui Judicatis Terram" (Even-Handed Justice)

- ❑ In this essay, Ruskin delves into the **concept of justice and its application in economic and social affairs.**
- ❑ He argues that **true justice requires fairness, compassion, and a commitment to the well-being of all members of society.**
- ❑ Ruskin criticizes the **prevailing economic system for perpetuating inequality and social injustice**, calling for reforms that prioritize the needs of the poor and disadvantaged.
- ❑ He emphasizes the **moral imperative of justice in economic transactions and advocates for a more humane and equitable society.**

Essay 4: "Ad Valorem" (according to [the] value [of something])

- ❑ The final essay focuses on the practical implications of Ruskin's ideas for economic policy and social reform.
- ❑ He proposes specific measures to address the inequalities and injustices inherent in the capitalist system, including progressive taxation, government intervention in the economy, and the promotion of cooperative enterprises.
- ❑ Ruskin emphasizes the importance of moral and ethical considerations in economic decision-making and argues that society should prioritize the well-being of its members over material wealth.
- ❑ He concludes by calling for a radical transformation of the economic and social order to create a more just and humane society.

"The Roots of Honour"

Introduction to Concepts:

Ruskin's exploration of honor serves as a foundational element in his critique of society. He believes that honor is not merely a superficial concept tied to wealth or social status but rather a fundamental principle rooted in moral integrity and virtuous conduct.

According to Ruskin, true honor entails a sense of duty towards others and a commitment to upholding ethical standards. By contrasting genuine honor with shallow notions associated with material wealth and power, Ruskin highlights the importance of prioritizing moral values over external markers of success.

Wealth and Labor:

- ❑ Ruskin challenges the conventional understanding of wealth as mere monetary accumulation by asserting that **true wealth is generated through productive labor.**
- ❑ He emphasizes the transformative power of human effort, where **labor converts natural resources into valuable goods and services.**
- ❑ In Ruskin's view, **labor is the primary source of wealth** and should be recognized as such. He advocates for a shift in societal perception to value labor not only for its economic contributions but also for **its inherent dignity and significance.**
- ❑ By emphasizing the importance of labor, Ruskin aims to promote a **more equitable distribution of wealth and a greater appreciation for the role of workers in driving economic prosperity.**

Critique of Materialism:

- ❑ Ruskin's critique of materialism is a scathing indictment of the societal mindset that equates wealth with happiness and success.
- ❑ He argues that the relentless pursuit of material wealth, divorced from ethical considerations, leads to a host of detrimental consequences.
- ❑ Ruskin asserts that this materialistic mindset fosters moral degradation, as individuals prioritize personal gain over principles of justice, compassion, and altruism.
- ❑ He highlights the corrosive effects of materialism on social cohesion, exacerbating inequalities and fostering a culture of selfishness and greed.

❑ Ruskin condemns the shallow values of materialistic societies, calling for a reevaluation of societal priorities based on principles of justice, compassion, and altruism.

❑ He advocates for a shift towards a more ethical and humane approach to wealth and success, one that emphasizes the well-being of all members of society over individual accumulation of wealth.

Science and Ethics:

❑ In his discussion of science, Ruskin acknowledges the potential for both positive and negative outcomes stemming from scientific progress.

❑ While recognizing the benefits that scientific advancements can bring to society, he issues a stern warning against the neglect of moral and ethical considerations in the pursuit of knowledge.

❑ Ruskin emphasizes **the importance of ethical guidelines** to govern scientific inquiry, ensuring that it serves the common good and does not harm individuals or the environment.

❑ He argues that **scientific progress must be accompanied by a strong ethical framework** to prevent the misuse of knowledge for destructive purposes.

❑ Ruskin's discussion of science and ethics underscores the **interconnectedness of knowledge and morality**.

❑ He advocates for a **harmonious relationship between scientific progress and ethical principles**, emphasizing the need for scientists and society as a whole to prioritize ethical considerations in all scientific endeavors.

Justice in Economic Transactions:

- ❑ Ruskin's exploration of justice in economic transactions is a meticulous examination of the ethical dimensions of economic activity.
- ❑ He advocates for a system where fair compensation for labor and equitable distribution of wealth are paramount.
- ❑ Ruskin condemns the exploitation of labor and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a privileged few, highlighting the inherent injustices perpetuated by such practices.
- ❑ Central to Ruskin's argument is the notion that justice should serve as a guiding principle in all economic activities.
- ❑ He asserts that economic growth should benefit all members of society, rather than enriching a select few at the expense of the many.
- ❑ Ruskin calls for a redistribution of wealth and resources to ensure that the benefits of economic prosperity are shared equitably among all individuals.

❑ Ruskin emphasizes the importance of addressing **systemic inequalities and advocating for policies** that promote social justice and economic fairness.

❑ He challenges the **prevailing economic orthodoxy** that prioritizes profit maximization over human welfare, urging for a paradigm shift towards a more just and equitable economic system.

The Five Great Intellectual Professions:

Ruskin's identification of the "five great intellectual professions" reflects his belief in the pivotal role of these professions in shaping society and promoting the common good. **The soldier, the pastor, the physician, the lawyer, and the man of science** are viewed as custodians of knowledge and guardians of moral and ethical principles.

1. The Soldier:

- ❑ Ruskin sees the soldier as a central figure in society, tasked with maintaining order, defending the nation, and upholding justice.
- ❑ However, he criticizes the prevailing attitudes within the military, particularly the glorification of war and the pursuit of conquest for political gain.
- ❑ Ruskin advocates for a more ethical approach to warfare, urging soldiers to uphold principles of justice, compassion, and integrity in their actions.
- ❑ He emphasizes the importance of using military power responsibly and ethically to protect the rights and freedoms of all individuals.

2. The Pastor:

□ Ruskin views the pastor as a spiritual leader responsible for guiding individuals in matters of faith and morality.

□ However, he critiques the clergy for their focus on doctrinal disputes and theological debates rather than addressing the practical needs of their congregations.

□ Ruskin urges pastors to prioritize compassion, empathy, and ethical leadership in their ministry, emphasizing the importance of addressing social injustices and promoting the welfare of all members of society.

3. The Physician:

- ❑ The physician is seen by Ruskin as a healer and caretaker of the physical and mental well-being of individuals.
- ❑ However, he criticizes the medical profession for its focus on profit-driven healthcare systems and the overreliance on medical interventions rather than preventive care.
- ❑ Ruskin advocates for a more holistic approach to medicine that prioritizes the well-being of patients over financial gain, urging physicians to uphold principles of compassion, integrity, and ethical practice in their work.

4. The Lawyer:

□ Ruskin identifies the lawyer as a guardian of justice and defender of individual rights within society.

□ However, he critiques the legal profession for its emphasis on technicalities and legal maneuvering at the expense of justice and fairness.

□ Ruskin calls for lawyers to prioritize principles of justice, equity, and integrity in their practice, urging them to use their legal expertise to promote social justice and uphold the rights of all individuals, especially the marginalized and disadvantaged.

5. The Man of Science:

□ Ruskin sees the man of science as a seeker of truth and knowledge, responsible for advancing human understanding through empirical inquiry and research.

□ However, he critiques the scientific community for its narrow focus on materialistic pursuits and technological progress at the expense of ethical considerations and societal well-being.

□ Ruskin urges scientists to uphold principles of ethical conduct, integrity, and social responsibility in their research and innovation, emphasizing the importance of using scientific knowledge for the betterment of humanity and the protection of the natural world.

❑ He calls for a **renewal of moral and ethical values within these professions, urging practitioners to uphold principles of justice, compassion, and integrity in their work.**

❑ Ruskin emphasizes the **importance of using one's intellectual talents and professional expertise** for the betterment of society, rather than personal gain or advancement.

❑ He urges individuals within these professions to embrace their roles as **advocates for justice and champions of the common good, striving to create a more equitable and humane society for all members.**

□ Ruskin's identification of the "five great intellectual professions" underscores the influential roles these professions **play in shaping society and promoting the common good.**

□ However, Ruskin also critiques the prevailing attitudes and practices within these professions, arguing that practitioners often **prioritize self-interest over the welfare of others.**

Conclusion:

- ❑ "The Roots of Honour" presents a comprehensive analysis of various aspects of society, including wealth, labor, science, justice, and the intellectual professions.
- ❑ Ruskin challenges readers to reconsider their assumptions about honor, wealth, and the ethical responsibilities of individuals within society.
- ❑ He emphasizes the importance of ethical considerations in all aspects of human endeavor, advocating for a more just, compassionate, and equitable society.
- ❑ This essay sets the stage for Ruskin's broader critique of capitalism and his advocacy for social reform in subsequent essays.

Essay 2: "The Veins of Wealth"

In "The Veins of Wealth," Ruskin delves deeper into his critique of the prevailing economic system, focusing on the mechanisms of wealth distribution and the role of economy in society.

Critique of Wealth Distribution:

- ❑ Ruskin's critique of **wealth distribution is rooted in his observation of the inherent flaws and injustices** within the prevailing economic system.
- ❑ He argues **that wealth tends to accumulate in the hands of a small, privileged minority, while the majority of people struggle to make ends meet or live in poverty.**
- ❑ This concentration of wealth, according to Ruskin, not only perpetuates social inequality but also **leads to exploitation and moral degradation within society.**

❑ Ruskin condemns the **unjust distribution of wealth as a fundamental injustice that undermines the fabric of society.** He sees it as a result of systemic **inequalities and institutional biases** that favor the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the **less fortunate.**

❑ This unequal distribution of wealth, according to Ruskin, creates a hierarchical society where access to resources, opportunities, and social mobility is **limited for the majority.**

❑ Moreover, Ruskin argues that the concentration of wealth exacerbates social tensions and undermines social cohesion, leading to **increased social unrest and discontent.**

❑ He warns that this disparity in wealth distribution can ultimately **destabilize society** and **threaten its long-term stability and well-being.**

Nature's Contribution to Wealth:

❑ In contrast to the prevailing economic narrative that often overlooks nature's role in wealth creation, Ruskin emphasizes the vital contribution of **natural resources to economic prosperity**.

❑ He argues that land, water, minerals, and other **natural resources are the true sources of wealth**, as human labor can only transform these resources into goods and services.

❑ Ruskin criticizes the **exploitation of natural resources for profit without considering the long-term consequences for the environment and future generations**.

❑ He warns against the **unsustainable practices that deplete natural resources and degrade the environment**, leading to ecological crises and irreparable damage to ecosystems.

- ❑ Furthermore, Ruskin emphasizes the interconnectedness of human society and the natural world, highlighting the importance of stewardship and sustainable resource management.
- ❑ He calls for a reevaluation of societal priorities to recognize and value nature's contribution to wealth creation, advocating for policies and practices that promote environmental conservation and sustainable development.
- ❑ Ruskin's critique of wealth distribution underscores the need for a more equitable and sustainable economic system that values the contributions of both human labor and natural resources.
- ❑ He calls for policies and practices that prioritize social justice, environmental sustainability, and the common good, aiming to create a more just, prosperous, and harmonious society for all.

Labor as the Source of Wealth:

- ❑ Ruskin passionately reiterates his belief in the centrality of **labor as the primary source of wealth in society**.
- ❑ He emphasizes the dignity and significance of productive work, contrasting it with the prevailing notion that **wealth is generated solely through financial speculation or exploitation**.
- ❑ Ruskin argues that **true wealth arises from the application of human labor to natural resources**, where individuals transform raw materials into valuable goods and services through their efforts.

❑ Ruskin criticizes the devaluation of labor in modern society, where the contributions of workers are often overlooked or exploited for the benefit of a privileged few.

❑ He calls for a reevaluation of societal priorities to recognize and value the essential role of workers in the economy.

❑ Ruskin's advocacy for the recognition of labor as the source of wealth reflects his broader concern for social justice and the equitable distribution of resources within society.

Role of Economy in Society:

❑ In examining the role of the economy in society, Ruskin challenges the prevailing economic orthodoxy that prioritizes profit maximization and individual gain over social welfare and ethical considerations.

❑ He argues that the **economy should serve the common good and promote the well-being of all members** of society, rather than catering to the interests of a privileged few.

❑ Ruskin criticizes the narrow focus on material wealth and economic growth at the expense of human welfare and environmental sustainability.

❑ He calls for a more ethical and humane approach to economics, one that prioritizes principles of justice, compassion, and social responsibility.

❑ Ruskin emphasizes the importance of valuing human dignity and promoting the common good within economic decision-making, advocating for policies and practices that prioritize the welfare of workers, the environment, and future generations.

❑ He calls for a fundamental reorientation of economic priorities towards promoting the well-being of all members of society and ensuring the equitable distribution of resources.

Conclusion:

"The Veins of Wealth" provides a detailed critique of the existing economic system, highlighting its inherent injustices and moral shortcomings. Ruskin calls for a radical transformation of the economy to prioritize justice, compassion, and the common good. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing nature's contribution to wealth creation, valuing the dignity of labor, and promoting a more ethical and equitable approach to economic activity. This essay sets the stage for Ruskin's broader critique of capitalism and his advocacy for social reform in subsequent essays.

Mahatma Gandhi's paraphrase

Unto This Last had a very important impact on Gandhi's philosophy. He discovered the book in March 1904 through Henry Polak, whom he had met in a vegetarian restaurant in South Africa. Polak was sub-editor of the Johannesburg paper *The Critic*. Gandhi decided immediately not only to change his own life according to Ruskin's teaching, but also to publish his own newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, from a farm where everybody would get the same salary, without distinction of function, race, or nationality. This, for that time, was quite revolutionary. Thus Gandhi created Phoenix Settlement.

Gandhi translated *Unto This Last* into Gujarati in 1908 under the title of *Sarvodaya* (Well Being of All). Valji Govindji Desai translated it back to English in 1951 under the title of *Unto This Last: A Paraphrase*. This last essay can be considered his program on economics, as in *Unto This Last*, Gandhi found an important part of his social and economic ideas.

Both Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and many others were greatly influenced by *Unto This Last*. Although this brief book is difficult reading, it is considered one of the most important literary works of Victorian England, and Ruskin's political and art theories remain important.